

Miriam Kelly Brush Memorial Minute

Listing the accomplishments of Miriam Brush is both a delight and a near impossibility. This is not only because her accomplishments in Quaker circles and elsewhere are so numerous, but also because her influence on so many people throughout her long life was often quiet, personal and incalculable. She had spiritual gifts in leadership, eldering, mentoring, and wisdom. Her spirituality had both depth and breadth, enabling her to listen and talk to a wide range of beliefs.

Miriam and her husband John were among the founders of New Brunswick Monthly Meeting in 1954, where she also served as clerk, among other positions. Together they founded the New Jersey Friends Center, an international, interracial, coeducational cooperative boarding house for students attending Rutgers University, operating from 1964 to 1984 complete with a program director. The residents and directors lived with a concern for social issues, justice and world peace. The Center was legally a consortium that included all the meetings of New Jersey, thus including both New York Yearly Meeting and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The Center was also the home of the New Brunswick Friends Meeting. Miriam and John were also founders and long time supporters of Powell House. She served as clerk of New York Yearly Meeting from 1970 to 1974, helping to establish the current committee structure of the Yearly Meeting. She clerked Friends United Meeting in 1995-1996 and during the 1996 Triennial when the clerk died suddenly. She also served as a trustee of Oakwood Friends School.

A member of the Religious Society of Friends from the 1940s, Miriam's Quaker faith and values were central to her life and self-evident to those who knew her. She and John were married at Chicago's 57th Street Meeting in 1942. They were members of Friends' meetings in Madison, WI, St. Louis, MO, Plainfield, NJ, and then New Brunswick after its founding. She transferred her membership eventually to Medford Meeting when she and John retired to Medford Leas in 1995, although her attachment to New Brunswick continued. It may be more accurate to say that New Brunswick's attachment to Miriam continued. The depth of her wisdom and understanding of Quaker good order was so profound that her presence was greatly missed thereafter. This was undoubtedly the experience of others in the many organizations she served, who all regarded her as theirs. She was recognized in New York Yearly Meeting as the go-to person by the Yearly Meeting clerks that followed her, for all the years she was able to attend Summer Sessions, until she retired to Medford Leas. Many Friends recall her clearing up process questions and other concerns from the floor at the request of various clerks of the Yearly Meeting when business became difficult. Her knowledge and wisdom were truly profound, and she was recognized as the authority at many levels of Friends and elsewhere. Stories of her influence – personal and institutional – are legion.

In addition to her Quaker service, Miriam served as President of the Piscataway NJ Board of Education – the first woman member and the first woman President. As a member of Piscataway Library Board, in 1961 she was instrumental in converting the then-private library to a public, municipal body. She was a member of the Piscataway Charter

Commission, which in the late 1960s initiated changes in the form of Township governance. After retirement, she was a volunteer consultant to Head Start and a volunteer tax preparer. She had undergraduate and graduate degrees in chemistry and a PhD in nutrition and served as Professor Emeritus of Nutrition at Rutgers University, from which she retired in 1986 as Professor and Chair of the Home Economics Department and Director of the Graduate Program in Applied Human Nutrition. She served her department at Douglass College and the wider university in many roles over 30 years. On retirement, she was recognized by a number of professional organizations for outstanding contributions and distinguished leadership.

Miriam was fiercely independent, supportive of others, and gifted in her ability to speak concisely and clearly about matters of value. Her relationship with her husband of 64 years and her family was a wonder and a model for a long marriage based in affection, mutual respect, and shared values. Many of us cherished our far reaching conversations with her and hold her as a model for a life well lived.

Always up for a new challenge, she began a formal exercise routine at age 80 and, despite having no vision beyond light and dark, continued with determination until just weeks before she died. Miriam celebrated her ninety-eighth birthday on November 9, 2013 with her surviving children. She died February 12, 2014. Upon learning of her death, many fellow Quakers noted her wisdom and her spiritual gifts. She is survived by her children: Jonathan, and his wife Anita Greenbaum Brush; Kamala, and her wife Lucy Baruch; and Timothy, and his wife Ki Brush; as well as by five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her son Steven in 2006 and her husband of 64 years, John, in 2007. She was greatly beloved and will live in the hearts of all of those she influenced so deeply.

Approved March 23, 2014

Keith Voos, Clerk
New Brunswick Monthly Meeting