

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

In the late seventeenth century, Quakers originated a unique strain of constitutionalism, based on their theology and ecclesiology, that emphasized constitutional perpetuity and radical change through popular peaceful protest. While Whigs could imagine no other means of drastic constitutional reform except revolution, Quakers denied this as a legitimate option to halt governmental abuse of authority and advocated instead civil disobedience. This theory of a perpetual yet amendable constitution and its concomitant idea of popular sovereignty are things that most scholars believe did not exist until the American Founding. The most notable advocate of this theory was Founding Father John Dickinson, champion of American rights, but not revolution. His thought and action have been misunderstood until now, when they are placed within the Quaker tradition. This theory of Quaker constitutionalism can be traced in a clear and direct line from early Quakers through Dickinson to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Jane E. Calvert received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2003 and is currently assistant professor of history at the University of Kentucky. Her articles and reviews have been published in *History of Political Thought*, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, *History Compass*, *Annali di storia dell' esegesi*, *Quaker Religious Thought*, *Journal of Religion*, *Quaker History*, and *Pennsylvania History*. She has also received fellowships and grants from the University of Chicago (1996–99, 1999, 2001, 2002); Haverford College (2000); the Library Company of Philadelphia/Historical Society of Pennsylvania (2002); the Newberry Library (2005); the National Endowment for the Humanities (2005); the American Philosophical Society (2006); the Huntington Library (2006); and the David Library of the American Revolution (2007). She is currently working on an edited volume of John Dickinson's political writings.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

JANE E. CALVERT

*University of Kentucky*



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521884365](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521884365)

© Jane E. Calvert 2009

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2009

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Calvert, Jane E., 1970–

Quaker constitutionalism and the political thought of John Dickinson / Jane E. Calvert.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88436-5 (hbk.)

1. Dickinson, John, 1732–1810 – Political and social views. 2. Quakers – United States – Political activity – History – 18th century. 3. Constitutional history – United States.

4. Political science – United States – History – 18th century. 5. United States – Politics and government – 1775–1783. 6. United States – Politics and government – 1783–1809.

7. Pennsylvania – Politics and government – 1775–1865. 8. Delaware – Politics and government – 1775–1865. 9. Legislators – United States – Biography. 10. Quakers – Pennsylvania – Biography. I. Title.

E302.6.D5C34 2009

973.3'092-dc22 2008029668

ISBN 978-0-521-88436-5 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel timetables, and other factual information given in this work are correct at the time of first printing, but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee the accuracy of such information thereafter.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John  
Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For Eric*

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John  
Dickinson  
Jane E. Calvert  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
I. QUAKER CONSTITUTIONALISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, C.1652–1763	
1. Bureaucratic Libertines: The Origins of Quaker Constitutionalism and Civil Dissent	25
2. A Sacred Institution: The Quaker Theory of a Civil Constitution	65
3. “Dissenters in Our Own Country”: Constituting a Quaker Government in Pennsylvania	100
4. Civil Unity and “Seeds of Dissention” in the Golden Age of Quaker Theocracy	136
5. The Fruits of Quaker Dissent: Political Schism and the Rise of John Dickinson	177
II. THE POLITICAL QUAKERISM OF JOHN DICKINSON, 1763–1789	
6. Turbulent but Pacific: “Dickinsonian Politics” in the American Revolution	207
7. “The Worthy Against the Licentious”: The Critical Period in Pennsylvania	247
	vii

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John  
Dickinson  
Jane E. Calvert  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

viii	<i>Contents</i>
8. “The Political Rock of Our Salvation”: The U.S. Constitution According to John Dickinson	279
Epilogue: The Persistence of Quaker Constitutionalism, 1789–1963	312
<i>Bibliography</i>	335
<i>Index</i>	365

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

Looking back, I imagine I can see the beginnings of this book in my first year of college – at a Quaker school, reading Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*, and being entranced with his description of moderated political participation as the highest good. By graduation I had a growing collection of questions that needed answering – about Americans and how they relate to one another and their government and about Quakerism. Beginning this project as my master’s thesis at the University of Chicago was a first attempt to find answers.

As the study progressed through the dissertation and into this final form, teachers, mentors, colleagues, and friends shaped it and helped bring it forth with their own questions and observations. I can trace the birth of specific themes back to their words. Tom Hamm asked me what I thought of Quaker quietism. Martin Marty talked with me about the “leaky Quakers,” with their porous and fluid community. Catherine Brekus pushed me to think about whether Quakers were simply radical Puritans. Pauline Maier and Ethan Shagan thought with me about whether Quakers, as pacifists, could be considered Whigs. And, in a question that turned the dissertation toward a book, Cass Sunstein asked whether Quakers considered the constitution sacrosanct. While these snippets are hardly the only guidance I received, they are the moments that stand out in my mind as turning points in the development of my thesis. I hope my responses do justice to their queries.

Many others were helpful in equally important ways. Mark Noll served as my constant optimistic skeptic, always challenging, rarely convinced in the early stages, but always encouraging. Matt Cohen described, in terms that are still beyond me, why my project was worthwhile. Paul Rahe and Kenneth Bowling had, among much sage advice, the foresight to know that I was writing a book about John Dickinson years before I did. It was my good fortune that Jim Green at the Library Company of Philadelphia directed me their way. The kind folks at the Friends Library of Swarthmore College were always ready with bountiful resources, reliable assistance, and donations to the Calvert library. Georg Mauerhoff at Readex gave me access to *Archive of Americana*, without

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

which I would have been at a loss. Lisa Clark Diller provided me with among the most thoughtful comments on an early draft. My student assistants, Peter Regan and Karl Alexander, worked long hours with messy early footnotes. The RHCP were ever present with their spicy soul food for the heart and mind, which sustained me in ways nothing else could. Lew Bateman, my editor at Cambridge, was as patient as he could be with this simultaneously picky and ignorant first-time author. And the Friends of the John Dickinson Mansion have been as enthusiastic an audience as a scholar can hope to have. My heartfelt appreciation to each and all.

Fellowships and grants from a number of institutions were also crucial for the completion of the project. Most important was the Newberry Library (Monticello College Foundation Fellowship), where, with the gifts of six months without teaching and a lively and supportive intellectual community, the dissertation transformed, seemingly on its own, into a book. Those were, without a doubt, the most fulfilling months of my professional life. An NEH “We the People” Summer Stipend and the administration of St. Mary’s College of Maryland contributed to this scholarly getaway. The support of the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship), often embodied in the person of librarian Connie King, allowed me access to the seminal resources on Dickinson. The American Philosophical Society (Library Residence Research Fellowship), the Haverford College Quaker Collection (Gest Fellowship), and the Huntington Library (Robert L. Middlekauff Fellowship) offered unique and indispensable resources and support in spectacular environs. The bucolic, if not rabbit-friendly, environment of the David Library of the American Revolution (Library Fellowship) was the fulfillment of a dream – twenty-four-hour library access to everything a girl could desire on the War of Independence. Conversations with the staffs and scholars I have met at these places enriched and complicated my ideas. I am grateful to all of them.

Acknowledgment is also due to several journals for allowing me to reprint portions of articles in this study: “The Quaker Theory of a Civil Constitution,” *History of Political Thought* vol. 27, no. 4 (2006), 586–619; “America’s Forgotten Founder: John Dickinson and the American Revolution,” *History Compass*, 5/3 (May 2007), 1001–11, DOI 10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00424.x; and “Liberty without Tumult: Understanding the Politics of John Dickinson,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 132, no. 3 (2007), 233–62. The readers at these journals, as well as those at Cambridge University Press, offered wonderful encouragement and suggestions.

My deepest appreciation goes to my family. My mother, Jenifer Patterson, was a constant, without whom I would not have even made it through graduate school. I am sure the political theory genes I inherited from my father-professor, Robert Calvert, as well as the decades of ideas he exposed me to, are the reason I had any questions to begin with. And my brother, Edward Calvert, was always interested in and appreciative of my progress.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-88436-5 - Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*Acknowledgments*

xi

Above all, however, this project would not have emerged from the dark recesses without my husband, Eric Kiltinen. The questions he asked, drawing it out, and the hours he spent (often trapped in a moving car) listening to my inchoate musings cannot be enumerated. He has been an invaluable sounding-board, a learned theologian, a meticulous editor and index-helper, a competent computer-fixer, a reliable and loving cat- and horse-sitter, a steady Baconbringer, cook, carpenter, and all-around Hausmann, and my friend. If there is anything worthy about this book, I owe it to him, because it could not have been written without him.

Lexington, Kentucky

June 2008

Abbreviations

APS	American Philosophical Society
<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Letters from the Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789.</i> Paul Hubert Smith, ed. 25 vols. Summerfield, FL: Historical Database, 1995.
DPA	Delaware Public Archives
FHL	Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania
HQC	Haverford College Quaker Collection
<i>Friends’ Library</i>	<i>The Friends’ Library: comprises journals, doctrinal treatises, and other writings of the Religious Society of Friends.</i> William Evans and Thomas Evans, eds. 14 vols. Philadelphia: J. Rakestraw, 1837–50.
JCC	<i>Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789.</i> Worthington C. Ford et al., eds. Washington, DC, 1904–37.
JDP/LCP	John Dickinson Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia
LL	<i>Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary, 1682–1709.</i> Craig Horle et al., eds. 3 vols. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991–2005.
LCP	Library Company of Philadelphia
<i>Letters</i>	John Dickinson, <i>Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, To the Inhabitants of the British Colonies</i> (1767–68) in Forrest McDonald, ed., <i>Empire and Nation: Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania (John Dickinson); Letters from a Federal Farmer (Richard Henry Lee)</i> , 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1999).

“Notes”	John Dickinson, handwritten notes on his copy of <i>The Constitution of the Common-Wealth of Pennsylvania</i> (Philadelphia, 1776), 5–9, located in the Library Company of Philadelphia.
Resolutions	Resolutions from the “Meeting in the State-House Yard” in Peter Force, ed., <i>American Archives</i> . ser. 5 (Washington, DC, 1837–53), 1149–52. Published in the <i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i> , Oct. 23, 1776.
RRL/HSP	R. R. Logan Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania
PA	<i>Pennsylvania Archives, Eighth Series: Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania</i> . Gertrude MacKinney, ed. 7 vols. Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall, 1931.
Penn-Logan Corresp.	<i>Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan, Secretary of the Province and Others</i> . Edward Armstrong, ed. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1870–72.
PMHB	<i>Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography</i>
PWP	<i>The Papers of William Penn</i> . Richards. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, eds. 5 vols. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981–86.
PYM	Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Statutes	<i>Statutes-at-Large of Pennsylvania from 1682–1801</i> . James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, eds. 15 vols. Harrisburg, PA: Clarence M. Busch, State Printer of Pennsylvania, 1896–1911.
WMQ	<i>The William and Mary Quarterly</i>