

Book Review

Sheila Spielhofer, *Stemming the Dark Tide: The Quakers in Vienna, 1919-1942*. York: William Sessions, 2001. ISBN 1 85072 267 6.

Reviewed by Jane Zavitz-Bond

Stemming the Dark Tide is a splendid book in content and presentation. It tells the story of Quaker relief work and of the Quaker Meeting in Vienna, a direct outgrowth of the relief program by British and American Friends after World War I, until the International Friends Centre closed in 1942. The Meeting and its members survived WWII within the German sphere; the Friends Centre reopened in 1948. As the twentieth century ended, Sheila Spielhofer, who grew up in the Vienna Meeting, sought its history. She gathered the straws of the Quaker tale, through unflagging research, bonded them to the clay of European political history to shape the bricks, which, when fired by her imagination and discipline, became this particular and significant work. With her discoveries the author brought the story to life, a gift to us and future readers.

Why review a book published ten years ago? I read and returned to this book over the last several months, drawn to many of the persons within its pages, having heard some of their accounts directly, or from published memoirs. I found *Stemming the Dark Tide* on the QBS (Quaker Book Service) sale table during Canadian Yearly Meeting as an acquisition for the Dorland Library of the CYM Archives. A logical choice by its subtitle, without knowing the riches it held. I trust this book will be utilized in the future both for its content and as a model to encourage researchers to seek all possible primary sources then to select content and present it in as effective a manner.

Why submit a review to this issue of *Canadian Quaker History Journal*? It relates to Kathleen Hertzberg, a faithful Canadian Friend

and one of the few persons still living who shared in the pre-WWII days of the Vienna Quaker story. Her report to Woodbrooke along with an introduction by Robynne Rogers Healey appeared in the previous journal. This, along with the appearance of other current WWII Quaker studies and biographies, increases the significance of the fully documented volume to a fuller understanding of the Austrians and the relationships to their German neighbours. This impacted the Quakers' perspectives as events unfolded. Having discovered this book I now hope others find it. Friends may well find the understandings gained useful in the future.

The story began as Hilda Clark, a young medical doctor and granddaughter of John Bright, arrived in Vienna, in 1919, under the War Victims Relief established by English Friends. With many starving in Vienna, Clark, an able and determined woman, organized a feeding program for the children. She proved that rickets was not a communicable disease, but the result of malnutrition. Clark first experimented with soybean 'milk' to supply the nutrients. It was not practical then, but today is commercially produced. Next, American Quaker farmers shipped 'Vienna cows' to meet the dietary needs of the children. This program was expanded by the Mennonites after WWII to aid a starving Europe. Clark's awareness of the physical and psychological needs of the volunteers if they were to continue the demanding work soon led to establishing the International Quaker Centre. British and American Friends, and others, continued to serve, and Meeting was held there. Some

Austrians became Quakers drawn in by knowing Friends who put their faith into service.

The Quakers who brought relief services to Vienna and the new Vienna Quakers all responded to the desperate needs of the Austrians, but their perspectives later diverged as they were in different circumstances. Most of the Quakers who came to Vienna saw service as their role, indeed it was their purpose for coming. Over the years the Vienna Meeting's existence was threatened by the tightening political noose. The Friends needed and found spirituality as the essential for the meeting.

The 'anschluss' fused Austria to Germany as their political and economic ties were joined. This brought employment and solved major problems so that relief was no longer the essential service. Some Quakers in the meeting felt more comfortable, for a time, but soon the treatment of the Jews, other non-Aryans, or any in opposition, led to imprisonment and deportation. The Quaker work at the Centre shifted to assist those desperate for exit visas. These were useless without a guarantee of an individual host for the refugee in the country designated. Too few received that guarantee. Friends did what they could. Two groups of children were escorted to safety. Most of those going to France perished in Auschwitz; those going to England lived, often with guilt for surviving when their families did not.

In September 1939 as war began, the English left. The Americans remained until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Then the Austrians, employed by the Centre but not Quakers, out of necessity were on their own. At great risk they did what they could to supply the basic necessities – shoes, a coat patched, a blanket, or even a bag of straw to sleep on – for those being transported out of the country as workers and/or to the death camps. The International Quaker Centre closed in 1942, having moved from its former site at

Singerstrasse 16, when no longer permitted to work officially. Some were helped to escape secretly, unofficially, by the valiant workers. The care given over the years was remembered. A Vienna centre reopened in 1948, called simply 'Quaker House', and Quakers continued in Vienna.

Larger world history provides the backdrop for the account Sheila Spielhofer researched and drew together. She allows us to share the struggles and successes that those undertaking the Vienna International Centre work and of the Meeting experienced during those fateful years. Some of the ideas planted – the work camp and the farming community that supported life and brought healing to the spirit of those who came, are signposts for the future. The small basic projects are the way to create peace when mirrored back and forth many times over the globe. The ideas and hope that comes from a story such as this will assist help show the way.

The book's compelling story of heroic people holds us, but the richness of the resources Sheila Spielhofer discovered underscores and validates the story. The spectrum of perspectives of those involved brought the drama, and truth, of the events to us. Listing sources and footnotes at the end of each chapter assisted as I read and turned often for the source and any related comments with excitement as I knew some of the people. The photographs, the author's choice of quotations from letters, journals and reports were well chosen, and skillfully interwoven as the account proceeded. The author is to be congratulated, and thanked, for her care and imagination in creating this compelling volume of history. Read *Stemming the Dark Tide* to discover for your self, and join in this appreciation.

Some Personal Footnotes to Quaker History.

Having written the book review, I hope it is appropriate to share some personal 'footnotes' to *Stemming the Dark Tide*. The people and events relate to Quaker history during my lifetime. Responses came tumbling into mind as I read. Memories are my major source. The Friends involved in the Vienna work have been part of the larger story of world Quakerism in the twentieth century with continuing impact. Their Quaker activities are interwoven, as life is, when wholeness is found.

Some of my 'footnote-thoughts.'

1. Quakers were allowed to continue in Germany and Austria by the Nazis as an association, but were not considered to be an institutional church. I found it fascinating to learn that German Quakers were allowed to continue under Hitler as they claimed a relationship to the mystics, such as Jakob Bohme, before George Fox (1624-1691) and not English, but Aryan! I quickly reached for Rufus Jones' *Mystical Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries* to check the publication date. I thought it preceded WWI; well, just as it was published in 1914. Had Rufus written it because it was needed to support the German Quakers? No, but it did assist them in being accepted. Rufus Jones was involved with the German Quakers. He was one who requested 50,000 exit visas for Jews prior to the war. The feeding program for children in Germany after WWI gave Quakers support, even from some Nazis, who were fed as children. Pendle Hill pamphlets have presented the early mystics as possibly known to Fox. The ideas Quakers have found did exist prior to Fox, as truth has always been.
2. Hans A. Schmidt, whom Sheila Spielhofer referenced and noted as 'American', is a US citizen, who came after the war, and is now a retired professor of history. He wrote *The*

Quakers and the Nazis. I am sure she knew he was German who was born and went to The Quaker School Eerde, on a castle estate near Ommen, in northwest Holland. He was one of the twenty-five per cent of non-Jewish students included in the legislation to permit some of their own children to leave Germany, when the school was established. The Christian children survived; the Jewish students were taken near the end of WWII and nearly all perished in the camps. Hans Schmidt spoke at the Conference of Quaker Historians and Archivists about his early major work on Quakers in Hitler's Germany. I was present and very interested because I had been at Eerde in 1948.

3. Now we are older and fewer, but for many years, I could not read a major Quaker periodical without meeting a former Young Friend from the summer of 1948. Sixty-three years ago today, as I write, sixty Young Friends – and 'friends of the Friends' – from eighteen countries came together. The war was over, we wanted to be together and share in the process of making a peaceful world. Had the Europeans not requested that some American Young Friends coming to the international conference at Eerde in July 1948, be 'friends of the Friends', as many of them were, I would not have come to Canada as a Quaker bride or be here today. I became the 'token' to satisfy the Europeans, selected later as the substitute for one who found he could not attend. I was not 'officially' a member of the Society of Friends, but my mother was, and I attended meeting with relatives, hence my involvement with Young Friends, which I chose. My Methodist father grew up in a nest of Quaker farm families. He, too, was a 'friend of the Friends', who lived his last days in a caring Quaker facility and was buried in the pioneer Friends Meeting Cemetery. Every meal at home was a time to share. A teacher, he took us through all that

was happening. We had the PBS Background to the News before that program existed. This was a major part of my education.

4. The issue of membership was major for all concerned, as Spielhofer made clear. Emma Cadbury understood the difficult situation for the Austrians related to church membership as a result of her time in Vienna when working there alone representing AFSC. Emma understood the need for 'friends of the Friends' for them. Not all older meetings with established procedures understood, but when the Friends World Committee for Consultation was organized (around 1937), Emma Cadbury was in charge of the Wider Quaker Fellowship list and the content for the mailings. Many of the key persons – Howard and Anna Griscom Ellkington, Rufus Jones, Douglas Steere – were the same individuals who were involved with the Berlin and Vienna Quakers. Surely this is not an accident. They saw the need for a consultative body of Friends. When I was named as a representative from Canadian Friends in 1953, Emma Cadbury, a tiny little lady, was still reporting for the Wider Quaker Fellowship. Seeing her then, it was difficult to imagine her as the determined worker in Vienna during the war. She was one of the first to return after WWII. Again we see the impact of the Vienna, and German, experience upon the world of Friends, as FWCC still connects Friends today. It arose as friends in the world wanted to continue working together for peace and understanding
5. War, peace and politics are related. Leonard Kenworthy's war time year in Berlin and trips to see folks at the Quaker Centre in Vienna were mentioned in the regular letters read aloud at the home where he also came. Did this influence his father, Murray Kenworthy, to go to Washington, DC for

extended visits at Carroll and Mary Lowes Kenworthy's while carrying forward his concern to establish the Friends' Committee for National Legislation (FCNL)? My major resources for writing an essay on universal military conscription came from FCNL and Pendle Hill. My aunt saw that I had access to the best materials available. Locally, I was the only student who wrote against the legislation. I was in grade nine. The American Legion essay was required to receive English credit. This is only a very small taste of what the peace seekers in Europe faced. We needed to be actively working for peace, especially when the war was over, that another war not come in the next generation. Today the time is shorter.

6. Several items emerged as I read, underlining previous awareness and bringing others together for added conclusions.

Summarized, they are:

- a) Know the language when you expect to work with others. The major problems would have been avoided, or eased, between the Centre and the Meeting in Vienna.
- b) Be aware as you go to work with others, especially in another country or culture, that they have a history and experience that gives a perspective which is to be considered and appreciated.
- c) The work camp, and garden aspects of living sustained many and renewed them. Let us remember that and there is hope.
- d) Never feel there is nothing you can do. The results may never be known to you, but the ripples remain. May the spirit of our actions be for good. The story of the Quakers in Vienna carries these threads within it. The visitors who came after the war were amazed at the spirit of the few who were gathered for meeting. It is the miracle of faith and living it with others in community.

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