

An Historical Sketch of Haverford Friends Meeting

Eagle Road at St. Denis Lane
Havertown, Pennsylvania

Written by Mary C. Dickenson, as edited by Martha and William Goebel in 1957

Old Haverford Friends Meeting is the oldest house of worship in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. About 1682, a large number of settlers from Wales came to this country and settled the three townships of Haverford, Merion and Radnor. The love of home in these Welsh hearts was so great that before consenting to cross the seas, they had bargained with the Proprietary for a separate Barony of [40,000]* acres where they could attend to all their duties, both temporal and spiritual, in their own way and in their own language in the truth of God in peace. Some of these families were founders of Haverford Meeting and as was the custom of early Friends, until a house for special service was ready, the homes of nearby members were the meeting places of the Society.

In 1684, there is an account of a monthly meeting being held at the house of John Bevan, Haverford. The same year a small piece of ground was laid out next to the Meetinghouse for a burial lot. Dr. George Smith, a member of this Meeting, in his valuable history of Delaware County says, "there are undoubted facts showing there was a Meeting House erected here as early as 1688. It was of rude construction and transient duration, a log building. The land upon which the building stands belonged to William Howell, a Welsh settler who came here from Wales in the ship Lyons in 1682. William Penn gave Howell a grant of 5,000 acres. Howell deeded to his friends, John Bevan, William Lewis, Henry Lewis, and Morris Llewellyn, Trustees of the Meeting, the grounds and log building in 1693, 'for the use and behalf of the people called Quakers.'" There is an account of one of the first marriage certificates recorded here, Lewis David and Florence Jones, March 20, 1690. Provision was first made in 1694 to have a stable built near the Meetinghouse to provide comfort for the horses. In 1695, William Howell, William Jenkins, and Ellis Hugh were directed to inspect and consider a way to build a Meetinghouse or repair the old log building. In 1697, subscriptions were taken after the manner of the day from members of this Meeting and other Meetings and a stone house was erected, which is thought to be the south end of the original building with its rough masonry. The date of its completion and occupancy has been placed in 1700. Cost was 158 pounds. A kind of stove provided heat; smoke escaped through a hole in the wall and fuel was piled outside. There was no porch or chimney then. Construction of the porch shows on the present building. During the Revolution, it is related that lead from the window frames and sashes was seized to make bullets.

In 1700, William Penn visited this Meetinghouse several times. Records tell of him bringing a child from Darby on horseback. It was difficult for the Welsh Quakers,[who spoke Welsh,] to understand Penn's sermon as he [spoke English being] from England [and] of half-Dutch, half-English parentage. In 1800, the north end of this building was added to the other. On the inside a partition between the two buildings was arranged with pulleys to raise and lower parts at each end when the Meeting needed both rooms at the same time. It was the custom then for men and women Friends to hold their business sessions separately. The membership of the Meeting had increased very much by this time. In the northeast corner of the room, a staircase led to a schoolroom above.

Repairs and changes in the building were slight until 1909, when alterations removed the partition separating the two rooms. The table in the gallery was refinished and varnished. Many certificates of marriage were signed upon it. During the summer of 1930, a stone a stone addition was built to the

south side of the old Meetinghouse to conform in design with the old structure. This was done to have a room for First Day School activities. The large stone block now facing the Meetinghouse porch was used a century ago for those coming on horseback to dismount. The bronze tablet on the wall in the Meetinghouse was dedicated in 1927 (June 17) by a descendant of John Bevan (Augusta L. Curtis, of New York). The inscription upon the tablet is thus: "Blessed be those who in a new land implant those principles of Christ that are eternal." The latest addition, one which doubled the area of the First Day School room, was constructed in 1949 with all the work being done by members of the Meeting.

The Preparative Meeting was laid down in 1950, and Old Haverford Monthly Meeting held its first business session on January 2, 1950. On May 16, 1951, the Trustees of Old Haverford Monthly Meeting became incorporated. As of January 1957, total membership was 172 (115 adults and 57 children). There [were] six First Day School classes.

[In 1952,] Meeting for Worship was held at 11:30 AM on First Day, with First Day School convening at 10:15 AM except the first First Day of the month, when the families worship together at 11:30 AM**.

[Now, in 2023 we Worship at 10:30AM with First Day School held concurrently. Other 2023 edits to the original text above are shown in brackets].

The original source document was scanned and can be viewed here:

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