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Friends Farm: Australia's First Quaker Commune

Australia has a long and rich history of religious groups trying to establish some sort of utopia by removing themselves from urban centres to rural idylls. The first of these was *Herrnhut*, in western Victoria (1853–1889), and today there are many such as *Danthonia Bruderhof* and *New Govardhana*, in NSW, *Chenrezig*, in Queensland and *Rocky Cape Hutterites* in Tasmania. While Quakers in the UK and USA have a tradition of forming rural communes starting from the seventeenth century, the first, and most important of such in Australia was *Friends Farm*, established in 1869 on what is now Queensland's Sunshine Coast. This group was led by the charismatic Alfred Allen, a radical Quaker from Sydney. He believed that he had been reborn, held Christ within him, and had achieved sin-free perfection. He was disowned, twice, by Sydney Quakers after when he led his small band of would-be communards to the "wilderness" of Queensland where they sought to create a perfect society. Not surprisingly, it did not quite work out that way.

In *A Question of Survival: Quakers in Australia in the Nineteenth Century*, William Oats wrote of how several Sydney-based Quakers, in 1869, "withdrew to set up in Queensland what would now be described as a 'commune'." This, Oats stated, was "a community experiment on the Mooloolah River. . . known as The Friends Farm."¹ While numerous Quaker communal settlements had been founded overseas, and non-Quaker communes, such as *Herrnhut*, preceded 1869 in Australia,² Friends Farm was the first Quaker commune in Australia and, until now, little has been known about it or its founder, Alfred Allen and other members.³

1. Wm. Oats, *A Question of Survival: Quakers in Australia in the Nineteenth Century* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1985), 274, 281, 283.

2. W. Metcalf and E. Huf, *Herrnhut: Australia's First Utopian Commune* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

3. Many people have helped with this research project, most importantly Jenny Madeline, Archivist for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting, and Alfred Allen's great granddaughter. Others who helped, in alphabetical order, are Daryll Bellingham, Helen Best, Lyall Cowell, Carol Hawley, Wilma Hiddins, Milli Kafcaloudis, Ray Kerkhove, Bill Lavarack, Neil McGarvie, Tim Miller, Kaye Nardella, Judith Pembleton, Clive Plater, and Kate Symonds.

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What/Who are Quakers/Friends?

The Religious Society of Friends, more commonly known as Quakers, began in seventeenth century England, nominally founded by George Fox, although he brought together existing Christian dissenting sects rather than starting from scratch.⁴ Quakers are perhaps best known for “meeting together for worship without any ordained priests or ministers, and without the use of any external rites such as baptism or the eucharist.”⁵ Their basis of worship is to “silently wait upon God.” They usually address each other as “friend” but collectively are usually referred to as Quakers. Globally, there are said to be about half a million Quakers, about 80 per cent of whom follow the “evangelical” or “programmed” tradition where there is an order of service and a pastor.⁶

Quakers, like many other Christian groups, have occasionally seen communal living as the best way to solve practical, material problems while witnessing their faith, unobstructed by social norms. It also appeals to them, and helps them thrive because they are beyond the control of church leaders who might object to their radical ways. This inclination to withdraw and live communally is usually based on biblical texts such as Acts 2:44-7 and 4:32-5, and Luke 12:32-48.⁷ The first Quaker communal group, called Quaker Company, was founded by several Quaker women in about 1692 in Derbyshire, England. Other early, Quaker-established, semi-communal groups in the UK included Gravelly (1825), and Quakers were instrumental in helping Robert Owen establish New Lanark in 1816.⁸ Likewise in North America, Quakers established numerous utopian/communal schemes such as Spring Hill (1829), Fraternal Home (1840), Highland Home (1844), Cedar Vale (1875), and Friendswood (1890).⁹

The first Quaker to visit Australia was Sydney Parkinson, sailing with Captain Cook in 1770, and the first to stay for any time and have an impact were James Backhouse and George Walker, between 1832 and 1838.¹⁰ Australian Quaker numbers grew dramatically throughout the nineteenth century, with Sydney and Melbourne being the foci. Today there are only about 1,000 Quakers in Australia, with about the same number of “attenders” who join them in worship but have not taken the formal step of joining. Most Australian Quakers follow the “non-evangelical” or “non-programmed”

4. The best-known of these dissenting groups were the Laetantine-Arians.

5. See: <http://www.quakers.org.au/?page=A2> (accessed 27 July 2016).

6. See: <http://www.quakers.org.au/?page=A2>; Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (2015). *Epistles and Testimonies*, pp 7–8 (accessed 27 July 2016).

7. T. Bassett, “The Quakers and Communitarianism,” *Bulletin of Friends’ Historical Association* 43, no. 2 (1954): 84–99.

8. C. Coates, *Utopia Britannica: British Utopian Experiments 1325–1945* (London: Diggers & Dreamers, 2001), 34–36, 73–77, 201–2.

9. T. Miller, *The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities*, 2nd ed. (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2015), 68, 162–63, 169, 203, 414.

10. P. Edmonds, “Travelling ‘Under Concern’: Quakers James Backhouse and George Washington Walker Tour the Antipodean Colonies, 1832–1841,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012): 769–88.

tradition, having neither clergy nor order of service, and they neither preach nor proselytise.¹¹

While Roman Catholics have established several Australian communal groups such as Byrnestown and Monmouth (1893) and Maryknoll (1949), the Salvation Army helped establish Mizpah and Protestant Unity (1893), Congregationalists established Woolloongabba Exemplars (1893) and Theosophists established The Manor (1922), the Quakers have been less active — hence our particular religious interest in the history of Friends Farm.¹²

Troubles in Sydney

Within the Australian Quaker religious community, a Christian sect based on peace and tolerance, in Sydney both were obvious by their absence in the 1860s. One young man in particular, Alfred Allen, who had joined the Sydney Quakers in 1864, became a thorn in their side. Allen had previously joined Sydney's Pitt Street Congregational Union church where he began to study for the ministry. He was expelled when they found his religious views to be "unorthodox, in fact dangerous."¹³ Another minister warned Allen, "Ah young man — you are a child of the devil and on the fair road to Hell."¹⁴

Alfred Allen was a seventh-generation Quaker and his mother raised him with Quaker values and beliefs, in spite of her husband's reticence. As a young man, however, he "sought the broader margins of other denominations," particularly Congregationalism. But, after being rejected there and joining the Quakers, came to believe that "Quakerism, had lost the fervour of its early faith, if it had not lost the faith itself. It was in danger of becoming little more than a tradition."¹⁵

One contemporary Friend observed that Allen "was an innovator, and they [other Quakers] regarded him as dangerous. He was, in fact, the earliest Friend here of what we would now call the advanced or progressive type."¹⁶

11. Oats, 26–49 and 75–126; M. Trott, "Backhouse, James (1794–1869)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ed. D Pike et al. (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1966–), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/backhouse-james-1728/text1899> (accessed 8 August 2016); and <http://www.quakers.org.au/?page=A2> (accessed 27 July 2016).

12. B. Metcalf, *The Gayndah Communes* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 1998); V. Dawson, *Chinchilla's Communal Settlers* (Brisbane: Veronica Dawson, 2014); W. Metcalf, R. Kerr, and I. Christie, "Protestant Unity Commune and the Establishment of Pomona," *Queensland History Journal* 22, no. 11 (2015): 841–58; W. Metcalf, R. Kerr, and I. Christie, "Woolloongabba Exemplars Commune," *Queensland History Journal* 21, no. 5 (2011): 319–35; and W. Metcalf, "The Manor Family: Australia's Oldest Urban Commune," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 100, no. 2 (2014): 194–212.

13. Oats, 269–78; Alfred Allen (17.5.1839–5.8.1917) *Autobiographical Notes* c. 1887–1890, property of Jenny Madeline, Sydney, 16–18; J. Madeline (née Allen), *Allen Argus*, no. 2, April 2000 (unpublished).

14. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 12–33, 21.

15. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 2–3; Allen, Alfred (1839–1917), http://search.freefind.com/find.html?si=31821120&pid=r&n=0&_charset=UTF-8&bcd=:&query=allan (accessed 9 July 2016).

16. *The Australian Friend*, August 1917, 1100. "Progressive" seems to have meant modern although it is hard to know for sure. In 1917 it was certainly a compliment.

Allen was persistent and obsessive in his Bible-study and prayer, and developed “a mental grasp of Quakerism which probably few people, since the first generation of Friends, have possessed.”¹⁷

Allen claimed to possess a special power because he had within him “Christ — for Christ — is this power — this life — to possess him — is indeed to possess Eternal life — for this life is in him — whosoever hath him hath life.” Allen believed he had been “born religious” and that his “moral nature was early and well developed.” Now that he had been “born again,” and because “Judgement day is past,” and “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. . . cannot sin” therefore he was perfect, truly free from sin. Allen had been reborn because Christ “hath appeared ‘the second time without sin unto salvation’” and Allen wittily added that he knew of “no third time of his coming spoken of [in the Bible].”¹⁸

Before reaching this state of perfection, Allen admitted to having been in “the worst of bondage. . . I knew nothing of liberty.” He sought answers in churches, from priests, “but found it not, for they did not know it.” Then he discovered that Quakerism held the answers “but as a beautiful thing that had been and was no more.” Allen managed to recapture that vital essence, became reborn, and now his “joy is to point it out to others so that as they too hunger and thirst — they may also be filled — that that they may rejoice in the liberty of the Gospel — which is the freedom of the Spirit.”¹⁹ Allen had nothing to learn from his Quaker elders because, being perfect, he could not learn more nor do anything wrong. Allen and his followers, having been “born again” optimistically looked forward to a utopian life of “purity, peace, love, joy, [and] heaven.”²⁰

Allen had avidly studied one of the earliest Quaker texts, Robert Barclay’s *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678) and was transformed by Barclay’s insights. Allen grasped the core truth that anyone could achieve perfection and transformation through the “inward light of Christ” and henceforth he could not understand why others could not comprehend and accept this obvious, fundamental truth.²¹

Allen urged “My Dear Felicia,” the wife of Friend, Francis Hopkins’, to “come out from amongst them [Quakers, and join] my people and be a peculiar people unto me and let the Lord reign in his holy temple. . . . Go not dear one into the fray of these gentiles from truth & mingle not in their

17. “Testimony of Sydney Monthly Meeting regarding Alfred Allen, deceased,” www.bios.quakers.org.au/TextFiles/Allen_Alfred_1839-1917.rtf (accessed 21 June 2016); Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 8–13.

18. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 4; Letter from Alfred Allen to Felicia Hopkins, 20 March 1868, State Library of Queensland (hereafter SLQ) Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) OMI 53/1; A. Allen, J. Dixon, J. Mitchell, Wm. Tutting, and A. Wood, *A Letter from Friends in Sydney to the Dear Friends in Melbourne* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1867), 8.

19. Letter sent by Alfred Allen to Felicia Hopkins, 25 April 1868, SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) OMI 53/2.

20. Allen et al. *A Letter from Friends*, 8.

21. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 17; R. Barclay, *Theologiae Vere Christianae Apologia [Apology for the True Christian Divinity]*, [1678] (Farmington: Quaker Heritage House, 2002).

Sacrifices nor be partaker of their altars.”²² It is hard to know whether or not Allen was trying to entice his “Dear Felicia” away from her recently married husband. Such “familiarity” probably contributed to accusations of immorality, although more likely is that those accusations arose from him being seen walking, chatting, and laughing with a single, young Quaker woman, after services. Allen agreed that he had indeed done so and, provocatively told his accusers that he “hoped so to do many times more.”²³

Allen’s religious passion and confidence was similar to contemporary religious fanatics, from various traditions, who believe that they have attained a degree of intimacy with God and, having been “reborn,” no longer need to be constrained by social and cultural norms. They have been granted exclusive knowledge and insight — and anyone who disagrees is simply wrong.²⁴ In Allen’s mind, the Quakers had had the answers, as exemplified by Barclay’s thesis — but had deviated from the true path and needed a radical shake-up, and God had chosen him for the task.

Allen would regularly and bravely climb onto a soap-box in Sydney’s Hyde Park to promote his radical Quaker ideals, and face serious abuse for his efforts. With his utter conviction, oratory skills, enthusiasm, and charisma, Allen gathered together a group of young Quakers who regarded “nearly the whole of professing Christendom as a woeful Apostasy — a deplorable Babylon of confusion.” Closer to home, they believed their Sydney elders had deviated from true Quakerism, particularly by moving towards programmed meetings and a hierarchy. Allen and his colleagues wrote and published a tract condemning their contemporary Friends who “have, generally, much degenerated from the purity, power, life, and spirit of” early Quakers. Allen and his followers sought to “maintain the testimony of the Old Friends, *with whom we are at one in all their great truths*; and particularly their most distinguished doctrine of Freedom from Sin,” a doctrine that they complained was now even being “denied as possible by some who call themselves Friends.” They menacingly warned of how Christ, who had already returned “in spirit” would soon be “revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all of them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.” God, “with ten thousand of his saints” would then “execute judgement upon the ungodly.” Allen and his colleagues condemned any Quaker who disagreed as being “Antichrist.”²⁵

The disruptive problems within Sydney Quaker circles were such that several senior Quakers, including Joseph Neave and Walter Robson, travelled

22. Letter sent by Alfred Allen to Felicia Hopkins, 25 April 1868, SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) OMI 53/2.

23. Meeting Reports, 2 September 1867 and 3 October 1867, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting Archives.

24. See, for example, P. Bowler, *The True Believers* (Sydney: Methuen, 1986); L. Samways, *Dangerous Persuaders* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1994); L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998); D. Bromley and J. G. Melton, *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and J. G. Melton, “Cults,” *The Encyclopedia of Community*, ed. K. Christensen and D. Levinson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 357–60.

25. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 20; Allen *et al.* *A Letter from Friends*, 4–11.

from England, and Edward Sayce and Samuel Levitt from Melbourne, to Sydney to resolve matters — but with limited success.²⁶

Alfred Allen's supporters included Ruth Allen, Walter Barton, Marian Burnett, Joseph Dixon, Frederick Horsnail, James and Jessie Mitchell, Arthur and John Richardson, Gustave Riebe, Mary Ann Stewart, William Tutting, and Arthur and Jane Wood.²⁷ Given Allen's passionate rhetoric, and increasing circle of support, the Sydney Quakers bitterly "disowned" him on 3 October 1867, for "immorality, unsound doctrine, and disorderly conduct."²⁸ After intervention by Neave, Robson, Sayce, and Levitt, the Sydney Quakers reluctantly readmitted Allen on 7 May 1868, then again "disowned" him on 5 October 1868.²⁹

Allen wrote to his "Dear Felicia," saying

no doubt thou hast heard of our troubles in Sydney mutiny — however they are working well and with truth increases & reigns. JJ Neave, Walter Robson, E. Sayce & S. Levitt have inquired into my disownment — they have left no stone unturned in their inquiry & they have all signed a certificate & have given me a copy — entirely clearing me of every charge and have expressed full unity with us.³⁰

Allen's claim was correct — the four Quaker investigators agreed that Allen and his colleagues had been harshly mistreated by their fellow "Friends" in Sydney, and while they disagreed with Allen on various points of faith and practice, accepted his right, as a Quaker, to voice his opinions and to be fairly heard.³¹ In fact Joseph Neave candidly admitted to admiring Allen and his followers as being "so closely united in love to one another, so earnest and devoted in their work, that it does seem in measure like a revival of the Quakerism of the 17th century."³²

Access to Quaker Archives reveals just how abominably Alfred Allen and his colleagues were treated by fellow Quakers, led by Abraham Davy, a malicious, vindictive character. Davy, for reasons we shall never know, acted in a most *unQuakerly* manner to try to blacken Allen's character, and ban him from Friends' circles. Reading archival accounts of this *bastardry*, including stacking meetings, spreading false rumours, and withholding documents,

26. Oats, 272.

27. MS Box 27/4/4, 27 November 1867, Friends House Archives London; Letter to Yearly Meeting of Friends in London, 1 November 1868, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting Archives.

28. Oats, 272.

29. G. Walsh, ed., "Allen, Alfred (1839–1917)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3, 26; Oats, 273–74; F. Harris, "History of Queensland Society of Friends" (1966), SLQ: Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Records, Box 10913 O/S, item 5767; Allen, Alfred (1839–1917), http://search.freefind.com/find.html?si=31821120&pid=r&n=0&_charset=UTF-8&bcd=-&query=allan (accessed 9 July 2016); J. Madeline (née Allen), *Allen Argus*, no. 2, April 2000 (unpublished).

30. Letter sent by Alfred Allen to Felicia Hopkins, 25 April 1868, SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) OMI 53/2.

31. J. Neave, W. Robson, E. Sayce, and S. Levitt, Letter signed 30 April 1868, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting Archives Box 52 T.

32. J. Neave, "About Sydney Friends," Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting Archives, 18 April 1868.

makes contemporary factional brawling within political parties seem like a tea-party. In the end, Allen's unconscionable mistreatment probably did him and his cause more good than harm.³³

Walter Robson was less tolerant of Allen, and wrote to Francis Hopkins, the husband of Allen's "my dear Felicia" and asserted that, because of Allen, matters in Sydney Quaker circles "at present, is such as cannot but greatly depress us both, but we must try to exercise faith in that Power that can subdue all things unto itself, believing that every child permitted by our heavenly father is designed to work for his people's good."³⁴

Alfred Allen, the "child" about whom Robson patronisingly referred, above, had been born in 1839, in Belfast, Ireland, the son of William Bell Allen and Ruth (née Johnston). He was a seventh-generation Quaker on both his mother's and father's sides. In 1844, aged five, Alfred Allen came to Sydney with his mother and three siblings on the *South Stockton*, his father having come three years earlier to establish a successful soap-making and candle-making business. His home life was miserable with a heavy-drinking and abusive father who endangered his mother's life. After finishing school, and because he had "a marked taste for mechanics" Alfred Allen trained for four years as an engineer. He married Amelia Petford in 1861 and they had three sons and a daughter. He joined the Sydney Quakers in 1864 but, as seen above, almost from the start severely criticised them as being "too-orthodox and too-compromising," and they disowned him twice.³⁵

As many over-enthusiastic religious devotees have done in the past and continue to do today, Allen and a few of his followers, being rejected by the establishment, looked for a "wilderness" where they could create their own utopia, away from the evils and temptations of the city, where they could follow their own rules, that is, the TRUE word of God — as embedded in, or at least channelled by, Alfred Allen. There is no evidence that Allen or other members were aware of earlier Quaker communal groups in Europe and North America such as Gravely and Fraternal Home, or of earlier communes in Australia such as Herrnhut. Beyond what is provided here, there is no evidence of the source of Allen's utopian vision.

Queensland Bound

Several of these young radicals, including Allen (without his wife), left Sydney in late winter 1868 and made their way to Brisbane, Queensland, in the hopes that they could establish a Quaker commune in an isolated area where they would be free to practise their radical faith and cultural habits without

33. Letter written 2 September 1867, and report dated 3 October 1867, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), NSW Regional Meeting Archives.

34. Letter from Walter Robson to William Hopkins, 10/12/1868, SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Box 8319, OMI 29/1.

35. Allen, *Autobiographical Notes*, 3, 11, 15, 18; Email from Jenny Madeline, Allen's great granddaughter, 1 August 2016; Walsh, 26; Allen, Alfred (1839–1917), http://search.freefind.com/find.html?si=31821120&pid=r&n=0&_charset_=UTF-8&bcd=-÷&query=allan (accessed 9 July 2016).

interference from the conservative Sydney Quaker hierarchy. Allen, Arthur Wood, Joseph Dixon and Frederick Horsnail already knew the Brisbane Quakers, having sailed up from Sydney for the opening of Brisbane's first Quaker Meeting House on 7 October 1866.³⁶ Although Allen condemned Brisbane Quakers for lacking religious rigour and being almost as bad as those in Sydney, he used them as a convenient base from which to launch his utopian commune.

Joseph Dixon, one of these young and radical Quakers, recorded coming with Alfred Allen to Queensland in 1868, where they joined local Quaker Herbert Everett and set off, "like the Israelites of old, [to] spy out the land."³⁷ On horseback they rode north from Brisbane, camping at Burpengary Creek, crossed the Caboolture River by punt, with their horses swimming, then rode through the forests of the Glass House Mountains at which they greatly marvelled. They employed William Grigor, who ran the Cobb and Co station at Bankfoot House, still standing on Old Gympie Road, southwest of Beerwah, as their guide. Then

we wound our way through the gum trees & forest to the Mooloolah plains a large expanse of open grass country. The scrub or soft wood forest and vines comes up to the grass and is like a wall of trees it is strange it cuts off so straight like a wall. We camped for the night rolled in our blankets. . . . We examined the plain about a mile wide and some miles long down the river. We were pleased with the country as it was ready for the plough. . . . The country was uninhabited except for some tribes of blacks and a few timber getters. The blacks are tall athletic fellows — live by hunting & fishing & possums, native bears who live in trees & eat gum leaves.³⁸

This land, which they so admired because it was free of vine scrub, covered in grass and therefore "ready for the plough," was what is now called "Meridan Plains," along the south side of the Mooloolah River, south of Buderim and north-west of Caloundra. Meridan Plains had been the preserve of the Kabi Kabi aborigines until Edmund Lander and Franz Joseph Rode secured a lease over what they called "Maradan"/"Meridian Plains" in 1861. This lease was cancelled and the land thrown open to settlers under the *Crown Lands Alienation Act 1868*.

Establishment of Friends Farm Commune

Joseph Dixon described how, after discovering this land "ready for the plough," they sailed back to Sydney and arranged their personal and financial affairs before coming back to Queensland in late 1869. By then, Alfred Allen's party had increased to include Joseph Dixon, Herbert Everett, Frederick Horsnail, Gustave [aka Gustaphus] Riebe and Arthur Wood. Of these,

36. SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Records, Box 10913 O/S, item 5767; Oats, 280–1.

37. J. Dixon, *Diary and Reminiscences*, reminiscences section (undated), SLQ, John Oxley Library, Box 8948, OM75–117, 9.

38. Dixon, 10; See also E. Heap, "In the Wake of the Raftsmen," *Queensland Heritage* 1, no. 4, (1968): 9–19.

Allen, Everett and Wood were married but left their wives and children behind to pursue their “spiritual quest.” Taking advantage of the liberal conditions of the newly passed, and widely publicised, *Crown Lands Alienation Act 1868*,³⁹ they selected land along the Mooloolah River, on the treeless Meridan (flood) Plains which they had so admired the previous year as being “ready for the plough.” Their objective was to grow sugarcane and prosper as an independent communal venture, following “True Quaker” ideals and practices. On 1 November, Alfred Allen, on behalf of Arthur Wood, Gustave Riebe, and himself, selected 375 ha of land within a curve of the Mooloolah River, while Dixon and Everett selected 260 ha a bit lower down the river. Frederick Horsnail then selected land to link up these properties which they planned to operate communally but, for unknown reasons, Horsnail’s application was refused.⁴⁰

On 1 December 1869 Alfred Allen was the first of these would-be communards to move onto their land. Dixon recalled how Allen, Wood, and Riebe called their place “Friends Farm” and where they soon built a large but simple communal house. They found, perhaps unhappily, that they were not as isolated in a wilderness as they had first thought themselves to be, because the “tide came up the river and the ocean at the Heads was [only] 14 miles [20 kms] off. The steamboat used to come here once a month or so for log timber and we conveniently got our supplies from Brisbane.”⁴¹

Who were Allen’s fellow travellers on this utopian communal venture? Joseph Dixon had been born to Quaker parents in Yorkshire, England, in 1841, landed in Melbourne in June 1864, and worked as a grocer. He moved to Sydney where he opened his own grocery business on Pitt Street, and joined Sydney Quakers before joining Allen’s utopian quest.⁴²

Gustave Adolf Riebe had been born in Pressburg, Hungary,⁴³ in 1838, and arrived in Sydney, on 1 March 1862, having worked his passage as a steward on the *Damascus*. In partnership with Isaac Stevenson, he opened a grocery store on the corner of Castlereagh and Park Streets, Sydney, then in 1864 set up his own grocery on William Street, Woolloomooloo. In May 1871, he married Harriet Stubbs, and they went on to have four children. He had been an avid, conventional Quaker, before following Allen’s radical lead.⁴⁴

39. *Crown Lands Alienation Act 1868 (Queensland)*, http://ozcase.library.qut.edu.au/qlhc/documents/CrownLandsAlienationAct1868_31Vic_46.pdf (accessed 21 June 2016); *Brisbane Courier*, 30 May 1868, 6.

40. *Queenslander*, 6 November 1869, 6; J. Tainton, *Memoires of Buderim* (Buderim: Buderim Historical Society, 1974, 3; QSA Item ID 31857; QSA Item ID 31856; QSA Item ID 31859; QSA Item ID 863; QSA Item ID 32462; and QSA Item ID 31863, Application 574. All blocks were surveyed by William Fryar.

41. QSA Item ID 31880 (LAN/AG56; PRV9882/1/2234); Dixon, 14.

42. *Nambour Chronicle and North Cast Advertiser*, 10 August 1923, 7.

43. Now known as Bratislava, in Slovakia.

44. “Gustavious [sic] A Riebe,” SLQ: Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Records, Box 10913 O/S, item 5767; Queensland Index to Birth and Death Records; *Empire*, 24 March 1864, 1. Riebe was survived by a son, William, and a daughter, Amy.

Arthur Branscombe Wood was born in Devonshire, England, in 1837, the son of Arthur Wood and Loveday Winsborrow. He came to Australia in 1853, married Jane Stewart in 1861, and they had three children. He was another keen, but conventional, Quaker who worked as a school teacher in Sydney prior to joining Alfred Allen with whom he moved to Queensland, leaving his family behind.⁴⁵

Herbert Everett was born in Norfolk, England, in 1840 and came to Australia in 1862. He worked on rural properties in Queensland, then moved to Brisbane where he operated the Kangaroo Point Ferry. He became a strong, and conventional, Quaker supporter, and helped to finance and build Brisbane's first Quaker Meeting House. Everett married Josephine Tomlin in 1865 and they had eight children. After Everett met Alfred Allen in 1866 he became disenchanted with the slow pace and moderate views of Brisbane's Quakers, left his work and family, and became another of Allen's avid supporters.⁴⁶

Frederick Horsnail was born in Kent, England, in 1840, the son of a devout, well-known Quaker family. He became chronically ill in the 1860s and moved to Australia in 1865 with hopes of better health. Horsnail was devoted to his Quaker faith, complaining how too many contemporary Friends suffered from loss of "freedom from sin." Horsnail coped with his pain and chronic illness through meditation, turning "within in silence from all wandering thoughts." He moved to Brisbane in 1866 where he supported the local Quakers, but found them not rigorous enough for his tastes. His religious zeal almost matched that of Alfred Allen with whom he connected when he moved to Sydney, and whom he then followed back to Queensland in 1869. Living with his fellow radical Quakers at Friends Farm, Horsnail experienced "such happiness" because "brethren I have here, to whom I am united by a love begotten by our great Father."⁴⁷

Dixon described Friends Farm's indigenous neighbours, probably the traditional owners of this land, with whom they had established unusually good relations — although we only have reports from one side:

The blacks used to come about hunting & fishing. There was a saltwater creek near us and a tribe of blacks, their wives (gins) and started to fish the creek. The gins put their picanninies in a possum rug they were asleep & put no clothes of any kind. They looked quite nice & comfortable. The men had nets on pieces of sapplings like bows and each a home made net say 6 ft. [1.8 m] long. The blacks went into the creeks and made a line right across and when one fellow caught a big eel he went staggering out with it, and the fires were ready it was dropped into the ashes and roasted. The boys & girls naked were spearing the fish when they had a

45. Bellamy Family History, <http://person.ancestry.com.au/tree/186714/person/6095257682/facts> (accessed 21 July 2016); *Sands Directory for Sydney and New South Wales, 1867*, 397.

46. *Australian Friend*, August 1927, 2119; SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Records, Box 10913 O/S, item 5767; and OMI 37/1/1, Box 8320; *Brisbane Courier*, 5 May 1868, 1.

47. *Annual Monitor for 1874* (London: Samuel Harris, 1873), 103–10; "Meeting House Cash Book," SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Records, OMI 37/1/1, Box 8320.

chance. They never make provision for the future — and must be hungry sometimes. . . The blacks were always very jolly and full of fun.⁴⁸

Early in 1870, after having built rough accommodation for everyone, those at Friends' Farm advertised to buy "four or six good WORKING BULLOCKS with Yokes," so that they could plough their land and plant cane.⁴⁹

It does not seem to have occurred to these naïve young Friends who had no agricultural, let alone climatic, experience in coastal, sub-tropical Queensland to wonder why the land on which they had settled because it was "ready for the plough," had no trees. They were soon to discover that they were living on a very vulnerable flood plain.

In late May 1870, when Herbert Everett and Joseph Dixon had almost finished building another house on this low area, and had ploughed some land and planted cane which was growing well "sudden disaster fell on us. We had heavy rain for a couple of days and as we had no high land the water surrounded us. We got the punt up to the house and although we had the house [on stumps] 4 feet [1.1 m] high, this fresh brought the water up to the floor."⁵⁰

They used their punt to travel across their flooded cane fields to visit those at the main Friends Farm house and "while their farm was covered with water in places the ridge on which the house was built was dry."⁵¹ This was because those at the main Friends Farm had had enough good sense to at least build their communal facilities on the two or so hectares of slightly higher land on this flood plain. This small area can be discerned today a few metres south of Sunset Drive, about midway between Reservoir Avenue and Westaway Road, just west of the tree-line. Today, while the rest of the Meridan Plain regularly floods, this area remains reasonably flood-free.

This flood in the last week of May 1870 obviously convinced those at Friends Farm they should rely not only on growing sugar cane, so they also bought young cattle to fatten on the lush grass on their floodplain — and also, most likely, to eat it down so that it would be less of a fire hazard in winter.⁵²

Those at Friends Farm continued to grow sugar cane, built a small cane-crushing mill near their house, and began to produce sugar, marketable even though it was "pretty brown stuff."⁵³ Friends Farm's cane crushing plant had "very primitive machinery the rollers being of wood and one horse going

48. Dixon, 14–16.

49. *Queenslander*, 12 March 1870, 1, and 19 March 1870, 1.

50. Dixon, 16; *Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland Flood Summary 1870–1879*, http://www.bom.gov.au/qld/flood/fld_history/floodsum_1870.shtml (accessed 21 June 2016), *Brisbane Courier* 30 May 1870, 3.

51. Dixon, 17.

52. *Queenslander*, 28 January 1871, 1.

53. Alfred Allen had trained as an engineer but, according to Walsh, 26, had been dismissed for unacceptable political activity. According to Allen, however, he left after four years because of serious back problems. Nevertheless, Allen had the engineering skills to build a small sugar mill.

round and round. The juice was not half pressed out.”⁵⁴ They transported their sugar, either on their punt or with their bullocks and dray, to a depot that James Low and William Grigor had erected on the riverfront at what is now Charles Clark Park, Mooloolaba. From there the sugar was sent by ship to Sydney for processing. The communards did all the work themselves, employing neither white nor Islander labour.

In spite of endless work at Friends Farm, Alfred Allen made regular trips to Brisbane to lecture on his utopian version of Quakerism — and invoked public ridicule and opposition from other Christian preachers. Allen seemed undaunted, in fact energised, by such opponents and soldiered on.⁵⁵

Friends Farm’s cattle thrived on the rich grassland along the alluvial flats, and members were able to work together amicably, and live and eat communally in their simple house, a couple of metres above the floodplain. But soon after, in the second week of July 1870, another severe rain event flooded the area. On Dixon’s and Everett’s section of Friends Farm, “the flood had reached the roof and doors harness and anything that could float had gone out to sea.” Worn out, and perhaps tiring of poverty and of Allen’s rhetoric, Dixon and Everett abandoned this communal quest, and moved to Brisbane “sadder but wiser men.”⁵⁶ They soon returned to the area, however, and selected much higher and drier land near Friends Farm, at what is now Buderim, “a lovely place with no settlement. The land was the best volcanic [soil] and eventually when the scrub was felled gave a beautiful view of the ocean & Mooloolah Bay.”⁵⁷

But those hardy young men still at Friends Farm, having built their communal house and cane crusher on the only bit of land above flood level, persevered. In late 1871, an observer reported that their cane crop was “very fine. . . as fine as any you have seen.” He went on to describe in detail how the

first mill in the district is now at work, at Friends Farm, owned by a party of that enterprising and industrious body [Quakers]. Probably the plant is the cheapest yet set to work in the colony. The mill is powerful, having rollers 30 inches [76 cm] long and 27 inches [69 cm] diameter. The battery is of the usual form; it is 18 feet [5.5 m] long, 3 feet [91 cm] wide, and 18 inches [46 cm] deep; there is a tache⁵⁸ of 60 gallons [273 l.], and two clarifiers, each of 200 gallons [909 l.]. All this plant has been set upon a trench dug in the level soil, and although but few bricks have been used, it is found to act very well. The Friends are their own sugar makers as well as cane growers, and are turning out a very fair sugar. The cane is Bourbon, just twelve months old, and I believe it will yield two tons of sugar per acre. The capabilities of the plant in the unfinished state mentioned are about 8 cwt. [407 k]

54. Dixon, 17.

55. For example: *Brisbane Courier*, 7 July 1870, 2; *Queenslander*, 17 June 1871, 2.

56. Dixon, 19; *Maryborough Chronicle*, 16 July 1870, 2; *Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland Flood Summary 1870–1879*.

57. Dixon, 20.

58. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “tache” as: “Each pan of the series through which the juice of the sugar-cane is passed in evaporating it; esp. the smallest and last of these, called specifically the striking-tache.”

daily. The total cost, buildings included, is about £100. But then the Friends are their own designers, builders, &c.⁵⁹

A month later, another keen observer watched the juice passing from the horse-driven rollers to the clarifiers where it was boiled, passing next to a “subsiding vessel” and thence “strained into a battery.” The furnace, in a ditch, had a flue made from a sheet of iron. The mill had been operating for several weeks and “for simplicity combined with efficiency it is a success, and shows what may be done by. . . perseverance.” The sugar appeared to be of a high quality, free from “unpleasant taste.” This success led Friends Farm members to expect to plant an additional 8 ha for the next year, and other local farmers were expected to follow suit so that “prosperity promises her favour to this important locality.”⁶⁰

Soon afterwards, on 8–9 January 1872, heavy rain again caused serious flooding. Friends Farm lost about 160 m of post and rail fencing that had been “carried clean of the ground.” This time water even inundated the (relatively) high location of their house and sugar mill where “all the pans, clarifiers, tache, etc. were set afloat in the sugar house.” Fortunately, “as the rain ceased the water went off rapidly, and now the plain is tolerably dry” — and most of their cane thrived.⁶¹

Tragedy struck soon afterwards, on 16 February 1872, when their dear colleague, Frederick Horsnail, aged 31, died at Friends Farm. Horsnail had been in poor health for some time and had been unable to do hard physical work, so probably looked after cooking meals. They buried him near Friends Farm and enclosed his grave with a neat wooden fence.⁶²

Joseph Dixon had condemned the cane-crushing mill at Friends Farm as having hand-hewn, wooden rollers, but soon after Horsnail's death they upgraded this inefficient and wasteful equipment because the rollers that were later found there, and which survive today, are of cast iron — but were still horse-powered.⁶³

On 26 March 1872 Alfred Allen, their leader who had acquired the original lease in his own name but on behalf of the group, formally changed the lease to include Arthur Wood and Gustave Riebe, reflecting the reality of the communal operation of Friends Farm after Dixon, Horsnail, and Everett had departed.⁶⁴

Late in the winter of 1872 a surveyor, Claudius Whish, was “busily planning roads” through the Meridan Plains, particularly to connect to Buderim and Mooloolaba, and observed how the sugar cane at Friends Farm was thriving: “The land lies very low, the nights and mornings were bitterly cold,

59. *Queenslander*, 2 December 1871, 25.

60. *Queenslander*, 6 January 1872, 11.

61. *Queenslander*, 27 January 1872, 10.

62. *Queenslander*, 24 February 1872, 1; *Annual Monitor* for 1874 (London: Samuel Harris, 1873), 103–10; *Brisbane Courier*, 21 March 1872, 2; SLQ: Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Records, Box 11055, item 5767; *The British Friend*, January 2, 1882, 2; Anon, *Mitchell Family* (SLQ, P929.2, MIT0 13).

63. Dixon, 17.

64. QSA Item ID 31880.

and the frost lay crisp on the ground at day light, but the sugar cane remained as green as ever it was in the height of summer.”⁶⁵

Obviously Friends Farm’s sugar crop was a great success because, in September 1872, using their modern, cast-iron rollers, they had been crushing for some time and were producing “medium, well-tasted” sugar. This observer also noted a post office, new roads, and houses in the area where “cane-growing and cattle-raising busily occupy the. . . settlers, and considering that the cane is not injured by frost, it bids fair to give them a good return.”⁶⁶

Once again, however, severe floods in the first and second weeks of March 1873 destroyed their crops and this triggered the end of Friends Farm.⁶⁷ Gustave Riebe and Arthur Wood left at the end of that month, while Alfred Allen, now a leader without followers, clung to faint hopes of eventual success. This was not to be and in the third week of June 1873 Friends Farm was again flooded, and Allen was forced to abandon this utopian project.⁶⁸ Allen later claimed to have become very sick at this time, and was only saved by being nursed by Aborigines — but this story is questionable.⁶⁹

After Friends Farm

On 8 January 1876 they transferred the leasehold on their land to Robert Cribb, of Brisbane, who then obtained a deed on 18 April 1876.⁷⁰ It is unclear how Cribb used the land, but presumably he had more sense than to try to live on it and grow sugarcane.

Alfred Allen returned to Sydney where he was employed in the printing business of F. Cunninghame & Co., then moved into the Insurance business with A.M.P. He was successful and well respected in both, and prospered. Perhaps playing the Quaker role of “humanitarian adjudicator,”⁷¹ Allen became actively involved in the campaign to stop South-Sea islanders being recruited as labourers in Queensland. This put him in opposition to his former close friend and fellow-communard, Joseph Dixon, whose Buderim sugar operations, post-commune, depended on such labour, but who reputedly treated his workers fairly, they being “well fed and clothed, and not overworked.” Allen was involved in a wide range of philanthropic, financial, and temperance issues, and became a minor poet. He entered politics as a Waverley Council Alderman (1885–1887) then represented Paddington in the NSW Legislative Assembly between 1887 and 1894. It is unclear why it

65. *Telegraph*, 24 February 1873, 2.

66. *Brisbane Courier*, 30 September 1872, 3.

67. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 March 1873, 5, 4 March 1873, 2, 6 March 1873, 2, and 22 March 1873, 6; *Queenslander*, 8 March 1873, 10, and 29 March 1873, 2.

68. “Gustavious [sic] A Riebe,” SLQ: Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Records, Box 10913 O/S, item 5767; *Brisbane Courier*, 20 June 1873, 2–3, and 21 June 1873, 5; *Queenslander*, 28 June 1873, 3.

69. Oats, 283; Allen, Alfred, www.bios.quakers.org.au/TextFiles/Allen_Alfred_1839-1917.rtf (accessed 21 June 2016).

70. QSA Item ID 31880.

71. Edmonds, 772.

was not until July 1889 when Allen was finally readmitted to the Quakers. One observer recalled that “much that had seemed to Friends of 50 years ago questionable in his religious views became more acceptable. In some respects he had been a man in advance of his time.” In 1898 Allen retired to a house called Mooloolah at Lawson, in the Blue Mountains, where he became an active bushwalker and raconteur and, adopting the Dickensian name of Samuel Pickwick, formed his own Pickwick Club. It is probably within that guise that he might have embellished the story about being sick at Friends Farm and being saved by “a poor black gin.” Allen returned to Sydney in 1910, where he died in 1917, leaving an estate of £5,289. He was said to have been “a man of high character [who had] always identified himself with every democratic movement.”⁷²

His wife, Amelia Allen, was also deeply involved in a wide range of social and political issues including funeral reform, temperance, women's suffrage, and relief for unemployed and destitute people. She died in 1928 in her daughter's Sydney home, also appropriately called Mooloolah.⁷³

Following the collapse of Friends Farm, Gustave Riebe briefly remained in the area, joining the electoral roll for East Moreton in October 1874.⁷⁴ He held onto some land, and acquired more at Buderim, but moved to Brisbane in late 1874 where he established a grocery business at 94 Queen Street, on the east side between Albert and Edwards streets, and lived with his family in Red Hill. He showed his humanitarian, “Friend,” side by taking part in the Early Closing Association devoted to giving workers more free time, and to other humanitarian groups. He returned to live at Palmyra, his farm at Buderim, in the mid-1880s where he became a prominent citizen involved in community groups such as the Acclimatisation Society and, between 1886 and 1902, served as a Magistrate. He returned to Brisbane in 1901, and died at his Red Hill home on 12 February 1917, aged 79.⁷⁵

After Friends Farm collapsed, Arthur Branscombe Wood, who had already acquired land in the Mooloolah area in his own name, stayed there and tried to farm. He joined the electoral roll in 1874. Failing at farming, he returned to New South Wales where he resumed school teaching, firstly at Lambton, then at Petersham where he became headmaster. He retired in 1896, wrote

72. Walsh, 26; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1917, 8; A. Allen and J. Smith, *A Correct and Faithful Account of a Journey to the Fish River Caves* (Wentworth Falls: Den Fenella Press, 2012); Oats, 283; *The British Friend*, 1 August 1883, 210–11, and 1 February 1884, 39–41; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1918, 9 and 18 May 1918, 9; A. Allen, *Australian Verse Drift: Poems* (Sydney: Cunningham, 1883); Allen, Alfred (1839–1917), http://search.freefind.com/find.html?si=31821120&pid=r&n=0&_charset=UTF-8&bcd=÷&query=allan (accessed 9 July 2016).

73. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1888, 9, 10 October 1890, 12, 15 November 1890, 10, 25 April 1892, 8, 3 April 1896, 10, 2 April 1920, 3, and 1 September 1928, 16.

74. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 October 1874, 4.

75. *Brisbane Courier*, 2 July 1880, 1, 8 June 1881, 3, 11 June 1881, 3, and 10 October 1892, 8; *Queenslander*, 23 June 1883, 989, and 9 January 1886, 67; *Telegraph*, 19 September 1885, 8; *Week*, 31 January 1902, 31; *Brisbane Directory for 1878–9*, (Brisbane: McNaught, 1878), 66 and 139; QSA ID 823389, *Orders and Elections*, No. 192.

music, travelled extensively, then returned to England in 1911 where he died on 29 April 1914.⁷⁶

Joseph Dixon and Herbert Everett had moved to Buderim in about 1872 after their sugarcane venture collapsed, being flooded out once too often. In Buderim, they built a sugar mill and prospered, but their partnership dissolved. Dixon remained in Buderim until 1895, then sold his mill and moved to Gympie where he ran a shoe-shop for eleven years before retiring to what is now Flaxton in 1906, and where he died in October 1929, aged 88. Herbert Everett moved to the river-side of Thorne Street, Kangaroo Point, Brisbane and, in conjunction with his brother, Horace, ran a successful ironmongery business on Edward Street, Brisbane. He remained a staunch Quaker until his death in June 1927, aged 87.⁷⁷

Some of Friends Farm's sugar crushing equipment was purchased by Joseph Dixon in 1876, and moved to Buderim, while the rest of their equipment and buildings were simply abandoned.⁷⁸ Most of Dixon's sugar mill in Buderim, however, did not come from materials scavenged from Friends Farm but from recently imported, steam-driven equipment which Dixon had purchased from Joseph Fountain at Burpengary, this being a very modern and efficient mill compared to what Friends Farm had used.⁷⁹

In the 1920s this low, wet area was still known as Friends Farm.⁸⁰ In 1925 a local reporter, visiting the site observed "a few pieces of rusty machinery" that he saw as a monument to "practically the initial attempt at sugar-making on the North Coast." He claimed that "the experiments of this noble little band of pioneers [Friends Farm] set the foundation of an industry which today extends over the whole of the State and is worth millions of pounds to the nation."⁸¹

Soon afterwards, another elderly informant, reminiscing, blamed Alfred Allen for the failure of Friends Farm because, as an "inexperienced person" he had selected land unsuitable for cane-growing, made "numerous blunders," and "wasted a fair amount of money." This is too harsh on Allen since all the Friends were equally inexperienced, and had agreed on this land, and they prospered for several years — although it was too wet to succeed in the long term, particularly given that much better land was available nearby.⁸²

76. *Brisbane Courier*, 9 March 1871, 3, 6 October 1874, 4; Bellamy Family History; Jennings Family Tree, <http://person.ancestry.com.au/tree/55240154/person/13788947909/facts> (accessed 21 July 2016).

77. *Brisbane Directory for 1878–9*, 111; *Brisbane Post Office Directory and Country Guide for 1883–4* (Brisbane: Watson Ferguson, 1883), 168; *Brisbane Courier*, 23 June 1927, 15, and 30 October 1929, 21; *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 10 August 1923, 7; *Australian Friend*, August 1927, 2119; *The British Friend*, January 2, 1882, 2, SLQ, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) OMI 28/14 & OMI 28/20 [Box 8319] letters from Herbert Everett dated 25 January 1881 and 21 February 1882.

78. Tainton, 3–5.

79. *Nambour Chronicle*, 10 August 1923, 7; and Dixon, 22.

80. *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 10 August 1923, 7, and 4 March 1927, 11.

81. *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 21 August 1925, 4.

82. *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 25 September 1925, 10.

In 1974 a local minister reported that “some of the debris [of Friends Farm] is still visible at the site.” Three years later, on 19 October 1977, two local historians, Stan Tutt and Percy Reynolds, photographed this site where they found some of the equipment still there, including the two cast-iron rollers, horse-gear, and cog-wheels. These they removed to the Moreton Sugar Mill, Nambour and, after that mill closed in 2003, to the Nambour Museum where it is now safely housed and on display.⁸³

In May 2016, I relocated the site of Friends Farm. The small, higher area where they built their house and mill is easy to identify. The ground is very rough and the thick grass made it impossible to make out specific metal artefacts, anything of wood having long since been burnt. The lush green grass across the flood plain was waist or even shoulder high, and the land still looked deceptively “ready for the plough.”

Summary and Conclusion

Alfred Allen had enormous energy, dedication, and religious faith and, most significantly, charisma. He was chastised and oppressed by the Quaker establishment although he is now held in higher esteem by Quakers. My first opinion of Allen was of a rowdy, self-opinioned religious fanatic — but the more I studied him the more I came to admire him and respect what he tried to do — and what he achieved in later life.

Friends Farm commune, like its Australian communal predecessors, demonstrated both the strength and weakness of this form of settlement. The number of people involved provides a social network and security, and a workforce able to achieve what no single farm family could do. Communes often have access to capital and skills, and they can often outcompete their neighbours. Against that is the problem of how to get along with fellow-communards.⁸⁴ This is what has dragged down so many communes, although Friends Farm would have failed regardless of social relations, given their poor land.

However, as with all historical research we can only go by the evidence, and while it appears that Allen and his fellow, would-be communards, got on well with their indigenous “neighbours,” whom they were, after all, displacing from their land, we must be aware of research, such as by Nicholas Brodie, which argues this may be eye-wash whereby “Quaker = Humanitarian,” and their approach to Indigenous people is seen to have been “non-invasive, passive and protective.” We shall never know this about Friends Farm, although, again as Brodie reminds us, Quakers, whether good or bad “were nonetheless part of a wider phenomenon of dispossession.”⁸⁵

83. Tainton, 4; S. Tutt, *Sunshine Coast Heritage* (Maroochydore: Discovery Press, 1995), 85; emails from Clive Plater, Nambour Museum, 28 July and 2 August, 2016.

84. B. Metcalf, “The Encyclopedia of Australian Utopian Communalism,” *Arena* 31 (2008): 47–61; B. Metcalf, *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995).

85. N. Brodie, “Quaker Dreaming: The “Lost” Cotton Archive and the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land,” *Journal of Religious History* 40, no. 3 (2016): 304–5.

The only other Quaker-based communes in Australia were Community House, established in 1940 in Fitzroy, Melbourne, and Paxton, established in 1941 at Slack's Creek, south of Brisbane. Both sought to promote Quaker peace initiatives by providing a safe haven for young Australian pacifists. Community House relied on residents' contributions, and collapsed in 1945. Paxton prospered, supporting themselves through raising small crops and selling eggs, but collapsed in 1946. I can find no evidence that either knew about, let alone learned from, Friends Farm commune.⁸⁶

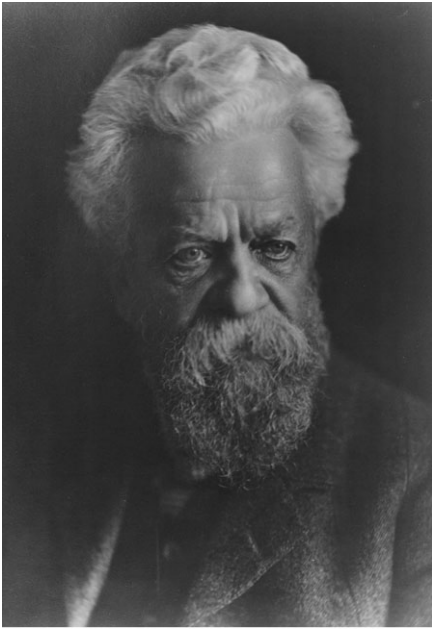
Friends Farm lasted less than four years, but the wonder is not that it collapsed but that it lasted even that long. In spite of their hard work and enterprising natures, their choice of land on a flood-plain, which to this day regularly floods, ensured the commune's demise. None of the communards had farming experience, and little experience in a semi-tropical environment. Nor is there evidence that any of the communards knew anything about communal living, instead relying on the assumption that since they were like-minded Friends, their faith and religious enthusiasm would provide the much-needed communal glue.

It was not sufficient for them, as it has rarely been sufficient for any other would-be Christian commune. Communal living requires far more than a shared religious passion.



Alfred & Amelia Allen, early 1860s

86. *Peacemaker*, January 1942, 1, January 1943, 1, November 1943, 4, January 1944, 2, May 1944, 4, October 1945, 1, and January 1946, 2; and *Telegraph*, 27 November 1943, 3.



Alfred Allen, c. 1890



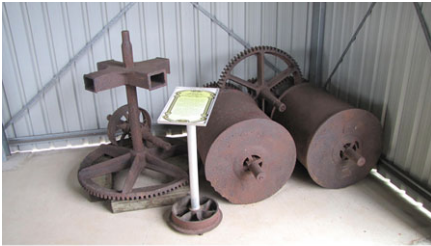
Arthur Branscombe Wood, c. 1885



Gustave Adolf Riebe c. 1885



Joseph Dixon, c. 1880



Cast-iron cane rollers, cogwheel, and horse-gear
from Friends Farm sugar mill.