Lower Merion Friends Meeting House
(Merion Friends Meeting House)
~~Merion~~, Pennsylvania.
Narberth Vic,

HABS No. PA-145

HABS
PA
46-NARB.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Philadelphia
No.L Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey(Fed.)
Joseph P.Sims, District Officer
2008 Architect's Building, Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS No. PA-145

Addendum to
Lower Merion Friends Meetinghouse
(Merion Friends Meetinghouse)
Montgomery Avenue and Meetinghouse Lane
Narberth Vicinity
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS
PA,
46-NARB.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
PA,
46-NARB.V,
1-

Form 10-920
(June 1983)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE	COUNTY	TOWN OR VICINITY
Pennsylvania	Montgomery	Narberth Vicinity

HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE *(INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME)*
Lower Merion Friends Meetinghouse

HABS NO.
PA-145

SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE
Merion Friends Meetinghouse

COMPLETE ADDRESS *(DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES)*
Montgomery Avenue and Meetinghouse Lane

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION *(INCLUDE SOURCE)*
1695

ARCHITECT(S) *(INCLUDE SOURCE)*

SIGNIFICANCE *(ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE)*
William Penn preached in this early Quaker meetinghouse. It is the oldest house of worship in the state.

STYLE *(IF APPROPRIATE)*

MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION *(INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS)*
Stuccoed random rubble scored to imitate ashlar.

SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE *(SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE)*
T-shaped, three bay front, one-and-a-half stories

EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE
Cross gable roofs with pent eaves, semi-elliptical arches over openings, pedimented hoods over entrances.

INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE *(DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)*

MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES
Addition completed in 1712.

PRESENT CONDITION AND USE

OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE
Also carriage sheds: random rubble L-shaped sheds with open front and gable roof.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION *(INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.)*
Manuscript, HABS Pennsylvania Catalog, Deborah S. Burns, 1976-79, in HABS Office.

COMPILER, AFFILIATION
Mary Buckley, HABS Historian

DATE
July 21, 1983

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERION FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
(Lower Merion Friends Meeting House)

This report is an addendum to an one-page report previously submitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 615 Montgomery Avenue at Meeting House Lane, Merion Station, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania 19006

Owner: Merion Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Present Use: Used continuously for over 300 years as a meeting house for religious worship, with adjacent burying ground, carriage sheds, and, more recently, a social hall.

Significance: The construction of Merion began as early as 1695 and was completed by 1715, making it the oldest Friends Meeting House in the Delaware Valley. Its near cruciform plan is unprecedented in a Friends Meeting House. Many resist the idea that the emigrant Friends would adopt a plan so closely resembling one used by the Anglican Church when they rejected all that such a structure represented. It may be, however, that its unusual configuration reflects the lack of prescribed standards indicative of meeting houses erected by the earliest Quaker settlers. Religious persecution, and their own belief in the unsuitability of "steeple-houses" to Quaker worship, discouraged the Society of Friends members in England and Wales from developing a meeting house building type prior to the 1689 Act of Toleration. Many choose instead to meet in the out-of-doors, or in private houses or farm buildings, often even once free to worship openly. Unfettered by the persecution experienced by their English counterparts, Friends who immigrated to the American Colonies explored various architectural possibilities. The builders of Merion Meeting House were among the first generation of Welsh Quaker converts, and the first to settle in Penn's Colony, some arriving as early as 1682.[1] Without a model to emulate, the Merion Friends may have looked to the rural parish churches of their homeland for architectural inspiration for their meeting house. Its early unpatterned design distinguishes it as a departure point in the evolution of the American Friends meeting house in the Delaware Valley. Merion Meeting House is also of interest for its use of English building traditions--most notably seen in its cruck or bent principal rafters.

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[1] The Merionethshire Quakers represent the first known migration of a Celtic-speaking Welsh community in the Western Hemisphere. William Bolger, "National Historic Landmark Nomination, Merion Friends Meeting House, Merion Station, Pennsylvania (draft); 1997.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, Summer 1997

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1695-1715. The Merion Friends Meeting House was begun as early as 1695 (although more likely closer to 1700), and was completed by 1715. The south front section, forming the base of the T-shaped structure, probably was the first section to be finished. It was used as the first permanent meeting house while awaiting the completion of the large section to its rear. It is possible that the sections were conceived of, and erected as, part of two separate building campaigns. It is more likely, however, that the building was conceived as a whole and took as long as twenty years to complete.[2] (For a further discussion of the date(s) of construction, see Historical Context).

2. Architect: No records of the design process for the Merion Meeting House remain. Likewise, an architect or, more appropriately for that time, a master builder was not identified. As was customary during this period, the meeting members created the design; they did so a building committee appointed by the meeting to decide upon a proper form. The committee often worked in consultation with members of the larger monthly meeting (which included Merion, Old Haverford, Radnor, and Schuylkill meetings).[3] In later years, the building committee might visit other area meeting houses, adapting elements that suited their own purposes, and perhaps, budget. In the case of Merion, however, there were few meeting houses to emulate in the Pennsylvania Colony in the 1695-1715, and so they probably looked to the small parish chapels of their homeland for a design.

3. Owners: The land on which the meeting house rests has been the property of the Merion Friends from the time of their arrival to the newly established colony in 1682. It was part of a larger tract granted by William Penn to the Welsh Quakers in 1681. John

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[2] The date is based on the extant minutes for both the Radnor Monthly and Merion Preparative meetings, other primary documents (cited in the historical context section), and the physical evidence.

A note on dates: except were quoted and in the formal references, the report translates the "Scriptural" (ie. numerical) names of months favored by Friends into the more common pagan names. According to the Julian calendar in use before 1752, the year began in March. Within the text of the report, the pre-1752 dates have been converted to their modern equivalents. However, no attempt has been made to confirm the modernization of dates derived from secondary sources.

[3] The design process at Merion can be inferred from the one documented at Radnor Meeting House which was constructed in 1718. As the minutes stated, "....meeting pursuant to Radnor Frds., desire acquess (sic) with ym in building a new meeting house, and this meeting (Radnor Monthly) appoints David Morris, David Lewis, Edd Rees, Robert Jones, Richard Hayes and Samuel Lewis to assist ym in ye contrivance of ye building thereof and they meet together abt it on 21st of this instant and bring account thereof to ye next meeting." The preparative meeting informs the monthly meeting of their desire to built a meeting house, and a committee is appointed to determine the proper form and oversee construction. Radnor Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 3rd day 9 mo. 1717.

Thomas and Edward Jones purchased 5,000 acres of the "Welsh Tract" on behalf of themselves and fifteen other families who constituted the "Merionshire Adventurers." After their arrival in Pennsylvania from Merionethshire, Wales in 1682, the land was surveyed by Penn's surveyor and distributed amongst the Merionethshire Friends. In 1695, one of the "Adventurers," Edward Rees, conveyed ½ acre and 6 perches to the trustees of Merion Preparative Meeting for the purpose of creating a burying ground.[4] The meeting house property supposedly was held by the society in the form of leases. The deed for 3/4 acre and 23 perches, was not conveyed until March 20, 1714.[5] In 1763, Joseph Tunes donated 23 perches for the expansion of the burying grounds to provide for the burial of indigent Friends of the meeting.[6] These three parcels were re-surveyed and bound together in 1783 to form a single parcel consisting of 1-3/4 acres and 16 perches. Approximately 1 acre was added in 1801, and another in 1804.[7] The property currently is held by the Trustees of the Merion Monthly Meeting.

4. Builders, suppliers: The Merion Meeting House was built by the meeting members, with the assistance of members of the larger monthly meeting, and some outside labor. The Quakers essentially constituted a closed society, particularly the recently emigrated Welsh, who intended to establish their own barony, or self-governing state, within the Pennsylvania Colony. Their meeting houses were generally of their own design and construction, members contributing according to their ability. Individuals, generally elders, were appointed to a building committee to oversee the various phases of construction, acting as a contractor. Funds towards building the meeting house were raised through subscriptions from its members, and solicited from members of the monthly and/or quarterly meeting when insufficient, as was generally the case. Subscriptions also were rendered in the form of building materials. Whenever possible, capable members would undertake the actual construction.

The extant minutes, dating from 1702-04, suggest that the building committee for Merion Meeting House included Griffith John, Edward Jones, Robert Jones, Edward Rees, John

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[4] August 20, 1695; Phila. Exemplification Bk. VII:156; as cited in Browning pg. 549. The 1695 date for the conveyance of the burying ground is considered to be among the evidence in support of 1695 as the date for the initial construction of the meeting house. This does not provide conclusive evidence because burying grounds frequently were established before meeting houses. While they could always meet in each others houses, the Friends were denied burial in church cemeteries. On the other hand, evidence of an earlier burying ground exists. If so, the 1695 deed could represent attempts to make further or more substantial improvements to the site, such as the construction of a meeting house.

[5] Deed recorded May 2, 1746 by Robert Jones and Rees Price, survivors of the original grantors; Phila Bk. G.VII:131; As cited in Charles H. Browning *Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1912), 551-52. Again, the date of this deed is cited among the evidence in support of the 1714 date for the completion of the meeting house. In this case, the deed refers to their "recently completed" meeting house. Browning, 551.

[6] Ibid., 554.

[7] Ibid., 557-58.

Roberts, and Owen Roberts. These individuals oversaw work and collected subscriptions. The Merion Friends (composed largely of yeoman farmers and "gentleman") appear to have financed the construction of their meeting house largely on their own. Subscriptions from other meetings within the Radnor Monthly Meeting also supplemented the construction fund. For example, the Radnor Monthly Meeting minutes note that in 1713, "Five pounds, old currency, formerly lent to Rees Howell, transferred to the Merion Meeting, towards finishing their meeting house."[8]

The preparative minutes for Merion Meeting, extant from 1702 through 1704 mention some individuals who may have served as carpenters for the construction of the meeting house. Included were David Maurice (a member of Haverford Meeting) and Richard Thomas. John Roberts, who conducted a sawmill, proposed to pay the balance of his subscription towards the construction of the meeting house by "sawing (timbers?) Upon ye account of the meeting."[9] Still others were appointed to supply needed finishes such as locks and hinges. Beginning the 7th day of the 2nd month 1704, members Edward Rees, Edward Jones, Owen Roberts and Robert Jones are requested to oversee the process of "seeing for stone" toward the construction of the meeting house. These entries indicate that stone for the construction of the meeting house was gathered from the surrounding area by hired workmen and/or members of the meeting.

John Roberts' personal account of the subscriptions collected and funds expended towards the completion of the meeting house (covering the period from 1712 through 1717), again confirms that various members of the meeting supplied building materials and labor. John Jones is indicated as a carpenter paid for work on the meeting house, as is John Knowles (not listed as a member of Merion Meeting); John Moore submitted a bill for "work done," and Richard Jones and Edward Roberts, bills for "sawing." Other meeting members who supplied materials include James and Owen Thomas for lime, John Roberts for nails, and John Cadwalader for hinges. Still others extended loans to be repaid through the collection of subscriptions.

Skilled craftsmen were brought in from a distance as well, as indicated by entries such as "To Edward Jones[10], acct for diett, liquor, board and other things" (1712-13). The masonry work was not documented, which could indicate that members were providing services in kind. Minute entries between 1703 to 1704 record members "seeing for stone," is likely a reference to individuals collecting stone in anticipation of construction.

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[8] Radnor Monthly Meeting, Minutes; 3rd day of the 8month & 12th day of the 9th month 1713; as cited in Browning, 548-49.

[9] Merion Preparative Meeting, Minutes, 6th day of 6th month 1703. And Browning, 539.

[10] Edd Jones is mentioned in the Radnor Monthly Meeting Minutes as being a carpenter living in Haverford, 2nd mo. 13th day 1721.

This scenario precludes stone from appearing on a list of supplies or expenditures. Also, Ellis Pugh, a member of Radnor Meeting and a stone mason by trade, appears in the accounts as receiving payment upon three occasions. Although it is not specified what those payments were for, the implication is that he applied his skills to the construction of Merion Meeting House.[11]

5. Original Plans and Construction: It has not been conclusively determined whether Merion Meeting House was built during a single building campaign or as two separate campaigns. The debate surrounds whether or not the meeting house's cruciform plan was intentional or simply happened by chance. The Society of Friends was one of the most radical factions within the Protestant movement in the seventeenth century. Many resist the idea that the Friends, persecuted for their religious practices, selected a plan so closely resembling one traditionally associated with the established church when they rejected all that such a structure represented. As one member of Merion Meeting stated in the 1940s, "The present ground plan of the Meeting House is cruciform. That such would have been planned deliberately by the Friends of that time is unthinkable. As far as we know, this is the only case of an old Meeting House erected in this form in the world. The design could easily have originated from the addition of a new part to the original, which probably is what occurred."[12] The real cause for debate may be a lack of understanding of historical context in which it was erected.

For the purposes of the HABS documentation, the years between 1695 and 1715 constitute the period of original plans and construction. Because the extant records point to both ongoing construction and use between these dates, it is likely that the single-story three-bay-by-one-bay structure, the current south portion, served as the meeting house while the larger section to the north rear was still under construction. The loft above the south section may have then served as a women's business meeting room until the larger section was finished.[13] After completion, the larger rear section was used for worship and men's business, and the original section became the women's business meeting. This front section later may have served as a lobby with a schoolroom above. The principal (north) meeting room rose nearly two stories, exposing the cruck portion of the hand-

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[11] John Roberts personal account of the subscriptions collected and expenditures made towards the building of Merion Meeting House, 1712-17 (FHL). 1712-13, "To Ellis Pugh acct for 216 per: at 3/10...? 1713. 6mo.6, "To ball (balance) due to Ellis Pugh --18 (pounds) 5 (shillings) 8. 1713-14, "By Ellis Pugh & to his order --8 (pounds) 7 (shillings) 4-3/4. In Rev. Mardy T Rees. A History of the Quakers in Wales and Their Emigration to North America (Carmarthen: W. Spurrell and Son, 1925), 161-62, he identified Ellis Pugh as a stone mason.

[12] Samuel J. Bunting, Jr. in his "Merion Meeting House, 1695-1945; a Study of Evidence Relating to the Date," (publisher unknown, 1945), 2.

[13] The minutes refer to making benches for the loft in 1702. Using a loft space for the women's meeting was commonly done in England and Wales. The loft may have also served as a schoolroom. There is an oral tradition of the latter use, but no documentary evidence has been found to substantiate this before the mid nineteenth century.

hewn and white-washed roof framing. Indirect natural lighting was provided by leaded casement windows that flanked the room at ceiling height.

Merion's builders combined traditional and innovative building technologies to create a building both conducive to spiritual growth and reminiscent of the architecture of their Welsh homeland. The meeting house was constructed with cruck or bent principle rafters, a Medieval English building tradition that is combined with a newer building technology, that of a king-post truss system. They relied on antiquated building techniques even though newer ones were available to them. Radnor Meeting House was erected just a few years later without the bent members. Old-fashioned leaded casement windows used at Merion already were being replaced with sash windows by this time (again, as used at Radnor in 1718).

The partially exposed, white-washed structural members create a pleasing aesthetic. The cruck adds wall height to accommodate the second-story windows that provided indirect light into the meeting room, as did the elevated placement of the first story windows. In combination with its unfinished wainscoting, bench seating and other austere elements, Merion constitutes a well-constructed yet "plain" design that is indicative of Quaker buildings.

6. Changes and additions: The first major change may have been the filling of the east opening of the south front section of the meeting house. Both the date of this change and the reason for it are unknown. It is possible that the south section originally was oriented to the east and that this former opening served as the front entryway. Merion would then more closely resemble the other early Welsh-built meeting houses, such as Radnor (1718) and Old Haverford (1701), that have a side gabled roof and single front entry. The in-filling and the possible reorientation of the entry could have been a result of the completion of the rear section of the meeting house in ca. 1715. Historic depictions indicate this bay was closed prior to the application of the plaster finish in ca.1829.[14]

Men's and women's privies that flank the rear corners of the meeting house were added later. An archeological investigation revealed that they replaced an earlier privy located in the southwest crux of the meeting house.[15] The date for the construction of the men's

[14] It also has been suggested that changes to meeting houses such as the in filling of bays were often the result of inadequate or inappropriate lighting conditions.

[15] This investigation was conducted by National Park Service archeologist, David Orr, assisted by NPS historian, William Bolger, in 1997. Its location near the current front entry furthers the argument for reorientation.

privy is not known. The women's privy (located at the northeast corner) was built by Merion Meeting member and builder Joseph Price in the spring of 1809.[16]

The most substantial changes to the building were undertaken in ca. 1829, when the meeting house was "repaired," as the current date stone states. While the minutes for this period are missing, secondary sources and material evidence suggest that the "repairs" included plastering the exterior, lowering the ceiling in the north section (and perhaps in the south section as well), replacing the original leaded casement windows with the current sash windows, and the adding of the center chimney.

The most pronounced exterior change was the covering of the stone facades with plaster scored to resemble ashlar masonry. This finish treatment, although popular in its day, has since been lamented by historians of the meeting house.[17] The plaster conceals the stonework fashioned by its Welsh builders, who were no doubt conversant with stone construction. It also obscures evidence which would help determine how the two sections were integrated, and later changes, such as the in-filling of the opening in the east elevation. Still visible through the plaster in turn-of the century photographs were the location of the original date stone in the south (front) gable end, and, below it, three posts protruding from above the window.[18] Despite the aesthetic and historical hindrances, after nearly 170 years, the plaster work has been embraced as a identifying component of the structure.

Although the ceiling in the north section was lowered, a large portion of the original ceiling that was applied to the underside of the collar beams, can still be seen in the attic. The lower ceiling necessitated the construction of a wall to the front of the gallery to meet the new ceiling height. The major impetus for the lowering of the ceiling was undoubtedly heat conservation. The central chimney was added at this time, cutting through the structural system which joins the two sections. The chimney provided a flue for a stove, creating a centralized heat source; the building probably was not heated

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[16] According to excerpts from his diary, on the 26th of May, "I helped James Jones to lay out a necessary for the Women at Meeting House...." On the 30th, "I was half a day cuting (sic) rafters for necessary at Meeting house and they got 3 rafters and plates and joists of mine Rafters about 30 feet." And on the 9th of June, "I begun (the day?) at friends necessary." Both privies remain, and the meeting house is still without plumbing.

[17] For example, in Theodore Bean's *History of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1884), 928, it is stated, " It was of stone, pointed, but in repairing it, probably in 1822 [he mistakenly cites date in date stone as 1822 rather than 1829] or not much later, it was plaster in imitation of large dressed stone, which has marred its venerable appearance."

[18] The purpose of these posts is a mystery. They do not correspond to an current structural members nor are they assumed to have served a function, such as hoisting items into a loft storage space. One possible use may have been as a roost for birds or carrier pigeons, which other persecuted religious--such as the Catholics--used to inform members as to the location of the next meeting.

originally. The chimney rests on the floor joists rather than on a foundation at ground level. This suspended chimney allows for uninterrupted meeting space, if not structural stability.

It is possible that the ceiling was lowered in the south section to provide a larger, more usable space in the loft above. Evidence of the lowering is seen in the partially plaster walls that rise up to the height of the sill upon which the roof trusses rest, leaving the remainder of this space unfinished. Like the principal meeting room, the roof trusses may have been partially exposed. Further evidence is offered by a brief publication produced in 1917 which states, "There was a school in the attic over the Meeting loft about 1820-30. It is said that this portion of the Meeting House was not added until the nineteenth century."[19] If the ceiling was lowered, the boarded partition between the loft and the "schoolroom" was added at this time. This claim is suggested by the condition of the materials, which do not appear to be as old as the rest of that section.[20] To facilitate use of this area as a school room, the shutters in the gallery may have been added at this time as well. Evidence suggests that the gallery was enlarged and/or rebuilt.

The current eight-over-twelve-light sash windows replaced the original leaded casement windows. Remnants of the latter are found in the bays located in the gable ends of the north section. The change in windows was probably made during the ca. 1829 renovations, evidenced by the original windows cut-off in the attic from the meeting room when the ceiling height was lowered.

Most facing benches were built with three tiers. Merion's two-tiered facing bench suggests that it was reduced by one tier (date unknown). A row of nail holes in the wainscoting behind the facing benches hints at the former location of the top tier. The hat pegs that are now out of reach provides further evidence of a third tier. The reduction of the facing bench by one tier may reflect a programmatic change, such as the elimination of one level in the hierarchy of minister, overseer, elder.

In 1849, a burial vault was dug in the southeast crux of the building to provide storage for bodies pending burial in the adjoining burying ground. Vaults were used primarily during the winter months when the frozen ground prohibited grave digging.

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[19] *A Short Historical Sketch of the Old Merion Meeting House, Merion, PA.* (Publisher unknown, 8th Month 4th, 1917). This booklet is located in the library at Merion Meeting House.

[20] Samuel J. Bunting, Jr. Unpublished report on the building technology of "Merion Meeting House," 6mo.14-15 1939. On the 6mo. 13th 1939 Mr. Bunting accompanied Messrs. Henderson and Thomas, and Dr. R.L. William, builders and minister of Norriton Presbyterian Church (1698) near Norristown, PA., who were "studying old meeting houses in preparation for restoring their church." Bunting prepared a brief report of their findings. With regard to the schoolroom, they were of the mind that the floor was not original, indicated by the marks of machine planing; and that the partition wall was constructed of materials like those used in the 1829 renovations.

B. Historical Context:

Welsh Quakers and the Settlement of the "Welsh Tract"

In 1681, a delegation of Friends from North Wales petitioned William Penn for lands in his new colony of Pennsylvania, hoping to establish their own Welsh "Barony," or self-governing state. As the founding members of the Society of Friends in Wales, they constituted the first generation of Quaker converts. Among them were the builders of Merion Meeting House, the first of the "Welsh Tract" settlers to arrive. They landed in Upland (Chester) in 1682, two months ahead of Penn's initial visit, and prior to the laying out of the city of Philadelphia. In addition to being among the pioneering Friends to put Penn's "Holy Experiment" into practice, they are acclaimed as the first known migration of a Celtic-speaking Welsh community in the Western Hemisphere.[21] Their meeting house was one of the earliest meeting houses erected in the Delaware Valley and among the few from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries to survive. For over 300 years it has served as the center of religious and social life for the Friends of Lower Merion Township.

The establishment of Quakerism in Wales in the mid seventeenth century is attributed to the leadership of John ap John, Wales' first minister or "Public Friend" of the Society of Friends. While a young minister of the local congregation he heard of the preaching of Quakerism's founder George Fox and became curious. John ap John attended some of Fox's meetings and heard the doctrines of the Society begun in 1652. Convinced by the tenets of Quakerism, John ap John returned to Wales "abode in the truth, and (having) received a part of the ministry..."[22] He began holding meetings for worship and "convincing" his neighbors sometime about 1653. He organized small, secret meetings. John ap John accompanied Fox on his 1657 of Wales, and Fox probably attended some of John's meetings.[23] These early meetings were organized into a system of quarterly and yearly meetings.[24] The first Welsh Yearly Meeting was held in

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[21] William Bolger, "National Historic Landmark Nomination, Merion Friends Meeting House, Merion Station, Pennsylvania; prepared 1997.

[22] Norman Penney, ed. *Journal of George Fox*. As cited in Becker, 17.

[23] Rees, 18.

[24] The meetings of the Society of Friends are organized in an administrative hierarchy of yearly, quarterly, monthly and preparative meetings. The yearly meeting, held annually, is at the top of the hierarchy. This organizational body, make up largely of representatives from the Quarterly meetings, sets policy. Quarterly meetings are located within loosely defined districts consisting of monthly and preparative meetings. As the name implies, they met quarterly and are made up of representative of the monthly meetings. They present important concerns and general information (such as answers to the queries) to the yearly meeting. The quarterly meeting is made up of a cluster of monthly meetings. The monthly meetings are made up of representative of the individual preparative meetings. They deal mostly with disciplinary actions and other important business of the preparative meetings within its jurisdiction. The preparative is the individual meeting for worship and business dealing specifically with the needs of its members.

Merionethshire (home of the Merion Pennsylvania Friends) at the house of Ellis Morris on the 7th day of the 3rd month 1683.

According to Rev. T. Mardy Rees, who wrote the history of the Friends in Wales, Merionethshire contributed more people to the Quaker population than any other Welsh community. Many of them suffered greatly for their beliefs. As Rees dramatically asserted, "The fires of persecution burned fiercely in Merionethshire, but the sufferers emerged from the furnace as refined as gold. Men of noble lineage proved their valour and loyalty to Truth."[25] They faced imprisonment (often under inhuman conditions) and/or loss of property for holding meetings for worship, refusing to attend their parish church, and refusing to take an oath of allegiance. The Merionethshire Friends were persistent in their beliefs. When meetings were banned at one house, they met in another, or in "the dales and woods" of neighboring districts.[26] A number of these early converts later emigrated to Pennsylvania to found the Merion Meeting.[27] Included was Robert Owen, who had served as a justice of the peace in Wales and was jailed for five-and-a-half years for holding meetings in his home. He later became one of the eminent ministers of Merion Meeting. Hugh Roberts, also subjected to severe punishment in Wales, became an active Quaker minister. Before Merion Meeting House was erected, meetings were held in his house.

John ap John formed a committee of Welsh Friends to meet with William Penn after he heard of his attempts to found an American colony based on the principal of religious toleration. In 1618, they purchased land in his newly founded colony with the intent of establishing their own barony.[28] Among those present at this negotiation were some of the founding members of Merion Meeting, including: Dr. Griffith Owen, Dr. Edward Jones, John ap Thomas, Hugh Roberts, Thomas Ellis, and probably John Roberts and Robert Owen. The so-called "Welsh Tract" consisted of 30,000 acres. Deeds, the first of which was dated the 16th of September 1681, were made out to the heads of seven "companies" established for the purpose of dividing and selling parcels to the various Welsh settlers. The members of the first company called themselves the "Merioneth Adventurers," although they were officially known as the "Thomas & Jones Company." Along with a handful of subscribers, John Thomas and Edward Jones were the first Welsh Friends to arrive in Pennsylvania and lay claim to their lands.

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[25] Rees, 147.

[26] Ibid., 146-59.

[27] They included Thomas Ellis, Edward Griffith, Griffith John, Robert Owen, Hugh Roberts, and John Williams. Catherine Thomas, widow of persecuted Quaker, John Thomas, also emigrated to the Welsh tract; her grandson, Thomas Jones, became the first clerk of Merion Meeting.

[28] This Penn initially agreed to do, but the privilege was later revoked.

They landed in the town of Uplands, now Chester, in August 1682, one year after the arrival of the initial Pennsylvania colonists. In 1681, A Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends in the Delaware Valley was established in Burlington, New Jersey. It was not until the end of the following year that enough Friends were inhabiting the newly laid out town of Philadelphia to warrant a meeting separate from that held in Burlington. Spurred by Penn's initial visit, the Philadelphia Monthly and Quarterly meetings were created on the 9th day of the 11th month 1682. The Philadelphia Monthly Meeting was soon joined with the Friends "living over the Schuylkill river"--consisting of a small group of Schuylkill Friends, and the Welsh Friends of Merion and Haverford Meetings.

Merion, the first within the Welsh Tract, was established as an "indulged" meeting under the care of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting in August of 1682, and officially set up as a preparative meeting in 1683, under the leadership of Hugh Roberts.[29] Roberts had been a prominent Friends minister in Wales, and would become well known in America as a "traveling Friend." Other founding members included Edward Jones, William Edward, Edward ap Rees and Robert ap David. The subscribers were composed mostly of "gentlemen" and yeoman farmers. In November 1683, they were joined by fifty more.[30] They named their settlement Merion in honor of their homeland. The early gatherings were held without the benefit of a public meeting house. Their numbers were too small and demands necessitated by settlement too great to warrant it.

In 1684, the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting granted the Welsh Friends permission to form their own monthly meetings.[31] The original Schuylkill Monthly Meeting (which met at the home of Thomas Duckett) was joined with the other Welsh preparative meetings to form Haverford Monthly Meeting. Meetings were held alternately at the homes of four of the original members: Thomas Duckett of Schuylkill, William Warner of Radnor, Hugh Roberts of Merion, and John Bevan of Haverford.[32] In 1698, it became known as the Radnor Monthly Meeting.

The first public meeting house of the Welsh Friends was probably a log meeting house at Radnor that supposedly was built in 1693. Although it has been suggested that Merion Meeting had a log meeting house prior to this date, no evidence has been found to substantiate that claim. The log structure at Radnor served both the preparative and monthly meetings. This meeting house was replaced in 1717-18. Some sources state that there was a meeting house in Old Haverford

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[29] Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 4th day, 1st month 1683/84; as cited in Browning, 501.

[30] A second party of subscribers, consisting of Hugh Robert, Edward Owen, William John, Cadwalader Morgan, Hugh John, Katherin Thomas and Gainor Roberts, and their families.

[31] Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, 4th day 1st month 1683/4.

[32] Pennsylvania Historical Survey, Division of Community Service Programs, Work Projects Administration. *Inventory of Church Archives, Society of Friends in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Friends Historical Association, 1941), 69.

Meeting by 1693 as well. The current building was erected in 1701, and the addition in 1800. The original section of Merion Meeting House probably was begun ca.1695-1702, potentially making it not only the oldest standing meeting house among the Welsh Friends but also within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

English Precedent and American Meeting House Design

Merion's cruciform-plan is an anomaly in both English and American Friends meeting house design. Early English Quakers were inhibited from erecting meeting houses because of religious persecution and their own ideas regarding the unsuitability of "steeple houses" to Quaker worship. Whereas from the very start, the American Friends were free to create public meeting houses. But without prototypes, they experimented with designs that best facilitated their silent worship and democratic form of self rule (separate men's and women's business meetings). Thus, the colonial period was marked by a diversity of forms that reflected both the lack of prescribed standards and the influence of regional variations in building traditions and materials. Although unusual, Merion was not the only seemingly unconventional early meeting house design.[33] The Friends of Burlington, New Jersey built an octagonal meeting house around the same time period.

Little is actually known of other early meeting houses in the Philadelphia area, few of which still stand. Based on the extant record, most tended to be basically square in shape, and many had hipped roofs. The earliest Philadelphia meeting house for which an image survives is the Second Bank Meeting House of 1702. In addition to the attributes just described, its most significant feature was its two primary entryways. These corresponded to gender specific meeting rooms, indicating the influence upon design of separate mens and women's business meetings. Most of the early "country" meeting houses of this period also appeared as single cell structures. However, they were generally one story and had only one principal entryway. Some of these meeting houses, like their urban counterparts, were partitioned to accommodate separate business meetings. Most, however, received later additions to house the women's meeting. This was generally accomplished once the membership had grown large enough to warrant it. By the late eighteenth century, a prototypical meeting house form had emerged. Partly a result of the experimentation that characterized the earlier period, the prototype was also a product of concurrent movements in Quaker history. The Merion Friends, however, were among the first Quakers to immigrate to Pennsylvania, with some arriving as early as 1682. Without a standard form to emulate, it is conceivable that the recently immigrated Friends constructed a meeting house that was an adaptation of what was familiar to them. That would have been the rural parish churches of their homeland. Thus, Merion Meeting House's unusual configuration may

[33] There is strong physical evidence to suggest that Third Haven Friends Meeting House in Easton, Maryland was originally constructed in a similar cruciform plan. The T section was later removed and a shed addition created running the length of what is now the front elevation. This was done in the 1790s, probably to make the building conform to what had fairly recently become the standard program, and corresponding meeting house design.

merely reflect the lack of prescribed standards for meeting house design during the early period of settlement.

While persecution was largely responsible for preventing English Friends from building meeting houses, George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, prescribed no set building form for Quaker worship. He, in fact, saw no need for distinct buildings, believing that God dwells not "in temples made with hands," but in the hearts of men. He stated: "Dost thou call the steeple-house the Church? The Church is the people whom God has purchased with his blood, and not the house."[34] Believing in the tendency of church buildings to inspire idolatrous and patterned worship, Fox often presided over open-air meetings, as did many of the first ministers or "Traveling Friends." The lack of a prescribed building type arguably was consistent with Quaker philosophy whereby programed worship and professional ministry were eliminated. Quakers believe that individuals are guided by their own "inward light" or "that of God in every man." During the early period of their history, meeting house design probably was neglected because the emphasis was on apostilizing and developing the basic tenets of their Society, rather than defining meeting space. Practicality dictated some type of structure prior to the development of a building type, however. In 1687, Fox provided some clues regarding proper form in response to an inquiry about retrofitting an existing structure for use as a meeting house. He stated:

> And as concerning the meeting place itself whether the Barn or the House, I shall leave it to you. But if the Barn will do better, if you could make it wider.... and the ground may be rais'd that you may go up a step or two to go into the Meeting House & it will be more wholesome....and you have stones enough, and poor men to get them. And I would have all the Thatch pulled off all the Houses....and let all the Houses be slated, and the Walls about it to be made substantial to stand, and laid in Lime and Sand....And I would have a porch made to the Meeting place of the Common side of the yard.... And I would have the meeting place large, for truth may increase....and let it be done substantially.[35]

Fox advocated structures that are well built, and recommended engaging the assistance of the local Quaker population and utilizing indigenous materials in the construction. Perhaps equally significant is what Fox does not discuss, such as interior furnishings and fittings, or adornment of any kind. This was dictated by the Quaker tenet of simplicity, and would remain as the single most important characteristic of meeting house design. Unlike most ecclesiastical buildings, nothing about a Friends meeting house revealed its purpose. The architectural elements and iconography used to identify most religious buildings are not applicable here. There is no

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[34] *The Journal of George Fox*, 93f. Cited in O.S. Chedburn, "Theology and Architecture in the Tradition of the Meeting House, *The Friends Quarterly*, 20, no. 2 (April 1977), p. 61-62. Also noteworthy: Friends, to the present day, define "meeting" in terms of people, independent of a structure.

[35] George Fox, Letter to Thomas Lower, 28th day of 2nd month, 1687; "True copy of a letter from George Fox to Thomas Lower: 'touching his intention how to dispose of Petty's House and Tenement as followeth.' From the Tuke Papers, preserved in Borthwick Institute, York (Catalogue no. 81). As cited in: "a Letter from George Fox, Hitherto Unpublished, on Building a Meeting House," *The Friends' Quarterly*. Vol. 20, No. 2 (April 1977): 68-69.

steeple, no cross; little ornamentation, beyond the occasional turned balustrade, makes its way into the Friends meeting house. The wood elements such as the wainscoting, partitions, and other furnishings and fittings that distinguish meeting houses are plainly executed and left without a finish. Quality of materials and restrained craftsmanship are emphasized above all else. Simplicity, combined with the use of indigenous materials and building traditions, resulted in a structure in harmony with both the local built and natural environment. Uncluttered by iconographic imagery, meeting houses were intended to soothe the spirit and cultivate one's "inner light." These concepts have persisted for centuries, guiding the development of American Friends meeting houses to the present day.

The loose "program" that guided the meetings for worship and business has played a vital role in the evolution of meeting house design, and is particularly relevent to understanding Merion. American Friends of the colonial period adhered to the English program whereby the entire meeting--male and female--met for worship in a single room. Once worship services were concluded, the men and women would separate into two rooms to conduct their meeting for business. The continuation of this pattern is recorded in the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting Minutes for the 2nd of December 1684, which states "Where friends being mett in ye fear of ye Lord and after Several Testimonies borne and Several Papers from George Fox and the Generall Meeting was Read, the men and women *separated* and proceeded to Business."[36] Because the room used for business needed only to accommodate approximately one-half of the meeting's population, it constituted only about one-third of the total space within the meeting house. Generally occupied by the women's business meeting, the smaller room usually was located beyond a wood partition, but sometimes in a loft or adjacent structure. Meeting for worship in a single room meant that a facing bench was needed in that room only, and was therefore absent from the women's (business) meeting room. It also meant that there was no one logical location for the women's meeting room in relationship to the men's. The disproportionately sized meeting rooms in extant early meeting houses are a testament to this meeting pattern. And in the case of Merion, so is the lack of a facing bench and the seemingly awkward placement of the women's meeting.

Although the American Friends maintained close contact with their English counterparts, programmatic changes evolved in the colonies, centered around the treatment of the women's meeting. By the late eighteenth century, it became common practice in America for the women and men to sit on separate sides of the meeting house for worship as well as for business, lowering the partition prior to the business meetings. Because of this arrangement, equally sized meeting rooms became necessary. This *doubled*, two-cell plan formed the basis for the later prototype. Once the Friends began meeting separately for worship, access to the facing bench from both sections became necessary. The solution exhibited in the prototype was to place the men's and women's meeting rooms side-by-side, rather than front-to-back as was common in English meeting houses, and extend a single facing bench the entire length of the building.

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[36] Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 2nd day of the 10th month 1684.

Thus, Merion's parish church configuration and plan conducive to English patterns of meeting distinguish it as the beginning point in the evolution of Friends Meeting House design in the Delaware Valley.[37] The meeting houses erected from the time of the earliest immigrations of Friends through the mid-eighteenth century reflect a period of experimentation. They manifest slight differences in plan as issues such as determining the role of the women's meeting are played out. Outward appearance is effected further by the incorporation of region building traditions and materials. The development of the doubled prototype during the late eighteenth century did much to reverse the experimental trends of the previous century. Factors such as changes in the program of the meetings, however, has allowed for the continued evolution of American Friends meeting house design to the present.

The Construction of Merion Friends Meeting House: The Documentary Evidence

The resemblance of Merion Friends Meeting House to a cruciform-plan church has been the cause of controversy for many years. The debate stems largely from the fact that the traditional church form – the cross – is an anathema to Quaker customs and ideology. Or at least, how they later came to be defined. Instead the effects of English program, and the lack of prescribed standards upon meeting house design, shaped Merion meeting house. Furthermore, available written and physical evidence suggests that Merion *was* erected as the Friends originally intended it to be. Without any preconceived notions regarding proper form, the Merion Friends were simply not preoccupied by it. It is conceivable, then, that the recently immigrated Friends constructed a meeting house based on what they knew and so adapted the lay-out of the rural parish churches of their homeland to their needs. Despite its near cruciform plan, Merion's design is in keeping with the Quaker tenant of simplicity. And when built, Merion reflected a vast departure from the church forms of the day.

The dates of construction for Merion Meeting House span the years 1695 to 1715. The need expressed by historians such as Bunting to insist that Merion was erected in two separate building campaigns (ca.1695 to 1705 and ca. 1715) serves a dual purpose. It explains both its unusual plan, and the broad time-span for its construction. Merion's unconventional plan has

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[37] Although no other meeting house in the Delaware Valley resembles Merion in overall plan and outward appearance, most of the early ones also contained disproportionately sized meeting rooms for men and women's business. Further examples are provided by the two other meeting houses within the same monthly meeting as Merion: Old Haverford (ca. 1700, 1800), and Radnor (1717-18, 1722). Old Haverford (1700) was enlarged in 1800 by a women's meeting of smaller dimensions, but of the same height, creating an asymmetrical, five-bay long structure. At Radnor, a smaller women's meeting room/school room was added within a few years after the completion of the larger structure, separated from the principal meeting room by a partition. This too resulted in an asymmetrical structure of five bays in width, but with a roof line staggered in height. Plymouth Meeting House provides another local example. The added women's meeting, although similarly sized, originally had a lower roof line and did not communicate with the larger meeting room (there was no door between them). In each case, a room was added that was subordinate in size, resulting in an asymmetrical structure. However, the addition was made to one end to create a rectangular configuration. Merion Meeting House differs in its chronology and the location of the women's meeting. What all four have in common is their attempt to develop a usable plan working from what they knew of English meeting houses and program, interjecting the democratic American mind set with regard to separate women's meetings for business.

already been addressed. The fact that Merion Meeting House may have been twenty years in the making was not an unusual scenario during the early settlement period. Several meetings also experienced lengthy building campaigns, occupying partially finished structures. The extant minutes indicate there was a meeting house on this site in 1695. This may have been the start of the same ediface that was completed by 1705. Between 1702 through 1704, finishing touches are being made to the meeting house at the same time that plans are underway for new construction. It is most likely then, that the south front section was begun and in use as early as 1695 and finished by 1705. Reference to a loft suggests that the early section was used for worship and that a loft provided for separate business meetings. The Merion Friends intended to use this smaller structure while the larger section was under construction. Stone was already being gathered for the construction of the new section prior to the completion of the original. Thus, actual construction on the north section may have been delayed until as late as 1712. Final completion, containing both sections under a single roof, did not taken place until 1714-15. Although building efforts undertaken concurrent with planned construction suggest that Merion was intended as one unified structure rather than as two separate parts, the question is basically irrelevant. The meeting house was not fully functional until it achieved its current and final form.

The primary written evidence for dating meeting houses are the minutes of the individual preparative, and the larger monthly and quarterly, meetings. Committee reports and financial records are also important, but generally do not survive. Before the later nineteenth century, minutes for the Merion Preparative and the Radnor Monthly meetings (of which Merion was a part) are largely missing, particularly during the periods of construction.[38] However, some pieces of primary evidence are extant that point to initial construction in the late seventeenth century. The minutes do indicate that a "Public Meeting House" stood in "Meirion" in 1695. In his "Study of Evidence Relating to the Date" [of Merion Meeting House], Samuel Bunting mentions that marriages were held in the home of Hugh Roberts through 1694, and that in October of 1695, the first marriage held at "the publick meeting house in Meirion" is recorded. Bunting also quotes the minutes of the Women's Meeting for Business, which discusses payments for cleaning "Meirion meeting house" in February of 1696.[39] Some historians have suggested that the 1695 structure was of logs, as so many early meeting houses were. But no evidence exists to support this supposition. Citing another sources, the journal of traveling Friend Thomas Story refers to a large meeting held at "Merion meeting house" on the 15th day of December 1699. Finally, the minutes from the men's business meeting are extant from 1703 through 1704. They indicate that meetings were being held during those years in their meeting

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[38] Relying on minutes for information regarding meeting house construction can also be problematic because discussions of matters pertaining to the material world are conspicuously absent. Only vague reference and/or utilitarian consideration is given to issues of meeting house construction. This reflects the Quaker belief that it is "the meeting"--meaning its members--rather than the physical structure that is important.

[39] Samuel J. Bunting, Jr. *Merion Meeting House 1695-1945, A Study of Evidence Relating to the Date* (publisher unknown, 1945), 7.

house, while prior meetings were recorded as being held in the homes of individuals such as Hugh Roberts.

In 1702 and 1703, the meeting appoints various individuals to either oversee, or personally undertake, finishes to the meeting house. This seems to indicate that the building, although being used, is not yet complete. Projects include making benches,[40] and a cupboard to hold books and papers.[41] Locks and hinges were acquired for the meeting house closet, and "hookes and staples" for the meeting house and its windows.[42] In June of 1703, Owen Jones and Robert Jones are appointed to "gett boards sowed (sawed) for benches and for the Loft, and to speak with David Maurice concerning securing the meeting house."[43] John Robert is paid for "saweing (sic.) upon ye account of ye meeting."[44] John Moore is asked to make a "grybeing how" (grubbing hoe?) for the use of the meeting, presumably to grade the around surrounding the meeting house after construction.[45]

At the same time that the Merion Friends are finishing the main building, they are planning for a new structure. As the year 1703 comes to a close, the minutes mention the need to collect from those who have yet to pay their subscriptions towards building "the addition to ye meeting house."[46] On April 7, 1704, a committee of members was formed to "see for stones to build a meeting house and to gett workmen to dig them."[47] This exercise continues through 1704, and perhaps for some time thereafter. The minutes are missing after 1704, and there is no further

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[40] Griffith John and Robert Jones (probably building committee members) to obtaining a carpenter to make benches for the meeting house. Merion Preparative Meeting, Minutes, 5th day of the 4th month 1702.

[41] Robert Roberts is appointed to "make a cupboard in ye meeting house to the use of ye meeting to keep friends bookes or papers." Merion Preparative Meeting, Minutes, 5th day of the 1st month 1702.

[42] Thomas Jones is appointed to "gett hinges and lock for meeting house closett" Merion Preparative Meeting, Minutes, 4th day 4th month 1703.

[43] Rather than installing locks, in this context, "securing" most likely is a reference to making the building secure against the elements, i.e. finishing the roof or some other major component of the meeting house. A similar reference appears to making "secure" the Center Meeting House in 1685, "....there appearing necessity for the getting up (of) the roof for secure(ing) of walls" (Minutes of the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, 1.1mo.1695).

[44] Ibid., 6th day 6th month 1703, 1st day 3rd month 1703, and 2nd day 7th month 1704.

[45] Ibid., 3rd day 7th month 1703.

[46] Ibid., 12th day 4th month 1703. It is interesting that the word "addition" is used. It is not clear whether this is a reference to the building currently under construction or the one being planned (that is, the north rear section). If the former, this suggests that there may be some validity to the notion of an earlier log structure. Perhaps the south section was appended to the log building, which was later replaced by the current stone section to the north. If the log section lay to the east (adjoined by the former doorway) or to the west, it might explain why the larger section had to be made to the north, creating the unusual T-plan.

[47] Merion Preparative Meeting, Minutes, 7th day of the 2nd month 1704.

record for a number of years. A few other vague references appear that relate to the construction of a meeting house, however. In 1711, Cadwalader Morgan bequeathed " the sum of Twenty pounds money aforesaid towards building Meirion (sic.) Meeting house, to be paid by my said Executors *when it is a building to the said use*."[48] This cynically stated endowment seems to confirm the idea that the Merion Friends were overdue in completing their meeting house. In October of 1713, the minutes of the Radnor Monthly Meeting record money "formerly lent to Rees Howell, transferred to the Merion Meeting, *towards finishing their meeting house*."[emphasis mine]

The best primary source relating to the construction of Merion Meeting House is meeting member, John Roberts' accounts of the subscriptions collected and funds expended from 1712 through 1717. The document includes itemized lists of building supplies purchased, money paid for carpenter's time, board, and funds loaned by various members towards the building's construction. Although not a complete list of the materials, it provides concrete evidence of substantial construction. This financial account also documents the communal manner in which the early Friends meeting houses were built. Members contributed building materials, labor, or funding, probably according to their ability. Although the accounts are still unsettled in 1717, there are no entries for laborers paid or supplies purchased after 1714. Thus, the meeting house was finished by the end of that year, if not completely paid up.

The Construction of Merion Friends Meeting House: The Physical Evidence

The physical evidence is no more definitive than the written records. While many structural elements give clues as to the period of construction, others have been obscured. The meeting house is clearly a very early building, as indicated by the unique roof structure and remnants of the original windows. Of the three meeting houses erected by the Welsh Friends within an approximately twenty-five year time frame, only Merion is erected using building technology reflective of early English building traditions such as the crux or bent principal rafters and the leaded casement windows. The other two meeting houses, Radnor (1718) and Old Haverford (1701), adopt the more recently developed king-post truss system. As part of the same monthly meeting, the three meetings consulted one another with regard to form and even contributed funds towards the construction of each others meeting houses. Yet, the differences in construction technology and plan suggest that Merion (or its design) is much earlier.

The connection between the roofs in the north and south sections of Merion Meeting House has also been studied for clues. The form of the trusses in both sections are the same. The center truss in the north portion of the building extends out, into the south (connected by mortise and tenon to the tie beam of the first truss in that section). By so doing, there is a distribution of the structural load. While this suggests that the two roofs were built at once, this same arrangement

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[48] Copied from the original paper in City Hall Philadelphia, Year 1711 (10th day of the 7th month), number 211; as cited in Bunting, 2.

would have been a solution to the problem of removing the north bearing wall of the south section in order to *add* a section to it.[49] The ceiling in the interior of the southern section is lower than that of the north, while they are at the same height from the exterior. Perhaps an earlier roof on the southern portion was raised or replaced to meet the height of the "addition."

Because it covered the stonework, the application of the stucco finish about 1829 obscured clues to construction chronology. An examination of the juncture of the two sections, for example, could have indicated whether the north and south sections were integrated structurally into one another, or if one was added later. Also evident in the stonework, before the stucco, was the in-filled doorway or window to the east side of the south section. Based upon what appear to be nail holes in the wainscoting along the east wall, some have suggested there was once a facing bench there. If so, the south section - more easily than the north - would have stood on its own as a meeting house. As its own entity, the south section more readily fit the pattern of meeting house development seen that the other early Welsh-built meeting houses at Radnor and (old) Haverford.

Among the most controversial pieces of evidence is the date stone in the west gable end of the larger, north section of the meeting house which reads: "Built 1695 Repaired 1829." The accuracy of the date stone has been challenged by historians. Bunting claimed that the Friends regarded deviation from the truth, even in the most trivial matters, as sinful. Therefore, according to Bunting, "The Friends would not have put that date stone there if there had been in their minds the slightest doubt of the accuracy of the dates given!"[50] The situation was more complicated than Bunting asserts. In 1829, following the schism between the Hicksite and the Orthodox Friends, a deed to the meeting house property was drawn up by the former trustees of the meeting, relinquishing title to the Hicksites. They immediately began to update the meeting house. The exterior was stuccoed and scored to resemble ashlar block, as was fashionable at that time. Renovations also were made to conserve heat. The Hicksite Friends, in essence,

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[49] Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler, "Structural History of Merion Meeting House," National Park Service Memorandum, 18 August 1983. This argument for dating was presented following examination by Ms. Batcheler, Lee H. Nelson, NPS Historical Architect, and Mr. David Yeomans, Structural Engineering Professor, Liverpool University, England. William C. Bolger & David G. Orr, National Historic landmark nomination, Merion Friends Meeting House (draft, prepared 1997). Field investigation by HABS team, depicted in measured drawings.

[50] Bunting, 5. It is also worth noting that the single most crucial piece of evidence currently used to date the meeting house to that time--John Robert's personal account of the subscriptions collected and funds expended towards the completion of the meeting house undertaken between 1712-17--probably was not known to them. This important piece of evidence was discovered in the oldest minute book of the Women's Monthly Meeting near the time of the bicentennial celebration in 1895. Bicentennial Committee. 1695-1895, Bicentennial Anniversary of the Friends' Meeting House Merion, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1895),12. First mention of this document, "recently found." Charles H. Browning. *Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1912), 543. It is here that he states the location in which the document was discovered; the date is given in a newspaper clipping which states, "a paper has recently been found containing the names of subscribers, and the amount contributed in the year 1713 for building the meeting house....These evidences prove that....the building was probably completed in its present form in 1713." "Lower Merion Church, 200th Anniversary of the Old Friends' Meeting House," *Public Ledger--Philadelphia*, 7 October 1895.

rededicated the meeting house by adding a new date stone that declared it "repaired." The object of the date stone was not solely to acknowledge the repairs, but was also an effort to physically lay claim to their meeting house. The 1695 date (added in 1829) respectfully acknowledges the contributions of their forbearers and the legacy that had been handed down to them. By adding the 1829 date, the Hicksite Quaker's primary objective may have been to place themselves definitively within the historical continuum of Merion Meeting House.

Conclusion

Merion Friends Meeting House reflects a rather unique form indicative of its status as one of the earliest meeting houses erected in this country by persecuted emigrant Quakers. Its design appears to be that a rural parishes church, temper by the Quaker tenet of simplicity. It bears little resemblance to meeting house designs in England or the American colonies. In essence, it is neither church nor meeting house. Its design instead signifies the move from popular church forms to the development of a building type uniquely suited to Quaker worship and business. Like its controversial form, the fact that likely took twenty years to build is not unusual when viewed in light of larger patterns of meeting houses construction during that era. The nearly seven-year struggle over the construction of the Center Square Meeting House, the first masonry meeting house in Philadelphia, is indicative of the difficulties the Friends faced in constructing many of the early meeting houses.[51] Issues relating to the settlement period included the lack of permanent dwellings and other necessary infrastructure, and limited financial resources and skilled craftsmen to build. These factors could have rendered their meeting houses incomplete, although in use, for many years. And as their numbers grew, the Quakers slowly added to existing buildings, resulting in a variety of building forms. Although those constructing meeting houses were generally careful to include a date stone, it was probably the antiquity of the meeting rather than the meeting house that they were most anxious to celebrate. In some cases, new meeting houses were constructed from the materials salvaged from the older building. The latter phenomena has complicated the chronology of a number of meeting houses that bear the label "rebuilt," possibly including Merion. Although the Merion Friends Meeting House may resulted from two separate building campaigns, it is highly likely that it was conceived as a single structure, and not considered complete until it reaches its current T-shaped configuration.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

[51] The erection of Center Square Meeting House was suggested by William Penn during his initial visit to the colony in 1683, and the following year he donated much of the needed materials. Construction, however, did not begin until July of 1685. It was first occupied in 1687, although minutes from the first month of 1689 indicate that a floor had not been laid nor the windows hung. It was not completed until 1690. After at least two years of planning and five years of construction, it was so poorly constructed that by 1700 it was beginning to fall apart; it was dismantled in 1703.

1. Architectural Character: The Merion Friends Meeting House more closely resembles rural parish churches of its builder's Welsh homeland than the standard design for American Friends meeting houses. Merion makes use of Medieval English building traditions, as seen in the stone construction, bent roof timbers, and original leaded casement windows. These elements are combined with architectural details introduced in London during the Renaissance period but so prevalent in Colonial Pennsylvania architecture as to become identified with it. These are the pent roof, and the pedimented hoods that appear over the doorways. Merion's unusual T-shaped configuration is near cruciform in plan. It reflects the lack of prescribed standards for proper form, inherent in the meeting houses erected by the earliest Quaker settlers. More closely paralleling English churches in plans and construction technology, Merion Friends Meeting House is distinguished as the point of departure in the development of meeting house design in America.

When compared with other meeting houses of this period Merion appears not only atypical but also far grander. A few other bold experiments in meeting house design were erected in the early period of Quaker settlement in the Delaware Valley. A particularly noteworthy example was Burlington, New Jersey's octagonal meeting house of the 1680s. More typical, however, was a simpler, almost square, single cell structure. As English meeting house historian David Butler points out, "These first settlers were meeting in the most basic log houses, and a generation or two was to pass before any development took place beyond these. Even in the city of Philadelphia there is little in the account of the Centre Square meeting house (1685) to suggest anything more than a plain box to keep out the weather..."[52] Considering the primitive environment in which it was erected (and probably the limited availability of skilled craftsmen), Merion's refined architectural elements set it apart from neighboring buildings. In many ways, the south section adheres to the prototype used at Radnor and Old Haverford meeting houses, all within the same monthly meeting. Each one consisted initially of a small, single-story, square-shaped structure. The facade of Merion's original section, with its batten doorway in the gable end, flanked by the broken pent roof, is also reminiscent of the Old City Hall building in Philadelphia. It was located near the "Great Meeting House" and dates from the same time period. Thus, on the whole, Merion more closely resembles the civic or ecclesiastic, rather than the domestic building type to which nearly all meeting houses conform. It seems that it was intended as a testimonial to the vitality of Penn's holy experiment.

2. Condition of the Fabric: Merion Meeting House appears to be well maintained and in good condition. However, stresses upon the structural system could result in significant damage if it is not reinforced. Some of the stress is caused by slight defects in the

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[52] David M. Butler. "Quaker Meeting Houses in America and England: Impressions and Comparisons," *Quaker History*, vol. 77, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 103.

original structure, such as the narrow king post and loose struts. In places, the cruck section – which are cut rather than bent into shape – already have been reinforced. The majority of the stress is the result of modifications made about 1829 to accommodate the addition of the brick chimney stack (and the later, modern heating system) and the dropped ceiling. Substantial cracks along the ceiling in the gallery indicate that post supports or some other form of reinforcement are needed. These modifications are the only significant compromises to the architectural integrity of the structure. The dropped ceiling conceals the cruck, hand-hewn timbers and other elements of the structural system originally intended to be exposed, and the windows that once provided indirect light into the meeting house.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Merion Friends Meeting House is a one-and-a-half story, T-shaped structure made of stone, with an intersecting gable roof. The south (front) section, forming the base of the T-plan, has a gable-front roof and is three bays across and one bay deep. It measures 26' 3-1/4" east to west by 20' north to south. In the center of the facade is the principal entry, that is flanked by windows. Above the entry is a window in the gable end. The north section, to the rear, is two bays deep and two bays across, and measures 40' 8" east to west by 26' 7-1/2" north to south. Doorways are located at both the east and west sides of the north section. Flanking the corners of the north rear section are privy additions. Access to an in-ground receiving tomb is found in the crux of the south and north section, at the east elevation.

2. Foundation: The meeting house rests on a stone foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are of stone construction (probably Wissahickon Schist). A plaster finish, scored to resemble ashlar block, was applied about 1829. The scoring is wearing away and so is not readily apparent. At the base of all the elevations is a water table; a drip mold is located along the wall above the pent roof. A date stone, added in 1829, is in the west gable end of the north section of the meeting house. It was inscribed, "Built 1695, Repaired 1829." It replaced the original date stone located in the gable end of the south front section that was missing for many years. The position of the original date stone is no longer visible, but appears in turn-of-the-century photographs of the meeting house as a ghost-like image under the plaster finish.

4. Structural system, framing: The meeting house is of load-bearing masonry construction, with identical roof truss systems in both the north and south section. The A-frame trusses are supported by an off-center king post, dove-tailed into the collar beam, and flanked by supporting struts or braces. The most unique feature is the bent or cruck principle rafters, a medieval English construction technique. These cruck members rest on plates, transferring the load vertically onto the stone walls. The common rafters

are pinned at the top (there is no ridge pole) and extend the roof out beyond the walls to create an overhanging eave. Purlins lend strength to the rafters. The rafters also hold the lath onto which the roof shingles are nailed. The tie beam of the center truss in the north section extends to join with a similar tie beam in the south section, which are held by mortise and tenon. The principle rafter at this juncture joins the tie beam with a crook. According to Historical Architect Penelope Batcheler, the framing in the south section is integral with that of the north, whether built in one phase or two. She stated:

> If built together this extended tie beam of the center truss was an ingenious method of transferring the loads to the tie beam of the first south truss where the two buildings adjoined with no wall below to receive the loads. If the north building was added, this load transfer method was needed when the south building('s) north wall was removed.[53]

Dr. David Yeomans, a professor of structural engineering at Liverpool University examined the roof structure of Merion Meeting House as part of a comparative study of "English roofs" in Colonial America. He found Merion's roof system to be among the most interesting he had seen, commenting that "this structure uses a primitive form of trussing I have not so far seen in England, although it clearly derives from here."[54] He further asserts that Merion's roof structure conforms to that prescribed by Sir Roger Pratt in his unpublished works on architecture. Pratt described a "king piece" as having "a strong dovetail at the bottom to truss up the beam under it" and the principal rafters as "all made of knee pieces because that by their crookedness [...] much of the weight of the roof is by that means taken off the walling." He continued, "the roof is much more in the garrets by reason of the upright of the knee to the first purlin."[55]

In 1829, a chimney was added, cutting through the tie beam which connected the roof structures of the two sections. To compensate for this, framing members were added surrounding the chimney.

5. Porches: The front entryway is covered by a simple pedimented portico supported by tapering octagonal wood posts that rest on a metal claws. Large stones form a floor under the portico. This porch was probably added during the mid nineteenth century, replacing the original unsupported hood, which survive over the two side doorways.[56]

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[53] Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler. "Structural History of Merion Meeting House," unpublished report, Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, 18 August 1983.

[54] D.T. Yeomans. "a Preliminary Study of 'English' Roofs in Colonial America." *Bulletin, The Association for Preservation Technology*, vol. XIII, no. 4, 1981, p.16.

[55] Ibid., citing R.T. Gunther, *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* (London: 1928), 212.

[56] The entry portico first appears in depictions of the meeting house in 1843, in a drawing entitled "Ancient Friends Meeting-house at Lower Merion," from the historical collection of Sherman Day (copy in Merion Meeting Archives).

6. Chimneys: A single brick chimney stack, covered with a plaster finish, is located near the juncture of the north and south sections.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are three exterior doorways. The principal doorway is located to the center of the south front section of the T-shaped structure, with corresponding doorways located to the east and west sides of the north section. The south front doorway is large enough to accommodate a double door, and has an arched lintel. The doorway has a simple, wood architrave surround with a large bead along the inner edge. The doorway is recessed, with plain reveals. The doors are two-panel, with a thumb latch. The doorways located at the side elevations have a single door six-panel door, but otherwise resemble the front entry, with an arched lintel and a plain wood surround. Both side doorways are recessed and are covered by an unsupported hood.

a. Windows and shutters: The typical window is a large eight-over-twelve-light sash with an arched lintel, wood sill, and a plain wood surround. The windows have paneled shutters supported by strap hinges with long metal hooks as shutter stays. A noteworthy detail of the first story windows is the fact that they are elevated, thus prohibiting easy viewing of the out-of-doors that might serve to distract the meeting from worship. The elevated window also create a more pleasing indirect light. The two rear windows at the north elevation are located even higher, to accommodate the raised facing benches along the rear interior wall. There is a smaller eight-over-twelve-light sash window in the gable front of the south section. The pent roof is broken to accommodate this window. In the gable ends of the north section, batten doors cover the remnants of the original, early eighteenth century leaded casement windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof consists of intersecting gables, with both sections rising to a height of 30' 6" to the roof ridge. It was originally covered with wood shingles but is now covered with asphalt shingles. The privy additions that flank the rear wall of the north section have hipped roofs.

b. Cornices, eaves: There is a pent roof in all three gable ends, broken in the south front to accommodate a window.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The first floor consists of two rooms, a smaller, square-shaped room to the front with a large, rectangular room adjoining it. The rooms are separated by a wood partition. The larger north room is flanked by boxed winder stairways which lead to a second floor gallery which overlooks the north meeting. The gallery has tiered benches. There is a doorway in the rear of the gallery that leads to a room over the south front meeting. An access panel to the current attic space above the north meeting is also accessible by ladder from the gallery. (See HABS plans for more detail and dimensions.)

2. Stairways: Winding, cabinet stairs are in the southeast and southwest corners of the north section of the meeting house. They provide access to the gallery and the second floor, or loft, of the south section.

3. Flooring: The flooring is made of unfinished, random-width wood. This is a 1904 replacement of the original flooring.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: There is unfinished wood wainscoting along the walls, rising to a height of 10' above the floor behind the elevated facing benches along the north rear wall. The walls above the wainscoting are plastered and painted white.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doorways have plain wood surrounds with a butt joint. The interior surface of the doors leading to the outside are of wide, vertical planks reinforced by horizontal members at the top, bottom and (near) center. There are single doors to the east and west entryways, and double doors to the front. The front doors are held by iron strap hinges located at the top and bottom supports. These doors also have a large box lock and latch. A more modern bolt has been added. Slide bolts hold the west side door in place. Four-panel doors are found at the base of the cabinet stairs, and simple batten doors provide access to closets under the stairways.

b. Windows: The windows are recessed with plain (plastered), splayed reveals. They have simple wood surrounds with butt joints. Wood blinds now hang in the windows.

6. Benches: An elevated platform or facing benches are located along the north rear wall, spanning the distance between the two rear windows. Similar platforms flank this one, along the east and west walls. They span the distance from the rear wall to the side doorway. The facing benches are fixed, while the other benches in the meeting house are moveable. The benches are of unfinished wood, with simple curved bench ends and slightly angled backs.

7. Partition: A retractable wood panel partition separates the south front and north rear sections of the meeting house, with a doorway to the center. The lower panels of the partition are fixed, while the panels above slide up into the wall that divides the two sections. The partition is painted white. The doorway has a plain surround and double paneled doors. A low, fixed paneled partition once separated the boys from the girls in the youth's gallery above. Only the supporting post remains as a indicator of its former location.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: A modern gas-fired, hot-air heating system was installed in 1954. An historic view from about 1925 shows two stoves in the north room that flank the room to the east and west, with the stove pipes running to the center flue.[57] A stove also sits to the west of the front doorway in the south section. The minutes for the 4th day of November 1903 indicate that two stoves were purchased in 1900 and placed in the meeting house (presumably replacing earlier stoves). The stoves may have been first added to heat the meeting house about 1829, when the current chimney stack was put in place.

b. Lighting: Electric lights were added to the meeting house sometime in the early twentieth century. The idea to have "electric wires and lights placed in Merion Meeting House" was first suggested in April 1903, but it was determined that funds for such an undertaking were not available at that time.[58]

c. Plumbing: The meeting house is still without plumbing.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The meeting house now sits on a triangular piece of ground bounded by the busy Montgomery Avenue to the front and Meeting House Lane to the rear. The meeting house is now surrounded by dense bushes and is shaded by large trees. The property is surrounded by stone walls. Openings in the walls allow for access from a drive that winds from the far southeast corner of the property, at Montgomery Avenue, past the old carriage or horse sheds to a circle in front of the meeting house, and continues to the west of the meeting house to the Meeting House Lane entrance. A second horse shed is located near this entrance. To the east of the meeting house is the walled burying ground, with a central walkway. Portions of the burying ground probably pre-date the meeting house. The burying ground contains at least 2,000 burial, many of

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[57] Merion Meeting Archives, Historic photography, ca. 1925.

[58] Merion Meeting Archives, financial records.

which are unmarked as was the Friends custom prior to the later nineteenth century.[59] The walls around the burying ground were presumably begun sometime after 1732, when funds were bequeath for that purpose through the will of Robert David.[60] Subscriptions were collected in 1848 for repairing the walls and carriage/horse sheds. The old walls were pulled down and new ones constructed beginning in the summer of 1875. Working as weather permitted, the project was not completed until the spring of 1877.[61]

2. Outbuildings: Privies form small masonry additions to the northeast and northwest corners of the meeting house. They may still serve their original function, as the meeting house is without plumbing (Although they are not generally used). The foundations of an eighteenth century privy exist in the southwest corner of the building formed by the intersection of the T-plan. A burial holding vault was dug into the corresponding southeast corner in 1849. The vault is accessible through bulk-head doors located to the south. A stairway leads to a small holding vault.

Two late eighteenth or early nineteenth century carriage or horse sheds are located on the property. The first is to the west, near the Meeting House Lane entry, across the drive from the meeting house. The other, located to the southeast corner of the property, is a larger L-shaped structure that abuts the cemetery wall to its north rear. Both sheds are open, wood frame structures constructed of heavy timbers, with a wood shingle roof.

A caretaker's cottage and the community building are also located on the eastern side of the property. The latter was begun in 1949, and was designed by Heacock & Platt, who are architects of Philadelphia. A school building, dating from 1765, was once located to the north of Merion Meeting House, on the other side of Meeting House Lane. The school building was later removed and the loft above the south section of the meeting house was adopted for that purpose. Contiguous to the property (located between the meeting house and the community building) is the General Wayne Inn, an eighteenth-century building listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Note: FHL refers to the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

A. Early Views:

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[59] Mary Wood, Interview with author, July 1997. Mrs. Wood has been researching the records in an effort to determine the numbers and names of individuals buried here.

[60] Copy of Will, dated 26 April 1732, is located in the archives of the Merion Meeting, community building.

[61] Merion Meeting Archives, financial records.

Breton, William. "Friends Meeting House- Merion, PA." Watercolor, ca. 1829 (undated), HSP Bb 862 B 756, #10. Shows meeting house without the stuccoed finish (in filled opening at south elevation and ghosts of date stone and posts in south gable end).

Collins, Isaac. "Friends Meeting House, Lower Merion, Pennsylvania." Sketch, frontispiece for Wilson Armistead, Select Miscellanies, Chiefly Illustrative of the History, Christian Principles and Sufferings of the Society of Friends, vol. IV (London: Charles Gilpin, 1851); photocopy in Notebook, Merion Meeting Archives; and Photo File, Merion Meeting House, FHL. Shows stone meeting house with fencing, carriage sheds and schoolhouse roof in background.

Reinagle, Hugh. "Friends Meeting House, Merion; 1810 #173." Painting, located at the Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia, PA. (Photocopy in Notebook, Merion Meeting Archives). Stylized version of stone meeting house; decrepit looking (ancient) and with a kick in the roof.

Smith, Walter B. "Friends Meeting House (Merion Meeting House)," Walter B. Smith Collection, ca. 1940s view, HSP, box V53.

Steel, J.W. "Friends Meeting House, Merion," Sketch,

Sutcliffs, Robert. "Friends Meeting House at Merion, ca. 1805," Sketch, Travels in America, 2nd edition (York, England: publisher unknown, 1815), plate III (photo-copy in Notebook, Merion Archives).

Zell, T. Elwood. "Ancient Friends Meeting House, Lower Merion, near Philadelphia; Built 1695." Engraving, Ezra Michener, Retrospect of Early Quakerism (Philadelphia: T. Elwood Zell, 1860), p. 61. Shows perspective view of stone meeting house as artist imagined it looked (prior of ca. 1829) with diamond-pane leaded casement windows, date stone in south gable end, etc.; also includes carriage shed and roof of schoolhouse.

B. Interviews:

Wood, Mary. Interview by author, 21 July 1997 , Merion Meeting House, Merion Station, Pennsylvania.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Merion Friends Meeting House was undertaken during the summer of 1997 as part of a larger project to document the Friends Meetings Houses of the Delaware Valley, by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of HABS/HAER; Paul Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. Funding was made possible through a congressional appropriation for documentation in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The project was planned and administered by HABS historians Catherine C. Lavoie and Aaron V. Wunsch; and architect Robert R. Arzola. Measured drawings were produced by architect Roger Miller, and architecture technicians Christy Bernard, Pamela Howell, Kevin J. Lam and Adam Maksay (US ICOMOS). The project historians were Aaron V. Wunsch and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large Format Photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer. Special thanks for their assistance in facilitating the documentation of Merion Meeting House goes to Olive Tatman, Clerk; and to Mary Wood, archivist, for the meeting; and William Bolger, Program Coordinator, National Historical Landmarks, Philadelphia Regional Office, NPS.