

Opening the Hedge

Ohio Friends lowered the hedge dramatically during the 1950s. Following a rocky start, Ohio Friends made several changes in an effort to be faithful to what the Lord was asking of them in their generation.

The decade got off to a rocky start. In 1951, Stillwater QM asked Ohio YM to appoint a committee to assist in resolving disunity at Ridge. The meeting there had fallen into two factions. Part of the problem was that the Doudna family had been prominent at Ridge for 150 years but had rarely had their spiritual gifts recognized. When Edgar and Bertha McGrew moved to the Walton Home, they had their memberships transferred from Winona to Somerset MM, not aware of the local tension. Edgar McGrew was an Elder, and Bertha was a respected Minister. Overseers visited the McGrews, at which time Bertha helped them understand she was not going to be disowned. Ridge tried to remove Edgar from serving as an Elder, and it appeared that the one faction was disowning members of the other faction. The YM committee visited with the two factions and individual families. The committee did not see any obvious answer to the problem; it recommended that the YM allow any dissatisfied members to be allowed to apply for membership in another meeting without obtaining approval from Somerset MM. This decision resulted in an exodus from Ridge to other meetings, particularly Stillwater. The tension of the situation bothered young Friends, who saw the elderly plain Friends on both sides at Ridge as representing the failed Quakerism of the past.

In 1951, 28 members of Fairhope MM moved to Costa Rica and started the Monteverde meeting. After four young men were imprisoned for not registering for the draft for the Korean War, the meeting examined options. Many families chose to move to Costa Rica because that nation had disbanded its military. Their departure left Fairhope Meeting in a weakened state.

In the wake of these two events, those Ohio Friends who sought to liberalize the YM came to dominate YM sessions. In 1953, the YM ap-

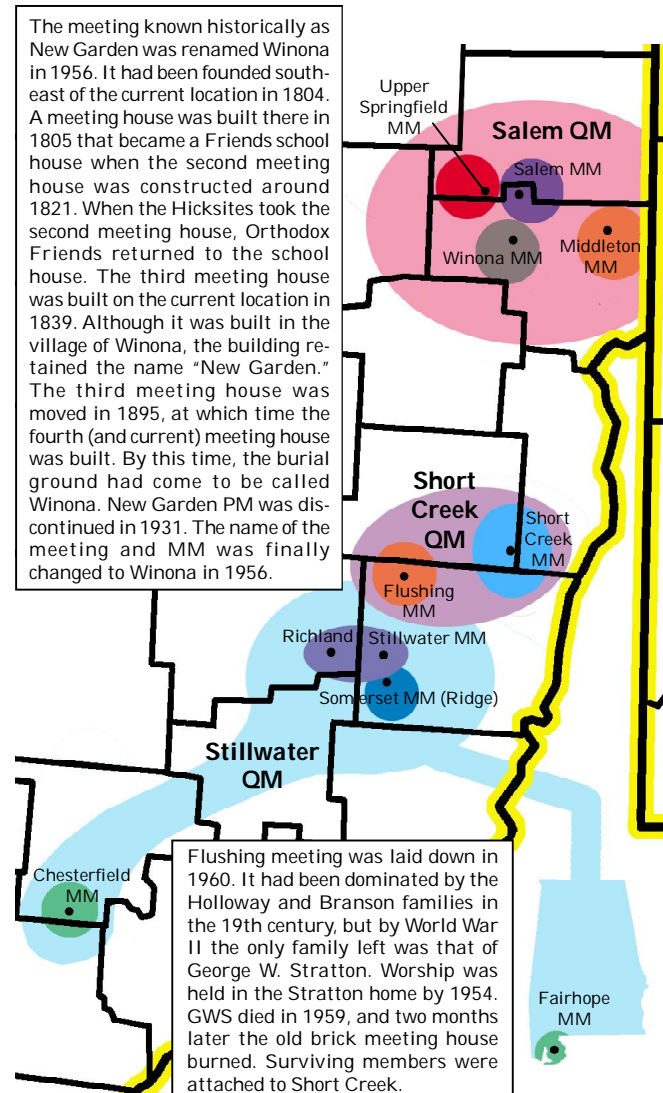
pointed a committee on "present day problems." This committee read through the Discipline and produced an interesting set of 27 queries for Friends to consider; these queries remain mostly valid for Friends to consider today. Friends throughout the YM considered these queries, and Short Creek QM forwarded a reply to YM in 1955. Among other things, SCQM believed that the Queries needed to be revised and that the historic practice of the overseers answering the Queries should end, allowing all members to respond. The YM committee, which came to be called the "Committee on Testimonies," recommended in 1956 that "searching" Queries be drafted in the place of the existing yes/no Queries.

The concerns raised by the Committee on Testimonies resulted in a consideration of revision of the Discipline. In 1959, Salem QM forwarded a minute recommending that the time had arrived for a revision. A committee was appointed to coordinate consideration among the MMs.

Two procedural changes occurred in the decade. In 1953, the YM agreed that everyone would sit on the women's side at Stillwater. Although joint session business meetings had been taking place for a few years, the men continued to sit in the north room and the women continued to use the south room. Beginning with 1953, the Clerk's table has been located where it is today. In 1958, the Meeting for Sufferings was renamed the Representative Meeting, and six-year terms were initiated on a rotating basis.

The Meeting for Sufferings reported a concern to the YM in 1957 for the spiritual life of the members and meetings. The YM appointed the Spiritual Life Committee, which held annual gatherings and discussion groups. The committee was particularly interested in involving the young Friends in the discussions and recommended in 1958 that meetings devote more time to fellowship. In 1959, the committee reported "an expectant willingness to develop new insights," and the following year it held a conference on the topic of how people come to Christ.

1950 to 1960



In 1959, the Representative Meeting approved the publication of a new history of Ohio YM. It had been written by Charles P. Morlan, who had played a major role in the YM in the previous two decades as YM Clerk and from his work with COs during World War II. His book, published as *A Brief History of Ohio Yearly Meeting*, was the most complete history of the YM at that time. It included information from private correspondence and conversations that are no longer accessible.

Two earlier histories of Ohio Friends had been written. During World War I, Watson Dewees wrote *Notes on the Early History of Ohio Yearly Meeting*, which focused on Ohio YM up to the 1854 division. About a decade later, Alfred Whinnery wrote a paper at Ohio State University titled *A Short Account of Conservative Friends in Ohio*. Both books emphasized the social history of Ohio Friends, with less emphasis upon their spirituality than we would expect today.