



Quaker Meeting House - Dover N.H.  
Over 200 Years Old

*Friends Meeting House ~ Dover, New Hampshire. Built in 1768, it has served its people for over 200 years. Early Friends became so disturbed and so emotionally involved that they were nicknamed 'Quakers', a name which has stuck to this day.*

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## THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN DOVER AND VICINITY



*The following article is part 1 of 2 parts. The information was obtained by Weirs Historian, Beth Lavertue, from her friend Mrs. Shirley Leslie of Rochester, N.H., former clerk of Friends Meeting House. This all started when Beth saw a question by B. McK. of Portsmouth and answer by Bruce Heald in his weekly "Ask The Doctor" column. -ed.*

To better understand the beginning of Friends here in our area let us go back to England where there was a great deal of unrest in the churches which were not meeting the spiritual needs of its people. Amongst the "seekers" was a young man named George Fox. In his search he became convinced that there was that of God in

everyone, and that man should allow the divine to have complete control of his life. This belief and practice made his followers live more God centered lives. It made them very sensitive to the well being of their fellow man. In the sight of God everyone was equal which meant they should not take off their hats in the presence

of Kings, magistrates, etc. One certainly could not go into war and kill. One must love his enemies, and do good to those who persecute him.

Prisons were visited to promote better living conditions and perhaps more frequently, they themselves were put into the prisons

See **FRIENDS** on page 17



**FRIENDS, from page 1**

because of their concern for equality. Early Friends became so disturbed and so emotionally involved that they were nicknamed "Quakers", a name which has stuck to this day. Persecution continued in England until the Toleration Acts were written in 1689.

We can well understand why these heretics were a threat to Dover when they came as missionaries telling everyone who would listen that there was an innerlight within which needed nurturing. They told of a loving God who wanted to be very important in everyone's life.

This was a big threat to the Church and Government Laws were made and enforced to persecute these heretics. The first to come to Dover were William Robinson and Marmaduke Stevenson. They had introduced Quakerism and prepared Dover for Mary Tomkins and Alice Ambros who arrived in Dover in 1662. These women along with a convert Ann Coleman created quite a stir. They went back and forth across the river to Kittery now Eliot. In Kittery Major Shapleigh made the women welcome. They continued to go back to Dover where they were not wanted. The Priest instigated a flood of persecutions. The three women were apprehended by virtue of the Cart-Law, which is as follows:

To the constable of Dover, Hampton, Salisbury, Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Wenham, Linn, Boston, Roxbury, Dedham, and till these vagabond Quakers, are out of this jurisdiction.'

'You and every one of you are required in the King's Majesty's name to take these vagabond Quakers, Ann Coleman, Mary Tomkins, and Alice Ambros, and make them fast to the Cart's tail, and drawing the cart through your several towns, to whip them upon their naked backs, not exceeding ten stripes apiece on each of them in each town; and so to convey them from Constable to Constable till they

are out of this jurisdiction, as you will answer it at your peril; and this shall be your warrant. For me, Richard Walderne, at Dover dated Dec. 22, 1662.

This was certainly a cruel warrant. They would have to travel on snow and dirt around 80 miles. Their backs would be very raw. The historians claim that the priest thought it was a big joke. The women were whipped in Dover and after being shown the warrant they allowed the men to take them onto Hampton. When they arrived in Seabrook, Major Pike interfered and would not allow the Constable to whip them. He put them into a boat with a Dr. Benefoot, who had come along with the women. They went down the river to Ipswich Bay; then along the coast to the Pascataqua; then up the river to Shapleigh's Creek. They went to Major Nicholas Shapleigh's house where they were cordially received. They stayed there until they had completely recovered from their punishment they had received in Dover and Hampton.

Feeling much better the women decided that they should go back to the other side of the river and visit the friends they had made. More persecutions were enforced upon them by the sons of Thomas Roberts, young Thomas and his brother John. Seeing Alice Ambros and Mary Tomkins enter a home, they went in and took Alice by the arms and dragged her face down through snow that was knee deep, over stumps and old trees for nearly a mile to Thomas Canney's house. He was called a 'wickard sorcerer.' They went back and got Mary and took her in like manner. The next morning they threw them both into the icy water to die. Miraculously they managed to come ashore and reach Durham. The history book tells us that they walked into a Church Service and began to tell their message concerning the "in-

See **FRIENDS** on page 20



**FRIENDS, from page 17**

ner light". In an effort to stop them, the Priest began pinching them. It must have hurt but it did not stop them because they had an audience that was interested in what they had to say. In disgust, the Priest left for the Isle of Shoals.

Back in Dover the Elderly Thomas Roberts was so disturbed because his sons had been so cruel to the women that he protested by not going to church. Because he did not have the money to pay the fine for not attending Church, his cow was taken from him. A friend of George Fox's, Elizabeth was visiting Dover and was upset because the cow was

taken from a needy couple and she made a protest. Elizabeth was put into the stocks and then into prison for four days. Quint says that Walderne's wife was very upset because her husband "mischiefed" Friends.

Fines for those who paid any attention to the Friends were quite stiff. For attending Friends Meeting 5 shillings, for having any of their reading material, 10 shillings, and for entertaining a Friend in his home, 40 shillings

Bishop says, "neither imprisonment, fines, or starvation could daunt these fearless disciples of the "Inner Light". Show them a whipping post, they cling to it, a

prison they enter it, a halter and they put their heads into it. Others fascinated by the Glory of persecution came to the place of affliction."

As more people became convinced that Friends had a message for them the afflictions eased up. Quint says, "Quakers became a most orderly thrifty Christian body". About one-third of Dover became Friends.

Dover had its share of problems with the Indians. Friends made friends with the local ones. Ebenezer Varney built his home on Varney Street about 1696. He and his wife Mary Otis had a huge fireplace and never locked their door.

During the winter they found a few Indians still asleep in front of the fire place.

John Hanson and his family lived on Knox Marsh road. While John and his oldest son were at meeting on the fifth day, some Canadian Indians came to the Hanson home in June, 1724. They killed two small children and took John's wife Elizabeth, her new born baby, a nurse and several daughters out into the woods and started back to Canada where they would sell their victims to the French for slaves.

Elizabeth's trip to Canada is in the book "The Remarkable Captivity and Surprising Deliverance of Elizabeth Hanson." Friends everywhere collected money for John to pay the ransom. Minutes in Philadelphia Monthly Meeting show that they raised \$1,000, for this purpose. John was able to bring back all but his sixteen year old daughter, Sarah. Later he started back to bring her back, but died on the way. Sarah married a French man in order to obtain her freedom. She never returned to Dover.

In the beginning Friends worshipped in peoples homes. Wherever they came together was the place of worship. The first Meeting House to be used only for worship was given to Friends by John Knight. It was at Dover Neck which at that time was the center of town.

Historians do not agree as to when the second Meeting House was built but we do know that it was sometime between 1712 and 1720 on what is know the south west corner of Silver and Locust streets and was called the "Cochecha Meeting House".

Friends were spreading out in order to have more land for farming. The need of more meetings was felt. Requests came to the Monthly Meeting to worship in someone's home. A committee was formed to investigate the sincerity and report back at the next Monthly Meeting. If the report was favorable the new group was given the opportunity to meet for worship each first and fifth day except the day of Monthly Meeting for six months or a year. At the end of that time it was evaluated once more to see if it should continue. Queries were given to all meetings and a report of them were shared at Monthly Meeting and passed on to Quarterly Meeting. During the years there have been meetings under the care of Dover Monthly Meeting in Kittery, Berwick, Gilman-ton, Sandwich, Barrington,

Lee, New Durham, Upper Rochester (Meaderboro) and Lower Rochester (Gonic).

Under the date of ninth month 19th 1767 we find a minute. It is the mind of this meeting to send to the Quarterly Meeting for a committee to see whether we should build a Meeting House or repair the old ones and the place where in Dover".

Under the date eleventh mo. 21st 1767 "A local committee was appointed to take a deed of a lot of land of Aaron Hanson and to propose how big it should be and make a report thereof to the next Monthly Meeting.

Plans went into action and the present Meeting house was built sixth mo. 9th 1768. At that time Kittery wanted a Meeting House and Dover didn't know what to do with theirs at Dover Neck, so it was torn down and taken across the river when the ice was thick. There is a marker in Eliot where it stood and one is able to look across the river and see St. Thomas School near where it had been originally.

No one knows where the second Meeting House went. A historian writing in 1790 claimed that it disappeared. There was a rumor however that it was moved to Spring Street.

In this new Meeting house Whittier's Grandparents, Samuel Hussey and Mercy Evans were married Fifth mo. 5th 1769 and his parents, John Whittier and Abigail Hussey were married thirty-five years later, tenth month 3rd 1804.

Whittier enjoyed the stories his mother told of Dover. One of the characters he enjoyed, referring to him as the gray wizard, was Ambros Bampton called Bampton the sorcerer. He was born fifth mo. 15th 1717 and died eighth mo. 1790. He lived on a part of what is Three Rivers Farm now. He married Rebecca Austin Hill in Friends Meeting ninth mo. 1st 1750. Annie Pinkham tells "He was called the sorcerer from the fact that he possessed certain unaccountable powers of

See **FRIENDS** on page 21



**FRIENDS, from Page 20**

disclosing the unknown and declaring the coming of future events with remarkable accuracy. To him resorted farmers who had lost their cattle, matrons whose household goods, silver spoons and table linen had been stolen or maidens whose lovers were absent and the quiet meek spirited old man received them kindly, put on his iron rimmed spectacles, open his conjuring book, and after reflection gave the required answers without money and without price.

We should say something about Friends and the keeping of slaves. As early as 1731 we find the following minute: "Whereas some Friends signified at our last Monthly Meeting, they were uneasy in the practice of Friends buying or trading on negroes or slaves which was left to this Meeting for consideration. After due consideration thereof the desire of this Meeting is that all Friends that are clear of slaves may not be concerned in the practice thereof, but to keep themselves clear of practicing the trade of buying or selling slaves."

In ninth mo. 1777 A committee was asked to visit everyone who held slaves and advise them to set them free and report to our next Meeting. Twelfth mo. 1777 the committee brought eight manumissions and recorded them with the meeting which freed 10 slaves. By 1784 not a Friend in America owned a slave.

Annie Pinkham writes, "In the early days Meeting-houses were not heated. Some of the women carried foot stoves containing a few coals—sometimes a piece of oak plank was well heated and served to warm ones feet. In second mo 1788 a committee was appointed to take under consideration some preparation for a fire for the comfort of said meeting in cold weather—either one or two stoves. The first stove was a potash kettle. As I understand it, a hearth was laid to protect the floor and a circular wall of bricks was

built on this, an opening being left for a sheet iron door in which to put the wood and an iron potash kettle inverted over it.

Some years later this stove was replaced by one that had been bought for them in Russia by Capt. Flagg. It cost \$66 and was paid for in clear white pine boards at \$6 per M, and the lumber was cut on land owned by the Friends at that time. Previously about 1774 the meeting bought a four acre lot partly covered with pine timber and partly grass land where Friends could turn out their horses to pasture when they came from a distance to meeting.

Dover Monthly Meeting was not blind to the injustice of British treatment of the colonies. On First month 1774 the large Protest Meeting called by the town was held at the Dover Meeting House. A resolution was unanimously passed upholding the demand for representation in government. Henry Bailey Stevens used to say that the Meeting House became the Faneuil Hall of Dover. It was a year later that Nathaniel Meader and others made a statement. "We do not chose to sign allegiance to the Colonies".

Third mo. 23rd 1776

speaks of three who went into the war—"after deliberate consideration thereof it is the judgement of the Meeting that the above named Friends should not stand as members of our said Meeting until they return with unfained repentance for the above misconduct.

Notable Events - the History of Dover N.H. 1623-1865 has several interesting notes on the Quakers. In one we read, "The town of Dover voted to allow the Society of Friends 1300 ft of boards for their propriation of the money paid for the purchase of a bell as soon as the same could be collected from the person who bought the lots'. (1789) Friends had been having trouble because they had to pay a tax which many times was used for the Church.

In that same book we find "Oct. 18, 1826 Died, Marble Osborne aged 74, a member of the Society of Friends. He was esteemed by all who knew him, and it maybe emphatically said he was the noblest worker of God, an honest man. Also died Oct 23 Mercy aged 67 relict of Marble Osborne.

One of the most important committees during these times was the overseers of the poor. There were those

who had big families and when the farmers had a poor year they became needy.

Many Friends were disowned because they were not attending meetings, or were keeping bad company, or not treating their neighbors fairly. There were however, Friends who repented and hoped that the meeting would continue their watch and care over them.

In 1884 Asa and Emeline Tuttle came back from the middle west where they had been missionaries amongst the Indians. They were very active in the meeting. Due to the influence of Emeline the women's business meetings were discontinued and the sliding doors no longer needed to be shut during Monthly Meeting. It was after their death that Dover Meeting lacked leadership and attendance began to decline.

By 1912 a very few active members were here in Dover. Annie Pinkham and for a while her husband Clarence carried out the business of the meeting. Clarence and Walter Meader wrote letters to Washington on behalf of Dover Monthly Meeting. Annie enjoyed going over all of the family records and giving them to those who were interested.

She kept active until she went to California to live with her sister about 1950.

For several years the benches were found moved around and the rest of the Meeting House undisturbed. Later it was learned that one of the fraternities at the University expected their new members to spend one night in the Meeting House.

This paper by no means tells all that happened but it does give a review of what happened in the lives of those who came before us.

*Next week we will hear from the old Friends Meeting House itself.*

-ed.