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## Willis H. White Papers

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1874-1966 (*Bulk:* 1919-1942)

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Read collection overview

A convinced Friend who became an advocate for peace, Willis H. White was a member of the East Greenwich Monthly Meeting. A secretary in the Providence-based real estate firm William H. White & Sons, White was active in several organizations promoting peace and spiritual renewal within the Society of Friends in the years after the First World War.

The bulk of Willis H. White's papers are concentrated on his activities on behalf of peace, social justice, and the Society of Friends in the period 1919-1922. The collection includes materials documenting White's work with the American Friends Service Committee and on invigorating the Society through the London Conference of All Friends and the evangelical Forward Movement of Friends, and there is a relatively small, but interesting series of letters from the labor and peace activist, A. J. Muste.

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### Background on Willis H. White

A convinced member of the Society of Friends, Willis Harkness White was born in Millville, Massachusetts, on Dec. 22, 1862, the son of Maranda (Harkness) and John Baker White. Moving with his family to North Uxbridge at the age of three, White was not yet five when his mother passed away, and barely seven when his father married for the second time to Julia A. (Roper) White.

As a young man, White worked at a variety of white collar jobs for firms in and near Providence, R.I., until 1883, the year in which he turned twenty-one, married, changed religion, and began his career in earnest. On Feb. 21, 1883, White joined the Society of Friends when he married a devout young Quaker woman Emily Sisson, and shortly thereafter he was hired by his brother-in-law, Charles Sisson, to become bookkeeper for the New Hope Webbing Company. When that company incorporated in 1889, White was named Secretary.

Willis and Emily raised four children: Mary H. White (1884-1979), who married Arthur L. Flagg in 1910; Charles Howard White (1885-1975), Louisa White (1894-1980), and Edward Asa White (1896-1994). As his sons reached adulthood, White left Hope Webbing to set up his own real estate firm and mortgage brokerage, the William H. White & Sons Company, naming Charles President, Edward as Vice-President, and serving himself as Treasurer.

Outside of work, White became an active presence in the Greenwich Monthly Meeting and the New England Yearly Meeting. A social reformer, he was an ardent supporter of the American Protective Tariff League and a staunch prohibitionist, serving for several years as treasurer of Anti-Saloon League of Rhode Island. Fittingly, given his background, he served on both the Finance Committee and Real Estate Committee of the Yearly Meeting, and he was active in the American Friends Service Committee, in Quaker peace work, and the evangelical Friends' Forward Movement, which in the years after the First World War sought to reinvestigate spiritual commitment among Friends. In 1922, he was selected as a delegate to the London Conference of All Friends, an effort to unite all branches of the Society around the testimony against war.

The Whites lived in Providence from 1889 until White's death on April 5, 1946. He is interred in the North Burial Ground in Providence, R.I.

## Scope of collection

The bulk of Willis H. White's papers are concentrated on his activities on behalf of peace, social justice, and the Society of Friends in the few years after the end of the First World War. The collection includes materials documenting White's work with the American Friends Service Committee and on invigorating the Society through the London Conference of All Friends and the evangelical Forward Movement of Friends, and there is a relatively small, but interesting series of letters from the labor and peace activist, A. J. Muste. Also of note are the copy of an address by Harold Bonell, a prominent Baptist minister, to the New England Yearly Meeting in 1942 on peace and a set of minutes from the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of the Smithfield Monthly Meeting regarding the War in Vietnam.

## Inventory

American Friends Service Committee

1919-1924

Box 1: 1

Bonell, Harold: [Address given at the Yearly Meeting of Friends for New England](#)

1942 June 26

Box 1: 2

A Baptist minister addressing the NEYM on peace: "in times like there when even Newcastle suffers destruction, it may be that even the humble importation of an alien collier might well find acceptance." Praise for the work of the American Friends Service Committee; discussion of how "the church ministers to a stricken world." "Peace is not the absence of hostilities; it is the presence of a state of mind and spirit that makes hostility impossible. Peace has never been secured by war." Church and Soviet Russia. "It is the task of the church above and before all other agencies to feed the starving and heal the broken in this stricken world, now if possible, if not, just as soon as it is humanly possible to do so. It is the task of the church immediately to take steps in the direction of real brotherhood; we cannot speak to the world of brotherhood while the church is so hopelessly divided. It is the task of the church to demand, now and always, a fairness of attitude and treatment of all men that will make possible that state of mind and spirit that is true peace."

Correspondence

1880-1942

Box 1: 3

Forward Movement of Friends

1920 Mar.-Apr.

Box 1: 4

Forward Movement of Friends

1920 May-Nov.

Box 1: 5

London Conference of All Friends: Correspondence

1920

Box 1: 6

London Conference of All Friends: Ephemera

1920

Box 1: 7

London Yearly Meeting: To Friends the world over and to all who seek the way of life [epistle]

1916

Box 1: 8

Marstaller, Lelia S.: [Conscription of women](#) [printed]

ca.1943

Box 1: 9

Essay opposing the proposal to draft women into military service: "See what our did when they brought slaves to work their farms -- a civil war, a divided, untold human suffering for generations of both white and colored, race problems far solved. Conscription of women is just as potential as was the introduction of slave; and conscription and slavery are not distant relatives."

Miscellaneous

1900-1942

Box 1: 10

Muste, A. J.: Correspondence

1919-1921

Box 1: 11

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)

1919 Sept. 18

Relaying news of the birth of a daughter, Constance, on Aug. 18.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)

1919 Oct. 12

Cannot come to Providence due to a prior commitment at the Forum.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)

1919 Oct. 28

Sorry to hear of Charles Sisson's illness and hopes he recovers. Cannot be in this weekend due to prior engagements.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)

1919 Nov. 21

Expects to be at meeting in Providence on First Day.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)

1919 Nov. 24

A couple of months ago Charles Sisson loaned \$500 to bail out two men in Chester,.. working for the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America; now some members in Utica are a similar situation and the national convention voted to assess one dollar apiece for an fund but will need a loan to keep them going until January. Legal fight resisting in Paterson who tried to drive the union out cost \$5,000 and now the authorities Passaic are trying to do the same, ignoring the court's decision that

they were a lawful: "Of course we haven't \$5000 or anywhere near that amount to spend in every city of country and so we go without our rights! And this is one of the things which causes the among the workers that I was talking about last night."

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1919 Dec. 8

Following up on his request for a loan for the Amalgamated Textile Workers.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1919 Dec. 13

Understands White's position on the labor question and would like the opportunity discuss: the money requested was not for "regular organization work, but to enable us to give fair trial to workers who have been arrested and to whom every one ought to want to give a trial surely. Take my own case in Lawrence last winter. If friends had not contributed, I not have had an adequate trial and it is a moral certainty that I would have gotten at a month's jail sentence, although I was as innocent of wrong-doing as a new-born babe. Now of workers are railroaded to jail in this way and this accounts for so much of the that exists and to many is so hard to understand."

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1920 May 7

Getting along well with their work, though the "present excitement in the industry" makes for more work. Has lately been working on implementing an agreement textile manufacturers that seems to contain "some constructive and hopeful ideas... as I am trying to do the sort of thing for which this agreement stands, I am inclined to agree with thy fear that we must have a smash up before things improve." The movement of the Interchurch World Movement "has done some honest and excellent in investigating and trying to adjust labor difficulties. On the whole, however, I am the movement is degenerating pretty much into a money-raising drive. I gather that Friends especially in the West are more interested in the Interchurch than e.g. in next All-Friends Conference in London. This seems to me deplorable utterly. There is no hope Friends -- and perhaps little for the world -- save as Friends stick to their own God-given. Better be small and peculiar than big and 'without savor.'"

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1921 Jan. 24

Unemployment in the textile industry has been high for more than six months, is high; looking for support for workers' relief.

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1921 Feb. 2

Thanks for the check: "I quite agree with thee that labor tends to be too much in spirit of war, not nearly so much as the other side on the whole, but that is no excuse. My heart I strive to keep in the spirit of truth and love. I am more certain than ever that spirit is our only trustworthy guide."

Muste, A. J.: [Letter to Willis H. White](#) (New York, N.Y.)  
1921 May 27

"If thee believes that I can be of service by telling my labor story in the of the Gospel, as thee phrases it, at Yearly Meeting, I shall be grateful and glad to.... Thee understands of course that I shall not wish to come if my coming were to cause ill that would disturb the Yearly Meeting spirit."

New England Yearly Meeting. Evangelistic and Church Extension Committee  
1922

Box 1: 12  
Newport (R.I.) Meetinghouse sale  
1922

Box 1: 13  
Newsclippings  
1874-1924

Box 1: 14  
Rhode Island Commission on the Employment Problems of the Negro  
1942

Box 1: 15  
[Smithfield Monthly Meeting Peace and Social Concerns Committee](#)  
1966 Feb. 25  
Box 1: 16

Deliberations to build consensus on U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam. Committee urges friends to write individually to congressman and the president regarding issues of concern to us as Friends. We strongly believe that each letter carries weight; we see this work as an individual responsibility if the Quaker ideal is to live." Committee approves funds for the Miami (Ind.) Meeting to hold workshops "in the deep South, negro leaders in the Christian non-violent approach to social problems." Agree for the need for a deeper commitment to Quaker ideals and suggest meetings amongst Friends "We believe there should be a common goal which is a deeper commitment to the Quaker way of Life. We that the theme be 'What Do We think?'"

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Part of the New England Yearly Meeting Records, April 2016.

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Aug. 2016.

### Related Material

SCUA houses a collection of papers for the [Peck-Sisson-White families](#) (MS 933) as part of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends Records.

See the Willis H. White Papers at the Rhode Island Historical Society (MS 1111).

### Digitized content

Selected materials in the White Papers have been digitized and are available online in [Credo](#).

### Language:

English

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## Search terms

### Subjects

- American Friends Service Committee

- Conference of All Friends
- Forward movement (Evangelical movement)
- Pacifism
- Peace movements
- Quakers--Rhode Island
- World War, 1914-1918

### Contributors

- White, Willis H. [main entry]
- Bonell, Harold C. (Harold Charles), 1908-1977
- Muste, A. J. (Abraham John), 1885-1967

### Genres and formats

- Ephemera

### Link to similar SCUA collections

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