

American Quaker Records

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The mid-1600s was a period of religious unrest in England. The Church of England was the official religion in England, but many people were “non-Conformists” resisting the Church of England. Some of these non-conformists were a group of “Seekers” that were looking for alternative religious options. George Fox was one of these seekers. Through communications with other seekers and reading the bible George Fox developed his beliefs that every believer could communicate directly with God and didn’t need the trained leaders in the Church of England to intercede to between the people and God. George Fox believed in an “Inner Light” where each person should be led by their direct communication from God.

The Religious Society of Friends was formally started between 1650 and 1652 in Northwest England. The movement quickly spread through the England and other countries. Soon meetings were established in Ireland and North America.

“Quaker” was originally a slang name for Religious Society of Friends. The term Quaker is now widely accepted as an alternate name for the Religious Society of Friends.

Non-conformist persecution continued in England and North America.

Quakers were in North America by 1656. Massachusetts was probably the most resistant to Quakers. In 1658, the Massachusetts legislature enacted a law prohibiting Quakers in the Colony and providing for arrest and banishment. Some Quakers were imprisoned. Several cruel punishments were used including public whipping in the streets. Mary Dyer was one of the English Quakers hung in Massachusetts. Thomas Macy was not a Quaker, but he was fined for allowing a group of Quakers to take shelter in his barn during a thunderstorm. Many Quakers from Massachusetts moved to Rhode Island where they were more accepted.

Quakers were more accepted in the Mid-Atlantic region. King Charles II gave a large land grant to William Penn in 1681 to settle debts owed to William’s father Admiral Sir William Penn. William Penn created the Colony of Pennsylvania (meaning Penn’s Woods). William Penn encouraged religious freedom and in 1682 a large immigration of Quakers from England, Ireland, and other European countries started. Many early Quakers settled in Philadelphia and surrounding areas.

By 1750, the Society of Friends was the third largest religion in America. If you have ancestors in the American mid-west before 1776 you have about a 50/50 chance of having Quaker ancestors

One factor that limited the growth of Quakerism was their strict discipline requirements and their disownment of members that violated the discipline rules. Many people have ancestors that were Quakers, but at some point, they were disowned and joined other religious organizations.

Meeting structure

Early Quakers held meetings for worship in the homes of believers. As the community grew, they would build meeting houses to hold their meetings. They did not use the term church. They had a hierarchy of meetings:

- Month meetings – These are the local meetings and the meeting records with the most genealogical records. These meetings held monthly business meetings to record changes to their membership. This could include births, deaths, transfers, and disciplinary actions.
- Quarterly meetings – These are generally regional meetings to approve establishment of new meetings, laying down meetings that were closing, and coordination actions between monthly meetings.
- Yearly meetings – are primarily business meetings for groups of Quarterly meetings that may include multiple states or entire countries
- Five-year meetings – were used to coordinate between multiple yearly meetings
- Preparatory Meetings – Were often established in new areas to build a community and work toward becoming a monthly meeting.

Men and women maintained separate records books. The monthly meetings minutes recorded the items discussed at the monthly meetings. Often separate books were maintained to record births, deaths, and marriages. These books may also include names and birth dates of family members transferring from other meetings.

Quaker separations – In the 1800s there were several groups that chose to separate from their Quaker meetings and formed new meetings. There were many different groups, but the Hicksite separation was one of the largest. There were also conservative groups that wanted to maintain the old silent meeting formats. There were also some groups that moved toward evangelical meetings that hired ministers.

Migrations

Early Quakers in Massachusetts, Mid-Atlantic states, and Barbados

William Penn and founding of Pennsylvania 1682

Migration south to the Carolina region in 1700s

Heavy migration from Nantucket in 1771-1775

Uncomfortable with Slavery – migration to Ohio and Indiana early 1800s

Migrations west to Iowa and Kansas mid-19th century

Late 19th and 20th century spread to western states

Records

Maintained since 1650 in each monthly meeting

Dates: Julian calendar used before 1752 when Gregorian calendar was adopted. Not all meetings adopted Gregorian calendar at same time. Quakers didn't use month names because of pagan origins. They used numbers so dates are provided like 5th day of the 6th month, 1735. Dates should be recorded

as found. When translation is required such as genealogy program original date should be included in notes or comment field.

William Wade Hinshaw indexing project 1926-1947

Published five volumes of “Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy”

Additional volumes and collections of records were published after his death

original records

- Usually controlled by yearly meetings
- Some may have restrictions
- Stored in college and/or state archives
- Copies may be available in local meeting
- On-line copies - Family Search/Ancestry/MyHeritage
- Published sources
 - Hinshaw volumes - Regional/specialized books - Family genealogies
 - Many books available on-line (Google books, Archive.org, local meeting history)
 - In many libraries
 - Newsletters/journals – May be in libraries

Further reading

Web resources

Database of North American Quaker meetings contains many valuable details about each meeting

<https://www.quakermeetings.com/Plone> (verified 1/26/2022)

Cindi's list Quaker resources has many links to other resources on-line

<https://www.cyndislist.com/quaker/> (verified 1/26/2022)

Detailed paper about Quaker disownment <http://quaker.org/legacy/disown.html> (verified 1/26/2022)

Nantucket Historical Association database of over 40,000 early Nantucket residents. Many were Quakers. <https://nha.org/research/research-tools/barney-genealogical-record/> (verified 1/26/2022)

North Carolina Friends Historical Society <https://www.ncfhs.org/> (verified 1/26/2022)

Linage society for descendants that can trace their ancestry to a person that came to North America on one of the ships that arrived between 15 Dec 1681 and 31 Dec 1862 in company with William Penn. Site has list of known eligible ancestors. <http://www.welcomesociety.org/> (verified 1/26/2022)

Linage society for people that can trace their ancestry to a member of the society of Friends in 1835 or before. Site has list of known eligible ancestors. <http://www.earlyquakers.org/> (verified 1/26/2022)

Wikipedia has some excellent summaries and references lists. Start with "History of Quakers" at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Quakers (verified 1/26/2022)

Maps show location of current Friends meetings for each yearly meeting <http://www.quakermaps.com/> (verified 1/26/2022)

Books

NOTE: Some of these books are out of print. Many are available in public libraries. You may need to consider interlibrary loan if your local library does not have a copy. Some of them are available as reprints. You may find some are available on line at www.Archive.org , www.forgottenbooks.org , or books.google.com.

"Our Quaker Ancestors; Finding Them in Quaker Records", by Ellen Thomas Berry & David Allen Berry

"Thee & Me; A Beginner's Guide to Early Quaker Records", by Lisa Parry Arnold

"Immigration of the Irish Quakers into Pennsylvania, 1682-1750" by Albert Cook Myers

"Irish Quaker Records: 1654-1860", Olive C. Goodbody

"Quakers on the American Frontier", by Errol T. Elliott

"Penn's Colony: Genealogical and Historical Materials Related to the Settlement of Pennsylvania, Volume 2 Welcome Claimants Proved, Disproved, and Doubtful", by George E. McCracken

"Quakers and the American Family; British Settlement in the Delaware Valley", by Barry Levy

"Southern Quakers and Slavery: A Study in Institutional History" by Stephen Beauregard Weeks

"Quaker Nantucket; The Religious Community Behind the Whaling Empire" by Robert J. Leach and Peter Gow

"The Friendly Virginians; America's First Quakers", by Jay Worrall Jr.

"The Carolina Quaker Experience, 1665-1985: an Interpretation", Seth B. Hinshaw

"The Quaker Colonies", by Sydney G Fisher

"Quakerism on the Eastern Shore" by Kenneth Carrol

"Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy", by William Wade Hinshaw

- Volume I – North Carolina
- Volume II – New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania
- Volume III – New York and Long Island
- Volume IV – Ohio
- Volume V – Ohio records of Wilmington and Indiana Yearly Meetings
- Volume VI – Virginia
- Volume VII – Indiana (edited by Willard Heiss) in seven parts
- Additional data published by others for some meetings

SAMPLE ENTRY from QUAKER MEETINGS.COM

Meeting name: BEAR CREEK (CONSERVATIVE)

Website

Another Website: http://iymc.org/monthlymeetings/#Bear_Creek

Former meeting names

No former names are known

State or Province: IOWA

County: DALLAS

Physical location: EARLHAM 50072, 1808 BEAR CREEK RD., ADAMS TWP.

Latitude: 41.53930 N **Longitude:** 094.20799 W

Date granted: 1856/06/14

Date of first meeting: 1856/07/16

Current Status: ACTIVE

Before and After: PM 1855/02/10-1904/06 FROM ACKWORTH (SOUTH RIVER, THREE RIVER) MM.

Branches

[CONSERVATIVE] AFTER 1877/06/30

Latest yearly meeting: IOWA (CONSERVATIVE) Y.M.

Where records are kept: MEETINGHOUSE. IOWA (FUM) YM. mf IOWA STATE HIST. SOC. (FUM)
#25, 26, 27

Records known extant: BEAR CREEK SAFE: MIN 1856-1981, WOMEN MIN 1866-1875, 1877-1935, REMOVALS 1858-1865, M&E 1877-1907, TREAS 1872-1931, BEAR CREEK PM MIN 1877-1904, WOMEN PM MIN 1877-1904, EAST GROVE PM 1869-1873, EAST GROVE WOMEN PM 1869-1873, WISCOTTA PM 1865-1876, IOWA YM: MIN 1869-1871, 1874-1877, WOMEN MIN 1856-1877, M&O MIN 1856-1877, PM MIN 1866-1877, ACKWORTH (SOUTH RIVER) MM MIN 1866-1877, ACKWORTH (SOUTH RIVER) MEN & WOMEN PM MIN 1869-1877.

Affiliations

PLEASANT PLAIN Q.M. UNTIL 1859/11/26

ACKWORTH (SOUTH RIVER) Q.M. 1860/03/10 - 1866/02/17

INDIANA (ORTHODOX) Y.M. UNTIL 1862

BEAR CREEK Q.M. 1866/05/12 - 1982

Local-related histories: HERBERT C. STANDING, *HISTORICAL NOTES CONCERNING THE CONSERVATIVE FRIENDS AT BEAR CREEK* (1977). DARIUS B. COOK, *HISTORY OF QUAKER DIVIDE* (1914, REPRINTED 1970).

Comments: "INFORMAL HINSHAW TRANSCRIPTS", IOWA QUAKER MONTHLY MEETING RECORDS, VOLS. 10 + 2, FROM SELBY PUBLISHING, <http://www.selbypub.com/iowa.htm>.

Subordinates

SUMMIT GROVE PM UNTIL 1865/09

[STUART, GUTHRIE CTY., IA]

EAST GROVE PM 1869/04/15-1873/09/18

WISCOTTA PM 1865/07/06-1876/05/25

NORTH BRANCH PM 1863/07/09-1869/08

NORTH BRANCH WG 1908/04-1912ca.

[EARLHAM, MADISON CTY.]

UNION PM 1867/04/22-1869/08

SOUTH RIVER WG 1908/04-1980ca.

[WARREN CTY?]

LAUGHING WATERS PM 2012BEF
[MINNEAPOLIS, MN]