

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STAMFORD-GREENWICH FRIENDS MEETING

Stamford Greenwich Friends Meeting was founded by John LeRoy DeForest in 1948. Jack, as he was commonly known, came from a family of Huguenots who had settled in the Long Ridge Village section of Stamford in the 1600s. Raised as a Congregationalist, John became interested in Quakers after becoming a pacifist. Jack talked to a number of friends about the possibility of a Quaker meeting, and in 1948 a small group gathered in Jack's garden on Rock Rimmon Road in Stamford. Over the next few years the meeting grew in numbers. The worship group became a preparative meeting under Purchase Meeting in 1949, and a monthly meeting within Purchase Quarterly Meeting in 1953. DeForest kept a diary from the earliest days of the meeting until his death. It gives in great detail his perspective on everything that happened including interesting insights into the interpersonal relationships in the meeting. A copy of the diary is at the Swarthmore Historical Library.

The then Stamford Preparative Meeting purchased the property at 572 Roxbury Road on January 19th, 1951. The purchase was made with the help of a loan from the School Fund of the Purchase Executive meeting, which was subsequently repaid. The building at 572 has a long and fascinating history. A church was originally built on a triangle of land adjacent to the present site, probably around 1835. The meeting house was moved to the present location when the church was disbanded. The building was leased by the City of Stamford and served as a one-room schoolhouse until June 24, 1949. Reverting to the Baptists who no longer needed the building, it was purchased by Friends. The meeting continued to flourish, growing to more than 100 members. The large meeting room was added to the building in 1956–1957, and the inclusion of a fireplace was apparently the cause of many discussions among Friends. This extension was made with the help of a loan from New York Yearly Meeting, which was subsequently repaid.

From 1952 until 1968 the meeting, in cooperation with AFSC, hosted High School Conferences on important topics each summer. Students came from nearby states, and the events brought both attention and members to the meeting. During both the Korean and Vietnam wars, the meeting operated a draft-counseling center serving both the Greenwich and Stamford communities.

Over the years the meeting had many weighty Friends as members. Among them were Bert Bigelow and his wife Sylvia, who were active in nuclear disarmament and civil rights causes. In 1955, the Bigelows along with other Friends in the NYC area, housed two of the 25 Hiroshima Maidens, young women who had been badly disfigured by the atom bomb explosions who were brought to the States and received medical treatment in New York. Bert was also the captain of the *Golden Rule*, which he attempted to sail into a nuclear testing area in the Pacific in 1958.

During the late 90s the meeting began to lose members as many retired and moved away, no fewer than six couples moving at the same time to the same retirement

community in New Hampshire. The First Day school gradually completely disappeared and no new people joined the meeting.

In November of 2003, the clerk of the meeting, Bill Dick, wrote to New York Yearly Meeting to report the dwindling numbers and the difficulty of sustaining the meeting with only eight or nine people living nearby and attending meeting. In 2004, the meeting acted on some of the ideas they got from other small meetings and from a workshop on Advancement. Carol Holmes, one of the traveling Friends of NYYM, began visiting for worship regularly, as did some Friends from neighboring meetings and a few from the yearly meeting. But the core of active local members continued to decline in numbers and in health. After a business meeting in October 2005, Bill Dick informed the yearly meeting that they were ready to lay the meeting down.

Over the next five years, the last members of Stamford-Greenwich meeting worked carefully through the process of deciding how, whether, and when to sell the property and lay down the meeting. Support from Friends in the quarter was mixed. Regrettably, no one gave regular help with finances or property maintenance. However, members of Purchase Quarter Ministry & Counsel were able to offer some spiritual support and pastoral care. PQ M&C helped Stamford-Greenwich Friends to hold meeting for worship on Sunday afternoons once a month. This was done to enable Friends from other meetings in the quarter to participate, while still remaining active in their home meetings. The numbers were small; generally two or three visitors joined with three or four from Stamford-Greenwich, yet the worship was consistently sweet, deep, and nurturing.

Esmé Ingledew, Bill Dick's wife and the meeting's treasurer and recorder, carried the responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the building in the final years. In the fall of 2007, with Bill's health in serious decline, Esmé wrote to all the members to explain the dire condition of the meeting, and began to gather the documents necessary to sell the property.

In February 2008, at Purchase Quarterly Meeting, Stamford-Greenwich Meeting was declared inactive. A care committee was formed by Purchase Quarterly Meeting to support the ongoing process of discernment about the future of the meeting. On the committee were Deb Wood and Peter Close, members of Purchase Meeting; Janet Hough, Chappaqua Meeting; and Carol Holmes, Brooklyn Meeting.

In November 2009, a memorial service for Bill Dick was held in the Stamford-Greenwich meetinghouse, under the care of the Purchase Quarter Ministry & Counsel. With the glorious voices of Serendipity Chorale, this beautiful memorial service for Bill, the meeting's final clerk, was also the final meeting for worship to take place in the meetinghouse.

For years, Esmé and the care committee felt the property to be a heavy burden. Stamford-Greenwich and Purchase Quarter Friends believed that the meeting should sell the property before the meeting was laid down. It came as a relief when it was

suggested that it would not be necessary—that, in fact, it might not be in good order for a meeting of one active member to make a decision to sell a meetinghouse.

In the fall of 2010, the care committee sent a letter to all remaining members of Stamford-Greenwich Meeting asking where their membership should be transferred prior to laying down the meeting. The transfers were accomplished and reported to the NYYM office. The meeting was finally laid down by the Quarter at their meeting on November 7, 2010. This action was reported to NYYM at Fall Sessions 2010.

Upon the meeting's being laid down, ownership of the meeting's property and its assets transferred to New York Yearly Meeting. The care and maintenance of the property, payment of all bills, and decisions about its future use and/or sale became the responsibility of the Trustees of New York Yearly Meeting.