

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

September 2026



Children and young people need love and stability. Are we doing all we can to uphold and sustain parents and others who carry the responsibility for providing this care?

Advices and Queries #24

Upcoming Events and Announcements

The next Meeting for Worship for Business will be held in person at the Meeting House on Sunday, September 13 at 12:30 p.m. The following one will be on Sunday, October 4. You can also join us online on our regular Meeting Zoom link.

Save the Date! There will be a potluck dinner on Friday, September 25 on the topic "Considering Reparation".

Pelham Half Yearly Meeting is leading the planning for a possible Regional Ontario Gathering at Camp NeeKauNis in 2027. Friends from anywhere in Canada are invited to this gathering of community building, spiritual nurture, and intergenerational fun in the renewing atmosphere of camp. There will not be business sessions. The organizing committee is looking for volunteers to help decide on timing, plan both the adult and youth program, other activities, meals and to help do registration and administration. It is hoped that the plans will be finalized in the fall of 2026 and registration materials be prepared for March 2027 release. Participation in the planning is requested from all the Central Ontario Monthly Meetings. Meeting representatives and individuals are welcomed. If you would like to be part of the planning process and can participate in monthly Zoom evening meetings, please contact Fran McQuail at fmcquail@gmail.com.



Hope Not Hate Rally

by Susan Wortman



This rally was organized by a number of local organizations as part of the response to the anti-immigration and white supremacist organization Dominion Society, that had proposed to hold its first conference in Hamilton on that day. It took place outside Hamilton City Hall on Saturday, August 29. The Hamilton Anti-Racism Resource Centre, Mayor Andrea Horwarth, and even the Hamilton police urged venues to not rent space to this group that promotes hate and division.

This concerted effort was successful. The group was denied space at two locations in Hamilton, and in Niagara Falls communities were also warned to be wary of this organization. Ultimately, they did hold their conference in Burlington. It was protested by a smaller group of activists at that site.

The rally was held under sunny skies, with up-beat music, some speeches, and lots of creative signs. Many community groups had information tables and there was plenty of time for discussions with old and new friends.



first photo: Steve and Gordie Bunn and Susan Wortman

second photo: Chidera Ikewibe and Susan Wortman.

Book Review: *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead*

by Jane Wright

Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Alchemy by Knopf Canada, 2025)

This is a remarkable book. The author has taken on the difficult task of describing an Indigenous experience of the world. She uses water, ‘Nibi,’ as a way to understand the Nishnaabeg because water is “a fugitive that erodes and escapes containment.” Indigenous experience is more like water because water is always in motion, from human perspiration to water vapour to rain to groundwater to plant transpiration. We all share water and cannot live without it. Non-Indigenous settlers on the other hand value land and boundaries, permanence and economic gain. Simpson writes that the European linear concept of past, present and future facilitates capitalism. In contrast, Nishnaabeg time is circular, determined by one’s location on the planet and the rotation of the earth around the sun. An installation by Indigenous artist Rebecca Belmore exhibits the way even the sound of water cuts through “the noise of colonialism.”

Ecologists describe eastern Ontario where Simpson grew up as the oak savanna and mixed hardwood area between the Great Lakes-St Lawrence Lowlands and the boreal forest. Simpson rejects ecological boundaries and instead describes her homeland as a place ripe with “overlapping zones of abundance.” Areas of transition like this, like shoreline and marshes also, are powerful sites of gathering, learning, medicine, harvest, and regeneration. These lands “resist systems that seek discipline and control.” In contrast, settler-made canals and locks, private cottages, farms, and industrial sites divide up, limit, and control the land. There are unseen consequences. For example, eels from the faraway Sargasso Sea once travelled up the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario’s rivers and streams. Now they are gone.

In *Theory of Water*, the writer uses origin stories and works by artists and poets to tell of the Indigenous world of relationships. Wampun strings show

networks and communications among “plants, animals, birds, fish, insects, and waterways and landforms.” Indigenous nations are connections among peoples. They are networks not political states as we know them. “Indigenous maps are narratives of relationality and interconnection, not a set of fixed positions in space.” Many Indigenous consider themselves stateless. They do not vote and travel without passports.

Indigenous practices are a system of mutual care, of gift-giving and offerings which respect the lives and autonomy of animals and all nature. Simpson describes this as a “Nishnaabeg coalition, working with plant life, animal life and all the other planetary forces that existed before humans.” This is very different from resource management.

We are warned against taking Indigenous concepts out of context and I am working hard not to do this as I write about this challenging book. Simpson observes that as Indigenous people have become more political, the Canadian state has hijacked native knowledge to bolster its own agenda. “Indigenous understandings of the world are processed, depoliticized, sanitized, and colonized into a form that is nearly unrecognizable to the Knowledge Holders who shared it in the first place.”

Theory of Water has been described as a meditation on water, and what it means to live in communion with the earth. It is also an indictment of settler thinking. Simpson writes, “By 1833 in Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg ogamig, the place where we all live and work together, my ancestors were acutely aware that white people were not interested in sharing, a rubric of care or the welfare of any living thing other than themselves.” She reminds us also of the experience of children “stolen by the state,” “subjected to unspeakable violence, including in some cases torture, solitary confinement, starvation and sexual abuse.” She writes, “Colonialism is about severing relationships — to each other, to our lands, to hope and to our futures.” In contrast, Nibi connects us to all living things. It is both inside us and global. Nibi is resilient, transformative, and shows what is possible.

Theory of Water was awarded the Hilary Weston Writers’ Trust Prize for Non-fiction in 2025.

Book Review: *Apeirogon*

by Glenna Janzen

Apierogon by Colum McCann (Random House, 2020)

When I took *Apeirogon* out of the library, I immediately looked up the meaning of the word, as I'd never heard it before. "APEIROGON: geometry, an apeirogon infinite polygon is a polygon with an infinite number of sides." How can this be, I thought? And then I started reading the book... The Israel-Palestine *question* isn't cut and dried or black and white; it is more like the apeirogon of the book's title: so many opinions, so many experiences, so many views.

What I liked about this book is that it is experiential: it follows the real lives of two men: a Palestinian, Bassam Aramin, and an Israeli, Rami Elhanan: "An Israeli, against the occupation. A Palestinian, studying the Holocaust." The two men are grieving their daughters: Smadar, turned into "a scattered human jigsaw" at the age of 13 by a suicide bomber, and Abir, assassinated aged 10 by a trigger-happy member of the Israeli army. Both fathers join a group of fellow-bereaved parents who unite in their sorrow to press for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. At the same time, however, the book is not a documentary; it is a "hybrid novel", or perhaps creative non-fiction.

Apeirogon is difficult to read, saddening and maddening, and uplifting. Look for it in the Hamilton Public Library system.



Dolly Parton from a Quaker Perspective

by Steve Bunn

The world-wide outpouring of tribute to Dolly Parton following her recent death could be seen as a simple by-product of that singer's celebrity status. It is notable however that much of the praise directed at Parton – a ten-time Grammy winner – had very little to do with her musical career. Instead, Parton is being remembered for words and actions inspired by her belief about “that little God-light” that exists within all of us – a belief that would be familiar to every Quaker.

However, the parallels between Dolly-ism and Quakerism extend beyond theology and are even more apparent when one considers how Parton's faith manifested itself in practice. In 2023 for instance, Paramore's Hayley Williamson lauded Parton for all “the years that you've been working really hard to stand by your convictions...(but) you've also found a way to make people feel welcome (and) I think that that does more in the way of potentially inviting change.” In terms of reflecting on Parton's de facto Quakerism therefore, her response to these observations was particularly revealing:

“There is a God piece in all of us, and I try to find that in everybody – even the worst people, there's something good in there. Maybe they didn't get a chance to be it. I understand that people that hate so much usually are the people that have never been loved enough.”

Furthering the Quaker parallel, Parton then made a point of noting the distinction between “answering that of God in everyone” and arbitrary relativity. This was a distinction that Parton lived and embraced, as was apparent in her unequivocal stands against racism and misogyny, her vocal advocacy for the rights of 2S&LGBTQQIA+ persons, and her lyrical admonition that “greedy politicians, present and past, wouldn't know the truth if it bit 'em in the ass.” As she told Williamson:

“In my own self, I just try to love people. I try to find the God light in everybody, and I try to let mine shine extra hard...But...I can tell you where to put it if I don't like where you got it. That's when I say I

often use my temper, but I seldom lose it...there's never an excuse to be rude, but sometimes there's a reason.”

In a time of deep political and ideological polarization, Dolly Parton fought injustice by subscribing to the Quaker ethos of “refusing to be enemies” even with the people she disagreed with most. In doing so, her words and actions transcended the rhetorical silos and echo chambers that have fragmented our world. One tribute to Dolly Parton captured this sentiment perfectly when it observed how she is currently being mourned by “polyamorous vegan baristas” and “millions of tattooed, urban progressive cyclists,” but also by your “conservative, open-carry uncles who post conspiracy memes on Facebook.”

Dolly Parton’s life was a clinic on how to actually go about “answering that of God in everyone,” and her legacy stands as a testament that there is a better – and more effective – way for human beings to conduct themselves. Born into Pentecostalism and raised in Appalachian culture, Dolly Parton’s words and actions nevertheless became almost indistinguishable from Quaker universalist fellowship, and those words and actions continue to make the world a much better place.



I Feel Like a Bird with a Broken Wing

by Sheldon Clark

I feel like a bird with a broken wing.
I've pecked, pecked, pecked, pecked, and pecked.
Grain without flight tastes no longer.
Peck, peck, peck, sharpens eyes, nostrils, sounds.
Still, a bird with a broken wing, must need be careful.

Swallows, especially broken-winged ones, and cats don't mix.
I peck, peck, peck, stay clean. Dust baths are fun.
Hirundo rustica flies from barn eaves to shallow smudge pools after rain.
They splash. They sing. They shimmy-shake. They take to wing.
The colourful prism produced is as beautiful as soaring into blue space.

Hop to it, I say, but jumping, even from curb height, is dangerous.
Hop to it to the nearby soft green grass for shade and a few bugs.
I dream of swooping on the air ways, flock-circling as one, again.
If only, I can hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, to those wayside bushes. No cats.
If only, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, when hope is fulfilled.

I am grateful for little, like a seed, a bug, water, baths, barns, friends.
I say a prayer for my broken wing. I see clearly now.
I welcome our Old Friend.
I chirp, chirrup, ever so ... 'til ... Silence.
I yield to the gentle twinkles above.
Night falls on all.

A Visit to the Pales: A Holy Place of Peace

by Wayne Irwin

In 2007, my late wife, Flora, and I took the opportunity to visit The Pales Quaker Meeting House in the beautiful hills of Radnorshire, Wales. It was such a peaceful and spiritually memorable experience.



Located atop a rise of land with clear views of anyone approaching from any direction, friend or threat, it is one of the earliest meeting houses in continuous use in Wales. Friends first gathered on that hilltop during the turbulent years following the visits of George Fox in

the 1650s, at a time when Quakers faced persecution for worshipping outside the established church. My own Great (x6) Grandfather, Griffith Owen, survived five years there in a stinking dungeon, before being released to come out to Pennsylvania.

In Radnorshire, Friends first met for worship in homes before establishing a burial ground in 1673. The name itself, “The Pales,” arose from an old word meaning ‘an enclosed space,’ referring originally to that fenced burial ground. The present meeting house was built in the early eighteenth century as a sanctuary for the living, supporting a faith that had endured and outlasted the religious tribulations of the time.

The padded chairs and benches, and the worn wooden floor memorialize the generations who have



gathered there, to listen together for the enlightening inner Word. Every bit as inspiring as the interior of the building, is the exterior, with its grand vistas, its fulsome garden, and its carefully placed benches, inviting ongoing quietude on any day, by any visitor.



To this day, The Pales continues to host worship, and retreats, and to welcome Friends from around the world. Sitting there amidst

the gentle hum of nature, Flora and I felt a grace-filled oneness across the generations of that sacred community.



About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. They are due by the Friday before Business Meeting. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. Please limit submissions to a maximum of 750 words. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Siân Reid, daywitch@gmail.com.

We acknowledge the land upon which Hamilton Friends Meeting House is located as the shared traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg, protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt covenant. This historic peace agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibwe, and allied nations represents a commitment to share and protect the land, water, plants, and animals, with respect. It is the privilege of Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to share in the tradition of stewardship of this land, which has been the environment of human beings in this territory for thousands of years. We honour the original Peoples of this land and express a commitment to and gratitude for the opportunity to work together toward restorative justice and reconciliation.