

2006

# From the Hicksites to the Progressive Friends: The Rural Roots of Perfectionism and Social Reform among North American Friends

Christopher Densmore

*Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, cdensmol@swarthmore.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies>

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Densmore, Christopher (2006) "From the Hicksites to the Progressive Friends: The Rural Roots of Perfectionism and Social Reform among North American Friends," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 10: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol10/iss2/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

FROM THE HICKSITES TO THE PROGRESSIVE FRIENDS:  
THE RURAL ROOTS OF PERFECTIONISM AND  
SOCIAL REFORM AMONG NORTH AMERICAN FRIENDS

Christopher Densmore

Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, USA

ABSTRACT

In the 1840s and 1850s, North American Friends endured a series of localized separations. This paper examines the Progressive Friends separations in Genesee Yearly Meeting in 1848, centered in the 'burned-over district' of New York State, and in Western Quarterly Meeting of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in 1852-53. Both separations had roots in the controversy among Friends over appropriate anti-slavery activities and both challenged the existing structures of the Religious Society of Friends. These separations were both radical and rural, and mark a distinct change from the earlier deference of Friends towards the leadership of London and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings.

KEYWORDS

Progressive Friends, anti-slavery, perfectionism, come-outerism, Genesee Yearly Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite),

In the 1840s and 1850s the Religious Society of Friends in North America underwent a series of divisions. Wilburite or Conservative Friends separated from the Orthodox yearly meetings of New England, New York and Ohio to defend the 'ancient testimonies' of the Religious Society of Friends from what they perceived to be the theological innovations of Joseph John Gurney and others. At the same time, and often in the same localities, Progressive or Congregational Friends separated from the Hicksite yearly meetings of Indiana, Ohio, Genesee, New York and Pennsylvania in reaction to the perceived institutional conservatism of the Society and in order to make common cause with non-Quakers in the reforms of the day, particularly in the Garrisonian wing of the anti-slavery movement. Unlike the earlier Hicksite-Orthodox controversy that resulted in the division of most of the North American yearly meetings in 1827-28, the Wilburite and Progressive divisions,

though concerning issues which troubled Friends nationally, were local, rural and episodic. Sympathies for the conservative Wilburite position or the Progressive position, seen by some modern Quaker historians as proto-liberal, were widespread among Friends, yet actual divisions were limited. In the course of this paper, I briefly discuss the Congregational Friends separation from Genesee Yearly Meeting in Upstate New York in 1848 and the Progressive Friends separation from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in 1852–53 and then comment on the implications of these events for understanding factionalism among Friends.

#### PERFECTIONISM AND COMEOUTERISM IN THE BURNED-OVER DISTRICT

The 1848 schism in Genesee Yearly Meeting took place in a region noted for a number of religious and social experiments. The annual sessions of Genesee Yearly Meeting—encompassing the Hicksite meetings of central and western New York State, Upper Canada (Ontario) and Michigan—were held at Farmington, New York, six miles from Palmyra, New York, the birthplace of Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in the 1820s and twelve miles from Hydesville, New York, the birthplace of Modern Spiritualism in 1848. Other religious or social experiments of the era included the community established by ex-Quaker Jemima Wilkinson, known to her followers as ‘The Public Universal Friend’, two Shaker communities, the perfectionist and sexually experimental Oneida Community, and a number of short-lived Fourerist communities in the 1840s. In the 1830s and 1840s, the region became noted for anti-slavery activity and as the location of the first two woman’s rights conventions, held at Seneca Falls and Rochester in 1848. A minor scholarly industry has flourished, beginning with the 1950 publication of Whitney Cross’s study, *The Burned-Over District*, offering various explanations of the relationship between evangelical religion and social reform, and the appeal of religious and social experimentation in a society rapidly transforming from an agricultural to a market economy. Cross, however, focused on the relationship between evangelical religion, revivalism and reform, and admitted to being unable to place Quakers in his landscape of reform.<sup>1</sup> More recent work, particularly Nancy A. Hewitt’s *Women’s Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (1984), far from neglecting Quakers, have placed Hicksite and Congregational Friends, allied to the Garrisonian anti-slavery movement, in the forefront of ‘ultraist’ reform.<sup>2</sup>

The Finneyite revivals of the 1820s and 1830s were contained largely within the existing denominational structures of the Congregational and the Presbyterian Churches. Other, more institutionally radical, groups of reformers did call for fundamental changes to denominational structures or for the abolition of all denominational and sectarian structures. Two related, but also contradictory, tendencies were ‘come-outerism’ and what, for lack of a universally agreed-upon designation, I will call ‘Christian Primitivism’. The term ‘come-outer’ derives from Rev. 18:4, ‘And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues’, or the similar text in 2 Cor. 6:17. The term was allied to Wesleyan and Free Methodists (terms that have a different application in the United States than they do in either the United Kingdom

or Canada), which separated from the main body of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1840s and 1850s, and smaller groups of Presbyterians and Baptists who felt that the existing churches were being faithful in their social testimonies, particularly, though not exclusively, concerning slavery and abolitionism. The term has also been applied to the Progressive Friends. The paradox is that the religious ‘come-outers’ who were very much a part of the landscape of the ‘burned-over district’, and particularly the anti-slavery and woman’s rights movements, were not coming out of the world to find a refuge in sectarian religion, but coming out of the churches; that is, rejecting the existing denominational structures so that they could engage themselves more fully in the work of reforming the world.<sup>3</sup>

‘Christian Primitivism’ was a reaction to the innovations in the evangelical Protestant churches in early nineteenth century, specifically to the rise of tract societies, missionaries and theological schools. The Christian Primitives shared with the Come-outers a sense that the existing churches were filled with human inventions that hindered the growth of true religion and holiness. This was the message of several periodicals published in the burned-over district in the 1820s: *Plain Truth* (Rochester and Canandaigua), the *Free Meeting Advocate* (Auburn) and *Priestcraft Exposed* (Lockport). These publications railed against theological schools, tract societies, missionaries, priests (anyone who preached for hire) and Calvinists in general. To paraphrase, the message was ‘Stop sending Bibles. If we want them, we will buy them ourselves’. To a casual reader, some of the articles may have appeared anti-religious, though the intent was anti-clerical. The full title of *Priestcraft Exposed*, continued, ‘*And Primitive Christianity Defended*’. The publisher of both *Plain Truth* and *Priestcraft Exposed* was a Hicksite Quaker. Elias Hicks spoke frequently against tract societies, missionary societies, and other humanly-created institutions in the 1820s. At Hester Street Meeting in New York City on 5th Month 25, 1828, he asked rhetorically ‘what are bible societies and missionary societies? They are all the works of antichrist, and these must all be broken down and not one stone left upon another’.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the come-outer movement, the Primitives represented a rejection of the world and had little of the social reform impulse, at least in regard to abolition and woman’s rights. The Primitive (or Anti-Missionary) Baptists and Primitive Methodists of the American South of today come from these roots. In their rejection of paid ministers, in their austere plainness in their Meeting Houses and in their rejection of instrumental music (though not singing), Primitive Baptists of today share many traits with Conservative Friends.

#### COME-OUTERISM AMONG THE METHODISTS AND PRESBYTERIANS

In the 1830s, an important new element is added to the mix—abolitionism. Slavery had troubled the American political and religious conscience for more than seventy years, but in the 1830s the debate intensified and personalized with the establishment of national and local abolition societies, abolition newspapers and abolitionist lecturers. For many, the religious duty to be an abolitionist was obvious. For some, abolition came as a religious conversion. Abolitionists, and particularly those among

the Methodists and Presbyterians, were often unwilling to continue in fellowship with denominations that tolerated slave holding by clergy or even by the laity.

The slavery issue – fellowship with slave owners – became quickly intertwined with issues of church polity. Gerrit Smith of Peterboro, New York, soon to become a major figure in the anti-slavery movement, wrote in 1839 to catalog the failings of New School General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church: ‘My Dear Sir – Instances are continually occurring to remind us of the evil influences of sectarianism in the church of Christ, and to strengthen the desire for the abolition of all religious sects’.<sup>5</sup> Smith’s ‘come-outer’ solution was a paradox. In their enthusiasm for a non-sectarian, activist form of Christianity, the come-outers were themselves adding to the proliferation of denominational churches. They differed from the Christian Primitives by replacing religious experience by social reform as the test of faithfulness.

The Methodists, particularly in Western New York and Michigan, were also very troubled by slavery, and particularly by what they saw as the erosion of their original anti-slavery testimonies by the churches in the South, and the willingness of Northern churches to tolerate slave-ownership for the sake of expanding and retaining members in the slave states. This led in the 1840s to schism and the creation of the Wesleyan Methodist denomination in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The anti-slavery activists saw, with considerable evidence, the authority structure of the church as working to silence the abolitionists. When the separation of the Wesleyan Methodists occurred, it focused almost equally on slavery and church government. One convention of Methodist dissidents resolved in 1840: ‘That the government of the M.E. [Methodist Episcopal] Church, as contained in the discipline, and explained and administered by its Episcopacy, is anti-republican, and is, in principle, an encroachment upon natural rights, and in its administration subversive, not only of true Christian liberty, but frequently on the sacred right of conscience’ and that ‘the power which the bishops of the M.E. Church have wielded against the sacred cause of the bleeding slave... have not only convinced us of the danger of confiding such unlimited power to individual men...’<sup>7</sup>

#### COME-OUTER FRIENDS AND COME-OUTER METHODISTS

Come-outer Friends and Wesleyan Methodists shared the same landscape and same strong anti-slavery testimonies, yet there is almost no evidence that the two groups interacted with each other. The major periodical of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, *The True Wesleyan* (1843–52), though containing extensive coverage of Wesleyan activities in Upstate New York, has virtually no mention of Quakers – Hicksite, Progressive, Conservative or Orthodox. A rare case of convergence occurred in Michigan, where abolitionist-minded Quakers belonging to both the Hicksite and Orthodox branches of Adrian Monthly Meeting had organized the first anti-slavery society in the state. Some ‘weighty members’ of the Orthodox meeting objected to Friends mixing with members of other denominations in the anti-slavery ‘excitement’, with the result that in 1839 Laura Smith Haviland and twenty other actively anti-slavery Quakers resigned from Adrian Meeting and joined with come-

outer Presbyterians and Methodists to establish an anti-slavery Wesleyan Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE PROGRESSIVE FRIENDS IN GENESEE YEARLY MEETING

The Hicksite Friends of Genesee Yearly Meeting in Upstate New York and Michigan were also troubled with the issue of slavery. The members were increasingly polarized between those who saw active participation in the abolitionist movement as a natural manifestation of Friends’ long-standing testimony against slavery, and others, who, though opposed to slavery, wished to avoid mixing with the world’s people, and feared that the activists among them were following human reason rather than the leadings of the spirit. The issue became one of the authority of the meeting, particularly as expressed by the ministers and elders, over individual conscience. On the one hand, ministers and elders were to guide and nurture spiritual development, but on the other they could be seen as hindering that same development. This tension, which in the 1820s had been focused on scriptural interpretation, became tied up with reactions to slavery and abolition in the 1830s and 1840s. For those Quakers who clearly understood that duty to God required positive steps on behalf of the slave, cautions from elders about mixing with the world’s people seemed positively un-Quakerly, and evidence that human institutions were coming between people and their manifest duty towards God.

Sunderland P. Gardner of Farmington, New York, a widely known and respected Hicksite minister, presented the conservative Hicksite position. In his *Address To The Youth and Children of The Society of Friends*, published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1846, Gardner gave a thoughtful consideration of reform. Slavery and intemperance were great evils, and Friends needed to bear a full and efficient testimony against all evil. Yet, Gardner cautioned, ‘wrong may be wrongfully opposed, and war opposed in a warlike spirit’. Gardner continued:

It may be asked then, shall we be idle, fold our hands, and remain indifferent to the evils... I answer, no: But there are things which should be first put in order, and they should be perfected in their proper course; and that which is first in the order of Truth, appears to be a subjection on our part, without reserve, to the refining power of Divine Love...<sup>9</sup>

The radicals, in contrast, felt that it was the manifest duty of every Friend to lose no opportunity to speak and act against slavery, and to make common cause with others who acted similarly, both within and outside the Religious Society of Friends. They were impatient with the quietism of a Sunderland P. Gardner that asked that right motives precede right actions.

Among the Hicksite Friends of Genesee Yearly Meeting, the issue was both political (abolitionism) and corporate. Many Quakers had embraced the abolitionist movement as an extension of traditional Quaker anti-slavery. However, they also had to contend with the anti-political Friends who saw such movements as worldly and against the spirit of Quaker pacifism. This raised the question about the authority of the meeting over individual conscience and action. The radicals began to see the

ministers and elders, who most often expressed the collective authority of the meeting, as an improper, and ultimately un-Quakerly, restraint on liberty. The Hicksite Friends of Genesee Yearly Meeting could not achieve unity on the issue of abolitionist activism so the radicals left Genesee Yearly Meeting in June of 1848 for greater liberty. The resultant 'Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends', later renamed the 'Friends of Human Progress', opened its annual meeting at Waterloo, New York, to all who were interested in bettering humanity. The resulting annual meetings, held until 1884, provided a platform for reformers who were otherwise Quakers, Unitarians, Spiritualists and Free Thinkers.

Historians of the burned-over district puzzle over the relationship of evangelical ideas, perfectionism and reform. There was no single link. The come-outer Wesleyan Methodists were evangelical and theologically orthodox. The traditional Quakers were non-evangelical and embraced a form of perfectionism but rejected involvement in worldly reform. More radical Quakers substituted activism in the cause of reform for the older sectarian perfectionism. The come-outers in general, whatever their theological positions, and unlike the Finneyites, were willing to set aside doctrinal issues in the service of open churches and more open reform movement. Come-outers began in movements to purify the churches, and bring them back to primitive Christian simplicity, and ended in 'the world', often speaking the language of politics and rationalism, to transform society.

#### WOMEN'S RIGHTS WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS AND WITHOUT

The conservatives in Genesee Yearly Meeting balked at the dangerous and un-Quakerly innovation of abolishing the select meetings of ministers and elders. Not all reforms were as controversial. In 1837, Junius Monthly Meeting near Waterloo, New York, proposed to Farmington Quarterly Meeting, and Farmington Quarterly Meeting subsequently proposed to Genesee Yearly Meeting, that the discipline be so altered to explicitly recognize that the men's and women's meetings for discipline were equal in all respects. This removed the obligation of the women's meeting to seek the 'approbation' of the men's meeting on certain matters. So far as can be determined by the monthly, quarterly and yearly meeting minutes, or from the lack of comment in the Quaker press or other surviving records and manuscripts, the change was adopted quickly and without controversy. New York Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) subsequently made a similar alteration in their discipline, also with no visible opposition. A similar alteration in the discipline was proposed in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, but the matter was dropped with little comment and Philadelphia did not alter their discipline to equalize the role of men's and women's meetings until 1877.

The impact of Junius Monthly Meeting's advocacy of gender equality in 1837 had a greater impact in society at large than it apparently did among Quakers. Many of the principal organizers of the First Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, about five miles from the location of the Junius Meeting House, were members of, or close associates of, members of Junius Monthly Meeting. What seems

not to have been considered terribly controversial for the internal organizing of Quaker meetings was exceedingly radical when applied to society at large.

#### THE PROGRESSIVE SEPARATION IN PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

The Progressive separation in Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting was closely tied to the anti-slavery movement. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in 1837 appealed to its members 'To embrace every right opportunity to maintain and exalt our religious testimony against slavery', but Friends were divided in what constituted 'right opportunities'. A Friend recalled after the Civil War how Lucretia Mott had traveled among meetings in Chester County Pennsylvania advocating Friends to actively join with the anti-slavery movement as a matter of religious duty only to be followed by George Fox White, a prominent Hicksite minister from New York, who 'sought to infuse among Friends a disinclination to join the anti-slavery crusade, largely on the grounds that by such action they would, in his opinion, find themselves associated with infidels, freethinkers and those who regarded active opposition to slavery as a religion in itself...'<sup>10</sup>

Chester County became the focal point of controversy among Hicksite Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting on the anti-slavery issue. By 1845, anti-slavery Friends, meeting in Marlborough Friends Meeting House, were openly discussing whether time had come to abandon the Religious Society of Friends. Quakerism, the Conference decided, had once been 'an instrument of good...[but now] turns to the traditions of the past for its guides to action, instead of attending to the revelations of the present; hence the sectarian prejudice that would crucify all that is new, and condemn unheard all that our fathers did not teach'. After a series of meetings, held from May to September 1845, the attenders of the Marlborough Conference decided to remain within the Religious Society of Friends, though effectively putting Western Quarterly Meeting and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting on notice that a separation was possible. Accounts of these meetings were published in the anti-slavery newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*.

Unlike the burned-over district of Upstate New York, Chester County had no reputation for religious or social experimentation, beyond the dissenting—but by this time largely denominationally contained—testimonies of the Friends. It did, however, have a very active anti-slavery movement, extending back to the eighteenth century and increasing in activity with the rise of the new anti-slavery movement in the 1830s. Most of the active abolitionists in the county were Quakers.

The primary issues troubling Chester County Hicksites in the 1840s concerned involvement in the anti-slavery movement. Meetings were divided on whether to open their doors to public lectures by anti-slavery agents and whether such people were acting from true leadings or merely human reason. By 1848, however, likely influenced by the examples of Progressive Friends in Ohio, Upstate New York and Michigan, some radicals were openly questioning the role of ministers and elders and select meetings. In November 1848, Elijah Pennypacker of Chester County visited Green Street Meeting in Philadelphia, and was moved to speak on evils of slavery. In

doing so, he said no more than was said there by Lucretia Mott, George Truman or George Fox White. But then Pennypacker moved on to other issues, charging that Quakers had fallen from their original principles, from their belief in man's equality, from their belief that God could teach his people himself and from their trust in the inward light. Instead, modern Quakers:

have fettered and limited themselves with disciplines and conventional rules, and have begun to venerate established forms above the revealing of truth in the soul, and we see the results. Are we not now putting our organic law above the light of truth? If we regard truth as our all sufficient guide, and mankind as an equal brotherhood, why these partitions? Why these high seats? Why our select meetings and privileged officers?<sup>11</sup>

It was at this point that one elder (Clement Biddle) requested Pennypacker to sit down, and another elder (James Mott, Lucretia's husband) said that he should speak on, and the meeting degenerated into disorder. The issue had moved beyond slavery to include Quaker organization: Why the partitions between men's and women's meetings? Why acknowledge some members as elders and others as ministers and thus give more weight to one person's understanding of the light of truth than another's? This was radical stuff – and had been the cause of a division in Genesee Yearly Meeting in New York State that very summer when the radicals walked out of Yearly Meeting to form the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends. Biddle and the others were no doubt aware of the separation at Farmington and concerned about the spread of such ideas to Philadelphia.

#### PENNSYLVANIA YEARLY MEETING OF PROGRESSIVE FRIENDS

Separation had been threatened by the Marlborough Conference in 1845. By 1848, when Pennypacker troubled Green Street Meeting, there were Progressive (or Congregational) yearly meetings organized, or in the process of being organized, in Ohio, Upstate New York and Michigan. While Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) had a number of members in sympathy with the reformers, no separation occurred for another four years. The precipitating event in the separation was the return to Chester County of Joseph and Ruth Dugdale, leading members of the Progressive Green Plain Yearly Meeting. The Dugdales had visited Pennsylvania in 1845 and while there had been questions raised about the status of their membership in the Religious Society of Friends, they were allowed to participate in both the sessions of Philadelphia Yearly and Western Quarterly meetings.

What was tolerated when the Dugdales were merely visiting became a serious issue when the Dugdales became local residents of Chester County in 1851. In May 1851, Western Quarterly Meeting ended in confusion as Friends disagreed on whether the Dugdales had a right of membership. By the end of the summer, two bodies claimed to be Kennett Monthly Meeting. Both sides kept minutes and attempted to meet at the same time in the same buildings. By September 1851, the Hicksite branch of Kennett Monthly Meeting began disciplinary proceedings against one of its members for 'disorderly conduct in having associated with others in holding a meeting out of the order and in subversion of the discipline of the society...' In

May 1852, two distinct bodies, both claiming to be Western Quarterly Meeting, sent representatives to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite). The Yearly Meeting seated the 'non-Dugdale' representatives, thus recognizing their legitimacy. In June the two sides clashed over the use of Marlborough Meeting House, ending with the arrest of several Dugdaleites for disturbing a religious meeting.

In sending representatives to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Dugdaleites seemed to hope that there could be a resolution of the difficulties within Western Quarterly Meeting without a separation, but the events of May and June of 1852 ended that hope. In October 1852, Western Quarterly Meeting (Progressive) called for a 'General Religious Conference' to be held at the Kennett Meeting House in May 1853. The call was addressed to all who were interested in a new religious association, free of sectarian strictures, and dedicated to the cause of human progress. The Yearly Meetings of Progressive Friends in New York, Ohio and Michigan were held up as models.

The General Religious Conference at Kennett in 1853 established a new organization, the 'Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends'. The Yearly Meeting adopted testimonies on temperance, slavery, the rights, wrongs and duties of women, tobacco and capital punishment, and a lengthy 'Exposition of Sentiments' addressed 'to the Friends of Pure and Undeiled Religion, and all Seekers after Truth, of whatever name or denomination'. Sectarian religion was to be replaced by a platform 'as broad as Humanity, and comprehensive as Truth. We interrogate no man as to his theological belief; we send no Committees to pry into the motives of those who may desire to share the benefits of our Association; but open the door to all who recognize the Equal Brotherhood of the Human Family, without regard to sex, color or condition...'

#### THE END OF THE PROGRESSIVE FRIENDS

The perfected and reformed Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, later renamed the 'Friends of Human Progress', met annually in the Quaker Meeting House near Waterloo, New York, from 1849 to 1884. The annual sessions of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends were held at the Longwood Meeting House, near Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, until 1940. As forums for discussion, both the Waterloo and Longwood annual meetings were successful in bringing together a diverse group of the leading reformers of their times to discuss anti-slavery, temperance, women's rights, and in later years, land reform, prison reform, race relations and anti-imperialism.

Both Longwood and Waterloo failed the original come-outer goal to serve as a purified alternative to, or replacement of, the existing churches. Both opened up their platforms to all 'who realize the equal brotherhood of the human family' and in so doing functioned as loose coalitions of reformers rather than as institutional replacements for the old churches and meetings. Who made up this coalition of reformers? First, Quakers who had abandoned church structures because they felt that human invention was coming between (generic) man and God, but would continue to hold a theocentric and discipleship position. Humans could reach perfection

though prayerful attention to the directions of God (rightly understood) and also through human reason. The Bible continued to be authoritative, but only if read in the proper spirit. Secondly, religious liberals, people who had rejected the idea of certain authority of either clergy or Scripture, yet through a mixture of religious feeling and rationalism, found inspiration in the Bible, and a home inside of religious institution. Waterloo in particular, and Longwood to a lesser extent, also included Spiritualists and Free Thinkers. In the context of the 1840s and 1850s, the latter two groups, or at least some representatives of each, shared a rational and empirical view of religion. Traditional churches had asked people to believe on faith, transmitted by text and traditions. Early Spiritualism offered a truth claim whereby the reality of an afterlife could be tested against observable phenomena. All of these several strands could unite at the annual meetings remained otherwise separate and distinguishable.

The Progressives were unable to maintain local meetings for worship. The Progressive branch of Junius (Waterloo) Monthly Meeting was still meeting in the late 1850s, but probably was discontinued by the early 1860s. The Progressive branch of Kennett Monthly Meeting in Pennsylvania may have continued into the 1860s or possibly into the 1870s when most of the surviving members reunited with the Hicksite Meeting. Neither seems to have attracted non-Quakers, with the notable exceptions of anti-slavery editor Oliver Johnson, who joined Junius and later became clerk of Longwood, and woman's rights advocate, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who identified herself with Junius Monthly Meeting in the 1850s.

Unlike the earlier Hicksite-Orthodox separation, the Progressive separations were decidedly regional. In Genesee Yearly Meeting, the separation was confined to Michigan Quarterly Meetings and one or possibly two of the ten monthly meetings in Upstate New York. In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Hicksite), the separation was confined to one Western Quarterly Meeting, and largely to a single Monthly Meeting, Kennett. The limited geographical extent of actual divisions in the 1840s and 1850s, whether of the Progressives from the Hicksites or of the Wilburites from the Orthodox, obscures wider circles of sympathy for the liberal and conservative positions of Friends at large.

#### ANTI-SLAVERY AS A PARALLEL INSTITUTIONAL HOME FOR FRIENDS

All of the Progressive separations of the 1840s and 1850s were closely linked to disagreements among Hicksite Friends over the proper role of Quakers in the anti-slavery movement. From the 1770s to the 1830s, abolitionist activities had focused on lobbying and petitioning governmental authorities. Quaker involvement in the old abolition societies aroused little controversy among Friends. The new methods of the post-1830 abolitionist movement, with the establishment of popular, local anti-slavery societies, efforts to reach the public through periodicals and pamphlets—often with harsh rhetoric against slave-holders and anyone who did not condemn the institution—raised basic questions about Quaker involvement with the world. This post-1830 abolition movement built an organizational structure that was parallel to, but also independent of, the Religious Society of Friends. Clearly Quakers are only a part, and given their relative numbers in the population, necessarily a minor part of

the abolition movement in the pre-Civil War era. There were certainly strong anti-slavery movements in areas where no Quakers lived. However, looking through the columns of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* (Philadelphia), *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York City), and the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Salem, Ohio), a Friend living in rural Pennsylvania, western New York, Ohio or Michigan would find the names of other radical Friends operating as editors, agents, lecturers and letter writers. If he attended an anti-slavery lecture, he would often be listening to a Quaker or ex-Quaker. So, if the Religious Society of Friends was tied together by Friends traveling in the ministry, though monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings, and a common literature, the abolitionist-minded Friend had traveling anti-slavery lectures. The weekly abolitionist newspapers mentioned above carried numerous articles critical of the reluctance of some Friends to make common cause with non-Quaker abolitionists. The names of those who formed the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends are the same as those who made up the leadership of the local and county level anti-slavery societies in Chester County. The leaders of the Friends of Human Progress had earlier been officers of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society.

#### OBSERVATIONS ON TOWN AND COUNTRY

In 1800, North American Quakerism was predominately rural, as was the population generally, but it can be thought of as having two significant urban centers: Philadelphia and London. The annual epistles of London Yearly Meeting were reprinted and circulated to virtually every Quaker family in America. The several North American yearly meetings placed great weight on the opinions of British Friends, whether in the form of the annual epistle, in books reprinted in America or in the visits of traveling Friends. Within North America, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting held a similar position of presumed authority. The sense that 'London' or 'Philadelphia' could be seen as urban was both metaphorical and structural. In both cases, decisions reached by the Yearly Meetings represented ideas which may have originated in either 'town' or 'country' but the transmission of those ideas was seen to come from the cities.

The deference paid to London and Philadelphia was not the same as linear authority. While the disciplines of the several yearly meetings in North America of this period are quite similar in both belief and format, each was modeled to conform to the history and circumstances of the individual meeting. More importantly, authority existed apart from the institutions of Quakerism. There was no American Oxford or Cambridge, and a John Woolman or a Joshua Evans in rural New Jersey had ready access to the approved writings of 'ancient friends' for understanding Quakerism, and direct access to 'the universal and saving light' of Christ.

North American Friends of the early nineteenth century could also draw on institutional, and often personal, memories of reformation and change. The final stages of the Quaker movement to rid itself of the taint of slave ownership came in the 1770s and 1780s, well within the living memory of Elias Hicks and within the corporate memory of the succeeding generation of Friends. This abolition movement had come first from individual voices and the initiatives of local meetings, working up

the hierarchy of meetings, from the periphery to the center. Friends had a model of progress working from the bottom upwards.

The authority of the metaphorical 'urban' London Yearly Meeting and perhaps more importantly the 'first among equals' status of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was swept away for the Hicksite Friends by the controversies of the 1820s. As Hicksites read their history, the Hicksite-Orthodox separation of 1827-28 might have been avoided had it not been for the high-handedness of the elders in Philadelphia and the presence of traveling English Friends.<sup>12</sup> Wilburite Friends had a similar loss of confidence in London Yearly Meeting, first over concerns raised during the Beacon Controversy, and more significantly during the North American ministry of Joseph John Gurney, an individual seen by Wilburites as theologically unsound and personally unqualified as a gospel minister, yet traveling with a certificate from London Yearly Meeting.

The center (town) might err, but country Friends could maintain the standards of the Religious Society of Friends, through division if necessary. The willingness of small groups of Friends to challenge the authority of their yearly meetings came from both the conservative and progressive wings of the Society. The Wilburites separated from the 'larger body' to maintain Quaker distinctiveness, and the Progressives separated to carry forward the work of social reform. The intellectual map for many North American Friends was no longer dominated by London and Philadelphia. These capitals of Quakerism would continue to be important, but in the minds of many Friends the critical issues involving the preservation and future direction of the Religious Society of Friends were being discussed and decided in the rural Quaker strongholds.

#### NOTES

1. Cross, W., *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950, p. 17.
2. Hewett, N., *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984. See also Wellman, J., *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
3. McKivigan, J., 'The Antislavery "Comeouter" Sects: A Neglected Dimension of the Abolitionist Movement', *Civil War History* 26 (1980), pp. 140-60 (143, 155-58).
4. *The Quaker* 3 (1828), pp. 211-12; see also Thomas Wetherald's sermon in the same source, pp. 204 and 211; also Hicks, E., *Journal*, New York: Isaac Hopper, 1832, p. 383.
5. Frothingham, O., *Gerrit Smith: A Biography*, New York: Putnam's, 1878, p. 91.
6. For a modern treatment of the controversy, see Matthews, D., *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780-1845*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965.
7. Matlack, L., *The History of American Slavery and Methodism*, New York, 1849, pp. 322-23.
8. Haviland, L., *A Woman's Life Work*, Cincinnati: Walden & Stowe, 1882, pp. 32-34. The separation also had a theological dimension with those resigning from the Orthodox branch of Adrian Monthly Meeting charging that Friends had denied the Holy Scriptures as a test of doctrine.
9. Gardner, S., *An Address to the Children and Youth of the Religious Society of Friends*, Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Chapman, 1846, pp. 10-11.
10. The incidents described here are covered more fully in Densmore, C., 'Be Ye Therefore Perfect: Anti-Slavery and the Origins of the Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends in Chester County, Pennsylvania', *Quaker History* 93 (Fall 2004), pp. 28-46.

11. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 28 September 1848; see also Densmore, 'Be Ye Perfect', p. 36-37.
12. Janney, S., *History of the Religious Society of Friends*, 4 vols.; Philadelphia: E. Ellwood Zell, 1859-70, IV, p. 174.

#### AUTHOR DETAILS

Christopher Densmore is Curator, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.

Mailing address: Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania 19081, USA. Email: cdensmo1@swarthmore.edu.