

## Yonge Street Monthly Meeting Of Friends 1806 - 1906 - 2006

About the year 1776, some of the descendants of members of the Society of Friends who were early settlers in America, struck out for the wilderness of central and northern Pennsylvania with



the purpose of finding new homes and organizing new Quaker colonies. In this territory, they settled in the beautiful and fertile valley of Fishing Creek about Catawissa and along the Susquehanna River in Northumberland County. Other descendants moved still farther north into Pennsylvania and located on the sunny northern slopes of Muncy Valley and along the Loyalsock Creek; and in the uplands to the east and west of the present hamlet of Warrensville situated in Lycoming County.

Another group of Friends settled at Fishing Creek in the region about the present town of Millsville in Columbia County. Their principal settlements were soon greatly increased by an influx of newcomers from Bucks County, and from Kingwood and Hardwick Meetings in New Jersey. A few families presented certificates from well-known Meetings of Friends in Chester County, Pennsylvania. From 1796 to 1799 all these Friends belonged to Catawissa Monthly Meeting. In 1799, a new Monthly Meeting was established at Muncy, Fishing Creek, and at Loyalsock or Pine Grove.

About the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a few Friends belonging to Muncy Meeting paid religious visits to the province of Upper

Canada, and upon their return began to extol the merits of the vast wilderness which was opening up to the new settlers. One of their number later spoke of this new land "as it were flowing with

milk and honey" so great was their enthusiasm concerning this newly-prospected settlement.

In the year 1800, three Friends families requested certificates of removal from Muncy MM to the newly-organized Monthly Meeting of Pelham in Upper Canada. Between 1803 and 1808 a general evacuation of Friends residing at Catawissa took place which reduced the membership of that MM to such an extent that Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting directed that this Meeting be discontinued and the members transferred to the Monthly Meeting at Muncy.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> month 1804 a new Preparative Meeting was established at Yonge Street, York County, and most of the Friends who removed from Northumberland and Lycoming Counties in Pennsylvania resided within the verge of it, and consequently had their certificates of membership transferred from the Monthly Meeting at Pelham to the newly-instituted meeting.

In a few years 1806, Yonge Street Monthly Meeting was established.

Yonge Street Monthly Meeting prospered to the extent that, in the ensuing years, preparative meetings were established under its care. It has had a continuity in the Society of

Friends for 200 years.

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Centennial Celebration of the Establishment  
of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting 1806 -  
1906

September 18<sup>th</sup> 1906 was a red letter day on the calendar of the Friends of the town of Newmarket and vicinity, as on that date they had decided to hold a Centennial Anniversary in the Meeting House on Botsford Street. In spring 1906, in anticipation of celebrations, Friends in Newmarket had been occupied with improving the appearance of their Church. The exterior woodwork had a new coat of paint. The interior walls were papered, the ceiling painted, and the woodwork varnished. The contractor, Mr Bolt Hewitt did a very satisfactory job. Plans were prepared for an addition to the School House, costing about \$800. The Yonge Street Quarterly Meeting was to be held in Newmarket the coming summer. Several distinguished ministers from the States were expected to be present.

There was established on Yonge Street, 100 years ago, a Monthly Meeting of Quakers, and the Centennial celebration of this event took place in the Friends Meeting House on Tuesday afternoon, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1906. The weather was fine and clear, one of those balmy September days when nature seems trying to appear her best before the coming of the autumn frosts.

There was a good assembly present. Friends were in attendance from Toronto, Bloomfield, Whitchurch, Uxbridge, Schomberg, Dunkerron, and other points. At 2:30 pm the meeting assembled for worship with the following Friends on the platform:

Ransler Levens, Elizabeth Cody, Jane Taylor, Seba Armitage, J.W. Peckham, Isaac Wilson, Dr J.J. Mills, Benjamin Cody, Frank Cornell. A half hour of good old-fashioned Quaker meeting was enjoyed.

About 3 o'clock, the chair was taken by Frank Cornell, and George Phillips read the following minutes of the Monthly Meeting held one hundred years ago:

At Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, held the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month 1806, Nathaniel Pearson is appointed clerk at this time.

The meeting appoints Isaac Phillips, David Willson, and Charles Chapman to bring forward a name to take the station of clerk and report to next meeting.

The meeting directs that our future Preparative Meeting be held on the week preceding the Monthly Meeting.

The Friends of Whitchurch request a further Indulgence of holding their meeting, with which this meeting unites, until the Monthly Meeting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month next [1807], under the care of Isaac Phillips, Isaac Hollingshead, Charles Chapman, William Phillips, Timothy Rogers, and Amos Armitage.

Amos Armitage requests to be released from the station of overseer. The Meeting appoints Israel Lundy David Willson, Samuel Lundy, Asa Rogers, John Dunham, Joseph Webster, and Francis Westly to bring forward a suitable name for that station to next meeting.

A friend produced to this meeting an address to the present Governor, which, being read, approved, and signed by

the clerk, Timothy Rogers and Amos Armitage are appointed to attend on the Governor therewith.

One of their first acts was to send a communication to the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada.

Address to Francis Gore, Lieutenant-Governor, presented by Yonge Street Friends, Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1806. (Gazette, October 4, 1806)

The Society of the people called Quakers, to Francis Gore, Governor of Upper Canada, sendeth greeting.

Notwithstanding we are a people who hold forth to the world a principle which, in many respects, differs from the greater part of mankind, yet we believe in our seasonable duty as saith the Apostle, "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake, whether it be the King as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well; in this we hope to be his humble and peaceful subjects. Although we cannot, for conscience sake, join with many of our fellow mortals in complimentary customs of man, neither in taking up the sword to shed human blood, for the Scripture saith that 'it is righteousness that exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people', we feel concerned for the welfare and the prosperity of the Province. Hoping thy administration may be such as to be a terror to the evil-minded and a pleasure to them that do well, then will thy Province flourish and prosper under thy direction, which is the earnest desire

and prayer of thy sincere friends.

Read and approved in the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting of Friends, 18<sup>th</sup> - ninth month - 1806.

To this, the Governor made answer -  
I return you my thanks for your dutiful address and for your good wishes for my welfare, and prosperity of this Province. I have no doubt of your proving peaceful and good subjects to His Majesty, as well as industrious and respectable members of society. I shall at all times be happy to afford to such persons my countenance and support.

Government House, York, Upper Canada  
Francis Gore

30<sup>th</sup> September 1806 Lieutenant-Governor

Mr Benjamin Cody gave a paper on the history of the meeting. It was followed by a paper which gave a brief sketch of the present state of Quakerism in England prepared by Mr W.G. Brown of Toronto who unfortunately could not be present, but which was read by Mr Isaac Wilson. An address by Dr Mills of Toronto, was followed with one by Mr J.W. Peckham of Utica, New York. Some 15-20 other persons spoke. Prayer was ordered by J.W. Peckham, after which Isaac Wilson spoke from the words "Our Father". Dr Mills made the closing prayer.

At the beginning of the meeting, the hope was expressed that the same Divine covering which overshadowed our forefathers one hundred years ago might rest upon us, and all present felt that the prayer was fully answered. The service was truly helpful, and under the leadership of the Great Head of the Church all realized that they were "One in

Christ Jesus". The proceedings were wound up by the serving of refreshments in the school room.

Benjamin Cody, who is now in his 85<sup>th</sup> year, gave a paper on The Establishment of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1806.

As we are about to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting of Friends, the mind naturally turns back to the time of the first settlement of the Friends in this vicinity, and of meetings for worship before the Monthly Meeting was established - also of the intervening space to the present.

The records we have show that about the year 1800, Timothy Rogers, by arrangement with the Government of Upper Canada, was to bring in forty settlers. In fulfilling his obligation, he succeeded in getting a large number of Friends from Pennsylvania, New York, and other places. The fact that a meeting for worship was regularly established in first month 1802 shows the zeal and earnestness of the early Friends. A Preparative Meeting was first held in 6<sup>th</sup> month 1804, and the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting was first held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of 9<sup>th</sup> month 1806 - all under the authority of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

One of the first acts of the Monthly Meeting was to prepare an address to the Governor of the Province, and appoint Timothy Rogers and Amos Armitage to attend on the Governor therewith.

Among the records of early date we find prominent the names of Timothy Rogers, Amos Armitage, Nathaniel Pearson, Isaac and William Phillips, Isaac Rogers, Asa Rogers, Israel Lundy, and others.

Nathaniel Pearson and Amos Armitage were noted clerks of the Meeting in those days, whose posterity are now numerous in

these parts. Our late friend James Pearson was a grandson of Nathaniel Pearson. Seba, Isaac, and William Armitage, and others now living are grandsons of the above Amos Armitage. Lewis Armitage is his great-grandson.

Three noted families of Rogers were among the first settlers - Timothy, Asa, and Isaac. Asa Rogers, a son of Wing Rogers of Vermont, married a daughter of Timothy Rogers. A large number of descendants of Timothy Rogers and Wing Rogers of Vermont now exist - not all bearing the name of Rogers for daughters get their names changed by marriage.

In Meeting Records, Isaac Rogers, grandfather of our friend Levi Rogers, is credited with the honour of having had the first child born among the Friends on Yonge Street, a daughter named Sarah Rogers who was born in 4<sup>th</sup> month 1800.

Three brothers of the Phillips family settled not far away - Philip, Isaac, and William. My mother was a daughter of William & Hannah Phillips. If the descendants of the Phillips are numerous - many bearing different names by daughters marrying. No doubt, if they could be numbered, it would be by the thousands.

Many Friends came and settled in different sections. Meetings were soon established at Whitchurch, Uxbridge, and Pickering. Numbers increased by birth and other ways. The record shows that by 1816, there had been more than 150 births among them. The record of old young in 1828 gives the names of over 800 members.

In considering the above record, the thought comes up, "Why is it that the Friends branch of the Church has not continued to increase more than it has?" We had the vantage ground, yet other branches of the Church have gone forward, greatly outstripping us in

numbers. No doubt, different persons will interpret it in different ways. The dear Sav-  
iour, in talking to the people, said a house di-  
vided against itself could not stand. Has that  
anything to do in the matter? If so, would it  
not be wise to seek Divine Guidance? Perad-  
venture, a remedy might be found and our  
branch of the Church again go forward, as in  
the early days, and be a means in the Lord's  
hands of bringing many more souls to Christ.

**BENJAMIN CODY (ca 1821-1906)**

Died in Newmarket, Ontario, on Novem-  
ber 19, 1906, in his 85<sup>th</sup> year. The Town of  
Newmarket was startled on Monday by the  
announcement of the very sudden death of Mr  
Benjamin Cody. The old gentleman got up in  
the morning in his usual health, ate a hearty  
breakfast, and attended to his furnace as he  
was wont. About 11 o'clock, while sitting in  
his chair, he complained of a pain in his  
stomach. A doctor was sent for, who gave him  
some medicine and he appeared to be re-  
lieved. Shortly before 1 o'clock, just as the  
doctor called a second time, he suddenly col-  
lapsed.

Deceased was one of the best known  
Quakers in this section of the country - an  
influential, honorable, and worthy citizen. For  
many years, he carried on farming operations  
on Yonge Street in this vicinity, and took a  
very active interest in municipal and school  
matters. On retiring from business pursuits,  
he located in Newmarket and gave many  
years of excellent service to the Town as  
Councillor, and as a member of the Board of  
Health. He was a progressive man of good  
judgment, and his opinions always carried  
much weight in both the commercial and re-  
ligious circles in which he moved.

The Society of Friends of which he was a

prominent worker for many years, loses one  
of its most ardent supporters. He lived to en-  
joy the fruits of his arduous pioneer labours,  
was a man among men, and was able to say,  
with Paul, "I have finished my course; I have  
kept the faith; henceforth, there is laid up for  
me a crown of righteousness".

He leaves seven daughters to mourn the  
departure of a kind and honoured father: Mrs  
Lambie, Mrs Hill, and Mrs W.N. Starr, of  
Newmarket; Mrs Wigham, and Miss Ellen  
Cody of Toronto; Mrs Grant of Dundas; and  
Mrs Rush of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, all of  
whom were home for the funeral which took  
place Thursday afternoon with interment in  
Newmarket Cemetery.

**Sources:**

*Newmarket Era*, September 21, 1906, p. 6 ;

*Newmarket Era*, September 28, 1906, p. 7 - copied  
from *The Canadian Friend*

*Newmarket Era*, November 23, 1906, pp. 2, 3.