HISTORY OF WEST RICHMOND FRIENDS MEETING

PREPARED BY PROF. HARLOW LINDLEY OF EARLHAM

The movement for the West Richmond Friends Meeting was not the product of momentary enthusiasm. Many Friends had long felt that as a denomination they should take advantage of the opening in West Richmond with its two opportunities—the growing territory of West Richmond and the opportunity for service by the faculty and student body of Earlham college.

In 1899 John Wilhelm Rowntree a minister from England was on a religious visit to this country with an especial concern for the work of young Friends, as exemplified in the Bible school and Christian Endeavor society. In the early autumn of that year he was entertained in Allen Jay's home on the National Road, West.

Young People Convene.

While there he called together several of the younger people from the different Friends meetings in Richmond and expresed his deep interest in Earlham college and her young people, and his conviction that there should be a strong vigorous meeting at the college so that, as the students came up from the different Friends meetings, they should find here a type of meeting that could utilize their talents and send them back to their home meetings strengthened and ready to assume somewhat of the responsibilities of the church.

Allen Jay sympathized most deeply with John Wilhelm Rowntree's thought in this matter and in the next few years as he looked ahead and saw with prophetic eye, the place and scope the Five Years Meeting would hold to the church at large, as well as here in Richmond, a vision for the future of the society gripped him and until his death, the determination to endeavor to bring his vision to reality, never left him. Toward the close of 1906 or early in 1907, Clarence Case, then pastor of South Eighth Street Meeting, made a map showing the location of Friends in Richmond. When finished, the map showed three considerable groups of Friends—one in East Richmond, one north of the railroad, and one in West Richmond.

Committees Are Appointed.

In December 1907 committees were appointed in bouth South Eighth Street and Whitewater Monthly meetings to consider the subject of religous work for Friends on the West Side of the city. Several joint conferences of these committees were held and the discussions were conducted in an earnest and Christian spirit. At end of these conferences a sub-committee was appointed to investigate and make definite propositions if possible. The sub-committee invited the Friends west of the river for a conference at Earlham college the latter part of November, 1908.

A goodly number of West Richmond Friends were present and many of them expressed their belief that the time had come when some effort should be made made to establish a meeting west of the river. Allen Jay spoke earnestly of his great desire to see the College and the community united in a meeting for worship. Then as the work of the Five Years Meeting became more unified there would be need for a central building which should be for American Friends what the Devonshire House was for English Friends. He expressed the hope that these three needs might be combined in one great central building, which should be equipped with committee rooms, offices and an auditorium.

Hannah D. Francisco spoke of the feeling that had existed among Friends for more than fifty years that there should be a meeting west of the river and if there was no other way she would offer her home for the use of such a meeting until a house could be secured. Before the conference adourned a committee was appointed to call upon all Friends west of the river to see how many might desire a monthly meeting to be established and if they were willing to support such a meeting.

Secure List of Names

The names of 140 persons, members of Whitewater and South Eighth Street monthly meetings were secured who expressed themselves as desiring a monthly meeting in West Richmond. After a full discussion the large joint committee united in recommending to the Quarterly meeting that the request of these Friends be granted. The Quarterly meeting in December, 1908, appointed a committee to take this request under consideration and in March, 1909, the Quarterly meeting granted the request, to become effective when a name for the meeting and a place for holding it were presented to the Quarterly meeting. In June, 1909, after the desired information had been given, West Richmond Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends was established by Whitewater Quarterly Meeting to be opened on July 14, 1909, at 7:30 o'clock p. m., at Earlham College. J. Gurney Hill, Rachel Baily Hill, Timothy Nicholson, Eliza W. Hiatt, Alice Winder and Edward Timberlake were appointed to be present at that time.

The first membership included 85 members from Whitewater Monthly meeting, 60 from South Eighth Street, 10 by request and 7 by certificate—162 in all.

Runs Back Over Records

With the establishment of the monthly meeting an accomplished fact—it may be of some interest to run back through different records to discover, if we can, the constant and abiding thought of Friends for a meeting west of the river that seems to have existed, almost from the establishing of Indiana Yearly meeting in 1821. On December 10, 1833, we find recorded two deeds transferring two farms to the Trustees of Indiana Yearly meeting, who were appointed to receive them; the one farm north of the National Road and owned by David Wright; the other, south of the Road and owned by Zimri and Lydia Cook comprising about 300 acres.

Deeds Cite the Reports

In these deeds is recited the following report from the Yearly meeting held in October, 1833. "The committee appointed at a former sitting to bring names of Friends to be appointed Trustees offered the following: John Maxwell, Thomas Evans, Charles Moffitt, James Pegg and John Pool, who were united with, and appointed Trustees to receive deeds for the lands purchased of David Wright and Zimri Cook and to hold the same in trust for the use, benefit and profit of Indiana Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends for a meeting house or houses for the accommodation of Friends for a boarding house or houses for the accommodation of Friends and their horses during the attendance at the Yearly Meeting; and if way should open, for the establishment of a Boarding School for Friends' children; for farming, pasturage, etc., etc., and such other uses as the said meeting may hereafter direct and for no other intent, benefit or purpose whatever, and it is to be distinctly understood that the said trustees shall at any time hereafter transfer the same to other trustees as the said meeting may direct."

It could hardly be said 'for the accommodation of Friends attending Yearly Meeting"—if the boarding house and hitching grounds were to be on the farm and the Yearly meeting continued to be held away to the northeast of the Richmond of that time. It has been a general custom for Friends to establish a meeting and place a school near by; hence it would seem that the early thought of Friends in securing this ground was for the location of the Yearly meeting house upon it.

Becomes Site of School

The south farm became the home of the Friends' Board School and because of the burden of the building expense—the north farm was divided into eight out lots and sold. One five-acre plot was deeded by the Trustees to William B. Morgan, who later sold it to Timothy Harrison. He built a commodius dwelling house upon it. Some years after his death the Harrison heirs deeded this property to Cleveland K. Chase who later sold it to Henry C. Wright and from him the trustees of West Richmond meeting received a deed for it in 1915. It is a comfort to know that Friends are established as a meeting on the very soil that was dedicated to Friends work those many years ago.

In 1848 the General Boarding School committee reported to the yearly meeting as follows:

"Ninth month, thirtieth, 1848—Having received an acceptable donation of fifty pounds sterling from our dear Friends in England upon which is realized the sum of $245.55 for the purpose of assisting us in building a meeting house on the school premises, separate from the school buildings, it is the judgment of the committee that such a house would be of essential advantage to the school, and that the case be submitted to the Yearly Meeting."

Minutes Are Adopted

The Yearly Meeting adopted the following minute after this report was read:

"The subject brought to view by the foregoing extract has claimed the consideration of this meeting; and we are informed that about $300 has been realized by the committee from sales of surplus materials of the school buildings, now occupied; and that the two sums may probably be sufficient to pay the cost of building a meeting house as proposed. The meeting is free that the aforesaid funds be appropriated under under the care and direction of the General Boarding School committee for that purpose, and encourages the said committee to proceed with the work as in their judgment may appear best."

Nothing more is reported to the Yearly Meeting concerning this meeting house until 1851, when it was decided to erect a teacher's dwelling instead.

Meet In Bible Class

In reciting some of her childhood recollections Hannah D. Francisco recalled, that some time during the years between 1855 and 1860 several Friends met every two weeks during the winters, at some Friends home in a Bible study class. This class occasionally met with her parents, Joseph and Esther Dickinson, and others who lived east of the river. It was ever urged that a meeting near the college would induce Friends to settle in that part and thus would be built up about the college a strong and helpful meeting.

In 1869 the Yearly Meeting trustees brought to the attention of the meeting for Sufferings,a statement made by three responsible builders of Richmond, that the Yearly Meeting house situated north of the railroad was in bad condition and that a pressure of heavy snows might render it unsafe. A committee of eleven men was appointed by the Yearly meeting to consider this matter, to have the building carefully examined and to report to a future session.

Apprehend No Danger

The committee did report later that they apprehended no immediate danger but suggested some repairs that should be made. They also suggested that the Yearly Meeting name a committee to consider the propriety of building a new Yearly meeting house and it thought best to sell a portion of ground south of the Yearly Meeting house lot so as to defray the expense of building. The Yearly Meeting appointed a committee of thirty-nine men who were to take the entire matter under serious consideration and report the next year. In 1870 this committee reported as follows:

"To the Yearly Meeting:

The committee to whom was referred the subject of building a new house to accommodate the Yearly Meeting report that we met and after a free interchange of views, are united in reporting (two individuals dissenting) that it would be best—all circumstances connected with the present condition and want of the Yearly Meeting in this particular being considered—to build on the northeast corner of the land connected with Earlham college and that it would be right to sell our present Yearly Meeting property and appropriate the proceeds of sale towards the building of a new house on the land mentioned."

Report is Considered.

The record states that the Yearly Meeting considered this report, but it was not satisfied to adopt it or the location proposed and dismissed the subject for the present. In 1872 a committee of five, with an advisory committee of one from each Quarterly meeting was appointed and authorized to sell the old property and procure a suitable location within the limits of the city of Richmond, and build a suitable house if in their judgment it was best to do so. This committee was continued from year to year until 1877, when the present site of the Yearly Meeting house on East Main street was purchased and the house begun.

Thus the subject of a Friends Meeting on the West side was left until the action enumerated in the beginning of this sketch. On June 29, 1910, at a meeting of the men of the congregation it was the expressed opinion of those present that a house should be erected as a memorial to Allen Jay, and this suggestion was endorsed by the West Richmond Monthly meeting December 4, 1910. The contract for the new building was let February 7, 1916. Ground was broken on April third and the corner stone was laid with appropriate ceremony on June seventh.

Events in Liberty

Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Dawson and Miss Katherine Templeton, were in Richmond Saturday.....Misses Mary Rebecca Pigman and Mildred Page spent the day Saturday in Oxford.....Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bryant, and Mrs. Charles Little spent the day Saturday in Richmond.....Monroe Duvall, Herschel Duke and George Rude were in Hamilton, Sunday evening for the opening performance of "Watch Your Step."..Miss Eleanor Richardson returned home Sunday evening from a visit with relatives in Indianapolis.....Mr. and Mrs. Lou Ryan were in Cincinnati, Tuesday.....Misses Kate Husted and Mayme Reeves and Howard Barnard and Kenneth Thurston were in Richmond, Sunday evening.....Walter Bossert, Paul Farley and Dwight Tappen were in Brookville Friday night for the basket ball game.....Mrs. Charles A. Drapier and daughter Elizabeth, will spend the day Wednesday in Cincinnati.....Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Husted were in Cincinnati on business Monday.....Miss Mabel Earhart of College Corner, was the week end guest of Miss Mary Rebecca Pigman.....Mrs. Clarence Phares and little daughter, returned to their home in Camden Sunday, after a week's visit with J. M. Freeman and family.....George Coughlin, was the week-end guest of relatives in Indianapolis.....Walter Ainsley spent the week-end with relatives in Connersville.....Miss Helen Mitchell was home from Oxford college to spend the week-end with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Smith Mitchell.

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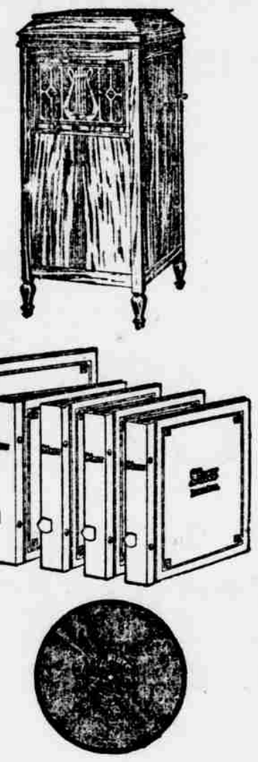

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