Quakers Journey to the Orient: East Asia Material in Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College

Albert W. Fowler
ARTICLES

QUAKERS JOURNEY TO THE ORIENT: EAST ASIA MATERIAL
IN FRIENDS HISTORICAL LIBRARY OF SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

Albert W. Fowler
Swarthmore College

Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College has Quaker history as a collecting focus and, since Quakers have had much less contact with Asia than with Europe or even Africa, the amount of source material pertaining to East Asian is small. Only two out of more than 250 manuscript and archival collections have a clear East Asia focus. However, some other collections contain significant East Asian material, presenting aspects of East Asian life and culture as seen from the perspective of American Quakers.

Friends Historical Library was established in 1871, two years after the opening of Swarthmore College, when Anson Lapham donated 150 volumes of Quaker books for a small library "exclusively for matters pertaining to Friends." Since then it has evolved into a major research library with material on the history and doctrine of the Religious Society of Friends, Quaker activity in literature, science, business, education, and government, plus Quaker reform efforts in peace, Indian rights, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery.

Swarthmore and Haverford Colleges were each established by different branches of Quakers (Orthodox founded Haverford and Hicksites Swarthmore) but, since the reunion of the two Philadelphia Yearly Meetings in 1955, the two colleges share responsibility for the care of the official Philadelphia Quaker records. In addition to publications and documents, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College has major collections of photographs, drawings and other works of art, audiorecordings, motion pictures, and artifacts and the library holds either in the original manuscript or on microfilm the largest collection in the world of official Quaker meeting records. The manuscript and visual archives of Swarthmore College are available at Friends Historical Library. Almost all of the collections the library holds are in the English language.

In addition to collections of Quaker sources pertaining to East Asia available at the Quaker Collection at Haverford College and at Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, the scholar may want to consult the archives of the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia. The AFSC, a major social service organization of American Quakers founded in 1917, cooperated in the Friends Ambulance Unit in China, prepared position papers concerning United States foreign policy towards China, and was one of the leading pacifist organizations opposing United States participation in the Indochina War. The Swarthmore College Peace Collection also has considerable source material from the peace movement concerning the Indochina War, as well as some collections pertaining to Japan. Finally, the scholar may want to consult records of American Quaker missions available at Malone and Earlham Colleges, as well as records of British mission and overseas service records available at Friends House Library in London.

One of the most heavily consulted research collections, and certainly the most used resource by East Asian specialists, are the publications, manuscript writings, and related material of Inazô Nitobe (1862-1933). From a well-to-do Japanese family, Nitobe became religious at an early age and was drawn to the writings of Thomas Carlyle. He went abroad for his education, studying first at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His Ph.D. came from the university in Halle in Germany where he wrote a dissertation in German on Japanese landownership. Nitobe became a Quaker in 1885 while studying in Baltimore and soon afterward met Mary Patterson Elkinton (1857-1938), his future wife, when lecturing to a group of Quakers in Philadelphia. They did not marry until 1891 after his education in Germany was completed. Nitobe's career was mostly as an educator in Japan, but he also served as an agricultural administrator in Taiwan. He is most remembered as an
international statesman, serving as Under Secretary-General of the League of Nations at Geneva from 1919 to 1926. Nitobe’s writings, available at Swarthmore, should be considered as two separate but related collections: publications and manuscripts. The library catalogs all books (including those by Nitobe) and they are described in a card catalog maintained separately from the manuscript collections. We have a complete set of Nitobe’s published writings, both in English and Japanese.

The manuscript collection called Nitobe Papers is arranged according to archival principles and therefore described differently from books, using a typed inventory as the principal finding aid. The Nitobe Papers include the letters of both Inazō himself and his wife, Mary Patterson Elkinton Nitobe. The Inazō Nitobe letters in the collection are mostly addressed to members of the Elkinton family in Philadelphia and donated to the library by their descendants. This is a small portion of Nitobe’s manuscripts, most of which are in Japan. A leading Philadelphia Orthodox Quaker family, the Elkinons founded a chemical products firm, now called PQ Corporation. But the Elkinons blended business acumen with dedicated Christian service. Several family members were respected Quaker ministers who travelled widely in America and overseas. Initially, Mary Elkinton’s parents opposed her marriage to Inazō Nitobe. For a marriage to be approved by a Quaker meeting, permission from the parents was required. When Mary Elkinton’s parents disapproved, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting denied permission for the marriage. But, in an unusual reversal, the Meeting reconsidered and granted permission for the wedding which then took place without the Elkinton parents present. Her brothers, however, did attend.

The library holds three manuscript collections created by members of the Elkinton family, including the Nitobe Papers. The Inazō Nitobe letters, mostly addressed to his brother-in-law, Joseph Elkinton, deserve mention. Nitobe was teaching at the time of these letters, the 1890s, at the Sapporo Agricultural School and the letters describe the curriculum in some detail. Certainly agricultural lectures were important but what interested Nitobe most was teaching ethics and morality. Here he made use of the Bible and English literature to help fill in what he regarded as a moral void in Japanese culture. Also he was interested in education for self-government and used the writings of William Penn for that purpose. Finally, with the help and prodding of his American Quaker wife, Nitobe became interested in philanthropic work related to education, particularly readings for prisoners and the founding of a "Ragged" school for poor children for which he obtained financial assistance from the Elkinton family.

Here both Nitobes expressed a need not simply to talk about religion but to act according to its tenets. Seen from Nitobe’s later career, these early letters provide important insight into his view of culture and morality, how his understanding of Quakerism and Christianity contributed to these views, and how he blended Japanese culture and religion into a broad moral and religious framework. Nitobe’s aim of serving as "a bridge across the Pacific", helping Japanese and Westerners better understand and communicate with each other, is evident even in these formative years as an educator. Mary Elkinton Nitobe clearly shared her husband's dreams of religious service. Her letters, 1890-1938, in addition to providing insight into Inazō Nitobe’s career, describe her own important charitable work, her domestic life, and her continuing close contacts with the Elkinton family in Philadelphia.

The papers of Joseph Elkinton (1859-1920), brother of Mary Elkinton Nitobe, are included in the large collection of Elkinton family papers. As a Quaker minister, he became deeply involved in a project of religious service, assisting a group of Doukhobors, a small pacifist sect, in migrating from Russia to Canada to avoid military conscription. Joseph Elkinton’s papers are also of interest to the East Asian specialist because he made two extensive journeys to China and Japan in 1905 and 1915 which are both described in detail in letters to his family at home. The first trip was made at the suggestion of John Wanamaker, shortly after Elkinton, a chemist, retired from the family business and was free to devote time and energy to travels and religious concerns. In addition to visiting the Nitobes in Japan, Elkinton travelled extensively in China, mainly contacting Christian missions. A highlight of his travels was a spectacular but risky trip by boat several hundred miles up the Yangtze River. Joseph Elkinton was an avid photographer; a collection of glass slides from one of his trips is part of the Elkinton Family Papers.
In addition to Inazo Nitobe, another educator in East Asia reflected in the library's manuscript collections is Margaret Hallowell Riggs Augur, a Hicksite Quaker who taught in Canton, China in the 1920s. The collection, called Friends Opportunity in the Orient, was compiled by her Quaker supporters in the United States who informally, i.e., without official connection to a Quaker meeting, collected funds to support her work. The papers are mainly letters Margaret Riggs Augur sent to her American supporters reporting on her work. She had a Quaker sense of a religious calling to serve as an educator in China and regarded the funds raised as personal support for her work rather than specifically to benefit the institutions where she was employed. A complication developed when she switched employers, moving from Canton Christian College to Canton Hospital where her husband worked. An understandable result of that change was that the two institutions then competed for funds from her American sponsors, the College arguing that it was undenominational, while the Hospital had the burden of formal ties to the Presbyterian Mission.

Non-sectarian governance was evidently a powerful argument to her Quaker sponsors and, recognizing this, she defended the Hospital's work as being undenominational in nature with the connections to the Presbyterians being only technical. Her letters describe her personal life, her recent marriage, her motivation for Christian service through teaching. Very little specific information is given about her curriculum or her Chinese students except that she taught English, science, and gardening, mostly to Chinese adults. She provides quite a contrast to Inazo Nitobe who reported his curriculum and educational philosophy in considerable detail!

A third Quaker, or rather someone raised in a Quaker family, who journeyed to the Orient was Linnaeus Fussell (1842-1907), a Navy doctor. His letters form a small portion of a large manuscript collection, the Lewis Family Papers, and the East Asian specialist would be concerned only with those letters written by Fussell while aboard the U.S.S. Unadilla. This ship was based in Hong Kong from 1867 to 1869 from which it made occasional visits to nearby Chinese ports. On one occasion it also journeyed to the Tonkin Gulf and Siam.

During the Civil War, Fussell had joined the Union army, finding the call to free the slave, through war if necessary, stronger than the Quaker testimony of pacifism. After the war he had studied medicine and become a doctor in the U.S. Navy. Fussell's correspondence describes the life of an American naval officer, including contacts with the international military and diplomatic community, dominated by the British, stationed at Chinese posts. But his letters are also filled with curiosity about Chinese festivals, temples, gardens, and crowded city streets which he visited on frequent shore excursions. On at least two occasions, Fussell describes encounters with armed Chinese during journeys upriver.

The last document to be mentioned in this account of East Asian material is an epistle, an official letter from Szechwan Yearly Meeting of Friends in 1913 addressed to Quakers overseas, a copy of which was sent to James S. Haviland and is included in the Haviland Family Papers. The epistle expresses a belief in progress and the clear hope that the new Chinese Republic will provide a more supportive environment for a small Quaker Christian group than did the previous regime.
Several types of finding aids provide access to the library’s collections. An overview can be obtained through a brief descriptive leaflet, available free of charge. In addition, for $4.00, a researcher can purchase a copy of the Guide to the Manuscript Collections of Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College (1982) which describes briefly over 250 manuscript collections and contains an extensive index. In 1982 G. K. Hall published the Catalog of the Book and Serials Collections of the Friends Historical Library in which our card catalog is reproduced. It is held at a number of large research libraries where it can be consulted before visiting Swarthmore College. Our manuscript collections are described in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections and in some more specialized publications like Women’s History Sources. Our unpublished finding aids in the library include a card catalog for manuscript and archival collections, an inventory for Quaker meeting records, and a card index to the picture collections. More detailed inventories are available for most of the manuscript and archival collections. These inventories can be photocopied. For more specific questions or to provide information in advance of a research visit, please write to J. William Frost, Director or to Albert W. Fowler, Curator, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA 19081. The phone number is 215-328-8496.

The Quaker journeys to East Asia preserved in the collections of Friends Historical Library may be interpreted in various ways. The American Quaker travellers discussed in this article include a teacher, a mission visitor, a naval officer, and a woman who, against the advice of her family, became the wife of a Japanese educator who became a prominent international civil servant. Clearly, the collection that so far has proven most valuable to East Asian scholars is the Nitobe Papers. Inazō Nitobe’s journey was in the opposite direction to that of the four American Quakers. Each of these travellers, true to his or her own vision which included a Quaker dimension, attempted to build a bridge across the Pacific. Why these differing bridges were tried can provide the scholar with valuable evidence to assess interactions between Americans and East Asians which, though occurring in the past, hold significance for understanding our evolving cultural perspectives.