

Memorial Minutes 1999

NEW ENGLAND YEARLY
MEETING *of* FRIENDS

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Penelope Turton

We celebrate the Light as shown in the life of Penelope Turton, who died on August 24, 1998, in Framingham, Massachusetts. She was born on July 22, 1912, in Hatfield, Herts, England, the daughter of Maysey Somerset Hirton and Constance May (Robinson) Turton.

Penelope grew up in England, spending a brief time, after her father's death, living in Ireland near her mother's family. Upon the outbreak of World War II in 1939, she served in the British Red Cross as a social worker, participating in the evacuation of British soldiers at Dunkirk and working in heavily bombed sections of southern England. At the war's end, Margaret Welch of Boston invited her for a holiday. Penelope stayed in the United States, making it her permanent home. She and Margaret Welch were close friends and companions until Margaret's death in 1984. In 1954, Penelope joined Friends Meeting at Cambridge, where Margaret was already a member. In the summer, the two of them lived at the Nixon house in Framingham, where Penelope began her second career of organic farming in the fields of Stearns Farm and operating a natural foods store. She also founded a food co-operative.

Penelope continued her ardent social action work in many ways: with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, as one of the founders of the Framingham Area Draft Counseling Service, and through writing, telephoning, and visiting the offices of elected representatives. She was a founder and faithful attender of the Good Friday Witness for Peace gatherings on the Boston Common and for many years served as clerk of Cambridge Meeting's Peace & Social Concerns Committee. In addition, she helped found Cambridge Meeting's Death & Dying Committee, and later, was one of the principal instigators of legislation that made the living will legal in Massachusetts. When she felt that she was too old for some types of direct action, she paid fines for young Friends who were arrested for matters of conscience.

Having settled in Framingham for the growing season,

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Penelope and Margaret started a worship group at Margaret's summer home, often meeting on the back terrace. From this gathering, the Framingham Preparative Meeting was formed under the care of Friends Meeting at Cambridge. In 1964, the No. 7 Schoolhouse at the corner of Demands Road and Nixon Road was acquired and moved 150 feet to a one-acre plot given by Margaret Welch. In 1979, Framingham Friends Meeting was set off from Friends Meeting at Cambridge. Although a founder of the Framingham Meeting, Penelope became a sojourning member, retaining her strong attachment to the Cambridge Meeting. For over three decades, Penelope nourished Framingham Friends Meeting by offering loving care, serving on nearly every committee, holding nearly every office, and representing the Meeting diligently and with great conviction on the Framingham Interfaith Clergy Association.

The Bible was an important source of religious inspiration and sustenance to Penelope. Because she was passionately committed to the careful use of plain English, Penelope championed the use of modern translations of the Bible. She believed modern versions to be more direct, honest, and comprehensible than the familiar King James Version she had grown up with in the Church of England.

Penelope Turton knew the value of an honest, simple life; her home was a tiny, rustic cottage adjacent to her farm and the meetinghouse. She had a deep abiding faith underpinning passionate convictions, and it was said that she was "wonderful, feisty, committed, and vociferous." She acted with the forthright belief that she was witnessing the Truth, whether opposing military armaments or removing a pacifier from the mouth of an infant.

Dedicated and hard working, Penelope communicated her enthusiasm to the many people she engaged to work in her garden and on her other projects. She taught many young (and older) people how to garden organically—and properly. Since she liked and respected those who worked with her, she had high expectations of them, and she did not hesitate to let people know if their work was not up to her standards. Her criticism could be acerbic, but it was always well intended. She

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did not expect any more of others than she did of herself.

People were fascinated and enthralled by her, and some were a bit awed and frightened. A delight and a terror, Penelope was something of a guardian angel. As a relative remarked, Penelope, “like her mother, knew how to run a parish.” Friends, neighbors, and the wider peace community will miss this crusty, loving, and indomitable spirit.

—FRAMINGHAM FRIENDS MEETING SALEM QUARTERLY MEETING

Memorial Minutes

We received Memorial Minutes from Salem Quarter for Virginia Clark, David McClellan, Friends Meeting at Cambridge; Marian Smith, Acton; Ruth Satterthwaite, Wellesley; and from Framingham, Sidney Cobb and Penelope Turton. The latter was approved for forwarding to Sessions. Questions were raised concerning criteria used in forwarding Memorial Minutes to sessions. We hope to reach greater clarity on this issue at our November meeting and will carry forward several minutes to be considered at that time.

PATRICIA SHOTWELL, CLERK