

The Society of Friends in Leeds County

By Harry D. Blanchard

This article was first published in 1933 in the column of Harry D. Blanchard, of the *Brockville Recorder and Times*.

And now we shall get around to the matter of the Society of Friends, as long promised. It will be recalled that the old hand-written record book setting out the details of the proceedings of the Leeds monthly Quaker meeting at Yonge, later called Farmersville, commencing with the year 1833, 95 years ago, was after much patient search found by Mr. Sherman, a New York magazine editor, in an old trunk in the attic of the house in Athens formerly owned by our best friends and neighbors, Uncle Arza and Aunt Sarah Wiltse, now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Eaton. Mr. Sherman was interested in matters of his ancestry and his forefathers had been Leeds Quakers. The book is now a valued treasure in the library of the University of Western Ontario at London. It was secured for library by reason of the fact that all Quaker records are, by general understanding, sent to Prof. Arthur Dorland, who is a member of the faculty of the university and who some years ago published a very valuable work on the History of the Society of Friends in America. Through the courtesy of Prof. Dorland and Prof. Fred Landon, the librarian, the writer was permitted to make transcript of vital matters from this book while it was for the purpose loaned to the Toronto Reference Library, during the period of which loan it was secured in a fire-proof vault. With as much brevity as may be we shall now arrange these records for the enlightenment of searchers of the

history of the province for all time to come:

The Society of Friends

The Society of Friends in Canada evidently had close affiliation with the parent bodies in New York and New England, for in the early pages of the old book we find it stated that Richard Carpenter was clerk at the Friends' meeting for sufferings held in New York on the 1st of the 12th month, 1845. The Quakers never named the month as others did; thus with them January was "1st month" and December "12th month". Likewise they looked with disfavor upon the names for the week. With them Sunday was "1st day" and Saturday "7th day". The necessity for this explanation will appear hereinafter. It is also noted in the old book that Abraham Shearman, Jr. (which name translated into Canadian tongue is Sherman), was clerk of the yearly meeting of Friends for New England, 6th month, 1845. In New England, the old book says quarterly meetings were held in Salem, Mass. (the home of the writer's family before the disruption at the Revolution); in Falmouth, Mass.; in Smithfield, Mass.; in Vassalborough, Maine, and in Dover, N.H. The only familiar names appearing in connection with these meetings are those of Daniel Taber, Vassalborough, Maine; Joseph Taber, Albion, Maine, and James N. Fry, Bolton, Mass. In the eastern section of Upper Canada quarterly meetings were held on the 4th of the month in accordance with the below set out programme:

In the 2nd month at Westlake, Prince Edward county, after the last 1st day;

In the 6th month at Leeds (Yonge) after the 3rd 1st day;

In the 10th month at Westlake, after the 1st 7th day;

In the 12th month at Kingston, the 2nd 4th day after the 4th 1st day in the 12th month.

That last day may seem a puzzle and it will pay to sit down and figure it out; it means in December at Kingston on the 2nd Wednesday after the 4th Sunday in December.

We shall set out the earliest records in the book, the principal “queries” or beliefs, some general notes and shall arrange the rest of the information alphabetically, under family names, for the sake of brevity, conciseness and ready reference.

Answers to Queries

The Leeds monthly meeting was held at Yonge on the 10th of the 5th month, 1838. The clerk's time having expired, the meeting appoints David Wiltse to that service for one year. At the meeting on the 12th of the 7th month, 1838, the queries were all read and considered and the answers are as follows:-

1. We believe Friends are mostly careful to attend all our meetings for religious worship and discipline, the hour is nearly observed, not altogether clear in that of sleeping in meeting; no other unbecoming behaviour appears in them.
2. We believe that love and unity is generally maintained as becomes brethren; if differences arise, due care is taken speedily to end them; we believe Friends do discourage talebearing and detraction and mostly avoid them.
3. We believe friends do endeavor to keep themselves, their own and their Friends' children, under their care, in plainest of speech, behaviour and apparel, and do

endeavor by example and precept to train them up in a religious life and conversation consistent with our Christian profession. We believe the Scriptures of truth are frequently read in Friends families and they do extend due care in these respects towards others under their tuition.

4. We believe Friends do avoid the use of distilled, spirituous liquors, excepting for purposes strictly medicinal. We know of none that frequent taverns or places of diversion.

5. We believe care is taken seasonable to deal with offenders in the spirit of meekness and agreeable to discipline.

6. We know of none that keep company with those not of our society, on account of marriage; we know of no parents that connive at their children keeping company with such; we know of none that attend the marriages of those that go out from amongst us, or marriages accomplished by a priest, one case excepted and care taken.

7. We believe that Friends are clear in the several parts of this query.

8. We believe that Friends do endeavor to perform their promises and pay their just debts. We know of none that extend their business beyond their ability to manage, as becomes our religious profession, or who give occasion for fear on these accounts.

Report was Presented

On the 12th of the 1st month, 1843, the committee appointed to forward the information required by the society's half yearly meeting report that there are none who has accepted posts of profit and honor under the government, nor any that has suffered on account of military requirements; and that there are two children attending Friends' boarding school, 43 attending district schools, one taught at home and 18 attending no schools. We should say that a few years later, when the

society was in a flourishing condition, such a report would have made a much better showing.

On the 12th of the 2nd month, 1852, the Leeds monthly meeting, theretofore described as “held at Yonge”, is stated to have been held at Farmersville. At this meeting the committee appointed to collect the information required by the yearly meeting respecting schools reported that the schools within their limits, at which the children of Friends are receiving their education, are sectional schools, commonly called district schools, in which no teacher is licensed to teach except those of good morals. As for the religious character of the schools, the committee thinks it would be best explained by an extract from the 14th section of the School Act, which in substance is as follows: “Nor shall any pupil in any such school be required to read or study in or from any religious book which shall be objected to by his or her parents or guardians, and shall be allowed to receive such religious instruction as their parents or guardians may desire”. One child only is reported as not receiving proper education and that one deaf and dumb and with no mother and her father, disowned by Friends, pays no regard to her education, nor does he contribute in any way to her support.

The Quakers’ Customs

We shall now say a word as to the strict customs and ways of the Society of Friends. If a member erred, a complaint was forthwith lodged at the monthly meeting; a committee of two was then appointed to wait upon him. If he was in a “tender mood” and expressed sincere regret and a desire to be continued in the membership, his wish was granted and a second committee was appointed to so inform him. If, however, he was

unrepentant, he was promptly “disowned” and he could never be reinstated until he was in a “tender mood” and honestly repentant. In the book are records of numerous complaints; no offence, however, was very serious; some of them concerned semi-habitual attendance at the religious meetings of other communion. Then, when a member desired a certificate of removal to another “meeting” an appointed committee of three or four, sometimes two of them women, made a thorough investigation, to ensure that he had been just in all his dealings with his neighbors and that he had “settled his temporal affairs” (paid his debts) before a certificate was [unreadable] of deviation from their law and custom in these vital matters, strict rectitude in daily conduct and in liquidation of debt. It will thus be seen that to be a Friend was to be a citizen who was an honor to any community and whose departure was always regretted by people of all denominations.

Then again, it should be said that when two members wished to be united in marriage, the meeting, after satisfying itself that there were no impediments no previous engagements, had to give its consent. The ceremony itself was the most sensible, effective and binding ever conceived by mortal man. The bride and the groom simply stood up before the whole meeting; the groom stated plainly that he took this woman for his wife until death did them part and the bride stated that she took this man likewise. Then a committee of two male members, of advanced years and long standing in the society, was appointed to accompany the newly wed couple to their first house of entertainment after their marriage. This committee reported to the meeting that the marriage was an accomplished fact, having been completed in an orderly manner, and

handed the marriage certificate to the official known as the "Recorder." There were no divorces. There were no desertions, and in all the book there is no whisper of marital disagreement excepting in one instance where a husband lost his temper and was thoroughly disciplined for it. Lest there should be disquiet of mind anywhere. We should say that this last mentioned somewhat pathetically humorous, and indeed very human, temporary fall-from-grace was on the part of a member of a family unknown to anyone in the county at this day, they having been only temporary residents.

Some Early "Ministers"

Eliza Brewer and Perses Gardner were outstanding and gifted "ministers" of the Leeds meeting, as was Eliza Varney, in Upper Canada as a whole. We have heard friends in various parts of Ontario speak in reverence of the ministry of Eliza Varney. In Leeds the most gifted speakers in later years were the late Justus Robeson, father of our good friend Ephraim Robeson, of Athens and Aunt Priscilla Stevens. The zenith of Quaker influence in the community was probably reached about the year 1852, when the Leeds meeting had the honor of sending two of its ministers, Perses Gardner and Eliza Brewer, on a preaching mission to meetings of the society in the United States and in England and Ireland. Next week we shall set out the alphabetically arranged records in connection with the names mentioned in the book and shall try to bring this story to a conclusion.

And now we shall try to finish the Quaker records. The names appearing in the old record books are set out below in alphabetical order with various items of information after each, the word "new" signifying where it appears, that the one

concerned became a new member that year, and the abbreviation "com." signifying appointment to membership in committee:

Abel, Orvilla; new, 1845.

Abel, William; coml., 1852; 14th 7th month, 1853, his marriage approved to Esther Stanley of the Monthly Meeting at Upper Springfield, in the state of Ohio; 14th 8th month, 1854, he requested certificate of removal to the Monthly Meeting at Upper Springfield, Ohio.

Abels, Lyman; new, 1840 overseer, 1846; com., 1852.

Austin, James; new, 1841.

Austin, Minerva E.; new, 1849.

Austin, Robert M.; father of James; new, 1838; 15th 2nd month, 1851, requested certificate of removal for himself and family to the Monthly Meeting at Salem, Henry county, Iowa.

Austin, Sary, wife of Robert M. And mother of James.

Baker, Esther; new, 1843.

Baker, Joseph; 17th 10th month, 1850, his marriage to Sarah Ann Brewer approved.

Baker, William; 28th 3rd month, 1843, in a letter from Kingston, announces his marriage, but omits the name of the bride.

Benedict, Altes Lodemas, daughter of Widow Emma Benedict; new, 1844.

Benedict, Emma, 8th 5th month, 1845, her marriage to Alvin Orton approved.

Benedict, Isaac; com., 1838; com., 1839 com., 1840 com., 1841 com., 1842 com., 1843; overseer 1840, 1842, 1843 and 1846; 9th 8th month, 1849 requests certificate of removal to "the verge" of Monthly Meeting at Salem, Iowa.

Benedict, Isaac, Jr.; 9th 8th month. 1849, requests certificate of removal to Salem, Iowa.

Benedict, Jebediah; com., 1844; com., 1845.

Blanchard, Aaron; new, 1840.

Blanchard, Alexander, born 12th 5th month, 1838, registered as a new member in the year 1842.

Blanchard, Angeline, daughter of James and Sally Blanchard, born 9th 6th month, 1835, registered as a new member in the year 1842.

Blanchard, Ebenezer; new, 1840; com., 1841; com., 1847; com., 1849; com., 1852.

Blanchard, James; com., 1841; noted in book in 1842 as grandfather of Alexander.

Blanchard, Mabel; new, 1843.

- Blanchard, Sally; noted in book 1842 as grandmother of Alexander.
- Blancher, Albert; new, 1839; 11th 10th month, 1849, marriage approved to Sarah Ann Hayes.
- Blancher, Eunice; 14th 4th month, 1842, her marriage approved to Thomas Robeson.
- Blancher, James; new, 1840.
- Blancher, Sala; new, 1839.
- Booth, Charlotte; 8th 12th month, 1842, her marriage approved to Francis Sheldon.
- Brewer, Eliza; 14th 8th month, 1845, acknowledged as a minister; 12th 2nd month, 1852, given letter of greeting to Friends' Meetings in the United States, England and Ireland.
- Brewer, John, new, 1838.
- Brewer, Johnson; com., 1839; com., 1840; com., 1852; overseer 1840 and 1841; clerk, 1855.
- Brewer, Margaret; 8th 2nd month, 1849, her marriage approved to Johnathan Ward.
- Brewer, Philip; overseer 1841, 1842, 1843, 1844, and 1848; com. 1852.
- Brewer, Sarah Ann; 17th 10th month, 1850, her marriage approved to Joseph Baker.
- Brock, Isaac; overseer, 1838, 1840 and 1844; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1840.
- Buck, William; new, 1855
- Bullard, Josiah; overseer, 1838, 1840 and 1844; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1840.
- Calhoun, Alexander; new, 1842: 1852 granted certificate of removal to the "western part of the province."
- Code, Benjamin; 10th 9th month, 1846, his marriage approved to Mary R. More. Mr. Code presented certificate from Yonge Street Meeting, proving his membership and freedom from other engagements.
- Coon, Uta; new, 1843.
- Cornell, Lemuel; new, 1843; com., 1843; com., 1844; com., 1845; com., 1850; com., 1852; Recorder, [unreadable] and 1846.
- Cornell, Mary; new, 1843.
- Cornell, Samuel; assistant clerk, 1848.
- Danby, Joseph; new, 1840.
- Derbyshire, Alexander; new, 184_, com., 1852; 9th 5th month, 185_ requested certificate of removal for himself and family to Monthly Meeting at Salem, Iowa; 13th 6th month, 1850, returned the above mentioned certificate to the Meeting.
- Derbyshire, Daniel; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1841; com., 1852;
- Derbyshire, Daniel 2nd; new 1851.
- Derbyshire, Eliza; new, 1850.
- Derbyshire, Harvey; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1841; com., 1842; [unreadable] resigned as librarian; 13th 5th month, 1852, he and his wife Susannah visited the Leeds Meeting From Salem, Iowa.
- Derbyshire, Joseph; com., 1838; com., 1840; com., 1845; Recorder, [unreadable] and 1844.
- Derbyshire, Mary; 14th 10th month 1847, her marriage approved William Robinson.
- Dow, James; new, 1842.
- Dow, James, Sr.; new, 1839.
- Drew, John G.; new, 1843.
- Fairman, Benjamin M.; new, 1849.
- Ferris, Enoch; new, 1854.
- Ferris, John V.; new, 1847; com., 1852.
- Ferris, Johnathan; overseer, [unreadable], 1842, 1843, 1845, and 1846; com., 1852.
- Ferris, Joseph C.; com., 1844; com., 1852.
- Frost, John; new, 1842.
- Gardner, David; new, 1851, from [unreadable] Monthly Meeting; com., [unreadable]; 12th 2nd month, 1852 given letter of greeting to Friends' Meeting in the United States, Ireland and England (Swansea); 11th of 11th month, 1852, with his wife given certificate of removal to [unreadable] Monthly Meeting.
- Gardner, Ellen, daughter of David and Perses; new, 1851.
- Hannah, James; new, 1842.
- Hayes, Anna; 12th 10th month, 1843, her marriage approved to Wm. Knowles; Anna Hayes being a widow, a committee is appointed to see that her children's rights are legally secured; committee later reported children's rights protected.
- Hayes, Carmi; new, 1841.
- Hayes, Eri; new, 1839; com., 1840.
- Hayes, Sarah Ann; new, 1840; 11th 10th month, 1849, her marriage approved to Albert Blancher.
- Hodgson, John; new, 1843.
- Hudson, Matilda; new, 1844.
- Knight, Peter; overseer, 1848; 15th 2nd month, 1851, requests certificate of removal to Monthly Meeting at Salem, Iowa.
- Knowles, William; new, 1842; com., 1842; com., 184; com., 1852; 12th 10th month, 1843, his marriage

- approved to Anna Hayes; a committee had been appointed to see that he was clear from other engagements; committee reported favorably.
- Lake, Martha Jane; new, 1854.
- Lake, William; new, 1846.
- Lee, Ephraim; new, 1838.
- Lillie, Turner; new, 1840; com., 1849; com., 1852; clerk, 1841 and 1842; assistant clerk, 1855.
- Matthie, Anna; new, 1843.
- Matthie, James, Jr.; new, 1839.
- McCallum, Stephen; new, 1842.
- Merrell, Lovina; new, 1851.
- More, Mary R.; new, 1846, from Yonge Street Meeting; 10th 9th month, 1846, her marriage approved to Benjamin Code.
- Mott, Redah; new, 1850.
- Nash, William; new, 1849.
- Olds, David; new, 1841.
- Olds, Rebecca; 13th 1st month, 1853, Monthly Meeting unanimously appointed her as Elder in the Society.
- Olds, Samuel; com., 1850.
- Orton, Alvin; new, 1840; 9th 5th month, 1845, his marriage approved to Emma Benedict, widow.
- Palmer, Abel; committee, 1842.
- Palmer, Abraham; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1840; overseer, 1839 and 1846; 10th 1st month, 1850, requests certificate of removal to Salem, Iowa.
- Palmer, Abraham, Jr.; minor child of Abraham and Catherine Palmer, to Salem, Iowa, 1850.
- Palmer, Alphiis; 14th 9th month, 1854, certificate of removal to Red Cedar, Iowa
- Palmer, Catherine; wife of Abraham Palmer; to Salem, Iowa, 1850.
- Palmer, Degruel; minor child of Abraham and Catherine, to Salem, Iowa, 1850.
- Palmer, Ephraim; minor child of Abraham and Catherine, to Salem, Iowa, 1850.
- Palmer, Horatio; minor child of Abraham and Catherine, to Salem, Iowa, 1850.
- Palmer, Isaac; 14th 2nd month, 1850, certificate of removal to Salem, Iowa.
- Pheris, Johnathan; com., 1838.
- Robeson, James; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1840; com., 1843; com., 1845; com., 1847; com., 1850; overseer, 1843 and 1846.
- Robeson, Thomas; 14th 4th month, 1842, his marriage to Eunice Blancher approved.
- Robinson, William; 14th 10th month, 1847, his marriage to Mary Derbyshire approved; information received from Westlake Meeting certifying him free of other engagements; he was anxious to get home to Prince Edward county and a special meeting was held the following day to complete the marriage.
- Sheldon, Francis; 10th 1st month, 1839, given certificate of removal; no statement as to new location; 8th 12th month, 1842, his marriage approved to Charlotte Booth.
- Sherman, Aaron; new, 1842.
- Slack, Daniel; new, 1849 9th 8th month, 1849, requests certificate of removal to Monthly Meeting at Salem, Iowa.
- Slack, Louisa; new, 1849.
- Slack, Lovina; new, 1847.
- Slack, William; new, 1849.
- Smith, Eleanor; wife of Otis Smith, Sr.
- Smith, Elizabeth; new, 1848.
- Smith, Levi; com., 1838; com., 1854.
- Smith, Lewis; new, 1846.
- Smith, Otis, Sr.; com., 1838; com., 1839; 11th 3rd month, 1847, given credentials by the clerk, authorizing him to attend Friends' Meetings in New York, Ohio and Michigan; 9th 5th month, 1850, requests certificate of removal for himself and his wife Eleanor to Salem, Iowa; 8th 7th month, 1852, he and his wife Eleanor returned from Salem, Iowa; 14th 4th month, 1853, to Salem, Iowa.
- Smith, Otis, Jr.; (father of the late Uncle Wriley Smith of covered memory), on the 11th of the 8th month, 1847, severed his connection with the Society of Friends and joined the Methodist denomination.
- Stanley, Esther; from Upper Springfield, Ohio, Monthly Meeting; 14th 7th month, 1853, her marriage to William Abel approved.
- Ward, Johnathan; 8th 2nd month 1849, his marriage approved to Margaret Brewer; com., 1852.
- Ward, Johnathan P.; new, 1847.
- Ward, John F.; new, 1854.
- White, Maria; new, 1842; adopted child of James and Sally Blanchard; Maria born 16th 7th month, 1834.
- Wiltse, Anna; new, 1849.
- Wiltse, David; clerk, 1838, 1839 and 1840; overseer, 1838; assistant 1849, 1850, 1851, 1852, 1853 and 1854; com., 1839; com., 1840.

Wiltse, James 3rd; new, 1840.

Wiltse, Joseph; com., 1839; com., 1840; com., 1842;
com., 1843; com., 1843; com., 1850; Overseer,
1839 and 1842; treasurer and librarian, 1852.

Wiltse, Thankful; new, 1849.

Wing, Harvey; com., 1838; overseer, 1838.

Wing, Jedediah; new, 1840; com., 1843; 14th 2nd
month, 1850, requested certificate of removal to
Salem, Iowa, for himself, his wife and his family.

Wing, Jehiel; com., 1838; com., 1839; com., 1841;
com., 1847; overseer, 1841 and 1844; 9th 8th
month, 1849, requests certificate of removal to
Salem, Iowa.

Wing, Mary Emeline; new, 1850.

Wing, Philip; com., 1839; com., 1840; com., 1842;
com., 1843; com., 1844; com., 1849; com., 1850;
com., 1852; assistant clerk, 1841; clerk, 1843 to
1854.

Wing, Phoebe; assistant clerk, 1844; made an Elder
14th 8th month, 1851.

Yates, Abel; new, 1851; Recorder, 1852.

Yourex, John; new, 1848; com., 1850; com., 1852.