

... And Life Of Quaker Founders

Continued from Page 2

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 Ezek Brown, blacksmith, and Howland Mason, miller, as well as a large number of Quaker farmers. Neighbors dubbed the settlement, "Quakertown."

Between 1824 and 1831 there were occasional gatherings for Quaker worship in Farmington, but there was no formally constituted monthly meeting. 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 1829, 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 meet-

ing in Michigan. Earlier Friends had held meetings for worship 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 literally the teaching of Jesus "freely give" 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 "record his gift in the ministry." George Fox had taught that Oxford and Cambridge 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, Quakeresses 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 Solinda 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 valiant 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 prayer, the meeting 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 merely initials and a "plain" date were inscribed. Quakers numbered the days and months rather than use "pagan" terms derived from the names of ancient gods.

THE MEETINGHOUSES in Farmington and Livonia were of traditional design and were patterned after those in East. The building resembled a large oblong house without any

crosses, symbols, or other outward features.

Usually a long porch extended along the side. The interior was divided into two large meetingrooms separated by shutters. Women and men were seated separately, and during worship the shutters were opened. 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. These were called "facing benches."

On First-Days (Sunday) Friends would assemble in the morning for worship. Quaker discipline urged members to dress very simply—men wore collarless coats and broad-brimmed hats; women wore neat grey or purple dresses with either linen caps or "poke 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 drawn to the Wesleyan Methodist Church or the Universalist 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 included Quaker communities 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 meetings 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 1835.

Members of the Farmington meeting were active in cooperating 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. declined to the point where only a small number gathered on First-Day for worship. In 1869, Adrian Quarterly 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, but the meetinghouse was converted into a residence about 1870 by members of the Power family.

Its exterior and interior were drastically altered, but the quiet burial grounds were filled with more ostentatious 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 envelopes all mortals, yet their Christian labors, although modest, were of significance to the larger community as will be displayed in a survey of Livonia meeting, 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 9640 Sorrento near Plymouth

Rd. and at the "Hicksite" meeting at the Friends School in Detroit 1100 St. Aubin Blvd. in Elmwood Park.

Friends hope that someday meetings in Farmington and Livonia can be reorganized.

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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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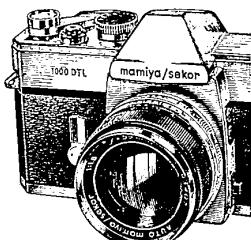
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