

# **A Short Account of The First Settlement of Friends in Canada, In the Latter Part of The 18th And Fore Part of the 19th Century**

*By B. Cody  
Newmarket, Ontario:  
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## **Introduction to the Reader:**

Thinking that many Friends of the day, and perhaps generations to come, would be interested in an account concerning the rise of the Society of Friends in Canada, the time and manner when the early meetings were established, I (having felt much interest in the matter) have spared no pains in procuring as much knowledge as I could on the subject, and I now offer it for the benefit of those who may be interested in its history, -- with some remarks also regarding the Society of later date, of its prosperity whilst harmony existed, and of its decay when strife and divisions took place. I trust that the earnestness of the Friends in early times and their willingness to endure great hardships for the cause of Christ, and their success in the ingathering of souls, may be a stimulus to others to be vigilant [sic] in the Lord's work, as well as a warning to not let discord and ill-feeling have place in the heart. May all keep in mind injunction to the Hebrews, (Heb. 12 : 15) "Looking diligently lest any fall from the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled." B. CODY. Newmarket, Ont., 1903.

The earliest account I have been able to find of Friends in Canada is given in a letter of James Pemberton to Rebecca Jones, then in England, in which he says : "On the borders of Canada a man, who had been an officer in the army, grew dissatisfied and uneasy in his mind, returned home, got into the quiet, and sat down with his family, retiring inward to wait upon God. This drew the attention of some of his neighbors who come and sat down with them, but did not know there were any people

whatever that held the same principles they were led to embrace, until some who had been in the army and got some knowledge of Friends and their principles, called them Quakers. Then they sought to be informed respecting us and meeting with Barclay's Apology, rejoined to find there was a people who professed this inward principle; their number is about twelve families who have embraced this doctrine." (2nd Vol Friends Review, page 131).

This letter was written about the year 1785.

No regular meeting of the Society appears to have been established at this time, but in all probability those persons had been meeting for worship in this manner for some time, to have the twelve families united together.

They having learned of the locality where the Friends (or Quakers) resided, application was made to Nine Partners Monthly Meeting, (perhaps 300 miles away) for admission into membership, that being the nearest Monthly Meeting known to them.

Friends of that meeting not feeling prepared to act, referred the matter to the Quarterly and thence to the Yearly Meeting for advice which resulted in the appointment of a Committee by the Yearly Meeting to visit them, to advise and assist in the establishment of meetings, also recommending to the Monthly Meeting of Nine Partners the appointment of a Committee to unite with the former in visiting the applicants.

In fulfilling their appointment the Yearly Meetings' Committee travelled on horse-back, as far as Rome, N.Y., where by appointment they were met by the Monthly Meetings' Committee, who had procured a boat at

Schenectady and ascended the Mohawk to that place. Here the two Committees united and performed the remaining part of the journey to Canada, and back to that place by water.

A canal was in operation connecting the Mohawk, with Wood Creek, through which they passed to Oneida Lake, and down its outlet, the Oswego River, to Lake Ontario- having had their boat carried around the falls.

On reaching the lake they took on two passengers -- a man and his wife -- and a pilot, having only an open boat to be propelled by oars with the occasional use of a blanket for a sail when the wind was fair.

They proceeded around the Eastern end of the lake, going from island to island as the wind and weather permitted, lodging at nights on shore in the best manner they could, carrying their provisions and cooking it by the way. Being retarded by winds and storms, their voyage was slow and hazardous. Several of the Monthly Meetings Committee were women who shared the trials and dangers of the voyage.

At one time they had a narrow escape from being foundered. Their temporary sail gave way when moving rapidly before the wind over a rough sea. The pilot became so alarmed that he gave up the helm. One of the Friends immediately stepped back, took the helm and called to the others to get out the oars. By steady pulling they were able to ride the seas and succeeded in landing in safety.

When the alarm had subsided the old man (their passenger) broke the silence by saying: "I thought we should have all gone to the bottom and I thought you were all fitter to die than I was."

On reaching an island not far from Kingston they were windbound three days and nights, and their provisions failing they had to live on a very small allowance the last morning they baked and eat [sic] their last small cake. The wind abating they ventured to set out and reached Kingston before night, from whence they proceeded to the Settlement of Friends along the Bay of Quinte. They met with a hearty welcome from those whom they went to visit and were deeply interested in their

intercourse with them. They advised and assisted in the establishment of meetings and visited most of their families.

Having finished their labors among them they again embarked in their frail vessel, and after various trials and detentions were favored to return to Rome in safety.

In going and returning they passed twelve nights in the woods with such shelter and accommodation as they carried with them." (2nd Vol. Friends Review P. 385-386.)

In connection with the above the records of the Society show that on the seventh of the ninth month, 1798, the first Preparative Meeting of Friends in Canada was held at the house of Philip Dorland in Adolphustown, Upper Canada.

Committees from New York Yearly Meeting and Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting acting jointly, were present to assist in the establishing of it.

In consequence of its remote situation enlarged powers were allowed the Meeting, viz :

To accomplish marriages, to deal with offenders, to receive requests for membership, and report their judgment of the cases to the Monthly Meeting.

The Committee in attendance were Fry Willis, Enoch Dorland, Gideon Seamen, Henry Hall and Reuben Haight.

Not far from the above date Settlements of Friends commenced in several places in Canada of which we will endeavor to give some account in due course. And as the Friends and meeting above described were in connection with New York Yearly Meeting I will give some further account of establishing Meetings in that section. Other places further West the Friends and Meetings for a time were under the care of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

## MEETINGS IN THE VICINITY OF WESTLAKE

On the 29th of 1st month, 1801, the first West Lake Monthly Meeting was held in Friends Meeting House in Adolphustown.

At the Monthly Meeting held in

Adolphustown the 16th of 4th mo., 1801, propositions were received and entertained for holding a Preparative Meeting at Kingston and a meeting- for worship at West Lake. These meetings were accordingly held under the care of a committee.

In 11th mo., 1803, a Preparative Meeting was established at West Lake.

At the Monthly Meeting held in 4th mo., 1801, a Meeting for Worship was allowed to be held at Green Point in Sophiasburg, under the care of a committee.

#### Respecting the Establishing of FRIENDS MEETINGS AT PELHAM AND VICINITY

The minutes of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting show that in the year 1797 they appointed a Committee to visit the Friends residing at Pelham and vicinity.

Report of Committee.

Extracts from the Yearly Meeting Minutes of 4th Mo., 1799.

The Committee to visit the Friends of Pelham and vicinity reported with a proposition that the Meeting appoint a Committee to visit them the ensuing summer, with the powers to establish a Monthly Meeting and to assist them in opening it if they, when among them, after duly considering their situation, should think right to proceed therein, the said Monthly Meeting to be under the particular care of the Yearly Meeting.

The report was approved and the Committee continued with some additions for the service, making 23 in all.

A report of the Committee dated Pelham, 10th Mo., 1st, 1799, says: After visiting the families of Friends at Black Creek and Short Hills, and having had weighty conference with them at their Meeting House at Pelham, which was generally attended by the members of both Meetings, we unite in the judgment .that it may be best to establish a Monthly Meeting amongst them, to be composed of the members of those two Meetings; that it be named Pelham Monthly Meeting, to be held alternately at Pelham and Black Creek the first 4th day in

each month, the first Monthly Meeting to be held tomorrow at Pelham at 11 o'clock; and that a meeting be held at Black Creek on the 1st and 5th days of each week: and at Pelham on the 1st and 4th day of each week; and that a Preparative Meeting be held at Black Creek on the last 5th day in each month, and one at Pelham the last 4th day in each month, all to begin at 11 o'clock.

And as they are few in numbers (43 at Pelham and 36 at Black Creek) it is agreed that both men and women sit together whilst transacting the business of the Preparative and , Monthly Meetings, and that they report once a year to the Yearly Meeting written answers to the queries.

The first Monthly Meeting was held 2nd of 10th mo., 1799.

On the 2nd of 12th mo., 1801, a committee was appointed to visit and advise with Friends at Yonge Street, and on the sixth of 1st month, 1802, an addition was made to said Committee with power to appoint a Meeting for Worship and have Overseers among them.

On the seventh of 7th month the Committee reported that they had visited them and advised them to hold a Meeting for Worship on the 1st and 5th days of the week and nominate Friends for Overseers.

On the 6th of 10th month of the same year, Yonge Street Friends requested Friends of Pelham to unite with them in applying to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to establish a Preparative Meeting there.

The request was granted and the first Preparative Meeting of Yonge Street was held in 6th mo., 1804. For conditions see the following:

#### COPIES OF MINUTES OF YEARLY MEETINGS.

At the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia held in 4th mo., 1804 : ,

The Committee having the matter in charge, reported in favor of establishing a Meeting for Worship and a Preparative Meeting at Yonge Street, and that the business of the meeting be transacted by men and women in a

united capacity, which was adopted by the meeting with the addition that the said Preparative Meeting has authority to take cognizance of presentations on account of marriages and make due appointments for their orderly accomplishment; that they keep regular records of the certificates of these marriages and fair minutes of the proceedings of such other business as is proper to a Preparative Meeting; and at least every three months transmit by appointment to the Monthly Meeting at Pelham requisite reports for its information and satisfaction.

On receiving the information from the Yearly Meeting Pelham Monthly Meeting sanctioned it and left Friends at liberty to open the said Preparative Meeting when they think most convenient.

Agreeably thereto on fifth day, the 21st of 6th mo., 1804, the first Preparative Meeting was held.

Nathaniel Pearson was appointed Clerk for the time and Isaac Phillips, William Phillips, Samuel Lundy and Asa Rogers were appointed to propose to next Meeting a suitable name for Clerk.

In that year William Pearson and Hannah James were married in accordance with Friends Discipline at that time. The couple had to appear together in the Meeting, to declare their intentions, and the next Preparative Meeting come and declare their continuance of intention of marriage.

In the 12th mo., 1805, the establishing of a Monthly Meeting at Yonge Street was considered and an application to that effect directed to be forwarded to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

#### Minute of PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING on the Subject.

At Philadelphia Yearly Meeting held 4th mo., 1806, it united with a proposition from Pelham Monthly Meeting to establish a Monthly Meeting at Yonge Street, to be held on the second 5th day after the first 1st day in each month, and be called Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, and to be opened in 9th mo. next.

#### FIRST MEETING.

At Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, held 18th of 9th mo., 1806, Nathaniel Pearson was appointed Clerk for the time and a Committee appointed to propose a name for Clerk to the next Meeting.

An address was prepared at this time to the Governor of the Province and Timothy Rogers and Amos Armitage appointed to attend on the Governor therewith.

An indulged Meeting was granted at the house of Nathaniel Hay, East Gwillimbury, 1st Meeting 6th mo., 1807.

At Yonge Street Monthly Meeting held 16th of 7th mo., 1807 30 members certified, and accepted 15 Minors.

Nathaniel Pearson, Amos Armitage and Israel Lundy were appointed to obtain a Deed of Conveyance from Asa Rogers and Mary his wife for two acres of land for the use of the Meeting.

In the 6th mo., 1808, Joseph Collins, Charles Chapman and James Hughes were appointed Trustees to take a title of land in Uxbridge.

11th mo., 1809, Uxbridge Friends were granted a Week-Day Meeting.

8th mo., 1810, an indulged Preparative Meeting was granted to Whitchurch Friends, to be jointly men and women, and Uxbridge Preparative Meeting established.

7th mo., 1812, Pickering allowed an indulged Meeting for Worship on 1st day at John Haight's dwelling house.

In 1812 the Friends at Norwich were granted a Meeting for Worship under the care of a committee.

Norwich Preparative Meeting established 1815, and South Norwich granted an indulged Meeting. Norwich Monthly Meeting first held 2nd of 5th mo., 1821.

In the 12th mo., 1806, Adolphustown Monthly Meeting appointed a Committee to confer with the Friends of Yonge Street, in reference to being united in the transaction of church affairs, which concern finally resulted in the three Monthly Meetings of Canada laying the matter before the Yearly Meetings of New York and Philadelphia, both Yearly Meetings

being interested, in consequence of which a Committee of said Meetings attended Adolphustown Monthly Meeting, 26th of 9th mo., 1808.

In the records of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting we find the following:

At Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, held 13th of 10th mo., 1808, John Brown, John Shomaker Hannah Fisher and Rebecca Archer from Philadelphia; Reuben Haight, Ann Shipley and Anna Merrit from New York, attended and produced minutes from the aforesaid Yearly Meetings on the subject of uniting the three Monthly Meetings in the establishing of a Quarterly Meeting.

The Meeting at the time being in a united capacity appointed a Committee to confer with them.

At Yonge Street Monthly Meeting held 17th of 8th mo., 1809 extracts were received from Philadelphia and New York Yearly Meetings, showing that they have jointly agreed that the Friends who constitute the three Monthly Meetings in the Province shall constitute a meeting for discipline, vested with the powers of a Quarterly Meeting, to be held alternately at West Lake and Yonge Street twice in the year, to be called Canada Half-Yearly Meeting, to be opened first at West Lake on the 4th day of the week following the last first day in the 1st mo., and at Yonge Street on the 4th day of the week following the last 1st day in 8th mo., 'the Monthly Meetings to be placed under the care of New York Yearly Meeting.

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*Bloomfield Meeting House - 1925*

#### TO RECAPITULATE.

Respecting the Times of Establishing Meetings.

#### **Meetings of West lake and Vicinity.**

First preparative Meeting in Canada held 7th of 9th mo., 1798, at Adolphustown.

First Monthly Meeting held 16th of 4th mo., 1801, at Adolphustown. Preparative Meeting at Kingston established, and a Meeting for Worship at West Lake.

11th mo., 1803, Preparative Meeting established at West Lake and a Meeting for Worship granted at Green Point in Sophiasburg.



*Pelham Meeting House - 1920*

#### **Pelham and Vicinity.**

1st Monthly Meeting held 2nd of 10th mo., 1799, at Pelham.

Preparative Meetings of Pelham and Black Greek, and Meetings for Worship established at same time.

1812, Norwich granted a Meeting for Worship.

1815, Preparative Meeting at Norwich was established.

1817, South Norwich was granted an indulged Meeting.

Second of 5th mo., 1821, Norwich Monthly Meeting first held.

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### **Meetings of Yonge Street and Vicinity.**

Yonge Street Monthly Meeting first held 18th of 9th mo., 1806.

An indulged Meeting granted at the house of Nathaniel Ray, East Gwillimbury, 6th mo., 1807.

Yonge Street Meetings for Worship established 6th of 1st mo., 1802. Preparative Meeting first held 6th mo., 1804.

Preparative Meeting and Meeting for Worship established at Uxbridge 11th mo., 1809.

Preparative Meeting granted to Whitchurch, 8th mo., 1810.

Seventh mo., 1812, Pickering allowed a Meeting for Worship on first day.



*Chain Lake Meeting House, Hartney, Manitoba*

We see by the foregoing records that in less than 25 year 13 Meetings for Worship along the Southern borders of Upper Canada in different places from the Bay of Quinte east to Pelham and Norwich west, a distance of over 300 miles, had been established with 9 Preparative and 4 Monthly Meetings; also a Quarterly Meeting, with an appreciating public.

No doubt if the harmony, earnestness and zeal for the Lord's work had continued as at first the Society of Friends in Canada would now be one of the leading churches; but divisions came marring the good work and it is doubtful whether the three bodies now (1903) claiming to be Friends in Canada, an numbered, are as numerous as they were before these

divisions took place.

Experience and observation show us that divisions in other churches tended to weaken their power for good, which became so apparent to them that many of them have sought to remedy the evil so far as they could and again united together to combat the evils of the times, thereby increasing their power for good. When this takes place in the Friends branch of the Church and harmony exists, with the zeal and life that characterized the Friends for the cause of their Lord and Master of the first 25 years of their existence in Canada, no doubt results will crown their efforts with like success, and instead of decreased numbers many will flock to their standard and they again become a power for good in the land.

May the Lord hasten the day when unity and harmony shall prevail and His work prosper throughout the land.

The day is coming! Shall we assist or retard the work? WHICH SHALL WE DO?

### **APPENDIX**

It was recently recorded the saying of an old Scottish Methodist, who, in his earlier years, had clung vehemently to one or other of the two small sections either side of the street, "The street I'm now travelling in, lad, has no sides, and if power were given me I would preach purity of doctrine less than I did."

"Are you a little heretical at your journey's end," said his interlocutor.

"I kenna. Names have not the same terror on me they once had. Since I was laid by here alone I have had whisperings of the still small voice telling me that the foot-fall of faith and these wranglings will ne' er be heard in the kingdom whereunto I am nearing, and as love cements all differences I'll perhaps find the place roomier than I thought in times-by past."

**Benjamin Cody of Newmarket**  
**Obituary from** *The Canadian Friend*  
Vol. 1, No. 7 (December 1905): 7-8.

A few of the old workers of the Society of Friends remain to tell us of the great work done

in the past by their self-sacrificing lives, and one of these is found in Benjamin Cody of Newmarket, born in 1822. His father was Stephen Cody, an esteemed elder of the Society, and his mother, Rebecca Phillips Cody, was a minister among Friends.

From youth to old age he has been found faithful in promoting his Master's cause in the Society. The younger members of today have but little conception of the work demanded in the early days of Canada. Forty and fifty years ago but few railways were in existence, so that attending meetings meant the giving up of business for a number of days. Benjamin Cody through nothing of leaving business opportunities for two weeks or more driving to Westlake for Half-year Meeting, or of going to New York Yearly meeting by way of the canal, which meant very slow travelling.

Then again, when Quarterly meeting was held in Mariposa or Pickering, no matter what the weather might be carriage and horses were brought out and a whole day spent in the journey. Many times the subject of this sketch laid aside business and drove travelling Friends to Norwich or Grey, stopping on the way to visit scattered members.

In the early sixties our Friend became impressed with the need of a Sabbath School as there were many children in the meeting who needed bible teaching, and as yet no Sabbath Schools had been opened among Friends. He, with Theodore Huntely and others, organized a First Day School, with Clayton Webb as its first superintendent. This school has never since been closed, but was transplanted to Newmarket when the meeting was changed from Yonge St to that place May 1893. Here he was leader of the adult class for a number of years. With the growth of membership in Newmarket it was considered wise to purchase the Congregational Church, which was soon after burned. Benjamin Cody was one of the leading spirits in the rebuilding, as he has ever been in all good work.

He has always been anxious for the educational advancement of the children of Friends, and was one of the committee who

took an active part in the building and equipping of Pickering College.

Perhaps no one now living in Canada knows more of the history of the up-building of the Society of Friends than he. It is a great privilege to talk with him of the new times as well as of the old, for he keeps pace with the growing needs of the people.

To this day he is ever ready to uphold the hands of the minister and other workers, and all feel in his presence the atmosphere of the mind of Christ. May he still be long preserved to his family and to the Society.