

Ohio YM (Wilburite)

Difficulties in Ohio YM were not all resolved by the departure of the Gurneyites in 1854. A minority of Ohio Friends hoped for a way to resolve differences with the Gurneyites, which became increasingly unlikely as time passed. Benjamin Hoyle, men's Yearly Meeting Clerk, met on occasion with Rachel Patterson, women's YM Clerk, to discuss the situation and foster similar attitudes on both sides of the partition (and thus avoid the earlier problems).

When the Meeting for Sufferings met in Second Month 1855, it discussed the situation. The YMs of Indiana, Baltimore, and North Carolina sent the Ohio epistle back, having recognized the Ohio Gurneyites. The Friends who hoped for a reconciliation with the Gurneyites stood in the way of recognition of Salem QM in Iowa, the only Wilburite body west of Ohio. This was a problem because many young Ohio families were moving to Iowa and wanted to have their memberships transferred there. The M4S decided at its session on 2/16/1855 that Stillwater MM would hold the memberships of Ohio Friends in Iowa until further notice.

The last real opportunity to reconcile took place at yearly meeting time in 1855. The Gurneyites visited the meeting of Ministers & Elders when it met just prior to YM but did not interrupt it. On the first day of YM, the Gurney YM clerks sat at the table with the Wilbur Clerks and waited for Hoyle and Patterson to complete their business before starting their own business. The next day, the Gurneyites took possession of the Mt. Pleasant YMH, forcing the Wilburites to meet outside – the women used the horse sheds, but the men met in the rain.

Ohio YM was pursuing an independent course at this time. It had been rejected by all Orthodox YMs except for Philadelphia YM, but Philadelphia last sent an epistle to Ohio in 1856. Still, Ohio and Philadelphia acted as the "twin sisters" among traditional Friends. Ohio did not have unity to exchange epistles with the Wilburite bodies in New England, New York, Baltimore, and Iowa.

The situation in Iowa remained difficult. In 1856, Caleb Gregg visited Ohio YM. Gregg was a gifted minister who had been recognized at Pennsville before moving to Iowa in the early 1850s. In 1856, he was serving as Clerk of Salem QM in Iowa. A large number of Ohio Friends were living inside Salem QM (with their memberships at Stillwater), and establishing a tie between the two organizations would strengthen Salem QM. Ohio Friends, however, did not have unity to endorse his minute or to recognize Salem QM.

At the yearly meeting of 1858, the men Friends faced a very difficult decision. When the QM Representatives met, they were divided about re-appointing Benjamin Hoyle as YM Clerk. He had served for 20 years, the longest term of any Ohio YM Clerk. After the 1854 division, Ohio YM was sometimes called the "Hoyle Yearly Meeting." With passing time, Hoyle's insistence on steering the YM on an independent course was becoming increasingly untenable. The QM Representatives made the difficult decision to recommend George Gilbert of Sewickley as the new YM Clerk. Hoyle was hurt by not being re-appointed and did not turn in the YM minute book to Gilbert. It remained in the Hoyle family for another 15 years, after which time the succeeding minutes were recorded in it.

George Gilbert played a major role in easing the tensions in Ohio YM. He was more inclined to support the Wilburites in other areas than Hoyle, a position that was more obvious in 1858 than it had been in 1855. Friends at Yearly Meeting then agreed to open new meetings in Iowa for the growing number of Friends there. Most of these Iowa Friends held their membership at Stillwater, but a large proportion held their membership in Pennsville QM.

One last issue that divided Ohio Friends was what to do with Gurneyites who were still in membership. Some MMs began to remove them from the membership lists in the late 1850s, but others did not have unity to take action. Some MMs never achieved unity to remove Gurneyites from their membership lists.

1855 to 1860

In 1856, a strong wind destroyed the [Upper] Springfield Meeting House [22]. It had been in use by both the Wilburites and Gurneyites. The two groups built new MHs near each other that were nearly identical in appearance.

Note: numbers indicate the same meetings as listed on page 37.

The Guernsey MH [40] burned in 1857. The Wilburites and Gurneyites built new MHs adjacent to each other on the same property.

Several changes took place in Middleton MM. A new frame meeting house was constructed in 1858 for Middleton [13] that was used for a century. Carmel MM was attached to Middleton MM in 1854. Soon thereafter, all three subordinate meetings in Pennsylvania were laid down, as was Elk Run.

Centre Meeting [8] was laid down in 1859. It had been organized in 1797, and its meeting house had been constructed in 1802.

The Redstone / Peace Hill Meeting House was sold in 1859. The sale was under consideration when the division of 1854 took place. All burials were removed and relocated, three building lots were carved off the east end, and the remaining parcel was sold to the school district. Separate and identical deeds were issued by the Wilburites and Gurneyites.

Somerset Meeting [42] was laid down in 1860. Following the Hicksite division, the Orthodox MH was built on the north side of the village. The meeting was laid down after losing Tilman and Rachel Patterson. Tilman had an agricultural accident and lost one eye, so he and his wife Rachel decided to move to Iowa where their children lived.



Southland Friends Meeting House

