

## ANNUAL MEETING:

**Our Annual Meeting** will be held on Saturday, November 9, 2024, at the historic Centre Friends Meeting, 325 NC 62 East, Greensboro, NC. It will begin at 9:30 a.m. with refreshments.



Ron Osborne

This year's talk will be presented by Ron Osborne. The ninth generation of his family growing up in the Centre Friends Meeting community of rural Guilford County and 13th generation North Carolina Quaker, Ron Osborne developed a love of history and for learning more about his family's stories. The first of those accounts were given to him while at the knee of his grandparents and elders, listening to their recollections.

Leaving home, Ron earned a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from

North Carolina State University and became a licensed professional engineer, embarking on a 35-year utility career. All the while, he continued to explore history, and collect family stories.

Retiring in 2019 as the emergency preparedness manager for Duke Energy's North and South Carolina distribution system, history continues to remain his first passion.

An amateur historian/storyteller, Ron and his wife of 34 years, Elizabeth, raised their three kids on their small farm in southern Alamance County. The two of them still live there, devoting time to the cadence of farm life, traveling broadly, and maintaining an active presence in their congregation, Spring Friends Meeting, and within numerous social justice and progressive initiatives. Ron currently serves as Chair of the Alamance County Democratic Party

An interesting side note is that he is the father of Sarah McCombie, of the musical duo, Chatham Rabbits.

Ron will be speaking about the life of William Bales Hockett (1828-1905). Hockett was a conscientious objector during the Civil War. Even so, he found himself drafted but refused to fight. He wound up imprisoned by the Union Army. He was assisted by Philadelphia Quakers and his case was heard by Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War. He was freed and returned to the

Centre community in 1865 to live out the rest of his days. He is buried at the Centre Meeting graveyard.

There is no charge for the event. Please bring your Friends and friends.

Editor's Note: We are pleased to present an edited version of Beulah Gullion's "Friends Divided: Willie Frye and the Conflict of Consciences."

### **THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF WILLIE FRYE**

**Taken from "Friends Divided: Willie Frye and the Conflict of Conscience"**

By Beulah Gullion

#### **Introduction**

Willie Frye (1931–2013), a Quaker minister from Virginia, became a pivotal figure in the debates over social justice within the Southern Quaker community during the late 20th century. Known for his unyielding commitment to conscience, Frye's life embodied the tensions between conservative evangelical Christianity and the emerging progressive movements for racial integration and LGBTQIA rights. Born and raised in the evangelical Christian tradition, Frye began his ministry as a fundamentalist preacher, but his beliefs gradually evolved as he encountered and confronted the challenges of social injustice. His advocacy for racial integration within his congregation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in the late 1960s

and early 1970s marked the beginning of his public defiance against prevailing social norms. Frye's theological journey led him further into controversy as he became one of the first Southern Quaker leaders to openly support LGBTQIA rights during the culture wars of the 1990s. His efforts not only reflected the ideological divisions within the North Carolina Quaker community but also underscored the broader conflicts between tradition and change in American religion during this period. By examining Frye's life and ministry, this article sheds light on the complexities of religious conscience, community, and activism in the late 20th-century South.

#### **Conflict and Advocacy: Racial Integration**

Willie Frye's ministry took a pivotal turn when he became the pastor of Winston-Salem Friends Meeting in North Carolina in 1968. Having previously served at White Plains and Goldsboro Friends Meetings, Frye was already known for his deep commitment to social justice and equality. However, it was at Winston-Salem that he first faced significant opposition to his advocacy efforts (Gullion). The conflict began when Frye invited an African American speaker to his pulpit, an action that challenged the congregation's unspoken norm of racial exclusivity. Several members objected to Frye's invitation, prompting him to confront the issue of racial integration directly within the meeting. Frye pushed for Winston-Salem Friends Meeting to formally commit to welcoming members regardless of race,

arguing that the congregation's actions needed to match its professed Quaker values of equality and inclusion. His challenge led to heated debates and sparked a division within the congregation. Frye insisted that he needed a "free pulpit" and the assurance that all members would be treated equally according to Quaker principles. He declared, "I am a Quaker, and if I cannot be allowed to be a Quaker in this Meeting, I will be one elsewhere," underscoring his readiness to leave rather than compromise his beliefs.

The conflict escalated as Frye's call for racial inclusivity met with resistance from a significant portion of the congregation. This resistance led to the involvement of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting's Pastor-Meeting Relations Committee, which attempted to mediate the dispute. The committee's intervention, however, failed to resolve the issue, and tensions continued to mount. Frye and his family endured personal attacks and ostracism, including slanderous rumors about his children and threats to their safety. Despite these challenges, Frye remained resolute in his efforts to integrate the congregation and promote racial justice. Eventually, the conflict led to a formal schism within Winston-Salem Friends Meeting. In November 1971, the decision was made to split the meeting, resulting in the creation of a new congregation, Forsyth Friends Meeting, which would adhere more closely to Frye's vision of an inclusive community. For Frye, this outcome was both a victory and a sobering reminder of the deep divisions within his religious

community. He continued to advocate for social justice, partnering with various racial justice initiatives and expanding his ministry to address broader issues of inequality. The experience at Winston-Salem Friends Meeting marked a turning point in Frye's ministry, solidifying his commitment to activism and setting the stage for his later advocacy on behalf of LGBTQIA rights.

### **Key Turning Points and Activism for LGBTQIA Rights**

Willie Frye's commitment to social justice took a defining turn in the 1990s when he became a prominent advocate for LGBTQIA rights within the North Carolina Quaker community. This period marked a series of key turning points in his ministry, where his evolving theology and activism put him in direct conflict with many members of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (NCYM). Frye's activism began to center on challenging the exclusionary practices and conservative interpretations of scripture that prevailed among many Quaker congregations in the South. The most significant turning point came in 1993 when Frye published his two-part pamphlet, "Homosexuality: An Attempt at Dialogue." In these pamphlets, Frye argued for a more open and inclusive understanding of Christian teachings regarding sexuality. He called for a re-examination of biblical texts that were traditionally used to condemn homosexuality, proposing instead a theology that recognized the inherent worth and dignity of LGBTQIA individuals. Frye's writings emphasized

dialogue and understanding, urging his fellow Quakers to move beyond rigid doctrinal positions and embrace a more compassionate and just approach.

The reaction to Frye's pamphlets was immediate and intense. Many conservative members of the NCYM saw his position as a direct threat to traditional Quaker beliefs and practices. Accusations were made that Frye was spreading "new age" ideologies and aligning with secular movements that deviated from the "truth of the gospel." Some Friends called for Frye to step down from his leadership roles and even suggested that his involvement in the Yearly Meeting be curtailed. The backlash against Frye was both personal and public; he received hate mail, and there were harsh criticisms regarding his support for LGBTQIA individuals, particularly concerning his openly gay son.

Despite the growing opposition, Frye did not relent. He continued to speak out and write in support of LGBTQIA inclusion, drawing on his faith as a source of courage and guidance. Frye became actively involved with organizations such as the Piedmont Friends for Gay and Lesbian Concern and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), working to build bridges between LGBTQIA individuals and faith communities. His activism extended beyond his own Quaker circles; he frequently contributed to publications like *Friends Journal* and the national newsletter of Friends for Gay and Lesbian Concern, amplifying his message of inclusion to a broader audience.

Frye's advocacy efforts were not only a response to external conflicts but also deeply rooted in his own spiritual journey and evolving theology. He saw his work as a fulfillment of the Quaker testimony of equality, which called for recognizing "that of God in everyone." His engagement in LGBTQIA rights was consistent with his belief that the Quaker commitment to peace and justice demanded an unwavering stand against all forms of discrimination and exclusion. Frye believed that by affirming the lives and dignity of LGBTQIA individuals, the Quaker community could more fully live out its spiritual principles.

While Frye's activism cost him friendships and standing within certain Quaker circles, it also positioned him as a leader in the movement for LGBTQIA inclusion in Southern religious communities. His efforts helped foster greater dialogue and reflection within the NCYM, prompting some members to reconsider their positions and sparking discussions that reverberated throughout the wider Quaker world. Frye's work demonstrated that faith could be a force for social change, challenging long-standing prejudices and advocating for a more just and loving world.

By the end of his life, Frye's activism had left a lasting impact on the North Carolina Quaker community. His willingness to confront exclusionary practices and advocate for marginalized individuals helped shape a more inclusive vision of Quakerism in the South. Frye's legacy serves as a reminder of the power of personal

conviction and the role of religious communities in the ongoing struggle for equality and human rights.

## Conclusion

Willie Frye's life and ministry illustrate the profound challenges and complexities of living a faith-driven commitment to social justice in the face of institutional resistance and societal change. From his early advocacy for racial integration within the Quaker community to his later support for LGBTQIA rights, Frye's journey reflects the evolving landscape of American religion during the late 20th century. His unwavering dedication to his conscience, even when it meant confronting deeply held traditions and facing personal and professional consequences, demonstrates the enduring power of individual conviction in the pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable world. Frye's theological evolution – from a conservative evangelical background to an inclusive Quaker minister – was not just a personal transformation but a reflection of broader conflicts within American Christianity over issues of race, sexuality, and social justice. His efforts to reframe Quaker theology to embrace marginalized communities, especially LGBTQIA individuals, challenged both his local congregation and the wider North Carolina Yearly Meeting to confront their assumptions and biases. In doing so, Frye positioned himself as a bridge between tradition and progress, exemplifying a faith that was dynamic, compassionate, and inclusive.

While Frye is perhaps best known for his pioneering advocacy of LGBTQIA rights, he also fought tirelessly for racial equality throughout his ministry. His courageous stance on racial integration in the 1960s and 1970s laid the groundwork for his later activism, demonstrating his consistent commitment to justice and the Quaker principle of recognizing "that of God in everyone." Frye's dedication to both causes – despite facing considerable backlash and personal hardship – shows how deeply interconnected these struggles for equality were in his vision of a just society.

Though his advocacy was often met with opposition and hostility, Frye's work played a crucial role in fostering dialogue and reflection within the Southern Quaker community. His legacy continues to resonate, offering a model of how religious communities can engage with issues of equality and human rights in ways that are both faithful to their core values and responsive to the needs of the present. Frye's life serves as a testament to the transformative potential of faith when coupled with courage, empathy, and a commitment to justice for all.

For those interested in learning more about Frye's work and the history of Quakerism, his papers, housed in the Quaker Archives at Guilford College, are a rich source of wisdom and insight. These documents offer a valuable glimpse into the challenges, conflicts, and triumphs of a minister who sought to live out his values with integrity and boldness. Frye's archives remain an essential resource for anyone interested

in the complexities of Quaker history, social justice, and the intersection of faith and activism.

By examining Frye's ministry, we see the critical importance of individual and communal efforts to align religious practice with the principles of justice and love. His story is a reminder that the path to social change is often fraught with conflict but also rich with opportunities for growth, understanding, and healing. In the end, Willie Frye's example encourages us to consider how we, too, might live out our values with integrity and boldness in the face of adversity, advocating for justice in all its forms.

**NATHANAEL GREENE**  
**August 7, 1742 - June 19, 1786**

By Linda Willard

Nathanael Greene was born August 7, 1742, in Potowomut, Warwick, Rhode Island, to Nathanael Greene Sr. and his second wife, Mary Mott Greene. His father, a Quaker, was a prosperous merchant and farmer. While Greene's early education was limited, he used every available moment to read. He saved his money and used it to purchase books, eventually acquiring a large personal library.

Greene was reared in the Quaker faith, but at an early age he developed a strong interest in the military. Prior to the American Revolution, Greene lived a quiet life as a blacksmith in his family's iron foundry in Coventry, Rhode Island.

In 1770, Greene was elected to the Rhode Island General Assembly and became an advocate for American independence. In 1773, Greene attended a military parade or drill and was subsequently expelled from his Quaker meeting.

In 1774, Greene married Catherine Littlefield. The Greens had six children.

Also in 1774, Greene began what would become a very illustrious military career when he helped to organize the Kentish Guards, a Rhode Island militia unit. Due to a slight limp from childhood, he was only allowed to serve as a private in the Kentish Guards. Greene later commanded the Rhode Island Army of Observation and became a brigadier general in the Continental Army. His performance in 1776 during the siege of Boston so impressed General George Washington that Washington gave Greene the command of the military forces of Boston after the British evacuated the city. Greene was only thirty-four years old at the time making him the youngest Major General in the Continental Army during this time. Greene participated in the Battles of Trenton in New Jersey and Brandywine and Germantown in Pennsylvania and acted as Quartermaster at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

Greene's greatest military action would begin in 1780 when Washington gave him the command of the Continental Army in the South. The war was going badly for the patriots. They were faced with a superior and well-trained army

under General Cornwallis. Greene knew his troops were not capable of defeating the British in any large battles. Greene relied on sudden, brief attacks. Although Greene and his troops did not win the famous Battle of Guilford Courthouse, they inflicted serious damage on Cornwallis's troops. Greene led his men on a retreat that forced the British to follow, leading them far away from their supply lines in Charleston, South Carolina.

After the war, Greene had the reputation of being George Washington's most gifted and dependable officer. North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia offered Greene liberal land grants and money. He sold most of the land to pay for rations for those under his command. Greene twice refused the post of Secretary of War. In 1785, Greene settled on his Georgia estate, Mulberry Grove Plantation. Unaccustomed to the heat and humidity of the South, he suffered a sunstroke and died at his estate on June 19, 1786.

THIS NEEDS TO NOT BE IN  
COLUMNS!!!

I did this on a separate document.

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