

## Historical Notes Concerning the Conservative Friends



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Written at Bear Creek, near Earlham, Iowa

Summer of 1977

## HISTORICAL NOTES CONCERNING THE CONSERVATIVE FRIENDS AT BEAR CREEK

One hundred years ago, in 1877, events took place within the Religious Society of Friends in Iowa which culminated in the organization of the Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative). These events first came into focus in Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting. The Bear Creek Friends Meeting (Conservative) has been the only Meeting of those comprising the original Yearly Meeting which has continued on throughout the intervening century. The following account is an attempt to provide a historical sketch of the Conservative Friends at Bear Creek.

### Early History of Bear Creek Quarter

Friends first began to settle in Iowa in 1835, establishing their first community at Salem in the southeast corner of the state. During the decade of the 1840's the Quaker migration to eastern and south-central Iowa accelerated, and a number of monthly meetings and quarterly meetings were established under the oversight of Indiana Yearly Meeting. It was not until the decade of the 1850's that this migration reached the area thirty or forty miles west of Des Moines, the area which came to be designated as Bear Creek Quarter. Having reached this far west, the tide of migration tended to halt its territorial expansion for a time and to build up the settlements already established. In the decades of the 1870's and 1880's there was another tide of migration, but this was generally to Kansas and other regions west of the Missouri River. The cluster of settlements in Bear Creek Quarter continued to constitute the largest concentration of Friends in the western half of Iowa. Since this collection of Friends meetings was separated by about thirty miles from the next closest cluster of Friends, that of South River Quarter to the east, the Friends of the various settlements of Bear Creek Quarter constituted an especially close-knit group.

The earliest settlements were at Bear Creek and Summit Grove. The Bear Creek settlement was centered in the southwest corner of Dallas County, along the ridge between the South Raccoon River and the stream called Bear Creek. The Summit Grove settlement was located some eight or ten miles west, in the general area of the present town of Stuart.

The first Quaker pioneers at Bear Creek were an older couple, Richard and Elizabeth (Betsy) Mendenhall, who were accompanied by their daughter, Nancy, and her husband John M. Males, and their family. They settled near the timber land to the south of the Raccoon River in May, 1853. There were likely a few other Quaker settlers who came later in the same year. On Christmas Day, 1853, William and Richard Cook and their families moved into a "camp" which they had built on the Bear Creek bottom and began construction of log houses on the land they had entered. The Cooks had been accompanied on the journey from Indiana by John Wilson and his family, which included some grown sons. The Wilsons settled farther south, nearer the present town of Earlham. By the first part of 1854 a number of close relatives of the Mendenhall and Cook families had arrived at Bear Creek.

The settlement at Summit Grove was well underway by May, 1855. It was then that the first meeting for worship is said to have been held. A number of members of the Bowles family were soon on the scene at Summit Grove, also the family of George Cook, closely related to the Cook family at Bear Creek.

For the most part, these early settlers at Bear Creek and Summit Grove came from Friends communities in west-central Indiana where they had been living in close association for the past 25 or 30 years. However, by the time they reached Iowa, many of these people had a heritage of nearly two centuries of Quaker history, and the Indiana sojourn had been only one installment of a lengthy series of Quaker settlements.

Many of the ancestors of the Iowa settlers had been convinced of Quakerism by George Fox and his Valiant Sixty at the time of the rise of the Society of Friends in England in the 1650's, or they may have heard the message a few years later from William Edmundson in Ireland. Some of the children of these first Friends of Truth had found new homes in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the days of William Penn. From there, in the years after 1720, they had pressed southward, coming into contact with other Friends who had already been maintaining their Quaker faith for several generations along the Eastern Shore of Maryland and in the Tidewater area of Virginia. By 1750 this migration had reached the Piedmont of North Carolina, and by 1770 settlements were being made in South Carolina, and even in Georgia. In the years immediately after 1800 there was another great migration from the Carolinas to southwestern Ohio, a migration undertaken to escape the evils of a social order which countenanced slavery. Then, in the 1820's, the children of these Ohio settlers pressed westward to establish new settlements across central Indiana.

Therefore, the older Friends who came from Indiana to Bear Creek remembered Other settlements besides those in Indiana. Richard Mendenhall spent his boyhood in North Carolina, and his wife, Betsy Barnett Mendenhall could

remember her early childhood in central Virginia, before her family had moved to North Carolina and then to Ohio. John and Peter Cook had been born in the Bush River settlement in South Carolina and as children had accompanied their father and other relatives on the migration to the Northwest Territory and a new home in Ohio.

However, for the most part, the younger settlers of Bear Creek Quarter had been children of the frontier, with few opportunities for close association with Friends from the long-established Meetings in England and along the Eastern seaboard. Although they generally valued education, they did not have the scholastic opportunities available in Philadelphia. True, this lack of sophistication may have enabled their meetings to escape, for the most part, the disasterous Hicksite and Wilburite separations which had torn apart many Friends communities farther east. The more well informed of the Bear Creek and Summit Grove settlers knew about the movements swirling around the personalities of Elias Hicks, John Wilbur, and Joseph John Gurney, but they were content to accept without too much questioning the Gurneyite emphasis of Indiana Yearly Meeting (Orthodox), while maintaining the traditional Friends manner of worship and discipline.

### The Organization of Meetings

Informal Friends meetings seem to have been held at Bear Creek during the spring and early summer of 1854, but the first "public meeting" was a meeting appointed by Seth Barker, a minister from North Carolina who was accompanied by Jesse Henly. This meeting was held in Seventh Month (July), 1854 at the house of William H. Cook, and proved to be large for a new neighborhood.

Regular meetings for worship were held thereafter at the home of John Cook and then at the home of Joseph Cook. The meeting came to be formally organized as Bear Creek Preparative Meeting of Friends on Second Month 7, 1855. It was a subordinate meeting of Three Rivers Monthly Meeting which already included South River, Middle River, and Indianola Preparative Meetings. Three Rivers Monthly Meeting, in turn, was subordinate to Pleasant Plain Quarterly Meeting. The first Friends coming to Bear Creek seem to have left their membership certificates with Pleasant Plain Monthly Meeting, which was centered at the present village of Pleasant Plain in southeastern Iowa.

Plans for building the first meetinghouse at Bear Creek were begun in the early part of 1855, and the building seems to have been substantially completed by the end of 1856. The meetinghouse was located on the east end of a five acre lot which had been

donated by Joseph Cook. The present Bear Creek grave yard had already been located at the west end of this lot early in 1854. This meetinghouse seems also to have served as a school house until 1866.

The Summit Grove Preparative Meeting was opened on Seventh Month, 1855. On Seventh Month 16, 1856, Bear Creek Monthly Meeting was organized, consisting of Bear Creek Preparative Meeting and Summit Grove Preparative Meeting. The Monthly Meeting alternated between Bear Creek and Summit Grove.

On Third Month 10<sup>th</sup>, 1860, South River Quarterly Meeting was opened at South River (now Ackworth) in Warren County, Iowa, at the direction of Indiana Yearly Meeting. Friends in south central Iowa must have rejoiced that they need no longer journey to Pleasant Plain to attend quarterly meeting. Bear Creek Friends made an addition to their meetinghouse in order to be able to entertain quarterly meeting at Bear Creek. South River Quarter became part of Iowa Yearly Meeting when Iowa Yearly Meeting was set off from Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1863.

Besides Bear Creek and Summit Grove, there were three other centers where Friends formed settlements. The smallest of these was Oakland, located about a mile north of the present town of Redfield. It included the families of John Lee and John Lamb. Oakland was established as a preparative meeting in 1858, but by Fourth Month, 1861 this was discontinued.

The Spring Valley settlement was located about two miles north and east of Casey, about ten miles west of Summit Grove. It included the Chantry, Wrigley, and Betts families. Unlike the other settlements, these people seem to have come almost directly from Pennsylvania. An indulged meeting for worship was allowed in 1858. This developed into Spring Valley

Preparative Meeting, which was opened Twelfth Month 31, 1862.

The North Branch settlement surrounded and included the site of the present town of Earlham. As has already been mentioned, the John Wilson family had located in this area as early as 1853. Besides Wilsons, other early families at North Branch included Barnetts, Stantons, Hocketts, Allens, Griffins, and Millses. A meeting for worship was opened at North Branch on Sixth Month 20, 1861, and North Branch Preparative Meeting was first held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Seventh Month, 1863. By that time they had built a temporary meetinghouse about three miles east and south of the present Earlham corporate limits.

Until 1865, all of the Friends in the settlements at Bear Creek, North Branch, Summit Grove, and Sprint Valley were members of Bear Creek Monthly Meeting. However, on Tenth Month 7, 1865 Summit Grove Monthly Meeting was opened by South River Quarterly Meeting. This new monthly meeting included Summit Grove Preparative Meeting and Spring Valley Preparative Meeting.

In 1866, following the division of Bear Creek Monthly Meeting, Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting was set off from South River Quarterly Meeting. The new quarterly meeting included only the two monthly meetings of Bear Creek and Summit Grove.

However, North Branch Preparative Meeting continued to prosper. In 1867 they built a new meetinghouse located at the present North Branch cemetery site. On Fourth Month 22, 1867, Union Preparative Meeting was organized by Friends living to the west of North Branch. A meetinghouse was soon built, located in the northeast corner of Penn Township, Madison County. When the town of Earlham was organized shortly thereafter, this meetinghouse was moved into the village a mile or so away. On Ninth Month 30, 1869, North Branch Monthly Meeting was organized, consisting of the two preparative meetings, North Branch and Union.

#### Wiscotta, Middle Coon, and East Grove Meetings

Bear Creek Monthly Meeting continued to set off preparative meetings in the years following the Civil War, but these all tended to be of short duration.

The village of Wiscotta waxed and waned as a center of enterprise during the 1860's. Wiscotta Preparative Meeting was opened in the summer of 1865 and seemed to prosper for a few years. A meetinghouse was built, a scripture school was maintained for a time, and Wiscotta Friends contributed a significant amount to the Monthly Meeting budget. It was not until Fifth Month 27, 1876 that Wiscotta Preparative Meeting was discontinued.

In 1867 Middle Coon Preparative Meeting was established, composed of Friends living on Mosquito Creek and on the north side of the Middle

Raccoon River, some distance west and north of the present town of Redfield. It appears that many members of this group soon moved away to other areas. The meeting was discontinued in First Month, 1871.

For the purposes of this particular study, we should take special note of the brief history of another preparative meeting... East Grove. East Grove Preparative Meeting was organized Fourth Month 15, 1869 at the home of Ruth Newlin, about 2 1/2 miles east and north of Bear Creek Meeting. A meetinghouse was soon built, just south of the Newlin homestead. By Eleventh Month, 1871 this building had been moved to a location a mile farther east, at the bottom of the hill south of the homestead where Clifford and Genevieve Rater now reside. On Tenth Month 30, 1870 the men's minutes of the preparative meeting list the following heads of families: J.F. Hanson, S.H. Bufkin, M.M. Davidson, A.S. Newlin, Abner Newlin, Edward Hadley, Jesse Hadley, Jasper Hadley, W.S. Ramsey, Ambrose Kenworthy.

This list did not include the name of George Standing, since George and Deborah Standing and five sons did not arrive at Bear Creek until the summer of 1871.

This meeting included two recorded ministers: Ruth Newlin and John Frederic Hanson. A scripture school was conducted, at least for part of the year. Deborah Standing and Jasper Hadley cooperated in planning the scripture school program during the later period of the meeting's existence.

But some of the families of attenders at East Grove decided to join the United Brethren. Some of the Friends moved away, and John Frederic

Hanson left for a lengthy religious visit to Norway. Of the members who remained, some wanted to rejoin the larger meeting at Bear Creek. So the East Grove Preparative Meeting was laid down in Eighth Month, 1873.

However, some of the Friends, who did not have strong ties at Bear Creek and who did not appreciate the "progressive" emphasis which was stressed there, were sad to see the doors of their little meeting closed. Abner Newlin, then scarcely more than 20 years of age, was the last clerk of the men's preparative meeting for business at East Grove. At the bottom of the final page of minutes he wrote: "Said meeting existed 4 years, 5 mo., 3d."

### The Civil War Time

We cannot, in this paper, deal at length with all aspects of pioneer life in the settlements of Bear Creek Quarter. Darius B. Cook, in his History of Quaker Divide, has provided much descriptive material of this kind. Since it presented particular challenges and problems to Friends, we might say a few words about the Civil War period and the Quaker response during that time.

During the years immediately preceding the war, the pioneer cabins at Summit Grove and Bear Creek occasionally served as stops on the

Underground Railroad. Blacks who were escaping from slavery in Missouri would sometimes be hidden in Quaker wagons and transported from one place to another as they made their way east to Des Moines and then onward to Canada.

In the time of the Civil War, the young Quaker men were torn between their obligation to maintain the peace testimony of Friends and their desire to actively support the struggle against slavery. Some from the Bear Creek settlement voluntarily enlisted in the army. Others accepted combatant or non-combatant service when they were drafted, rather than seek exemption by payment of \$300 or the furnishing of a substitute.

As the war drew to its close, two families of ex-slaves from Tennessee located in the Bear Creek community for a time, and their children attended local schools. After the war had ended, considerable support was given to the Freedman's Committee. Interest in the work of this committee rose

dramatically when a local Friends couple, Darius and Rebecca Bowles, assumed teaching duties at a "freedman's school" in Booneville, Missouri.

## The Separation of 1877

During the years following the Civil War there was a substantial increase in religious activity within the meetings of Bear Creek Quarter. This was part of a general trend throughout Iowa Yearly Meeting and in other Friends communities throughout the Midwest.

In addition to the regular Firstday and mid-week meetings for worship, the scripture school at Bear Creek seems to have been conducted on a yeararound basis, while smaller meetings often had scripture schools during part of the year. In addition, there were sometimes afternoon meetings on Firstday and numerous youths' meetings. Then, in accordance with the approval of the Iowa Yearly Meeting of 1872, General Meetings of several days' duration came to be held "for worship and the dissemination of the principles of the Christian religion".

This increase in activity, in itself, would not have aroused any strong opposition on the part of most Friends. What was disturbing was the fact that methods and techniques and systems of theology were being adopted which were at variance with, or contradictory to, traditional Friends' practices and Friends' beliefs.

The leaders of this new surge of activity came to adopt the general patterns of evangelism prevailing in the Midwest and on the frontier at that time. This approach maintained that man, as a child of the fallen Adam, is essentially sinful. Individuals can only be saved from their fallen condition through a definite and intense conversion experience whereby, through the acceptance of the gift of salvation wrought by Christ's sacrifice, their sins are forgiven and washed away. The revival meeting was designed as a technique whereby the attainment of this intense conversion experience could be facilitated.

For a number of Friends, this revision and transformation of Quaker faith and practice brought a sense of release and renewal. This seemed to be particularly true among the younger generation. However, for certain other Friends, both old and young, this approach was most unsatisfactory, not only because it was not in harmony with traditional Friends' ways, but because it did not speak to their own conditions. Ella Newlin, who was a young woman in her later teens at the time, has written as follows:

"It is not for me to say there was no good done, as thy faith so shall it be unto thee. The lives of some were changed. There are also those who were changed in quiet meetings. I attended many revival meetings, but they never stirred anything in me or reached my case. I was hungry and thirsty for the bread and water of Life. I did not believe what the leaders told us, that if we would go to the mourner's bench and let them pray for us, we would be converted.

"Every bench wherever I sat was a mourner's bench. I knew I needed Christ and must have Him, but He was not in that for me. I felt it would only increase my burden to attempt to do as they urged us to do. "It would bring condemnation and not the peace I longed for. It was too cheap for me. I wanted the real thing or nothing at all. It would do me no good to be converted when I knew it was not true. . .

"Hicksism carried away many people and caused a great split about 1827. . . They denied the outward Christ as being any more than a good man. . . They spiritualized the outward all away.

"Then (John Wilbur said) right on the heels of this great schism, came the other extreme. While people were watching for the enemy behind them, he slips in unaware and undetected by many and emphasized the outward historical Christ and his offering on the cross as all sufficient to save us. We had only to believe and make a public confession of it and it could be obtained any time at our own will. Forgetting that, "If we be reconciled by His death, how much more will we be saved by His life." The Comforter which he promised to send, the spirit of truth which shall lead you unto all truth. Our part is to consent to be led and to follow on to know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. This is the Inner Light so emphasized by early Friends. "That was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Not something saved over by the fall, but a free gift through Jesus Christ our Lord, whereby man can work out his soul's salvation by obedience to the light. It comes by degrees as we are able to bear...." 1

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1 Ella Newlin, "Written by Ella Newlin in 1935", (typed manuscript)

The leaders of this evangelistic movement among Friends made use of the General Meetings to advance their own goals. Although theoretically these meetings were to be held strictly within the context of established Friends' procedures, more and more these General Meetings turned out to be, in fact, revival meetings.

This was not a sudden development. As early as 1867, Stacy Bevan and John S. Bond, traveling ministers with minutes, one from Honey Creek Monthly Meeting and the other from Bangor Monthly Meeting, held a meeting at Bear Creek which took on many of the aspects of a revival meeting. However, the use of these techniques and procedures accelerated during the years, and, among certain groups of Friends, dissatisfaction with this approach to matters of religion also increased.

Things came to a climax in Second Month, 1877, when a General Meeting was held at Bear Creek immediately following the regular Quarterly Meeting sessions. The meetings began on Firstday evening and extended through Thirdday after the usual order. But on Fourthday morning a "call" was made by one of the men in charge of the meeting. ..for all those who wished to forsake sin and lead a different life to come to the front seats.

Then, in the words of Darius B. Cook:

"... About twenty arose at once, some not waiting to reach the aisles stepped over seats, and the "mourners" bench was again introduced into Bear Creek Meeting. Great confusion followed. Some who did not come forward were visited at their seats, where prayer groups were formed. Some in the room were praying, others weeping aloud, some were pleading, and occasionally another would break in with a stanza or two of hymn. The more conservative Friends, who had been dissatisfied all along with these revolutionary revival methods, and had used their influence to hold it in check, or keep it out, were much hurt by this move. Apparently by common impulse, they left the meeting and began to depart for their homes 2

There seems to be little record of what transpired in the three month interval after this General Meeting, but on Fifth Month 29, 1877 a conference was held at Bear Creek which was attended by those members of

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2 Darius B. Cook, Memoirs of Quaker Divide (Dexter, Iowa: The Dexter Sentinel, 1914), p. 70-71.

Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting who were dissatisfied with the changed order of the Society of Friends. A statement was approved in which they endeavored to set forth their particular grievances.

They believed that there was too much dependence upon outward means, thereby drawing away from the spirituality of the gospel, a settling down at ease in a literal knowledge and belief of the truths of the Holy Scriptures.— They feared that an effort was being made to explain the sacred truths of religion in terms comprehensible by unassisted reason, so as to avoid the mortifying experience of becoming a fool for Christ's sake and taking up the daily cross to the wisdom and friendship, the honor and the fashions of the world.— They were skeptical of running into great activity in certain religious and benevolent undertakings, while neglecting other important areas of concern. — They saw a tendency to undervalue the writings of the early Friends, particularly such writings as Robert Barclay's Apology for the True Christian Divinity. They objected to the introduction into meetings for worship much formality in the way of reading and singing and in the character of the ministry and prayer. — Lastly, they objected to the manner in which General Meetings were conducted.

This conference sent an extract of its minutes to the constituent monthly meetings of the quarterly meeting. This extract reads as follows:

"At a conference of Friends, members of Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting, held Fifth Month 29<sup>th</sup>, 1877, it was decided that the time had fully come when it was incumbent upon us in order to support our ancient doctrines and principles to disclaim the offices of the non-descript body now in church government, and replace them by those in unity with the doctrines and in favor of supporting our ancient principles and testimonies." <sup>1</sup>

Of the three monthly meetings of the Quarterly Meeting, North Branch was the only one in which the "conservative" party was numerous enough to offer any significant challenge to the "progressive" element. But even at North Branch the Conservatives could not effect the reorganization they desired in the face of the opposition at their next regular monthly meeting on Sixth Month 16, 1877. They had to withdraw from the meeting and meet - 12separately the following week and set up a separate organization. At North Branch the Conservatives managed to retain control of the North Branch Meetinghouse, while the Progressives held all of their meetings henceforth at the Union Meetinghouse in Earlham.

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, op. cit., p. 83

At Bear Creek the Conservatives did not even try to directly challenge the Progressive faction. On the next regular Monthly Meeting day, Sixth Month 30, 1877, they withdrew to the Bear Creek schoolhouse and held their separate Monthly Meeting.

At Summit Grove the little group of Conservatives met at the home of Margaret Bowles for worship on a Firstday morning. At the close of the meeting, a short conference was held to decide on future plans. The decision was made to meet the Seventh of Seventh Month, 1877, to organize a separate Monthly Meeting.

These three Conservative Monthly Meetings each prepared a report to the Quarterly Meeting to be held at Bear Creek on Eighth Month 12h These reports were not presented to the Quarterly Meeting which convened in the Bear Creek Meetinghouse. Instead, the Conservative Friends met at the Bear Creek schoolhouse and carried on a separate Quarterly Meeting. At this meeting reports were addressed to Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends to be held at Oskaloosa, Iowa, Ninth Month 5<sup>th</sup>, 1877.

When Iowa Yearly Meeting convened at Oskaloosa the following month, it was presented with two sets of reports from Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting. These reports were referred by the Yearly Meeting to the representatives from the other Quarters. These representatives rejected the reports of the Conservative group.

So the seventeen Conservative Friends from Bear Creek Quarter withdrew from the meetinghouse, gathered in the corner of the yard to decide what to do, secured the use of another building in Oskaloosa, and proceeded to organize a Yearly Meeting.

It is difficult for us to comprehend today the lonely situation in which these seventeen Friends found themselves. They did know that there were - 13other Friends throughout the established Iowa Yearly Meeting who sympathized with them, but they did not know the extent of this sympathy. They did know that they had relatives and former associates in Indiana and in Kansas who shared their views, but no Conservative Yearly Meetings had yet been organized in these states. They did know that they had some kinship with the Wilburite Friends of New England and of Ohio and of Hickory Grove Quaffer in Iowa, but would these Wilburites tolerate the somewhat less

disciplined deportment of these former Gurneyites? Truly, the venture of this little band of Friends was a venture of faith.

Thus did the Conservative Friends of Bear Creek come to a parting of the ways with the majority of the membership of the Yearly Meeting. The question has been asked, "Was this necessary? If Friends had been patient and waited, could not the differences have been reconciled?" To the leaders of the Conservative Friends the answer came to be increasingly clear, "It was necessary." In those Meetings where the Conservative Friends had not withdrawn, but had stayed and tried to maintain their ancient testimonies, the Progressive leadership had paid little heed to their desires. The process of transforming the Meetings into the prevailing Midwest Protestant pattern seemed to proceed on its unalterable course under such circumstances. Only when the Conservative Friends had withdrawn to their separate Meetings was the genuine Quaker culture preserved to any marked degree.

They would readily acknowledge that the way of the Conservative Friends was a lonely way, and it often involved much hardship. Yet, for those who chose to take this way, it offered a sense of inward peace, the feeling that one was walking in accordance with the Truth.

#### The Later History of the Meetings of Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting (Conservative)

At the time of the separation of 1877, the total membership of the three Conservative Monthly Meetings was reported to be 42 families and 21 parts of families, with a total membership of 241. It is not clear how accurate these figures might be or how they were distributed among the meetings. We might estimate that about 50% of this membership was affiliated with North Branch Monthly Meeting, 35% with Bear Creek Monthly Meeting, and 15% with Summit Grove Monthly Meeting. Of these three Monthly Meetings, only Bear Creek exists at this present time. However, these three meetings were integrally related in the years immediately following the separation, and all have left lasting impressions on the character of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative). Therefore, some mention will be made of each Meeting.

#### Summit Grove Monthly Meeting (Conservative)

It appears that the early membership of Summit Grove Monthly Meeting (Conservative) following the separation of 1877 included a number of names from the Spring Valley settlement near Casey, as well as from Summit Grove.

However, evidently only one meeting for worship could be maintained, that at Summit Grove.

A perusal of the minutes of this Monthly Meeting indicates that a fairly active Meeting was functioning for about seven years, from 1877 to 1884. However, by Fifth Month 10, 1884, the transfer of members out had much depleted the number of members. Most of the transferring had been made to Walnut Creek Monthly Meeting in Jewell County, Kansas. A proposal was made to the Quarterly Meeting that the Monthly Meeting be laid down.

The Quarterly Meeting seems to have persuaded the remaining members at Summit Grove to hold on for a while longer. The Monthly Meeting organization was maintained for seven more years, although the level of activity seems to have been very low.

In 1890, Thomas Pickett, a respected member who had moved to Kansas some five years earlier, returned his membership to Summit Grove. Application was made to the Charleston Fund in Philadelphia for \$150 toward building a meetinghouse. The Charleston Fund granted the money, but there is no record in the Monthly Meeting minutes as to whether or not the meetinghouse was built.

On Tenth Month 10, 1891, a certificate of removal was granted to Thomas Pickett, back to Walnut Creek Monthly Meeting in Kansas. At the same Monthly Meeting, another request was made to the Quarterly Meeting that summit Grove Monthly Meeting be laid down. This time the request was granted, and the members were attached to North Branch Monthly Meeting. However, a meeting for worship continued to be held at Summit grove until 1898.

Summit Grove Meeting is important to Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and to Quakerdom at large because it was the Meeting to which many of the Bowles family belonged before they migrated to Kansas and to other areas. A number of descendants of this family still have membership in this Yearly Meeting. Also, Frances Bathurst and Eunice Morris, daughters of Jacob and Rebecca Cook of Summit Grove, retained their Friends membership throughout their lives and were known to many now living.

The book, Ephraim Bowles (his Quaker Heritage), compiled in large part by Joanna Bowles Mott, gives us some interesting insights into the early history of Friends at Summit Grove.

## North Branch Meeting

The history of North Branch Meeting following the separation of 1877 was not spectacular. The reading of the minutes for the years from 1877 to 1891 tends to give a surface impression that all was going well. The routine Monthly Meeting business was carried on properly... the answering of the queries, the appointing of representatives to Quarterly Meeting, etc. The number of families in the Meeting tended to remain about the same.

However, this is evidently a misleading impression. While the older generation remained faithful to the time-honored patterns, the younger people were evidently slipping away. True, some of them were joining the tide of migration to Kansas, to Colorado, and to the Dakotas, but others were attending the meeting of the other branch of Friends in Earlham, or they were joining other religious groups. Visitors to the meeting for worship at North Branch tended to characterize it as lacking in vitality.

While North Branch Monthly Meeting relinquished Union Preparative Meeting as a result of the separation of 1877, it soon gained another preparative meeting, South River. In 1878 a number of Friends in the Ackworth area withdrew from the larger body of Friends in that vicinity and asked to be attached to North Branch Monthly Meeting. They organized South River Preparative Meeting which continued until 1894. At that time, while the Preparative Meeting was laid down, the meeting for worship was still kept up, and it has continued until the present day.

North Branch made one venture in education. A boarding school term was held in the winter of 1883. Twenty students were boarded and a number of others lived at home or arranged for their own board. This school was not continued for another year.

By 1891 most of the members of North Branch were apparently living in the town of Earlham. Suddenly the minutes indicate that they were negotiating to meet in the Methodist church building on Firstday afternoons and Fourthday mornings. This was followed by the making of plans for the moving of the North Branch meetinghouse into Earlham. Finally, it was decided to build a new meetinghouse in Earlham. James Thornton is said to have been the head carpenter in charge of the construction. He seems to have been assisted by William Ramsey and others. The new building was completed late in 1891. It was built to be about the same size as the

meetinghouse at North Branch, large enough so that the North Branch Friends could continue to entertain Iowa Yearly Meeting.

From 1877 through 1881 the Yearly Meeting had been held in Oskaloosa. Then, from 1882 through 1888 it had been held at North Branch. In 1889 the Yearly Meeting began to alternate between West Branch and North Branch, which continued until the Yearly Meeting was held at Paullina for the first time in 1913. It was held in Earlham in 1892, 1894, 1896, 1898, 1900, 1902, 1904, 1907, 1909, and 1911.

William Ramsey is said to have dismantled the vacated meetinghouse at North Branch and used the material to construct a dwelling house for his family. This house, located about three or four miles north of North Branch and overlooking Bear Creek, is still in use. (It burned in 1977.) The walnut benches from the North Branch meetinghouse were transferred to the new meetinghouse in Earlham.

The routine of North Branch Meeting in its Earlham location seems to have been about as unbroken as it had been out in the country. One of the tasks which the Meeting assumed from about 1895 to 1901 was that of

having care for Richard and Mary Cook. This couple had been among the first pioneers in the Bear Creek settlement. They seem to have lived at Summit Grove for some time, and in their later years they had come to

Earlham. In their old age they had fallen into poverty. North Branch Friends saw to it that they had shelter and sustenance during the final years of their lives, although nephews of the couple also assisted with the task.

North Branch Monthly Meeting continued until 1908, when its remaining members, including those of South River Meeting and a few carried over from Summit Grove, were attached to Bear Creek Monthly Meeting. Meetings for worship were continued in the Earlham meetinghouse, sometimes on a rather sporadic basis, until 1916.

Joseph Beezley seems to have been a leader of North Branch Meeting in the years following the separation of 1877. The last clerk of the men's Monthly Meeting was Elwood Mendenhall. In 1909 he married Ruth Rockwell. Within a few years they moved to Paullina, Iowa. From thence the family moved on to Fairhope, Alabama, and finally some of them pioneered in the Friends community at Monte Verde, Costa Rica.

The older Friends of the present Bear Creek Meeting still remember some of the last of the elderly Friends of North Branch Meeting. These included Almeda Wroe, Anne Compton, Christopher Wilson, and Joshua and Louisa Thornton. William, Wilson, and Hannah Diggs, although somewhat younger, also maintained an interest in the meeting. Anne Mills was always on hand to help entertain Friends at Yearly Meeting time.

Some of the Friends at North Branch may have been stern and straightlaced by our present standards. Yet, many of them are remembered as being warm and human people who endeavored to maintain a steadfast Quaker witness in their day and generation.

#### Bear Creek Meeting

Bear Creek Meeting (Conservative), like Summit Grove, was left without a meetinghouse after the separation of 1877. First the Friends met at the home of Lydia Pickering. Then, within a few months, they acquired the house which had been vacated by the Alfred McKinney family, and they fitted it up for use as a meetinghouse. This house was located on a lot to the east of the Bear Creek grave yard. In 1876, before the separation, the first meetinghouse at Bear Creek had been replaced by a larger building in a new location on the north side of the main Bear Creek road a number of rods to the east. Therefore, the Conservative Friends had a pleasant little place to themselves, although they could hear the hymns being sung by the Progressive Friends across the road on summer Firstdays when all of the windows were open.

The foremost leader of the Conservative Friends at Bear Creek was Ruth Newlin. Since 1859 she had been a recorded minister, and she was widely respected in Friends circles outside of her local Meeting. Mention should also be made of the revered Elder, Peter Cook, who lived only until 1880, but who, with his wife Keziah, gave stability and wise counsel to the Meeting in its beginning years.

The Conservative Friends Meeting at Bear Creek, while never large, seems to have constituted a fairly sizeable group in the years immediately following 1877. In the answers to the queries on Eighth Month 15, 1878, the Monthly Meeting reported 18 families and 6 parts of families, for a total membership of 96. However, within the next six years a number of removals were reported, with four or five families going to Walnut Creek Monthly Meeting in Kansas, perhaps stopping for a year or two in the Summit Grove area on the way.

Also, in 1880, there was a time of unpleasantness when the Meeting came to a parting of the ways with Zimri Horner, one of its most influential members, and most of his family.

By Eighth Month 14, 1884, the Meeting could report only 8 families and 7 parts of families in its membership, and this was the approximate size it was to maintain for a number of years to come. Some of those included among the active members and attenders at this time were: Ruth Newlin, Abner and Ella Newlin and their young family, George and Deborah

Standing and their three younger sons... (Charles, Alfred, and Josiah),

Milton and Mary Mills, James Gooden, his sister Elma Gooden, Melvin and Lucinda McGrew, George McNichols, Eli and Melissa Scott, and William

H. and Keziah Cook and William's aged mother, Keziah Cook, Sr. Henry and Eunice Standing and their young family, while members of the Meeting, lived in South Dakota for seven years from about 1884 to 1891, and Henry's brother, Ernest, after also homesteading in Dakota, died in 1886.

When we read the minutes of Bear Creek Monthly Meeting for the years from 1877 to 1890, not a great deal seems to be going on. Yet, unlike the situation at North Branch and Summit Grove, a younger generation is beginning to assume responsibility. There is the young couple, Abner and Ella Newlin, who are determined to carry on in the way of the Conservative Friends, regardless of whether or not the rest of their generation should fall away. There are the Standing brothers, who are conscious of their English Quaker heritage and who have English relatives who visit them from time to time, bringing new ideas from the larger world, ideas about Darwin's theory of evolution, about higher criticism of the Bible, and about new social and political movements. And then there are those elder members of the Meeting who are wise enough and pliable enough to make way for the acceptance of new ideas and new concerns.

A new phase in the life of the Conservative Friends at Bear Creek seems to have begun about 1891. It was at this time that Henry and Eunice Standing and family returned to the community from South Dakota. Abner and Ella Newlin were most anxious to have a Friends' school for their two young sons, Roy and Jay, and the Henry Standings had two daughters of school age, Edith and Bertha. A visiting Friend from the Philadelphia area, Evan Sharpless, had encouraged them in their concern for a school and had given a sum of money

to facilitate the project. So plans were made to build a small school house in the maple grove south of Abner Newlin's house.

A logging crew consisting of Abner Newlin, Henry Standing, Charles Standing, Alfred Standing, and James Gooden proceeded to cut logs from Newlins' woodlot and to drag them across to the other side of the Raccoon River to await the arrival of a portable sawmill. Then, Joanna Bowles, sister of Ella Bowles Newlin, was contacted by mail in Kansas and asked to be the first teacher. After much inner struggle, she gave up other teaching plans in Kansas and agreed to come to Iowa.

The portable sawmill did not arrive for some months to saw the logs, so the schoolhouse was not built until the later spring or summer of 1892. However, Joanna Bowles (later Joanna Mott) taught a successful three months term of school in the spring of 1892, with four pupils, in the parlor of the home of George and Deborah Standing. This was the beginning of what came to be known as Cedar Grove School, an enterprise which was carried on for more than forty years and which served as a focal point of interest for the Conservative Friends of Bear Creek.

The school building stood at its original site near the Newlin homestead from 1892 to 1906. Then it was moved to Alfred Standings' grove, where it stayed until the winter of 1913-1914. Then it was moved to what was known as "Henry Standing's raspberry patch", and in the summer of 1914 a six foot addition was made to the structure. The little white frame building still stands in the last location, although it has not been used as a day-school since 1933. A well written record has been compiled of the history of Cedar Grove School, so little additional reference will be made to it in this paper. Mention should be made of the fact that a number of the children of the large family of William and Susanna Ramsey attended the school, although the Ramseys were actually members of the North Branch Meeting.

Beginning in about 1895, a serious conflict of opinions seemed to exist within Bear Creek Monthly Meeting and within Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting regarding the manner of dealing with delinquent and uninterested members. There were some who pressed for a very stringent policy. They wanted to formally disown everyone who had committed some minor trespass or who was no longer an active member. However, those of another position favored a more lenient policy...desiring that those who wanted to join another

religious group or who were no longer interested in being members should merely be dropped from the membership list after appropriate consultation had been carried on with the parties involved. This controversy caused so much trouble that the Yearly Meeting appointed a committee to visit the meetings of Bear Creek Quarter to deal with the problem. Evidently no resolution was made at Bear Creek until 1908, when the logjam seems to have been broken and inactive members were allowed to be released without the stigma of disownment proceedings.

Ruth Newlin, who had been the only recorded minister of the Meeting, died on Eighth Month 18, 1898, having been a semi-invalid in her later

years. However, at the time of her death, two other gifted persons had already been assuming the burden of the vocal ministry of the Meeting. They were Ella Newlin, who was recorded a minister in 1901, and Charles Standing, who was recorded in 1906. Ella Newlin, generally accompanied by her husband, Abner, traveled extensively in the ministry. During her lifetime she visited within the limits of all of the seven Conservative Yearly Meetings in the United States and Canada, also Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Orthodox). In 1920-1921 she attended the World Conference of Friends in London and traveled extensively in the British Isles and in Europe...

Charles Standing, having many farm and family responsibilities, seldom traveled outside of Iowa. -- Following the death of Charles Standing in 1936, Alfred Standing seemed to assume the mantle of his brother and continued to be a most acceptable minister throughout the remainder of his long life, which was completed in 1967.

By 1902 the Meeting was much dissatisfied with its cramped little meetinghouse, and application was made to the Charleston fund in Philadelphia for a \$500 grant toward building a new meetinghouse. The money was granted, and, with additional money from Meeting members, the building project was soon underway. William Ramsey and Aaron Macy are said to have been the carpenters. The main structure of the meetinghouse was completed by the autumn of 1902. Porches and other improvements were added in 1905. The new meetinghouse was located just east of the old one, east of the Bear Creek grave yard. Both structures are still standing at the time of this writing, although both are in a very deteriorated condition.

In 1904 Paullina Monthly Meeting became a part of Bear Creek

Quarterly Meeting, and strong bonds of friendship developed between the Friends of Paullina and Bear Creek, although 170 miles separated the two Meetings. Especially after Stavanger Boarding School was closed in 1911, students from Bear Creek would take high school work at the Paullina Friends School during the winter months. Throughout the years there have been quite a number of marriages between young people from Paullina and those of Bear Creek and South River.

In 1908, with the laying down of North Branch Monthly Meeting, Bear Creek Monthly Meeting came to assume responsibility of all of the scattered remnants of North Branch and Summit Grove Meetings. By 1911 the little meeting for worship at South River was having difficulty in meeting on a regular basis, and a committee was appointed to have special oversight of South River Meeting. By 1912 the worship group at Earlham was also faltering, and the committee's responsibilities were broadened to include Earlham, also. The Oversight Committee was also given authority to visit scattered members and to appoint meetings as way opened. This committee remained active for about ten years. At the end of that time, while the Earlham Meeting had been definitely terminated, the South River Meeting seemed to be in a considerably stronger condition than ten years previously.

In reviewing the lives of the Friends who were in places of responsibility in Bear Creek Meeting in the years immediately preceding and following 1900, mention should be made of James Gooden. His deliberate judgment served as a balance wheel in Meeting business affairs. He served as clerk of the men's meeting of Bear Creek Monthly Meeting from 1895 to 1908 and again in 1915 and 1916. He served in the same capacity for Bear Creek Quarterly Meeting from 1897 to 1912, and for twelve years he was clerk of the men's meeting of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative), from 1906 through 1917.

In 1909 the Meeting was strengthened by the settlement of a new family within its borders: Chester and Joanna Mott and their two children, Mary and Milford. Joanna Mott has been mentioned previously as having been the first teacher of the Meeting's school. Chester and Joanna had a breadth of outlook and an appreciation of liberal religion which gave much encouragement and comfort to young seekers after truth.

Those who were children in Bear Creek Meeting in the years from 1900 to 1915 have many fond memories of a close-knit community. They talk of the

long rides to meeting on Firstdays and Fifthdays. They mention Nathan Compton, brother of Mary Mills, who lived in a little cottage near the meetinghouse and was in charge of building and grounds. They speak of the three old men: George Standing, Milton Mills, and Ephraim Bowles all hard of hearing and one or two wearing earphones, who would always greet each other in the same manner at the rise of meeting for worship. They recall family gatherings and picnics and visiting in one another's homes --where they became so fully conscious of the various strengths and weaknesses of their neighbors.

By 1916 the time had come when the little meeting for worship in the meetinghouse in Earlham had to be finally laid down. Also, all but one of the families who regularly attended Bear Creek Conservative Meeting now lived in the general area three or four miles north of Earlham. Only James Gooden, with his foster parents, Milton and Mary Mills, still resided on their farm about three miles from the Bear Creek Conservative meetinghouse which was located near the Bear Creek grave yard. When James Gooden bought a car, the distance they must travel to meeting was no longer such an important factor. So the decision was made to move the meetinghouse in Earlham out to the lot where the Cedar Grove school had already been located since 1914, on land previously owned by Henry Standing.

So William Mott, a Friend from Iowa City who was engaged in the house-moving business, was engaged to have responsibility for the job. A basement was dug, and by Tenth Month, 1916 the meetinghouse was situated at its new location. Iowa Yearly Meeting was held in this resituated meetinghouse in 1917 and in 1920. Since that time, the Yearly Meeting has only been held at Bear Creek in one other year, 1946, although the Meeting has entertained Mid-year Meeting in 1958, 1976, and 1977.

During the year of 1915 the clouds of war began to grow ominous. Friends at Bear Creek organized a Peace Committee. They kept in contact with peace efforts by Friends throughout the country. Numerous letters and telegrams were sent to the President and to Iowa's Senators and Representatives in Washington, D.C.

In Fourth Month of 1917 the United States declared war. The Conservative Friends of Bear Creek, as well as the other Friends in the community who sought to maintain their peace testimony, were put to a severe test.

Strong pressure was applied to induce the Friends to purchase war bonds. A number of the older men of Bear Creek Meeting were called to the county seat at Adel, where those in charge of selling the bonds dealt with them in a strenuous way. It was about this time that James Gooden was recovering from a broken arm which had resulted from a kick by a horse. Some self-styled "patriots", knowing that he had refused to buy war bonds, took it upon themselves to persuade him to change his mind. In shoving him into an automobile, they reinjured his arm.

In the summer of 1918, Arthur Standing and Jesse Standing, along with other Friends from Iowa: John Cope, Sidney Henderson, Lawrence Dewees, and Curtis Smith, were drafted into the army and sent to Camp Gordon in the state of Georgia. Here they refused both to engage in military training or to perform non-combatant service. The military officers proceeded to make things very difficult for them. In their letters home, certain code signs made it evident to their elders in Iowa that things were not going at all well with them. Charles Standing and Clarkson Moffitt journeyed to Georgia and visited with the Iowa men and had conversations with the military officials. Following their visit, the conditions seem to improve at Camp Gordon for the conscientious objectors. Arthur Standing and Sidney Henderson were soon paroled to the American Friends Service Committee to engage in reconstruction work in France. Jay Newlin, from Bear Creek Conservative Meeting, also did work in France with the A.F.S.C. at this time. Jesse Standing and most of the other Iowa Friends at Camp Gordon were granted farm furloughs.

A number of Friends and other conscientious objectors were detained at Camp Dodge in Des Moines. Bear Creek Friends had opportunities to visit them there. Three Friends received farm furloughs to work in the Bear Creek neighborhood. These were William McCracken and Cecil Haworth from Kansas, and Loren Adamson from Ackworth, Iowa.

Following the war, the 1920's were a time of considerable activity for members of the Meeting. Several of the older young people were attending William Penn College. There were a number of marriages during this period, and new families were established. The high school age young people often attended Scattergood School, although a few attended for at least a year or two at the Friends Boarding School at Barnesville, Ohio.

From 1918 until 1927 or later, Edith Newlin taught in the Friends Girls School in Tokyo, Japan. She was back in the U.S. on furlough for a year in 1923-1924. During this time, Gilbert and Minnie Bowles were also serving in Japan, as were Herbert and Madeline Nicholson and family. The Bosleses and Nicholsons would occasionally stop by at Bear Creek on their way to or from Japan and would share their experiences with their Iowa relatives.

The decade of the 1930's was a time of austerity at Bear Creek, as it was elsewhere. Years of depression, combined with years of drought, made life especially difficult for young families. But older Friends, who had often mortgaged their farms to help finance the education and advancement of their children, also found themselves in precarious financial circumstances. It was a time for trying to make do with basic necessities, of sharing meager resources, and of hoping for better times.

Cedar Grove School was closed as a Meeting school in 1932, although it continued on for another year on something of an independent basis, with an older daughter of one of the families virtually volunteering her services as teacher. The financial difficulties of the time made it almost impossible to raise any significant amount of salary for a teacher. Also, some of the parents were no longer convinced that this kind of "guarded" education was best for their children. Some of the older students of the Meeting attended Friends Boarding School in Ohio. After 1944, when Scattergood School at West Branch was reopened, a number of young people from Bear Creek attended at Scattergood.

On Tenth Month 26, 1935 a significant decision was made by the Monthly Meeting, to combine the men's and women's meetings for business.

With the coming of the 1940's, the economic problems declined, but Friends faced another time of war. This time there was little in the way of harassment. The neighborhood people and the government authorities were

generally much more tolerant and understanding. However, young men had to again face the draft and make the decision as to whether or not they would cooperate with the military system. In the years of World War II, 1941-1945, there were not many young men of draft age who were actual members of Bear Creek Meeting, and some of these received farm deferments. However, there were young men in close association with the Meeting who served in Civilian Public Service or elected to take a nonregistrant or non-cooperative position in regard to Selective Service.

Friendly relations were maintained with the C.P.S. unit located at Ames, Iowa.

Then, a few years later, another challenge was posed by the requirement to register again under the Selective Service Act of 1948. At that time Henry Standing and Roy Knight took the non-registrant position, also Herbert Standing and Leland Standing from the Bear Creek community, as did a number of other Friends and pacifists from Iowa and throughout the country. As a consequence of this action, twenty-two men from Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas were sentenced to prison for 18 months at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri. Most of these were released on parole within six or eight months.

In the later 1940's and early 1950's a number of young families spent substantial periods of time in the Bear Creek community before moving on to new areas of endeavor elsewhere. These included the families of James and Josephine Ball, Arthur and Carolyn Emery, Burton and Alberta Kisling, and Allen and Bertha Osborne.

In 1950 the Peace and Temperance Committee of the Meeting sponsored a refugee family from eastern Europe, the John Merkilov family. This proved to be an interesting and generally rewarding project for all concerned.

During the years following 1940, and extending into the 1950's, there seemed to be a resurgence of the Fundamentalist emphasis within most of the Meetings of the "Progressive" Friends of Iowa. There was a renewed reliance upon revival meeting techniques and an insistence upon a particular interpretation of the Bible. This did not seem to be especially dissimilar to the emphasis which had been made at the time of the separation of 1877. The Conservative Meetings became a refuge for those who could not accept this

Fundamentalist kind of religion, and Bear Creek Meeting served as one of these places of refuge.

It was during this same period, particularly in the decade following World War II, that new Friends Meetings began to form in the larger cities and university centers of Iowa. The Meeting at Ames was somewhat an outgrowth of the Civilian Public Service unit which had been located there.

As time went by, some of the attenders of the Ames Meeting wanted more tangible Friends membership than that provided by an independent worship group. Therefore, some of them applied for membership in Bear Creek Monthly Meeting, and they were accepted. Eventually way opened for most the city and university Meetings throughout Iowa to become constituent Monthly Meetings of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative). The experience of a number of Ames Friends with membership at Bear Creek seemed to serve as something of a bridge between the old Meetings and the new.

As for the past twenty-five years among the Conservative Friends at Bear Creek, perhaps not too much need be said. From a rather low point in the late 1950's, there seemed to be an increase in attendance and activity in the 1960's. But now an older generation is fast slipping away. The little group of those who are younger sometimes feel discouraged as they endeavor to maintain a meaningful community in the midst of the diverse challenges and demands of today's world.

But the old white-frame meetinghouse still stands there in the midst of its peaceful rural surroundings. Friends from across Iowa yearly Meeting (Conservative) like to assemble there each spring for Mid-year Meeting. For many individuals and families scattered throughout the United States and throughout the world, Bear Creek Meeting is still a symbol of a cherished Quaker faith, a place to which they can return home. So, as we remember the great faithfulness of those who have gone before, may we in our own time be strengthened, that the Conservative Friends of Bear Creek may have a witness in the future as they have had a witness in the past.

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