

Clerks Column

This issue marks a milestone for FQA, as the editorial baton for Types & Shadows is passed from Esther Murer to Marlene Fitzwater. It's hard to overstate the importance of Esther's contributions to FQA in its first, founding decade; she not only brought the newsletter into being and put it together issue after issue; she also created our FQA website, and brought much wisdom and good questions to our board deliberations. she has also deepened many of our informal gatherings with her excellent poetry. (You can find two samples of it on the FQA site at: ["Therefore choose life": A CALL TO ART](#))

We'd known for some time that Esther was feeling a growing inner call to other work, and frankly, I had been dreading the prospect of a change. Editors, and good editors like Esther, do not grow on trees. Thus Marlene's emergence on our radar screen seems like a truly providential event, for which we're extremely grateful. We look forward to her new ideas and wide range of talents. One special asset she will bring to FQA's efforts is a live connection to the west coast, to broaden our horizons in a concrete way. We've needed this, been longing for it; now it's here.

So enjoy this issue, as i will, and be aware that with it FQA is growing, again.

There's a small North Carolina town – a village, really – which this time of year comes alive with the most important ongoing Quaker arts project in American history, maybe in all Quaker history.

Big talk about a small place, which too many of us have never heard of. But I'm not kidding: the Snow Camp Historical Drama Society, Inc. is now in its third decade, and these folks put on a heck of a show, such as you won't find anywhere else among Friends.

Two shows, actually: The Sword of Peace, about Carolina Quakers during the American Revolution; and Pathway to Freedom, about Levi Coffin and the Underground Railroad. Both are full-fledged, full-length plays, professionally written and acted, with large casts in period costumes. They're performed outdoors, in an ampitheatre surrounded by beautiful woods.

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Best of all, these shows are indigenous productions: Snow Camp, which is about halfway between Greensboro and Durham, was settled by Quakers in the 1740s, and some of the families behind the theatre project have lived in the area ever since. This is their history they're dramatizing, as well as ours.

But the plays are not only authentic, they're also telling; they lift up issues of war and peace, faith and practice, witness and compromise, that have confronted Friends throughout our history as a people, and which are before us again now.

I saw the first act of the Sword of Peace back in 1984, as part of a Friends United Meeting field trip; but the performance was cut short by an evening downpour, the occupational hazard of such ventures. It wasn't until last summer that I was able to see the rest, and it was worth the wait. I eagerly returned the next week to take in Pathway to Freedom, which was just as good.

This project is not exactly a goldmine; each year the producers have to beg and borrow to keep it going; but somehow they manage; they've been scraping by, keeping this high-quality labor of love and outreach going for thirty years.

This summer's season will open on June 15, and run through mid-August. Any Friend traveling down this way during that period for pleasure could hardly do better than to include Snow Camp on their itinerary. For all ages, these plays pack more Quaker history and theology into a thoroughly appealing, entertaining package than just about anything else I can think of. Their website is: www.snowcampdrama.com/

One more item: this summer will also see something new on the Friendly arts scene; a tour by Quaker musicians, under the care of FQA. The Friendly Gangstaz Committee, a troupe of young adult Friends which was profiled in these pages last year, will spend a week in July traveling down the east coast, performing at several Quaker venues.

The Gangstaz do hip-hop versions of old Quaker hymns, as well as original material of their own. They came together at the FGC Gathering in 2001, and have also performed at the FWCC Quaker peace conference at Guilford College last January.

This tour, which opens July 6 at Brooklyn Meeting in New York City, will be the first for the Gangstaz, and it will have a peace theme. Watch for more details at their

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website: www.friendlygangstaz.com; and if you're in the area of a performance, come and join in!

May 13, 2003

Types & Shadows is published quarterly by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Subscriptions are available through membership in the FQA.

This page added February 2005