

**Illinois Yearly Meeting
Site Envisioning Committee
Plan for the Campus
21 January 2012**

Narrative Walk Through the Illinois Yearly Meeting Campus Plan

There are three clear parts to the Illinois Yearly Meeting (IYM) campus. The south section which was the original two acre parcel, now larger, contains the meeting house (MH) and is the center of the campus, physically, actively, and spiritually. The north section, three acres across Quaker Lane is a wooded grove and contains the campground, cabins, high school bunkhouse and bath house and is the summer sleeping porch for the site. The west section, a six acre old Quaker farmstead is the newest and largest portion. It is centered by the Clear Creek House (CCH), a year round place for worship, meetings, and overnight accommodations, and includes the long shed, an old barn and several other outbuildings. Our task is to better understand each of these sections, to propose how they might be further improved over time, and to knit them together into one whole.

The North Section

The north section has been used as a campground since it became part of the campus in 1969. It has a good sense of privacy, a wooded grove contained on the west and north sides by hedgerows and somewhat screened from the road. It functions best in the summer and good weather months.

Campground Buildings

The Bath House, built in 1975, sits near the center of the three acre parcel. This is used by all of the campers and while functional, is rustic and some renovations may be considered to allow it to be cleaned more easily, keep insects out and to weather winter better. The six newer Cabins, built using materials recycled from the old dormitory in 2006 create an arc in the northwest corner. Each of them can sleep eight persons with bunks in each corner. The High School Bunkhouse, once the dining hall for the yearly meeting and built in 1883 was moved to a position along the east side near the road in 2005 and is the center for high school Friend's activities during the annual sessions, Quakes and work weekends. One room can be warmed with a gas wall heater. It needs to be fixed up with sturdy interior finishes, working windows with screens, and some work should be done to ventilate it and keep it cooler. The exterior deck at the east side should probably be rebuilt or improved in the next decade. The Foxhole, a one-car garage that remained from the original farmstead is often used as a daytime gathering place for the middle school age Friends. The Penn House, an old hen house, is used for storage. A flat piece of ground should be kept open for erecting the tipi. A shaded outdoor meeting circle should be considered, perhaps as part of a new deck or in the location of the existing campfire circle. The rest of the site, especially the area nestled by the cabins and near the Bath House is used by tent campers, and there are a few electrical hookups for camping vehicles.

Campground Walkways

In order to make the campground more fully accessible graded grass paths, perhaps eventually developing into crushed stone or dried clay pervious paved walkways, should connect the driveway entrance at the southwest corner, curving in front of the cabins, the bath house and the bunkhouse forming an arc around the main campground space. A second grass walkway, which may also function as part of a nature trail, will swing around the outside of those buildings in a larger arc from the southwest corner, past the campfire ring, to the southeast corner bunkhouse driveway entrance.

Campground Hedgerows and Landscape

Some trees at the north and east edges of the property have suffered from pesticide drift from the adjacent farm fields and are dead. New native trees and shrubs that are resistant to pesticides will be planted to strengthen these hedgerows and provide food and habitat for more bird and animal species while defining and containing the site and providing some additional privacy.

Campground Parking

Parking will remain where it has been located, close to the road accessed from the driveway at the southwest corner of the parcel. This helps screen the camping area and provides some distance from the road. The redbuds along the edge of the road also help provide screening. Parking will remain on grass as it is usually needed only on a temporary and short term basis, and allows precipitation to permeate the ground rather than running off if paved. Approximately 32 cars can be parked there with about another three near the high school bunkhouse.

The South Section

Near the center of the south property is the Meeting House (MH) which was built in 1875 on two acres of land donated to the Yearly Meeting in the following year. A driveway loop circles the building and allowed buggies and wagons ease of maneuvering and the still hitched horses could be left in the grassy groves at each side of or the open lawn at the center. The five sugar maples near the road and the trees at the east and west sides of the driveway, together with the MH porch define the lawn area. It is an important area for activity and interaction and should remain so.

Meeting House

The front porch was not part of the original MH but was added probably early in the 20th century, and now is such an important part of the building that it is hard to imagine it not being there. Outhouses were located at each side of the rear of the building. The one at the east side has been converted to a tool shed (though it is intact, including the benches with holes) while the one at the west side has been reconstructed to a toilet room and storage/mechanical room. Likewise the east side porch remains intact while the west side porch has been enclosed and forms part of an accessible entry at the end of the wheelchair ramp, as well as ramped passage to the toilet and storage rooms. In the 1940's a basement was dug out under the west half of the MH for use for dining and a kitchen addition was built at the west part of the rear side of the building that extended about four feet above grade. A stair was cut into the corner of the west meeting room and

another stair in a one story “doghouse” addition, built in 1980, is located at the center rear of the building.

The MH is un-insulated and the west meeting room has forced air heat with mechanical equipment located in the east side of the basement with a sheet metal flue that runs up against the center retracting wall between the two meeting rooms. The heat is only useful in early fall and late spring and the building is too high and too large and so difficult, expensive and wasteful to heat during most days in winter.

The MH and the porch, lawn and groves around it are the real center of the whole campus. Many yearly meeting functions have arranged themselves around the MH over time including tents and groups of chairs under the trees for committee meetings and worship sharing, little kids playing and the craft tent just west of the MH, and square dancing and older kids playing on the lawn.

The building is recognized as a national historic landmark and so its exterior appearance and relationship to the landscape should be preserved. It should remain a stand-alone building with respectful distance to any new buildings or structures, especially as seen from Quaker Lane.

Additional Buildings and Land

A dining hall, where meals prepared at the homes of local Quakers were served, was built for the yearly meeting in 1883 and located at the west edge of the original parcel a short distance away from the MH. Later it was used by young Friends and called the Junior Yearly Meeting House (JYMH). It was moved in 2005 to the east side of the campground and became the High School Bunkhouse. Just before it was moved one room functioned as winter meeting space for Clear Creek Meeting which used the MH during warm weather months.

Additional land has been added to this center parcel. In 1960, a two story concrete block dormitory with wood floor and roof structure was built just south of the JYMH and crossed the south property line requiring an additional small trapezoidal piece of property that was given to the Yearly Meeting by the Mills Family. This building was uncomfortable and unsafe and was removed in 2005 with portions of it recycled into the new campground cabins. In 2001 a one acre parcel, 115 feet wide and 360 feet deep west of the original parcel was purchased. This piece contains the small prairie and has been used for parking at annual sessions. In 2009 money was set aside for the purchase of an additional roughly three-quarter acre parcel south of the original parcel. Once this purchase is made, hopefully this year, from descendents of the Mills family, it will allow more of a land buffer around the meeting house from adjacent properties.

Labyrinth

The property along the east side of the MH is one of the quietest places on the site and promotes a sense of contemplation. This is especially true as one moves south toward the rear of the MH. The southeast corner seems an ideal location for developing a Labyrinth

which might be formed and marked by path surface materials, maze plantings or cutting into a prairie.

New Dining Hall

It has been a commonly held desire to move out of our basement dining room to a new dining hall of some kind that is above ground and takes advantage of light and views to make that ritual in a space more on a par with the MH. It could be an unheated porch-like screened pavilion, perhaps served by a rented temporary kitchen in a truck, or it might be an enclosed year-round heated and cooled dining and meeting room surrounded by porches with a permanent kitchen and restrooms as envisioned in 2009. The dining hall should be lower and behind the MH to insure the latter's importance is maintained by its greater presence. It is located nearby the MH as their two functions require close proximity, but far enough away to keep its distance. It should take full advantage of the long views to the south just at the lane between two different farmer's fields which seems to disappear into infinity. It should also have distant views to the north across the open fields north of Quaker Lane, and closer overlooking young children playing near the MH and older ones just west on new playing fields where the prairie is now located. A kitchen garden could be located just west of the dining room and community gardens might be located nearby. The restrooms and kitchen should be connected to a new septic tank and be piped to the existing lift station and septic field behind and to the east of the MH which used to accommodate the old dormitory and now has plenty of capacity.

Sustainable Buildings

Any new buildings should be built using good sustainable practices. They should be oriented east-west, be well insulated, take advantage of natural light and ventilation, use energy efficient lighting, and mechanical systems, use recycled materials, and have a roof angled for solar hot water and photovoltaic panels. The Dining Hall might collect rooftop precipitation to be channeled to the existing cistern for use for toilets or irrigation. The document on Sustainability prepared by the Environmental Concerns Committee in 2008 should be referred to for any new work on buildings or additions.

The West Section

The six acre west section was purchased in 2009 with remarkable unity and speed. The Yearly Meeting was prepared to act as we had spent the previous year working on the designs for a new Dining Hall and Dormitory to be located just behind and beside the MH and were aware of how difficult it was to fit those buildings on the existing site. The design work was ongoing as the economy fell into recession, and the cost of the buildings was higher than initial estimates for a variety of reasons. Just as it became obvious that new buildings were not within our reach in the near term, the property to the west of the MH became available. For a fraction of the cost of even one of the new buildings, we were able to get a new building that, when renovated, would provide us with most of the program functions that were part of the new Dormitory building. Along with this came several potentially useful outbuildings, while doubling our land area so that any new buildings would no longer have to crowd the MH. The property of the meeting now extends about 1440 feet from east to west along Quaker Lane, a little more than one quarter of a mile.

Clear Creek House

At the center of this property was a 2-1/2 story, five bedroom farm house built in 1905 that has now been restored and renamed the Clear Creek House of Illinois Yearly Meeting (CCH). The building provides a winter home for Clear Creek Meeting and year-round indoor heated and air-conditioned sleeping and meeting space for retreats, committee meetings, and annual sessions. It includes two bathrooms with large showers and can sleep a maximum of 16 people. The kitchen is in need of some relatively minor renovation that may take place this year. The first floor rooms need to be made accessible with ramps, probably leading up to, and at the rear vestibule entrance area. The attached garage may be able to be converted, or demolished and a new addition built to accommodate two or three accessible sleeping rooms as well as two or three accessible common bathrooms. If this is accomplished the house should be able to sleep as many as 24 guests overnight.

Caretaker

It is anticipated that a caretaker will be needed on a part-time to fulltime basis as we try to maintain the property and expand our use of it in the coming years. The unfinished attic of the CCH might be renovated for lodging an onsite caretaker (who would use the existing kitchen) and would not require an exterior fire stair from the attic (though a good means of secondary egress would be desirable). Eventually a separate cottage for a caretaker might be needed and could be located near the driveway and Quaker Lane at the northwest corner of the property. This might involve removing the existing round Grain Bin or renovating it for that purpose.

Outbuildings

The west property contains a timber framed Barn near the southwest corner that should remain, be protected from deterioration, and might ultimately be restored for some future purpose. Attached to the west side of the barn is a concrete block Dairy Barn which has some foundation issues but is in reasonable shape and can be cleaned up and used for storage. The deteriorating shed attached to the north side of the Dairy Barn should be demolished soon. Three tall clay tile Silos south of the Barns have been sealed to make them safe from potential climbers. Perhaps they might ultimately be used to mount wind turbines for generating electricity, or for observatories if outfitted with a safe spiral stair, or as interesting hermitages for a contemplative retreat. Along the west side of the driveway are a metal Machine Shed and the Grain Bin. The Machine Shed is currently rented out in return for mowing a portion of the site, but might be better used for seasonal and maintenance equipment storage for our use as spaces we currently use are demolished or renovated for other purposes.

New Dormitory

The CCH already functions much like the dormitory that was designed in 2008 before the economy stumbled and before the additional property was purchased. A second Dormitory might be built in the future if the need arises and should be located south and west of the CCH and in line with the Barn. The plan of that dormitory is used as a placeholder on the drawing (likewise at the dining hall). The actual buildings may be different as the program for the number and types of rooms might change. Any meeting

space in this new dormitory should be located on the east end and a view corridor to the MH free of trees should be maintained as well as views to the south. A new septic tank and field will need to be developed in the field next to this building to serve it and the proposed accessible sleeping rooms at CCH. This building, CCH, and the farm outbuildings form the boundaries of a large outdoor room enclosing the loop driveway and the lawn inside.

Quiet Camping

The space inside the CCH driveway loop could be used for a quiet camping area with campers using the new bathrooms at the CCH.

The Long Shed

With the purchase of the new west parcel the meeting property extends along the south side of Quaker Lane a distance of 1165 feet and varies between 360 feet and 378 feet in depth. A natural ridge runs parallel to the road and rises about five feet above the road surface, dropping away to the south along the rear of the property. The MH and CCH sit roughly atop this ridge. A long metal shed built about 1960 also sits atop this ridge. It is about 250 feet long and about fifty feet wide. It was used in the past for raising chickens, and later, foxes. It has a shallow concrete foundation that extends up a few feet above grade, and is a frame building with wood trusses making a ceiling eight feet above a dirt floor. The walls and roof are covered in aluminum. The western-most portion is separated from the rest and outfitted as a garage/storage space with a concrete floor. This building would be difficult to re-use in a good way and the recommendation is that it be demolished. The aluminum can be recycled, perhaps helping to recover a portion of the demolition costs, and the wood might be salvaged for possible re-use.

New Driveway Connection

A driveway loop sits to the west of the CCH. It once looped around the original brick farmhouse that was refashioned into a garage after the new house was built and torn down circa 2000. A new drive should be built connecting the back of the MH driveway loop with the CCH driveway loop. This will create an internal connection for pedestrians and people between the two buildings and properties and the new buildings should be located along this drive. Initially it might be graded smooth and kept in grass but ultimately it should be paved with crushed stone or dried clay as the other drives. It could follow a straight line, or be made to gently curve as it connects the MH, Dining Hall, CCH, Dormitory and other outbuildings. This will be the primary route for the golf cart shuttle traveling between the MH and CCH, and eventually the Dormitory and Dining Hall as well.

Views

The demolition of the Long Shed will open up land at the top of the ridge and also allow an unobstructed view from the CCH to the MH. Care should be taken that no new trees are planted in the View Corridor between the two buildings, or in other important view corridors marked on the site plan, such as the views south from the MH and any new buildings, and the views north from the MH porch to the McNabb church steeple, and from the Dining Hall and CCH porches.

Memorial Grove

The land currently occupied by the Long Shed and immediately to the north could be developed into a landscaped Memorial Grove, a place where we might walk through, or sit and remember Friends who have left us. A covered Pavilion might be built on or near the concrete slab at the west end of the Long Shed. The landscape should be designed to avoid lawn care and mowing.

Playing Fields and Campfire Ring

The new Playing Fields and Campfire Ring are located where they can be close enough to the MH and Dining Hall to feel close and visible from those buildings but far enough away so that the games don't disturb lectures or worship and the late night campfires don't disturb sleepers in the campground or at CCH or the Dormitory. This location will require the removal of the present prairie.

Walking Paths

A graded walking path will be developed to connect the walkway in front of the MH, the Campfire Ring, Playing Fields, Lawn Parking, Memorial Grove, the front of CCH, and the loop drive and Quiet Camping area. A branch walkway might connect to the new drive which would create another connection between CCH and the Dining Hall. These will help to make the site more accessible to those that have difficulty walking over uneven surfaces and for those in wheelchairs.

Parking

Parking for the MH is normally on the grass adjacent to the MH loop driveway but during annual sessions the driveway is closed to parking and used sparingly for deliveries and organizing out-trips, and to drop off folks who have difficulty walking longer distances or over uneven terrain. Parking for them during the sessions has been located close to the meeting house in the strip between the prairie and the trees just west of the original MH parcel, but in the new configuration this would put parked and moving cars between the younger children's play area and the older children playing on the new Playing Fields. Also, the terrain was uneven and difficult to manage for many of those with difficulty walking. The solution chosen was to encourage those who need accessible parking at the sessions to drive in to the MH driveway loop and have their cars valet parked by a high school or young or older adult Friend who would return their keys and let them know the location of their car. When ready to leave the Friend on parking duty at the time can retrieve their car, or they can catch the golf cart shuttle running between CCH and the MH.

Much of the parking would be on the lawn located near the road between the driveway entrance just west of the MH sign and extending in front of the Playing Fields and Memorial Grove to the driveway entrance just east of CCH. This area should be able to accommodate at least 40 vehicles. It would be screened from the road with smaller native flowering trees in a similar fashion as the redbuds at the campground parking. Having much of the parking located close to Quaker Lane means that, for the most part, cars don't penetrate the site very deeply and cross fewer pedestrian paths. There is the possibility of additional parking that is located away from the road and deeper in the site.

If there is a great need, parking for CCH and the new Dormitory can be located along the south side of the new connecting driveway lane, just south and east of those buildings and this could allow for about 20 more vehicles. Carpooling and ride sharing should continue to be encouraged and perhaps van pickups from passenger train stations on the Burlington and Illinois Central lines and Bus station can be worked out to minimize energy usage and reduce the numbers of cars on site.

Landscape

When you look at the campus in aerial photos you can see that the whole twelve-plus acre site is a kind of natural oasis in a kind of agricultural desert. The Environmental Concerns Committee has encouraged the Yearly Meeting to encourage a diversity of native plant and animal species and to choose a variety of plants and make other landscape choices that will further that. With so much more land grass mowing expenses are very high. One idea that can contribute to the natural environment and reduce mowing expenses would be to create a large swath of prairie across the whole south and west edges of the property that lies south of Quaker Lane. This would give us about two acres of prairie and the long views to the south toward the farm fields would look across this prairie at closer range. A nature trail might lead alongside and into this. Making this prairie will take a good deal of effort to establish and some to maintain it as well. A new hedgerow has already begun to be planted along the west property line and will extend along the south property line behind the barns. The existing hedgerow along the east property line near the MH will be filled in and extended to the new corner of the site once it is purchased. These should encourage insects and birds and other small animals to take residence. We have hosted owls in dead trees and the Barn, and other interesting birds have been seen and heard on site as well. Orchard trees might also be added to the site for their fruits as well as their beauty. This would be of benefit to humans as well as animals. The ECC has developed a Landscape Guidelines document for the site and has begun to work on the hedgerows.

Conclusion

This plan sets out to give us some guidelines to follow so that we can make the best of our campus and dream into the future. It gives us a framework that allows us to begin work on projects that won't be undone by a later project. It encourages us to make all of the campus more accessible. It pushes us to make this place more environmentally sustainable for all of the species occupying it, human, plant and animal. It understands that there are different kinds of spaces; active and passive places, quiet and loud places, and daytime and nighttime spaces. It recognizes that buildings and landscape can come together to make good outdoor rooms, indoor spaces, and transitional spaces between the two like porches. It tries to organize activities in a way that is symbiotic and natural so that the connections from one part to the next and one place to the next function well. Hopefully it will help to make us a stronger and more engaged community, while being open, inviting and welcoming to the local community around us.