

# Guilfordian

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## Quaker Treasure Housed In Collection

By Iris B. Velvin

Four years ago, a University of Chicago graduate student, researching early religious thought in the South, came to visit his parents in High Point during semester break. Thomas E. Terrell, Jr., whose brother and sister had attended Guilford College, came to campus to inspect the Friends' Historical Collection in the library for information on early North Carolinian Quakerism. Among the documents, which date back to the 1680s, he found a piece of literature that put Guilford College in the news.

In the back of an old minutes book of the now-defunct Symonds Creek Monthly Meeting, Tom Terrell found the oldest poem yet discovered in the Carolinas. The poem, written by Henry White in 1698, is also the oldest known religious poetry from the South.

Terrell researched Henry White's Life and wrote an article about the poem, including its text, which was printed in the last issue of the Journal of Early American Literature. The journal is published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which prepared a news release about the finding. The story was picked up by The Associated Press and as a result was carried by many newspapers nationwide.

Terrell, who is now in law school at UNC, has corresponded with the curator of the Friends' Historical Collection. In a recent letter, he exclaims how he has told people about his discovery since it happened in late 1979, and has been met with yawns. But now, he says, it seems everyone is interested.

Not a lot is known about Henry White. He was born in Isle of Wight County in Virginia, and moved to what is now Perquimans County in eastern North Carolina. He was converted to Quakerism in 1679 by travelling evangelists, one of which was George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends. White became a religious leader in his community. A map of his property hangs on the wall of the Friends' Historical Collection Room in the campus library.

White's poem, 302 lines of rhymed couplets, tells of a man's fall from grace and his salvation through Christ. Terrell says that whatever the poem might lack in literary distinction, it makes up for in energy, "written out of deep religious conviction with the enthusiasm of a convert."

The poem differs from other Southern verse of its time, which

was primarily written by Virginians in praise of the commercial virtues of the New World. Most religious poetry of that era was written by the Puritans in New England, so the discovery of White's poem stunned Terrell. He says, "I knew almost immediately that I had come across a work of literature that came out of a period when things like this were not thought to exist."

In his article in *Early American Literature*, Terrell speculates that White wrote the poem to instruct members of his community in the Quaker faith. White's brief introduction to the poem says it contains "some holsum exhortations for everyone to take notice of, wrighten in verse by one who hath love in his harte to all mankind...that all may come to the knowleg of god." A portion of the poem, addressing God, reads:

"though with them then deliver and keep their souls forever but for the wiked thy soul doth hate ther actions all abomynate and will my soul doth know be honored in ther overthrow if that they dont with speed repent and com to Crist whom thou hast sent!"

The poem has an unpredictable meter and a surprising variation of rhyming sounds, but its value lies more in its historical significance rather than in its literary quality.

The style of White's work does not reveal any influence from Southern secular poetry of the day, says Damon Hickey, curator of the Friends' Historical Collection. White's verse more closely resembles the religious poetry of the New England Puritans. Hickey points out that although the Puritans persecuted Quakers in New England, even going so far as to hang some Friends who refused to accept banishment, the two sects shared a common religious background which could lead to similar expressions of faith.

"You wonder where he got his literary models from," Hickey says of White. "Religious poetry doesn't seem to have been a really big thing among early Quakers." He thinks that White was probably exposed to other literature in Virginia before moving to the isolated community in eastern North Carolina.

The poem's discovery pleases Damon Hickey, but does not seem to greatly shock him. "We're always in the process of discovering pleasant surprises in the collection," he says.



Photo by Tom Risser

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, Tears from the depth of some divine despair; Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes, In looking on the happy autumn fields, And thinking of the days that are no more."—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

## Guilford College Receives Aid Grant

Guilford College received a \$25,000 grant from The Cannon Foundation of Concord, NC, last week for career development and student self-help programs.

Guilford President William R. Rogers, in accepting the grant, said \$10,000 would fund pre-professional institutional work-study programs for students—providing special opportunities in areas such as computer science, recreational leadership, sports management, accounting, business office transactions, health service organization, academic tutoring, athletic training and teaching assistantships.

"In each of these areas," Rogers said, "students will gain valuable skills related on the one hand to their academic preparation and on the other to vocational competencies which will be im-

portant to them later on."

Another \$10,000 will fund part of the college's public service internships in settings such as hospitals, family service clinics, counseling services, museum administration and historical preservation.



"Opportunities to work as interns in these public service areas will again be related both to academic work within the College and to preparation for future positions of leadership in the public sector," Rogers explained.

He said the remaining \$5,000 would strengthen the job location and development program, a Guilford-Greensboro-Bennett

College cooperative effort that is housed on the Guilford campus. "This can help us increase staff support for this program—in turn, enabling us to locate more jobs for students and thereby increasing their self-help programs as they fund their educational work."

In expressing Guilford's gratitude to the Cannon Foundation for this "important support," Rogers said, "These programs will be extremely significant to our students as they seek ways simultaneously to meet education costs and to gain experience relevant to their future professional careers."

Cannon Foundation executive director Dan L. Gray praised Guilford College for "the fine work being done by your organization... we are glad to have a part in supporting its program."