John Wilbur (1774-1856) of Hopkinton, R.I., m. Lydia Collins in 1793. He was an Elder in his meeting at age 28 and was a Minister ten years later in 1812. He was a staunch supporter of conservative (primitive) Quaker principles and was the chief opponent to Joseph John Gurney's evangelical view of the Truth. He made two religious visits to Great Britain, the first in 1831-33, the second in 1853-54. His lifelong opposition to Gurney led to his disownment in 1843 and the separation in 1845 of New England Yearly Meeting into Gurneyites and Wilburites.

(Biographical information from: Dictionary of Quaker Biography and The later periods of Quakerism / by Rufus M. Jones)

Summary of collection
Primarily letters of John Wilbur giving in great detail his position relative to the views of Joseph John Gurney and the separation of New England Yearly Meeting. His trip to Great Britain in 1853-54 is documented as well.

Related collections
Additional John Wilbur material may be found in: Sheppard family papers, 1656-1916 (Ms. Coll. 858); Letchworth family papers, 1839-1861 (part of Ms. Coll. 950).

Arrangement and description of collection
Five folders arranged as follows.

- Folder 1
  9 letters of John Wilbur to his family, 1831-1848, which discuss family matters; his trip to Great Britain in 1831-32; his view of the crisis approaching the Society of Friends and his arguments with the Gurneyites; his visit to N.Y. to supervise publication of his book [A narrative and exposition of the late proceedings of New England Yearly Meeting] in 1845 and the separation of New England Yearly Meeting.

- Folder 2
  16 letters of Wilbur to his family, 1853-55 relating to his trip to Great Britain, giving in detail his reception and experiences there, including the reaction to him by London Yearly Meeting. Also includes 2 letters from Amos C. Wilbur relating to the trip.

- Folder 3
  10 letters to Peleg Mitchell (d. 1831) of Nantucket, 1838-53, with detailed discussions of Wilbur's attitude toward Gurney and the separation.

- Folder 4
  2 ms. transcripts of letters by Wilbur dealing with his views of the Society of Friends and Gurney, as well as his trip to Great Britain.

- Folder 5
  Letters (1853-54) of those sympathetic to Wilbur; misc. papers, (1847-70) re: to Wilbur, and letters (1844-1873) of other Wilbur family members chiefly containing family news; also 2 drawings of JW.

Contents of folders:

1. Wilbur, John (1774-1856)
  Letters to his family 1831-1848.
  9 letters (8 ALS, 1 ms. copy), 8 with typed abstracts as follows:

http://www.haverford.edu/library/special/aids/wilbur/
9 mo. 23, 1831 Stockport, Cheshire (England) addressed to wife and children
topics:
- anxiously awaiting letters from home
- visited meetings in Lancashire and Cheshire
- going to Liverpool for Quarterly Meeting
- gives account of meetings and places visited
- expresses appreciation for traveling companion George Crosfield

7 mo. 13, 1832 Tideford, Cornwall, addressed to Mary Hazard
topics:
- serious illness of one of his children and fear he may not see her again in this world
- letter has note from Lydia Wilbur, Jr. for her sister dated 9 mo. 25, 1832

5 mo. 2, 1837 Hopkinton, addressed to Mary Hazard
topics:
- serious illness of "our dear child" and asks for further news of her condition

4 mo. 9, 1841 Hopkinton, addressed to "my dear children"
topics:
- family news
- marriage of daughter Susan
- family gathering on First day
- nearby farm for sale, wishes Hazards could buy it
- state of affairs in New England, expresses fear that serious crisis approaching Society of Friends
- describes in detail his arguments with Gurneyites
- "P.S. Be very careful not to expose this letter to anyone not faithful to primitive doctrines"

Page 1 of ALS of John Wilbur, 3 mo. 21, 1842, Hopkinton, RI, addressed to "My dear children," in which Wilbur writes of the Gurneyites' personal visits and letters to him, hoping to change his position and that he senses a crisis ahead. Page 2 (each 98k)
topics:
- family news
- death of child of Thomas
- Gurneyites annoying JW by personal visits and letters (trying to get him to change his position)
- JW expects crisis
- Gurneyites may enter a complaint to Monthly Meeting

1 mo. 23, 1845 New York, [N.Y.], addressed to Wm. R. Hazard
topics:
- arrival in New York
- printing of JW book begun [A narrative and exposition of the late proceedings of New England Yearly Meeting, N.Y. : Piercy & Reed, 1845]
- will stay 2 weeks and read proof sheets
- attends Quarterly Meeting in New York, describes sermon
- NY Friends concerned that separation will spread to NY
- discusses number of Friends necessary to constitute Quarterly Meeting

12 mo. 28, 1847 Hopkinton, addressed to Wm. R. Hazard
topics:
- Hazards exchanged property and moved to a new house
- discusses Gurneyites and impossibility of making them see soundness of pure Quaker principles
- asks for explanation of attitude of Theresa and Mead Atwater

7 mo. 22, 1848 Hopkinton, addressed to "my dear children, William and Mary Hazard"
topics:
- family matters
- numbers of Ohio Friends attended Yearly Meeting
- finds no misgivings or dissatisfaction at being detached from Gurneyites
- discusses basis on which the Committee of Conference proposes to restore unity and harmony, project doubtless undertakes to arrest proceedings in Phila. and Ohio and turn attention of Friends in Ireland from contemplated disavowal of Gurney's doctrines
- discusses Gurney's doctrines
- William has got a water remedy establishment at Spring Grove, near Pawtucket
- family marriages (grandchildren)

10 mo. 16, 1848 Fall River, addressed to Thomas Foster
topics:
- attended meeting in New Bedford, Dartmouth and West Point
- had interviews with ministers of different denominations at Nantucket which all felt were satisfactory
- wants them to bring roll of papers (from his drawer) containing the interrogations and answers relating to Fall River case and bring it with them when they come to Quarterly Meeting
- JW wants [Ethan] and Samuel Sheffield to bring copies of such minutes on their books as relate to JW's application to the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings for restoration of membership
2. Wilbur, John (1774-1856)

Letters to his family 1853-1855.

16 letters (7 ALS, 9 ms. copies) with typed abstracts as follows:

8 mo. 16, 1853 Hopkinton, addressed to Wm. and Mary Hazard

- would like William [Hazard] to act as traveling companion
- JW has strong concern to make this journey [to Great Britain]
- London Yearly Meeting to blame for letting certain doctrines emanate from them
- wishes to sail by 8th or 15th of next month

9 mo. 2, 1853 Hopkinton, addressed to Wm. R. Hazard

- selection of traveling companion, wants William but some feel companion should not be family member
- will write to John Lippincott (Phila.), inquire if he will go
- 10 [mo.] 1853 Liverpool (England), addressed to "my dear children, grandchildren and friends"

- arrival at Liverpool and voyage over
- went to Margaret Crosfield's
- called on Thomas Thompson, principal elder
- expects to go soon to London
- expresses apprehension at possible conflicts and differences of opinion in his travels

10 mo. 24, 1853 John Rickmans, Wellingham, addressed to "my dear children, friends and grandchildren"

- satisfactory time at Manchester
- visit to Birmingham and stayed with Samuel King
- at London visited by Robert Foster and Samuel Cash, members of committee of the Meeting for Sufferings, they tried to dissuade him from pursuit of his concern
- they will announce in all meetings that he is not member of Society of Friends
- gives detailed description of their conversation
- JW feels he is still member as disowned contrary to Discipline
- JW feels London Yearly Meeting made mistake in recognizing larger body of Friends as New England Yearly Meeting without an investigation
- JW’s opinion is that London Yearly Meeting is responsible for the dissension among American Friends
- attended meeting of whole Committee of Meeting for Sufferings, consisting of Thomas Norton, Samuel Fox, Samuel Gurney, Robert Foster, Samuel Cash, George Stacey, Peter Bedford and Thomas Chalk
- gives detailed account of discussion
- refers to action of Phila. Yearly Meeting, London Yearly Meeting

11 mo. 5, 1853 [England], addressed to "my dear children, friends & grandchildren"

- stays with Daniel P. Hack at Brighton
- experience at meeting
- Friends not in sympathy with him
- Hack advises JW to return to America and become reconciled
- JW discusses beliefs and reasons for disownment
- visits other meetings
- met with Peter Bedford who was very unsympathetic
- spoke in meeting, Peter Bedford announces to Friends that JW not a member of Society of Friends
- goes to London, Meeting for Sufferings passed minute advising Friends not to receive JW as a minister
- attended Devonshire meeting and spoke

11 mo. 14, 1853 Sudbury in Suffolk, addressed to "my dear children, friends and grandchildren"

- describes meeting at Tottenham and remarks he made
- Paul Beaven objected to his speaking in their meetings
- JW’s speaking supported by Dr. Edward May and another Friend
- visited Sudbury, saw graves of Sarah Grubb and husband, spoke at meeting
- JW thinks leaders of Friends in England are trying to keep together and avoid separation, yet many young people leaving
- sends copy of the proceedings of the Meeting for Sufferings

12 mo. 10, 1853 Manchester, addressed to "my dear children, friends and grandchildren"

- visited Bakewell in Derbyshire
- stayed with William Gauntly, an Elder of sound mind
- attended meetings at Sheffield, had good service but rebuked at close
- says circular from Meeting for Sufferings in London prejudiced Friends against him
- JW has written his own circular and sent it out
- plans to go to Rochdale, Marsden, Bradford, Leeds, Carlisle and Glasgow

12 mo. 31, 1853 Glasgow, addressed to "my dear children J.S. and S.S. Kenyon"

-
family matters
discusses circular letter his friends have distributed and the good effect it has had, no one has objected to his speaking in meeting since it was published
the "British Friend" has come out in his support
Lydia A. Barclay has come to Glasgow, she has helped them with their expenses
discusses plans for trip to Ireland
12 mo. 31, 1853 Amos C. Wilbur to nephew John W. Foster (this letter written on same sheet as above letter)
topics:
circular of Meeting for Sufferings has brought criticism to Gurneyites
"British Friend" in support of JW
plans to have six subscriptions of "BF" sent home
plans for rest of trip
1 mo. 12, 1854 Amos C. Wilbur to brother Thomas Wilbur (this letter written on same sheet as above letter)
topics:
trip to Ireland and reception there
1 mo. 14, 1854 at J. & C. Sargent's near Moate, addressed to "my dear friends, children & grandchildren"
topics:
travels from Glasgow to Belfast to Lisburn
Friends there aloof
went to Jacob Green's where treated well but Friends there unwilling to enter into discussion
coldly received at Charles Wakefield's (CW was formerly opposed to JIG but now thinks highly of Gurneyite leaders in Ireland)
JW thinks Friends in Ireland shouldn't have recognized larger body in New England
visited Dublin and spoke in meeting
expects to go to Clonmel, Waterford and Bristol
attended meeting at Moate, spoke and gives account of what said
1 mo. 28, 1854, addressed to "my dear friends, children & grandchildren"
topics:
arrival in Bristol
Irish Friends very favorable to Gurney
visit with Eliza Southall Hunt of Bristol and her attitude toward Gurney
after meeting at Bristol, a principal member advised JW to desist from attending meetings as was probably doing more harm than good
describes sermon he gave
Lydia A. Barclay wants books by JW
going on to Birmingham, now lodging with William Tanner's wife, only living child of Daniel Wheeler
2 mo. 6, 1854 Croyden near London, addressed to W.H. Wilbur "my dear son"
topics:
arrival in Bristol
attended several meetings on way to London
now plans to attend meetings in London and in area
then to Birmingham and Liverpool and plans to embark 1st of next month
plans to go by way of Bakewell to meet Lydia A. Barclay
JW says he has fulfilled his duties "in such a manner as to bring sweet peace & solid satisfaction"
JW feels power of Gurneyites depreciating
8 mo. 21, 1855 Hopkinton, addressed to Mary Hazard (another letter on back by Phebe Foster to Mary Hazard)
topics:
Mary Hazard's health
suggests visit to New England would be helpful
personal letter
11 mo. 14, 1855 Hopkinton, addressed to Wm. R. Hazard and Mary Hazard
topics:
JW expects to arrive in Poughkeepsie on 5th day
family news
attendance at Fall River Quarterly Meeting nearly double in number to those at first
Nantucket, Berwick and Salem Meetings have grown
Friends in England interested in separation in New England
documents bearing on all aspects of separation published in "British Friends"
11 mo. 19, 1855 Hopkinton, addressed to Mary Hazard "my dear daughter"
topics:
met Anna Mekeel at depot in New York
also met John and Sarah Paddock on boat
says health is no worse after visiting Hazards

3. Wilbur, John (1774-1856)

Letters to Peleg Mitchell [of Nantucket].
10 ALS as follows:
6 mo. 30, 1838 Hopkinton (also a typed transcript of this letter)

- very full discussion of JW's attitude towards the writings and teachings of Gurney
- JW expresses the fear that Friends are being unduly influenced by these teachings which are not according to the true Quaker principles

8 mo. 10, 1840 Dartmouth

- theological discussion
- Quarterly Meeting a painful time, gives detailed account
- Monthly Meeting refused to give him a traveling certificate
- JW and wife now visiting Seth and Mary Davis

9 mo. 21, 1841 Hopkinton

- improved health
- recently visited daughter Anna at Pawtucket, had satisfactory meeting
- discusses JG and his writings
- attitude of other Friends toward JW
- disapproves of actions of Gurneyites
- discusses general situation in Society of Friends

2 mo. 15, 1842 Horan Cottage

- theological discussion
- describes a visit of a delegation of two from Yearly Meeting (P.P. and A.W.)
- discusses in some detail his conversations with representatives of Select Meeting
- Nathan Douglas received a certificate for religious service in several Quarterly Meetings
- at one meeting, Gurneyites left him standing on steps
- JW sends message to Prince Gardner

8 mo. 1, 1842 Horan Cottage (also typed transcript of letter)

- difficulty re: appointment of a Clerk
- discusses in great detail the "trial of the complaint" against JW by Yearly Meeting Committee
- gives extracts from letter of Lydia A. Barclay on conditions in England

3 mo. 1, 1843 Hopkinton

- JW says his friend William Evans advised appealing to Monthly Meeting against actions of Quarterly Meeting
- other friends advise against this
- gives reasons why it is thought such an appeal would be of no avail
- gives extracts from letter of William Evans
- has received letter from Ezra Comfort, gives extracts

6 mo. 9, 1844 Hopkinton

- re: present unsettled state of things in New England
- urges that "sound Friends" should attend the approaching Yearly Meeting
- refers to "our worthy Friends" William Evans and Ezra Comfort

6 mo. 11, 1845 Fall River

- compares the situation of Friends in New England who want to see primitive doctrines restored to the story of the Israelites in Egypt
- fears that recent deputation to the Island are not true followers of the Light, but have ulterior motive
- hopes that many Friends will attend Yearly Meeting
- invites Peleg and wife to come to house of Thomas and Ann before going on to Newport

3 mo. 7, 1847 Hopkinton

- death of Laban Paddock, sympathetic to wife and son
- discusses situation of Friends as a religious body, less strength among Phila. Friends than 2 years ago
- fears small number of Friends in New England to stand for truth
- all others called Friends seem to be a combination of Quakerism and Gurneyism - alias Episcopalians!
- conditions in New England different from rest of country
- discusses Hicksite separation and differences between that and present separation
- funeral sermon for JG preached by Bishop of Norwich, JW thinks they were "hand in hand and one in spirit"
- Lydia A. Barclay expects to move to Aberdeen, Scotland

7 mo. 7, 1853 Hopkinton

- asks Peleg to act as his traveling companion in Europe
- William Hodgson thinks it would be better that "one of our own Y. Meeting" go
• JW offers to contribute $50 towards an outfit and committee will be responsible for the travel expenses

4. Wilbur, John (1774-1856)
2 letters, 1839-1853 (ms. copies).

5 mo. 20, 1839 (extract of a letter of JW)

- mourns dangers that afflict Society of Friends at present time
- men have disguised themselves as members of the Society in order to undermine it, E. Hicks, Isaac Crewdon and E. Bates are well known among their number
- those concerned must warn their brethren against such men
- JG included among those who endanger Quakerism
- JG won't permit inquiry into his beliefs
- even though JG comes with a certificate from his Yearly Meeting, JW says should not have to accept his statements as true when we can see for ourselves they are false
- lists some objectionable doctrines in Gurney's writings

12 mo. 20, 1853 Colder Bridge, Lancashire, addressed to S.B. and M. Gould

- visited relatives of the Goulds at Edge End
- Caleb Haworth entirely clear of Gurneyism, contributed L5 to the cause
- discusses in detail his reception by English Friends and their attitude toward his speaking in meeting
- Meeting for Sufferings in London sent out circular prohibiting Friends in England from receiving JW as a minister
- JW not discouraged
- JW on his way to Lancaster, Carlisle and Glasgow, then to Ireland

5. Wilbur, John (1774-1856) and others, 1844-1873

(letters in this folder express views sympathetic to JW).

• 2 drawings of JW (gift of Wm. Bacon Evans)
• ms. copy of certificate granted to JW by Yearly Meeting at Newport, R.I. in 6 mo. 1853
• Broadside, "NOTICE TO FRIENDS AND OTHERS" from John Wilbur and Jonathan Nichols, to be used to announce a meeting for worship of the "primitive order of the Society of Friends," with "challenge 1847" written on reverse (78k)
•misc. papers re: to JW, includes poem, newspaper clipping,
• ms. copy 12 mo. 18, 1853, extracts of letter of J.G. Hayman to J.G.S.
• ALS Leeds, 1 mo. 14, 1854, Daniel Pickard to Wm. Hodgson Jr.
• ms. copy Cockermouth, 24/6 mo., letter of Catharine Sargent to Wm. Hodgson
• ALS Cockermouth, 6 mo. 23, 1853, letter of J. C. Sargent to Wm. Hodgson
• ALS Colerain, 10 mo. 14, 1861, letter of Joshua Maule to Joseph E. Maule
• ALS Aberdeen [Scot.], 11 mo. 10, 1853, letter of Lydia A. Barclay to Phebe Foster
• ALS Bakewell, Derbyshire, 12 mo. 2, 1853, letter of Catharine Smith to Susan Ray and sisters
• ALS 2 mo. 10, 1854, letter of Catharine Smith to Mary Hazard with note by JW on last page
• ALS Fall River, 8 mo. 27, 1844, letter of Amos C. Wilbur to JW, topics: discusses last monthly meeting
• ALS Fall River, 7 mo. 9, 1845, letter of W.H. Wilbur to Wm. and Mary Hazard, topics: family news, death of brother John
• ALS Fall River, 12 mo. 16, 1845, letter of Thomas Wilbur to Mary Hazard, topics: family news, Thos. journey from Poughkeepsie to Fall River
• ALS "Wigton," Cumberland, 12 mo. 24, 1853, letter of Amos Wilbur to friend (at Wrighton, Cumberland Co.), topics: discusses meeting at Carlisle and evening with Gurneyites
• ALS Hopkinson, 12 mo. 26, 1873, letter of Phebe Foster to sister, topics: death of brother Amos

Note: see "Journal of the life of John Wilbur, a minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends; with selections from his correspondence, &c." (Providence: Published by George H. Whitney, 1859).