

## Pacifism in Practice: Remembering Peter Brock

Thomas Socknat

On September 15, 2007, a beautiful fall Saturday, the Canadian Friends Historical Association held its Annual Meeting on the grounds of the Sharon Temple. The theme of the historical program, organized by Jane Zavitz, was the pacifist ethic practiced and exemplified by Peter Brock, the noted peace historian who had recently passed away. Jane wanted to do something to honour the memory of Peter Brock as well as to reiterate the Society of Friends' commitment to peace. It proved to be a very successful and interesting connection of Brock's historical scholarship and the Quaker Peace Testimony.

I had the privilege of chairing that afternoon session which included two presentations, one on Brock the scholar by John Stanley and the other on Canadian pacifists in the Friends Ambulance Unit in China during the Second World War by Susan Armstrong-Reid. At first glance it appears the two papers were about very different topics but as the session developed a number of important and interesting links were made. Both papers are reproduced below.

The first speaker, John Stanley, introduced Peter Brock the academic through a concise summary of his major scholarly accomplishments. As a former student of Brock, a joint author with Brock and P. Wrobel of *Nation to History: Polish Historians from the Enlightenment to the Second World War* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), and editor of a complete bibliography of Peter Brock's scholarly publications (copies of which were available at the meeting), he was well suited for the task. His talk reminded those in attendance

that, with over 30 books to his credit, Peter Brock had a major international reputation as a historian of pacifism and Polish history. In fact, his last two books were on Polish historians and on conscientious objectors, which he himself was during the Second World War.

The second speaker then turned to the Second World War experiences of Canadian pacifists. Susan Armstrong-Reid, an independent scholar and co-author, with David Murray, of *Armies of Peace: Canada and the UNRRA Years* (University of Toronto Press, 2008), is currently involved in two research projects, a biography of Lyle Creelman, who headed UNRRA's nursing brigade in the British zone of Occupied Germany and a history of the Friends Ambulance Unit in China. It was that last topic that formed the basis of her presentation that focused on two Canadians in the FAU's China Convoy during the Second World War: Ed Abbott and Francis Starr. Having had access to private letters and photographs, Susan's presentation focused on the personal experiences of these two conscientious objectors, including PowerPoint slides of photos. It was further enhanced by the fact that Ed and Vivian Abbott and Francis Starr's brother were in attendance.

During the question period that followed, people not only shared personal memories but also made important connections. For instance, although not in the FAU, Peter Brock was a conscientious objector in Britain and after the Second World War he performed humanitarian work for the American Friends Service Committee in Poland, alongside Paul Zavitz, Jane's first husband. Also while in

Poland, Brock developed a keen interest in the histories of Poland and pacifism, the two areas of research that would dominate his professional career. Obviously, Peter Brock's personal and professional life reflected the pacifism in practice exemplified by Ed Abbott and Francis Starr in the Friends Ambulance Unit as well as by the Sharon Temple itself, a monument to the historical roots of pacifism in Canada.

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