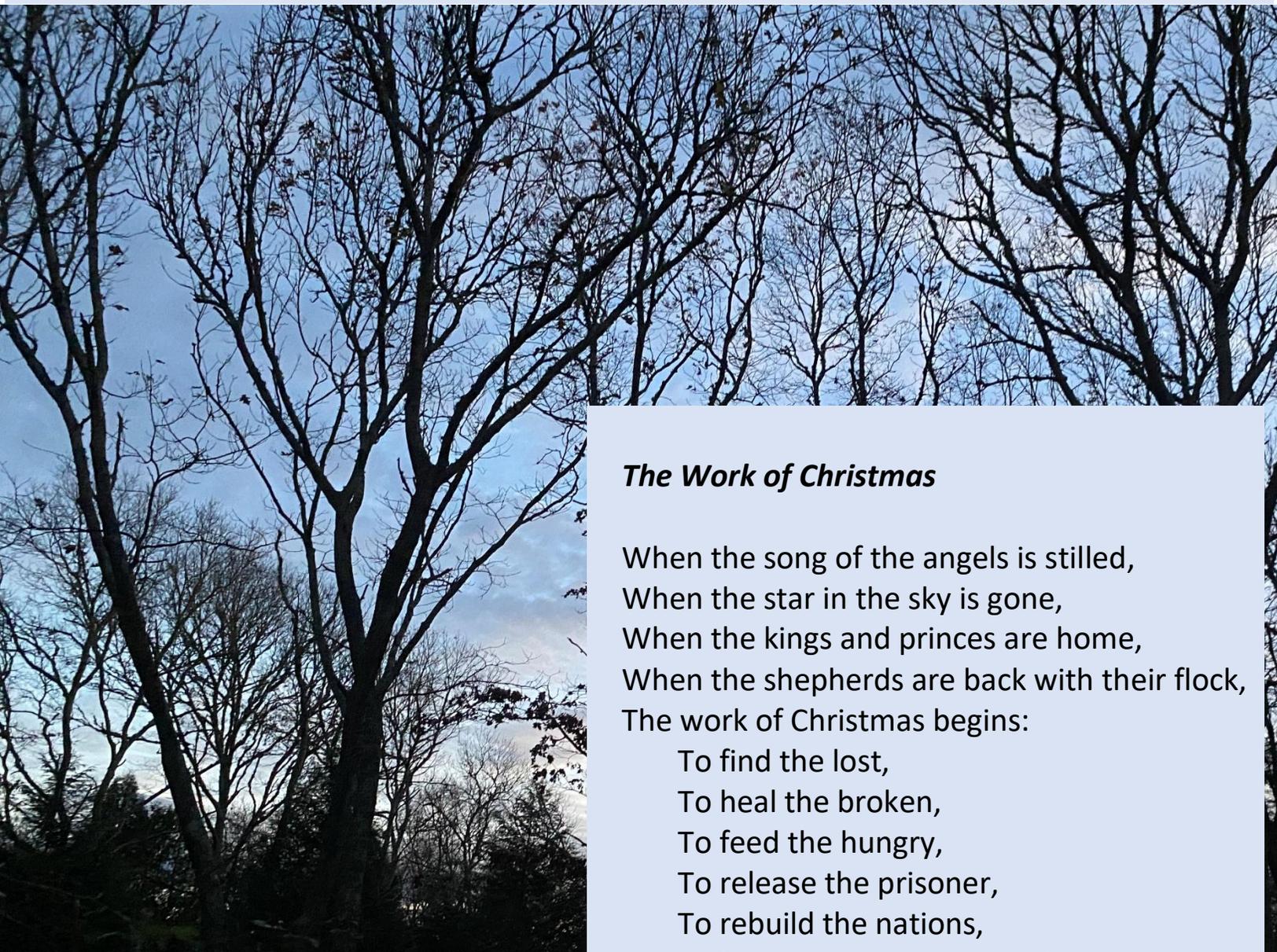


# THE GAZETTE

Sandwich Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

DECEMBER 2025



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## *The Work of Christmas*

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among brothers,  
To make music in the heart.

Thurman, H. "The Work of Christmas," *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1985, p.23.

## Upcoming Events

### **New England Yearly Meeting**

Monthly check-in for immigration justice work among friends. **December 23** and **January 27**, 7:00 p.m. Learn more and register at <https://neym.org/events-calendar/2025/11/monthly-check-immigration-justice-work-among-friends>.

### **Sandwich Quarterly Meeting**

**Quarterly Meeting for Business** – Saturday, **January 24** at East Sandwich at 10:00 a.m. with fellowship beginning at 9:30 a.m.

**Provincetown** -- A **worship group** in the manner of Friends has started on the **first Wednesday** of the month at the UU Meeting House, 236 Commercial St., Provincetown. There is no parking. The phone number for questions is (508) 487-9344 or Kenneth at [suttonkenneth@pm.me](mailto:suttonkenneth@pm.me). The schedule may have changed. Call to make sure.

**New Bedford** – **Work party** after worship followed by lunch. Every **second Sunday**, with next gatherings on **December 14** and **January 11**.

**New Bedford** -- **Vigils for Love** -- weekly multifaith gatherings of silence, song, and prayer in support of all immigrants living in the community. **Wednesdays** from 3:30 - 4:30. Next gatherings are December 3, 10, 17 and 31 and January 7 and 14. See attached flyer for further information or contact Gretchen Baker-Smith at [hellogretchen@gmail.com](mailto:hellogretchen@gmail.com) .



## Sandwich Monthly Meeting

**Monthly Meeting for Business -- December 7** at 12 noon in Yarmouth, in person only. Friends are welcome to come at 10:00 a.m. for worship followed by a light lunch.

**East Sandwich – Annual New Year’s Eve gathering** at East Sandwich Meetinghouse. Potluck dinner from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Worship will follow from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.



**East Sandwich -- Keeping Centered in Troubled Times.** Queries and worship sharing, Sundays **December 14** and **January 11** at East Sandwich Community Building, 8:30 a.m. facilitated by Lee Hamilton and Bill Holcombe, respectively.

**West Falmouth – Lectio Divina** – in-person gathering in the library corner every Sunday at 9:00 a.m. to consider selections from the Gospel of John.

**West Falmouth – Second Sunday Forum** – Sunday, **January 11**, Steve Gates will speak on *Addressing Food Insecurity in Our Community: Unexpected Joys*. See attached flyer for further information.

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

**First Monday Lecture** with historian **Dr. Erica Canela** – *A Radical Side of the Early Quakers* – **December 1** from 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Hybrid. Free and open to the public, but registration required. Learn more and register at

<https://pendlehill.org/calendar/a-radical-side/>.

**January reading group** – This month we will read Carol Conti-Entin’s Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Improvisation and Spiritual Disciplines: Continuing the Divine-Human Duet* (PHP #288), exploring music and spiritual disciplines, as we lean into the spiritual disciplines of rest and resistance. **January 13** from 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Learn more and register at <https://pendlehill.org/calendar/january-reading-group/>.

## **American Friends Service Committee**

**Third Tuesdays: *Protect, Resist and Build with AFSC***, a monthly webinar series that brings together AFSC constituents to learn about how to protect, resist, and build just peace, just migration, and just economies. Next sessions are **December 16** and **January 20** from at 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Learn more and register at <https://www.mobilize.us/afsc/event/746944/>.

***Quaker Action Magazine*** is published twice a year and covers AFSC's worldwide work for peace and justice and provides readers with resources for action. The new issue has articles on immigration, Gaza, climate change, and grassroots fundraising. Read the new issue at <https://afsc.org/quaker-action>.

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

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/>.

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

*Thrivability & Way Opening: Moving Beyond "Sustainability."* In a time of converging crises, how do Friends move from doing "less harm" to cultivating conditions for life to truly thrive? Author and Quaker Jean M. Russell will lead this online workshop from Quaker Earthcare Witness. **December 17** at 7:00 p.m. Register at <https://neym.org/events-calendar/2025/12/thrivability-way-opening-moving-beyond-sustainability>

***Fran Lightsom received this message from The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts:***

***One of the Best Kept Secrets (Unintentionally so) in the Quaker Community***

The Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts is an organization comprised of Friends and friends of Friends who are dedicated to the Arts either as practitioners or supporters. We have been in existence for more than thirty years. Among us are writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, actors, videographers and more. Our membership, currently over one hundred and fifty, includes Friends from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and South America. We are under the care of the Trenton, NJ Meeting.

We celebrate the creativity of all our members, professionals and amateurs alike, and provide opportunities for community interaction, exhibitions, and more in both real and virtual settings. We publish a quarterly journal: *Types & Shadows*.

We invite you to visit our website, [mnm.fqaquaker.org](http://mnm.fqaquaker.org), where you can find out more about our activities, read the online version of *Types & Shadows*, and find ways to join our group.

**Ruth and Rod Zwirner** share this report from the 2025 annual meeting of Quaker Earthcare Witness:

The annual meeting was held November 16-19, 2025 at Powell House, a conference and retreat center for NY Yearly Meeting. The theme this year was *Common Ground: One Community-One Earth*. About 40 attended from the U.S. and Canada, in person and on zoom. We experienced worship, worship sharing, sharing during meals, business meetings, and speakers. Most of the group also attended the November 18 “No Kings” demonstration in Albany, NY.

Three speakers challenged and informed us. Bill McKibben (by zoom) encouraged us as Quakers to follow our concern on climate action. Geoff Garver introduced us to two books, *Territories of Life: Exploring Vitality of Governance for Conserved and Protected Areas* by Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend and *The Trouble with Wilderness* by William Cronin. For many of us the concepts of thriving and territories of life were new. These refer to communities where local persons have developed governance to ensure the well-being of all of life. The third speaker was Eileen Flanagan who shared from her book *Common Ground: How the Crisis of the Earth is Saving Us from Our Illusion of Separation*. She shared stories of grassroots organizing to demonstrate how people can build movements against corporations responsible for climate change by building solidarity with one another.

Keith Runyan, the general secretary of QEW, attended the COP 30 in Brazil where he was part of a presentation with FWCC. FWCC and QEW are involved in a mapping project to identify all Meetings worldwide that have taken climate action initiative. The friendship garden project in West Falmouth will be an included meeting. The other exciting decision was approval for a new initiative to develop QEW Africa which will be based in Kaimosi, Kenya to facilitate grants for earthcare projects which will be better developed by those who live there.

Queries presented for worship sharing were: How are we influenced by “dominant” patterns? What are we doing to cultivate living in right relationship within ourselves, in our meetings, and in the world?



Poster on display at Allen's Neck Meetinghouse. Photo by M. Cornell, October 25, 2025.



## Photos

### Friendship Garden – October 9 – Putting the 2025 Garden to Bed for the Winter

Photos by Erica H. Adams except photo of butternut squash p.8 by Steve Gates.







***Our last delivery  
(November 6) for  
this year to the  
Falmouth Service  
Center: 30 butternut  
squash and  
associated recipes***



## **Readers Write**

### ***A few thoughts around Faith and Practice Revision***

*Eric H. Edwards*

As the committee to revise the book of *Faith and Practice* for New England works into its third decade, I felt an opportunity to write a few thoughts down before the end of the project brings to bear other considerations for myself and the finalizing of the text itself.

I discovered early on that this work was not overawing. It is the work of human beings at a certain time for a relatively small Society (not a church and without a hierarchy of professionals defining the meaning of what a Friend is). It is, however, humbling. Humbling over and over. The Society is not ethnically heavily diverse, although it is also far from any describable homogeneity. It IS, however, widely diverse as expected in the possible descriptions of Inward religious experience. The Religious Society of Friends depends upon individuals to be responsible to the inner promptings of the Divine, whether that of a fundamental silence or of the care-full preaching of its ministers (only a few of whom are recognized outwardly these days) or the activism that the world needs for those properly grounded. Finding and describing the boundaries and aspirations of this diverse Inwardness has been at the heart of all Faith and Practice documents since the beginning of the Society. It is the right and obligation of our Society to describe as best it can the mission and hope the Society wishes to achieve, and be an example and witness to that. This can only be done by regularly testing and submitting to the opportunities the Divine invites (in other words, most of our worship practice). To resist the cultural and social norms as well as the intellectual and emotional assumptions that hinder or attempt to destroy such aspirations, The Society of Friends must be patient and persistent. Correct expression of the requirements the Society expects of its members is critical. Those requirements are not mysterious. They are serious elements of the Faith and its health.

To produce a text like this requires honesty, humility, doggedness, and cooperation among Friends committed to the Society. Clarity now will not be quite the same as it was a hundred years ago, nor as it will appear to be a hundred years from now. There is, though, plenty of clarity to find. The committee has and will continue to seek whatever clarity is available to it. This means that documents we have produced are sent to every meeting in New England for discussion and, yes, sometimes a clarity we were unable to find among ourselves, try as we might, comes to us from discerning, caring, aspiring meetings.

I enjoy this process. Those committed to the Society and its two-pronged mission – first, of declaring openly that whatever is graceful and transcendent is directly available to people without any kind of external intermediary (although often not without inward personal struggle); and second, to make that opportunity available to others (often with no visible result except the open persistence of one's Faith) -- are a loving, sometimes argumentative, crowd. I am happy to be a subset of that crowd tasked to help our generation describe itself as best we can, so that those much older than ourselves are not embarrassed by our discernment, and those who are significantly younger are not misled in their own aspirations.

As I have been able to find my way in the life of the Society, I hope my share of the work on Faith and Practice will assist others to know what they should do and be, whether as a Friend or anything else.

Religious life today is marked by either a voluntary inclination to follow and practice a certain religious path, or by coercion (regardless how gentle) whether from family, ethnicity, or simple cultural bias. Friends have mostly required and always defended the voluntary commitment path. *Faith and Practice* as a document is part of that path for me. The way is literally open to anyone, and yet to be chosen, even now, by only a few.

***Border Book Author Leads Lively and Informative Discussion***     *Miriam Davidson with notes by John Davidson*

A standing-room only crowd, including many Quakers, gave a warm welcome to author and immigration activist Sarah Towle at the opening event of her book tour at the Woods Hole Public Library on October 6.

“What began as a border crisis is now an everywhere crisis,” Towle said, as she addressed the proliferation of arrests, detentions, and deportations of immigrants since President Trump took office for the second time in January.

Towle’s Woods Hole visit was the first of more than two dozen appearances she made throughout the Northeast this fall in conjunction with the publication of the second edition of her award-winning book *Crossing the Line: Finding American in the Borderlands*.\*

Her talk, “How Immigration Became Weaponized to Drive U.S. Democracy into Crisis and What You Can Do to Help Refuse, Resist and Reclaim Human Rights,” was followed by a panel discussion with two local immigrant-rights advocates, Miriam Davidson and Travis Mapp.

Towle is an American writer, podcaster and educator who lives and works in England. Davidson, formerly based in Tucson, Arizona, is an attendee at West Falmouth Meeting who has written several books on border issues. Mapp is a school teacher originally from Trinidad and Tobago who serves on the board of Racial Justice Falmouth and is a member of the Barnstable County Human Rights Commission.

Towle described researching her book during the first Trump administration, when public outcry forced the end of the cruel “family separation” policy at the border. However, such separations continue to take place, as immigrant parents are being arrested, incarcerated, and deported away from their children every day in communities across America.

Towle went on to discuss the global expansion of what is called “the border industrial complex” – that is, the immigrant detection, detention, and deportation system. She noted that the U.S.’s anti-immigrant enforcement budget is now higher than that of all federal law enforcement agencies combined, as well as higher than the military budgets of every country on Earth other than China and the U.S.

Following Towle’s talk, Davidson, author of a book on the 1980’s sanctuary movement and its co-founder, Quaker rancher and philosopher Jim Corbett, spoke on the lessons of that time.

She said those who seek to protect undocumented migrants today may face legal consequences, just as members of the 1980s movement did. Eight of them, including movement co-founder and Presbyterian pastor John Fife, were convicted of conspiracy, alien smuggling, and other charges after a federal trial in Tucson in 1985-86.

Davidson said that, in the wake of the sanctuary trial, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Border Patrol generally followed a policy not to arrest migrants in or near sensitive locations such as courthouses, schools, churches, and hospitals. However, since January 2025 that is no longer the case.



From left to right: M. Davidson, S. Towle and T. Mapp. Woods Hole Library, October 6. Photos by E. H. Adams.

Mapp, who teaches in Massachusetts high schools with large immigrant populations, noted the fear and anxiety the stepped-up enforcement has caused among his students. He mentioned several students who have had family members detained, as well as students who are now afraid to come to school. He said he has met with other teachers and administrators to coordinate an action plan should ICE appear on or near school grounds.

The speakers' presentation concluded with a call to action. Audience members, who numbered about 65, responded with specific questions and suggestions about how locals can learn, and what to do, about ICE activities in their neighborhoods.

Sandra Faiman-Silva from the Falmouth Immigrant Rights Coalition passed out "Know Your Rights" materials in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and described the outreach work of her organization. She said the FIRC has met with some one hundred local business owners and at least 80 percent were receptive to discussing strategies for how to respond should ICE officers attempt to enter their workplaces or detain their employees.

Towle's talk was co-sponsored by the Falmouth Immigrant Rights Coalition and the Jewel Cobb Action Coalition as well as the Woods Hole Public Library. Members of West Falmouth Meeting helped arrange Towle's visit and hosted her during her stay.

The event was filmed by FCTV and will be available on the FCTV You Tube channel at a future date.

More information on Towle and her book can be found at her Substack, [Tales of Humanity](#), and podcast, [From the Borderlands](#).

Towle, S. *Crossing the Line: Finding American in the Borderlands*.\* Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2025.

***The Rise***

***Bill Holcombe***

*September 2025*



A rise in the land  
stretches 35 miles or so  
between long narrow deep deep  
resplendent lakes Seneca & Cayuga  
where I've walked rode biked  
over 60 years off n on  
a sense of place  
where I could live  
where once did live  
rich in sensation offset dwelling  
below Appalachian poverty line

Autumn 1967 that earth  
gave off crisp musk  
ground frost clear air  
grape redolent  
October days when scientists  
worried over another glaciation  
the ground the hills awaiting  
wineries not yet cultivated

If I could write music  
I'd dedicate a tone poem  
to this place  
this rise  
those fields & vineyards  
to roadside historic markers  
small villages  
the fields the barns  
soft then swelling strains  
inspired by merging  
Aaron Copland's The Tender Land  
& Our Town  
to breathe into my tears.

**More**  
**Diane Hanna**



*October 2025*

When I talk to God, it's a grocery list  
of gratitudes that goes on a bit until  
God gets bored with same-old, same-old,  
so I shift to hopes for friends with bad knees,  
faltering vision, irregular heartbeats.

Still God wants more and so do the angels  
(my favorites) with their forgiving natures,  
eagerness to help, the blessed comfort  
of their print housedresses, plain faces,  
floured hands that can roll a perfect pie crust.

I'm not sure any one of them is taking me  
seriously, as if they sense my showing up  
every morning for this prayer business is as  
perfunctory as flossing, paying the phone bill,  
staying hydrated.

A friend tells me God wants everything:  
not my new couch or these poems, not pleas  
or suggestions. Something to do with essence,  
as essential as air and water, whatever is inside  
the bones, whatever is left behind.

Unsure, I turn to the ordinary: clouds, rain,  
an osprey's cry, scent of privet, old eyes of an alley cat.  
Learn to sit still at the white Quaker Meeting house  
with its roadside flowers in a mayonnaise jar,  
its open windows, while I listen, listen hard for more.

## ***Yarmouth – Indigenous Gathering October 2025***

*Bob*

*Kelley*

On Sunday, October 26, 2025, the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth (HSOY) held its fourth annual Reservation Walk with Quaker Hospitality. The walk was led by Nipmuc–Wampanoag Waban Webquish and HSOY President and tenth-generation Yarmouth Quaker Bob Kelley. This sold-out event drew more than thirty-five attendees, including those who attended the hospitality hosted by Yarmouth Friends.



The Indian Memorial, built in 1883 by Historian Daniel Wing from volcanic rock.

Much preparation goes into an event like this. It takes timely coordination between our Indigenous speaker, HSOY, the event participants, and Yarmouth Friends.

About the walk: In the 1713 Division of Common Lands in Yarmouth, an Indigenous Reservation was established by the Selectmen for the Indigenous peoples of the area to make their home. There was a collaboration between the Selectmen and the leadership of the Mattacheese as to the location of the land to be set aside. The spot chosen was 160

acres between Long Pond and Bass River in South Yarmouth, with the town retaining ownership.

Unlike the Indigenous settlements at Mashpee and Potanumicut (Eastham), the Yarmouth reservation was an unnatural settlement, created because it was located about halfway between the two natural settlements.

During the walk, participants learned about the reservation and some of its history. Some of the Indigenous men living on the reservation were whalers. The whale boat landing was near the mouth of Bass River on the West Dennis side. John Gorham, a whaleman from a family of military men, lived in Yarmouth near the Barnstable border.

Louisburg was the largest fortress on the eastern seaboard and was occupied by the French. During the 1745 Siege at Louisburg, Capt. Gorham recruited thirteen Indigenous men from the Yarmouth reservation to be part of a four-thousand-man voluntary force from Massachusetts.

This was a unique group of men who were recruited for their adeptness in maneuvering whaleboats. Gorham devised special rigging and outfitted the boats so they could move quickly on the water and be carried swiftly over land. These Yarmouth men will forever be known as the backbone of the first amphibious warfare unit in America. They were part of an elite fighting force known as Gorham's Rangers. Reportedly, eight of the Rangers died of disease, two stayed in Canada, and only three returned to the Yarmouth reservation. A huge loss to a very small community.

The Sachem of the Yarmouth reservation was Elisha Nauhaught. The natives living on the reservation were "Christianized" as were those at Mashpee and Potanumicutt. In 1870, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a long poem entitled "The Legend of the Nauhaught" published under the title "Nauhaught the Deacon." The Sachem was afflicted with smallpox in the late 1780s and perished along with most of the remaining Indigenous peoples of the reservation.

When the epidemic hit South Yarmouth, Friend John Killey became infected. His wife Elizabeth (Pollard) had had the disease as a young woman. The Killey's lived immediately south of the reservation and opened their parlor to the sick Indigenous people. This was unheard of in the latter 18<sup>th</sup> century. As a point of interest, Friend Elizabeth Pollard was sister to Capt. George Pollard of the ship *Essex*, of *Moby Dick* fame.

Friend Silas Baker and his wife Rachel (Marchant) had a similar situation a little further down Old Main Street near Willow Street and also opened their parlor to the sick.

The result of this epidemic left fewer than a dozen Indigenous survivors. Thomas Greenough and most of his family survived. The reservation lasted 65 years and was then dissolved on January 20, 1779 into ten lots that were leased to the highest bidder for a period of 999 years.



# Historical Society of Old Yarmouth

info@hsoy.org



1. Northeast corner reservation
2. Friends Meetinghouse
3. Greenough & Naughtaut
4. Indian Memorial
5. Southern reservation border
6. Killey & Baker
7. Clapp's Point

Marcus Hendricks/Waban Webquish  
wampanoagshells@gmail.com

Map by Robert D. Kelley 2014 - Enhanced by Steve Gray 2019

Our walk began at Packet Landing which is adjacent to the Lower Bass River Bridge. (See map on previous page. The map was created by Bob and is handed out at the beginning of the yearly walk. The back of the map contains the Whittier poem referred to earlier.) This spot represented the northeast corner of the former reservation. We continued through the Quaker cemetery, where we discussed the *Doctrine of Discovery* and early Quaker ties to the Indigenous. The path then leads up Station Avenue, the red dotted line on the map, to Indian Memorial Drive.

There was conversation at Wing's Grove Park and at the Indian Memorial where the walk finished. The group then walked back to the Quaker schoolhouse, where the Yarmouth Friends offered a robust hospitality of Indigenous-style foods for all participants.

Prior to our meal we paused for a group picture outside the schoolhouse. (See below.)



Photo credit: P. Fawcett. October 26, 2025.

Among the foods we all enjoyed were stuffed quahogs prepared by Waban Webquish, salmon, butternut soup, 3-sister salad, cornbread, apple butter, blueberry pies, and cider. The butternut soup was provided by Barb Lambdin from original recipe by Sabrina Kane. Here's the recipe:

## ***Butternut Soup***

*Boil-*

*1 butternut squash*

*2 carrots*

*2 potatoes or ½ cauliflower*

*Fish out, cool, and peel the squash*

*Then mash the veggies with some of the cooking water*

*I used ½ C quinoa in addition to some cauliflower*

*Sauté-*

*1 large onion chopped*

*several cloves of garlic minced*

*1" ginger minced*

*Add-*

*mashed veggies and*

*1 T curry powder*

*¼ t red pepper flakes*

*1 can coconut milk*

*Add-*

*vegetable broth and/or water from boiling the squash to get*

*the consistency you want*

*Salt to taste*

*None of the measurement are specific, all based on the size of the veggies and your discretion/taste.*

*DO NOT overdo the ¼ t pepper flakes. A little goes a long way.*



***December 21 – National Homeless Persons  
Memorial Service and Sleep-Out***

*Alan Burt*

December 21 has been designated National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. It is also the longest night of the year. Memorial services are held at over one hundred cities across America.

Quakers have been participating in these memorial services since 2002. This year's service will be held at East Sandwich Meetinghouse. Wampanoag tribal member Robyn Stamps, Director of Robyn's Resources, will join us for a potluck dinner after which she will update us on the services her organization provides for our homeless neighbors. Following a discussion with Robyn, we will move into worship sharing on our thoughts and feelings about the homeless neighbors suffering in our midst.

As in past years, a few of us will sleep outside the meetinghouse that night as a way of marking and reflecting on what our homeless brothers and sisters experience every day. Others are welcome to sleep in the community house. Everyone is welcome to attend the evening service.

Robyn spoke with us at the West Falmouth Meetinghouse last year at a very-well-attended dinner and I look forward to this year's gathering (at least the indoor part of it). I honor Robyn and her organization which does so much homeless outreach work. Donations can again be made to Robyn's Resources P.O. 137, Buzzards Bay, 02532.

Date: December 21, 2025

Place: East Sandwich Meeting House, 6 Quaker Rd, Sandwich, MA.

Time: 5:30 – 6:15 pm potluck

6:15 - 6:45 presentation/discussion on homelessness

6:45 - 7:30pm memorial service, worship sharing.

## ***Why Go to Friends Meeting?***

*Lewis Randa*

Over the years, I've often been asked why I attend Quaker meeting and what I get out of it. My answer varies, but it always draws on what I've experienced in Friends meetings over the past half century, and on the peacefulness and quiet strength I find on a walk around the bog or through wooded areas.

Forest bathing (as some refer to it) and Quaker meeting for worship share certain undeniable qualities: both are gentle immersions in a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere, and both require openness more than effort.

Forest bathing invites slowing down, setting aside goals and devices, and letting the colors, shapes, sounds, and scents of the woods seep and speak into one's awareness until the forest's spirit and presence settle in and the body and mind are refreshed, healed even. The forest does most of the "work"; our task is simply to walk, linger, breathe, see, and allow this living presence to wash through the senses. Gail Melix's recent article in Friends Journal says it best.\*

Meeting for worship begins similarly, as Friends gather in shared silence and lay aside busyness to become inwardly attentive and open. There is no sermon to consume or evaluate, only the simple practice of sitting, breathing, and staying open to "that of God" that surrounds and dwells in everyone and in everything. At times, the silence deepens into a gathered state, when the room feels held in a quiet unity that no one person controls. It's impossible to fully define, but it has shaped me in ways that keep drawing me back, though the reasons shift over time.

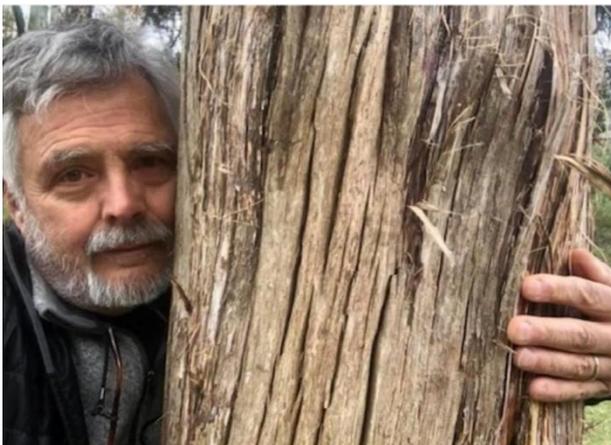
*Meeting for worship is where our hearts and souls cross-pollinate in a silence that asks nothing more of us than to stay open and absorb the essence of those who surround us.*

Both the forest and the meeting room teach that the peace we seek outside is a reflection of the peace within ourselves and within the community turned inward together. Trees and plants share light, air, and soil, shaping the space in which one stands; those at Quaker meeting share consciousness, faith, and tenderness, shaping the silence in which we all sit. To hug a tree is to lean into forest bathing; to share spoken ministry during meeting is to lean into a human forest where we are bathed in a deeper awareness through shared insights and epiphanies.

The thing about hugging a tree is that there is no other living being you can hug that reaches down into the Earth and up to the sky – that was here before you were born, and will be here long after you die.

In both settings, our consciousness cross-pollinates: with fellow Friends at meeting and with the expressions of nature that crawl, walk, fly, and burrow, and with the trees and plants that sustain them. In each setting, we find ourselves strengthened for whatever step faith asks of us next. Whether at the rise of meeting or stepping out of the woods, it is often clear that you are leaving a fuller human being than you were when you first arrived. The power of nature and the power of human nature have together held a place in my spiritual journey. In the end, attending Friends Meeting is like a quiet walk in the woods: I go because it helps me return to myself and to what matters most.

\*G. Melix, “The delight of being alive.” Friends Journal, February 1, 2025. See <https://www.friendsjournal.org/the-delight-of-being-alive/>.



A favorite tree in Duxbury, MA near the Randas' home. Photo by M. Randa, 2015.



## ***Let There Be Light***

*Paul Denoncourt*

Each week at Quaker worship we are asked to "hold people in the Light." Just what does that mean? This past Sunday, before worship at ESFM, a roundtable discussion was held on this very question. Barry Simon, the facilitator (thank you, Barry, for organizing it!), asked each of the 19 attendees what The Light meant to us. What was produced was a beautiful patchwork quilt of theological, metaphorical, and experiential contributions. It was unfortunate that we did not have a scribe to write down all that was said, because what was said was very powerful.

In preparation for the event, I searched the bible for all references to light. The very first is the familiar Genesis 1:3 which states "God said "Let there be Light", which was spoken in what is identified as the "first day." But later, in Genesis 1:14-19, God created the sun and the moon on the "fourth day", the former to "govern the day" and the later to "govern the night." So, if the sun and the moon had not yet been created, what was the "Light" of Genesis 1:3? Now my interest piqued. So, I did what all good academic researchers do in such a situation; I Googled it. Then I followed several non-Google threads. It turns out that this question has been asked by seekers and theologians for centuries.

What follows is not an essay on the Quaker practice of holding someone in the Light. I have not been a Quaker long enough to understand it to the point of being able to explain it to anyone, and I challenge any Friend who understands it well to explain it to the rest of us in the next edition of *The Gazette*. This submission is meant to address the apparent biblical contradiction of duplicate lights.

To save you all time and to spare you the labor of wading through difficult theological arguments (which I did not fully comprehend), here is the bottom line: No one knows for certain. But there are three general patterns of explanation. These three patterns parallel what I often find in biblical interpretation: literal, metaphorical, and theological layers of explanation.

1. The literal. On the first day God created a temporary light source -- I guess so he could see what He was doing -- and after the fourth day did not need it anymore. This explanation was given on several fundamentalist Christian websites where the Bible is held to be inerrant and is to be interpreted literally.
2. The metaphorical. The Light in Genesis 1:3 is a metaphor for the energy of the Big Bang. This position was posed by a few nonfundamentalist authors.
3. The theological. The Light is interpreted as a manifestation of God's own presence and glory, and his power to create *ex nihilo*. Some theologians go one step further to say that God's physical presence in creation is the Christ, so the Light of God's presence is the Light of Christ, through whom all was subsequently created. From a trinitarian viewpoint, these two explanations merge.

Perhaps the metaphorical and the theological interpretations can coexist at different levels of consciousness. Perhaps all three interpretations are wrong. If the Infinite is ineffable, then Divinity cannot be known or understood by our limited, finite minds. If so, the only tools which the author(s) of Genesis can employ to aim us in the right direction would be metaphor and symbolism. It is like a finger pointing at the moon; the finger is not the moon. The Light is a finger pointing us towards the unknowable across an unbreachable gap of comprehension.



**Clerks\***

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