

Margaret Fell Fox – Mother of the Quakers

During the 1600s George Fox started a reformation movement known as the Quakers. Also called the Society of Friends, this group was known for its silent meetings, which emphasized individual experience and communion with God, its pacifist political stance and its members' commitment to social justice.

This sect played a very significant role in changing the scope of Christianity in England and the new colonies. But if it had not been for the tireless efforts of one woman, the movement might never have gotten off the ground.

Margaret Askew was born in 1614 to a wealthy family in Lancashire, England. While still a teen-ager she married Thomas Fell, who was much older than she.

Her husband was a former member of Parliament and a well-respected judge. His business dealings caused him to spend a considerable amount of time away from his large estate home of Swarthmore.

Margaret was often left in charge of administering the estate's affairs. It was a task for which she proved very capable.

When she was 38, Margaret met itinerant preacher George Fox. In the short time he visited at Swarthmore Hall, Margaret, her daughters and her servants all accepted the new truths he espoused.

Although Margaret's husband never became a Quaker, he was sympathetic to Fox's message. He used his power to protect his wife and her friends from political and religious persecution.

Fox had few organizational skills, so Margaret graciously stepped in and used the vast resources of her husband's estate to help birth and organize the Quaker movement. In 1658 Judge Fell died, leaving the huge estate to his wife. But soon after his death, Margaret, who was no longer protected from religious harassment by her husband's influence, lost her inheritance.

At the time, Quakers were encountering intense persecution. Both George Fox and Margaret Fell, along with many other followers in the group, were imprisoned for propagating the new doctrine.

Margaret became a prolific writer and apologist. She wrote many doctrinal papers that helped to formalize the Quaker beliefs.

The best known of her pamphlets was *Women's Speaking Justified by the Scriptures*, published in 1666 during a four-year imprisonment. This work set forth a vigorous defense in favor of women's spiritual equality and their active participation in public ministry.

In 1669 Margaret Fell and George Fox were married. In the years to follow they organized a worldwide movement. William Penn visited Swarthmore Hall in 1676 and later went on to found the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania.

In 1691, George Fox died; Margaret died 11 years later in 1702. Through all her trials and hard work she became known as the "nursing mother" of Quakerism.