

History of Montreal Meeting, 1929-1964

by W. LLOYD G. WILLIAMS

The history of the Society of Friends in what is now Canada goes back to the period just after the American Revolution. In fact, although Quakerism in Canada has gained to some extent, particularly in this century, by immigration from England and, to a lesser extent from the continent of Europe, it is largely an offshoot of American Quakerism. Immigration of a small body of Quakers from the United States to the Maritime Provinces was a result of the Revolution, but the main body of Friends in Canada has as its origin immigration from the United States to Ontario, which is still the principal centre in Canada. This immigration was in the main a part of the migration toward the West in search of cheap land and better material opportunities. It owed little to the United Empire Loyalist migration, except in the Maritime Provinces, where it did not take permanent root.

Characteristically, the first Meetings in the Province of Quebec of which Stanley Zielinski has written an interesting account, based on thorough research, were in the Eastern Townships near the American border and derived from immigration from the New England states. The only record I know of Friends visiting Montreal in the early days was when Stephen Grellet (Etienné de Grellet) in 1804 approached Montreal through La Prairie, where he addressed a meeting, composed partly of English Canadians and partly of French Canadians, first in English and then in French. He then crossed over to Montreal. "I visited there", he writes, "several pious persons and, in one of their numerics, I had much openness with some of the men, especially their superior. I had also a meeting in that city." This is the only meeting of which we have record, held according to the manner of Friends, in Montreal before 1917, although there is a rumour of an earlier organized Meeting.

In 1907, a few English Friends, of whom Alfred Stansfield, long professor of Metallurgy at McGill University was one, organized a Meeting of which we possess the record book. Presumably most of these moved on to the United States and other parts of Canada. At any rate the movement soon expired.

The present Meeting began in the autumn of 1929, and was initiated by Eugene A. Forsey, a young graduate of Oxford University, who

joined the McGill Department of Economics and Political Science in that year, and a few other Friends, of whom the present writer, who joined the Department of Mathematics at McGill some years earlier, was one. Meetings were at first held only once monthly and took place in the Central Y.M.C.A. The movement gradually gained strength and after some years we met each Sunday, always in borrowed rooms until December 15, 1963, when we met for the first time in our own home at 2196 St. Luke Street. We were organized and attained the status of a Monthly Meeting under the aegis of Pelham Half-Year Meeting of Genesee Yearly Meeting in 1942. Thus we have been meeting as a Friends group for 35 years and as an organized Meeting for 21 years.

We recall a survivor of the French Revolution, who, when he was asked what he did during those years, replied, "I survived!" Perhaps this is all that can be said of our small group in Montreal, but, as our new home and our list of some forty resident members and attenders, including children, it is not quite all. More important even than our new home, in this possession of which we rejoice, is the contribution which this humble undertaking has made to the lives of some of us who are still here and of others now far away. Our first clerk, John Henry Hobart, in his interesting book *Quaker by Conviction* writes: "Now I was learning what an immense contribution the Society of Friends could itself make to the effectiveness of the individual. The wonderful thing is that a person can give his all to such a group and emerge as a stronger individual, richer in all those attributes of the spirit of which he has given most generously. I regard the time I served as clerk to the Montreal Friends Meeting from its inception in 1942 until I left Montreal in 1947 to work with the American Friends Service Committee as the most rewarding years of my life. The loss of our Friends, John and Enkl Hobart was a great blow to our Meeting and there was a period when we might have asked whether it could survive. I clearly remember a spring Sunday, when we were meeting in the Presbyterian College, when I sat for an hour alone, and when, on leaving I met the Gordieffs arriving from across the border in New York State, an hour late because of the change of time which did not take place in the United States until later. There was a period when the average attendance must have been about half a dozen. If our weekly Meeting today with an average attendance of perhaps twenty-five seems small to newcomers, to us oldtimers it seems comfortably large.

A period of great interest to us was that from 1945 to 1949, when a few young refugees who had got in touch with Friends while in camps in the Eastern Townships came to us. Among these I recall, two who graduated from McGill were Kaspar Naegele, now dean and professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia and Thomas Cassiter,

now professor of French at Smith College. Another attender of about this period was John Karela Smart, a native African, outstandingly tall and handsome, who graduated at McGill in medicine and is now foreign minister in the Government of Sierra Leone as well as a contributor to the funds which have made our new Friends House possible.

A venture which we undertook with considerable success was the holding of a series of lectures each winter. There were usually five lectures, three given by non-Friends and two by Friends. With financial help from the Friends General Conference and interested people in the city, we carried these on for several years. Among Friends who came were Rufus M. Jones, Roscoe Pound, Brand Blanshard, Henry J. Cadbury, Paul S. Cadbury, Frank Aydelotte, Anna Brinton and John Henry Hobart, who returned to us to describe the experiment in which he was concerned, in introducing white students into Lincoln University, a Negro university. I recall one amusing incident. A lady who was somewhat late in arriving at the lecture, which was perhaps excusable as the lecturer was her husband, as she ascended the stairs was met by a man coming down who excitedly warned her that there was a man up there preaching "rank pacifism." It was perhaps not surprising as the lecturer was Henry Cadbury. Of non-Friends who came to us in these years, I recall particularly Professor Hocking of Harvard, the well-known philosopher, two Roman Catholics, one a leader in the cooperative movement in Nova Scotia and the other president of Hunter College in New York, Professor Charles Cochrane of the University of Toronto, author of the great work, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, and Louis Finkelstein, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Dr. Finkelstein delivered an interesting and inspiring lecture on the Sadducees, in spite of a very light supper. The reason for the light supper, perhaps more amusing to others than to Dr. Finkelstein, was our ignorance of the dietary laws to which he was subject: the only thing on our menu which he could eat, and that at special order, was Post Toasties.

Our new home we could not have acquired without the generous aid of Friends and others outside Montreal. We mention especially Toronto Monthly Meeting, the Friends General Conference, English Friends' contribution through several Quaker trusts including three Cadbury trusts in Birmingham. It is worthy of note that we have received contributions not only from various parts of Canada, England and the United States, but even from Australia and Africa. To all these generous contributors we record our grateful thanks.

We owe much to Jonas Lehman of the School of Architecture of McGill University for his inspiring enthusiasm and taste in advising

as with regard to all the details of remodeling, decorating and furnishing the Centre. Without his advice and help the Centre would not be at all what it has become. Valiant work of the hardest kind has been contributed by Elizabeth Taylor Rossinger, James and Stephanie Logan, Walberg Hack, Norman Crockett and others, while the Blackies have, by their industry and knowledge, contributed to beautifying the exterior of Friends House.

A number of our members and attenders, especially university students, have left for other parts of Canada, the United States or elsewhere. But as some have left others have joined us and we have enjoyed a steady if slow growth. Our oldest members in length of membership and in years are Jean Jackson and Lloyd Williams. Others who have come later and happily are still with us are André and Elizabeth Taylor Rossinger, James and Stephanie Logan, Ann Silver Allee, Stanley and Joyce Jones, Stanley and Miwa Zielinski, Conrad and Elfrida Blackie, Jack and Barbara Brown, Dr. Francis McNaughton, Norman and Nancy Chance, Anthony Meech and Madge Alden.

Some of those who have left us but whom we remember with affection are Elizabeth Murray Carmel, Drs. Murray and Helen Cunningham, Barbara Bochevzef, Dr. C. A. Macconkey, Bernhard and Pamela Klausener, now directors of a Friends Centre in East Pakistan, Hiroshi Sakamoto, who has returned with his family to Japan, Philip and Janet Martin, Sidney Lucas, Nell East, Petronella Clark, Dr. Neida Ogden Dineen, now practicing medicine in the United States, Fred Sykes and Edward Bell.

We have not only survived, but have laid a foundation which will, we hope, ensure the survival of our Meeting into the indefinite future. Our history is really in the future, rather than in the past.

Friends in the Eastern Townships

Condensation of an article by S. A. Zielinski in The Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association, Autumn 1961

The name Farnham Meeting comes from the township of East Farnham, Brome County, in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. This Meeting is unique in some respects. It was isolated from other Meetings; it started in a wilderness and lasted for more than a century; at the peak of its development it had more than a hundred members.

The village in which most of the members lived is the village today known as East Farnham, but was then called Allen's Corner. One remarkable fact about the Eastern Townships is that this was the only part of the Province of Quebec which was colonized exclusively by English speaking settlers.

The Friends who opened the Farnham Meeting came from or at least through Vermont, mostly between 1800 and 1820. All the Quaker families who settled in the Eastern Townships had been originally forced by circumstances to leave southern New England. Since they refused to take arms, they were considered to be enemies, or at least undesirable neutrals. Their exodus was slow. Most of them moved at first into northern Vermont, which was practically neutral during the Revolution, and some of them stayed there for more than fifty years, but they did not feel very secure and kept going north. The opening of colonization in the Eastern Townships was providential for Friends, and the first application of "a company of Quakers" for a grant of land was made in 1792, i.e., as soon as it could be made.

There were two "companies" of Friends who moved into Lower Canada. The first, under the leadership of Nicholas Austin of Somersworth, New Hampshire, settled on the western shore of Lake Memphremagog in 1793. As far as we know, they never established a meeting. The descendants still live in this area, and several localities bear the names of the original settlers: Peasley, Eastman, Austin. The Roman Catholic Church tries to obliterate the latter name by calling the village St. Austin, which is a variant form of the name of St. Augustine. This is probably the only case in history when a Friend became a Roman Catholic saint.

The second company was only very loosely organized, if organized at all. Several Quaker families, well acquainted with each other and even interrelated, slowly drifted into East Farnham township and settled around a place known later as Allen's Corner.

The leader of this second group was Gideon Bull. His ancestors, his wife, and his children were Quakers, but he never joined the Society of Friends. The Bulls came to East Farnham township in 1800. Gideon brought with him his wife Abigeh (also a Bull, and probably his cousin of the Connecticut line), as well as five children, among them Aaron, who was then thirteen. They were followed by the Knowleses (Samuel, his wife Sally Woodard, and eight children), Meaders, Bartons, Barnums, Hoskinses, Bassetts, Tabers, Purinton, and Stevenses.

And they established the Farnham Meeting.

Informal meetings for worship took place probably as early as 1814. They were held in the house of one of the Knowleses. By 1820 three families — Knowleses, Bulls and Meaders — sent a request to Ferrisburg to hold a meeting for worship on First Day. This request was signed by fourteen applicants: seven Knowleses, five Bulls and two Meaders. It was sent on September 4, 1820, and received in Ferrisburg twenty-three days later on September 27. On January 3, 1821, the request was granted for one year: one meeting for worship on the First and one on the Fifth day. The place was, as before, in David Knowles's house. At about this time the first burying ground was established on a lot south from the Knowles property. The earliest grave is marked 1826, but there are several older unidentified graves. Later on, this cemetery was known as Jewells' burying ground.

On April 18, 1822, the Meeting was allowed as an indulged Meeting. A year later the first meeting house (a log house) was built on the Stevenses' property. In 1826 Farnham Meeting became a Preparative Meeting. By this time it was developing normally and had plenty of committees: for the care of schools, for Indian affairs, for the care of the meeting house "and make fire therein" (this latter committee burned the house and all five years later), for the poor, to investigate the morals of Henry Knowles, to establish the quota paid to Ferrisburg, and what not.

Although the first meeting house burned in 1831, after a prophecy to this effect by Aaron Barton, it took three years to build a second one. Probably a unique feature of this new house were two rocking chairs in front of the gallery: one occupied by Stephen Bassett because of his infirmity, and the other by Frederick England for reasons unknown.

On the 22nd of June, 1840, the Farnham Meeting was allowed as a Monthly Meeting on probation, and finally, two years later, became a full-fledged Monthly Meeting.

Starting in 1850, the Quarterly Meetings were held once a year in East Farnham. This took place in October. Many Friends from Ver-

mont and many visiting ministers attended. It probably did not occur to our Friends that their situation was peculiar from the political point of view; it was not a Canadian but the Vermont Quarterly Meeting (a part of New York Yearly Meeting) which was held in Canada.

The Wilbur-Gurney controversy affected the Meeting very badly. The Wilburite minority was very small, but there were many Friends who were disgusted by the hostility between the two factions. Many were disowned, and many left the Meeting of their own will. However, this was not the reason why the Meeting finally declined. The division was followed by a revival, parallel to the great revival in the United States. More than a dozen new members joined the Meeting and a new meeting house was built in 1871, although it was not necessary at all. Was it an act of defiance or of wishful thinking?

After the short revival in the seventies, the number of members started to decline rapidly. In the nineties there were about a dozen attending the meeting for worship. In 1900 "only a handful of Friends remained," and the meeting was laid down in 1902. A few years later the house was sold for lumber.

The life of the Meeting was fairly normal in its weekly routine, and similar in the life of hundreds of others. But there were a few rather unusual factors in its history. For a small, primitive and strictly farming community, the Meeting had quite a number of traveling ministers. And some of the travels were remarkable indeed. The first such journey in which these Friends took part started even before the Farnham Meeting was allowed. In 1823 Joseph Hoag went with Samuel Knowles on one of the longest trips on record. They covered not less than 7600 miles in twenty-one months. According to Joseph's journal, they went to Peru and Black River, New York, and then to Upper Canada, Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Indiana and Illinois.

Another visit of this kind was made in 1839-40 by David and Drusilla Knowles. David was lame. They felt a concern to preach to the Indians, and they departed in a one horse buggy to make a trip of 5000 miles. They never worried about Indians, and that they did not speak any Indian language. The first stage to New York took them twenty days. They went to Philadelphia and then west. It took them two weeks to cross the Alleghonies in snow sometimes three feet deep. They had to walk most of the time. They crossed the Ohio River in February. In May they boarded a boat in Cincinnati, buggy, horse and all, and ultimately reached Little Rock, Arkansas. The next six weeks they spent among Indians, but with rather disappointing results. They

came back by way of Kansas City, St. Louis and Richmond, always in the same buggy.

Although we have no proof that Allen's Corner was a terminal of the Underground Railroad, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. We know from the records of the Vermont Underground Railroad that there was a branch line going to Franklin, Berkshire and Finsburg, thus reaching the territory of the Farnham Meeting. We know also that there were a few Negroes living in Panton and Brimé. One of them lived in Allen's Corner and attended the meetings for worship.

Among other activities of these Friends, there is one other that deserves attention, because it is rather unexpected. They were inordinately fond of writing. This would be understandable in the case of the few scholars, such as George A. Barton, who left Allen's Corner, acquired higher education, and became professor at Bryn Mawr College and an author of distinction. But there were other members of the Meeting who could hardly be described as educated, who nevertheless left all sorts of "writings" for posterity.

Even after the Farnham Meeting was laid down in 1902, not all activities connected with the Meeting's different properties ceased. Just a year before the last meetings for worship took place, a sort of committee was formed to take care of the original burying ground. Keziah Jewell made a gift of land on which the burying ground was situated "in consideration that the said Plot of ground shall remain forever as such burying ground sacred to the memory of those whose mortal remains are and were buried there..." Six Tabers, two Bulls, and ten other names appear on a subscription list "for the purpose of cleaning up the ground and further beautifying and fencing the Jewell Burying Ground". This cemetery is in remarkably good shape today. In January 1917, "The Friends Cemetery Company" was incorporated in Cowansville. This company still exists and takes care of the meeting house burying ground.

There is no moral to this story, but there is a sequel. If one visits the site of the old meeting house on a sunny Sunday morning in summer just before noon, one may occasionally see a Quaker Meeting for worship taking place. It is the Friends from Montreal, from the Eastern Townships, and perhaps a few from across the border in Vermont. Friends are sitting in the shade of a large maple tree; there are graves of long departed members of the Farnham Meeting all around them. And there is silence.

The Farnham Meeting goes on.

What a Quaker Meeting House Means to Us

by ANDRÉ ROSSINGER

It all depends upon our vision about the inherent potential of the Quaker message in the second half of the twentieth century, and on our efforts in translating this vision into reality in personal, social and international relationships.

The Meeting House of brick and mortar has a meaning for us, only if its activities make it a potential powerhouse in helping each of us and everyone else in every dimension of life:

...in our silent and in our articulate search for God-in-man and man-in-God;

...in realizing God as the Law and Love of Life;

...in the endless maturing process of accepting God's love and sharing it with our fellow men;

...in realizing that peace is more than the absence of war; it is a continuous transformation of the individual and society, in order to bring out the divine potential in man;

...in constructive, critical evaluation of every aspect of contemporary life, which may promote or retard such a transformation;

...in harmonizing our duties and obligations deriving from the fact that we are simultaneously citizens of our country and of the world, but that foremost we are citizens of God's Universe;

...in developing spiritual, moral and intellectual integrity in our daily life, in the midst of a missile powered jungle which has been developed by perversion of our civilization and heritage;

...in recalling the best of this heritage, and continuously adding to it in order to build a peaceful transition to the next stage of history.

A Quaker Centre which embodies a wide spectrum of concerns and a willingness for hard work, cannot stagnate or die, but can only flourish. Every Meeting House or Quaker Centre which seeks to re-interpret George Fox's seventeenth century message for mid-twentieth

century conditions — without watering it down — can only blossom because it will speak to the condition of our time.

In this spirit, projects can be implemented under very favourable conditions:

1. Meeting for Worship, the heart and radiating centre for all other activities, can take place in an improved physical setting and atmosphere.

2. Child Development Program in cooperation with the parents, for stimulating the budding of a healthy, balanced and whole personality for varying age groups. This is a real challenge in this day and age of conditioned fear, anxiety and insecurity. Facilities should be available for the spiritual, moral and cultural development of the children of members and attenders during the weekends and, if necessary, during the week as well. Having a Centre provides wide scope for experimentation in finding up-to-date solutions for blending religious-spiritual education with all round development of the child with the help of art, handicrafts, drama, dance, literature, documentary films, physical and cultural anthropology, under the guidance of experts. Such an evolving Child Development Program should give new meaning and extended horizons to the conventional Sunday School or First-Day School. It should not compete with the home, school or playground, but should create a feed-back in all three areas; it should make the children better sons and daughters at home, better pupils at school, and better play-mates on any field of play. It should generate first that quality of sensitiveness for beauty, truth and loving kindness which really enables them to understand the biblical heritage.

3. Quaker Study Groups and Retreats for the nourishing of our religious-spiritual growth, and for strengthening our faith, which is the most important intangible base and "energy-source" for all our tangible concerns and activities.

4. Service Projects. It can build up an extensive Quaker Library, including a Peace Education Reference Library in conjunction with Reading Room and Lending Services; can develop International Student Programs and be open-minded about other suitable concerns.

5. "Quaker Forum." From early fall to late spring, from year to year, a carefully planned lecture series should investigate every problem which directly or indirectly has a bearing on the contemporary fermentation process at home and in the World. Every political, economic, social, cultural, national and international question which actually or potentially contributes to man's crisis of growth or decline requires

scrutiny in order to derive positive lessons from it for the benefit of every one concerned.

With the "Quaker Forum" the "Quaker Center" could fulfill the additional role of a Community Centre. It could provide adult education in the best sense of the word: by searching for a statesmanlike approach to the burning questions of our times; by drawing from the vast reservoir of enlightened resource people in every field; by offering to the potential audience of truth-hungry seekers a mature forum, for listening and participation.

However, no matter how many outside resource people are invited to help us in our search and sharing, the overall character of planning should carry a Quaker purpose and sense of identity. What is this Quaker sense of identity? What is the perennial Christian legacy of George Fox who went back to the original basic teaching of Jesus Christ?

We are religiously motivated pacifists. This means not only being against wars, but also being for long and short range preventive state-manship, which by using foresight and determination eliminates the causes of war.

We are religiously motivated social reformers, firmly believing that the spiritual law of life should be translated into the historic law of peaceful progress. Courageous, sincere and profound reforms realized and implemented, in due time, would end our still adolescent stage of history, in which progress until now, has followed a tragically zig-zag course of reactionary efforts to block progress, of revolution and counter-revolution, of the half-measures of an exhausted society due to hot wars, cold wars and civil wars, of reform under duress and reform used as a bribe to deepen the split in society.

We believe, that the ultimate meaning of human life is to bring out all the divine potentials which God has planted in each of us: the potential to love and respect man in God, and to love and respect God in man; to develop the inherent creative intelligence of man, to gain knowledge and wisdom, in order to cooperate with the law of life, and so that the law of life may cooperate with him; to create such a continuously evolving and improving personal, social and international climate, which will, instead of choking, help the seed of God in man to blossom. This means man's really growing up and behaving as a child of God, worthy of that name.

We believe in the tremendous value of scientific and technological achievement, as the result of man's growing understanding of, and coo-

ation with God's Universe and its Law. However, it serves progress only if it is not used as a means of man's inhumanity against man, only if man is master and not slave of it.

We believe in man's profound need to realize, in contrast to the lopsided, fragmented, frustrated driftwood existence, the wholeness and sanctity of life and world, and within it, his own need to develop a sense of wholeness.

We believe it is the most sacred duty of every parent and every adult to help the younger generation to become more mature citizens of God's Universe, and of this world than the present and past generation have been.

We believe that religion well understood is a dynamic lever of inner growth, transformation and maturing, and a constant guiding light in closing the gap between faith and practice, between high spiritual and moral principles and a man-made split society and world. Meeting for Worship is the most important aspect of the Society of Friends, but it is basically only a preparation. The real test comes when we leave the Meeting House: What are we doing with our religion during the rest of the week, day after day, year after year?

We are worthy of the name Quaker only if we are seekers, for only seekers become also never-ending finders. Having and developing this, or other related visions, and working for their implementation in our Quaker Centre means not only planting seeds by us gardeners, but also growing. In reality, everyone of us is simultaneously seed and gardener. Every Quaker Meeting House, Centre, or Home is potentially a pilot project for the City of God.