

Quakers in Early Columbia County, Part II

By Darren Price

[Excerpted and edited from Willard R. Rhoads, History of the Catawissa Quaker Meeting and the Roaring Creek Quaker Meeting (Numidia, 1963). Rhoads was also the author of Genealogy of the Rarig Family (Numidia, 1935). Editorial comments are enclosed in square brackets. Notes not in square brackets are Rhoads'.]

Introduction

Five meeting houses of the Society of Friends [Quakers] were located within Columbia County, Pennsylvania, and four others were located within the verge or influence of those in the county during the last 175 years [1787-1963]. These included Catawissa, Roaring Creek, Millville, Greenwood and Berwick within the county, together with Muncy (Pennsdale), Loyal Sock (Pine Grove), Elkland and Shamokin (Bear Gap) in adjacent counties.

[Part I covered the arrival of the first Quakers to the Roaring Creek Valley, the establishment of the first Meetings, and events up to and including the laying down of the Catawissa Monthly Meeting in Dec 1808, which then continued as a Preparative Meeting.]

Muncy Monthly Meeting

It will be remembered that the Muncy Monthly Meeting was set up by the Catawissa Monthly Meeting in October 1799. The first meeting of Catawissa and Roaring Creek with the Muncy Monthly Meeting was held on January, 1809.

February 15, 1809. Benjamin Sharpless was selected as clerk for the Muncy Monthly Meeting.

April 18, 1810. The committee has secured title to the lots on Berwick for a meeting house and school.

May 23, 1810. The Pine Grove (Loyal Sock) Indulged Meeting is continued. It is proposed to alternate the Monthly Meetings at Muncy and Fishing Creek.

October 23, 1811. Moses Starr and Joseph Whitacre were elected Elders of the Muncy Meeting.

August 19, 1812. Moses Lukens was elected as clerk of the Muncy Monthly Meeting and on February 11, 1813 Bezaleel Hayhurst and Henry Parker were elected as the new Elders.

[Ed. note: One of the original thirteen Quaker families that established Germantown Colony, outside (now part of) Philadelphia, was that of Jan Lucken, or Lukens. Moses Lukens is presumed, although not verified, to be a descendant of that family.]

April 21, 1813. The Muncy Monthly Meeting received a request from the Catawissa Preparative Meeting [the Catawissa Monthly Meeting was laid down in Dec 1808] stating that in view of the

great distance to the Muncy Meeting and the difficulty of attending same, they request that a monthly meeting be established among them.

June 23, 1813. The committee appointed to consider the request brought up from the Catawissa Preparative Meeting "to set up a monthly meeting within the limits of that preparative meeting, to be held at Roaring Creek". Signed by Samuel Carpenter and John Kester on June 17, 1813.

[Ed. note: the Kesters are descendants of the Kosters/Kuster family, also of early Germantown Colony.]

February 7, 1814. The Quarterly Meeting at Philadelphia approved the plans for a Monthly Meeting at Roaring Creek.

April 20, 1814. The Muncy Monthly Meeting decides that the newly created monthly meeting shall be known as the "Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting", and shall be opened for the first time in sixth month (June) next. Catawissa suggested that this monthly meeting shall be composed of the Roaring Creek and Catawissa Preparative Meeting and that Berwick Indulged Meeting be attached to Catawissa.

Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting

Roaring Creek held their first meeting on June 15, 1814.

July 13, 1814. Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting appointed Benjamin Sharpless as clerk and Thomas Ellis, Bezaleel Hayhurst, Joseph Millard, Jeremiah Hughes and Edward Linville as Overseers. For Elders, they appointed Benjamin Sharpless, Thomas Ellis, Bezaleel Hayhurst and from the Women Friends, Mary Field, Susannah Hayhurst and Rachel Hibbs.

Note: The names of many men and women will be included in this history of the Roaring Creek Meeting, because these are the names of the early settlers in Roaring Creek Valley. Many names had to be omitted for lack of space.

Note: The Friends had always believed that their young men and women should not marry outside of their faith. However the minutes through the years contained many examples of this violation. One example will be given here to show how this situation was handled. At the meeting of October 12, 1814, it was reported that "John Lee had accomplished his marriage by the assistance of a Magistrate, with a woman not in membership with Friends". A committee of two men was appointed to "take an opportunity" with him on the occasion and report their sense to the next Monthly Meeting.

The Committee had an opportunity (interview) with Lee, and he presented them with an acknowledgment admitting and condemning his misconduct. He was therefore retained as a member. In other cases where a man refused to yield, the committee prepared an "essay of testification" against his conduct which was read, approved, signed and a copy delivered to him. If he still refused to change his mind he would lose his rights to membership.

[Ed. note: Transcriptions of Quaker meeting minutes often use the notation "disowned MOU" (married out of unity).]



*Roaring Creek Quaker Meeting House, Erected
1796*

Other misdeeds and shortcomings, which could lead to a hearing and possible dismissal, as recorded in the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting minutes included training with the militia, taking strong drink to excess, making use of liquors at a vendue (public sale), neglecting attendance at meetings, nonpayment of debt, launching into trade beyond the man's ability to manage, et cetera.

If a woman married outside of the faith, the case was always handled by the Women Friends, who followed the same procedure as the men. However, one man was always selected to accompany the women, probably to provide a horse and buggy for their transportation, as the Quaker homes were widely scattered. It is evident from the above that the Quakers were concerned not only with the religious life of their members, but also with their day to day activities.

April 9, 1815. Jeremiah Hughes, Jason Hibbs, Joseph Hughes and Moses Starr were appointed Trustees of the Roaring Creek Meeting House and Lot.

November 12, 1815. Moses Starr and William Hughes were appointed to attend the Quarterly Meeting at Philadelphia.

February 14, 1816. Joshua Lloyd requests certificate to Short Creek Monthly Meeting, Ohio.

November 12, 1817. A proposal was made to raise \$40 to pay the expenses of members attending the Quarterly Meeting in Philadelphia. It was felt that five dollars per member would be adequate.

April 14, 1819. Joseph Hayhurst and Penninah Field declare their intention of getting married.

May 12, 1819. John Eves has agreed to take two of Sarah Yarnall's children, Rebecca and John, until they are 16 years of age, and will give them nine months schooling, for which this meeting will pay Eves \$20 and will pay the teacher for their schooling.

March 15, 1820. Elizabeth Hughes requests a certificate for her son Charles, a minor, to Gwynedd Monthly Meeting.

November 15, 1820. John Hughes of Roaring Creek Meeting requests a certificate to Younge Street Monthly Meeting in Canada.

February 14, 1821. It was agreed to alternate the Monthly Meetings between Roaring Creek and Catawissa, and hold the first meeting at Catawissa in June.

Note: From June 1821 until April 1846 the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting alternated between Roaring Creek and Catawissa.

July 11, 1821 at Roaring Creek. A committee from Muncy Monthly Meeting attended and expressed a concern that a Quarterly Meeting be established "on this side of the mountain".

November 19, 1821 at Roaring Creek. Berwick Friends request a further continuance of their Indulged Meeting. It was granted to October 1822.

Oct 16, 1822 at Catawissa. Berwick Friends request to have an Established Meeting at that place. However the committee who have care of the Berwick Meeting feel they should continue another year as an Indulged Meeting.

Note: The meaning of an Established Meeting is not clear. Swarthmore Historical Library informs the author that an Established Meeting can be either a Preparative Meeting or a Monthly Meeting with authority to keep birth, marriage and other such records, which an Indulged Meeting is not authorized to do. In 1850 the Half Yearly Meeting at Fishing Creek (Millville) set up a Preparative Meeting at both Berwick and Shamokin.

February 12, 1823 at Catawissa. The Quarterly Meeting on February 3, 1823, granted Berwick an Established Meeting to be known as the Berwick Meeting to be opened on the First-day (Sunday) of June.

July 16, 1823 at Roaring Creek. Hannah Irvin is admitted into membership at the Younge Street, Canada, Monthly Meeting.

November 10, 1824 at Roaring Creek. Amos Davis requests that his three minor children come under care of Friends. They are received into membership.

November 16, 1825 at Roaring Creek. Rowland Hughes wishes to be released from the care of schooling of poor children.

February 14, 1827 at Catawissa. A committee of six Friends was appointed to consider the propriety of continuing or discontinuing this meeting. At the March Meeting it was decided to continue the meeting.

September 10, 1828 at Roaring Creek. Concerning the subject of the late separation of Friends, this Meeting requests to become a branch of the Quarterly Meeting of Friends to be held at Cherry Street Philadelphia.

Note: This request was granted and the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting became a member of the Hicksite Branch which was held at Cherry Street.

The Separation

Throughout their history the Quakers had been against war and in favor of peace, but at times they had their own internal trouble. Elias Hicks (1748-1830) born in Hempstead, Long Island, New York, of a Quaker family started out as an itinerant minister but developed into a strong effective speaker, with a warm personal appeal to Friends. Hicks felt the Quakers were becoming too liberal in their views and worship, and held that they should return to the simple belief of the Inner Light as taught by George Fox.

At the Yearly Meeting in Philadelphia in 1827, the two factions came to a separation; those following Hicks were known as "Hicksites" while those who remained true to the old faith were known as "Orthodox". As a result of this difference, all the Monthly Meetings in the region were literally forced into deciding what faction they would follow. Elias Hicks spoke at the Roaring Creek and Catawissa Meetings and both followed his teachings, which became known as the "Religious Society of Friends".

It was later observed that, in general, the rural areas followed Hicks, while the urban areas held to the Orthodox. In 1946, after 119 years of separation, steps were taken to unite and today [in 1963] they are well on their way in returning to the same fold.

May 16, 1832 at Roaring Creek. Benjamin Sharpless attended the Quarterly Meeting at Philadelphia...and returned with six copies of our Discipline, ten copies of the extracts of the yearly Meeting and fifty copies of John Comly's Epistles. John Comly was a minister and assistant clerk of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. He spoke at Roaring Creek and was warmly welcomed because he had relatives -- the Hamptons -- in the valley.

[Ed. Note: the Hampton family came to the Roaring Creek Valley from Wrightstown, Bucks County, in the late 1700s. They were Scots Quakers who originally emigrated to New Jersey at about the same time the colony of Germantown was established.]

September 12, 1832 at Roaring Creek. Elida John of Shamokin requests to come under care of the Friends. He was accepted November 14, 1832.

Note: This is the first mention of the John Family, a famous Quaker family that settled in Shamokin (later Ralpho) Township in the region around Elysburg, Pa. The family played a prominent role in the Shamokin, Catawissa and Roaring Creek Quaker Meetings, and many members of the family served as clerks and officers of the Monthly Meetings. In addition the family furnished many Quaker ministers.

January 16, 1833 at Roaring Creek. Muncy Monthly Meeting suggests establishing a Quarterly Meeting composed of Friends of Maiden Creek, Muncy and Roaring Creek. The plan was not considered desirable. Roaring Creek then proposed a Half Yearly Meeting to be held at Fishing Creek (Millville), to be composed of Muncy and Roaring Creek Monthly Meetings. This meeting was granted by the Yearly Meeting in 1834 and was known as the "Fishing Creek Half Yearly Meeting".

September 11, 1833 at Roaring Creek. Perry John of Bear Gap wishes to come under care of Friends. He was received into membership on October 16, 1833.

January 15, 1834 at Roaring Creek. The committee on the subject of schools reports that there are only 16 children of Friends, between the ages of 5 and 16, within the limits of our Monthly Meeting, and they are in a very scattered situation.

Note: Pennsylvania passed the Public School Act in 1834, and the Yearly Meeting of the Friends inquired as to the number of children in the Monthly Meeting areas, receiving the above answer from Roaring Creek.

April 15, 1835 at Catawissa. Reuben John of Bear Gap requests to come under the care of Friends. He was received into membership on May 13, 1835.

August 12, 1835 at Catawissa. Elida John was selected as clerk of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting and Sarah, his wife also joined the Meeting on November 11, 1835.

January 13, 1836 at Roaring Creek. Edward Linville and Bezaleel Hayhurst from the men and Mary Linville and Mary Ellis from the Women Friends were elected as Elders of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting at this time. Eliza S. John was received into membership of the Friends on July 13, 1836.

[Ed. note: Eliza S. John kept a diary, which has survived, and is a useful resource for researching Quaker families in this place and time. Transcriptions of The Diary of Eliza John are available on-line on FamilySearch and RootsWeb (downloadable), and there have also been published bound reprints. Google "Eliza John Diary" to locate copies.]

February 13, 1839 at Catawissa. Elida John and Sarah Hughes are appointed as Elders in addition to those who already stand appointed.

Note: It must become apparent to the reader that the John Family of Shamokin (Elysburg) injected life and vitality into the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting.

[End of Part 2. Part 3 includes the establishment of Shamokin Meeting and the laying down of Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting.]