

FREDERICK BARNES TOLLES

Frederick Barnes Tolles, the noted Quaker historian and librarian, was born in Nashua, New Hampshire, on April 18, 1915. His parents were James Ulysses and Josie Hobson (Barnes) Tolles. After graduation from the Proctor Academy in Andover, New Hampshire, in 1932, Tolles entered Harvard College, from which institution he graduated with an A.B., magna cum laude, in 1936. He stayed on in Cambridge to take an A.M. in English and to begin more advanced graduate work in the history of 'a phenomenon called "American civilization,"' while earning 'a modest living as assistant, or blue-book-reader in English.' He received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1947 and an honorary Litt.D. from Haverford College in 1959.

During graduate school Tolles made a spiritual decision that shaped the rest of his personal and professional life. Having discovered 'an eighteenth-century Quaker writer and saint named John Woolman and a twentieth-century Quaker scholar-saint named Henry J. Cadbury,' he wrote in the third person in his Harvard *25th Anniversary Report*, 'he abandoned the "cold tea and pale negations" . . . of Unitarianism for the warmer, more positive and compassionate faith of the Religious Society of Friends.' Shortly afterwards, in 1941, he began his long association with two Quaker institutions, Swarthmore College and its Friends Historical Library. At the college he rose through the ranks from instructor to Howard M. and Charles F. Jenkins Professor of Quaker History and Research (1954) and Jenkins Professor Emeritus (1970). He took several leaves of absence during this time. Drafted in 1943, he refused service in the army as a conscientious objector and was thereupon assigned to alternative work in Civilian Public Service. He spent two and a half years working on various conservation projects, serving as 'a guinea pig in a starvation project,' and helping counsel

fellow COs. From 1950 to 1954 he was on leave of absence from Swarthmore as a fellow at the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California. And a long series of illnesses and operations kept him out of classrooms and in hospitals for eighteen months beginning in the summer of 1958 and again in the summer of 1961.

Tolles was an important and productive scholar. His stature derives, in part at least, from his having written about the Quakers in the larger context of American society. Perhaps more than those of his fellow Quaker historian Rufus M. Jones, Tolles's works, beginning with his first book, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia* (published in 1948 as one of the first monographs sponsored by the Institute of Early American History and Culture), fit well into the mainstream of American historical writing on the early period. Tolles, of course, was not unaware of this. After Clifford K. Shipton wrote to congratulate him on the publication of *Meeting House and Counting House*, Tolles replied, 'The Quakers and other groups in the Middle Colonies deserve the same kind of scholarly treatment that the New England Puritans have received. It is the fault, I think, of the graduate schools and historical societies in this region that they have never received their due.' Other books followed in this scholarly mold: *Slavery and the 'Woman Question': Lucretia Mott's Diary* (edited, 1952), *Atlantic Community of the Early Friends* (1952), *George Logan of Philadelphia* (1953), *James Logan and the Culture of Provincial America* (1957), *The Witness of William Penn* (edited with E. Gordon Alderfer, 1957), *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture* (1960), and the *Journal of John Woolman* (edited, 1961).

Membership in the American Antiquarian Society came to Tolles in April 1967. 'Often in the past,' he wrote Ted Shipton, 'I have dreamed about becoming a member of the American Antiquarian Society, though I have always told myself to

stop dreaming, for it would never come to pass. But now it has!' Because of distance and illness, Tolles was not active in the Society. He attended no meetings and published no articles in the *Proceedings*.

Tolles married Elizabeth Ellen Smith on June 24, 1939. They had three children, Ellen, James Melville, and Katharine, born in 1942, 1944, and 1949, respectively. 'In his family life,' Tolles wrote (again in the third person), 'he was outrageously contented.'

Poor health nagged Tolles's career and forced his retirement from teaching at the age of fifty-five. He died in a nursing home on April 18, 1975, his sixtieth birthday. His wife, children, a sister, and two grandchildren survive him.

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