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"For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace": The Spiritual Travails of a Cochranite Woman

David Newell

The Communal Societies Collection at Hamilton College recently acquired a title that is as remarkable, in terms of content, as it is rare: Olive Junkins's *The Dealings of a Few of the Church at York who Call themselves Christians, with Samuel Junkins and his Wife: Together with a Short Sketch of Her Own Christian Experience, Written by Her Own Hand* [York, Maine?]: Printed for the author, 1825.¹

It appears to be the only surviving contemporary monograph that can be deemed a primary Cochranite work, written by a woman who embraced most or all of the theological beliefs of Jacob Cochrane, and held to his views of a "common stock" regarding "earthly stores."² Olive Junkins, who authored this pamphlet, was the spiritual wife of Cochranite Samuel Junkins, who in 1823 "attempted to establish a new organization under his control."³

The Cochranites or the Society of Free Brethren, 1816 – 1819

What is sometimes termed the "Cochrane Delusion" arose during the late 1810s—a time of intensive revivalism in upland New England, particularly among Separate and Freewill Baptist churches during the Second Great Awakening. Like the 1779-1782 revivals that followed the First Great Awakening, and which led to the establishment of a number of anti-Calvinist churches and sects (e.g., the Universalists, Shakers, and Freewill Baptists), these later revivals also occurred during times of war and economic distress and spawned a variety of new dissenting religious bodies. The Hutchinsonites (1810s), Osgoodites (1812), Reformed Methodists (1814), Pilgrims, or Bullardites (1816-17), and the Cochranites, to name but a few, were uniformly charismatic and anti-Calvinist, and many introduced communal modes of living.⁴

Jacob Cochrane (1782-1836) was born at Enfield, New Hampshire, and by around 1813 was living in Conway, New Hampshire. Freewill Baptist elder Ephraim Stinchfield reported that Cochrane had moved into

the Saco River valley area of southern Maine in late 1816.⁵ By the next year Cochrane was exhorting at Freewill Baptist meetings and attracting considerable attention, and was highly esteemed by those who attended his meetings. Stinchfield first heard Cochrane preach in 1817, and reported that “people applauded what he said, by Amens and shouts, though nothing indecorous appeared”—despite this, Stinchfield still suspected that Cochrane was a “religious juggler.”⁶

The powerful religious revival that began in southern Maine in 1816 intensified during the following years, particularly among the Freewill Baptist and Christian Connexion churches. In this environment of remarkable religious enthusiasm, Jacob Cochrane moved from church to church, exhorting and preaching and became one of the most noted figures in the revival. Stinchfield heard that “large numbers (some said more than one thousand) had been converted under his ministry ... the reformation ... was marvelous—such as was never known in those parts before.”⁷ By 1818 Cochrane was itinerating throughout York County, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Stinchfield attended a meeting where the congregation “soon struck or commenced a lively tune, accompanied with words, while some fell to dancing and jumping. Others shouted *Amen*, or *Glory to God*, and *Glory to Jesus!* The jumping, dancing, singing and shouting ... was an awful jargon to me.”⁸

The most extraordinary doctrine expounded by Cochrane, however, was one that would lead to public scrutiny, notoriety, and condemnation. Stinchfield reported that “each brother and sister in this fraternity has a spiritual husband, wife, mate, or yoke fellow, such as they choose, or their leaders choose for them. These spiritual mates, dissolve, or disannul, all former marriage connections; and many of them bed and board together, to the exclusion of all former vows.”⁹ However, it appears quite evident that there were significant differences between what Cochrane actually taught and practiced and what Stinchfield and others reported to the public.

In April 1819 Stinchfield published an anti-Cochranite pamphlet entitled *Cochranism Delineated* at Portland, Maine, and declared that he would stand as a “Watchman” and would “do what I can, to expose the deception.” It went through several editions (including a second Portland edition) and intensified the growing public opposition to the new sect, then called by Cochrane the “Society of Free Brethren.” In *Cochranism Delineated*, Stinchfield described the various rituals introduced by Cochrane, including “a feast, which he calls the passover” replete with marching exercises including one called “whipping the snake,” often performed at his house in

Saco.¹⁰ Cochrane's house was the central nexus for the scattered believers where the "general family" included twelve females plus other men and women who would remain there for short periods. Stinchfield charged that these women had "surrendered their persons, character and property into the common stock."¹¹

Two months prior to the release of Stinchfield's pamphlet, two Biddeford men entered formal complaints against Cochrane, charging him with "gross lewdness, lascivious behavior and adultery" and a trial was scheduled at York for May 18.¹² *Cochranism Delineated* was published a month before the trial and Stinchfield probably hoped that his publication would help lead to Cochrane being found guilty and sentenced. The trial held at York, Maine, was sensational, with lurid and startling testimony from witnesses. Local newspapers published numerous detailed accounts of the court proceedings. So great was the interest in the case that a separate forty-page account of the entire trial was published in the summer of 1819 at nearby Kennebunk.¹³ Whether Stinchfield's pamphlet influenced the jury or not is not known; however, Cochrane was found guilty of adultery and several other charges at the May 18 trial. After the jury announced their verdict, the court waited for Cochrane to appear for sentencing. Then after searching for him they "ascertained that he had absconded" and left the county.¹⁴ In October 1819 Cochrane was apprehended and brought before a county judge at Alfred, and sentenced to eighteen days of solitary confinement in the local jail, to be followed by four years of hard labor incarceration at the Massachusetts State Prison in Charlestown.¹⁵

Not only was this turn of events terribly demoralizing to his followers, but the imprisonment of Jacob Cochrane dealt a severe blow to the Society of Free Brethren and resulted in the departure of most adherents, who returned to the Freewill Baptist fold. Was the trial fair and impartial? Probably not—certainly not by today's standards, and arguably not by those of 1819. Other prominent Freewill Baptists did not harbor so severe a sense of opposition as Stinchfield did, and some believed that Cochrane was sincere and exerted a positive influence. Elder Clement Phinney, a noted Freewill Baptist minister, believed that Cochrane, while a preacher, yet "belonged to no denomination of Christians; [and] was however friendly to all; on the one hand, he did not wish to tear down any existing religious organization, nor, on the other, did he wish to add another to their number. He desired rather to work through any or all to restore to the church apostolic religion and the lost miraculous powers. Such were his professions."¹⁶

A close reading of *Report of the Trial of Jacob Cochran* suggests that much of the testimony against him was likely spurious and probably untruthful. One York County attorney declared that there were many believable witnesses who saw no evidence of adultery or improper conduct and added, “I believe that if any other than a Cochranite had been brought to the bar, and the charges as faintly supported as in this case, he would have been acquitted.”¹⁷

A recent examination of Cochranism by Joyce Butler furnishes a more balanced assessment of Cochran’s activities. She observed that to those outside of his society “these manifestations of religious hysteria were considered sinful excesses, but actually they were in the best tradition of radical evangelism and revivalism. More to the point, in them lay the appeal of Cochranism. His eloquent oratory, the joyous singing, the dancing, even the physical excesses were a relief after ‘the solemn psalm tunes and hymns, the pausing and hanging on the parts in slow long metre’ and all the other ‘rigid discipline’ connected at that time with accepted religious observance.”¹⁸

There can be no doubt, however, that the imprisonment of Jacob Cochran, and the related negative publicity abounding in the newspaper and pamphlet accounts, so demoralized the Cochranites that, according to Dale Broadhurst, in the years immediately following his incarceration at Charlestown State Prison, there were only several dozen adherents that continued to openly proclaim their faith as members of the Society of Free Brethren. He reports that “other than their filing of appeals, attempting to gain an early release of their leader, the Cochranites’ activities during this period remain largely undocumented and forgotten.”¹⁹

It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully comprehend or understand the faith and practice of Cochran’s Society of Free Brethren. They left no written word describing their beliefs, although Cochran, after his release from prison in 1823, “visited James Remich in Kennebunk and tried without success to convince Remich to release the copyright on [the] report of the trial in order that he might write his autobiography.”²⁰ It was never published. The group is best remembered today, not as the Society of Free Brethren, but rather as the Cochranites—the mean-spirited descriptor used by their enemies. Indeed, virtually all that has been written about them has been taken from Ephraim Stinchfield’s works and later works by hostile critics of Cochran’s society. The Cochranites (if I can be forgiven for continuing the use of this term) have long been defined by their detractors.

While the Cochranite numbers plummeted in the aftermath of Jacob's trial, they did not disappear from the American landscape. A second wave of Cochranite groups arose during the 1820s, this time spreading the principles of the Society of Free Brethren both within and outside of York County, Maine.

Samuel Junkins' Church of Christ and Other Later Cochranite Groups

The activities of various ex-Cochranites and their establishment of various churches and societies during and after 1823 (the year of Cochrane's release from prison) are not so well-known or documented as those of the 1817-1819 period. Butler sums up Cochrane's activities during this later period: "His life following his release from prison is shadowy and—like the rest of his history—has been the subject of lurid and exaggerated stories.... Subsequently, he is known to have been in Hamburg, New York, attempting to gain converts and to have gathered followers in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and Stratham, New Hampshire."²¹

Some former Cochranites established new independent churches, some apparently with the involvement or approbation of Jacob Cochrane and some without. One church, the Free Church of Christ of Kennebunk, numbered over one hundred "professors of religion."²² According to an article published in the *Kennebeck Gazette* and republished elsewhere, this church had been "recently gathered" by Jacob Cochrane and was comprised of "a few of [his] deluded followers." In early 1828 "the notorious Hull Barton" was ordained by the church to serve as its minister.²³ Barton was a noted New Light Quaker and religious seeker who would later affiliate, for brief periods, with the Mormons and Shakers. The previous year Barton had visited Cochrane at his domicile called "the Ark" in Hollis, Maine, where "six or seven men with their spiritual wives [and] Jacob and his spiritual and natural wives" lived having "all things in common." Barton wrote a newspaper article about his visit in which he was critical of the sect and reported that they were hopeless fanatics. He confronted Cochrane, telling him that "he was a poor deceived creature, if not a great imposter."²⁴ Barton's published condemnation of Cochrane and his society at Hollis, on one hand, and his affiliation with the group at Kennebunk, on the other, suggests that there may have been differences and possibly some tensions between the various later Cochranite bodies.

Another later Cochranite group was formed by Samuel Junkins of York, Maine (1769–1845). Junkins had been a member of Cochrane’s Society of Free Brethren and he “attempted to establish a new organization under his control about 1823.”²⁵ During August of that year Junkins posted the following notice on the door of the newly erected meetinghouse built jointly by York Methodists and Freewill Baptists:

NOTICE

At a Baptist Meeting House, York, on the Lord’s Day next the House will be free for the Sons and Daughters of Zion to wait on the Lord and honor him that hath made them free, also, the Family of Egypt may have another opportunity to come up to Jerusalem to keep the feast in Tabernacles or, if they refuse they must not expect to have any rain of the Spirit on them. Hypocrites, Mongrels and Lepers are desired to withdraw.

Samuel Junkins, Servant of the Church
of Christ in York August 1, 1823.²⁶

It is not known if Junkins had been united to a spiritual wife (or wives) when he was associated with Cochrane prior to 1820. His first (legally married) wife Patty Barnard bore eight children before she died, presumably in 1822. In June 1823 Junkins was “spiritually united” to Olive Williams, who became a zealous believer in her spiritual husband’s faith. Because of considerable public outcry in the neighborhood against this improper union, “they thought it prudent to be legally married, or as they expressed ‘united after the manner of the beast,’ which they did on 27 January 1824.”²⁷ Olive Williams was born in Parsonsfield, Maine, in 1789, and when eighteen years of age moved to Waterville. Then “after many turns and overturns” she went on to Dover, New Hampshire, where she reported that “I had one child and was a stranger,”²⁸ Whether Olive had this child out of wedlock and what her “turns and overturns” were, we are left to speculate. She wrote that she was of “delicate constitution,” yet it is manifestly evident that she was neither shy nor withdrawn as evidenced by what she had to say—and how she said it—in her thirty-two page pamphlet. One historian, in comparing Olive to her husband, noted that she was “by no means the weaker vessel.”²⁹ It is significant that it was

Olive, and not Samuel, who took the initiative to write and publish the pamphlet in 1825.

It appears that several denominations were utilizing the new meetinghouse in York, including Junkins's "Church of Christ in York." From what Olive relates in *Dealings*, she and her husband also attended meetings of the Freewill Baptists sitting in the Junkins's family pew. It was during these meetings, with Samuel and Olive in attendance, that—on occasion—the "immediate command of God" would compel them to disrupt the meeting and proclaim various revelations or condemn the Freewill Baptist elders for "Old Jerusalem" views and "vain worship."³⁰ These outbursts were reminiscent of the Rogerenes who, in eighteenth-century Connecticut, often boldly proclaimed their beliefs during Congregationalist worship services and vociferously berated the Congregationalist minister. When the Rogerenes disrupted meetings of the "Standing Order" they were usually forcibly removed from the meetinghouse and often tried, convicted, and sometimes jailed, for disturbing church meetings. In some instances the Rogerenes were fined substantial sums for their conduct.

Such was the fate of Samuel and Olive, who were charged with similar sundry crimes. At the October term of court of Common Pleas in 1824 Samuel was fined \$20 and costs, in all about \$40, and Olive another \$5, plus \$34 of costs, "for willfully disturbing a meeting held at the Baptist Meeting House in York on the Lord's Day."³¹

The following year, Olive wrote *The Dealings of a Few of the Church at York who Call themselves Christians, with Samuel Junkins and his Wife: Together with a Short Sketch of Her Own Christian Experience, Written by Her Own Hand*. It was probably printed at York, Maine, although the printer chose not to identify himself. Why did she write it? It seems certain that a primary motivation was to tell her side of the story regarding the court case. Furthermore, Olive was likely compelled to refute some of the slander circulating in and around York about her and her character. For example, a man who attended the court proceedings referred to Olive as a "bunter" (i.e. a "low dirty prostitute, half whore and half beggar") an obvious criticism of Olive's spiritual marriage to Samuel. Olive emphatically retorted that the charges against her and her husband had nothing to do with their marriage relationship.

Another reason, possibly the most important, for Olive to send her pamphlet abroad, was to give her the opportunity to define and describe her faith, practice, and beliefs—and to defend them. And this is rich stuff

indeed for the twenty-first century reader: a Cochranite text, and by a woman no less. It is a rare glimpse into the heart and soul of one who, with her husband, had accepted Jacob Cochrane's teachings. In essence, it is the polar opposite to Stinchfield's *Cochranism Delineated* in terms of defining and describing Cochrane's Society of Free Brethren and successor Cochranite groups. In short, it is a work about Cochranism by a Cochranite.

Olive furnishes such a clear and succinct declaration of her faith and belief on the last pages of *Dealings* that it warrants inclusion here. It is a plain statement of what she and other Cochranites believed.

What is the true worship of God? To know the will of God revealed in us by immediate revelation, and we obey the same. What are and have been the exercise of those? They are kind, merciful, honest, humble, patient, moderate and just; they teach, pray, sing, exhort, shout, fast, set in silence, weep, laugh, dance, leap, prophesy, heal the sick, cast out devils, will not resist evil, and some for a sign to others, have had to go naked, some to wear girdles, some to set on the ground cross legged, some in sackcloth and ashes: all this has been done by immediate command of God for the redemption of fallen man.³²

Olive also defended the right of women to preach and exhort in the churches. A large part of *Dealings* addresses Olive's defense of this right, backed by considerable scriptural evidence. She argued that "some may object against a woman's prophesying, but I believe there are abundant proofs of that, concerning a woman that prayeth or prophesyeth."³³ The Freewill Baptists, Christians, and Reformed Methodists, were accepting and even ordaining women as exhorters and preachers by the 1810s and 1820s, including such luminaries as Clarissa Danforth and Salome Lincoln. Olive appears to have been the author of a spirited and joyous poem included in *Dealings* that emphatically defends the right of women to preach and exhort.³⁴

Olive also included in *Dealings* an oblique defense of the Cochranite tenet of spiritual marriage. She argued that spiritual purity is superior to worldly practices and lusts. The points she makes in her apologetic are similar to early Shaker views on the worldly and spiritual roles of men and women. Given this, some reconsideration of Stinchfield's account of a Cochranite meeting in Arundel, Maine, might well be warranted. It was there, said Stinchfield, that a "wife ... wished to know whether I had the courage to kiss her." He, of course "declined, and took a seat," but one has to wonder whether her intentions were not amorous, but rather

an expression of her faith, tinged perhaps, with a touch of sarcasm—obviously not what Stinchfield had in mind.³⁵

The text also reveals Olive's fanatic and vengeful tendencies. In one case she railed against a certain lawyer who testified to Samuel's and her guilt and treated her rather roughly in court. "I then felt strong in God, and told several, that God would take that proud Lawyer from the earth before court, and so he did, for in less than five weeks he was put under the clods."³⁶ Other enemies of the Junkinses and the Church of Christ in York were also treated to Olive's sharp tongue.

What came to pass after Olive's pamphlet was published is not known. The Church of Christ in York, or Sons and Daughters of Zion (whatever they may have called themselves), seem to have survived through the 1830s. Samuel drew up his will in 1840 leaving much of his property to his society. Here it is Samuel who writes, and the text is as fascinating and instructive as Olive's writings. An excerpt:

The rest of What property I Shall Leave I freely give it to the Lord Jesus Christ altho it is all his before with a will that it might Be kept for a place to Entertain and rest Pilgrim of all Denominations that is traveling to mount Zion having made there Escape from Egypt Land with a kingdom within them—also followers that is a Seeking a City whose foundation and builder is God that they may find a place to Rest and refresh themselves with Encouragement to pursue the paths that Pilgrims in all ages have troden ... that the Stand may be wholly for the Lord and his followers to Refresh themselves—amen.³⁷

Samuel died in the faith in 1845 and Olive administered his estate. Her date of death is not known. Whether Junkins's Church of Christ in York survived into the 1840s is not known, but if it did, it was likely a small group that "refreshed themselves" at Junkins's house from time to time and probably was the last flickering flame of Cochranism in Maine.

Olive Junkins's *Dealings* is an exceptionally rare work. It is not noticed in *American Imprints* or *Sabin*. Prior to Hamilton College's acquisition of this title, it was not in OCLC. The only other known copy of this work is in the collection of the Old York [Maine] Historical Society. Its discovery offers to scholars, for the first time, an unvarnished glimpse into the Cochranite faith, by one of its own.

Notes

1. Cited below as: Junkins, *Dealings*.
2. Those who initially affiliated with Jacob Cochrane considered themselves members of the “Society of Free Brethren.” Those who opposed this society sarcastically referred to them as “Cochranites.” In the years following Cochrane’s imprisonment in 1819, several Cochranite-like churches were established, each with its own denominational name. The society at York, Maine, under the leadership of Samuel Junkins may have referred to themselves as the “Sons and Daughters of Zion” or “The Church of Christ in York.” Whether these later believers considered themselves to be Cochranites or not is controversial at least and arguably moot.
3. Harry Alexander Davis, *The Junkins Family. Descendants of Robert Junkins of York County, Maine* (Washington, D.C., 1938), 41. It was Davis who, at some time prior to 1938, discovered Olive Junkins’s pamphlet and made mention of it in his published genealogy.
4. The most intensive periods of revivalism swept through parts of New England during 1810-11 and 1816-17. The Reformed Methodists, noted for their gifts of the Holy Ghost, established a commune on the New York-Vermont border. The Cochranites practiced a mix of conventional and communal economics, as did the Osgoodites. The Pilgrims were a peripatetic communal group travelling from Quebec to Arkansas during the late 1810s.
5. Ephraim Stinchfield, *Cochranism Delineated: or, a Description of, and Specific for a Religious Hydrophobia, Which has spread and is still spreading, in a number of Towns in the Counties of York and Cumberland: District of Maine* (Boston: Printed for N. Coverly, 1819), 3.
6. *Ibid.*, 4.
7. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
8. *Ibid.*, 6.
9. *Ibid.*, 7.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.
11. *Ibid.*, 12.
12. [Gamaliel E Smith; James Kinsman Remich], *Report of the Trial of Jacob Cochrane, on Sundry Charges of Adultery, and Lewd and Lascivious Conduct before the Supreme Judicial Court, Begun and Holden at York, within and for the county of York, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on the third Tuesday of May, 1819* (Kennebunk, Me: Printed by James K. Remich, 1819), 4.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 40.
15. *Ibid.*, various pages. See also “Jacob Cochrane Chronology” by Dale R. Broadhurst (<http://olivercowdery.com/gathering/JCochran.htm#chrono>). Maine was a district of Massachusetts in 1819 and would become a state the following year.

16. D. M. Graham, *The Life of Clement Phinney*. (Dover, N. H.: William Burr Printer, 1851), 79.
17. [Smith and Remich], *Report of the Trial of Jacob Cochrane*, 34.
18. Joyce Butler, "Cochranism Delineated. A Twentieth-Century Study," in *Maine in the Early Republic, from Revolution to Statehood*, (Hanover, N.H. and London, U.K.: University Press of New England, 1988), 156.
19. "Jacob Cochrane Chronology," notes for 1820-1823. This observation is also confirmed by Joyce Butler.
20. Butler, "Cochranism Delineated. A Twentieth-Century Study," 159.
21. *Ibid.*, 159.
22. "To the Public," *New York Telescope*, May 3, 1828, 194.
23. "Ordination Extra," *Salem Gazette*, February 22, 1828, [1].
24. Hull Barton, "Religious Imposture," *New York Telescope*, January 26, 1828, 138.
25. Harry Davis Alexander, *The Junkins Family, Descendants of Robert Junkins of York County, Maine* (Washington D.C., 1938), 41.
26. Alexander. *The Junkins Family*, 41. This meetinghouse was utilized by the Freewill Baptists and occasionally by other denominations. It was apparently capable of being used by Junkins and his followers.
27. *Ibid.*, 41.
28. *Ibid.*, 40-41. Junkins, *Dealings*, 11-12.
29. Edward C. Moody. *Handbook History of the Town of York From Early Times to the Present* (Augusta, Maine: Kennebec Journal Co., 1914), 187.
30. Junkins, *Dealings*, 31. See also event described on p. 9 and following.
31. Alexander, *The Junkins Family*, 41.
32. Junkins, *Dealings*, 30-31.
33. *Ibid.*, 13.
34. *Ibid.*, 14-15. This particular hymn does not appear in any other publication, and as such, it suggests that Olive Junkins was likely the author. Another verse on p. 30 was evidently written by Olive given its internal evidence.
35. Stinchfield, *Cochranism Delineated*, 15.
36. Junkins, *Dealings*, 20.
37. Alexander, *Junkins Family*, 43.