

## A Place We Friends Can Call Home

Out of the silence, a voice speaks. Heads lift, ears strain to hear the spiritual message spoken out of an "Inner Light" leading. Silence resumes as men and women and sometimes children center down in silent worship.



**Members of the Live Oak Friends Meeting gather in front of their new home. From left are Ruth W. Marsh, Albert Munn, May Mansoor Munn, Krystyna D. Ansevin, Malcolm McCorquodale, Robin McCorquodale, Yvonne Boeger, Philip Bell, Virginia Bell, Caroline Sheridan, Nancy Sheridan and Grant K. Fisher.**

As Quakers (Friends), and as members of the Live Oak Friends Meeting, we've wandered, Bedouin-like, all over Houston in search of a "home" - a meeting place where we could sit in silent worship in the manner of an unprogrammed Friends Meeting, where our children could have First Day (Sunday) School, and where we could conduct our monthly business meetings.

In the mid-'50s, our Quaker group was a handful of seekers who met for evening

worship at a private home.

Later, as Friends grew in number, "home" was located in the old Jewish Community Center on Hermann Drive, where we planted a live oak tree on Arbor Day — now large and flourishing.

During the early '60s, Friends met in what once was the Presbyterian manse, known to us as the Houston Council of Churches building on oak-lined Chelsea.

At that time, some of our members became active volunteers at Jeff Davis, then Houston's charity hospital (now the TB and maternity hospital). Red Cross-trained Friends worked as nurses' aids and orderlies in an attempt to offer relief to the overworked staff. As a result of this experience, writer Jan de Hartog, then a member of our meeting, wrote his book, *The Hospital. Concern of Friends and others for Jeff Davis and the ensuing publicity helped end the stalemate between county and city over the fate of the hospital, hastened its physical move to Ben Taub, in 1964, and initiated much needed reform.*

YWCA on Willow, near South Post Oak. Our stay there was interrupted for about a year when we began to meet at the Religion Center building on the University of Houston campus. But it was at Peden Y, a year following my husband's death, that I met and decided to marry Albert Munn, a recent member of our Meeting. Although Peden Y was functional, we hoped for a more inspirational setting for a Quaker wedding. With the help of our friend Phil Libby, then regional director of the National Council of Christians and Jews, we were given permission for a small Meeting for Marriage at the Rothko Chapel.

During the mid-'70s our search for a permanent location took us to the Heights where a large, two-story house on an attractive street sold for a mere \$25,000.

But Quakers, being an individualistic lot, and believing in consensus in decision-making, were not of one mind on the question of ownership of property. So we let it pass. At the same time, one of the de Menu "gray" houses in the area of the Rothko Chapel was offered for our use. We accepted gratefully, and for the next five years or so, our Live Oak Friends' Meeting was located on the corner of Sul Ross and Mandel.

Next, we were able to temporarily rent space from the Chocolate Bayou Theater. During this time, attendance of plays by our members increased dramatically.

Our next move was to the Mennonite Church on Wirt Road, in Spring Branch, where we arranged for use of the building Sunday evenings. The Mennonites, with whom we shared a peace testimony, were generous, the building and grounds attractive, but evening meetings were sometimes inconvenient, especially for parents with small children.

This time our search for a permanent meeting house began in earnest. We also discovered that 1982-83 prices for property were sometimes triple those of the mid-70s.

We finally found it — a place we hoped would be a steppingstone toward spiritual and

physical growth — a modest blue-painted frame house with its own small garage apartment (to be used for our First Day school for children); a place to worship in the manner of unprogrammed Friends, to discuss, to conduct business meetings, to build community. Our very own (though mortgaged) meeting house, on the corner of Alexander and 10th in the Heights.

Visitors are always welcome!

*May Mansoor Munn taught world history at Memorial High School before moving to Onalaska on Lake Livingston. She is currently working on her first novel*

**Readers are invited to submit essays for possible publication. Send them to The Magazine of The Houston Post Houston, TX 77001.**

Published: The MAGAZINE of the Houston Post; November 4, 1984.