

Chappaqua Friends Meeting



The Early Years

*Published in 2003
to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the
Chappaqua Friends Meeting House
on Quaker Road*

AUTHORS' NOTE:

This brief history is by no means a definitive record of Quakers in the Chappaqua area in the 18th century. Our purpose has been to give some sense of who these people were and what their lives were like during that time. For further reading, look to books mentioned in the endnotes and to materials at the New Castle Historical Society. The principal authors of this account are Janet Hough, Barbara Rutledge, and Phebe Washburn, of the Chappaqua Religious Society of Friends. We thank Sara Langbert and Gene Hawes, also Friends, for research and editorial help, respectively. We also thank the New Castle Historical Society for assistance in publishing this booklet.

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Friends continue to worship in the
Chappaqua Meeting House on First Days (Sundays)
at 10:30 a.m. throughout the year.
Visitors are always welcome to join us in our
unprogrammed Meeting for Worship

"Whereas several Friends, who live at a place called Shapiqua within the Bounds of North Castle have continued for some Considerable time to meet together at the home of Abel Weeks and desire to have a meeting Established Amongst them, the meeting therefore having considered thereof desires the approbation of the Quarterly Meeting for the same"

From the minutes of the Purchase Monthly Meeting of Friends (Quakers), 8th month, 10th day, 1745

This is the first reference we have to what is now officially named the Chappaqua Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Members of the Meeting still gather for worship regularly on First Day (Sunday) in their meeting house on Quaker Road, as they have for 250 years. What was the journey that brought Friends to Shapiqua? What were their religious beliefs, and how did they differ from those of the Dutch and other English settlers who surrounded them in Westchester and Connecticut?

(1) The journey began in England. There, from the time of Henry VIII in the 16th century, waves of change had swept through the Christian faith, with Puritans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anabaptists, and others, "progressively purifying" it of what

they viewed as excessive hierarchy and form. The religious ferment continued on into the 17th century with many seeking further changes.

One was a young man named George Fox, who had roamed England for a number of years seeking religious guidance from the 'hireling priests' in the 'steeple houses,' but had found no satisfaction. Finally, he wrote in his Journal,

"When I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell me what to do, then oh then I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy." ¹

There were many others at that time who were finding the Light within, and by 1652 Fox was gathering them, particularly in the northwest of England. "The energizing center of the whole movement out of which all else grew was the Inward Light, the Inward Christ, that of God in every man. It was this doctrine of the Light as a unifying principle which made Quakerism more than just another protesting sect." ²

These early Quakers were much persecuted for practices growing out of their beliefs, which offended both the established Church and the State. These practices included refusal to pay tithes to the established Church, refusal of "hat honor" (doffing one's hat to superiors), use of then-intimate forms of pronouns, ("thee" and "thou") with everyone, and refusal to swear the oaths then widely required. Many Quakers were beaten, thrown out of their homes, and imprisoned. George Fox was subjected to eight imprisonments.

The next part of the journey was that of eleven Quaker missionaries who sailed in the ship *Woodhouse* in 1657 to New Netherland, now the New York City area. Not long after, many settlers from England in the Long Island towns of Flushing, Hempstead, Newtown, Gravesend, and Oyster Bay became supporters. These Quakers were sometimes arrested and fined by the Dutch, but at least they were not hanged, as four were in Massachusetts.

Elizabeth Weekes (Weeks), great-grandmother of Abel Weeks, was fined 20 guilders in April of 1658 under a Sunday Law in Hempstead "for not only absenting herself from public worship of God, but profaning the Lord's Day by going to a conventicle or meeting in the woods where there were two Quakers."³ The number of Quakers on Long Island continued to grow, however, by "convincement," large families, and new arrivals from England.

For many Quakers the next step in the journey was across the Sound to the mainland. Meetings were established in 1685 in the town of Westchester (now in the Bronx), and in Mamaroneck. The latter would in time become the Scarsdale Friends Meeting. In 1695, John Harrison, a Quaker from Flushing "...purchased of the Indians a tract of land about nine miles in length and nearly three in width ... The Indians reserved 'such whitewood trees as shall be found suitable to make canoes of...'"⁴ Large numbers of Friends came to settle there. They called it "Harrison's Purchase," or simply "The Purchase" and it is still known today as Purchase, NY. A meeting house was erected there in 1727.

(3) The final step in the journey of Quakers to Shapiqua was made possible

by the availability of land lying between the established Dutch and English Manors and Patents, the ownership of which had long been contested. Uncertainties about the boundaries of Cortlandt and Philipsburg Manor, the border between New York and Connecticut (which was changed several times), and the claims of one John Richbell in the area, were all delaying factors. Settlement would finally start with the issuing of ten patents for the land which was to become the Town of North Castle, beginning with the West Patent in 1701. Westchester County was established in 1683 and "North Cassel" [sic] is first mentioned in the Minutes of the Court of Session, June 6, 1721.⁵

Thus it was that around 1720, Abel Weeks, a Friend who was a third-generation American, came with his family to North Castle from Long Island. He built a house at a bend of a road between Shapiqua and New Castle Corners, now Mt. Kisco, and this house was where Shapiqua Friends held their first meetings.

Abel Weeks had bought his land from Native Americans. Ownership of land was not as easy for everyone. A large portion of Westchester was held by the Philipse family and available only for lease. In the mid-1700s, some young Quaker men came from "The Purchase" and leased farms in the northern section of the Philipse Manor known as Nanahagen, now in the Town of Mt. Pleasant. They joined the Quaker following at Shapiqua.

For Abel Weeks and his family and the other settlers, there was much hard work, with lands to clear and houses to build. By 1736, Quakers were an important

presence in the area. Records of the Town of North Castle from 1736-1791 contain the yearly appointments for the Town government. Quaker names were prominent among them. Moses Quinby was the Clerk from 1736 to 1741.⁶ Roads and livestock were important concerns. In 1743 Joseph Sutton was named Highway Master for Shapiqua "all over the place."⁷ Joseph Weeks was named an overseer of roads in 1757 "from the middle of the long Bridge up to Abel Weeks' hill and so down to the Meeting House."⁸ Other appointments included ones as "fence viewers," "prisers" (appraisers) of damage, and "pounders" (impounders). These were positions that Abel Weeks also held at one time or another

Each owner had an ear-mark brand for his livestock. Weeks's mark, issued April 7, 1741, was a "latch the fore side of the near Ear & a half penny the foreside of the off Ear."⁹

The Chappaqua meeting house

The opening of this account quoted the Purchase Meeting Minute requesting approval to start a Friends Meeting in Shapiqua. This having been approved, four months later, in 12th month 1745, the Purchase Meeting also approved that "Abel Weeks be appointed overseer of the new Meeting."¹⁰

(5) Although Abel's home continued to be the assembly place, the number of Quakers settling in the area soon outgrew these quarters. In 1752, Shapiqua Friends took a request for a meeting house to their Monthly Meeting at Mamaroneck. Anthony Field, Henry Franklin, Moses Quinby and John Clapp were

appointed to pursue the matter. Soon after, these Friends reported to the Quarterly Meeting that they had "viewed a place that may answer."¹¹ The land they referred to was a two-acre parcel that John Reynolds, a Quaker farmer, had deeded to Shapiqua Friends in 1747 for a cemetery and future meeting house. (A third acre would be deeded at a later time by Reuben Haight.) The Quarterly Meeting considered their request and minuted that, "a house 20 by 26 feet with 18 foot posts was allowed".¹² Richard Cornell, Abel Weeks, and Moses Quinby were appointed to employ the workmen and carpenters.

Construction of the Meeting House began in 1753. This is the year that is cited on the National Register of Historic Places plaque now affixed to the outside south wall. Shapiqua Friends of the 1750s contributed as much money as they could toward the building expense. Then, as was Quaker practice of the time, subscriptions were solicited in the Monthly Meetings of Mamaroneck and Oblong "to pay for and finish the Shapiqua house" in 1754.¹³ At the time of its completion, the meeting house represented the first house of worship to be built in the town.

The meeting house followed a standard design of the 1700s, resembling a plain rectangular farmhouse with shingled exterior. Its 18-foot-tall oak posts and its beams and studs were all hand-hewn, and fastened together with wooden pegs. The walls of the building were filled with a mixture of lime, hay, and oat straw, early insulating materials. Even with these, winter-time conditions in the early years there must have been austere. In 1784, about the time stoves became available, the

