

On Writing a Memorial Minute Friends Meeting of Washington

Many Friends feel hesitant or inadequate when the Meeting asks them to take responsibility preparing a memorial minute for a Friend who has died. Memorial minutes are important: they become part of the permanent records of the Meeting and usually are sent to survivors and to organizations with which the deceased person had important ties. Yet they should not be a cause for discomfort — particularly if such feelings lead the writer to delay in the timely preparation of the Minute. This memorandum and the sample memorial minutes attached are to help give guidance on the procedure that is followed in preparing memorial minutes at Friends Meeting of Washington and to suggest what makes a "good" memorial minute. But suggestions should never substitute for our own good judgement. You were asked by the Monthly Meeting because you knew or had some special relationship with the Friend; let his or her spirit shine through your words in your own way!

Procedure:

Usually the Clerk will call and ask if you would be willing to be asked to prepare a Memorial Minute. At the next Monthly Meeting, your name will be proposed and approved. The Meeting Office will then send you a written reminder of the task.

Ordinarily, you should prepare the minute for consideration by a Monthly Meeting held no later than one or two months after you have been asked. Please let the Clerk know if there will be a delay that prevents adhering to this schedule. Memorial minutes long delayed no longer have the freshness they should ideally possess and, when sent to survivors, may rekindle painful memories rather than providing comfort.

When you have prepared the minute, telephone the Meeting office - (202)483-3310 - that the minute is ready to be handled at the next regularly scheduled Meeting for Business.

Plan to be at the Business Meeting to read the minute. Your minute should be typed if at all possible. At the bottom of the minute, note "prepared by _____" and the date of the Monthly Meeting. Once the Meeting has approved the minute, hand the copy to the Recording Clerk; it will be retyped onto permanent record paper by the Meeting Office.

Content

The Meeting office can often supply you with considerable useful information about a deceased Meeting member. You may want to supplement your own memories by talking to others who were close associates or friends of the deceased.

Please resist the temptation to write a biography of the Friend: you are writing a celebration of a life and a relationship to the Meeting and to the world, not an obituary! Revealing anecdotes or illuminating reminiscences capture a person's spirit far more clearly than a recitation of facts of birth place, dates of marriage, and places of residence. Try to think what personal or spiritual characteristics of a person made him or her special.

Do not feel that a memorial minute need be long: some of the best are little more than half-a-page.

Thank you for undertaking this duty of love. Most Friends find, once the task is completed, that the rewards of the work outweigh any temporary feeling of burden they may have felt when asked.

Prepared by Grant P. Thompson
December, 1983

(SAMPLE MINUTE)

Memorial Minute
for
Katharine Russell Hayes Durand
1902-1997

Katharine Russell Hayes Durand, beloved member of the FMW community for over twenty-five years, and a mainstay of the 9:00 Meeting, died at the age of 95 in Oregon on October 31, 1997. She had moved there in 1993 to live with her daughters after living in Washington for over forty years. A lifelong Friend and birthright member of Swarthmore Meeting, where her father Russell Hayes was Swarthmore College Librarian, faculty member and published poet, she remained a sojourner at FMW until 1981 when she transferred her membership.

Everyone has a favorite memory or anecdote about Katharine (Kithe as she was known to some, Kate to her Oregon friends). Whether sliding down bannisters, riding behind our clerk on his motorcycle, or performing a striptease at her 90th birthday party in Quaker House Living Room (to show off a tee shirt that read, "Over what hill? Where? I never saw a hill!") she was always unique, original, witty, erudite, spiritual! She was quoted in an Oregon newspaper as saying that "the best part of my life began in my late 80's. I feel as though I know what it is all about although I can't really pinpoint what 'it' is. I guess I just happen to love adventure."

In her early life she graduated from Radcliffe College in 1923 after transferring from Swarthmore because she felt the need to experience the challenge of a new environment having grown up on the Swarthmore campus. She married her Harvard beau, and later professor, Dana B. Durand, who joined OSS during World War II. They served in Berlin during the very crucial Airlift years, and later he headed the Soviet Desk at CIA. Besides raising three children, Katharine was caregiver for elderly relatives, was an avid gardener and retained a keen interest in politics, art, literature, music and languages. Her letters are masterpieces of wit and intellect. Her zest for adventure kept her surrounded by young people who found her a lively companion for any escapade (such as collecting elephant manure for her garden at 5 a.m. when the circus was in town!)

Katharine served on the Library Committee at FMW, both as clerk and librarian, spending every Wednesday afternoon for several years at the Meetinghouse working on keeping the collection and records up to date. She rode the bus to and from her home in Wesley Heights, and became a favorite ex-officio member of the staff.

She will be missed by all of us to whom she brought blessings of Light and laughter. A memorial service will be held next summer in Embreeville, Pennsylvania at Romansville Meeting in Chester County, where she spent her summers growing up and went in later years whenever she could.

Prepared by Molly Tully, 2/98