

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

Middletown Road, 1 mile north of Pennell Road (Route 452)

Lima vicinity

Delaware County

Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6655

HABS

PA-6655

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
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MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

HABS NO. PA-6655

Location: Middletown Road (Rt. 352), approximately one mile north of the intersection with Pennell Road (Rt. 452), just north of Old Forge Cemetery, Lima vicinity, Delaware County, Pennsylvania.

Owner: Middletown Meeting of the Society of Friends.

Present Use: Meeting house for religious worship and general use by the Middletown Meeting of the Society of Friends.

Significance: In 1888, the Middletown Preparative Meeting House was significantly altered for the second time in order to conform to changing patterns of meeting house development. Middletown Meeting House was begun as early as 1702 as a single-cell, three-bay, central entry structure typical of the rural meeting houses of the Delaware Valley during the early settlement period. During the 1790s, the building was doubled in size through the addition of a second apartment to better accommodate separate men's and women's business meetings. The resulting two-celled structure was in keeping with the newly established prototype for American Friends meeting house design which consisted of a six-bay-long structure with equally sized apartments for men and women, each with its own entryway. In the 1880s, the meeting house was reconfigured, creating a more church-like appearance and orientation. This last change reflects a tendency that began in the later nineteenth century within some Friends meetings to adopt elements of mainstream ecclesiastic architecture.

Middletown is among the oldest Friends Meetings in what was originally Chester Quarter. An indulged meeting for worship began in the home of John Bowater in 1686. In 1700, the Middletown Friends purchased land with the intention of establishing a burial ground and building a meeting house. While much of the early structure has been obscured by the changes made during the late nineteenth century, evidence of its eighteenth-century appearance is clearly visible in the attic. The remnants of the early structure include a barrel-vaulted ceiling and one of its eighteenth-century windows.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, summer 1999.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 2)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1702, ca. 1792-97, and 1888. While most secondary sources indicate that the meeting house is quite old, the date for its construction is unknown. Some suggest that the current house was erected ca. 1770.¹ This, however, is unlikely. There is no reference to its construction at that time in the monthly or quarterly meeting minutes (the preparative meeting minutes are largely missing). Moreover, the quarterly meetings were careful to answer the annual query that began in the 1750s regarding the formation of new meetings and the construction of new meeting houses; there is no mention within their minutes of the construction of a meeting house at Middletown during the second half of the eighteenth century. The quarterly meeting minutes do provide support for the construction of a meeting house at Middletown ca. 1702. Although some sources propose that this was a log structure, there is no primary evidence to indicate the nature of the building material. In addition, an historic photograph taken prior to 1888 when the last major alteration took place depicts a structure erected in two separate building campaigns. It is possible, then, that the original portion--most likely that which lies to the south end of the current structure--dates from as early as 1702. The northerly section is a later addition. While this addition may have been erected ca. 1770, more than likely it was erected between 1792 and 1797.² It was at this time that an extant record book records extensive repairs and alterations to the meeting house.³ The meeting house was again remodeled and its orientation changed in 1888.⁴

2. Architect: There is no known architect or master builder for the meeting house. The design was most likely derived by the members of the meeting themselves, perhaps with assistance from the Newark or Chester Monthly, or the Concord Quarterly meetings of which Middletown was a part. As was common practice at that time, select members

¹ Ca. 1770 is given as the date for the meeting house in two notable sources. See T. Chalkley Matlack. "Brief Historical Sketches concerning Friends' Meetings of the Past and Present with special reference to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," 311-13 (the original volumes are located at The Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library; copy available at FHL); 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), 190.

² This could explain the lack of reference within the annual queries, since the intent was to record *new* meetings and meeting houses (and not additions to existing ones) as an indication of the vitality of or of an increase in the Quaker faith.

³ Middletown Preparative Meeting, Treasurer's Book, 1791-1815.

⁴ Chester Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 4 mo. 24 1888.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 3)

were appointed to a building committee to determine proper form and to oversee the construction of the building.

3. Owners: In 1700, the committee appointed to locate a site for their proposed meeting house and a burial ground reported doing so.⁵ The property consisted of 5-3/4 acres and came in the form of a donation from Joshua Hastings. The property remains in the possession of the Middletown Friends.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: There is no information as to who actually built the ca. 1702 section of the meeting house. As was then the practice among Friends, a building committee was likely formed to develop a plan and oversee the construction process. Indulged meetings were held prior to the construction of the meeting house at the home of John Bowater, and thus the meeting was referred to by his name. It is likely that he had a hand in seeing to the construction of the early meeting house, but other names were not recorded.⁶

The accounts for the “altering and repairing” of the meeting house that took place between 1793 and 1797 include the names of workmen and others involved in the construction process. Israel Taylor, William Register, Virgil Eachus, and William Yarnall were paid for masonry work; Seth Hoopes and Nathan Sharpless for carpentry work and/or “sawing.” Jesse Passmore was paid for sixteen lights of sash (windows). Some, but not all, were likely members of the meeting; Eli Yarnall was reimbursed for board, likely of workmen. A number of meeting members appear repeatedly in the context of supplying needed building materials and funds, and were therefore likely members of the building committee. These include Thomas Sharpless, Eli Yarnall, John Worrall, John Hill, and Caleb Yarnall. Another indication of involvement in the construction process may be the subscriptions; seven male members of the meeting contributed the same generous subscription, including: John Hill, Jacob Minshall, Eli Yarnall, James Emlen, Joseph Pennell, John Pennell, John Worrall and Abraham Pennell. As “weighty” Friends they would likely have been consulted in determining and/or overseeing building form.

5. Original plans and construction: The meeting house began as a one-story, single-cell structure with a central entryway and a side-gabled roof and a chimney in the south end.

⁵ Matlack, 312.

⁶ A committee was established by the quarterly meeting to help settle on a location for the meeting house, and some of those members may have been involved in planning for the house. Their names are Phillip Roman, Robert Pyle, Nathaniel Newlin, George Robinson, John Hood and John Wood.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 4)

The interior likely consisted of a single meeting room, but may have been partitioned prior to the construction of the addition.

6. Alterations and additions: The meeting house later received an addition of similar size and proportions to the original structure. The numerous changes that have been made to the meeting house, particularly the stucco that has been applied to three sides, make it hard to determine which of these two sections is the original. However, an historic photograph of the meeting house taken prior to the 1888 renovations suggests that the south end is older. Although both sections are three-bays in length with a central doorway, the section to the south is somewhat smaller. The south section has a single doorway while there is a double doorway in the northern section. The flanking windows are also smaller in the southern section, and, more significantly, are placed higher on the wall. Early meeting houses tended to do this in order to avoid outside distractions during meeting. The photograph also shows what looks to be the end of a tie rod under the eaves of the south portion that indicates the need for structural support, and therefore, greater antiquity. The section to the north was likely added between 1793 and 1797, based upon accounts for what appears to have been extensive repairs and alterations. The addition, although somewhat larger, basically constituted a doubling of the original structure to create a two-celled meeting house. Once the addition was made, the south section was used to accommodate the women for worship and business meetings, as suggested by the extant accounting records which indicate payment for "*repairs* in the women's end of the meeting house" (italics mine) rather than new construction.⁷ In addition to being larger, the northern section had a double-door entryway that was covered by a gabled hood. A hood also appeared in the north end, but not over the front doorway of the older section, a further indication of its subservient status as women's meeting section. The new windows were placed in the older section as indicated by the payment for "16 lites of sash" made in 1797.⁸ The first story windows were twelve-over-eight light sash, and those on the second were eight-over-eight. The interior of the meeting house was certainly partitioned with a facing bench along the east (rear) wall, and included a vaulted ceiling that is still evident in the attic.

In 1888, the meeting house underwent drastic alterations that included, most significantly, the infilling of the doorways and windows along the front elevation, and the reorientation of the front entryway to the northern gable end. In the place of the six original front bays, four six-over-six-light sash windows were installed. The mason evidently took advantage of some of the former openings when adding the new, for their placement is not symmetrical (nor had it been). The former side entry at the north end

⁷ Treasurer's Book, 4 mo. 23. 1795.

⁸ Treasurer's Book, 4 mo. 25. 1797.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 5)

was enlarged to give prominence to the new front facade, and replacement windows were installed in the first story (the 1797 windows are still in place behind the shutters in the gable end). A front porch was added. It is supported by chamfered posts with ornamental brackets and it has a shed roof. The area above the porch received an application of fishscale shingles. The area below the porch has been whitewashed. The porch is extended at the east end across the privy addition that protrudes from the building (access is from the interior). Replacement windows were added to the east elevation, and the bays along the south end were all infilled. On the interior, a dropped ceiling was added. The partition, although not original, may be located in its original position. The woodworking of the paneled partition matches that of the doors added during the 1880s renovations. The facing bench has been removed or rebuilt along the south end wall. To the north front of the current meeting house is a lobby area. The western section is open to the entry and serves as a vestibule. The eastern section is closed off by a doorway and is used as a hall leading to the privy addition. A fireplace was later added to the center of the east wall of the northern apartment.

B. Historical Context:

At the Concord Quarterly meeting held on the 6th of November 1699, the Friends of “John Bowaters meeting” informed them of their intentions to build a meeting house. While the “Bowater Friends” were determined to erect a structure in which to meet, they could not agree upon the site. Therefore, they laid the issue before the quarterly meeting whom appointed a committee to travel to Bowater’s home, to hear from them, and to help them make a determination as to an appropriate site.⁹ Friends of Middletown Township had been meeting at Bowater’s home since 1686, but the meeting had actually been established sometime prior to that. The quarterly minutes for 1686 indicate that this was the same meeting that had met prior at the home of Bartholomew Coppock’s, for the benefit of Friends living in “ye westerly woods.”¹⁰ Thus by the close of 1699, it was determined to erect a meeting house “for the service of friends & Truth” adjacent to the “Hastings burying place.”¹¹ Joshua Hastings donated 5-3/4 acres contiguous to the burying ground already established in Middletown. Having served as an “indulged” meeting for many years, the Middletown Meeting was officially recognized and set-

⁹ Concord Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, 9th mo. 6th day & 12th mo. 5th day 1699.

¹⁰ Chester Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, 3rd mo. 3rd day 1686; as cited in: Henry Araham Ashmead, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Lit Everts Company, 1884), 613.

¹¹ Concord Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, 12th mo. 5th day 1699.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 6)

up as a preparative meeting under the care of the Chester Monthly Meeting in 1701. It would remain a preparative meeting until 1931 when it was designated as a monthly meeting.¹²

The first meeting house of the Middletown Friends was likely not erected or ready for use until at least 1702. An accounting of the contributions towards the yearly stock of each preparative meeting within the Chester Quarter lists this meeting as "John Bowater's" until sometime that year when it is officially designated as "Middletown" meeting.¹³ The preparative meeting minutes are no longer extant for this time period, but the quarterly minutes first mention a meeting held at "Middletown meeting house" in September of 1702.¹⁴ According to one source, a log meeting house was erected and used until 1770, when it was replaced by another structure.¹⁵ There is no information to suggest that the first structure was of logs other than to do so would have been in keeping with a general pattern of early meeting house development. Based upon a late nineteenth century photography which indicates that the meeting house was erected in two sections, and the apparent antiquity of the eastern section, it is more likely that the ca. 1702 meeting house was added to rather than replaced. Despite claims that the current meeting house was erected in 1770, no documentation could be found to substantiate that. Contrary to that chronology is the information provided by an extant Treasurer's Book, beginning in 1791.

Over the course of the next five years, the Treasurer's Book lists expenditures, including the collection of funds raised to "defray the expense of altering and repairing our meeting house," which occurs in February of 1793.¹⁶ The listing includes the contributions of forty-eight individuals, likely representing the heads of households, and includes such surnames as Emlen, Hill, Minshall, Pennell, Worrell, and Yarnall. The accounts are also an indication of the communal nature of the Quaker design and construction process. The meeting members all contribute in some way to the process, bringing their skills and/or needed materials and financial contributions according to their ability. Beginning in July of 1794, Thomas Sharpless makes claim for reimbursement for "materials for the work." Other members also contributed to the alterations to the meeting house. John Worrall was paid numerous times between 1791 and 1794 for "sawing," presumably providing lumber for the new construction. Between 1792 and 1797

¹² 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) 190.

¹³ Chester Monthly Meeting, accounts (listed with the minute book), 1702.

¹⁴ Chester Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 7th mo. 28th day, 1702.

¹⁵ Pennsylvania Historical Survey, 190.

¹⁶ Middletown Preparative Meeting, Treasurer's Book, 1791-1815.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 7)

the accounts indicate payment for masonry work to Isreal Taylor, William Register, Virgil Eachus, and William Yarnall. Seth Hoopes was paid for carpentry work. Nathan Sharpless, Caleb Yarnall, and John Hill also provide lumber, and Jesse Passamore is paid for "sixteen lites of sash" or windows.

Among the specific alterations and repairs mentioned is that relating to the construction of a "gallery" and "repairs" in the "women's end of the meeting house" in April of 1795. The implication is that the old meeting house is being renovated for use by the women's meeting. The "gallery" is a reference to a minister's gallery or facing benches being added to the women's meeting section of the meeting house. This is a likely indication of the time in which the Middletown Friends moved from a pattern of meeting established by English Friends to that adopted by the American Friends during the late eighteenth century. The colonial Friends initially adhered to the English pattern whereby the Friends met together in a single room for meeting for worship and then separated for business meetings, with the women removing themselves to another room. This room was smaller, as it needed only to accommodate the adult female population, and did not require the facing benches from which the ministers, elders, and overseers presided over the meeting for worship. The American Friends established their own pattern of meeting which is manifested in the two-cell or "doubled" form that by this time was becoming the standard for meeting house design throughout the country. The doubled form allowed for equal treatment of the men's and women's sections of the meeting house (i.e., equal size and both with facing benches), separated by a retractable partition. The addition to the Middletown Meeting House was likely both an effort to accommodate a growing population and to conform to new patterns of meeting program.¹⁷

The schism that divided the Friends into Hicksite and Orthodox factions in 1827 likewise split the Middletown Meeting. The Orthodox faction, presumably representing in minority, were forced to hold their meetings in the small school house located near the eastern edge of the property. In 1834, Joseph Pennell donated a half-acre lot located between the old meeting house property and the school house lot upon which to build a new meeting house. In the following year, a single-story, six-bay-long doubled meeting house was erected of stone. Both the school house and the Orthodox meeting house are still standing.

In 1888, the (old) Middletown Meeting House once again underwent a major alteration. This time, the existing structure was reconfigured to conform to mainstream ecclesiastic architectural forms, eliminating the dual entries for men and women in favor of a single entry in the gable end. The interior was likewise reoriented and the facing benches were removed from their original location across the long, northern wall, to the eastern end wall. The partition is said to have remained in its original location, which is likely, although its ornamental woodworking seems to

¹⁷For more information on the doubled form see Catherine Lavoie, "Buckingham Friends Meeting, HABS NO. PA-6224," Historic American Buildings Survey, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 8)

indicate a later date during the Victorian era. Moving the facing benches to the end denotes a programmatic change. No longer would men and women sit to either side of a partition for worship and business merely lowering the partition for the latter meetings. While the new relationship of the facing bench to the partition suggests a return to the old English pattern of meeting, it is more likely that change reflected a decrease in population and the use of the meeting house for social gatherings. It is likely that the meeting only required a single apartment in order to accommodate the meeting for worship. And as indicative of Friends meeting patterns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is likely that separate business meetings were eliminated in favor of a “united” meeting. In fact, the Chester Monthly Meeting of which Middletown was a part, agreed to hold their business meetings jointly during the renovation period, presumably indicating a permanent change.¹⁸ This arrangement freed the western apartment for social gatherings. The more chapel-like orientation of the Middletown Meeting House also reflects the tendency of some meetings to adopt mainstream architectural forms. Such practice was prevalent among those Friends outside the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting who were more evangelical in their outlook towards religious beliefs and practices.¹⁹

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The architectural styling of the current meeting house is reflective of the 1888 changes made in a vernacular interpretation of the Queen Anne. When the principal entryways located on the long southern facade were infilled, a single large entry was cut into the western gable end. A porch supported by chamfered posts with over-sized ornamental brackets was built the length of the wall, and fishscale shingles were added in the gable end. The roughly coursed rubble stonework is still visible at the southern facade. All of the other stone facades have been stuccoed, however, presumably to hide seams from the infill of the original openings and/or the replacement of the original windows.

2. Condition of fabric: The meeting house is in fair condition. The plaster in the lowered ceiling is beginning to fall and other minor cosmetic repairs are wanting.

¹⁸ Chester Monthly Meeting, Minutes, 26 July 1888.

¹⁹ For more information on this practice see: Catherine Lavoie, “Germantown Friends Meeting House, HABS NO. PA-6654,” Historic American Buildings Survey, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 9)

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The meeting house is rectangularly shaped, measuring 41'-8" in length and 30'-2-1/4" across, and 25' 6-3/4" from the finished floor to the roof ridge. The front porch runs the length of the north facade and is 7'-4" in depth.

2. Foundations: The foundations are made of stone.

3. Walls: The walls are of roughly coursed rubble stone. There is much infill and/or patching of the stonework, particularly to the west elevation which was formerly the front of the meeting house. The east and south elevations have been stuccoed, hence hiding the seams that indicate the former fenestration.

4. Structural systems, framing: The meeting house is of load-bearing masonry construction. The roof structure consists of a king post system, with pegged rafters and (no roof ridge). Beneath the truss is hung a barrel vault, lath-and-plaster ceiling. The vault is currently supported by an inverted king-post from which a dropped ceiling is hung.

5. Porches, stoops: Part of the 1888 renovations was a shed roof porch that runs the length of the north front elevation. The porch is supported by chamfered posts and is ornamented by over-sized brackets. The ceiling is of match-board, and there is vertical framing in the ends that has been cut in a sawtooth pattern. The roof is covered with wood shingles.

6. Chimneys: Historic images indicate that there was once a chimney in the southern gable end of the meeting house, and later, two smaller stacks along the roof ridge suggest that each apartment was heated by a wood stove. Currently, there is still a chimney in the south end and chimney and fireplace along the east rear wall of the meeting house towards the northern end. The fireplace was added in the 1950s.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Although historic images of the meeting house indicate that it could have been entered from three separate doorways, those two formerly located along the west elevation have been infilled, leaving only one to the north. The centrally located north doorway has been enlarged for use as the principal doorway. The doorway is slightly recessed into the stone walls, and has a plain wood surround. The double doors are narrow and have four panels each.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 10)

b. Windows and shutters: The typical window currently is a six-over-six-light sash with a simple narrow wood surround with a cyma backband, and a wood sill. There are paneled shutters. These windows are replacements dating from the 1880s renovations. One of the late-eighteenth century, eight-over-eight-light sash windows is intact in the north gable end, protected by the closed shutters.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The meeting house has a gable roof covered with wood shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a narrow cornice with a return at the gable ends and a slight overhang.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The bulk of the interior is divided into two apartments by a retractable wood partition. The principal meeting room is to the south where the facing benches are located. Running the length of the wall, there are three doorways in the partition for access from the other meeting room. This apartment is now used primarily as a social room and there is a fireplace to the center of the east wall. The northern end of the meeting house has been partitioned into an entry hall and vestibule, which also provides entry into the privy addition located in the northeast corner.

2. Stairways: There are no stairways. Access to the attic space is through batten doors in the north gable end.

3. Flooring: The floors are of narrow wood planking, probably dating to the 1880s renovations.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls have a narrow, beaded matchboard wainscoting, above which is a rough-cast plaster finish. The ceiling is also of plaster. The meeting house currently has a dropped ceiling; the former barrel-vaulted ceiling is visible from the attic.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The interior doors all match the partition. They are quite ornamental and include eight raised panels (two below the lock rail) with beveled rails and stiles surrounding them. There are three doorways each in the partition and in the wall that separates the vestibule from the northern apartment. The two

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 11)

sets are on axis with each other and include one to the center and one to either end. The doorways of the vestibule wall have a narrow stepped wood surround.

b. Windows: The windows are recessed into the stone walls. They have plain splayed reveals with a rounded molding along the outer edge.

6. Benches: There is a single-tiered stand or set of facing benches along the south wall, with two rows of facing benches. The facing benches run the length of the wall and there is a step to the center and to each end. The other benches are of the traditional, moveable, wood type (see drawings for profile of bench end).

7. Partition: The partition is located to the center of the room, is made of unpainted, paneled wood sections and is quite ornamental. It is divided lengthwise into two large sections separated by a doorway located to the center and at each end. Each section has a fixed lower section covered in beaded wainscoting, a fixed upper section of with a row square, molded panels, and a two larger sections that retract (one up and the other down). The panels are raised and the stiles and rails that surround them are beveled.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: There is a fireplace in the northern apartment.

b. Plumbing: There is no plumbing and the privy remains extant. It is located in a small addition to the far northern end of the east wall.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The meeting house originally faced the Middletown Road which lies to the west, but has been reoriented to face north. The burying ground to the south of the meeting house predates it. Stone walls surround it and abut the meeting house along the south end wall. To the west rear are the former carriage sheds and there is a caretaker's house to the north. Historic images dating from the late nineteenth century depict a fairly barren surrounding landscape, but a number of large trees are now growing around the meeting house, particularly to the east side.

2. Outbuildings: The property includes a walled burying ground, a caretaker's house, and a long row of carriage sheds currently used garage and storage sheds and partially enclosed for that purpose.

MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 12)

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

A. Early Views:

Friends Historical Library, Meeting House Photograph Collection, Middletown Meeting House; perspective view of north and east elevations, undated (ca. 1870s).

Ibid., perspective view of east and south elevations and surrounding landscape, undated (ca. 1880).

Ibid., perspective view of north and east elevations, undated (ca. 1888, newly renovated).

Ibid., view of east elevation with picnic in foreground, entitled "Middletown pr. 1888 (remodeled), 1888.

B. Interviews:

Darlington, Jared & Paul Rodebaugh, interview with Catherine Lavoie & Aaron Wunsch, at the Middletown Preparative Friends Meeting House, June 1999.

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MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 13)

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MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 14)

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MIDDLETOWN PREPARATIVE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6655 (page 15)

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The documentation of the Middletown Friends Meeting House was undertaken during the summer of 1999 as part of a larger program to record the Friends Meeting Houses of the Delaware Valley. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of HABS/HAER; Paul Dolinsky, Chief HABS; funding was made possible through a congressional appropriation for documentation in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The project was planned and administered by HABS historians Aaron V. Wunsch and Catherine C. Lavoie; and architect Robert R. Arzola. Measured Drawings were produced by supervising architect John P. White, and architectural technicians Cleary Larkin, James McGrath, Jr., Elaine Schweitzer, Kelly Willard, and Irina Madalina Ienulescu (US ICOMOS). The project Historians were Aaron V. Wunsch, Virginia Price, and Catherine C. Lavoie; this report was written by Catherine Lavoie. Large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. Special thanks for their help and support goes to Jared Darlington, Clerk; Paul Rodebaugh, and Jeff Kirby, caretaker.