

Take 1 if you want

MEETING HOUSE TALK

This building is a Friend's Meeting House where people in the area came once a week on first day Sunday 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.

I am going to give you a map used for the walking tour of Lionville on Chester County Day in 1971. This represents the village about 1800 to 1860 when it was a thriving industrial village.

Looking at a map of this area the oldest things are the roads. Hundreds of years ago, these roads (except Route 100, presently marked Pottstown Pike) 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 a Swedish settlement on the Schuylkill River near Norristown and entering Uwchlan Twp. on what came to be known as Swedesford Road. Along that road there grew up many houses of the settlers, so they too could travel the roads - one is the Uwchlan Twp. building, across Rt. 100 at Marchwood Shopping Center; the Lion Share is another farm house, changed very little. Crump road went from Lionville by Milford Rd. under what is now Marsh Creek Lake, the old village of Milford Mills, across the Brandywine by a ford at Lyndell, and joined what is

now Route 322 near the present Brandywine Manor Church. It went all the way to Harris's Ford on the Susquehanna River, now Harrisburg.

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 Friends 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 here 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", after the town in Wales where David Lloyd had lived. There was never a pool of water here. As more travelers used the roads in Chester County, many Inns sprang up and the town of Welsh Pool was renamed "Red Lyon", after the Red Lyon Inn. The majority of people could not read, so the Inns had colorful signs to identify them. After a number of years, the Lion signs became so popular in Pennsylvania that the village decided in 1826, with the first appointed Post Master, to become Lionville.

By that time more people could read and write and even had mail arriving once a week.

The John Vickers homestead which is now Vickers Tavern had a close alliance to the Meeting House. 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). One famous Vickers started making his pottery in 1822, but his grandfather and father were making pottery even before that. 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 Phila. 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 Nixon.

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 (opposite the Valley Forge Motel). The Chapel is gone, but what remains is a large plot of grass.

Up North Village Avenue, past the Meeting House and burial grounds, is the little School House. Built in 1859, it was used continually until the Spring of 1960. In 1961, the Uwchlan Twp. purchased it for their Meeting Place. But, now that they have the Baird House, they turned it over to the Uwchlan Historical Commission, which made it into a local museum. They collected old desks and artifacts. 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 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 not 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 datestone 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 replaced later. The window openings are all old, but the glass, the frames, the shutters and 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 exterior were changed. On north side was a door to remove caskets to the 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 (have gone) sent representatives to Uwchlan. They all held their burial 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 an 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 meeting 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 home-made lanterns provided light. Many men died and they are buried behind the Meeting House.

By the time the Civil War came, some 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. 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 Uwchlan Monthly Meeting. "Eighth Day, Eighth 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, herein: 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 the 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 few 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 Twp. and the Friends began to move away or attend other Meetings. The few families could hardly maintain this building, so in 1920 they sold it to the Uwchlan Grange Patron of Husbandry. The Grange continued to rent it as a school, and the Grange members and local 4-H 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 it 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 Woman'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 wing remodeled with money we had raised over the years with bazaars, plant sales and Travelogues. The architect, Mr. Brumbaugh,

designed it to be more in keeping with the main house and to contain our furnace and rest room. After many discussions and votes, half for and half against it was decided to restore the Meeting House as much as conveniently possible to its original shape and form

But - The Club, realized that a small group of women, no matter how hard working and dedicated, could not alone raise enough money to even 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 as a Club continue to meet here and manage it. The badly leaking roof was replaced along with the four original chimneys. Then we had to tear off the deteriorating front porch before it fell.

The Trust saw that to repair and restore as far back as possible to the original state much more money would be needed. After the Meeting House was declared a National Historic Site in 1973, the Club had received a small Federal grant that helped with the most demanding repairs.

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.

I am happy to report 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. The latest projects have been devoted to the interior - remodeling the kitchen, adding an original fireplace and new coat closets, etc..

We are very proud of our Meeting House and most of what we make at the Club's Plant Sale, etc. goes to its upkeep. The Trust holds a

Hertiage Tea once a year and from April to November we have Open House
2 to 4 P.M. the first Sunday of each month.
