

## Historical background

**Source Notes:** Much of the following material is based on or quoted from the excellent “*Guide to the Records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in New England*” published by the RI Historical Society in 1997 and compiled by Richard D. Stattler, New England Yearly Meeting Archivist and partially sponsored by the *Obadiah Brown Benevolent Fund* and other supporters.

### INTRODUCTION

#### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Quakers are members of a religious group that began in England in the 1640s. The formal name is the ‘*Religious Society of Friends*’. Quakers did not separate religious life and secular life. They felt that all could live together in peace if they followed the Holy Spirit. Quakers, or *Friends* have been known for their religious testimonies against war and slavery, and in support of simplicity and social justice. Many early leaders of the anti-slavery, anti-war and woman’s rights movements have been Quakers.

#### FRIENDS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Society of Friends is organized in several layers of "**meetings.**" A congregation which today may call itself a "church" has a **Monthly Meeting** to take care of its business. The term **Monthly Meeting** is used to refer to both the monthly event and the group that holds it. In the past there were also **Preparative** or **Particular** meetings which prepared matters for presentation at the **Monthly Meeting**. In addition, small settlements of Friends were sometimes allowed to have their own **Meeting for Worship** or **Indulged Meeting** for Worship. These small groups were "under the care of" a **Monthly Meeting**.

A basic understanding of the **administrative structure** is fundamental to comprehending much of the language and terminology of the Society of Friends. The largest body is the **Yearly Meeting**. For many rather confusing reasons, there have been several **different yearly meetings** active in New England. The largest, **New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM)**, has covered almost the entire region since 1661.

The yearly meeting has been composed of **quarterly meetings** since the early 18th century. They in turn are composed of **monthly meetings**, which are the basic administrative unit of the Society of Friends. Almost all of the membership information is recorded on the **monthly meeting** level. The **monthly meeting** is sometimes subdivided into smaller meetings: **preparative meetings**, which prepare business for the monthly meetings; and **meetings for worship**, which generally create no records.

There are “**Conferences**” of various world-wide collections of **Yearly Meetings** and **Monthly Meetings** which are a more recent development. Volunteer transcribers should be aware of their existence but note that they have little to do regarding the current project. They are often referred to by their acronyms made up of the first letters of the words in their organizational names. For the record they are: FGC, FUM, and EFCI – *Friends General Conference*, *Friends United Meeting*, and *Evangelical Friends Church International*. Each of these three organizations represent different branches within Quakerism. FGC- affiliated meetings are typically in the "**unprogrammed**" Quaker tradition, though there are a number of Friends churches, or meetings, with pastoral leadership who also belong. ("**Unprogrammed**" means that such meetings take place without a designated pastor who leads the service, or a prepared order of worship). FUM is a collection of **Christ-centered Quakers**, embracing 34 yearly meetings and

associations, thousands of local gatherings and hundreds of thousands of individuals. In addition there are several individual **Monthly meetings** and organizations that are members of FUM. EFCI places greater emphasis on **evangelical** Christian beliefs. Some Quaker **Monthly Meetings** are affiliated with both FGC and FUM. See diagram of the structure attached.

## 4c-HELPFUL INFORMATION- SCHISMS

### HISTORICAL SCHISMS

#### Splits (credits to Wikipedia)

In the 19th century, there was a **diversification of theological beliefs** in the Religious Society of Friends, and this led to several large splits within the Quaker movement. Like other religious sects, the differences were along the conservative to liberal spectrum with the “conservative” staying with some of the original ideas relating to the cultivation of God’s light within the individual believer and the “liberal” leaning to more emphasis on evangelicalism and the Bible.

#### Hicksite–Orthodox split

The Hicksite–Orthodox split arose out of both ideological and socioeconomic tensions. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting **Hicksites** tended to be agrarian and poorer than the more urban, wealthier, **Orthodox** Quakers. With increasing financial success, **Orthodox** Quakers wanted to "make the Society a more respectable body—to transform their sect into a church—*by adopting mainstream Protestant orthodoxy*". **Hicksites**, though they held a variety of views, generally saw the market economy as corrupting, and believed **Orthodox Quakers** had sacrificed their orthodox Christian spirituality for material success. **Hicksites** viewed the Bible as secondary to the individual **cultivation of God's light within**.

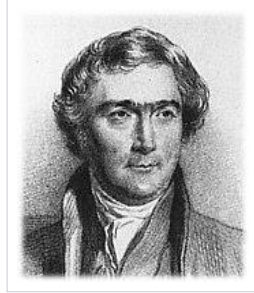
With **Gurneyite Quakers'** (Orthodox) shift toward Protestant principles and away from the spiritualization of human relations, women's role as promoters of "holy conversation" started to decrease. Conversely, within the **Hicksite** movement the rejection of the market economy and the continuing focus on community and family bonds tended to encourage women to retain their role as powerful arbiters.

**Elias Hicks'** religious views were claimed to be “Universalist”(a doctrine stating that every human soul will ultimately be reconciled to God because of divine love and mercy) and to contradict **Quakers' historical orthodox Christian beliefs and practices**. Hicks' Gospel preaching and teaching precipitated the *Great Separation of 1827*, which resulted in a parallel system of Yearly Meetings in America, joined by Friends from Philadelphia, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Baltimore. They were referred to by their opponents as **Hicksites** and by others, and sometimes themselves, as **orthodox**. Quakers in Great Britain recognized only the **Orthodox** Quakers and refused to correspond with the **Hicksites**.

#### Beaconite controversy

Isaac Crewdson was a **Recorded Minister** (A **Recorded Minister** was originally a male or female Quaker who was acknowledged to have a gift of spoken ministry) in Manchester, UK. His 1835 book *A Beacon to the Society of Friends* strongly argued that the inner light could not exist alongside a religious belief in salvation by the atonement of Christ. This Christian controversy led to Crewdson's resignation from the Religious Society of Friends, along with 48 fellow members of Manchester Meeting and about 250 other British Quakers in 1836–37. Some of these joined the **Plymouth Brethren Church**.

## Rise of Gurneyite Quakerism, and the Gurneyite–Conservative split



Joseph John Gurney was a prominent 19th century British Friend and a strong proponent of evangelical views

The Quaker Yearly Meetings supporting the religious beliefs of Joseph John Gurney were known as *Gurneyite* yearly meetings. Many eventually collectively became the Five Years Meeting and then Friends United Meeting (FUM), although **London Yearly Meeting**, which had been strongly **Gurneyite** in the 19th century, did not join either of these groups. These (FUM) Quaker yearly meetings make up the largest proportion of Quakers in the world today.

Some *orthodox* Quakers in America disliked the move towards evangelical Christianity and saw it as a dilution of Friends' traditional orthodox Christian belief in being inwardly led by the **Holy Spirit**. These Friends were led by **John Wilbur**, who was expelled from his yearly meeting in 1842. He and his supporters formed their own **Conservative Friends Yearly Meeting**. (The Monthly Meeting in Smith Mills, Dartmouth (on State Road) was of this particular (Wilburite or Conservative) persuasion.) In the UK in 1868 some Friends broke away from **London Yearly Meeting** for the same reason. They formed a separate body of Friends called **Fritchley General Meeting**, which remained distinct and separate from London Yearly Meeting until 1968. Similar Christian splits took place in Canada. The Yearly Meetings that supported **John Wilbur's** religious beliefs were known as **Conservative Friends**.

## 4d-HELPFUL INFORMATION-RECORD KEEPING

### RECORD-KEEPING

#### What Can I Expect to Find in Quaker Records-In General

There are generally two types of **monthly meeting records**, *minutes* taken during the business meeting, and *separate registers of births, marriages and burials*. Later in the 19th century many meetings began to keep membership registers which incorporated more comprehensive information. Each meeting kept records for individuals and families as long as they remained faithful members of the meeting and within its geographical boundaries. When a family moved from one meeting to another, a *letter (certificate of removal)* was sent to the new monthly meeting they would be attending. Notice of the transfer was written into the minutes of the original meeting, and was also noted as received in the new meeting.

*Meeting minutes* contain a recording of all business conducted in the meeting. These include approvals of **marriage intentions, records of discipline, disownment, requests for burial in the meeting burial grounds, and removal**. Monthly meeting minutes rarely include information about births and deaths.

#### What Can I Expect to Find in Quaker Records-for The Dartmouth Monthly Meeting?

The collection of records which are the subject of this project, the 6,067 pages of the Dartmouth Monthly Meeting (Apponegansett) include the following:

(1) *Minutes of DMM Men's Meetings* 1699-1727- 273 pages; 1727-1762-367 pages; 1762-1785-547 pages; 1785-1803-395 pages; 1803-1822-361 pages; and 1844-1891-588 pages: total of 2,731 pages.

(2) *Minutes of DMM Women's Meetings* 1699-1782-269 pages; 1782-1812-260 pages; and 1812-1854-442 pages: total of 971 pages.

(3) *Minutes of DMM Combined Meetings* 1891-1955-587 pages; and 1952-1968-152 pages: total of 739 pages.

(4) *Births, Marriages, & Deaths- DMM* 1699-1880-867 pages.

(5) *Births & Deaths DMM* 1841-1956-46 pages.

(6) *DMM Book of Discipline* 421 pages.

(7) *DMM Removals* 1792-1821-176 pages; and 1822-1847-116 pages: total of 292 pages. The total count of original pages to be transcribed is 6,067.

We will attack this huge task one bite at a time beginning with the 292 pages of Removal Records.

## **4e-HELPFUL INFORMATION-DARTMOUTH QUAKERS**

### **DARTMOUTH QUAKERS**

The Quakers of Dartmouth have been affiliated historically with most of the groups within the greater world of Friends. As an illustration; at the time when the RI Historical Society created the excellent maps of Friends Meetings in New England we see that in SE New England the variety in 1997 included: (1) Unprogrammed Meetings at North Dartmouth (State Rd), Apponegansett, New Bedford, & Mattapoissett; (2) Programmed Meetings (with a Pastor) at Smith Neck, Allen's Neck & Swansea; (3) Programmed & Unprogrammed Meetings for Worship (with a Pastor) in Smithfield RI; (4) Programmed & Unprogrammed Meetings for Worship (without a Pastor) in Westport; (5) Evangelical Friends Church - Eastern Region in Newport, RI & Portsmouth, RI (not in NEYM). Note that Swansea and Apponegansett are both "Preparative Meetings" or "Meetings for Worship" and do not have Monthly Business Meetings.

**4f-HELPFUL INFORMATION-HIERARCHY OF FRIENDS**

