

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

Archives of the New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
c/o Rhode Island Historical Society Library
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Providence, Rhode Island 02906
(401) 331-8575

Introduction

The current Archives of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (NEYM) began in the 1960s, the results of the incessant work and dedication of Thyra Jane Foster. After retiring from teaching, Thyra Jane worked with the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings as well as the Yearly meeting and Quaker Schools, to establish a centralized place for Friends records, one that would be accessible to the public for research. The records that did not become part of the Archives were microfilmed. Today, through Thyra Jane's dedication, most of the records have been microfilmed. These copies are available in many national repositories. The Archives have a regular, ongoing records program which provides for the Yearly Meeting and affiliates to send their records to a centralized repository.

Scope and Content of the Collection

The Yearly Meeting Archives contains the records of the New England Yearly, Quarterly, and Monthly Meetings. Also included are the Moses Brown School records and Quaker trusts. The dates of the records range from 1654 (Sandwich Monthly Meeting) to the present. Most of the records are in volumes and are minutes to the business meetings of the monthly meetings. Some volumes contain marriage certificates, birth and death dates of members, membership lists, removals (letters allowing a member to move from one meeting to another), testimonies (beliefs and convictions), sufferings (penalties Quakers suffered for following testimonies), denials, memorials, slave manumissions, and financial transactions.

Records of the Wilburites [Conservative Friends] are also available. These Friends were followers of John Wilbur. A schism occurred in 1845 and was healed in 1945. Documents of this split and other controversies can be found in the Archives.

The NEYM Archives also has a small reference library of about 500 books. Holdings also include many pamphlets and tracts concerning all aspects of Quakerism, including doctrine, peace, slavery, biographies, and history from the eighteenth century to the present.

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

- 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 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 the 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 Library of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Many of the records are microfilmed and available in the main reading room. Other records of the Archives are available by appointment only. The Library is open: Tuesday-Saturday 9-5 and Sunday 12-4. Call (401) 331-8575 for an appointment.

Fees are charged for all genealogical research conducted by the Archivist. Please contact the Archivist for a current fee schedule. The Archives and the research services of the Archivist are available for Monthly Meetings and their members without charge. Members of the New England Yearly Meeting and the general public are all welcome to use the resources of the RIHS Library and the NEYM Archives during regular library hours at no charge.

Some of the original records of the New England Yearly Meeting are in other repositories such as the Maine Historical Society and the Nantucket Historical Society. Please check to see if the NEYM Archives has the material needed.

Directions to the NEYM Archives

Take Interstate 95 N or S to exit 20 in Providence, RI. Take Rt. 195E to exit 2 (Wickenden Street). Take the first left onto Wickenden Street. Go through two sets of lights. Make a left onto Hope Street. Follow 6 blocks to 121 Hope Street (corner of Hope and Power). Parking is available on the street.

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Archives Collection Policy

Approved at a meeting of the Archives and Historical Records Committee, 10th mo. 9, 1999

This policy describes the types of gifts which the New England Yearly Meeting Archives will accept. Though there is a small budget which may be used for purchases in exceptional circumstances, the Archives does not actively pursue a purchasing policy. It maintains that all official records of the Yearly Meeting or any of its subordinate meetings are the legal property of the creating body. Records of quarterly and monthly meetings remain the legal property of those meetings, but upon being sent to the Archives are to be considered on permanent deposit there.

While this collection policy lists the types of records collected by the Archives, the decision whether to accept a given donation will also be based on its condition and size. A collection in poor condition will take some expense to conserve, and if mold is present, it may present a danger to the other items in the Archives. Particularly large collections might require more storage space than their historical worth would merit. In these or similar exceptional circumstances, the Archivist will make a subjective decision based on the historical value of the donation versus the problems involved.

Except where otherwise stated, the Archives only 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.

The following record types are collected by the New England Yearly Meeting Archives. Any other items cannot be accepted into the Archives; to accommodate any exceptions, the Archives and Historical Records Committee of the Yearly Meeting must revise the collection policy accordingly at a formal meeting for business.

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. For the Yearly Meeting, an effort is made to obtain two copies of the printed minutes, signed by the clerk, as well as the unpublished copies given to the Yearly Meeting attendees.

Most current minutes are generated electronically. The archives prefers to receive printouts made on archival paper and signed by the meeting's clerk, but will accept other forms of copies. Handwritten or typed minutes are collected in the following order of preference:

1. Original copies signed by the Clerk of the meeting
2. Photocopies made onto archival paper, signed by the Clerk
3. Photocopies made onto acidic, non-archival paper

Vital Statistics

Collected for the Yearly Meeting, Quarterly Meetings, Monthly Meetings, Preparative Meetings, and any other particular meeting which may have generated vital statistics. Manuscript or photocopies of early vital records may be accepted at the discretion of the Archivist. Vital statistics include records of membership, births, deaths, marriages, burials, removals, memorials, denials and acknowledgments.

Indexes

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

Newsletters

Collected for the Yearly Meeting and its committees, Quarterly Meetings, Monthly Meetings, and Preparative Meetings.

Committee Records

Collected for all Yearly and Quarterly Meeting committees. For Monthly Meetings, the records of the following committees or their equivalents are collected: Ministry and Counsel, and committees having care of burial grounds, membership and meeting houses.

Other committee records are collected for Monthly Meetings at the discretion of the Archivist, including finance, peace and social concerns, missionary, library, first day school and special event committee records. Committee records generated by Preparative Meetings are only accepted at the discretion of the Archivist.

As for other Quaker-related organizations outside of the New England Yearly meeting, such as Friends United Meeting or Friends General Conference, the Archives will only collect materials directly relating to New England Yearly Meeting's involvement, and encourages these organizations to maintain their own national archives. The Archives will collect materials relating to the New England Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee, including minutes and pamphlets.

Records of those institutions with a formal or semi-formal connection to New England Yearly Meeting will be collected; this includes Quaker school and retirement homes.

Financial Records

The Archives collects financial records of meetings only at the discretion of the Archivist. Yearly meeting financial records will be collected more thoroughly, including account books, check books, cash books, stock ledgers, records of special funds, and reports. Canceled checks will not be collected from any meeting.

Personal Papers

Personal papers are generally not accepted, but there are exceptions. If the papers were generated in the course of official meeting activity, and do not duplicate items already archived, they may be accepted; this includes correspondence and notes.

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.

In exceptional circumstances, the Archives will accept collections of unofficial personal papers, if the principal focus is Quakerism in New England, the papers complement information already housed in the Archives, and the size can be accommodated. However, efforts will first be made to find a home for the papers in a suitable research library or historical society.

Printed Material

The Archives does not accession duplicates of items already in its collection, unless intended to replace an item in inferior condition; duplicates may be accepted for donation to the book sale. In addition, the Archives does not accept books or pamphlets based solely on their provenance (prior ownership). Specific items from entire libraries, whether meeting or personal, will be accepted only if they fill the following policy, and will not be maintained as separate collections. The Archives accepts books and pamphlets 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 to be seminal works on the Society of Friends in general.

Serials, Magazines and Journals

The Archives will only collect those concerning the Yearly Meeting, published by the yearly meeting, or used for the Archivist's reference (such as *Quaker History*). Although the Archives already has many serials from London and Philadelphia yearly meetings, it will not continue to add to this collection.

Photographs and Slides

Unidentified photographs are not collected by the Archives. The Archives does collect photographs of identified meeting houses, members, and events. The same is true of slides although they are not stable for preservation.

Recordings

The Archives does not actively solicit audio or video tapes, but may accept these items at the discretion of the Archivist if they are of historical significance.

Electronic Records

The Archives will accept electronic records only under exceptional circumstances and greatly prefers printed copies of these records. Electronic records must meet the following requirements to be accepted into the Archives:

1. Their content must fall within a category listed in this policy.
 2. They must either come with their own software, or be accessible through software used by the Archives.
 3. Their format must be compatible with hardware used by the Archives.
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Queries on Friends Records for New England Yearly Meeting

1. Are minutes, newsletters and other records printed on archival-quality paper? If you use a computer to record minutes, or to store minutes and other records, do you make archival-paper copies of these records in a timely and consistent manner? Do you also have back-ups for everything stored on a computer? Are these stored off-site?
2. Do you keep your records in places secure from conditions which will damage them, such as attics or basements? If your meetinghouse cannot provide optimal storage for records (temperatures maintained at 65 to 70 degrees and humidity levels at 45-55%) have you contacted the NEYM Archivist for assistance on safe records storage?
3. Does the meeting have exact records of all of its business agreements, trusts, and conveyances governing its finances and property?
4. Does the committee in charge of any burial grounds keep an accurate record of the location of graves?
5. 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?
6. Has the meeting appointed an archivist or historian to be responsible for arranging and making available its inactive records? Does some Friend supervise the preparation of archival copies for transfer to the NEYM Archives at regular intervals? Has the meeting requested a copy of the NEYM Archives Collection Policy from the Archivist?
7. Is there a disposition or retention schedule which shows what has happened and is happening to the records the meeting makes? Are your minute books indexed?
8. Have Friends considered conducting oral history interviews with experienced Friends? If you have questions about oral history or videotaping do you seek the help of the NEYM Archivist or the Archives and Historical Records Committee? If you have already conducted oral history interviews, have you made legal agreements with the interviewees regarding the tape recordings?
9. Does the meeting from time to time appoint a session to consider its history? Does it contact the NEYM Archivist for assistance in this endeavor?
10. Does the meeting have a copy of: *Handbook on Records: Their Creation, Maintenance, and Preservation in the Meeting*, Sandy Spring: Baltimore Yearly Meeting Committee on Records, 1996? [Available from the FGC Bookstore, 1-800-966-4556; or from Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860-1296; (301) 774-7663. The cost is \$6.00 plus shipping and handling.]