

January, 1956

## History of Houston Friends Meeting for Worship

Houston Friends Meeting for worship grew out of a longing in the hearts of scattered Friends in the Houston area to find those of like mind and spirit with whom they could share in unprogrammed worship. After much wishful talk and a few short-lived attempts to establish a Meeting over the years, impetus was given by discussion at the first and second Southwest Regional Conferences and serious planning began when Ferner Nuhn and Eubanks Carsner visited Houston in May, 1954. The coming of Martha Peery and the Charles O. Minor family to Houston later that summer brought much strength to the group hoping for a Meeting. Early in September, 1954, a planning group met at Lois Brockman's home and discussed ways of overcoming the difficulties which had heretofore outnumbered the Friends.

At this planning meeting, more than on any previous occasion in the Houston efforts, it was clearly evident that there was deep need, genuine concern and serious intent to undertake a beginning which would lead eventually to an organized Meeting. All there that night were aware of a Presence with us, opening a way before us. Unforeseen answers were found one by one to the questions of time, place, distance, metropolitan scatteredness which had stymied us previously, and our individual busyness gave precedence to our urgent mutual concern that a Meeting for Worship must become a reality. Walter and Myra Whitson offered the use of their home Sunday evenings indefinitely; 7:30 p.m. was chosen on a trial basis as a meeting time suitable to avoid conflicts with existing obligations of various Friends who had undertaken other church responsibilities when they found no Meeting in Houston.

The first regular Meeting for Worship was held on Sunday evening, September 19, 1954, at the Whitson's home, and has continued to meet weekly until the present. For the first few months the Meeting was begun by one or another of those present reading aloud very briefly from some devotional literature (such as Pendie Hill pamphlets, Thomas Kelly's Testament of Devotion, John Woolman's Journal, etc.) This was followed by 45 minutes of unprogrammed worship. During that first meeting, and often in the months that followed, we were acutely aware of a Presence with us drawing us together, strengthening us and guiding us to resources we had not known, bringing needed help to us from unexpected sources, opening our hearts to each other so that a feeling of mutual tenderness grew among us.

A half-hour of study and discussion followed the worship period, with such books as Howard Brinton's "Friends 'or 300 Years" being used.

On February 27th, 1955, the first of planned monthly meetings for business was held, and these have continued regularly. Walter Whitson has acted as Presiding Clerk and Mary Minor as Recording Clerk and William Rouse as Treasurer, since it was agreed from the beginning that we would try to conduct business after the manner of an organized Friends Meeting to prepare for the time when we could achieve formal recognition and proper affiliation. Various committees have served for specific tasks. Attendance at Meetings for Worship and for Business varied from 8 to 14 adult person throughout the first year; of these about 8 are Friends holding membership in Meetings elsewhere.

A First Day School was soon felt to be of great importance and this was begun in September, 1955. Children sat with their parents for a few minutes at the beginning of the worship period, then went to another room to continue activities with a teacher. Eventually the children were divided into two age groups.

Visitations from Friends such as Ferner Nuhn, Eubanks Carsner, Faith and Willard Hastings, George and Emily Walton, and many others have given comfort and counsel to the Meeting.

We have thought that knowing each other and sharing experiences outside of the Meeting for Worship is most desirable, and to this end many enjoyable whole-family get-togethers have been planned, such as a potluck supper in several homes, a picnic supper on the beach at Galveston, an outing at the Stevenson's fruit farm near Friendswood, a Christmas carol-sing at the Minor's, an evening of star-gazing under Margaret Willit's guidance, etc. The Meeting feels that these opportunities for children to share with their parents in group social and recreational life heighten the values of the shared worship experience. (The age range in the group of more than 40 at the Galveston beach party was from a few-months' old baby to an 85 year old woman, for example.) The Houston Meeting seeks to demonstrate that Quakerism is a way of life, that worship is a part of life, not apart from it.

The Meeting, as a group, and members as individuals, has helped prepare for the Southwest Regional Conference; has helped plan for AFSC Institute and AFSC speakers, etc., but has not undertaken any specific continuing service project as yet.

Lois Brockman