

Some of Thomas Jefferson's Complicated Friends: Quakers Working for Jefferson on his Slave Plantations or Providing Outside Goods

a Virtual Fellow's Forum with Sue Kozel

A virtual fellow's forum with Sue Kozel, Independent Scholar, from August 2021.

Recording available (<https://vimeo.com/616076855>)

During and after the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson maintained working relationships with many American Quakers, including some who opposed enslavement. While defending the right of Quakers to worship in Virginia, Jefferson also described the Quakers as “British” by nature due to their role as pacifists in the American Revolution. Jefferson’s relationship with Quakers has long, conflicted, and sometimes contradictory roots and outcomes. Scholar Sue Kozel will examine several of Jefferson’s business relationships with Quakers, including the Brinhursts of Philadelphia; Philadelphia iron monger and jail visionary Caleb Lownes; and American Philosophical Society president Caspar Wistar, a Quaker who often corresponded with Jefferson on the Lewis & Clark expedition and scientific matters, but only once addressed slavery (and only then meekly writing on behalf of his abolitionist brother). The prospect of business with this wealthy slave-owning Virginian might have caused some Quakers to put aside moral values. In this talk, Kozel will delve deeper into Quakers working for and with Jefferson and seeks to deconstruct what historian Jay Worrall described as Quaker influences on Jefferson, including the alleged Quaker roots of his mother. This research hopes to excavate the Quakers who were paid wages by or traded with Jefferson and will plot, on a working map, Quakers on the Jefferson payroll on his slave plantations, those who rented mill or land from Jefferson, those who provided services in cities in which Jefferson resided, and those who sold Jefferson goods. To do this, Kozel will explore the ideas of morals by focusing on the question, “Does it always come down to money?”

Sue Kozel is an independent scholar. She is developing a co-edited book project with Scholar James Gigantino on New Jersey African Americans and freedom after the American Revolution. Additionally, while named a “Public Scholar” by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, she presented narratives from her book project that chronicles the life and murder of NJ enslaved woman “Wench Betty.” This project has unveiled

unexpected twists and turns with slaves purchased after Betty's murder being brought to Ohio by her killer's family, with at least one African American not freed until 1833, and the re-discovery of a Potter's Fields of African American enslaved in Betty's town, Allentown, Upper Freehold, New Jersey.

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