

# Historical Sketch of NCYM-C

## Yearly Meeting First Approval 7/16/2016

### Colonial Period

The first Friends in North Carolina of whom there is a record are Henry and Hannah Phillips, who were convinced of the Truth in New England and subsequently moved to the Albemarle Sound region of the Carolinas in 1665. When William Edmundson visited them in 1672, Henry Phillips reported he had not seen any other Friends for seven years. A few months later George Fox also visited the Phillips family. Edmundson wrote in his journal that in several meetings for worship he and George Fox held for inhabitants of that area several hearts were reached and tendered by the Lord's testimony. By 1680 there were several monthly meetings and a quarterly meeting active in the area north of Albemarle Sound. North Carolina Yearly Meeting was established on Fourth Month 4, 1698, and has met annually since that date. Within 50 years of the beginning of the "Quaker movement" in England, the movement had spread to the colony of the Carolinas and grown into an organized yearly meeting in North Carolina.

Though Friends were never a large portion of the total population of the colony, they did wield political influence; Quaker John Archdale was governor of the colony in 1695 and 1696. During the period beginning with his governorship, a number of Friends were elected to the assembly; and Quakers were the most influential political power in the Carolinas in the last decade of that century.<sup>1</sup>

The number of North Carolina Friends grew steadily throughout the 1700s through immigration and convincement. Around the middle of that century a large number of Friends from other colonies began moving into the Piedmont area of North Carolina. The Friends community was nurtured and knit together during this period by numerous Friends traveling in the gospel ministry for extended periods of time, often in the most difficult of situations.

It is notable that many of these travelers were women.<sup>2</sup> Women ministers were unacceptable in other Christian denominations at this time and it was extremely uncommon for women to travel alone without a male companion. These women Quaker traveling ministers regularly scandalized people outside the Religious Society of Friends, which made it more difficult for them to travel.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.carolana.com/NC/Royal\\_Colony/nc\\_royal\\_colony\\_quakers.html](http://www.carolana.com/NC/Royal_Colony/nc_royal_colony_quakers.html), accessed 1/12/16.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, as many as a thousand women ministers traveled amongst the colonies and the British Isles during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (cf Larsen, Rebecca, *Daughters of Light*). These women ministers had a significant influence on Quaker religion and culture. Their religious service often extended into writing pamphlets that spread widely among Friends and public speaking beyond the Quaker meetinghouse. Friends in North Carolina welcomed traveling women ministers such as their own Charity Cook, a frequent traveler as well as the mother of 14 children.

## **Quaker Separations in the 1800s**

Friends in North Carolina avoided the major schisms that divided the Quaker world in the 1800s. Consistently, Friends in North Carolina chose to value living in unity over disputing fine points of doctrine or Quaker tradition and practice. The teachings ascribed to Elias Hicks in the 1820s did not gain much traction in North Carolina, and the yearly meeting remained a solid part of what would be known as the Orthodox branch of Friends. The Wilburite-Gurneyite split in 1845 posed a greater danger to the yearly meeting's unity. At the moment it appeared that Thomas Hunt, Yearly Meeting clerk, would recommend receiving the epistle<sup>3</sup> from the Wilburite yearly meeting in New England, his father Nathan Hunt rose to give such powerful testimony to the value of remaining unified that the moment passed without action and the Yearly Meeting did not divide.<sup>4</sup> By the beginning of the 20th century North Carolina Yearly Meeting was the only existing yearly meeting established before the separations began that had not itself separated.

## **Slavery<sup>5</sup>**

Outside pressures on North Carolina Friends may have contributed to their desire to maintain unity among themselves. Beginning in 1688, Friends began to realize the immorality of slavery, which some Friends had been practicing alongside their non-Quaker neighbors. Over several decades the need to separate themselves from this practice grew in importance for Friends. As chattel slavery came to permeate all aspects of life in the South, it became more and more difficult for Friends to live in keeping with their beliefs. The combination of economic opportunity, the general "westward movement", and escape from a slave-owning society was a strong attraction to many North Carolina Friends. In the years leading up to the Civil War, as many as 10,000 Friends are reported to have emigrated from North Carolina to free territories and states. Some monthly meetings moved as a group; their minutes report a meeting for business in North Carolina one month, and the next meeting in Indiana or some other free region. (During this period so many Quakers left Virginia that the yearly meeting was laid down in 1844, and the remaining meetings attached to Baltimore Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) as "Virginia Half-yearly Meeting.")

For those who stayed behind, life became more and more difficult. Friends reached unity in the early 1770s that they were not to hold slaves themselves, but what were they to do about buying goods made by slaves (which included just about everything)? What about the slaves

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<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth and early 20th century, the exchange of epistles was highly symbolic: a yearly meeting corresponded only with those other yearly meetings it considered "correct" in theology and practice. To receive an epistle from one part of a yearly meeting that had already separated was to take a side in the issues of the division.

<sup>4</sup> Jay, Allen, *Autobiography of Allen Jay*, "Chapter 14: How Nathan Hunt Delayed Separation in North Carolina", Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2010. Jay's account is paraphrased at length in Anscombe, Francis Charles, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> For additional information and insight on this subject, see Hiram Hilty's *By Land and Sea: Quakers confront Slavery and its Aftermath in North Carolina*, North Carolina yearly Meeting (FUM), 1993.

themselves? Friends in North Carolina made numerous efforts to address these problems, none of which were successful. They freed their own slaves and even purchased some slaves from non-Friends so they could be freed, but the state legislature made manumission illegal and ruled that any “free” Negro could be re-enslaved by any white citizen. Efforts were made by “colonization societies” to send groups of freed slaves to Liberia, Haiti, and other places, but were eventually given up as infeasible. Friends attempted to purchase slaves and treat them as free persons, transferring many to the ownership of the yearly meeting in order to keep their motives clear. The state legislature responded by making it illegal for any slaveowner to neglect to treat slaves as slaves, and empowering any citizen to seize any slave whose owner was neglecting that responsibility. A number of North Carolina Friends did participate in the Underground Railroad. Levi and Catherine Coffin, who are known for their work in this area in Indiana and Ohio, were native North Carolinians.

### **Strains on the Yearly Meeting (1861-1902)**

The sufferings of North Carolina Friends for conscience’s sake during the Civil War included fines, imprisonment, seizure and destruction of property, forced labor, and in a few cases sentences of death by firing squad or bayonet. Many of these incidents are uniquely recorded in Fernando Cartland’s “*Southern Heroes: Friends in War Time.*”

By the end of the war and during the Reconstruction period the circumstances of Friends in North Carolina were so difficult, physically and spiritually, that a group of Northern Friends banded together in the Baltimore Association to provide material, educational, and spiritual assistance. These efforts were by and large a great blessing, but they also introduced new ideas and practices to North Carolina Friends that would prove to be both controversial and disruptive.

In the years between the end of the Civil War and 1900, Friends from the Baltimore Association encouraged North Carolina Friends to adopt some of the techniques and practices employed by the evangelical Christian movement that was sweeping much of the nation. Friends began holding what would today be called revival meetings under the auspices of the yearly meeting, including mourner’s benches, altar calls, and much greater emotionalism than was common in Friends meetings of the day. While these innovations were successful in many ways, some North Carolina Friends, particularly in the northeastern portion of the state (Eastern Quarter), felt they were not in keeping with Friends historic faith and practice. In keeping with the desire to maintain unity, the yearly meeting agreed that those meetings which did not approve of the new evangelical work did not have to participate or pay for it in their yearly meeting apportionments.

The Richmond Conference of 1887 and the subsequent *Richmond Declaration* were additional sources of strained relationships in North Carolina Yearly Meeting.<sup>6</sup> Some North Carolina observers were concerned that such a conference was being held, pointing out that previous conferences had played a role in Hicksite and Wilburite separations in Ohio. While the *Declaration* issued by the conference did seem to discourage the excesses of revivalism, it also left the way open for programmed worship (including congregational singing and altar calls), and above all a professional ministry. There was also an implied shift in the understanding of salvation from the historic view of a lifelong work (“taking up the daily cross”) to a single and swift conversion experience accomplished in a moment.

Matters came to a head when the majority of North Carolina Yearly Meeting adopted the *Uniform Discipline* over the expressed opposition of Friends in Eastern Quarter. The *Uniform Discipline* was the organizing document of a new central organization of Friends (Five Years Meeting), to which it was hoped all yearly meetings would belong. It increased the authority of yearly meetings in an attempt to increase the uniformity of Friends faith and practice in the wake of the separations of the 1800s. An example which bore heavily on Friends in Eastern Quarter was the new authority of the yearly meeting to prevent individuals from being recorded in the ministry or appointed as elders, or to dismiss those already recorded, if they did not hold and teach doctrines approved by the yearly meeting. This seemed an unacceptable infringement on the responsibility of local monthly meetings to discern spiritual gifts among their own membership.

### **Separation of North Carolina Yearly Meeting**

On Ninth Month 5, 1903, the traditionalist Friends in Eastern Quarter, believing that the *Uniform Discipline* had not been properly adopted, “reassembled” as Eastern Quarterly Meeting in Rich Square to meet under the 1893 *Discipline*. The motive of this step, the minutes of that meeting show, was

*not merely to transact the business, ...but also to inform the monthly meetings in a clear but loving manner, that we believe the time has fully come, when we must cease to go on as we have in the past .... To every member of Eastern Quarterly meeting, who favors the adoption of the Uniform Discipline, we would say in tender love, that while it is in a sense of inexpressible sadness to us, that we cannot walk together and be agreed, yet we desire that every one may be fully persuaded in his own mind, may seek diligently to know the will of our Heavenly Father, and be faithful to his leadings. We crave this for our entire membership.*

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about these events, see Minear, Mark, *Richmond 1887*, and Hamm, Thomas, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907*.

From this meeting in 1903 the separation of North Carolina Yearly Meeting into two continuing bodies may be dated. In 1904 the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends held at Cedar Grove in Woodland, N.C. met as a separate body for the first time. In 1907 this body approved a minute “embracing some of the reasons for our existence as a separate body”:

*Dear Friends: We are now assembled in this place the fourth time in the capacity of a Yearly Meeting. A concern has spread over us to briefly set forth by way of explanation some of the reasons for our existence as a separate body. We had borne with the spirit that had been at work for many years among us, introducing subversive changes, especially in our manner of worship, until the Uniform Discipline had been prepared and offered for our acceptance. This Discipline was adopted by the body assembled at High Point, North Carolina, in a Yearly Meeting capacity, and was sent down, requiring all subordinate meetings to put it into practice. It would have been a severe trial of submission to have adopted the minor changes, but there were changes involved, the importance of which were fundamental. Among these was the submission of qualification for the ministry to a body over which the particular monthly meeting had no control.*

*Although this Uniform Discipline does not require of all those accepting it that our ancient manner of worship shall at once be abandoned; it opens a way for it and offers encouragement for the introduction of a new order of things as soon as it can be effected without apparent violence. It offers no protest against the pastoral system which it is well known is rapidly gaining favor among those claiming to be Friends.*

*With the remnant of like faith from various parts of our State, and the body of Friends in this locality which included the larger part of the members of the original Rich Square Monthly Meeting, we are now holding North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends at Cedar Grove in Woodland, N. C.*

Beginning in 1908 and in successive revisions of the *Discipline*, the yearly meeting has summarized these matters into the following commitments of faith and practice:

*About this time, those members of the Yearly Meeting who felt that it was right for them to maintain the doctrines of the immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit, of the headship of Christ over all things to His Church, and of the waiting worship and inspirational ministry which are, and must ever be, the outgrowth of these doctrines, believed it would be right for them to hold a separate Yearly Meeting. Accordingly they met in the capacity of North Carolina*

*Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, at Cedar Grove, in the town of Woodland, Northampton County, North Carolina, in the year of 1904.*

### **Relations with other Friends**

North Carolina Yearly Meeting at Cedar Grove immediately initiated correspondence with six other yearly meetings with which they felt they had most in common. These six yearly meetings had also separated from their fellow Friends over theological issues, though at different times and under different circumstances. With varying degrees of alacrity each of these six yearly meetings accepted North Carolina Yearly Meeting at Cedar Grove as one of them. For convenience, these seven yearly meetings came to be called Conservative Friends. This yearly meeting was distinct from other Conservative yearly meetings in attaching less importance to maintaining plain dress and plain speech; more importance to higher education; and in giving greater weight to the immediate, perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit than to Friends tradition or Scripture.

An immediate result of the separation was a large influx of Friends transferring their membership from other monthly meetings to the Conservative Rich Square meeting in Woodland (formerly Cedar Grove Preparative meeting, part of Rich Square Monthly Meeting in the town of Rich Square, five miles to the south). In a civil negotiation immediately following the separation, Friends on both sides agreed that the Conservative body would hold title to Cedar Grove Meeting House in Woodland, and the Five Years Meeting Friends would retain title to the Rich Square Meeting House in Rich Square. Both groups called themselves Rich Square Monthly Meeting.

Over the next several years, as monthly meetings were established and new meeting houses built in several areas across the state, the Friends who had transferred their membership to Rich Square transferred them once again, to the new (Conservative) monthly meetings. In each case, the founding members of these new meetings were primarily members of one or two extended families, and these families sustained leadership at the monthly and yearly meeting levels for over half a century. The Yearly Meeting was organized into Eastern and Southern Quarterly Meetings, following the pattern of the yearly meeting before the separation.

Friends in North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (Cedar Grove) maintained civil relationships with their Five Years Meeting counterparts over the years. They also kept up a steady stream of correspondence, intervisitation, and transfers of membership with other conservative yearly meetings, particularly Ohio Yearly Meeting. A noteworthy traveling minister of this period was Anna E. C. Fisher.

In 1935 the yearly meeting was moved to approve a *Brief Statement of the Doctrines and Principles as ever believed by Friends*.<sup>7</sup> While closely parallel to the *Brief Synopsis of the Principles and Testimonies of the Religious Society of Friends* adopted by all seven Conservative yearly meetings in 1912, the *Brief Statement* is the expression of our yearly meeting only, and therefore more illuminating as to the beliefs and practices of North Carolina Conservatives in particular.

The establishment of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) in 1937 occasioned serious debate inside our yearly meeting: to what extent should Conservative Friends associate with those who had different beliefs? The arguments offered against participation by some Friends in the yearly meeting were articulate, extensive, and published outside the yearly meeting, but the sense of Representative Body was that Friends who felt led to participate should be free to do so, and that Representative Body would provide them with the proper credentials. Since that time the yearly meeting has been quite active in various FWCC programs and activities, sending representatives to FWCC gatherings and conferences and serving in leadership roles particularly in the Section of the Americas.

### **Recent History**

As one's focus moves nearer to the present day, it becomes more difficult to tell what events and developments are truly important. The full import of some events has not yet unfolded in their entirety; the contemporary observer may be blind to developments that will prove to be quite significant. Recognizing these limitations, there are points in the recent history of the yearly meeting that appear notable. Beginning with Virginia Beach Friends in 1954, a series of new, urban monthly meetings have been accepted into yearly meeting membership. Some had members with family ties to the yearly meeting, while others did not. At the same time, several of the monthly meetings established a half-century earlier, mostly in rural settings, were declining in membership or laid down altogether. Only two of the six original monthly meetings survived into the 21st century; they are currently joined by seven new monthly meetings, all in urban settings. The shift in membership from a body primarily composed of families whose members were born and raised among Conservative Friends to a group made up largely of unrelated individuals who became convinced Friends as adults has had several outcomes, including the following:

- The Truth underlying doctrines and practices that were at one time simply 'received' as "the way Friends are" is now being articulated in new ways that are accessible and convincing to newcomers.

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<sup>7</sup> Both the *Brief Synopsis* and the *Brief Statement* are available on the links page of the yearly meeting web site (<http://ncymc.org/ymlinks.html>).

- Adult religious education is seen as more important than before.
- The yearly meeting and its members have been drawn to more engagement with the wider world of Friends in recent decades. This activity has included publications that articulate the nature of conservative Quakerism as well as participation and leadership in various Quaker programs of study and retreat. The yearly meeting's commitment to Friends education includes involvement with several Quaker affiliated schools. Louise B. Wilson, a recorded minister and founder of Virginia Beach Friends Meeting and Friends School in Virginia Beach, exemplified this involvement, leadership and commitment.
- Meetings are involved in a wide number of activities with Friends and other groups around common issues, including the environment, justice, peace and other social concerns. One important commitment has been our support of and involvement with the peace work of Quaker House of Fayetteville.
- The yearly meeting membership has become much more diverse in many ways. We have been especially enriched as a faith community by the full participation of Friends of various sexual orientations and gender identities.

The confluence of old and new seems to have been spiritually productive for all involved, as the Yearly Meeting has consistently sought out the immediate, perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit in each situation.