

HISTORY OF THE GWYNEDD MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Orthodox Meeting House built about ..1830.
Location in neighborhood of North Wales in
Montgomery County, Pa.

Gwynedd is a Preparative and Monthly Meeting belonging to Abington Quarter of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Hicksite Friends, and is a meeting of ancient standing, having been established in 1700. The Radnor records inform us that in 1699 "There is a General Meeting appointed at Gwynedd, the second weekly third day of every month. at the desire of Friends there." And again in 1703, "Gwynedd Friends desire their Preparative Meeting removed from their General Meeting to the last weekly third day in the month; which was approved."

The Monthly Meeting was established in 1714. Quoting from the same authority:- "At the Monthly Meeting held at Radnor meeting-house, the ninth day of the tenth month, 1714, it is left for further consideration what time to appoint the Monthly Meeting of Gwynedd and Plymouth; which was left to the appointment of this meeting by the Quarterly Meeting. Gwynedd and Plymouth Friends, after consideration what day is suitable for their Monthly Meeting, propose the last third day in every month; which this meeting acquiesces with."

Regarding the Meeting House at Gwynedd, Samuel Smith has stated, "A meeting-house was built in the year 1700, and a larger one in 1712; and the meeting held therein on the 19th of the 7th month of that year."

The date on the front wall of the present Meeting House is 1823. The building is a fine structure, rough-casted, large, and kept in excellent repair. It stands on high ground at the intersection of the De Kalb Street Pike and Summeytown Pike, midway between Ambler and North Wales, in Montgomery County, Pa., the name of North Wales having, in early times, been given to the meeting. The grounds surrounding it are beautified by fine old shade trees, many of them being grand old oaks of the primeval forest, which have seen more years than the Meeting House itself. A horse-block of early days is carefully kept in good condition and stands some distance to the southeast of the House. From it the graveyard to the west and rear of the Meeting House is seen in all its quietness and beauty. In the Burial Ground are a few quaint unmarked field-stones, and others having initials and dates, one of the oldest being in the Moore row. It is marked "M. M. 1770." There is another, much older, placed to the memory of Mary Bate who died in 1714: the stone is a slab lying flat on the grave, but the passage of time has caused the inscription to be almost or quite illegible.

Among the family names noticed most frequently on the stones in the Gwynedd Burial Ground are Lukens, Foulke, Shoemaker, Cleaver, Roberts and Ambler, while others to be seen are Cooper, Conard, Evans, Fulton, Jenkins, Jones, Moore, Michener, Kather, Myers, Pim, Redifer, Rutter, Scarlett, Stockdale, Thomas, Walton and Zorns. Formerly the graveyard was separated from the Meeting House Yard by a wooden fence (so old photographs of the House show) extending from the corner of the Meeting

House to the road, but this has been removed and the two yards are now continuous. On the southern and western bounds of the cemetery is a privet hedge, while on the north side an open fence of metal piping separates the graveyard from the ground in front of the wagon-sheds. A graveled pathway intersects the graveyard northward from a corner of the Meeting House, but it is evidently an addition of later years, for it passes directly over the grave of "Gainer Jones died 1847 aged 91 years." This grave is under the spreading branches of a tree.

The two doors at the rear of the House, opening to the graveyard, formerly had steps to the ground, but now, unused, have had the steps removed. At the northeast corner of the Meeting House is the building in which Gwynedd Friends' School was conducted until 1928 when it was discontinued and the building then became an annex in which lunches are prepared for Quarterly Meeting gatherings and other special purposes.

An attractive porte-cochere built at the southeast corner of the House is the one feature which adds a modern aspect to Gwynedd Meeting House, deducting from the antique appearance of the place which the climbing summer ivy about the doorways endeavors to sustain.

Much has been written about Gwynedd Township and the Meeting House. The following notes are quoted from Theodore W. Bean's "History of Montgomery County, Pa.," published in 1884:-

"Friends' Meeting House, owing to its antiquity and long-extended influence, is deemed well worthy a separate article. From its being almost in the exact centre of the township, or original purchase it was the third house of worship erected in the county, being preceded a few years only by those erected in Lower Merion and Abington. Nearly two centuries have now passed away since these occurrences, producing great changes in almost everything, and from which even their ancient meetings have not been by any means kept. Hallowed and venerable associations cluster around them, the impress of which should by no means be entirely lost on their numerous and respected descendants. Posterity owes much to the past, and as long as gratitude exists it will remain a serious question as to the best or most proper method to meet such obligations. The labors of the historian are certainly not calculated to weaken such ties, but to ennoble or exalt them.

"The minute-book of Gwynedd Monthly Meeting commences in 1714, but it is stated therein that this place was settled 'and called by the name of Gwynedd township in the latter end of the year 1698 and the beginning of the year 1699.' The principal settlers and purchasers, among others, were William Jones, Thomas Evans, Robert Evans, Owen Evans, Cadwallader Evans, Hugh Griffith, John Hugh, Edward Foulke, John Humphrey and Robert Jones. Of this number those who were Friends met together 'at the houses of John Hugh and John Humphrey.' With the exception of the latter two and most probably Hugh Griffith, the remainder were attached to the Established Church of England. An identity of interests in this new settlement was calculated to draw them close together. It is evident that the meetings held in the aforesaid houses led to the organization of this congregation. The churchmen for a brief term did assemble for worship at the house of Robert Evans where his brother Cadwal-

lader supplied in part the place of a minister, by reading to them portions of the services and passages from his Welsh Bible. This may not have been maintained much beyond a year, for on building the first log meeting-house in 1700, on the site of the present edifice, they all united, assisted by later immigrants, who must have also increased the body of Friends. The relation is that Robert and Cadwallader Evans first sought them by attending at their place of worship, and finally through their influence the rest were brought over, on which the meeting-house was agreed upon. It is a well-settled tradition that William Penn and his daughter Letitia and a servant came out on horse back to visit the settlement shortly after its erection and that he preached in it, staying on this occasion overnight at the house of his friend, Thomas Evans, the first settler, who resided near by.....

"The log meeting-house proving inadequate for the accommodation of the society, which was no doubt in part brought about by the influx of immigration and the continuous prosperity of the settlement, a subscription paper was drawn up in the Welsh language, in 1710-11, to which were signed sixty-six names headed by William, John and Thomas Evans. The sums ranged from one to eleven pounds each, the total reaching to about two hundred pounds. Hugh Griffith assisted in its building, and it was completed in 1712. It was considerably larger than the former, and was built of stone, with two galleries and a hip-roof. It occupied the former site, and the ground was a portion of Robert Evans' purchase, still covered with the original forest. The subscription paper mentioned is an interesting relic and has long been preserved and retained in the Foulke Family.

"Rowland Ellis, on behalf of Haverford, represented, on the 10th of Fourth Month, 1699, to the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, about this Welsh settlement twenty miles distant, who had for some time held a First-day Meeting by their advice and consent, and, as they do not understand the English language, desired to be joined to Haverford Monthly Meeting, to which consent was given. At the Monthly Meeting held at Rednor Meeting-house on the 9th of Tenth Month, 1714, it was left for consideration as to what time the Monthly Meeting of Gwynedd and Plymouth (should be held) be left to the appointment of this meeting by the Quarterly Meeting held in Philadelphia. The Third-day of every month was proposed and agreed upon.

"Being now constituted a Monthly Meeting, they were allowed the privilege of recording all their births, marriages, deaths and removals, which had heretofore been entered in the records of Haverford. Plymouth Friends being few in numbers and the meetings being chiefly held here, it was called Gwynedd Monthly Meeting, which name has been ever since retained. John Evans was appointed the first clerk, and Edward Foulke and Robert Jones overseers. On the 26th of Second Month, 1715, Friends in Providence were allowed to hold a meeting on the first First-day of every month, and a few months thereafter liberty was given to have a burying-place. But the meeting-house again proving too small, it was decided the 28th of Tenth Month, 1725, to have it enlarged. John Cadwallader, John Jones and John Evans being appointed a committee to have charge of the same.....

"Gwynedd Monthly Meeting remained in Philadelphia Quarter until 1786, when it comprised, with Abington, Horsham, Richland and Byberry, Abington Quarter, whose meetings are now held at Abington in Second Month, Horsham in the Fifth, Gwynedd in the Eighth and Byberry in the Eleventh.

"The present meeting-house was built in 1823. It is a plain, substantial, two-story structure, forty by seventy-five feet in dimensions. When first built here, in 1700, the spot must have been very secluded. In the ample yard and burial ground attached several original forest-trees are still preserved, one of these, a chestnut, nearly four feet in diameter. Near the southern corner of the yard is a stone bearing the name of Mary Bate, daughter of Humphrey and Ann Bate, who died in 1714."

NOTE.- The huge chestnut tree mentioned in the foregoing, is no longer in existence in 1929. Further, the name of Humphrey Bate's daughter was Martha, not Mary. Her tombstone is indicated as the oldest in the Burial Ground, and the following is the entire inscription:-

Hear lieth the body of Martha the daughter of Humphrey Bate and Anne his wif departed of this life Aprell 25 aged 3 Y 6 M 1714.

The Separation of 1827 affected Gwynedd Friends' Meeting and a small minority withdrew and established the Gwynedd Orthodox Branch. About 1830 they built a Meeting House some little distance from the old Meeting House, and established a Burial Ground beside it on the road from Spring House to Penllyn. It was stated in "The Friend", 9th Mo. 4, 1830, in an article detailing the various meetings of Orthodox Friends at that time:- "In Abington Quarter new houses have been erected at Gwynedd, Horsham and Byberry."

The Gwynedd Meeting of Orthodox Friends has been discontinued, the Meeting House sold and remodeled and added to, and converted into a handsome dwelling. In 1931 it is known by the name of "Orthodox Cottage." In the small wall-inclosed Burial Ground beside the dwelling are thirteen marked graves. Two stones bear no lettering, three have initials and year dates, four are members of the Spencer family, two of the Ambler, and one of the Walton family. The latest inscription is that of

GEORGE SPENCER Passed from time 11th Mo. 6th, 1895.

Courtesy of the
FRIENDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Swarthmore College
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