

*From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends, 1801-1850* By Robynne Rogers Healey

Chris Raible

Volume 99, Number 1, Spring 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065804ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065804ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Raible, C. (2007). Review of [*From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends, 1801-1850* By Robynne Rogers Healey]. *Ontario History*, 99(1), 120-122. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065804ar>

## From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends, 1801-1850

By Robynne Rogers Healey. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006. 292 pages. Illustrations. \$75.00 cloth. ISBN 0-7735-3136-X.

*From Quaker to Upper Canadian* is the most recent volume in the extensive McGill-Queen's 'Studies in the History of Religion' series. It centres on one small community, the Society of Friends, living in a few square kilometers north of the town of York in Upper Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century. They are often spoken of as the Yonge Street Quakers. The focus is thus very specific, but the significance of Healey's thesis is almost universal, for she asks the compelling question: how can a community insulate itself from the perceived evils of a larger society without isolating itself from responsible participation in that society?

Trinity Western University professor Robynne Healey, not a Quaker herself, sensitively describes a people caught by conflicting pressures such as between the disciplines of faith and the demands of secular society, or between the obligations of kinship ties and the realities of economic necessities. The power of personal experience was in conflict with the authority of recorded revelation, and so too were the commands of traditional teaching with the sway of charismatic leadership. Still further, the need for unity and keeping the community together was not easily resolved with the ideal of purity and keeping the community virtuous.

In less than a half-century these Quaker settlers suffered three major traumas. In

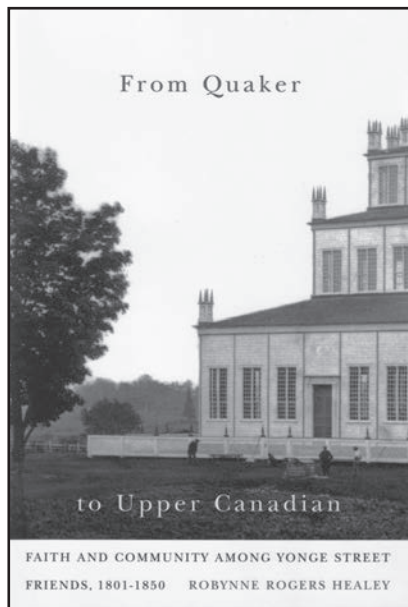
1813, barely a decade after their arrival in Upper Canada, several key members, led by David Willson, withdrew to form the "Children of Light." This body, and the familiar Sharon Temple which they built south of Lake Simcoe, has been well covered in studies by Albert Schrauwers and by W. John McIntyre, works on which Healey often relies. But her focus, sharpened by analysis of Quaker archives, is less on Willson and more on the impact of the separation on the whole body of Quakers. Some were disowned; some returned disillusioned; some attempted to maintain connections; some severed themselves completely.

The second upset occurred in 1829 when the community divided between Hicksites and Orthodox. The Hicksites trusted the traditional Quaker "inner light" of personal experience, whereas the Orthodox faction insisted on the truths of Biblical revelation, the divinity of Christ and Christ's atonement for human sin. Both groups believed they were true to the Quaker *Book of Discipline*. This division among North American Quakers has been fully examined by a number of American scholars, and forty years ago by Arthur G. Dorland in his classic canvas of Quakers in Canada. Again, Healey brings fresh insights, looking at specific families and individuals, and pondering the consequences of the controversy. She suggests that Methodist support of the Orthodox Quakers helped lead to their eventual absorption into broader, evangelical Canadian Protestantism. Healey is especially concerned with the importance of women to the Quaker community and their central involvement in both of these community crises. Quaker belief affirms the spiritual equality of men and women, and women could play crucial roles on both sides in each of these conflicts.

The third upheaval was the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837. Quakers, fully as much as their neighbours, held grievances against the British colonial administration, and both the Yonge Street Quakers and members of the Children of Light were deeply involved in the ill-fated skirmishes or as active supporters of the rebels. Citing a modern authority, Healey twice states that Quakers

“formed 4.2 per cent of the population in rebel areas, yet accounted for 40 per cent of the known rebels and supporters.” (pp. 13, 146) This is a questionable assertion, surely, as Quaker pacifist teachings were totally opposed to armed rebellion. Many Quakers undoubtedly experienced a crisis of conscience, yet significant numbers did take up arms. Many were jailed and one former Quaker, Samuel Lount, was hanged.

The Rebellion was the most dramatic of a series of severe tensions between Quakers and the government. They first settled in Upper Canada with assurances, they thought, that their beliefs would be fully respected; yet they could not vote or serve on juries because they would not swear oaths. Quakers were fined – and jailed if they did not pay the fines – for refusing to serve in the militia, and their goods were requisitioned to supply the military in the War of 1812. Their faith forbade Quakers from leasing Clergy Reserve land and thereby financially supporting another church. Also, like other settlers, Quakers were caught up in such controversies as the Alien Question, the court and legal system,



and the neglect of roads and bridges.

Healey includes a fascinating brief chapter on the secularization of education and its effects on the Quaker community. The Hicksite-Orthodox split forced them to abandon their “religiously guarded” education, with the result that their children had to attend government-funded schools and began losing their unique Quaker identity.

Secular tensions, and especially those related to the Rebellion, deserve much fuller consideration than Healey offers here however. Colin Read’s pamphlet is her only citation for understanding the Rebellion and she relies too heavily on Gerald Craig’s forty-year-old general history for her discussion of the complexities of the Clergy Reserves. Healey’s bibliography shows her appreciation of a cluster of recent studies, but her principal sources – and the book’s true strength – are the Quaker manuscripts she so extensively researched: minutes, letters, diaries, articles and other documents. She mined hitherto neglected veins, most notably the Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives at Pickering College in Newmarket, and found gold. Pity that the price may discourage many from purchasing a work of such import.

Chris Raible,  
Creemore, Ontario

#### **Bibliography:**

Dorland, Arthur G. *The Quakers in Canada: a History*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968.

McIntyre, W. John. *Children of Peace*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.

Read, Colin. *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, Historical booklet #46, 1988.

Schrauwers, Albert. *Awaiting the Millenni-*

*um: the Children of Peace and the Village of Hope, 1812-1889*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

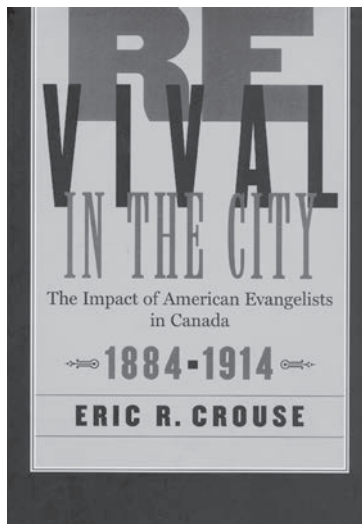
Society of Friends. *Book of Christian Discipline: Consisting of Extracts on Doctrine, Practice and Church Government*. London: Harris, 1883.

## Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914

By Eric R. Crouse. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005. xv + 230 pp. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-7735-2898-9.

Dwight L. Moody, Sam Jones, Sam Small, Reuben Archer Torrey, Charles Alexander and J. Wilbur Chapman. While there were other evangelists who came up from the United States to Canada, these men were the ones with the most significant impact and audiences. Crouse examines each man's revivalist campaign in Canada, and shows how support for such campaigns waxed and waned under each, ultimately waning by the time of Chapman. The description of the popular reaction to these revivals is fascinating, and Crouse's adept handling of the contemporary reports of the revivals provides the reader with a clear sense of the religious and social impact of these larger-than-life men. For instance, Crouse's description of people breaking a window to avoid asphyxiation in an over-packed auditorium in Toronto in 1886, only to have a hundred or so people try to get in through the window, provides a sense of the religious zeal of those who longed to hear these men preach.

From the 1880s through to the early 1900s these prominent evangelists travelled throughout Canada, speaking in most of the major cities and many smaller ones such as Ottawa, Hamilton, Kingston and Brantford. It was a time of serious social ills such as poverty and overcrowding



This volume is a part of the growing and valuable 'Studies in the History of Religion' series being published by McGill-Queen's University Press, begun by George Rawlyk but now edited by Donald H. Akenson. *Revival in the City* is an examination of how Canadian Protestants reacted to, and were influenced by, prominent American evangelists who travelled throughout Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The main sources for the extensive and detailed research by Professor Eric Crouse are the reports and analyses of the revivals in secular publications like the *Hamilton Daily Spectator* or the *Montreal Daily Star*, and in church publications such as the *Methodist Christian Guardian* or the Anglican *Canadian Churchman*. The specific American evangelists that he focuses on are