

OLD CHATHAM MONTHLY MEETING

NYYM, Religious Society of Friends

Memorial Minute for Viola Evelyn Purvis

3 Eleventh Month, 1911 - 11 Second Month, 2003

Friends in Old Chatham join those across New York Yearly Meeting and throughout the world family of Friends in remembering and giving thanks for the life of Viola E. Purvis.

Raised in the Baptist tradition, Viola was always committed to exploring the breadth of theological thought and to serving in ecumenical efforts. While a student at the City College of New York, she worked with Dorothy Day to establish a Catholic Worker soup kitchen. Serving as staff at the American Baptist Foreign Mission office, Viola came to understand that "In order to be a good Baptist, I had to become a Quaker." During these years, she first lived in a \$20-per-month rent-controlled flat in Greenwich Village, a resource enjoyed by many a Friend and friend over the years.

Viola served New York Yearly Meeting in various staff capacities, including general secretary and field secretary, for nearly 25 years. As she traveled throughout the Yearly Meeting, she was appreciated for listening carefully to Friends' concerns even as she shared ideas, insights and wisdom born of her own experience. As part of her ministry with the Yearly Meeting, Viola spent many weekends at Powell House, attending and often assisting in leadership of workshops and retreats.

Whether leading a workshop in pastoral care, listening to an individual Friend, or overseeing the administrative matters of our Yearly Meeting, Viola was a patient, gentle, and caring presence. Those who did not know her well, nor understand her absolute

devotion to the conviction that there is that of God in every person, sometimes found her to be just a tad too sweet, and even a bit hard to take. What a revelation, then, when Viola stood to give vocal ministry in meeting for worship, her usually gentle and sweet voice taking on a deep resonance as she spoke or sang the insight or Truth given her to share. When Viola traveled to Cuba with an ecumenical delegation and had the opportunity to address Fidel Castro, we can well imagine that the ever-present sparkle in her eye sharpened into a spark of the Divine.

Always a bit of a wanderer at heart, Viola traveled more extensively in the ministry following her retirement from service to New York Yearly Meeting. She visited Friends across Europe, was a student at Wodbrooke, and ministered with Friends in Jamaica before settling - for a while - to serve as secretary at Orlando Friends Meeting in Southeastern Yearly Meeting. In 1886, Viola traveled to Nicaragua with a Witness for Peace delegation, and soon became involved in the ProNica Project of Southeastern Yearly Meeting. A panoramic photo of the weekly peace vigil across from the American embassy in Managua, with Viola peering out from under her signature conical sunhat, was among cherished mementos in later years as it served to engage visitors in conversation on issues of peace and justice.

After a few years' sojourn back in New York Yearly Meeting, when she transferred her membership to Old Chatham Meeting, Viola again settled in Florida, living with Friends before moving to a life-care community where she resided until her death. She attended meeting for worship at St. Petersburg as long as her health allowed, and it was there that Friends gathered to share many loving messages and recollections in a memorial meeting on 23 Second Month, 2003.

Those who attended the sessions of New York Yearly Meeting at Silver Bay in 2003 enjoyed looking through Viola's collection of

photographs and postcards from her wide travel among Friends. Viola was remembered by various Yearly Meeting members as "so supportive of me when I was new to Friends," "one whose few words could evoke a clear image and a profound understanding," and "the only Friend in my adult life who could call me 'Dearie'."

In addition to her legacy of long service to Friends, her awed wonder at the beauty and glories of God's creation, and many memories in the hearts of those who were touched by her ministry, Viola leaves a monograph summarizing the life and ministry of Emily Howland, a 19th century minister and peacemaker in New York Yearly Meeting and spiritual mentor to Viola. With Emily Howland, whose words guided Viola, and with Viola, may we each be guided "to strive to touch and know the great human heart of us all."

---Approved by Old Chatham MM 9

Eleventh Month 2003 to forward to NYYM