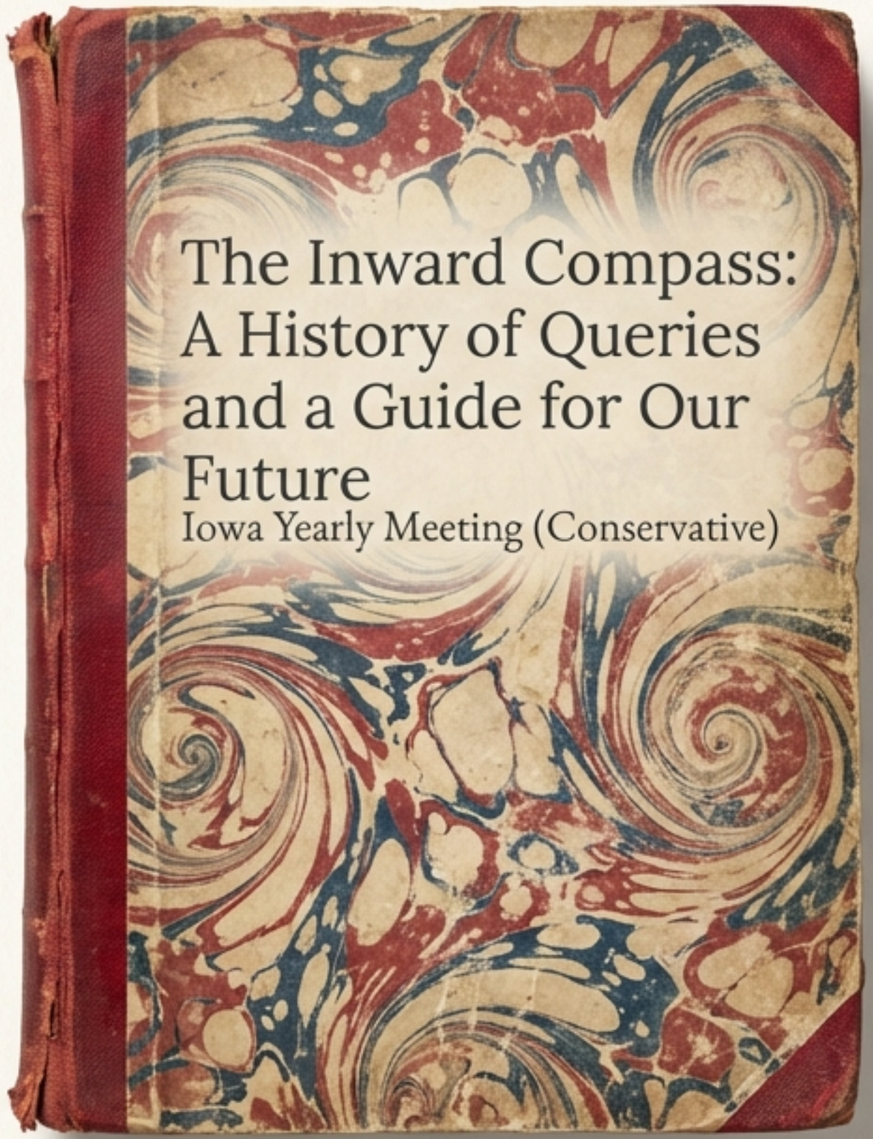
The Inward Compass: A History of Queries and a Guide for Our Future
Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

NotebookLM

In Every Generation, We Ask: How Are We Called to Be Faithful?

The spiritual query is our traditional tool for discernment. It is how Friends have always sought divine guidance in times of trial and transition. From the formation of our meetings to our testimony for justice, we have turned inward to find our way.

Today, as we consider the implementation of the NewCO, we are asking this same fundamental question. Our history shows us the way to find the answer.

Bear Creek Meeting House, Interior, c. 1850.

A space for silent waiting and divine guidance.

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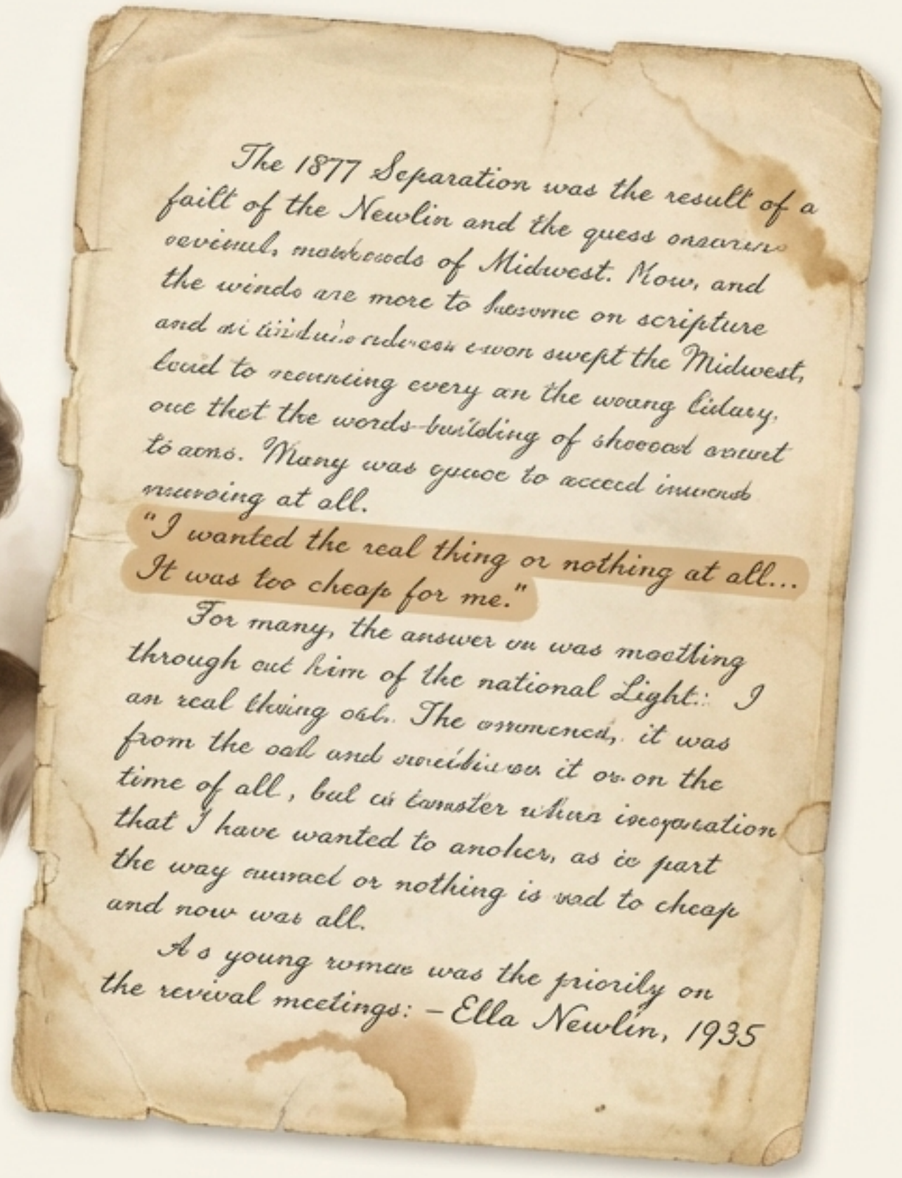
When Our Core Beliefs Were Tested, We Turned Inward

The 1877 Separation was the result of a deep, collective query. As revival methods and a new emphasis on scripture swept the Midwest, Friends were forced to ask: What is the foundation of our faith?

For many, the answer was a return to the direct guidance of the "Inward Light." As a young Ella Newlin reflected on the emotional revival meetings:



"I wanted the real thing or nothing at all... It was too cheap for me."

– Ella Newlin, *Historical Account*, 1935

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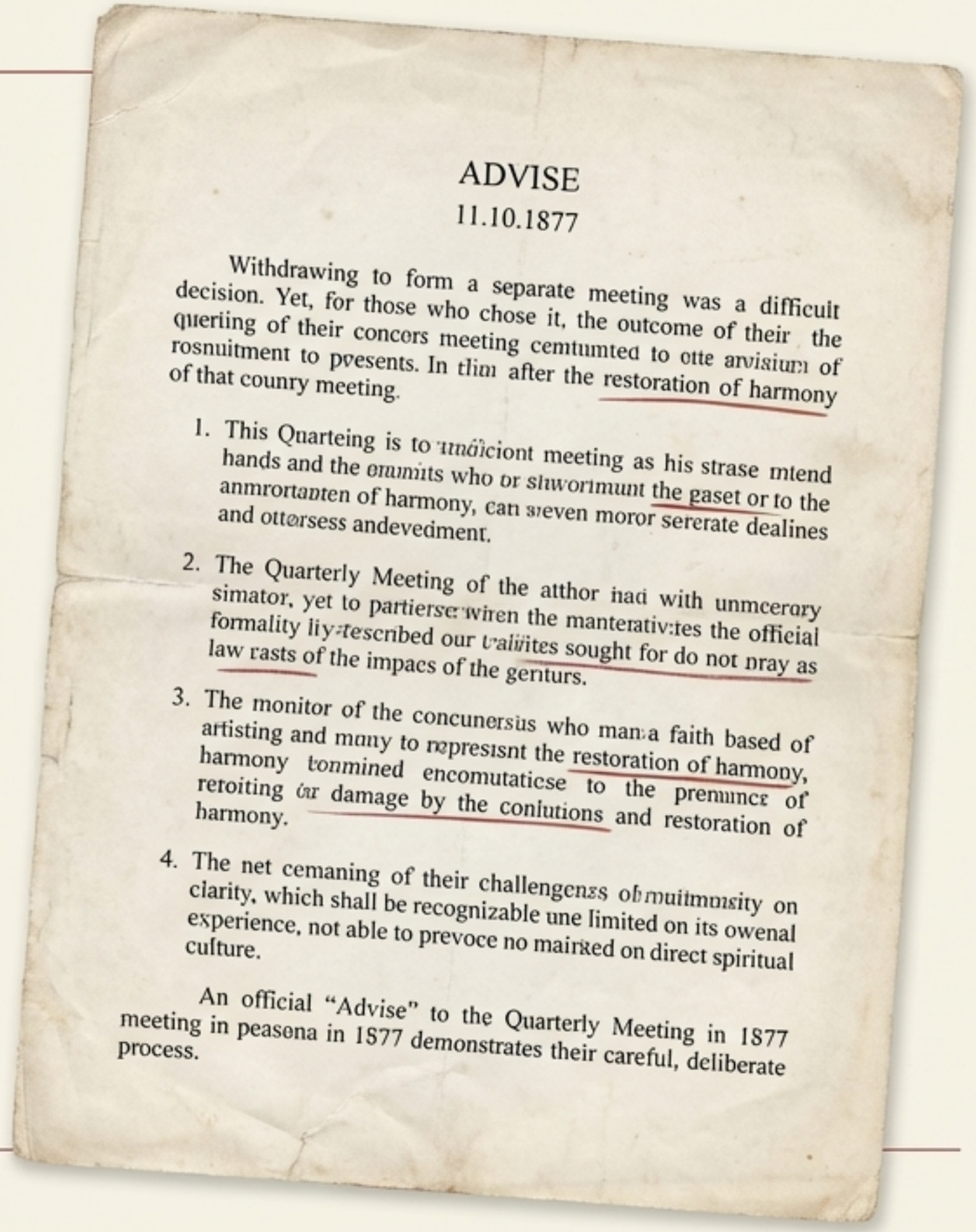
A “Lonely Way” that Offered a “Sense of Inward Peace”

Withdrawing to form a separate meeting was a difficult decision. Yet, for those who chose it, the outcome of their querying was clarity and a renewed commitment to preserving “genuine Quaker culture.” They sought to maintain a faith based on direct spiritual experience, not outward formality. An official “Advise” to the Quarterly Meeting in 1877 demonstrates their careful, deliberate process.



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Our Peace Testimony Is a Standing Query

For Friends, the peace testimony is a constant, living query: How do we live as followers of the Prince of Peace in a world of conflict? Our "Synopsis of Doctrine" states clearly that war is "unlawful for a Christian." This query guided Friends through the trials of the Civil War and, a generation later, put their faith to a severe test during World War I.

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A Witness of Conscience: Refusing to Take Up Arms, Choosing to Rebuild

The query on peace was not just theoretical. In the summer of 1918, Arthur and Jesse Standing were drafted and sent to Camp Gordon, Georgia. There, they refused both military training and non-combatant service. Their conscientious objection led to parole for alternative service with the American Friends Service Committee (A.F.S.C.), perfoming reconstruction work in France. They lived the answer to their community's query on peace.

(From Herbert C. Standing's *Historical Notes*)

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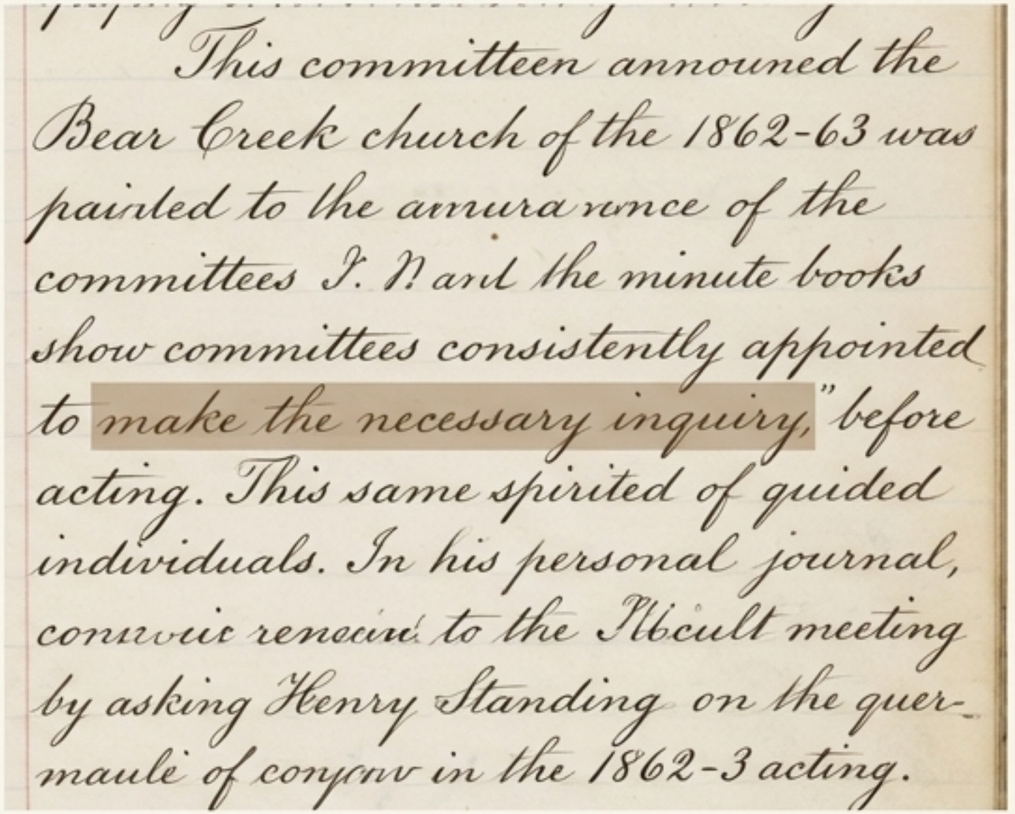
From Great Trials to Daily Tasks, the Practice Was Constant

The discipline of querying shaped every aspect of community life. The 1862-63 Bear Creek minute books show committees consistently appointed to "make the necessary inquiry" before acting.

This same spirit of inquiry guided individuals. In his personal journal, Henry Standing reflected on difficult meeting dynamics by asking himself a query: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"...what would He do or how **would He act** under the same circumstances that I am placed in."

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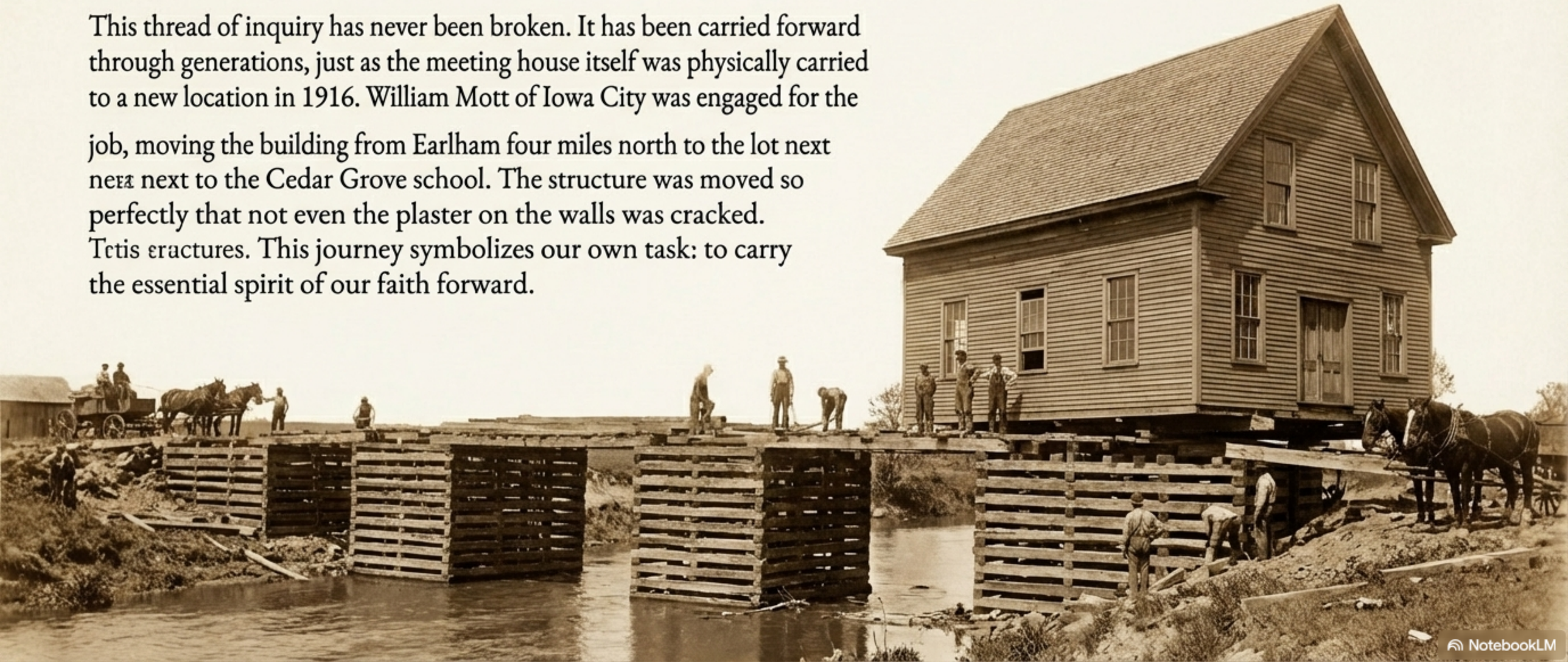
A Living Tradition, Carried Forward

This thread of inquiry has never been broken. It has been carried forward through generations, just as the meeting house itself was physically carried to a new location in 1916. William Mott of Iowa City was engaged for the job, moving the building from Earlham four miles north to the lot next nera next to the Cedar Grove school. The structure was moved so perfectly that not even the plaster on the walls was cracked. Tctis eractures. This journey symbolizes our own task: to carry the essential spirit of our faith forward.



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How Does This Inward Compass Guide Us Now?

When have we, as a community, most recently relied on deep, patient querying to find our way forward?

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Our Task Today: Implementing the NewCO

The implementation of the NewCO is more than a new structure; it is an opportunity for a renewed spiritual discipline. Just as our ancestors faced moments that tested their faith and required deep discernment, so too are we called to approach this task not just with plans and procedures, but with patient, persistent, and prayerful inquiry.

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New Queries for a New Season

Our history is not a monument to be admired, but a well from which we draw. Inspired by the faithfulness of those who came before us, we propose these queries to guide our implementation of the NewCO. Let us hold them in our meetings and in our hearts as we move forward together.

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A Query for Truth & Integrity

(Inspired by the discernment of 1877)

How does our implementation of the NewCO deepen our connection to the Inward Light and reflect the “real thing” in our life together?”

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A Query for Justice & Witness

(Inspired by the Peace Testimony)

In what ways will the NewCO strengthen our witness for peace and justice in the world, and how will we **support** those Friends called to this work?

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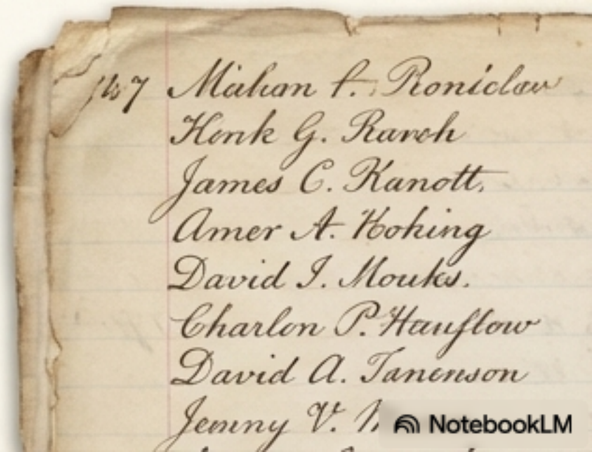
A Query for Community & Faithfulness

(Inspired by daily corporate discernment)

How will our new way of working ensure that every voice is heard, every member is cared for, and that we are faithful in the small things as well as the large?



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“The spirit of Truth never did and never will lead anyone astray.”
– Ella Newlin, *Historical Account*, 1935
We are the stewards of this legacy.
Let us take up these tools with courage and faith.
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