



“OVER THE CREEK” The Story of the Creek Meeting House

With the Creek Meeting House prominently featured on the front cover of the Society's new book *Building Clinton: An Architectural Survey 1760–1965*, it seemed only fitting to include a story about our historic building in this issue of the newsletter. Our feature begins with a piece originally written by William Birdsall a century ago. We've also included a thumbnail summary of the three Quaker meeting houses in town, and we conclude with additional details about the Creek Meeting House gathered by Neil Larson and Jill Fisher for the architectural survey published this year in *Building Clinton*.

PART I: “To Pitch Upon a Place” by William Birdsall, 1914

“Different families settling in this region in 1771 numbered five men and three women, heads of families.” A minute reads, “Friends over the Creek desired a Meeting which was granted at the home of Jonathan Hoag.” In 1776, the Meeting was moved to a little log house belonging to Paul and Phebe Upton. The Meeting increased rapidly in numbers and was removed to Elijah Hoag's, being held in his barn in summer and in his dwelling house during the winter. The name Creek was given to this meeting because people from the parent meeting, Nine Partners, had to ford the creek to come here, calling the meeting “Over the Creek.”

A committee had been appointed in 1775 to “pitch upon a place” for a Meeting House and the stone building, standing today, was started in 1777 and finished in 1782. It is a substantial structure of native fieldstone, put together with clay. The hand-hewn oaken beams are imbedded in its walls. This building was constructed by members of the Meeting. *[Editor's note: By 1797 the Creek Meeting's congregation had grown to the point that another new meeting house, the Crum Elbow, was built on the western edge of the Town of Clinton. The Crum Elbow Meeting and Cemetery are on Quaker Lane in Hyde Park, which until about 1810 was part of the Town of Clinton.]*

According to records, the Stone Meeting House and cemetery were built on land given by Abel Peters. About 1792 Mr. Peters built the brick mansion just to the north of it. His residence [located at 2461 Salt Point Turnpike] is still standing.

[The] Creek Meeting acted as an “underground railroad” station for helping runaway slaves. A friend tells me she well remembered how Elihu Griffin (Ben Germond Place) [90 Germond Road] and others sheltered the slaves and helped Alfred Underhill (Webster Place) [689 Schultsville Road] fill out his family carriage to start at dusk of evening for John Gould's in Hudson to send them on to Canada. Anna Upton would dress any wounds and make them comfortable.

PART II: Quaker Meeting Houses in the Town of Clinton

Creek Meeting was established sixth month, twenty-first, 1776 as a part of Nine Partners Monthly Meeting. In 1782 it was made a monthly Meeting. In 1828 there



THE SHINGLE MEETING HOUSE

was a division, part of the membership built a new Meeting House on the site of the present Upton Lake Cemetery. This was known as The Shingle Meeting House. *[Editor's note: The “division” refers to the schism between the Hicksite and Orthodox Quakers in 1827. The Hicksites retained the sect's original simplicity and strict belief in the primacy of the “inner light,” while the Orthodox wished to adopt lifestyle practices that were more liberal and theologically more in keeping with mainline Protestant churches.]* In 1890 another Meeting House was built in the village across from the Creek Meeting House and the Shingle Meeting House was torn down. In 1916 the Friends Church (*photo below*) felt the need for space to include community activities, so the Meeting House was moved back and the present church was built in front of it. The former building was made into a gymnasium and Church Hall.

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THE PRESENT BUILDING (Built 1890)

PART III: A National Landmark

Seeking greener pastures in the early 18th century, members of the Society of Friends migrated to this area, not only from Long Island but from overcrowded communities in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. Those settlers attended meeting at the Nine Partners Meeting House in the neighboring Town of Washington, but by 1750 enough Friends were living “over the creek” in Clinton that they commenced having their weekly meetings in homes there. In 1777 the Creek Friends began building the existing stone meeting house in Clinton Corners on land donated by Abel Peters, one of the largest landowners in town whose holdings included a farm, sawmill, and general store.

Quaker meeting houses were geographical and architectural landmarks. They were focal points in the network of Quaker communities and the organizational hierarchy of meetings, ranging from weekly preparative meetings to monthly, quarterly, and annual business meetings. The Creek Meeting House was a monthly meeting and was large in size to accommodate Friends coming from other meetings. Constructed with walls of stone, the building is an anomaly among the small wood frame meeting houses with which it was associated. Yet, like them, it more resembled a house than a church

in design. Its function was evident in its fenestration and the dual entrances on the front façade. Inside was a large, open meeting space finished with finely crafted wood components and simple benches facing a raised dais in the front where the elders sat. A second-story gallery provided the additional space monthly meetings required. The gallery was closed off by a ceiling when not in use, and a moveable partition would divide the lower space for gender-separated business meetings. The interior of the Creek Meeting House has been altered over the years, but many of its original features are still discernable.

Domestic architecture suited the Quakers’ worldview and mode of worship. They were by and large rural families of modest means who rejected the ceremony and sumptuousness of the state church, as well as the vanity of upper-class materialism. Any building that provided seclusion and enough space for a meeting was a suitable place. The Quakers who settled in Clinton held their meetings in private homes until the Creek Meeting House was completed in 1782. By the end of the 18th century, the Quaker meeting house had been transformed into an overt symbol of modesty, restraint, and separation, and Friends’ domestic architecture was made emphatically plain to extend that statement to personal life.

PART IV: Postscript

The Creek Meeting sold the building to the Upton Lake Grange in 1927 and joined the Bulls Head Meeting in 1936. The Grange, in turn, owned the building for nearly 70 years before transferring it to the Society in 1995. Today the Creek Meeting House is home to the Clinton Historical Society, which has undertaken numerous repairs and renovations—including replacing six columns on the second floor (with timbers sawn and hand-planed from a large tree felled on site), dry rot-damaged timbers under the roof, and the old slate-covered gable roof with a copper roof in early 2003. In recognition of its significant history, the meeting house and the surrounding cemetery were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989.

The Creek Meeting House is home to the Society’s archives and hosts activities that include monthly program meetings (September through June), an annual summer exhibit, and periodic fundraisers such as dinners and tag sales. The Society’s next “big” project is to create a digital catalog of our archival and museum collections. This multi-year project will take the venerable meeting house into the 21st century (establishing an internet connection and web presence) as it helps all of us to better understand this place we call home—the Town of Clinton.

SOURCES: *Part I* originally appeared with the title “History of Creek or Clinton Corners Meeting of the Society of Friends” in the 1959 pamphlet *Town of Clinton: An Historical Review 1959* compiled by the Upton Lake Grange. *Part II* originally appeared as the opening segment of an article entitled “Churches” in *Town of Clinton: An Historical Review 1959*. *Part III* is adapted from *Building Clinton An Architectural Survey 1760-1965* prepared by Larson Fisher Associates and co-published by the Clinton Historical Society and the Town of Clinton in 2015.