DATA ON MEETING HOUSE

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| 1715 | Land donated. |
| 1737 (Feb) | 1 acre bought by John and Sarah Cadwalader for five (5) shillings to enlarge burial ground. |
| 1744 | 1st house mentioned in minutes.  |
| 1751 | Torn down and boards and glass sold. |
| 1756 | Present one finished - probably took several yearsto build. i |
| 1775 | Wall around house and cemetery finished. |
| 1875 | Interior changed, south porch added - partition changed. |
| 1904 | Finish of carriage sheds, west addition. |
|  |  |
| 1723-1799 | Used as library. |
| 1810-1826 1833-1870 1882-1893 | Used as a school house by Friends. They used private homes, also. |
| 1806-1932 | Public High School. |
| 1918-1960 | Public Elementary School. |
| 1920 | Bought by Grange – east wing changed. |
| 1963 | Bought by Woman's Community Club of Uwchlan-interior updated. |
| 1973 | Placed on National Register of Historic Places.  |
| 1976 | Bought by Uwchlan Conservation Trust, Inc. |

**Compiled by:**

 **Marion Hemphill – 1980**

MEETING HOUSE TALK

This building is a Friend's Meeting House where people in the area came once a week to worship God and once a month to attend their business meetings. It is no longer used nor owned by the Society of Friends, but it is preserved as the oldest public building in Uwchlan Township.

Looking at a map of this area the oldest things are the roads. Hundreds of years ago, many of these roads were there. Not as roads, of course, but as trails, where the Lenni Lenape Indians traveled back and forth through the forest, from the rivers and streams where their villages were located. When in 1682 William Penn sold tracts of these lands to Friends from Great Britain, the people cleared the land and built their log houses near the trails so they, too, could travel by foot or horseback. About 50 years later, they called the part now South Village Avenue, "Kings Road". It was a section of a colonial road running from the Schuylkill River near Norristown and entering Uwchlan Township on what came to be known as Ship Road. Along that road there grew up many houses that the settlers lived in, so they too could travel the roads - one is the Uwchlan Township building, across Route 100 at Marchwood Shopping Center; the Lion Share is another farm house, changed very little; and in the Cadwalader Apartment Complex is a beautiful home that was very authentically restored for Dr. Crump, for whom Crump Road was named. This road went from Lionville by Milford under what is now Marsh Creek Lake, the old village of Milford Mills, across the Brandywine by a ford at Lyndell, and jointed what is now Route 322 near the present Brandywine Manor Church. It went all the way to Harris's Ford on the Susguehanna River, now Harrisburg. It was called the Paxton Road.

Just to be confusing, the old trail, what is now Route 113, was also called "Kings Road". It ran from Wilmington on the Delaware far to the North. But don't think these roads were fit for a King. They were narrow, often muddy paths, and full of stones and holes. Whitford Road was originally a private lane for the Welsh in the valley to use to First Day Meetings.

Why did Lionville become a town when most colonial towns grew up around mills run by streams of water, and how did this area get such a strange name? The town grew up because of the several roads crossing right here at the Meeting House and because of the travelers on it; first on horseback, later in carts and Conestoga wagons. Also, lots of drovers, sending their cattle and sheep, to and from the towns for sales. The farmers along the road found it profitable to move to a house near the crossroads and cater to the travelers, because almost all farmers were usually expert at some other trade.

THE NAME OF THE TOWNSHIP

The majority of settlers came from Wales, and David Lloyd, a friend of William Penn, sold large and small lots from the thousands he owned, and these Welshmen loved the hilly lands. They called it Uwchlan or "the land above the valley". As travelers used the roads in Chester County many Inns sprang up and the village was called Red Lyon after the Red Lyon Inn. The majority of the people could not read so the Inns had colorful signs to identify them. The town here at the crossroads was at one time called "Welsh Pool", after the town in Wales where David Lloyd had lived. There was never a pool here. In 1800's a land developer named Dennis Whalen hoped to increase the size of the village by selling off 1/2 acre lots. This development effort failed, but those same lots finally sold 75 years later along South Village Avenue. In 1826 when the first post office came to the village, there were several "Red Lyons" in Pennsylvania so it was decided to call the village Lionville. By that time most people could read and write and they even had mail arriving once a week.

Let's take a backward tour through Lionville, starting with the John Vickers homestead where the Vickers Tavern is now, northeast on Welsh Pool Road. They do not know where the first Vickers got his clay for his pottery. (We have pieces of early Vickers pottery in the corner cupboard). Our famous Vickers started making his pottery here in 1822, but his grandfather and father were making pottery even before then. Four generations of Vickers made pottery. John Vickers was better known in the County as an ardent abolitionist, and an active member of the Underground Railroad. His father, Thomas, was one of the original members of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, formed in Philadelphia in 1777, with Benjamin Franklin as its first President. All the Vickers family were active members of the Uwchlan Meeting House. One member, Martha, sister of John, who was the most famous potter, had another claim to fame; she married William Milhous in 1807. His family, on both sides, were respected members of this quarterly Meeting. Several are buried here. William and Martha moved to Ohio and later became the great, great grandparents of Hannah Milhous Nixon, mother of former President Richard Nixon. Looking at the homes along South Village Avenue, we see a Georgian style manor house that was once a Post Office. Post Offices were in private homes and moved as different people were Postmaster. Mail arrived first by horseback once a week and later by stagecoach several times a week.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church was not there until after 1852. This Meeting House was the only place of worship in town and for many miles.

The next earliest place of worship in Uwchlan Township was Benson's Chapel, a Methodist Chapel, located on Township Line Road which is off Route 100 between Uwchlan and Upper Uwchlan Township. The Chapel is gone, but what remains is a large plot of grass with a little stone wall surrounding a few graves. The authors of "History of Chester County", Futhey and Cope, said "It is probable that the Rev. Joseph Pillmore, one of Rev. John Wesley's first missionaries to America, preached in Uwchlan Township in 1772. In 1774, preachers made an appointment in Uwchlan where a Society was raised up near the Little Eagle Tavern, where Benson's Chapel was built in 1781. There was a Society at this place, for Benjamin Adams preached at Benson's in 1780. This meeting was the parent of Battens or Hopewell Church. The offspring lives, but the parent is no more. The lot on which the church stood is still in the possession of the Methodists on which are still a few graves. Some ancient Methodists are buried there, and here most likely a grave was made for Isaac Rollands, the first Methodist preacher the people heard".

"Isaac Rollands, the first Methodist preacher in Chester County, came from the eastern shore of Maryland and by 1773 had penetrated to the center of the County and established several preaching places. In 1783, he was thrown from a horse and killed near Yellow Springs, Chester County. It is presumed he is buried at Benson's Chapel".

There are only two now known buried there. There is a bronze plaque that reads "Joseph Jones came from England when nine years of age. Removed from Cwynedd, Pennsylvania to the "Back Country" of Pikeland in 1745 and buried here in 1793. Lydia Roberts, his wife, granddaughter of Robert Cadwalader, who immigrated from Merionshire, Wales to Cwynedd, Pennsylvania in 1698. Lydia Roberts Jones died April 4, 1787. This is followed by a verse from a Well-wisher, lauding Lydia and the words "Wall restored by the decendents in 1935". The people along the road are not Methodists, but they care for the plot.

Next to the former church and manse was a cabinet maker and undertaker. It was natural that the carpenter would also make the coffins. One of the oldest houses in the village is the home of William Isinger. It has changed a little on the inside and outside, but basically is the same. A fireplace is boarded up and a new part was added before 1800. At one time, it was a Boarding School for girls.

The large stone house without stucco used to be a butcher shop - owned and operated by Morticai and Lydia Lee. They were Friends and are buried in the grounds behind the Meeting House. The burial grounds are still owned by the Friends. Many stones are down - few remain. The Friends of Downingtown Meeting annually grant us the means to care for it.

The next large building was one of two general stores - sold food, drinks, cloth, boots and tools. It had a pot-bellied stove where villagers congregated to gossip.

There was once a harness-making shop and wheelright shop. There is a modern fire house - where the old time one was. We have only a picture of the tiny, early building that housed the engine that was first pulled by men and later by horses. The large building was built onto the 1929 firehouse. The carriage-maker and blacksmith were on the site of the trucking company. Another store now Ficca's barbershop, which sold everything from "needles to anchors". Both stores had tailors who made clothes for men. Of course, woman made their own clothes.

The Red Lyon Inn was first a log cabin. In 1725, it was rebuilt of red brick and that was when it was named the Red Lyon Inn. From 1725 to 1888, it served as an important drover Inn. The men slept in the house (which has been altered quite a bit over the years). The cattle were bedded down in the lots next to the Inn, where Trego now parks trucks.

Along Whitford Road was the site of the Tinsmith - Most of the kitchen ware was made of tin or pottery. Later, there was a very successful felt hat factory at the spot.

In 1895, the Odd Fellows built a meeting hall that served the community for many years. It is now the home of a community theater group, the West Chester and Barley Sheaf Players.

Up North Village Avenue, past the meeting House and burial grounds, is the Edith P. Moore Lionville School House. Built in 1859, it was used continually until the Spring of 1960. In 1961, the Uwchlan Township used it for their Township building. But, now that they have the Baird house, they turned it over to the Uwchlan Township Historical Commission, which has restored it as a one room school and also uses it as a Township museum. Until 1961, there was no heat except for the pot-bellied stove and the only water was in buckets. The School House is one of the few one room school houses left, as such in the area.

The Uwchlan Meeting House - In 1715, a Welshman named Joseph Cadwalader purchased a large tract of land from David Lloyd (whom I mentioned before, as owning so much land here) and he designated a small piece of his land along Kings Road as belonging to the Society of Friends for a burial ground and for a Meeting House. Conveniently, the Welsh Friends had been meeting on First Day at different homes, but now they built a log cabin on the land. We think from the records, that the first log cabin burned down. They then built a second log house with real glass windows. Then, as many more people moved into the Uwchlan area and prospered, they built this very Meeting House from field stone. The date stone on the west side says it was finished in 1756.

All the stonework, the large beams, the rafters and the west floor are of the old building. The east floor was added later. The window openings are all old, but the glass, the frames, the shutters and the porch were all added later. If you noticed from the outside, there are second floor windows, no stairs, though. Originally, we found that they had a balcony all across the front and there were stairs that went up to the balcony. Originally, there were three or four fireplaces for heat in the corners. They were modeled after Swedish fireplaces. In that corner you can still see where the hearth stone lay. When remodeled in 1875, only interior and south interior were changed. On north side was a door to remove caskets to burial ground.

The partition originally went east to west, instead of the way it is now. And why did they have a partition? First for warmth - if they only had a few people attending meetings, they would close the partition. Second - for business meetings. The women met on one side, the men on the other. The women were just as important as the men, but they had their own affairs.

This was a monthly meeting, as well as a weekly meeting, where they carried on their business matters. The other two Meeting Houses, Nantmeal and Pikeland, sent representatives to Uwchlan. They held their burials and weddings here, too.

This building was the first school in the area. The Friends started teaching their own children as soon as they settled. When the Meeting House was built, the school was open to all children, paying the way for services to those who could not afford tuition. After the public school system was started in Pennsylvania, the meeting House was rented as both a high School and Elementary School. This was also the first Library in a large area.

Friends believed in education, democracy and equality of all races; but not in violence or fighting. In the winter of 1777, many Revolutionary soldiers were wounded or seriously ill, and George Washington's Surgeon General, Dr. Bodo Otto, started a hospital in Yellow Springs (now Chester Springs), a large building which has since burned down. This building soon became over-crowded and there was a great deal of contagious diseases. Dr. Otto looked for an additional site and demanded the keys to the Uwchlan Meeting House. The story goes, that he took the keys from the caretaker by force. In any event, the Friends, who did not want to have anything to do with war, were persuaded that they could be helpful in this way. They gave up their place of worship and schoolhouse for as long as needed. As a hospital, an institution practically unknown in those days, it could not have been very comfortable. There were no beds and the soldiers slept on straw on the floor. The only heat was from the fireplaces. Water was brought in by pails from distant wells. Candles and homemade lanterns provided light. Many men died and they are buried behind the Meeting House. This burial ground is now under the jurisdiction of the Downingtown Friends. They give the Trust money to keep it cut.

By the time the Civil War came, 80 years later, the Friends offered the Meeting House as a hospital, as they were all in favor of the abolition of slavery and the great work of the Underground Railroad. (To find out more of the underground, read this pamphlet from Vickers Tavern). This time, some of the soldiers must have slept in the balcony, for above this ceiling on the walls are scratched names, messages and regimental numbers.

These people who belonged to the Uwchlan Meeting were not super people. They had the same kind of problems we have today. The Library suffered greatly because books were not returned. The school committee, for years, could not agree on how the school funds should be spent. They worried about their children being exposed to undesirable influence. This is an entry in the minutes of the Uwchlan Monthly Meeting. "Eighth Day, Eight Month, 1765. We believe some amongst us are desirous to avoid excess on all occasions, and our moderation may be conspicuous in all our conduct, but some instances manifest that all are not so careful as they ought to be, herein1 And further Yellow Springs, being a place of promiscuous resort, and at this time of year in particular, is made a place of diversion, we hear some Friend's children not belonging to our Meeting as well as some who do, are suffered to go there without any real necessity, which may be very hurtful to them in a religious sense. We desire the same may become the concern of the Quarterly".

And among themselves, there were dogmatic differences. In 1828, the Society of Friends split into the Orthodox and Hicksites. In larger towns, such as West Chester, they had two Meeting Houses. They could not bear to meet in one building. Yet, here, as in a few other places, they worshiped together-the Hicksites on one side, the Orthodox on the other. They were side by side until 1881, and a few until 1900. After 1900, many other religious sects came into Uwchlan Township and the Friends began to move away or attend other churches. The few families could hardly maintain this building, so in 1920 they sold it to the Uwchlan Grange Patrons of Husbandry. The Grange continued to rent it as a school, and the Grange members and local 4H Groups held all their meetings here. By 1963, the Uwchlan Grange had dwindled to so few members that they could no longer keep it up. They sold it at that time to the Woman's Community Club of Uwchlan, with the understanding that the Club would preserve to and continue to allow the Grange to meet here once a week. This they did until 1974 when the last members died or moved away and the Grange at Lionville was disbanded.

The Women's Club first borrowed money to put in running water and a heating system. The lights were donated by a member in memory of her sister. The old east porch was converted into a kitchen. In 1974, we had the west wind remodeled with money we had raised over the years with bazaars, plant sales and the Travelogue. The Architect, Mr. Brumbaugh, designed it to be more in keeping with the main house and to contain our utilities. We hope, some day, to change the west room as far back as possible to the original, with perhaps one fireplace in the corner, the balcony and plain woodwork and the hard stiff benches.

But - The Club, realizing that a small group of women, no matter how hard working and dedicated, could not alone raise enough money to ever put on a much needed roof. So, by their efforts, the Uwchlan Conservation Trust was formed - an organization of concerned, local men and women. In November, 1976, the Club sold the building to the Trust - although we continue to meet here and manage it. The badly leaking roof has been replaced along with the four original chimneys. Several years ago the deteriorating 19th Century porch was removed and the exterior was restored to its original 18th Century appearance.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

In 1980, the Trust was offered a grant of $30,000.00 from the Penn Foundation if we could raise a corresponding amount by October 1982. We did so, and since then we have a new South exterior (note the recessed center where the original door existed), repointing, painting, electrical work, and other improvements. Later projects were devoted to the interior – remodeling the kitchen, adding an original fireplace and new coat closets, etc.

Like old people, our Meeting House requires ongoing attention. The roof was replaced, benches have been stabilized, and portions of the floor have been replaced.

We are very proud of our Meeting House and most of what we make at the WCCU Christmas Fair and Plant Sale goes to its upkeep.

The Meeting House is open for visitors the first Sunday of each month from April to November, 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.

All members are encouraged to join the Trust and attend the general meeting.