



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
OF FRIENDS
QUAKERS

The New England Yearly Meeting Archives: An Introduction to the Collection

Archives of New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
c/o Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst
W.E.B. DuBois Library, 25th Floor
154 Hicks Way
Amherst, MA 01003-9275
(413) 545-2780

Introduction

The current Archives of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (NEYM) began in the 1960s, the results of the unceasing work and dedication of Thyra Jane Foster. After retiring from teaching, Thyra Jane worked with monthly and quarterly meetings as well as Yearly Meeting and Quaker schools to establish a centralized place for Friends records, one that would be accessible to the public for research. For many years, the archives were housed at the Rhode Island Historical Society. As of 2016, that centralized repository is Special Collections and University Archives at UMass, Amherst (SCUA). The Archives and Historical Records Committee of NEYM (hereafter the Archives Committee) coordinates a regular, ongoing records program to encourage Yearly Meeting and affiliates to send their records to SCUA.

Scope and Content of the Collection

In 1661, less than a decade after the first Friends arrived in British North America, the precursor to New England Yearly Meeting was organized as Rhode Island Yearly Meeting. As one of approximately two dozen yearly meetings in the United States, NEYM currently comprises eight quarterly meetings and approximately 85 monthly meetings, which are the basic unit of organization for the Society.

Like many yearly meetings, NEYM has been diverse in spiritual practice, reflected in a history of separations and reunions. Most famously, Orthodox Friends in New England divided in the 1840s into the increasingly evangelically oriented Gurneyites, who went by the name Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England (joining Friends United Meeting in 1902), and the Wilburites, sometimes called Conservative Friends. In 1945, the disparate branches formally reunited.

Consolidated beginning in the 1960s, NEYM collection contains the official records of New England Yearly Meeting from its founding in the seventeenth century to the present, along with records of most of its constituent quarterly, monthly, and preparative meetings and records of Quaker schools and trusts. As varied as the Quaker practice they document, these records include minutes of meetings for business, committee records, newsletters, financial records, some

personal papers, printed books and serials, and an assortment of photographs, audiovisual materials, microfilm, and electronic records. Of particular note are the vital statistics recorded by the monthly meetings, including general information on births, deaths, marriages, membership, and obituaries, and specifically Quaker information on removals (formal letters written as members moved from one meeting to another), denials, testimonies (beliefs and convictions), and sufferings (penalties Quakers suffered for following testimonies). The Archives Committee of NEYM is a partner in records management and ongoing documentation of the Meeting and its constituent bodies.

The collection also includes several thousand Quaker books and pamphlets, including the libraries of Moses and Obadiah Brown and several individual monthly meetings. The records of most monthly meetings in Maine are held at the Maine Historical Society, while important bodies of records are held at the Newport Historical Society (some Nantucket and Rhode Island Meetings) or at individual monthly meetings.

For a thorough explanation of what kinds of records Friends keep and a glossary of Quaker terms, consult:

- Elizabeth Cazden, "Some Tips on Using Quaker Records," *Rhode Island Roots* (Vol. 37 No. 2, June 2011, pp. 103-106).
- Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Committee on Records, *Handbook on Records: Their Creation, Maintenance, and Preservation in the Meeting*, Sandy Spring, MD: Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 1996.
- Ellen and David Berry, *Our Quaker Ancestors: Finding Them in Quaker Records*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1987. A comprehensive guide to the records of Friends in New England lists records held at the Rhode Island Historical Society (that are now at SCUA) and at other repositories.
- Richard Stattler, *Guide to the Records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in New England*, Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997. It also contains a glossary, information on using Friends records for genealogy, notes on Quaker burial practices and Quaker dates.

[See below for the collection policy of New England Yearly Meeting Archives.]

How are the Records Used?

The New England records have been used to study the peace testimony during King Philip's War and the Revolutionary War, literature and tract distribution of Moses Brown, and for genealogical research. Not only is the early Quaker history important and necessary for research, but twentieth century material is also important as it provides information on how Quakers dealt with both World Wars, and on the unification of the two Yearly Meetings in 1945. Since Quakers seek to keep their testimony and discipline current with the demands and needs of the world, the archives are useful for reference to older practices.

Using the NEYM Archives

The NEYM Archives are located in the Department of Special Collections of the UMass Amherst Libraries. The collection has been inventoried and is being cataloged. A few items have also been digitized and can be viewed online.

For those interested in consulting the Archives you can view the collection descriptions currently available on the [website \(link is external\)](#).

You can submit questions to the archivists through the website. You can also go to the W. E. B. Du Bois Library on the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. SCUA is located on the 25th floor. Hours of operation are generally Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. during the academic calendar and summer from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Directions and hours of operation are available [here \(link is external\)](#).

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Archives Collection Policy

Approved at a meeting of the Archives Committee, April 9, 2017

This policy describes the types of submissions that are desired to ensure that the New England Yearly Meeting Archives continues to preserve rich documentation of the work of the Yearly Meeting and its constituent meetings. Special Collections and University Archives at UMass Amherst (SCUA) envisions itself as the New England research center for Quaker history (the equivalent of Swarthmore and Haverford Colleges for the Mid-Atlantic region and Guilford and Earlham Colleges for their respective regions). The past and future records of NEYM are the foundation of this collecting initiative.

As the memorandum of understanding stipulates, all records will be donated to SCUA as an unrestricted gift, with certain exceptions. NEYM grants to SCUA a nonexclusive license to exercise NEYM's rights. NEYM and the constituent meetings may request closing certain records for research due to concerns for privacy or sensitivity. Such closure shall be 20 or 40 years from the date of donation and will be clearly specified by mutual agreement between SCUA and the meeting donating the material. To the extent that NEYM or the constituent meeting holds copyright to the materials in the Collection, that copyright is shared with SCUA and either entity may grant permission to publish material.

The Archives collects records relating to New England Yearly Meeting, or to other Friends meetings based in New England. This includes Gurneyite, Wilburite and Otisite records for the period when the Yearly Meeting was divided. While it is possible that older records might still be discovered and gladly accepted by SCUA, the focus is collecting records that document the present-day activities of NEYM and its constituent meetings. Some records of affiliated organizations are also welcome, as specified below.

The following types of records should be donated to the New England Yearly Meeting Archives. Other items may be accepted into the Archives on a case-by-case basis by SCUA in collaboration with the Archives Committee of NEYM.

The Archives will accept any of these types of records in digital form if that is how they have been created. Meetings may also choose to print all or some records and submit the printouts. Although it is not a requirement, consider using acid-free paper if you choose to print materials.

Minutes of Meetings for Business

The Archives collects minutes for the Yearly Meeting, quarterly meetings, monthly meetings, preparative meetings and other particular meetings that may have generated minutes. Any reports or other attachments should be included. For the Yearly Meeting, an effort is made to obtain a copy of the printed minutes signed by the clerk, as well as the unpublished copies given to the Yearly Meeting attendees, if they differ significantly from the printed version.

Vital Statistics

Collected for the Yearly Meeting, quarterly meetings, monthly meetings, preparative meetings, and any other particular meeting that may have generated vital statistics. Vital statistics include records of membership, births, deaths, marriages, burials, removals, memorials, denials and acknowledgments. As long as these records are being actively used by the meeting, they should remain in the care of the clerk, recorder, or other member responsible for maintaining permanent records. When no longer in active use, vital statistics should be given to SCUA. Later copies of early vital records may be accepted at the discretion of SCUA. These might be manuscript extracts, photocopies, microfilm, or digital files.

Indexes

Indexes to minutes or vital records are collected whenever we are fortunate enough to receive them, if in the judgment of SCUA they will be even slightly useful to the researcher.

Newsletters

Collected for the Yearly Meeting and its committees, quarterly meetings, monthly meetings, preparative meetings and other particular meetings that may have generated newsletters.

Committee Records

Committees are typically responsible for much of the work and special projects that shape the life of a meeting and it is important that all minutes and other records they generate are included in the NEYM Archives. These records are collected for all Yearly and quarterly meeting committees. For monthly meetings and preparative meetings, the records of the following committees or their equivalents are collected: Ministry and Counsel, and committees having care of burial grounds, membership, and meetinghouses.

Other committee records can be collected for local meetings at their discretion and may include finance, peace and social concerns, missionary, library, First Day school, and special event committee records.

Financial Records

Yearly Meeting should give annual summary statements to the Archives. Financial records for other meetings or more detailed financial records for Yearly Meeting are not included in the Archives. Meetings are responsible for maintaining their own financial records as long as required by law, which is typically seven years.

Visual and Audio-Visual Materials

There are very few photographs, works of art on paper, or audio-visual materials relating to New England Quakerism in the Archives. The Archives Committee of NEYM, in collaboration with SCUA, would welcome more documentation of Quaker activities in these formats. If you have photographs or other images, films, videotapes, audiotapes, or other formats that document the people and events of your meeting, consider donating them to the Archives. As with other types of records, digital files will also be accepted. The more identification that can be provided, the better. In the case of oral histories, best practice stipulates that the meeting secure a release form from the interviewee and send it to SCUA along with the interview. The form can be found here: neym.org/archives/policy

Web sites

SCUA has the capacity to archive entire web sites. Please contact SCUA if you are interested in this option.

Printed Material

SCUA seeks to continue to build on NEYM's fine collection of books relating to New England Quakers and Quaker history more generally. Meetings and individuals may donate books and pamphlets to SCUA that fall under any of the following categories:

1. Published by New England Yearly Meeting or its constituent meetings.
2. With any aspect of New England Quakers as primary subject matter. This includes works published by Quaker-related groups such as the American Friends Service Committee, if they are specific to the New England region.
3. Works by or about members of New England Yearly Meeting, if their religious life is dealt with significantly.
4. Works considered seminal works on the Society of Friends in general.

Duplicates of items already in the collection may be offered back to the donor.

Serials, Magazines and Journals

The Archives will actively collect periodicals published by Yearly Meeting or about NEYM. The Archives will continue to maintain existing substantive runs of non-NEYM periodicals, including those from London and Philadelphia yearly meetings and may add to these holdings to fill in gaps as the opportunity arises.

Affiliated Organizations

SCUA is interested in collecting the records of any Quaker-affiliated organizations based in New England. The Archives will focus collecting efforts on these organizations and on materials directly relating to New England Yearly Meeting's involvement in national organizations such as Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference. SCUA holds the archives of the western Massachusetts branch of the American Friends Service Committee and will collect materials relating to the New England Regional Office of the AFSC as well.

Records of institutions with formal or informal connections to New England Yearly Meeting will be collected by SCUA. This includes Quaker schools and retirement homes such as the two Kendal communities in New England: the Lathrop Communities in Massachusetts and Kendal at Hanover.

Personal Papers

Similarly, SCUA is interested in collecting personal papers of New England Quakers that document either their roles within their meetings or their lives more broadly. If you are interested in donating your papers or know of someone whose papers should be added to the Archives, please contact SCUA directly.

The papers of Yearly Meeting clerks are actively solicited, after processing, duplicate minutes of committees will be discarded, but correspondence and important notes will be retained. The working papers of other Yearly Meeting officials and staff may be accepted, including secretaries and clerks of the Permanent Board.

Resources for Recording Clerks:

“Quaker Business Basics,” Friends General Conference.

[www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Quaker Business Basics_1.pdf](http://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Quaker_Business_Basics_1.pdf)

Damon D. Hickey, *“Unforeseen Joy”: Serving a Friends Meeting As Recording Clerk*. North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (FUM), 1987, updated 2013.

A thoughtful and thorough discussion of the issues involved in minuting, by an experienced recording clerk. Available from NCYM (\$10): www.ncym-fum.org/publications

Keith Redfern, *Before the Meeting: A Handbook for Clerks*, Quaker Home Service (London), 1994.

In British practice, a single person serves as both presiding and recording (minuting) clerk. It's tricky but doable if you're well-organized and pre-draft routine minutes. (“Recording

Clerk” is also used for the person we would call “General Secretary,” the top staff administrator for Britain Yearly Meeting.)

William Braasch Watson, *Before Business Begins: Notes for Friends Meeting Recording Clerks and Recorders*, Mosher Book and Tract Committee of NEYM, 1996.

Queries on Friends Records for the Monthly Meetings of New England Yearly Meeting

1. Has the meeting appointed some Friend to be responsible for gathering the permanent records and arranging to send them to the NEYM Archives at SCUA at regular intervals? Are members of the meeting familiar with the Archives Collection Policy?
(<https://neym.org/archives/policy>)
2. If you are printing minutes, newsletters, and other records, are you printing on acid-free paper? (Although desirable, this is not required). If you use a computer to record minutes, or to store minutes and other records, do you have multiple copies stored in multiple locations?
3. Do you keep your records in places secure from conditions that will damage them, such as attics or basements? If your meeting house cannot provide optimal storage for records (temperatures maintained at 65 to 70 degrees and humidity levels at 45 to 55%) have you contacted the NEYM Archives Committee for assistance on safe records storage?
4. Does the meeting have exact records of all of its business agreements, trusts, and conveyances governing its finances and property?
5. Does the committee in charge of any burial grounds keep an accurate record of the location of graves?
6. Does the recorder keep full records of births, marriages, divorces, deaths, interments or cremations, statistical reports, and decennial membership lists? Has the recorder reported to the meeting within the past year?
7. Is there a disposition or retention schedule which shows what has happened and is happening to the records the meeting creates and collects?
8. Have Friends considered conducting oral history interviews with experienced Friends? If you have questions about oral history or videotaping feel free to ask SCUA for help. If you have already conducted oral history interviews, have you obtained a signed release form from the interviewees?
9. Does the meeting from time to time hold a session to consider its history? Does it contact the NEYM Archives Committee for assistance in this endeavor?
10. Is the meeting familiar with Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s *Handbook on Records: Their Creation, Maintenance, and Preservation in the Meeting*?
(<http://web.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/bym/Handbook on Records3.htm>)