

Levi Pennington

People

1-20-1966

Levi Pennington To Edwin Bronner, January 20, 1966

Levi T. Pennington
George Fox University

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Recommended Citation

Pennington, Levi T., "Levi Pennington To Edwin Bronner, January 20, 1966" (1966). *Levi Pennington*. 361.
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January 20, 1966.

Edwin Bronner, Quaker Collection,
Haverford College Library,
Haverford, Pennsylvania.

Dear Friend:--

Your inquiry some months ago about the possibility of having some of my correspondence and perhaps other material for the Quaker section of the Haverford College Library has not been forgotten. I think I told you that I was surprised that it was desired, though George Fox College, formerly Pacific College when I was president, had suggested that they would like some of the things that I have written. But I was the more surprised that Earlham wanted what I was willing for them to have, and still more astonished when the University of Oregon, by correspondence and then by a visit of two of their librarians, wanted to take the whole thirty bushel boxes or more, everything from a letter accompanying my check for ten dollars to apply on account, or more likely a letter explaining why I couldn't send even a check for five dollars up to the letters from Herbert Hoover at the time of my wife's last illness and death; from my verses addressed to the new-born babe of two of my friends to "The Trail of the Serpent", "Jim" and "In a Castle", from "Base Ball in the Bible" for the Gold Q. Club to "Simon Peter: an Autobiography."

Well, I've just finished going over the correspondence of 1941, and it would be a great relief to turn the whole twenty-five bushels over to them; and there are things that concern my activities in Oregon that were outside the area of the work of Friends that they can make a good claim belong in the State University Library rather than anywhere else, especially since I hold a Master's degree from that institution, won as nobody else ever won such a degree there, or ever will.

But many of my activities were connected with Pacific (now George Fox) College, and with the fact that I was president of the college for thirty years and have been connected with it in a good many ways since, and with Oregon Yearly Meeting in which I was presiding clerk for years and a member for more than fifty-five years, with its headquarters right here in Newberg -- well, George Fox College college can't see how any other institution has any better claim, if it has any claim, on anything that George Fox wants.

And Earlham College, "that college has a better claim on the material that shows what you've been and what you have done than your own alma mater. And didn't we make you a LL.D after only fifty years? We ought to have whatever you have left after you have gone through all that correspondence and burned nine tents of it, as you say you are doing."

If I had done what my brother advised, and burned the entire mess, it would have simplified the problem of getting rid of tens of thousands of letters that could not, by the wildest

sweep of the imagination be of any use to anybody; and and after that, the problem of what to do with the stuff that was not ~~be~~ used.

I think I mentioned to you the fact that I was writing "Rambling Recollections of Ninety Happy Years," a different sort of autobiography if autobiography it can be called, telling the main things about myself, though not in any chronological way. I'm hoping to get that published and in book form, though I do not know yet what to use for money. It was written at odd times and in odd places, much of it by hand, a hundred pages or so before I was seventy, and then not touched again till I was past eighty-five. It is in the hands of a typist now, but the typist is a woman of two or three jobs, and is doing it more as a "labor of love" than anything else. She lives hundreds of miles from here, with her invalid, helpless husband and their three children, and she has a full time job as secretary to an executive in a big insurance company, and I do not know how far she has got with it nor when she will get it done.

One thing that has bothered me very much in ~~writing~~ some parts of these Recollections is the fact that there are some things that I think ought to be told that are not to the credit of the leadership of the yearly meeting and the college. The actions of the yearly meeting are on record in their minutes, and the members most active when these moves were taken of which I disapproved and which some of these men regretted and for which they apologized afterward -- most of these have been gone for years, and their names could not well be omitted if the story was told at all, and the acts of some of them were beyond criticism; but some of those whose conduct was most unworthy are still alive, and still in Oregon. To tell the whole story, names and all, might do them harm, and I have no desire to harm anybody. So my present intention is to tell of these actions but without going into detail, and then to write in fuller detail, names and stories both, and seal up that "inside" story for 25 years, or perhaps even longer, and put that part of the work in the hands of a college or colleges where it would be safe till all of the chief participants are gone.

I have thought of the possibility, if it is a possibility, of dividing my correspondence into four categories.

1. Correspondence that concerns primarily Pacific College and the affairs of Oregon Yearly Meeting/

2. Correspondence that concerns primarily affairs of Oregon outside the particular work of Friends in this area.

3. Correspondence dealing with the larger interests of Friends, such as the Five Years Meeting, the American Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, etc.

4. Matters more purely personal, such as my correspondence with my wife when I have been on long trips and sometimes on long absences, correspondence with Herbert and Lou Henry Hoover, with friends overseas, etc.

Maybe from the standpoint of Haverford or any other college library this sort of thing is unthinkable. If such a thing were attempted, that first group would go most naturally, as

it seems to me, to George Fox College; the second to the University of Oregon; the third to Haverford or Earlham. The fourth will go, without argument, to my older daughter Mary, for whatever disposition she wishes to make with them, except the correspondence with Rebecca. I can't yet think of that where just anybody who was curious could read it. Maybe I'm queer, but I can't at present think with composure of any one else reading those letters, even a hundred years from now. We were sweethearts all the 55 years and more that we lived and worked together, our love dearer the five years after our golden wedding than any previous five years, which is saying a good deal.

Is such a division as I have suggested even thinkable, or should all this correspondence be together? I see some of the difficulties in trying to separate it. Just how can you divide between Oregon Yearly Meeting on the one hand and the Five Years Meeting when so much of that story has to do with the fight in Oregon Yearly Meeting against the larger organization and the secession of Oregon? And the same for the fight against the AFSC -- fight is not a nice word to apply to Friends, but facts are facts.

Should I decide that all this correspondence that survives my murderous task of burning tens of thousands of letters that meant much to me when they were written and received should be in one library, and then decide which library gets it? Or should try the horrageous job of dividing it up?

I'm ashamed of having inflicting all this on you. If George Fox and Earlham and Oregon would all say "We've changed our minds; we don't want any of it", and Haverford still wanted it, how easy the decision would be. But "If the answer is easy, it's wrong." There are some things, a few, anyhow, that really ought to be in one of these institutions -- in four guesses or maybe less you could pick the right one.

If you survive all this, I hope to have a word from you some day.

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.