

# Ohio Wilburite and Gurneyite

Ohio Gurneyites forced a division in the YM on 9/5/1854. Difficult as it was, the division brought a degree of peace to the two camps and, after a brief bump in the late 1850s, introduced a new era of tranquility into Ohio YM.

Disunity was rampant in Ohio YM in the early 1850s. On the YM level, there was not unity to retain Clerks or Assistant Clerks. The men were not able to fill vacancies in the Meeting for Sufferings. When Stillwater QM recommended that a new QM be established for Pennsville, Chesterfield, and Plymouth MMs, the YM appointed a committee that concurred. When the report was read on the floor of the YM, however, the Gurneyites objected to it because the new QM was primarily comprised of Wilburites. While the women's Clerk, a Gurneyite, continued to write minutes with minority support, Benjamin Hoyle was not willing to do the same on the men's side.

Travelling Friends were intertwined into the difficulties. In 1846, two Wilburites from New England (William Hill and Pelatiah Hussey) voluntarily left YM sessions because of Gurneyite objections to their presence. The vitriol expressed towards them was so harsh that 37 Ohio Friends signed a letter for them to take home, apologizing for how they were treated. William Hill returned in 1853 with his wife Elizabeth. Ohio Gurneyites objected to having them in the meeting house and threatened to call the authorities to have them arrested. For three days, Gurneyites stopped any business from being transacted simply because of the Hills' presence. In the years 1849–53, 23 Gurneyite ministers had visited Ohio YM and had been allowed to sit through the sessions with little objection from Ohio Wilburites and no threat of legal action.

The nationwide network of Orthodox Friends (the General Committee) had continued to meet sporadically. After Ohio YM in 1853, they met again to plan a strategy for Ohio and Philadelphia YMs, which had not recognized the Gurneyite bodies in New England and New York. After their official business ended, they appointed a committee to visit Ohio and Philadelphia YMs to alert them that if they did not change course, they would face immediate disassociation.

The second division took place during Ohio YM in 1854. Among the many visitors were the group of people from the General Committee, William Evans (men's Clerk of Philadelphia YM), Thomas B. Gould (men's Clerk of New England YM), and Eliza Gurney (widow of J.J. Gurney). During the worship on First Day, Eliza Gurney believed that she was called upon to declare that Gould was consigned to go "down, down, down" to "the lowest depths of hell." On Second Day, the Gurneyite men appointed their own clerks over the objections of two-thirds of everyone gathered. One Gurneyite visitor stated during the meeting that they intended to have a division. The following day, a division took place on the west side of the meeting house, too.

The division slowly made its way through the YM. Four of the five QMs divided during their fall sessions. Monthly Meetings began to divide in Eleventh Month, and the Preparative Meetings began to divide in the first week of Twelfth Month. Several meetings disbanded altogether, and several Friends left Quakerism altogether – including William S. Bates, the men's YM Assistant Clerk. The process of division was not complete until 10/18/1856, when Gurneyites set up their own meeting at Chesterfield.

# 1850 to 1854

