

# Memorial Minutes 1995

NEW ENGLAND YEARLY  
MEETING *of* FRIENDS

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## NEYM 1995 Memorial Minutes

**Sunday, August 6, 1995 3:00 pm**

We heard memorial minutes for Donnell W Boardman, Sylvia Merrill Helfrick, Susan McAllester, Leona Gifford Stevens, J. Huston Westover, Edward Asa White, and Alice Louise Wiser. We thanked God for the ways in which the lives of these Friends touched our own.

### ***Donnell W. Boardman***

Donnell Boardman died at age 81 on November 17, 1994, after several months of failing health. He was born on February 20, 1913, in Plainfield, New Jersey. He graduated from Yale University and Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons.

As alternative service during World War II, he was a physician in the Japanese- American relocation camps. At one time, he was director of the Tulelake, California, camp hospital.

In 1946 Donnell, his wife, Elizabeth, and their growing family came to Acton, and Donnell began his medical practice in a nearby town. In 1955, he and two like-minded physicians founded the Acton Medical Associates. Donnell interrupted his medical practice twice in the late 1960s and early 1970s: once to travel to London in an unsuccessful attempt to urge Bertrand Russell to use his influence to end the Vietnam War; and once to work in Lugulu, Kenya, in the hospital sponsored by Friends United Meeting. He and Elizabeth returned to Lugulu for two years, 1978-1980, after he had formally retired. Donnell celebrated his seventieth birthday during an eight-week stint as physician in a mission hospital, sponsored by the Baptist Church, in the mountains of Haiti.

Donnell was an original member of the Physicians for Social Responsibility and of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. In 1991, he went to Chernobyl, USSR, as part of a United States team to assess the disaster at the nuclear power plant. His studies of low-level radiation led him to found the Center for Atomic Radiation Studies in 1982. He was revising his book on the subject when he died.

In the late 1950s, Donnell and Elizabeth began hosting meetings for worship in their home on Sunday evenings. Under the guidance of Henry Cadbury, among others, they started Acton Preparative Meeting, which was established as a monthly meeting in 1965.

Over the years, Donnell was a member of almost every major

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committee of Acton Meeting. At the time of his death, he was serving one of many terms on Ministry and Counsel. He applied his individuality and energy to inspire and challenge in countless ways. In his vocal ministry, in meetings for business, and as a committee member he was consistent in his efforts to encourage individuals of all ages, and the meeting, to grow in the spirit of Quakerism.

He and Elizabeth were long active in New England Yearly Meeting. Donnell completed a term on Yearly Meeting Finance Committee shortly before his final illness. He acted in this larger Quaker group with the same commitment, the same insistence on adherence to Quaker principles, and the same dedication to answering that of God in every person, that he applied to all aspects of his life. Donnell Boardman will be missed for his wisdom, his humor, his insight, his eloquence, his quirks and foibles, and his generosity of spirit.

—ACTON MONTHLY MEETING, SALEM QUARTERLY MEETING

### *Sylvia Merrill Helfrick*

A beloved member of Hartford Monthly Meeting for 42 years, Sylvia Helfrick, born August 31, 1917, died of cancer at her home in Manchester, Connecticut, on September 29, 1994. She fought death with remarkable bravery, enduring considerable suffering as she fought for the health that had been hers up until that time.

Sylvia Merrill graduated with honors from Radcliffe College, where she especially enjoyed singing with the Harvard-Radcliffe Glee Club. She received her MD from Johns Hopkins Medical School. In those days, women were uncommon in science classes and very few trained as doctors. It was while she was a student at Johns Hopkins that she met Francis Helfrick, a resident in pediatrics. They were married under the care of Homewood Friends Meeting in Baltimore in 1943. The entire family, including seven of the ten grandchildren, gathered at a favorite summer cottage in Maine to celebrate their 50th anniversary.

During World War II, the doctors Helfrick served in a Civilian Public Service unit in an isolated rural hospital in Puerto Rico. It had only the most rudimentary facilities. Sylvia, though a fully qualified doctor, was often treated as “the doctor’s wife” instead. Their first two children, Elizabeth and John, were born during this period.

Returning to the United States, Francis began a practice in Manchester, Connecticut, where an outbreak of measles helped establish his reputation as well as provide urgently needed income.

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There, four more children were born: Sylvia, Margaret, Dorothy, and Christina.

Both Sylvia and Francis always loved music and during their early years in Manchester, they held musical gatherings in their living room. These gatherings grew into the present Manchester Symphony Orchestra, in which they were both very active. Sylvia played for the orchestra for 33 years, until her final illness. She had played the violin since childhood, but switched to viola when that was what the Orchestra needed. She studied both violin and viola with Bernard Lurie, Concertmaster of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. Their music took the Helfricks on two trips to Europe with the Connecticut String Orchestra, and Sylvia was called upon regularly by the music director of Hartford's South Congregational Church to play for special occasions. She did so for years. On her return from six months of cancer treatment at Johns Hopkins, a string quartet of the Manchester Orchestra played a concert in her home as a welcoming gesture.

In 1971, Sylvia completed her psychiatric training at Connecticut Valley Hospital in Middletown. The presence of Francis's mother in their home made this possible. Sylvia was committed to personal growth. She later served in several positions in the Hartford area.

Sylvia loved the outdoors. The family biked, hiked, camped, and especially canoed, in Minnesota, Canada, and on the Housatonic River. Sylvia loved to garden, and could identify most plants in the area. Later she often helped in the orchid greenhouse that had become Francis's special hobby and last spring used her limited strength to plant specimen evergreens and azaleas in their garden, to make it "just perfect." Sylvia's concern for the environment and conservation was clearly visible. For most of their lives, the Helfricks got along with only one car. She could identify birds by their songs as well as by sight.

Sylvia loved visitors. Her hospitality was boundless, joyful, and welcoming, and was extended to uncounted numbers through the years. She had a gift for intimacy, a precious ability to convey the caring she felt.

Sylvia loved the Meeting. She served as clerk, and on many committees, and attended the Friends General Conference Gathering whenever possible. Her special love was children. She was active in the Religious Education committee of the Meeting long after her own children had left First Day School. Faithful in attendance at all

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meeting activities, her dedication and commitment were a constant inspiration to others, and her many years of experience were invaluable to those newer to the Meeting.

Sylvia loved beautiful art, operas and operettas, flowers, oriental works, Shakespeare, home cooking, and much more. She was always interested in whatever was new and did not hesitate to try things herself, whether laying bricks for their backyard patio or playing modern music.

Sylvia possessed a special grace and warmth. She agreed with Hegel that "Caring is the most important thing. Caring matters most." Her life was a witness to this. She will be missed by all whose lives she touched.

—HARTFORD MONTHLY MEETING, CONNECTICUT VALLEY QUARTERLY MEETING

### ***Susan McAllester***

Susan McAllester was born July 9, 1919, and died August 31, 1994, at home. She was a founding member of South Berkshire Monthly Meeting of Friends and had served the Meeting in many capacities: Clerk, Recording Clerk, Newsletter Editor, and Librarian. Such a listing only touches on her services and influence to the Meeting as her messages in Meeting for Worship were truly inspired and affected those who heard them, as they were all informed by a sensitivity to beauty and felicity of expression. Her energy, organizational skills, and practicality helped to keep the meeting together and going.

Susan was born in Statesville, North Carolina, daughter of Chesley and Elizabeth Sparrow Watkins, and attended school in Charlotte, NC, and New York City. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree at Radcliffe College in 1940 and her Masters degree from Columbia University Teachers College in 1941.

Beginning in the 1920s, she had visited and spent summers in Monterey, MA, and moved there full time in 1979. On September 1, 1940, she married David R McAllester and later moved to Middletown, CT, where she became poetry editor of College English Magazine and photographer. Her photographs appeared in various publications and exhibitions and in *Hogans: Navajo Houses and House Songs*, 1980, which she and her husband wrote and illustrated.

She was active in Monterey affairs such as the League of Women Voters, the Land Preservation Trust, Democratic Town Committee, and *The Monterey News* of which she was once layout

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and photography editor. Her other interests included hiking, canoeing, and travel.

Besides her husband, she leaves a daughter, Bonner J. McAllester; Bonner's husband, Joe Baker; a son, Burling V McAllester; a brother, George S. Watkins; and two granddaughters, Sudi Sparrow Baker and Cora Jay Baker.

—BERKSHIRE MONTHLY MEETING, CONNECTICUT VALLEY QUARTERLY MEETING

### *Leona Gifford Stevens*

“Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass.” Psalm 37:5. (Guiding verse for Good Will Home and School where Leona graduated in 1917.)

These words speak clearly of the life of Leona Stevens, born eighth month 14th, 1899, died fifth month 15th, 1994. Through the influence of her family and North Fairfield Meeting, where she was a birthright member, she committed herself to be a disciple of Christ at an early age. For her, all of life was sacred. In her school, her home, her relationships with her family and others, in all things, it was her intent to honor and glorify her Lord whom she knew as her constant companion. She was faithful to God, as were her husband Carl, and their three children, especially through their work at North Fairfield Meeting. As often as possible Leona was a part of Quarterly Meeting and Yearly Meeting.

Leona had a continuing thirst for knowing and communicating the spirit and truth of the Scriptures. She would work with her amplified Bible and Bible Dictionary searching for the little innuendo which would make the Bible live for others as it did for her. She learned with the Apostle Paul that the “letter of the law leads to the death of the soul; the spirit of God alone can give life to the soul” (II Corinthians 3:6). Leona often shared her newest insights during worship as well as with neighbors or friends, young and old. Her gift of simply communicating the Gospel message was recognized by many and was recorded by the meeting in the early 1970s.

The special messages of Friends were very important to Leona. She knew without a doubt that there was much evil controlling many lives, and was within her own, but the light of Christ was there too. As a Friend, her joy was to encourage that light so that it could overcome the darkness. Her Gifford forebears with others from Cape Cod settled on the Quaker Tract in Fairfield in the 1700s. Old writings, which Leona has helped to hand on, tell of their lively

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Christian faith expressed in words and their relationships with others. The Friends' transition period which brought music and released pastors was a part of Leona's experience. She came firmly to believe that there needed to be those released to minister and to teach and to pastor the flock which in many ways had been neglected for some time. She also longed for all to experience the joy and power of the Lord in music during worship. Leona's decisions often revealed three guide points: (1) The sense of the Scriptures; (2) The wisdom acquired from her family and the general tradition of Friends' experiences including the meeting; (3) Her gift of discernment which gave her an openness to the leadings of the Lord. When all was said and done, she knew she trusted in God's power and grace that could make something from her frailties.

Leona was different. When with her, a Friend always knew the power of the Lord was strong. Many have been reminded of II Corinthians 3:18 when they were with her... "all of us who are Christians ... reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured in ever increasing splendor into his own image." With a deep sensitivity, she was willing to face the ugliness and pain in life.

But she would not allow "the world around her to squeeze her into its own mold, but would let God remold her mind from within..." (paraphrase of Romans 12:2) so that her response was a keen desire to serve and heal and encourage "...to overcome evil with good." [Romans 12:21] She delighted in and sometimes sketched the beauty of the physical world. All people were her concern. She could look beyond the outer appearances of others to find how to strengthen their potential in the Lord. For those whose actions she felt were abhorrent to her Lord, she could love meaningfully. She had a vision for children and realized the need for intergenerational worship. It was Leona who made velvet shoes for little folks to wear in meeting. In her 80<sup>th</sup> year, she helped meaningfully with Vacation Church School.

A key in her whole life was Romans 12:1. "With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, fellow Christians, as an act of intelligent worship to give God your bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him." This led to a disciplined spiritual life and made special dietary needs, which might have been a burden, into another way to witness to the care of her Lord. Every fall she was greatly pleased to share her apples and her faith from her own wild apple tree which God had provided right in the middle of her flower garden. They were the only apples she could eat!



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A younger member of North Fairfield Meeting has said, “Leona carried a childlike innocence as she waited for the Lord’s directions. With her, there was a radiating peace and joy. She was like the eye in the middle of a hurricane. Her life’s message was ‘If you are calm and pray here, you will come to know what you need to know.’ She affirmed that there is a peace which passes understanding.”

—NORTH FAIRFIELD MONTHLY MEETING, VASSALBORO QUARTERLY MEETING

### *J. Huston Westover*

Huston Westover died in Concord, Massachusetts, on July 2, 1994, after years of fighting chronic myelogenous leukemia.

He became interested in the Religious Society of Friends because of their testimonies, especially the peace testimony, and he and his wife, Jane, joined the Friends in the late 1930s. At that time, they attended a meeting, held at Riverside Church in New York, and occasionally, the meetings downtown.

Huston became a conscientious objector in World War II when he was drafted, and worked under the American Friends Service Committee. This was called Civilian Public Service and was the first congressionally authorized program of alternative service in United States history. Huston worked for several months in a camp at Ashburnham, Massachusetts, at Presbyterian Hospital in New York, and then as Special Projects director. He said, “We believe that the service of peace is not temporary, as is the service of arms, but a permanent expression of a way of life.”

After the war, he decided to become a physician, and studied at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. While interning at the Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital in Cooperstown, New York, he started the Friends Medical Society, which is still active. After three years of medical practice with the Rip Van Winkle Clinic at Hudson, New York, Huston was asked to serve for three months as interim director of a hospital in Kunsan, Korea, under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee.

Huston and Jane belonged to a Friends meeting wherever they lived, including Copake Meeting, Cooperstown, New York; Oneonte Meeting, Philmont, New York; Pine Mountain Meeting, Whitesburg, Kentucky; Plymouth Meeting, Woodstock, Vermont; and Sarasota Meeting, Sarasota, Florida. While a member of Acton Meeting in the 1970s, Huston served as clerk and as a member of the Finance Committee. When the Westovers returned to Massachusetts from

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Vermont, he was appointed to a term on Acton Meeting's Committee for Ministry and Counsel. He also became the meeting's connection with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, reporting weekly on that committee's recommendations for political action.

In all of Huston's endeavors, the precepts and testimonies of Friends guided his manner of working, as well as his involvement in yearly, quarterly, and monthly meetings. His most recent concern was working for a single-payer health care program for the nation.

He wrote, "Our *Faith and Practice* is a living, ongoing representation of the development, with vitality, fluidity, and commitment, of the working views of the membership through the Monthly Meetings."

—ACTON MONTHLY MEETING, SALEM QUARTERLY MEETING

### *Edward Asa White*

Edward Asa White, a birthright Quaker, was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on December 6, 1896, the son of Willis Harkness White and Emily Peck Sisson White, members of the Providence Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends. He died in Providence on May 24, 1994, at the age of ninety-seven.

A long-standing family relationship with Moses Brown School began when his mother was a student there. Subsequently, he and his siblings, Mary, Charles, and Louise, graduated from the school. He was also a 1912 graduate of the Massachusetts Agricultural School, now the University of Massachusetts.

Edward was married to Ruth Dudley Blanchard for 65 years. She was an active member of both Providence and the New England Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends. They had three daughters, Barbara White Haddad, Priscilla White Ohler, and Deborah B. White.

In his career as a realtor and later as President of the Roger Williams Savings Fund and Loan Association, he demonstrated a unique Friendly concern for lower income families seeking financial help in purchasing a home. Edward held positions of leadership in many organizations such as The Providence Board of Realtors, the Rhode Island Real Estate Commission, the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Housing, and Citizens United for a Fair Housing Law in Rhode Island. He served as director and vice-president of University Heights, the first Rhode Island housing complex that was nondiscriminatory as to race, color, or income.

A lifelong member of the Providence Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, he served for several years on the boards of The

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Lincoln School and Moses Brown School. For over ten years during the period from 1940 to early 1950, he served on the New England Yearly Meeting Board of Managers of Investments and Permanent Funds. He was the prime mover in effecting the sale of the former Providence Meetinghouse and the building of its replacement on the Moses Brown campus.

In 1928, Edward moved to Arnold Mills, Cumberland, Rhode Island, where he purchased a home, continued the operation of a large apple orchard as an avocation, and became active in local political and community affairs. As a cofounder of the Arnold Mills Community-ites, his keen sense of humor prevailed in numerous local skits. Edward was a steadfast and trustworthy man, a solid citizen and family man whose ideals and selfless service supported many worthy endeavors. With his wife, Ruth, their home always offered a warm welcome to Quakers from near and far as well as to relatives and their many admiring friends.

—PROVIDENCE MONTHLY MEETING, RHODE ISLAND-SMITHFIELD QUARTERLY MEETING

### *Alice Louise Wiser*

Alice Louise Wiser, born January 22, 1937, a member of Burlington Monthly Meeting for over twenty years after she joined it by personal application in 1972, died of cancer in Hamilton, Ontario on April 2, 1995. Born in Wichita Falls, Texas, and raised there and in North Carolina, she graduated from high school a National Merit Scholar, encountered male chauvinism in college and dropped out. She joined the Air Force, was raped and was forced to let others adopt her child, for whom she searched for many years and rediscovered in 1991.

She began attending Friends meetings in La Jolla, near San Diego, where she went to junior college. Moving to Burlington in September 1971, she graduated from Goddard College, A.B. 1972, and M.A. 1974. In Burlington, she served as presiding clerk and represented Northwest Quarterly Meeting on the board of the Vermont Ecumenical Council. In the spring of 1976, she took four teenage "Earthquakers" to Great Britain, performing Quaker skits in Friends meetings and visiting the historic Quaker sites. That summer she was coordinator of New England Yearly Meeting's Junior Yearly Meeting.

By 1979, she reported seven trips to Ulster and Eire. Discouraged with only treating individuals in her family therapy

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practice, she resolved to see how other societies dealt with problems of conflict. In 1979-81, she traveled around the world with her son Nathan. In New Zealand and Australia, she led workshops on peace and conflict resolution. She had surgery and hepatitis in Singapore. On this trip, she became engaged to Bernhard Nickel, whom she married on December 29, 1982 in the Cambridge, Massachusetts meetinghouse under Burlington Meeting's care. Her difficult travel experience left her still enthusiastic for peace through visitation, and through a new relationship between men and women.

Study upon this theme at Harvard and abroad culminated in a Ph.D. in Psychology from Goldsmith's College, University of London, in 1990. Her thesis was entitled "Women as Peace Makers." In the early 1980s, she worked for the Equal Rights Amendment and organized peace caravans for the Feminist International for Peace and Food, which provided the Peace Tent, an alternative center at the Nairobi, Kenya, United Nations Decade of Women Forum in 1985. She and Frances Langworthy made Servas visitors welcome at her home in Burlington. She was recording clerk of the *Friends Journal* board and was active with the Friends General Conference and the women's centers at its Gatherings. Its Women's Center held worship in her memory on July 7, 1995. She founded Ovum Pacis, a Women's International Peace University, with the aid of Marcia Mason and an international board consisting mainly of women, aiming to help women from different countries and cultures learn from each other. She moved to Springfield, Pennsylvania about 1990, and transferred her membership to the Springfield Friends Meeting in 1992. It met for worship May 13, 1995, to focus on her life.

—BURLINGTON MONTHLY MEETING, NORTHWEST QUARTERLY MEETING