

To the Land Use Committee 3/2015
From G. Foster
Re: Land purchases

This history is drawn from the reading of Minutes I did to write the history of the Meeting from 1964, in which I wrote when we got our land. It also includes my remembrances and those of others. I also reviewed the earlier history written of the Meeting from 1939, which shows how "Geography was destiny" for our Meeting.

Basically, we were given about two acres in early 1960s by Ethel Dubois, on her farm on Long Plain Road. I have not read the Minutes to verify this but they are in the Archives.

In 1973, we bought about 120 acres of her farm from Ethel, as decided at January 1973 MM for Business. Minutes say there had been much other discussion.

I have advised Nina Weyl, who was asked to draw a site plan, that our deeds and any plans are in the Franklin Co. Registry of Deeds in Greenfield. The copies we might have are not located, but may be in the safe. David Ahfeld, who has tried to use the combination without success thinks when last opened it was empty. Ask Nina if she has drawn a plan after going to the Registry, Ken Hoffman has drawn a map which is in the Handbook and shows the features.

History of locations of Meeting

In 1939, a Meeting was formed at SC which became part, with Hartford, of Connecticut Valley Friends Fellowship, which was affiliated with the Friends Fellowship Council, in Philadelphia, which has a origin which is murky, but which served groups which did not join a YM. There was also a worship group at Mt. Hermon School in Northfield at the same time. Because of gas rationing, other Friends could not travel to either place but sometimes went by train.

In 1945, the two NEYMs united and CVFF joined as a third, independent group, and our Meeting was named Middle Connecticut Valley Monthly Meeting as it was in the middle of Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meetings, in Ct. and Vt. It formed three Preparative Meetings, in Northampton, Greenfield and South Hadley. Greenfield had a building, a house and studio called Sherwood Friends Center, given them by Mary Champney in her Will of 1950. Northampton met in SC religious buildings and S. Hadley in homes. There was also a Worship group in Great Barrington. Amherst Prep. Meeting, started in 1954 when a large number of Friends families came to UM, met in buildings at UM and AC. All of the Meetings were formed by Friends who came from out of the area, as there had been no Meetings since early 1800s, in Pelham and North Adams. The MM met once a month for Business, mostly at Sherwood.

The Amherst Meeting had many children and wanted to have a First Day School. They initiated renting a building, the Amherst Grange Hall, a former church, which is now the Narcul Center on Main St. in Amherst. It was a Meeting decision for all Meetings to gather there. Pictures of all are in the archives, A number of Friends in other Towns dropped out of Meeting, or remained in their Towns to have worship for

Judy Campbell has drawn a "family tree" of all the organ. history

students, but it was successful for the children. The 1960 State of Society report spoke of the success of the plan.

But we only rented for First Day; the children were underneath us, in the basement; and we began thinking of a Meetinghouse. We searched the area and finally bought a house lot at the southeast corner of Sunset Ave. and Fearing St. in Amherst. A number of Friends disagreed and said we should not "spend money on ourselves." An architect was hired who drew up a plan. However, several problems emerged, when a restaurant was planned for across the street in the Amherst Creamery, and a sewer pipe was found to run under the lot. We did not yet know that the 22 storey UMass. dorms, Southwest, would be built across the street! We sold the lot, at a profit, which disturbed Friends, who felt we had been land speculators, but this amount was used for the carpet and fireplace in the Meetinghouse.

At the same time, the Sherwood Center was taken by the State, and Interstate 91 was built through the area. Mary Champney's house was moved and her niece, Frances Malone lived in it. (in about 1990 the house was given to Mt. Toby) The money from the State was put under a Greenfield Board of Trustees, by the court, and this remained until recent years, when last trustee Peter Letson closed it. Some money for building the Mthouse was loaned to Mt. Toby and paid back with interest. Complexities of this would take several pages to describe.

Ethel Dubois, an attender, offered us a piece of land on her farm in Leverett, and as this location was about half way between South Hadley and Grfd we accepted it. Many were very reluctant to leave our ministry to students who had joined Friends. The same arch. plan for the building was used (although that lead to using features not suitable for the rural area, i.e. high windows blocking the view.)

We broke ground in Sept. 1963, after the corn field was cut, the building was built during the winter and summer and we held our first Meeting in October 1964. Soon after, the Meeting was renamed Mount Toby Meeting.

Ethel had been using the farm for a summer nature camp for inner city children from Holyoke, and trails were developed and a council ring. There was a farm pond built with USDA help, as a source of water for fire fighting, and it was used for swimming. Ethel had bought the farm in the 1930s as a summer place and retired there when she finished being a guidance counselor on Long Island. City people buying houses at that time of economic hardship was common in South Leverett and included a group of houses, including the Fosters, in East Leverett. Probably the farm was very early settled by British, before Leverett was set off from Sunderland, in 1774.

Friends helped Ethel with the camp, which was named Long Plain Nature Center with a Board of Trustees in the 1970s, so it could serve as a place for conscientious objectors to do alterative service.

In 1973, Ethel found she must retire again and help her five older sisters to retire to Kendal at Longwood in Penn. She needed to sell her house and land. After much discussion the Meeting bought about 120 acres, and Bob and Nan Archer, the house and 40 acres. The price was 20 to 30 thousand dollars, and we had to add this to the original mortgage for the Mthouse which added five or more years. We especially wanted to own the house lot between the Meeting and Ethels house and barn. I believe we also wanted to preserve the land in the way E. had used it. The Archers tried to provide for

trail info for others to enter from their land. Eventually the Board of the Center arranged for the concept to move into Amherst to become the Hitchcock Center for the Environment. When H celebrated their 50 anniversary in 2013, they counted from the start of E's center and honored her in the history in a movie. The minutes of the Board are in the archives of H.

As said above, M for B in Jan. 1973 approved buying the land, and I am going to look at those Minutes for any discussion of the decision.

Pertinent to the history is that the late Carl Davies, who was a forester, managed the land and had us put it under Chapter 60. His economic ideas were well accepted by a group who worked with him.

If the Meeting wants to transfer it to Conservation land, it would most logically be to the Rattlesnake Gutter Land Trust founded 20 years ago for L. Fosters are charter members. The Kestrel Trust has helped them to buy land, but large amounts of money have been raised, and 100s of acres of Leverett are in various plans.

I don't know if the highlines run through our land, but 30 years ago, we opposed an earlier gas pipe line which was to follow that right of way. Rights of way for the company were secured long ago, such as one which ran through Foster's back yard, from 1912.

So Friends should be appraised of complications of getting rid of the land. What about adding to our carbon tax?

And just as I write this, I have heard there is a history the land was taken from the native Americans fraudulently.