

Alaska Friends Conference
Epistle from Annual Session
August 3-6, 2023

To Friends Everywhere:

Nestled among the spruce and birch trees, with the sounds of sandhill cranes and great horned owls, we were grateful to be gathering in person again for the first time since 2021.

We welcomed visitors Avis Wanda McClinton, Michelle Bellows, and Ursula Knudsen-Latta, who shared their stories and news of their organizations.

We were graced by two powerful presentations that highlighted ways that we can help heal the scars of racism and White supremacy both in Alaska and in the Lower 48 states.

The first was a presentation from Alaskan Quakers Seeking Right Relations (AQSRR) about the many ways that have opened this past year for relationships with Alaska Native peoples following the approval last year of an apology for the damages suffered in Quaker Indigenous boarding schools. First, there was the opportunity to share the apology with a large group of mostly Tlingit people in Douglas, Alaska. Then in July of this year eight Alaskan Quakers traveled to Monmouth, OR with Jim and Susan LaBelle and Jamiann S'eiltin Hasselquist, who presented at a plenary session of Sierra

Cascades Yearly Meeting. The most recent opportunity was for Jan Bronson and Sarah Kehoe to attend the Annual Sessions of Alaska Yearly Meeting in Kotzebue, where they were invited to present the apology. As a way of following through with the intention to work toward truth, healing and transformation, we approved sending funds to assist with the development of a healing center in Kake, Alaska, where there was a Friends mission in the late 19th century.

Another highlight was a presentation by Avis Wanda McClinton about her work with the 339 Manumissions and Beyond Project in Philadelphia. The Project is a search for what happened to the 339 enslaved Africans who were promised freedom by Philadelphia Quaker slaveholders. We were moved by her powerful presentation, the first time to a Yearly Meeting. We hope to find ways to support her work and trust that other Friends will hear this message. One Friend called on Friends to financially support this project through its fund at Friends Fiduciary, and we are grateful to Howard University for hosting this critical work.

We also heard briefly from three members of the local Mat-Su Martin Luther King Jr. Foundation: Aundra Jackson, Daphne Barbosa-Jackson, and Melvin Sage-el, who talked about the importance of both acknowledging the truth of slavery and moving forward together to heal.

The State of the Meeting Reports from each of the Monthly Meetings indicate progress in recovering from the

impact of the COVID epidemic. All seven monthly meetings/worship groups were represented, either in person or on video conference. We welcomed the presence of two children and three dogs.