

DARBY FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
1017 Main Street
Darby
Delaware County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6690

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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DARBY FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

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Location: 1017 Main Street, between 10th & 11th streets, Darby, Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Built in 1805, the Darby Meeting House was designed in the prototypical doubled form of the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth century. It appears unaltered from its original design and includes significant intact architectural features such as the pent in gable end, and the doorway hood at west end. Noteworthy interior features include the tiered built-in benches to the front and sides of the meeting house, offsetting the facing benches along the rear wall. Due to decreases in the Quaker population of this neighborhood, maintenance for this significant structure has become difficult.

Description: Darby Friends Meeting House is a two-story, six-bay-by-three-bay structure built of locally quarried random-range stone, stuccoed to sides and rear. It measures 60' x 45' and has a side-gabled roof with a pent in the gable ends. There are two doorways to the front (west) elevation. Both have double-doors, three-panel per door. A porch runs the length of the front facade and at the north side elevation. There are also centrally located, double-door entries at the north and south side; an unsupported, pedimented hood covers the doorway at the south end. The meeting house is lit by twelve-over-twelve-light sash windows in the first story; eight-over-eight in the second; and two, six-over-six-light sash windows in the gable ends. Jack-archs with keystone appear over windows on the first story. There are two larger windows (presently boarded over) at each end of rear elevation. These windows have paneled shutters, and there are basement windows all around. One-bay-by-two-bay frame, shed-roof privy additions flank the rear elevation. There are interior chimneys in the gable ends.

A two-story stone house built as a school with a three-bay-by- two-bay, gable-roofed main block located at the front of the property; to one side and to the rear of the schoolhouse are two-story additions.

History: The founding members of Darby Meeting arrived in 1682 and established an indulged meeting for worship in the home of John Blumston that is mentioned in letter from William Penn to Friends in England.¹ Darby was set up as a monthly meeting by the Chester Quarterly Meeting in 1684. In 1687 the first meeting house was erected. This structure also served as Darby's town hall and was

¹Letter dated 17th day 1st mo. 1683.

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therefore a focus of activities for both the Quaker and non-Quaker communities. In 1701, a new meeting house was erected near the site of the first. Built in 1805, the current meeting house was located two blocks from the original site and its large size testifies to the growing strength of the Friends community in the area at that time.

The meeting house was designed in the two-cell form established with the construction of Buckingham Meeting House that allowed for equal apartments for men and women separated by a retractable wood partition. Thus, Darby is significant as a good representation of the many meeting houses that were constructed from the late-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century to replace older, seemingly antiquated designs. The meeting house includes significant intact architectural features and appears largely unaltered from its original design. One noteworthy exception is the porch that currently extends the length of the front elevation. Like many older meeting houses, beginning in the 1860s, the traditional gabled doorway hoods were replaced by porches that provided social space for gatherings before and after meetings as well as protection from inclement weather. Interior features of interest at Darby Meeting House include the fireplaces, and the tiered benches built into the front and side walls of the meeting house that offset the elevated facing benches along the rear wall. After the separation, the property was retained by the Hicksite Quakers. The Orthodox met in the homes of members until a meeting house was erected in Lansdowne in 1831. The meeting house retains an active meeting.

Sources: Dunlevey, Charles. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form, Darby Meeting" National Park Service, 1973.

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Smith, George. *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Printed by Henry B. Ashmead, 1862.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, 2001.