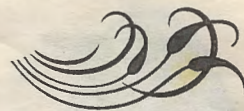


## A HISTORY OF DOVER FRIENDS MEETING

From 1955 to present, as told by the 222 year old Meetinghouse



The following article is part 2 of 2 parts. Part 1 appeared in last week's Weirs Times. 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.

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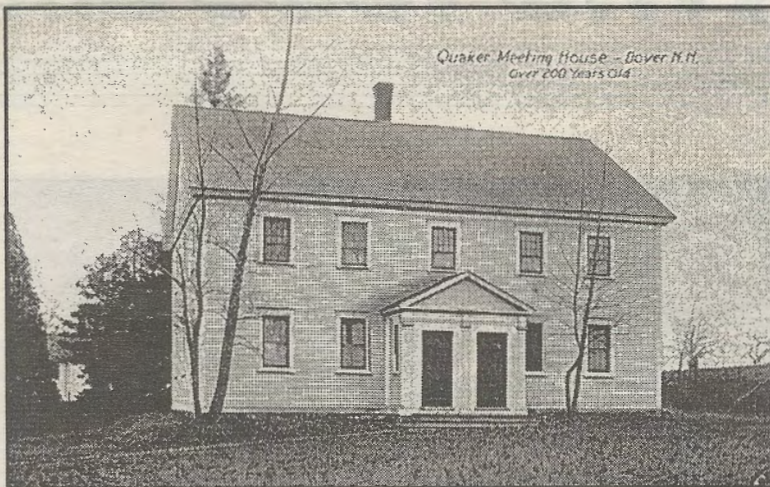
Having been urged to tell my story of what has happened within my walls and of those who became very special as Friends since 1955, with the help of my friends, I, the Dover Friends Meeting House, will do my best.

Before this time I had been too quiet. Many Friends in the area came every Fast

Day to Quarterly Meetings and to Monthly Business Meeting every third month. And for many years Friends came for morning worship during seventh and eighth months. There was no electricity or plumbing. Chemical toilets were under the stairs on either side.

Kerosene lamps were used on the few occasions when there were evening meetings. At one time there was a wooden picket fence on the street side of my yard. Earlier I faced a schoolhouse which was on the higher ground.

In 1955 Friends, members of the Gonic Meeting, opened my doors each First Day as usual, during seventh and eighth months for their unprogrammed Meeting for Worship. The average atten-



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dance was 35. It was that same summer that Dover had its Centennial Celebration. The city fathers asked Friends if they would keep my doors open to give the public the opportunity to visit with me. The Hinshaws, the Richardsons, the Leslies and Henry Bailey Stevens took turns staying with me. Light refreshments were served and my history and the history of Friends were told to all who asked.

I was built in 1768 when two separate Meetings of Friends desired to come together in a larger meeting-

house here in what was known at that time as Cocheco. Most visitors who came were interested in the fact that John Greenleaf Whittier's parents and grandparents were married here. Weddings are of interest to all, especially Quaker ones in which no minister, priest, or official joins the couple in happy matrimony.

Most everyone knew a little bit about William Penn. They wanted to know more about George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends called Quakers. When visitors to my house

heard about the three brave women who were tied to an oxcart and whipped out of Dover for their beliefs, they were amazed, but that is another story.

During the summer of '55 it was good to see my Gonic Friends once again and get to know new Friends. There was Silas and Louise Weeks and their twins, Charity and Charter, Lydia Frink from the Flushing (N.Y.) Monthly Meeting, Caroline Lanier who was a member from a well-known Friends family, the Scattergoods of Philadelphia, and Henry Bailey Stevens from Durham.

Too soon September came, school started and the Gonic Friends were back to their meetinghouse. It was then that Silas wished to discuss the possibility of continuing the unprogrammed worship during the fall. That was fine with me. Pauline Hinshaw and Shirley Leslie met with Silas in his office at the University of New Hampshire where he worked for the County Extensions Service. A few of those who were interested in coming here to worship were already committed to a church in their own community, so it was decided to have the meeting here on first day, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

The biggest problem in the past was that there was no one living near in Dover to care for me, opening my doors, keeping me clean, warming me in cold weather and shovelling a path to my door in winter. To my res-

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cue came the Leslies—Eddie, Shirley, and their children, Betty, Dick, and later Judy.

Soon after this decision was made, a fine couple, members of the Cambridge (Mass.) Meeting then living in Durham, asked if it would be possible to have meetings here. Eleanor and William (Billy) Dryer were delighted to find that it was already happening. They were a retired couple and made a great contribution to the meeting with their regular attendance and the hospitality of their home. Billy had

been an architect, designing some impressive bridges, and Eleanor was an accomplished musician. Both were active in promoting our peace testimony. I remember a meeting for worship in which no one had spoken. Billy rose, turned around, his face all aglow, and in his rich Scottish accent said, "Now wasn't that a beautiful meeting!"

In 1955 all of the benches were facing the facing bench. The old organ, very seldom used, was up front against the sliding panels. In front of the window near

the door was a tall wood and coal stove which was not satisfactory during the coldest months of the year. Several times the benches were drawn up close to keep warm.

On my right side three long table tops were supported by three narrow wooden horses on one end and a long board attached to the outside wall on the other end. Benches were placed close the tables and it was here that Friends enjoyed their basket lunches when they came to Quarterly Meeting each Fast Day. The

very tall bookcase was just inside the door. It was filled with Friends very old books and tracts carefully covered by my dear Friend, Annie Pinkham.

Outside, the wooden fence and gate were in poor condition, pushed around by the growing trees. In 1956 Eddie Leslie removed them with the help of an elderly man. He was happy to load them onto his little red wagon and said they would help keep his home warm.

It was that same year that Rolfe Richardson brought electricity into me. He wired the large lamp in the room for worship and put outlets close to the door on both sides. I was sure excited with this new convenience.

In second month 1957 a gas furnace was installed to heat the room for worship, replacing the wood stove. It was noisy when it was running but it made it much easier for Eddie who had been getting out in the wee hours to make me warm for morning worship. Walls were put up giving the chil-

dren a place of their own. Up to this time one small screened in corner was where they went after 15 minutes of silent worship with their parents. They gathered around a table to draw, color or read, making sure that if a child was apt to be whispering loudly he or she was facing the wall. Stories were read aloud when the meeting was over and parents were visiting. There were times when it was difficult for some to "center down" because the children were restless.

In 1959 Lydia Frink, a "birthright" Friend wanted her daughter, Eva, to have a Quaker wedding. There had not been a Quaker wedding here for a very long time. Lydia had new cushions made to replace the old kapok and leaky straw ones. The women spruced me up. I was happy and excited. The wedding followed Quaker tradition and was quite moving.

In 1965 the Willits family came to Durham. Lydia,

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Robin and Lee had been active in the Wellesley (Mass.) Meeting. Robin became a professor in the Whittemore School of Business at UNH. Lydia devoted a great deal of time to our peace testimony as a draft counselor and an active supporter of the AFSC and FCNL.

Henry Bailey Stevens, an author, decided to write a play about my past. He spent a great deal of time looking up what others had said about me in the monthly meeting records. He wrote special articles about Quaker families for Foster's Daily Democrat,

the local newspaper. They created a splendid background for his play which was produced twice. It was a big production. The Hussey Company whose family were old time Quakers of Berwick, brought stadium seating into my yard. My wide steps were the stage. The old organ was out on the grass for the music. Most of those who took part were Friends dressed in appropriate clothing for the period they represented. They brought back many happy and not so happy memories of my past.

It was produced first on August 17, 1963, in the cel-

ebration of the 300th year Friends worshipped here in Dover, and was entitled, Dover and its Friends. Due to the great interest it was produced again for New England Yearly Meeting in 1968 with a new title, Mother Whittier's Meeting. People came from miles to learn about my interesting past. If you have never read Mother Whittier's Meeting, please do so.

Henry and his sister, Anna Knauer, were vegetarians. Everyone in the Meeting were invited to Thanksgiving meal in their home. It must have been extra good because I heard happy com-

ments about it for a long time.

It was later, the seventh month the thirteenth day 1974, following Monthly Meeting, that Friends surprised Henry. It happened to be his 80th birthday and it seemed appropriate to have a "This is Your Life Henry". Gaining information from Mildred Richardson's diary of Henry's activities with Friends prior to '55, quizzing sister Anna and recalling some of the favorite poems of Whittier's, Henry was elated. The affair ended with the newly rebound book, Sewell's History of

Friends presented to the meeting. In the past I had heard Henry express sadness to see it in such poor condition. It had been rebound in his honor, since he had done so much to give the meeting a better appreciation of our poet. Whittier tells of his mother reading from it in his poem Snowbound.

Judith Jenness Ham, who came to Meeting here while growing up, and an old friend and neighbor of Henry's left us a sum of money which was used to have a portrait of Whittier's Mother in my library. She is beautiful. I will remember her as a happy little girl coming to Meeting with her parents and later marrying Whittier's Dad.

I am very fond of Anna Stabler. She and her husband, Russell, began coming to meeting in 1969 from New York Yearly Meeting. They were very active in their peace testimony. After Russell died in 1971, Anna spent a great deal of time with me. Having been a librarian, she soon had my books organized better and a file cabinet she brought in was soon filled with papers and periodicals which made me look much neater. She began the Meeting's newsletter and brought in a braided rug for the children's room giving it a homey atmosphere.

My quiet worship room

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has been blessed with the sunlight and shadows, creating a peaceful place for worship for over two hundred and twenty-odd years. Amna hung a prism in the beautiful window by the door. Friends have enjoyed its colorful ray. One first day a youngster with a patch over his eye due to treatment of some kind, saw the patch of color on the floor. He dropped to his knees and put out his hand to pick up the pretty thing. He soon learned to move his hand toward the sun so that the rainbow remained in his grasp. What joy and wonder shone in his small one-eyed face.

Speaking of light a special show was often repeated. During Meeting for Worship a Friend would rise to speak. The sun from the window would cast a picture on the wall, often recognizable of Henry Bailey Stevens, or of some other weighty Friend. Children's attention was often drawn to the ever-changing shadows.

"Carols for Peace" — I can't remember which year, a few Friends met and planned Christmas caroling downtown. They invited all who were concerned for world peace and brotherhood to bring a candle and join the singing at Henry Law Park. It was very successful I guess because about 60 people came back here and enjoyed cookies and a hot beverage. Many lingered and sang around the old organ which Sister Lucille Tessur, from St. Joseph's Church, enjoyed playing.

One crisp morning (in the 1970's) Friends arrived here to find that the heating system had given up. It was colder inside then it was out. Their first thought was to lock up and send everybody home. Or—might we find a warm place nearby where they could gather. Looking around my sunny yard, almost without words, they found an easy solution — let's meet here in the sunshine.

All hands got to work carrying out benches, even a facing bench, I think. Soon

Friends were gathered for a solar heated Meeting for Worship, though noisy Central Avenue traffic rushed beyond the hedge of trees and bushes. The children chose a section away from their parents for first day school. I sensed the fact that they had the real feeling of communion with each other and God. It was a worship service they shall long remember.

At one time several of the senior citizens in the area met with a few ladies to mend and iron clothes to be sold at a thrift shop to raise funds for adult education. Later all of the clothes were taken to the AFSC clothing room in Cambridge on committee day. Lunch was served to those who were eager for companionship and something to do.

During the summer of

1975 Friends were feeling the need of making me more useful in meeting their needs. It was decided to have a Fair. Friends found many items in their homes they no longer wanted and brought them for "Aunt Lydia's Attic". Garden produce was brought in to Uncle Silas' vegetable and fruit stand which was outdoors. Beautiful handwork covered a

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table in charge of creative Tess. Grampa Jack supervised the antiques and members of West Epping took over the kitchen and served soup and sandwiches. Oh my! We did have fun. Proceeds were used to build temporary walls, giving the children more privacy and a new green carpet replaced the old woolen one. It gave me a new look.

In 1979, Bernard Hiatt, preservation advisor, came here to ask all the important

questions to put me into the National Register of Historic Places. It was fortunate that Elwyn Meader had recently found the deed for the land on which I was built. Aaron Hanson had made it out in 1767 but hadn't recorded it until fourth month 1804. Bernard filled out the complicated inventory-nomination form and I was accepted—a wonderful honor.

I should say something about the Monthly Meeting. Dover Monthly Meeting

was made up of many Preparative Meetings and allowed Meetings. In 1955 there were only the Meaderboro, Gonic, and Dover. The Preparative Meetings prepared business for its legal body, the Monthly Meeting. Later in 1963, Meaderboro believed they could be more effective if they redrew from Friends and became a Community Church.

I believe it was sometime in the sixties that our English Friends in London in-

troduced a new approach to Monthly and Preparative Meetings. A Preparative Meeting was to prepare themselves to become a Monthly Meeting. Some of the new members here were eager to become a Monthly Meeting. Members in Gonic could appreciate their desire but emotionally they wanted to remain a part of Dover Monthly in which their ancestors were members ever since beginning. I could feel the tension between the two interests. It

took a long time of love and caring but finally in August, 1981, Gonic became Gonic Monthly Meeting and Dover became the New Dover Monthly Meeting.

I could go on and on — maybe another time. It is always nice to hear people recall me, the Friends Meeting House, as a very special place in their lives, where they worshipped God together and became an extended family "with these our Friends".