

A Friendly Letter

Issue Twenty-Two

First Month 1983

Dear Friend,

Beginning last month, our subscription list has been put on the computer of a local Friend; this process is helping me discover and weed out errors and duplications in my recordkeeping. One of my most frequent errors is to neglect to note when someone renews their subscription, which leads to the sending of renewal letters when they are not warranted. If this happens to you, please let me know.

One other note about the address labels which this computer is churning out: each one should carry a number at the bottom. This number should be the number of the last issue of your subscription. Again, if there is any inaccuracy in it, please let me know and it will be straightened out.

Turning to the month's subject, I am once again presuming to borrow a leaf from *Time Magazine* and pay tribute to Friends who seem to merit recognition as Quakers of the Year. The principal nomination, that of Herbert Nicholson of Pasadena, California, is described in the following pages. But in addition, having asked for nominations from readers, I want to take note here of an additional name, that of the late Don Green, the pastor of Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon who died late last year after an accident. Subscriber Virginia Douglas of Elyria, Ohio, wrote of Don:

"As a member of the first church that Don ever pastored (North Olmsted Friends Church, North Olmsted, Ohio), and a fellow classmate of his at Malone College, I feel very strongly the loss of this 'rising star' in Quakerdom. As you are already aware, Don was a standard of excellence and integrity. His work of reaching and healing between church and community, and between the various branches of the Friends made him a prophet to this generation. Although Don had been gone from his first pastorate about 11 years by the time of his death, many of us in this area had continued to watch with delight for news of what Don was doing, always rejoicing at the use of what we knew from experience to be his excellent skills.

"It seems fitting then, to suggest Don Green as posthumous nomination for 'Quaker of the Year.' We remember Don for his great love of the Lord and of Quakerdom, and the title of 'Quaker of the Year' would also seem appropriate."

Amen to that.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager
Chuck Fager

Sometime soon, the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians will issue its report. This report should include recommendations on what steps the government should take to compensate Japanese-Americans who were taken from their homes and put into internment camps during World War Two. Whatever they suggest, it is unlikely to be enough to cover the shame brought on America by this dark chapter in our history. Yet in this saga there is hidden a smaller story of courageous witness against this injustice, a witness which shone brightest then, but which has continued for almost forty years since the end of the internment.

Herbert Nicholson, a Friend of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, had been a missionary in Japan for 25 years before Pearl Harbor. Nicholson has a simple, strongly Christian faith, which made him comfortable among other evangelical denominations, and he was working as pastor in a Japanese Methodist church in Los Angeles when his flock was taken up by the government for transport to the camps. Although then in his fifties, Nicholson was an indefatigable worker, and once he understood what was happening he became a kind of combination circuit riding preacher, social worker and advocate for the internees. He travelled almost constantly, tens of thousands of miles to the isolated camps in California, Arizona, Texas and as far away as Montana, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Protesting a Travesty of the American Way

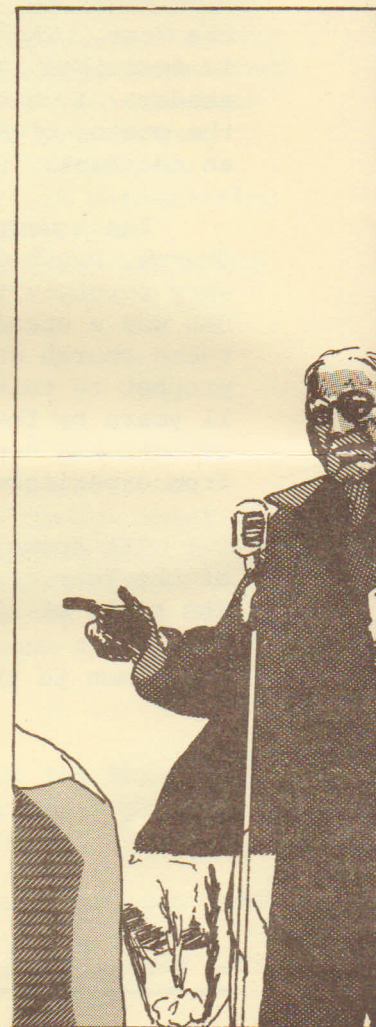
He also tried to organize protests against the internment. The day after Pearl Harbor, he got himself ejected from a church federation meeting for suggesting that the hysterical reports about Japanese-American sabotage were false. (They were.) Feelings against the "japs" ran very high. Finally he found a handful of people around Pasadena, mostly other Quakers, who formed a group called Friends of the American way. This little group organized relief efforts and wrote letters objecting to the treatment of their fellow citizens of Japanese extraction.

They didn't make much headway with the government, however, until February, 1944, when Dillon Myer, the head of the War Relocation Authority, visited Pasadena. While there he met with Nicholson and a delegation of the Friends of the American Way and the AFSC. By that time, young Japanese-American men had been proving their loyalty in battle as volunteers, and the Selective Service had begun drafting them out of the camps. Nicholson confronted Myer with the hypocrisy of calling these men to defend a government which held their families captive. To his surprise, Myer agreed with his criticism. "I wish," said Nicholson, "you'd go back to Washington and get the Army to open these camps at once."

An Amazing Journey to the Heart of the System

But Myer said he couldn't do that; it was outside his turf. He worked for the Justice Department, and such a policy change would have to come from the War Department. But Nicholson persisted: if Myer couldn't persuade the Army, he demanded, "who could do it?" Myer answered, "You can." "All right," Nicholson declared, "I'm on my way."

And so he was, the very same day, despite the fact that he had little money. He hitchhiked much of the way, and stopped at several camps along the way. Once he arrived in Washington, he made his way to the still-new Pentagon, where to his surprise he found several old acquaintances from the Japan mission field, working in intelligence. It was they who smoothed this stranger's way into the office of the Assistant Secretary of War in charge of internment policy, John McCloy. (McCloy was later head of the CIA.)



HERBERT V. NICHOLSON

Nicholson wasted no words with McCloy, making much the same case he had made to Dillon Myer. Again, surprisingly, the official agreed: McCloy said the big roadblock to releasing the internees from the camps was public opinion. He showed the pastor a stack of letters, mostly from the West Coast, insisting that no Japanese-Americans be permitted to return to their home areas. "We get very few letters on the other side of the issue," McCloy said. He pointed to his desk and added, "If you can fill this other basket on my desk with letters saying, 'We want our Japanese friends back again'...we'll open the camps as soon as we're sure that public opinion is not one hundred percent against it."

Nicholson did not have to be coaxed. Leaving McCloy's office, he went straight to Western Union, to send telegrams to the Friends of the American Way and to contacts at several camps, telling them to start writing letters. Then he caught the train to Philadelphia, where he passed on the word to the AFSC and the National Council of Churches. On his way back west he stopped at several more camps, to help the internees organize letter-writing campaigns through friends back home. The letters were sent not only to McCloy but also to President Roosevelt and Dillon Myer

A Rapid Response, and a Slow One

Nicholson says that within four months more than 150,000 letters poured into Washington, mainly from the West Coast, telling the administration what McCloy said they needed to hear. Even so, the officials temporized. There was an election coming on, and anti-Japanese sentiment was still widespread. That summer McCloy wrote to the Friends of the American Way, indicating he was willing to test the waters by releasing a single youth to leave the camps and enroll at Pasadena Junior College that fall. A young woman named Esther Takei was chosen; she was said to be bright and personable, and her brother had been killed in combat as a volunteer. A Quaker family took her in and she enrolled in the College in September, 1944.

For the first month or so, there was a lot of harassment: threatening phone calls and letters, and cars parading past her host's house. But there were also many messages of encouragement, and within weeks the harassment faded away. By December, plans were announced to open the camps and begin allowing the Japanese-Americans to return to their home areas.

A Ministry That Continued

After V-J Day, Nicholson turned his inexhaustible energies to relief efforts for the former Japanese enemy nation. Working with the Heifer Project International, he gathered and sent over 5,000 milk goats to Japan, accompanying three boatloads of them across the Pacific personally. In 1951, he returned to the mission field there with his wife for another decade's work with these people he loved.

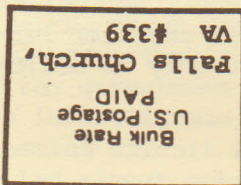
Herbert Nicholson will be 91 at the end of this month, and is now retired in Pasadena. He still visits many elderly Japanese-Americans in area nursing homes and corresponds with many others, as he has since retiring 20 years ago.

In Eighth Month, 1981, just out of the hospital after a third bout with cancer, he testified in Los Angeles before the Commission on Internment, calling on it to establish a memorial fund for those who died in the camps, and to publicize the loyalty of these citizens to America despite their unjust treatment. As he left the room, the capacity crowd burst into loud applause. But this was not the first time he had had a moment in the limelight. In 1973, at the unveiling of a monument at the site of the Manzanar Camp, he was asked to make the opening remarks. His main plea was to ask the Japanese-Americans, "Will you please forgive us as we pledge wholeheartedly to join you in the determination that such a thing shall never happen again in our beloved country?"



Manzanar - April 14, 1973

INSIDE: QUAKERS OF THE YEAR--
OUR SECOND NOMINATIONS.



From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter
P.O. Box 1361
Baileys Crossroads, VA 22041

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In this month in 1786, a young Englishman named Thomas Clarkson was seeking a publisher for an essay he had written opposing the slave trade. Clarkson was not a Quaker; but after several publishers had turned down his manuscript, which had won a prize at Cambridge University, a Quaker publisher named James Phillips accepted it. Thus began Clarkson's career as the premier antislavery investigator in Britain. Like a modern investigative reporter, Clarkson travelled around England uncovering the brutal, suppressed facts about slavery. British Friends formed a network of committees which took Clarkson's work and made it known throughout the land. This laid the base for the parliamentary moves against slavery, which were not to succeed for another quarter century. Clarkson and the Quakers worked together throughout his career. Indeed, he said that the inspiration, and much of the information for his pathbreaking essay first came from reading an antislavery report by the Philadelphia Friend Anthony Benezet, who was a pioneer, along with John Woolman of antislavery work among Friends and others in the United States.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

The Truth, and Nothing But

Larry Ingle, a subscriber from Chattanooga Meeting in Tennessee, has been doing research in Quaker records from the days of the Hicksite-Orthodox split among Friends. In one set of papers, he came across a report of a conversation between some Hicksites and an Orthodox Friend, Josiah Reeve. The Hicksites claimed a woman Friend as one of their members. But Josiah Reeve replied sternly that, "If she tells the truth, she is one of us; and if she lies, you are welcome to her."

With Apologies to Punxsutawney

Next month will see the observance of Groundhog Day. But the Philadelphia YM newsletter noted some time back the definition of a Quaker Ground Hog: "Comes out on Labor Day and sees nine months of committee meetings ahead."

PS.--My supply of Quaker Chuckles is getting low, Friends; can you send me some more to replenish my supply?

Also, have you considered sending a gift subscription to A Friendly Letter to your Meeting or Church?
