



The History of Mt. Toby Meeting

Volume 2

1954 - 1990s



John and Georgana Foster at Mt. Toby Meetinghouse (*Greenfield Recorder* photo) October 2004, 40th Anniversary of building the meetinghouse. Georgana Foster (member of Mt. Toby from 1957) is the author of this history.

History of Mt. Toby Meeting, Volume 2 – Georgana Foster

Introduction

Helen Griffiths wrote the history of the first 20 years of our Meeting from 1939 to 1959 when she was the newsletter editor in the 1950s. Gifted in spoken ministry and pastoral care in our Meeting, she was an author, and Chair of the English Department at Mount Holyoke College. The History & Records Committee has printed this early history and copies are available to borrow in the library.

The history of the Meeting activity during World War II has always been an inspiration to me, as well as the vivid description of the events when the Yearly Meetings united. Because some Friends have told me they "get bogged down" in the details, I propose to write a summary of this book as my first chapter, even while commending it to Friends to read. Following that, I propose to write a memoir of my experience in the Meeting since 1957. - Georgana Foster.

History of Mt. Toby Meeting - Chapter One

In her preface, Helen speaks of the "phenomenal growth" of Friends Meetings in the Connecticut Valley in the 20th century when our Quarterly Meeting was the first to be formed in a hundred years. That Meeting of a hundred years ago, which existed for thirty years from 1800, was the Pelham Preparative Meeting, under the care of Richmond Meeting in New Hampshire. Pelham was never allowed to be a full Monthly Meeting for reasons sadly detailed in a book written in 1970 by Paul Bigelow, (*Disowned, Disrupted and Dissolved: The life and times of the members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Pelham, Mass., 1806-1870*) a Meeting member and Pelham historian. He found records that the members were considered uncouth, and ignorant country folk, incapable of being a proper Meeting and the Meeting gradually died out. The famous abolitionist, Abby Kelley Foster was born in the Meeting in 1812 but her Quaker family moved back to Amesbury. Their fieldstone, "green" burying ground in Pelham, has been rediscovered by Roger Conant, and was cleaned and labeled by a Young Friends project from the 1994 Friends General Conference Gathering. Their Meetinghouse became a barn, and when it was torn down in the 1920s, a board was salvaged which was incorporated in our Meetinghouse. Look for the wall plaque, unfortunately painted over in a remodeling.

A hundred years later, in the 1920s there were scattered Quakers in the Connecticut Valley; Mary Taylor, a birthright Friend from Indiana, came with her husband George, who taught at Amherst College, and in 1924 a Meeting for Worship was held at the home of Paul Douglas until he went to Washington as a Senator. In his home, Friends from Northfield to New Haven also formed the informal Connecticut Valley Friends Fellowship in 1925, and "developed a warm family feeling", meeting about six times a year, with 50 people, sometimes on a farm in Montague. The Amherst group collected clothes for the AFSC relief in the depression, and the collection for material aids for them continued for decades.

It was not until 1939 when a Monthly Meeting was officially organized at Smith College, Northampton, initiated by Elined Kotschnig, a British Quaker who had just come with her husband Emil (who would teach at the college) from Zurich, Switzerland. Elined had studied under Carl Jung, and later helped found the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology. She saw the several informal groups meeting occasionally at colleges, and researched how an Independent meeting could be started. At that time there were two New England Yearly Meetings, Wilburite and Gurneyite, who had separated over doctrinal issues in 1845, and a new Meeting did not want to chose one to belong to, but Elined found they could affiliate with the Friends Fellowship Council in Philadelphia, founded by the American Friends Service Committee in 1935, as did the many Independent Meetings being founded in colleges. Among the students who joined in 1940 was Teresina Rowell who would later return, married to Joe Havens, with whom she would found Temenos Retreat Center in Shutesbury.

Immediately Friends were involved in a conference in Cambridge on keeping the country out of war and opposing peacetime conscription in 1940. As soon as the war began, they took on the work of financially supporting conscientious objectors who were put in the Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps run by AFSC (American Friends Service Committee). They had no income and their families had to be supported by their churches. AFSC tried to find government service work for them to do, in forests, mental institutions, or medical experiments. There was a camp in New Hampshire and the 1942 Meeting budget allocated \$600 to the camps nationally and \$100 to the local camps, but gas rationing soon made it impossible to continue to visit them. The experiences of a dozen or more of the men who were in CPS camps would later leaven our Meeting's peace testimony. Many Friends scattered to other alternative service during the war. Those who remained helped to sponsor European refugees, and tried to get Nisei girls from the Japanese-American internment camps scholarships for attending Smith and Mount Holyoke. This is only a brief summary of intense activity, which was to set a pattern for working to oppose war, binding up the wounds of war many times in the 20th century.

Miraculously, during the war, the two New England yearly Meetings, were still able to make plans to unite, and in June of 1945, the Connecticut Valley Friends Fellowship to which the Northampton Meeting belonged, was a third party to the uniting. Also in this third group were independent Meetings in Cambridge and Providence, RI. Thus began the long process of integrating the pastoral Meetings of the Five Years Meeting (now Friends United Meeting) with the unprogrammed Wilburites and the Independents. Northampton Meeting became the Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting (MCVMM), as they were in the middle of the Quarterly Meeting, between Connecticut and Vermont Meetings. MCVMM included groups holding a Meeting in homes for students in South Hadley; Greenfield group meeting in a barn studio loaned to them by Mary Champney, called Sherwood Friends Center; and a worship group in Great Barrington meeting at Gould Farm, a halfway house for mentally ill people and Northampton group at Smith College. Amherst Friends, who could not get to Northampton during the war, had often begun attending other churches. The Friends in all these groups worshipped together only once a month when they had Meeting for Business. Thus began the second chapter of the life of our Meeting.

History of Mt. Toby Meeting - Chapter Two

"The amazing decade of 1954-64"

During this decade, nine years after the Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting (MCVMM) joined the united New England Yearly Meeting, the three Preparative Meetings in MCVMM were joined by a new Meeting in Amherst, organized in 1954 by the many new Quaker families who came to the University of Massachusetts.

By 1959 the MCVMM decided to try a "consolidation experiment" for all the worship groups-- Greenfield, South Hadley, and Northampton -would join in Amherst in a rented hall for First Day Meeting for Worship. By 1960 they felt the experiment was successful and they began looking for land to build a meetinghouse. Groundbreaking was in October 1963 on land in Leverett, and the meetinghouse was opened in October 1964. The name of the Meeting was changed to reflect, "we will lift up our eyes to the hills" to Mt. Toby.

How had this sudden growth taken place? In the 1950s, the University of Massachusetts grew from 4,000 to 10,000 students and at least fifteen Quaker families from all over the USA came to Amherst for the (men) Friends to teach at the University. Among the first Friends, in 1954, Francis and Becky Holmes came from the Ithaca, NY Meeting at Cornell; they soon found a meeting place on campus, in the English seminar room in the old Chapel, arranged by member David Clark. As all of the families were raising the Baby Boomer generation (2-6 children per family), a need was soon felt for having First Day school more than once a month when all the groups met for Meeting for Business, often at the Sherwood Friends Center in Greenfield. (Sherwood was a barn studio given to Greenfield Friends by Mary Champney in the late '40s.)

The Amherst Meeting had found a building it could rent on Main Street, the Amherst Grange Hall, a steeple house of the Methodist church until 1950. (In the present day it is the Narcul Center.)

History of Mt. Toby Meeting - Chapter Three

More Friends families come to Amherst, and the "consolidated " Meeting for Worship. 1957-1961.

By the end of the 1950s, about 12 new Quaker families had come (or soon would) to be faculty at the fast growing University of Massachusetts. There were about 35 children in those families--from unborn babies to teenagers--and soon the use of small, borrowed spaces was not adequate. First Day School was held only once a month at the time of business Meeting of the Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting (MCVMM) which was held with a Meeting for Worship in various places--homes, farms, Woolman Hill and Sherwood Friends Center--with Greenfield, Northampton and South Hadley Preparative Meetings. Amherst became a Preparative Meeting with its own Business Meeting and by the December 1958 Meeting for Business of MCVMM they proposed a "consolidation" of the weekly Meeting for Worship which would take place in a rented Amherst location, to which Friends from the other Meetings could come if they chose, but could still worship in their own locations. In Greenfield this was the Sherwood Friends Center, a barn studio given to them by Mary Champney 1950. South Hadley friends had a biweekly afternoon Meeting with a supper in their homes for Mt. Holyoke students. Northampton Friends met with students in rooms in Helen Hills Hills (sic) Chapel.

Ministry and Counsel wrote in August 1959: "It was agreed to have a common meeting place for weekly worship together.... this arrangement to make possible a First Day School, which is what determined us to try this experiment of consolidating." The plan began in October 1959. It had also been encouraged by the First Day School committee when they met June, 1959, meeting under the apple tree at Woolman Hill, in Deerfield, a Quaker conference center founded just a few years before.

By October 1959 this "experiment" in consolidation began in the rented Amherst Grange Hall on Main Street in Amherst, a steeple house, which had been the Methodist Church until 1950. Meeting for Worship was held in the now empty sanctuary on folding chairs, and First Day School in the basement beneath, with the sound of children's activities rising from below. The essentials which a Meeting needs--a Bulletin Board, books from the Meeting library at Sherwood, free pamphlets, and a guest book, were set up in the entrance hall, and had to be stuffed in a closet with Grange lodge paraphernalia after Meeting. The children met in the dusty dining hall below, with its lingering cigar smoke, and fellowship lunch was prepared in the well-stocked kitchen.

Friends in the other towns, who considered their worship with students to be primary, felt led to continue being easily available to them. Greenfield Friends came to Amherst when the furnace at Sherwood Friends Center was not working in the winter, but the taking of their building by the State was still in the rumor stage. It was a time of much transition and difficult decisions. At the same time, Lester and Margaret Clarke continued a Meeting in their home in Great Barrington, which was also

affiliated with MCVMM.

By the spring of 1960 a draft of the State of Society report, said, "We evaluated our experience and found unexpected gains over and above First Day School. Far from sacrificing ourselves for our children, we had experienced a deeper spiritual life in our Meetings for Worship."

My journal entry for December 24, 1961 relates how that date was truly a family Christmas Day. Friends arrived in a snowstorm and Peggy Holden at the piano made the collection of Indian bells rung by children and various brass and wind instruments blend harmoniously. The older children hung "surprise balls" and "coin circles" on a tree--donations for AFSC Algerian refugee program--until the tree threatened to topple under the weight and had to be braced by yarn strings. Children crawled on the floor and all but the youngest joined us for a rich Meeting for Worship.

Then many joined a peace walk to the Amherst Common, as proposed in advance by David Leonard, carrying signs that this was the birthday of the Prince of Peace, "Fallout shelters are no Shelters", and "God works through men to bring Peace." Eric Zahradnik, at 11 months, was the youngest of the children pulled on sleds or carried. The few people we met looked at us curiously and a policeman asked what group we represented. "Friends of Peace" was the answer. "But what group?" "Quakers" We formed briefly at the crèche on the Common, and returned quickly to the warmth of the Grange Hall, and a miraculously multiplying number of dishes at potluck. We all felt physically and spiritually exhilarated and warmed. In retrospect, it should be said that peace marches were almost unknown at that time, we did no publicity and almost no one knew we marched.

History of Mt. Toby Meeting - Chapter Four

The great experiment of consolidating the four local Preparative Meetings of Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting (MCVMM) in October 1959 and of their holding their Meeting for Worship every first day in the Amherst Grange Hall proved to be a great experiment in how Friends who came together from 10 or more Yearly Meetings, pastoral, and unprogrammed from all over the country, most of them recently convinced Friends, could manage their different perceptions of how to organize a new Meeting. They were joining the MCVMM, which was 20 years old as an Independent Meeting, and 15 years old as a member of the united New England Yearly Meeting, which was writing its first *Faith and Practice*. The MCVMM already had its own practices on membership and structure, to which were now added to the experiences of Friends from all these yearly meetings.

Meetings for Business for the first year were filled with discussions about "how do we do things", with many discussions as to the time to hold Meeting and discussion groups, and how to function in a large open room, how to teach children, etc.

Friends from the Meetings in Greenfield, South Hadley and Northampton were making their own decisions as to whether some Friends would continue to hold Meetings in their Towns.

One of the early decisions was to use a program created by Philadelphia Friend - the Rachel Dubois Dialogues, a sharing process where all the participants in a circle answered a series of questions about their religious experiences, in turn. These dialogues enabled this disparate group of Friends to know each other in the spirit.

Following the pattern of Helen Griffiths in her history, we will introduce some of the Friends who came in the 1954-1964 period, and continued to be active.

Francis and Becky (Helen) Holmes, from the Ithaca MM, New York YM, John and Mimi Zadravnik, -John joined Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative, while at Iowa State; Trevor and Laura Robinson, came from Cornell and Syracuse Meetings NY, Trevor already a member of MCVMM, John and Georgana Foster from Ithaca, where Gee joined, John from a New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Wilburite); Curtis and Myrtle Johnson, Kansas YM, Bob and Nancy Archer and George and Ann Levinger, Cleveland Meeting of Lake Erie; Bob and Phyllis Agard, Earlham College, Indiana, Joe and Teresina Havens, Philadelphia; Terry originally Northampton Meeting; Sue and Steve Fletcher, Baltimore YM and Philadelphia YM; Marjorie and Thomas Hancock, New York YM; Elwood and Alta Mae Reber, Champaign Ill. Meeting, which they founded. In Amherst they joined David Clark, and James and Inez Fuller, members of MCVMM, and Mary Kentfield, NEYM of Friends (Wilburite), North Dartmouth, Mary Taylor, Ohio Yearly Meeting, and her husband George Taylor, at Amherst College since 1924.

Already in the Northampton Preparative Meeting, were Frances and Tom Crowe, a radiologist, Hartford, Gertrude and David Huntington, Bruce and Ruth Hawkins all at Smith College. In South Hadley at Mount Holyoke College, Peggy (pastoral Meeting in Indiana) and David Holden, David Leonard, Providence (Rhode Island) MM (teaching at UMass) and Julie Leonard; Helen Griffiths, originally Northampton Meeting; in Greenfield Meeting: Fritz and Alison Kaufhold, Gill: Sally and Bernard Dirks, Montague: Philip Woodbridge, anesthesiologist at Franklin Medical Center and Ruth Woodbridge.

Curtis Johnson, Joe Havens, Elwood Reber, Tom Hancock, had been in Civilian Public Service Camp as conscientious objectors to World War II, and Trevor Robinson, John Foster, Francis Holmes had registered as C.O.s with their draft boards and were given other classifications. There were many other variations, but experiences with the War had led all the men to Friends and their peace testimony. The Johnsons had just returned from two years on the Afghanistan border, and the Zahradniks from 2 years in an Iranian village, with USAID, and John Foster from India, with Quakers, all working in agricultural projects. Many men at UMass were in the College of Agriculture. All of this experience with the War and postwar international work were to direct the Meeting in the next years when war came again.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Five

While the Meeting was renting the Grange Hall in Amherst from 1959 on, the Meetinghouse Committee found a lot on the northeast corner of Fearing Street and Sunset Avenue in Amherst in 1962. This lot was purchased, and the committee began to search for an architect to design the building. They hired Elwood Weber of Springfield. After traveling around New England to look at other Meetinghouses, he designed a building with high windows on the street side and doors opening to a terrace on the back. I

In a short period of time, it was learned that the Amherst Creamery, across Fearing Street from the lot, was to be converted into a restaurant. The committee felt this would limit the parking possibilities on the street and not be compatible. The Meeting then decided to sell the lot; and the buyer, Louis Vincent, was the owner of the Creamery, and also owner of a popular local super-market.

Some profit was made selling the lot, and a few Friends felt we should not profit from real estate speculation, but the Meeting for Business decided the money could be used for two extras in the Meetinghouse plan - the wool carpet in the Meeting room and the fireplace.

Another factor related to this lot was in the unseen future: in the fields to the west of the lot, which then stretched empty to Hadley, the UMass Southwest Dormitory Complex, with 22-storey dorms, would be built in a few years. Also, at that time, almost no campus buildings were south of Old Chapel, so it appeared then that the lot we had bought was totally "off campus."

The committee returned to a search for new land on which to build, and this time a new offer entered the picture. Meeting attender Ethel DuBois offered a piece of land with frontage on Long Plain Road, Route 63, in Leverett, part of the farm which she had owned since the 1920s and lived on year round since retiring from her job as a guidance counselor on Long Island, NY. She had started the Long Plain Nature Center at her farm, using her barn, and the woods up the mountainside, and bringing children from the inner city in Holyoke.

The Meeting decided to accept the offer of the land from Ethel, though with reluctance to leave an Amherst location which made it possible for college students, a few of whom had become active in the Meeting, to attend. We felt a place for our children to have a First Day School must be our priority.

Also, Leverett would be a location closer to Greenfield Friends. It was becoming more evident that the Sherwood Friends Center in Greenfield would be taken by the State by eminent domain, to build the new Interstate 91 highway. A Greenfield Friend had measured and estimated the highway would go through the middle of the Center. Beloved by all the Meeting, Sherwood was a place where the library was located and Monthly Meetings for Business were often held. But the building was hardly a candidate for being moved, as it was a barn converted to a studio by Mary Champney,

which she willed to the Greenfield Preparative Meeting at her death in 1950.

The committee was approved to find a contractor, and asked Tony Conklin, a local builder, to give an estimate for building a Meetinghouse using the plans drawn by Weber. His figure was \$90,000. The Meeting had some thoughts of being able to build the Meetinghouse themselves, but realized this was unrealistic.

On a First Day in early October 1963, Meeting members gathered for a very exciting Meeting for Worship, and groundbreaking, at the Leverett site, sitting on the ground in the pasture. Pictures show the women in dresses and heels, and the men in coats and ties. Oldest member Mary Kentfield, who could not walk the field, sat in Philip Woodbridge's French Citroen car nearby, and spoke of our "lifting up our eyes to the hills from which comest our help." At the close of Worship, the children rushed into the field of corn stubble, barefoot and wielding shovels. Pictures show the girls in frilly dresses, and the boys in coats and shirts. Children from the Robinson, Agard, Zahradnik and Crowe families are included.

The foundation of the building was poured before winter, and the work on the building continued during the winter. The building would be opened by October 1964.



History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Six

In this chapter, we get to the exciting time when our Meeting moved into the new Meetinghouse at Long Plain Road in Leverett. Important items of business at that time were the re-naming of our meeting and how we planned to pay for the building.

On September 27, 1964, Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting held a Meeting for Worship followed by an afternoon Open House for the community in the new Meetinghouse. A letter sent to the Fosters, who were in India, by Miriam Zahradnik, described this:

“There were 175-200 persons at Meeting on Sunday last. We held two Meetings simultaneously, one in Fellowship Room. All was ready and in order, except no rain for the grass. Somehow a Quaker poster concerning the equality of men and women...to hold office, work, etc. got put up probably by Helen Griffiths) and another on the Inner Light. (The architect) Elwood Weber decorated with Vermont crocks of colored leaves and pine needles. His handmade lamps in the Meeting room are lovely... bench cushions a soft grey... rug mottled brown... walls white with dark wood in the corner posts.”

It appears this was the first Meeting for Friends in the new building in Leverett. A week later, on October 4, Quarterly Meeting was held, with Smithfield Quarterly Meeting asking to meet jointly with us. Changing the name of the Meeting from that of Middle Connecticut Valley had been discussed for several months that year, with a straw poll taken on 15 names. Those suggested and rejected at the May Meeting include: Names of Towns such as Leverett, as not indicating the scope of the Meeting; Pioneer Valley, as too commercial; Tri- County, like the Fair; Valley, too vague; and Long Plain (the Road we are on) already taken in NEYM. (Cornfield got a few votes.)

A preference for the name Mount Toby became clear, but it was not until our October Meeting for Business, the first in the new building, after rejecting Mid-Valley, Circling Hills, Leverett Hills, etc., it was approved to change to Mount Toby. We had been apprised that “Toby” indicates a receptacle for drinking beer, and “Tobias” a name meaning the goodness of God, and that the mountain was named for Captain L. Nathan Toby, reputed to be the first white man to have reached the summit.

Financing the building and furnishing of the Meetinghouse in 1964 had begun, of course, with the decision to build a Meetinghouse when the 20 or so Meeting families pledged money, in faith that enough could be raised. The contract for construction was \$80,000. The land was donated by Ethel Dubois, and in addition \$15,000 was received when the first lot chosen for the building site, which had been purchased in Amherst, was sold. Application was made to the Friends General Conference Meetinghouse fund, and the committee visiting us recommended a \$2,000 loan and \$2,000 grant.

The Greenfield Trustees also offered to lend money - interest free, for five years - making it possible to have a shorter bank mortgage. These Trustees were Greenfield

Friends appointed by the Meeting to legally manage the payment given by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts when they took the Sherwood Friends Center, Greenfield's Meetinghouse, by eminent domain and Greenfield Preparative Meeting was laid down. This complex job of the Trustees continued for 40 years, and it is outside the scope of this history to relate all the details, but the loan enabled the Meeting to finance its debt over many decades. The Meeting budget for the 1965-66 fiscal year was Operating \$3,400 and Meetinghouse payments \$3,160.

The report from the Friends General Conference committee who visited us does not seem to exist, but Paul Butterworth, a Hartford Friend on the committee, wrote to John Foster's parents that *"we fully agreed on as favorable report as fully recognized uncertainties will permit. I believe that a home of their own is thoroughly warranted and will bring added numbers and strength."* And Elinid Kotschnig, a founder of our Meeting in 1939, wrote *"It is a great day for all of you to be opening your own Meetinghouse, and I wish I could be there, remembering the early years when we were first forming a Meeting in Northampton... warm greetings... and our hope for every blessing on the new achievement."* Elinid at that time was the editor of *The Inward Light*, the publication of the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology, an organization intertwined with members of Mount Toby.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Seven

When Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting moved into the new meetinghouse in September 1964, we became Mount Toby Meeting. It was not a completely new undertaking, of course, for most committees were already in place, doing the work of the 25 year-old Monthly Meeting. We had most recently been gathering in a rented building, and each committee had been asked to make a dream list of what they would like to see in the new meetinghouse to enable them to do their work. The architect was asked to try to incorporate the suggestions, but also to stay in the budget.

The Room for Meeting for Worship

The room for Meeting for Worship was to have seating for 100 people, thought a maximum for worship, after which the Meeting should divide. A rug was considered necessary, as we did not like the clatter of feet on a wood floor. The windows were to be above eye level - perhaps because the building was originally designed to be in town, but maybe also to reduce distractions. The grouping of the benches would be in a hollow square, with no elevated facing benches found in some old Meetinghouses that are used for elders and those recorded as ministers.

Meeting for Business considered the style of the benches to be used in the worship room. The benches were the only meetinghouse objects for which all member unity was sought. Meeting for Business attendees sat on a model bench based on the architect's drawing and pronounced this traditional model not comfortable. The benches were finally designed and constructed by the father of Miriam Zahradnik, who was a carpenter in Fitchburg. The stain was liberally slapped on during an outside summer project, after which Trevor Robinson spent the winter repairing the damage, bench by bench.

The pillars in the corners of the room held planters, but climbing up to water and care for plants proved to be difficult. After a Meeting gardener said "we do not want dead plants in our Meeting for Worship," the planters were no longer used except for floral arrangements for special occasions. For the ceiling beams, a member suggested using barn beams, made at a great savings by the Unadilla Silo Company. We decided the fireplace would not be in the Meeting room, as in some Meetinghouses, as "Friends were not fire worshippers."

Entrance Hall

A divider partitioned the entrance hall, with shelves for the library on the south side. A catalogued library of several hundred books had been created at the Sherwood Friends Center and stored in the home of a member while the meetinghouse was being built. The librarian, who was overseas for that year, expressed his dissatisfaction with the small space, as he wished to start a New England Quaker research library and perhaps even have a separate building. (The Meeting did not support this project, but by the 1990s the library held 2,000 volumes

and was moved to its present location during a renovation of the meetinghouse.)

An Outreach Committee oversaw the bulletin boards on the side of the divider as well as the display of free and for-sale pamphlets, the Meeting Directory, and weekly newspaper announcements. There had never been a Friends meetinghouse in the area and we had to make ourselves known.

Nursery and First Day School

There were then about fifty children in the core families of Mount Toby Meeting. The First Day School committee had been active for several years in pushing the idea of a consolidated Meeting and then a home of our own where there would be a place for a clean and bright nursery and First Day School. Thus, a nursery was ordered with a child-size toilet and “Community Playthings” furniture, blocks, and toys made by the religious community of the Bruderhof. The room soon became filled with the many babies and toddlers of Meeting members. We had already begun hiring a childcare person. For years, we used members of a Jewish sorority, who would still be able to attend the services of their own faith community. Meeting appointed a person to interview the young women and set up guidelines - an early practice we pioneered.

The fellowship room was planned so it could be divided into five or more First Day classrooms by using the pullout folding walls. The fire marshal decided that each of these areas needed an exit and window, thus the many doors and windows in this room, and also the many shelf and cupboard units. The First Day School Committee led the lengthy and hard discussions about what they should teach, as there were Friends from many Yearly Meeting traditions and convinced Friends who had left other churches.

Other Rooms in the Meetinghouse

The hospitality committee felt the kitchen could be small because “we aren’t preparing big dinners, but having potlucks.” We also did not buy plates or flatware. The fellowship lunch announcement said: “bring your own dishes and utensils.” Paper plates were provided for guests, but eventually everyone used them, so it became necessary to make a collection of varied crockery and go back to the dishwashing we had hated to do in the rented Grange kitchen. Friends’ continuing revelations on what they would eat are a social history. An apocryphal monthly meeting minute advised that food for the Coffee Hour should be ‘cheap, nutritious and “politically correct”.’

The small room now used for a classroom was then an office, housing Meeting records and clocks for programming the heat. The original plan was to use electric heat, which could be programmed to come on in each room at a specific time. When electric heat became too expensive, the Meetinghouse changed to oil through a volunteer effort of meeting members plus leadership from a member who was a specialist in heating and plumbing.

The room now used for the library was added so that we could process clothes

donated for the post-World War II AFSC Material Aids program. This project had been going on for several years in other local churches, with packing done in the Holmes garage. Many tons of clothes were sent to Philadelphia to go overseas for refugees and disaster victims. As AFSC gave less priority to collecting clothes, the room was used for other purposes, and we were glad we had added the extra space.

Maintenance of Inside and Outside

At the first Meeting for Business at Mount Toby, it was announced it would cost \$500 a year for a janitor to clean the building. A Friend suggested that if 50 adult Friends gave two hours a year, we could do it ourselves. Miraculously, the plan for a cleaning schedule has continued for 45 years now!

The annual maintenance of the building was done on workdays, and in the first decades, the exterior of the meetinghouse was painted and a new roof shingling job done by the Meeting community. When we observed that 70-year-old Friends were on the roof, and one Friend stabbed herself by sitting on a lightning rod, it helped decide we should hire the work done.

The Grounds

Extensive plans for plantings were drawn up, for the meetinghouse sat on what had been pasture and corn fields. The plans proved too complex, and plantings were done as Friends gave Memorials or had inspiration. One original planting that remains is the now 30' Burr Oak by the driveway. Beloved Friend Helen Griffiths was flown from a retirement center in Pennsylvania by small plane, when she was well into her 80s, to be present at its planting in her honor. She approved a Burr Oak as being "appropriate" to her person.

Mowing and snowplowing were done at first by a farm tractor operated by two members who were agricultural engineers at UMass as well as part-time farmers, who were the only ones who could manage it. The lawn expanded, as did the parking lot. Many types of lawn mower were tried, and a mowing schedule patterned after the cleaning schedule was tried.

The "Holy Water" of Mount Toby

The water supply for the meetinghouse originally came from a spring up in the hills through lead pipes which brought water to the farmhouse of Ethel Dubois next door and then was piped to a tank in the meetinghouse basement. An effort to lay plastic pipes and to have a pipe junction to bring water directly to the meetinghouse met with misfortune when some of the pipes were severed by the digger. Meeting then had to dig a well for its water supply. A number of Friends still take this "holy water" from the outside tap because they find it better than their water at home.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Eight

Decade of 1960s - Part 1

Mount Toby Meeting settled into life in its new Meetinghouse in October 1964, little knowing what challenges the rest of the decade would bring. President Kennedy had been assassinated in 1963, and Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy would be assassinated in 1968, as the country experienced both the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement.

At the November 1966 Meeting for Business, two proposals were brought for consideration: to start a vigil protesting the War, on the Amherst common; and to try to give aid for work in North Vietnam to the Canadian Friends Service Committee.

Sunday Peace Vigils protesting the Vietnam War held on Amherst Common 1967 to 1973

There was unity to start a Vigil immediately, following the discipline used for several years at the Quaker Peace Vigils on Good Friday in Boston. Participants would stand in silent worship with one approved sign and one person assigned to speak to the public. The Vigil started in cold December on the Amherst Common sidewalk near the flagpole. Even elderly members of Mount Toby, sitting in chairs and wrapped in blankets, participated. Within a few weeks, 200 Amherst residents were attending. The Vigil was held at 12 noon every Sunday for seven years, until 1973. A few Friends went regularly instead of going to Meeting for Worship.

Eventually, the Vigil was kept largely by efforts of an Amherst peace group. When it was laid down, this group tried to erect a monument for it on the Common, but when denied permission, installed a small plaque in the earth under the flag, reading "Mourning and protesting the Vietnam War, 1967- 1973." The Amherst Vigil participants held a reunion 25 years later. Over the years, the site of the Vigil became the spot for demonstrations by various groups for many causes, including the Central American conflict and the Iraq war. It has become a place for witness that has almost never been empty.

Amherst Area Quaker Action Committee formed to help get medical aid to North Vietnam

The second proposal to the Monthly Meeting - to get medical and other aid to North Vietnam through the Canadian Friends Service Committee - was more difficult for the Meeting, because it was found that the action would be illegal under "trading with the enemy." The Monthly Meeting for Business in November 1966 could not unite in having the Meeting officially support collecting and distributing money, as the Meeting officials might be arrested, and Meeting funds being used to pay the mortgage on the Meetinghouse might be seized. Some members of the Meeting community were very unhappy with the decision not to support the action, and brought it back for another discussion. Actions like this were going on nationally.

The procedure developed for acting on this concern without meeting approval was to form the Amherst Area Quaker Action Committee, which received contributions and organized trips to take the money to Canada. The committee consisted of 15 people mostly connected to the Meeting. The first trip to the small border crossing at Derby, VT, was held in May 1967. Seven trips in all were held in five years, until 1972. Customs officials always appeared to read the law to them. No one was ever arrested, although the crossings were widely publicized. They were met by members of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) and were always served tea at the house of the same supporter, no matter how many there were.

Records in the extensive scrapbook of clippings and Meeting Minutes record that 50 to 100 people went each time and \$6,500 was raised in the first two years. The CFSC distributed the money to agencies doing medical work in North Vietnam and included the National Liberation Front; some was also given to South Vietnam where the American Friends Service Committee ran a clinic to make and fit prostheses for those who had lost limbs in the war.

Quaker Peace Testimony Leads to Draft Counseling and a fuller Meeting for Worship

Another program in which many Meeting members participated was initiated by Frances Crowe, and was to educate young men about the possibility of becoming conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War, and helping those who made that decision to be successful before local Draft Boards. To this end, Frances created a center in her basement in Northampton. There, training for draft counselors was held, as well as sessions with the young men she sought to help. This center eventually became the Western Massachusetts branch of American Friends Service Committee, an office for which Frances was the volunteer director for more than 30 years.

The decisions of young men from the Meeting to be conscientious objectors were not always recorded. As being drafted was the result of a national lottery, we did not always know the decisions of our young men who went to college or traveled. Many young men in the Meeting were not of draft age, but all were made aware of Friends testimonies about war.

An additional action the Monthly Meeting considered at length was for the Meetinghouse to be a listed Sanctuary, or shelter from arrest, for young men resisting the draft. Although Meeting decided to do this, it was never called on for this service. Meeting members participated in dozens of demonstrations and vigils, and some were arrested. A young woman from Leverett, Susie Williams, was supported through her many anti-war actions, leading to her federal imprisonment. During these times, as many as 200 people attended the Meeting for Worship because they knew of the Meeting testimonies, and the floor was full because benches could seat only 100.

Mt Toby Supports Civil Rights Movement

Participation in the Civil Rights Movement during this decade is not as well recorded.

The Equality project, which signed up businesses to promise to hire African Americans, was supported in many ways by Mount Toby. Also, a resolution was adopted by the Meeting to endorse the Poor People's Campaign, initiated by Martin Luther King, Jr., to send a busload of 52 to Washington DC for the Solidarity Day in June 1968, and to raise funds for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. One family hosted an African American high school student to live in their home for a year and attend Amherst Regional High School.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Eight

Decade of 1960s - Part 2

The decade of the 1960s not only challenged Mount Toby Meeting to find unity in its opposition to the Vietnam War, but also to become a united community of worshippers using the practices of Friends. Student attenders from the colleges became inevitably fewer after we moved to Leverett. The 20 or more Quaker families who moved to the area in the 1950s and 1960s because of the University's growth came from a dozen different Yearly Meetings, which were Pastoral, Conservative, Independent, and some Yearly Meetings which had not united after 19th-century divisions.

New First Day curriculum and activities for the Meeting children

The families who had been able to record their children as birthright (Quaker for life) members in some of those Yearly Meetings did not wish to change them to being junior members until age 25, the new practice recently written into the NEYM Faith and Practice, and never transferred from their former Meeting because of this. A few of these members had been raised as Quakers, but most were "convinced" to be Friends when they were adults, and had left their church. They were ambivalent about teaching the children of the Meeting about religion in First Day School.

The curriculum agreed on included nature study with Ethel Dubois, who still directed her Long Plain Nature Center next door, and activities such as painting murals and doing crafts. Visits to other churches were also encouraged. Although the curriculum did not focus on religion, there was frequently a nativity tableau at Christmas time with one time the newest Meeting baby in the manger and carols with many bells for children to ring.

Meeting families usually had 3 to 6 children, and many activities were planned for them, including Family Fellowship weekends at Woolman Hill in Deerfield; and at the Meetinghouse, with camping in tents or the ubiquitous Volkswagen buses. Maypole dancing at a member's farm and bringing apples to make cider with the Robinson's press were among other activities.

The Meeting debates activities for Young Friends in the 1960s

Activities suitable for Young Friends (YF) of high school age were also debated. Should the peace activists leading their class on First Day advocate that Friends "challenge authority" of all kinds? Young Friends organized themselves into a close group, and had sleepovers and "skimp suppers" to raise money. One YF protested the Vietnam War in high school by wearing a black armband, an action similar to those that became part of a national case, which went to the Supreme Court, on students' rights of free speech.

When the Meeting asked YF to write a part of the State of Society report, they submitted what became known as "The Poem," a frank and earthy description of the

Meeting. Several Meetings for Business were needed to decide whether to submit this poem with the adult report forwarded to Quarterly Meeting. It was not submitted, but made its impact.

A Meeting enriched by social activities and international experiences

Adult Friends enjoyed a fine social life together, especially in a folk and square dance group led by Friends expert in several traditions. Shared food for holidays, chorale singing, and painting began enduring Meeting traditions.

Each year found at least one Meeting family on a sabbatical leave in a European country or in India, with the children in local schools there and the families often participating in Meetings for Worship with Friends in those countries - a rich international experience for them to bring back to Mount Toby. The Meeting was also enriched by families attending the Friends General Conference held biannually in Cape May, NJ, and the Avon, CT, gatherings on social concerns of the New England AFSC.

At a shower for one of the last babies of the decade in 1968, Meeting women are shown in a picture at a morning coffee, surrounded by toddlers. Soon there was the first wedding under the care of the Meeting, one of the Young Adult Friends, followed quickly by others. These weddings are recorded only in Monthly Meeting minutes, not listed in a record book, for many were soon dissolved, to the sadness of the Meeting.

Challenges facing the Mount Toby community

While Mount Toby was building a strong community in many ways, there were challenges. Minutes of the Meeting refer to the appointment of several "Reconciliation committees," often because of disagreements about appointing Clerks and committees. One newsletter printed at the top that we mourn that Friends are hurting each other. Another sadness was that one Young Adult Friend disappeared. The Meeting mourned with her family until her body was found a year later.

At the end of the decade, an event, which would presage the challenges to the Meeting in the 1970s, was the appearance of a group of young men in Meeting for Worship who sat on the floor and chanted. They called themselves the Brotherhood of the Spirit and were living communally in a tree house. They challenged us about our materialism. A dialogue with them was held at Woolman Hill, and blankets were contributed to keep them warm. They later became a very large commune called the Renaissance Community.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Nine - 1970-74

In the first half of the 1970s, a few actions of Mount Toby Meeting were of major long-time importance. The Meeting bought a tract of land around the Meetinghouse from Ethel Dubois; we began renting the Meetinghouse to a day care center; the Meeting was shaken by events around marriage, divorce, and remarriage of families in the Meeting; we continued to work with others to oppose the escalation of the Vietnam war; and we began to work for the banning of nuclear weapons and to contribute to the Alternative Energy Coalition, which opposed nuclear power.

Buying Land

The January 1973 Meeting for Business approved the buying of approximately four acres along Route 63 between the home of Ethel Dubois and about 105 acres of mostly woodland north and west of the Meetinghouse. The land was purchased from Ethel, a member who had given us the land on which to build the Meetinghouse.

Ethel had run the Long Plain Nature Center on this land (and had brought children from the inner city to camp there), using the barn on the farm she had bought in the 1920s and retired to in 1963. She needed to sell her land for money to join her five sisters in retiring to a Kendal Quaker retirement center in Pennsylvania. Robert and Nan Archer bought Ethel's house and about 45 acres.

Friends had discussed for many months proposals to keep the Nature Center running, which it did for a short time. The Board of the Center then moved the concept into Amherst, and it became the Hitchcock Center for the Environment.

Day Care Center

At the October 1973 Business Meeting, the Meeting decided (after much "wresting with the question") to rent the Meetinghouse to a Cooperative Day Care Center, at the request of a Meeting family who belonged to it. Day care centers, especially those that took two-year-olds, were rare, and the Meeting thought it was providing housing for a social need. The arrangement, which lasted for fourteen years, eventually led to dissension because the Meeting could not use the building except on the weekends. The day care center finally was asked to leave, and it built the Hampshire Franklin Day Care further south on Route 63.

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Meeting

As reported in the State of Society Report for 1974, "Meeting has been drained emotionally by divorces involving three valued and loved members of the meeting..., aspects of which have occupied a substantial portion of time and energy of Business Meeting.... Friends have found it necessary to examine their own attitudes on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation... two adult study groups have been formed on Human Sexuality... in present day society."

The biggest specific issue was taking a marriage under the Care of the Meeting, following a break-up and divorce. Several Friends left the Meeting because of recommendations of Clearness Committees. The whole Meeting was never again to innocently feel that we were all one happy family.

Many other Meetings in New England Yearly Meeting were also affected by what was to be called the "Sexual Revolution." Mount Toby members joined discussion groups with other Friends, which resulted in the publication of queries on "Living with Oneself and Others," published by Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel in 1978.

Opposing the Vietnam War

Although the Vietnam War was coming to an end, bombing was extended to North Vietnam and Cambodia, and opposition increased. There were frequent demonstrations and arrests at Westover Air Base, more draft resistance, more college student participation, and continuation of actions described in the previous chapter on the 1960s.

Nuclear Power and the Environment

The issue of nuclear power was just coming to the fore. In the September 1974 Business Meeting, it was agreed to make a contribution to the Alternative Energy Coalition of Turners Falls, which was sponsoring a ballot proposition in our State Senatorial district to phase out Nuclear Power Plants. "We believe that the dangers to livability of this planet posed by Nuclear Power are so grave, they outweigh other considerations... substitute wise conventional power, and alternative energy sources for more meaningful jobs... and the hope of a more livable world."

These and other issues raised by the 1974 oil embargo and subsequent gasoline shortages would continue to be worked on by Meeting members for decades to come.

History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Ten - 1974-1985 Peace and Justice Actions of the Meeting

In the 1980s Mount Toby Meeting became very involved in actions that grew out of social protest movements of the period. One project in 1985, the Sanctuary Movement for Latin American refugees, is described in the book *Beyond Vietnam, the Politics of Protest in Massachusetts, 1974-1990*, written by Robert Surbrug, Jr. (University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). The second project, not described in the book, was a major one, the follow-up of which has extended for almost 30 years. That is the sponsorship of two families of Cambodian refugees.

Mount Toby sponsors Cambodian refugee families

In 1981, shortly after the Monthly Meeting had minuted that it would sponsor a family from Cambodia for the Lutheran Refugee Service in Springfield, the Meeting was asked if they could take the first two families arriving, which no other church was prepared to do immediately. One family arrived October 19, 1981, and the second, relatives of the first family, arrived on May 1, 1982.

These rural people had survived harrowing experiences while fleeing to and being in refugee camps, and they were in bad physical health, with broken families; but they cheerfully and sturdily adjusted to a new climate, a different language, and an urban life they had not known. Their airfare was paid for by U. S. government aid, and they had the status of asylum seeker, but their status was ambiguous for years after, and they were expected to soon support themselves.

Two Meeting families welcome Cambodian minors as foster children

At the same time, two Meeting families, Bob and Phyllis Agard and Arthur and Alice Swift, each took an “unaccompanied minor child” from Cambodia as a foster child in their families. The Agards and Swifts would later help their foster children find their siblings in other parts of the world, and help them marry other Cambodians and start families.

Committee formed to help the Cambodian refugees settle in the area

The committee to help the refugees was made a Meeting committee, and Bob Agard became a member of the local Cambodian Cluster. The national plan was to settle a large number of Cambodian refugees in one area.

For the first weeks, the families lived with some Meeting families. Then, the committee had to find housing for the families, take them food shopping and to medical and prenatal care, arrange for the children to be put in school, and help the adults learn English and get jobs they could do without English. This was a formidable task, one that the members of the committee performed with great care for about two decades. They continue to have contacts with the families now, three decades later. The committee also did fund raising and got volunteers from the Meeting community to help.

In 1991, our Cambodian families wanted to sponsor another family of their relatives. They and the Meeting organized fund raising from the wider community to pay for their airfare and for help after they arrived.

The terrible legacy of the Vietnam War

The leading for the Monthly Meeting to take on this task was rooted in the knowledge of what had been done to Cambodia because of the war in Vietnam by United States military - a war which Friends had spent so many years opposing while at the same time finding ways to bring relief to the countries to alleviate war damage.

Jim Matlack of our Meeting went to Cambodia in 1979 with early investigations of the American Friends Service Committee, after the killings in the country were over, to see what AFSC could do. Alice Swift was invited to go on another AFSC tour to the country in the 1980s.

Mount Toby connection with Cambodia continues

In the 1990s, the Swift's son Peter, who learned Khmer from his foster brother, created the Southeast Asia Development Fund, a program to create self-help projects in Cambodian villages. And, in the 21st century, Ruth Hazzard and Claude Tellier are helping local Cambodian refugee families who wished to bring clean water and simple sewage systems to the villages from which they came.

The local Cambodian community is now very large, as was planned, and its development is a very complex story, of which Mount Toby's part is only briefly summarized here.

The History of Mount Toby Meeting - Chapter Eleven

Important Events in the 1990s

In the early 1990s, following a period of more than a decade and half of renting the Meetinghouse to a day care center, and then to the Leverett elementary school pre-school, Meeting appointed a Space Committee to which other Meeting committees would report their thoughts on how we could improve the ways in which the Meetinghouse served the needs of those committees in doing their work. The suggestions given were incorporated into a design for renovations drawn up by Nina Weyl.

One major project was moving the library from the foyer to a room in the other wing of the Meetinghouse. With the divider removed, and area carpeted, a spacious area was opened up with a view out of the windows, and a chance to make a garden sitting space outside. The bookcases at the ends of the room were converted to bulletin board, and spaces for free pamphlets and literature for sale. The divider, a half wall, was moved to be a wall for the new library room. The room to which the library was moved was one which had been added to the plan of the Meetinghouse when it was built, for the use of sorting and packing clothes for the Material Aids program of the national American Friends Service Committee, a program for refugee aid started after WWII. This project had been carried on for years before the MH was built, but was being phased out by AFSC at this date. The office desk and files in the adjoining office room were also moved to the library, and that room was open for the use of a First Day School class for the younger children. The office telephone was moved to a "booth" as the storeroom area was renovated to make a more organized space for cleaning supplies, and other storage.

Kitchen renovations were the other major change. A second door was made into the Fellowship room, and the past- through windows enlarged, and cupboards for table dishes built above the table storage cupboard. A new commercial type stove and a refrigerator were purchased to replace the second hand donations used for several decades. These rearrangements were meant to make the kitchen (which had proved to be too small) easier to work in.

In the Fellowship Room, a sitting area was made around the fireplace with couches and chairs (renovated by Laura Robinson) and tables (built by Trevor Robinson) The four cubbies on the sides of the room (which had been meant for First Day School rooms which were to be made by the folding doors, were converted into bulletin boards and shelf area as needed. All of these changes were adaptations to the original design of the Meetinghouse to meet new needs. The architect for the building originally had designed as near to our specifications as we asked, within the cost that we could afford. An addition was added to the meetinghouse in 1997, when the Champney Room, designed by Nina Weyl, was added.

New Meetings set off from Mt. Toby Meeting

Great Barrington Worship Group left the meeting to form the South Berkshire Meeting in 1984.

In 1994, members of Mt. Toby Monthly Meeting who lived in Northampton formed a new meeting in Northampton, and built a meetinghouse on Gothic St.

When the Sherwood Friends Center building and land were taken by eminent domain in the 1970s for the construction of I-91, some attenders began to meet at Mt. Toby Meeting. Many others decided to continue meeting in northern Franklin County, forming a Greenfield worship group. Meetings were held in various locations: at Woolman Hill in Deerfield, the Champney House on Munson St. in Greenfield, The Pond House on Abbott St. in Greenfield.

Greenfield's Upper Valley Worship Group formed in 2006 under the care of Mt. Toby. Meetings were held first at the Green River Yoga Center on Main St., Greenfield, then at 274 Main St., and later at the Traprock Peace Center on Miles St. The worship group now meets at The Recovery Learning Community's Annex at 74 Federal St., Greenfield.

Details in this account were based on:

Guide to the Records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in New England / compiled by Richard D. Stattler, New England Yearly Meeting Archivist. Published by the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997, 113 pp.