MIRIAM AND SAM LEVERING: QUAKERS OF THE YEAR--1981

It would be easy to devote this whole article to describing the Leverings' work on the United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty. 1982 will mark their tenth year of effort in this project. They have made a definite Quaker influence felt on negotiating procedures for the treaty conference, on the processes for resolving numerous roadblocks to its completion, and even in some of the key provisions of the Treaty draft itself. They have done this, moreover, with little money, no official position and no connections to powerful lobbies. Instead, their resources have been perseverance, thorough knowledge of the complex issues involved, and the Quaker reputation for integrity and commitment to completion of the Treaty on an equitable basis.

Their work has been especially crucial in this past year, when the Treaty's expected completion was abruptly delayed by the new U.S. administration. If the U.S. delegation does return to the conference table this spring(as seemed likely when this was written), it will be in significant measure the fruit of the Leverings' decade of dedicated work.

Quaker Roots and Quaker Fruits

But I don't want to dwell here on the Leverings' work on the Law of the Sea; it has been mentioned or alluded to in these pages several times before, and really deserves a book of its own as a record. Here I am interested as well in these two people. Where does a masterwork of Quaker witness like this spring from? Where were they trained and motivated to perform so knowledgeably and effectively in the fields of international diplomacy and oceans policy?

From an apple orchard in Carroll County, Virginia, that's where. Sam was born there in 1908 and raised in the shadow of the Appalachian mountains. He returned with Miriam in 1938, after college and a stint of government work in Washington DC. They had met in 1930 at Cornell University, where Sam was a senior and Miriam a freshman. Seeking, in that Depression year, money to stay in school, Miriam had entered a speech competition that was part of Farmers Week at the university, because the winner would receive a $100 prize. "I wasn't sure what to talk about," she recalls, "so I spoke on the Farmer's Role in World Peace. Sam was in the audience, and heard my talk. He came up afterward and introduced himself. I didn't win the $100."

The Powerful Example of a Quaker Patriarch

At the orchard, Miriam came under the influence of Sam's father Ralph Levering, an impressive figure indeed. Ralph Levering came from a long line of witnessing Friends; among his forebears had been members of the American Peace Society, the major pacifist group of the 1830's, plus conductors on the Underground Railroad. Although he earned a graduate degree in international relations from Columbia University, he chose farming as a career, first raising strawberries in a Quaker settlement near Marysville, Tennessee. When he decided to switch to apples, he was told by the federal government that the southwestern Virginia hillsides were a good location. He took the train from Knoxville, Tennessee to Asheville, North Carolina, then walked over 100 miles northeast along the Appalachians, checking soil and plant conditions as he went along, as well as the proximity of Quaker meeting houses (this being territory dotted with Quakers of North Carolina Yearly Meeting). He finally chose Ararat, Virginia, just over the line from Mount Airy, North Carolina. Ararat is an isolated mountain community, where Elizabethan speech patterns can still be heard. Other Quaker families had moved there earlier from other areas in the region where the struggle over slavery was very costly for them; Carroll County's citizens were not slaveholders.

MIRIAM AND SAM LEVERING---Q

There Ralph Levering lived from 1908 until his death in 1945. Besides building up his orchard, he arranged his schedule

to leave time for working on Quaker concerns. He also read widely, and was known to recite Whittier to his cows while milking. He was active in Yearly Meeting, and drove his Model A truck around the community on First Day mornings, picking up children to take them to Sunday school. When alerts came in from the American Friends Service Committee and later the Friends Committee on National Legislation, he faithfully wrote letters to area newspapers setting forth Quaker views, especially in peace issues.

The tradition Ralph Levering embodied has shaped Sam and Miriam, and through them has influenced a much wider area. When Sam took over managing the orchard, he too ran it so he could leave it for extended periods to pursue his Quaker concerns, especially peace. He and Miriam also entertained a steady trickle of visitors, were active in their Yearly Meeting, and raised six children. They did all this on a very modest cash income, what would be considered poverty level by contemporary standards. Even so, from their Appalachian fastness, five of their children emerged to win advanced degrees at some of the nation's most prestigious colleges. Miriam reports also that all of their children remain interested in Quakerism, and most are active as well; this is a remarkable batting average these days.

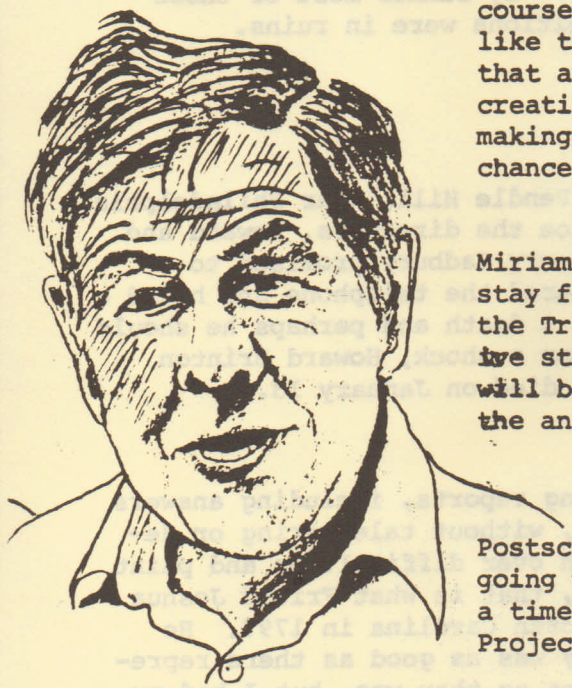
A Call for Action on a Cold Morning

Sam's concerns led him to FCNL, of which he served as Chairman for sixteen years. It was because of this position that he received a phone call one morning in 1972 from Philadelphia. Some weighty Friends were on the line; they were all excited about a proposed draft of a United Nations Law of the Sea Treaty they had just seen. They wanted FCNL to put someone to work supporting the development of the Treaty.

It so happened that the very night before there had been a sudden, untimely hard freeze along the Leverings' mountainside. All the buds on their trees were blackened by the cold, and Sam felt sure this meant they had lost their whole next season's apple crop. In that case, he and Miriam were suddenly free to respond personally to this call for action; and respond they did. For two years they worked under FCNL's auspices; then they branched out, founding the U.S. Committee for the Oceans and the Ocean Education Project.

Building a Structure for World Peace

For Sam and Miriam, though, the Law of the Sea Treaty was more than a target of opportunity. Their whole vision of peacemaking has centered around building international institutions with the capacity to resolve international conflicts without violence. "Of course, we have been involved in efforts to stop particular wars, like the Vietnam War," Miriam explains, "but we have also felt that a more fundamental blow to the war system would be struck by creation of alternative international institutions for peacemaking. And we felt the Law of the Sea Treaty was the best chance to make some real progress we had had in many years."



Throughout their ten years of work on the Treaty, Sam and Miriam have kept a low profile and avoided publicity, in order to stay focused on their delicate diplomatic task. Nevertheless, if the Treaty succeeds in becoming a key building block in an effective structure of world peacekeeping, naming them Quakers of the Year will be small enough tribute to their contribution to it and to the annals of the Quaker Peace Testimony in action.

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Postscript: For detailed information about the Leverings' ongoing work to promote completion of the Law of the Sea Treaty in a timely and equitable fashion write to: The Ocean Education Project, Rm. 212, 100 Maryland Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002.

AKERS OF THE YEAR, 1981

Sketch by STEWART L. BURKE

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

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INSIDE: OUR FIRST NOMINATION FOR QUAKER OF THE YEAR

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

On First Month 2, 1920, one of the saddest chapters of Quaker history came to a climax. The U.S. Attorney General, a Pennsylvania Friend named A. Mitchell Palmer, unleashed federal agents in raids across the country, to seize several thousand suspected "subversives." Led by a toughminded, fast-rising federal constable named John Edgar Hoover, the raids featured arrests without warrants, jailing for months without counsel or charges, beatings and brutal interrogation. Attorney General Palmer apparently had hopes of riding the wave of public fear over purported radical subversion to the presidency in the 1920 elections. Following the raids, he warned repeatedly that a communist uprising was planned for Fifth Month first, Mayday 1920. But nothing happened on that date, and as cooler heads began to look at the raids and their impact, they backfired on their author. As federal judge George Anderson of Boston said during the trial of several people picked up in the raids, "A more lawless proceeding it is hard for anyone to conceive. Talk about Americanization! What we need is to Americanize people that are acrrying on such proceedings as this." By summer most of those arrested had been released, and Palmer's presidential ambitions were in ruins.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

A Melancholy Message

In First Month, 1941, an observance was planned at Pendle Hill, near Philadelphia, to mark the 250th anniversary of George Fox's death. Since the directors, Howard and Anna Brinton, weren't sure of the exact date, historian Henry Cadbury promised to find out for them. A few days later, Howard Brinton answered the telephone and heard a grave telegraph operator advising him that there had been a death and perhaps he should prepare to pass the news to his wife. Steeling himself for a shock, Howard Brinton asked to have the details. The message was: "George Fox died on January 13."

Querying the Queries

This is also the time of year for State of the Meeting reports, including answers to queries like, "Are love and unity maintained among you, without talebearing or detraction?" Sometimes Meetings have been tempted to smooth over difficulties and paint an excessively rosy picture of their condition. At least, that is what Friend Joshua Evans thought about the report of New Garden Meeting in North Carolina in 1797. He wrote in his journal that he had told the Meeting "if they was as good as there represented there were not so many more as good on the continent as they was, but I had my fears it was not so."