

How we got from there to here: A review of the visioning process of ILYM (2001 - 2011)

By Maurine Pyle

When Jonathon Plummer was envisioning Illinois Yearly Meeting, he imagined a meetinghouse that could seat 800 people. We laughingly say that there must have been much thinner people in those early days. Even so, our 135 - year - old building is impressive, and our yearly meeting population is about 1000 at recent count. Not all members come to the summer sessions, but that is our goal.

We began a visioning process in December 2001 in Oglesby IL to help us address some long standing problems and to widen our view of how to use our historic property. Over the past decade we have held many such retreats, conducted surveys, visited monthly meetings and sat through countless committee meetings. Our question was "How should we be using our historic property?" (ILYM website: *2010\_vision power point* of initial survey by Matthew Smith and outcomes)

At this very first retreat we heard a loud and clear message – we wanted to restore our buildings and create a year-round retreat center. As the facilitator of that process, I was frankly surprised and curious about the breadth of that statement. We were an old yearly meeting with few financial resources and some rundown buildings. The goal seemed awfully high to me, but the Spirit was behind it, and we moved quickly forward.

Over the next few months we had professionals inspect the entire property and discovered severe termite damage under the meetinghouse. (ILYM Minute 37 - 2002). By 2002 we had began a serious restoration project (ILYM Minutes 23 & 44 - 2003). In 2005 we moved the Junior Yearly Meetinghouse to the campground to become the Bunkhouse for teens (ILYM Minute 16 & 42). We also took apart the old dorm, which was a firetrap, and used the salvaged materials to build six new cabins around the perimeter of the north campground. Now that was recycling!

The Site Envisioning Committee was formed in 2003 to propose new buildings on the McNabb campus such as a new dining hall and dormitory. Architects worked with the committee to propose designs. Thus, began a dream process by Site Envisioning and Development Committee for the creation of designs for some large new buildings, a dormitory and above-ground kitchen and dining room. (ILYM Minute #21 - 2008).

In the Fall of 2003, Peace Resources Committee brought forth a vision of *The Peace House on the Prairie* (Among Friends, Fall 2003), a retreat center that would offer nurture and sustenance for peacemakers.

During their retreat in September 2009, the Environmental Concerns Committee made some specific "Recommendations for the Natural Features on the Mills Property" to enhance its unity with nature. These included removing some trees and branches around the Mills House, cleaning up the Old Field for healthy growth, and burning the prairie and adding new plantings.

In addition, in 2006 a Dream Gathering Project was conducted where teams of people visited each monthly meeting to ask, "What does the yearly meeting mean to you, and how can it help your meeting? The findings were reported at the summer session as the Dream Gathering Report (ILYM Minute Book, 2006). Among those gathered dreams was a desire to have a gathering place for retreats for the monthly meetings.

Although a great effort was made by the Development Committee, the fundraising for the new buildings was not forthcoming, so we waited for God to show us a new way. In 2009 the Mills farmhouse and 6 acres, the contiguous parcel of land West of the old meetinghouse, came on the market for \$147,000 just before the summer yearly meeting session. Who says that Quakers take too long to decide? Within only a few weeks, we made a bid which was accepted. (ILYM Minute 22 & 53).

Now that we owned the new property, we asked ourselves another question -- what were we being called to do with it? In January 2010 I was once again asked to lead a visioning retreat in Bloomington, IL – this time for the entire property. Among the ideas we harvested were: a center for year-round retreats, a new dorm and dining hall, and programming for monthly meetings in various locations. The idea of a retreat center had emerged once again. There was a hunger out there.

Over the years growing from the seedling of an idea about a retreat center, we have faithfully followed God's *leadings*. I wonder where we will be led next?