

UPPER PROVIDENCE FRIENDS MEETINGHOUSE
8207 Black Rock Road
Oaks
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6706

HABS
PA-6706

PHOTOGRAPHS

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

UPPER PROVIDENCE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

HABS NO. PA-6706

Location: 8207 Black Rock Road, Oaks, Upper Providence Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Significance: Upper Providence Meeting House, built in 1828, reflects the early single-cell meeting house form, including the use of the rear carriage or mounting door that had long fallen out of use. The resurgence of old building types or building elements suggests that the evolution of meeting house design does not always follow a linear, chronological progression, and that old traditions are not easily forgotten. Upper Providence Meeting House also exhibits unusual, regionally identifying features such as tiered benches positioned in-the-round, stoves for heat, a vaulted ceiling, and a generally high level of integrity with regard to its interior finishes.

Description: Upper Providence Meeting House is a single-story, five-bay-by-three-bay, side-gable roof structure measuring 40-1/2' x 27-1/2', and erected of stone with a stuccoed exterior finish. There is a paired doorway to the center of the east front facade, covered by a gabled portico. The entry is flanked by two windows to each side. The windows are eight-over-twelve-light sash and have paneled shutters. The corresponding rear elevation has a carriage or mounting door to the center, flanked by windows. The south side elevation has a doorway to the center, flanked by windows, while the north side has only two windows. Located in the south gable end is a date stone that reads: "rebuilt 1828." There is an interior brick chimney in the north gable end.

The interior is separated into two identical apartments by a raised-panel partition. The partition has fixed upper and lower panels (curved to allow for vaulted ceiling) with those between being movable. The partition runs east to west, between the paired doorways of the front and rear. Unusual features of the interior of the meeting house include a vaulted ceiling and tiered benches along the front and side walls, offsetting the tiered facing benches located along the back, west wall. The facing benches consist of two tiers with three rows of facing benches, separated by the partition and with the a carriage door to the center. There is a folding clerk's desk to either side of the facing benches. There is wainscoting on all the walls, simple architrave molding surrounding the doors and windows, and random-width, unfinished wood flooring. There is a wood stove to the center of the north side room.

There is a newer, frame privy to the south end of the north rear elevation, and a stone wall enclosed burying ground to the south and west.

UPPER PROVIDENCE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6706 (page 2)

History: (Upper) Providence Preparative Meeting was set up by Gwynedd Monthly Meeting in 1733, after having functioned as an indulged meeting, or meeting for worship only, since 1716. Meetings were held in the home of James Hammer until 1730, when the first meeting house was erected. Built in 1828, the current Upper Providence Meeting House replaced the original log structure built in 1730 to serve an indulged meeting for worship. The current meeting house is of interest for its high level of architectural integrity, particularly with regard to its interior finishes. Like Downingtown Meeting House before it, Upper Providence also reflects the revival of the early single-cell form. The design of Upper Providence Meeting House includes even the long-abandoned rear carriage (or mounting) door. But like the later double-type meeting house, this structure is divided equally at its width. A partition is mounted on the post that separates the double doors of its front and rear entryways, belying the meeting house's single-cell exterior appearance.

The resurgence of old building types or building elements demonstrates that the evolution of meeting house design does not always follow a linear progression--or more to the point--that old traditions are not easily forgotten. The meeting house exhibits noteworthy interior features such as stoves for heat, a barrel-vaulted ceiling, and tiered benches positioned along the east, south, and west walls that offset the elevated facing benches located along the north wall. It is also interesting to note the variations in bench designs particularly with regard to the profile of the bench ends, and it has been suggested that some benches came from the earlier meeting house on site.

The unusually high level of integrity demonstrated by Upper Providence Meeting House can be in part attributed to the fact that the meeting has been laid down for well over a hundred years and that the meeting house is now used by Friends only for special occasions. Without a meeting to make use of the structure on a regular basis, there was no need to update the interior furnishings or to install modern systems, with the exception of a single electrical outlet.

The construction of the current meeting house followed the conveyance of the property to the Hicksite Friends after the schism that divided the Friends of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting into Orthodox and Hicksite groups. The meeting house was later covered with stucco. The meeting was laid down in 1866, with occasional meetings held after that time. Semi-annual meetings are still held at Upper Providence Meeting House by members of the Norristown Meeting who maintain and care for the building.

UPPER PROVIDENCE FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
HABS NO. PA-6706 (page 3)

Sources: Matlack, T. Chalkley. "Brief Historical Sketches concerning Friends' Meetings of the Past and Present with special reference to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," p. 63-65, (the original volumes are located at The Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library; copy available at Friends Historical Library), 1938.

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.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, 2000.