

Memories of a Conservative Friend

By Stuart Starr

Yonge Street Monthly Meeting

MY FIRST MEMORIES OF YONGE STREET MONTHLY MEETING would be from the early thirties. The regular attenders were my grandparents, my parents and us four children, as well as Charles and Nettie Doane and their bachelor son, Dave.

We met in the east room; at that time the seats were facing forward, the same as they are now in the west room. We were divided by gender — males on the east side of the aisle, females on the west. The Doanes and my grandparents sat on the facing benches. As well as a First Day meeting, there was a mid-week meeting on Fourth Day. I sat in the third seat from the back, and could look out the window at the Jersey cattle on the other side of Yonge Street. There was some defective glass in the window (I think it is still there), and it was entertaining to see the cars change shape as they passed that spot. On weekdays there was the occasional farmer with a team and wagon taking a load of grist to the mill.

With membership so small there was concern for the future of the Meetinghouse — that future trustees might sell it for commercial or industrial use. So it was sold to Charles Doane for \$300.00 with the provision that Friends could have the use of it as long as the Meeting continued to exist. My

grandfather died in 1934, and Charles and Nettie Doane soon after, and regular meetings were discontinued. Our family continued holding meeting in the home of my grandmother and aunt, and my parents made sure that Four Months Meeting was held once a year (on the last weekend of Fifth Month), thereby maintaining our legal tenancy. Business meeting was on Seventh Day, attended by members from Norwich, Pickering, and Yonge Street. On First Day there was a morning and afternoon Meeting for Worship, and these were often attended by a number of non-Friends from the surrounding area. We had a picnic lunch at noon.

After the war, immigration brought a number of new Friends and attenders to the Toronto area, some of whom were interested in the historic Meetinghouse, so meetings were resumed — at first, once a month in the summer, and as interest increased, so did the frequency, and finally regular meetings were held year round.

With the rise in attendance there was a concern about the future of the Meetinghouse. Some funds were raised and with the help of the Rogers Trust, we purchased it from Dave Doane for \$4500.00. Harry Beer, Eric Hall and I were the first trustees. My brother was upset that Dave “soaked us” \$4500.00 for property he bought for \$300.00 in the depths of the Depression.

However, when you consider the changing times and the fact that Dave cared for the property and spent some money on maintenance, I felt we got a bargain. I remember it being shingled, I guess in the forties, and I assume Dave and my father paid for that. Dave used to pasture his sheep on the grounds.

During the fifties and sixties, attendance was sporadic. On the first weekend my wife Caroline and I were back from our wedding (June 1957) total attendance was four: Harry and Betty Beer and Caroline and I. Another time a few years later Caroline did not feel like going so there were only our infant daughter Helen, my parents, and I. Helen was upset and cried throughout the whole hour. Since there was no one there who would be disturbed by it, I stayed and held her in my arms and rocked her but she didn't go to sleep. I guess it just didn't seem right without her mother.

Canadian Yearly Meeting

AFTER THE SEPARATION OF 1881, Canada Yearly Meeting Conservative (Wilburite) was moved from Norwich to Pickering, and was held in their big red brick Meetinghouse.

My mother, a native of Ohio, started teaching at Norwich Friends School in 1911. In 1912, she

went to Yearly Meeting at Pickering, where she met my father. They had their first conversation in the home of Elizabeth Richardson, just down the street. That house is still standing.

In 1919 the Pickering Meeting was in decline and no longer able to provide hospitality to Yearly Meeting, which returned to Norwich.

During my childhood, Canada Yearly Meeting consisted of Yonge Street Four Months Meeting, who met once yearly at each of the constituent Meetings: Norwich, Pickering and Yonge Street; Mariposa, near Lindsay; and Halcyonia at Borden, Saskatchewan. Numerous other Meetings were laid down or joined other groups.

About 1942, the Yearly Meeting trustees (Maurice Pollard, Elizabeth Richardson and Elmer Starr) had the unhappy task of selling the Pickering Meetinghouse. It is still in excellent condition today, in use as a Masonic Temple.

When I was a child, going to Yearly Meeting at Norwich in Sixth Month was a big event. It also gave me a few days out of school! We stayed with our cousins, the Francis Pollard family.

In the early fifties we were invited to meet at Pickering College in “joint and concurrent session” with Canada Yearly Meeting Five Years

(Gurneyite) and Genesee Yearly Meeting (Hicksite). I remember one elderly Friend who was in tears, very anxious that we return to Norwich the following year, saying, “If we don’t do it next year, we never will.” She was prophetic — we never did.

In 1955 complete union took place. I was appointed as a trustee of the newly united Canadian Yearly Meeting — an office that I held for thirty-eight years, nine of them as clerk.

The Norwich Meeting declined and the Meetinghouse is now a museum. Halcyonia Meeting decided not to become a member in the new yearly meeting. It is still active today, as an independent Conservative Meeting.

So Yonge Street is the one remaining Conservative Meeting still affiliated with Canadian Yearly Meeting.

Note: Information that predates my birth is taken from *The Quakers in Canada* by Arthur Dorland [whose photo is on the cover of this issue], and from my mother’s memoirs. 🍷

Stuart Starr is a member of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting.

what is this echo

**rippling in the depths
where only the bravest
may linger, casting nets
in search of light**

**webbed filaments that
for a time, coalesce
then drift, watery fronds
oozing bubbled breath**

**faint flickers precede
it, anticipate pulse
amplified a thousandfold
in a radiant chorus**

**and the song goes on
forever, touching every shore
bathed in the Word,
divers bear witness**

Alison Lobans is a member of Regina Allowed Meeting, under the care of Prairie Monthly Meeting.

(Photo: U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)