

2003,

Southeastern Yearly Meeting (FGC and FUM)

Established: 1962

Membership: approximately 560

Meetings: 16 Meetings, 1 Preparative Meeting, 6 Worship Groups and 2 Unaffiliated

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Publications:

SEYM Newsletter (3 issues): 1) Spring, 2) Summer/Early Fall, 3) Winter

Michener Lecture Pamphlet ISSN 1534-5211 (presented annually Martin Luther King weekend, January)

Walton Lecture Pamphlet ISSN 1534-5246 (presented annually during YM, Easter weekend)

Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) is unique in Quakerism with its founders having been members in three of the east coast's Quaker traditions: FGC, FUM, and Conservative. Quakers in the southeastern USA have a long and colorful history. Not only did George Fox travel past the then Spanish-claimed Florida and Georgia coastlines, but in 1696, Jonathan Dickinson, for whom the Florida State Park is named, landed and wrote his Journal describing (in seemingly rather unfriendly terms) his experiences with the locals. Nearly seventy-five years later, the Quaker botanist William Bartram studied Florida flora. He is perhaps the first Friend to witness the fury of a Florida hurricane, c. 1773. He also wrote that in 1793, he visited a Friends Meeting near Wrightsborough, Georgia, that had formed c. 1755. By 1807, these Friends, opposed to slavery, migrated to Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois.

C. 1800-1900, the first influx of Florida Friends arrived from Indiana, Nebraska and Iowa, into Alachua County. Whitewater Meeting (1884-1897) near Archer was under the care of Richmond Monthly Meeting (IN). They built the first Florida meetinghouse. During the same time period, Lake Kerr Friends having migrated from Michigan, Ohio, and London, GB, started the first Friends Elementary School. They sent their high school youth to Westtown Friends School near Philadelphia. The Big Freeze of 1892-1893 wiped out both of these Friends communities of orange grove owners.

Contemporary Quaker history commences in 1893 when the railroad transported the first Quaker farmers to Miami. The Quaker community there waxed and waned, finally becoming firmly established in 1948, and, under the care of FWCC, became a Monthly Meeting in 1950. Meanwhile, c. 1900, Friends had been moving to Orlando from the New Jersey and Philadelphia YMs and had established a preparative meeting under the care of Moorestown (NJ) Monthly Meeting. They became a Monthly Meeting in 1944 under the care of FWCC. In 1917, St. Petersburg Friends organized and have met regularly since. They, too, became a recognized Monthly Meeting under the care of FWCC and built Florida's first continuously used meetinghouse. Due to very poor roads and no direct transportation, there was little contact among these early Florida Friends.

By 1950, encouraged by AFSC, the Southeastern Conference of the Religious Society of Friends was formed. During the 1962 Conference, it is recorded that "*Seven Meetings of the Southeastern Friends Conference having indicated by official Minutes their desire to assume Yearly Meeting status, the Planning Committee recommends that these Meetings now consider themselves the Southeastern Yearly Meeting [of the Religious Society] of Friends...*" These seven Monthly Meetings were: Augusta, GA, and Florida meetings: Gainesville, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Palm Beach, and St. Petersburg. The first full Yearly Meeting was held 12 April 1963 near Avon Park, FL. J. Barnard Walton (Friends General Conference, 1915-1963) had been instrumental in shepherding the Conference from its inception in 1950 to this conclusion. In recognition of his support, it was decided to name the annual YM Saturday night lecture series, The Walton Lecture.

By 1970, SEYM decided to formally acknowledge the organizations that had supported its meetings: FGC, FUM and FWCC. After careful consideration, holiday weekends were selected for formal and informal gatherings to allow early Friends from SEYM's wide geographical area to attend as many meetings as possible. Easter week was selected for Yearly Meeting and the Walton Lecture. Martin Luther King weekend was chosen for Winter Representative Meeting and the annual Michener Lecture. Thanksgiving weekend was chosen for the recreational Half Yearly Meeting (HYM) held in state parks (Oleno, Wekiva Springs).

SEYM Meetings continue to grow and wane as population centers evolve. At the turn of the 21st century, twenty-five meetings are affiliated with or have a relationship with SEYM. These meetings in alphabetical order are: Augusta Monthly Meeting, Brandon Worship Group, Charleston Monthly Meeting, Clearwater Monthly Meeting, Deland Preparative Meeting, Ft. Lauderdale Monthly Meeting, Ft. Myers Monthly Meeting, Gainesville Monthly Meeting, Golden Isle Worship Group, Halifax Meeting, Jacksonville Monthly Meeting, Key West Worship Group, Lake Wales Worship Group, Managua Worship Group, Miami Monthly Meeting, Ocala Meeting, Orlando Monthly Meeting, Palm Beach Monthly Meeting, Sarasota Monthly Meeting, Space Coast Monthly Meeting, St. Petersburg Monthly Meeting, Stuart Worship Group, Tallahassee Monthly Meeting, Tampa Monthly Meeting, and Winter Park Monthly Meeting. SEYM is noted for its social concerns including assisting in the founding and support of ProNica, the Cuban Quaker Project, and Amigos Construction.