



A Lenape among the Quakers: The Life of Hannah Freeman

Dawn G. Marsh

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On July 28, 1797, an elderly Lenape woman stood before the newly appointed almsman of Pennsylvania's Chester County and delivered a brief account of her life. In a sad irony, Hannah Freeman was establishing her residency—a claim that paved the way for her removal to the poorhouse. Ultimately, however, it meant the final removal from the ancestral land she had so tenaciously maintained. Thus was William Penn's "peaceable kingdom" preserved.

A Lenape among the Quakers reconstructs Hannah Freeman's history, traveling from the days of her grandmothers before European settlement to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The story that emerges is one of persistence and resilience, as "Indian Hannah" negotiates life with the Quaker neighbors who employ her, entrust their children to her, seek out her healing skills, and, when she is weakened by sickness and age, care for her. And yet these are the same neighbors whose families have dispossessed hers. Fascinating in its own right, Hannah Freeman's life is also remarkable for its unique view of a Native American woman in a colonial community during a time of dramatic transformation and upheaval. In particular it expands our understanding of colonial history and the Native experience that history often renders silent.

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