

Hugh Stewart Barbour, a resident of Kendal on Hudson in Sleepy Hollow, New York, died on January 8, 2021. He was 99 years old. A lifelong scholar, academic, peace activist, and punster, he was still formulating plans well past his mid-90s to write a paper on the meaning of Jesus to Quakers.

Born in 1921 in Beijing, China, the first of three sons of an American missionary mother and Scottish geologist father, Barbour had a peripatetic childhood. By his own account, by the time he was sixteen, he had crossed the Pacific five times and the Atlantic ten, and had been “the outsider in ten schools.” Perhaps this feeling of exclusion helped to shape some of his later, lifelong concerns: Overcoming divisions among Christians generally, as well as among Friends; fostering ecumenism; and supporting those who suffered hardship for their religious convictions. He particularly focused on Quakers and other Christians in regions experiencing religious oppression.

Hugh attended boarding schools in England before entering Harvard College, from which he graduated magna cum laude in 1942. There he majored in the History of Science, but also valued his participation in the Student Christian Movement, where he connected with others across denominations and nationalities. Many in the Student Christian Movement between the World Wars became pacifists and practiced a social gospel committed to justice. These concerns for peace and for justice led Hugh eventually to join the Religious Society of Friends—though not before serving as the pastor of a Congregational church in Coventry, CT, as part of his training in divinity school. Concerned that, as a young man, he couldn’t deliver the Truth that his church members wanted to hear, he chose to pursue teaching instead.

Hugh was accepted at a number of distinguished medical and divinity schools, and chose Union Theological Seminary, earning a B.Div. He studied with Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, and received his Ph.D. in 1952 from Yale University, where his mentor was Roland Bainton. His Yale dissertation became a book, *The Quakers in Puritan England*, which has been an indispensable resource for Quaker historians ever since. Over the course of his career, Hugh authored or co-authored six additional books, including *Early Quaker Writings*, *Quaker Cross-Currents*, *Slavery and Theology*, and *The Quakers*, as well as more than 70 articles, reviews, chapters, and pamphlets. At his retirement, many esteemed colleagues honored Hugh with a weighty Festschrift.

Hugh joined the faculty of Earlham College, in Richmond, Indiana, as professor of religion in 1953. There he met Sirkka Talikka, a Finnish exchange student, and the two married in 1959 in Helsinki. She had been a refugee from Karelia who spent her childhood years in Lapland and Sweden during World War II. She and Hugh connected deeply through their shared experiences of dislocation and uprootedness as children, and a yearning for home and belonging, which they found together at Clear Creek Friends Meeting and the Earlham College community. Through their many years in Indiana and beyond, they kept close ties with family in Scotland and Finland.

Hugh taught widely at Earlham, first focusing on Quakerism, church history, and biblical studies, but then widening the curriculum to include Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and other traditions of East Asia, which he combined into a very popular course in World Religions. Early in his career, when the Earlham School of Religion came into being, Hugh was among its founding faculty. Not long after, when Earlham established its program in peace studies, Hugh became a steady contributor to its offerings. Through all his decades of teaching, he continued to earn his well-established reputation as an “absent-minded professor,” and stories—both reliable and apocryphal—abound.

From his youth, Hugh was a citizen of the world, and he sought to enrich through international experience the lives of his students. He and Sirkka led foreign study groups to Germany, Austria, and the Soviet Union, and also taught summer school at Viittakivi, an International Quaker Institute in Finland. They introduced Earlham students not only to the cultural riches of Europe but also to the genuine difficulties faced by dissidents who lived under repressive governments. He particularly honored East German Friends for their valiant internal stance, and sought to convey such experience in his teaching.

Hugh was committed as much to contemporary Quakerism as to its history. He was active in numerous Quaker organizations, including the Friends World Committee for Consultation, which Hugh represented in Kenya and Japan; the Friends Committee for National Legislation; and the World Council of Churches. Always aiming to promote understanding among different sorts of Quakers, he was active nationally in Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting.

A seeker of truth all his life, Hugh came from a family that combined science and religion, with high expectations that he lead a life of service to others. Hugh pondered deeply the relationship of the authority of individual experience with the conviction that truth resides in community, always on guard against the human tendency toward self-deception. Hugh’s reading of the young George Fox’s relationship with his family focused on love and rebellion—a fitting description of tendencies in Hugh himself. Toward the end of his life, he spoke personally about the meaning of Jesus for early Quakers, emphasizing his ability to bring grace and solace to those burdened by efforts to redress the world’s ills. The twinkle in Hugh’s eye, for which he is remembered by so many, suggests that he may have experienced this grace all along.

Hugh had a lifelong love of the outdoors, and often took his family on camping and canoeing trips to the wilds of Canada and New England. Squam Lake in New Hampshire was a multi-generational extended-family retreat, where Hugh could recharge with two of his favorite pastimes, boating and birding.

Hugh was a cherished member of Clear Creek Meeting in Richmond, Indiana, from 1953 to 1991. There, he was active in many ministries of the Meeting. From 1991 to 2005 he was part of Friends Meeting at Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he had been active as a student in his college years, and where he and Sirkka served together as Resident Friends for four years. He

was a member of Chappaqua Meeting from 2005-2021, where he is remembered for his gifts in teaching and for the weightiness that he brought to the life of that community.