

10 June 2017. Discussion session at Mount Toby Retreat, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Attendees: Audrey Barker Plotkin, Roger Conant, Will Snyder, Lynn Hatch, Cynthia Jacylon, John Ridgeway, Ruth Hazzard, Dave Grotsky

At the beginning of the discussion, we read the following:

To be of use: re-visioning the Land Use Committee's purpose

In the 1960s, Friends built the meeting house in Leverett on land donated by Ethel Dubois, and in 1972, Mount Toby Friends Meeting purchased 119 acres of her forest land, with the intention to carry on her legacy of engaging with the land for spiritual renewal. Recognizing a fundamental difference in view among Meeting members, part of the land was designated for timber management (with an intent to use the proceeds to fund 'good works' and to 'keep the land in good heart'), while a larger portion of the land was not actively managed.

How have these intentions been fulfilled over the past 45 years? Has the sense of the Meeting changed regarding forest management and ownership? How does owning and managing land allow opportunity to grapple honestly and deeply with questions of stewardship and human's place on earth? What other opportunities and challenges does ownership of this land present the Meeting?

The Land Use Committee is considering two topics:

- what are the benefits, joys, challenges, and disadvantages of managing some of our forested land for timber? Is it time to discontinue forest management?
- what are the benefits, joys, challenges, and disadvantages of owning this land?

Other printed items available during the discussion included:

- maps of the land
- Roger's proposal for donating/selling the land, with the Kestrel Trust follow up
- copies of the Harvard Forest 'Wildlands and Woodlands' vision for New England

The discussion included: brainstorming use of the land; pros and cons of owning the land; discussing questions about the land's physical features and history

Audrey Barker Plotkin recorded rather sparse notes. Here are a few that stuck with her:

- a helpful way to frame the discussion is: 'would Mount Toby's spiritual life be missing something without the land?'
- The frequent walks hosted by the Land Use Committee have raised awareness of the land: just hearing about a walk in the newsletter or during announcements has increased awareness, even among those who have not joined a walk. People are happy that the opportunity exists.
- The perspective that Will shared that owning and managing a particular piece of land is an opportunity to grapple honestly with humans' reliance on natural

resources hasn't been articulated in prior discussions and is of interest. Making these decisions is a privilege.

- The point of 'getting rid of' excess wealth as one of Roger's premises for give away the Mount Toby land sparked a broader discussion about how Mount Toby Friends funds itself exclusively (and perhaps precariously) by donations from members/attenders. This broader question may warrant a larger discussion within the Meeting, perhaps sponsored by the Finance Committee
- Related to this, the large reliance on volunteers to maintain buildings, trails, . . . may reflect a lack of 'caretaking capacity'
- We discussed that the land, like most land in this region, was taken from Native Americans, and how public ownership or public access could mitigate this history.

We came to realize that we would like to have a clearer understanding of the thinking behind purchasing the land from Ethel Dubois in 1972, and would be well served to seek out the stories from members who recall that time. In particular, we wondered:

- did Mount Toby pay market value for the land?
- Was the forest land purchase connected in any way to the fact that Ethel donated the Meetinghouse land to the Meeting in the 1960s?
- To what extent was the land purchase because of Ethel, rather than a desire to own forest land?
- Current Land Use committee members could seek out more understanding of Ethel's life through the Hitchcock Center.

Answers to these questions would help clarify how we can continue to honor Ethel's legacy, and perhaps to re-coup the investment that the Meeting made into the land purchase in 1972.

Other points – many of these ideas have risen up in prior discussions

- could the land be developed by us (for retiring Quakers? As a youth camp? If we sold it, would development/building be a threat?)
- Can we re-build the bridge? How much farther is it to walk around via the vehicle bridge? (note: at present, a new bridge needs a champion; hoping the Young Friends will jump at the opportunity isn't going to make it happen)