

ABINGTON (ORTHODOX) FRIENDS MEETINGHOUSE
(Little Abington Meeting House)
Jenkintown Road, across from Fisher Road
Jenkintown
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6657

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

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Location: Jenkintown Road, across from Fisher Road, Jenkintown, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Built in 1836, Abington Friends Meeting House reflects patterns of design found in the single-cell meeting house built during the period of early settlement in the Delaware Valley, but not frequently seen since the late-eighteenth century development of a prototypical two-celled form. It was erected following the schism that divided the Friends of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and elsewhere into Orthodox and Hicksite factions, an event that occurred within the former meeting in 1827. The split caused a boom in meeting house construction as the dissenting group left to form their own meetings. Although Abington Orthodox Meeting House has been abandoned and is currently in a deteriorating condition, it is the only post-schism, Orthodox-built meeting house that has not been rehabilitated for use as something other than a meeting house.

Description: The meeting house has a rectangular, single-cell configuration measuring approximately 36' x 24' and is made of stuccoed stone. It is a single-story, three-bay-by-three-bay structure with a side-gabled roof. The central doorway located to the south front appears as a paired doorway but is actually two separate doors with a post between that accommodated an internal partition. The doors to either side are five-panel. A hipped roof porch covers the front entry and is supported by Tuscan columns. There are doorways at both the east and west side elevations (filled in on east side); the rear is currently a blind wall. The windows are nine-over-nine-light sash and are positioned high on the facades. There are two windows in the east gable end and one in the west, and there are no windows to the rear (they likely have been filled in). There are paneled shutters on all the windows. Interior brick chimneys appear at the gable ends, and there is a date stone that reads "1836" in east gable end. There is a board & batten privy section at the west corner; its roof extends over the west side entry to form a porch supported by Tuscan columns. The meeting house is currently abandoned and in deteriorating condition. The openings have been boarded up, and the building is secured against entry.

There is a carriage/horse shed located to the southwest of the meeting house, beyond the privy extension.

History: As with Upper Providence, this meeting house combines a single-cell exterior with the interior configuration of the doubled prototype established by the construction of Buckingham Meeting House in 1768. Built in 1836, like many of

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its type, Abington Orthodox Meeting House was erected following the schism that divided Friends of the Delaware Valley and elsewhere into Orthodox and Hicksite branches, an event that occurred within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1827. The split caused a boom in meeting house construction as the minority group left to form their own meeting. In this case, the Friends responsible for the formation of the meeting had withdrawn from the old and influential Abington Meeting in whose structure the Quarterly meetings for this region were held. The Hicksite Friends were in the majority at Abington Meeting, and so the much smaller group of Orthodox sympathizers was obliged to leave the meeting in September of 1827. They met in the home of Daniel Fletcher prior to the construction of this structure, sometimes referred to as "Little Abington" Meeting House.

According to an article written in 1931,

The interior of the meeting house remains much as when it was built, except that the partition between the men's and women's section has been removed. The old wooden benches are still in use. The only decorative feature in the furnishings are the carved canopies and the green wooden slatted shades over the windows. The old wood box stands by the stove, which is the only means of heating the meeting, and a quaint ingrain carpet, its pattern a green scroll work, covers the floor. Within the last several years the 'Little Abington Meeting' has gained in attendance and though its members are still few they keep the meeting in good repair and its white trimmings freshly painted. The committee organized by the [Germantown at] Coulter Street Friends has been disbanded and the meeting has again become independent.¹

Although it is abandoned and is currently in a deteriorating condition, it is the only post-schism, Orthodox-built meeting house within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that has not been altered for use as something other than a meeting house. It is currently owned by Abington Township, Parks and Recreation.

¹Chalkley T. Matlack. "Brief Historical Sketches concerning Friends' Meetings of the Past and Present with special reference to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," (Original unpublished volumes are located at The Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library; copy available at FHL), 37.

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Sources: Matlack, T. Chalkley. "Brief Historical Sketches concerning Friends' Meetings of the Past and Present with special reference to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," (Original volumes are located at The Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library; copy available at FHL), 1938.

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