Growing Up in Quaker Neighborhood

By Ida Jane Bollinger (née Hicks), 1992

Transcribed by Kathryn Cooper (Ida Jane Hicks' great-granddaughter)

Note: Some errors in spelling and grammar have been edited for clarity. A scan of the original, unedited text can be found at the end.

At age 9 in 1918, my parents and I moved into a strictly Quaker community 20 miles north of Indianapolis, Ind. The community was predominantly settled by the Tomlinson family. Other prominent names were Barker, Chance, Carey, Coffin, and Moon. The church was known as Chester on the West side of U.S Road 31 about 2 mile north of Westfield. There was a cemetery out back of the Church where many of my ancestors were buried. In the beginning of settling the community, the first church also doubled as a school. By today's standards, it was very primitive, but children did learn the basics—reading, writing, English, and arithmetic—after all the crops had been harvested in the fall. Usually, school only was five months of the year.

The Tomlinson's had a sawmill and there was lots of timber, so a new church was built in the late 1800s/early 1900s, and when electricity came into the neighborhood around 1910, there were six drop cord lights in the sanctuary and one drop cord light installed in the pulpit. The church was one rectangular room with two potbellied stoves for heat in winter. All Sunday School classes were held in this room all at the same time. They were not noisy either. The men and boys were seated on the right-hand side of the center aisle and women and girls on the left-hand side. The older Quaker women wore bonnets of grey and black and long-skirted black or grey dresses with many petticoats. The men wore grey and black suits and coats with wide brimmed black hats. The church had a pump organ which earlier had been a bone of contention by some of the members. An organ in the church was a work of the Devil. At first some of the members left the church, but later returned. In the winter, those potbellied stoves fueled with wood were red hot

most of the time trying to take the chill off that big room. In zero weather, everyone wore their wraps and boots. If you got too comfortable, you might drop off to sleep. In summer, the air conditioning was open windows and doors with no screens.

We had a little rat terrier dog who was my brother's constant companion and did not want to miss anything. After we had gone to church one Sunday and were all settled into quiet worship, that dog snuck in the front door and proceeded to crawl in under the potbellied stove on the women's side of the church and laid down very quietly and went to sleep. All went well until someone moved and made a noise. The dog awakened with several loud yaps and frightened the older ladies sitting close by. Naturally, we young people giggled and almost were churched. My brother was instructed to shut up his dog before coming to church again.

My brother was always immaculate in body and dress with every hair in place. There was another boy there, same age but larger and always on the grimy and disheveled side, who insisted on picking on my brother. My brother did not want to fight and especially with the only good clothes he owned on. He kept trying to sidetrack the other boy. Finally, one Sunday my brother said, "I've had enough!" and my uncle, Robert Tomlinson, gave his consent for my brother to pitch into the other boy. My brother knocked him down, then crawled on top and pounded the daylights out of him until he was crying for help. My uncle stood back and smiled. When my brother finally let him up, my uncle said to the boy, "Now, maybe thee will leave him alone," and he did. The older people spoke with Thee, Thine, Thou in place of modern-day pronouns.

There was always a protracted Meeting, or revival, every winter for one week. During one of those when I was twenty years old, I was converted, or now called "Born Again." I became a member of that Meeting later on. During that time, I taught Sunday School and was Sunday School Secretary. Our attendance usually ran about twenty-five to thirty-five per Sunday. When the youth began getting into high school and college and had a means of transportation, they began going into Westfield where there were more of their school chums at Westfield Friends Church. Some pulled away and attended the other predominant faith, the Methodist

Church in town. My parents said "No," so we were the last youth to leave. When we did, we went to Hortonville Friends Church, although I never joined there. My membership remained in Westfield Quarterly Meeting. After there were only five members attending both the Wednesday morning and Sunday morning services, it was decided to disband altogether, especially in the winter months. Some of the older members who could walked into Westfield Friends Meeting.

During the month of August, all work stopped and everyone who could get away went to Plainfield to the Western division of Yearly Meeting. Asher K. Tomlinson and Robert Tomlinson always were prominent in running business of Yearly Meeting. After Robert Tomlinson purchased his Ford touring car, he would drive down for daily sessions and we went with him, taking a basket lunch to spread out on the lawn in front of the building at noon. On the way, we had a flat tire, which was not unusual but had to be removed there and fixed, put back on, and pumped up with a hand pump. Then, we proceeded on to Meeting a little late, but so were several others.

When I was about fifteen, along with two other older girls, I was sent to Yearly Meeting to stay overnight in a home of some Friends. My parents did not want me to go. I was too young. I went. I did not get into trouble. I did behave, learned many things, and had fun doing it. There were older people in the Chester congregation who took it upon themselves to keep a close watch on me and my brother. If we did something not meeting their approval, the telephone was ringing by the time we walked in the door. Yes, we were punished for whatever the offense. Yes, the Quakers back then were very strict. It was a sin for a child to wear dresses above the knee. Mine all had very wide hems and were let out many times as I grew. Other sinful things were going to movies, any type of dancing, and the list went on and on. My brother and I mowed a very large lawn with a real-type push mower and received 35¢ for the two of us and we were instructed not to spend it on movies, candies, or gum, or anything foolish. We did not mow that lawn again.

The Chester Church always set aside a Sunday afternoon in June called Children's Day. All children large and small participated. Of course, the church had

to be cleaned from top to bottom. I was usually called on to help. The organ needed repair. One pedal was down and needed a new strap put in to hold it in place. It usually needed cleaning inside too. I think this is where the remark, "Poor as a church mouse," came from, because we always found a mouse nest among all the dust in the organ. While we had the organ all torn apart and were discussing how to fix the thing (I was only about eleven years old and had never seen false teeth) one of the older women leaned over the railing in front of church and when she opened, she lost her teeth. I thought the poor woman was falling apart and was frightened to pick her teeth up for her.

We had a rose bush in our own yard that was always in full bloom by Children's Day and Dad's rose bush was stripped of most of its beautiful blossoms to decorate the church. No money was available. Different kinds of tree branches and flowers intertwined along the front railing and bouquets were here and there. It seemed my uncle always had burdock plants that grew taller and more vigorously than anyone in the country. For one Children's Day program, Uncle Robert dug one big healthy plant, then wired it into a big wooden tub, then put dirt in and tamped it down. He hauled this to church. Uncle Robert was always quoting poetry and when he was called on for his contribution to the program, the tub with the burdock was brought out. He proceeded to start talking to the plant and, at the same time, trying to pull the plant out of the tub by the roots. "Oh, how I wish I had a copy of that poem." Of course, he finally gave up in disgust, which brought down the house in laughter. Quakers were serious, hard-working people, but were always finding something funny about which to laugh and sometimes maybe poke fun at one another. Next day, the person poking the fun was the butt of the next prank.

Most all toys were homemade and few. We made out fun and played many running games. Drop the Handkerchief, Red Light, Big Step-Little Step, Hide & Seek, and many others. Those games helped us develop our bodies and stretched our minds, always trying to find new places to hide and devious ways to avoid the leader trying to catch us.

When older, the work was hard. Yes, water had to be pumped by hand for all uses. While pumping water for fifteen cows and six horses, I watched the birds. The pumps were always out in the sun. Not only was water pumped for all the stock, but carried bucketful by bucketful into the house for drinking, cooking, etc. On Monday, laundry day, water had to be heated in the boiler on the stove then transferred to rock-a-bye the washer. More water was carried to the boiler to heat, and the stove was fired with wood to boil the clothes and whiten them. Then they were transferred into tub of clean bluing rinse water and wrung out by hand, then hung outside one wire lines in sunshine and fresh air to dry. Always my job was to keep the wood box filled, the water reservoir on the back of the stove filled, the water bucket full (fresh water), and the ashes cleaned out of stoves and carried outside to spread on the garden. In the evening, there were eggs to gather. Eggs were exchanged for staples like sugar etc. In spring, they gathered sugar water from the many maples and boiled it down for maple syrup. It took gallons and gallons of water or sap to make a gallon of syrup. Many people raised sorghum cane to make a different sap to boil down into a heavy thick syrup to use as sweetener and in cooking as well as on bread. We ate lots of corn bread. The better clean ears of corn were chosen to shell by hand and sent to the mill to be ground for meal. It was ground much coarser than meal today. We also ate lots of cornmeal mush.

Everyone raised animals for use as meat: chicken, ducks, geese, cows, hogs, sheep. Butchering was done after the weather turned cold in the fall and the first one to butcher an animal gave all the neighbors meat, then the next one to butcher did the same. Meat was salted down in big barrels or smoked out in a smoke house or canned for use in the summer when it was too hot to butcher large animals.

We raised all the vegetables used on the table. There were no green or fresh vegetables on our table after frost until spring garden time. We gathered wild greens in spring before garden time. Those were dandelions, lambs' quarter, pepper grass, narrow leaf dock, mustard, plantin, and many others. Oh, how good with vinegar dressing, fried potatoes, or a big pot of dry beans and corn bread! We had no cellar, basement, or cave, so my dad dug a shallow place, placed lots of straw in, then our

potatoes, turnips, and cabbage with lots of straw on tip, then covered it all with piles of dirt. When vegetables were needed during winter, Dad would go out and dig into the hill to replenish the household supply. Mother always planted lots of Missouri Wonder cornfield beans, so when they come on in summer, we used them green. What we did not use green was let dry for winter use. These were set in by heating stove to finish drying. After supper dishes were done, we shelled beans. Sometimes we stepped on beans in gunny sacks to help break the hard hulls. That always caused us to have to wait for a windy day to blow trash out of beans. We always saved the best of all crops for seed for next year's crop. In spring of the year, my dad made ragdolls to test his seed corn if he was doubtful of germination. Then, we all spent Saturdays shelling seed corn by hand for planting. Seed potatoes were selected, sprouted, and cut into pieces with three eyes for planting. Oats was the first crop planted in spring. Wheat was planted in the fall. We never knew there were soybeans back there. Crops were oats, wheat, corn, clover, and rotated from field to field, year after year. All crops were put in and tended with horse power. There was no big power machinery except one steam engine threshing machine in the neighborhood.

Quakers were called the plain people using the plain language. We never said Mr. or Mrs. It was always Aunt or Uncle first-named persons. Our clothing was all plain homemade. In the fall, my aunt bought two pieces of plaid gingham for my school dresses. I wore one one week and the other the next week. My Sunday or church dress was usually made from some handed-down clothing. My mother, having been a seamstress, always made my dresses with a few extra fussy touches line hand embroidery or hand crocheted edgings. Girls were always required to wear hats in summer. Each spring, these were brought out and refurbished with hat dye (black) then a new cloth flower and ribbon added for summer wear again. In winter, we wore knitted hoods and scarves. I never had a coat brought for me until I was a big girl. Mother always found a hand-me-down to make over for me. I never had a store-bought dress until I was in high school. How proud I was! I felt so rich. I worked saving every penny from the sale of a brood of buff orphington chickens to

buy my first wristwatch for $8.00. My next big purchase was my graduation from high school dresses. Mother and I spent a Saturday in Indianapolis shopping. My baccalaureate dress was navy blue with exquisite embroidery across the front of the lower waist and cost the total of $4.00. The material was georgette, and that price included a full-length navy slip. My commencement dress was white georgette with a full slip. The dress had a long waist with full-gathered skirt and a big wide Bertha collar edged with fine lace. The cost was $10.00—an exorbitant price, but I was the best-dressed girl in the class that night. After wearing that dress white for two seasons, it was dyed a beautiful green and worn many more seasons.

In 1933, I was married to the grandson of a Quaker minister. I never met her because she was deceased the year before. We were married by a Quaker minister in his home at West Newton, Ind. I had a new blue dress that cost $4.00, beige shoes that cost $2.00, and a beige hat that cost 98¢. And the knot stayed tied for forty-five years until the death of my spouse. We only bought a few items to go to housekeeping: springs & a mattress, a five-burner coal oil stove with an oven, a kitchen cabinet, a breakfast set (table + six chairs) unfinished, and a 9x12 rug. My husband only earned $10.00 a week. Our house rent was $10.00 a month. We found a house for $6.00 a month and moved because we thought $10.00 too high. We raised a garden everywhere we went and lived in town because my husband worked for the canning factory as a truck driver.

At that time, a 1 lb. loaf of bread cost .04¢, 1 lb. of butter, 1.5¢ or 4¢ per quarter, good or best cut beef steak was 25¢ per lb. Hamburger was 2 lbs. for 25¢. Brains were 3 lbs. for 25¢ or 10¢ per lb. Liver was 10¢ per lb. Stewing beef was 10¢ per lb. Beef roasts were 25¢ per lb. Pork was cheaper than beef. Pork chops were 15¢ per lb., sausage was 2 lbs. for 25 ¢ or 15¢ per lb. Navy beans or Great Northern beans (dry) were 2¢ per lb. or 10 lb. for 19¢. Eggs were 12-15¢ per dozen. Yard goods (prints) were 15¢ per yard. Muslin was 5¢ per yard, a spool of thread 250 yd. was 5¢. In 1935, I bought hand-made Philippian hand-embroidered baby dresses for 25¢ each. They are still good in '92, although yellowed with age.

I have continued to stay a Quaker and have moved my membership four times. I am thankful I was raised in a strict Quaker neighborhood. I am convinced it has been the backbone of my character and strict morals. It has been very hard for me to accept the looseness and slap-happy way of raising families today.

Growing Up in Quaker Neighborhood

At age 9 in 1918 my parents + I moved into a strictly Quaker Community 20 miles North of Indianapolis, Ind. The community was predominately settled by the Tomlinson family. Other prominent names were Barker, Chance, Carey, Coffin, + Moon, The Church was known as Chester on West side of U.S. Road 31 about 2 mile north of Westfield. There was a cemetry out back of the Church where many of my ancestors were buried. In the beginning of settling the community the first Church also doubled as a school. By todays standards was very primative. But children did learn the basics, reading, writing, English, arithmetic; later all the crops had been harvested in the fall. Usually school only was 5 mos of the year. The Tomlinson's had a saw mill and there was lots of timber so a new Church was built in late 1800's early 1900's and when electricity came into the neighborhood around 1910 there were 6 drop cord lights in sanctuary and 1 drop cord light over the Pulpit, installed. The Church was one rectangular room with 2 pot bellied stoves for heat in winter. All Sunday School classes were held in this room all at same time. Were not noisy either. The men + boys were seated on right hand side of center aisle and women and girls on left hand side. The older quakers women wore grey and black, long skirted dresses with many petticoats. Bonnets. The men wore grey and black suits and coats with wide brimmed Black hats. The church had a pump organ which earlier had been a bone of contention by some of the members. An organ in the Church was a work of the Devil. At first some of the members left the Church but later returned. In the winter those pot bellied stoves fueled with wood were red hot most of the time trying to take the chill off that big room. In zero weather everyone wore their wraps and boots. If you got to comfortable you might drop off to sleep. In summer

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