

Memorial Minute for Kingdon Swayne

Kingdon Swayne was the most broadly influential member of Newtown Friends Meeting in the late twentieth century. By his distinguished appearance alone, he drew attention. When he spoke, he commanded respect; his range and depth of knowledge were impressive. When he wrote, he conveyed scholarship, understanding and insight. When he sang, he moved and inspired. And he was our friend; his manner was gentle, kind and generous.

Perhaps integrity is the Quaker testimony that Kingdon modeled best. His identity was infused with Quaker values and aspirations that were sometimes difficult to reconcile with changing times and circumstances. His impressive capacity for discernment provided the basis for decisions and actions that were consistent with, sustainable and integrated in his unique personality and path in life. He was raised on the George School campus, the son of teachers, and attended Newtown Meeting from his youth. He served in the U.S. Army for four years during World War II, rising to the rank of captain and earning a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. Until his retirement in 1966, he continued to serve his country as a State Department Foreign Service diplomat in England, China, Canada, Japan and Burma. Kingdon's success in his career reflected his love of problem solving, his peacemaking skills and his dedication to build a just and peaceful world.

Returning to Newtown as a professor of political science at Bucks County Community College, he served as Mayor of Newtown, clerk of Newtown Friends Meeting, and clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He was a member of the Bucks County Choral Society and served as board member of the American Friends Service Committee and as a member and clerk of the George School Committee. His own history and knowledge of George School made it fitting for him to serve as the school's archivist and historian and to author the centennial history, *George School, The History of a Quaker Community*. He also wrote histories of Newtown Friends School and Friends Home and Village, and he actively participated in the 1997 revision of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Faith & Practice*.

Kingdon's 1985 Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Stewardship of Wealth*, presented a unique worldly perspective on the moral and ethical responsibilities attending personal wealth. This was a manifesto of personal discernment that stood behind his generous gifts to Newtown Meeting, George School and Newtown Friends School over many years. Many building projects and initiatives at all three institutions were enabled by Kingdon's major gifts. He perceived and supported the needs of the Newtown Meeting community. Although he personally did not think the recent renovation of the meetinghouse was necessary, he generously contributed to the project. In memory of his parents, he established the Norman and Amelia Swayne Preceptorship which serves as a model for faculty chairs at George School. In memory of his mother, Amelia Swayne,

the first head of Newtown Friends School, Kingdon sponsored building the Swayne Library and Media Center at Newtown Friends School. At the same time, Kingdon chose to live in simple circumstances, donating his own small home to the Friends Home in Newtown and spending most of his later years there in an apartment. His personal choice of simplicity while affording enduring improvements for the communities he cared about serve as witness to and a rare example of faithfulness to Quaker testimonies.

A man who lived much of his life as a diplomat in foreign cultures, Kingdon had a world view anchored in Quaker upbringing and suffused with diversity. It was a memorable adult first day school when he shared his spiritual journey. He labeled himself a post-Christian agnostic, though he later rejected the label, agnostic, calling himself non-theistic. How he arrived at that was the subject of long and labored discernment for a man who modeled what it is to be a Quaker.

Kingdon Swayne died on April 22, 2009, in Yardley, Pennsylvania and is buried in the burial grounds at Newtown Friends Meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Martin and Lisa Ogletree