

Arch Street Friends Meeting House
330 Arch Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1388

HABS,
PA,
51-PHILA,
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

**ADDENDUM TO:
ARCH STREET FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
330 Arch St.
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania**

HABS No. PA-1388

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO
ARCH STREET FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
10-

HABS No. PA-1388

Location: 330 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: The Philadelphia-area Yearly Meeting of Friends was established in 1681 and was housed in a number of earlier meeting houses prior to the construction of the current building. In 1804, the east wing and center section of the present Arch Street Meeting House was erected according to a design developed by Quaker carpenter and architect Owen Biddle. The annual session of the women's yearly meeting was held here. The present-day west wing was added in 1811, at which time the men's meeting was moved into the east section and the women moved to the newly completed western section. Arch Street Meeting House is a symmetrically balanced, three-part structure built of bricks laid up in Flemish bond. It is elegantly understated and, therefore despite its Georgian architectural styling and refined construction, is in keeping with Quaker plainness.¹

Description: Although originally constructed around an L-shaped plan, the present structure follows an U-shaped plan and faces north. The meeting house is a large, two-story, three part entity that consists of a central, gable-fronted pavilion of three bays that is, in turn, flanked by five-bay by seven-bay sections. The attached flankers are each covered by a low-hipped roof crowned by a lantern. The meeting house is made of bricks laid up in Flemish bond over a coursed ashlar, exposed stone foundation. The windows are double-hung sash; the glazing varies. Inside, there are two meeting rooms – one to the east, the other to the west of a lobby and committee meeting space. Because of the separate meeting rooms for men and women Friends, there is no need for a partition. Traditional elements such as a gallery and facing benches are present, however.

Historical Notes: Following the 1681 establishment of the Yearly Meeting in Burlington, New Jersey, Friends across the river in Philadelphia were holding their own meetings for worship and for business by 1683. When the Yearly Meeting gathered in Philadelphia, the Friends congregated in the Boarded Meeting House. By 1696, they had outgrown their quarters and so erected the Great Meeting House; three years later, the Friends added a gallery to the building to further meet their increasing membership's needs. The Philadelphia Friends continued to host the yearly meeting alternatively

¹Catherine C. Lavoie, excerpted from text of "Silent Witness," 2002.

with those in Burlington and in time relocated to the Pine Street Meeting House (1753).

In 1760, Philadelphia became the permanent site of the Yearly Meeting of Friends. In time the meeting house on Pine Street became too small to comfortably accommodate them; in 1802, the men's meeting moved into the North Street Meeting House and two years later, the women's meeting was held in the new structure built on Arch Street. In 1811, the men's meeting again shared space with the women Friends; all met at the Arch Street facility.

The impetus for the construction of the Arch Street Meeting House is said to have come from the women of the yearly meeting who wanted a structure that could accommodate the men's and women's yearly meetings under the same roof, and who wanted to discontinue the practice of gathering in separate meeting houses for the business meetings. The completed meeting house at Arch Street contained a central hall and committee room flanked by identical meeting rooms. As laid-out, the plan of the Arch Street Meeting House reaffirms of the commitment to support both business meetings as they had been established by the first yearly meeting of the Delaware Valley Friends held in 1681. George Fox, who founded the Society of Friends in England during the 1650s, advocated separate meetings for men and women as a means of insuring active participation by women in Quaker proceedings. In practice, the women's business meeting dealt primarily with social concerns such as marriage and aid to the needy while the men's meeting considered issues of policy and finance. Despite the disparate themes governing each meeting, the attempt to place women on par with their male counterparts was a radical one for its day and reflects a social consciousness indicative of Quaker beliefs. Moreover, the colonial Friends held women's meetings for business more consistently than did the English Friends. This procedure, it has been argued, contributed to the development in the Delaware Valley of the two-cell meeting house that contains equally proportioned and fitted rooms for men's and women's meetings for business. This building form, notably, does not appear in England.²

The Arch Street Meeting House was home to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as well as smaller, subsidiary Quarterly and Monthly meetings

²Catherine C. Lavoie, excerpted from text of "Silent Witness," 2002.

ARCH STREET MEETING HOUSE

HABS No. PA-1388

(page 3)

until the late 1820s. After the separation, the Arch Street Meeting House remained in the care of the Orthodox Friends. When the Hicksite and Orthodox Friends reunited in the mid-twentieth century, the Arch Street Meeting House was again used as the site of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, just as it is today. It also serves as a conference center and museum; the restored west room provides the backdrop for the interpretation of Quaker meeting history while the east room is a multi-purpose facility.

Sources:

Inventory of Church Archives: Society of Friends in Pennsylvania.
Friends' Historical Association for the WPA, November 1941.

Catherine C. Lavoie, "Silent Witness: Quaker Meeting Houses in the Delaware Valley, 1695 to the Present," (forthcoming, 2002).