

Memorial Minute
Ella R. Otto – February 16, 1911 – April 3, 2002

Ella Otto, with her husband, George and children transferred from Middletown Meeting to Newtown Meeting in March of 1946, and quickly became active in Meeting affairs. Ella taught in First Day School, and at various times served on Religious Education and Worship and Ministry Committees, as well as Overseers. Notably, she represented Newtown on committees of Bucks Quarterly Meeting (Friends Home, Camp Onas, Chandler Hall); Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Social Order, Neighborhood Guild); and Friends General Conference. One of Ella's notable traits was to greet newcomers to Meeting, and to invite them to Sunday dinner.

In 1947 the Ottos were among those who after a long series of monthly meeting sessions convinced Newtown Meeting to establish Newtown Friends School, and then raised the funds to construct it. The Ella and George Otto Library was in place when the School opened, and for the initial years Ella did daily volunteer service as librarian. A former member and graduate of the School, now 60 years old and living in the Far West, has written that the three women who had the most influence in his youth were his mother, his godmother, and librarian Ella Otto. Ella and George moved to Pennswood Village in 1980, two weeks after it opened, having been active founders. After George's death in 1996, when her own failing health made it difficult to come to Court Street, she sat faithfully every First Day at the head of the "wheelchair" Meeting, founded for the benefit of those Pennswood residents who found it physically difficult to go to Meeting elsewhere. Her vocal ministry there was greatly appreciated, and continued until two weeks before her death.

My earliest memory of Ella was at the NFS "end of school" picnic when she was perhaps in her early forties. Don and I were there as a way of introducing him as the new Eighth Grade teacher of the expanding school. She was at the far end of the field, leading a long line of small children playing "Follow the Leader" where they walked, skipped or ran after her and imitated her comic actions. I was impressed and amused and asked the name of the adult leader. "Why that's Ella Otto." I remember thinking, "She must be a nice lady." And I was right. She was always personally interested in each of us, all of us, what we were doing, what we were reading. She also enjoyed concerts and took occasional art classes with successful results. She was a loving, gentle and very able woman who was usually seriously and thoughtfully involved in so many Quaker interests and projects. It was always comforting to know that she was around somewhere.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Laurence Cushmore
 Mildred B. Sparks