

Moses Brown School Incorporation

Background and Context of Unresolved Issues

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The Moses Brown will is lost and other records of the time when bequests and gifts were given to New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM) to establish what is now known as the Moses Brown School are incomplete.

However from those records and from various discernment sessions, we believe a fair summary of the charge given to (and accepted by) NEYM when the School was established is:

The School will be a Quaker Boarding School (administered in a manner consistent with Quaker practices and testimonies) to educate Quakers and some of the children of the poor in a manner that effects good religious and moral character and in a manner that serves to effect the ability to make an honorable living.

More specifically, the original deed from Moses Brown (the individual) to certain trustees which was recorded in the Providence Land Records, April 24, 1819, grants the property "In trust and to their successors and assigns forever to have and to hold and for the intentions and purpose of the aforesaid People, Friends or Quakers of the Yearly Meeting for New England to erect suitable buildings thereon for a School House or Houses for the purpose of instruction in guarded education of the rising generations in a Boarding School or schools according to the original minutes of the intentions of the said Yearly Meeting and hereafter set forth for the most effectual government thereof by the grantor and grantees herein expressed." This deed further recites: "It being always hereafter to be understood that the whole of the said granted premises is and are to be at the sole disposal of the said meeting best in such manner that the said interest property, rents, profits, income and use is to be forever hereafter held and proved by the said meeting for the purpose of keeping up and maintaining a School or Schools for the education of the rising generation as aforesaid and is never at any time hereafter to be divested or applied to any other use or purpose whatsoever."

The trustees then transferred the property to the newly incorporated (by act of the Rhode Island Legislature) Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England by deed recorded, August 15, 1828. This transfer was subject to the restrictions of the deed from Moses Brown

As we come to a time in which NEYM is asked to turn ownership (and thus ultimate responsibility) for the School over to an independent corporation governed by a Board of Overseers of which 1/3 of the members must be Friends – the following unresolved issues have risen – and are here recorded.

1. *Does NEYM properly judge that its charge to provide a Quaker School in perpetuity is honorably discharged to another governing body?*

Context and Reflection:

- a. Many/most NEYM Friends believe that the Moses Brown School at present is a wonderful school and an excellent example of a Quaker education. A living experience with Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship are reported to be an authentic part of the Moses Brown School experience. A meeting for worship is held every Wednesday. Quaker business

- practices are followed by the Board of Overseers, including the requirement that decisions are made by a ‘sense of the meeting’.
- b. Some Friends throughout the years have judged that while some Quaker education, testimonies and practices are part of the School experience... Quakerism and Quaker practices are not as important at the School or as widely practiced as ‘ought’ to be the case. Some Friends believe that the Moses Brown School has become more of a traditional New England college preparatory school than a Quaker school. Many Friends believe it is a shining example of a Quaker, college preparatory school. (Note: also see “d” below)
 - c. Friends recognize that for many years, day-to-day operation of the School has been the sole purview of the School administration and the Board of Overseers. The current accomplishments and condition of the School is largely a product of the School’s administration, faculty and Board’s vision and efforts. Some Friends therefore believe that, outside of (plausibly) technically/legally holding such a right, NEYM gave up the right to make major decisions for the School many years ago.
 - d. The current proposal to incorporate the Moses Brown School includes provision for an ongoing “Committee on Nurturing Friends Education” made up of members of NEYM and the Moses Brown School community. Some Friends believe the existence of such a committee goes a long way in guaranteeing the continuance and enhancement of Moses Brown as a Quaker school. Some Friends believe that such committees can fairly easily become powerless and irrelevant.
2. *Does NEYM properly judge that its charge to provide a school to educate Quakers (and its concern for education of children of the poor) in perpetuity is honorably discharged to another governing body?*

Context and Reflection:

- a. The Moses Brown School has admissions policies that encourage recruitment, admission, and tuition assistance for the children of Friends.
- b. Present policy, however, neither guarantees future policy nor codifies this most basic purpose of the school in perpetuity.
- c. Some Friends believe that this original most basic mission, to educate the rising generation of Friends in New England, must be reaffirmed and accepted as at least one of the ‘core missions’ of the School in perpetuity.
- d. Representatives of the School report that roughly 10% of the current student body are children of the poor.
- e. Some Friends have expressed the sense that a statement of the School’s intention to honor at least that level of education for the poor, in perpetuity, would allow them to judge that its charge to provide education for children of the poor in perpetuity is honorably discharged to another body.

3. *Does NEYM properly judge its charge to provide a Quaker school administered in a manner consistent with Quaker practices and testimonies is honorably discharged to another governing body?*

Context and Reflection:

There has (have) been occasion(s) in the past when NEYM Friends have felt that investments made with the School's endowment fund have not met NEYM's standards for investment (peace testimony and stewardship testimony). The proposed new By-laws commit to following Quaker practices in such regard.

4. *Is the enormous net worth and educational resource, that Moses Brown School has become, properly given to another governing body to determine the future use of that resource?*

Context and Reflection:

- a. Many Friends (see paragraph "c" in #1 above) believe that school is already governed by others and that we need to let it go in an official way.
 - b. Some Friends believe we have not undertaken that discernment in a sufficient enough manner and believe that institutions such as the Moses Brown School are needed by Friends (with direct oversight by Friends) to educate generations of students who will, in their adult lives, reflect Quaker values in the world. These Friends have asked whether it is appropriate that such a resource be used (in large part as they see it) to educate upper middle class Providence young people. Such Friends urge that a broad discussion of the School's importance to the mission of Friends take place before any transference of this resource to another governing body occurs.
5. *Within the context that many years ago NEYM acquiesced in allowing the boarding component of the School to be laid down – Does NEYM have any further responsibility to hold open the possibility of a resumption of the boarding option at the Moses Brown School?*

Context and Reflection:

Quaker children from outside of the greater Providence area once attended the Moses Brown School because boarding facilities were available. There are NEYM Friends who believe that any future administration of the School would properly maintain openness to a resumption of the boarding option (or hospitality in local homes) so that more distant Quaker children could consider attending the school.