

History of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting Locations

The Site Committee began by reviewing our past locations to understand how well each served the Meeting's needs and to remember the reasons for moving to new locations. Most of this information was obtained from past State of the Meeting reports (shown quoted).

Early Years (1976 – 1981)

May 1977: "After much discussion and prayerful consideration, South Berkeley Worship Group asked for preparative meeting status under the care of Berkeley Monthly Meeting. This request was approved at Berkeley's October 1976 meeting for business. We now meet as Strawberry Creek Preparative Meeting in the area of South Berkeley and North Oakland.

For the past year we have met in each others homes. We change homes every two months so that we will not burden any family by too long a stay, yet not change so frequently as to feel fragmented. We are not presently considering a meeting place outside our homes. We are content. Meeting in our own homes strengthens our sense of community and responsibility for nurturing the spiritual as well as physical well-being of our meeting."

May 1978: "The Strawberry Creek Preparative Meeting continues to hold Meetings for Worship every First Day in our home, staying from one to three months in each home."

May 1979: "Strawberry Creek Preparative Meeting continues as a community of about 85 people, 60 adults and 25 children. We hold Meetings for Worship on First Days in individual homes, staying 1-2 months, with up to 40 adults and 10 children in regular attendance."

May 1980: "After long thought and preparation, we were allowed to become a full monthly meeting by the Quarterly Meeting." (No discussion of location in this report).

Graduate Theological Union (1981 – 1984)

Spring 1981: Our attendance has been stable at 35-50. Our first day school has expanded. These dimensions meant that we could no longer be adequately housed in the home of our members. After thoughtful searching and deliberation, we began to experiment with renting sites for worship and first day school. A new location is expected to offer us extra time and space for an adult religious education period. We expect to evaluate these experiences with rental sites."

May 1982: "In April, 1981, we began meeting in rented space at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley."

April 1983: "We continue to meet for worship at the Graduate Theological Union; although we occasionally feel the difficulties of not occupying our own Meetinghouse, we find that the present arrangement suits our needs adequately and frees us to devote resources to other things."

The First Day School has grown enormously. It meets in the nearby University Christian Church building."

May 1984: No discussion of location.

Berkeley Friends Church (1985 – 1996)

May 1985: Missing

May 1986: “In January 1986 we completed our first year of renting space from Berkeley Local Friends Meeting of California Yearly Meeting, often referred to as Berkeley Friends Church.”

May 1990: “About 50 youngsters participate in six First Day classes. We are now in our fifth year of renting space for the Meeting from Berkeley Friends Church, with whom we have held a joint children’s program. Their decision to have a separate program this year led us to reevaluate the purpose of our religious education and challenged us to deepen our relationships and communication with Berkeley Friends Church.”

April 1993: “This year, our meeting held three threshing sessions in which our concerns, fears and divergent views about the Meeting’s role in providing clearness and support for same sex partners seeking marriage under the care of the meeting were aired. As a result, we resolved to do so with the same care and concern as for opposite sex partners.”

May 1994: “Strawberry Creek continues to glory in the number of children in our meeting. There were an average of 23 children in the children’s program during most of the year, led by a devoted group of teachers.”

May 1996: “For ten years, we have enjoyed the privilege of renting space from the Berkeley Friends Church. But as their own needs for space have changed from time to time, we have begun to feel that our consequent adjustments of meeting time, and especially of First Day School arrangements, have not been in our best interest as a Meeting. After friendly conversations with Friends Church, we have addressed the issue through called and strenuous threshing sessions and have reviewed the explorations of a site committee. The reporting and consequent airing of discomforts have continued, but are greatly diminished due to our open, time-consuming, but faithful process for listening to one another and reminding ourselves of the primary necessity for achieving a resolution that will enhance the life of the whole Meeting. We are now at the point of experimenting by holding two Meetings for Worship at the one suitable option of the many carefully researched by the site committee and will thereafter consider what next.”

Shelton Primary Education Center (SPEC) (1996 – 2000)

April 1997: “The major event of our year was the move from Berkeley Friends Church to Shelton’s Primary Education Center. This had us engrossed in the process of making a decision to move, the actual move, settling in to the new place and beginning to become neighbors in our new neighborhood ...

First Day School continues to pose many challenges to us as a meeting. We wish to sustain our living tradition and to provide for a continuing informed Quaker presence in the world. In practice, however, this desire is easily overcome by our own personal needs for shared worship and competing cultural influences. Our children have many commitments and parents seem reluctant to press children into attendance ...

Over sixty-five children are listed in our Meeting Directory. Attendance records indicate an active children's community of twenty-four ...

The move to Shelton's School required a period of special effort by the Facilities Committee to become accustomed to the more complicated procedures for setting up and taking down for the meeting and taking care of the property."

Spring 1998: "Our new site has provided increased space and freedom for our First-Day School Program. There are fewer children in the Meeting than formerly; the largest group is now of high-school age ...

Sadly, our outreach to the community around us has been disappointing to many who wanted to create bridges to our multicultural neighborhood and community."

May 1999: "At Shelton School we enjoy having our own space on First Day and the opportunity for a greater variety of activities after meeting, but some continue to find the meeting space and the noise of BART trains distracting."

May 2000. "The First Day School Program has continued to flourish. In June, certificates of attendance were awarded to 25 children or teens and 3 infants or toddlers ...

For over three years, we have been fortunate to rent a large space at the Shelton Primary Education Center, which has been available to us all day every First Day. During the year, two listening meetings were held on the suitability of our present site and a site committee continued to carefully explore options for either relocating or expanding our space at the present site. Many Friends expressed the desire for a plainer room, visually more spacious and quiet, while at the same time Friends appreciated our location and the large space that is currently available for First Day School, adult education, meetings for business, and our social hour after meetings for worship."

Crowden School (2000 – 2001)

May 2001: "After a lengthy process of discerning whether to move and where to move, we Strawberries were smoothly "transplanted" on October 1, 2000. There had been a feeling that we had outgrown our old location because the worship room, which was used as a kindergarten during the week and had a very active primary school spirit, was visually distracting and could no longer comfortably hold our growing numbers. Furthermore, the bathrooms and some of the First-Day School rooms were not wheelchair-accessible, and conversion of the room from kindergarten to meetinghouse and back again was a minor miracle, accomplished weekly by our hard-working Facilities Committee. Our Site Committee did an extensive search and considered a number of sites before presenting its recommendation of Crowden School ...

... our rent has doubled, and we are paying attention to the effects on our individual and Meeting budgets. And because our current rental agreement will expire in October of 2001, one of our strongest concerns as a Meeting continues to be about ourselves – about our location ...

One similarity between our old and new locations is that both buildings are located on major thoroughfares, but that our Meeting room itself is tricky to find, because it is tucked away behind

a gate, marked by a sign that is only displayed on First Days. This is a literal problem, and perhaps also a metaphor for our relationship as a Meeting to the world outside our gates.”

Berkeley Technology Academy (2001 – 2024)

May 2002: “We have begun a process of discernment on the future of our meeting site prompted in part by the increased size of our meeting, but also by our chronic insecurity as tenants. We have moved several times in recent years and, although we have adapted to each location, each move has taken time and energy from the meeting.”

May 2003: “As we approach the end of our second year at Berkeley Alternative High School, we come to Meeting under the ominous shadow of our country’s wars and threats of war ...

First Day School is the largest ongoing activity conducted by the Meeting, apart from meeting for worship itself. We see 40-50 children and young people coming, with over 30 attending regularly ...

Strawberry Creek gave major attention over the year to questions about a stable, long-term location for the Meeting. Last spring’s four listening meetings ...”

April 2004: “Another area which the Meeting is attempting to discern is its relationship with the space it occupies. After several listening Meetings, a special site analysis committee was set up to bring to the Meeting a review of its needs and options. The Meeting must still discern whether and how different kinds of space or a permanent site might enhance the life of the meeting. The members of the Meeting community are listening to each other and seeking a positive conclusion of this process for the Meeting, whatever that conclusion may be.”

May 2005: “About 100 to 120 of us gather to worship each week ...

Our First Day School is warmly appreciated with parents remarking how much their children love to attend. Approximately 35 young people regularly participate in the First Day School program ...

Still, many of our young Friends find it difficult to stay connected to our meeting community. Some have left to attend school in other states. Young Friends are finding it difficult to afford to live in the Bay Area, one of the most expensive places to live in the country.”

April 2014: “As we continue our searching about whether to obtain a permanent site, we have had many discussions about the resources we have ready for such a purchase and resources (mostly human) and time we have already spent in finding Way to proceed. The Site Committee continued to weigh options and offer possible solutions to the Meeting.”

April 2015: “The Care of the Meeting Committee took on the role of the site committee for the time being. This became particularly crucial when we suddenly lost our meeting space for the summer, and when we realized that our rented space is not adequate for all committees and after-Meeting activities, especially if we hope to accommodate people of all physical abilities.

Our First Day School had a sudden loss of regularly attending children, as well as a depleted supply of adults who were interested in serving the First Day School. We spent six months with

an ad hoc committee doing work on this. We worked on ways to create a welcoming atmosphere for our families; we have come out the other end. A new teen group is coming together jointly with Berkeley Meeting.”

May 2016: “Our First Day School Children’s Program experienced the loss of committee members. With one new member, and the support of hired helpers, it is now bringing energy and spirit to its work.

We continue to rent space at B-Tech High School in South Berkeley. For years, we have explored the possibility of owning a meetinghouse and have contributed to a fund for a possible purchase. So far, we have not found what we have been looking for, and have become more aware of the financial and management burden meetinghouse ownership would bring. This has been very painful, especially for those who have worked so hard and for so long in search of a home of our own. We are now challenged to discern how to proceed, not least, with the substantial funds contributed for a purpose now on hold. Without a meetinghouse, we are not very visible to our local community. Yet we have a welcome stream of visitors who know to look for us.

Our space situation has been eased by the offer of Berkeley Friends Meeting for us to rent space in their recently renovated meetinghouse on Thursday evenings for our committee meetings. There, too, we join with Berkeley Friends in our Wednesday early-morning worship.”

May 2017: “There has been a significant increase in the number of children attending our First Day Children’s Program. The First Day Children’s Program has in the not too distant past experienced some challenges. We are encouraged and delighted that attendance has increased significantly in the past year and that the program is robust and engaging. Some parents have expressed a strong interest in developing a curriculum of (absorbing, deep) Quaker religious education that in the future may be brought to children in the Children’s Program.”

April 2018: “The First Day Children’s Program provides a wonderfully bright light to the Meeting; people greatly enjoyed and appreciated their work on and presentation of the Quaker Testimonies. We are also grateful for a large family whose children reliably come to Meeting; this allows the Children’s First Day program teachers to plan ahead and to know there will be children to teach ...

Other beginnings and endings include laying down of the Site Committee. The committee had been on hiatus for some time, and was officially laid down at Business Meeting. The Berkeley Technology Academy campus has proved to be a good site for our Meeting and we hope that the venue will remain available to us for the foreseeable future.”

March 2019: “Our children are working seriously to understand our Advices and Queries and Testimonies. The whole meeting benefits from the special and lively energy of the young people who come into Meeting to share a report of their First Day experience. We are grateful to them, and we aim to be so dynamic and thriving that they can’t help knowing us and seeing who we are.”

April 2020: “We redirected the Site Contingency Fund (to find a permanent site) to meet financial needs essential to the life of the Meeting beyond ordinary operating expenses, or to respond to specific leadings of the Spirit ...

We continue to seek solutions to two problems that affect full participation in our Meeting: our Meeting takes place in a gymnasium with poor acoustics, and as more of us deal with declining hearing, this is a serious problem. Also, an average First Day can draw 40-60 attenders, and late arrivals are disruptive to some of us and interfere with our experience of worship.”

Observations

Strawberry Creek Preparative Meeting met in individual’s homes when attendance was greater than today’s in-person attendance.

When 20 – 30 children attended regularly between about 1980 and 2005, the Meeting needed 3 to 5 classrooms for First Day Children’s program.

Meeting has experienced declining attendance of both adults and children since about 2005.

Meeting attempted to find a more suitable location than Berkeley Technology Academy since moving there. No suitable location was found despite substantial searching between 2002 and 2016.

Meeting’s needs today are substantially different than they were in 2005, in 2016, or in 2020.

Meeting at Friends Church constrained the space and time available to SCMM. Similar constraints would likely exist when renting space from other churches. This problem also occurred at Crowden School, which often scheduled concerts on Sundays.

Friends appreciated the amount of space and time available at Shelton School but did not like the visual distractions and noise. Many Friends also find the space at Berkeley Technology Academy unattractive and full of visual or auditory distractions.

The realization that much of the space was not wheelchair accessible precipitated a decision to move from Shelton School. Meeting has been clear since then that full accessibility is necessary.

Acoustics are poor in the multipurpose room of Berkeley Technology Academy.

Meeting was difficult to find, hidden from the world, when it rented spaces in churches and schools. It has been less difficult to find since locating at Berkeley Technology Academy.