

This is My Father's World

**Clance Wilson
The 2005 Jonathan Plummer Lecture
Presented at
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends
McNabb, Illinois
July 31, 2005**



"This rural community, which was largely settled by Quakers from Belmont County, Ohio, and Washington County, Pennsylvania, was settled by fifteen Quaker families from 1834-1855. If the Quaker Lane Quakers were to permit their community to die completely, they would probably feel that they had betrayed their ancestors who founded the colony." (Historical note abstracted from THE QUAKER LANE COMMUNITY by Ronald Norman Dean, a doctoral dissertation in possession of Helen Jean Nelson)

This is My Father's World

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
All nature sings and round me rings the music of the
spheres.
This is my Father's world, I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas.
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise.
The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's
praise.

This is my Father's world, He shines in all that's fair.
In the rustling grass I hear him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the
Ruler yet.
This is my Father's World, Should my heart be ever sad?
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring,
God reigns; let the earth be glad!

This is God's glorious world, O let us not forget
That all these wonders we can see reveal God's purpose
yet.
This Earth is ours in trust, to tend and keep it fair,
With love for trees and skies and seas
And creatures everywhere.

Introduction by Maurine Pyle, Clerk, Illinois Yearly Meeting

Around 1682, English and Welsh Quakers sailed for America under the guidance of William Penn. The descendants of these early Friends are still living on farms around our Yearly Meetinghouse. By remaining true to the founding principles of the Religious Society of Friends, these Quaker families of Putnam County, Illinois have kept alive the vision seen by George Fox from Pendle Hill of "a great people to be gathered."

Clance Wilson, whose Plummer Lecture will be delivered today, continued to hold this vision even when there was very little evidence of it remaining on Quaker Lane in McNabb. A generation of the children of Clear Creek Meeting had moved away to the cities and towns. The remaining group of Friends who attended meeting for worship had dwindled to a few older members. Some people were saying that after the older generation died there would be no one else to hold the Clear Creek Meeting together. Clance would not accept that the founders' vision had been extinguished for once and for all. He truly believed in it. Today we will hear the story of how Clance faithfully followed his ancestors' call to welcome new life to Clear Creek and enliven Illinois Yearly Meeting.

Clance died before he could complete the writing of this lecture. Each year we select someone to deliver a keynote speech named for Jonathan Plummer, the founder of Friends General Conference and Illinois Yearly Meeting. He asked me to finish it for him in cooperation with many of his friends and relatives. When asked how he intended to prepare for the lecture Clance said, "I am just going to be myself and just tell them how I went through life."

Using transcripts of audio recordings of Clance's life stories, we have added reflections on his life from friends and relatives. Today his story will be told by five members of Clear Creek Meeting, symbolizing their communal life on Quaker Lane. Clance's own words will be read by Bill Mize and Dick Ashdown. Carol Bartles and Jeannie Marvin will read the voices of the community. Diane Wilson, his wife, will read her own remembrance about her life with Clance.

(Further remarks by Maurine, as compiler, editor, and narrator, will appear interspersed below in italics.)

THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD

OPENING

Clance:

As I have read other Plummer Lectures I think I have the same feelings as many others. Surprised to be asked, then feeling very honored and finally having the reality set in. Realizing we have to do it and then wondering what we may have to offer. This was and still is a major question for me. What can I relate that is of interest? I am sure I was not picked because I agree with most of the activities of the Yearly Meeting. Those of you who know me, know that I do not walk in lockstep with the majority thinking of the group.

To start, I was born on the day Calvin Coolidge was elected President, November 2, 1926. My Grandmother Wilson kept a diary so I checked to see what she had to say on that day. Grandmother wrote, "Today Laura May arrived, only she was a boy." They were hoping for a sister for my two brothers, but she was not born for another few years.

My parents' names were Ralph Oliver and Verna Stansell Wilson. I was named after my mother's brother, Clarence Jeremiah Stansell. My Grandfather, Jeremiah Stansell, was also a namesake. I am a birthright Friend. On the Wilson side, our Quaker history goes back 300 years to Stephen Wilson, the first Wilson to arrive in America. He was from Bringham, Cumberland County, England. He transferred his membership to Chesterfield Monthly Meeting in New Jersey where meetings were held before William Penn came to Philadelphia in 1682.

I am an 8th generation Quaker, descended from a founding family of Clear Creek Meeting, Amos and Anna Morris Wilson, who came to Putnam County in 1851. I had the rare privilege of growing up in a Quaker home in a Quaker rural community. My mother was a Methodist, who became Quaker when she married my father. There was not much spiritual teaching or reading of the Bible at home. We did not have prayers at meals. But my parents led Quaker lives. They led by example. They very seldom told us what to do.

*Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places,
islands, nations wherever you come, that your carriage
and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to
them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the*

world, answering that of God in every one.

George Fox, 1656

Clance:

When I was a boy, Clear Creek Meeting was larger than it is now, but basically the same. On Sundays they had probably about 30 people there. The older men would sit in the back. It seems like we always sat as a family there in the first or second row from the back. Sunday School met before meeting for worship. Even as little kids we would sit through the meeting, usually quite solemnly. They did not entertain us during meeting. No pencils, no writing, that I can remember anyway. We just sat there, which kids today seem to have a difficult time doing. The men never spoke in church at that time. Clarence Mills spoke, but that was when I was quite small. When I was in high school it was mostly the women who spoke.

Almost everybody who went to meeting were our relations, so it was my cousins and brothers who went to Sunday School. They were typical Sunday School classes, Bible stories and that type of thing. The only Bible story I really remember is the Good Samaritan. I have tried to live somewhat that type of life. Helping other people. All of us could do more, of course.

I always enjoyed Yearly Meeting. It was smaller at that time. People who visited stayed in homes. We always had somebody stay at our home; all the people did. Bernard Walton, a field secretary from American Friends Service Committee, always came to our house; just a wonderful individual. I had other role models too, people I admired in meeting. Bud Wolf's father Andy was one I looked up to and my grandparents. You always went to Yearly Meeting and met different people. You could pattern your life after people you think are special. They were all very honest men of good character. I don't think any of them smoked or drank. They were just good solid farmers.

At Yearly Meeting I remember the kids coming from Chicago. At that time we had meals in what is now the Junior Yearly Meetinghouse. It was great. There were about twelve tables and food was served family style. Sometimes we would have two different seatings for all the people. That was really an enjoyable place to eat. I've always loved to eat. I loved their ginger snaps! I mean we NEVER had store-bought cookies.

Reed Wilson, his son:

I believe I can safely say that outside his family, nothing gave my father more pleasure and self-fulfillment than his return in later years to the religious practice of his youth as he once again became active here in the Clear Creek Meeting of the Society of Friends. This was not a surprising move on his part as the Quakers have been deeply entwined with the Wilson family history.

My father was determined to help build the size of Clear Creek Quaker Meeting. As a result, he became good friends with many people -- mostly from outside the McNabb community -- who decided to make this Meeting House their place of worship. These friendships were a bit surprising in one respect. As part of a long line of conservative Republicans in the family, Dad

had little in common in terms of ideology with most of his Quaker friends. In fact I would occasionally tease him about the dangers of their liberalism rubbing off on him. He would just say his friends were good people, and of course, they are. What they had in common was their Christian faith, which has the ability to bridge all gulfs. My father and his fellow Quakers were Friends in the best Quaker sense of the word.

Clance:

I am a Christian and a seeker. I still read the Bible and try to interpret it. I have taken it up mostly in the past 10 years. After I got out of the Army, I went to the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and once or twice to the Quakers. When I married my first wife, who was a Methodist, I became active in the Methodist Church in McNabb. Then after my divorce for a few years I did not go to church. When I married Diane, my second wife, we attended the United Church of Christ in Granville. I became a member there. Then about ten years ago I started returning to Clear Creek Meeting in the summertime. I always felt more at home there. Finally I decided to return to Clear Creek Meeting.

Helen Jean Nelson, Clear Creek elder:

In the summertime I was driving by Clear Creek Meetinghouse on a Wednesday night and saw a lone car parked beside it. I stopped to see who it was and found Clance Wilson sitting on the front porch. I asked him why he was there all alone, and he replied, "I am not alone."

A poem by John Greenleaf Whittier

And so, I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this room,
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;
The strength of mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off and leaves us God alone.

Clance was a spiritual "late-bloomer." His life is an encouragement for what is possible if we heed the Spirit, even if we are starting later in life. Many people do not know that Clance never gave vocal ministry in meeting until he was about 50 years old. One reason may have been the tradition among Clear Creek Friends to record capable vocal ministers. The mainly laconic farmers of Clear Creek may have felt the need to select a speaker for God so that they would not be embarrassed by speaking before the meeting. Clance admitted to being a shy person when speaking before groups of people. He told the following story about the first time when he spoke in meeting.

Clance:

I do feel that a couple of times in my life I have been forced by the Holy Spirit to speak in meeting. The first time was about a young girl named Dee, the daughter of a friend of mine, who had leukemia. She died in my arms. I had never spoken in meeting for worship. I found myself standing up, sweating, wondering what to say. I just told a bit about how Dee died and said that I saw why Jesus said you had to believe like a little child. That's where you get your faith. She had no fear of dying, no fear of dying whatsoever. All she wanted was to die at home. Now that, for a little nine-year-old, is something. It made you believe, that is what it did. It was such a good example of how a little child can lead.

Clance said that this marked the beginning of his ministry.

THIS IS GOD'S GLORIOUS WORLD (Guardian Angels)

Clance:

I have always felt that I have a guardian angel. At eighteen months of age I became ill with pneumonia, seriously ill. I was in the hospital for six weeks and my parents told me that they had given up hope that I would survive. The doctors tried something new and went through my back to drain my lungs. They brought me home weighing only 15 pounds. I have not had a carry-over health problem from this, but I do think it changed the way my family treated me. My mother is a good example. I have always said that if I robbed a bank, my mother would say: "Well, he needed the money."

I think this probably made life a little easier for me. This guardian angel has stayed with me throughout my life.

I have had other problems along the way. When I got out of high school in August 1944, I got spinal meningitis. They gave me sulfa drugs, which had been discovered as a cure only two years earlier. I think that was fortunate for me.

Later when I was in the Army, I was a paratrooper. On my sixth jump I dropped like stone. Just before I hit the ground my chute opened up and I landed like a leaf. I came in standing up. If it had been two or three seconds later, I would have been pretty well smashed up on the ground.

Another time while I was farming, I was driving my combine down the road on Rt. 89 at almost two o'clock in the morning when all at once the lights went out. I got it off the road, but I could not see. When I came back the next day there was a limb off a tree eight feet in front of my combine cab. If I had gone another four feet it would have smashed me. So I keep thinking I must have a guardian angel who has taken care of me, and I should do something with my life.

*He has given his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

Psalm 91:11

IN THE RUSTLING GRASS I HEAR HIM PASS

Diane Lockwood Wilson:

Clance was fortunate to grow up in a loving Quaker family. The Wilson farm, "Timberedge," was located just north of the Friends Cemetery near Dick Ashdown's house today. Uncle Arthur Wilson, who later married Anna Mary Heider, lived one way down the road, and Aunt Gynetha Wilson Hawks lived the other. Clance and his brothers John David and Charles Stansell were born close together, and Laura May came along nine years later. Nothing was more important to Mom than her family, and when I married Clance, I was taken right in.

Clance and his dad were very close. They farmed together for years and shared a love of Jersey cows. Clance spoke often of his favorite cow, Belinda. She became a national milk champion. He loved his life on the farm and always thought of himself as a farmer.

They butchered their own meat and had a huge garden. They did not have much money, but as Clance's mother used to say, "It was the greatest of plenty." Saturday night of course was bath time, "if they could catch us!" Clance said. The children went barefoot all summer, and the family enjoyed picnics in the woods by Clear Creek, which was sometimes deep enough for swimming. Clance would say, "It's a shame kids today can't have what we had."

Clance spoke of summer evenings, the lightning bugs coming up from the oat fields, and Grange Halloween parties where adults and children dressed in costume. Legend has it that Clance once fooled everyone by masquerading as Cinderella. At Christmas his job was to find a tree from the woods and bring it home. He would scout all year looking for the perfect one.

John Swaney Grade School students loved to play down at the creek at recess; they could go where they wanted as long as they could hear the bell. They would build a huge dam from grass and brush thrown nearby. Can you picture them returning to class with wet and muddy clothes and shoes? Clance was dismayed by the strict supervision that teachers must employ today.

From childhood on Clance and his brother tended to the Friends Cemetery grounds, located down the road from their farm. They were helping their Grandpa Wilson with a duty that apparently extended for several generations of the Wilson family. It took three days to mow the grounds with push type mowers for which he was paid \$1 and dinner.

Clance:

One July evening after supper I can distinctly remember walking down the lane that went west to a timber we had and also 20 acres of farmland there. I walked with my father, barefooted, of course. I remember the dust on that path and an absolutely beautiful moon.

I was going out to help Dad shock oats. You do this with a binder to put them together into bundles. And then to shock them you take two bundles against each other, then two bundles together against them. Then on each side put three more bundles and then spread one bundle and put that on top for a cap. You let it set out there and it would dry better that way. So when you were going to thresh it, you pitched those bundles onto a rack and took it to the threshing machine.

I was never the type who liked mechanical things so I seldom drove the tractor. When I was nine I used to take water to the men out in the fields. I had a pony named Gyp. We would go out with two jugs, one on each side of my saddle. That was fun too. I got paid maybe 50 cents a day.

But the year I got out of grade school, when I was fourteen, I drove a team of horses with a rack. I would go out with our threshing ring, which was made up mostly of Quakers. A threshing ring is where farmers get together to buy a threshing machine, like a cooperative deal; they worked together on threshing. One year they would start at one end of the farms and the next year they would start at the other end. I would go out with my hayrack and three guys would pitch the bundles onto the rack. I would load the rack up and we would put on big loads of bundles. I would take the rack to the threshing machine. Then I would pitch them into the machine.

Neil Mesner, Clear Creek member:

Clance loved horses. He spoke fondly of having been given the responsibility at age fourteen, of driving a team of horses on the grain bundle wagon for the threshing run in the neighborhood. Not an easy task, loading several hundred bundles from the shocks in the field, driving the load to the threshing machine, then back to the field for another load. Six or eight loads during the heat of the summer day. Tomorrow more of the same, possibly in the fields of the next neighbor on the run.

Two or three weeks of hard work. All the while in constant companionship and care of the faithful and hardworking team of horses. Seeing that the team was fed their oats and hay, making sure they had a drink of water, "throwing" on the harnesses, an intricate if indelicate process which had to be done just right so that everything would perform properly through the day. Observing the horses' health and condition, maybe putting a salve on a sore collar bone bruise. Hitching up the team to the wagon and down the road to the grain field as soon as the dew had disappeared. Each man had a place in line to unload the machine. First done in the evening was first up the next morning.

The team of horses required some care at noon with water and some oats. In the evening after driving home the sweaty harness was removed, more feed and water given. Maybe a roll in the dust by the horses, which seemed to give great relief to the hardworking animals. The horses were usually stalled in the barn where they rested for the next day.

The threshing session was in some ways a very intense time of the year, although maybe not as hard physically for the horses as some other routines, such as plowing or cultivating. On any task or routine the horses required special care and attention. Their owner had to be aware of their needs each and every day to some extent.

Now in spite of this regimen, Clance said he loved working with horses. He was involved with them heavily in his younger days and spoke with considerable regret of the change over to tractors that had taken place to a large degree during his tenure with the Armed Forces during World War II. He told me more than once that he probably would have continued to farm longer if he had been able to operate with horses instead of modern tractors.

Most young people in that age learned to drive horses and take care of them. It was in many ways a character building experience. The horse became your friend, companion, and ally, as well as a necessity for making a living. I think that anyone who could do with love and devotion, as Clance did, had something special deep down inside, and he carried those traits with him his whole life.

One could ask why we are all so concerned with discovering just what was deep within the soul of Clance Wilson that made him tick, made him into the man we learned to love, made him into the man who loved them in so many ways and in the daily circumstances of life. He showed that love when and where it was needed.

Indeed! Why should we study this man's life? The more we study this special life, the more we realize it was of special note, worthy of study and discovery that many people are laboring with at the present moment. I don't think we are trying to put the memory of Clance on some special unattainable pedestal, although we certainly want to honor and remember his life.

His life, as well as anyone's life, is precious in God's sight. A dearly beloved traveler in God's world. And that life is precious in our own sight, in our own world. Worthy of our study, our consideration, our reverence, and awe. Clance became, and still is, a special part of our own lives and the world around us.

THE EARTH IS OURS IN TRUST (Army service)

Clance:

When I went into the Army that was a big decision. Both my brothers got a deferment because of agriculture so they did not have to make a big decision. I don't know why, but I had no desire to do that. When I was a senior in high school, a program came out that if you volunteered before you were 18 you would be sent to school for a while. I tried to do that but my parents wouldn't sign for me.

In my decision whether or not to become a conscientious objector, I took into consideration the fact that if I knew that someone was going to hurt my family, I would defend them physically with everything I had, would use violence. If I needed to, I would. So that meant I was not a conscientious objector. I could see no difference between protecting my country and protecting my family. So I went into the Army.

Reed Wilson, son:

I recall my father considering the manner in which World War II ended in the Pacific Theater, where he was stationed. He was of two minds on the matter -- being appalled at the death and destruction caused by the use of atomic bombs, but yet knowing that without the use of these weapons, the American Army would have had to invade the Japanese homeland and face an extremely bloody campaign which he may well have not survived.

Clance:

June 20, 1998

Dear FCNL (Friends Committee on National Legislation),

I just received my June FCNL Newsletter and I am disturbed by your statement that "Some U.S. political, military and published leaders exchanged the unpleasant reality for a more comfortable myth that 'the bomb ended the war and saved lives.'"

You may think that the atomic bomb should have not have been dropped, but you must realize that the alternatives were worse. Just a few days before Hiroshima, Tokyo had been practically destroyed with incendiary bombs; more than one hundred thousand people were killed. If this type of bombing had continued, the entire country of Japan would have been destroyed.

Also, there were over five hundred ships in the Manila Harbor ready for an invasion of Japan. If this had happened, thousands and thousands of men would have been killed on both sides.

Wars are terrible, and there are no easy solutions, but Japan started this one with the invasion of China, the many atrocities they committed, including the killing of an estimated twenty million Chinese. I would be interested in how you think the war should have ended.

Was there, Clance Wilson

Carol Zimmerman, 57th Street Meeting:

I met an unusually calm person in the midst of the hubbub of the yearly meeting. I introduced myself to learn what he was doing there. He told me he was active once more with Friends. We talked a little bit and it didn't matter. We were just people who liked being among other Quakers. Finally I asked him a few questions about himself. He answered with simple, spiritual pride, saying that he had been in the armed forces. That was the first thing he told me when he talked about his life fashioned outside of the family. He might have suspected that I would be offended by that because I am a Convinced Friend. There is a very strong, deep and spiritual quality in my memory of this man that his military service was part of his spiritual experience.

THE BIRDS THEIR CAROLS RAISE (Breakfast with the Birds)

Bill Howenstine, a Quaker environmentalist:

Clance's memorial service was held on Earth Day. That seemed appropriate because I see Clance as a man of the earth. He had a farm heritage, he participated in the IYM Environmental Concerns Committee and as trustee of the Putnam County Conservation District. We shared the same goals of saving natural areas. I loved him.

When the Environmental Concerns would be meeting at McNabb, he would invite us all to awaken before dawn to have "breakfast with the birds" at the Conservation District pavilion. He would provide the doughnuts and coffee spread out on a picnic table and invite us to join him.

He said he could not identify the birds by their songs but I can picture him listening at dawn as hard as he could to the birdsongs.

I remember when I was a boy growing up in Ohio I observed life in the deep permanent pools in the creek bed that sustained life during the periods of dryness. Clance was one of those deep permanent pools that sustained the life of the creek. He may not have known many birds, but he was a birdsong that touched all of us.

Pam, his daughter:

As a child my favorite times with Dad were spent in the barn or the woods, especially the woods. I think Nature was sacred to him, although again, he did not really say so. He just showed me by taking me for walks and teaching me the names of local flora and fauna. I think he thought that any faith could be practiced in God's outside cathedral. That a holy Being who created trees, fall leaves, morel mushrooms and kittens alike was a benevolent Being. My father taught me that the song of birds and the babble of a brook are better than any human choir. He taught me that Nature connects us to a universal, loving Being.

A poem by Bill Mize, a Clear Creek Friend:

Star Light
Star Bright
First star I see tonight
Wish I may
Wish I might...

We rose at four to greet the woods
To hear the birds come out
Before the sun
First one by one
They whistle, warble, shout.

There still we sit, my friend and I
Beneath the stars that fill the sky
And listen deep to every song
That makes its way from out the throng
Unto the morning light.

We find a deep refreshment there
Immersed in music like a prayer
...Then come new thoughts begun in song
To feed the spirit all day long
In wonderment aware.

We worship in that gentle light
And say "good morning" to the night

And wish we may and wish we might
Not ere forget this sweet twilight
God's altar in the air.

Then homeward bound, we walk as one
Into the world, into the sun
And seek the words that cannot tell
God's secrets witnessed, deep and well
And on the world does run...

HE SHINES IN ALL THAT'S FAIR (acceptance and hospitality)

Clance held a traditional view of Quakerism as Christianity. During the 20th and 21st centuries that picture has been enlarged to include Buddhists, Jews and people of other faith traditions. In spite of his theological and other cultural differences with the newcomers, Clance always displayed an open mind to those who crossed his path. His was a welcoming spirit.

Clance:

I think traditional Quakers are completely different from Quakers today. Really there is very little resemblance between the two. From a theological viewpoint we are just faint shadows. They were very dedicated Christians for one thing. I mean extremely dedicated. It was the most important thing in their lives. It was more important than life itself. Some of them died -- many of them died, because they believed in the Quakerism of that day. Although I am not sure I would die for not taking off my hat, Quakers today have very little resemblance to the Quakers of those days.

To me a good Quaker is one who believes in Christ, who is Christian and lives as Jesus told us to, which is the golden rule. To me, you live your life as a Quaker as a Christian, not only on Sundays. You have to do it all week. I have always considered honesty as being the backbone of Quakerism. That means being honest with yourself too. You have to be honest with yourself and others.

Quakers are different because we believe that we can be our ministers ourselves, whereas I think practically all of the other churches feel they have to have some kind of minister to work through. Anyway, they have to have a minister to teach them about God. Whereas, I think it is our own responsibility to have our own relationship with God and to learn about God.

Brad Laird, South Bend Meeting:

I saw Clance look past my ponytail and liberal political leanings and join me in discussion about what it is to be a person who has a deep and constant sense of the divine in his life, but also applies that presence of Love to those around him, turning strangers into brothers and sisters, loving as Jesus showed us how to love.

I am reminded of George Fox discussing seeing that of God in everyone. Such was my experience of Clance and Diane, seeing that of God in me. I surely saw that in Clance. This is a powerful and lasting testimony that I claim anew as my happy responsibility to take wherever I go.

Carol Bartles, Clear Creek Meeting member:

When I think of my friendship with Clance, I realize he was grounded. He was of the earth. Clance was a supportive Friend in quiet ways. I think of Clance as being supportive like friends on a track team. In high school track, someone would stand behind you and offer their foot as a pushing off base for the racing runner.

Clance wasn't planning to run the race he saw that I was running, but he provided the foot that made sure I could. He gave me the confidence that he was behind me, to hold me secure as I ran my race; as I did what I was called to do. That is how I saw his quiet support.

Susan, his daughter:

The last several years, my Dad and I shared a special place with each other in our conversations of the meaning of God and life. We both gave up a bit of what we thought we might know as the "truth" to explore other truths and to see the other's perceptions of life. In this manner, I believe I acquired some of his wisdom, and he began to see "new" possibilities.

SHOULD MY HEART BE EVER SAD? (first marriage)

Clance married Pat Feaster, his college sweetheart, in 1950 after their graduation from the University of Illinois. He worked for Pet Milk for two years, and then they returned to the Wilson family farm in McNabb. It was a wonderful place to raise their children Reed, Pam and Susan.

Eventually, however, Pat was very unhappy on the farm. After the children were grown the marriage ended in divorce.

Clance sometimes spoke sadly of this failed relationship, and no doubt this experience deepened his compassion for others who suffered as he had.

**HIS HAND THE WONDERS WROUGHT
(Caring for the lost and disadvantaged)**

David Dayton, his son-in-law:

One thing that made a big impression on me was that Clance did not appear to be obligated to do things. That is not to say that he did not do things; in fact, just the opposite. For more than two years he watched over his Aunt Lucile almost every minute of every day. But none of these things were ever an obligation for Clance. They seemed to be things that he sought to do his part in the world, rather than things that needed to be worked into a busy schedule. He served those people as naturally as if he were eating breakfast or putting on a shoe.

Pam, his daughter:

My father enjoyed where he was. I never had the feeling he wanted to be someone else. He seemed to be present to who he was and whom he could help at any given time. During my life on the farm I saw a myriad of individuals helped by my dad. Several served as hired hands of sorts. I don't know how or if they were paid, but I do know they had a function and a place to be. I know my dad was kind to them and helped them in their lives. There was Davy, a young man with some sort of learning disability who lived with us for a while. There was also Betty, a troubled foster child, and a cousin he helped who had schizophrenia.

All benefited from my father's non-judgmental ways. Later in life Dad took on other individuals who society at large would toss away. Becky who is in jail. People striving for peace in Africa. His quiet leadership enrolled others to do the same.

Clance always felt the impulse to help people. For a period of time he was unable to drive his car because of multiple sclerosis, so he hired Becky Morris, as his driver. Later when she was incarcerated for shooting her mother in a fit of rage, he began regular visits to her in jail and prison.

Clance:

Before Becky shot her mother, I really hadn't had much contact with her for several years. I was down to see her last weekend, and she told everybody, her friends there, that I'm her father. So I guess I am her father. I have become a sort of spiritual advisor to her. She has become very spiritual, attends a meeting of women each week, and studies the Bible.

Clear Creek Meeting supported him in supporting Becky. He felt she did not receive fair treatment. Clance persevered in seeking additional hearings to reduce her sentence. He supported her financially. Clear Creek members took turns visiting her in prison. He asked for a clearness committee for membership for Becky, and she was accepted as a full member. She was recommended for membership and was accepted as a full member of Clear Creek Meeting.

Becky Morris, writing from prison in Lincoln, Illinois:

I met Clance in 1991 when I volunteered at the Putnam County Conservation District. He worked on the board at that time. Myself and others transplanted wildflowers that were indigenous to the area. Clance was familiar with a lot of woods and could tell us where to find the plants. After getting to know Clance he invited me to the Quaker meetinghouse one Sunday. I loved it. I had found what I was looking for.

Over the years Clance has been my best friend and a father figure. I never had a parent; a mother or father doesn't really make a parent. He gave me guidance. Clance and I liked a lot of the same things. That was the start of a wonderful friendship. We helped each other. When I moved from the Granville area we didn't see each other much or spend a great deal of time together.

When I found myself in trouble and locked up, Clance was there again. He gave me hope where there was none and has always been there for me during the six years of my incarceration. Without Clance I would have given up a long time ago. He kept me going and always said, "Buck up, kid. You can do it." So every time I am down I hear Clance saying that to me and I pull myself together and get going again.

He was a special person to me, and I will live the rest of my life trying to live up to what he would want me to do. That will keep me happy. I will never forget all Clance has done. Maybe I can pass that on to someone else.

FOR SKIES AND SEAS (2nd marriage)

Diane Lockwood Wilson:

Clance and I were so happy to be married on April 22, 1978. After years of frustration and unhappiness, we appreciated each other very much. The same capacity that he showed to others: warmth, love, and acceptance -- I was blessed to have all the time. Reed, Susie, and Pam were out on their own by then, and my children were still at home. Through the years, they have all been happy for us, and Jeff and Jill especially loved Clance for "taking them in" and being the father they had longed for and needed... not that this was always evident during their teen years.

Clance never felt very successful in his business life. He made more friends than money, but I think he had a subconscious realization that it was not the important thing for him. He lived his life with clear priorities of what was important, not getting bogged down with details.

He was a voracious and eclectic reader, thirsty for knowledge about history, religion, philosophy, literature, politics -- subjects that were given little attention in his agriculture program in crowded postwar classes at the University of Illinois. He loved reading Tolkien, Agatha Christie, Louis LaMour, and Zane Grey and the Quaker writings of George Fox and Robert Barclay. I can picture him reading in a favorite green chair with our little gray cat, Tinkerbelle, purring on his lap.

Once at a retreat at the Meeting House, we had an activity of choosing a photograph from a large selection that was laid out. We were asked to find one that "spoke to us" and then later share our choice and why we had selected it. Clance and I without knowing the choice of the other picked the same one, a peaceful winter scene, and had similar thoughts on it. Clance and I were a perfect fit.

On April first we received the news that Clance's illness was very bad. Driving home I said, "I guess I'll have to start treating you better." His reply was, "I don't know how you could."

The day Clance was buried in the Friends' Cemetery was our twenty-seventh wedding anniversary. How lucky I was to have had him all those years!

April 22, 1996, An Afternoon on Puget Sound

The caption on the picture postcard reads "An Afternoon on Puget Sound." The illustration portrays a lovely little sailboat parting the sun's reflections on a beautiful waterway. The amazing part is that my husband and I are in this scene.

Our son-in-law, David, guides the thirty-five foot sailboat on this peaceful Easter Sunday afternoon in Washington. He is handsome and capable and kind; Clance and I love him very much. There is classical music playing on the tape player, lovely and appropriate for this magical place.

The fluff of the sails propels us silently through the calm, sunsparkling water. Clance and I lounge on the deck, shameless parasites, while David and our daughter Pam play captain and crew. Pam delights in seeing to our comfort and showing us once again how much she cares about us. How lucky we are to have her!

I feel incredibly lazy and utterly peaceful. Responsibilities of life in Illinois seem far distant and unrelated as I drink in every Northwest detail: ever-greened islands, cranes and sea gulls, and even the awesome majesty of snow-capped Mount Rainier in the distance before us.

Just then, an intermission of humor: seals playing hide-and-seek on and around a buoy. David circles a few times so that we can enjoy the spectacle, and the game continues as we glide on to our next scene.

Now years later, the postcard is a bit faded, but as the memory of that beautiful spot on Puget Sound returns, I feel once again the warmth of that April sun and the breath of the spring wind. The serenity and love that enveloped me that day in that special place are a gift that I treasure now.

ALL THESE WONDERS WE CAN SEE REVEAL GOD'S PURPOSE YET (Renewal of Clear Creek Meeting)

Clance said many times that if God kept him alive it must have been for a reason. He never felt he knew the reason and would never specify one, but he may have thought it was connected to the Meeting. Some of the fruits of his late-blooming ministry have been related to the renewal of Clear Creek Meeting and the vision for the renewed yearly meeting. Clance saw the historic meetinghouse at Clear Creek as a place of retreat, refreshment, and spiritual renewal for both individuals and groups. Clance strongly felt the presence of God in the natural setting at the meeting house. He felt that this was what we need most, the most precious gift of the site. This unique gift of spiritual refreshment he felt should comprise the core of the new building project, along with the purpose of facilitating others to share in the spiritual fruits of the place.

Under his time as clerk several other important projects were initiated: regional First Day School on the first Sunday of each month, serving the needs of Quaker families from a wide geographic range, encouraging personal donations by members, contributions to Malesi Kinaro of Kenya for the development of Peace Center -- all springing from his constant questioning of "What can we do to help others more?"

Jeannie Marvin and Carol Bartles, Clear Creek:

When we came as newcomers to Clear Creek Meeting, Clance was the first person to come up and introduce himself. He did this with everyone who was new to the meeting. Clance never let anyone leave the meetinghouse without a hello. He offered his hand in friendship and welcome. Now we do the same. Clance has taught us all how to welcome and draw in new life to the meeting.

As Clear Creek began growing, Clance saw the need for the old members and the new to get to know each other better. He turned to Maurine Pyle to lead a weekend retreat, and this has since become an annual event. With our retreats Maurine has helped the members see our potential as Friends and helped us find a way to be safe in our individual spiritual growth. We have grown into a spiritual body that can accomplish greater things.

The retreat was some kind of birth for us. Before that retreat we were a friendly enough meeting, but afterwards we began to be a real community. We got to know each other and ourselves better. There was a sense that we were going somewhere together.

Our spiritual sharing groups that were started afterwards have been sometimes difficult, sometimes fascinating experiences of group energy. But we always have that feeling of being knitted together, of belonging to each other and to the task of being in that place which was Clear Creek. Sometimes it felt like we were not alone. We were knitting a bond that stretched out to include others and new projects. There is a warmth in these sharing groups that has become part of the energy of the Meeting.

Our spiritual direction groups continue to have a profound impact on each person who participates. Our willingness to be open and to share is so important to being in community. This has been an unexpected consequence of the rebuilding of Clear Creek Meeting started by Clance over a dozen years ago.

John David Wilson, his brother:

I just know that if Clance had not kept coming to church, the meeting would not be here. I thought Clear Creek was dying but with you people coming back, it is alive again.

Joan Pine, Evanston Meeting:

I recall a workshop a couple of years ago on Outreach where Clance happened to sit next to me. I remember how committed he was to welcoming and enfolding all within reach of Clear Creek Meeting. He told of organizing open houses, potlucks, and other programs to acquaint the surrounding community with the life of Friends. He clearly was devoted to a ministry in the best sense. Would that all of us had such a person in our meetings. I know he will be missed by all of us, not only Friends in Clear Creek. Such a spirit lives on, I am convinced, and will be helping Friends from the Other Side.

Elke Narkiewicz, Upper Fox Valley:

He had a large presence, all at once welcoming and loving and full of confidence in others. I first met Clance when my husband and I asked if we could marry at the Clear Creek Meetinghouse. He clasped us on the shoulders with his large hands and said, "That would be wonderful! We would be delighted." Every time we saw Clance he greeted us with the same warm enthusiasm.

Diane Lockwood Wilson:

Clance and Maurine Pyle had a very special bond. He considered her his mentor, minister, and dear friend. David Finke in recalling a conversation he had with Clance about her said:

He sat me on the porch several years ago to make sure I got the whole picture, which in his view, started with Maurine being with and believing in them as a meeting.

Clance's dream was very simple, that others would come to know and to love what he experienced in the Clear Creek Meeting as a child and then later in life. A close connection with Christianity, as set forth by the early Quakers in this community, and the presence of God in the beautiful, natural setting of the Meeting House. He greeted each person with warmth, love, and such complete acceptance that they dared to participate in the ongoing realization of his vision.

Clance was surprised as he sometimes received attention for his role in the profound turn-around of Clear Creek and, to some extent, even the Illinois Yearly Meeting. And then he was both astonished and humbled when asked to deliver the Plummer Lecture. He was so pleased that Maurine, his mentor, minister, and dear friend would write it for him.

Clance:

I lived in the country, had no desire to live in town. When I go out I think of my favorite hymn, "This is my Father's World." I think its so true. This is my Father's world.

Clance Wilson, a birthright Friend and mentor to many, exemplified the testimony of integrity. He was a "natural" Friend, who denied book learning of the Society, but was a lifelong student of the tradition. When asked how he learned his Quaker values, his simple reply was, "I knew what my parents expected of me." His faithfulness sustained Clear Creek when it dwindled to as few as two attenders on occasion. His welcoming ways put all visitors immediately at ease. He was a peacemaker who looked to the positive when faced with human conflict and, in his Christ-like way, did not judge or verbally criticize others' weaknesses. He truly looked to that of God in others and helped it to shine. This enabled others to transcend their limitations gracefully. He ministered to those less fortunate than he and visited the sick and imprisoned. He was fond of saying, "Jesus taught us how to live." He loved nature and believed in its power to renew us. He dreamt that the natural spiritual gifts of the Clear Creek site would become a refreshment to the spirits of many and that there was no higher purpose. He loved to sing: "This is my Father's World." His words were few, but savory. His spirit was large and gentle. He was the truest of Friends.

-- Bill Mize

Clarence Jeremiah Wilson was born into the Clear Creek Monthly Meeting of Friends on November 2, 1926, and died April 16, 2005, with the many whom his life touched celebrating the precious time he had been among us. Graduating with a Master's Degree in Dairy Science from the University of Illinois, Clarence spent his working life in the field of agriculture, with dairying, farming, and sales of agricultural equipment. His home was always in the McNabb, Illinois, community and area. Although he had ended his formal Quaker membership in 1962, his membership in Clear Creek Meeting was reactivated in 1992. He also served 11 years as its Clerk.

(based on information supplied by Carol Bartles)