



Cousins, Edward and Elias

People might ask, “Who was that Quaker that painted those pictures, or perhaps what is a “Hicksite?” I’d like to get this straight from the beginning; They are asking about two different people both named Hicks; Edward Hicks was a not so famous Minister to the Religious Society of Friends, (Quakers) a mediocre farmer, and very famous American painter. It’s his painting that brought him fame but his preaching was described this way;

“His testimonies were often severe... yet to the penitent, to the returning prodigal, the sinner awakened to a sense of his guilt and to the seeking children his doctrine dropped as dew.”

Elias Hicks, Edward’s much older second cousin, was a not so famous farmer and carpenter but a very famous American Quaker Minister. Like cousin Edward, Elias ‘s preaching was severe but the “dew” from his sermons was on his brow. It is

said he preached with such vigor he needed a handkerchief to keep himself dry. More about that later.

Elias was a very self-confident person, but Edward seems to have had a self-image problem. Unlike the bold announcements that heralded a sermon by cousin Elias this is the way he notified the public of his plans to preach;

“A Little Present for Friends and Friendly People:
In the form of Miscellaneous Discourse
By a Poor Iterate Mechanic.”

Edward conveyed meaning through symbols portrayed simply. Over his lifetime he produced sixty-one known paintings with a Peaceable Kingdom message taken from the Bible, (Isaiah,11:6-8). Cousin Elias Hicks used his considerable written and verbal skills to produce about the same number of complex but quotable quotes. Some of which are easily understood by the modern reader. Very few of today's Quakers can recite a quote from Elias but almost all of them can recognize Edward's paintings, although they may not know his name was Edward.

Elias was a, “Birthright Quaker” as he was born to a Quaker family living in Long Island, New York where Quakers were hard to find. Later in life he worked to change that by helping to build his own Meeting House.

Elias became a member of the Society of Friends, in his early twenties. He and his wife Jemima who bore eleven children of which only five survived, were so against alcohol that they allowed travelers to stay in their Long Island home without

charge so as to keep them away from the taverns. Quite the contrary, Edward was born into an Anglican family but was raised by Quakers in that cradle of Quakerism, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Unlike his cousin Elias, in his youth Edward had a regular seat at the local taverns. He describes his early years as “wayward” but became “convinced” (of Quakerism) and a member of the Society in his early twenties or at about the same age as Elias just thirty years or so later.

On the surface they were different people but there was also a common bond between the two men. That bond was a deep belief in the “inner light,” or a person’s relationship to the “God Within.” Arguing against religious leaders of the time they both preached that scripture without a person’s relationship to the inner light was at best useless and at worst dangerous. As you might expect they suffered severe criticism for this view; especially by the English Quakers, who it appears to me felt that adherence to the Bible was a matter of personal responsibility rather than behavior guided by the spirit. To make his point Elias made this argument when he preached;

“People have Killed each other for the sake of scripture.”

Edward who spoke loudly with his preaching and softly with his painting tried again and again to heal this theological disagreement among his beloved Quakers. It is also easy to suspect that he painted to heal himself. Over and over again he used his passion for art to portray his view that William Penn’s seventeenth century treaty with the Lenape Indians of

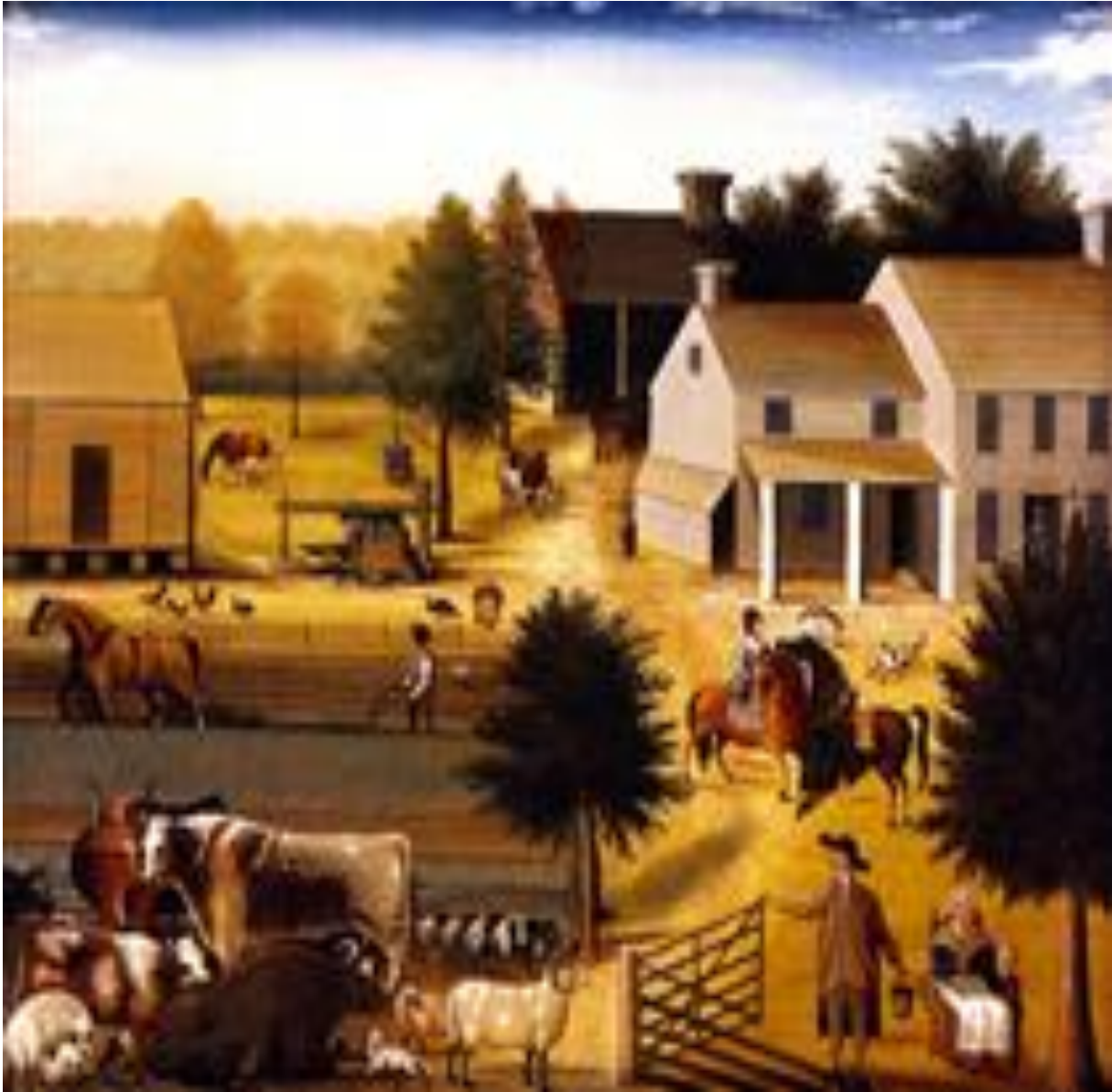
Pennsylvania brought with it a roadmap for a diverse people to live together in perpetual harmony. Unfortunately, the actual treaty appears to be a myth created in a painting by the English artist Benjamin West as no document representing this supposed treaty has never been found. Treaty or not Penn kept his promise of peace with the Indians but sadly his dream and Edwards were never realized. As soon as Penn returned to England his sons cheated them out of their land, ending their fathers promise and Edwards hope for re- uniting the Society didn't come until long after his death.

While Edward was painting serene scenes of predators snuggling up to their prey. Elias on the other hand, was preaching powerfully and with determination. For the rest of his life, he remained unmoved by the pain felt by Edward and others as he continued to widen the differences within the Society by refuting the concepts of; penal substitution, original sin, the trinity, predestination, the impossibility of falling from grace, and an external devil. Edward preached the same message from the same page and although it's debatable his cousin Elias was the one who became known as the founder of the "Progressive" Quakers.

As Elias traveled and preached the poorer and more rural Quakers gradually began to call themselves "Hicksites" while the urban and usually wealthier Quakers who gave strict adherence to the scriptures became known as "Orthodox." After years of friction the disagreement came to a head in 1828 at the Yearly Meeting of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting when

the two sides could not agree on a clerk for the following year. Sadly, in that next year with each side claiming authority, there were two parallel Yearly Meetings held and the split between factions of the Religious Society of Friends became official. That split which was expected to last a year or two ended officially in 1968 with the reunification of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

While Edward and Elias were unified in their message, they lived very different private lives. Elias appears to this Quaker to be very self-confident and dogmatic in his views. Quite the opposite Edward spent most of his life in inner conflict filled with self-doubt. The difference seems to be simply a product of destiny. Elias was taught farming by his father and his success as a farmer allowed him the freedom to travel as a Minister. Edwards mother died when he was one year old and his father being a Tory, was stripped of his property after the revolutionary war. Out of necessity, at the tender age of three, he was sent to be raised by a Quaker friend of his mothers. Edward has said that these years were perhaps happiest time of his life.



Years later he rendered the farm this way.
His adoptive parents are in the lower right corner.



At age thirteen Edward left the farm, became apprenticed, and learned his craft painting signs and carriages. Unlike Elias, Edwards talent was not farming but painting and the only way he could support himself and his family of five children while traveling as a Minister was to decorate the signs and household items he was paid to paint. He spent his life wishing that it were not true but he loved creating art for art's sake and most unfortunately for him it was believed by the Quakers of the time that decorative art lacked practicality and therefore was an indulgence. To his lifelong regret in the face of tremendous opposition his passion never left him. Good for him.

Edward describes his suffering this way;

“My constitutional nature has presented formidable obstacles to the attainment of the truly desirable character, a consistent and exemplary member of the Religious Society of Friends, one of which is an excessive fondness for painting, a trade to which I was brought up”

(Which one of us could not substitute our own word in place of “painting?”)

Although they agreed on the inner light, they obviously differed greatly on the importance of harmony within the Society of Friends. Despite their differences Edward and Elias met and corresponded regularly and in time Edward grew to love his cousin. In 1829 when he was forty-nine years old and Elias was then eighty-one (just a year from his passing,) he began to include his him in his paintings. Most of this love must have come from their shared religious view, but perhaps some of it was born out of the relief he experienced, (and the rest of us) from his internal struggle when his cousin preached;

“God gave us passion- if we may call them passions- in order that we might seek after those things which we need and have a right to experience.” (yes, sex was included)

While Elias and Edward were both very public preacher’s they lived their private lives differently. Edward, perhaps to quell some of his guilt regarding his passion painted his Peaceable

Kingdom series, sometimes called his easel paintings, (as opposed to signs and furniture,) exclusively for his private enjoyment and always gifted them away to his Family and Friends. He never intended them to be commercialized. We enjoy the paintings now because they eventually found their way into the American art markets of the 1920's and 1930's. If it were not for them, he probably would have been largely forgotten.

Edward began the paintings that brought him his immortality in 1816 when he was twenty-six years of age. He continued painting them throughout his lifetime. While Elias and cousin Edward's preaching and writing was always consistent and unified, Edwards "Kingdom" paintings can be categorized into three definite periods. Early, Middle, and Late, but all of them contain the same Biblical message;

[“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”](#)

Many art critics, authors, and contributors to Wikipedia have different theories regarding his message and motivation. Having read many of them I can say, yours and mine are as good as any. Lucky for us that leaves you and I free to use our own imagination as to what they say or don't say.



This is the first of what came to be called his easel paintings. (as opposed to signs and furniture painting) Was it his attempt at a “Peaceable Kingdom or was it just a collection of the representations he had learned to inscribe on signs, coaches, and household items? Maybe it’s just his imaginary petting zoo? To our eternal frustration perhaps it’s simply a picture of predators and prey with no message at all. Beautiful in its simplicity it shows no sign of formal training and thus it is referred to most frequently as “Naïve” or “Untrained Art.” I prefer the term “American Primitive” or “Folk Art “which came much later but for me brings a certain amount of validity to the

style. It is not difficult to imagine that the simplicity inherent in Edwards painting was as much trying to paint simply in accordance with his Quaker beliefs as the limits of his artistic skill. It is also true that his commercial paintings were not of the Peaceable Kingdom theme. In his vocation he repeatedly produced paintings of George Washington, The Declaration of Independence, Penn's grave at Jordans, Niagara Falls and others which often display a much more formal style but would still not be considered, "Fine Art."

Since it's been decided that your opinion and mine is as good as any, I agree with those who say it conveys a clear message. I see the the figures in the painting as not so much about Lions and Lambs as Orthodox and Hicksite Friends, (capital F) peacefully co-existing. Only Edward knows for sure but one might assume that the child in the painting is the baby Jesus, or perhaps the artist himself, and the animals surrounding him are representations of people who were part of Hick's life; cousin Elias included. I would like to think that Edward, whose Quaker faith would not allow him to approve of his own passion, painted himself into the scene somewhere, but which one? What about the lion? Some believe the lion represents England still others see it as simply a character in the verse. If I had a choice, I would be the leopard.



This is the first of Edwards paintings that is clearly meant to symbolize the Peaceable Kingdom as represented in the Old Testament. He reveals his skills as a sign painter when he narrates the painting in the frame (just in case you didn't get the point.) If you think you have seen the background detail of Virginia's Natural Bridge before you just may have. This one is borrowed from a painting by Richard Westhall entitled, "The Peaceable Kingdom of The Branch." It appears that it now resides in the White House and can often be seen displayed behind the president on your evening news.

Since these paintings were never intended for sale Edward felt free to copy the Natural Bridge in this work, and details from other artists whenever it suited his purpose. If you look really hard you can find William Penn and other Quakers standing with Indians under the bridge. They appear to be holding a document that is assumed to be the treaty. Variations of Penn and his group appear and then disappear again and again in the series. This one was painted in 1829 when Edward was forty-nine years old and Elias was eighty-one. It may well be that because his cousin began his eternal rest that year or perhaps it was caused by the split among Friends becoming official in 1830 Edward began to include cousin Elias in his Peaceable Kingdom series, (below).



You must look carefully but Elias is can be identified because he is standing in profile holding his legendary handkerchief. Once you have found Elias compare the sleeping leopard in that picture with the one above. Now the leopard is wide eyed. the lion cuddles up to the child, and William Penn his entourage and the Indians, which were always included in previous paintings have disappeared. A crowd has gathered behind his cousin and there is a banner threading its way thru the crowd that reads;

“Mind the light within, it is glad tidings of great joy peace on earth, good will.”

This begins what has been dubbed Edwards, “Branch paintings “as the child is always seen holding a branch, a symbol which apparently had great meaning to Edward. (feel free to make your own guess along with all the others). It is in this period that the animals begin to take on human characteristics. There is expression in their faces and their body language is relaxed. Please notice how the entire canvas glows with the youthful look of the child that seems to be enjoying the affection it’s receiving from the lion. Throughout the decades of his work the expressive gaze of the animals along with their size, body language and position on the canvas changes constantly. It’s clear to me that our Mr. Hicks has used the animals as symbols toward a greater message and although it quite probably was a portrayal of his pain regarding the split among Quakers as has been said, “it can say whatever the viewer wants it to say.”

When Edward began including his cousin in the paintings it marked the beginning of Edwards middle period. While Cousin Elias was traveling the country successfully prompting Long Island farmers to free their slaves, live a temperate life, and be guided by the inner light Edward was preaching the same message but privately he continued painting. In this period the animals in the painting have a look of concern and there appears a crack in the earth separating the animals and the children from Penn and his companions who have reappeared. A second crack in the earth at the bottom of the painting makes its appearance and seems to threaten the children at its edge. It says to me that he saw the split that was causing him so much pain was becoming more entrenched and putting future generations in jeopardy.



In Edwards late period all of his paintings show the animals aging and the crack widening as it threatens to swallow up the children in the foreground. William Penn and his followers are

still included and at the same time the animals become much larger and are portrayed as being much older and feebler. The generally peaceful tone of the paintings moves to one that is darker and somewhat distressing.



Edward was working on this painting for his daughter in 1849 when he died at the age of sixty-nine. The joy of the early paintings has been replaced by the sadness which was his life. His beloved cousin Elias had been dead for seventeen years and the division among the members of his faith had widened beyond hope of reconciliation. Today his paintings are scattered around the world and he finds his rest where he preached. in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Cousin Elias's last wish was that he not be laid out in a cotton blanket produced by slave labor and many Quakers even now in what has expanded into "suburban" Bucks County call themselves, "Hicksites".

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