

# Ohio Friends

The decade of the 1840s was the second in a succession of four difficult decades for Ohio Friends. Theological disputes imported from elsewhere were the cause of most of the problems.

The primary source of tension within Ohio YM was the ongoing publication of writings of Joseph John Gurney in England. New York Friends republished one of his works in 1840 and asked if Ohio Friends wished to have copies, but the Ohio Meeting for Sufferings (M4S) replied that it did not want the book to circulate in Ohio. In 1842, the M4S wrote London Friends regarding a new Gurney book; they replied in 1843 that Gurney published it himself without going through the normal process of seeking approval by British Friends.

Supporters of Gurney elevated the tension in the early 1840s. In New England, they brought charges against a local schoolteacher named John Wilbur, who had written a leaflet that compared Gurney's writings with those of early Friends. His MM did not sustain the charges, so Gurney supporters restructured the meetings in southwestern Rhode Island and began disownment proceedings. Ohio YM's men's Clerk, Benjamin Hoyle, and North Carolina YM's women's Clerk, Abigail Stanley, were travelling in the ministry there at the time and visited both parties to understand the issues. New England Gurneyites refused to endorse their minutes and banned them from holding called meetings because they visited with Wilbur. The same treatment was extended to Joseph Edgerton, a minister at Somerset who later travelled to New England. Eventually, New England Gurneyites disowned Wilbur. A division took place at New England YM, and both the Gurneyite and Wilburite YMs in New England sent epistles to Ohio. Hoyle and Edgerton disagreed with the way the division took place on the yearly meeting level, and they believed that Ohio Friends should stand apart from recognizing either.

At Ohio YM in 1845, the men's YM did not read either epistle from New England. On the

women's side, however, the Clerk (Jane Plummer) and the Assistant Clerk (Hannah Ladd) were strong supporters of Gurney. They read the Gurneyite epistle from New England, and throughout the following decade they forced through minutes on the Gurney issue that a majority of women Friends vocally opposed. Most years, the QM Representatives did not have unity to recommend names for YM Clerks, which meant that the men's Clerks (Hoyle and William S. Bates) and the women's Clerks (Plummer and Ladd) served continuously from 1842–54. Ohio YM allowed travelling Gurneyites from New England to sit in the gallery at Mount Pleasant during Ohio YM, over objections by Abner Heald and Jacob Holloway.

In the meantime, Gurney continued to publish works that upset Friends. The Ohio M4S wrote London Friends again in 1845 "to set forth our disunity" with Gurney's latest treatise. Philadelphia YM followed suit; it approved a document titled *An Appeal for the Ancient Doctrines* that was approved by Ohio YM in 1848.

A new guideline was established in 1845 that stands to this day. Prior to this time, it was customary for the YM Clerks to be named as QM Representatives to the YM. As now, the QM Representatives recommended names of Clerks to the YM. Doctrinal tension overlapped into the meetings of the Representatives, and the Clerks would defend themselves when a Representative believed (rightly or wrongly) that other names should be brought forth. An unminuted decision was made in 1845 that the Clerks could no longer be named as Representatives. Beginning with 1846, the Clerks were only named when they wanted to ask to be relieved.

An ongoing concern of Ohio Friends was the welfare of blacks and Indians. In 1841, the M4S approved a letter to incoming President William Henry Harrison. After his death, the letter was amended, and a committee delivered it to President Tyler. Tyler appreciated their visit and wrote later that he intended to pursue a benevolent policy towards the Indians.

# 1840 to 1850

