

MORRIS KEMP
1903 --1989

Morris Kemp, a birthright Friend and a member of the Friends Meeting of Washington for forty years, died quietly on the thirty-first day of Twelfth Month, 1989, in the Bethesda Retirement and Nursing Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He had known death was imminent and observed it without fuss, fear, or self-pity, the way he also had lived. The last of his friends to see him was told, three days before death came, "I think my next stop will be heaven." He was 86 years old. A memorial service was held at Friends Meeting of Washington on the twenty-seventh day of First Month, 1990.

Morris Kemp never married. He is survived by an elderly sister-in-law in California, some distant cousins he never knew well, and his friends. Morris's friends and sister-in-law were his only "family" for the last thirty-four years of his life, since the death of a beloved older brother, Ellwood Kemp, Jr., in Los Angeles in 1955.

The few companions who remain from earlier years remember Morris Kemp with great warmth and fondness, and Morris attracted new friends right up to the end of his days. He retained a capacity for zestful living, even in the confinement of a two-room suite in a retirement home, and he shared his enthusiasms eagerly. Among them were German beer, German food, Thomas Mann's novels, and --his favorite source of inspiration --Goethe's Faust, which he had reread many times and from which he could quote at length in the original German. As a trained historian who had studied in Hamburg, Berlin, Paris, New York City, and at Harvard, who had obtained a master's degree in history from Columbia University (along with a library science degree) and a doctorate in jurisprudence from New York University, Morris Kemp never lost his keen interest in the affairs of the world. Reading the New York Times from cover to cover remained a daily ritual until the very end.

Unselfconsciously, he inspired nursing home staff and visitors alike with the vitality of spirit emanating from his six-foot, weakened, nearly skeletal frame that served as vehicle for that spirit. It is Morris's gift of spontaneous kindness, however, -- again with utter lack of self-consciousness --that many who knew him remember most warmly. This kindness expressed itself in a remarkable capacity for sensitive listening and tactful support toward anyone in need of solace and encouragement; whether stranger or friend did not matter, the need alone was enough to evoke his generous but never burdening concern.

Morris Kemp was not well known to members of the Friends Meeting of Washington -- to our loss, for he was, and is, a remarkable individual. In addition to his personal achievements, his Quaker roots can be traced back to approximately 1712, when the first of his Quaker ancestors to emigrate to the American colonies arrived from Ireland. Through this ancestor, he is distantly related to our Meeting member Sara Hadley -- their great-great-grandfathers were brothers. Morris's paternal grandparents were both birthright Friends, Betsy Morris and Joshua Kemp, Jr.

Betsy Morris' parents helped establish a new Quaker settlement in Indiana in the 1830s, emigrating there from North Carolina in distress over slavery. Joshua Kemp traced the same path some years later and married Betsy Morris. In 1845, Betsy Morris and Joshua Kemp founded the Bloomingdale Academy, one of the best-known Friends' boarding schools on what was then the western frontier. This long history is meticulously recorded --apparently in a grandmother's clear penmanship --on two fragile sheets of paper obviously treasured by Morris. They came to light after Morris' death, carefully preserved among his very few personal possessions.

Morris Kemp himself is the second son of Henrietta Jarcks, a German immigrant who was not a Quaker, and Ellwood Kemp, a birthright Friend who was a professor of education in the University of Indiana Yearly Meeting. Morris came to New York City with his mother as a boy of thirteen. He transferred his childhood membership in Coloma Monthly Meeting to 15th Street Meeting in New York City in 1936, when he was thirty-three. He transferred his meeting membership again in 1949, from 15th Street Meeting to Friends Meeting of Washington, after he had been working at the State Department for about six years as a archivist specializing in secret documents relating to World War II and its aftermath. Morris achieved brief fame in 1944 with research on the Atlantic Charter that revealed no such document ever existed. Before coming to the State Department, he had been chief librarian of the University of Kansas City.

Through one of his closest friends in Washington, a State Department colleague who attended St. John's Episcopal Church on Lafayette Square, Morris became involved with St John's, too, worshiping alternately there and at Friends Meeting of Washington. In 1951, two years after becoming a member of Friends Meeting of Washington, he also became a communicant at St. John's. Both relationships continued, side by side, for the rest of his life. This may help to explain the rather tenuous communication that existed between Morris and the Friends Meeting of Washington, but it is not the sole explanation. Morris loved Friends ways and Friends' worship. He expressed Friends' values in his life consciously and, as will be seen, also courageously when occasion required. But he was a complex, modest, and very private man. He accepted friendship and assistance gratefully when it was offered, and he offered it gladly to others; but he ventured few requests for either.

He involved himself very little in the organizational aspect of either of his faith communities. Other than attendance at worship, his chief relationship was through individual friendships. As State Department Liaison to the Library of Congress in the early 1950s, Morris participated with much pleasure in an informal group of colleagues at the Library, including Joan Oehser's mother, who ate together frequently and called themselves "The Supper Club." In later years, Morris frequented the Senior Center in Quaker House, where he delighted in animated conversations in German with Erik Menke and Clayton Loughran.

For all of his enjoyment of companionship and his interest in other people, however, Morris remained something of a mystery even to his friends. It was not his custom to talk about himself or to burden others with his problems. When a McCarthy Era injustice ended his State Department career in 1953, he quietly fought the Civil Service Commission for three years to clear his

reputation of the suspicion of "disloyalty" and subversion" because he had signed a petition in 1941 protesting the unconstitutional behavior of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Members of the Meeting noticed that his employment between 1953 and 1956 consisted of sporadic odd jobs in the nature of librarianship or administration for this and that private organization. The Meeting was aware also of his limited financial circumstances in that period, offering assistance one year to attend Friends General Conference, an event Morris Kemp looked forward to eagerly each year and would have regretted missing. But if anyone in the Friends Meeting knew the reason for Morris Kemp's circumstances, there is no evidence of this today.

It appears, rather, that only when his solitary battle with McCarthyism had been won and he was once again in federal employment did he mention his personal crisis to anyone in the Meeting. The allusion came as a single sentence in his glad reply to a friendly note from Meeting office staff trying to update membership records. Morris was happy to have been traced to Arizona, where he was now chief librarian on an Army weaponry proving ground, a situation he found quite uncongenial. It was a situation he soon left.

When his search then for an academic post failed to reopen doors to the academic librarianship he had abandoned in 1943 to serve in the State Department, Morris returned to Washington in 1959, retired from federal service, and remained professionally active for two more decades, until nearly 80 years of age, as an independent scholar and translator. He lived in utmost material simplicity throughout that time, although, thanks in goodly measure to his brother's bequest, he was no longer a poor man.

Morris recalled vividly and fondly four boyhood years spent with relatives of his mother, Henrietta Jarcks Kemp, in Hamburg, just before and during the first three years of World War I. Henrietta Kemp, apparently separated from Morris' father (with whom Morris' older brother remained), brought her thirteen-year-old son back to the United States when this country, too, entered the war against Germany and Austria. They settled in New York City where Morris attended high school and then Columbia University. Morris remained in touch with his Hamburg relatives, at least until the Second World War. He enjoyed a reunion with them when he returned to Germany in 1925 in the first group of American university students to be offered a government exchange scholarship by the Weimar government.

Morris' student years at Columbia provided the happiest memories of his long, active life. He arranged for his considerable estate to go to Columbia University as the Ellwood Wadsworth and Morris Kemp Scholarship Fund for worthy scholars at the College and Law School of the university. His sole piece of furniture at the time of death was a chair decorated with the Columbia University seal.

Morris Kemp's life-long passion for seeking truth never yielded, nor his passion to protect this freedom for others, although his public expression of these commitments tended to be in the subdued scholarly fashion of understated commentary on carefully selected topics. A small clipping from the Washington Post dated July 29, 1986, was found among the few possessions he cared about enough to keep. It is his own letter to the editor of the Post. In it he notes first that Hans Morgenthau had been a colleague at the University of Kansas City and then says merely, "I would like to draw attention to a statement he made that although written in 1974, is still pertinent today." Morris concluded his terse letter of protest by citing these words of Hans Morgenthau:

"With unfailing consistency, we have since the end of the Second World War intervened on behalf of conservative and fascist repression against revolution and radical reform. In an age when societies are in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary stage, we have become the foremost counterrevolutionary status quo power on earth."

To the end, Morris Kemp kept faith with the spirit of truth-seeking and with the duty to speak truth to power. He was a worthy Friend.