

THE GAZETTE

"a news-sheet, a periodical publication giving an account of current events"

Sandwich Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends SEPTEMBER 2024



1979

X: Whatever is foreseen in joy

Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day,
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.

Berry, W. *This Day: Collected and New Sabbath Poems*.
New York, NY: Counterpoint Press, 2013.

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Upcoming Events

New England Yearly Meeting

Walking in the World as a Friend: Community Practice Group -- **September 16, October 21, and November 18.** An online series from 7:15 to 9:00 p.m. Join Nadine Hoover and Beth Collea in the simple yet powerful essential practices described in *Walking in the World as a Friend*. Participants are invited to commit to practicing for three months, September to November, to experiment with listening inwardly to love and conscience working within us, testing discernment, recording, and yielding—and keeping a journal of an experiment with Spirit in our lives. Learn more and register at <https://neym.org/events-calendar/2024/09/walking-world-friend-community-practice-group>. A free copy of the book can be downloaded from <https://quakerrecollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Walking-in-World-as-a-Friend.pdf>.

Bible Half Hours from the 364th Annual Sessions – Some recordings are now available at <https://quakersofnewengland.buzzsprout.com/>.

International Meeting for Worship – Join Friends around the world for a one-hour international Meeting for Worship. Daily from noon to 1:00 p.m. Learn more at <https://neym.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Meeting%20Details.pdf>.

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting

Sandwich Quarterly Ministry & Counsel will meet on Saturday, **September 28** at 10:00 a.m. in Mattapoisett. Quarterly M&C is open to all, but it is unlikely that a hybrid meeting will be possible.

Sandwich Quarterly Meeting for Business – Saturday, **October 26** at Westport. Meet for coffee and greetings at 9:30 a.m. MfB will begin at 10:00 a.m. Hybrid.

New Bedford – Work party after worship followed by lunch – Sunday, **September 8** and **October 13** and every second Sunday.

Sandwich Monthly Meeting

Sandwich Monthly Meeting Potluck Picnic will be held Sunday, **September 8** at East Sandwich Meetinghouse at noon.

Sandwich Monthly Meeting for Business will be Sunday, **October 10** at West Falmouth.

American Friends Service Committee – See <https://afsc.org/>.

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Peace in Palestine and Israel every **Thursday** 5:30 p.m. See <https://afsc.org/events/meeting-worship-attention-peace-palestine-israel>.

Action Hour for a Ceasefire Now -- Join ASFC staff every **Friday** at 12:00 p.m. to hear updates from Gaza. Then, take action with us as we contact our elected officials and call for an immediate cease-fire and humanitarian access to Gaza. Our elected officials need to keep hearing from us. See <https://afsc.org/events/action-hour-cease-fire-now>.

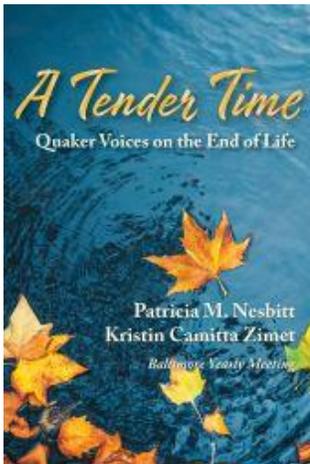
Pendle Hill– See <https://pendlehill.org/>.

Stephen G. Cary Memorial Lecture 2024: *Light Within and Light Without ~ The Personal and Political in the Formation of a Palestinian-American Quaker Identity* – **September 9** from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. In this talk Palestinian-American, historian, and Quaker Steve Tamari examines intersections and contradictions within a faith tradition that strives to balance individual spiritual experience with political activism at a time when this country, including Quaker communities, is divided on how to respond to Israel’s war on Palestinians.



World Quaker Day – Sunday, **October 6** -- Join Friends as Pendle Hill Friend in Residence Jennifer Kavanagh shares on the theme of “being now,” reflecting on everyday life as worship, slowing down, and taking time out. Following daily worship from 9:30-10:30 a.m. <https://pendlehill.org/events/world-quaker-day/>.

Pendle Hill’s Reading Group –Wednesday, **October 16** from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. Worship sharing on Paul Buckley’s *Quaker Testimony: What We Witness to the World* (PHP #481). Register at <https://pendlehill.org/events/pendle-hills-reading-group-october-2024/>.



Hand in Hand: Aging Together in the Spirit – Wednesdays, **September 4, 11** and **18** from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. A three-part online series with members of Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s End of Life Working Group and authors of its new resource, *A Tender Time: Quaker Voices on the End of Life*. A unique collection of Quaker voices, historical and contemporary, *A Tender Time* explores practical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of aging, dying well, and making end-of-life decisions guided by the Spirit and Quaker values. It moves in widening circles, from aging to dying, and from primary caregivers, to friends, to the whole faith community. Learn more and register at <https://pendlehill.org/events/hand-in-hand-aging-together-in-the-spirit/>.

First Monday Lecture with Brian Blackmore -- *‘Too Queer to Be Quaker:’ The Limits of Liberal Quaker Inclusion of Lesbian and Gay People during the Cold War and Today*. **October 7**, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. Join Friend Brian Blackmore, Director of Quaker Engagement at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), as he describes the harm done by Friends in the 1950s towards gay and lesbian people, highlighting the Cold War era attitudes that reinforced the marginalization of gay and lesbian people in the Quaker world. We will also examine the limits of Quaker acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people today in order to speculate about transformations that are needed within the Religious Society of Friends. Learn more and register at <https://pendlehill.org/events/too-queer-to-be-quaker/>. This is part of a larger series offered by Beacon Hill Friends House exploring the stories of Quaker participation in the gay rights movement. See <https://bhfh.org/making-queer-quaker-history/>.

News from some other Quaker organizations can be found at the following links:

Quaker Earthcare Witness: <https://quakerearthcare.org/>

Friends Committee on National Legislation: <https://fcnl.org/>

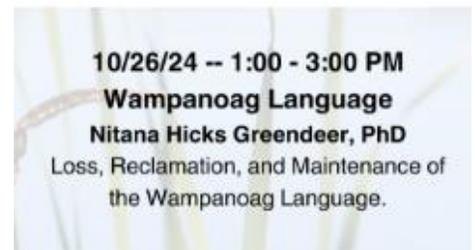
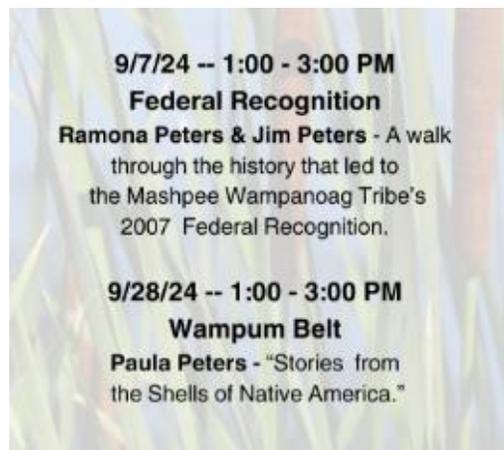
Friends World Committee on Consultation: <https://www.fwccamericas.org>

Friends General Conference: <https://www.fgcquaker.org>

Quaker United Nations Organization: <https://quno.org/>



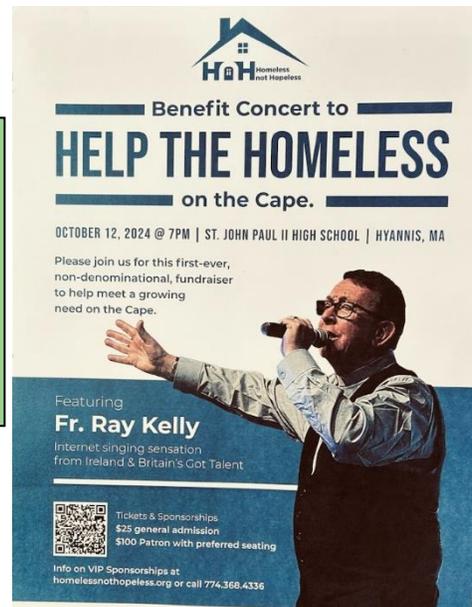
2024 Educational Series – A Collaboration between the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Falmouth and Linking Indigenous & Non-Indigenous Knowledge, Inc. (L.I.N.K.)



Black Lives Matter: Falmouth Kneel at Noon
Silent vigil for 9 minutes 29 seconds in support of Black lives, weekly on **Sundays** at **noon** on the Falmouth Village Green.

Dialogue Across Differences at Yarmouth Meeting Schoolhouse -- Saturday, **October 12** from 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Topics vary, among them are climate change, political differences, and family issues. The upcoming discussion will focus on water. Led by Tom Bidga Peyton.

Benefit Concert to help Cape Cod's homeless – October 12 at 7:00 p.m. at St. John Paul II High School in Hyannis. Sponsored by Homeless not Hopeless. Learn more and buy tickets at <https://homelesstohopeless.org/upcoming-events-fundraisers/>.



The poster features the Homeless not Hopeless logo at the top, which consists of a house icon with 'HH' inside. Below the logo, the text reads 'Benefit Concert to HELP THE HOMELESS on the Cape.' The date and location are listed as 'OCTOBER 12, 2024 @ 7PM | ST. JOHN PAUL II HIGH SCHOOL | HYANNIS, MA'. A photograph of Fr. Ray Kelly singing into a microphone is on the right. Text on the left describes the event as a 'first-ever, non-denominational, fundraiser to help meet a growing need on the Cape.' It also lists the featured artist, 'Fr. Ray Kelly', as an 'Internet singing sensation from Ireland & Britain's Got Talent'. At the bottom left, there is a QR code and a list of ticket prices: '\$25 general admission' and '\$100 Patron with preferred seating'. Contact information for VIP sponsorships is provided at the bottom right.

Sunday Mornings at 8:30 a.m. at East Sandwich Meeting Community Hall

September 15 -- 'Tea at 3 with Eleanor Roosevelt and Me'

Janet Rodgers performs in her original play portraying Eleanor Roosevelt as she navigates the twists and turns of an early life on her road toward becoming Mother of the World. Join Eleanor as she faces her fears and her critics with determination, courage and humor.

September 22 – "How do you define God?" This discussion in worship-sharing format will focus on one's personal sense of God and will be led by Kathy Olsen. There will be *no* zoom connection for this discussion.



Friends send their congratulations and good wishes to **Mark Davidson** as he begins his first year at Wheaton College.

Death of Barbara Leeds (Jones) Parker

Friends were greatly saddened by the death of Barbara Parker on August 8 at the age of 99. A birthright Quaker, Barbara grew up in Rutledge, PA and graduated from Westtown High School as did both her parents. Barbara worked as a registered nurse for 40 years. She became a member of Sandwich Monthly Meeting in 2019 and attended East Sandwich Meeting regularly. Barbara enjoyed reading, bird watching, quilting and other needlework. She is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and Alexander Pollard and her granddaughter Lily, all of Sandwich, with whom she lived. She also leaves daughter Kimberly (Michael) Cormier, and a son, Peter Parker, five other grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Barbara was predeceased by her husband of over 60 years, J. Donald Parker, in 2014 and by her son Lawrence Parker in 2015. A memorial meeting for worship will be held at a later date.



Memorial Meeting for Worship

Linda Holton (1946 – 2024)

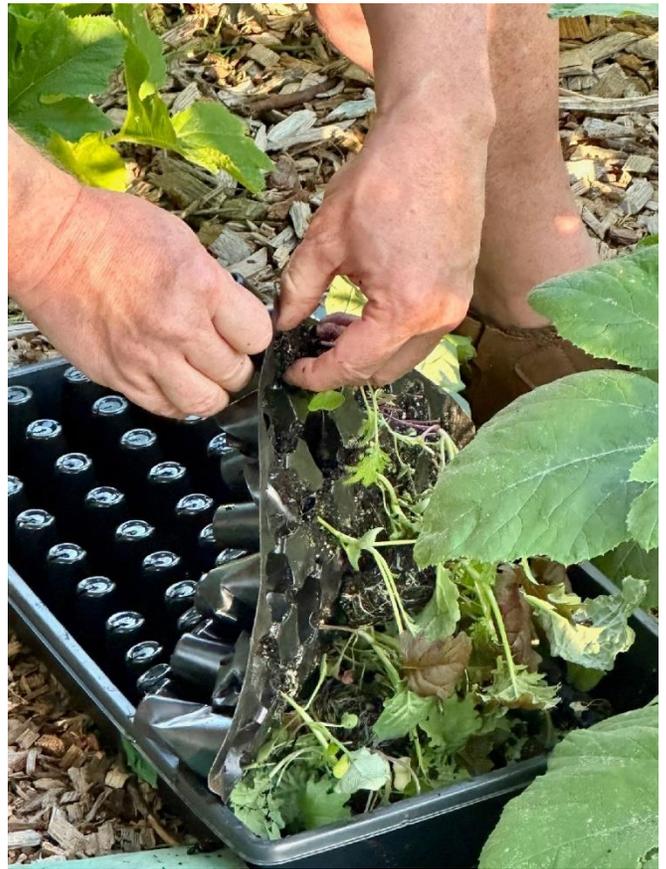
Our dear Friend Linda Holton, longtime clerk of East Sandwich Preparative Meeting, passed away peacefully in her home on August 17 at the age of 78. A memorial meeting for worship will be held at East Sandwich Meetinghouse on Saturday, **September 7** at 12:00 noon. Family, friends, and Friends are invited to an after-service gathering at Linda's daughter Emily's home in West Barnstable.

Photos of Friends

Friends joined Erica in July to view her solo exhibit of abstract water colors at Colo Colo Gallery in New Bedford.



Photo credits clockwise from upper left: Erica H. Adams, July 13; Suzanna Schell, July 4; Steve Gates, July 13; Erica H. Adams, July 13.



From the Friendship Garden -- Photos by Erica H. Adams, August 2024 (upper right and lower two) and Rita O'Donnell, July 2024 (upper left).

Readers Write

A Mixed Record

David Young

We have been made aware of Quakers' participation in the shameful record of the Indian residential schools. So I was pleased to see the report of a team sent by NYYM and NEYM in 1842 to learn the condition of the tribes involuntarily settled west of the Mississippi.

John Lang and Samuel Taylor report two major concerns. The first involved the cash payments specified in treaties. These were paid annually to individuals, who were immediately fleeced by profiteers selling them liquor. The second was a fear of further relocation, should their new land become valuable to whites.

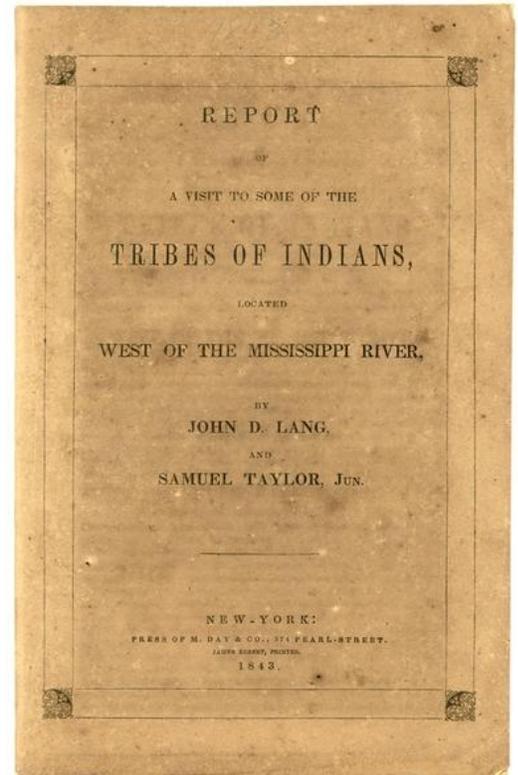
In regard to education, they noted several schools sponsored by religious denominations (including Ohio Yearly Meeting's Shawnee School), none of which seemed to be boarding schools. And one of the team's recommendations was that the teachers in these schools should be members of the tribes themselves.

As to religion, Lang and Taylor apparently also did a measure of proselytizing, but they included this comment from an old Native man: "A long time ago, your old men talked to us about your religion, and we told them about our religion; and they told us that though your religion was different from our religion, yet if the heart was right we could travel together through this world and be saved at last."*

Certainly, the Yearly Meetings could not solve the Native Americans' problems, but at that time at least they respected them.

* Lang, J.D. and S. Taylor, Jr. *Report of a Visit to Some of the Tribes of Indians Located West of the Mississippi River*, New York, NY: M. Day & Co., 1843, p. 14. Read the full report at <https://credo.library.umass.edu/> in the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Records Collection.

Ed. Note: NEYM's Quaker Indian Boarding School Research Group recently released their report on New England Quaker involvement in the Indian Boarding Schools of the late nineteenth century. See <https://quakersofnewengland.buzzsprout.com/887587/15508136>. Both audio and print versions are available.



Two Quakers to Remember

Alan Burt

This past month, East Sandwich Meeting lost two beloved members, Barbara Parker and Linda Holton. Though much grief and sorrow have passed, what remains lasting and profound are the loving remembrances exchanged. Below are some of my remembrances of Barbara and Linda.

Barbara Parker (1925-2024)

Barbara was 99 years old when she passed, which made her the oldest person I had ever known. I loved her from our very first meeting. Perhaps it was because she reminded me of my grandmother who raised me and who had passed away 40 years ago or perhaps it was the twinkle in her eye. I think maybe it was the twinkle in her eye.

Right from the start, I was curious about Barbara, interested in learning more about who she was as a person and as a Quaker. It didn't take any of us long to realize how sharp Barbara was. Just a few short months ago she spoke about her life at one of our morning discussion groups before worship. We learned that Barbara was a birthright Quaker and that she had attended Westtown, a Quaker boarding school. As she spoke about her early learning experiences, we got a sense of what it was like simply being alive that long ago, along with what it was like being a Quaker back then. Barbara was clearly grateful to have been raised as a Quaker and the Quaker way of life was important to her. She did not elaborate much on any of this, as it was not like her to bring attention to herself or to be overly intellectual. When we asked more questions, she would then give us just a little bit more with a twinkle in her eye, as if to say, "yes, I was blessed by it all, let's leave it at that."

While she was at Westtown Barbara's belief in the importance of service to others led to her decision to become a nurse. As Barbara spoke about her decades of service as a Quaker and as a nurse, we got a sense of the loving kindness and care she had provided so many during her lifetime. I could not help but feel a deep sense of respect and gratitude for the life she had lived.



Barbara spoke about her move to the Cape, which gave her the opportunity to attend our East Sandwich Meeting. Barbara rarely missed a meeting with us and when she spoke during worship, it was always about the love in the room with us, her Quaker family. And what a joy it was to get to really know her as she often attended our hospitality gatherings afterwards. Barbara was plain spoken and to the point -- she wrote her request to transfer her membership to Sandwich Monthly Meeting on a paper napkin! I remember Ann Prentice smiling as she shared the simplicity and the profoundness of Barbara's napkin application.

I'll end here with what I am sensing as a parting gift from Barbara, her words to me, and perhaps to all of us. "Just as I tried my best with the time I had, it is now time for each of you to live your lives, the best you can as your Faith and Practice. It is a gift to have and a gift to give, bye, bye friends."

Linda Holton (1946-2024)

None of us was surprised with the recent passing of Linda Holton. Her struggles dealing with cancer over the past few years have been heartbreaking for our meeting. However, along with the worry and sadness there has also been the opportunity for us to be there for our dear Linda, letting her know how much we loved her and how much we wanted to ease her suffering in any way we could. The tapestry of this love has been beautiful.

We were blessed having Linda as our clerk for so many years. Even after she chose to step down from this role, we continued to see her as our loving clerk. We were then so fortunate that Ann Prentice took on this official role, and how beautiful it was having two amazing clerks.

Sadly, our times together were few and far between as our Linda was not well and could not always be there with us. However, when she was able to join us, it was a very special event, a celebration of love and joy. So many of us were drawn to be with her that one had to stand in line waiting for a turn. Although I always wanted my time with her, it was always a joy simply watching others have their precious moments with Linda.

I was blessed to have an hour or so with Linda just a few days before her passing. As I sat down next to her, her hand gently dropped down into mine. We did not talk much as she was tired and worn. But she continued to catch her breath as she had things to say and so tenderly expressed her love for all of us.

As I was about to leave, she looked at me, smiled and said, "I'm tired now Alan, I've had my beautiful life, which I have been so grateful for, and it is now time for me to go. Tell everyone that I love them dearly and for them to go on being a small but mighty meeting."

Our Linda is gone, but for those who knew and loved her, she will never be forgotten. The essence of Linda's love is embedded in us forevermore. And let us all live in such a loving way that like Linda, we too will be remembered always. Perhaps it is our loving that is eternal, our love that is "that of God in each of us."



Friendship Garden Harvest, August 14, 2024.
Photo by Erica H. Adams.

The “Other” Quaker House

Molly Cornell

Quaker House in Fayetteville, North Carolina, has remained an item in West Falmouth Meeting’s donation budget for years, beginning back when Amelie and Rudolf Scheltema and Eric Edwards, among other Friends, provided draft counseling during the Vietnam War. Presented as “a place of peace in a military city,” *Quaker House* was established when several Quaker Meetings came together in 1969 “to serve the military community and advocate for peace.”

The location of *Quaker House* is no coincidence. Fayetteville is the home of Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg) --- the largest military installation by population on the planet, with over 52,000 military personnel. Fort Liberty had its origins in 1952 as a center for “unconventional warfare” with the creation of the Psychological Warfare Center. In 1961, the Special Forces Group was founded with a mission of training counterinsurgency forces in Southeast Asia. The major units at the Army base today include the 82nd Airborne, XVIII Airborne Corps, 18 Aviation Brigade, 4th Medical Command, and the US Army Special Operations Command (formerly the Psychological Warfare Center).

Now that the draft has ended, some Friends ask: “Why *Quaker House*?” A protest sign that reads: “YES to the Troops, NO to the Wars” speaks to the continued need for *Quaker House* as a living testimony to Peace. “The emotional damage of military participation continues to destroy lives for members of the military and their families,” says Wayne Finegar, Executive Director of *Quaker House*.

The current mission of *Quaker House* is “to work for peace and to support individuals who have been harmed by military service.” The work is done in three general areas. First is the *GI Rights Hotline*. Active-duty service members stationed throughout the world call in asking for help in dealing with the stress and guilt of participating in an action that they no longer feel is right, and seeking advice for conscientious discharge. Second is *Military Counseling Services*. Counseling deals with issues such as domestic violence, PTSD, moral injury, sexual assault, and healthcare services including reproductive healthcare for women. Adjusting to the transition from military service to civil society can be extremely challenging for some veterans. Tragically, the 2023 Annual Report on Suicide in the Military reported a continued increase in deaths among both active participants and veterans. The third area of work towards peace is the *Advocacy Team* associated with FCNL (Friends Committee on National Legislation) which lobbies on behalf of *Quaker House* for legislative policy in Washington, D.C. “At *Quaker House*, we don’t try to do policy work,” says Finegar. “We’re for ending war. It’s for leaders and diplomats in Washington and other capitals to hash out the details.”

Draft Counseling at W. Falmouth Meeting:

Interview with Eric Edwards 7/31/2024

Molly Cornell

Molly: When I was clearing stuff out of the meetinghouse a while ago, a black and white painted sign turned up that said “Draft Counseling.”

Eric: Oh, yes. The sign’s probably been kicking around in the basement for a long time.

Molly: We moved it upstairs to the archive area! So, tell me. When did West Falmouth Meeting do draft counseling, and who was involved?

Eric: It was back sometime in the 80s. There was a lot of interest in the Selective Service at that time, and debate whether to shut it down or upgrade it in some way. People were confused about registration and what to do if they had feelings about the requirement. One problem was that there was no place on the form to indicate your objection to the draft. And there was the added concern of legal action if one didn't register. During those years there was a lot of post-Vietnam political activity going on. Information and materials were available about how to offer counseling on refusal to register.



John holds up the draft counseling sign from the 80s. A second sign to the left directed people to Quaker House for draft counseling. Photo credit: Erica H. Adams, August 28, 2024.

Amelie and Rudi Scheltema and I, along with a young scientist from Woods Hole, decided to offer draft counseling at the meetinghouse one evening a week. Not that many people came, usually one or two people at a time, which was good because we could have a conversation with them and discuss their situation. Sometimes it would be a person coming for themselves. Other times it might be a parent who came, saying, "My son is turning 18 and I need advice." There were different choices of how they could respond to the registration requirement. Most often we'd advise them to write in a statement on the form saying "I am opposed to war and if there is a draft I will apply for an exemption," and make a copy for safekeeping.

We also got permission to participate in "Recruiting Day" at Falmouth High School where we'd set up a counter-recruitment table. The recruiters didn't seem to mind us at all! They'd come around and say hello and chat a bit. They were more concerned about competition from other branches of the military who were there promoting their stuff.

Recruiting Day at the high school is now a thing of the past.

We offered draft counseling for three or four years until it became a dwindling concern for young people. At one point you couldn't apply for a federally funded college scholarship unless you were registered. The government tried various things to get people to register. Nowadays a list of eligible men is automatically put into a Selective Service database.

Looking back on those days it was a beautiful time. It was a "Quaker thing" that you could offer. You could invite people's hearts and minds to be drawn to it. And if you didn't do it, there was nowhere else for them to go.

A Quaker Hiker

Paul Denoncourt

Finally, months of research, logistical planning, gear upgrades, medical evaluations, resupply mailings, physical training and packing are complete. My hiking buddy (trail name Pozzy) and I (trail name Paladin) are set to depart in a few days for the California Sierra Mountains to attempt a through hike of the John Muir Trail, famed for its remoteness, beauty, difficult terrain, unpredictable weather and extreme elevation.

Perhaps Friends who live near the Cape Cod Canal have seen me doing practice hikes on the Canal Service Road or around Great Herring Pond with a 36-pound pack on my back (see photo). I was very pleased to find that my pack, once finally and fully loaded for the first leg (six days) of the trek, only weighed 33 pounds!



Three fewer pounds may not sound like a lot but it's a noticeable difference. The second leg (nine days) will require carrying three additional days of food which will bring the total weight to 39 pounds. Ugh! That will be very noticeable! Hopefully I will have my "trail legs" by then. If all goes according to plan—which almost never happens—the 220-mile hike will take about 23 days, finishing on the summit of Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the continental U.S., at sunrise. I cannot think of a better place or time to be awed by the Creator's handiwork.

My concerns are my age (I will turn 69 on trail) and the elevation (8,000 to 14,500 feet—a lot for someone who lives at sea level). Too much? Maybe. Risky? Certainly. Please hold me in the light as I attempt this challenge. I will chronicle my journey, success or failure, in future issues of *The Gazette*.

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” From T.S. Eliot's preface to *Transit of Venus: poems* by H. Crosby, Paris: Back Sun Press, 1931.

Paul on a practice hike preparing for the John Muir Trail, August 2024.

Friendship Garden Update

Steve Gates

Wow, we've had a busy last 2 months! We've had an amazing harvest this summer . . . first radishes and lettuce, but then when hot summer weather arrived, we had onions, potatoes, squash, beans, peas, tomatoes, and hot peppers in profusion, along with a smattering of other vegetables. After being washed, all food went to the Falmouth Service Center, where the volunteers told us the fresh, organic produce we contributed would be gone in a few minutes. What a joy!

We've all learned a lot this summer. For example, several of the group have focused on building compost piles, using the freshly-mown and, importantly, non-chemically-treated grass from the Quaker House yard mixed with leaves, vegetable waste, and even weeds to create organic compost. We use a special "compost thermometer" to measure the temperature of the pile as the materials decompose, and a drill with a large auger bit to "turn" the pile. If turned every 2 days or so, the pile gets up to about 160° F, so everything bad (like weeds) is killed. The resulting compost is being stockpiled for the next phase of our project.

One of the design points of our project was to reduce the amount of physical labor required. So we installed a set of soaker hoses and 2 timers to make it possible, at least in theory, not to do any manual watering. The reality has been a bit different: when we see plants drying out, we have to figure out how to alter the watering system to solve the problem. Fortunately, even as the summer has grown hotter and drier, we have had to do less manual watering as we understand the irrigation system better.

One of the great successes of the project so far has been related to one of our goals, which is to build community amongst the participants. Our volunteers really like the chance to eat together and to participate in vigorous discussions about a wide range of topics of topical interest, such as national politics. Once the meal finishes, everyone chooses what they want to work on and then pitches in. So far 22 people have participated as volunteers, including 2 from E. Sandwich and 1 non-Quaker. It's amazing to watch! If you'd like to join us, please let me know so I can put you on our mailing list to get the times and agenda for each gardening session.



Garden Party Potluck, August 21, 2024.
Photo by Erica H. Adams.

One of my delightful highlights this summer is the Quaker garden, potluck dining, and learning about the science of gardening!!!

It is such a happy get-together with my Friends, solving the world's problems, eating delish food and certainly taking care of the garden. Last week August 15th was so special!!! The garden was bursting with cherry tomatoes, squash, potatoes and lettuce. What a joy to witness the beauty of nature and the energy of the soil!!!

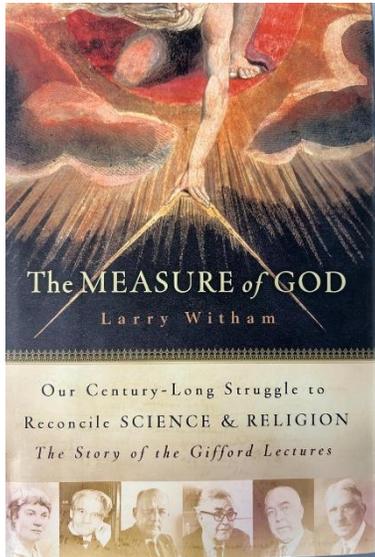
Thank you, dear Friends, for this project, all to help out the needy citizens in our town, A NOBLE CAUSE!!! Looking forward to more tutoring in nature!! -- Maggie Saab

Summer 2024 Friendship Garden Crops on Their Way to Falmouth Service Center



What We're Reading

John Davidson: *The Measure of God: Our Century Long Struggle to Reconcile Science & Religion (The Story of the Gifford Lectures)* by Larry Witham.



Witham gives a beautifully clear and readable portrayal of various forms of natural theology - the attempt to base religious beliefs on science, reason and human experience - as he traces the history of the Gifford Lectures in their responses to successive challenges from materialism, science, technology and religious pluralism. Spanning more than a century, and presented at four major universities in Scotland, these lectures (in oral and written form) have contained and summarized some of the most influential scholarship defining the scope, character and limitations of discourse about God. *The Measure of God* succeeds in presenting clearly and in an engaging manner the history of these lectures, bringing to life the many crucial issues discussed over the decades.

Lord Gifford was a 19th century Scottish judge who left a major bequest and intended his lectures on natural theology to reach a wide public audience (pp. 21-24). Although Adam Gifford was trained in the law, he also participated in the then-active debates between the traditional Calvinism of Scotland and the rising new modern philosophy, with many thinkers questioning Calvinist predestination as well as other ancient doctrines. The lectures were to be about the new sciences and their impact on every other sector of life. Many of Scotland's leading religious thinkers were acutely aware of how technology, urban life, and theories in natural science such as biological evolution would be changing the Christian worldview forever. When, in March of 1887, the full text of Gifford's will was published, the failure to reconcile or make reference to any of the old Christian terminology in the text made clear that he was not funding a particularly orthodox project. With an unshakable conviction that God existed, he did not worry about what philosophy or science might turn up. No "constraint" was to be imposed upon lecture topics (p. 25).

The Gifford Lectures began with Scottish idealist philosopher James Stirling in 1890. His lectures were not so much an espousal of idealism as a survey of the philosophical attempt to prove God and the arguments against those attempts (p. 40). Stirling lectured on Hegel, whose system he then used in the defense of religion despite all of the onslaughts of the evolutionary thinking of Darwin and his followers such as Thomas Henry Huxley and the engineer Herbert Spencer in the last decades of the 19th century. The next great lecturer was also a Hegelian, the American Harvard professor Josiah Royce (p.50). Royce delivered his Giffords in Aberdeen in January of 1900, and emphasized the ethical implications of Absolute Idealism. The Hegelian ideas that were friendly to religion caught on in the English-speaking world, despite the fact that Karl Marx had used Hegel to attack all religion and private property. Idealism was a formidable, and perhaps the only, philosophical system around to defend Christian Theism against the rising tide of materialist philosophy. While the philosophy of idealism proposed a kind of evolutionary development, it was an evolution of God's mind, not the godless, willy-nilly, and accidental evolution of Darwin's scientific theory. It was no surprise, therefore, that idealist philosophers swamped the early choices for Gifford lecturers.

The Harvard professor and psychologist William James, the author of the two-volume *Principles of Psychology* in 1890 (p. 84), which established his reputation internationally and became a benchmark in the field, arrived at Edinburgh University to begin his Gifford Lectures in 1901. The eyes of nearly 250 people stared down on that opening day. Trained in medicine, he told his audience not to be intimidated by the “medical materialism” of his day, which had provided a simplistic explanation for religious belief. Only a few years before the Giffords, James had made his debut as a published philosopher in *The Will to Believe* (p. 83). For both science and philosophy, his book of essays and lectures espoused two of his own world-destroying ideas, the first being “Radical Empiricism.” Empiricism studied concrete events. It allowed people “in the course of future experience” to change their ideas, to be flexible, to be free of dogmatic theories. This empiricism cared nothing for ultimate causes, making it radical. The empiricist relished “the crudity of experience,” over gleaming systems of thought. Truth was out there for the radical empiricist, but that search found the world in a permanent state of “pluralism” - and pluralism was James’s second world-destroying idea. It was James who introduced the word pluralism into Western philosophy (p. 83). In a word, pluralism recognized the limits of human perception, arguing that people, in effect, had their own universes when trying to grasp ultimate things. It suited the human mind far better than a single, abstract system, forced onto unwilling minds. In his own age, James faced two such abstract, all-organizing systems, Absolute Idealism and scientific materialism. With pluralism as well as his concept of pragmatism, James had come upon a weapon to break apart such great all-consuming systems - which he called “block universes - “so that individuality, unpredictability, creativity, diversity, and radical empiricism could all find room to breathe (p. 84).

James’s Gifford lectures were a catalog of cases of religious experience both modern and ancient (p. 85). There were religious ecstasies such as George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, and Teresa of Avila, the Catholic saint. The medical materialists had an explanation, James said, but it should not worry ordinary believers too much. Materialists said these religious figures showed “symptoms of nervous instability.” They called Saint Paul’s revelation on the road to Damascus “a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex.” Since everyone knew Paul’s story this pedantic materialist claim brought a laugh. Yet even if true, James said, such medical arguments were self-defeating for atheists. Following medical materialism, “we should doubtless see ‘the liver’ determining the dicta of the sturdy atheist decisively (p. 85).” By making fun of materialism, James leveled the playing field for believers.

Over the course of the book journalist Larry Witham reviews the history of anthropology, psychology, physics and historical analysis in describing a hundred years of lectures, and in the process reveals a series of startling debates that should interest Quakers. For example, he points out that the idea of the big bang as the origin of the universe came along with the concept of the atomic, molecular, chemical, stellar, planetary, and biological evolution of the universe over some fourteen billion years. Everything that happened was based on a small number of “constants,” or unchanging amounts of force, weight, quantity and ratio, that apparently came with the universe in the beginning and apparently never change (p. 254). If they had changed, even in the slightest degree, the universe seen today would not have evolved; if they changed slightly today, that same universe would dissolve into chaos. Hence, the philosophers would argue, there are two choices. Either the universe was designed to produce intelligent biological life or else human beings, winning the cosmic lottery, are beneficiaries of a one in a billion chance.

Witham, L. *The Measure of God: Our Century-Long Struggle to Reconcile Science & Religion*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2005.

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