

## Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917–1950

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a gifted gardener, a descendant of the original settlers of the Community of True Inspiration who was born in the Amana Colonies and who has been committed to a home and small plot of land for decades. Rettig and his spouse have carefully preserved a foodways tradition that should be of interest to folklorists, historians, agronomists, chefs, and anyone interested in local and regional food systems. Through horticulture, the book provides significant insight into one of Iowa's most intriguing immigrant early settlement communities.

*Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917–1950*, by Allan W. Austin. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012. xi, 257 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Kristin Anderson-Bricker is associate professor of history at Loras College. Her dissertation (Syracuse University, 1997) was "Making a Movement: The Meaning of Community in the Congress of Racial Equality, 1958–1968."

The content explored by Allan Austin in *Quaker Brotherhood* intersects with the history of Iowa through the Scattergood Friends School. In 1938 the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) created a hostel for European refugees fleeing the growing threat to Jews at the defunct Scattergood Boarding School in West Branch, Iowa. Because of its isolated location in agricultural America, the Scattergood Hostel provided an ideal location to achieve Quaker goals of assimilating Jewish refugees into American society. The hostel provided a space to recuperate from the forced loss of community, a curriculum to assist in adjusting to new lives in the United States, and contacts in the region to relocate refugees in nearby communities. At the same time as the AFSC was carrying out this peace work, it was also working toward its goal of improving race relations through intercultural connections. Specifically, this small group of Quakers believed in ameliorating racism by transforming individuals. They created opportunities for people to have contact with those different from themselves, and through those experiences hoped for greater understanding between diverse peoples. The 185 guests who resided at Scattergood on their way to more permanent lives in America brought diversity to Cedar County and interacted with Iowans in both formal and informal ways. By 1943, the flow of refugees had slowed and the Iowa hostel closed.

Although a minor story in *Quaker Brotherhood*, Scattergood Hostel provides a good summation of the interracial activism of the AFSC up to that point. Beginning in the 1920s, the organization fought racism by promoting personal contact between people of color and whites,

particularly members of the Society of Friends who reflected the racist attitudes of the society at large. The Interracial Section (1924–1929), the American Interracial Peace Committee (1927–1931), and the Institute of Race Relations (1933–1941) used educational outreach to recruit African Americans to Quaker pacifist ideas and to create opportunities for blacks and whites to build personal relationships. The summer workshops of the 1930s, which brought together interracial faculty and students for one month of study and shared living, carried the ideas of social science research to the AFSC. These ideas affirmed the Quaker belief in the malleability of human nature and the ability to transform human values and attitudes, but also pushed AFSC leaders to realize that in order to end racism, they needed to reform society; racist ideals may be culturally constructed, but the economic system in America exacerbated racism. In fact, AFSC leaders came to see the competition between various peoples for limited economic resources as a root cause of prejudice.

The refugee crisis of World War II led them to an additional realization: by responding to the needs of displaced peoples, they also worked toward building an interracial society. So, after the war, the AFSC leaders determined to work on race obliquely. In other words, they needed to solve human problems—especially around poverty—and in the process, the interracial groups of people involved would build relationships and abandon their prejudices and fears. By the early 1950s, the AFSC no longer labeled its indirect approach as race relations work, preferring to house it in the Community Relations Committee. Some programs provided assistance to improve housing, others challenged segregated schools, and still others taught self-reliance. Most successfully, they worked to expand the range of jobs available to African Americans. A well-entrenched philosophy by the early 1960s, the community relations approach led AFSC staff to embrace the ideas and tactics of Saul Alinsky.

Essentially, *Quaker Brotherhood* conveys the difficulties of achieving racial reform in America during the first half of the twentieth century. The AFSC persisted despite constant financial challenges and some Quakers' continued resistance to racial equality. In assessing the work of this organization, success must be measured in small increments: one white individual realizing that the African American across the table differed little from himself; an African American getting a job in a previously all-white department store; poor neighbors learning self-reliance through gardening and canning. The interracial activism of the AFSC—plagued by inadequate finances, conflict among staffers, the starts and stops of committee work, and success measured in the transformation of one life—reveals that achieving change is long, slow, and unexciting. Small numbers of individuals spent lots of time thinking

and talking and incrementally trying out ideas decades before the civil rights movement brought faster-moving changes. Thus, Austin leaves us with an important lesson to learn about reform, applicable to both the past and present.

*Black Print with a White Carnation: Mildred Brown and the Omaha Star Newspaper, 1938–1989*, by Amy Helene Forss. Women in the West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. xii, 241 pp. Illustrations, table, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 paperback.

Reviewer Darrel E. Bigham is professor of history emeritus at the University of Southern Indiana. He is the author of “The Black Press in Indiana, 1879–1985” in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1854–1985* (1996) and *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (1987).

Author Amy Helene Forss describes Mildred Dee Brown (1905–1989) as publisher of the longest-running black newspaper founded by a black woman in American history. She was actually the *co-founder* (with her then husband) of the *Omaha Star* in 1938. Always sporting a white carnation corsage, Brown became matriarch of the historically African American near north side of Omaha. Born in Alabama, the newlywed migrated northward with her physician husband in 1928, part of the Great Migration that transformed the cities of the Midwest. After brief stays in several other midwestern cities, she and her husband settled in Omaha in 1938. Over the five decades that followed, Brown’s weekly newspaper played a variety of roles – promoting communication within the black community and between blacks and whites as well as advocating fair housing, school desegregation, fair employment, and racial harmony. The late 1960s proved her greatest challenge, as riots racked the north side and much of the infrastructure and the population suffered enormous damage.

Forss argues that Brown’s achievements were significant. She was the only black, female newspaper owner not to inherit a weekly from her husband. The only surviving black newspaper in Nebraska (with circulation figures not clearly provided, unfortunately), the *Star* was built on Brown’s strong sense of family tradition, promotion of the politics of respectability, support for community activism, encouragement of racial solidarity, and alteration of strategies to fit the times. No one ever doubted who was in charge of her newspaper, though.

Forss takes us through eight chapters of narrative. The first discusses Brown’s family’s roots in Alabama; the second her participation in the Great Migration. During the Browns’ brief sojourn in Sioux City, they created a newspaper, the *Silent Messenger*, for fellow congregants