

Contented

Elma M. Starr

Edited by Francis Starr, Stuart S. Starr, and Christopher K. Starr

Preface

The document you are holding is the memoirs of Elma McGrew Starr (1890–1985), together with supplementary materials regarding her life and character [transcriber's note – the appendices that are part of the original 1989 printing by Raven Rocks Press are not included here]. The memoirs themselves were written at the request of members of her family and are printed primarily with this readership in mind. However, they also contain much of significance in the study of religious and regional his-

tory. In particular, her life and public concerns were closely tied up with the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ohio and southern Ontario. We have tried, without making these memoirs any less personal, to edit and expand them in such a way as to make them more accessible to readers outside of her immediate family and friends.

The Editors

Centered in contentment and circled with thankfulness to my dear Heavenly Father and His son Jesus Christ on my Earth-to-Heaven



Francis Mordecai Starr Family 50th wedding anniversary.

journey of over 90 years, I pray for divine guidance recording the facts of my experiences and truths of my faith.

The suggestion to do this came from son Francis, in his letter of Seventh-month 1st, 1980: "Mother, for some time I have been thinking of asking thee to write a testament, or statement, or set of principles to distribute to thy descendents." Later grandson Christopher wrote to me in support of his father's suggestion, emphasizing that my statement should be a record of both the "external and internal events" of my life.

I was both honored and humbled by such an encouragement from these dear ones and freely accepted the challenge. After much prayerful thought that night a clear inspiration came to me of just what I should write. I did not then begin to write it, though, and in the morning the inspiration had left me. After further prayerful thought in the daytime I set down "faith in the Heavenly Father and Son and the gift of Their spirit" as the guiding principle.

I have read that "parents should share their deepest thoughts with their children" and have been pondering what I can remember from my earliest years. My twin sister Edith and I were both Ninth-month 21st, 1890 near Harrisville, Ohio. Our parents were Gilbert and Eliza (Hall) McGrew. My earliest recollection is that when 4 ½ years old I stood on a chair by the dining room cupboard and reached for an orange which I had seen put there. It was something new to me. Grandmother Hall, hearing me, came from the kitchen. She replaced the forbidden fruit, saying, "It is for thy mother." She gently led me to a chair by my mother, then in bed with my baby sister. I do not remember any punishment.

I may have had a natural inclination to climb, and perhaps to meddle, for my next remembrance is that of standing on a chair to touch the bright reflector behind the coal oil lamp on the kitchen wall. The reflector fell and broke. Mother gently helped me down and gather up

the pieces and said, "We will show them to father." I loved my father, but had a heavy heart until he came and I showed him the pieces. A gentle caution from my parents *not to meddle* was the only punishment.

A family routine was for us to all sit still a bit before meals. After breakfast father read from the Bible as we again sat still in our chairs. Then he frequently knelt in prayer, as often did a visiting Minister. This practice at home was a good preparation for regular twice-weekly attendance at meeting for worship. We became accustomed to sit still without entertainment. Sisters Anna and Caroline sat with mother on the women's side of the meeting room, Edith and I with father on the men's side. Sometimes we laid over on his lap and had a nap. I do not remember ever being bored with the silence.

Ida Binns often spoke in meeting. Once her message was "Discouragement is the work of the Evil One," and another time it was "The Sprit of God is quick and powerful." Asa Branson, who sat in the top bench of the gallery on the men's side, once said, "I can tell by looking in your eyes if you are worshipping." I thought, "I'll shut my eyes so Asa can't see them." He was very hard of hearing and used an ear-trumpet. Once he was seen pumping water into it and, on being asked why, he said they he had "heard a bad word and was washing it out."

Once when older I secretly question, "Am I a Christian?" and "What does it mean to be a Christian?" When I asked mother what *Friends* believed about *baptism* she answered, "When thee is older thee will understand." That did not satisfy me, then or later. I felt she should have told me what she thought. Years later in my reading I found the same question much discussed and answered to my satisfaction. Thankfully, I now realize that all my life I have truly desired to know and to follow Jesus, and often I have been blest with a small measure of consciousness of his presence and guidance in various situations.

Edith and I learned the alphabet from capi-

tal letters in the Bible at 1st of the chapters. Mother had been a teacher and taught us words and short sentences, as well as numbers and the multiplication tables. She made books for us and set copies for us to learn to write. Penmanship was her specialty.

The summer that Edith and I were 8 years old, Mabel Cameron came to live with us and with our horse and buggy took us the 1 ½ miles to "Science Knob" Friends School, on a hilltop north of Harrisville meeting house. Fourth-day evenings she asked us all to memorize passages of scripture. Next morning, after her usual Bible reading, we each stood and recited our verses and then by turns read a chapter from the Bible.

At about 10:30 on Fifth-day mornings we walked behind the teacher to the nearby meeting house, for meeting. The younger children sat with their parents, the older girls with our teacher, the older boys together on the men's side. After meeting we quietly returned to the school house and had mental arithmetic before lunch time. We ate our lunches as we sat at our desks, unless weather favored picnicking in the yard or a nearby wood-land. Teacher often read from an interesting book while we ate. At all times we were expected to behave properly.

About 1900 the school house was moved south and put nearer the Meeting House, near a big oak tree, and called "lone Oak School." Uncle Samuel Hall moved it with his equipment of big horse-drawn wooden rollers under the house. I watched it being done.

When I was appointed president of our "Students League" literary society, Mother wrote for me an inaugural address with the theme "It is said, 'He who does the best he can, can do no better.' I trust you will not view my mistakes with a critic's eye, but will pass them by."

Once when Edith and I were walking up the hill to school, cousin Albert Ashton came along on his horse. He pulled up beside a stump and from it we climbed on behind him, but we

soon slid off onto the frozen ground. We were not hurt. After he tied the horse in a Meeting House shed, he came back and walked to school with us.

Our parents read to us from Friends books or other books about such famous people as Abraham Lincoln and Francis Willard. They also subscribed to the periodicals "Scattered Seeds" "Bird Lore" and "Dumb Animals" for us. Each week we kept lists of the different kinds of birds we saw. One summer I had 55 on my list. First day morning we eagerly tried to see who would see the first one. Usually it was a cat bird, which had a nest in a tree in the yard.

The top of an old, discarded carriage was our play house. Boards with bricks between them were our cupboard for bits of old dishes. We each had a pet lamb and fed it milk from a bottle. We also had little brown bantam chickens. I liked to milk cows.

Dock and Miranda Wooden were Negro neighbors. She had been a laundress in Cleveland, and we girls took father's white shirts to her to iron stiff bosoms. She had interesting things up the winding stairs in their log cabin which she liked to show us. Jock and Becky Hill were our other neighbors. From a hole in a hill of our farm he dug coal for us. She came to help with our washing.

The 1st day of school sister Caroline, we four girls walked over the hill to the south of our house, wearing pretty blue figured calico dresses, all alike and made at home or by our Aunt Caroline Binns.

By 1902 Father was ready to retire from the farm, so Mother and I outlined our desire for a new house.¹ This was taken to Robert Sears, an architect in Flushing, Ohio, to perfect. Land was bought from Grandmother Hall near our Meeting House and on the Harrisville Adena Pike. A contractor built upon the cement blocks that father and our hired man, Labe Morlan, had laid. Before the house was all done, Aunt Lizzie McGrew and we four girls

moved in, so as to be near the school. The "Sunset Views" house was ready for the family by New Year 1904.

That winter Grandmother Hall was confined to bed. She and Aunt Caroline lived in the east part of the old Hall house. One evening it was thought Grandmother was quite low, so we all went down to see her. She soon died, and Uncle Samuel went for Tabitha Hall to lay out the body. The funeral was held in the Hall parlor, and we all attended the burial in our Harrisville Friends graveyard. Aunt Caroline continued to live in that home, but helped out in Uncle Samuel's and Uncle Joseph's and our home in the area, especially with the sewing of our dresses. She later remarried.

On the north side of our old farm was a deep hollow with a small creek on smooth stones. We girls liked to go there. On a hillside near it was a small tract of land we had bought. Here was a berry patch. Mother, riding side saddle on a horse, and we girls walking, picked berries and brought them back to the house. There were maple trees there too, which Father tapped. Sitting by the open grate fire in the winter, he made spiles from elderberry stalks. These he drove into holes in these trees to catch the sap dripping into wooden buckets. On a stone boat, drawn by a horse, was a wooden barrel for the sap. This was hauled near the house and boiled in a big iron pot hanging from a wooden tripod. The partly boiled sap was then boiled down further to syrup on the kitchen stove. Once Mother poured hot sap into a large stone crock and it broke, so that the sap poured out in the floor. She was very sorry, because Father had worked hard for it.

On the twins' 12th birthday, Ninth-month 21st, 1902, Grandmother and Auntie and Uncle Samuel's and Uncle Joseph's families came to our place to dinner. Uncle Joseph's family had recently returned from California and brought us presents and I think they also brought oranges – very rare then.

Father was not a carpenter, but he made a little wooden sled for us to slide down from the chicken house to the north porch past a very big Seckel pear tree. Mother wanted us to learn other people's ways of doing housework, so we often helped in other houses. When I helped aunt Anna prepare for a corn-cutters' supper she gave me 5 cents. When older I received \$3 per week. For three years I was agent for Templin seeds from Calla, Ohio. In 1905 my pay was a 30 piece set of pretty red flowered dishes which was a pleasure to put in an empty cupboard. A 1907 letter from them states: "It is our pleasure to advise you that through your efforts, which we heartily appreciate, you were successful in securing one of 30 prizes of \$6 each in our department. Thank you for the work you have done. We solicit your cooperation and influence in the future." Later pay was in cash, with which I bought bonnets. In 1910 I took a correspondence course in sewing and helped in other homes, especially with children's clothes. Once I lodged at Aunt Elizabeth Stratton's home at Winona and dowed for Mary C. Steer and Emily Satterthwait. For the latter I cut 2 pieces for the same part and there was not material for another piece, a real problem. I do not know now how it was solved, but the dress got made.

After I had been making girls' bonnets for a while, a big black one, the kind women wore, was given me to repair. As I could not get it done properly, I took it to Lizzie Pickitt of Barnesville to do it and teach me how. Later Rachel W. Hall, a specialist in Bonnet-work, came from Philadelphia to visit us. She gave me further instruction, and I later inherited her tools and supplies.

From my remembrances of storms, one which I experienced at our McGrew "Sunset Views" home stands out. On Sixth-month 6th, 1906 at 6 p.m. I heard a roaring sound and saw through the window a whirling cloud with straw in it. It rained down a row of apple trees, throwing them right and left, went east about a

mile, where it hit a high steep hill and went up in the air.

The spring of 1907 Edith and I entered Olney Friends Boarding School² at Barnesville, Ohio. There were 24 pupils. Our cousin Benjamin Thomas was principal, Howard Brinton³ and Emma Tabott were the other teachers, and William and Dorothy Ashton were superintendents.

Skating on the school pond was a joy. Big boys helped inexperienced girls to learn. Louis Kirk kindly helped me. "Cousin meetings" in the collection room were once a week. Harlan Webster of Columbus, Ohio was not really a cousin of mine but we like to meet. After school was out, "walking to the station," in pairs was common. He asked to accompany me to Tacoma Station. I said I'd be wearing my bonnet, so maybe he would not like that. He did not object. The girls were expected to wear our bonnets to Meetings of worship at nearby Stillwater meeting, also the once a term we went to town. Harlan came to visit me at our home once, but Mother discouraged our further friendship, since he was a city boy and I from the farm.

The summer of 1911 I attended the Normal School at Scio, Ohio, traveling from Adena by train boarding with Thomas Mooney and wife and walking half a mile to college. I enjoyed the teachers and pupils and received a grade of "A." I paid \$8 for my tuition for two months.

When at Canada Yearly Meeting at Pickering, Ontario in 1903 mother was interested that the children of Norwich, Ontario had school in their parents' homes, so she helped to raise money for a schoolhouse there. I was later accepted as a teacher in that same school, beginning in the fall of 1911. On Ninth-month 4th I took the train from Adena to Cleveland, then I took a trolley car to St. Luke's hospital to see nurse Almeda Hall, once my favourite teacher at Harrisville Friends School. After a short visit, she brought me back to the trolley stop. She told me that when on a sidewalk I should keep

on the outside of it in good light. With my bonnet and carrying bag, I would be considered a Red Cross worker and not likely be molested. After leaving the trolley and thinking I must have walked far enough, I stopped at a corner store, where men were sitting at counter. I was told I was on the right way to the wharf for the Port Stanley Steamer. I decided I had been at a bar. On the lake steamer I had the upper bunk in a cabin. The lady in the lower bunk was a nurse and good company. On landing I took a trolley to the steam car dept, where I got my ticket to Woodstock. There I took a hack to Norwich where Joseph Clayton met me. My trunk was not here, but I was assured it would come on the next boat, and it did.

I lodged at the Clayton house during my stay at Norwich, though I boarded around a week at a time at each of my pupils' homes, and the children took care of my lunch box. This lessened each home's pay to me, which was altogether \$200 per year. My mother wrote that she prayed for me the night of my trip. During the 1912 vacation I got a railroad ticket from Norwich to Adena to see my mother before she and Esther Fowler left for Esther's religious visit to the British Isles. This was soon after the Titanic sank, but Mother enjoyed the ocean voyage on the sister ship of the Titanic.

I had gone via Windsor and Detroit but returned via Sarnia, Ontario. It was interesting going through the curving tunnel under the Detroit river. The new Norwich Friends school house was built on the Clayton farm near a large elm tree with 3 big limbs so we call it "Tri Elms School." There were 15 pupils, in all grades. I was not familiar with "Canadian Authorized" textbooks and so had to study the lessons before going to school. I called on the area school inspector to invite him to visit our school and was very pleased when he accepted the invitation.

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Each week I wrote a verse or proverb on the blackboard to be memorized and recited in concert. Later I was asked why I wrote, "Hitch your wagon to a star." I replied that that was before I knew one with two *rs*. During Canada Yearly Meeting in 1912 I first met Elmer Starr of Newmarket, Ontario. Later his aunt Emma Pollard invited him, and me also, to their home near Norwich. After that we corresponded. At the end of my second year as a teacher I resigned, feeling it was not best for my attentions to be divided. I loved all the Norwich Friends, and they insisted I stay longer.

In my diary I find the following moving entry of Seventh-month 9th, 1914: "Yesterday, the anniversary of my dear Elmer's and my engagement, a retrospect of the past year, of our love – experiences and our courtship was much with me. Perfect was the day, perfect were the twilight and evening, so too was the night, the slumbering earth crowned with twinkling, sparkling, starry dome. At an unknown hour I knelt before my open window to view the wonders of God's beautiful night, when one speck of light took its flight from the southern to the western part of the sky, drawing out of leaving a purest white streak in its train. Then all star and train, in their perfection, vanished. A more perfect shooting star I had never witnessed. The mystery – how I should happen to arise and be at the window looking in the right direction all at exactly the right moment – remains with me as surely intended for a lesson from God alone to this very small speck on His earth. While pondering on the vision, desiring that my mind might enable to grasp the intended message, the thought came to me as all about me was quiet, this is an emblem of our love this past year. Such a perfect shooting star must symbolize the spark of love, the train – so closely connected – symbolizing its growth and effects."

With \$30 of my teaching money I bought a sewing machine and made my wedding clothes and some for sister Edith. In Fourth-month

1915 Elmer and I "passed meeting" in Short Creek Monthly Meeting at Colerain, Ohio. My parents accompanied us to both men's and women's meetings to say, "We continue our intentions of marriage with each other." Each clerk then read the meeting's minute of "approval of the marriage," since no obstructions appeared. And in each meeting two Friends were appointed "to see that good order at the marriage and reception was observed." The date for our wedding had been given and approved. We had asked Elmer's sister Evelyn and cousin Alfred Starr and my sister Edith and cousin Edgar McGrew to be attendants at our wedding in the Harrisville Meeting House at 10:00 a.m. on Fourth-month 29th, 1915.

Elmer's parents and his aunt Hannah Starr and uncle John and aunt Lizzie Rowland had come the evening before and lodged in the neighbourhood. Uncle John remarked that Elmer "could have found several wives near home." Coming through U.S. Customs, Aunt Lizzie sat upon their wedding present of silverware, so that it passed unnoticed.

Uncle Jesse Edgerton read the certificate, which was then signed in witness by our parents and 61 others. There were 66 present at dinner. Father and Mother Starr stayed at the McGrew home that night. Elmer and I went by train to Tunessasa, New York, next day, and the next day on to Newmarket, where we stayed that night with Garth and Mother Starr. The following day we moved into the little house which was to be our home for 58 years. Elmer again helped his father and Elroy and two hired hands on the farm.

I did enjoy that summer of 1915, getting to know the people of Newmarket and attending Yonge Street meeting. In Ninth-month we took the train to Ohio to visit my parents. They had retired from the farm and built a new house near the meeting house. As it happened, we did not return promptly to Ontario, but occupied the house of Fred and Eliza Hall while they went to California for the winter. Then Elmer

went to work on my parents' old farm, and we moved into the North Kitchen and a few adjoining rooms in the house.

My parents were very pleased to help settle Elmer and me in part of this house which had meant so much to them for 40 years. There on Sixth-month 27, 1916 our son Francis was born. I had suffered 17 hours of labor with no anesthetic. Almeda Hall was my loving nurse, saying, "It is the hardest pain to bear, but soonest forgotten." This was in the big north downstairs bedroom where "little Mary" was born and then died at 2 ½ years old, and where her sisters, Edith, Elma, Anna and Caroline were born.

That winter Elmer had seen an advertisement for a registered driving horse for \$200. He bought it and liked it. The warm, damp climate of Ohio did not suit Elmer's health, and we were eager to return to the little house where we had spent our first half-year of married life. We thought to drive to Canada with the horse and buggy, along with the baby, but were persuaded against traveling in this way. Mother and Uncle Samuel opposed us moving back at all, as there were very few other Friends in the Newmarket area, but Father was more in agreement with us. We sold the horse (for \$100) and took the train to Toronto, where Father Starr met us. They helped us get re-established in our house, Elmer was eager to go to the barn to see the horses.

We named our farm *Starr Elms*, because of the 12 large elm trees near our buildings and because our names begin with "Elm." These magnificent trees later succumbed to the prevalent Dutch elm disease, but one, "Huldah's tree" on the highest part of the farm, was green much longer.

Our second baby, Gilbert, was born Sixth-month 24th, 1918. On that same day Elmer's brother Nelson Elroy was in a farm wagon when it was hit by a train at the railway crossing in Aurora. He was thrown out and so badly hurt that he died in a hospital in Toronto be-

fore his parents arrived. Several came from there to the funeral at the Starr home. Elroy and Vera Arnold had been married for more than a year and living in an apartment fixed for them in the Starr home. Their son Arthur was then two months old. Elmer told me about the accident. I was too weak to hear much, but I had a vision of Elroy entering heaven and heard sweet music. Elroy was a cheerful and exemplary young man.

That winter there was an epidemic of Asian Flu, which Elmer contracted at a public auction. Soon there were four of us sick with it in each of the two Starr homes, with Father and Mother Starr doing barn chores and housework at both places. I told my mother "We are too sick to all get better. I do not know who will be taken." I was nursing Gilbert, but my breasts went solid and did not respond to a pump. He never had supplementary food, even a bottle. He died of flu in 11 days at 8 ½ days of age. He was named for my father, who appreciated that but never saw him, though Mother came to us during this period. Father sent us \$5, which we used for a silver name plate on the coffin. Elmer and I were able to be up for the small funeral at our home. Francis had liked to play with Gilbert and missed him.

Our doctor had asked our consent to give Gilbert four drops of brandy with water in a teaspoon at regular intervals as medicine. He prescribed 1 tsbp of whisky in a glass of warm water for me, the worst dose of medicine I ever had. I had not then been involved in temperance work and so did not think to decline it. Near the last Gilbert laid on the lounge and waved his hands and feet (Was he flying away? Affected by the brandy?). Often I have thought "Sweet bud of being, for a moment given, how pure young spirits are in Heaven." I called him "Baby Bright-Eyes."

After Gilbert's death, Francis was a special comfort. I soon walked, holding his hand, to visit our near neighbors, Joshua and Grace Oliver. She had been one of the few to visit us

during our sickness, as most were afraid of contracting it. We felt the effects of the flu for months afterwards. Our daughter Harriet was born at home on Seventh-month 24th 1920.⁴ She seemed a healthy baby, but was fretful. I was weak, and my milk may not have been very good. Whooping cough was common in our area in the summer of 1920, and Harriet got it. At about that time we got word that my father had died. The doctor pronounced Harriet well enough to travel, so we took both her and Francis to Harrisville for Father's funeral. Sadly, I viewed my dear father's face in his coffin. He had died at Mansfield, Ohio, where he had been taken five months earlier. Mother had visited him there several times, but he did not know her. She was very reluctant for him to go to the mental hospital.

Father had been a steady attender at meeting and in his later years often spoke briefly in worship. Once before meeting he overheard Gilbert Thomas (and appreciated nephew and namesake) talking with John Binns as they hung up their coats. Gilbert remarked to John, "I hear thee has moved again. A rolling stone gathers no moss." John replied, "A setting hen does not grown fat." Father thought them a clever pair.

In 1920 Father Starr had retired from farming and sold one of his farms to Elmer and me. After my father's funeral Elmer returned to Ontario, while the children and I stayed behind for Curtis Smith and sister Edith's marriage in Harrisville Meeting House on Eleventh-month 24th, 1920. To help prepare for the wedding had been an extra strain on me (I was still breast-feeding Harriet). I was in bed when they left for their home in Iowa. Later sister Caroline accompanied us on the train to Starr Elms. We had been gone two months, and Elmer was very glad to have us home. His mother and sister Esther had helped him look after our home.

From my guest book I see that my mother and sister Anna were with us during the last part of Sixth-month 1921.

One day in 1924 Mother and I attended a meeting of the Pine Orchard Women's Institute,⁵ near Newmarket, to hear Ethel Chapman. That was the beginning of our friendship. I heard her again on other occasions, and she visited us at home. In First-month 1927 I was surprised, on opening the *Ontario Farmer*, to find that she had taken me as an example of a farm woman in an article titled "An Adventure in Contentment." This has in fact long been a theme of mine. Often in my memory, I see Amelia Babb looking at our Friends Calendar and hear her reading aloud from it, "A contented mind is a continual feast." I believe a Higher Power opened my young mind then to take notice of that and retain it for my life's motto. Various questions arise in my mind concerning its application. Is there a danger of being too easily contented? But an answer is "our contentment can always be in the Lord. His goodness and power, the same yesterday, today and forever."

Once when I was starting from home to attend a meeting of the Willing Workers, the women's group at Pine Orchard Union Church, I went to the kitchen to tell my daughters farewell. I found Harriet on a stool washing dishes. She said, "I am a worker but not a willing worker."

Another time I was at a front door to tell the girls "Farewell" as they were leaving for a party. I said, "Have a good time" and afterwards thought I should have said, "Help the others to have a good time." I thought they looked very good in their new print dresses, which I had made.

My mother was remarried in 1925 to William Steer. They moved to Barnesville, so that I was able to visit my old school while visiting them. Sister Anna had gone with them and finally died there in 1927 of tuberculosis. Later I had another reason to go there, as Francis was at Olney Friends Boarding School in 1932 – 33. Harriet and Huldah each had four years there and graduated. After I had crossed the Canada

– USA border 112 times I quit counting. That was many years ago and I still cross from time to time.

Father Starr died on Fifth-month 7th, 1934 in Newmarket after a gallstone operation. In breaking the news, the doctor said to Esther, “now is the time to say our prayers.” She thought, “We *have* been praying.”

When I came to live with the Starrs, my widowed sister-in-law Esther was a member of Vandorf Women’s Institute. The meetings were likely in the basement of the Wesley United Church. We enjoyed the ladies there, but for various reasons soon joined the Pine Orchard Institute and later the new Bogarttown one, nearer our homes, where I was convener of the History Committee in 1936. These last two institutes joined in a study of our area and especially the history of the two small meeting houses at Pine Orchard. Andrew Hebb, editor of the Newmarket paper, cooperated and printed a booklet on “Pine Orchard History, 1800 – 1936.” Most all of the 300 printed sold promptly at 50¢ each, the few remaining at \$1 each.

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To read over our Starr Elms guest books is enjoyable and memory-reviving! On Eleventh-month 10th, 1933 Henry J. Moore spoke at the Bogarttown schoolhouse outside Newmarket (where Elmer’s grandfather, Francis Starr, had been the first teacher) on “the Peace Gardens.” It was he who originated the idea for such a place on the international border between Manitoba and North Dakota, an international project which became popular and widely known.

The subject of *peace* among nations has long had prominence in my thinking and has been a lifetime search.⁶ In the Bogarttown Women’s Institute this was at first my main assignment, but when there came a call for work on *temperance* I offered to specialize in that. Elmer once

remarked that it was evident “thee is not temperate in thy temperance work.” In 1938 I went to Willard Hall in Toronto for a short course in this subject sponsored by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Toronto. One evening our leader, a local medical doctor, piloted a few of us around to see some of the beverage rooms. Not much drinking was going on just then, though, as it was still early.

After one of the large provincial temperance conventions I had an image of the blue sky, sometimes spotted with dark clouds, as an illustration of how our country is darkened by spells of intemperance. With diligent, prayerful effort, the temperance workers’ hope for a better world can come to pass, even if temporarily. Many mornings, inspirations and passages of scripture come to mind, and I occasionally feel depressed that I have not done more. Still, I am thankful for much.

Elmer, Harriet and I went to Ohio in the summer of 1940 to attend Huldah’s graduation at Olney. After that Elmer and the girls returned directly home, but I went with Mother and two others to spend a month in Iowa with relatives. Aside from visiting, I did a great deal of sewing for Mother before riding home to Ontario with one of my former Norwich pupils and her family.

On Third-month 18th, 1941 (Huldah’s 18th birthday) Harriet was married to Alfred Cope at Grandmother Starr’s home. At her advanced age, Grandmother was unable to travel to the meeting house. The wedding took place in the dining room, because Harriet remembered four funerals in the parlor and would not have it there. The following day Alfred and Harriet left for their home in Ohio.

The next wedding in the family was that of Raymond Stanley of Columbiana, Ohio and our Huldah on Ninth-month 30th, 1944 in the Yonge Street meeting house, with the reception at Starr Elms. It was the first wedding in the meeting house in 40 years. Raymond and Huldah then went to Rochester, New York,

where he as subject in a series of medical experiments.⁷ Huldah, meanwhile, worked as a nurse's aide. At the end of his service, they moved to Columbiana where their six children were born.

Both of our daughters were now married and gone to homes of their own, and Francis was now grown and away much of the time. Only the youngest, Stuart, remained. Nonetheless, both at home and in the community there was still so much for me to do.

In 1941 Francis was at a conscientious objector camp at Montreal River in northern Ontario, where he and about 100 other young men of various denominations were put to work building a road. The next spring they were transferred to British Columbia to fight fires. Early in 1943 he was given leave to return home to help on the farm, and in 1944 he went to China in the service of the Friends Ambulance Unit. Late in 1947 the Friends Service Council of England sent him to Pakistan to help with refugees. It was there that he met Dorothy Schlick of Ames, Iowa, whom he married on Sixth-month 17th, 1948.

My first attendance at the Sunday School Convention⁸ was at Lemonville, Ontario. Seneca Baker was sitting near the door as I entered the hall, and I whispered to him to close the meeting with prayer. He responded, "If I feel called to." I felt a little guilty since, as a Friend, I knew well that it is our way to wait for and respond to a call. I was humbled with the welcome and response to my efforts. In all schools a quiet reverence and spiritualism was felt. The superintendents were solemn and helpful, as were some teachers and older members. All pupils were expected to bring their own Bibles, and to have help, if necessary, to find the text, and to study the lessons before coming to school. Memorizing was encouraged.

Although I had for some time been an intermediate teacher at Pine Orchard Sunday School, it was a surprise at the 1941 Whitchurch Sunday School Convention to find

that I was chosen as its president. I felt honored, but unworthy. The outgoing president, William Paisley, helped me as did Jacob Grove, the secretary-treasurer for several years. Thirteen Sunday schools of six different denominations were in the township association, though the Mennonites and Disciples did not join. Elmer taught the young people's class at Pine Orchard for some years. While I was president we left our classes to our assistants and visited the various Sunday schools, usually staying to the church service following. We enjoyed becoming acquainted with so many nice people. After three years I resigned as president, though I continued to attend conventions when I could.

At the close of my third and last convention as president I asked all to stand quietly, and if anyone felt like offering a prayer I hoped they would be faithful. Four lay persons responded, though preachers were also present. I then resigned, feeling that others should be given the opportunity and responsibility of the presidency.

The York County unit of the Ontario Temperance Federation met at the home of its president, Dr. Wilson. I took the leadership of its Youth Oratorical Contests and made repeated visits to the WCTU provincial offices in Toronto to obtain material to help our youth in public speaking contests at local and county meetings. These were held in various areas and well attended. I kept a record of the topics and speakers, which I later placed in the Bogartown museum. These oratorical contests continue to interest me, as younger people are always needed to push the cause of abstinence. At the end of 1955 I retired from the leadership of the contests after 18 years. I did enjoy them, and they were good for the young people and the cause. After Dr. Wilson, J.R. Richardson and J. MacKenzie served as president. These two were among those present at a meeting at Starr Elms in 1971 where it was decided to dissolve our unit of the Ontario Temperance Federation, for reasons I no longer recall.

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It is enjoyable to reread my diaries from this period, and I will quote a few entries here.

Seventh-month 29th, 1947. This beautiful summer morning I opened our north door at Starr Elms and I looked up into the blue sky. 'Thanks be to the Giver of our innumerable blessings' was the language of my soul.

Seventh-month 11th, 1950. I have been thinking of our dear children and longing to do my duty for each one. If our dear Harriet could get here and I would keep close enough to Jesus, He would guide my mind and hands to know what to do for her recovery. There is such satisfaction in reflecting upon our dear Huldah's visit, ending with her diligence in having all our clothes and bedding and hers washed and dried and folded and her bed made up so neatly. I praise Thee, dear Heavenly Father, from Whom all blessings flow.

Tenth-month 19th, 1950. 'Nothing between' is the language of my heart this perfect a.m., as before the open window I feast on the pure air and cloudless, tinted sky. Nothing to hinder my full view of nature's beauties. Nothing to hinder or hurry me from full and free communion with the Divine, Who has so richly blessed me always.

Ninth-month 15th, 1952. 'Men, be your masters' was quoted at the very large and inspiring provincial temperance convention in Owen Sound this month. It was my privilege to attend all five sessions.

'What doth God require of thee, O man, but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God.' I am reminded that Joseph Clayton repeated this in our sitting room when he and Bertha Pollard and Elmer and I were in a meeting for ministers and elders. He was feeling low in spirits. Now, Second-month 1954, he and Carrie and gone, we believe to a glorious reward. May the latter days of my dear Elmer and me, like theirs, be faithful.

In Fourth-month 1945 I had a telegram

from sister Edith, informing that our mother was very ill, so I took a train from Toronto to Iowa. When I got to her bedside, Mother asked, "Has thee come to take me home?" I thought, "I have come to take thee as near the Heavenly Home as it is possible for a human to do." At another time she gave a little giggle. I asked, "What is funny?" She replied, "I thought there was a little girl standing by me and I wanted her to get in bed with me." I supposed that referred to Mary, who had died very young. Another time she exclaimed, "Fire," and "I saw something bright." When I thought she was nearly gone, I said, "Farewell, Mother." She plainly replied, "Farewell, darling daughter." She said, "Wouldn't that be *awful* if I did not have hope?" Her use of "awful" impressed me, since she did not want her daughters to use that word which "pertained to something wonderful like thunder and lightning." I was there when she died on Fifth-month 19th. Just a few days earlier, as I lay awake one night reflecting on my weeks with Mother, during which she seemed to be awaiting a summons, "God is watching over us and beneath is His hand" were my thankful words.

I promptly returned home to Canada after Mother's funeral. It was not long before Mother Starr, too, passed away, on Eighth-month 18th of the same year, and again I was present.

My diary records the following on Fifth-month 11th, 1935. "Psalm 23 comes preciously to mind as I face another day in Toronto. I am going to the Ontario Temperance Federation office, then to Friends House for lunch, then to a committee meeting at 1 o'clock. After that, I will visit the Ontario Bible College on Spadina Avenue, before taking the 6:45 bus back to Newmarket." This was an example of many trips to Toronto. As I did not drive a car and often had occasion to use the Newmarket-Toronto bus along Yonge Street, I approached the bus company in 1945 about introducing a line along Don Mills Road.⁹ Later two men

called on me to announce that they had “come to answer your prayers.” They were amused by my puzzled look and asked, “You wonder *which* prayers?” The bus company, they informed me, was very much interested in running a line along Don Mills Road. It would help them to get an operating license for it if there was public support, and they proposed to bring a bus to take all petitioners to Toronto. It was up to me to collect names of petitioners. Elmer took me to call on the neighbors, and we collected 75 names. I enjoyed our trip to Toronto to deliver the petition in person to the provincial parliament, and later the president of the Hollinger Bus Line wrote to thank me for my efforts and express confidence that the request for an operating permit would be approved. The Don Mills Road line did come into being, two buses a day each way, though it was later discontinued as uneconomical.

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As I sit in my big chair looking westward out the window of my room at Walton Home, I have been reviewing the guest books which we began at Starr Elms in Fifth-month of 1915. The first entry reads “I am young and I am small, but I am the first to enjoy the hospitality of this new home – R.R. Hawtin per E.S.” Elmer had carried his young nephew over from the Grandfather Starr house across the road. Following that entry is Elmer’s Aunt Hannah Jane Starr’s name on the same date, with blank space into which she meant to copy the poem “The New Home.” On the next page is the signature of Howard Brinton. He was in Newmarket at the time to teach at Pickering College and was our first dinner guest. Elmer was careful to get all of our visitors to sign the guest book, and in looking through the four volumes I am amazed at how much company we had over the years. Many were our relatives and Friends attending quarterly meeting at the Yonge Street meeting house.

In Twelfth-month 1948 Francis and Dorothy returned from Pakistan. They had been there as relief workers, he with the British Friends and she with the American Friends and were married in Lahore. Dorothy worked as a nurse in Newmarket Hospital, while Francis worked on a nearby farm and sometimes on Starr Elms. Their first child, Christopher, was born in Newmarket in 1949. Later they moved to a farm near Woodbridge, Ontario and then again to Alton. In 1954 they came to live in the new “Grandfather Starr house” down the hill from Starr Elms.

Dorothy was eager to return to active nursing and so went to work at the hospital in Newmarket. She was also at that time the editor of the *Canadian Friend*, journal of the Canada Yearly Meeting. They remained there until 1956, and in that time the children were often under my care, especially when one parent or the other was away from home. In 1955 the Canadian Friends Service Committee had been hearing of trouble involving the Doukhobors¹⁰ in British Columbia and asked Dorothy to go out there to look into the situation. In the summer of 1956 they moved to Ottawa.¹¹

Our guest book entry for Ninth-month 15th, 1952 reads “Stuart S. Starr just returned from England and Europe.” He had attended the Friends World Conference in England. Dorothy was also a delegate.

In Eleventh-month 1954 I went to Philadelphia with Francis and Dorothy, in order to visit relatives and attend the Philadelphia Friends general meeting. The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* carried an article title, “Bonnet of Canadian Friend Recalls Quaker Plain Forms,” in which they said, “The Quaker bonnet has all but passed from the Quaker meeting scene here. It was left to one of several distant visitors to give this plain touch to the annual meeting of Friends in the old Race Street Meeting House on Grace west of 15th Street. Mrs Elma Starr, 60, diminutive and gentle faced from Ontario, Canada Friends Meeting was marked from sev-

eral hundred at the meeting by her black cup-shaped bonnet tied under her chin. 'The older Friends in our Conservative Meetings have clung to our plain ways,' she explained. 'The younger Quakers, even in Canada, have discontinued the plain form, but thee'll see them among strict Quakers where I was born in Eastern Ohio.' Her son Francis, a leader in the Canadian Friends Service Committee, was easily spotted as a visitor by a chin beard. He was accompanied by his wife Dorothy who is editor of the *Canadian Friend* paper. For Francis Starr it was an unexpected reunion with Daniel and Jane Dye now directors of the 'John Woolman Memorial Center,' Mt. Holly, New Jersey. While the Dyes were missionary teachers in Chengtu, China, Starr had been their guest, he being with the wartime Friends Ambulance Unit then. He later served with Friends Service Unit in Pakistan. His wife had also served as a relief worker in Pakistan."

On Sixth-month 1st, 1957, Stuart was married to Caroline Stanley of Whittier, Iowa. Francis came from Ottawa in his station wagon and took charge of Starr Elms while Stuart, Elmer and I took the station wagon to Iowa for the wedding. The reason for the station wagon was so that Stuart and Caroline would have a big car to bring her things to Newmarket, as they were to live at Starr Elms. Stuart took over the farm in 1956, as Elmer then retired, though he continued to help out for many years when he was able. I did enjoy having Stuart and Caroline and their growing family so close to us. All four of their children were born in the hospital in Newmarket.

During those years Caroline's mother sometimes came from Iowa to visit us, as did Francis, Harriet and huldah and their families, and we had many other visitors as well.

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In reviewing my diary and old letters, 1964 was the fullest and most varied at home and

elsewhere. [There follows a summary of entries for 76 days during 1964. These include mention of the usual interests of a farm wife, such as weather, crops, family and neighbors, but there is more than that. Of the 76 entries, 28 mention involvement in the business of the Canadian Yearly meeting and various public issues, of which temperance is the most prominent. The three following entries will serve to illustrate this.]

Third-month 24th. Good to be at our Newmarket ladies' prayer meeting. Elmer and I called on the editor of the Newmarket Era to voice our concern about the liquor vote. Hew as most courteous. We told him of our dislike of liquor ads in his paper and our appreciation of his editorials.

Fourth-month 21st. After consulting with Elmer, Stuart and Caroline, I was able to draft the resolution on firearms for the Women's Institute.

Sixth-month 26th. I am so thankful for big, capable Francis and thoughtful, helpful Lucie and Andrew, here again on a visit. They collected 2+ gallons of maple sap. I feel contented in my efforts of York County temperance. Bert and Irmgard King and daughter Heidi paid us a cheery visit. I am appointed to the Moral Education and Mothers Department of the Newmarket WCTU. I am thankful for good education in all phases of my 73 years. 21 attended the prayer circle at Grace Church. My 'Mothers Day' article appeared in the Era, to my satisfaction! We called on our new neighbors in the old Colville house. Good fellowship at Yearly Meeting at Pickering College. The Stanleys all arrived after a 7 1/2 hour trip, and 18 of us had dinner on the law before they left for Camp Neekaunis.

"A slave to system and order." That expression has stuck with me. It was my ideal to follow a certain routine in my daily and weekly duties, and the motto in my housework has been "Order is Heaven's first law." But one cold morning I was forced by circumstance to

change that order, and then I thought “Do not be a slave to it.”

Once I dreamt that I went alone to a neglected old meeting house, where I was surprised to see old relics which the descendants of those from old times had put on display. Then I awoke and wondered, “Am I cherishing old meeting houses and Friends history too much?” My mind was also much exercised once by a dream of straddling a fence. I was in sympathy with the conservative and also with those actively working for change. I was trying to evaluate my position in light of the next Sunday School lesson about the “talents,” being desirous to use my talents to the Master’s service.

On Seventh-month 7th, 1967, Elmer’s birthday, Harriet died after a long illness. Francis took Elmer and me to Ohio for the funeral, and we stopped off in Oakville to pick up Christopher, who also attended. Harriet was a favourite of her grandmother, Harriet Starr, and a dear and capable wife and mother.

In Eleventh-month 1970, Helen Stephenson visited to ask me, on behalf of the Yearly Meeting Committee, to deliver the Sutherland P. Gardner lecture at the next year’s Yearly Meeting. I was almost overwhelmed at the thought of such a large responsibility. For the next several months I prayed and meditated on the suggested topic of “Spiritual Experiences.” My dear friend, Grace Pincoe of Toronto, gave much encouragement. The train trip to Winnipeg and the entire meeting were of great interest to me and thankfully remembered. I felt so unworthy and incapable, but the lecture was finally completed and delivered to my satisfaction.

Generally retiring early, it has long been my habit to have clear meditations in the night. An undated diary entry from this period says that “in my night meditations I am occasionally disturbed because of but little consciousness of Jesus. I sense my very deep love and appreciation for my dear husband, who the previous

evening dragged in a big piece of wood for the fireplace. My heart ached at his changed condition from the active farmer of earlier years. I also remembered my deep appreciation and love for our thoughtful little grandson Stephen as he ran to help me get a pitcher of water and then ran ahead to open the door for me. Once he said, ‘Nancy (his baby sister) is a cutie, I do love her.’ Then I thought of dear granddaughter Mary in her pleasure to receive the robin’s egg which Elmer had found in the grass. So I feel if I so love these dear ones, I am loving Jesus.

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In my diary I find written on Third-month 12th, 1970: “Come up into the sunshine floods my soul this bright, pure morning as I reflect on our baby Gilbert lying dead in our little Sewing Room 51 years ago. More of that sweet, sad times comes to mind as I lay by my dear, quietly sleeping Elmer, who so longs to go too.” On Seventh-month 7th, 1973, Elmer’s 92nd birthday, Stuart took us for a drive around the farm, but we doubt that Elmer realized it. At 8 a.m. on the 18th I sat by him on our bed and felt his last pulsebeat. Dr. Urquhart came and, standing at the foot of the bed, said, “Yes, he is gone.” I felt “Blessed are those who die in the Lord.” Stuart phoned Huldah and Francis. I did not feel like doing anything. Many thoughts came to me as I realized my aloneness and reflected on the past. I loved my Elmer with everlasting love.

I dreaded funerals, but the 21st was a fine day, and the Pine Orchard Union Church was full. Several days later, as Francis and his son Andrew drove out the long Starr Elms driveway, Francis turned to bid me farewell and the 7 a.m. sun shone on his face. He looked like Elmer, and I thanked God for showing him to me. I had been praying for a vision of Elmer in Heaven.

Since Elmer’s death, I have spent the sum-

mers mostly in Ontario and the winters at the Walton Home in Barnesville, Ohio, just a short distance from the boarding school. Relatives have conveyed me on my trips between the two places. Stuart and family sold Starr elms in 1979. After searching over much of Ontario for a new place to their liking, they settled on a farm at Brechin, 60 miles to the north.

Two diary entries are among those recording the times I spent back at Starr Elms after Elmer's death:

Sixth-month 26th, 1974. At 11:30 last night Stuart and Caroline got home from another 'farm hunt.' I have been walking alone towards the back of this good farm, with thoughts of the beauty of this perfect day. As I walked up our curved driveway, admiring the tall trees which Elmer and our sons planted along it long ago, I remembered how Elmer repeatedly thanked God 'for making them grow.' Andrew was leading a calf to tie on lush grass nearby. I am thankful that he takes an interest in things here. I admired the clouds and thought of Jesus ascending into the clouds of glory, wondering what it would be like to see him so come. I had a full heart.

Sixth-month 24th, 1978. I am thankful to feel well and ambitious in this Starr Elms home again, where my mother used to say that the air was a little purer than any place else she had been. Sun warms my back as I sit at our parents' old desk in the porch. When ready for breakfast, I go to Stuart and Caroline's dining table. Everyone here eat when ready, except at supper, when we all eat together. Stuart and Mary got in three loads of baled hay yesterday. At the barn, Caroline and Mary throw them off the wagon onto a conveyor, which takes them up into the mow for Stuart to put in place. I do like being here with them all. The four children are big now.

When I returned home to Starr Elms, I continued to sort through our things. Granddaughter Helen helped to put my diplomas on the

wall, of my 1909 graduation from Friends Boarding School, a 1910 correspondence course in dress-making, a 1921 correspondence course in home nursing. After baby Gilbert's death I felt that I needed to know more about nursing.

On Seventh-month 18th, 1981, we had a big family reunion in the village of Vandorf, just a few miles south of Starr Elms. It was timed to coincide as nearly as was practical to the 100th anniversary of Elmer's birth on Seventh-month 7th, 1881, and 27 relatives from both sides of his family and our descendants were in attendance. We held the reunion in the old Bogart-town public school building, which has been moved to Vandorf and is now a museum. An enjoyable and thankful occasion.

I do enjoy the big west window of my room here at the Walton Home and the plants in the window sill. I look at them often as I lay down to rest my heart and jittery nerves. Morning and evening and sometimes in between I pray for my sisters and children and grandchildren and give thanks for their preservation and health and that they and many others do not taste alcohol or tobacco or harmful drugs. As I like to retire by 8 p.m. and arise at 6 a.m., I often lay awake and recite poems and scripture memorized long ago and recall past events. Exactly five years ago, Sixth-month 2nd, 1977, I wrote "A perfect morning for an hour's walk in our farm lane to 'stand and stare' and contemplate God in nature in this place familiar to three generations of Starrs. I am happy to be here again for the summer after four winters in Ohio." It is now another perfect Sixth-day morning, and I am thankful for a clear mind to again reflect on that walk along Starr Elms lane. The air was so still as I stood there alone with a feeling of awe. The place is still there, but much changed by the new owners.

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I have just finished reading over my jottings

on these sheets, as I again sit by my west window at the Walton Home. It has been a real pleasure to have recall many of my experiences and blessings, Many have been the precious visitations of the divine presence to my soul which are not inscribed here, not anywhere else on paper. Nonetheless, those which I have written will serve as a solemn reminder that I have been abundantly blessed, and my heart overflows with thankfulness. My duty now is to help feed our dear grandchildren and great-grandchildren with the break of righteousness. Again I pray that the Divine blessing and preservation be with you all.

Very lovingly,
Mother, Grandmother and
Great-Grandmother
Barnesville, Ohio
Seventh-month 5th, 1982

¹ This remark is especially revealing and probably means exactly what it says. In a recent letter, Elma Starr's younger sister, Caroline M. Stanley, remarks that Elma was consistently the leader among the four sisters, including her twin, and that the other sisters "like to have her as leader."

² A high school run by the Ohio Yearly Meeting, founded in 1837 and attended by about half of Elmer and Elma Starr's descendants. The name was recently changed to Olney Friends School.

³ Howard H. Brinton (1884 – 1973) was a leading scholar of Quakerism in North America.

⁴ Huldah was born on Third-month 18th, 1923 and Stuart on Second-month 27th, 1927.

⁵ An organization of rural women for social, cultural and educational purposes. It meets monthly to exchange information and ideas for the improvement of rural life. It is joined with similar local organizations in the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, which in turn is part of the Associated Countrywomen of the World.

⁶ Nowhere in these memoirs does Elma Starr directly address the matter of her unwavering pacifism. The following remarks on the subject are by her son Francis in a letter to a younger relative. "Once when I was quite young Mother had a discussion with a peddler about Friends' testimonies. The only one he couldn't accept was the peace testimony. I clearly remember him saying, 'But surely, Mrs. Starr, if a man was coming at you with a knife and you felt he had murder in his heart, you would do what you could to stop him, even if you had to kill him.' Mother didn't hesitate to answer that she was ready to die, and a person with evil in his heart was not, and she would have no part in consigning him to Hell. I've remembered that incident many times, especially at the first Friends meeting I attended in China. Bob McClure told us of a young missionary who arrived in Tientsin and was soon surrounded by Boxer rebels and killed. A Chinese boy who witnessed the killing was so impressed with the missionary's non-resistance that he made enquiries and eventually became one of China's best known Christians."

⁷ As a conscientious objector to war, Raymond Stanley was exempted from fighting, but he was obliged to participate in other government work. In this case, he underwent one year each of an experimental diet, high-altitude tests, and dehydration tests conducted for the Surgeon General of the United States.

⁸ An organization of the various Sunday Schools in Whitchurch Township, which includes Newmarket.

⁹ Also called Woodbine Avenue. Both this and Yonge Street run north from Toronto, one passing Newmarket on the west side and the other on the east. Starr Elms was on Don Mills Road.

¹⁰ A pacifist-anarchist sect which originated in Russia. Because of religious persecution, they emigrated to western Canada late in the 19th century with the help of Joseph Elkinton, a wealthy American Quaker. One radical sub-group, the Sons of Freedom, refused to send their children to public school or provide approved private education. When the government took custody of the children, the Sons of Freedom began a campaign of often violent protest. Dorothy Starr represented the Quakers in an unsuccessful attempt to mediate the dispute.

¹¹ Together with the family of Gordon and Betty McClure, the Starrs moved to Ottawa in order to help the few Quakers there to increase and regularize attendance at worship. The group was soon afterwards recognized as a monthly meeting by Canada Yearly Meeting.