

# The Provident FRIEND

News from the Providence Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

September 14, 2018

## Providence Monthly Meeting for Worship

with a Concern for Business

9th of 9th Month, 2018

### Minutes

1. Friends gathered at the Saylesville meetinghouse at noon, with 17 Friends gathered at the Saylesville meetinghouse present. Presiding clerk Rebecca Leuchak began the period of silent worship by reading the following queries taken from West Chester Friends Meeting via the Quaker Cloud:

*Are our meetings for worship and our meetings for business alike held in stilled, expectant waiting upon God?*

*As we worship in living silence for purposes of business, are we drawn together by the power of God in our midst?*

*How does our worship and our work together nurture all, creating a deeper sense of community?*

2. Announcements.

**Great Road Day in Lincoln – September 22<sup>nd</sup> from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** A reminder: Saylesville meetinghouse will be open on September 22 from 11:00 to 4:00 as part of Lincoln's "Great Road Day," celebrating the historic district.

We can use more volunteers! Plans so far include tours of the meetinghouse, writing with quill pens, demonstration of repairing the windows, story reading, and spinning. More activities would be welcome if you would like to help with one! (Either propose your own or we will suggest something. If you don't want to be there all day, volunteer for an hour or two.) We would love it if someone would paint a plywood or cardboard picture with face holes cut out so that people can take photographs of one another looking like Quakers. We would also love to have contributions of cookies to offer.

Please let Rebecca Smith know if you would like to help out or to get more information.

**White Privilege Reading Group.** In response to the NEYM's call to examine White Privilege, a small group met from January to June 2018 and held pot luck discussions around race. Under the care of Peace and Social Action, this group is now beginning to host a series of reading-focused discussions in order to inform our broader meeting community on the topic and engage us in further reflection and action. Discussions will be each month at the meetinghouse on the fourth First Day (Sunday) at 8:30 am and end in time for meeting for worship. Sessions will generally be led by the person who vetted and suggested the book or article. We intend to hold our first discussion on the fourth Sunday in October (Oct. 28).

Details will be published on the listserv and in the newsletter, and if needed, assistance will be provided for the purchase of materials. If childcare is needed, please let us know so we can arrange it. Please contact Steve ([steve@absteve.com](mailto:steve@absteve.com) 401-439-7281) or Eugenia ([emarks66@gmail.com](mailto:emarks66@gmail.com) 401-272-8424) with your interest or questions.

Please consider joining this discussion group.

## CALENDAR

### Saturday, September 15

Bookswap, Saylesville Meetinghouse

### Friday, September 21

**1:30 pm**, Fellowship with Muslim Neighbors  
Masjid Al Kareem, 39 Haskins St., Providence

### Saturday, September 22

**1-4 pm**, Great Road Day, Lincoln, RI  
Presentations and tours at the 1703 Saylesville Meetinghouse and at other historic sites in Lincoln

### Sunday, October 7\*

**11:15 am**, PMM Monthly Potluck, Providence Meetinghouse  
(\*To take place IF the meetinghouse is cleared for use)

### Sunday, October 14

**12 pm**, PMM Business Meeting, Saylesville Meetinghouse

### Sunday, October 28

**8:30-10am**, Discussion Group on Race, PMH Library. Planned reading: Say the Wrong Thing, by Dr. Amanda Kemp.

**3. Membership recommendation.** For Ministry and Counsel, and following the usual clearness process, Rosanne Cedroni brought a recommendation that Austin Jaspers be accepted into membership with us. Friends approve. Bill Monroe, Hans-Dieter Gomes, and Victoria Eck will coordinate a suitable welcome.

**4. Ministry and Counsel Report.** For Ministry and Counsel, Betsy Cazden reported that Bruce Shaw will replace Ariana Steele as committee clerk. As a result, he plans to lay down the task of scheduling the use of the Providence meetinghouse. Any Friend interested in learning more about this opportunity to serve the Meeting community should speak with Bruce.

**5. Treasurer's Report.** On behalf of Treasurer Peter Swaszek, Dan Lederer reported on the first quarter of fiscal year 2018-2019. Contributions are somewhat ahead of last year but are still below one-quarter of the budgeted amount. As expected, the large expenses so far this year have been for the construction and repair work on the two meetinghouses. Funds are being drawn from the Providence Addition account and the Ruggiero Bequest account, restricted to the Providence and Saylesville meetinghouses respectively, and these accounts are expected to be used up in this process.

**6. FUM Personnel Policy** For Finance Committee, and in response to our earlier request, Dan Lederer reported on the status of the personnel policy of Friends United Meeting. It has been our practice to allow Friends contributing to our Meeting to specify that the fraction of their contribution which would normally go to FUM via New England Yearly Meeting be sent to the African Great Lakes Initiative instead. Dan passed on messages from Noah Merrill and Frederick Martin of NEYM that, although the policy has not changed, the FUM General Board has now minuted that they are not in unity with it. We expect further discussion of this issue, and of our monthly Meeting's donation policy, at a later date.

**7. Saylesville Update.** For the Saylesville Working Group, Sherry Provencal, Betsy Cazden, and Bruce Downing reported that many things are going on at the meetinghouse. Worship takes place regularly, as does the bookswap. The heirloom tomato garden is growing well and tomatoes may be available for sale at Great Road Day on September 22, when the meetinghouse will be open for tours and historical activities. The people at Hearthside House have been good partners in scheduling events and publicity. Ann and Bob Durant have installed a new informational plaque on the pillar, and there are brochures and a new flag and sign for openings. A display about Saylesville meetinghouse was shown at NEYM and received much favorable attention.

**8. Property Committee Report.** For Property Committee, Nina Berry reported that Heritage Restoration, Inc., the company that previously carried out repairs on the east wall, has begun work on more of the Saylesville building exterior. The goal is to restore the exterior to a safe and protected condition while being mindful of its historic importance. Necessary permits have been obtained from the town and from the Rhode Island State Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. Siding has been stripped from the south side (some will be reused) and numerous repairs have been made to the deteriorated portions of the foundation, framing, sheathing, etc. In the process, Heritage is taking pains to avoid changing the building's air and water dynamic in order not to introduce moisture issues that can lead to rot. Work has also begun on the west side, which seems to be in somewhat better condition than feared. The unused chimney on the larger part of the meetinghouse, which is not original to the building and which has served as an entry point for bats, will be removed. (We have installed bat houses outside the meetinghouse.) The older chimney on the west end will be repaired and retained. The budget for this project is capped at \$100,000, for which funds are available. The contract allows for volunteer labor to offset some of the costs, but there have been no volunteers so far. It would be particularly useful to have volunteers to re-glaze the windows, as this necessary work will not be covered by the contract budget. Volunteers could also be useful in pulling nails out of the old clapboards.

Interestingly, the restorers may have helped to answer our perennial debate as to which part of the building came first: they feel that the smaller section is the original and that the larger section began life as a barn which was later moved into its current position.

We hope to have members of Heritage Restoration participate in the September 22 event with educational information about the building's historical aspects and perhaps a demonstration of window glazing.

We thank the Property Committee for their hard work.

**9. Providence Meetinghouse Expansion.** On behalf of Bruce Carlsten, Dan reported that, although the start of construction was delayed, work has gone fairly smoothly, and the focus is now on interior work. Materials and design have been chosen to be both energy-efficient and in keeping with the older part of the building. Construction costs so far are adhering closely to the \$659,000 budget, and contributions to date total over \$275,000. We have also received a \$10,000 grant from the NEYM Legacy Fund, and some \$27,000 in pledges are expected to come in. Additional donations are still encouraged. There is some uncertainty about whether the large maple tree to the east of the building can be preserved, and if so, how best to do it; a meeting with an arborist has been arranged. The heating system is not yet in place but should be working before cold weather sets in. Some plumbing may be in place by mid-September, but all rooms and bathrooms are not expected to ready at that point, and a certificate of occupancy will be needed before the new nursery can be used. We expect to continue to meet for worship at Moses Brown for several more weeks.

Friends note that attendance at Meeting for Worship in the temporary location is not what it usually is at this time of year, and we urge Property Committee to help us get back into the meetinghouse as soon as two bathrooms are available. Rebecca Leuchak noted that Moses Brown will be sending in a cleaning crew in the next couple of weeks. We thank Property Committee for their work in this matter also.

**10. New England Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions.** Betsy Cazden reported on this year's New England Yearly Meeting sessions, held at Castleton University in Vermont, with a theme of *In Fear and Trembling Be Bold in God's Service*. 620 Friends attended, including several from Providence. Topics which came forward included continuing support for immigrants and refugees; responses to the climate crisis; support for the Poor People's Campaign to eradicate poverty; the prohibition of nuclear weapons; criminal justice reform; uses of the Legacy Gift funds (there were pictures of our expansion project); the ongoing revisions to *Faith and Practice*; and finances. Details are available on the NEYM website (neym.org). Issues of structural inequality in society have been frequent topics of interest in recent years. A discussion took place this year regarding paths to leadership within our communities and whether they are equally available to all.

The preliminary *Faith and Practice* chapter on membership was brought forward at sessions and was not approved. The concept of dual membership was the major point of disunity, as it was when our own Meeting discussed the proposed chapter. Further discernment will be needed on this matter. NEYM sends a request to individual monthly meetings that all attempt to reduce their carbon footprints by 10%.

11. No further business appearing, we closed with a period of silent worship a little before 2:00 p.m., intending to meet next on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Tenth month at the Saylesville meetinghouse.

Rebecca Leuchak (presiding clerk)

Rebecca Smith (recording clerk)

#### **PMM Continues Meeting in the Sinclair Room at Moses Brown**

The construction of the new wing of the Providence meetinghouse is moving along nicely (see minutes, above, and photos, below). Until the finishing touches are added to the interior and the necessary inspections completed, we will continue to meet on the Moses Brown School campus in the Sinclair Room. It's not yet clear whether we will be back in the meetinghouse in time for an October potluck on 10/7, but updates on the building's status will be going out on the list serve. For those Friends who haven't yet had the pleasure of silent meeting in that large sunny room, here is how to get there:

Park in the school's west lot, L in the map below. The entrance is off of Hope Street and is located just north of the new squash court building. The entrance to Ross House, 04 on the map, is directly east of the lot. There is a ramp that loops around to the right. The Sinclair Room is two floors up and there is an elevator just inside the door to facilitate accessibility. Friends will be entering the elevator on the lowest level – LL. They need to travel past B Level to get to the Sinclair room which is on Level 1.

## **Saylesville Meetinghouse Featured at Lincoln's Great Road Day September 22**

Saylesville meetinghouse will be open for visits on Lincoln's Great Road Day on Saturday, September 22 from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Friends will offer presentations on quill-pen writing, wool-spinning, and Quaker history. We'll also be offering tours of the meetinghouse and light refreshments. A shuttle bus will offer rides to other historic sites in Lincoln. If young (or old) Friends would like to participate in the festivities - whether as volunteers on the day or as helpers with preparations such as baking cookies or setting up activities - or if you have suggestions, please contact Rebecca Smith or Eugenia Marks.

Saylesville meeting

## **Jean Schnell Exhibit in New Bedford Shows New England Meetinghouses**

Photographer Jean Schnell is currently showing 23 photographs from her series of New England meetinghouses at the S&G gallery in New Bedford. The show will remain open until September 28, when it concludes with a closing reception 5-8 PM. The gallery, which is accessible by elevator, is located at 88 Hatch St, 306-A, New Bedford, MA. For more information on the show, please contact [Denn@sandgprojectgallery.com](mailto:Denn@sandgprojectgallery.com), 774-279-2606. In October, Jean will be hanging work in the rear lobby of the Moakley Courthouse in downtown Boston. Because it is a state building, the show has to be more historically focused, so each photo will have a caption explaining who Quakers are and some info about them, both past and present. This show will remain up until the end of December. Jean has photographed both of our meetinghouses in this moving series. Her work can also be accessed on her website, <https://www.jeanschnell.com>.

## **Volunteer Needed to Manage Providence Meetinghouse Scheduling**

For many years, Bruce Shaw has been the steadfast scheduler for all PMM meetinghouse activities. The time has come for a change, as Bruce prepares to take up clerkship of Ministry & Counsel. We are in need of a volunteer (ideally someone who has good organizational skills and lives somewhere in the vicinity of the meetinghouse) who can take on the duties of scheduling. Bruce is available to assist with transitioning into these new capacities. If this is an opportunity that speaks to you, please contact Rebecca Leuchak.

## **Furniture Donations Needed for Refugee Families**

While the flow of incoming refugees to RI and the United States has lessened in recent months, families are still arriving in our community, fleeing war and persecution in their home countries and trying to begin a new life here. The local nonprofit AHOPE continues to set up homes for these new arrivals, but their stores of donated furnishings and household goods are depleted. It's time to stock up again! If you have sofas, chairs, tables, cabinets, appliances, or housewares that are serviceable and might help make a family feel at home, please contact Jen McFadden to find out how to arrange for a truck to pick up your donations.

## **The Best Version of Ourselves**

by Dan Lederer

While always a feature of our country's history, divisiveness seems to be especially pronounced recently. People tend to take contentious positions on such issues as immigration, global warming, gun control, and police brutality, leaving us wondering what, if anything, we as individuals can do to promote reconciliation and peaceful resolution of these vexing problems. Pondering this, I came across what may be a helpful aphorism: *Try to be the best version of yourself going forward.*

At first glance this maxim may seem simplistic and obvious, but I think it's worth delving into a little more deeply. So what then is "the best version of yourself"? You can waste a lot of energy trying to be like someone else whom you seek to emulate, or like the person you think others want you to be. Just being yourself, or, in other words,

being authentic, requires a lot less effort. We're all endowed with unique strengths and weaknesses. While it may sound trite, there's a lot of truth in the saying that, in the game of life, it's not a question of who's been dealt the best hand of cards, but rather how we best play the hand we've each been given. While there are numerous guides we could turn to in this pursuit, Quakerism teaches that the best guide for each of us may reside within, provided we allow ourselves the peace, the quiet, and the time to receive that guidance.

We're asked to do this "going forward". Looking to the past, it's easy to feel regretful about times when we could have done things differently and achieved an outcome more to our liking. But the past is gone, and it may help to remember that everything that's happened to us up until now, including what we label as both "good" and "bad", has brought us to this moment.

And finally, notice that we are asked to "try to be" rather than just "to be". Even if we try continually to do the right thing in any given situation, that is, to be at our best, inevitably there are times when we fall short. I would guess that this happens to all of us, and it provides an opportunity to learn to do better rather than a reason to give up. Winston Churchill, who had his share of failures, said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts." So let's continue to try to be emissaries of peace and kindness in all our interactions with others, with the hope that the "ripple effect" will make a difference in our troubled world.

*Editor's Note: The Provident Friend is always seeking thoughtful contributions from members and attenders. If you have something you'd like to share with Friends, please contact [providentfriend@providencefriends.org](mailto:providentfriend@providencefriends.org) and let the editor know!*

## Clerk's Corner

from Rebecca Leuchak, Presiding Clerk

The Seasons Turn...

As we all resume the fall season's rhythms in work and school, and as many who have been away over the summer return to meeting, I am reminded once again of the vital role we each play in building our Friends community. I think about this often, speak about it to many, and sometimes even write about it.

Each person in our meeting, whether member or attender, holds a key piece of the complex and rich whole that is Providence Monthly Meeting. There are no souls merely holding a blank space in our Religious Society of Friends. We are individuals who each count, who each contribute. For me, this is one of the most precious aspects of our faith. We are who we are corporately thanks to your contribution—your inner light, your truth, your commitment.

Where else in my world do I see that kind of total engagement? I believe it is rare—and radical. More common in religious and secular realms is a structure where power and leadership belong to the few, while the many suffer themselves to be led. Hierarchy, domination, and passivity are encouraged in society at large—after all, when only a few voices contribute, an organization's self-definition becomes much simpler and its decision-making more efficient.

But we know that in the very early days of Quakerism George Fox asserted the equal access of all to the understanding of the divine, discovered by turning within to what he called the inward light. This was a radical proposition because it dissolved any boundaries between the individual and the divine. Other faiths conceived of God as a very distant, supernatural being, approachable only through intercessors. But Fox taught that God could be revealed in our literal midst, taking shape as divine truth and divine power within each one of us. The divine is within us, immediate and accessible, whether we recognize it or not. And that shining, divine spark in each person constitutes a universality and a unity. All are welcomed to the table, and every voice is valued.

Quaker culture affirms direct personal access to the divine, as well as an important corollary: We must also *act*. Individuals have both the power of human agency and the responsibility to make individual commitment. No one else will or can do our work for us!

I mentioned that I think of these foundational notions in the Society of Friends as *radical*. They create the necessary



groundwork for what might be called “radical participation.” Our equality in the Spirit is the basis for true social activism; it is the bedrock from which any particular initiative to do good work in the world springs. In that thrilling spirit of activism, we as Friends may all celebrate our sense of agency and voice, faithfully participating in building a better community and ultimately, if our model prevails, a better world.

Welcome back, Friends. I look forward to our work together!

## A Constructive Image



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