FROM THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT: SOME THOUGHTS ON SAYMA THEN AND NOW

By SAYMA’s new clerk

As a longtime participant in the life of SAYMA, what are some of the changes you’ve observed? As a historian, how do you see the history of our yearly meeting in the context of the larger history of the Religious Society of Friends?

I’m probably not the oldest person in Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association, but I may have attended its sessions the longest—since 1976, when we met at Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee, a year before we decided to affiliate with Friends General Conference. SAYMA’s annual attendance has not gotten much larger, but the geographical reach has: now stretching from Oxford, Mississippi, in the south; Memphis, Tennessee, in the west; Columbia, South Carolina, in the east; and to Charlestown, West Virginia, in the north. That some of these are beyond the southern Appalachians suggests that we’ve tweaked our testimony on integrity a bit beyond the breaking point. (Though, lest I injure someone’s feelings, I would stress that I’m overjoyed to see everyone each year, no matter how far they’ve traveled, but I hope we hold back from admitting a meeting west of the Mississippi or on the Outer Banks.)

The most obvious change between then and now is that more people are convinced Friends rather than people who were raised within the Quaker fold—or at least that’s my impression; I have no figures to prove it—and I include myself in that category. One of the most obvious results of this development is that we tend to import into our business sessions what we’ve learned about influencing decisions in other groups. Hence SAYMA Friends tend to treat committee recommendations not as though they’ve been seasoned already but as another a chance to give anyone who desires a chance to say as much, and as often, as that one can command the floor. The traditional Quaker notion that one should speak only once on a given topic has evaporated; some Friends even prepare texts from which they read. And others even think they have a right to repeat again and again what has been said already. We find God’s Truth by repeating it—over and over. Personal self-restraint has clearly evanesced. Such changes drag out business meetings, cause jams in the final session, and lead some Friends to turn away in disgust, perhaps to stay away next year.

I haven’t attended many other yearly meetings, so I have no real way to compare, but my guess is that the same things happen pretty much across the board. We modern convinced Friends believe, after all, that the issues we face are so crucial that they rarely require a glance at the past to learn from it or even exempt us from looking in the first place. Nor do we conceive that today’s practice will become tomorrow’s precedent or that the young Friends who watch us flailing around will come to think that’s the way Quakers are supposed to work.

One close SAYMA Friend of mine insists that many modern Quakers simply don’t know and seldom think or care about what historic Quaker procedure might require. Our forebears bequeathed to us a way to conduct business by finding God’s will. As SAYMA’s clerk for the next two years, I hope to join us in seeking it—and hoping we find it, on matters as diverse as what stance Friends should take on a boycott of Israeli goods made in the West Bank, our relation to AFSC, and how much money we ought to commit to our burgeoning and successful SAYF.

Larry Ingle
Chattanooga
NEWS OF MEETINGS
Compiled by Errol Hess. <errol@kitenet.net>

To make sure that your meeting’s news is included in this compilation, please add Errol to your newsletter’s e-mail distribution list, and he will make sure to highlight events from your meeting, too!

ATHENS-- Friends are searching for a meetinghouse because group sharing cost has moved.


CHARLESTON-- No unity on Swannanoa minute. Work continues to reduce harm of strip mining. Began using Google phone.


COOKEVILLE-- Friends advocate for increased solar usage. Visited solar farm. Need first day school to welcome young family interested in attending. Two members with health problems assisted by meeting.

GREENVILLE-- A small core group is blessed with frequent visitors, some of whom occasionally return.

MEMPHIS-- Several expenditures from spiritual development fund. Meetinghouse used by Memphis Zen community.

WEST KNOXVILLE-- First Day School on summer break. Four outside groups currently use meetinghouse. Meeting contributed to Quaker Earthcare Witness. Meetinghouse security issue. Audit completed.

FRIENDS GENERAL CONFERENCE NEWS

As your FGC representative, I wanted to let you know about a few things from Friends General Conference!

1. The Annual Gathering of Friends was a spirit-filled time. This year, the main speakers were videotaped, and you can watch & learn more at this link: annual Gathering of Friends, held this year in California, Pennsylvania. The theme of this year's Gathering was Let Love Be the First Motion, a touchstone that manifested throughout the week in Friends' attention to contemporary social issues like mountaintop removal, mass incarceration, and challenging oppression both within and outside of our faith community.

2. The Annual Gathering of Friends for 2015 will be in NORTH CAROLINA (!!!!) – our SAYMA homeground. I hope you will join me, my wife Jessica, our daughter Evelyn (22 months old) for a week with thousands of other Quakers learning, worshiping, and playing together in North Carolina.

3. The FGC bookstore is gearing up to launch a completely-rebuilt QuakerBooks.org, with improved browsing, convenient checkouts, and easier downloads. For decades, QuakerBooks.org has been a primary source for books on Quaker history, Quaker process, spirituality, peace and social concerns, and religious education. The website will provide easy search and browsing, a more convenient checkout process, and painless downloads of many more ebooks than ever before! Click here to Sign up for the QuakerBooks eNewsletter to get notified of the launch.

4. FGC organized a panel of Adult Young Friends to answer the commonly-asked question Why is everyone in our meeting over 50? Watch the engaging discussion about outreach, technology, and the future of Quakerism. Of course, in Nashville Meeting, where the age “mode” is currently biggest for our kids between 18-36 months old, this is currently not my reality. However, I know it is a concern for many of our Meetings in SAYMA and beyond.

5. The QuakerCloud (hosting Meeting websites) is going strong. Is your Meeting on the Cloud? I know mine is! Central Committee (the big annual board meeting) of FGC is in October. Please let me know if you or your meetings have any concerns you want me to share – or any requests.

Christina VanRegenmorter
SAYMA FGC Representative
FGC Central Committee Assistant Recording Clerk
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CELO BUILDING PROCESS

This is another in the occasional and ongoing series of articles in which meetings share what the experience of finding, building, or changing, their meetinghouse has meant to the life of their meeting. If your meeting feels led to share thoughts about how your physical meeting space contributes to the life of your meeting, please consider submitting an article to the SAFriend.

Celo Monthly Meeting of Friends began in 1946 with an informal gathering of Friends who had moved to Celo Community. They met in homes and the community center in the winter and a goat barn in the summer. They became a monthly meeting in 1949. In 1967 the members began to winterize the Toness goat barn. A large stone fireplace was built by a local stone mason. Margit Hirschenhauser arrived in May 1961 and moved into the Toness cabin near the goat barn and became the caretaker for many years. A room was added to her cabin for First Day School. Another small two room building was built in the 1980s for First Day School.

Fifteen years ago, 1993, we did a Survey of Physical Needs of the meeting to discern what to do about our caretaker cabin and meeting house. Both buildings were in very poor condition and we decided they needed to be replaced. We decided to replace the caretaker house first. In 1996 we received a very generous donation by a member for two-thirds of the cost and we raised the balance in one year. We built a new building that includes an apartment for a a caretaker, a shared kitchen and a large room for meetings, hospitality and First Day School. It is also presently being used by a preschool group during the week. The building was completed in 1997 and is called Margithaus, in memory of our longtime caretaker, Margit Hirschenhauser. When we had our 50th anniversary in 1999, we began the fundraising for the new meeting house. Five years later, 2003, we had raised most of the money needed and decided to begin building and spent one more year raising the balance. We received a grant from FGC Friends Meeting House Fund. It took us 10 years to raise the money and build the building.

In 2003 hemlock trees were cut in the community and a portable saw mill was brought to the site to cut the logs into boards for siding. Pine trees were cut for the timber framing. Poplar and locust trees were donated by a member from his wood lot and were used for paneling, decks and porches. A local builder and his crew built the timber frame construction. We then depended on volunteers to work on the building. During the five year building process the volunteers included members, neighbors, friends and members of SAYMA. Rocks were collected from the South Toe River and a fireplace was built by a local mason. We decided to have a fireplace in the new building as it represented nurturing and warmth for us in the winter, as it had in the goat barn.

During this entire process we had Special Called Meetings for business to plan for the new building. We met almost once a month for five years. We announced the agenda in case anyone wanted to be sure to attend for that decision. Anyone could attend but there was a steady attendance by six to eight members. It was decided to have three members be appointed as Contract Coordinators to be the contact with any contractors we hired. One person took on the responsibility of Building Coordinator (or owner advocate).

The fifteen years of planning and building these two buildings was a loving, caring and learning process for us. It brought us together as a community. We had disagreements at times but always found a sense of the meeting in our decisions. One couple was away for a year during this time and asked us to revisit a decision when they returned. We did this and they agreed with our decision. It was probably good that it took so long to accomplish. We were then able to let go emotionally of our old meeting house and move into the new one. We carried embers from the old fireplace to the new one.

Some expressed sadness at leaving the old converted goat barn where we had met since 1967. It represented the ultimate simplicity. We have tried to maintain that same simplicity in our new meeting house. It is light and has many windows. It feels as if we are sitting in the trees and have brought nature and the woods into our place of worship. Many have expressed joy in our new building. George Fox said that the building is not important. What is important is a gathering of people who have come together in corporate worship to feel the presence of God whether that is in a building or in the wood.

Joyce Johnson <joycewiddie@gmail.com>

Submissions wanted!

The deadline for submissions for the next Southern Appalachian Friend is December 1, 2014. Please send articles, stories, poems, or artwork to Beth Ensign, SAF editor: h.e.ensign@gmail.com OR 173 Flora Ave NE, Atlanta, GA 30307.
SAYMA has three “list serves,” electronic mailing lists that allow a sender to send one email to the list, which then transparently sends it on to the addresses of the subscribers to the list.

The SAYMA-Announce list is for ANNOUNCEMENTS. Perhaps your meeting is having a workshop and you’d like to invite Friends from other meetings. Maybe a Quaker organization has a job opening. Or you have a new blog you think Friends would like to follow. These sorts of things go to SAYMA-Announce. Replies to items in SAYMA-Announce automatically go to the SAYMA-Discuss list, below.

The SAYMA-Discuss list is for DISCUSSIONS. If you’d like to know what other meetings have done about having a workshop, or how Friends feel about starting a blog, or any other topic where thoughtful discourse can bring new insight and light, this is the place to start a conversation.

Finally, there is the SAYMA-Bulletin list. Only the SAYMA Clerk and the SAYMA administrative assistant post to this list. It is used for official material that needs to go out to the yearly meeting. It is recommended that all meeting clerks and reps subscribe to this list.

In order for the list serves to operate smoothly, users need to be aware of a few things. First, choose one list to which to send your email. Don’t send to both SAYMA-Announce and SAYMA-Discuss. Decide whether it is an announcement or a discussion. Depending on your email client (that is, the program you use to access your email, be it Outlook, Thunderbird, Gmail, etc.) clicking “reply” to a list serve email MIGHT reply to the sender, but it often defaults to replying to the whole list. Thus, the email from your F/friend Perpetua, announcing her new blog, reminds you that you have her hoe that she left at the work day. Make sure you’re sending that email just to Perpetua. Start a new email if necessary.

Similarly, don’t copy other people (or lists) on your email to the list serve. If you have an announcement you want to send to your own meeting’s list, the SAYMA list serve, and several individual email addresses, please send a separate email to the SAYMA list. This prevents a “reply all” from people who are not part of the list serve including the SAYMA list serve. When these “reply alls” come in, the administrator has to deal with them individually. It also prevents your message from being held for admin approval because of “too many cc’s.”

Never, ever subscribe the list serve to a mailing list, even one from a Quaker organization. You may send an announcement to Friends telling them how to subscribe to the mailing list if they are interested. You may send a link to an online version of the mail sent to the mailing list. But don’t subscribe the list serve. Because of the automated nature of some of these mailing lists, it is difficult to get off a list since an “unsubscribe” message can’t be sent from the list serve email address, and because the sender from the mailing list is not a subscriber, the message will not get to the list serve members anyway.

Try not to forward emails from others, including Quaker organizations, with lots of graphics and pictures. There is a size limit on messages, because some subscribers are using dial up connections and large emails can slow down their systems. Other users have limited email storage. Again, it is probably better to just send a link to an online version of the email or information on how Friends can subscribe if interested.

Friends who are not subscribed to the SAYMA Announce list can still send an announcement to the list by emailing to sayma-announce@kitenet.net. The email will be held until an administrator can approve it. It may speed up approval if you subsequently send an email to adminasst@sayma.org saying you are sending an email to the list serve. It is preferable to send your announcement directly to SAYMA-announce, rather than email the administrative assistant and ask her to forward it to the list. So preferable that she will likely return the email to you for you to send yourself.

You can control your own subscriptions to the lists by clicking on the links at the SAYMA homepage (bottom right corner at www.sayma.org) You may also request assistance from the Administrative Assistant, Liz Perch, adminasst@sayma.org. You may also send any questions about the list serve process to Liz.
Celo Meeting's project supporting education (mostly girls and women) among the Samburu in Lotuleilei, Kenya is now in its third year. These pastoralists in the northern plain of Samburu Central are one of the scattered parts of the Masai tribe, who were divided into four distant segments by the British when they left East Africa, in order to break their potential for rebellion. Though they are no threat to the central government that followed the British colonialists, the boys are still raised to be warriors, and in some areas (not Samburu Central, which is isolated from other tribes), still practice cattle-raiding, bride abduction, and revenge killing.

In the developing world, women's education is the key to social betterment and economic advancement. In the case of the Samburu Mission, the impetus came from within the community, not from outside, which is a central reason for the project's initial success. To summarize the bullet points from our brochure, education
- increases self-sufficiency and offers alternatives to poverty
- decreases reliance solely on grazing
- helps individuals make informed choices about work and lifestyle
- avoids vulnerability to resource exploitation such as mining, drilling, and deforestation
- supports alternative health practices concerning family size, child marriage, teen pregnancy, and female genital cutting

Female genital cutting is part of the Samburu girls' initiation ritual, after which they are available for marriage. It is supported and overseen by women, and is the culture's traditional way of conferring womanhood on girls, sometimes as early as 8-10. It is outlawed by the Kenyan government, but the Samburu are intentionally marginalized, and there is no enforcement by the distant authorities. Some of the other tribes do not practice it. For instance, Sammy LeToole, the mission director and initiator of the project, married a Turkana, who do not have this practice. Demaris is now a fully integrated member of the Lotuleilei women, despite this significant cultural difference. It is one of the goals of our project to introduce the women to alternatives to this practice, which the girls in secondary school experience in their dorm life away from the village. But this is a delicate matter, over which neither western custom nor the central government have been ceded moral authority.

The Samburu Project is having both success and some growing pains. Fifty children from the Shepherds School have transitioned to formal school, and there remain more than a hundred students of all ages under the tutelage of two dedicated teachers. But those teachers were unpaid for four months this year, due to a delay in reporting from Sammy. Meanwhile, the Kenyan government raised secondary education tuition from $275 to $500/year, which meant our funds do not go as far. Fortunately, we now have enough for back pay and funding of the Shepherds School through December.

Of the eight girls we originally sponsored for secondary school scholarships, one has graduated, returning to Lotuleilei to volunteer at the Shepherds School. Stella (pictured) would like to become a nurse, but lacks funding at this point, and is considering teaching. We are committed to supporting the other girls through graduation, but due to the steep rise in tuition, we will not be able to commit to additional students at this time. FUM Africa has generously volunteered to cover any tuition shortfall we may experience this year, so that none of the girls will have to drop out for lack of funds.

During our committee's meeting in July with Sammy, we discussed ways to address this year's budget shortfall. He reported that the adult literacy project has been successful enough that the women are continuing to educate each other at three different levels, without a teacher. So we are discontinuing funding for this sector of the project in favor of the Shepherds School and girls'
secondary scholarships. The Friends Church in Lotuleilei is bringing in resources to help the adult women with income generating activities, which is one of the foci of First Day gatherings that last from morning to evening, worship followed by work groups of various ages and gender.

FUM sponsored Sammy for a two-month visit to the US this summer during which he visited FGC Meetings (Kalamazoo, Michigan, Celo, Charlotte, and Swannanoa Valley), conservative yearly meetings in Ohio and North Carolina, and FUM meetings, centered in High Point. Geeta and I hosted him for eight days, and were humbled, delighted and inspired by his gracious and humorous personality and deeply informed Christian spirituality. All three of us were fed deeply at NC Yearly Meeting Conservative's gathering at Guilford, and Sammy inspired a small group who attended the interest group for the Samburu Project. Last year, Charlotte joined Celo in supporting the Nurturing Knowledge Project, and our fundraiser there netted a substantial amount. Now the support has widened to Swannanoa Valley and some of the NC Conservative Meetings, in addition to the line item funding that FUM Africa provides, principally for the Samburu Mission health clinic and its workers.

More than ever after this summer's visit, Sammy emphasizes that Nurturing Knowledge is a joint project of FUM and FGC meetings. This pan-Quaker approach is underlined by the practice of having both silent waiting worship and programmed worship (with lots of singing) on First Day at Lotuleilei Friends Church. In our discussions, Sammy decried Quaker schisms, and was delighted by Loyd Lee Wilson's verbal history of NCYM Conservative, which did not break from NC Yearly Meeting until forced by the attempted imposition of the Richmond Declaration (1887), requiring that all meetings sign a declaration of faith, in 1905. Unusually for an African, he said that theological quarrels about homosexuality were “trivial” issues, having nothing to do with Christ's teachings.

During a visit with Sammy to Charlotte Meeting, one of the questioners wanted to know if the secondary education opportunity might lead to unfulfilled ambitions for the girls. After Sammy responded by emphasizing all the positives that would follow from their experience and formal degrees, I repeated the question, sensing that he did not understand. Sammy continued to talk about community values, further elaborating what the girls would inevitably share to uplift the people of Samburu, including further education of elder women, who are the opinion leaders. I realized from this exchange that our individualistic values simply don't exist in Samburu society, long steeped in communitarianism.

Two examples illustrating Sammy's confidence include Stella, the recent secondary graduate who has returned to volunteer at the Shepherds School, and university-educated Sabina (pictured). If Stella is able to pursue her nursing career, I am confident she will provide skilled nursing to whichever Samburu village she marries into. Sabina, the first Samburu girl to graduate from Kenyatta University, Kenya's premier university, has returned to Samburu Central to teach her pastoralist kin conservation grazing practices after majoring in conservation biology. She continues to serve her community even though she married a policeman in Nairobi (after twice refusing her family's choice, so she could pursue her education).

Under her leadership, a group who have traditionally thought “all cattle in the world” were their God-given right are learning to live within the limits of the land.

Shortly before his visit to the US, Sammy had a leading role to make an overture to the rival Turkana tribe. Though the Turkana are quite distant from Samburu Central, they continue a murderous exchange with the Masai who neighbor them in the north. After getting Demaris' assent, Sammy traveled alone from the northern market city of Barogoi to a large settlement of Turkana to bring his message of peace. When they learned that he was Samburu, they were shocked. After crossing three fence lines, successively moving to the very center of the settlement of 500 dwellings, surrounded by all the men, Sammy made his appeal, asking for divine guidance not to “annoy” his hosts. The young men were quite angry and agitated at first, but their elders calmed them down and listened carefully to Sammy's appeal for peace between the Samburu and the Turkana, saying he was urged by God. He himself was an example, married to Demaris, back in Barogoi with her family. The elders were amazed at the very idea of peace, but quickly realized what an improvement it would make in their lives. After spending three days as their guest, Sammy returned to Barogoi, along with a small contingent of the men. Once there, he took them all to dinner. They parted with an invitation for Sammy to return anytime. When I talked to him after his return two weeks ago, he said he planned to go back soon, but not until he had met with the clearness committee the Celo Samburu Committee had requested him to form to help him discern his way forward with this dangerous and courageous work.
Due to Sammy’s initiative, our committee has decided to broaden our mission to include support of his peace initiative with the Turkana, providing funds for travel, which is both difficult and expensive, as well as lodging and food when required. We will initiate support once we hear from Sammy’s local clearness committee.

Bob McGahey, 
Recording Clerk, Nurturing Knowledge Committee, CFM

SAYMA Friends are invited to consider donating to this project, which is both life-changing for the individual beneficiaries and potentially transformative of Kenya’s incendiary tribal practices. For more information, see http://changeinsights.wordpress.com. You may send questions to mcgahey@yancey.main.nc.us. A contribution of any amount is welcome and helpful, made out to Celo Friends Meeting, Samburu Fund on the “for” line: Samburu Fund Celo Friends Meeting 70 Meetinghouse Lane Burnsville, NC 28714.

WHAT ABOUT BDS? A FRIEND’S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Since we have been having discourse about the efficacy of boycotts I thought this story of my journey to speak to the people who run Caterpillar, Inc. would be of interest to SAYMA Friends. Friends need to converse with those that are thought to be creating violence before taking any other action. So, I jumped at the chance to travel with 3 other members of Jewish Voice for Peace - Atlanta to have a conversation with the President and board members of Caterpillar, Inc at their annual stockholder’s meeting in Corinth, MS, a 5 hour of drive from Atlanta.

We drove into the parking lot for the 8 AM meeting and about 20 police officers were present “so they could arrest anyone making a disturbance” I was told. After being screened for weapons, like at an airport, we took our seats and the meeting began. We JVP members had been given proxies so we could participate as stockholders since only they were allowed to attend the meeting unless specifically invited by management. The room was packed with about 200 employees and vendors of Caterpillar so we were pretty sure not much would happen.

The entire meeting took about 20 minutes. It was disappointing to hear the board chair announce that no questions would be allowed this year. Three minutes was allowed for the minister who was the Presbyterian Church, USA’s representative, to read their request that Caterpillar change its “Code of Conduct” to include recognizing the human rights of people in the countries where it does business. Their motion was defeated by 83% to 17% of the votes cast.

To Caterpillar’s credit, their presentation of their Green Initiative was good to hear. Afterwards, when the board meeting was over we stockholders were finally given permission to speak with board member, individually. I thanked the president for Caterpillar’s effort to be an industry leader in making protection of the environment a core value. When asked why protecting humans from being harmed by his company’s machines was not his bodyguards informed me that our conversation was over.

On the way home, we shared our experiences and helped to prepare the person who was going to attend the Presbyterian USA Church’s bi-annual conference which was to meet in Chicago the following week. Her work and that of others from the Jewish Voice for Peace members from around the country, helped to win approval for divestment of $16 million of Caterpillar Inc. stock from their pension fund. Caterpillar, Inc. and others who are supporting the Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza were put on public notice that their actions were not without consequences.

Clearly, there is violence being done to many civilians in Gaza and the West Bank using Caterpillar machines made here in the USA. The question put before SAYMA is “What does the Spirit wish us to say about this and about other companies who profit from sales of their products which are used to implement the oppression of Palestinians?” What sayest Thou?

Free Solomon Polazzo, 
Atlanta Meeting
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<td>West Knoxville Friends Meeting</td>
<td>Knoxville TN</td>
<td>(865) 694-0036</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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