

The Early Days of the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting
as told by Lois Ann Hobbs during the CHFM forum on April 14, 2019

What I hope to do this morning is briefly trace my memories of the Chapel Hill Meeting from the time I began attending in 1941. Since we have many new attenders, I want to connect some of our present concerns with friends who are no longer with us.

In 1941, at the last week of summer school at UNC, by chance I met Grimsley Hobbs. On our first date he told me in detail two things that were very important to him that summer. One - was the adventures he had just had with his father and a crew of Quaker barn builders restoring Baldwins Mill in Chatham County. Two - that he was a Quaker and a Conscientious Objector. When he described Quakerism, I realized that as a pacifist I already had those same beliefs.

As many of you know Grim and I have been involved with gristmills all of our lives – but that is not what I want to share with you. I want to trace my early memories of the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting (CHFM). Before I start in 1941, I want to first tell two earlier local Chapel Hill Quaker stories.

The first happened just after the Civil War. I became aware of this when a well-known retired African-American teacher, Francis Hargraves, approached me in 1991. She asked if I could find out if her great grandfather had been a teacher in the Freedom School opened in Chapel Hill in 1867 by the Quakers. Francis remembered this building as a child growing up in Chapel Hill. The boarded up old building stood in what is now a road connecting Carrboro and Chapel Hill, between the AME Church and the present day carwash. She said it was a spooky building which the children carefully avoided as haunted. I knew from the Hobbs family that the land had been sold by the Quakers when the road connecting it was built in 1938. The money was used to build the Hargraves Community Center in the historic black end of town.

Later, when I was in Philadelphia, I went to the Archives of Quaker History and there I found detailed accounts of every cent spent and every person involved with the Freedom Schools in North Carolina. Starting in 1867, eight Freedom Schools were established from Goldsboro to Greensboro. Details about the school in Chapel Hill included the names of teachers that came to teach for small stipends. The number of students taught - night and day - was more than 200 each day. The school lasted until 1875 when the State gradually took over running the schools. I did not find Francis Hargraves' grandfather's name. I did find that, from the start, teachers were trained to take over these classes. He may have been one of those trained. I know that the building came down in 1938, because a local resident, Eleanor Pegg, told me that she bought the old timbers when it was dismantled.

The second story happened prior to World War II. In 1938, Chapel Hill Friends Meeting was contacted by New York City friends with the request that they consider sponsoring an Austrian Jewish refugee who had skills to start a candy business. The refugee, Edward Dan Danziger, was driven to Chapel Hill and they found a suitable location for a business on Franklin Street. Dudley Carroll and Richard Hobbs underwrote his bank loan for equipment. His Viennese Coffee Shop was a thriving business for many years. He brought his family and they were prominent citizens.

In the summer of 1941, and continuing until the fall of 1943, I attended the Quaker Meeting in Chapel Hill that started in 1935 in a large room in Graham Memorial, which was then the UNC student union building. The chairs were arranged around the walls with a table in the center. At most, there were six or seven attenders, all old. They were Richard Hobbs and his brother A. W. "Hick" Hobbs, Dudley Carroll, Adolf Firth, and Charlotte Adams. Occasionally a wife would come, but no young people except Grimsley and I attended. My son, Grim Jr., remembers attending in the early 1950s when he was five years old. We were living as caretakers of Gimghoul Castle. He sat

patiently for the whole hour. I never remember visitors and I doubt that that small group had any expectations that it would grow.

Still, I know they contributed to a Building & Loan account so that they were able to buy what must have been a cheap piece of land. When we worked on clearing it in the late 1950s, it was obvious that this land (on which CHFM now sits) had been a dump. I think it was a place where they dumped debris from construction sites, so it was covered with scrub growth. By the time of the decision to build in 1960, Grimsley and I had moved on to Earlham College. Who designed the building, who was the contractor, and what it cost, I will leave to someone else to discover. I do know that when it opened, it was soon evident that it was too small. Funds were raised to extend the building.

My comment here is how far sighted this original group of old people were. Their children had left and they saw no evidence of younger people coming to take their place. The second time the Meeting invested in the future was in the founding of the Carolina Friends School. This detailed story will have to be told by others, as we were living in Greensboro.

I will speak now about some members who had a special part in organizing some of our continuing concerns.

Claude Shotts - died in 1989

Claude and Mary Shotts were directors of the C.O. camp in Marion, Indiana from 1941 to 1943. In 1942 during World War II, Claude went to Washington D.C. to make it possible to send of thousands of C.O.'s to hospitals, agricultural experimental stations and sanitation projects. The AFSC (American Friends Service Committee), at the war's end, sent Claude to Germany to establish community centers to help German citizens rebuild their lives.

The Shotts came to Chapel Hill in 1947 and became members of our Meeting in 1948. Claude headed up the YMCA at UNC and made it a center for student action. He brought controversial speakers. He started the first students abroad program, seeing this as a way to introduce students to other cultures and thus to a broader understanding. This was a new idea, and Claude expanded it at Guilford College to a semester abroad.

Now in the spirit of Claude Shotts' life work, the Shotts fund currently encourages Meeting members to expand their spiritual experiences.

Mildred Ringwalt – died in 1994

Mildred became interested in the Society of Friends while living in England. Her deep concern for social problems following World War II led her to seek spiritual guidance. She found it in the Friends Meeting and applied for membership. Mildred told the story of being turned down at her first Clearness Committee meeting for membership. At the start, as a way to introduce herself, she handed the convener a copy of her father's accomplishments. He handed it back to her and suggested that she come back later, saying that they were not interested in her father - they were only interested in her. She did go back and was accepted as a member in England.

Mildred came to Chapel Hill friends in 1959. From the beginning, she was influential in building the Meeting House which opened in 1960. We were at Earlham college at this time, but I heard that when the new Chapel Hill Friends Meeting opened many people were attracted and that it was too small. It had to be enlarged. Mildred was involved in raising the funds for this addition.

Mildred's early concern was for local schools that would not accept black children (African Americans). She had an important role in establishing the Carolina Friends School. She was a member of its first governing Board and remained active until her death.

Mildred was also instrumental in founding what became the Interfaith Council (I.F.C.). In 1961 she formed a committee of women made up from different churches to organize action to address problems of the homeless. She was on the Board until her death.

Mildred was in integral part of demonstrations against the Vietnam war. She was arrested in Washington (D.C.) and spent the night in jail. She sued the government for false arrest and was awarded \$1600 damages which she donated to peace organizations. She refused to pay her portion of the income tax which went to support the military.

Charlotte Adams – died at age 102 in 2005

Charlotte Adams, like Margaret Ringwald, was always out front in the demonstration for peace and civil rights. I remember Charlotte from the first Quaker Meetings at Graham Memorial, though she did not join the Meeting until she was 90 years old.

In 1935, Charlotte founded the local branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which still meets in Chapel Hill. In the 1960s, she and two other women sat through hours of local court proceedings to make sure minorities and long haired young men received fair treatment. During those many hours they saw disputes between neighbors that could have been solved out of court. Today the Dispute Settlement Center of Orange County is the outcome of her efforts started in 1977.

Charlotte lead a weekly vigil in front of the post office against the Vietnam war from 1966 to 1972.

There are so many stories to tell about Charlotte! One, without telling her husband, she put up their house as collateral to bail out a Vietnam draftee who refused to serve. Another, in 1960, she was pepper sprayed after she and five UNC housekeepers refused to leave the Governor's office because he refused to meet with them to discuss State workers' low wages. Another time, she led a demonstration outside the movie theater for months to integrate it. When it rained, the manager of the theater came out with an umbrella and walked with her.

In the early 1970s I said to Charlotte, "Charlotte, I don't know if I will ever demonstrate again – I am so burnt out." Charlotte replied in her gentle Virginia accent, "My dear, I have been burned out many times."

Bob Gwyn – died 2010

Bob and Martha Gwyn came to the Chapel Hill friends Meeting in 1966. They had one son and adopted seven multiracial children. Bob taught Communications at UNC, so it was with his skills that he began the Peoples Channel. This is still the local public access television station run by the community for the community. This enables local nonprofit organizations to share news and ideas.

Bob had a major part in founding Quaker House in Fayetteville North Carolina. In 1969, a Fort Bragg soldier, Dean Holland, site to apply for Conscientious Objection status. He asked the Unitarian Meeting in Fort Bragg to support him. They would not. A local teacher at Methodist College, Bruce Pullum, advised him to appeal to the Quaker Meeting in Chapel Hill. This soldier hitchhiked up to Meeting, stood and told his story. Bob Gwynne did the usual Quaker thing – he formed a committee. Lynn and Steve

Newson were part of that committee. Bob served as Clerk of that committee for five years, counseling military personnel about their rights, options and alternatives. Chapel Hill Friends Meeting has been the pillar of strength to Quaker House since that time

Lightning Brown – died in 1996

Lightning came to the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting in 1980 and found this Meeting community to be a comfortable place in which he could fight for the underdog. Talented in the arts, he was openly gay at a time when that brought threats to his life. In 1984 he was named citizen of the year.

As a lawyer, Lightning stood up for civil rights, zoning matters, environmental issues. He gave speeches, wrote a newspaper column and work hard for changes at the local level. He found a welcome sanctuary in the Meeting. He spent his last days in a hospice for those with Aids, surrounded by many Quaker friends.

Tim Heninger

As written by Dottie Heninger

In the mid-1990s, Tim (Heninger) had retired from UNC and was interested in finding meaningful involvement in the community. Tim did many types of volunteer work, but a major involvement became OCC (Orange Correctional Center). I think he was the first of CHFM folks to engage with OCC. He didn't like much going to Yoke Fellows – it was too loud to have and hear a conversation. The new Peace Center is a great improvement! Eventually, Tim began taking prisoners out on passes. One young man in particular became a good friend, Will Richardson. Will was often with Tim at our home, at CHFM (where he presented a Forum on life at OCC), or out somewhere else. Will became a part of our life. Tim was able to help Will resolve some family issues and regain custody of his son at the time of his release. We were his “home plan”.

Tim liked the Head of the prison - in fact, he admired him very much. One day, Tim ask him what he could do to help the OCC men. It was suggested that building a playground, so then that the men could have more “normal” visits with their children and actually play with them, would be appreciated. Tim thought this was a great idea. He applied for a grant to design the playground for OCC. With funds in hand and the materials paid for, the playground was built. The men provided the construction work and – Voila! – it became a reality.

After Will was released, we didn't see him much. And missed him. But Tim continued to have other adventures with men from OCC as he took them out on passes. Later, Hank Elkins moved to Carol Woods Retirement Center and he and Tim shared interest in supporting prisoners, and others in Meeting grew to share the same involvement. All following a good Quaker tradition of concern for prisoners.