

## WESTFIELD MONTHLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS 1785

The world was changing as the seventeenth century moved into its second half. New lands were opening up. Bold men were leaving the old and familiar behind and setting their eyes on far away places where a new, different, and hopefully better way of life was waiting for those who were brave enough, determined enough to strike out in search of those things they most desired. At this same critical period, the men and women who had banded themselves together and were known as the Religious Society of Friends, were becoming increasingly the object of persecution and harassment by those who found their religious beliefs and practices too new and different to accept.

George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, came early to America. It was 1672 when he paid his first visit to New Jersey, and on his return to England in 1673 he suggested that this colony could indeed be the most suitable place for the Quakers to settle. He sought out William Penn and other prominent Friends and after conferring with them, he requested that they be on the watch for an opportunity to purchase this land if it should be offered for sale.

They didn't have a long wait. In 1674 Lord Berkely offered his half of West Jersey for sale and it was quickly purchased by two Friends, John Fenwick and Edward Byllynge, for one thousand pounds. That amounted to less than a half cent an acre. Another buy was made in 1680 by these two and some of their fellow Friends, from the Duke of York. In 1681, William Penn and eleven partners purchased East Jersey from Lady Carteret for thirty-four thousand pounds. (East Jersey and West Jersey were united as a Crown Colony in 1702.)

While this acquisition of land was going on, the Quakers were readying themselves for their journey across the Sea. Not only would they be establishing themselves in new homes, they would be making a new life, a new society. With this in mind, a Charter was drawn up in 1676. Called the "Concessions and Agreements of the Proprietors, Free Holders and Inhabitants of West Jersey in America," it was adopted and signed by William Penn and about one hundred and fifty others who had proprietary rights in the Province. This charter established freedom of religion, trial by jury and included within its structure the elementary principles underlying the Bill of Rights. The real Quaker history in the tri-boro area began shortly after that time.

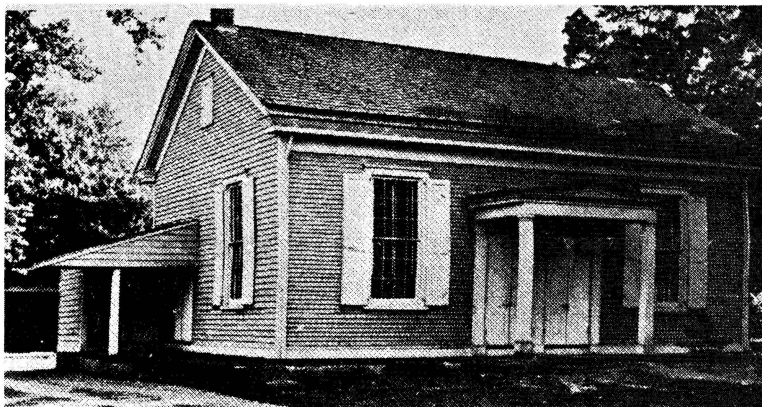
The Good Ship Kent traveled across the Atlantic and up the Delaware. It came to Burlington, moored to a sycamore tree and put down its gangplank. The Quakers who came ashore either had bought their land before they left England or purchased it from the Indians when they arrived here. Those who came already owning land included the Evans family. The Indians sold land to John and Sarah Roberts. The names of these and other Quakers are still seen on street signs . . . Parry Road, Thomas Avenue, Lippincott Avenue, Taylor's Lane. These and many more remind us of those early settlers.

These good people grew in numbers. They established homes and businesses. For the first 100 years in the new land they came together to worship, meeting in homes. However, since the Friends have historically felt that education was a cornerstone, an integral part of the foundation of their faith, they first concerned themselves with the need to build schools.

The present Westfield Friends School had its beginnings in the home of Abraham Warrington, near Fork Landing on the Pennsauken Creek in 1785. The minutes of the Chester Meeting, which had oversight of this school, dated July 1791, say this: "Trustees appointed in the twelfth (sic) month past to have the oversight of this school taught by Abraham Warrington made a satisfactory report."

In this same year, land on Riverton Road valued at "Six Pounds, Hard Money" was brought and a stone building was erected. This building was also used for Sunday Worship until 1799 when more land adjoining the school was acquired from William and Ann Lippincott. It once was part of the land owned by Thomas Lippincott which he had called his "West Field." The meeting house that was built on this spot in 1800 continued in use until 1859 when it was destroyed by fire along with several of the tall trees which surrounded it. In the same year, the brick meeting house was built and the trees, which today reach skyward and shelter the structure on all sides, were planted. Friends records show the completion date as April 13, 1860. History books record April 13, 1860, as a tragic day in our nation's history . . . the firing on Fort Sumter, the event that was to pour fuel on the smoldering fires of Civil War.

The Quakers, like all other religious bodies, were not immune to strife and dissension within their own ranks. A split occurred in 1827. In many communities in the Philadelphia area one frequently finds two Friends' meeting houses, sometimes next door to one another. In Cinnaminson, the Orthodox (Arch Street) Friends built a frame meeting house in 1848 on the west corner of Pomona Road and Branch Pike. The Hicksite (Race Street) Friends continued to use the original meeting house on Riverton Road. The Orthodox Friends Meeting House was razed in 1974, and today you can hardly see where the structure stood.



**"Orthodox Friends Meeting House as it stood on corner of Pomona Road and Riverton-Moorestown Road in 1848."**

Eventually the difficulties were reconciled, though it took many years for the healing process to come about. The fuel shortage of World War II helped some, but the true healing was also aided and abetted by the work of two highly respected members of their respective Meetings, Jane Rushmore and Howard Taylor. During the winter months, the two groups began to worship together in the brick meeting house on Riverton Road, and during the hot summer months, they met in the frame meeting house on Branch Pike.

The two yearly meetings joined together in 1955. The Branch Pike property was sold to Saint Charles Borromeo Parish. Moneys realized from this sale were used to construct a new building adjacent to the original one built in 1859. Traditional Quaker thrift was observed in that some of the old benches and even some of the carpets being used in the new meeting house had been used in the old Branch Pike structure. The old building was remodeled and continues to be used as an annex to the school, while the new meeting house is used for all worship and social functions.

In this coming together, the terms Hicksite, Orthodox, Race Street or Arch Street Friends are now happily a thing of the past.

One can walk through the burial grounds at Westfield and find that it was used by both meetings even during the long years of separation. In those early years most of the grave markers were made from a soft marble, and the legends have long since vanished under the impact of the rains and winters of the passing years. The oldest legible stone marks the grave of William Lippincott. The engravings show the date of his birth as 1770 and mark his death in 1830. It is reasonable to assume it was his ground that was purchased by the meeting in 1799.

The grave markers in the cemetery reveal how many of the Quaker families have influenced the life of the tri-boro communities in farming, business and civic affairs. One finds names like Coales, Coward, Conrow, McVaugh, Knight, Richie, Stover, Taylor and many others who have been active in the meetings and in public affairs, oftentimes serving as mayors, working on township councils, or as members of a school board.

Much of the historical data relating to Westfield Friends Meeting was compiled by a descendant of the Richie family, Mr. Edward Richie.

The Westfield School remains a most significant single contribution to the community, and, with the exception of the years 1905, 1906 and 1907, the school has been continually active since 1795. While the present building dates from 1840, it has been enlarged five times — first in 1913, again in 1927, 1950, 1955, and 1973. The enrollment has fluctuated through the years. What started as a one room, one teacher school now has an enrollment of 170 students, more or less equally divided between boys and girls.

Quaker contributions to the quality of life in Cinnaminson have been many. It is interesting to note that Arthur Leeds Richie who farmed on Branch Pike from 1909 until the early 1940's was listed with Luther Burbank in recognition of his work in developing sugar corn varieties as well as cooperating with Rutgers University in developing new varieties of peaches.

Another Quaker, Samuel L. Allen, invented the Flexible Flyer Sled, still one of the most cherished possessions of children who find such delight in streaking down a snow-covered hill.

Many a grandfather of today learned to swim in McVaugh's pool, another Quaker contribution to the community. Times have changed since it was built in 1924 and used plain pure creek water with no filtration or chlorine!

Today a tenth generation descendant of those early Quaker settlers would be hard to distinguish from your other neighbors. In the beginning years, and until perhaps as recently as sixty years ago, their dress and speech were distinctive. The term "Quaker" was sometimes applied in a derisive fashion. Today, however, because of their upright conduct and their practice of a "Seven day religion" the term "Quaker" invokes instead an image of quality and integrity.

Quaker interest in community betterment and conservation is notably found in the establishment of Cinnaminson's Wood Park, bounded by Riverton Road, Pomona Road and Branch Pike, and the recent 90 acre "Open Space easement" of the Taylor farm which will ensure a natural habitat for wild life in the future.

For all the fine and worthwhile activities to which the Friends have given over their time, talent and dedication, many voices will speak grateful words of thanks. But the most fitting commendation that can be directed to the Friends would certainly have to be centered upon the way in which they have shown by example, by the very nature of their everyday lives, that man is God's creation and should show in his deeds, in his words, and indeed, in all manner and means at his disposal, that the Lord is at the center of all things, and we as His children should give heed to His commandment to make ourselves His worthy servants, striving always to perfect our nature and do His will as He makes it known to us. In their kindness, diligence, honesty in all dealings and love for their fellow man, the Friends have indeed held up an example of what it is to live your beliefs as well as speak them.

