

Quaker History and Heritage

Wilmington College was founded in 1870 by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). This affiliation continues today. The members of the Board of Trustees, the college's governing body, are selected by the Wilmington Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. In addition, Wilmington Yearly Meeting offices are located on campus in the Kelly Religious Center, named after Thomas R. Kelly, an alumnus and prominent Quaker writer.

The first College building, College Hall, was built in 1866, as the site of Franklin College, a non-sectarian institution which went out of existence in 1869. The building was sold to the Quakers in 1870, marking the birth of Wilmington College.

Through the years Wilmington College has grown from that small beginning to its present status as one of Ohio's respected private, liberal arts colleges. Here learning is combined with practical application, values are as important as facts, and students and faculty regard each other as persons, not names and numbers.

Quaker traditions are important to the Wilmington campus atmosphere. Their influence is felt in the personal working relationships among members of the College community and in the concern for each individual. Students, faculty, administration, and staff are addressed by names rather than titles. This reflects Quaker values of mutuality and equality.

Decisions at Wilmington College are not reached by voting. Rather, the group seeks for a plan of action upon which all can unite. This approach to problem solving, based on consensus, reflects a Quaker approach to business and can be seen operating in almost any group meeting on campus, from the trustees to faculty-staff meetings to small informal committees. Many student groups also follow this way of decision-making.

College programs on and off campus also reflect Quaker traditions and concerns. Friends have founded 12 liberal arts colleges in the United States. Historically, Friends have been concerned with careers involving practical skills, such as agriculture and carpentry. The Wilmington combination of liberal arts and career preparation reflects Quaker interests in education.

Since the founding of the Religious Society of Friends in 17th century England, Friends have worked to end war and create a world of peace. The Peace Testimony continues to be a central witness of Quakerism. It is made visible at Wilmington College with the Peace Studies program, the annual Westheimer Peace Symposium, and the Peace Resource Center, which attracts scholars and visitors from around the world. The Center houses extensive materials on the atomic bombings of World War II. Its Hiroshima-Nagasaki Collection, related to the bombings of those cities, is the largest collection of this kind outside of Japan.

Quakers also have a long-standing interest in international education and international relations. The College academic program reflects this international emphasis in the general education program. International students from many different countries also reflect the hope that Wilmington College will help students develop a fuller understanding of world cultures and world issues.