



## Brief History of New Garden Meeting

By Dr. Peg Jones



New Garden Meeting House stands on land that was part of a Penn grant to John Miller, a Quaker from County Carlow, Ireland. John Miller, Michael Lightfoot, Simon Hadley, James Starr and Joseph Sharp were among several Quakers who brought their families to settle in this neighborhood. To this land, they gave the name New Garden in memory of their home Meeting, New Garden. At first when the Quaker settlers met to worship, they met in John Miller's log house. As their numbers swelled, they asked permission from Chester Quarter "to build a Meeting House near John Miller's dwelling house." This request was granted and in 1713, a log Meeting House was constructed on the southeast corner of John Miller's 1013

acres. Although New Garden became a Monthly Meeting in 1718, until 1792, it met on alternate months with London Grove Meeting.

Despite the struggle to clear the forest, to build homes and farm buildings, in 1743, New Garden Friends replaced their log house with a brick Meeting House, the south end of the present building. Legend has it that the bricks came from England, however, in 1790, when the north end was built, the bricks were probably fired in the brickyard on Sunny Dell Road.

New Garden built a school in 1777, near where the present fireplace is located. This was a log building with an enormous stone fireplace across one end. The school was a paid subscription school for Friends' children until 1829, when non-Friends were admitted. With the advent of public education, the school served as a public school, but closed in 1856, to be replaced by several neighborhood schools.

In 1827, when there was a theological dispute among Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, New Garden was unique in that it did not disown those Friends who chose to leave, to build and worship in another Meeting House. The clerk, Ezra Webster, compared the Meeting to a stone wall out of which some stones had fallen, leaving the Meeting a little weak, but still standing. He prophesied that some day those stones would be replaced, and in 1955, they were. The differences at the time of the separation were no longer differences and Friends were once more united as a Society.

New Garden Friends refurbished their Meeting House in 1905. Improvements included changing the two front doors to one, and building the long porch and covered entrance. Although the Lombardy poplars of the early days were gone, a row of Maple trees was planted to shade the Meeting House.

The Meeting House has seen its benches filled with silent worshippers; it has heard impassioned pleas to free the slaves, to care for the poor, to curb drunkenness, to protect the native people, to find ways to peace. New Garden Meeting has for all its 300 years been a haven where Friends might come together in the serenity of the Silence to worship their God.