

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

*Property* Farmington Quaker Crossroads District  
*Location* Town of Farmington, Ontario County, New

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## 7. Narrative Description

### *Overview*

Surrounded by rolling farmlands and nineteenth century houses, interspersed at half-mile intervals with newly-built large homes, the Farmington Quaker Crossroads Historic District is located in the Town of Farmington, at the intersection of County Route 8 and Sheldon Road, about four miles north of New York State Thruway Exit 44, two miles north of the Erie Barge Canal, five miles south of the village of Macedon on State Route 31, and one mile east of Pumpkin Hook (the only nineteenth century hamlet in Farmington).

Quakers built their first meetinghouse on the northeast corner of this crossroads in 1796. Nothing remains of this building, but in 1804, Quakers built a new structure on this site, now marked by a granite commemorative tablet. In 1816, Quakers outgrew the 1804 building and built a larger meetinghouse, 47 feet by 60 feet, on the northwest corner of the intersection. This building still stands. In 1927, it became a barn, and the new owner moved it 325 feet north to its current location. It is now separated from its original site by two houses. One house was moved here about 1990 from the Town of Victor, and the other, a ranch house, was built in the 1990s. A third non-contributing house, another ranch house, stands close to the corner, just on or beyond the original site of the meetinghouse.

Dominating the crossroads, the current Farmington Friends Church rises from a knoll on the northwest corner, on or near the site of the 1804 meetinghouse. Built in 1876, the Friends Church is a frame building with a large gable facing the street, typical of Quaker meetinghouses built in central New York in the 1870s. A large cemetery, whose stones date to the early nineteenth century, surrounds the building. Fields of grain, backed up against woods and wetland, occupy the remaining two corners on the south side of this crossroads. The entire district encompasses approximately 30 acres.

### *Buildings and Structures List*

This district includes eleven contributing components and three non-contributing components. These properties are detailed below and are keyed to the attached site map.

#### A. Contributing:

##### 1) *Site of 1796 and 1804 meetinghouses.* (Site 1 on map)

In 1796, Friends constructed a double log house (half used as a meetinghouse and half used as a school) on about 15 acres of land on what is now the northeast corner of County Route 8 and Sheldon Road, deeded by Nathan Comstock to "The Society of Religious People called Friends or Quakers," with the provision that a burying ground also be created "for Friends and friendly people." This was popularly considered the first house of worship west of Clinton, Oneida County.<sup>1</sup>

When this building burned in 1803, Friends constructed a frame building in 1804, 44 feet by 32 feet, covered with four-foot shaved cedar boards, fastened with wrought nails. This building was located on or in front of the current 1876 Quaker meetinghouse.

On October 6, 1929, Quakers and other erected a bronze tablet on a granite block (a contributing feature in this district) to mark the location of the old meetinghouse, inscribed as follows:

The earliest  
Friends Meetinghouse  
west of Utica  
was built of logs  
near this spot by pioneers  
1796  
A frame structure 1804  
Was replaced 1876  
By the present building

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity*, (Palmyra, New York: Palmyra *Courier-Journal*, c. 1930). 256-57.

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A larger meeting house  
Built opposite this site  
Accommodated the yearly meetings  
And was used for worship  
1816-1926

Erected by public spirited  
citizens and the State of New York  
1929

President Herbert Hoover was one of the contributors to this monument. He was himself a Quaker, and his mother was a famous Quaker minister.<sup>2</sup>

2) *Site of 1816 Quaker Meetinghouse* (Site 2 on map)

By 1816, so many Quakers had migrated to Farmington that local Quakers decided to build a new meetinghouse. They first considered a plan to enlarge the existing meetinghouse, but on March 28, 1816, trustees of Farmington Monthly Meeting reported that “if the present house be so enlarged as proposed it would be attended with a considerable expense and still would be inconvenient and disagreeable.” They proposed instead to build an entirely new structure, twice as big as the 1804 building, 40 x 60 feet with 22 foot posts, at a cost of \$2250, \$1150 to be raised by “friends of this monthly meeting,” \$700 to come from the sale of the present meetinghouse, “reserving the stoves and seats,” and \$400 to be requested from New York Yearly Meeting. Farmington Quarterly Meeting accepted this proposal on April 17, 1816, On July 25, 1816, Farmington Monthly Meeting reported in its minutes that the Meeting for Sufferings of New York Yearly Meeting had given Farmington Monthly Meeting the requested \$400. Presumably, work began on the meetinghouse sometime late in the spring or early in the summer.<sup>3</sup>

Although the original proposal had been to build the new structure “within a few rods of the present one,” they actually constructed the building across the road, on the northwest corner of the intersection.<sup>4</sup>

3) *1816 Quaker Meetinghouse* (Site 3 on map)

When the building was finished, probably in 1817, it was 60 feet two inches wide by 47 feet deep, made of “the finest whitewood,” with boards up to thirty inches wide, free from knots, with twelve-over-nine sashes and six bays on the east and west sides of the building and three bays on the north and south sides. Some of the building’s features—notably the roof trusses and twelve-over-twelve windows--bore similarities to plates in Asher Benjamin’s *The Country Builder’s Assistant* (1797). Two doors opened off the east side and one door opened off the south side onto a simple one-story porch that enclosed the east and south sides of the building. A smaller building, with center doorway and window on either side, was attached at the southwest corner, used for committee meetings.<sup>5</sup>

Inside, ministers and elders sat on a facing bench across the west side, and members sat on plain board seats on the main floor or in the gallery, around the north, east, and south sides, entered by stairways from either end. Walls were plastered. Walls, floor, seats, and woodwork were unpainted. Benches were straight-backed, about eight feet long. Two iron stoves heated the room. A board partition could be raised or lowered down the middle to separate men’s and women’s meetings for business. At some point, Quakers placed shades on the windows, with fixtures made entirely of wood and labels that showed they were patented in 1851.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity*, 258.

<sup>3</sup> Asher Benjamin, *The Country Builder’s Assistant* (1797), reprint (Chester, Connecticut: Applewood Books, n.d.), Plate XIII [windows], and Plate XXIX, Fig. C [trusses]. Thanks to Marie Parsons for finding this.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes, Farmington Monthly Meeting, March 28, 1816.

<sup>5</sup> “Old Quaker Church Now Celery Storage,” *Rochester Times-Union*, May 18, 1927; Clipping, [Rochester newspaper, 1927], Rochester Public Library.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity*, (Palmyra, New York: Palmyra Courier-Journal, c. 1930). 257. Overall measurements by Bill Brandow and Jessica Malarik, of John G. Waite Associates. See photographs in Continuation Sheet: Photos.

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At the time of the separation of Quakers into Hicksite and Orthodox groups in 1828, this 1816 meetinghouse officially became the Hicksite meetinghouse, where Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends (Hicksite), annually attracted Friends from western New York, Canada, and Michigan. Orthodox Friends met across the road in the old 1804 building. For large meetings, however, Orthodox Friends also used the 1816 meetinghouse. When English Orthodox Friend Joseph John Gurney preached in Farmington in 1839, he used the 1816 meetinghouse, and Orthodox Friends used this building in 1871 for a large gathering, reportedly up to 6000 people.

As young Friends moved away, Quakers discontinued yearly meetings at Farmington. Beginning about 1914, however, they held meetings in the 1816 meetinghouse once a year in October, inviting Friends from all over the country. In April 1927, a committee of Friends composed of Henry Greene (for sixty years a member of Farmington Friends' Meeting), Supervisor Oscar Gardner of Farmington (son of Sunderlin P. Gardner, Farmington Hicksite minister for sixty years) and Anson L. Gardner of Canandaigua sold this meetinghouse and five acres of land to John Van Lare, who owned the farm just north of the meetinghouse. Van Lare hired George Bender of Rochester to remove the porch and small building at the rear and move the building (which weighed about 400 tons) 325 feet north of its original site, closer to Van Lare's farm, where he used the meetinghouse to store celery. Probably at this time, Van Lare also lowered the second story windows and filled in the gallery level to make a full second floor. The small annex that was once connected to the meetinghouse remained near its original site and became a dwelling. It burned in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

In 2005, Lyjah and Gillian Wilton purchased the meetinghouse. It was in poor condition, with a hole in the southwest corner of the roof and gaps in the siding. In February 2007, a windstorm blew off the east wall of the building. The Farmington Town Board mandated that the building was unsafe and should be demolished. To save the structure, Lyjah Wilton donated the meetinghouse to the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation, a 501c3 organization based in Seneca Falls, New York, and a group of concerned citizens, with the assistance of architect John G. Waite, began to develop plans and raise money to document, stabilize, and restore the building. With financial assistance from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Heritage New York Women's History Trail, New York State Council on the Arts, the Chace Fund of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, and many private donors, this group stabilized the southeast corner of the meetinghouse August 2006 and covered the roof with a tarp. In December 2006, they covered the entire meetinghouse with a net, to prevent any pieces of the meetinghouse from blowing off into the road.

4) *1876 Quaker Meetinghouse.* (Site 4 on map)

In 1876, the 1804 meetinghouse, used by the Orthodox Quakers in Farmington, burned. Quakers erected a new building, built by D.C. Brundage, dedicated on June 11, 1876. It was called a Quaker church rather than a meetinghouse, to reflect their mainstream Protestant pastoral organization, which included a paid pastor and services with sermons and hymns.<sup>8</sup>

The new church was similar in form to other post-Civil War Orthodox Quaker meetinghouses in upstate New York, including the ones at Skaneateles and Poplar Ridge (see Continuation Sheet: Photos, Comparable Buildings). A steep gable faced the front, with a door in the center flanked by a two-over-two windows on either side and a double two-over-window above the front door, topped by a steep drip molding. A small shed extended on the northwest side of the building. Four tall windows opened into the sanctuary on the south side, with three on the north side. Inside, one large sanctuary had a center aisle flanked by pews leading to a simple altar and lectern on the east end. The congregation installed an organ in the early 1900s (replaced with a new one about 1958) and a piano about 1920. In 1918, they replaced an earlier wooden porch with a similar small one and changed the location of the front drives. In 1954, they added a kitchen and Sunday Schools rooms in the rear. In 1964, they added an educational wing with six classrooms and an assembly room. They redecorated the sanctuary with new carpeting and light fixtures in 1968-69.<sup>9</sup>

5) *Cemetery* (Site 6 on map)

Nathan Comstock's original 1796 deed included provisions for a burying ground at what is now the northeast corner of County Route 8 and Sheldon Road, as part of the meetinghouse lot. When the first burials took place at this lot is not known, but the earliest dated tombstone, as noted on the inventory of this cemetery listed on the U.S. GenWeb website, was that of Deborah Power, who died

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<sup>7</sup> "Old Quaker Church Now Celery Storage," *Rochester Times-Union*, May 18, 1927; "Decline of Friends Society Brings Site Change," [Rochester newspaper], May 9, [1927]; Clipping, [Rochester newspaper, 1927], Rochester Public Library.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas L. Cook, *Palmyra and Vicinity*, (Palmyra, New York: Palmyra *Courier-Journal*, c. 1930). 256-57.

<sup>9</sup> Town of Farmington, *Town of Farmington Bicentennial, 1788 to 1988*, 73.

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December 11, 1817, aged 42 years, 10 months, and 3 days. Few stones exist before 1840. After 1828, Orthodox Quaker graves were concentrated on the east side of the cemetery and Hicksite Quaker graves on the west. About 670 known graves have been identified in the two parts of these cemeteries.<sup>10</sup> The cemetery includes the graves of at least one known freedom seeker (Selby Howard, born in Maryland, whose gravestone reads “Selby Howard, Died February 18, 1885, aged 83y, 10m, 23d; husband of Harriet, Born a slave, lived a freeman, died in the Lord”), as well as those of several locally and nationally significant reformers, including Otis Comstock, abolitionist and Underground Railroad agent; William Burling (Hicksite), who served on the joint committee for Indian Affairs, at the time the Quakers helped negotiate the compromise Treaty of 1842 between the Seneca and the U.S. government; and J.C. Hathaway, Esther Hathaway, and Phebe Hathaway, abolitionists, Underground Railroad agents, and friends of Frederick Douglass. Its historic layout and many nineteenth century plantings remain intact and it contains a nineteenth century receiving vault, privy and maintenance shed.

6) *Field on southeast corner of intersection of County Route 8 and Sheldon Road (Site 7 on map)*

Owned by Farmington Friends Church, this field has historically been planted with grain. Backed by woods and wetland on the south side, it contributes to the historic agricultural context of the Farmington Quaker Historic District.

7) *Field on southwest corner of intersection of County Route 8 and Sheldon (Allen-Padgham) Road (Site 8 on map)*

Owned by Robert Bowe, this field also has typically been planted with grain and backs up to wetlands on the south side, contributing to the historic character of this agricultural area.

B. *Non-contributing: 1990s—Three modern houses (Sites 9, 10, 11 on map)*

When John Van Lare moved the 1816 Hicksite meetinghouse 325 feet north to its current location, he detached the smaller addition on the southwest corner that Quakers had used for committee meetings. He left it near its original site, where one of his daughters used it as a dwelling. It burned in the 1990s.

At that time, the corner lot was divided and two ranch houses were built there. One, owned in 2007 by Peter R. Drock, Sr., was built in 1989 on the corner at 190 County Route 8. The other, owned by Michael Nisbet, was built in 1990 just north of it at 186 County Route 8. Margaret Hartsough, Farmington Town Historian, identified the original site of the 1816 meetinghouse as the area between these two ranch houses.

In the spring of 1989, a house formerly owned by the Victor Methodist Church, was moved from Victor to the lot north of these two ranch houses, just south of the 1816 meetinghouse. In 2007, it was owned by Keith H. Trammel at 176 County Route 8.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ny/county/ontario/cems/farmington/farmingfriends.htm>. The next two dated tombstones were for John Grinnell, died Mar 29, 1828, aged 57 years, 11 months, husband of Rhoda Denningsmith; and Anna Smith, died August 19, 1830; aged 31 years, 11 months, 2 days; wife of Asa, daughter of Welcome & Elizabeth (Burchard) Herendeen.

<sup>11</sup> Information courtesy of Margaret Hartsough, Farmington Town Historian.