

Memorial Minute for Eldon Hamm (1916 – Oct 9, 2012)

Eldon Hamm, the Friend with the longest connection to Ann Arbor Friends Meeting, died at age 97 on October 9, 2012. He was an original founding member of the Meeting, listed in the May 21, 1937 minutes as an affiliate member. He became a full member on June 21, 1998. He was involved in the establishment of both the Meeting and Friends Lake Community, and during his long life, he contributed countless hours of care and labor to both. Eldon grew up on a modest general farm in Custer, Michigan, the eldest of three boys and two girls. His father was a lay minister for the local Church of the Brethren, as well as a farmer, but the country-wide depression caused a loss of the family farm when Eldon was a teen. He spent long hours on chores, but loved to go fishing and swimming on the Pere Marquette River with some youth from a local tribe of Native Americans. His effort to advocate for Indian treaty rights by writing to the Ludington newspaper impressed the editor so much that he strongly encouraged Eldon to attend the University of Michigan (UM).

In 1934 he came as a student to UM and got a job with the National Youth Administration for \$15 a month to support himself while living with a group of students in Reverend Pickerill's basement, an arrangement that eventually became a co-op. He was involved in the early days of the student co-op housing movement (Inter-Cooperative Council) that started in Ann Arbor in 1932, during the great depression, and later spread to many college communities.

When he first applied to UM, Eldon indicated that he was a member of a "peace church," and that brought an invitation from Arthur Dunham to join a small Quaker worship group. He began attending after the group had moved from Arthur and Esther Dunham's home to the Michigan League. Some years later Eldon served as clerk of a committee appointed to explore various possibilities for establishing a Friends Center, and eventually the group was able to buy 1416 Hill Street from Laura Gray (which is now the part of our complex called Quaker House).

When Eldon was a junior at UM, a freshman named Mabel Douglas began attending Meeting also and the two became friends and eventually married. Eldon and Mabel had four children - Carolyn, Douglas, Lois, and Bruce - and reared them in their home on Geddes Avenue in Ann Arbor. Eldon became a secondary school teacher for the majority of his career, teaching first in Dexter and then in South Redford. As a teacher, Eldon believed that "learning should never be restricted to the classroom," so he also tried to bring the world into his students' awareness. For example, to stimulate his students to write, Eldon (with a wildlife license in hand) brought to his classroom a live raccoon named Kit, which he had raised at home with his family. His long-held dream of writing an illustrated children's book about the experience of raising Kit was fulfilled at age 97 when his late daughter, Carolyn, and granddaughter Elisa helped him publish *The Whole Kit and Caboodle*.

In the early years, Eldon's unpopular pacifist beliefs led to the loss of his job as editor of the Big Rapids, Michigan newspaper because he refused to participate in the war bond drive. When the U.S. entered World War II in the 1940s, Eldon and his brothers, Ivan and Otho, applied for and were granted conscientious objector status. Eldon did civilian public service in firefighting, forestry, and trail maintenance in the Oregon forests at Cascade Locks; Otho and Ivan were both in camps in the east. At the end of the war, Eldon became editor of *The Reporter*, the newspaper of the Central Committee on Conscientious Objection (CCCO) in Washington, DC.

Eldon felt strongly that families and individuals need an outdoor environment to nurture their spirits, and he joined with Elise Boulding and others to purchase 90 acres with a half-mile frontage on Long Lake near Chelsea in 1961. He always felt that the Lake Community boosted the recreational side of religious fellowship and rounded out the life of the Meeting, and in order to support the project, he and Mabel bought two cabin sites. Al Connor recalls that the Hamm family was one of the first from Meeting to welcome the five Connors by taking them swimming and fishing. Eldon liked smelts and would catch a mess of them in the Detroit River or up north on a Saturday, then bring them to Meeting to share on Sunday. As recently as 2011 Eldon cooked a very large salmon over a campfire to feed the folks gathered for the AAFM 75th anniversary celebration.

Eldon delighted in many things in his life - family, fishing, boating, swimming, the woods and open fields - and part of the joy was in sharing those passions with others. He will be long remembered by young and old alike as an active man with a wide smile and a caring soul.