

Rock Creek Friends Meeting Organizational History



Rock Creek Friends Meeting is a large urban congregation of unprogrammed Quakers. The Meeting formally became a Meeting in 1792, although first formal minutes exist from 1776. Friends began in the region in 1677. The Meeting has a current membership of 450, with 150 Friends attending services on Firstday. The Meetings involvements and concerns are wider than those of the organizations which it founds.

The Meeting is affiliated with a retirement community, Heather Hills, and its co-organization, Quaker Senior Services. It appoints members to the Board of Quaker Senior Services, who appoints members to the Board of Heather Hills. Heather Hills was preceded by The Canby, a home for the Quaker elderly in Baltimore founded in 1917 by Baltimore Yearly Meeting and The Bradley Home, originally purchased in 1924 and replacing and expanding The Canby. The Bradley home remained in operation until 1957, when it moved to a new site.

In the 1970's the Bradley home was finding fewer occupants and did not comply with new State regulations for the aged, consequently it was closed. In 1973 a committee was appointed by the Meeting to consider the alternatives, and in 1975 it reported that the group had decided to proceed with construction of a large, free-standing life-time care facility costing between \$8 and \$11 million. Size was required to be self-supporting and include several levels of care. The Meeting approved and the principal from the Bradley Fund was applied to the project. Heather Hills repaid its loan from the Meeting by 1991.

When Heather Hills was founded, Rock Creek Meeting appointed its Board members. The Meeting wholeheartedly supported Heather Hills, but was aware that the homes it replaced had been accessible to Friends with less means than was required for Heather Hills. The Meeting urged Heather Hills to create access to services for the less-affluent aged and in the 1990's Heather Hills worked on several projects. Ultimately however, the residents of Heather Hills were concerned about risking their own assets on projects outside of Heather Hills. Consequently Heather Hills asked Rock Creek Meeting in 2000 to create a new organization, Quaker Senior Services, which would work toward additional services and would also appoint the Board of Heather Hills. The Meeting approved the proposal.

Although Rock Creek appointed the Board of Quaker Senior Services, it never developed a close relationship to the organization, despite receiving an annual report. It was not a financial contributor to the organization, and considered QSS's requests for funds as requests for any project sponsored by the Meeting. Because QSS's requests for funds fell short of the Meeting's expectations for program design, the Meeting never contributed funds to QSS. The Meeting several times independently established a committee to consider the needs of aged Friends, and usually invited QSS to talk with them; however QSS never became a full participant. By 2005, the Meeting was having difficulty appointing members to the QSS Board. Members of the Meeting are generally unaware of its work, despite having members on its Board. When members of the Board came to the Meeting decrying lack of Board members, some additional members were appointed, and the Meeting began to explore more deeply the work of QSS. In 2008, it created a committee to try to reframe the relationship between the Meeting and QSS, but this process came to a stalemate.

Rock Creek Meeting is also affiliated with Rock Creek Quaker School which began in 1784. The School has undergone many changes in its history. It began as a school open to the public at a time when there were not public schools, although its mission was to 'guard' the education of young Quakers and teaching was done by Quakers. The school was co-educational at this time. By the 1820's corporal punishment was outlawed and women became teachers. In 1858, the Meeting agreed to receive tuition payments; prior to this time the principal faculty member did so. In 1868 an expansion program begins: a high school is opened and coursework leads both the college preparation and to employment. By 1885 only 42 of 225 students are Quakers. In 1888-1899, the Meeting had no involvement with the school, but this was temporary. Ultimately the Meeting re-purchased the equipment and built a new space for the School next to the Meetinghouse. A committee of the Meeting oversees the School, which had 154 students in 1899.

During the early 1900's the school expanded again. It changed from student body of 201 with budget of \$15,000 to a student body of 550 and budget of \$150,000. Tuition was fairly low at \$125; a competitor's was \$250. The proportion of Quaker teachers declined to less than one third; many are Rock Creek Quaker School graduates. Salaries are, by 1927, typical of the era. Friends' students are "seldom from the ranks of those in the social register," but comfortably well off. Children from the Meeting were supported by the Meeting.

The school purchased land and moved further north by 1936. The depression caused its census to drop by 40%, and it did not rise again until after WWII. About 75% of Meeting children attended Rock Creek Quaker School. The Meeting decided to move to the edge of the campus in 1944, raising funds and building a building in 1949. It continues to reside in this location.

The School continued to be the responsibility of a Committee of the Meeting, and had several successive leaders who had been active in the Meeting. The Meeting and community were at odds about integrating the school, which had been segregated for about 100 years. In 1950 the Meeting decided to integrate itself and its projects (including Camp Glyndon, and the Bradley Home) but in fact nothing happened. In 1954, the school integrated its pre-school class with six new students, planning on a gradual integration process. However, in 1964, the entire school integrated quietly.

After WWII the school changed as times change and its scale, in comparison to the Meeting, makes Meeting control more difficult. In 1973, the Meeting agreed that the School should be an independent 501c3 organization, with the Meeting controlling the mission and the membership of the Board. The School, operating on any annual budget of over \$2 million, had outgrown the Meeting which had a \$23,000 annual budget. Over the years, the details of appointment to the Board change, giving the School some authority, and expanding the size of the Board. Although the School and the Meeting have a joint Nominating committee, the membership continues to be appointed by the Meeting.

Many, but not all, members of the Meeting send their children to Rock Creek Quaker School and are very active in the School. Some without children at the School also serve on the Board. The School reports to the Meeting at least once, but often twice, a year, keeping the Meeting informed of the overall picture. With the long tenure of a member of the Meeting as Head of the School, Friends began to pay less attention, allowing the Board to work independently. With his retirement in 1998, the Board and the Meeting began to interact more, in strategic planning and as neighbors. Some of the interaction was difficult, and two Meeting members resigned from the School's Board. The Meeting created a consultative committee of members of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, and the Head and Chair of the School. A new head, another strategic planning process, and clearer articulation of the meaning of Quakerism in the

School refreshed the relationship between the two institutions. The School continues to be a place from which new members come into the Meeting community. Indeed, in 2009, the Meeting created a process to provide additional financial support for Meeting participants to continue attending Friends School.

Throughout its history, however, Rock Creek Friends Meeting has had wider concerns than those of the elders and of education. These include involvement with GEDCO, an interfaith emergency services and housing organization and earlier involvement with BRIDGE, a Baltimore faith based advocacy organization. Meeting members are involved in a number of social concerns, some of which are supported through grants and other assistance from the Meeting.

Timeline

- 1677-1758 Rapid proliferation of Meetings along West River. Friends gathered together twice yearly. Friends created a Finance committee in 1677.
- 1680 First Meetinghouse built at Betty's Cove.
- 1737 First formal membership in Religious Society of Friends.
- 1773 Friends begin to move into the city of Baltimore.
- 1776 Formal minutes for "Patapsco Preparative Meeting", under the care of Gunpowder Monthly Meeting, begin.
- 1780 240 individuals are named in Baltimore Preparative Meeting. A meetinghouse was built on Bell Street in 1781.
- 1784 Committee assigned to oversee school.
- 1786 Finance Committee named on permanent basis.
- 1792 Full Monthly Meeting status granted.
- 1799 A library committee is formed and a library created.
- 1805 A Meeting house is built on Landon Street and another group begins meeting there as 'western district.' The meeting splits in 1807 with 374 names in Western District and 375 in Eastern District, though when 102 members of Elk Ridge joined Western District it became 476. Some bitterness arose over financial matters and care of property in both places.
- 1806 First Discipline printed for this Meeting. In the absence of a statement of faith, a set of codes for behavior is essential. Running through this document are what

Friends now refer to as specific historic testimonies: strictures against such practices as betting and gambling, 'hat honor', capital punishment, secret societies, paid ministries, oaths and slavery and affirmation for integrity in business, penal reform, plain language, relief of suffering, social order, temperance, moderation, and peace.

The Discipline includes nine Queries which the Meeting prepared written responses to. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Meeting records show many cases of displeasure with individual actions and expectations of improved behavior.

1828 A great schism occurs: the Orthodox-Hicksite Split. Hicksites believed that each person born is filled with a 'measure of Light': if one walks a kind and careful path, a sinless life is possible-as luminous as the life of Jesus Christ. Orthodox believed in the divinity of Christ. City Friends were more likely to be Orthodox; rural Friends Hicksite. The split occasions little comment in Minutes, but in November a statement is made that persons who have left the meeting would have to make written application to be reinstated in membership. Friends were very active leaders in the community as well as the Meeting. Many prospered. Notable included bankers, railroaders, the founder of the first non-denominational free school in Maryland, and an individual who spent much of his life working for the unfortunate.

1862-1866 During the Civil War, Friends were clear that good trade practice did not include slavery and first testified this in 1778. A delegation of Quakers appeared at US Congress in 1790. Friends also had a historic stand for peace. Abolitionist papers were in all the Meetings prior to the war. The Meetings urged individuals not to get involved in calls for war and called attention in 1840's to young men 'joining a military company.' In 1852, the Education Committee warned that 'Friends are taxed for their support [of the school system] and this tax in part goes to pay military officers or to train children in the art of war.' Friends continued to work on behalf of blacks, for Indians, and not to mention war. However, a minute was written in 1866 acknowledging that some members had violated the Society's principles on war and expressed confidence that they could be reinstated as individuals asked.

- 1881 Women's meetings are first stated as co-equal to men's in 'rights and privileges' including initiating business of all types, although final ratification of any business must be 'by concurrent status.' Meeting membership is 632.
- 1888 Landon Street Meetinghouse is sold; from October through March 1889 the Meeting is held at Bell Street. The new Meetinghouse further north is ready in April 1889. Yearly Meeting sessions are held there in the fall, and women serve 3400 meals between October 25 and November 2.
- 1897 Men's and Women's Meetings are discontinued and all meetings are joint.
- 1890-1904 A quiet period. Minutes record financial details and membership matters, such as births, deaths, transfers, marriages, and so forth. Wavering relationship with the School. Meeting membership is 573 in 1900.
- 1904-1917 A progressive era when many philanthropic activities were undertaken, including a relief committee, visits to prisons, reformatories, juvenile courts, etc. The Meeting was supportive of blacks. Political issues of the day begin to be mentioned in the minutes. Prohibition is supported by Friends. Women's suffrage gets less attention. Meeting membership is 488 in 1910.
- 1914-1917 Prior to the war, Friends distributed pacifist literature widely. However, Friends were very supportive of the war, once it started. They bought Liberty Bonds, which openly financed the war. After 'much discussion' the flag was displayed in the Meetinghouse because the President had urged all houses of worship to do so. The Meeting provided lodging and recreation for servicemen, using the facilities of the school.
- 1919 Meeting membership is 404 in 1919 and some are concerned about its gradual diminishment.
- 1921 An executive secretary is hired in 1921 to expand meeting activities.
Meeting reflects the broader Protestant Christian community, with emphasis on Bible study and the life and lessons of Jesus.
- 1922 Camp Glyndon is purchased and established. A home for the elderly is established with funds from the Bradleys and Browns. This home remained in operation until 1957. Peace and social justice issues are actively pursued.
- 1926 Bell Meeting is laid down and the building sold to the city. Profits are to benefit the free school nearby and Friends Benevolent Society.
- 1927 Rock Creek Quaker School decides to move further north.

- 1930s The Depression has a relatively mild impact. Membership is steady and most organizations operate at normal capacity. Friends provide clothing and aid for others. Friends were concerned about the rise of Hitlerism in Germany and worked for immigration to the US.
- 1940 During the summer, Baltimore young Friends founded Friends Overseas Relief and gathered 5 tons of clothing for refugees in France and England and two tons for refugees of the Spanish civil war. Friends publicly proclaimed the peace testimony and provided relief.
- 1940-1945 Friends actively supported alternative service settings, raising money and contributing material goods. Conscientious objectors were provided hospitality. 75% of young men from both Baltimore Yearly Meetings served in the war, in combatant or non-combatant roles. Due to the gas shortage, some of the Meeting activities were curtailed, but Quakers continued their philanthropic work sending clothing and contributions to Europe and for Japanese-Americans.
- 1943 Executive Secretary leaves the Meeting to become Headmaster of Rock Creek Quaker School. He is replaced.
- 1944 The Meetinghouse is sold. Meeting begins to meet at Rock Creek Quaker School. The Meeting changes its name to "Rock Creek Monthly Meeting of Friends." A small meeting, neither Hicksite nor Orthodox, is founded in West Baltimore. This meeting opens a community center in a poor neighborhood at which AFSC offers a workcamp. It is the first interracial project in Baltimore. This meeting was laid down in 1962.
- 1949 Building a Meetinghouse begins and is completed.
- 1950 Meeting agrees to open the School, Camp Glyndon, the Bradley Home, and the Meeting itself "to members of other races, who are in sympathy with Friends' principles." Little change occurs, however.
- 1955 Six black children enter kindergarten at Rock Creek Quaker School. Eighteen pupils withdrew from the school, but enrollment actually increased by five students and gradually rose thereafter.
- 1957 The Bradley Home is sold in 1957 and another residence is refurbished by September 1958. In 1957 Camp Glyndon was sold and several Meetings in the area purchased 385 acres near Thurmont Maryland and establish another camp. A separate board is established for this group.

Attitudes about alcohol are changing; some members acknowledge moderation rather than abstinence in dealing with it. Ministry and Counsel decried the increasingly frenetic activity in committees. Meeting continued supporting activities of peace and justice, including support of immigrants.

1960 Five black students come to Rock Creek Quaker School from Prince Edward County, Virginia when all public schools there are closed. The Joint Social Order committee begins to push for an end to all public discrimination practices in Baltimore and Maryland.

1964 Rock Creek Quaker School opens to all races throughout the school with little comment.

Nov 2, 1965 Staff of the Meeting, immolates himself in front of the Pentagon to protest American policy toward Vietnam. The Meeting does not employ another Executive Secretary.

1968-1970 The Meeting easily arrives at a consensus against the war in Vietnam but argues extensively over what it should do as a group. Support is given for individual actions of conscience, but the Meeting cannot agree to forgo paying the telephone tax which was supporting the war. The Meeting refuses to lend money to a Mobilization project, and refuses to support a member who turns in his draft card.

Less division is experienced over issues of local social justice. Individual members of the Meeting are in contact with black churches; the Meeting donates use of its space for a day-care center for inner-city children, and makes a donation to Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Meeting decides not to pay to install air-conditioning "in view of the many needs of the world."

1969 Meeting Trustees liquidate investment in government bonds used to fund the war. Gradually, the Meeting divests all holdings in Pentagon's top 100 contractors. The Meeting asks Trustees to invest 5% of the Meetings assets (\$65,000) in social significant causes, such as a black-owned bank and companies owning integrated apartment houses.

1966-72 Meeting members are more divided on issues than at any other time, yet survive. Meeting membership grows from 408 in 1965 to 480 in 1973.

1970 The Meeting approves a proposal to open the Meetinghouse to any draft resister whose beliefs are consistent with Friends' principles, but none approach the Meeting. The Meeting was able to give a donation for

adoption of Vietnam orphans, and to contribute to paying for a draft counselor through AFSC.

- 1970s Meeting and the institutions it is involved with become more separate. In 1973 Rock Creek Quaker School was incorporated as a separate organization. The Bradley home is closed; Heather Hills is founded. The free school project, based across the street from the Bell Street Meetinghouse, also changed. The City took over ownership of the center; the Trustees were dissolved, but Rock Creek Friends remained on the Board of the Community Center and continued to make some contributions. Individual members of meeting were, as always, engaged in service to the community. Many worked with AFSC, whose regional office moved to Baltimore during this time.
- 1979 Meeting decides to divest from all companies doing business in South Africa.
- 1980s Membership increases to over 500. The Meeting re-establishes the position of Executive Secretary in 1985. Social outreach work continues, some with large contributions.
- 1982-1984 Meeting and Rock Creek Quaker School labor over procedures for the Joint Nominating Committee. It is made clear that the Joint Nominating Committee is not obligated to accept all nominees of the School's nominating committee. The Meeting also affirms that diversity is important on the Board. The School holds a bicentennial celebration in 1984.
- 1988 Some changes are made to the School's bylaws. The Meeting presents an orientation to Quakerism for new School faculty; this is an annual event. The Meeting discusses sharing its space with the School.
- 1989 The Meeting works out parking arrangements with the School.
- 1990s The School raises significant funds, builds new space and expands enrollment. It also celebrates the Meeting's bicentennial. The Meeting creates a significant display on its bicentennial and has a book written about its history.
- 1990 An endowment fund for Meeting children attending Rock Creek School is created by individual gifts and approved.
- 1994 The School works with the Meeting to make fundamental changes in the school's by-laws, including expanding the size of the Board with more non-Friends and changing the appointment schedule. The Chair is always to be a Friend.

- 1998 The Meeting acknowledges the retirement of the Head of Friends School, and the arrival of a new Head, who is not a Friend. The Meeting encourages the School to be more aware of consideration for persons with disability.
- 1999 The Meeting approves a revised Mission Statement for the School.
- 2000 The School is engaged in Strategic Planning process and engages in efforts to have closer ties to the Meeting. A small Committee of Ministry and Counsel begins meeting with Heads of School. A donor presents the Meeting with funds for use of study of Quakerism by faculty at the School. Two members of the Meeting who have been very active in the School's Board resign.
- 2001 The Meeting is informed its Ministry and Counsel committee is 'carrying a concern for the spiritual life of Rock Creek Quaker School and Rock Creek's relationship to it'. A number of projects are undertaken between the two institutions. The school begins to build a playground on Meeting property without consulting the Meeting and some damage is done to old trees; time is taken to repair the relationship. A consultative process is set up to be used between the School and the Meeting. The Meeting becomes much more conscious of its own space and rights. At the end of the year, the Head of the School leaves. An interim director is appointed.
- 2003 Additional By-laws changes for Rock Creek School are labored over and approved. These involved the roles and appointment of members to the Board who are representatives of School functions, such as the Development Director, a student, etc. The consultative process of informing the Meeting of School activities is used.
- 2004 The Meeting signs a lease with the School for it to operate a daycare facility in the Meetinghouse. The Meeting agrees to let the School use its mailing list for fund-raising.
- 2005 The School decides that the Board's chair does not have to be a Friend. A new Head of school begins. The relationship between the Meeting and School seems improved.
- 2007 The Meeting's Executive Secretary and Office Secretary both resign unexpectedly. Criticism is made for the personnel process and the Meeting begins a long period of debate over staffing and supervision. Concern over the Meeting's relationship to Quaker Senior Services is also expressed and a

committee of members of the Meeting, some of whom are members of QSS and Heather Hills Boards, is appointed.



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