

Levi Pennington

People

9-15-1965

Levi Pennington To Errol Elliott, September 15, 1965

Levi T. Pennington
George Fox University

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Recommended Citation

Pennington, Levi T., "Levi Pennington To Errol Elliott, September 15, 1965" (1965). *Levi Pennington*. 347.
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September 15, 1965.

Errol T. Elliott,
27½ N.W. Seventh,
Richmond, Indiana.

Dear Friend:--

Your letter of August 31 should have had an earlier reply but for the fact that I have been buried with work since its receipt, and even now I have not dug out enough so that I can even be sure that I understand exactly what you wish I'd send you, or bring you, or have you come out and get, or transmit by thought waves, or whatever.

I've been trying for months to get written two episodes in the life of Oregon Yearly Meeting, and it isn't done yet, and I have little idea when I can get at it again. I got back just before Midnight Sunday night from an American Friends Service Committee "retreat" at Seabeck, and found an accumulation of correspondence that is still formidable, though I have given this old Remington 12 a real beating.

These Rambling Recollections of which I am sure I must have written you, are not a connected story. And a story like that of Oregon's withdrawal from the Five Years Meeting can be got with official accuracy only from the minutes of Oregon Yearly Meeting and the minutes of the Five Years Meeting, and as far as Oregon Yearly Meeting is concerned there is a mass of this material, communications from Oregon to the Five Years Meeting and back. I have not copied all of that, and you have access to tall that and can spend as many weary hours going over it as I have done. I have been trying to bring into my story some of the background, the side lights, the things that go on back of the curtain, and it does not make a nice story. The same is true of Oregon's withdrawal from the American Friends Service Committee and its opposition to that body.

Personally I cannot see where my work has been of any great significance to Quakerism, unless it should be that I helped to keep Pacific College alive until such a time as somebody else could do for it what has brought about the great change of the past five years or so. I tried to keep Oregon in the Five Years Meeting, but it seceded. I tried to keep it from withdrawing from the American Friends Service Committee, but it withdrew, denies the use of the yearly meeting house, which is the house of worship of Newberg Monthly Meeting, to any representative of the AFSC and advises all local meetings to do the same.

Locally much the same sort of thing has happened over and over again. They wanted to sell the western half of the two blocks on which the church stood; I opposed it; they sold it and for years a street carnival was there the week of yearly meeting,

and the merry notes of the merry-go-round mingled with the sacred hymns. It was proposed to sell the north lot of the parsonage grounds, to a former pastor, who would never let it get into the hands of anybody who would embarrass the church; I opposed the sale; it was sold, and became a wood yard. The parsonage was old and inadequate; we had a chance to buy a residence on the corner opposite to the church as the old one was on a corresponding corner on the opposite, a house that matched the church in style of architecture and material, and it was opposed because it would be a better house than most of the members had; they turned the bargain down, and it cost thousands of dollars more before they got the present house built. And so on and on. It would almost seem as if my opposition would insure the success of an enterprise -- and deep regret later on the part of those who have succeeded.

I could give you a running account of my life, with little details, but I'm almost sure that is not what you want. An old copy of Who's Who in America, or Who's Who on the Pacific Coast, or Who's Who in Oregon would give you some of this. I was born August 29, 1875, at Amo, Indiana. When I was seven years old, the family moved to Long Lake, some seven miles west of Traverse City. A few more years and we were living in Traverse City, and I was attending the Traverse City High School. My father accepted the pastorate of the little Friends Church at Manton, at a support of \$100 a year. All the family that were able to work and earn a bit did so. I continued in Traverse City till January, 1892, when I had to join the family at Manton. I graduated from the Manton High School that year. I taught in the Round Top school near Maple City when I was 17; graduated from the Traverse City High School in 1894; taught in other schools near Grawn, the Pegg school, the Mayfield School, the Onaway school, and was head of the school at Rogers City, the county seat of Presque Isle County. Asked to take a position on the staff of the Daily Eagle I went back to Traverse City. Worked on this job for over a year, when I left by mutual consent of me and the management. Sold life insurance for a time, then took a job as reporter on the other daily, the Morning Record, later the Evening Record. Married Bertha May Waters, and my daughters Mary Esther and Bertha May were born. Their mother died when the latter was only 20 days old. Worked up to city editor, then the call came to take the pastorate of two little country churches, Westland and Western Grove, ^{in Michigan,} There less than two years; then two years as pastor of Old Wabash and South Wabash for a year and the second year of South Wabash; then pastor of Knightstown meeting for two years, with the privilege of attending Earlham College; then pastor of South Eighth Street church for two years; then called to the presidency of Pacific College.

Those are some of the "bare bones" facts, with one of most important events omitted, my marriage with Rebecca Kidd, with whom I became acquainted while teaching at Onaway, before my first marriage. Anything that I may have accomplished since our marriage, during my first pastorate, was largely because of her help, encouragement, inspiration. But all that would not make very exciting reading, and I can't imagine your using much of it if any.

If you and I could be together for a week or a month or a year, maybe I could give you what you would want from me. Since that does not seem likely to happen, I wonder if we'd better not

wait and see if I can get this first draft of my "Random Recollections" written, then get the whole mass of material revised and brought into some sort of order if possible; then get it typed; and then see if it contains anything that will help you. I'd not think it impossible that I might get it put into print, though perhaps the expense would be prohibitive.

Four institutions of higher learning (isn't that a high-sounding phrase?) are trying to make me believe that it would be useful for future historians to have some twenty-five or thirty bushels of my correspondence stored away in their archives. They include George Fox, Earlham, Haverford and the University of Oregon. Friday of next week two men from the last named institution, the Acquisition Librarian and the Curator of Special Collections, are to call on me in an effort to induce me to "cease and desist" in the murderous work I have been doing in burning up nine tenths of the mass of correspondence that I have been accumulating for years. Since away back when I have written from 1000 to 1500 letters a year, and while I am sure most of that is not worth saving for ten minutes, to say nothing of saving it for centuries, they are going to see if they can't drive a dray up here and get some score and a half of boxes to take back to Eugene. The one thing I am sure of is that they'll not do that. If I had kept a diary for the past seventy years, that might be an interesting document, but how a letter to my daughter telling her that I had slipped on a wet rock and jammed my big toe against another rock and blackened the nail could be of any importance to a future historian is beyond me. Anyhow if the burning of thousands of my letters, as has already happened, will make future historians miss something, they'll never know that they have missed it, and so it won't be missed.

I'm ashamed of all this worthless chatter, but I'm not ashamed enough so that I'll destroy it and see if I can't do better.

With best wishes, one of which is that I could give you the help that you desire and give it to you now, I am

Sincerely your friend,