

Geneva Meeting and Geneva Quaker Center between 1920 and 1938

Extract from:

“Quaker international work in Europe since 1914 – Thèse présentée à l’Université de Genève pour l’obtention du grade de Docteur ès Sciences politiques”, Willis H. Hall (Etats-Unis d’Amérique ... étudiant de l’Institut universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales), Imprimeries Réunies de Chambéry (Savoie), 1938, p. 93-94.

(...) In addition to Germany and France Yearly Meetings, which are now autonomous bodies, there are two more groups, one in Geneva which has not been organized as a Monthly Meeting but which functions in most respects as a Monthly Meeting belonging to London Yearly Meeting¹¹⁴, and a small group which meets in the Vienna Center but which has not been organized as a Monthly Meeting.

The Geneva Meeting in contrast to all the others had no direct connection with the reconstruction or relief work. In June, 1920, a small group of individuals began holding meetings for worship in private homes and later in a room loaned for the purpose by the Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute¹¹⁶. This group continued to become more and more active until 1923 when it seems to have been one of the principal forces, together with the Quakers’ interest in the League of Nations, which induced the C.I.S. [Council for International Service] at the Council Meeting on May 2, 1923, to take the preliminary steps towards assisting this local group of Friends to lease a room at 5 Place de la Taconnerie with the expectation that it would be used for the Meeting and for a Quaker Center¹¹⁷. The A.F.S.C. [American Friends Service Committee], following the lead taken by the English Friends, on June 25, 1923, voted the necessary appropriations to enable it to share equally in the Geneva Center work¹¹⁸. Some months later additional rooms were taken which served as the headquarters of the Geneva Center until September, 1937¹¹⁹.

Only a few citizens of Geneva have ever joined the Society of Friends, yet that Meeting is one of the largest and most active to be found in any of the Centers. The League of Nations draws Friends and others in sympathy with Quakerism from many countries to Geneva, and consequently this Meeting has today the most international group and at the same time one that is kept keyed up and alert by the new life and the new challenges which are always coming to it¹²⁰. But in view of the knowledge that it is located in the city of Calvin, that a number of modern religious movements have caught the attention of many of the younger intellectuals, and also that the Meeting is largely composed of foreign intellectuals who are also predominantly English-speaking, would lead to the conclusion that there is little likelihood that either the masses or the intellectuals in Geneva will form a strong indigenous Society of Friends¹²¹.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Irene Pickard, Nov. 29, 1937, at the Geneva Center.

¹¹⁶ Jones, Ethel, “The Geneva Center”, on F.I.S. page, *Friend* (L), July, 1921, LXI : 424-425.

¹¹⁷ C.I.S. *Minutes*, May 2, 1923.

¹¹⁸ A.F.S.C. *Minutes*, June 25, 1923, p.9.

¹¹⁹ « Friends International Service – The Council », *Friend* (L), Oct. 19, 1923, LXIII : 821 ; Geneva Center *Report*, Sept.-Dec., 1937, p.1.

¹²⁰ Geneva Center *Reports*, 1925-1938.

¹²¹ Tritton, Frederick J., “A Quaker Revival in Europe”, *The Wayfarer*, Nov., 1934, XIII : 215.

Interview with Marie Butts, General Secretary of the International Bureau of Education and Clerk of the Members’ Meeting in Geneva Friends, Feb., 18, 1938 ; the writer’s own contacts with the Geneva group from 1928 to 1938.