

# QUAKERS AND THEIR MEETING HOUSE AT APPONEGANSETT

BY ANN GIDLEY LOWRY

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APPONEGANSETT MEETING HOUSE

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THE first purchasers of Old Dartmouth and the first settlers there continued to use the Indian names Cushena, Ponagansett and Coakset to designate the three natural divisions of the territory officially named Dartmouth, when incorporated as a town in 1664.

Like other Indian names these three were spelled in many different ways by Colonial scribes who felt no inhibitions in the written use of their own language, and regarded the unwritten Indian tongue as fair field for experiment. With an A prefixed, the three names survive in our local geography, but Cushena alone retains its ancient rank as the name of the town of Acushnet. Acoaxet territory became Westport and the Indian name preserves only a wraithlike existence. Ponagansett was the central portion of Old Dartmouth and corresponded nearly to the area of the present Dartmouth township. The name Apponagansett is applied to the river which empties into Buzzards Bay at South Dartmouth village, appears on maps as the name of the hamlet which Dartmouth people still generally call "Head of the River" or merely "the Head," and is also the name by which this oldest Dartmouth meeting house is widely known. There is something attractive about each of the ancient spellings — Ponaggansett, Poneygansit, and Ponigansit used contemporaneously. In these less venturesome days I note only two variants. On the maps the name is Apponagansett. The accepted use in referring to the meeting house is to use an e instead of an a before the g.

The name of the monthly meeting established here in 1699 by the parent meeting in Rhode Island has always been Dartmouth Monthly Meeting. One regrets that the more frolicsome name was never lured into the sober records of the monthly meetings.

The present Apponegansett Meeting House was built during the second year of George Washington's first term as President.

It stands within a few feet of the site of an earlier meeting house which was erected by Dartmouth Quakers two hundred and forty-one years ago. When that first house was built near a bend of the Paskamansett, there were many more trees everywhere about and perhaps only one dwelling house within *a mile of this spot*. There was a highway as now though narrow and probably rough. It was the road traversed by Allens, Slo-cums and others riding north through Cushena and so to Sandwich or Plymouth or Marshfield, the older settlements to the east, from which many of the Dartmouth men and women came. It was used by the Russells and Howlands, who lived east of the Apponegansett River, as they travelled west toward Portsmouth to attend monthly meetings held at Newport, if they used the ferry at what is now Hix Bridge, a ferry apparently in use as early as 1686.

Today although the clearings about the meeting house are wider, they are still small fields. There are more dwelling houses in the neighborhood, but they still remain out of sight. From the wider, smoother, much more travelled highway the house as of old quietly turns away to face the sun and what remains of the forest. The spot retains such a serene and gentle beauty, the stillness seems so tender, the peace so profound that it is as it ever was, an ideal place for the ideal Friends' meeting. One's next thought is, perforce, the melancholy one that what lacks is the human element, the followers of Fox who were called in early times Children of Light and later Friends of Truth. I do not hold it impossible that such as they may, in large numbers, meet here again. There are many today who still believe that love is the most powerful force man has ever found and the present meeting house is good for another hundred and fifty years.

Despite persecution the number of Quakers in English settlements in America grew rapidly as was the case in the dales and towns in England. There George Fox, the founder, began his preaching journeys in 1647 at the age of twenty-four. "I was glad," he writes in his journal, "that I was commanded to

turn people to that inward light, Spirit and grace, by which all might know their salvation and their way to God — even that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any.”

Seven years after Fox began to preach, sixty Quaker ministers, sometimes referred to as Publishers of Truth, were traveling up and down England. A little later they visited the American colonies. In Barbadoes and Rhode Island they found the greatest liberty, but they found eager listeners wherever English folk had brought to the New World that tremendous interest in religion which characterized 17th century England, accompanied by the Independents’ distaste for the authoritarian position of episcopacy or presbytery. George Fox from the first accompanied his spiritual teaching with practical suggestions for the moral, political and social welfare of his hearers. His crystal clear sincerity swept away not only religious pretense but also the acceptance of some one else’s religious formula in creed or prayer or hymn. Live your religion in every word and act of your life, was his message, and if you desire to help others in spiritual growth declare to them only those things you have experienced yourself, as your spirit has realized the presence and heard the voice of a Divine teacher. We cannot be surprised that such teachings had a powerful appeal to the strongly individualistic English. They had become very well acquainted with the Bible, and they heartily enjoyed religious discussions, but at this time discordant voices were rising from many small new sects, each claiming to have found its scheme of theology in the infallible Scriptures. George Fox directed them to look within their own hearts and find there the indwelling life of Christ that could “speak to their condition” and remake their lives. Fox valued the Bible, knew most of it by heart and constantly quoted from it, but he refused to call it the Word of God or to admit its authority was higher than that of the “inward light, Spirit and grace.”

It was in 1656 that the first Quakers came to Massachusetts. Two women, Ann Austin and Mary Fisher, arrived at Boston

in a vessel from Barbadoes. Lest their dangerous and heretical doctrines might do harm, they were immediately clapped into jail and their books were burned by the hangman. As soon as possible they were deported, but they were cruelly treated for the five weeks they were in prison. The same course was followed with eight other Quakers who arrived, to the great disgust of the Boston authorities, two days after the women had left.

It was evident that a law regarding these troublers of Boston's peace must be passed, and the first ordinance directed against them was passed October 14, 1656. It provided severe penalties for the master of any vessel who knowingly brought a Quaker into the colony and any Quakers who came from any direction were to be imprisoned, severely whipped, kept at work and allowed to converse with no one. Anyone who imported or concealed Quaker books or writings was also to be severely punished.

But Quakers continued to come, so the Boston legislators passed more severe laws and Plymouth took similar action. An enactment of May 19, 1658 forbade Quakers to hold meetings. Any who attended were to be fined ten shillings, any who should speak in the meeting five pounds. There were other penalties for old offenders. These were the laws under which Henry Howland of Marshfield and William and Ralph Allen of Sandwich were heavily fined for allowing meetings in their houses. Many were the whippings administered. At one time Christopher Holder, a very early Quaker messenger from England to America, and Samuel Shattuck, his host, received in Boston thirty lashes from a three corded knotted whip swung by the stout arm of the hangman. Later this same Christopher Holder, John Copeland and John Rous had their right ears amputated by the hangman and were held in jail nine weeks, being beaten twice a week with the knotted cord.

In 1658 and 1661 laws were passed which provided the death penalty for banished Quakers who should return, and under these last laws four Quakers, William Robinson, Marmaduke Stevenson, Mary Dyer and William Leddra were hanged on



Boston Common. Of Mary Dyer, a member of the General Court said, "She did hang as a flag for others to take example by." It was said in scorn but was gloriously true. The harsh measures used by the Puritans served excellently well to produce new converts. The great majority of Massachusetts people did not approve the imprisonments, fines, whippings and banishments. To see men and women stripped to the waist and brutally whipped at the cart tail because they came into the colony to teach the Quaker faith, radical and revolutionary though that teaching might appear to a rigid Calvinist, aroused a wave of warm human sympathy for the sufferers. This human sympathy was fertile soil in which the seeds of the new teaching quickly took root. Cotton Mather might call the Quakers "dangerous villains, devil-driven creatures." Many who listened to them used the name the Quakers themselves first adopted, "Children of Light."

The execution of the Boston Martyrs stirred up much feeling against the Massachusetts officials and the fall of Puritanism in England shook their position. An appeal was made to the King and as a result Charles II ordered the release of all the Quakers then held in Boston jail. Further he decreed that in the future those held liable for the death penalty should be sent to England for trial. This last the Massachusetts Puritans did not wish to do, but there were no more executions. The whipping of Quakers continued for fifteen years longer. After that fines, distrains, disfranchisement and imprisonment were continued many years as punishments for Quakers and others who refused to pay the tax for the support of a minister officially approved, or who refused to perform military service.

Our sympathy goes out to the Quakers, but a certain amount of understanding is due to the Puritan leaders. By the endurance of great hardship in holding to their own religious beliefs they had established a fair new home in the New World in which to live. Here they proposed to arrange their lives, and the lives of all who should come there, according to an orderly religious pattern which they were certain had Divine



approval. According to that pattern they set up their government. If the lines of the pattern seemed to fade, they enacted laws. An early act was to send two Episcopalians back to England. Soon they banished Roger Williams. Then rose Anne Hutchinson and her followers. Next appeared the Anabaptists. Last came the Quakers. All upset the order and blurred the pattern of the Massachusetts theocracy. So the Puritan ministers and magistrates who believed the use of force would preserve their precious pattern, used all the force they had to combat the danger. The weapon they chose bent in their hands, but knowing naught else to use, they kept on wielding it.

The men who built the first Apponegansett Meeting House had listened to Quaker teaching since they were children. Their fathers and mothers may have first heard it in Sandwich, where Christopher Holder had preached in 1657, and where gatherings in the homes of William Allen, William Newland and Ralph Allen had resulted by 1658 in the first established Monthly Meeting in America. Or they may have met with it in Marshfield, where Henry Howland from 1657 had meetings in his house or perhaps in Lynn or in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. The older generation had suffered much for their Quaker beliefs. Some of their sons and daughters had attended the court trials, some had seen the public whippings. Some had seen the sheriff come into their father's home to collect a fine imposed. Some had seen cattle driven off, and wood and household gear taken away, or "distrained", when that father refused to pay a fine, or the "priest's rate", which was the Quaker term for the tax for an orthodox minister's support.

The older folk clung to their old homes but many wanted their children to settle further from the centres of Puritan influence. They were therefore greatly interested in the beginning of the settlement of Dartmouth. As for the young Quakers about to marry and found homes, we can pretty well understand why they would be willing to take their chances with Ponagansett Indians rather than with Boston, Marshfield or Sandwich Puritan officials.

It is difficult to say who were the first Quakers in Ponagansett but certainly Howlands, Allens, Slocums, Smiths and Tuckers were early arrivals. The Slocums came over from Portsmouth where Rhode Island's tolerance afforded protection, but good farming land was becoming scarce. The Howlands and Smiths came from Marshfield and the Allens from Sandwich, both towns of Plymouth Colony. The Tuckers came from Milton where the arm of the law reaching out from Boston came down even more heavily than it did from Plymouth.

Most of Dartmouth's first Quaker settlers chose home sites in the southern part of the new territory. To that section came many who did not call themselves Quakers, but who felt a close sympathy with their Quaker neighbors. Such was John Russell who sold land he owned with the Acushnet group soon after 1660 and then purchased the share of Miles Standish in Ponagansett. He next proceeded, perhaps as early as 1662, to build a house and to plant orchards on the east bank of the Apponagansett River just north of what is now South Dartmouth village. Although he fortified his house as a garrison during the King Philip War 1675-7, he was apparently largely in sympathy with the Quakers and at least two of his sons married Quaker girls.

Henry Howland, a great uncle of these girls, was one of the original purchasers of Dartmouth in 1652 and was one of the first Quakers in all Plymouth Colony. He himself probably never lived in Dartmouth, but his son Zoeth and the latter's wife, Abigail, moved there about the same time as John Russell. Their home was near the Paskamansett River not far from the future site of Apponegansett Meeting House. Zoeth Howland was killed by Indians in 1676 at the ferry near the present Stone Bridge in Tiverton. Zoeth's son Nathaniel became a useful citizen and a well-known Friends' minister. His first home was near the present Dartmouth Town House. Another son, Benjamin, who married Judith Sampson, settled at Round Hill.

Ralph Allen of Sandwich bought Dartmouth lands in 1663. He had joined the Quakers with his six brothers and sisters in 1657. It is probable that he lived in Dartmouth for a few years,

though he returned to Sandwich before his death in 1698. After his first purchase he bought more Dartmouth lands as he had four sons to settle. The sons were Joseph, Increase, Ebenezer and Zachariah. The first three lived near each other, at "Barnes-his-joy." Ralph's daughter, Patience, married Richard Evans of Newport. His grand daughter Rose, daughter of Joseph, married Nathaniel Howland.

Giles Slocum of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, bought land in Dartmouth in 1659. His son Peleg married Mary, the daughter of Christopher Holder, "the Mutilated," and Catharine Marbury Scott, a sister of Anne Hutchinson. Peleg Slocum built his home south of the present Russells Mills on the west side of the Paskamansett. He was the first Dartmouth Quaker mentioned as a "public Friend." This meant that he was a preacher. The name may have been derived somehow from the term "Publishers of Truth".

Beside being "a public Friend," Peleg Slocum was a highly successful farmer and merchant. He and his wife were widely known for their liberal hospitality. Many travelling Friends stopped at their house and meetings were regularly held there. Even after the meeting house was built in 1699 the monthly meetings were held at Peleg Slocum's until 1703.

Giles Slocum's youngest son Eliezer, whose romance with the Lady Elephel Fitzgerald has been colorfully told, came to Dartmouth later than his brother. There he settled on his inheritance from Giles to the south of Peleg's acreage and near to the Allens at Barnes Joy.

John Smith came from Plymouth to Dartmouth very early along with the Russells and Howlands. His first wife, Deborah, was the daughter of Arthur Howland brother of Henry; his second, Ruhamah, the daughter of Richard Kirby. John Smith settled on the eastern side of the Paskamansett in the region known for many years as Smith's Neck. He was appointed Lieutenant of the Military Company of Dartmouth in 1673, so he belongs with John Russell, perhaps, as accepting some but not all the Quaker belief. He had been fined in Plymouth because Quaker

meetings were held in his house. Several of his thirteen children became prominent members of the Dartmouth meeting.

John Lapham from Newport took up land west of John Smith across the Paskamansett River from the Slocums.

The Quaker homesteads thus far mentioned were all at the southerly end of the town. This was a natural outcome of the wish of the settlers to keep in touch with their friends in Portsmouth and Sandwich. Both of these places could easily be reached by water, though to reach Sandwich one had to travel a few miles by land across Cape Cod at the head of Buzzards Bay. I think we tend to forget how much travel was accomplished by the use of small boats in the early days.

Henry Tucker, a Quaker from Milton, settled farther inland when he took up his Dartmouth holdings on the Paskamansett south of the present village of Smith Mills. There he and George Babcock agreed with the Dartmouth authorities in 1664 to build a mill. It was the first official act of the town. In exchange Tucker and Babcock were to receive one share of the Dartmouth territory. The proprietors completed this transfer in 1684. Henry Tucker bought land also of William Allen of Sandwich, brother of Ralph, in 1670. Just when Henry first settled down in Ponagansett as a resident is uncertain. The mill was running at least as early as 1681. Ten years before that Henry was named Highway Surveyor for the town. But what would have happened to him or any other Quakers in 1675 and 1676 when King Philip's war was going on? The records say most of the houses in Dartmouth were burnt.

There are no satisfactory answers. The early accounts of the destruction appear to be very vague. They usually tell of Indian killings in Dartmouth, Middleboro, Taunton and perhaps other places in such a way that no exact account can be gained of what actually happened in each place. We know of only four Dartmouth people who were murdered by the Indians. Jacob Mitchell and his wife and John Pope, the latter's brother, were killed in Fairhaven on their way to John Cooke's garrison house and Zoeth Howland, the Quaker, was killed at the ferry

where the Stone Bridge now is. Of course there may have been others.

Does it seem too difficult to suppose that during that troubled two years some Quakers stayed quietly on their farms in the south portion of Ponagansett on the little necks running out into waters, by which if need arose they could escape, and that others went off to Portsmouth or Sandwich and stayed with relatives and friends for the duration of a war in which they could take no part?

After the war was over the Plymouth authorities ordered the inhabitants of Dartmouth "to live compact together to defend themselves from assault of an enemy and better to attend public worship of God and ministry of the word of God, carelessness to obtain and attend unto in fear, may have been a provocation of God thus to chastise their contempts of his gospel."

The Dartmouth people could not very well live in compact groups on account of the way in which their land was cut up by rivers and inlets of the sea. As to having an orthodox minister as the Plymouth officials desired, that was the thing of all others they were resolved against. As to what acts might have been "a provocation of God," it is possible that those two men of integrity, John Russell and John Smith, both of whom may have heard promises of security made to Indians who surrendered at the Russell Garrison, and who later saw eighty Indians, who had trusted those promises, led off to be sold into slavery because the Plymouth powers would not sanction the promises, those two and others may have pondered very seriously this matter of God's displeasure.

During the next twenty years many more people came to Dartmouth, houses that had been burned were rebuilt, others were erected on newly laid out farms, the trails became wider paths, a ferry was put in operation at Hix Bridge, and a town house was built at a spot later called Perry's Grove.

Among the newcomers were many Quakers and the meetings they held in the homes of the more active or concerned were in-



creasing in size. It seems probable that on ordinary First-days (Sundays) there would be a little gathering at Peleg Slocum's below Russells Mills, one at John Tucker's up near Tucker and Babcock's mill, another at Nathaniel Howland's over toward Clark's Cove, perhaps others elsewhere. Once a month a general meeting would seem desirable, perhaps on the First-day following the Rhode Island monthly meeting held at Newport. After the Dartmouth meeting for worship ended, those who had been able to go to Newport would report on matters considered there. At this time Dartmouth Friends were all considered members of the older meeting. At all events we know that a monthly meeting for worship was held at Peleg Slocum's, probably because he had a larger house than most. But as time went on even his house was not large enough and the project of building a meeting house began to occupy the minds of Dartmouth Friends.

From old records we take the following minutes.

At a monthly meeting held at Newport the 13th day of 12th month 1698.

"Dartmouth Friends having Determined to build a meeting house & Referred to this meeting wheare it shall bee Erected: Dan'l Gould: Walter Clark Ebenezer Jacob Mot are Apoynted to vewe the playse and determin wheare it shall Stand."

Ebenezer's last name disappeared. Was it Allen?

"At a man's meeting in the Town of Dartmouth the 6: day of the 1st month 1699 at the house of John Lapham wee underwritten, Peleg Slocum, Jacob Mott, Abraham Tucker, the day and year above written undertake to build a meeting House for the people of God, in Scorn called Quakers, 35 foot long 30 foot wide and 14 foot studds, To worship and serve the true and Living God in according as they are persuaded in Contience they Ought to Do, and for no other use, Interest or Purpose, but as aforesd, and when one or more of us decease, then Immediately the survivors Choose others in our room, together with the consent of the assembly of the said people, so to be and Remain to us and them forever as aforesaid, which sd House shall be compleatly

finished at or before the 10 day of the 10 month next Insuing the date herof.

In witness here to wee subscribe our names with our own hands. And further we of the said Society of people towards the building of said House of our free will Contribute as followeth:

	£	s
John Tucker	10	
Peleg Slocum	15	
John Lapham	05	
Nathaniel Howland	05	
Abraham Tucker	10	
Increas Allen	3	12
Ebenezer Allen	05	
Eleazer Slocum	03	
Jacob Mott	03	
Benjamin Howland	02	
Richard Evens	01	
Judah Smith	01.	”

Four days later at Newport —

“At A monthly mens Meeting At newport ye 10th Day off ye 1st month 1699. The ffrriends Appoynted to Settell ye Lands ffor building A meetinge house at the Request of Dartmouth friends Doth Returne ffor Answare that it is don to A generall Satisfaction.”

Peleg Slocum, who had made the largest contribution for the building, gave six acres of land “to set a meeting house on” from a forty acre tract he had bought of Hugh Mosher. The latter had purchased the forty acres from Stephen Treasee, one of the original purchasers of Dartmouth.

We are not surprised that the offer of this site and its acceptance were “don to a generall Satisfaction.” A meeting house here was centrally located if we consider the Slocums coming up from Slocum’s Neck, the Allens from Allen’s Neck, the Smiths from Smith’s Neck, Benjamin Howland’s family



from Round Hill, the Tuckers from the northern end of Tucker Road, the Russells and Nathaniel Howland's family from their homes to the east of the Apponagansett river.

From the record of a general yearly men's meeting at the house of Latham Clarke in Newport holding business sessions on the 9th, 10th and 12th of 6th month 1699.\* (\*This was just after the completion of the first Apponegansett meeting house.)

On the 9th: "Dartmouth Friends desire to be a monthly meeting apart from Rhode Island." On the 10th the desire was approved and thereafter Dartmouth and Narragansett Monthly Meetings were to compose Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting. On the 12th: "the friends of Dartmouth hath agreed that their monthly men's and women's meeting of business shall be the next second day after the monthly meeting of worship at the house of Peleg Slocum."

The foregoing minutes have shown the desire for a meeting house, the careful planning for it and its site and the naturally coincident desire of the Dartmouth group "to be a monthly meeting." Among the Quakers the monthly meeting, though subordinate apparently to the quarterly and yearly meetings, was and still is the active executive core and spiritual guardian of the local groups. It is the unit that originates, proceeds to action and gets things done. The superior meetings act more as benevolent advisers or committees to approve suggested action. Rather rarely do they disapprove or block action.

The men who signed the meeting house subscription were in their thirties and forties, vigorous, active, enthusiastic. They had many family ties with each other in addition to the circumstance that there were four sets of brothers in the group of twelve. They loved this smiling land of Ponagansett and the farms and orchards they were developing. But had they been able, as I think they were not, to use the pretty flowery phrases of a John Bereton or a Gilbert Archer in describing their "fair fields", "their stately groves," "their pleasant brooks" and rivers, they would have hesitated to use that ability. They lived their poetry. They chose one of the most beautiful spots in the town

for the place where they would come to worship. They brought up their large families in the belief that religion was a way of living, not a written code to which one subscribed, that Indians were children of God, and the Puritans as well (though neither seemed fully aware of their responsibilities), that the form of civil government mattered little, but that the spirit animating those who administered the government mattered very much, that the Quaker teaching of brotherly love could remake the world.

In view of the success which attended the Dartmouth Friends in living out their beliefs we must needs forgive their writing down so little, but it is indeed odd that we should not know the approximate date when the first meeting house was finished were it not for a passage in the journal of Thomas Story. He was the friend of William Penn and at one time an official in the colony of Pennsylvania, an eminent Quaker minister possessed of great learning and culture. In his journal of June 1699 occurs the following:

"On the 7th I went to Scituate. The day following I rode thirty miles near to Sandwich and hearing that my companion (Roger Gill) was to have a meeting next day at Dartmouth, about thirty-five miles off, after some concern and consideration I resolved to go hither. Accordingly, in the morning, about the break of day, we set forward, and arrived at John Tucker's three miles from the meeting house about half an hour after the ninth hour. Here we rested a little, and then went to meeting and were there before my companion; who when he came, was glad to see me, for the meeting was large, and he had almost lost his voice by a great cold."

There is another later reference to the new house in a letter written by Dartmouth Friends the 11th of 10th month 1699 to two English Friends, William Ellis and Aaron Atkinson, and published in a life of the former. "The Lord opened the hearts of Friends in this place to contribute freely to the building of our meeting house: and it is accomplished, and we had our Yearly Meeting in it. There were many Friends from other

places present and we had a very good meeting for the presence of the Lord was with us to our great comfort and satisfaction; and we have a mens and women's meeting settled amongst us once a month, which is of good service, and we can truly say that Truth doth grow and prosper amongst us and that we have reaped the fruits of your labours, and we pray the Lord to keep us still in love truly to himself and one to another to the end of our days."

The letter is signed by fourteen men and women.

"The fruit of your labours" refers we suppose to the visit to New England in the latter part of 1698 of the two men. One, perhaps both, visited at John Tucker's and attended Dartmouth meetings. The letter would indicate that they had gathered converts and encouraged a meeting place large enough to hold them.

When we try to visualize the early building our fancy has little to feed on save the proportions decided upon at the meeting at John Lapham's house and our knowledge of what the early Dartmouth dwelling houses looked like. But there would be no chimney we think, and as there would be no need for a loft for use as sleeping quarters, perhaps the roof had less than the usual slant. Our reason for leaving out a chimney is the often quoted minute of 1710 wherein, "Wm. Soule is Appoynted to procure a Pot to make a fire in and Coals to burn in it." The Pot would be an enormous cauldron raised off the floor on large stones.

Very soon the building was found to be too small for the use of the rapidly growing group of Friends in Dartmouth, and it was enlarged in 1702, again in 1727 and a third time in 1743. Perhaps it was in 1743 that the second gallery was built which my great grandfather favored as his place to sit "so that I could look down on people's heads." This was a narrow gallery having room for only two rows of benches and it was built above "the high seats." He was a boy of twelve or thirteen when the house was taken down in 1790. A proposal in 1765 for a fourth enlargement was not carried out.

There is no record showing how many members the vigorous meeting had during this period. Indeed for fifty years after the founding of the Society there was no regular membership. Those who attended the meetings and were thought to have "received the Truth" and to hold the views of the Society were considered members. Dr. Edward Tucker estimated the probable number in this meeting before 1750 as 1500. By 1777 the number had decreased to a probable 1100. The largest meetings were held in June directly after the annual meeting in Newport for all New England Friends. At this time a good many ministers from other colonies or from England might come to nearby Dartmouth before going north to Scituate, Lynn and Salem, or south toward Long Island and New Jersey. John Griffith, here in 1766, estimated the number at Apponegansett at one meeting as 2000. Did they all sit down outdoors under the trees, or did they take the windows out of the frames and put additional seats outside so that all could hear? At the Starbuck house on Nantucket, where Peleg Slocum took John Richardson there in his sloop for a meeting in 1701, this later procedure was used "to satisfaction."

If it seems surprising that people assembled here by the hundreds we must keep in mind the number of separate congregations that would be represented. Small meetings sprang up here and there all over the Old Dartmouth area, each group meeting at first in a private house and later on building a meeting house. Such meetings developed at Acoaxet, Rochester, Acushnet, Newtown (above Smith Mills), Allen's Neck, at the head of the Noquechuck River in Westport, Smith's Neck and New Bedford.

In 1788 Dartmouth and Acoaxet were transferred from the Rhode Island to the Sandwich Quarter. Acushnet and Rochester had been transferred thither in 1762.

Not only did the farmers and merchants of this meeting contribute money to build meeting houses in their own town. They subscribed generously toward building meeting houses elsewhere, as extracts from the minutes show.

1705	10£			"to assist Friends at Salem to build a Meeting House"
1707	10£			"money collected for boston meeting house"
1709	10£			subscribed "towards the building of friends meeting in boston"
1738	7£			contributed towards building Leicester Meeting House
1744	26£			contributed towards Taunton and West-erly Meeting Houses
1753	10£	3s		collected for Kingston Meeting House
1754	22£	3s		collected for Kingston Meeting House
1754	17£	8s		for repairs on Warwick Meeting House
1758	36£	11s	6d	towards Providence Meeting House and land
1759	22£	17s	7d	towards Providence Meeting House and land
1760	163£	11s		towards Providence Meeting House and land
1760	10£	1s	8d	towards Boston Meeting House
1761	45£			towards Providence Meeting House and land

Here are other extracts from the Monthly Meeting minutes.  
 1707 15th of 7th mo. "And the matter concerning chusing of two friends for to spake to people to come orderly into meeting as soon as conveniently they can after they come to the meeting house, and not to stand talking and spending away their time without doors as the maner of some hath ben to their own hurt and to the truble of friends is refered to the next monthly meeting."

1708 5th mo. "and this meeting orders Benjamin Howland to pay out of our stock to Thomas Hadaway eight shillings for the hire of horses for freinds. And six shillings to Daniel Wood for going to Nantucket with freinds."

"and the freinds that was chosen the last monthly meeting for to speak with Peleg Slocumb for to know whether he would give another deed of the meeting house land after another

method, and they report that sd. Slocumb is not willing. Whereupon the meeting made choyce of Benjamin Howland, Eliezer Slocumb, William Wood, Judah Smith, and Samell Mott for trustees to have a deed made to them from the former trustees In the method that Thomas Story sent to us for the better securing sd. land."

It is evident that the eloquent preacher, Thomas Story, had given helpful legal advice in a letter written perhaps after his second visit to Dartmouth when he had visited the philanthropic but cautious Peleg and sailed with him across the bay. Story's journal notes, "On the thirteenth day of the fifth month about the tenth hour of the morning I set sail for the island of Nantucket in a shallop belonging to our Friend Peleg Slocum, which under divine Providence, he himself chiefly conducted, and landed there the next morning about six."

As in the case of Thomas Story, visitors were often counselors as well as preachers. They were also important distributors of news. There is no doubt that the steady passage back and forth along the Atlantic seaboard and to and from England of these altruistic spirits brought into scattered Quaker groups a constant invigoration. Those visited were kept well informed of events outside their own locality or colony. While their horizon was widened, their common interests were strengthened. By the example of others they were encouraged to stand firmly for their beliefs and the visitors departing, carried fresh messages of cheer to the next community. It must be admitted, however, that from the earliest days of Quakerism some travelled about under concerns which lacked the Divine authority. It was difficult to persuade them of this, as they could and usually did claim that they followed where the Light within led. About the only possible answer to this was, "I think thou art mistaken." It was an answer frequently made and heeded more often than one might suppose.

But to return to the old minutes. Here is one of 7th mo. 1708 — "and John Tucker is appoynted to goe to boston to carry a petition on the behalf of freinds to the govenor and



counsel to desire them to omit the makeing and gathering that part of said rate which is sposed for a preist: the which part freinds can not be active in either making or paying the same, it being contrary to that principle of truth which we make profession of."

One of the Friends in whose behalf the petition was made was Deliverance Smith, a brother of Judah, one of the original subscribers for the meeting house. He had been chosen a Selectman and Assessor, but refused to assess the sum of sixty pounds added to the Queen's tax for the support of a hireling minister. For this refusal he was arrested and imprisoned in Bristol jail.

The Dartmouth Meeting thereupon appointed his brother Judah and Benjamin Howland to hire a farm hand to care for the prisoner's farm, the meeting assuming the expense thereof, "friends having unity with him in his sufferings." They also sent John Tucker up to Boston to see the Governor, but it would appear that Deliverance had spent quite a while in jail before this second move was made.

Two months later the following is recorded. 1708—9th mo. "and John Tucker hath ben at boston with a petition to the governor and counsel as appoynted: but he could not get an answer as yet, whether they will omit the sixty pounds that is sposed for the minister's rate or not — and John Tucker signifies to this meeting that he is not willing to receive aney money for his service in going to boston to the goveneor and counsel on behalf of freinds and others."

John was continued a committee of one and 1709 1st mo. "gives this meeting an account that he hath ben at boston as ordered and the Jeneral Court hath granted an order to the sherif of Bristol to relleise the prisoners they paying him the fees: wich they could not do: therefore they are still continued prisoners." The fees were collected and sent to Bristol and the prisoners "relleised," but within four months Deliverance Smith fought another round with the state. He with John Tucker, William Wood, William Soule and John Lapham Jr. were impressed while at the Dartmouth Town House by John Akin of



the train band to go to Canada in the Queen's service. How the five stated their case that they could not in conscience "act in any warlike posture or use carnal weapons to destroy men's lives" first to Captain Akin at the Town House, then to Col. Byfield at Bristol and lastly to Governor Dudley at Roxbury, and how the latter gave them their liberty to go home "without demanding money of us, or we paying him any" is all set forth in a letter written by them to the Monthly Meeting and read in the old meeting house two hundred and thirty one years ago.

In some similar cases of refusal to perform military duty, Dartmouth Friends were imprisoned and their property seized and sold to pay their fines.

Here is a minute of 1711 which concerns Dartmouth's first school master. Daniel Shepherd of Shepherd Plains, not far from here toward the Tucker Road, taught a school in John Russell's home near the present Town House. Is there perhaps a hint of asperity in the minute such as a man of known tolerance and superior attainments seems often to evoke?

1711—8th mo. 4. "John Tucker and Deliverance Smith are appointed to speak to Daniel Shepherd, and to give him to understand ye order of friends and what he must expect if he comes in unity with us, and he be a member of this meeting."

Persons who attended meetings and seemed to have received the Truth were invited to attend the meetings for discipline, which meant meetings in which all affairs of the meeting, religious concerns and secular business were considered. Minutes of such meeting were carefully kept. Those invited to attend were regarded as members and their children also when they were old enough and if they were thought suitable. After 1755 the definition of membership became more particular.

Here is a minute that arouses our sympathies.

1713—5th mo. "And this meeting advises that freinds restrain their children and searvants from going into companies on first Dayes before or after Meeting but go home in good order."

And the next calls for admiration. Dartmouth and Nantucket Meetings were the first in New England to question the Quaker toleration of slavery, though George Fox when he visited Barbadoes thirty years earlier had recognized the evil of it and advised Friends holding slaves to free them after a term of years.

1716—1st mo. "And it being proposed by some freinds to this meeting whither it be agreeable to truth to purchase Slaves and keep them term of Life wch is refeered to ye consideration of the Quarterly Meeting."

Fifty years would pass, however, before the Meeting would go into effective action against members who held slaves.

1721—6th mo. "John Tucker and Thos. Taber Junr. are appointed to draw up something relating to wiggs, and bring to the next monthly meeting."

1723—8th mo. "Henry Tucker and James Barker are appointed to look for a freind School master that is capable to read, write, and cypher, and to know upon what terms, and to make return to our next monthly meeting of their proceedings."

1724—9th mo. "and a subscription of 20 pounds is agreed upon at this meeting for John Handson a freind living in Dover to the eastward of Boston who has of late had his wife and several children carried away by the Indians, and also his bedding and other cloathing and John Tucker is appointed to receave the money and send it by the first oppertunity."

The constant struggle of Dartmouth Friends against paying a tax for the support of an orthodox minister ended in 1724. The Baptists in the town were equally opposed to the "priests' rate" and joined forces with the Friends.

In 1723 the experiment was tried of the town's choosing a minister from among Friends who would, of course, refuse to be paid. They chose Nathaniel Howland. This was not satisfactory in any wise to the General Court or Assembly which had taxed Dartmouth one hundred pounds for the support of a minister, the choice to be approved by the General Court. Dartmouth refused to raise the tax, but realizing their selectmen would be imprisoned for failure to collect tax, the

town voted to raise seven hundred pounds to pay the expenses of caring for the affairs of the selectmen and of sending an appeal to the King.

The selectmen were imprisoned in Bristol jail as had been foreseen. They remained there for a year and a half and were joined by two selectmen from Tiverton, imprisoned for the same reason. Those who thus suffered for conscience sake were Philip Taber and John Akin of Dartmouth, Joseph Anthony and John Sisson of Tiverton. Some were Quakers and some were Baptists, but all were determined that free Englishmen should have religious liberty.

The appeal to the King was successful. After consideration of it at the Court of Saint James by his Majesty Charles II and the Lords of the Privy Council, it was ordered that the taxes for the ministers' salary should be remitted to Dartmouth and Tiverton, and the selectmen who had refused to assess them should immediately be released. This was done and one more important struggle for "perfect liberty in all matters of religious concernment" had been won.

1725—3rd mo. "The accounts of some sufferings of Peleg Slocum and John Tucker having their creatures taken away from their Islands called Elizabeth Islands Distrained by John Mayhu constable of Chilmark was presented to this meeting. Taken from Peleg Slocum eighty sheep for the Preist's rate and towards the building of a Presbyterian meeting house ye said sheep was sold for 34£ Demand was 26£ 12s 11p. And taken from John Tucker on ye like occasion one horse sold for 10£ and one heffer sold for 2£ ten shillings; demand was 7£ 15s 19p all taken in ye year 1724; the above sd. sufferings was perused and ordered to be sent to the Yearly Meeting at Rhoad Island."

1757—3rd mo. "The Committee appointed to collect the sum that freinds have suffered on account of wars and fighting distrained and imprisonment, and fines is 198£ 18s which is allowed and assumed by the meeting."

1757—5th mo. "380£ 0s 4p for ditto."

1760—4th mo. "Subscribed \$79 (dollars) for the suffering people in Boston by fire."

"Joseph Tucker and Job Russell have returned from Boston Genl. Court and have got Friends released from Taunton Jail, where some of them have been for many months, and they have a receipt from the Select men of Boston for the \$79."

I suppose if there had been no fire in Boston, no distress of others that Friends could in conscience relieve by a subscription of \$79, those who would not pay a fine for failing to perform military service would have remained more months in Taunton jail.

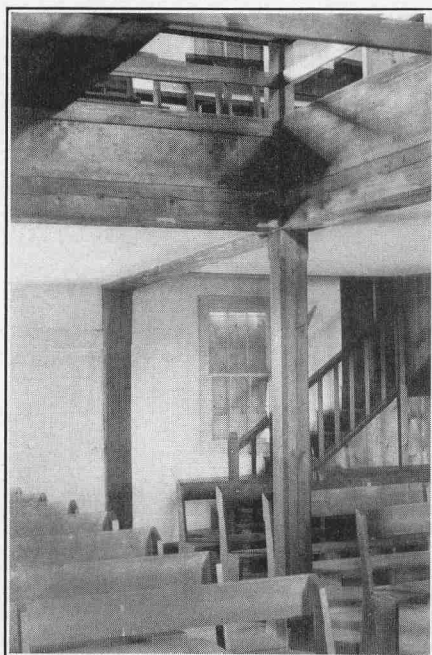
In 1772 a committee was appointed to visit those members still holding slaves. Since the minute of 1716 which queried as to whether it were "agreeable to Truth" to hold slaves for a life term, John Woolman, the great apostle for freedom of the slave, had twice visited Dartmouth, in 1747 and 1760. After the second visit some Friends no longer felt easy to keep their slaves and so freed them. However a committee appointed in 1772 to visit those still slave owners makes this detailed report.

"Joseph Russell had 2 negroes in bondage and refused to set them at liberty. Isaac Howland Jr. had one and refused to free him. Rebecca Slocum, widow, 3 negroes in bondage of full age and one or two under age and refused to liberate them, but had ordered them to be freed in her will. John Russell complied with advice of Friends so far as to set one or two negroes free and directed in his will that the other should be freed also, the latter being under age. Wm. Sanford had one slave, a female, and promptly set her at liberty. Peleg Slocum freed one and agreed to liberate the remaining ones when 26 yrs. old, they being under age."

By 1772 no slaves were known to be held by New England Friends.

In April 1790 it was decided to take down the meeting house that had been in use for ninety years and build another on nearly the same site. The present house was in use by the following September.

It is not difficult to find in southern New England buildings as old as the present Apponegansett Meeting House, which in this year of 1940, has reached the age of one hundred and fifty years. Very few such structures, however have so nearly retained the original exterior and interior form. Some have been carefully "restored" by a historical society or an owner with a love for old times and ways, but in this case one change would enable us to see the building just about as it originally looked. In 1876, the date cut on the west door stone, the old window sashes were taken out and the present sashes set in.



Southwest Corner with Stairway to Gallery

I suppose that the original sashes held twelve instead of six panes, giving twenty-four panes to each window. In 1790 this was a usual arrangement in the large houses built in this locality. At this time, also, the entire building was resingled. The roof has had, of course to be resingled from time to time, and as the years have passed careful hands have replaced what rain and snow and wind and sun have weakened.

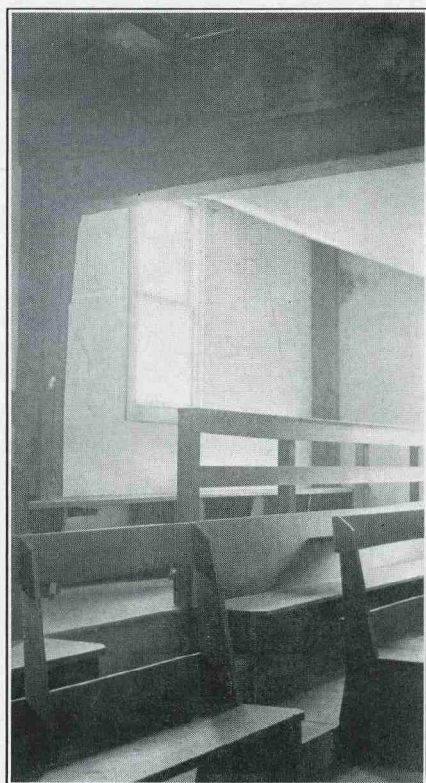
The building faced the south as, without doubt, the first building had. Even so the two doors opening directly into the meeting room must have let in plenty of cold as they were opened again and again when the Friends assembled in winter weather.

The carriage sheds, which were nearer the road than the meeting house, also opened to the south. There were, I think, two sheds at one time, one on either side of the entrance gate. When the sheds were filled, horses were fastened by rope halters to convenient trees.



Those who came to meeting in 1699 came on horseback or afoot. By 1790 there were many, I suppose, who would arrive in a chaise.

John would drive the chaise up the gentle slope from the road and around to the front, stopping before the west or women's door. There Mary and the children would alight on the old stone horse block and go quietly inside, the older lads using the east or men's door. By the time John had driven down to the sheds, fastened his horse and walked back to the east door his family were already a part of the silent worshipping group and hardly stirred an eyelash at his entrance.



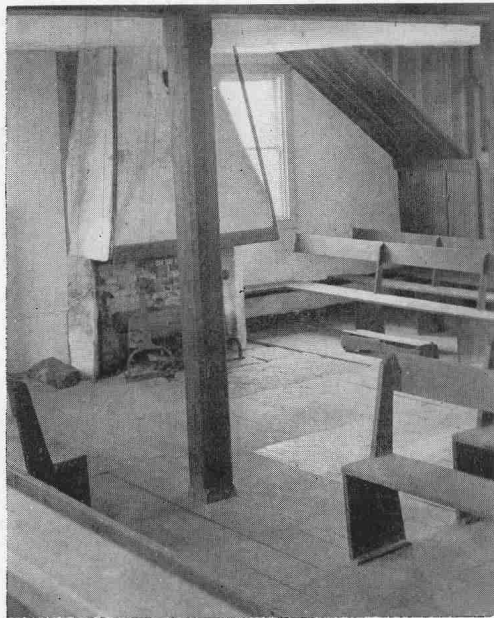
The high seats

Today I see the house within just about as my great-grandfather saw it save for the beautiful warm brown color which the years have given the native pine. Here are the same upright posts of oak, with beautifully chamfered edges that support the gallery. Here are three rows of pine benches on three different levels at the far side of the room, arranged so that the ministers and elders seated thereon would face the assembly.

These three benches were called "the high seats". The benches in the body of the house and the gallery were all of the simplest pattern that benches with a single board at the back could follow. So nicely planned were they, however, as to width of seat and slant of the uprights to which the back board was nailed, that they are more comfortable than you expect. No cushions were used in

the early days. Despite the inviting pine boards, little cutting of initials or dates appears to have been done. On the seat of the last bench on the men's side there is, however, a carving of a whale, beautifully executed. What more natural subject to swim through the mind of a Dartmouth boy during the long meeting hours?

At either end of the room are huge hooded fire places, unlike any other old fireplaces I have seen in New England. The lower edges of the hoods are rectangular, and are supported at the two



Fire Place at the East End of the Room

outer corners by heavy iron bands which pierce the ceiling and evidently fasten to floor beams of the gallery. The hoods narrow as they rise until at the ceiling they have the appearance of medium sized chimneys. Continuing thus, they finally emerge one at either end of the long ridge piece of the roof. The sides of the fireplace were somewhat cut back so that the logs on the massive wrought iron andirons almost seemed to be burn-

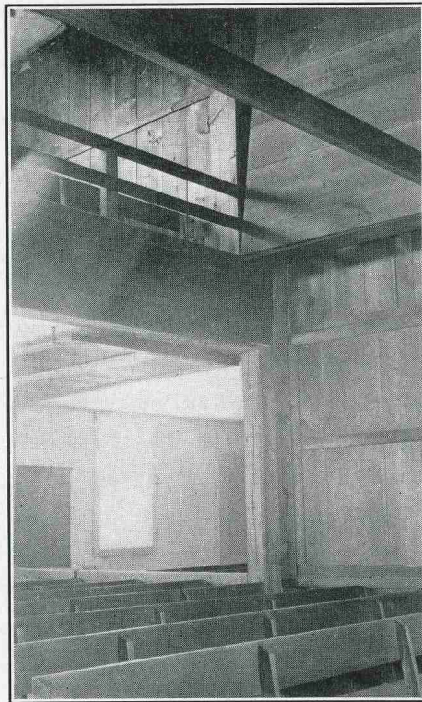
ing out in the room and many could stand about to warm themselves before the meeting began. One of the hearths is of squared field stones carefully laid.

These may have supported "the iron pot" that William Soule was appointed to buy in 1710 for the charcoal fires in the first meeting house. The other hearth is laid with brick, the same brick of which the chimneys were built.

In cold weather when the gallery benches were not needed the second story could be completely shut off by a curious ar-



rangement. On either side of the central partition which divided the gallery from front to rear, a huge trap door eight planks wide with iron hinges on the side next the partition was shut down. It could not have been made wider if it were to lean up against the wall, and it was very heavy as it was. But "as it was" it was not wide enough completely to cover the opening. Therefore a second loose part of the door was made with a nice groove along one edge that over lapped the large trap door. Two men could quickly lay down or open these doors.



Showing the hinged partition, the sliding partition and the trap door

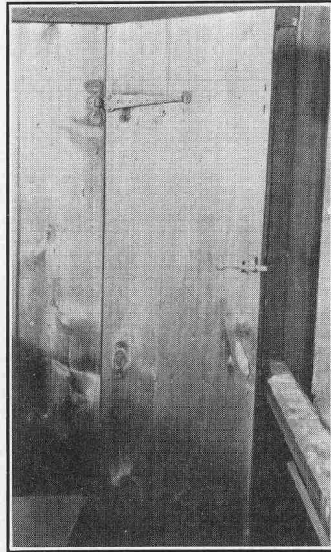
The meeting room could be divided by vertical partitions also. This was done at the monthly meetings for business, which in the earlier days men and women Friends conducted separately. This division was also accomplished in a curious fashion.

For three quarters of the distance from the front to the rear of the room partitions of smooth thin pine, braced with pine crosspieces were lowered by small ropes until they met the low center partition which, on the main floor, divided the men's from the women's side. There were three of these partitions which ordinarily were kept hoisted beside the

permanent gallery partition. But the fourth section of the partition, at the south side of the room, could not be thus hoisted without blocking the door between east and west galleries. This section was therefore hinged and held up to the ceiling by iron hooks catching its edges. When the hooks were released the section swung down into place. In one of the three sliding partitions

there was also the upper part of a door so that if it were necessary to send a messenger to the men's or women's meetings this door might be used. The lower half of the door remained with the low permanent partition. The messenger's door was near the "high seats". On the middle high seat the clerk of the meeting sat beside a desk made of a removable wooden shelf resting on two cleats.

There was quite a pleasant stir at the conclusion of the meeting for worship which preceded the monthly meeting. That



The door between the two galleries

conclusion was marked as at other meetings, by the ceremony of "shaking hands". The man who sat at the head of the meeting — that is on the highest bench at the ends nearest the women's side — shook hands with the man next to him. Then everybody shook hands with whomever sat beside him. Very occasionally the head of the meeting shook hands with the woman who sat at the head on the women's side but I think that was in later times and considered an innovation.

Meantime men were lowering the partitions by their ropes, and releasing the swinging partition.

There was a medley of little sounds which the children greatly enjoyed — a creak of ropes, a clink of metal, a rattle of boards, — delightful sounds. Then all at once the division was complete and the clerks were putting up the little desks and arranging their papers. But they never proceeded at once to the business of the meeting. There was always a little pause as if to remind the children whose ears had been delighted with those creaks and rattles — pleasant messages from a real world — that even the business affairs of a religious society must be conducted solemnly and there must never be any appearance of haste.

My grandfather, Jesse Tucker, wrote of his boyhood experiences thus:

"And here in childhood oft I came  
And sat the meeting through.  
My childish fancy took free range  
On all within my view.

"Each crack and crevice, knot and stain,  
Was pondered o'er and o'er.  
The post where worms had eaten through  
And the sunlight on the floor.

"I even now remember well  
The sound the door-latch made,  
A harsh, metallic, quivering sound,  
As in the catch it played.

"Here ranged before my vision sat  
The elders, not a few.  
They all, I thought, were goodly men,  
And reverence was their due.

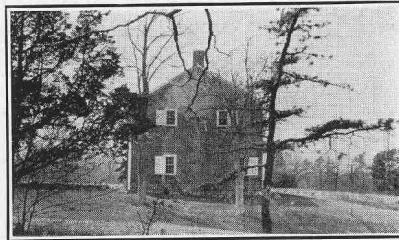
"And one among the number,  
Black-eyed and straight and tall,  
My childish fancy thought him like  
The great apostle Paul.

"The women Friends in those past days  
Were clothed so trim and neat,  
Their cloaks of drab and bonnets plain  
Bespoke the Friend complete.

"And here and there a maiden fair  
Had on a white silk bonnet,  
More fitting for her youthful face  
Than hat with roses on it.

The lovely proportions of the old room, the hooded fireplaces, the white of plastered walls and the warm brown of much pine wood, the smoothly worn wide floor boards, the quaint

stairways to the gallery produce an effect of completeness, such as only masterpieces produce. This is, in reality, the masterpiece created by Dartmouth Quakers, who in general put their fine arts into living harmonious lives, but here wrought a house for the worship of God which perfectly expresses their clear vision of the beauty of simplicity.



### Clerks of Dartmouth Monthly Meeting

John Tucker	1699
Isaac Smith	1751
Job Russell	1762
William Anthony, Jr.	1774
Caleb Greene	1785
Joseph Estes	1793
William Anthony, Jr.	1795
Joseph Estes	1796
James Tucker	1801
Isaac R. Gifford	1833
George Almy	1848
Isaac R. Potter	1864
Charles Fisher	1873
Edward G. Wood	1893
Philip A. Cornell	1896
Sarah F. Potter	1903*
Ellen L. Goddard	1906
Harry R. Sherman	1908
Mary I. Gifford	1939

\*During 1892 the men's and womens' business meetings merged  
but from 1699 the womens' meetings had women clerks.