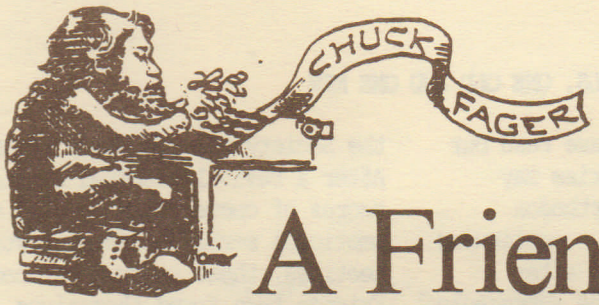

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Eighty-Eight ISSN #0739-5418 Eighth Month, 1988

Dear Friend,

Say what thee will, Friends General Conference is still the biggest, most exciting annual Friends assembly of them all. Last month almost 2000 of us descended on Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, setting a post-Cape May attendance record for the third year in a row. Indeed, the phone was still ringing even as the FGC staff left Philadelphia, and some last-minute registrants had to be turned away. (Ed. note: Sign up early next year!)

This burgeoning phenomenon of Quaker culture is not only straining the capacities of FGC's overworked staff; it is also something of a surprise and challenge to a southern host body. By halfway into the Gathering, the university staff reported in amazement that we were consuming food, especially fruits and vegetables, at a rate four times what they had expected; they couldn't find more yogurt anywhere, and we had inhaled all the granola within a hundred miles.

Otherwise, though, all seemed to go well. A high point for me, as usual, was checking in with Friends from all over and catching up with their progress in following particular leadings. Most reports seemed promising. Consider two samples:

Janet Minshall of Atlanta Meeting, whose concern to build new links with African Friends, especially women, was described in AFL#64 and won her a nomination as Quaker of the Year in #70, reported that she is preparing for another six-week visit to Kenya, to lay the groundwork for an international exchange program involving work on food, water and environmental projects by college students and others as way opens. Janet has faced a stready stream of obstacles in pursuing this concern, from finances to illness to the indifference of many Friends, but none has stopped her. My hat is off to her again as she departs.

The project of another Quaker of the Year, Janet Riley and the Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee, has overcome as many or more hurdles. Theirs will be a book, *The Human Experience*, including stories by some of the best modern American and Russian writers, selected jointly by a team of Americans and Soviets working by Quaker process, and to be published in both countries. (This was also described in #70.)

The news is that it is finished; the editorial part, that is. The manuscript is at the publisher, Knopf, and is due out next spring. The list of U.S. authors makes my mouth water: Garrison Keillor, Alice Walker, John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates to name only a few. The Soviets are, of course, less well-known here, but Tony Manousos, who worked with Janet through the selection process, assures me they are well-known there and have contributed first class work.

If anybody ever deserved a best-seller, it is these fine, and broke, Friends. (Their committee is six months behind in paying Janet and Tony their pittance salaries, but that has not stopped them.) I do not shrink from predicting that this book project, which came literally out of nowhere but the leading of the Spirit, could make literary as well as Quaker history.

These are only two of the shafts of light that lit up my landscape at FGC last month. Is it any wonder I'm enthusiastic about it, and the Friends whose coming together is its essence?

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. As first surfaced here in #82, FGC has definitely decided to move its offices out of Friends Center, to larger quarters nearby.

NEW LIGHT ON TWO QUAKER REVIVALS, ONE OLD AND ONE NEW

Two very different new publications shed much useful new light on the past of Friends in the United States, and raise very provocative questions about our future, especially the future of the liberal branches. The first is a straightforward work of history, a new book called *The Transformation of American Quakerism*, by Thomas Hamm. It was published in Fourth Month by the University of Indiana Press, priced at $25.00. Friend Hamm, an Indiana native is a historian who has just become the archivist of Earlham College.

The Transformation of American Quakerism won a prize for a work of church history, and deserved it. I have not read a more illuminating treatment of the events and forces which produced pastoral Quakerism, and I doubt if a better one will soon be produced. With this book Hamm takes his place in the front rank of younger Quaker historians.

ORTHODOX UPHEAVALS

His book should be on every meeting's bookshelf, and not only because it is a fine specimen of the historian's craft. As will be explained shortly, understanding this large chunk of our history is vital, not just for pastoral Friends, but for all Quakers who want to maintain a real connection with the Society's heritage, especially as we attempt to apply this heritage in the years to come.

Hamm's book opens in 1800, and summarizes the events leading up to the Great Separation of 1827. This sad saga has been recounted more fully in Larry Ingle's fine book, *Quakers In Conflict*(see AFL#71 for a detailed review); here it is necessary background for Hamm's main purpose, which is to understand what happened to the Orthodox wing of Friends after the Separation, especially in the Midwest, which is where the pastoral system was born about fifty years later.

As those of us who have read our one-volume Quaker histories may remember vaguely, the Orthodox branch was subjected to a continuing series of troubles, even after ridding themselves of the supposedly unsound Hicksites. First came the Gurneyite evangelical movement, which produced another round of schisms between the evangelicals and the Wilburite or Conservative Friends in the 1840s and 1850s. Then, not long after the Civil War ended, midwestern Quakerism was caught up in the interdenominational revival and holiness movements.

REFORM VERSUS REVOLUTION

Hamm argues persuasively that the early Gurneyite leaders thought of themselves as reformers within a clearly understood Quaker tradition, which they wished to preserve and renew. But the holiness revivalists were revolutionaries. They regarded Quaker "peculiarities" as dead weight, and rapidly swept away almost all the specific characteristic of this tradition in the monthly and yearly meetings where they gained influence.

Out went the the notions of the Inner Light and salvation as a long growth process; with them went silent worship, lay leadership, plain dress and speech, the peace testimony, and voteless decisions. In came pastors, programmed meetings, even baptism and communion in some places, and a new theology that centered on revivalist soul-saving and instantaneous sanctification, and was unremittingly hostile to modernist developments such as critical Bible studies and belief in evolution.

On the surface, the revivals were a big success; they brought in thousands of new members. But it was their very success which started all the trouble. Their converts were gathered in a manner, and around ideas very much at odds with the traditional style and structures of the Society the newcomers entered. After a revival gathered dozens or scores of converts in a noisy and emotional series of evangelistic meetings, these newly convinced Friends then found themselves expected to worship in solemn and silent assemblies dominated by sober, quietist elders.

Many of these converts didn't like the disparity. And the revivalists didn't like it either. The revivalists had very definite ideas about the paths their new flocks should travel, and it was not in the quietist, Inner Light trails, and certainly not in the ways of modernism, which some influential Gurneyites were then just beginning to take.

The ensuing struggle went on until—well, it is still going on in some places. But Hamm follows it through 1907, when the holiness forces suffered a temporary setback after one of their number veered off into a loony pentecostalism.

AN INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

The changes Hamm has researched and described so well here can be understood, at one level, as an institutional crisis. The traditional structures of midwestern Gurneyite Quakerism were simply not prepared, physically or spiritually, to handle the large influx of enthusiastic newcomers; the revivals thus created a crisis of identity for them.

But the revivalists and their followers did not wait around for the elders to resolve their internal turmoil: they plunged ahead and imported structures and belief systems in the affected meetings which were more familiar to the newcomers. These new structures, Hamm shows very convincingly, had almost nothing in common with the Orthodox Quakerism that had gone before, even in its Gurneyite variety. That was fine

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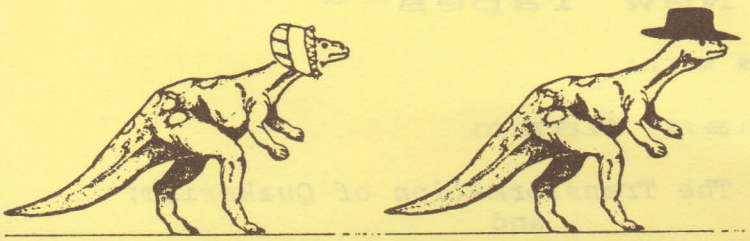

The Friendly Dinosaur

Well, MAYBE....I printed up a few with the above design (about 7" wide) for my family, and a few people asked if they could get some. I'm game, but the minimum print order is a dozen, and in small batches they're expensive. If enough of you want them, I'll do it--and I'll even take almost all the risk. Here's the deal:

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with the revivalists; they saw no value in the old ways, especially if they got in the way of the generic holiness revivalism and proto-fundamentalism they were preaching.

To dramatize the result, Hamm cites the memoirs of one James Baldwin, who had been raised in Indiana's Westfield Meeting. In his pre-Civil War youth, the Quaker community there was distinctive in many ways: an unadorned meeting-house, silent worship, plain dress and speech, work for testimonies including peace and abolition, and discipline by overseers.

But when Baldwin revisited Westfield Friends after the turn of the century, he found them in a steepled church with an organ, a pulpit, and a fulltime pastor, who preached standard holiness to a congregation indistinguishable from that of any other local Protestant parish. "The Quakers of Westfield," Hamm concludes(as did Baldwin), "were no longer separate from 'the world'—they had become part of it." And so had all the other midwestern Orthodox Quaker groups except the small bands of Conservatives.

FROM BOOK TO CHART

At this point we need to leave Hamm's masterful story and move to the other publication mentioned at the outset. It is not a book but a chart, tracing in minute detail virtually all of the divisions, transformations and reunifications that have occurred in American Quakerism over more than 300 years. Its author is Geoffrey Kaiser of Unami Meeting in Pennsylvania.

Kaiser is not a professional historian; by trade he repairs player pianos. But it is safe to say that Quaker history is a passion with him, and he has been working on this chart for several years, drawing each version painstakingly by hand as his understanding of our convoluted course has broadened. The current version, the tenth revised edition, takes up a sheet of paper about three feet wide by four feet high. Given the mass of detail, there is no way of reproducing it here in a reduced form; but you can order it from him for $9.00 postpaid, at Box 222, Sumneytown PA 18084.

Some other previous charts are in print in various places; but none even remotely approaches Kaiser's in completeness and detail. Viewed from a distance, his chart resembles a tree, with a central root at the bottom dividing into several large branches, then sprouting scores of boughs and twigs. Up close, it is somewhat more like a can of worms—an inelegant but suggestive comparison.

ILLUMINATING OPINIONS

There is much explanatory text on the chart, but the best explanation of it comes from Kaiser himself, who has used it as the basis for a number of workshops at various meetings. His perspective on this visual history could perhaps best be described as a rowdy Wilburism, outspokenly opinionated about formal innovations, but taking some care to be fair to the multiplicity of Quaker permutations he has sketched.

In workshops it takes more than an hour to move from the bottom of the chart, and the pre-1827 days, through the turmoil of Hicks and Gurney and the revival to the twentieth century separations(yes, there have been several) and reunifications. But beyond the formal organizational changes, Kaiser's chart also illuminates some of the transformations that have occurred within existing groupings. For instance, his analysis of the changes among the Orthodox between Gurney and the revivals supports Hamm's work, based on his own studies. Yet even more striking and original, at least to me, was his description of the changes among FGC and Unaffiliated Friends from what he calls the old Hicksite to the new "Beanite" outlook. "Beanite" Quakerism is so named after Joel Bean, the once Orthodox Friend from Iowa who fled the revival to California and ended up becoming the father of the Unaffiliated yearly meetings of the West, and the liberal-mystical outlook which has spread from them throughout FGC. (Hamm tells Bean's story very well, as does David Le Shana's *Quakers In California*; see also AFLs #33, 41, & 72.)

A NEW NAME, AN OLD CHALLENGE

"As with other movements," Kaiser notes, "the Beanites are reluctant to accept an '-ite' label." But whether we like the monicker or not, his chart makes it clear that the parentage is direct and the name an apt one.

But an insight built on this one is even more provocative. Kaiser points out, and his chart makes plain, that the "Beanites" are in a situation with many parallels to that of the Orthodox when the revival broke loose: a once declining movement rejuvenated by a large influx of enthusiastic new members, who however bring with them lots of baggage from outside and strain the existing structures.

Kaiser concludes that "Questions faced by the Gurneyite yms when they were caught up in the Revival Movement trends of the late 1800's as to what constituted appropriate Quaker belief and practice may now become a challenge to this branch in the wake of its own recent 'revival.'"

I think he is dead right in this prediction, and that it is already beginning to come to pass.

Hamm's account of the revival upheavals, while valuable enough on its own, takes on even more significance when joined to the results of Geoffrey Kaiser's chart. The two offer a unique set of resources for efforts to discern where American Friends are today, and where in particular the "Beanites" may be headed in years to come. We are fortunate indeed to have them available to us.

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

INSIDE: COPING WITH TWO QUAKER REVIVALS,
ONE OLD, AND ONE NEW

TWO MONTHS AGO *IN QUAKER HISTORY*

We interrupt our usual chronological sequence to bring you a special report on Quaker evangelism, just brought to us by Tony Manousos of the Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee in Philadelphia. In the transcripts of the public statements at the Moscow Summit meeting in Fifth Month last, Manousos found the following comments by Ronald Reagan, as the President made a toast:

"Once again, Mr. General Secretary, I want to extend my thanks for your hospitality...as you have been a gracious host, we've tried to be gracious guests by bringing along some small expressions of our gratitude. There's one gift in particular that I wanted to mention, not only in view of my own former profession, but because it has, I think, something important to say to us about what is underway this week in Moscow.

"It is a film—not as well known as some, but an American classic....The film also has sweep and majesty and power and pathos. For you see, it takes place against the backdrop of our American epic, the civil war. And because the family is of the Quaker religion, and renounces violence, each of its characters must...face this war and the moral dilemma it poses....Just as the invading armies come into southern Indiana...the Quaker farmer is approached by two of his neighbors. One is also a Quaker who earlier in the story, when times were peaceful, denounces violence....But now that the enemy has burned his barn, he's on his way to battle....The other visitor, also on his way to battle...although a non-believer...says he's proud of the Quaker farmer's decision not to fight. In the face of the tragedy of war, he's grateful, as he says, that somebody's holding out for a better way of settling things.

"It seems to me, Mr. General Secretary, that...we too have been holding out for a better way of settling things. And by the way, the film's title is more than a little appropriate—it's called *Friendly Persuasion.*"

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Here are two more items from the experience of Quaker COs in World War Two, in the Civilian Public Service program. One comes from the unit at the Byberry State mental hospital near Philadelphia. The COs lived at the hospital, and were subject to a wide range of government regulations, under which they often chafed and grumbled. With this in mind, one CPS wag suggested that the unit put up a banner for the benefit of the inmates which read: "We Are As Committed As You Are."

Another group, at the unit in Campton, New Hampshire wanted more "significant" work to do, and volunteered to test some new lice control remedies. The equipment for this experiment consisted of lice-infested underwear, which the men were obliged to wear for three weeks straight, during which time the affected areas of their bodies were sprayed and dusted with various concoctions to see how the lice reacted. The motto of this unit, summing up this experience, was: "They Also Serve Who Only Stand and Scratch."