

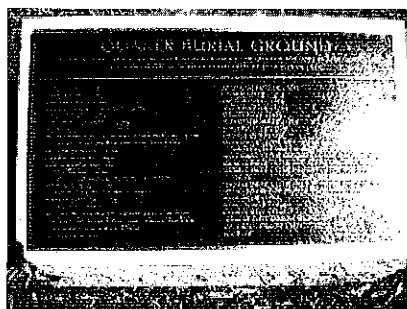
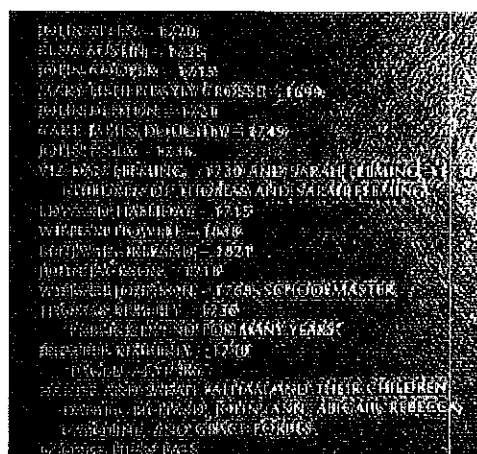
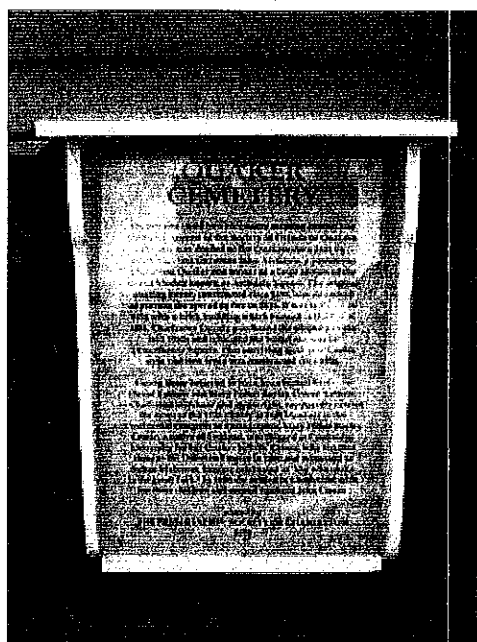


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Mary Fisher Crosse

BIRTH 1623
York, York Unitary Authority, North Yorkshire, England

DEATH 1698 (aged 74–75)
Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina, USA

BURIAL Quaker Churchyard
Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina, USA

MEMORIAL ID 52351571

Quaker preacher and missionary. In 1652 when she first appeared in a historical record, she was living in the town of Pontefract in Yorkshire, England as the servant of Richard Tomlinson. At this time, under the influence of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, many converts were made in the area, among them Mary Fisher and probably her master and mistress also. The public rebuke of clerical and civil officers was a characteristic act of early Quakers; Mary Fisher was imprisoned in York Castle in 1652 because she thus spoke to the "priest" at Selby. That same year she was one of the six Friends, all "prisoners of the Lord at York Castle," who supplements their rebuke by issuing a pamphlet, "False Prophets and False Teachers Described." In 1653 and 1654 she suffered further imprisonments at York for like offense at the church in Pontefract. The Quakers hostility extended also to the colleges where the regular ministry were trained. In December 1653, now a full-fledged itinerant preacher, Mary Fisher went with an older unmarried woman, Elizabeth Williams, to Cambridge University, where they reprovved some students and were heckled in return, The two women were, upon instructions from the mayor, taken to the Market Cross, stripped naked to the waist, and severely flogged, probably under the terms of an old law against vagabonds then being revived and used against Quakers. In 1655 Mary Fisher-still formenting trouble in pursuit of her faith-was imprisoned for rebuking the "priest" of Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire. Later that year she made her first contacts with America, traveling with another woman older than herself, married and the mother of five children,

named Ann Austin. After some time in the British West Indies island of Barbados, a relatively receptive place for Quakers, these two made their way to Boston harbor in Massachusetts Bay colony. They arrived in July 1656. Though no Quakers had before visited that colony, the sect's reputation as heretics had preceded them. Seeking to avoid the danger of contagion, the deputy governor, Richard Bellingham, and the Council took firm steps. The two women were not allowed to land until their "books," about a hundred pamphlets of Quaker propaganda, had been confiscated and burned by the common hangman and they themselves had been searched naked for marks of witches; they were then taken ashore, held incommunicado for five weeks, and banished back to Barbados. About two days after their departure eight more Quakers sailed into the harbor, and others followed, to be met by still sterner measures of repression, until in the years 1659-1661 four Quaker visitors were executed, among them Mary Dyer. There are scattered references to Mary Fisher in the West Indies after her attempted missionary work in New England, But the next major episode of her colorful life took her in the opposite direction. As early as 1657-58 (not, as often reported, in 1660) she joined a group of three men and three women traveling from England by ship to the Mediterranean and the Near East, by her own account, then journeyed alone overland some five to six hundred miles from the western shore of southern Greece to Adrianople in Turkey to interview the young Sultan Mahomet IV, who was encamped nearby with his army. Describing herself as an ambassador of "the Most High God," she was presented to the Sultan, to whom she freely spoke her mind. The formal interview completed, she declined a proffered escort and guard and made her way safely to Constantinople and so back to England. Her report of these events made a lasting impression, for the "Great Turk" was a dreaded figure in the imagination of the West. His kindness to an unprotected maiden stood in contrast to the treatment she had received at the hands of Christians both in England and New England. Of the next years of Mary Fisher's life little is known. In 1662 she was married to William Bayly, a sea captain of Poole, England, and a noted Quaker preacher and writer. The same year she was present when he was arrested on St. Martin's Street, London, and though great with child she was roughly treated by the officers. When Bayly died at sea in June 1675 returning from Barbados, three of their children were living: William, Mary, and Susanna. The next year his writings were collected in a stout quarto volume, ending on page 747 with Mary Bayly's testimony to her deceased husband. On

September 19, 1678, at Horshydown, Southwark, she was married a second time, to John Cross, a "cordwainer," with whom in 1682 she migrated to Charleston, S.C., along with her three children. Cross died about 1687. Ten years later, in February, 1697, Robert Barrow, a forlorn Quaker traveler in Charleston, writing in his last illness to his wife in England, refers to his "landlady and nurse," "one whose name you have heard of, a Yorkshire woman, born within two miles of York; her maiden name was Mary Fisher, she that spake to the great Turk." Mary Cross made her will in August 1698 and died before the end of the year. In all probability she lies buried in the Friends' burial ground still extant in Charleston, for it was near her home. Her children married and settled in South Carolina. A granddaughter, Sophia Hume, became a noted Quaker preacher.

Taken from Notable American Women 1607-1059: A Biographical Dictionary, Volume 1.

Created by: Saratoga

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