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A TRIBUTE TO J. CALVIN KEENE, FIRST EDITOR OF QRT (1959-1963)

DEAN FREIDAY

Before the information is forever lost, an outline of J. Calvin Keene's career seems in order. He died in November 2002 at the age of 94, and the principle facts which follow were furnished by his daughter, Mrs. Joan W. (Keene) Smith. His two longest periods of academic service were at Howard University (1943-1958) and St. Lawrence University (1958-1974). Only four people—all in their 90s—remain from those who knew him at Howard. The warm personal recollections from that period are by Mrs. Pearl L. Bailey, Administrative Secretary to the Dean of the School of Religion at that time.

The years of Calvin's editorship were accompanied by his wife Elsa's service on the Editorial Committee of *Quaker Religious Thought*. The authors that wrote for *QRT* during that period, Howard H. Brinton, Maurice A. Crease, Lewis Benson, Wilmer A. Cooper, Arthur O. Roberts, Chris Downing, Hugh S. Barbour, T. Canby Jones, D. Elton Trueblood, and Douglas V. Steere, provided a quality of input rarely available to a new journal.

The range of the topics they covered, pneumatology, Christology, ecclesiology, religious anthropology, religious experience, historical religion, Scripture, ministry, sacramentality, experience of God, and Christ as motivation to Quaker service, quite appropriately cut a wide swath through the total field of Quaker thought. They also mirrored Calvin Keene's extensive background in philosophy, religion, and theology.

Calvin Keene and Elsa Feichtinger met and were married when both were teaching for four years in Izmir, Turkey. It was Calvin's first faculty appointment after graduation from Lebanon Valley University. Unfortunately the men's division of International University there suddenly closed. Although the women's division, where Elsa had been teaching continued, it seemed best for both of them to return to the U.S. However, the Middle East retained a warm place in their hearts, and Calvin took a temporary assignment at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, while on sabbatical from the U.S. institution where he was teaching, some years later.

On returning to the U.S. from Turkey, Calvin earned a doctorate from Yale Divinity School. After which, he received a faculty appointment at Colgate University. While teaching there, Dr. Eugene

around. He was not “the boss.” When he became impatient with the paper trail and central administration requirements (because of the time it took from his research and writing) I was his buffer. The differences in our color, sex, and age were never issue; we were allies in a common cause. We became *friends*.

In 1958, Dr. Bewkes, who by then had become President of the St. Lawrence University, invited Calvin to serve on the accrediting team. One of Calvin’s recommendations was that St. Lawrence, although a secular university named for the river not the saint, ought to have a Department of Religion. Calvin’s suggestion was not only met, but in the fall of 1958, he was lured away from Howard to head the new department.

After both he and Elsa had retired from teaching in 1974, they moved to Lewisburg, PA, where they spent the rest of their lives. Elsa predeceased Calvin by eight years. One of the reasons for selecting Lewisburg was to be near Calvin’s brother Paul, who had founded Walnut Acres in nearby Penn’s Creek, PA. An early producer of organic foods, it became one of the largest in the country. Unfortunately, Paul (who is still alive) had to give it up because of age and poor health.

Calvin received honorary doctorates from both Lebanon Valley and St. Lawrence Universities. At St. Lawrence, the quality of his teaching was recognized by creating a J. Calvin Keene award, given to the outstanding teacher of the year. Subsequently an alumnus also set up and funded a scholarship in Calvin’s name.

In New York Yearly Meeting, he is remembered as the person most frequently called upon for advice at the annual business sessions in Silver Bay on Lake George, when the 300 participants became divided over a point of theology or biblical interpretation. Calvin would explain in his mild-spoken way what he saw as being at issue. Usually, his explanation gave ground for the sense of the meeting to arise and allow proceeding to the next item on the agenda without further discussion.

As one of the finest Quaker theologians of our day, Calvin Keene pointed the way forward in many ways. As the first editor of *Quaker Religious Thought* and as a contributor to our understandings of God’s Truth along the way, we express our appreciation for his life and for his service to us all.