

BENJAMIN HARRISON BRANCH, Jr.
August 27, 1919 - July 23, 1993

Benjamin Harrison Branch, Jr. never actually became a member of Friends Meeting of Washington although several of his relatives were members in the early days of our meeting. He was a member of Lincoln Meeting, in Loudoun County, Virginia, where he was born. His paternal grandfather, a Presbyterian minister who came to live with Ben's parents when he retired, had a strong influence on young Ben. But Ben's mother was from an old Quaker family and Ben grew up on the family farm in Hamilton near many Quaker cousins. He attended Westtown School, as had his mother, and Guilford College, where he met his future wife. In 1950 members of Goose Creek Meeting (Hicksite) and Lincoln Meeting (Orthodox) agreed to unite after more than a century of separation. Ben did not wish to be considered a member of the united Meeting and did not recognize the union; he always maintained that his membership remained with Lincoln Meeting.

Lack of formal membership here, however, did not stop him from being very much a part of our Meeting. He moved to the Washington area forty years ago and his children, James and Millicent, attended First Day School when they were very small. He served for many years on the Library Committee, including four years when he was also the Librarian, and was one of the Meeting's two Historians at the time of his death. As such, he served ex-officio on the Records and Handbook Committee after its establishment in 1990, where he cheerfully performed the tedious task of making copies of 60 years of Monthly Meeting minutes and membership records.

Friends remember him as loving and caring and as "kindness itself," ready to lend a helping hand to others. He was a quiet man, as befits a professional librarian; he was head of the acquisitions department of the library at the United States Geological Survey for almost thirty years. He was a very private person and did not readily share details of his life and work with others.

He talked readily enough, however, when the conversation was about his favorite subject, Quaker history, and happily delved into old documents to check facts, unearth evidence and trace genealogies. He did extensive research on the history of Orthodox Meetings in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting area, particularly in the nineteenth century, and wrote a book and several monographs on the subject. He enjoyed attending Yearly Meeting sessions and gatherings of other Quaker organizations.

He was taken ill while attending the Friends Meeting Triennial sessions in Clinton, New York, and died a week later. We take comfort in the knowledge that his active life came to an end where he was happiest - in the company of congenial Friends.