



# NORTH CAROLINA FRIENDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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Quakerism in North Carolina 1672 - 2022  
Commemorating Our 350-Year Heritage

## EXCITING NEWS FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the North Carolina Friends Historical Society will be held this year on November 12th. We will meet at Springfield Friends Meeting (555 E. Springfield Road, High Point, NC 27263), which was the longtime home of Nathan Hunt. A luncheon is not planned this year, therefore there is no cost nor reservation needed to attend. Invite your f/Friends to come with you!

We invite you to gather in the Springfield Friends Meeting Fellowship Hall for coffee and light refreshment at 10:00 a.m. The program, "The Life and Ministry of Nathan Hunt" will begin at 10:30 a.m.

Nathan Hunt (1758-1853) was one of the best-known Quaker ministers of his generation in North Carolina. Born near New Garden, he was a witness to the Battle of Guilford Courthouse and helped to nurse the wounded following the battle.

He was deeply concerned for education, and was one of the principal founders of Guilford College. He was also single-handedly responsible for preventing the breakup of North Carolina Yearly

Meeting during the Orthodox/Hicksite separation. Although he did not live to see the Civil War, his strong opposition to slavery influenced North Carolina Yearly Meeting.

After the war, his farm near Springfield was purchased by the Baltimore Association and became the Model Farm. Nathan Hunt and his family moved to Piney Woods Meeting and then to Springfield, where he remained for most of the rest of his life. He is buried in Springfield Friends Cemetery. Many of his descendants also became influential Quakers and served as ministers, educators and leaders.



*Nathan Hunt*

Our speaker is Joshua Brown, currently pastor at Springfield Friends Meeting. He previously served West Richmond Friends Meeting in Indiana for 22 years and Adirondack Friends Meeting

in New York for nine years. Prior to this, he was the assistant director at Beacon Hill Friends House in Boston, Massachusetts.



*Joshua Brown*

Springfield Friends Meeting is one of the oldest meetings in Piedmont North Carolina and is home to the Museum of Old Domestic Life. It is the perfect place for Josh to pursue his deep interest in history. He has published seven books and numerous articles. He is possibly best known for his editing of the 2010 edition of the Autobiography of Allen Jay.

Josh serves on the board of the North Carolina Friends Historical Society. In his spare time, he enjoys playing traditional folk music and gospel hymns and he is a wood turner. He and his wife Joyce Leacy Brown have two grown children, Elizabeth and Matt.

Following the meeting, Curator **Brenda Haworth** will open **The Museum of Old Domestic Life** to visitors. It is a fascinating display of everyday items from Quaker families who lived in Guilford and Randolph County in the 1800s.

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*We are pleased to offer the second installment of Max L. Carter's "Quaker Settlement in the Carolinas." This is based on several recent class offerings at Friends Homes and the Shepherd's Center, both located in Greensboro. In addition, he recently led a trip of New Garden Friends Meeting Friends and others to Pasquotank and Perquimans Counties. The current installment focuses on Friends in Piedmont North Carolina.*

### QUAKER SETTLEMENT IN THE CAROLINAS

Early Quaker settlement in the Carolinas was influenced by several factors. One was the persecution of Friends in New England. Although King Charles II had forbidden the further execution of Quakers in a missive delivered in 1660 (and we have high hopes for further benefit to Friends under King Charles III!), punishment for Quaker activity was still severe. The forbidding swamps and wilderness of northeastern Carolina offered a good refuge. Another was the tolerant constitution of the Proprietary Colony and the absence of the kind of control the Church of England maintained in other colonies. Furthermore, travel along the seacoast offered access to the inlets along the eastern limits of what is now North Carolina.

The communities of Friends that developed in Perquimans and Pasquotank Counties following the residence of the Phelps/Phillips family in 1665 and the visits by William Edmondson and George Fox in 1672 formed the center of Quakerism in the Carolinas for many years, as other factors prevented Quakers from moving very far inland. Rivers were navigable only so far westward; there was no developed road system; Native Americans controlled most of the

territory. By the mid-1700s, however, conditions had changed, and by the end of the century, the center of North Carolina Quakerism had moved to the Piedmont.

Following the Tuscarora War of the early 1700s, some Indian tribes moved out of the state, and others moved away from the territory now comprising the counties of the Piedmont. At the same time that this land was being vacated by its original inhabitants, the situation in southeastern Pennsylvania was also changing for the Quaker population. Land in and around Philadelphia was becoming expensive and more crowded. Movement to the west was problematic, as there was warfare on the frontier, and the Alleghenies formed a geographical barrier. At the same time, the ministers and elders of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were effecting a tightening of the "Discipline" in an attempt to reform a Religious Society of Friends that was becoming "at ease in Zion."

The Carolina back country thus beckoned with its available land, lack of Established Church control, and distance from those pesky ministers and elders with their increased "discipline."

Into that back country of the Carolina Piedmont first came a group of Pennsylvania Quakers in the 1740s known as the Bryant Party. Blazing a trail through central Virginia that became known as the Philadelphia Wagon Road, they settled along the Yadkin River. Others soon followed, and by 1749 there was a community of Friends at Cane Creek in what is now Alamance County. Becoming a monthly meeting in 1751, it became the "mother of meetings" in central North Carolina, monthly meetings soon being established in the 1750s at New Garden, Centre, and Deep River. Hundreds of families poured into the area, building

a thriving Quaker community of farms, mills, small businesses, schools, and places of worship a quarter century before the American Revolutionary War. Many of those family surnames are still to be found in Alamance, Guilford, Randolph, and surrounding counties: Hunt, Mendenhall, Johnson, Osborne, Newlin, Carter, and others.

That Philadelphia Wagon Road migration was soon followed by scores of families from Nantucket, where crowded conditions and cost of land was also becoming a discouraging factor. But most of all, the economy of the island depended on whaling, and the whales were moving farther and farther out to sea. Replacing the creatures that once circled the island in abundance were British man-o-wars, portending the coming war. Macys, Folgers, Coffins, Swains, Husseys, Starbucks, Gardners, and others joined their spiritual cousins in the Carolinas, the migration peaking in 1772.

Significantly, the areas from which those Piedmont settlers came were the centers of strong anti-slavery sentiment. It was in southeastern Pennsylvania that the 1688 "Germantown Remonstrance" was written by Friends and Mennonites in the first European Christian protest against the practice of slavery. As its influence spread into the 1700s through the passion of Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, and other Quakers, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting increasingly developed a conscience against slavery. At the same time, Nantucket Quaker sailors who had witnessed the worst of the Middle Passage and Caribbean slave plantations helped form the island's anti-slavery society in the 1730s. By the time Thomas Newby's appeal in the early 1770s to his Piney Woods Meeting about freeing his enslaved persons began working its way through the procedures

of North Carolina Yearly Meeting, Piedmont Friends were ready to offer their support. When Philadelphia Yearly Meeting adopted its anti-slavery testimony in 1776, North Carolina Yearly Meeting was soon to follow.

This set in motion a series of attempts by North Carolina Friends to address the issue of slavery. A state law prohibiting freeing enslaved persons led to the artifice of the Yearly Meeting assuming "ownership" of hundreds of people formerly enslaved by Friends. Known as "Quaker free Negroes," they were technically owned but had their own agency and lived and worked freely. Friends also became active in "colonization societies," arranging for ships to carry the formerly enslaved back to Africa or to the Caribbean. Others helped form the state's first manumission society, and in 1819, the first known activity of what later was called the Underground Railroad occurred in the New Garden community as Vestal and Alethea Coffin aided "free Black" John Dimrey to escape kidnappers and begin the long trek to Richmond, Indiana, and freedom.

Responding to the sin of slavery was not the only challenge facing the Quaker community in North Carolina, however. Escaping the problem of frontier warfare in Pennsylvania and British warships around Nantucket, Friends in the Piedmont were soon faced with the War of Regulation, a precursor to the Revolutionary War as farmers and others rebelled against the taxation and control coming from the colonial government on the coast. Battles were fought in the Cane Creek Friends community that saw the participation of Quakers such as Herman Husband and John Pyle. For that and other reasons, they were disowned. Others, such as the Eno River settlement of Friends, responded to the violence by removing

to Georgia, founding the Quaker community of Wrightsboro.

On the heels of the War of Regulation came the Southern campaign of the Revolutionary War. In 1781, the battles came to the Quaker community. General Nathanael Greene, a disowned Quaker from Rhode Island, was dispatched by George Washington to lead the campaign, in part, because his familiarity with Friends might afford opportunity to find support for the American troops from the Quaker community. Indeed, Greene did communicate with the leadership of the Yearly Meeting about offering food and housing for his soldiers. In response, Friends reasserted their testimony against war and overthrowing governments by violence but affirmed that they would assist any in need – whether they be American or British.

As the war did move into the Piedmont, Friends had the opportunity to put their faith to the test. A few, such as John Pyle, joined the British side and fought. Some others joined the American side and saw battle. Many had their farms and larders ransacked by both American and British troops as thousands of soldiers encamped in the area had to be fed. Most Quakers, however, maintained their peace testimony, refused to take up arms, and provided care to those injured in the fighting.

On the 15th of Third Month, 1781, the Battle of New Garden and the Battle of Guilford Court House in Guilford County left hundreds dead and wounded on the battlefields in the Quaker community. The New Garden meetinghouse was used as a field hospital, and hundreds fell in the fields around the meetinghouse and graveyard. Both armies left their dead and wounded as they retreated, and Friends came out to assist them. Nearly

150 dead from both sides were buried in mass graves in the New Garden cemetery, and others were buried where they fell in the fields and along New Garden Road. Several Friends contracted small pox from assisting the wounded. Richard Williams, who had sold the land in 1757 for the meetinghouse and graveyard, died from the disease. Nathan Hunt, later known as the patriarch of the Yearly Meeting, contracted smallpox, too, but fortunately survived.

Problems of war and slavery were factors in encouraging Friends to begin migrating out of the Carolinas. One of the first to explore other frontiers was Thomas Beals, who in the early 1770s was one of the first Europeans to venture into the Indian country of Ohio. There, he had a vision of a great community of Quakers - a vision that would soon be fulfilled. In the 1790s, some New Garden Friends ventured across the mountains into eastern Tennessee and founded the community of Friendsville. In the early 1800s, Zachariah Dicks, a sort of Quaker prophet, traveled among Friends in South Carolina and Georgia encouraging them to leave before the devastation that continued slavery would bring to the South. Wrightsboro, GA, and Bush River, SC, were soon abandoned by Quakers.

But it wasn't only slavery and war that encouraged the beginning of a massive Quaker migration "to the West." The economy had also been deeply affected by foraging armies and exhausted soil. As Federal treaties with the Indians in the Northwest Territory opened up large swaths of rich soil in what would become Ohio and Indiana, Quakers began leaving the South for those "free states" and deep loam. By 1806, Quakers had founded the town of Richmond, ten years before Indiana became a state.

Other Friends poured into southern Indiana, and as the Quaker engineer Jonathan Knight helped construct the National Road through central Indiana in the 1820s, that highway became a magnet for more Quakers to "follow the frontier" and settle in Wayne, Henry, Randolph, and other counties. Others fulfilled Thomas Beals' vision and moved in large numbers into Clinton and surrounding counties in southwestern Ohio.

A once numerous community of Friends in the South was reduced to fewer than 2,000 adult members by the end of the Civil War. No Quakers remained in Georgia and South Carolina. So few Quaker teachers and students remained by 1831 that Nathan Hunt encouraged the building of a boarding school so there would be at least one place for families to send their children for a guarded Quaker education. It took six more years to raise the money to open New Garden Boarding School. Virginia Yearly Meeting was laid down in 1844. North Carolina Yearly Meeting barely survived through the heroic efforts of the few Friends who chose to remain to serve the remnant community and keep New Garden Boarding School open - aided by the work of the Baltimore Association to Advise and Assist Friends in the Southern States.

But that is a story for a later time!

### **A SIDEBAR**

For those Friends who remained in the South, times were difficult. In a timeline of Somerton Friends Meeting's history as the Suffolk County (formerly Nansemond), VA, meeting celebrated its 350th anniversary this year, pastoral minister Richard Wilcox included these events around the time of the Civil War:

1846-8: Hare men of Somerton have cash confiscated by Nansemond Sheriff for not participating in the war with Mexico.

1850: John and Edna Hare of Somerton described as “keepers” on the Underground Railroad.

1862: Henry Hare, William P. Hare, Joseph J. Hare, and Benjamin F. Hare of Somerton taken to Confederate Camp and placed under guard for refusing to bear arms.

1861-64: William Henry Hare, a Somerton Elder, is shot in the head by Confederate soldiers but survives.

1866: Sarah Smiley of New England starts school for Black children next to Somerton. Olive Roberts is the teacher.

03/05/1866: Neighbors burn down the meetinghouse and school in the night when it is known the Hares were out of town. Area Blacks commit to rebuilding the school in 10 days.

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**CARLTON WHITE ROUNTREE  
OCTOBER 11, 1927-FEBRUARY 24, 2021**

We would be remiss if we did not mention the passing of Carlton White Rountree on February 24, 2021. A Quaker living in Belvidere, North Carolina, he contributed greatly to what we know of Quaker history in Perquimans County. He was born in Perquimans County on October 11, 1927, and was the son of the late James Madison Rountree and Sarah Elizabeth White Rountree.

A retired French teacher from First Colonial High School in Virginia Beach, VA having taught for 30 years, he was a member of Up River Friends Meeting in Belvidere. Having a deep love and

wealth of knowledge in Quakerism, he had written two books about its local history concerning the early Quakers and Up River Friends Meeting. He had served with the US Merchant Marine and was a veteran of the US Army having served in Germany.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by two brothers, Selden Rountree (deceased wife, Minnie Belle Rountree) and Daly Rountree. Surviving are his brother, Jesse Rountree (wife, Veronica) of Belvidere; three nieces, Kathy Hunter, Kim Owens, and Sarah Price; and two nephews, Ray and Keith Rountree; and many great nieces, nephews and extended family members.

A graveside memorial service was held in Up River Cemetery conducted by Pastors Chuck Hartman and Richard Wilcox.

Memorial contributions may be made either to Up River Friends Meeting, 523 Up River Road, Belvidere, NC 27919, or to Arbor Day Foundation, online at [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org).



*Carlton White Rountree*

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