

The First Year of *The Canadian Friend*

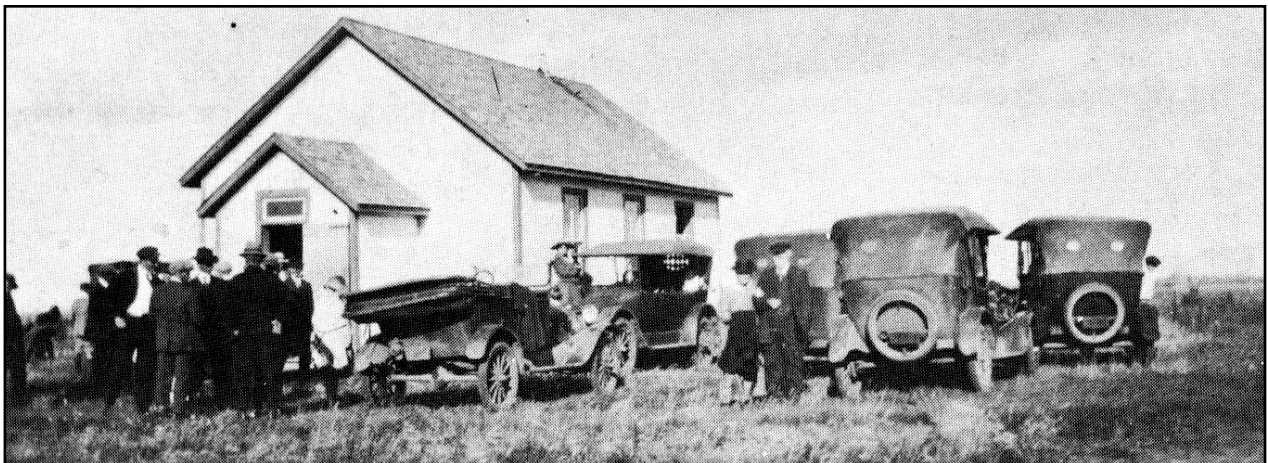
By Kyle Jolliffe

About a century ago a group of Friends met in Toronto and formed the Canadian Friend Publishing Association. Lots of things have changed since the first sample issue of *The Canadian Friend* in June 1905, including the initial annual subscription price of fifty cents a year, and the transition of many Canadian Friends to a post-Christian theology. Yet more than a few of the concerns and the sense of spiritual fellowship expressed in its pages way back then have a quite familiar ring today. In this article I look at *The Canadian Friend* during its first year of publication.

Canadian Friends were then divided into three groups, after the 1828 “Hicksite separation” (named after Elias Hicks, the best-known member of the liberal group) in New York Yearly Meeting, and the 1881 “Wilburite separation” (named after John Wilbur, the leading member of the tradition-oriented quietist group). In 1834, Hicksite Friends in Canada and Western New York State became Genesee Yearly Meeting.

The other party to this first schism called themselves “Orthodox Friends.” In 1867, Canadian Orthodox Friends became Canada Yearly Meeting. In turn, the Wilburite Separation had split Canada Yearly Meeting, with the Wilburites (also known as “Conservative Friends”) calling themselves Canada Yearly Meeting (Conservative). In 1955, all three groups united to become one group again and Canadian Yearly Meeting was born.

Until the early 1930s, *The Canadian Friend* was run by Orthodox Friends, who had in the 1870s, despite strong protests by Conservative Friends, eagerly embraced revival meetings and other innovations, including paid ministers. But by 1905 the high water mark of the revival era had long passed, and a new generation of Friends was slowly but surely remaking Orthodox Quakerism. Each month, the front cover of the new magazine stated it was “Conservative enough to retain the fundamental principles of Quakerism. Liberal enough to meet the needs of the Twentieth Century.”



The meetinghouse pictured above doubled as the community centre of the 1904 Quaker settlement in Swarthmore, southwestern Saskatchewan, ten miles from the town of Unity. Swarthmore Friends Meeting later replaced it with a larger structure, after 1925 when the Meeting became part of the United Church of Canada. (The photo is from *Golden Threads: The Tapestry of Swarthmore*, compiled by The Swarthmore Jubilee Association in 1955.)

Its first editorial confidently set out the goals of the new publication: “*The Canadian Friend* enters upon its career with the earnest desire of its promoters that whether its career be long or short, it may result in building up the Kingdom of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and greatly strengthening the cause of the Society of Friends in Canada. It must, we think, be obvious to anyone that has considered the question that there is a great need of some means by which our members shall be kept in touch with each other more frequently. It is this need we hope to meet. If the coming Yearly Meeting shall decide to take charge of the paper and continue its publication no doubt the general outlines of a policy to be pursued will be laid down, but it is safe to say that it will be no part of that policy to endeavor to approach in any way upon the field of the older and better equipped Friends’ periodicals. We believe, however, that as a medium of interchange of opinion on questions of interest to our own meetings and diffusing of information about our work such a periodical may serve a very useful purpose. Since our organization as a Yearly Meeting in 1867, we have passed through many vicissitudes and often the difficulties have been so great that many have become discouraged, but through it all God has preserved us. Many sad mistakes have been made; the wise counsels of moderation and forbearance have not always prevailed and unhappy divisions have rent our already small body greatly impairing our usefulness and curtailing our power for service. But, while we humbly seek to learn wisdom from the past, we should not dwell unduly upon it. The time for discouragement and inaction is gone by, that for hope and resolute prayerful effort has come. Let us turn our faces toward the light and lift up our heads in hope. Shall we not come up to our approaching Yearly Meeting with such fervency of spirit, such consecration of heart and earnestness

in prayer that it may be manifest that Quakerism in Canada is not a effete thing, but a vital force in the lives of men. The power of the living Christ is sufficient to meeting the needs of to-day, and when we can in all sincerity adopt the language of the worthy founder of our society as our motto, ‘We are nothing; Christ is all’ then shall we see returning again the blessing and prosperity of the early days of our church ... ”

To read its faded pages is to peer into a forgotten world. The mainstays of that world were the annual sessions of Yearly Meeting, Pickering College (the boarding school then located at Pickering, Ontario), mission work in Japan, peace and temperance concerns, and the desire for stronger meetings and closer contact between its isolated members.

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The annual sessions of Canada Yearly Meeting best united these Friends. The first issue in June 1905 especially promoted these sessions that July. A strong appeal was made to first-time attenders, promising they would “go home with a higher opinion of the Friends Church and a better knowledge of the work

both at home and in foreign fields.” Its readers were also urged to read every article and to come to Yearly Meeting prepared to say if this publication would be helpful or not.

Judging from the Yearly Meeting report in the August 1905 issue, the Friends there had definitely prepared well for their time together. Credit was given to those who, six months earlier, had formed a Friends prayer league. Some of these people had pledged “to pray daily for a special manifestation of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit during the sessions of the Yearly Meeting.” For many there, the larger than usual attendance was “the assurance that the Lord was about to answer the petitions of His people.”

The first issue set the pattern for the issues of that first year. Besides an editorial and editorial notes, there were news items from meetings. Some meetings told of declining numbers, as many Friends were leaving rural Ontario and moving to Western Canada or to cities. But other meetings reported they were healthy, with interest in them increasing. There was also a section on missionary work, with emphasis on the Japan mission led by Gurney Binford and Elizabeth Binford.

Pickering College was often mentioned. After many years of struggle (including closing it at one point) the school had become less of a financial burden to the Yearly Meeting, and its reputation had considerably improved. In 1905, enrolment was at an all-time high and worthy applicants for admission had to be turned away. Canadian Friends were also proud that it was entirely free from military training and the military spirit. Sadly, catastrophe struck on 30 December 1905 when the main buildings burnt down. Fundraising for rebuilding soon started and, in October 1908, the cornerstone was laid for the new school, relocated to Newmarket, Ontario. It re-opened soon afterwards.

Each issue had what can be called “filler.” Sometimes it was Quaker history or biographies of well-known Friends. Other times it was devotional material, such as testimonials of individual faith, or stories about salvation, or poems. There were also “sentence sermons,” being pithy reminders to its readers to live devout lives. The October 1905 issue said, “A good many children hate the Church because their parents are only pious in pleasant weather.” The May 1906 issue likewise noted, “No church is rich unless the poor sit in the pews.”

There were also reports from the quarterly meetings of Pelham, West Lake, and Yonge Street. These meetings typically had several ministers there, a Meeting for Business, a Meeting of Ministry and Oversight, and morning and evening addresses. For example, the February 1906 Pelham Quarterly Meeting had a Saturday morning meeting with a sermon on prayer: its place, its purpose, and its power. The business meeting discussed the burning of Pickering College, told what action Representative Meeting had taken, and appealed to those present for their sympathy and loyal support

in rebuilding the school. The Meeting on Ministry and Oversight conducted its usual business, followed by a reading from *The message of Quakerism: two addresses* by Rufus M. Jones. That book, published in 1901, emphasized the Quaker position on the outward ordinances (i.e. baptism and communion). Reports were also given from the six Bible schools.

The heart of the new magazine was its staff. Frank Cornell, the pastor of the Newmarket Friends Church, was its editor, with the exception of the Missionary Department, which was edited by Phebe J. Wright. Besides frequent appeals for subscribers, the editor often solicited articles from his readers, telling them in the October 1905 issue, “Remember that this is OUR paper, and all Friends should help make it interesting and useful.” As well as mourning the deaths of Friends, the editor noted positive events and urged Friends to be more active in their meetings. In the February 1906 issue he noted how a Toronto newspaper said that, instead of a revivalist occasionally capturing a sinner, “the constant and steady work of the churches is what tells.”

The foregoing is only a sampling of *The Canadian Friend* during its first year. More could certainly be written about the meetings it depicted and the steadfast faith of their members.

I deeply wish that it could have had pictures of some of the smiling people at the 1905 sessions of Canada Yearly Meeting. If such pictures existed, Canadian Friends today could plainly see that they and their predecessors a century ago are parallel (and, I like to think, not too distant) worlds of faith. The Friends of 1905 in the language of the day worked out their own vision of faith, just as Canadian Friends today carry out the same task. Perhaps a century from now Canadian Friends will see that they are part of this same ageless story, building upon a rich legacy. 🍷

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