

## PROFILE: CLAIRE MCKENZIE DARROW

By Deborah Haviland - August 2014



*Claire has been a dear friend of mine for more than 26 years. We met when Pete and I moved to Cushing in 1987 and were neighbors and friends/ Friends living on the peninsula down the road from each other. We have maintained our friendship and support for each other through the years. Writing her profile at this time is a gift to her and to the meeting so that all can know her life and appreciate her commitment to the growth of our meeting. She is, indeed, one of our elders.*

*NOTE: In 2010 Claire wrote and compiled a beautiful book for her children and grandchildren. titled McKenzie/Fincke Ancestors. It is enhanced with pictures and*

*stories of her life. Direct quotes in Claire's Profile are from this family history.*

Claire Fincke McKenzie was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, on May 2, 1935. She had one brother, Robert Angus McKenzie, who was two years older and an important part of her life and growing-up years. Bob died in 2002, and Claire has written that she will always miss him. Claire's parents, Ken and Marnie Fincke McKenzie, summered on Cape Cod at Quissett Harbor and Claire spent all her summers there from age of 9 until the end of college. She loved the Cape and being on the water. She came from a sailing family and has been an accomplished sailor all her life. Her grandfather Clarence Fincke had a 36' yawl *Kahuna*, which she loved sailing on during WWII. "I loved being aboard *Kahuna* and going below, climbing up in the fore cabin on the funny shaped bunks and having a nap. We children swam off the boat when we were able to swim around the boat without a life preserver."

"I was lucky enough to be born into a sailing and musical family, strictly amateur but still interested in it all. I started piano lessons at 7 and kept on until teenage years made it impossible to find time to practice in my busy schedule. By that time I had begun singing in the local church choir, which had a talented organist/conductor and I learned how group music worked and loved it." In college she sang in the choir for four years and after college sang in various community choruses.

Claire graduated from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in June 1957. The same month she married Allen MacGregor. They had four children—Kit, Jenny, Leslie and Amy. Today Kit, Jenny and Amy live in Maine and Leslie in New Hampshire. Claire has nine grandchildren, whom she treasures and who have been a special part of her life.

Claire and Allen lived in Connecticut and Bath, Maine, and divorced after sixteen years. She then chose to support herself and moved around Maine for a few years, joining several different choruses and becoming familiar with other conductors and new music. After living alone for seven years she married an old friend, George Darrow, who was director of a wilderness canoe-tripping camp on West Grand Lake, Maine. When George died, after ten years, she moved to Sheepscot and joined the Oratorio Chorale and sang with them for years.

While living in Bath, she worked for a local newspaper, doing its bookkeeping. After her divorce from Allen, she started her own accounting business. She felt good being out on her own. After a second passage of years alone, in 1999 she married another old friend, Rick Freeman. She and Rick love to garden and raise most of their own vegetables, storing them in a root cellar to last the winter. Rick is also a sailor and they have chartered sail boats by themselves to explore Penobscot Bay. They also had a 19-foot daysailer nearby their home “which we jump into when we’re tired of gardening.” Their home in Georgetown is beautiful with keepsakes from both their marriages. It is peaceful and tranquil, on acreage that looks out on meadow, marsh, and gardens and is a haven for birds.

When Claire lived in Connecticut she was drawn to Quakerism and became a member of Guilford Monthly Meeting in New Haven, Connecticut. She continued to follow this spiritual direction and joined Midcoast Meeting in January 1979 by transfer from Durham (Maine) Monthly Meeting. At that time Midcoast was a small meeting that met at the Skidompha Library in Damariscotta.

Over more than ten years the meeting changed venues a number of times—Miles Hospital Conference Center, Choutaeu Chapin’s barn, and Mobius, to name a few. By 1991 the Meeting had grown considerably and discussion began about building a meetinghouse. Claire was always in the forefront advocating for this. After determining that the geographic center of our community was the Damariscotta area, the serious search began for property. It was not easy to find, but the Meeting was finally able to achieve the lovely location where we are now located. Now the Meetinghouse Committee moved forward hiring an architect, negotiating with members and attenders about needs and desires, and planning and carrying out fund-raising. Claire was Clerk of this committee from the very beginning and her energy and commitment to this goal did not flag. She was part of a very dedicated group that helped the Meeting achieve a permanent home.

When the meetinghouse was finished and dedicated in 1995, her daughter Amy was the first to be married under the care of the Meeting. The meetinghouse wasn’t completely finished, but almost—enough to allow this joyous occasion to take place. As the Meeting has grown and changed, Claire has played many roles—Ministry & Counsel Committee and clerk, Building & Grounds Committee and clerk, Nominating Committee, and Clerk of the Meeting. In early years she had the idea for a newsletter to help the members and attenders communicate and get to know each other better. For years she was the editor and I was her assistant. She had the idea for writing profiles of Meeting members and attenders, and she and I did this for a number of years. She has left her mark and helped us mature and grow.

She has also been very active in the wider Quaker community. She was a member of the Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting for a number of years and also served on Yearly Meeting committees. During these years Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting was growing and Claire was also an active participant in VQM affairs.

Over the years she and Rick have had many wonderful trips together and she has seen many corners of the world. But today Claire’s life is quiet. She has Alzheimer’s and aphasia, and she is not a part of the world the way she was most of her life. Rick brings her to Meeting when she says she would like to come. Her daughters visit weekly and her life is smooth and filled with love and caring.

In her family history she ends the section about her life with these words: “It has been an amazing life, none of which I could have predicted in college, except marriage and children. But I am grateful for the painful times and the alone times which I see as occasions for much inner growth. And the good times have been wonderful, My college, Vassar, has imbued me with an innate curiosity to look around and really see what’s important and beautiful there. There is never a dull moment.”