

The Three Yearly Meetings Prior to 1955

By June-Etta Chenard

Terms referring to the three yearly meetings that formed Canadian Yearly Meeting in 1955 can be confusing. More knowledge of our historical roots helps us better understand, and hopefully appreciate, some of the differences among Canadian Friends today.

By the opening of the nineteenth century, two divergent tendencies had become apparent among U.S. Friends. Both had roots in early Quaker thought though they had previously existed together without seriously disturbing Friends' unity.

Tensions had begun among Friends in response to liberal and to evangelical revival trends, as well as to conservative reactions towards Elias Hicks and other like-minded Friends who questioned traditional doctrines such as the primary authority of the Bible and the divinity of Jesus. These tensions increased until they culminated in the "Great Separation of 1827–1828." At this point the five U.S. Yearly Meetings of the Society divided into Orthodox Christian and Hicksite branches.

SEPARATE QUAKER BODIES IN CANADA

Quaker settlements in Upper Canada (Ontario) were made by emigrants from the United States. Though earlier attempts at settlement in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Quebec had not lasted, before the close of the eighteenth century the first Monthly Meetings in Canada had been organised in Adolphustown (Prince Edward County) and in Pelham (Niagara Peninsula).

Friends in these first settlements continued to be attached to their parent New York and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings. Consequently the U.S. Quaker separations produced the same result in Canada in 1829.

GENESSEE YEARLY MEETING, HICKSITE FRIENDS, AND FRIENDS GENERAL CONFERENCE

One tendency, identified with the followers of Elias Hicks (1748–1830), was associated with ideas of liberal thinking and of stressing the Inward Light as the basis of salvation rather than the atonement made by Christ on the cross. When Hicksites referred to Christ as their saviour, they meant the Christ within. Hicksites also emphasised social reform. In 1834 the Hicksite branch established Canada and Pelham Half-Yearly Meetings, and Scipio and Farmington Quarterly Meetings to form Genesee Yearly Meeting. These Meetings joined in founding Friends General Conference in 1900.

CANADA YEARLY MEETING (ORTHODOX), FIVE YEARS MEETING (KNOWN SINCE 1965 AS FRIENDS UNITED MEETING)

During the early 1800s many Friends found a renewed interest in evangelical Christianity. The "Orthodox" branch moved closer in theology to Christian Protestantism, while the "Hicksite" branch had moved in a liberal direction.

In 1845, the Orthodox branch experienced a further split (Gurneyite-Wilburite): Joseph John Gurney of England, troubled by the Hicksite separation, emphasised Scriptural

authority. Gurneyites were Bible-centred evangelicals who retained pastors. John Wilbur of Rhode Island defended the authority of the Holy Spirit and Spirit-led ministry. In Canada, the Orthodox/Gurneyite branch of New York Yearly Meeting set off Pelham, Yonge Street and West Lake Quarterly Meetings to form Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) in 1867.

Gurneyites joined in the founding of Friends United Meeting in 1902.

Originally a part of New York Yearly Meeting, Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) later became affiliated with the Five Years Meeting of Friends. The Pelham Quarterly Meeting of Five Years Meeting transferred in 1959 to Ohio Yearly Meeting (Gurneyite), which is now Evangelical Friends Church (Evangelical Friends International).

In 1965, Five Years Meeting changed to Friends United Meeting because by that time it was meeting every three years and the "Five Years" name was often confusing.

CANADA YEARLY MEETING (CONSERVATIVE)

The Wilburites were traditionalist (conservative) Christians, more devoted to individual spiritual inspiration. They retained traditional Quaker dress and speech.

In 1881 the Conservatives separated to meet as Canada Yearly Meeting (Conservative), associated with similar Conservative Meetings in the U.S.

In 1909, a group of Friends from Fritchley, England, constituted itself as both Halcyonia Monthly Meeting

and Western Canada Yearly Meeting, which closed in 1936. WCYM asked Norwich Monthly Meeting and Yonge Street Four-Months Meeting of Canada (Conservative) Yearly Meeting to accept Halcyonia MM, its only monthly meeting, into membership. Halcyonia Monthly Meeting, like Pelham Quarterly Meeting, did not join CYM in 1955. Halcyonia Friends still meet for worship (See *Around the Family*).

Though Conservative Friends have never formed a common organisation, and a fair degree of

diversity still exists among them, there are several elements of constancy, the most significant of which is a belief in the indwelling Christ as redeemer.

In Canadian Yearly Meeting, one effect of the reunions was the almost total disappearance of the Conservative witness.

CANADIAN FRIENDS TODAY

Theological differences among Quaker groups have widened since the initial 1829 schism. Quakers now range the theological spectrum from

conservative evangelical to liberal Christian to non-Christians (usually found in unprogrammed meetings).

Canadian Yearly Meeting retains its membership in both Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, and in Friends World Committee for Consultation, which unites Friends of all persuasions. ♡

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Note: This information was taken from many sources. Special thanks to Kyle Jolliffe and Kathleen Hertzberg.

Steps towards the 1955 Unification

By Kathleen Hertzberg

1928

- Genesee Yearly Meeting and Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) met in joint session.

1931

- The three Yearly Meetings appointed members to a Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), which had been established that year. CFSC was a unifying influence on the three Yearly Meetings.

1931–1955

- Prior to unification, CFSC was similar to AFSC, an independent Quaker service organisation to which the three Yearly Meetings in Canada sent representatives. Upon unification, CFSC's status changed to become a committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting, though AFSC has remained an independent Quaker organisation, to which U.S. yearly meetings send their delegates.

1932

- Camp Neekaunis was founded.

1944

- Joint and concurrent sessions of the three Yearly Meetings were held at Pickering College.
- Canada YM (Conservative) met for the first time with the other two Canada Yearly Meetings.
- Camp Neekaunis played a role in the desire for unification, and Canadian Young Friends insisted on unifi-

cation of the three Yearly Meetings.

- A Committee on Closer Affiliation was appointed.

1950–1955

- The three Yearly Meetings met in concurrent sessions at Pickering College in Newmarket.

1954

- In joint session, the three Yearly Meetings recorded, "We accept the desire of Canadian Friends to have a united Yearly Meeting." Note that this minute had taken ten years to mature.
- The total membership of Canadian Yearly Meeting at that time was 616.
- **Pelham Quarterly Meeting and Halcyonia Monthly Meeting decided not to join Canadian Yearly Meeting.**

1955

- The first steps were taken toward organic unity of the three Yearly Meetings. Unification of the three Yearly Meetings was accepted and minuted.
- A start was made on a Canadian Yearly Meeting Discipline (Organisation and Procedure).
- CFSC continued to be a strong influence in building unity amongst Canadian Friends even after unification. ♡

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