



Spring 2019 Newsletter

## Friends Meeting House and Cemetery Association of Randolph Township, NJ

An Independent Preservation Association

**Editor's note.** With support from the *Morris County Heritage Commission Re-grant Program*, we are expanding the circulation of this *Newsletter* for the next three issues.

Every day, hundreds of people drive by the 1758 Randolph Friends Meeting House. Few know anything about its history or importance. They also are not aware of the effort that goes into preserving a historic site.

As the Association that maintains the site, we realize we must do more to raise public awareness and interest. However, opening a fragile, 260+ year-old building to the public presents challenges. The Meeting House was designed as a simple, unadorned place for silent worship. Its Quaker builders did not believe in drawing personal attention to themselves and therefore did not have their graves marked with stone monuments. For these and other reasons, we are exploring different ways to introduce and open this local, State and National site to the public, starting with the expanded circulation of our *Newsletter*.

If you are not a regular *Newsletter* recipient and would like to learn more about the Meeting House and the work of the Association, send a message or note as indicated in the box above. It will help you follow the preservation work we plan to undertake over the next few years and know more about the history of early Randolph. NHS

If you are not on our mailing list and would like to receive copies of our *Newsletter*:  
**Send an email to**  
[news@randolphmeetinghouse.org](mailto:news@randolphmeetinghouse.org)  
**...or a note to**  
N. Steneck, President, FMHCA  
127 Grandview Drive  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

### Meeting House Mysteries

#### When was the Slate Roof installed?

As the Association once again plans to replace an aging roof, one stage in the roof's history remains a mystery. The current wood shake roof was installed in 1978 and replaced an aging slate roof. It was assumed at the time that the slate roof had probably been installed shortly after the Association acquired the building in 1898. However, there was no evidence to support this assumption. If the Association did not install the slate roof, who did and when?

The Meeting House most likely began its long history with a wood shake roof made from local wood, such as native New Jersey Red Oak—the State Tree. With proper care, the original roof would have lasted 40-50 years, into the early 19th century.

The earliest record of the roof found to date is an 1826 committee report, which recommended,

*...to have it [the Meeting House] weather boarded and shingled if money enough can be raised. (Preparative Minutes, September 28, 1826)*

Two years later, the same committee reported that Elijah Brotherton, Richard Brotherton, Thomas Dell, Silvanus Hance, John Mills jr., Silas Dell, and William Mott had donated \$175 for “repairing the Meeting House.” Could they have used this money to install a new slate roof?

*... turn the page to find out ➔*



Meeting House ca. 1978, with new shake roof and before the paint was stripped

### Future Challenges

#### Our new Preservation Plan

In early March, Connolly and Hickey Historical Architects completed work on a *Historic Preservation Plan for the Randolph Friends Meeting House Property*. The new *Plan*, which was funded in part by a grant from the Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund, is designed to guide the Association's preservation activities over the coming decades. It will be used the same way John Dodd's 1986 *Guide to the Historic Structure Preservation of the Randolph*

*Friends Meeting House* has shaped preservation planning for the past 33 years.

Given the number of projects the Association has undertaken since removing the slate roof and installing new cedar shakes in 1978, it might be wondered how much more needs to be done.

However, as anyone who maintains an old building knows, there is always more work to do. In addition, the Association must take steps to expand public awareness and use of the property. We therefore

expected to receive a challenging list of recommendations and were not disappointed!

One simple but daunting way to summarize the challenge ahead is to look at Connolly and Hickey's estimate of the cost of the preservation, development and maintenance work they recommend: \$1,035,000.

*...see inside for how we plan to meet this challenge ➔*



visit us at: [www.randolphmeetinghouse.org](http://www.randolphmeetinghouse.org)  
 contact us at: [information@randolphmeetinghouse.org](mailto:information@randolphmeetinghouse.org)

↳ Meeting House Mysteries (continued)

\$175 might have been sufficient to install a slate roof, but slate roofing was not commonly used in the US before the Civil War, particularly for a plain rural building such as the Meeting House. More likely, the Meeting either repaired or replaced the original roof in the late 1820s, to keep the wind and rain out for another 40-50 years.

When the Meeting House next needed a new roof, the Meeting had ended (1865), leaving its care in uncertain hands. The deed for the property was transferred to Plainfield Meeting, but there is no evidence that Plainfield took over care of the building. Instead, there is evidence that descendants in the area stepped in from time to time to maintain the grounds and repair the building.

In the 1870s, Silas Young, John Alward and John Hance contributed funds to build a stone wall around the grounds, a job that may not have been completed until 1880, when it was reported in *Iron Era*, the local Dover newspaper, that:

*Some of the descendants of the Old Quaker families who formerly lived in this section are trying to make some improvement about the old burying ground. They have employed Mr. D. Tucker to lay a stone wall in lime and sand, which he has done more than half way round the grounds. [With] cutting the brushes and clearing off the yard, [it] helps the looks of things very much.*

A year later, Rev. B.C. Megie in Munsell's *History of Morris County* (1882) characterized the Meeting House as: "Lately recovered and otherwise improved." Since the roof was probably ready for replacement at this time, could the descendants living in the area also have installed a new slate roof?

**M. V. B. SEARING,**  
**CARPENTER and BUILDER,**  
 BLACKWELL ST., DOVER, N. J.  
 Plans and Specifications for buildings, Contracts taken and materials furnished.

**Slate Roofing**

I have made arrangements with one of the best quarries in Pennsylvania, by which I can put on slate roofs much cheaper than ever before—in fact about as low as good shingle roofs can be put on.  
 Dover, N. J., September 23d, 1878.

The late 1870s coincided with a clear growth in interest in slate roofs. In 1877 a New York company began advertising in the *Iron Era* a "Patent Slate Paint [to] protect your buildings." A year later, M.V.B. Searing of Dover, whose family long had

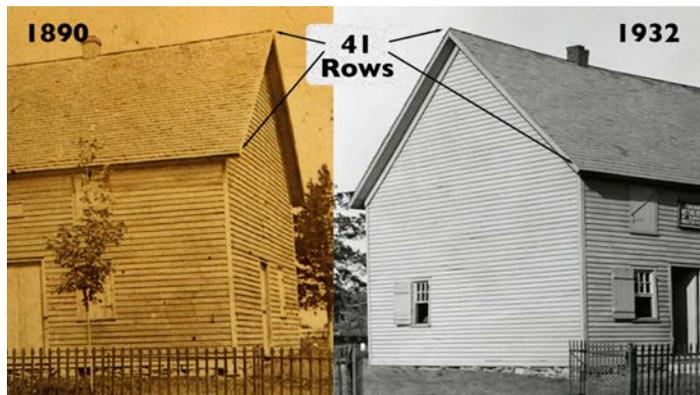
business ties with the Quaker community, began advertising slate roofs that could be installed for "as low as a good shingle roof." Two years later, J.J. Vreeland was offering slate:

*...furnished from the best quarries by the small quantity or car load, and laid, if desired, by experienced workmen at low rates.*

Assuming the repairs or replacements made in the late

1820s would have been reaching the end of their lifetime, this would have been an ideal time to install the new slate roof offered by contractors who had long worked side-by-side with the Randolph Quakers.

An 1880s date for the installation of the slate roof is supported by photographic evidence. In 1890, Clara Brotherton Cook gave Rachael Vail a photograph of the Meeting House. Its sepia tone and rough appearance suggest a wooden shake roof. However, if the photograph is enlarged and sharpened, it is possible to count the rows of roofing, which number 41. This is the same number of rows the Meeting House roof had in a 1932 photograph, when we know it had a slate roof.



1932 Photo from: Curtiss Photograph Collection, North Jersey History & Genealogy Center, Morristown & Morris Township Library. Available online through [www.jfpl.org](http://www.jfpl.org)

41 rows is more than one would expect for a wood shake roof. The shake roof installed in 1978 was designed to conform to traditional 18th c. building practices. At that time, hand cut shingles generally measured about 36" and were installed with a 10" spacing between rows. Crafted and installed in this way, it took 21 rows of shakes to cover one side of the Meeting House (Photo, front page).

The exact correlation of the number of rows in 1890 and 1932 strongly suggests that the slate roof was not installed in the early 20th century. Rather, given the growth in popularity of slate roofing starting in the late 1870s and the local efforts to provide better care for the Meeting House in the 1880s, it seems reasonable to conclude that the slate roof was installed sometime between 1878, when the first advertisements for inexpensive slate roofing appeared, and 1890, when it seems the new slate roof had been installed. Mystery solved? (Send comments to [news@randolphmeetinghouse.org](mailto:news@randolphmeetinghouse.org).)

Join us for Annual Meeting at the Meeting House on May 18, 2019 at 11:00 am

### ↪ Future Challenges (continued)

The \$1M+ estimate covers four stages of work that can be carried out over a number of years. Roughly summarized, the *Plan* calls for:

1. Restoring the Meeting House exterior:
  - Remove the asbestos and install a new shake roof
  - Replace the gutters and improve drainage to reduce water damage
  - Repair or replace worn siding and apply a protective finish
2. Repairing and upgrading the Cemetery and grounds:
  - Add on-site parking and repair paths
  - Straighten and repair markers
  - Remove dangerous trees and prune the rest
  - Restore landscape through management and new planting,
3. Restoring and making changes to the interior:
  - Repair and (re)finish interior wood wainscot, flooring, trim, cabinetry, plaster walls and ceiling
  - Replace the folding shutters installed in 1998 to close off the second floor in the winter with a more efficient system.
  - Upgrade lighting
  - Re-install a stove to show how the Meeting House was originally heated
4. Expanding and upgrading the Annex:
  - Add barrier-free restrooms
  - Improve kitchen facilities
  - Increase the size to include office and storage space



Area inside west wall that could be used for parking



Pully operated shutter, installed in 1998

With the exception of the roof project and removing trees, most of the proposed work does not need to be undertaken in the near future. In fact, about half of it could be put off indefinitely were it not for one key consideration: *public use*.

The Meeting House was designed to serve as both a community center as well as a place for worship. In its early days, the 125+ seating capacity could accommodate the entire population of the area it served. It hosted the “circular” gathering of Quakers from other meetings and visitors bringing news of trips to other states and countries. Today it has trouble hosting tours because there is no place to safely unload a school bus.

Restoring public use of the Meeting House and grounds has to be a top priority for the Association. Planning, therefore, must take account of the full range of projects we need to undertake. For the near term, we will focus on grants and donations to raise matching funds. Longer term, we will explore other options, starting with a new webpage and a presence on social media. If you have technical skills and are interested in helping, message: [news@randolphmeetinghouse.org](mailto:news@randolphmeetinghouse.org).

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## Association News and Updates

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**Annual Meeting.** The Association will gather for Annual Meeting at the Meeting House on **Saturday, May 18 at 11:00 am**. Meetings generally last until 3:00 pm. Visitors are welcome.

**Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund.** As noted above, work on the \$30,100 Planning Grant awarded in 2018 was completed in March, 2019. A new Construction Documents Grant request for \$75,560 (match \$15,112) was submitted the end of March. The funds will support planning for roof replacement and other exterior work. Awards will be announced June or July.

**Morris County Preservation Heritage Commission Re-Grant.** The Association applied for and received \$1,725

from the 2019 MCPHC Re-Grant program to expand circulation of this *Newsletter* and get advice on submitting a new State and National Register Nomination.

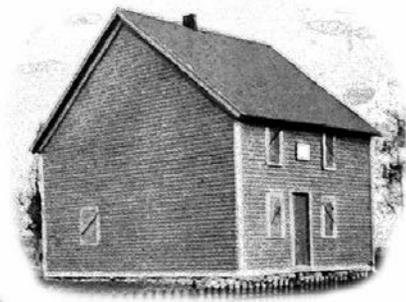
**State and National Register Nomination.** The Association plans to submit a new State and National Register Nomination in order to broaden the significance of the site. The current nomination, submitted in 1973, mentions only the Meeting House. The new submission will include the Cemetery and more information on the historical importance of the site.



Friends Meeting House and Cemetery Association  
of Randolph Township, New Jersey

return to:

Nicholas Steneck, President  
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## Spring 2019 Newsletter

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- *Future Challenges: A new Preservation Plan*
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Pegged, timber frame  
construction



Interior of the 1758 Randolph Meeting House

To donate to the preservation of this historic site,  
please visit our webpage  
[www.randolphmeetinghouse.org](http://www.randolphmeetinghouse.org)

Published by the Friends Meeting House & Cemetery Association of  
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Nick Steneck, Editor

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