



Doylestown Friends Meeting

From Indulged Meeting to Monthly Meeting, 1809-1950

Because of the difficulty of traveling to Buckingham over roads that were rough year-round, in 1806 Friends in Doylestown started gathering on First Days [Sundays] at the Union Academy in a rented room at the rate of \$12.00 per annum. The building, razed and replaced long ago, was at the corner of Court & Broad Streets. Subsequently, meetings were held in the Academy Building (today the Masonic Temple), on East State Street.

In 1834 Doylestown was accepted as an “indulged” meeting (similar to a mission church), under the care of Buckingham Friends Meeting.

“[S]everal friends residing in and near Doylestown made application to Buckingham monthly meeting for liberty to hold an indulged meeting on first days in the Village under the care of the monthly meeting. The meeting appointed a committee to confer with the applicants who after one or more considerations reported favorably. The meeting appointed another committee to have the care and oversight of the indulged meeting for one year, which has been continued from time to time.

A room in the Academy was rented by the applicants where they hold their meetings regularly. During the summer of 1835 the subject of building a meeting house for themselves was mentioned and after consultation was presented to the monthly meeting who encouraged the proposal and made arrangements to assist in defraying the expense. In order to avoid all difficulties which might arise in raising the funds for liquidating the expense, William Stokes, Timothy Smith, Samuel Hart, Eleazar T. McDowell and Samuel Yardley five of the applicants entered into a written agreement to build a house 50 by 26 feet, one story of 11 feet in height ---- appropriate all voluntary contributions as far as they would go.

The original one-story building included a cellar “built of stone seven feet high with an eighteen inch wall, and the remainder of said building to be built of Brick...to be executed in a workman like manner.” Built by Joseph James, the building was completed in February 1836, two years before the Borough of Doylestown was incorporated. The building cost \$1,654.50.

For the next 114 years Doylestown continued under this arrangement with Buckingham Monthly Meeting. But by 1941 there were weeks when only three elderly women worshipped on first day mornings. Typically, a psalm and a query [an inquiry requiring personal reflection and response] were read before they settled into worship. By 1947 there were First Days when only Anna Green Shoemaker attended meeting for worship. Even with so small a group, the meeting saw to its members and sought to influence the world around them.

In 1948 the Joint Committee for Friends in Bucks & Montgomery Counties asked Larry and Ruth Miller if they would take on the task of revitalizing the Doylestown Indulged Meeting. Ruth and Larry were tireless in their correspondence with local Friends, and in their recruitment of them to help restore this religious community. Their tireless work proved successful.

On July 26, 1950, Doylestown Indulged Meeting was granted its release from Buckingham, and became Doylestown Monthly Meeting. Doylestown Friends were thereafter responsible for their own business affairs and were incorporated as "Doylestown Monthly Meeting of Friends."

1950 to Present

Then as now, children spent 15 minutes with their parents and the meeting community before moving to the east side of the meetinghouse, just beyond the wood partitions. There were problems with noise coming through the thin panels, so Friends hung a curtain, distanced 18" from the wood to provide a sound absorption space. It didn't work very well. Discussion followed of building a second structure in the back yard or buying the house next door. Electricity had been installed in 1949, but there was still no central heat, only a potbelly stove on the west side of the meetinghouse.

By late 1953, with 18 core families and about 30 children, the meeting had to do something about its space shortage. Plans advanced for an addition at the back of the meetinghouse. Fund-raising commenced. Adjacent buildings had been considered but were either unavailable or too costly. By June 1954, however, it was clear that the needed funds would not be forthcoming. Unwilling to go into debt, the Meeting decided to pursue another plan: create a basement level by excavation.

Architectural plans were prepared by H. Mather Lippincott; and at the February 1955 Meeting for Business the "final revised plans" were approved for the renovation of the meetinghouse. Work began April 11, 1955. Friends dug out the basement with shovels and wheelbarrows, taking the dirt up a plank and out the rear door. Four classrooms were built into the basement space with a kitchen within one of them. Two bathrooms and a library were added to the east side of the meetinghouse; and the privy, to the right of the eastern door, was dismantled. Next to the kitchen, down below, a furnace was installed. The woodstove was removed; and the wood-box to the left of the eastern door was dismantled to make room for the basement stairway.

Doylestown Friends moved to the Plumstead meetinghouse on April 24, 1955 and didn't worship again in the renovated meetinghouse until November 7th. Toward the end of the renovations, every Saturday in September and October was a "Meeting Workday." Total expenses were \$15,159.61. Post completion, Doylestown Friends invited "contributors and neighbors" to an open house on January 15, 1956.

On January 13, 1982, the meetinghouse was severely damaged by an early morning fire. An overheated heat exchanger had been working continuously during an extreme cold spell; and the dry flooring served as fuel for the fire that damaged the library and restrooms on the east side of the meetinghouse and much of the basement. A complete restoration of the meetinghouse began in March 1982 and, under the oversight of clerk of the works Eric van der Water, was quickly completed within three months at a cost of \$77,765.

In the 1990s, the First Day School enrollment exceeded capacity; and some classes were required to meet off-site. In response, the meeting investigated "build and relocation" alternatives; and an architectural feasibility study showed that a rear addition could address the Meeting's space needs on the property. In 2003, after a long-range visioning and planning exercise, the decision was made to build an addition. A campaign was launched in 2005 to raise \$1 million for a 3,235 square foot addition, more than doubling the size of the 2,600 square foot meetinghouse. Originally estimated to cost \$850,000, by May 2006 the cost of the addition had escalated to \$1.3 million and was determined to be well beyond the meeting's reach.

As immediate alternatives, the Meeting determined that it would undertake a full rehabilitation of the basement and the installation of associated storm water management improvements. Moisture problems in the basement had long plagued the Meeting. The Meeting established a "Meetinghouse Growth Fund" to be utilized for the basement rehabilitation, as well as any other major capital expenditures that the Meeting would encounter in the future.

The two-phase basement project was undertaken in 2007 with the provision of stormwater management improvements to the rear yard and driveway to direct stormwater around the meetinghouse and out to Oakland Avenue. Upon completion, the interior renovations commenced. Upgrades were made to the HVAC system to provide for improved ventilation and dehumidification. Carpeting was removed and replaced by a tile floor; and three new movable sound-reducing partitions were installed.

The last improvements to the meetinghouse were in 2012, when the two restrooms on the first floor were consolidated into a single accessible facility; and in 2023 with brick sidewalk replacements.