

Pacific Yearly Meeting Indigenous Peoples Concerns Subcommittee of Ministry Committee Report to Representative Committee 2021

SUMMARY

1. **ACTION ITEM: Friends interested in being on the subcommittee, or who have recommendations for its membership, please contact us.**
2. **ACTION ITEM: Any Indigenous Friends who are interested in serving on the subcommittee or as an advisor, please contact us.**
3. **ACTION ITEM: Please share with meetings how Friends can join the Friends for Right Relationship listserv that is hosted by Decolonizing Quakers (details under “FRR listserv”, below).**

To contact us: Email address coming soon thanks to Communications Committee. In the meantime, contact Jim Summers, Ministry Liaison to our subcommittee.

Origin of the subcommittee

Members of this subcommittee are aware of Spirit at work in PacYM through efforts to “seek right relationship” such as:

- learning/unlearning;
- building relationships with Indigenous organizations and individuals;
- exploring land acknowledgments, the LandBack movement, “land tax”/”honor tax”/”reciprocity”, and other reparations;
- and being more welcoming, respectful, and inclusive of Indigenous Friends.

Forming under the care of the YM on this concern has been being talked about for a while, and the nudge has recently become stronger.

During the 2020 Annual Session, it was announced that the College Park Friends Educational Association (CPFEA) was considering putting the Woolman/Sierra Friends Center land up for sale and wanted to identify potential buyers. In the course of varied discussions, a number of Friends and alumni raised the possibility of returning, or ‘rematriating’, the land to the local Indigenous People: the Nisenan Tribe of the Nevada City Rancheria. Meanwhile, when Shelly Covert, Spokesperson for the Nisenan Tribe and Executive Director of the Tribe’s nonprofit, heard in the local community about the potential land sale, she reached out to Friends she knew and to CPFEA/Woolman to explore how the Tribe might regain this piece of their traditional lands. The Tribe and the Woolman community have some experience partnering already.

In mid-August, the Jones Fire swept through the Woolman campus, and the status of the sale and CPFEA’s future plans were uncertain while they responded to the aftermath of the fire. CPFEA reported to CPQM in October, and we have since heard that their insurance money includes enough to pay off CPFEA’s debts and that they have set aside consideration of selling the land. Shelly Covert, as an invited guest to CPQM’s Fall meeting, told how what is now known as Woolman sits on a major former Nisenan village site, Yulic’a, and she wrote a letter after that plenary about the Tribe’s interest in the land (attached; shared with permission): “...*Maybe the Friends would possibly agree that if it was to go up for sale that the Nisenan would have first rights to purchase. Or, maybe fundraising could still happen with support of the Friends, and we could get a different piece of land and the process would still accomplish repair work that both the Quakers and the Tribe are in need of...*” We are aware that CPFEA and Grass Valley Meeting, along with individual Friends, are continuing to work to strengthen their relationships with the Nisenan Tribe.

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Since then, discussion among some of those interested Friends has widened to how to support local meetings and Quaker organizations across PacYM on the broader concerns and actions, which led to reaching out to Ministry Committee about forming as a subcommittee. Indeed, we have already received a few requests for support and opportunities to take action.

Current state of the subcommittee

- **Purposes** (from approved draft job description):
 - "to inform and support the Pacific Yearly Meeting community as it seeks to uncover the history and ongoing impacts of colonization in and on both Indigenous and Quaker communities,
 - to increase awareness of Indigenous Peoples' struggles and joys both within and outside Quaker communities,
 - and to seek equitable and just partnership among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples."
- We want it to be clear in our communications that there are **Indigenous Friends in PacYM** and among Friends in general, and that the makeup of the subcommittee does not currently include any Indigenous Friends.
 - One of our top priorities --as reflected in the job description-- is "consulting with Indigenous Quakers and Indigenous non-Quakers who will provide guidance and hold us accountable as the subcommittee's work develops."
 - **ACTION ITEM: Any Indigenous Friends who are interested in serving on the subcommittee or as an advisor, please contact us.** We will also be doing outreach to the Indigenous PacYM Friends we already know.
 - While we hold a particular concern for Indigenous Peoples in our Yearly Meeting's regions (Mexico City, Hawaii, Nevada, California), we recognize that Indigenous Peoples from other regions also reside within PacYM's area and that there are important commonalities across North, Central, and South America (known to some as 'Turtle Island') and across the world.
- **Why be separate from Racial Justice Subcommittee?**
 - We and the Ministry Committee agreed that a subcommittee devoted specifically to Indigenous Concerns would shine needed Light on these issues in particular.
 - We intend to seek opportunities to collaborate with other PacYM committed and subcommittees, such as Racial Justice, Friends of Color, Peace and Social Concerns, Unity with Nature, Junior Yearly Meeting, Children's Program, and Latin American Concerns.
 - Whenever possible, we intend to work in collaboration with other related Quaker efforts, such as similar committees in other yearly meetings, the Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples program (currently part of Friends Peace Teams), American Friends Service Committee, Decolonizing Quakers, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends Committee on Legislation of California, etc.
 - Whenever possible, we also intend to work in collaboration with Indigenous organizations on shared goals and values, for example on environmental justice issues.
- Our first planned collaboration is with the PacYM Unity with Nature committee, on the **Braiding Sweetgrass Worship Group**, an opportunity for Friends to engage with the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Indigenous Anishinaabekwe ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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- **Web page on PacificYearlyMeeting.org site:**
 - We will start by providing resources, links, and examples of actions that meetings and organizations in PacYM are taking.
 - The intention is to foster networking and sharing across the YM and to strategically link with other sources for wider information.
- **“FRR Listserv”:**
 - An email listserv called Friends for Right Relationship has about 150 Friends and others, mainly from the US and Canada, who use it to share information and ask questions.
 - **ACTION ITEM FOR REPS: Please share this invitation from Decolonizing Quakers to join the FRR listserv:** *“Many Friends share a concern to recognize and act to repair the massive injustices committed against Indigenous Peoples. One way for Friends to stay in touch with each other is to join the Friends for Right Relationship Google Group. Please feel free to share news, resources, and relevant activities of your Quaker communities and organizations on Indigenous matters. You may also invite others to join. Guide them to visit <https://groups.google.com/g/FriendsRR> and complete the Join Request Form at the top of the page.”*
- **Survey** -- forthcoming to all meetings
 - Opportunity to share actions, ideas, and questions with us. We will share findings.
- **Interest Group at AS** -- we have submitted a proposal for a panel, discussion, networking, and visioning, “Toward Reparations and Justice for Indigenous Peoples and Communities: Some Steps PacYM Meetings are Taking.”
- **Input** -- We welcome input on the needs of meetings and organizations, and ideas for what would make PacYM more inclusive and active on these issues.
- **The name, job description, and clerkship** of this subcommittee may change, pending input from its eventual full membership and guidance from Indigenous Friends. Options considered so far:
 - Indigenous Concerns (similar to Latin American Concerns)
 - Indigenous Peoples’ Concerns (similar to Boulder MM’s and Australia YM’s)
 - Concerns for Indigenous Peoples
 - Indigenous Justice (like Racial Justice)

The subcommittee consists of these initial members, as approved by Ministry: Sophie Wood Brinker (unaffiliated), Rebekah Percy (La Jolla), Jim Summers (ex-officio as Liaison from Ministry; La Jolla), Lisa Hubbell (unaffiliated, Co-Convenor), Alyssa Nelson (Davis, Co-Convenor). Barbara Babin (Redwood Forest) will be joining after Annual Session



Nevada City Rancheria Tribal Council

P.O. Box 2624 Nevada City, Ca. 95959

530-265-6563 (Chairman) 530-570-0846 (Spokesperson)

Date: October 17, 2020

To: Sandra Schwartz, Clerk of CPFEA/Woolman Board
and Barbara Babin, Clerk of College Park Quarterly Meeting
cc: Marty Coleman-Hunt, Alyssa Nelson, Paula Palmer

Homa kani friends,

I hope these words find you well. This letter is from myself as well as the Nevada City Rancheria Tribal Council and discusses the current conversation around land repatriation (aka repatriation, but we are a matrilineal society). The Woolman land used to be the Nisenan town of Yulic'a (you-lee-cha) and was of great importance to the Tribe. This area was an important juncture for travel between Nisenan towns and there was a good place to cross the river down what is now Jones Bar Rd.

For many years, Tribal members and myself have worked through our non-profit CHIRP to share Nisenan Indigenous knowledge with both Woolman students and projects, as-well-as our longtime partner, Sierra Streams Institute, whose headquarters were on the Woolman land. I have collaborated with both Sierra Streams Institute and Woolman to write for grants that would fund the building of a "Nisenan living village" that would serve outdoor educational projects on the Woolman landscape. It was through these relationships that we were given a chance to reconnect with this Culturally significant piece of our Ancestral homelands for the first time since the gold rush.

When I heard that the Woolman land was going up for sale, I was quite sad. I guess I had felt comfort that this large piece of land was being cared for in a good way and I enjoyed knowing that the current Quaker ownership brought a lot of love to this place. When I saw the post about the land sale, I was glad to see the desire to keep this place in the hands of Quaker friends. But if that were not possible, the land sale would be open to the public. "Who would take care of this place now?" I wondered and worried. Part of me almost wished that I had never rekindled my relationship with Yulic'a because now it would be taken again.

It was in this moment that I remembered Paula Palmer and the workshop that we had done together with Amy Cooke and other local Friends from Woolman. Paula's work is to be in "right

Chairman: Richard Johnson

Vice Chair: Virginia Covert

Secretary: Shelly Covert

Treasurer: Lorena Davis

Alt: Sarah Thomas

Mal: Saxon Thomas

relationship with Native Americans”. I belong to their email group that is full of current conversation on this topic of Indigenous/Quaker relations. Quaker Friends who participate are working to address the fact that Quakers also ran Indian Boarding Schools, created to assimilate Native American children. This is when I began to wonder: If the Quakers were actively working to be in right relationship with Native Americans, I wondered if there was a way we could talk about the sale of Woolman, and if there was a way the Tribe could have the land restored to us.

So, I reached out to Paula, who reached out to others and recommended Alyssa Nelson because Alyssa is said to be known to have the experience and heart to help on these issues. And thusly, the conversation about rematriating the land to the Tribe was born. We talked with Marty Coleman-Hunt, and she shared a financial overview of what it costs annually to run Woolman, stating it was near the \$450,000 mark. That knowledge was a bit of a shock as the Tribe has truly little money. But, as we continued to explore this idea, many different suggestions were made as how to fundraise. I explored the reality of living on the land with the Tribe, as many people need homes. The Tribal Council was of the opinion that if we held the land, we would not need \$450,000 for maintenance as many of our Tribal members do that kind of work for their jobs, and as a Tribal community we would be self-run in a model that works for us. More ideas for fundraising were shared and conversations with Quaker friends seemed to be moving in a good direction. There were ideas of a partnership between Woolman and the Tribe, but the Tribe’s preference is to have something of its own. After a bit, it seemed that there might *actually* be a way to make this land rematriation a reality.

But then the fire came and of course, things changed. But the conversation didn’t stop completely, and a new question was asked: Would the Tribe still have interest in the land even though it had burned? The Tribe’s view about the land was unchanged; they would still like to have the land.

Shortly after the fire, Marty and I talked again, and she told me they were not selling Woolman. So, I began to form new, land centered thoughts. Maybe the Friends would possibly agree that if it was to go up for sale that the Nisenan would have first rights to purchase. Or, maybe fundraising could still happen with support of the Friends, and we could get a different piece of land and the process would still accomplish repair work that both the Quakers and the Tribe are in need of.

This is the course of events and conversations that brings us where we are today. I put this in writing for you so that the Tribe’s intentions are clear and that my intentions are clear. I am not always very good at being direct. And, sometimes, especially when there is an “ask” involved, I am not strong enough in voicing my convictions. Because of the violent history of what happened here, and the erasure of our history and visibility even today, it can also feel hard to talk openly and directly with non-Native people until we know them very well and have developed deep trust.

I hope this helps make sure there are not any misconceptions or miscommunications between any of us. It seems that even though we had a really good conversation, at some point Marty and I may have gotten our wires crossed in that she thought we didn’t want the land or that it was too much money to maintain the land. True that the Tribe could not come up with \$450,000 a year to maintain the land in its current model, but the Tribe would reimagine, redesign, and utilize other means to make it work for us in our way.

In closing, I know things will end up the way they do. And that will be the way. Here is the Tribe's view and a little history of how this conversation has evolved in the way it has. I appreciate everything that has taken place since the moment I reached out to Paula after learning that the Woolman land was going to be sold. Maybe we will get the land. Maybe we won't. Perhaps all of this is just to lay a framework for another time, and who knows what tomorrow will bring. One thing for certain, this is the beginning of a conversation about land repatriation that has never happened before and couldn't have happened without all the above happening first.

Thank you for inviting me to be introduced to all the Friends at the Quarterly Meeting this weekend and to welcome and bring luck to you in my Nisenan language. I look forward to getting to know the Woolman board members and strengthening our shared bond to and through the land at Yulic'a.

With all my best intentions to do no harm,

Shelly Covert, Spokesperson for the Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe and Executive Director for the California Heritage: Indigenous Research Project (CHIRP)

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