

The Canadian Quaker Archives at Pickering College

by JANE V. ZAVITZ

The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, is a Protestant sect gathered by George Fox (1641-1691) during the Puritan era in England. Friends believe that the Light of Christ is within each person, thus rendering priests, sacraments, and tithes to support a state church unnecessary. They also believe that Faithfulness to Truth makes the swearing of an judicial oath improper. These nonconformist stands brought persecution which resulted in considerable emigration to North America. The oldest records of Friends on the Canadian mainland date from 1762, when pacifist whalers from Nantucket settled at Barrington, Nova Scotia, in order to escape press gangs and privateers during the Seven Years War.

One characteristic practice of The Society of Friends carried into Canada was the keeping of meticulous records. Monthly Meetings, historically representing a group of local preparative meetings, have kept full membership registers, including births, marriages, transfers of members, and deaths. Minutes created by each level of meeting are the property of the meeting which created them, and meetings which have ceased to exist have entrusted their records to the next superior body. The Yearly Meeting, a body which is similar in nature to, but less hierarchical than, a conference or diocese, ultimately receives most records generated by all of its component meetings. Today, the fact that Canadian Yearly Meeting extends four thousand miles across the continent makes record assemblage a continued challenge.

Following the American War of Independence, Philadelphia and New York Yearly Meetings established the first meetings for "refugee" United Empire Loyalists in Canada. As a result of the schisms of 1828 and 1881, some meetings retained ties with Yearly Meetings in the United States, and other meetings formed two (orthodox and conservative) Canada Yearly Meetings. Often meetings of two or three of the "branches" existed in the same locality. Some record books bear stamps which indicate their use as evidence in trials concerning the division of property at the time of schism. This history has complicated both the retrieval and organization of Quaker records.

A fire in the Conservative Yearly Meetinghouse at Pickering, Ontario, during 1912 prompted James Cox, and Genessee Yearly Meeting — Hicksite, to deposit many records as combined archives in fireproof vaults in New York City. The nucleus of the Quaker archives in Canada began in the 1920s, when Arthur G. Dorland collected

Ontario records during research for his doctoral thesis. In 1927, he deposited these, along with the retrieved Genessee records, at the University of Western Ontario, where he was head of the Department of History. Subsequently, the clerks of each of the three Yearly Meetings in Canada signed agreements with the university to preserve their records. During the fifty-six-year period from 1927 to 1983, the generous support of Dorland and his colleagues Fred Landon, James Talman and, later, Edward Phelps, at the University of Western Ontario played a crucial role in preserving the Quaker archives in Canada.

The 1955 reunification of Friends in Canada resulted in the formation of the Canadian Yearly Meeting Records Committee, combining Canada Yearly Meeting — Orthodox, Canada Yearly Meeting — Conservative, and, Genessee Yearly Meeting — Hicksite records committees. Initially, there was little to do, as older records remained on deposit at the University of Western Ontario, and current records accumulated at Friends House in Toronto. Activity quickened, however; involvement in projects to microfilm records, and the seeking of records to add to those already preserved at the University of Western Ontario, were just two of the activities of a revitalized committee, with Rosemarie McMechan as clerk. A source of encouragement was The Canadian Friends Historical Association, founded in 1972 by Grace Pincoe and Kathleen Hertzberg, with Arthur G. Dorland as Honourary Chairman.

Lacking ecclesiastical centres, Yearly Meetings in North America have often chosen a Quaker school as the location in which to establish an archives and library. It was on 11 December 1983 that Canadian Yearly Meeting deposited its records at Pickering College, which also housed the Arthur G. Dorland Friends Historical Research Collection. Pickering, founded by Friends in 1842, is now an independent boys' secondary boarding school at Newmarket, Ontario. The first Canadian Yearly Meeting archivist was Jane V. Zavitz, Librarian of Pickering College since 1976 and a member of both the Canadian Yearly Meeting Records Committee and of The Canadian Friends Historical Association.

Rebuilding after a 1981 fire, Pickering College planned an environmentally-controlled storage room-vault as the archives of Canadian Yearly Meeting. The first deposits in the vault were the records from the University of Western Ontario, which arrived in a van driven by Edward Phelps even as the metal shelving was being installed in December 1982. All was ready by the dedication day in August 1983. Since that time, the vault has quickly filled, particularly in 1989 when the Canadian Yearly Meeting office moved from Toronto to Ottawa, sending a forty-year accumulation of records to the archives. Despite the Discipline's request that Meetings forward their records regularly, there are some unexpected acquisitions. In some cases, custodians felt that the records were personal property: some records of defunct Meetings have been lost by storage over decades in a drawer or attic. Records have appeared in local libraries and archives, or even at auctions. Thanks to many people, an impressive number of records have survived.

The Canadian Yearly Meeting records date from 1798 and cover settlements in Upper Canada — Prince Edward County, Niagara and Norwich districts, Yarmouth Township in Elgin County, Lobo Township in Middlesex County, Yonge Street and related meetings north of Toronto — as well as the only Quebec Meeting, East Farnham Township of Brome County (1820-1902). The Canada Half Yearly Meeting records

provide insight into the history of Upper Canada after 1810. Files of Monthly Meetings, including membership transfer certificates and some treasurers' records, are rich resources.

Private sources have provided some of the most valuable records. For example, the Rendall Rhodes Quaker Collection, acquired as the core of the Arthur G. Dorland Friends Historical Research Collection in 1981, is both geographically and chronologically the most complete discipline collection in the world.

Scholars of the twentieth century will find extensive documentation in the more recent records of Canadian Yearly Meeting committees: the Canadian Friends Service Committee; the Quaker Committee on Native Concerns; the Camp Nee-Kau-Kis Committee; the Committee on Jails and Justice; the Home Mission and Advancement Committee; the Religious Education Committee; the Discipline Committee; and the Foreign Missionary Board. These records are supplemented by the personal papers of active Yearly Meeting Friends such as Fred Haslam and John T. Dorland. Non-textual records include photographs and maps document meetinghouses, homes, and individuals. There are extensive holdings of published material, particularly periodicals: *The Canadian Friend*, published since 1904, as well as pamphlets and tracts containing the testimonies of Friends on the subjects of simplicity, education, human rights, and peace. Currently, the oral history project under the leadership of Kyle Jolliffe is a growing resource.

Jane Sweet, clerk of the Canadian Yearly Meeting Records Committee, calls three meetings per year. This committee is responsible for coordinating the work of the volunteers, both librarians and archivists, who file unbound records, clean and wrap volumes, and transfer records into acid-free storage containers. Aided by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Jane Zavitz, Archivist, and Albert Schauwers, a graduate student with an interest in Quaker materials, continue to facilitate access to the records by preparing computerized indexes and bibliographies using the INMAGIC and BIBLIO programmes. The first volume of the genealogical index to the Canadian Yearly Meeting Records for Yonge Street Monthly Meeting has appeared, and further volumes will follow as time permits.

We continue to fill in gaps and to add new treasures. Each day, telephone calls, letters and visitors, or the opening of a storage box bring moments of discovery. The new and the old combine as we use the computer to make the resources more accessible and hence more valuable to researchers. Welcome to the Canadian Quaker Archives!