

... And Life Of Quaker Founders

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home of the settlers. Farmington, New York.

Arthur Power had taken up a large tract of land which he divided and distributed among his numerous children. Later in 1824, Dr. Ezekiel Webb, a Quaker physician, arrived and built a log house which served as a post office. He was followed by Esek Bratt, blacksmith, and Howard Mason, miller, as well as a large number of Quaker farmers. Neighbors dubbed the settlement, "Quakerstown."

Between 1824 and 1831 there were occasional gatherings for Quaker worship in Farmington, but there was no formal organization until 1831.

Because of the recent theological divisions in the Society of Friends, both Orthodox and "Hicksite" Friends were concerned about retaining members who had emigrated to the Michigan Territory and desired to have monthly meetings established.

In July, 1830, Farmington quarterly meeting, New York, appointed five Friends to correspond with members in Michigan. Most of the families in Oakland County were associated with the orthodox New York yearly meeting while those in Wayne County were of the liberal Hicksite persuasion.

Travel and communication were slow, but finally in 1831 nine visiting Quakers of the Orthodox branch reached Farmington to assist in setting up a properly organized meeting for worship and business.

Farmington monthly meeting was the first Quaker meeting

ing in Michigan. Earlier Friends had held meetings in Detroit under British rule in 1793 but no ongoing organization developed at that time.

The Society of Friends was slow in organizing churches because Quakers did not have a paid ministry. Friends took care of the temporal needs of the people. He who received, "freely gave," and believed that every member was a potential minister with varying gifts and talents.

If an ordinary farmer or housewife seemed to possess a sensitivity to human need and spiritual leadings, the meeting would recruit his gift and extend it.

Friends taught that Oaths and Censure did not make a man a minister of Christ.

From the beginning complete equality of women with men was the rule of the Society of Friends with women serving as ministers and clerks. Later Quakers, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Stanton, Lucretia Mott and others organized the movement for women's suffrage at a time when women's right to vote and hold property were scorned and ridiculed.

Several Michigan Quakeresses were active in pioneer days in the cause of women's rights.

AFTER FARMINGTON

meeting was organized, Arthur Power donated two acres of land on Gill Rd., south of Grand River, as a site for a meetinghouse and burial ground.

In 1832, a traditional white frame meetinghouse was erected. The first burials were

those of Selinda Power and her seven-year-old daughter who died during the great cholera epidemic which swept the frontier. They were buried the day they died, Aug. 7, 1832. Arthur Power died Aug. 8, 1837.

Soon the burial grounds began to fill with the graves of the first start of Pioneer generation of Friends. Quaker funerals were very simple as was Quaker worship and life. Many relatives would gather for a wake which included a series of hearty meals.

At the appointed time, the remains would be conveyed to the meetinghouse. The coffin was sealed and two elders would preside over the hour of silent worship. After some limited vocal ministry and singing, the elders would close with the elders symbolically shaking hands. The coffin would be carried to the grave and, after another period of silence and prayer, the mourners would leave.

No eulogies or formal readings were prescribed—all utterances were to be at the free impulse of the spirit. Quaker practice did not prescribe a period of mourning, and headstones were to be small and of uniform size. Often there were inscribed a "In Memory" date with either names or "pagan" terms derived from the names of ancient gods.

THE MEETINGHOUSES in Farmington and Livonia were of traditional design and patterned after those in East. The building resembled a large dining room without an

altars, symbols, or other outward features.

Usually a long porch extended along one side. The edifice was divided into two large meetingrooms separated by shutters. Women and men sat separately, and during worship the shutters were closed. Women and men conducted business sessions separately with their own clerks in charge.

The interior was fitted with unvarnished simple benches. Along the wall opposite the entrance ran a three-tiered gallery of benches where ministers and elders sat facing the congregation. The benches were "facing benches."

On First-Days (Sunday) Friends would assemble in the morning for worship. Quaker discipline urged members to dress very simply—men were collarless coats and broad-brimmed hats; women wore neat grey or purple dresses with either linen caps of "pique bonnets."

AS THE DECADES passed, Farmington Friends carried on their traditions but had strong ties with their neighbors.

Many young people "married out of meeting" and were received into the West End Methodist Church which had beliefs somewhat compatible with those of Quakers.

Farmington meeting was a constituent of New York yearly meeting and Adrian quarterly meeting. Adrian quarterly meeting was organized in 1842 and became a Quaker meeting of considerable size at Adrian, Raisin Centre, Addison, Tecumseh,

Raisin Valley and Ypsilanti. The families had come from New York and were closely related. Correspondence and intervisitation among the meetings was constant between 1832 and 1860.

Gradually the Farmington meeting declined in numbers so that it was no longer necessary to have a meeting for business held regularly. In 1855 certificates of membership were sent to Ypsilanti meeting, and the meeting for worship in Farmington was placed under the spiritual supervision of elders of Ypsilanti meeting, which had been founded in 1832.

Members of the Farmington meeting were active in cooperation with Michigan Friends in various reform movements and the abolition of slavery. The activity of Livonia Hicksite or Liberal Friends paralleled those of Farmington Quakers and their mutual social enterprises deserve study in depth.

After the Civil War, the meeting on Gill Rd. divided to the point where only a small number gathered on First-Day for worship. In 1889, Adrian Quarter was placed under the care of Ohio yearly meeting.

At that time, Farmington meeting was "laid down" or discontinued on a regular basis. Certainly, Friends continued to gather for worship and study occasionally, and the meetinghouse was converted into a residence about 1870 by members of the Power family.

Its exterior and interior were distinctly altered, but the quiet burial grounds were filled with more ornate headstones over the years. It remains today as an incongruous landmark in a suburban housing development.

The old Quakers have passed into the eternal silence which ultimately envelops all mortals, yet their Christian labors, although modest, were of significance to the larger community. The difficulties in a survey of their life including the underground railroad and the activities of some prominent Quaker founders of Farmington and Plymouth.

ALTHOUGH BOTH FARMINGTON and Livonia meetings were disbanded, Quakerism did not die out in the area.

The founders of Farmington and Livonia could still feel a spirit of deep kinship with modern Quakers could they return from the dead.

In Detroit, Friends worship

on Sundays at 11 a.m. at the "Orthodox" meetinghouse at

9540 Sorrento near Plymouth

Rd. and at the "Hicksite" meeting at the Friends School in Detroit 1101 St. Aubin Blvd. in Elmwood Park.

Friends hope that someday

meetings in Farmington and Livonia can be reorganized.



HISTORICAL RESOURCE -- A wealth of historical information about the Farmington Area lies in the old Quaker cemetery on Gill Rd., just south of Grand River. Unfortunately, age and vandals have abused many tombstones making it difficult to read all the inscriptions.

Buried here is Arthur Power, Farmington's first settler, and Norman Lee who was grand master of the Farmington Masonic Lodge exactly 100 years ago. (Ralph Evert photo)

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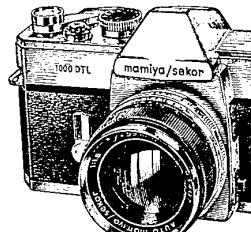
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