

Quakers in Early Columbia County, Part III

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 1 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. Part 2 described the Orthodox / Hicksite separation and the arrival of the John family to the Roaring Creek Valley]

Shamokin Meeting

October 14, 1840 at Catawissa. Shamokin Friends requested an Indulged Meeting for worship on the first day of the week (Sunday) in a school house near Asa T. John's for the ensuing six months. The request was granted.

Note: The Shamokin Meeting was named for Shamokin Township in Northumberland County, and in general covered the area around Elysburg. During February 1883 the eastern portion of the township was set up as Ralpho Township and the name of the Friends Meeting was changed to Bear Gap.

January 13, 1841 at Roaring Creek. Abia John of Shamokin requests to come under care of Friends. He was admitted to membership on March 17, 1841.



Roaring Creek Quaker Meeting House

June 16, 1841 at Catawissa. Moses Starr was ordered to transfer the Roaring Creek Meeting House and Lot to the new Trustees, John Hughes, Reuben John, Samuel Hampton and Judah Cherrington. The deed of trust was dated September 15, 1841.

July 14, 1841 at Roaring Creek. The following Friends were named as Overseers for the Roaring Creek Monthly

Meeting: William Thomas, Reuben John, Perry John and Benjamin Sharpless.

August 11, 1841 at Catawissa. Elida John is directed to take charge of the scattered meeting records, as well as the library.

April 13, 1842 at Catawissa. Shamokin Friends request permission to hold their meeting another year from next Monthly Meeting, and this request was granted.

December 14, 1842 at Catawissa. Shamokin Friends request privilege of holding mid-week meetings on fifth-day (Thursday) at the homes of Perry John, Elida John and Asa T. John in rotation, which was granted to them.

February 8, 1843 at Catawissa. Rebecca John of Shamokin, a Gospel Minister, and Perry John husband of Rebecca wishes to join her in paying a religious visit to the families of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting. At this time quite a few people, mostly from Shamokin Township around Elysburg, made request to come under the care of the Friends.

June 14, 1843 at Catawissa. Reuben John of Shamokin was elected as a Gospel Minister, and a notice was sent to the Half Yearly Meeting at Fishing Creek where his appointment was confirmed.

July 12, 1843 at Roaring Creek. The Meeting continues the Indulged Meeting of Shamokin Friends for another year.

December 13, 1843 at Roaring Creek. The committee appointed to assist Shamokin Friends to find a suitable site for a meeting house report that Asa T. John offers one acre of ground from his farm for the use of a meeting house and grave yard, reserving 60 perch until needed by the Meeting. Signed by Judah Cherrington, Abisha Thomas, Mahlon Hicks, Emily Thomas and Asa T. John.

June 12, 1844 at Catawissa. Rebecca John expresses a concern (desire) to attend next Yearly Meeting at Baltimore. Sarah H. John reports she would like to accompany Rebecca and the request is granted.

September 11, 1844 at Roaring Creek. Samuel Hampton and Reuben John are appointed to take charge of the Roaring Creek Meeting House and bring up to date the births, deaths and ages of deceased Friends.

April 16, 1845 at Catawissa. Shamokin Friends report that "the time has arrived to establish a Shamokin Meeting".

November 12, 1845 at Roaring Creek. Benjamin Sharpless, Samuel Hampton, Perry John and Mahlon Hicks were appointed Overseers; Benjamin Sharpless, William Thomas, Samuel Hampton, Elida John and Women Friends, Mary Linville, Mary Ellis, Sarah Pelkington, Sarah H. John and Martha Lee were selected as Elders for the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting.

December 17, 1845 at Catawissa. The Annual Queries record that "a Meeting has been settled in Shamokin Township near Bear Gap, on first (Sunday) and fifth (Thursday) days at 11:00 o'clock and called the Shamokin Meeting."

March 11, 1846 at Roaring Creek. A committee of six, including Mahlon Hicks, Reuben John, Joseph Pelkington, Sarah H. John, Emily Thomas and Elizabeth Johnson agree "that the Preparative Meetings be held alternately at Catawissa and Shamokin Meeting Houses - - -". This plan was adopted at the next meeting held April 15, 1846, and the meetings were held at Shamokin in the second, fourth, eighth and tenth months.

March 17, 1847 at Roaring Creek. This meeting...protested the use of Columbia County tax money toward defraying the expenses of a Volunteer Company from Danville sent to Pittsburgh and ordered this notice to be published in a county paper.

November 10, 1847 at Roaring Creek. Hiram John and Perry John reported to the Monthly Meeting on the subject of parades in our grave yards, that in accordance with Friends order, no parade at funerals nor the introduction of hireling ministers to officiate in the yard should be allowed.

January 16, 1850. The representatives of the Half Yearly Meeting at Fishing Creek agreed to establish Preparative Meetings at Berwick and Shamokin. The Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting was held in rotation at Catawissa [Feb.], Berwick [Mar.], Shamokin [Apr.] and at Roaring Creek [May].

August 13, 1851 at Shamokin. The children of Friends are subjected to unprofitable ceremonies and exposed to bad examples in the public schools.

Note: From this statement it would appear that the Friends were not satisfied with the work of the public schools, but the minutes do not record any change.

May 10, 1852. Abisha Thomas, sole surviving Trustee now in membership of the Society called "Quakers" belonging to and within the compass of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting now held circular [rotating] at Roaring Creek, Catawissa, Berwick and Shamokin, executed a Deed of Trust with Joseph Pelkington, Reuben John and Elida John to have and hold the Lot for the use of the Meeting House, and for no other purpose whatsoever.

November 14, 1855 at Berwick. It was suggested that the Catawissa Preparative Meeting be "laid down" (discontinued), and the monthly Meeting united in agreement. It was referred to the Fishing Creek Half Yearly Meeting for approval. The minutes do not refer to this subject again and it must therefore be assumed that the Catawissa Preparative Meeting was laid down. However Catawissa remained as a member of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting until the Monthly Meeting was laid down in 1917. It is also possible that Catawissa may have held First-day Meetings at the homes of members as was later done at Roaring Creek.

October 13, 1858. An application was made to the Court of Common Pleas at Bloomsburgh [sic] for permission to sell the school house lot (No. 48) at Catawissa.

November 10, 1858 at Berwick. Mary Emma Walters was received into membership of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting.

December 10, 1859 at Catawissa. Friends noted that an objectionable monument had been placed in the Roaring Creek burial ground. A large head stone was later removed.

January 16, 1861 at Roaring Creek. The Half Yearly Meeting at Fishing Creek agreed to "lay down" the Roaring Creek mid-weekly meeting. Enoch Kester and Samuel Hampton were ordered to take charge of the Roaring Creek Meeting House and burying ground.

October 14, 1869 at Catawissa. It was proposed to hold the Roaring Creek Preparative Meeting alternately at the home of Mary Ann Cherrington, wife of Lawson Hughes, and at the home of Enoch Kester, who was the husband of Ruth Ann, sister of Mary Ann Cherrington above.

Note: The above minute is a proposal and may not have been carried out at this time, but does indicate that meetings would soon be held in private homes. Much uncertainty exists about the time when First-day (Sunday) Meetings were no longer held in the Meeting House at Roaring Creek, but were held in private homes. J. H. Battle in the *History of Columbia and Montour Counties* states on page 306, "Friends in the vicinity of the Roaring Creek Meeting House have had regular meetings until a few years ago. For 90 years it was a place of worship". Written in 1887 this would give around 1884 as the year of ending. Older citizens remember when meetings were held at the homes of Mary Ann Hughes, Ruth Ann Kester, widow of Enoch Kester at Mill Grove and William John at Bear Gap.

June 16, 1869 at Catawissa. It was decided that the Berwick Meeting should be laid down.

April 16, 1870 at Shamokin. The Court appointed a jury to view the placing of a road through the lot adjoining the grave yard at Catawissa. A year later they received \$100 damage for allowing the road.

November 18, 1871 at Catawissa. Owen Cherrington was called for "marriage out of the Quaker Faith". Two men had an opportunity [interview] with Owen, but he manifested no desire to return and an "essay of testification" was prepared against him and he was dropped as a member.

Note: Owen Cherrington married Elizabeth Rarig, daughter of Elias Rarig, and a sister to Mrs. Jacob Hoffman. Judah Cherrington, father of Owen, had opened a store in Mill Grove in 1859, and Owen after his marriage operated the store. Around 1887, Owen and Elizabeth (Betsy) donated the tract of land for the Reformed Church at Mill Grove.

February 17, 1872 at Catawissa. [A portion of the Catawissa Meeting House property] was sold to George Scott for \$900. This lot was later divided and is now [in 1963] owned by Ralph Fox and Mary Cleaver.

June 13, 1874 at Catawissa. Enoch Kester, Abia John, Ruth Ann Kester and Mary Emma Walters were elected as Elders of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting.

July 18, 1874 at Catawissa. C. B. Jackson asks the Monthly Meeting that control of the burying ground at Berwick be given to certain officers to convert into a public cemetery. The request was refused.

October 14, 1876 at Catawissa. The Meeting House at Berwick was rented for school purposes for five months for \$30.

December 17, 1881 at Shamokin. The Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting paid \$25 toward the rebuilding of the Main Building at Swarthmore College near Philadelphia, which was destroyed by fire on September 25, 1881.

[Ed. note: Swarthmore College was founded in 1864 by the Friends of Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York Hicksite Meetings. Swarthmore's archives include the largest collection of Quaker records in the world, including the original records from Meetings reporting to Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and several other Yearly Meetings, as well as copies of records from other Meetings worldwide.]

February 17, 1883 at Shamokin. The name of the Shamokin Meeting was changed to the Bear Gap Meeting. On February 5, 1883, the name of the eastern part of Shamokin Township was changed to Ralpho Township, the present name.

June 21, 1887 at Catawissa. The Berwick Meeting House property was sold at public sale for \$1850 [to Judge Charles C. Evans].

April 18, 1897 at Bear Gap. Mary Emma Walter asks for the establishment of a Preparative Meeting at Catawissa. At the May meeting it was noted that "the way does not open for a Preparative Meeting at Catawissa."

[Ed. note: as mentioned in the previous article, Mary Emma Walter came to Catawissa from Elysburg in 1890, and had been cleaning the Meeting House, improving the grounds, and worshiping in the meeting house, which she continued to do until her death in 1930.]

May 24, 1903 at Roaring Creek. Anna L. Kester wishes to marry a man not of the Quaker Faith, and asks to be continued as a member.

Note: This request was granted and she was married to Reuben Beaver of Aristes. It is interesting to note that the attitude of the Quakers on the question of marrying outside of the Faith had changed since the marriage of Owen Cherrington [Anna's uncle], who was dropped. Now permission could be secured for such a marriage. Anna Kester had taught school at the one room school house in Newlin in 1893-1894 and again during 1900-1902, where the author [Willard Rhoads] was one of her pupils.

March 19, 1905 at Bear Gap. Mary A. John plans to marry J. Omar Heritage of Mickleton, New Jersey. Araminta Kester and T. Elwood Kester are asked to attend the wedding at Woodbury Monthly Meeting.

August 3, 1913 at Bear Gap. Griffith John resigns as clerk of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting and Anna (Kester) Beaver is appointed in his place.

September 19, 1915 at Roaring Creek. Ellen (Mrs. Grant) Beaver was appointed as clerk to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Anna Beaver on August 22, 1915.

August 19, 1917 at Roaring Creek. This is the last minute recorded in the minute book of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting, and is as follows: "It was the judgment of this Monthly Meeting that the \$500 in our hands be kept and applied to purposes of caring for our grave yards." There was no mention of laying down the Meeting or any other statement.

Note: The last Meeting at Bear Gap as recorded in the minute book was held on August 3, 1913, and the last Meeting at Catawissa was held on June 13, 1915.

Laying Down the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting

All efforts by the author to find a copy of the minute laying down the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting have failed to date. It is much more difficult to lay down a Monthly Meeting, which includes properties at Catawissa, Roaring Creek and Bear Gap, than in laying down a Preparative Meeting. Such an event requires action by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

A letter dated September 20, 1918, written to Ellen (Mrs. Grant) Beaver, who was the last clerk of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting, read in part: "At the last Meeting of the Representative Committee of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends the subject of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting being laid down was brought to the attention of the Meeting....tell us what property belongs to said Meeting laid down and what said members desire about it. Also, what records you have and what efforts are being made to preserve these..."

The properties of the Friends Meeting at Catawissa and Roaring Creek were transferred to the same set of Trustees, at Bloomsburg, Pa., February 8, 1919. Griffith John, surviving Trustee for the Society of People called Quakers residing within the compass of the Roaring Creek Monthly Meeting, transfers the property at Roaring Creek to Griffith John, William U. John, and T. Elwood Kester [and the same for the property at Catawissa].

Both properties were transferred to Trustees of the Millville Monthly Meeting by deed signed on August 26, 1921 as shown in the records at the Court House. No mention is made of the property at Bear Gap, and it is assumed that it reverted back to the farm from which it was originally taken.

Several reasons can be given for the decline of the Quaker following in the Catawissa and Roaring Creek area. Many Quaker families moved away. Most of these emigrated to Younge Street near Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, others went to Pelham, near Fenwick, west of Niagara Falls, Canada, while some went to Short Creek, Ohio. The Quakers were looking for good farm land, and it is likely they found such land at these places. A Monthly Meeting was set up at Younge Street and at Short Creek, and Friends corresponded with these centers for years. Another reason for leaving Catawissa and Roaring Creek, especially the latter, was the dwindling supply of land. After the Quakers opened up the "Old Reading Road" in August 1789, German

settlers moved into the valley over this same road, and occupied the eastern end of Roaring Creek Valley. This reduced the land available for Quakers.

A third reason may be found in the Quaker organization. When a man or woman married "outside of the Faith" [or "out of unity"] it was the general rule to drop them from membership. This meant the loss of the family, and through the years, the loss of their children and their children's children. In the early years when the Quakers needed support and growth, they were losing families. In the later years they realized their mistake and changed the rule, but much of the damage had been done.

The Friends now [in 1963] remaining in Columbia County are located in the Millville area where Preparative, Monthly and Quarterly Meetings are still held. The Meeting Houses at Catawissa and Roaring Creek stand silent today.

The Quakers in Roaring Creek Valley were a hard-working, thrifty and God-fearing group of people who set up their meeting house in 1796, and spread their culture throughout the valley. The Germans who came after them were also a hard-working, thrifty and God-fearing group of people, who set up their Union church in 1816, and spread their culture throughout the valley. We, the descendants of these groups should recognize and cherish the splendid heritage they have left us.