



Plainfield's Historic Quaker Meeting

The Plainfield Meeting of the Society of Friends derives from the meeting which John Laing organized at his home in Piscataway when he purchased the plantation, in 1692. Travel was difficult in those days, and in order to be nearer home the Piscataway Friends separated from Woodbridge in 1725, and the day of meeting was changed from the first to the fourth day of the week so as not to effect the attendance at the latter place. Laing gave the land on which the meeting house—24 feet square, with 2400 shingles on the outside—was built. The first meeting for worship was held there in 1736.

The peace-loving Quakers of this area were hard pressed to keep the peace during the Revolution. Their meeting house was occupied by soldiers in '76. Robert Willis, a Quaker preacher, was prevented from going south by the "Great Commotion" and narrowly escaped going to jail. Some of the leading Quakers had their property confiscated; others, including John Laing, were imprisoned.

Benjamin Harris was held prisoner in the Morristown jail, in the vilest surroundings, and given barely enough food to keep him alive until he signed a "paper for independency and suffered his apprentice to go in the army." For this disavowal of Quaker principles, Harris was disowned by his brethren. Marmaduke Hunt, an-

other prisoner, also confessed "an affirmation of fidelity to the States" in return for his liberty. He was disciplined.

The Plainfield Meeting House on Watchung Avenue, was built shortly after the Great Commotion, in 1788. Elias Hicks, central figure in the controversy which resulted in the separation, addressed large gatherings here on several occasions. In his Journal, he describes a visit on "9th month, 4th day," 1817: "From this place (Elizabethtown) we rode home with our friend, Henry Shotwell, of Rahway, who met us here. The next day we attended Friend's Meeting at Plainfield. Notice having been given that we intended to be there, the meeting was large, in which the Lord's power was manifested and His arm made bare for our help; and through which way was made and utterance given to preach the glad tidings of life and Salvation to the people in the demonstration of the spirit. Many hearts were broken and contrited by the prevalence of its power." Again, in 7th month, 1822, he attended a meeting, "which was large for the place and it was favored in an eminent manner to our mutual comfort."

Records of the Friends Society of East Jersey have been kept since 1686, when the first meeting was held at Perth Amboy. The Plainfield Meeting now serves the Rahway - Woodbridge area.