

## **SOUTH BERKSHIRE MONTHLY MEETING**

### **STATE OF SOCIETY REPORT**

NEYM has declared 2010 a Jubilee Year, a celebration of their 350 Annual Sessions and “a time for re-ordering our lives and possessions”, (Leviticus, 25). This year Monthly Meetings are not being asked to submit a State of the Society Report for eventual synthesis with other reports. Instead, each Meeting can decide whether or not to engage the process of writing a report, to avail themselves of an opportunity at self-reflection and assessment without the requirements that writing a formal report may have had in the past. Since we celebrated our twenty-fifth year as a Monthly Meeting in 2009, this opportunity seems entirely appropriate.

We begin our consideration on the state of our society with a “biography” of those who are no longer physically with us and continue with those who are with us now and those who will certainly follow us. The state of our society is but a reflection of the totality of our fellowship; each of us, whether physically present or not, projects a unique and irreplaceable facet.

We need first to acknowledge the passing of three Members in 2009 and early 2010. Betty Schmidt was one of our oldest Members. She served as Clerk of the Meeting and Editor of our Newsletter. She facilitated many social events and served as wise mentor to many of us. William Brinton brought a happy presence to our Meeting, never lacking for a good humored smile or comment. Having come from a long line of Quaker families he brought to our Meeting a vast historical awareness that many of us would not have otherwise known. “Bill” happily walked the earth for almost 100 years. Jonathan Warner joined us from an Oregon Meeting and became a dedicated participant in the life of our Meeting. He served as Clerk of Ministry and Counsel and as a member of our Finance Committee offered sage advice derived from his years in the finance industry.

We are also led to reflect on the passing, over the last several years, of several of our elders and original members: Gordon and Jane Bowles, Lester Clarke, David and Susan McAllister, Mary Seitz, Louise Brinton. Yet we are not diminished by our losses and we cannot but reflect on the constancy of our Meetings’ general disposition. Certainly, those who have gone before us still remain with us in a way that is often acknowledged during our Meeting for Worship. We also celebrate those original Members that are still with us and continue to provide us with both the solid footing at the core of our Meeting as well as a much valued historical context: Margaret Clarke, Shirley and Storrs Olds. Our Meeting receives ongoing nourishment from those who have passed, those who are still with us, and those who have more recently joined us. The light that we share has not dimmed.

2009 marked our twenty-fifth year as a Monthly Meeting. A celebration of this was eagerly anticipated and we excitedly devoted considerable time over several months towards planning what would be a joyful and significant gathering of our own and our neighboring community. On the day of the event, our Meeting House was filled with grateful, happy Friends and guests. Our celebration included talks, skits, music, poetry and good fellowship. We were particularly happy to have all of our First Day School children participate in a delightful series of skits on non-violence written by Walter Wink. As a “gathered meeting” we were all involved in the planning, organizing and presentation of this notable event.

Walter and June Keener Wink have been with us for many years. We note with joy as well as sadness the transition in their active lives of service in the causes of non-violence, peace and reconciliation and Walter’s vast contribution to religious scholarship. Their “quieter” years will be as rich for us as they will be for the rest of the world they have so gracefully served.

In January, 2010 the clerkship of our Meeting passed from Storrs Olds to Harvey Kaminoff. Storrs’ tenure as Clerk is deeply appreciated. His dedication to the life and health of every aspect of the Meeting and his quiet competence are gratefully acknowledged.

The heart of our Meeting, the Meeting for Worship, has become “quieter”. Our shared silence has deepened and at times approaches what Quakers call the “Gathered Meeting”. When thus corporately gathered, a sense of peace and serenity pervades our worship. We hold to the sense of corporate worship as it is understood in our tradition and accept that this is an ideal towards which we are moving. We are grateful that our worship is not dominated by excessive and repetitive speaking. We value balanced worship where both the silence and vocal ministry are entirely consistent with each other. We are committed to explore in increasing depth the spiritual state of our fellowship as it is expressed in our Meeting for Worship as well as our ministry in the outside world.

We are grateful to Assistant Clerk Alan Price who has undertaken to facilitate a series of Introduction to Quakerism conversations that have been well attended and enthusiastically received. We anticipate that deepening our knowledge of Quakerism will, in turn, deepen the quality of our worship and our ministry. Our Meeting is graced by the presence of seasoned Quakers.

Our Meetings for Worship to Conduct Business have also become “quieter.” Past issues that tended to divide us have receded and our Meetings more closely approach the Quaker ideal of a gathered “sense of the meeting.” We experienced an example of this in late 2009 when we attempted to craft a Minute expressing our general discomfort with the FUM employment policy. We eventually, after three “Called Meetings”, approved wording that resonated with us all. We are gratified that our Minute has served to clarify the position of at least one other

Monthly Meeting. We celebrate the Quaker way of engaging issues, a process that is, at once, thoughtful, unhurried and respectful of differences.

We are dedicated stewards of the land and building we own and occupy. It was through a series of happy “miracles” that we were able to purchase and build upon the property that serves as our home. We joyfully share this gift with the surrounding beauty of the Berkshire Hills and its generous display of nature and wildlife. We look forward to the continued care of our property that combines natural aesthetics of the land as well as a welcome and appropriate home for the wildlife with whom we share our gifts.

Our First Day School although small is enthusiastic and quite active. Our children are committed to engage concerns that offer them the opportunity to express Quaker values both in and out of the Meeting. An offshoot of First Day School is a recently approved Youth Program for those entering and engaging adolescence. There was a felt need for some form of acknowledgement to mark their transition into the teen age years.

Although many of us will not be present for our fiftieth anniversary, we do hold that the essential character of our Meeting, the state of our society, will be recognizable. It is with this thought that we celebrate the precious resource of our young friends and close this current installment of ongoing self-reflection.

Approved at Ministry and Counsel 6/14/2010;

Approved at Meeting for Business 6/20/2010.