

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

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Sixth Month 16, 2012

Evangelical Friends Church – Eastern Region

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Dear Friends:

We join with you in celebrating the 200th anniversary of Ohio Yearly Meeting. Your beginnings are part of our history, and we rejoice in remembering our common roots.

We recall how a flood of Quaker settlers began to pour across the Ohio River in 1800, seeking a place where they could live free from the evils of slavery. They did not come primarily as individual travelers, but as Friends in community, seeking to serve Truth. Their anchor at that time was Westland and Redstone Meetings, making up Redstone Quarter of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, in far western Pennsylvania. In 1799, Friends from Redstone traveled through the south, seeking to promote the idea of a Quaker settlement in the Northwest Territory, where slavery was permanently barred. As Bordon Stanton, from Contentnea Quarterly Meeting in North Carolina described it:

for several years Friends [had] had some distant view of moving out of that oppressive part of the land, but did not know where until we had an acceptable visit from some traveling Friends from the western part of Pennsylvania. They thought proper to propose to Friends for consideration, whether it would not be agreeable to best wisdom for us unitedly to remove northwest of the Ohio River — to a place where there were no slaves held, being a free country....

The decision to leave behind their farms and livelihood, and break up their beloved meetings, was hard for them, but they came to believe that God was calling them to a new land in the service of Truth. There was little prospect of adding Friends “by conviction” in the South, Stanton said, given the hold of slavery, but Truth might spread in the land beyond the Ohio. To quote further from his letter:

I was made sensible beyond doubting, that it was in the ordering of Wisdom for us to remove; and that the Lord was opening a way for our enlargement, if found worthy. Friends generally feeling something of the same, there were three of them who went to view the country, and one worthy public Friend. They traveled on till they came to this part of the western country, where they were stopped in their minds, believing it was the place for Friends to settle. So they turned back, and informed us of the same in a solemn meeting; in which dear Joseph Dew, the public Friend, intimated that he saw the seed of God sown in abundance, which extended far northwestward. This information, in the way it was delivered to us, much tendered our spirits, and strengthened us in the belief that it was right. So we undertook the work, and found the Lord to be a present helper in every needful time. . . . (Bordon Stanton, to Friends in Wrightsborough, Georgia, Twenty-Fifth of Fifth Month, 1802, Concord, Ohio

Friends in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia

The minutes of Redstone Quarter record the outcome of this decision:

At Westland Monthly Meeting, Sixth Month, 1800. This meeting is in receipt of extracts from the minutes and proceedings of a Monthly Meeting on Trent River, in Jones County, North Carolina, telling of the exercises of Friends of that meeting, which resulted in that meeting, almost in a body, concluding to issue certificates to nearly all its members, and surrendering their privileges of holding meeting, to Contentnea Quarterly Meeting, and as many of these aforesaid Friends and their families (and several from the Monthly Meeting of Coresound, in Carteret County, N. C.) have arrived and are now as sojourners in the vicinity of this meeting, and being a subject of such magnitude and importance, this meeting appointed David Greave (and eleven others) to confer with them, give such advice and assistance as may be necessary to procure a settlement for Friends in the territory northwest of the Ohio River and report to our next meeting."

Borden Stanton described developments through 1803:

The first of us moved west of the Ohio in the Ninth Month, 1800, and none of us had a house at our command to meet in to worship the Almighty Being. So we met in the woods until houses were built, which was but a short time. In less than one year Friends so increased that two Preparative Meetings were settled; and in last Twelfth Month a Monthly Meeting, called Concord also was opened, which is now large. Another Preparative Meeting is requested; also another First and week-day meeting. Four are already granted in the territory and three meeting houses are built. Way appears to be opening for another Monthly Meeting and I think a Quarterly Meeting."

Friends came to the Ohio country not only from North Carolina, but from Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. In 1804, Redstone established both Short Creek and Concord as monthly meetings, each with a preparative meeting under its care. Short Creek Quarter, consisting of these four meetings and set off from Redstone Quarter by Baltimore Yearly Meeting, was the first quarterly meeting west of the Ohio River. In 1808, Baltimore Yearly Meeting also set off Salem Quarter from Redstone Quarter. This was followed by Miami Quarter and West Branch Quarter in the western part of Ohio.

By 1810, Friends west of the Alleghenies were ready to organize their own yearly meeting. They brought this proposal to Baltimore, where it was considered at the next two annual sessions by large committees of men and women Friends. The 1812 annual sessions were attended by delegations of Friends from Redstone, Short Creek, Salem, and Miami Quarters. According to the minutes:

The consideration of the important subject of a division of the Yearly Meeting, as continued from last Yearly Meeting, being resumed, copies of minutes were produced from the Yearly Meetings of Friends of Philadelphia and of Virginia, informing that each of the said meetings had appointed a Committee (most of whom were present) to unite with us in deliberation thereon.

The decision to divide the yearly meeting was a difficult one. Friends in Baltimore Yearly Meeting, east and west of the Alleghenies were united by a common discipline and strong family and community ties. The vision of the Friends who had first visited Ohio, who "saw the seed of God sown in abundance," could not be denied. As the minutes record:

The Committee appointed to unite with women Friends in the further consideration of the important

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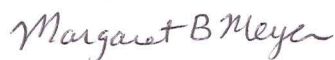
subject of a Yearly Meeting to be held in the State of Ohio, report, That we have several times met and have had the company of several brethren of the Yearly Meetings of Philadelphia and Virginia, and in our deliberations we have been favored with a good degree of solemnity, under which we were free to propose, that the Quarterly Meetings west of the Alleghany Mountains, within the verge of this Yearly Meeting, be at full liberty to convene together at Short Creek, on the third First-day in the Eighth Month next in the capacity of a Yearly Meeting, agreeable to their prospect and desire as expressed in their appeal to this meeting last year.

This recommendation was united with by the Yearly Meeting, and Ohio Yearly Meeting was born.

This history reminds us that the task we are called to is nothing less than sowing the seed of God. This is work of profound importance, and worthy of great sacrifice. It also reminds us that we are called to this work not only as individuals, but in community with each other.

We pray that God will continue to guide and prosper the work of all our yearly meetings. May we celebrate our common heritage, and hold on to our dream of being gathered at the feet of the Inward Teacher, in complete obedience and perfect love.

Sincerely,



Margaret B. Meyer
Clerk, Interim Meeting



Elizabeth F. Meyer
Presiding Clerk

cc: **Governor John Kasich**
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