

Warner Mifflin refused Certificates for London Yearly Meeting

WARNER MIFFLIN (1745-1798), descendant of a long line of Friends, was born in Virginia, and resided in Pennsylvania. He was a prominent Friend and philanthropist and was said, by Thomas Clarkson, to be "the first man in America to unconditionally emancipate his slaves." He frequently visited the Meetings of Friends with certificate, though an Elder, but the trouble arose when he asked for the approval of his friends to visit London Yearly Meeting. The following, from the *Friends' Miscellany*, vol. v. (1834), p. 218, reprinted in the *Life and Ancestry of Warner Mifflin*, by Hilda Justice, Phila., 1905, states the case :

About the year 1785, Warner Mifflin had a religious concern to visit his brethren in England. This was opened to Friends of his own Monthly and Quarterly Meetings and by them approved, so as to furnish him with regular certificates of their unity with him in his religious prospects. Warner Mifflin was then an Elder, and, according to the order and discipline of Society, he produced his certificates and spread his concern before the General Meeting of Ministers and Elders, held in Philadelphia, in the spring of 1786. It was probably a new case for an Elder to come forward with a religious concern to cross the Atlantic, on a visit to the churches. There does not appear to have been any doubt of the rectitude of his concern ; and had the General Meeting acted on the feelings of unity produced on the occasion, there is no doubt he would have been set at liberty to pursue the very important object he had in view, of visiting the meetings for discipline in England. But it was suggested by some Friends, that there was no letter of discipline, pointing out a way for Elders to visit the churches ; and, therefore, as Warner's concern was especially to build up Israel in the line of order, Friends thought he must go orderly. Job Scott, who was present on the occasion, says he was very submissive, and his concern was feelingly weighty.

Not discouraged, apparently, by the rebuff of the Philadelphia Ministers and Elders, Warner Mifflin laid his concern, towards the end of the following year, before Duck Creek M.M., but this time the local Friends, after frequently adjourning, appear to have dropped the matter and come to no conclusion. Here are the minutes :

96 *WARNER MIFFLIN REFUSED CERTIFICATES*

From Minutes Duck Creek Meeting 22d of 12 mo. 1787 (p. 436).

Our friend Warner Mifflin now lays before this meeting a religious Draught which hath for some time with weight attended his mind to visit our Brethren at their ensuing Yearly Meeting in London which being solidly deliberated on is left for more mature Consideration till our next.

26th of 1st mo. 1788 (p. 437).

The concern of our friend Warner Mifflin being revived and weightly considered by this Meeting it appears to be the prevailing sense of friends that the subject be yet left for further deliberation till our next.

From Minutes of Little Creek 23d of the 2d mo. 1788 (p. 438).

The concern of our friend Warner Mifflin coming again under our consideration it appears most easy to the minds of friends that it be yet continued for further consideration recommending a serious and weighty attention to the pointing of truth in his mind in the ripening up or the further procedure of his concern.

From Minutes of Duck Creek Meeting 26th day of 4th mo. 1788 (p. 441).

The concern of our friend Warner Mifflin again claiming the attention of this Meeting it is agreed to name John Cowgill, Robert Holliday, Ezekiel Cowgill, William Corbit, Israel Corbit, John Bowers and Baptis Lay to weightly consider and feel with the friend in his concern in the ability which may be afforded and report their sense and prospect thereof to our next.

From Minutes of Little Creek Meeting, 24th of 5th mo., 1788. (p. 443).

Four of the friends appointed in the concern of our friend Warner Mifflin report they have had a solid opportunity with him in which they feel unity in his prospect and concern, after weighty deliberation thereon, this meeting concurs with their report but as there appears some matters necessary to be done previous to his further procedure the same friends are continued to give the needful assistance therein and when accomplished are desired to report to this meeting.

26th of 7 mo. 1788 (p. 445).

The friends appointed in Warner Mifflin's case report that six of them have had an opportunity with him since our last but are not yet prepared to make a final report or produce a Certificate, they are therefore continued to pay the further needful attention thereto and desired to report when ready.

Thus were Friends in Great Britain deprived of a visit, which would doubtless have been very helpful, from what seems to us an excessive adherence to form and letter.

Has any American Friend in the station of Elder received plenary certificates to visit London Y.M. ?