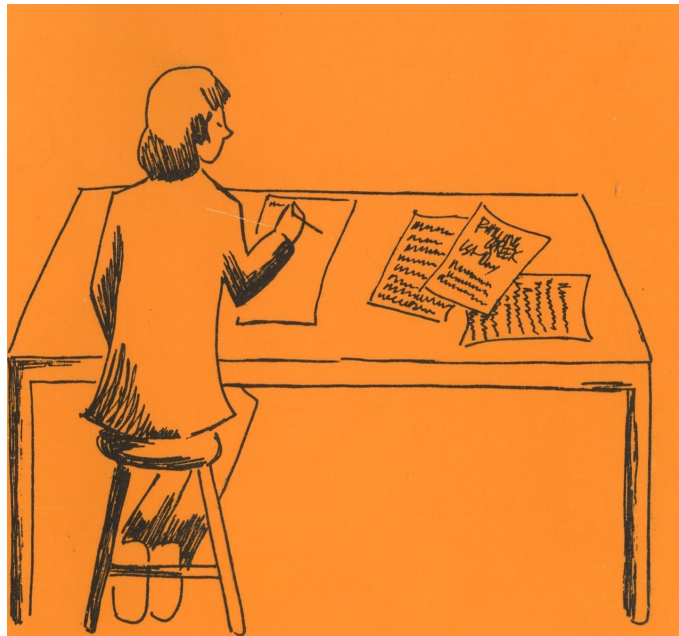


**“Unforeseen Joy”
Serving a Friends Meeting
As Recording Clerk**



Damon D. Hickey

“Unforeseen Joy”

Serving a Friends Meeting
As Recording Clerk

By
Damon D. Hickey

Illustrated by
A. Michie Shaw

Greensboro, North Carolina
North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends
1987

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Illustrations © 1987 A. Michie Shaw

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For all my mentors in “Unforeseen Joy”
especially Janie O. Sams.

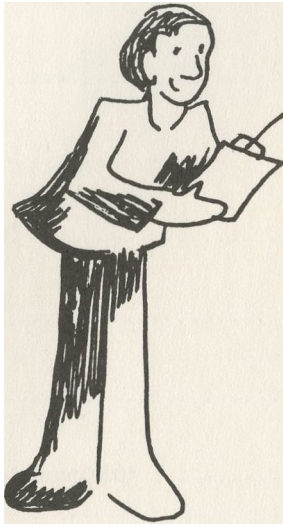


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Introduction

This manual has grown out of my experiences as a recording clerk, keeper of Quaker records, and leader of workshops for recording clerks in North Carolina and South Central yearly meetings. While it is written primarily for recording clerks in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (FUM), it draws upon a broad range of Quaker faith and practice, represented in the quotations from the Disciplines of yearly meetings which precede several chapters.

A manual for recording clerks would have seemed a strange thing only a few decades ago, since the office of recording clerk itself is a fairly recent creation. Even today in London and other yearly meetings, there is but one clerk, who both presides and records, sometimes with the assistance of other Friends. This manual assumes the separation of the presiding and recording functions in two persons. It further assumes that the recording clerk shares with the presiding clerk the responsibility for verbalizing the sense of the meeting.

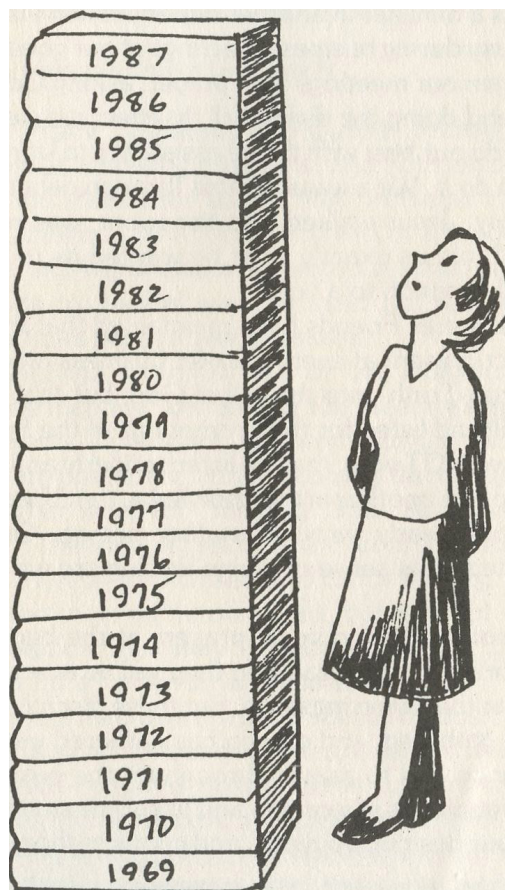
One of my strong biases, reflected in this manual, is in favor of minutes written and read aloud “in the face” of the meeting that produced them, rather than at the beginning of the next meeting. I recognize that for many meetings, including most of those in North Carolina, this is not common practice. Nevertheless, I feel that at least a modification of the procedure is within the reach of nearly every meeting’s recording clerk, once she or he has become accustomed to the job. Since I consider it an important part of the Quaker decision-making process, I have taken it as the norm for this manual, and tried to suggest modifications that may make it easier for the meetings and recording clerks who have never tried it.

I wish to express my thanks to the members of the Committee on the Care of Yearly Meeting Records and the members of the Publications Board of North Carolina Yearly Meeting and to others who read and commented on this manual; to Rausie Hobson, chairperson of the Publications Board, who solicited, prompted, and carried through its publication; to the many recording clerks whose questions and observations have shaped it; to my mentors in the recording process, to whom it is dedicated; and to Michie Shaw, my friend and former student, whom I asked to draw cartoons and who produced instead wonderful illustrations. Finally, my special thanks go to William B. Watson, who graciously permitted me to use examples from his superb manual, *Before Business Begins: Notes for Recording Clerks and Recordors*, written for and published by the Friends Meeting at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Guilford College
Greensboro, North Carolina, Fourth Month 1987

The Several Hats of a Recording Clerk

Being a recording clerk in a Friends meeting is difficult and rewarding. The recording clerk, in conjunction with the presiding clerk (assuming their functions are separated in the meeting), has the responsibility for articulating the sense of the meeting as to the direction in which it is being led by the Spirit of God. He or she is, therefore, an integral part of the Quaker decision-making process, a channel through which the meeting's sense of God's leading flows. The recording clerk wears other "hats" as well. He or she is the keeper of the meeting's official memory, and is therefore both its archivist and its historian. The recording clerk, unless the meeting appoints another person for this duty, is also charged with maintaining its vital membership records and is, therefore, the meeting's vital statistician. Serving a Friends meeting in all these ways requires several special gifts. Such gifts must be developed if they are to become skills. This manual is an effort to assist that development.



The Business Meeting As a Meeting for Worship

The purpose of our meetings for church affairs is to seek together the way of truth--the will of God in matters before us, holding that every activity of life is subject to his will. It is necessary for the proper conduct of our business meetings that we should assemble in a worshipping spirit, asking that we may be used by God in our day. The time of worship which precedes our consideration of the business in hand should be no mere formality but a time for collectedness of spirit. The silence which concludes our assembly may be used to give thanks for the divine leading.

Our meetings for church affairs are held in the spirit of worship. This does not mean that laughter and a sense of humour should be absent from them. It does mean that at all times there should be an inward recollection: out of this will spring a right dignity, flexible and free from pomp and formality. We meet together for common worship, for the pastoral care of our membership, for needful administration, for unhurried deliberation on matters of common concern, for testing personal concerns that are brought before us, and to get to know one another better in things that are eternal as in things that are temporal.

London Yearly Meeting's *Church Government*, 1980

Years ago, as a minister in another denomination I used to have a recurring fantasy during business meetings of our governing bodies. Always we began our meetings with prayer, asking God to guide us in discerning and doing the divine will. In effect we were promising that we would do our best with divine assistance to learn what God's will was and to do it. We always did this through debate and voting.

In my fantasy, Jesus walked into the room, was recognized by everyone, and told us exactly what he wanted us to do. Then the meeting put his opinion to a vote.

For three centuries Friends have maintained that the Holy Spirit of God is in fact present at every Quaker business meeting, guiding its members into Truth--into the will of God--but that it is essential for us to be still and listen for the promptings of the Spirit. It is also essential that we NOT vote, that we listen tenderly and with spiritual discernment to one another in the knowledge that the divine leading may come more clearly through another person. Only when the meeting is united in its sense of divine leading are we free to move forward.

Silence, devotionals, and vocal prayers at the beginning of our business meetings do not mean that they will be acts of worship, or that we will hear the divine message. But these disciplines remind us of why we are gathered, and of who has gathered us. Recourse to periods of silence and to prayer throughout the business meeting may serve to reunite us in worship and in submission to God at the points where our desires, opinions, and conflicts threaten to lead us astray.

The recording clerk of a Friends meeting has the awesome task of putting into words what the meeting discerns to be the will of God. As we shall see this task is not only that of the recording clerk. Nevertheless, the recording clerk must be a vessel open to the divine. In open worship Friends often hear others voice the very thoughts that have been forming in their own minds. In business meetings the clerks have the special responsibility of listening for and articulating the message that God is broadcasting throughout the meeting, but which may be heard or understood only partly by some.

Quaker Decision-Making

If we sometimes think things are wrong with our meetings for church affairs, it would help us to look at the situation in perspective if we could realize how many troubles arise not from the system, but from our human imperfections and the variety of our temperaments and viewpoints. These meetings are in fact occasions not merely for transacting with proper efficiency the affairs of the church but also opportunities when we can learn to bear and forbear, to practice to one another that love which suffereth long and is kind. Christianity is not only a faith but a community and in our meetings for church affairs we learn what membership of that community involves.

London Yearly Meeting's *Church Government*

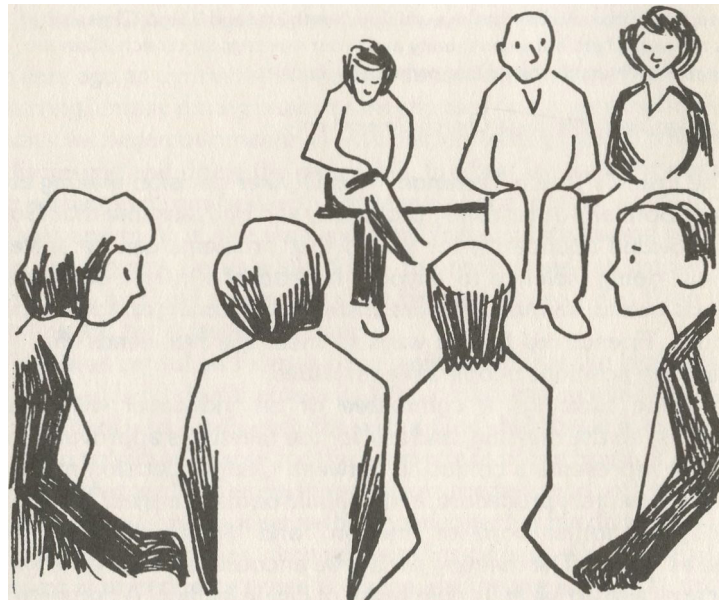
The Friends Peace Testimony and Quaker decision-making are linked. Both aim at resolving problems, and both assume that God has provided abundantly for us, so that problems can be solved without doing violence to anyone. Instead of win/lose solutions, Friends look for win/win answers. Instead of assuming an adversarial posture, Friends try to find ways to meet the real needs that lie behind the positions people take on issues.

In some meetings a committee or an individual will bring “minutes” to the meeting, and ask for the meeting’s approval. This practice represents a confusion between Quaker decision-making and parliamentary procedure, and it should be discouraged. “Minute” is not just another word for “motion,” and “Approve!” is not the same as “Aye!” The meeting should be encouraged to wrestle with concerns and arrive at its own sense of divine leading. A committee may bring to the meeting its own light, but it is not wise for it to prescribe a solution that may unnecessarily limit the meeting’s options and set up an adversarial climate.

Quaker business meetings are often scenes of tension, stress, and conflict. Old habits die hard, and we often assume that someone else is being closed, self-centered, obstructionist, narrow-minded, overly cautious, pushy, authoritarian, overbearing, stupid, or ignorant; while we are being open, concerned about the larger picture, bold, reasonably prudent, cooperative, knowledgeable, and efficient.

One antidote to this misperception of ourselves and one another is to ask oneself, what is the real concern this Friend has (despite what she or he says), and how can we meet it? Friends can thereby put themselves in one another’s shoes and avoid the impasse caused when they stake out positions and cling to them. Similarly, Friends can try to state their own concerns as clearly as possible. One way to get in touch with them is to ask about one’s own negative feelings: why am I disturbed about what another Friend is saying; what do I fear may or may not happen if we follow his or her leading?

There is another meaning of “concern” that has special significance for Friends. London Yearly Meeting defines this sense as “a leading to some specific task, felt by [a Friend] as an imperative claim of God upon him not to be denied even if he feels personal reluctance.... It has been the practice for a Friend, who believes that he has heard such a call to bring his concern before the gathered community of Friends in his monthly meeting, that it may be tested as a true leading of the Spirit” (Church Government, 1980).



A large part of Quaker decision-making is seeing that concerns of both types are expressed and dealt with by the meeting to the satisfaction of those who feel them. To do so requires imagination and thought, as well as speech. Silence is therefore a very important part of Quaker decision-making. It is an opportunity for Friends to listen for God’s leading, to sort out in their own minds what they and others are concerned about, and to discover solutions that meet their needs and concerns.

Writing Minutes

The clerks should prepare an agenda, preside at all meetings for business, keep accurate records of the proceedings in a book provided for that purpose, and handle all correspondence of the meeting. It is the clerk’s responsibility to weigh and judge the import of each issue and to present a minute to the meeting for consideration.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)’s Faith and Practice, 1983

Do not be afraid to ask the meeting to wait while you prepare your minute. You will then be able to complete it and have it accepted in that meeting. In some cases, you may need to have time for reflection and to bring in a minute after an interval in the meeting. It is, however, undesirable that minutes should be prepared afterwards for presentation to a later meeting when the membership may not be the same as that which originally deliberated.

Make sure that the minute covers all the points on which a decision is required and remember that reference may need to be made to it in the future. When the minutes record the presentation of reports which will be filed with them, it should not usually be necessary to quote the contents at length in the minutes themselves.

London Yearly Meeting's Church Government, 1980

When it appears to the clerk that the Meeting is generally united in its judgment, he or she should state clearly what appears to be the sense of the Meeting. If the members then give approval to the clerk's statement, a minute should be written, read, and submitted for approval before the conclusion of the session or, if this is not practicable, clearly outlined by the clerk for careful composition and presentation for approval at the next session. Any member may submit to the clerk a substitute minute for the approval of the Meeting.

A minute should state with clarity and precision the decision reached by the Meeting as well as the facts involved in it but need not recite or summarize the views expressed by individual members. The clerk may be given authority to make editorial changes in a minute if, after more careful consideration, they seem needed. Any such changes should be reported to the Meeting at its next session. When finally approved, a minute becomes part of the Meeting's permanent record.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, 1978

Once Friends have had a time for thought, prayer, and reflection, the clerk has the task of trying to express the thought that unifies the meeting, meets all concerns, and reflects the divine leading.

Friends vary widely in how they express these thoughts. The clerk may say as little as, "Well I guess we're finally agreed," and move on to the next item. The recording clerk is then left with the task of trying to figure out what the meeting has agreed upon. If the minutes are not written until after the meeting is over and not read until the next meeting, the chances are slim that the written words will express accurately what was decided.

Originally each meeting had only one clerk who both presided and recorded. In some meetings today this practice is retained, although the clerk may be assisted in some duties by another Friend. In other meetings the presiding clerk expresses the sense of the meeting and the recording clerk writes it down. Expressing the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the presiding clerk. But since gifts vary from Friend to Friend, a recording clerk who is better able to express the sense of the meeting may agree to assume this responsibility, leaving the presiding clerk free to preside. Sometimes the clerks will collaborate on formulating the minutes. Although each system has its advocates, the particular arrangement is probably less critical than making sure that the clerks have "read" the meeting correctly.

In the interest of time, it may be advisable for the clerk to express the sense of the meeting in fairly general terms, leaving it to the recording clerk (after consultation with the presiding clerk) to put the minute in polished form. But in most cases, it is better to pause while the clerk or clerks try to write a minute that they believe is an expression of the sense of the meeting. Then the minute can be read aloud and Friends can say if it indeed expresses their mind.

The pause also gives the clerks the essential silence for reflection, referred to above. Often the minute that results from such a pause says more than the meeting has said, but expresses exactly what it would like to say! On the other hand, the minute may express exactly what the meeting has said, but not what it wants to say. In that case it serves the useful purpose of prompting the meeting to deeper searching. The first time I attempted to write a minute "in the face of the meeting," I felt like a failure because it had to be revised and rewritten several times before it was satisfactory. But in reflecting on the experience, I realized that the meeting itself had not resolved the matter when I wrote the first draft, and would not have resolved it without the draft to respond to.



It is not always necessary to record and read back every item of business. Some meetings do, but others see no need to listen to opening and closing minutes, lists of committee members, and other routine business matters that the meeting has just transacted.

Most meetings do read the complete minutes of the last meeting at the opening of the next meeting. Unless all minutes are written in the face of the meeting and read back, it is essential that the recording clerk write them as soon as possible after the meeting and ask the presiding clerk to review them before they are published or read aloud at the next meeting.

Many recording clerks are uncertain about how much to record. Here a few rules of thumb may be helpful, although others will doubtless disagree with this list or want to add to it:

Give the name of the meeting, the date (and possibly the time), the place of the meeting, and the names of those in attendance. The latter is not always necessary, but is usually useful. A blank piece of paper passed around for everyone to sign makes it easier for the clerks.

Indicate in some way that the meeting began in an atmosphere of worship (with silence, a devotional, or a prayer); it is sometimes helpful to summarize in a few words the sense of a devotional message if one is given.

Report matters factually and simply.

When a matter is resolved, minute the resolution, not the discussion.

When a matter is not resolved, or not fully resolved, report the concerns raised and what will be done next. Listing the concerns helps the meeting or the responsible committee to see where work is needed. Here it is important that the recording clerk translate the positions of Friends into statements of concern.

Do not associate personal names with positions or concerns unless a friend asks that her or his name be minuted in this way. In the course of a Friendly discussion people may change their minds as they listen to others and are led into fuller truth. Associating them with positions they have taken makes it harder for them to be flexible. Doing so may also mean that the concerns of certain Friends will be taken more (or less) seriously than those of others because of the way different people are regarded in the meeting. Stating concerns without attaching names to them helps to assure that they will be dealt with without prejudice.

Always give a person's full (or at least first and last) name. Avoid nicknames. Be consistent in the way you cite a person's name. Future genealogists will bless you.

In order, to understand these principles in operation let us consider three versions of the minutes of a fictional Friends meeting, Falling Rock Monthly Meeting. The first is what may be called the "full" version:

Falling Rock Friends Meeting held its monthly meeting for business in the Fellowship Hall of the meetinghouse on Sunday, November 17, 1985, starting at 1:30 p.m., following meeting for worship and a potluck lunch. The meeting began with a period of silence and a prayer by our pastoral minister John Green. Our clerk Howard Penn thanked the members of the Falling Rock USFW for setting up for the lunch. He said he especially liked the Boston cream pie, and thanked whoever made it. Janie Smith said she had made it and thanked Howard for his compliment. Howard asked Janie for the recipe, and Janie said she would give it to him.

Our recording clerk Sylvia Fox read the minutes of our last meeting for business, held Sunday, October 20, 1985. Clerk Howard Penn asked if there were any corrections. Stewart Martin said he hadn't objected to employing a contractor to replace the meetinghouse roof, but he thought it would be cheaper to do it ourselves if we could get a work crew together. Frank Strong, chairperson of the House and Grounds Committee, said he thought the meeting had not made a decision, so his committee was still waiting to be told what to do. Bertha Martin said she didn't care what Stewart said, she didn't want him or any other member of the meeting falling off the roof and breaking their necks, and she didn't think the meeting had insurance to cover that sort of thing. Stewart said he thought the whole thing should be looked at by the House and Grounds Committee again, and everybody agreed. The minutes were then approved deleting the sentence that Stewart Martin was opposed to getting an outside contractor.

[The minutes then continue for ten pages more.]

Respectfully submitted, Sylvia Fox Recording Clerk

These minutes certainly make interesting reading, with a wealth of human detail. On the other hand, minutes that go on at such length each month are unlikely to be read by anyone, and the recording clerk will soon find herself exhausted and ready to resign. Just listening to minutes that long would take up a significant amount of time at the beginning of the next business meeting.

The second paragraph shows that the decision about the roof was not clear to the members last month. If the minute had been written during the October meeting and read back then, valuable time could have been saved rehashing the issue in November. It is quite likely that the meeting was unclear in October about what the next step should be. If the minute had been read aloud then, Stewart Martin might have had the opportunity to clarify his concern, and the meeting might then have instructed the House and Grounds Committee to start seeking an outside contractor. Because he did not, the roof went on leaking a month longer. Also,

the fact that the minutes are signed by the recording clerk, but not by the presiding clerk, indicates that Sylvia Fox did not review her minutes with Howard Penn, a step that might have avoided some of the confusion surrounding the decision about the roof.

These minutes use personal names far too much, particularly in connection with the issues and concerns under discussion. The account of Bertha Martin's comment about not wanting her husband to fall off the roof may bring chuckles from Friends, but it presents her in a very unflattering light. It would have been much better to have said something like, "Concern was expressed about the meeting's liability should its own members undertake the work."

In keeping with the easy informality of these minutes, contractions ("didn't") are used frequently. Since minutes of a Friends meeting are a record of a meeting gathered in the Spirit of God to discern and to do the divine will, a more formal tone would seem appropriate.

At the other extreme from these minutes is the "condensed" version:

Falling Rock Friends Meeting met for business 11/17/85. The minutes were read, corrected, and approved. The matter of the roof was referred to the House and Grounds Committee.

An application for membership was referred to Ministry and Counsel.

A Clearness Committee was appointed for a marriage.

Howard Penn was appointed to attend quarterly meeting.

The meeting discussed the drug program.

No decision was made about refugees.

The meeting adjourned.

Certainly no one would get tired from writing or reading these minutes! Obviously, what is left out is critical. What were the corrections to the previous minutes? Whose application for membership was referred to M & C? For whose marriage was the Clearness Committee set up? What is the name of the quarterly meeting? What drug program did the meeting discuss (a program to supply drugs for medical missions overseas, to prevent drug abuse, or to rehabilitate drug users)? What was the outcome of the discussion? What was the issue about refugees, and what will be done about it now? Who wrote the minutes? Also, but less critical, where was the meeting held, and who attended?

Inadequate as these minutes are, some minutes would have omitted entirely the items about the drug program and the refugee discussion, since no formal action resulted. But since these unresolved items may become the unfinished business for the next monthly meeting, some account of them, even the cryptic one here, is extremely important.

The third version of these minutes is somewhere between and beyond the other two. No minutes are ever ideal, and no two recording clerks would write the same set. The following is just one example of minutes that are faithful to the principles set forth in this chapter:

Falling Rock Friends Meeting For Business
November 17, 1985

At a meeting of Falling Rock Friends, Hillville, NC, held Sunday, November 17, 1985, fourteen members were present. The meeting was gathered in silent waiting. In a vocal prayer we were reminded that the Spirit of the living Christ dwells in each of our hearts to lead us into Truth if we but listen and follow.

Minutes of October. The minutes of the meeting of October 20 were read.

Membership Application. A letter from Sylvia Strong requesting membership in the meeting is referred to Ministry and Counsel.

Marriage Request. John Jones and Martha Fisher have asked to be married under the care of this meeting. The meeting appoints the following Friends to inquire into their clearness for marriage: Howard Penn, Bertha Martin, and Stewart Martin.

Quarterly Meeting. We appoint Howard Penn to represent us at the forthcoming meeting of Northwest Quarterly Meeting.

Drug Program. A concern about the rising use of drugs among our young people was shared with the meeting. The meeting has been asked to participate in a county-wide program of drug education and rehabilitation, which would involve commitment of meeting funds and the time of several volunteers each week. Several Friends felt strongly that this concern should receive the meeting's support, while others questioned the methods used by the county. There is not unity about our participating in this program at this time, but a strong desire to continue our consideration of this issue at a later meeting.

Refugee Concern.1 The Peace and Social Concerns Committee reported its consideration of the problems of Central American refugees in this country. Some members of the committee have had the opportunity to talk with people from El Salvador and are convinced that they are fleeing political persecution, but are eager to return to their country as soon as it is safe to do so. The committee united in asking the meeting to assist refugee families as the need arises.

In the discussion of this request several questions and concerns were raised. Would the meeting be violating the law if it assisted these people? Are there other ways in which the meeting could help without violating the law? Do we as Christians have a responsibility to welcome the homeless and the stranger in our midst? When does this responsibility take priority over obedience to human law? Should we be working to change the conditions that produce refugees? How are we responding to others in our own community who need our help? Are we aware of the spiritual basis for these problems and their solution? How does one tell the difference between political and economic refugees?

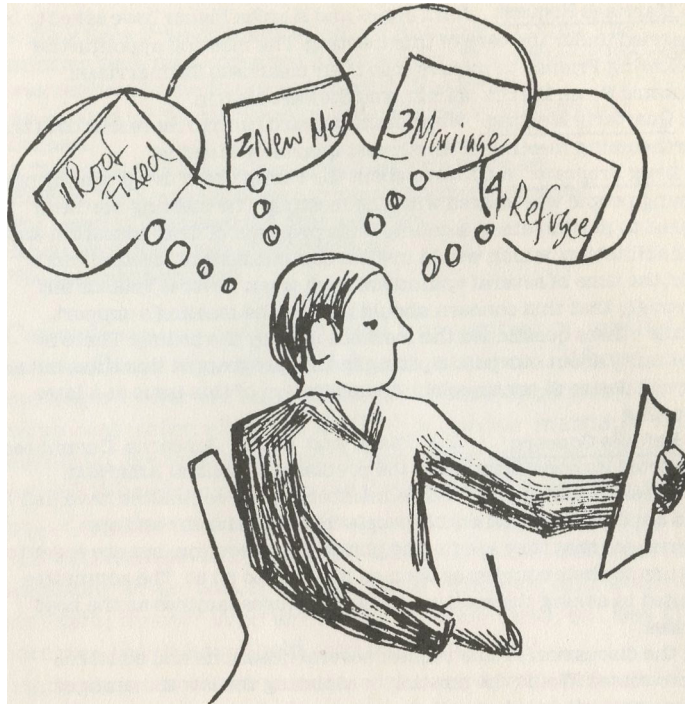
It is agreed that the meeting needs to discuss these concerns fully before action is taken, and asks the committee to find ways in which we may address them. Friends were reminded that, whatever else we may do, the time to pray is now.

There being no further business to claim our attention the meeting adjourned.

Howard Penn, Clerk

Sylvia Fox, Recording Clerk

These minutes begin with a heading that tells the name of the meeting and the date. Individual items of business are numbered and preceded by a heading. These devices make it easier to refer to a particular meeting or a particular matter.



The first paragraph states the name of the meeting, where and when it was held, and how many were present. The names of those present could have been included also. The worshipful nature of the gathering is underscored by a summary of the vocal prayer offered during the silence. Months and days of the week may be given in the classical style (November, Sunday) or the Quaker style (Eleventh Month, First Day) according to the custom of the meeting, but consistency should be observed.

It may be assumed that, in the last meeting, the resolution of issues was minuted and read back to the meeting at the time. Therefore, these minutes have already been approved (at the previous meeting), and do not have to be acted on again. They are simply read aloud as a reminder to the meeting.

Appropriate details of the membership and marriage applications and their disposition are given, including the composition of the Marriage Clearness Committee. It may be the custom in this meeting that the first-named Friend is always the convenor of a committee. Otherwise, the convenor should be designated in the minutes. The name of the quarterly meeting is given, and the date could have been included also.

The nature of the drug program is succinctly and objectively summarized, as well as the reservations of members of the meeting. The resolution (not to participate now but to continue considering the issue) is minuted, and presumably was read aloud to the meeting. Similarly, the refugee issue is presented factually. The recording clerk does not say that Salvadoran refugees are fleeing political persecution; she says that the members of the committee who have talked with them are convinced that this is the case.

The listing of the concerns and questions regarding refugees is crucial. Undoubtedly some members of the meeting expressed themselves in ways similar to what the recording clerk has written. But it is likely that some spoke in a more blunt, opinionated fashion. For example, we can imagine one person saying, "A lot of these people are just coming here to get better jobs than they can get back home. If you ask them, of course they're going to make up stories about how they were persecuted; they don't want to lose their meal ticket!" In the minutes this statement appears as a question, "How does one tell the difference between political and economic refugees?" Another Friend might have said, "As Christians we have a responsibility to follow God's law, to welcome the homeless and the stranger, even when that violates man-made laws!" The recording clerk turns this opinion into two questions: "Do we as Christians have a responsibility to welcome the homeless and the stranger in our midst? When does this responsibility take priority over obedience to human law?"

By translating dogmatic assertions into queries, the recording clerk is not being dishonest. A translator's task is to render an utterance faithfully into another language. In this case it is the language of the peaceful search for Truth. The recording clerk should read back these sentences to the meeting, if at all possible, and ask, "Does that express accurately the concerns of Friends?" Only then will she know whether she has been a good translator.

Throughout these minutes personal names are used only where essential: when requests have been received from particular individuals, or when particular Friends have been appointed by the meeting to some task. No names are associated with the concerns about the drug program or the refugee matter. Some recording clerks might have given the names of committee chair-people in connection with their reports. This recording clerk has always given the first and last names of Friends, and has avoided nicknames.

The minutes are signed by both clerks, since both assume responsibility for them. We do not know how the sense of the meeting was articulated. Howard Penn may have summarized the concerns about the refugee matter, and Sylvia Fox may have transcribed his words. Perhaps Howard Penn called for silence while Sylvia Fox formulated the sense of the meeting. In either event both are responsible for the words that finally appear on the paper.

A word about verb tense and voice may be in order. The minutes of organizations other than Friends meetings usually employ the past tense exclusively. In the minutes above, a combination of the past, present perfect, and present tenses is employed: past for matters discussed in the meeting ("A concern . . . was shared"), present perfect for what took place before the meeting ("John Jones and Martha Fisher have asked . . .," probably in a letter to the meeting), and present for actions taken in the business meeting itself ("We appoint . . ."). These minutes also make heavy use of the passive voice ("several questions and concerns were raised"), since the speakers are not usually identified. Such matters are largely a matter of personal style and consistency is rare, particularly when the minutes are read back just after they are written. In preparing the final draft the recording clerk may feel free to correct grammatical inconsistencies without asking the meeting's permission.

If minutes are written and read back in the face of the meeting, objections or corrections may be offered. The clerks should not feel that disagreement about the minute's wording reflects failure on their part. Sometimes a meeting thinks it is ready to make a minute before it has really reached unity. Reading the proposed minute aloud may alert the meeting that the matter is still unresolved, and prompt further discussion leading to a true sense of the meeting and a stronger minute.

As William Watson notes in his *Before Business Begins: Notes for Recording Clerks and Recorders* (see bibliography), there are two types of suggestions for change: those that can "be accommodated without substantially rewriting the minute" and those that cannot. The former usually pose little problem, although valuable meeting time can be wasted debating small matters of wording or technical matters which could best be left for private discussion with the clerks after the meeting is over. The other type of suggested change is more difficult to handle, since accepting it would involve rewriting what may (or may not) be a true minute already. William Watson's advice is, "Wait. If your judgment is right, other Friends will recognize what is happening and seek to reestablish the original sense. . . . If your judgment is not right, the suggestion will receive

support and you will have to find a way of expressing the change." When minutes are not approved (either whole or in part) until the next meeting, two other types of corrections may be suggested: those based on confusion about what really took place (discussed above) and those based on new information. The minutes, for example, may contain a statement that accurately reflects what was said or done in the meeting, but that has since been shown to be incorrect or incomplete. The best response is for the clerks to suggest that a statement be put in the minutes of the current meeting to correct the matters of fact, but that the minutes of the previous meeting stand as written.

Sometimes members of the meeting may object to the clerks' statement of the sense of the meeting because they are not in unity with the direction the meeting is taking. In such cases it is the presiding clerk's task to determine whether there is genuine unity otherwise, and how deeply the objecting Friends feel about the issue. Often, they will be willing to stand aside and let the meeting proceed, but ask that they be recorded as not in unity or as having reservations about the action taken. William Watson suggests that the resulting minute may include the objection along with "the willingness of the objectors to accept the need for action." He

continues, “If the objecting Friends have contributed to that unity by making a concession to the others, the minute can certainly reflect their presence and their contribution without jeopardizing the sense of the meeting.”

William Watson also suggests that recording clerks maintain “their own minute book,” including “the minutes and reports for the last four or five years,” as well as “other information to which either the Clerks or the meeting may have occasion to refer, such as membership and committee lists, the budget and the Treasurer’s report for each year, and copies of major studies prepared from time to time on particular matters of concern to the meeting.” An alternative is to keep a file box or briefcase with separate file folders for notes that have yet to be turned into typewritten minutes, minutes that have not been approved, and minutes that have been approved and signed by the clerks, as well as the other items suggested in William Watson’s list. Whatever the system used it is important that recording clerks be systematic in their work and that they not procrastinate in regard to the meeting’s business, even if they do so in their own affairs.

A new (or old!) recording clerk may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of trying at the same time to master so much detail, listen for everyone’s concerns, take good notes, write minutes while everyone is waiting, and be a channel for the Holy Spirit. I recently looked back at my earliest minutes and cringed to see that I had violated nearly every guideline in this manual. Recording clerks need to remember that, if practice does not make perfect, at least it makes better. God does not condemn you for your mistakes; why should you? You will grow in the job. At first you may be unable to write minutes in the face of the meeting, but later with more confidence, you can. Do your best, pray often, learn from your mistakes, collaborate with your presiding clerk, seek help when you need it, and keep trying. Your minutes will get better. Someday people will say, “I just don’t know how you do it!” and you can smile secretly to yourself.

Sample Minutes

The following sample minutes are adapted from William Watson’s manual for recording clerks. These minutes are for guidance only, and should be adapted to individual circumstances. William Watson states, “These phrases are not being offered as the one correct version of the minutes... They really should be treated as reminders and suggestions only.”

Request for Membership: “[Full names] of [city and state] and their minor children, [first names], have requested membership with us. Their request was referred to the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel for its consideration and guidance.” Or, “The application was received with great pleasure by the meeting, and [full names] were appointed a committee to visit with them and report back to the next meeting for business.”

Acceptance and Welcoming: “For the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel [or the Membership Committee] [names of new members] were recommended for membership. Friends accept them into membership and look forward to welcoming them in the near future.”

Report on Welcoming: “Friends received a report that [names of Welcoming Committee] had welcomed [names] into membership of the meeting.”

Transfer of Membership into the Meeting: “The meeting has received a certificate of transfer from [name, city, and state of meeting] for [full names]. Friends accept them into membership and look forward to welcoming them in the near future.”

Transfer of Membership to Another Meeting: “Friends approve the request of [full names] for transfer of their membership and that of their minor children [first names], associate members of the meeting, to [name of meeting], and instruct the clerk to send a certificate of removal to the clerk of [name of meeting].”

Report of Transfer: “The meeting has received acknowledgement from [name, city, and state of meeting] that [full names] and their minor children, [first names], were accepted into membership in that meeting.”

Associate Membership by Birth: “The clerk reported that [full name] was born on [date], to our members [full names] in [city and state]. He/She will be recorded as an associate member of the meeting.”

Associate Membership by Request: “Friends approve the request of [full names of parents] for associate membership of their children [first names and ages] in the meeting and look forward to welcoming them in the near future.”

Change from Associate Membership to Full Membership: “[Full names], who have been associate members of this meeting, were recommended by the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel for adult membership. Friends accept them into membership and look forward to welcoming them in the near future.”

Sojourning Membership: “The clerk read a minute from [name, city, and state of meeting], asking us to accept [full names] as sojourning members of our meeting. Friends accept this request and look forward to welcoming them as sojourning members while they are resident in this area.”

Removal of Membership to Another Religious Society: “[Full names], members of this meeting, have expressed the desire to unite in membership with another religious society and have asked the meeting to grant them a letter of recommendation. Friends approve their request.”

Or, “Having been informed that our members, [full names], are now members of another religious society, the meeting removes their names from the list of our members and will inform them of this action, suggesting that they consider possible relationship to Friends through the Wider Quaker Fellowship.”

Resignation Request: “It was reported that [full names] have submitted their resignations from the meeting. Friends appoint a committee of [names] to visit them in love and to inquire into the cause of their resignation.” Or, “This request is referred to the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel.”

Resignation Acceptance: “The committee to visit [full names] reported that they are firm in their desire to resign from the meeting. Friends accept their wish and grant their request.” Or “The Meeting on Ministry and Counsel reported that [full names] are firm in their desire to resign from the meeting. Friends accept their wish and grant their request.”

Discontinuance of Associate Members: “The following associate members, having reached the age of [age] without expressing a wish to join the meeting at this time, are discontinued in membership and removed from the rolls of the meeting according to the Discipline of North Carolina Yearly Meeting: [full names]. The Meeting on Ministry and Counsel has assured each of them that a future application for membership will be sympathetically considered by the meeting.”

Intentions to Marry and Committee on Clearness: “[Full names, indicating where appropriate whether either or both are members of the meeting] reported their intention to unite in marriage and ask this meeting to accept this care. Friends accept and appoint [names] as a Committee on Clearness for both parties.”

Reports on Clearness and Appointment of a Special Meeting and of a Committee of Oversight: “The committee appointed to inquire into the clearness of [full names] for marriage reported that it had found both clear for marriage. Friends accept this report and appoint a special meeting for worship for the purpose of this marriage to be held on [date], at [time], and appointed [names] as the Committee of Oversight.”

Report on the Marriage: “The Committee of Oversight reported that [full names] united in marriage at the meetinghouse on [date], in the manner of Friends.”

Request to Marry under the Care of Another Meeting: “[Full name of woman or man] reported her/his intention to unite in marriage with [full name] under the care of [name, city, and state of meeting] and asked that we report on her/his clearness for marriage. Friends accept this report and appoint [names] as a Committee on Clearness for [woman’s or man’s name].”

Report on Clearness to Be Sent to Another Meeting: “The committee appointed to inquire into the clearness of [full name] for marriage reported that it had found her/him clear for marriage. Friends accept this report and instruct the clerk to send its findings to the clerk of [name, city, and state of meeting].”

Nominations and Appointments of Members to Committees and of Officers of the Meeting: “The Nominating Committee recommended that the following persons serve as members of the standing committees and as officers of the meeting for the following year to begin on [date]. Friends accept these recommendations and appoint the persons nominated to serve in the capacities indicated in the report attached to these minutes.”

Preserving Minutes

The recording clerk shall keep an accurate set of Minutes, showing all matters brought to the attention of the Meeting and the actions taken. These shall be kept in permanent form in a minute book after they have been approved by the Meeting. The minutes of each Meeting must be signed by the clerk and dated correctly.

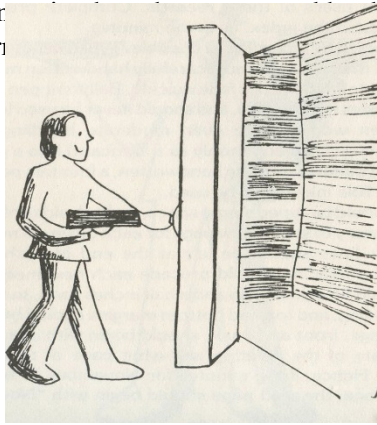
Monthly Meeting records should be kept in a book of a form which has been approved by the Yearly Meeting. Minute books and records should be carefully preserved, and it is recommended that the original copies be kept in the vault at Guilford College.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice, 1982

All meetings for business are directed to keep minutes of their proceedings in suitable books, carefully indexed and kept in safe custody. Books no longer in active use should be stored in a central depository approved by the Representative Meeting where they can be protected from damage by fire and where, under proper restrictions, they may be open to examination.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice. 1978

Once the complete minutes for a particular meeting (either at the time or at a subsequent meeting), and have been typed in their final form



meeting (either at the time or at a subsequent meeting), and have been typed in their final form. The minutes should be signed and dated by the clerk or clerks.

When a set of minutes is typed, approved, and signed, it becomes a historical document. Because earlier Friends had such a strong sense that their minutes were the records of God's people, Quaker minutes are far more complete than those of many other churches. People who are trying to trace their family history breathe sighs of relief when they discover a Quaker ancestor, for it is likely that good records will be found. During the Civil War, North Carolina Friends sent their minutes north to Baltimore, Maryland, for safekeeping, and got them back safe after the Union forces withdrew at the war's conclusion. Later the yearly meeting purchased a vault where the minutes were kept safe from fire and vermin. Historians are often impressed that so few of these early records have been lost. Recording clerks of today should remember that they form the latest link in this noble chain, and that whether future generations know their history or are ignorant of it depends on their care.

Some monthly and quarterly meetings and most yearly meetings index their minutes annually. If each item of business is numbered and given a heading, indexing minutes is not a difficult task. A simple alphabetical list of major topics (such as Refugees, Drug Program, Roof of Meetinghouse) and of people whose names appear in connection with vital records (births, marriages, divorces, deaths, applications for membership, admission to membership, and transfer of membership) should suffice. The topical headings will help meeting members and future historians to trace the meeting's deliberations on any particular issue, and to see quickly when actions were taken. The personal headings will be useful primarily to future genealogists, who will be (if present patterns continue) the most frequent users of these records. Complete proper names should be used in the index, as in the minutes.

Minutes should be typed if at all possible. Typed minutes are much easier to read than even the most carefully handwritten minutes, and most typewriter ink does not fade quickly. Ballpoint pen ink, on the other hand, fades very quickly, and should never be used for minutes. Pencil is even worse, since even moderate handling can turn graphite (which is used commonly as a lubricant) into a gray smear on the page. If minutes must be handwritten, a fountain pen or felt tip pen with indelible ink should be used.

Minutes should be typed single-space, on both sides of the paper. It is not necessary to start a new page for each business meeting, but several blank lines should be left at the end of each meeting's minutes, and a heading should precede each new meeting. Side margins should be at least one and a half inches each, to allow room for future binding, and top and bottom margins should be at least an inch. Each page, front and back, should begin with a brief heading giving the date of the meeting and what page of that meeting's minutes it is. Hence, if the minutes for November 17 begin in the middle of a page, the next page should begin with "November 17, page 2." Use a black typewriter ribbon, and change ribbons often enough to ensure that the print will be clear.

Paper quality is one of the most important ingredients in preserving minutes. Several companies market minute book outfits. These usually consist of heavy, sequentially numbered sheets of paper drilled with rectangular holes, plus a leather and board binder with posts that fit through the holes in the paper and lock into place. These outfits are quite expensive, and the paper is not rated as to content or acidity.

Archival supply houses sell archival quality paper. This paper is made of acid-free materials and has been treated with alkaline "residual buffers" that counteract acidity which the paper may absorb from its environment. These supply houses also sell typewriter ribbons impregnated with acid-free, permanent ink. These supplies are also expensive.

Ordinary typewriter paper is usually made of pulp that has been treated with various chemicals. Over time it will darken and become brittle because of its short fibers and its acidity. Newsprint, which is pure woodpulp, provides the most glaring example of this aging process, especially when it is exposed to ultraviolet light, including sunlight. Perhaps the least satisfactory modern typewriter paper for archival use is "corrasable," "erasable," or "easy-erase" bond, which is coated to make erasing easy, but which sticks to itself when wet and smears almost as badly as pencil-written documents.

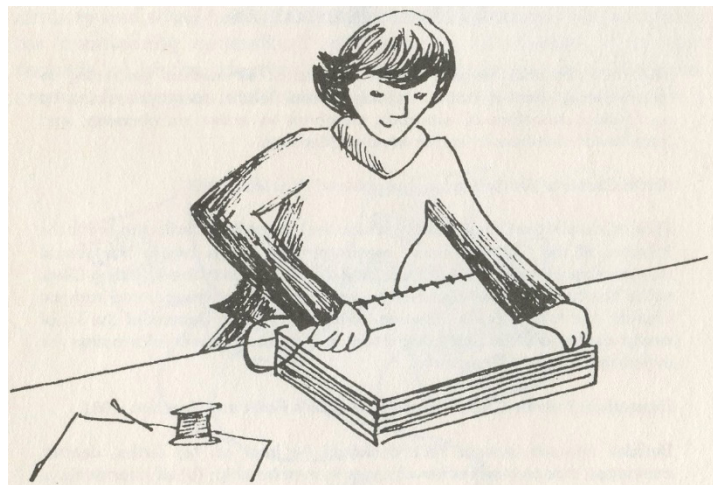
The oldest printed books, on the other hand, employed paper made from old linen and cotton rags, whose fibers were long and acid-free. Ironically unless these older books have been subjected to unusual environmental stresses, their paper may be in better condition than that of books printed relatively recently. Because of the poor durability of most modern papers, colleges and uni-

versities generally require students who are writing theses or dissertations to use “rag paper,” which is labeled “100% Cotton,” or “100% Rag Content,” and is often called “thesis paper.” It is available in various weights, including light, carbon-copy weight. It is more expensive than ordinary typing paper, but less costly than archival stock. For most meetings this paper, in a twenty-pound weight, is the most economical choice for durable minutes. North Carolina Yearly Meeting stocks this paper for the use of its monthly meetings.

Most university bookstores also sell “thesis binders,” black, cloth-covered, spring binders that “grab” the paper without piercing it. North Carolina Yearly Meeting has supplied each monthly meeting with such a binder. Its Committee on the Care of Yearly Meeting Records encourages each meeting to keep minutes on thesis paper in a thesis binder. Meetings are also urged to make a carbon copy or photocopy to keep in a separate, conventional, loose-leaf binder. The carbon copy or photocopy becomes the meeting’s own record of its proceedings. If one copy is lost or destroyed the other is likely to survive. The original on thesis paper becomes the official, permanent, archival minutes, signed by the clerks. Each year before yearly meeting session, the last year’s pages are to be removed and taken to Guilford College, where they are deposited in the vault in the library. When enough pages have been assembled, they are bound between permanent covers, and the monthly meeting is charged for the binding, resulting in a volume that is cheaper, more durable, and more convenient than a commercial minute book outfit.

Some meetings insert pages into their archival minutes that are not typed on thesis paper. Treasurer’s reports, letters to the meeting, and other materials not on acid-free paper can contribute to the deterioration of pages with which they are in contact. Generally, it is better to retype short reports (such as a treasurer’s) into the minutes, and to keep correspondence in a separate file. Longer reports that are critical to an understanding of the minutes may be photocopied onto thesis paper or, if a photocopier is not available, either retyped or inserted into the minutes as-is. The decision is the meetings and the recording clerks. If the choice is between retyping or promptly depositing the minutes in a safe repository, the material on ordinary paper can be placed between blank sheets of acid-free paper, thereby reducing somewhat the migration of the acid to the minutes themselves.

Even deteriorated paper can be redeemed. When a book of minutes shows signs of serious deterioration, from whatever cause, the Committee on the Care of Yearly Meeting Records of North Carolina Yearly Meeting informs the appropriate monthly or quarterly meeting of the fact, and asks it to pay for deacidification, lamination, and rebinding of the books. The library of Guilford College then sends the books to the laboratory at the North Carolina State Division of Archives and History, which first unbinds the book, then puts the pages through a solution that neutralizes acidity in the paper and adds residual buffers, and finally laminates (permanently binds under heat) the page between two leaves of clear, acid-free paper. The resulting “sandwich” has a linen strip along the spine, through which the binder’s needle is passed when the book is rebound. The process is relatively expensive (\$2.00 per sheet in 1986, plus about \$10.00 per volume for rebinding), demonstrating the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



Minutes are subject to many environmental hazards . Acid in paper does even more damage when combined with ultraviolet light, heat, and high humidity. Paper may be torn or catch on fire. A variety of insects and other small creatures eat paper or make nests out of it. Mildew is a common problem in damp areas. Books can be lost when a family moves or someone dies. It is probably best for minutes to be kept in a meetinghouse office, if possible, but the best insurance is to deposit the archival copy in the proper repository at least annually.

In addition, some yearly meetings pay for the microfilming of all their records. Both Philadelphia and North Carolina yearly meetings continuously microfilm current meeting volumes, and keep a security copy somewhere other than the place where the original minutes are stored. This practice also enables them to exchange microfilms of their minutes with Quaker repositories elsewhere.

Friends' minutes remain the property of the meetings that produced them. Although the archival repository actively discourages meetings from "borrowing back" their own minutes once deposited, the meetings have the ultimate say in what is done with them. In general minutes are made available to researchers with certain restrictions set by the meetings or by a yearly meeting committee on records. The Committee on the Care of Yearly Meeting Records of North Carolina Yearly Meeting limits the number of pages that any one person may photocopy or publish without the permission of the particular meeting, and requires researchers to limit their citations of disciplinary cases to the initials of the persons in question.

Other Records

The recorder shall keep a correct record of all matters pertaining to membership, such as births, marriages, and deaths; members joining by application, transfers of associate members to active membership, and transfers of members to and from other Meetings.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, 1982

[The officers of the Congregation include the] Recording Clerk, who keeps the Minutes of the Congregational meetings, who keeps on file the annual membership and statistical records, and who forwards to the Presiding Clerk of the Yearly Meeting in August the names of the delegates appointed from the church, and to the Yearly Meeting Directory Clerk in December the list of newly elected officers and committees and other pertinent information for inclusion in the new Directory.

Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region's Faith and Practice, 1981

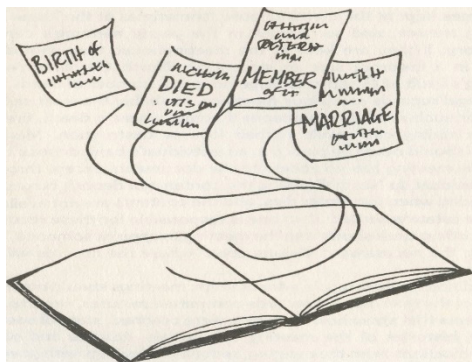
Besides minutes/special record should be kept of: (a) births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and other changes in membership; (b) all interments in burial grounds under the care of Meetings; (c) marriage certificates; (d) minutes liberating members for religious service; (e) certificates of transfer; (f) sojourning minutes; (g) conveyances and trusts and changes in the same.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, 1978

The term "Quaker records" usually refers to two sets of materials: the minutes of the business meetings and the membership records. In some monthly meetings the recording clerk is responsible for both sets of materials, although any meeting is free to appoint a second recorder or membership secretary to keep the meeting's vital records.

Generally, a membership record is an alphabetical list, of all the members of the meeting including the dates and sometimes the places of their births and deaths, the full names of their spouses and sometimes of their parents, the dates and places of their marriages, and the full names and birth dates of all their children, regardless of whether the spouses or children are members of the meeting. With the increase in the number of divorces even among Friends, dates of final divorce decrees may also be noted.

Vital records were begun among Friends during early persecutions when it became essential for Friends to know, if parents were arrested, which other family members required the meeting's care. Later, membership, including birthright membership, became an important issue of Quaker discipline. It was thought essential to know who was and was not a Friend in good standing, and the membership record book provided this information. At various times the membership record has also served as evidence that a young person subject to military service had, in fact, grown up a member of one of the "historic peace churches." Only within the last century and a half have public agencies accepted the responsibility for maintaining centralized vital records of citizens. The only records of births, deaths, and marriages for many eighteenth-century Europeans and Americans are therefore church records.



Friends still keep vital records, primarily for historical and genealogical purposes. Most meetings need some sort of current membership list, if only to know who is eligible for committee work, but a current list with addresses and telephone numbers will not satisfy researchers a century from now. The best solution is to maintain two lists: one current, perhaps on a card file, with names, addresses, telephone numbers, and other data useful to the meeting; and one historical/vital, with names, places, and dates. North Carolina Yearly Meeting provides its monthly meetings with membership record forms printed on thesis paper. The

meeting completes a form for each family unit or individual not part of a family unit. The sheets are to be kept in the meeting's thesis binder with its current, official minutes. When a child grows to maturity and leaves the meeting, no further information is kept about him or her. If the grown child remains in the meeting and starts his or her own separate household, a new sheet is then started. When the family is no longer a part of the meeting, through death or departure, its sheet is deposited in the yearly meeting vault at Guilford College along with the meeting's older minutes. Eventually the sheets are bound together to form a volume.

Other records kept by the meeting may or may not be the responsibility of the recording clerk. Burial records are usually kept at the meetinghouse, but a copy should be placed in a repository elsewhere. Legal documents, particularly deeds to property, are sometimes kept at the meetinghouse, sometimes at the home of a meeting trustee, and sometimes in the yearly meeting's central repository. If they are kept at the meetinghouse they should be placed in a fireproof safe or strongbox. North Carolina Yearly Meeting's vault at Guilford College houses a number of deeds and other legal records of various meetings. Probably the least secure place for such records is someone's home, where a death, fire, or spring cleaning can result in their loss or destruction. Meeting records should never be placed in an individual's bank deposit box, since the meeting has no access to the documents except through that individual. In North Carolina the contents of deposit boxes are impounded when the renter dies, and the contents are not available until the estate is settled. If no one is responsible for these records, the recording clerk should ask the meeting to appoint someone, and to make the necessary decisions about where the records will be kept.

In addition to the foregoing documents, meetings should maintain as part of their permanent records committee minutes, reports and documents that show how decisions were reached, state of society reports, histories of the meeting, memorials, epistles and other communications from the meeting, records of dealings with governmental agencies, photographs, drawings, treasurer's reports, meeting directories, budgets, personal letters to the meeting requesting action (including membership and marriage requests), and traveling minutes. Most should be deposited at least annually in the yearly meeting's repository. The staff of the Friends Historical Collection of Guilford College urges all meetings whose records are deposited in the collection to add it to the mailing list for their newsletter.

Each monthly meeting clerk of North Carolina Yearly Meeting is asked to complete an annual statistical report, and each quarterly meeting clerk is asked to complete a list of its officers, both by the end of June. The monthly meeting statistical report includes detailed information of membership statistics (including gains and losses since the last year's report), attendance averages (for morning and evening worship, Sunday school, youth fellowship, and monthly meeting), types of materials used in Sunday school, finances (broken down by types of receipts and disbursements, including both local and outreach activities), and officers (including clerks, chairpersons of committees, youth advisors, and representatives to other bodies and organizations). One copy of each annual report should be maintained with the permanent records of the meeting, and another sent to the yearly meeting office. The yearly meeting compiles this information and publishes it in its minutes.

The “Unforeseen Joy”

No one should embark on a term as recording clerk without realizing that it will require careful organization, and that it will be difficult at times. Yet despite the occasional difficulties and the exposure one sometimes feels when writing and reading minutes in a meeting, the experience can be deeply satisfying and spiritually uplifting. London Yearly Meeting’s Church Government (1980) puts it simply and beautifully:

In conducting the meeting and drafting minutes on its behalf the clerk’s abilities are strengthened by an awareness of the loyal upholding of the members of the meeting. Friends who have not known the unforeseen joy which comes from this experience may gain encouragement from this knowledge should they be invited to serve in this way. If the clerk’s service is under concern in the certainty of God’s presence and help in the meeting, then strength beyond his [or her] normal powers will be given.



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