

Pickering College: The Site of Canadian Quaker Reunification

By Canadian Yearly Meeting Archives Staff and Volunteers

The histories of Canadian Yearly Meeting and Pickering College are intertwined. In 1867, the year of Confederation, the first Yearly Meeting of Friends in Upper Canada occurred when Orthodox Friends met at Pickering College.

From 1950 until unification in 1955, the three yearly meetings in Canada held concurrent sessions at Pickering College. As the cover photograph, which was taken during Yearly Meeting in 1955, illustrates, the unification of the three YMs took place there as well. The newly formed Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) continued to meet there every year until 1970, when CYM met for the first time outside Ontario, at the University of Saskatoon. After that time, the Yearly Meeting sessions moved around the country, though they were still often held at Pickering College until 1995. Pickering College had indicated that it was dif-

ficult to accommodate CYM because of summer programmes held at the school.

From the beginnings of Quakerism, education has been an important concern. While touring America, Joseph John Gurney of England supported the establishment of the first Quaker co-ed boarding school at West Lake (Prince Edward County) in 1841. It then operated in Pickering, Ontario, (1878-85, 1892-1905) until it was destroyed by fire. The Newmarket site was chosen for rebuilding as it had a hilltop location, a larger Friends community, a direct rail line to Toronto, and availability of utilities, particularly water. English and Irish Friends gave Canadians generous support. The building's young architect, John Lyle, included the classic pillars as he did in Toronto's Union Station; however, Friends declined the dome he suggested. After having burned, the boarding school reopened in 1909.

Students came from the Prairies and even from the mission fields in Japan and Jamaica. During World War One (WWI), enrolment declined and in 1916 the College closed. Friends loaned the grounds and buildings to the Military Hospital Commission for use, rent free, until other facilities were built. This was very much in keeping with the humanitarian tradition of Friends and the Pickering ideal of service.

In 1917, all assets and endowments of the College were transferred to an independent corporation, of which 75% were to be Quakers. Postwar circumstances delayed reopening until 1927 when it became an independent boys' boarding school. In 1925, Genesee Yearly Meeting and Canada Yearly Meeting (Five Years) held their annual meetings there "in joint and concurrent sessions." From 1944 Canada Yearly Meeting (Conservative) met with them. Finally, in mid-June 1955, in the Meeting Room of Pickering College, reunification of Friends in Canada was realised. This was in part the result of years of: sharing as Young Friends at Camp Neekaunis, reading



Photo by Jane Zavitz-Bond of Yarmouth Monthly Meeting

The Canadian Friend, working for peace and other concerns through the Canadian Friends Service Committee, and sharing yearly meetings at Pickering College.

Pickering College continued to be the Yearly Meeting location until there was a need to meet in alternating sites as new Meetings spread across the country. That need and Pickering's summer schedule meant Canadian Yearly Meeting last met there in 1995. Also in 1995 a new Corporation constitution and by-laws set up the school as co-educational and officially eliminated the requirement for Quaker members. However, the philosophy and practices of Friends remain in the life of the school, and today many parents still choose Pickering for their children because of its Quaker heritage.

Well-known Friends Thomas Kelly, Howard Brinton and Arthur Dorland began as young teachers at Pickering, later making major contributions to world-wide Quakerism. Clarence Pickett was to be the headmaster if WWI had not intervened and the school closed. Upon re-opening, the first headmaster was Joseph McCulley who, after 20 years there, went on to reform the treatment and education of those in Canada's federal prisons. Harry Beer, the next headmaster, was a student in 1927 and then a teacher and headmaster at the College. He took the Pickering/Quaker philosophy opposing corporal punishment to the Canadian Association of Independent Schools, and they also finally ruled against caning and physical punishment in schools. A Cadet Corps, supported in other schools, was never considered at Pickering. Sheldon Clark followed as headmaster and encouraged hiring young Quaker teachers and enrolling Quaker students. Peter Sturupp, who has now been headmaster for a decade, greatly values the Quaker connections. Meeting combining speaking and silence is held each morning for all staff and students. Friends' testimonies for peace, human rights and social justice, along with

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environmental concerns, are in the curriculum and part of the school life. This year student exchange visits have begun with Friends' schools in the United States. Students coming from all over the world take their Pickering experience home with them and it continues to influence their lives. Our Friends' heritage is still bearing fruit.

A continuing link in the relationship of Canadian Yearly Meeting to Pickering College in recent times is the CYM Archives and its archivist, Jane Zavitz-Bond, formerly also the College librarian. After a fire in 1981, Pickering included an environmentally controlled room and vault for the archives in its rebuilding. The Rendell Rhoades Quaker Discipline Collection was acquired in 1981, and in 1983 the records and archives collections were brought from storage in the University of Western Ontario and in New York City.

The international Conference of Quaker Historians and Archivists held their 1988 biennial conference at Pickering. The Canadian Friends Historical Association will hold their annual meeting at Pickering College this September, when it will be

celebrating both the 100-year anniversary of *The Canadian Friend*, and the 50-year anniversary of Canadian Friends as a united Yearly Meeting.

Canadian Friends and Pickering College share the belief of "that of God in every one" and are aware of the benefits of a nurturing community. Although not officially linked now, they are still linked in spirit. If it were not for Canada Yearly Meeting Orthodox Friends, Pickering College might not exist; if not for Pickering College, the story of Canadian Yearly Meeting would be quite different. 🍀

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