

J. Harold Passmore  
1916 - 1983

Newtown Meeting minutes with sorrow the death of J. Harold Passmore on December 9, 1983.

Harold's lifelong commitment was to education, as teacher and administrator. He once said that he moved into the business part of education after concluding that he would always be a mediocre teacher. This remark tells us two things about Harold: he was modest and self-effacing to a fault, and he was determined to be the best the best that he could be.

Americans admire people who have good business sense; we also admire people whose lives are guided by a Spirit beyond self. We tend to assume that those two qualities don't coexist. So the person who possesses both in full measure is especially treasured. Harold was such a person. Those of us who have shared in Quaker business decisions with him may sometimes have leaned on him too heavily, out of respect for his ability to think clearly in a business mode and a spiritual mode simultaneously.

And Harold was not the Committee member who thought his duty was done when the meeting was over. He could always be relied on to help with the preparation and follow-up, whether in a leadership role or in carrying out some dull, routine task that others would shun.

Harold was business manager of George School for many years, and was active in the affairs of Newtown Friends School, Newtown Meeting, Pennswood Village, and of several important regional and national groupings of Quakers, but his most notable achievement was the creation, literally from the ground up, of Pennswood Village. It has emerged as an institution that reflects, perhaps more than anyone else, Harold Passmore the man. It is a caring community, employing the best current thinking about the special needs of the aging, and resting on a firm foundation of prudent, thoughtful management.

As Pennswood grew, its executive director grew with it. He found in his sixties two unsuspected talents that contributed greatly to his leadership of a group of several hundred strangers coming together looking for community. He learned to be at ease before a large audience, and he learned the uses of humor in cementing human relations. His little jokes with residents helped make a strange place seem familiar. Many of them have already become Pennswood folklore.

Harold's last weeks were yet another time of growth. He faced with great clarity the reality of his final illness, devoting what energy remained to him to helping family, friends, and hospital staff cope with the inevitable. In this he was sustained by a faith that he expressed in a kind of epitaph for himself two days before his death. He said, "I know who I am, I know where I am, and I know where I am going."

Kingdon W. Swayne