

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

Summer 2020



Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.

- Advices and Queries #34

Upcoming Events and Announcements

Changes are underway at the Meeting House! The recent bequest from our late member John Milton is allowing us to make some improvements to our Meeting House. The Maintenance Committee is waiting on a quote for a new backyard shed, and will be having an arborist in to prune our trees. The hope is that we can create a nice outdoor sitting area in our rear yard, and reduce the risk to the structure of the Meeting House. In addition, all twelve of our short benches will be getting new cushions, we have purchased eight new chairs, and the Meeting House's downstairs carpets are being cleaned.

An advisory group, consisting of Wilf Ruland, Marcy Hull, Darlene James, and Alice Preston, has been convened to discern what will be required in order to resume in-person worship at the Meeting House at some future date, in full compliance with provincial and municipal public health regulations. Friends wishing to submit thoughts or ideas to this working group are encouraged to do so. A budget for this group and its work was approved at the midsummer Business Meeting.

August 28 is the next meeting of the Cambridge Worship Group. We convene at 2 p.m., each in our own home. All are welcome!

September 12 will be our next Meeting for Worship for Business. Please note that this is a Saturday. The meeting will be held at 12:30 p.m. It is not certain at this time if it will be held in person, or in our Zoom Meeting space. Email will be sent inviting members and attenders to this meeting.

October 3 had been tentatively set as the date for Yonge Street Half-Yearly Meeting at our Meeting House. It has been suggested that an in-person gathering may not be able to be held at this time, and both this date, and the format of the Half-Yearly Meeting, are under review. Further information will be available in the September newsletter.

Carol Leigh and Glenna note that many of us have been seeking ways in which to support Indigenous peoples, and Glenna recently found an organization that provides scholarship and other assistance to Indigenous students:

<https://indspire.ca/ways-to-give/donate> . Interested individuals may wish to follow up.

A Tribute to one of our Friends

David Longstaff, whom we all know as a cheerful and helpful presence in many aspects of the life of our Meeting, has been nominated for the Ontario Senior Achievement Award for his volunteer work with Shalom Village. David has volunteered there since 2007, when his mother went to live at Shalom Village. The nomination letter says, in part, "13 years and over 2000 volunteer hours later, David Longstaff is the Shalom Village recreation department's right hand volunteer, whom they depend on for assistance for most of their scheduled programs. David is always ready and willing to assist wherever he is needed, and will happily step in, even at a moment's notice.

"In addition to portering residents to and from programs and assisting with the woodshop program, David's role has expanded to running regular Bingo sessions, delivering treats to residents, gardening, assisting with the monthly religious services, making the sets for the residents' plays, resident outings, accompanying residents to appointments, assisting at the reception desk, movie nights, sing-alongs and so much more... the Shalom Village annual fundraisers, the Ladies Auxiliary Tea and at the Hustle for Health...

"David is known and respected amongst all volunteers, staff and residents of Shalom Village. He is an integral member of the team. He has built trusting relationships with the residents and they feel comfortable and relaxed going with him to participate in the activities offered.

"The Shalom Village recreation staff rely on David to assist with programs. With David there, they know their program is reaching more residents of the home, as David ensures as many residents come to participate as would like to...

"David's time, hard work, assistance and commitment to Shalom Village, specifically within the recreation department, are truly valued and greatly appreciated."

We congratulate David on this prestigious nomination and wish him well. Thank you, David, for all you do for others!

Covid News from the Woodsides

Sarah and Theo moved to Dundas in March when we were told the border was closing, because we all worried that they would be without family support in Buffalo, especially if one of them got the virus. They have been with us ever since. For Don and Harriet, as grandparents, it has been a great boon; we have 24/7 contact with our grandchild. For Sarah, it is more mixed; she has benefitted from our childcare assistance, but not been able to visit her house in Buffalo or see her friends there. No one really expected that the border would stay closed for so long, and the only clothes she and Theo brought were not exactly summery!

We managed a week away in July for a vacation at Geneva Park, a YMCA conference centre with cottages on Lake Couchiching - a place other family members have visited or worked at in the past. Although their terrific children's program was shut down because of Covid, the beach was lovely and Theo's swimming leaped ahead. Simon joined us for the vacation, and has been a regular visitor at our house, to Theo's delight. He often takes Theo for an afternoon of music, movies or canoeing.

Now we face the dilemma of where Theo will go to school; back to Buffalo to his own school, or stay in Dundas. We will see.....



Peace Brigades International

Some of you may recall that Peter Cross was the first auditor for Peace Brigades International – Canada (PBI). He has been its treasurer for the last eight years. The organization was founded by several good Quakers amongst others, including Alaine Hawkins and Murray Thompson. Both did exceptionally good Quaker work.

Some Friends may remember when we (HMM) were paid a visit by Karen Ridd, a PBI fieldworker in El Salvador. She made Canadian headlines when she and another fieldworker from South America were arrested in El Salvador. After much political intervention by the Canadian government she was released. When she learned her co-worker was not being released, she refused to leave. As a result both were eventually released.

The heart of the work of PBI is to physically accompany human rights defenders in order to reduce the risks they face through the deterrence of an international presence. It's an essential task, 304 human rights defenders were killed last year alone. They also act as a deterrence to violence by drawing attention to the struggles of those defenders. Their aim is to let those who would do them harm know that the world is watching. Interested Friends can support this work in numerous ways.

There is a [free weekly e-newsletter](#) that helps build awareness and PBI also maintains a presence on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). PBI can also be supported by sharing their callouts for field volunteers to accompany defenders, responding to their [urgent action petitions](#), participating in their webinars, and, if possible, [by making a donation](#). They can also be reached at 613-237-6968 or at brent@pbicanada.org.



A Hamilton Meeting Reading Club

Friends will recall Don's ministry at a recent Meeting for Worship, reading a passage from Richard Wagamese's *Embers*. Don felt that there was a close parallel between the spirituality expressed in that book and what we find in our Quaker spirituality.

There is an opportunity here to develop our understanding of our relationship to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. The late Richard Wagamese offers us a spiritual connection to which we can choose to listen and upon which we can reflect. In *Embers*, and in his unfinished final book *One Drum*, we can discern our familiar faith and wisdom recast in an Indigenous setting.

Friends have pursued this opening. On the second Sunday of the month, at 3:00 p.m., we will continue our monthly discussions to share our thoughts on a series of selections from *Embers*, and if we wish to continue, from *One Drum*.

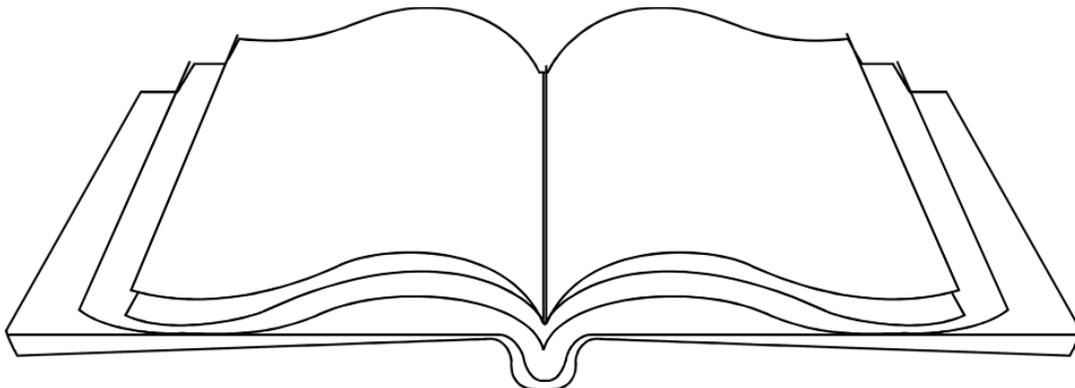
Our next session will focus on the book's second section, Harmony, and is scheduled for August 16th (Sunday) 3:00 p.m.

Please email Dick at prestonr@mcmaster.ca if you would like to join our group. Currently participating are:

Jenn Preston
Wilf Ruland
Mona Aziz
Kate Mackrell
Rob Nunn

Shirla Schellenberg
Alice Preston
Sarah C. Preston
Selina Millet
Margaret Nunn

Carol Leigh Wehking
Darlene James
Dick Preston
Betty Preston
Don Woodside



Book Review

The Fire in the Rock, by Charles Henderson Norman

by Beverly Shepard

Whether you are a committed Bible-believer or a total skeptic, this story will satisfy! Charles Henderson Norman is a complex man of many parts, and also a friend of our Friend Carol Leigh from her university days. He considers this remarkable book his “life's work, and the product of a lifetime of study and thought from many different perspectives.” He began his life journey in a traditional, conservative Christian family and at age 50 converted to modern (and agnostic) Judaism. Different perspectives, indeed! *The Fire in the Rock* is a love story, an adventure story, and a creative and well-researched retelling of the Exodus. Charles Norman has studied both the Biblical story and its interpretations, and much factual and historical information about desert lands of the Middle East, and the combination of awe and skepticism that such deep searching might cause has resulted in this book.

Did you ever wonder what happened to Moses between the time he left Egypt and the time he returned to free the Hebrew slaves? Have you had any doubts about the parting of the Red Sea? Have you wondered about that pillar of fire or the presence of manna? Charles can explain it all – not with a pack of boring facts, but with an inspired combination of reality and mysticism. Learning, for instance, that “manna”, also known as “manhu”, “grows in the Arabian and other deserts upon the limestone”^{*} is interesting and reassuring, but doesn't diminish the idea that the travelling Hebrews were blessed to have it on their long journey. As Tzipporah, Moses' wife, says of the bringing forth of water from rock, “Midyan was a dry land, but it was not a desert – and my husband knew many things, and was a wise man. Did God bring us water? In a way. He sent us Kisil [the name Moses bore during his years of wandering], and Kisil knew how to find it.” He also knew what a volcanic eruption could do, and it's now known that a profound one occurred during the time that the Exodus was said to have happened.

The book is told – utterly convincingly! – in Tzipporah's voice and is much more than a revisionist account of the journey that became The Exodus. It starts in Tzipporah's childhood and describes the life of a nomadic sheep-herding

people, tells the tale of a close and strong family, recounts a beautiful love story, and all the way through evokes the sense of wonder and faith that are the basis of any religion. The author says: “I believe that my book communicates some worthwhile principles, thoughts and ideas -- among them the deeply Jewish conviction that nothing -- no belief, no practice, no tradition -- is more important or holier than the life, freedom and dignity of the individual human being. All the rest is secondary, and our task is to bear that highest value in mind and heart while using both to pursue these three -- Truth, Justice, and Peace. All that was true for the man we call Moses more than three thousand years ago, and it remains true for us today.”

The Fire in the Rock was named to Kirkus Reviews' list of the Best Books of 2016. The reviews on Amazon were mainly 5-star, with just 11% being 4-star. It is available from Amazon but may still be carried in some bookstores. I read a copy that was lent to me by my sister Carol Leigh. It's just possible that she might lend it to you.



Three Poems

Beverly Shepard

Friends, there was some very deep and thought-provoking ministry during worship on First Day, July 26th. Light and dark, life and death, contrast and harmony -- a lot to consider. Here are three poems, written some time ago, which speak of these ideas.

Lux Aeterna

They certainly extolled it –
Mozart, Elgar, Brahms, Fauré –
repeating the Church's assurance that
the faithful would have it,
but really,
who wants it?
Imagine Forever without
a chance to rest your eyes,
a time to sleep,
a place for seeds to sprout,
a way to see the stars.

I will accept, if given,
life eternal,
but do not torment me
with eternal light.



On a Walk Through the Woods

The skeleton of a deer
lies strewn upon a bed
of the deer's hair.

A wren sings gaily
high in a tree.

Death comes to all.

Life continues.

This is the world; this is The Way.



After Harvest

Where I live
The fields lift and subside
Like the surface of an ocean
Caught and stopped in the midst of motion.

Over the swells the stubble lies
Cut down and strewn like rubble, once alive
Ready to be ploughed into the soil
Or rising with assumed integrity
Waiting (unknowing)
To become carpet and beds
In stalls that provide shelter from the winter.

No longer green
Not quite golden
The harvested fields assure me
That nothing is ever ended
All life connects to life
And death is a way of being.



Gracie

Dick Preston

Gracie's mom was Inuk, and she took pride in local Inuit history, including a legendary Inuk hunter named Weetaltuk, who among many achievements made a hand drawn map of the region, used by the traders and ship's captains. Old Man Weetaltuk was reputed to have killed a polar bear who chanced upon him when he had only his harpoon. It is said that he ran until the moment that he knew the bear was very close, leapt to the left (polar bears were thought to be right handed) and plunged his harpoon under the foreleg and into the heart. I believe it.

Her dad was from a "company family" Métis, Cree and French-Canadian, named Herodier. Their home was in the settlement of Fort George, on an island at the mouth of the Fort George river. Herodier would probably have been an employee of Révillon Frères, a competitor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1904-1931. Révillon was a French company, but they were doing business in a community where the language of business was English, and the language of most residents was Cree. So Gracie grew up in a bilingual, Cree and English-speaking household.

Gracie told me that, when she was a little girl, she would look for her mother's sewing kit and then, when her mother was looking for her, she would be found under the kitchen table, sewing away at something. This was a promise of a very good adult future. A traditional Inuit ideal for a man is to show skill with a harpoon. An ideal for a woman is to show skill with a needle, for example, to sew waterproof seams in making sealskin boots. It is a survival skill. As an adult, Gracie was also artistic with silk thread embroidery and with beadwork. Over the years, she made superb ceremonial beaded moosehide jackets for presentation to the Anglican Bishop. For the Canadian bicentennial she made a bowl from moosehide with the inside covered with beads in a beautiful geometric design and fine silk thread on the outside (see photo). We were fortunate to be able to buy it and it is now in the Cree cultural centre museum, **Aanischaaukamikw**, at Oujibougamu. We knew her then, in the 1960s, married to Pat Orr, the assistant administrator of the Horden Hall residence at Moose Factory. He was tall, limber, and good natured, able to chase after escaping kids without terrorizing them. They had kids and a stable family,

until Pat took to partying and eventually left his family behind for a job with Marconi communications at Great Whale River, on Hudson's Bay. Gracie returned to Fort George, with the kids.

Years later, in the 1970s, I was employed by the Cree School Board to give a preparatory course for Cree School Board folks who wanted to become certified at the academic level required by non-Native folks for jobs with this or any other school board in Québec. These folks all could read and write, but some had not done too much recently. A 20 billion dollar hydro generating project had centered on the Fort George River and people were hard pressed to adapt to modernization. One of the students was Gracie. In her evaluation at the close of the course, she made a comment about me. "He was so worldly wise." It was a generous compliment from a master craftsman who had raised her family in spite of Pat's desertion and a radically changing world.

