

Levi Pennington

People

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## Levi Pennington Writing to Clarence Pickett, March 30, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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March 30, 1947.

Clarence E. Pickett, Exec. Secy.,  
American Friends Service Com.,  
20 South Twelfth Street,  
Philadelphia, Penn.

Dear Friend:--

Whether I am going or coming back seems to be a bit uncertain. I thought I understood you that the central organization of the American Friends Service Committee and of any branch had to be composed entirely of Friends, in order that it might not degenerate into a "debating society" -- the words are yours. Accordingly when it was proposed to call a meeting to further consider and pass on the question as to whether we should or should not ask for the establishment of a branch in Oregon, I told some of those who were doing the inviting that it was supposed to be strictly a Friends gathering, and that their idea of inviting Dr. Coleman, Dick Morgan, Mrs. Gage, Mr. Genne, and a lot of others, P.C.R. members, members of the executive committee of the Northwest Institute of International Relations, etc., was not in accordance with the requirements of the AFSC as I understood you to explain them the evening you met with us; and I thought Dr. Homer L. Morris gave the same idea in the conference the next day.

Now comes a letter from Homer which contains the following paragraph:

You stated in your letter relative to the composition of the members of the branch AFSC committee that "it must be composed entirely of Friends, though we can use non-Friends in various sections." This is a stronger and more restricted statement than I intended to make. What I intended to say was that the ~~members of the corporation of~~ members of the corporation of the AFSC and the board of directors of the national organization are entirely Friends, although non-Friends are frequently appointed on sub-committees and sections. As far as I know there has been no definite statement of policy on this question in relation to branch offices by the Branch Office Committee or by the Board. My own feeling is that the members of the branch office committee should be composed largely of Friends, but in case there are some people who are entirely in sympathy with the point of view of Friends or who would be readily accepted in a Friends meeting, I see no reason why a few of these people should not serve on the branch office committee. The Northern California Branch has two or three members of the Executive Committee who are not Friends, but they are all in accord with the Friends' position. The important thing, it would seem to me, is that the direction and policy of the branch office should be in the hands of Friends and that it not be a simply inter-denominational enterprise. I have had no opportunity to discuss this meeting with the Branch Office Committee, and am only stating my personal opinion.

Well, that statement seemed to me decidedly at variance with what I understood you to say, and with the way I understood Homer, and I find that others understood the matter as I did, that the organization of this branch, its executive committee and its officers, must be confined to Friends, though non-Friends could be used on committees and in sections.

In reply to this part of Homer's letter I wrote as follows:

It was not so much your statements as those of Clarence Pickett on which I based my understanding that the organization of a branch of the American Friends Service Committee must be a matter of action by Friends only. I should be greatly disturbed over my inability to understand plain English if I should learn that he intended us to understand that we could invite in such people as Mrs. Gage, Mr. Hungerford, Dr. Coleman, Dick Morgan and others, who in the matter of peace education and other Quakerly view-points are much more Quakerly than many Quakers. I find that others who were present at that meeting when you and Clarence were present got the same idea that I did, that nobody but Friends were to be in the organization of the branch here, if one is organized. And these other folks, who are members of the committee organized while Ray Newton was here, understand that they are not to be at that meeting tomorrow night.

"People who are entirely in sympathy with the point of view of Friends" and "(people) who would be readily accepted in a Friends meeting" are words that have so widely varying meanings that they really have no meaning. "Entirely in sympathy with the point of view of Friends" -- what point of view of what Friends? Edward Mott, Rufus M. Jones, Errol T. Elliott, Earl Barker, Floyd Schmoer, Merrill Coffin, Newberg Meeting, Lents Meeting, Arch Street Meeting, Race Street, Ohio, New York, Kansas, New England, Oregon, Canada -- ouch!

Well, "I ask to learn", as Hashimura Togo used to say. If I have misunderstood, and a lot of those folks should have been at that meeting last night, I'll apologize to them. If I understood you correctly, then it would seem that the presence of non-Friends on the executive committee of the Northern California Branch is a bit out of the ordinary. In any case, I hope such names as Hungerford, Coleman, Genne, Gage, etc., will be on some of our committees, even if we shall be informed by you that they are not supposed to be on the executive committee nor among the officers.

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.