

## “The Oldest Yearly Meeting in the World.”

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Speaking at the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of New England Yearly Meeting, celebrated at Moses Brown School, Providence, R.I., 24 vi. 1911, Augustine Jones states: “It is notable as the only yearly meeting on the [American] continent, with the exception of Baltimore, which George Fox attended, and the oldest in the world.” A note to the printed report of the proceedings (a most informing pamphlet of over eighty pages) contains the words, “Since these remarks were made a note from England has been shown to me, mentioning a general meeting in London in 1661, the date of our origin, which is meant to suggest, I suppose, the beginning of their meeting to be of even date with ours.” After reference to the title page of the *London Book of Discipline*, 1883, and earlier editions, the author adds, “It would seem that finally, in 1672, the yearly meeting, by a special resolve or minute, established the annual meetings to be at London, hence its name, constitution, and historic existence ever after,” and closes with the words, “The matter is now not important, except in the verification of history.”

The subject may well be discussed in the verification of history.

The statement which appears on the title page of the *Book of Discipline*, 1883, regarding London Yearly Meeting “from its first institution in 1672,” is incorrect, and it has disappeared from the later edition of 1906. In the last named edition, vol. ii., p. 1, the minute made in 1672, “It is concluded . . . that . . . there be a General Meeting of Friends held at London once a year,” is modified by a statement of George Fox, “From thence [Skipton, 1660] the Yearly Meeting was removed to London the next year, where it hath been kept ever since, as being looked upon a more convenient place.” This would imply the holding of a Y.M. in 1661, but, as yet, no record of this has been discovered.

But we cannot accept the statement somewhat doubtfully admitted by the writer in the Anniversary proceedings that the beginning of the Y.M. of English Friends (the *place* of the Meeting is unimportant in this connection) was “of even date with ours,” for it is quite certain that General Yearly Meetings were held in England in 1660, at Skipton, “of men Friends out of many counties,” and earlier, in 1658, at John Crook’s in Bedfordshire, “a General Yearly Meeting for the whole nation” (see *The Journal of George Fox*, bi-cent. ed., i. 418, 469, and Camb. ed., i. 266, 355 and esp. 462). It is probable, as stated by R. M. Jones in his paper (see page 12 of pamphlet) that the General Meeting held in New England in 1661 “was in all respects like the general meetings which had already been held in England”; and (page 13) “that this first general meeting in the new world followed the old world model.” It is *not* probable that George Rofe, an English Friend, would have “appointed a general meeting for all Friends in those parts,” if such gatherings had not previously been held in his own country.