

Notes:

Quaker Book Publishing

Western Friend Connect – Workshop Meeting Room – 3/8/2018

Recorded by Charlene Weir

Participants:

- Joy Conrad-Rice – Interior British Columbia Meeting (Kelowna, BC)
- Claudia Hanson – Chico Meeting (Chico, CA)
- Mary Klein – Palo Alto Meeting (Palo Alto, CA)
- Barbara Luetke – Salmon Bay Meeting (Seattle, WA)
- Judy Lumb – Atlanta Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
- Rob Pierson – Albuquerque Meeting (Albuquerque, NM)

Note-taker's Summary

1. "Share what you have." Quakers have a unique view of the meaning and purpose of publishing their work. A "Quaker book" may be deeply "cleared," using the principles of social consensus, deep thinking, queries, and community-based relevance. They are part of who we are. Quaker process, clearness, and community are at the heart of Quaker publishing.
2. We are in a new age - the digital age – and it is changing what it means to publish the Quaker voice. We are not sure how to grapple with the changes and still preserve our values. Technology changes faster than content.
3. The dichotomy of digital versus paper may be too superficial. Digital publications are different from books because they are timelier, but fade more rapidly. Books may last longer and require more effort and seasoning; they are more expensive. In many ways, paper books are becoming luxuries.
4. The experience of reading depends on the medium. Different mediums are emerging to match different needs. For example, print books can be shared, annotated, reviewed, and discussed together.
5. Financial viability laces through questions of which media to publish in and what content to include in Quaker writings. Ensuring that we stay aligned with Quaker principles in the face of large social changes is an emergent challenge.

Introductions: Each participant's particular interest in this topic

- I'm writing a book about early Quakers and hope to learn more about Quaker publishing.
- I've had some experience publishing Quaker pamphlets and am interested in publishing more Quaker literature.

- As our meeting's librarian, I am interested in the world of Quaker publishing.
- I currently publish journals and books for Quakers and others.
- I would like to meet a Quaker publishing guru to help me figure out what to do with the journals I have been keeping for decades.

Query One:

What are your experiences with book publishing in comparison with other types of publishing?

- *Western Friend* has been moving towards only publishing books that seem likely to break even financially. We are not publishing pamphlets at all because they are unlikely to break even. The issue at one level is financial, but at another level it is a question of what medium people want to engage with – books, twitter, video . . . We also face the question of whether the works we publish are ones that nurture the spiritual life of Quakers in the West.
- Friends World Committee for Consultation used to publish pamphlets. Initially, these were financially sustainable because people subscribed to receive them as a way of donating to the organization. Those were the older people who supported FWCC. The younger generation does not want to subscribe to receive pamphlets, but prefers to “click” to access them and to pay very little for them. The result is that FWCC stopped publishing pamphlets recently.
- Different types of access seem to create a two-way dilemma. On the one hand, pamphlets and books are wonderful to have physically in one's hands. On the other hand, the internet allows access to diverse information sources, academic material, and hard-to-get literature that would not be accessible otherwise.
- Print books seem to last a long time. In that sense, they are valuable. For example, *Fit for Freedom* has lasted fifteen years as a work the Friends are still studying. In contrast, digital material is short-lived. Books require much effort to create; they are thoroughly vetted and edited, as compared to the simpler, less well-developed material on the internet. The result may be that the quality differs between different media.
- *What Canst Thou Say* began as a sort of “meeting for worship in print” in Seattle in 1980s. It supports mysticism in print – providing Friends a way to share messages that they might share during meeting for worship, or a way to share personal stories about mystical experiences. It began as a print journal published four times a year, then we added a website that allows us to publish many more contributions. We just need to prioritize what goes into print. The publication is produced by volunteers, and subscriptions pay for the printing.
- Books and eBooks have different feels. People have different preferences. The joy of a library is the ability to browse.

Query Two:

How well are Friends being served by the current business of Quaker book publishing?

- Quaker books that accompany a ministry do well as people are out and about. Books that look like a compilation from a journal don't last as long or do as well financially. Books that are timely will do well for a short time and then grow old. Historical books may last more.
- There are very few Quaker publishers any more - FGC is slowing its publishing business. This is an international problem.
- Print books are luxury items whereas the eBooks are the utility line.
- What is a Quaker book? Historically, the "idea" behind a Quaker publication may have been socially determined, decided by leaders, or created by a community. Early Quakers often focused on the "common voice" versus the individual voice in their publications. They were strongly committed to supporting Quaker writing. This foundation is in contrast to progressive modern writings, which can also be distinctively Quaker. A "clearinghouse" for Quaker publications might be needed – not so much a controlling body, but a body to decide how Quakers contribute to publishing, to determine what is needed, and to consider whether works speak to the greater Quaker mission.
- I find in working on my own Quaker book that many people are ready to help me, especially Friends – reading, and sharing their advice. The historic Quaker principles of social consensus, deep thinking, and queries are still relevant to publishing today. I would advise any Quaker writer not to hold back. "Share what you have"
- If more Quaker books were available as audiobooks, that might increase accessibility. Audio books fit certain readers.
- The problem with technology is that particular devices sometimes don't work with particular content. Also, technology changes faster than content – making book content even more temporary because you lose the older books in new media.
- Books are better for social interaction than other types of publications. They may be the best for group discussions. They promote more interaction, as you can search and annotate your personal views. The book can then serve as a way to compare and contrast our different views for discussion. You can also share print books with others – eBooks not so much.
- *Western Friend* will help Friends publish books that are congruent with *Western Friend's* mission of nurturing the spiritual health of Friends in the West.

Other:

- Email from Brent Bill to Barbara Leutke, 3/10/2018:
 - I saw that *Western Friend* was hosting that conversation and had hoped to be a part of it, but it just didn't work out.

- Yes, Quaker Press, after a three-year hiatus, is still publishing. We've released two books this year and have a third in the works. All are non-fiction.
- Information about Quaker Press and our submission process can be found at: www.fgcquaker.org/serve/publishing-fgc Downloads on that page include our submission guidelines and a proposal form.
- Our process is that, once I have received (via email) a proposal, I review it and make an initial determination regarding its suitability for Quaker Press. As a small press (2-3 books per year) with a limited budget, we are very careful about which projects we accept – to make certain that they're a good fit for us as well as that we're a good fit for the author/book. If it looks like a project that Quaker Press might be interested in, I then forward it to our Publications and Distribution Committee (all volunteers) for their feedback. If they approve moving forward with the project, we then begin a contracting process which includes a publication timeline.