

Quaker Makers Through History

17TH-18TH CENTURY

● Schoolgirl needlework

Quaker schools in England and Philadelphia produced distinctive medallion samplers with octagonal motifs.

- Ackworth School; Westtown School
- Cross-stitch, silk globes, darning samplers

● Newport furniture

Quaker cabinetmakers in Rhode Island built some of colonial America's finest furniture from their close-knit Point neighborhood workshops.

- Townsend & Goddard families
- Mahogany case pieces, block-front forms

● Benjamin Lay's cloth

First Quaker on record to abstain from slave-made goods; spun and wore his own clothing as direct antislavery witness.

- Philadelphia, early 18th c.

● Quaker pottery

Utilitarian stoneware in Piedmont North Carolina; techniques passed within kin networks and carried west with antislavery migration.

- Deep River Friends community

● Philadelphia cabinetmakers

Quaker craftsmen among the foremost furniture makers of colonial Philadelphia, in Chippendale and Queen Anne styles.

- William Savery, Thomas Affleck, David Evans

EARLY 19TH CENTURY

● John Woolman's undyed cloth

Wore undyed linen because dyes relied on enslaved labor — making his theology visible in his own dress.

- The garment as testimony
- Stood out even among plain-dressing Friends

● Free Produce movement

Quakers boycotted slave-made cotton, sugar, and dyes. Quilts left unfinished for want of free-labor thread.

- Lucretia Mott wore only wool & linen
- Elizabeth Chandler, Michigan frontier
- James Mott quit cotton trade for wool

● Elizabeth Fry's prison work

Quaker minister taught sewing and patchwork at Newgate Prison. Inmates earned income selling quilts and gained skills for life after release.

- Rajah Quilt — made at sea, 1841
- Convicts quilted en route to Australia

● Antislavery fairs

Quaker women sold quilts, needle books, and pincushions at abolitionist bazaars — craft objects as political argument.

- Pennsylvania Female Anti-Slavery Society
- "When pincushions are periodicals..."

MID-LATE 19TH CENTURY

● Abolition quilts

Quaker women stitched political messages into quilts; some Meeting communities made them collectively as corporate witness.

- Hadley Quilt, Indiana YM, 1842
- Chandler poem at center of 1836 crib quilt

● Edward Hicks, painter

Painted dozens of "Peaceable Kingdom" canvases as peace testimony. Understood painting as ministry; gave work freely.

- Bucks County, Pennsylvania

● North Carolina stoneware

Quaker potters carried the utilitarian pottery tradition westward with antislavery migration; it persisted into the 20th century.

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20TH CENTURY

● AFSC wartime making

WWI & WWII: Friends sewed clothing for relief and taught sewing to refugee women for self-sufficiency. Rebuilt 95% of homes in one Lorraine village.

- Founded maternity hospital in France, 1917
- Great Depression: craft training in Appalachia

● Stanley Webb Davies

British Quaker; premier Arts & Crafts furniture maker. First built wooden houses for WWI refugees in France before establishing his Lake District workshop.

- Windermere workshop, 1920s–1970s

● Quaker Tapestry

4,000 volunteers from 15 countries stitched 77 crewelwork panels over 15 years. A new stitch — the Quaker stitch — was invented for the project.

- Initiated by Ann Wynn-Wilson, 1981
- Kendal, Cumbria; based on Bayeux Tapestry
- Community making as corporate memory

TODAY

Friends

● Todd Drake, printmaker

New York Quaker produces linocuts and silkscreens on war and peace themes, posting them publicly as witness. Organizes Quaker Canvassing Peace Walks.

- Penington Friends House, East Village

● Pacific YM mutual aid

Young Adult Friends organized intergenerational mutual aid networks during COVID, bridging youth and elders and serving vulnerable community members.

- Santa Cruz Meeting, 2020

● Simplicity & ethical sourcing

Contemporary Friends apply the simplicity testimony through consumer choices — fair trade goods, mending over disposal, supply chain as moral question.

- Continuity of the Free Produce logic

TODAY

Quaker-resonant

Projects outside the Society of Friends that embody the same logic: decentralized making, open knowledge, craft in service of justice.

● e-NABLE prosthetics

~40,000 volunteers worldwide 3D print free prosthetic hands for people who lost limbs to war, disaster, or illness. Each hand costs \$1–5 to print.

- Open-source designs, freely shared
- Used by Syrian refugees in Lebanon

● Field Ready

Humanitarian NGO prints critical items on-site in disaster zones, replacing parts unavailable in broken supply chains and teaching skills to local partners.

- Umbilical cord clamps, Haiti
- Baby warmer parts, Nepal (12 hrs vs. 3 months)
- 215 medical device parts, Syria, 2020

● COVID PPE response

When hospital supply chains collapsed in 2020, distributed maker networks printed face shields and masks. Open-source files enabled rapid local production worldwide.

- 1,500+ volunteers, Colorado alone
- 500,000+ items shipped in April 2020

Across four centuries, a consistent logic runs through these projects: skills and tools shared across power differences; distributed production rather than centralized charity; open knowledge as a commons; and making as a form of human connection and dignity — not merely supply chain problem-solving. The antislavery sewing circle and the global 3D-printing volunteer network are separated by 180 years and very different technologies, but share the same animating conviction: that how we make, what we make with, and what we make for are all moral questions.