



Fall 2020 Newsletter

Friends Meeting House and Cemetery Association of Randolph Township, NJ

An Independent Preservation Association

Editor's note. The frightening consequences of the current Pandemic make it difficult to contemplate positive outcomes. On one bright side, however, we have noticed on our daily walks that the neighbors we pass are more open to masked, socially-distanced chats – about pets, the dry weather or life in general. Perhaps the rapid shift to online everything, from shopping to business meetings, will be a boon to preservation efforts, if properly used.

One clear benefit of the rapid shift to video conferencing is the opportunity to continue to meet, virtually, during the Pandemic. We expect to return to in-person meetings as soon as it is safe to do so, but most likely with increased virtual attendance. With the conferencing technologies that are becoming more widely used, if we take a break and tour the Cemetery to discuss parking options, someone sitting at home 2,000 miles away can join the tour and participate in discussions. Adding meaningful virtual attendance could increase meeting participation and membership.

Greater use of the online technologies can also help make history and preservation more accessible. As I was tracking down the Edward Dell farm for the story about the Norway spruce, I ran across a reference to the Veneta railroad stop on the DLW line. With a little research, I discovered that the stop was on Dell Avenue in Kenil, just down the road from where wife Peg lived. Knowing this, I immediately knew where the farm was located and its relationship to the Meeting House. For anyone who has never visited or knows little about the history of Randolph Township, the stop could have been in Alaska.

Beginning with a video on the Norway spruce, we plan to use the digital tools that have become widely used during the Pandemic to bring our preservation efforts to life. The goal is to use virtual visits and meeting participation to build support and encourage in-person visits once they are safe.

Nick Steneck, President, FMHCA
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Editor@randolphmeetinghouse.org

Association News and Updates

State and National Register nominations

In early September, we submitted an updated **National Register of Historic Places** nomination for the Randolph Friends Meeting House and Cemetery Site to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office for review and approval at the State level before forwarding for national recognition. The nomination proposes that the Meeting House be recognized as:

- i) New Jersey's oldest extant colonial wood-frame Quaker meeting house;
- ii) New Jersey's oldest of three extant colonial Quaker meeting houses that retains its original design and structure;
- iii) The oldest standing structure built as a house of worship in Morris County; and
- iv) The only remaining example of the four Woodbridge Monthly Meeting meeting houses associated with designer/builder John "Preacher" Vail.

The updated nomination is intended to broaden the description of the site to include the Cemetery, which is historically important and contains the graves of a number of significant individuals. It also provides a more detailed description of the significance of the site, replacing the current brief description developed when first nominated in 1973.

Construction Grant

In mid August, the Association learned that its **2020 Morris County Historic Preservation Trust Fund Construction Grant** application was fully funded. The grant will support the archaeological work needed to plan parking on the site and matching funds for roof replacement. If weather and other factors cooperate, both projects could be underway before the end of the year. Project updates and photographs will be posted on the Association's web site, if you would like to follow the work.

Video Projects

Our **2019 Morris County Heritage Commission Regrant** will allow us to work with a **County College of Morris** production class taught by Ray Kalas to produce a promotional video for the Meeting House. Working in teams of two, the students will plan and produce a video designed to increase public awareness of and interest in the site. These and other videos highlighting current and past projects will be posted on the Association web site and shared on social media.

Virtual Fall Meeting. Due to the Pandemic, the combined Annual-Fall Meeting will be held online, October 17, 2020. Message: editor@randolphmeetinghouse.org for more information.



Visit us at: www.randolphmeetinghouse.org
 Contact us at: information@randolphmeetinghouse.org

Join us for Fall Meeting online: October 17, 2020 at 10:30 am



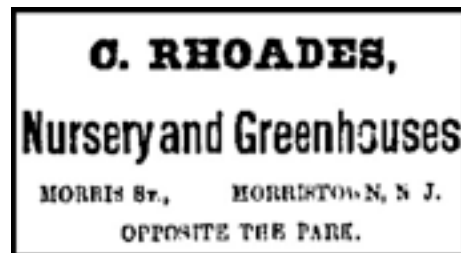
A Speculative History of the Norway Spruce

On September 3rd, the stately Norway Spruce that has dominated the Cemetery skyline for decades was carefully removed by a skilled crew from Fullerton Landscaping. To avoid damaging the markers crowded around the base of the tree, the branches were removed first and then large pieces of the trunk were cut and carefully lowered by rope to the empty space behind the Meeting House. Everything was then shredded and carted away. Joe Schilip, Associate Director of the County College of Morris Alex DeCroce Media Center, and Association supporters Carla and Wayne Myer recorded the entire process. Visit the Projects link on our web page to view a [video showing removal of the Norway spruce](#).

Who planted the tree & why?

The Norway spruce is not native to the US. It therefore probably began life in a nursery and was replanted in the Cemetery when it reached a manageable size (5-7 feet or ca. five years old). We know from the growth rings that the tree was about 135 years when it was cut down, suggesting that it was re-planted in the Cemetery in the early 1890s. Flowers, shrubs and trees were available at that time from Spangler's Flower Shop in Dover or Rhoades Nursery in Morristown. Spangler sold plants from door to door and in 1891 was looking for "a smart active man" to sell, "one with a horse preferred."

The time the tree most likely would have been planted falls in the years between the laying down of the Meeting (1865) and the founding of the Association (1898),



so there is no record of its planting. However, a closer look at burials in the Cemetery during this period suggests one possible answer to questions: who planted it and why?

The cluster of Brotherton graves around the base of the tree led to a tradition that connected it with the Brotherton family. However, in 1890, the main Brotherton burial area in the Cemetery was along the north wall, where Richard Brotherton (1787-1865) and his wife, Mary Brotherton (d. 1871), along with Richard's distant cousin, Jacob Lundy Brotherton (1810-1887), and Jacob's wife, Sarah Brotherton (1833-1892), were buried. The only Brotherton-related burial in the area around the tree in 1890 was Thomas and Rachael Brotherton Vail's son, William Brotherton Vail, who died of influenza in 1889 at age 32. Thomas and Rachael could have planted the Spruce near their son's grave, but an event that happened the following year suggests a more likely origin.

On March 29, 1891, Edward Dell (1823-1891), the son of Randolph Quakers Jessie (d. 1869) and Anna Dell (d. 1863), died, leaving behind a sizable estate. The 19th century Dells were farmers who branched out into other endeavors. His father, Jesse, worked as a surveyor. His brother Alfred at one time owned a store in Flanders and ended his life in Newark, running a mattress business with his son George.

In the four Federal censuses in which he appeared, Edward listed himself as a laborer (1850), a speculator owning \$300 worth of land (1860), a constable owning \$4,000 worth of land (1870) and a farmer (1880). He willed several properties to relatives and friends who had taken care of him in old age.

In his will, Edward give \$500 to the "Society of Friends located in the township of Randolph" to be invested in bonds and real estate. \$25 of the interest on the investments was to be used for the general care of the "Meeting House and grave yard" and \$5 "applied to keeping my own mentioned grave lot in good repair and condition forever." The lot was to be large enough "to hold at least four persons" (not specified) and to contain a "substantial granite monument" with his own name and the name of his parents. It was also to be surrounded by a "substantial iron fence" and cost \$1,000 no more nor less to be paid out of my estate."



Dell monument, taken from the Spruce tree, looking west.

Erecting a monument of this size and grandeur ran counter to Quaker *Book of Discipline*, which, prior to the mid-19th century, forbade any monuments and after that any large ornate monuments. Therefore, according to an article in the *Iron Era*, the Executors contacted Plainfield Monthly Meeting, which now held the deed, to get permission to erect the monument. Permission was apparently granted as the Dell monument now stands as the largest and most ornate monument in the Cemetery.

With such a grand and expensive monument being added to the Cemetery in 1891, could the Executors of Edward's will have decided to plant a special young spruce tree directly east of the gate through which the Dell lot

is entered? Based on the age of the tree and burials in the area, this may be the best estimate of who planted the Norway spruce in the Cemetery and why. It might have been the final purchase to ensure that "no more nor less" was spent on the Edward Dell monument.

Why was the tree removed?

Over the ensuing 130 or so years, the tree grew in size, eventually dwarfing the native cedar trees that surrounded it. The growth rings paint a picture of extended dry periods (1920-30s) and lush growth (1940-50s).

As the tree grew, it unfortunately posed unacceptable risks to the Meeting House. In 2006 it was struck by lightning that traveled down the tree and through the ground, damaging a corner of the Meeting House.



Lightening traveled down the tree, through the ground and to the northwest corner of the Meeting House, blasting off the base siding.

In addition, the 150-foot-tall mass could easily have crushed the Meeting House if it fell in that direction during a storm. Rather than waiting to include the work in a future grant request, to eliminate these risks the Association matched a special donation to cover the cost of the work.

Re-landscaping

For now, the area where the Norway spruce stood will be left as it is, with the stump still visible. A grassy meadow should grow up around the graves that will be tended is as the rest of the Cemetery. Once the archaeology project is completed, re-landscaping the entire Cemetery will be addressed as part of adding parking and visitor friendly paths.

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

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Visit us at:

www.randolphmeetinghouse.org

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To donate to the preservation of this historic site,
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www.randolphmeetinghouse.org

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Nick Steneck, Editor

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