



NORTH CAROLINA FRIENDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

GERTRUDE BEAL AND MARTHA DENTISTE, CO-EDITORS

ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER 4TH

We are fortunate to present for our annual meeting speaker Hal E. Pugh. He and his wife, Eleanor Minnock-Pugh, are authors of *Naomi "Omie" Wise: Her Life, Death and Legend*. It is the story of legend that has been told in the New Salem community for over two hundred years. The couple attempts to set the story straight in their new book which is grounded in scholarly research. We are in for an interesting presentation. Please join us on Saturday, November 4th, at 9:30 a.m. for light refreshments to be followed by the talk. After the talk there will be an opportunity to visit the gravesite of Naomi Wise. This will be held at Providence Friends Meeting, 2054 Providence Church Road, Pleasant Garden, NC. All are welcome.

Many will remember Doc Watson's rendition of the Ballad of Naomi Wise. The ballad was written in the early 19th century and Doc Watson learned the song from his mother. Lyrics are below.

Oh, listen to my story, I'll tell you
no lies
How John Lewis did murder poor
little Omie Wise
He told her to meet him at
Adams's Springs
He promised her money and
other fine things

So, fool-like she met him at
Adams's Springs
No money he brought her nor
other fine things

"Go with me, little Omie, and
away we will go
We'll go and get married and no
one will know."

She climbed up behind him and
away they did go
But off to the river where deep
waters flow

"John Lewis, John Lewis, will you
tell me your mind?
Do you intend to marry me or
leave me behind?"

"Little Omie, little Omie, I'll tell
you my mind
My mind is to drown you and
leave you behind."

“Have mercy on my baby and
spare me my life
I’ll go home as a beggar and never
be your wife.”

He kissed her and hugged her
and turned her around
Then pushed her in deep waters
where he knew that She would
drown.

Editor’s Note: We are pleased to offer Thomas Hamm’s address to Springfield Friends Meeting on the occasion of their 250th anniversary. We are sure that those who were unable to join in this celebration will find this most interesting. This article is being serialized. This is Part One. Part Two will be featured in the next volume of our newsletter, No. 72. Thank you, Thomas Hamm.

SPRINGFIELD 1773-2023
PART ONE
BY THOMAS HAMM

It began with Friends coming down from the North. Some came out of Virginia and Maryland, and later a few would make their way from the island of Nantucket, but most had lived in the Delaware Valley. Their homes had been in William Penn’s Holy Experiment. In the colonies of West New Jersey, Delaware, and especially Pennsylvania, they lived in places that foreshadowed what the United States would become. They came from a world in which religious liberty was foundational, established

churches were to be shunned, immigrants of all backgrounds were welcomed and allowed to maintain their communities as they desired, land was easily acquired, and suffrage, the right to vote, was as liberal as any place in the world in the eighteenth century.

They were also a farming people, and that explains why Carolina drew them. Before 1730, Pennsylvania had become what an admirer called “the best poor man’s country.” Land was fertile and relatively easy to acquire. The combination of hard-working, thrifty farmers; good soil; and access to markets in towns like Philadelphia and Burlington and Wilmington brought prosperity. But by the 1730s, the combination of continuing immigration and large families — eight or ten children were common in Quaker families — meant that land was becoming increasingly scarce and expensive in the counties around Philadelphia. Some Friends moved west, out of Chester and Bucks and Philadelphia counties into Berks and Lancaster and York counties — but they also quickly filled up. And moving farther west meant reaching the less attractive hills and ridges of the Appalachian range, lands that were claimed by the powerful Iroquois Confederacy, which did not take well to intruders.

So, Friends (and others) turned south. By 1735 enough Friends were living in western Maryland and the northern parts of Virginia that a new monthly meeting called Hopewell

was established. Significantly, it was connected not with the yearly meetings of Maryland or Virginia but was part of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. But those lands also filled up quickly, and so by 1750 Friends were moving south again, now into North Carolina. Between 1750 and 1775 North Carolina was the fastest growing of all English colonies in North America, as not just Friends, but Germans and Scots-Irish and English came south on what was called on the Great Wagon Road. Their destination was what was then called the North Carolina Back Country, what we now call the Piedmont. Here millions of acres were made available by the absentee English proprietor, Lord Granville, on easy terms.

The first Friends in what is now Guilford County arrived late in the 1740s. The earliest I can find settling within the bounds of what would become Springfield Monthly Meeting was Mordecai Mendenhall, who with his wife Charity Beeson took up a land grant in 1752. Soon he was joined by Haworths and Kerseys and Baleses and Thornburghs, who like the Mendenhalls and Beesons had come down from Pennsylvania by way of Hopewell Monthly Meeting. From Louisa County, Virginia, came the Hoggatts, convinced Friends, later joined by other Friends like the Stanleys and Johnsons with deep roots in the Virginia Tidewater. For reasons that are unclear, the Nantucket Quaker migration of the 1770s was not drawn to this area. The

significant exception was Matthew Coffin, although his marriage to a Mendenhall may explain that. So, by 1773 enough Friends had gathered to form a meeting that they called Springfield. The origin of the name is unclear, but it was one that Friends first used in the Delaware Valley, both in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and would carry not only to North Carolina but to Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas in the next century.

Having established our community and explained why and how it came to be, I can only express regret that time does not allow me to cover in the next forty minutes the history that Josh Brown, Brenda Haworth, and Dan Warren have laid out so ably in two volumes. Instead, I will provide you some vignettes of Quaker history as illustrated by events at Springfield. I want to share five: first, the founding era of Quietism, as illustrated by Springfield's most famous member, the minister Nathan Hunt, who lived from 1758 to 1853. Then we will move on to an era of conflict, as Springfield Friends faced the issue of slavery. Then we will see the culmination of the larger national conflict over slavery in the Civil War and Reconstruction, when Springfield became central to the survival of Quakerism in North Carolina, and we will meet luminous Friends like Allen Jay, Joseph Moore, Yardley Warner, and Allen U. Tomlinson. Then we will take up an era of dramatic change of another

kind, what became known in the 1870s as the Great Revival. Allen Jay will play a role, and we will meet another extraordinary Friend, Rufus P. King. Finally, we will look at how in the twentieth century Friends tried to make sense of all of this, as exemplified by Springfield's second pastor, Clara I. Cox, and another Friend who was never a member here but who rests in the burial ground, Elbert Russell.

When Friends began to meet at Springfield, it was the period that historians of Quakerism usually refer to as the era of quietism. The evangelistic urgency of early Friends had faded. Quakerism had become inward-looking. "The Reputation of Truth" demanded that Friends be unrelenting in enforcement of the Discipline, the code of rules that defined Quaker peculiarity and distinctiveness, and that lapses from grace either be repented of quickly or repudiated by the disownment of erring members. Reading the minutes of Springfield Monthly Meeting from 1790 to 1860 we find such cases almost every month. The most common offense was marrying a non-Friend, but there were assorted offenses against Quaker peculiarities as well as against acceptable standards of Christian morality. My wife's great-great-grandfather, John Wheeler Bales, whose parents were both elders, was nonetheless disowned in 1850 for fathering a child out of wedlock. That deviation from good order did not prevent him

from marrying first a Gardner and then a Kersey.

What defined Quietism, however, was not just uncompromising enforcement of the Discipline, but a conviction that conscientious Friends would, in every moral and religious action, be directly guided by the Holy Spirit. To act in one's own will was to be guilty of "creaturely activity." "This was what I desired – to do nothing, to feel nothing, to be nothing" that was not divinely inspired wrote one Friend of this period. Such a desire for complete subjection to the divine will was especially expected of Friends who were recorded as ministers, recognized as having a gift for preaching. Such Friends were often led to share messages not only with their own meetings but to travel in the ministry. From 1791 until 1853 Springfield was the home of the best-known North Carolina minister of the nineteenth century, and perhaps ever, Nathan Hunt. We know much about his life because in 1858 a collection of his letters and journals, along with those of his father, was published in Philadelphia. Nathan was not only the best-known North Carolina Friend of the first half of the nineteenth century, but also the best documented.

Nathan Hunt was born a little to the north, in the New Garden settlement of Friends in 1758. His grandmother, Mary (Woolman) Hunt, was an aunt of the abolitionist and diarist John Woolman, and his

father, William Hunt, was a recorded minister who traveled widely in North America and who died on a visit to England in 1772. Nathan came of age and married during the American Revolution. He recorded that when armies came through on the Guilford Courthouse campaign of early 1781, he lost most of his livestock to roving British soldiers.

What little we know of Nathan's early life comes from a memorial that Springfield Monthly Meeting prepared after his death. It recorded that "he was naturally of a lively and volatile disposition, and in some measure given to lightness" — in other words, he had a sense of humor. Fortunately, "when about seventeen years of age, he had a reaching visitation, and a renewed view of being called to the ministry." But old ways died hard: "for want of faithfully abiding under the solemn impression, he gradually again partook in associations with jovial companions." But the Inward Light was unsparing, and he was 'mercifully preserved, even in his greatest departure, from gross evils, or a departure from the peculiarities of the Society of Friends in relation to speech and apparel." In that passage one sees Quakerism in this era — fear of lightness, devotion to separation from the world, dependence on divine leading.

Nathan first spoke in meeting when he was 26, although he was not formally recorded a minister until 1792, just after he had moved

from New Garden to Springfield. Over the next forty years he would travel extensively among Friends in North America, visiting most of the Quaker communities in the United States and Canada. In 1820 and 1821 he was in the British Isles. Because he wrote frequently to his family when traveling, we get a sense of his mind. In the published versions of his letters, at least, the emphasis is on exhortation: "My dear children, I beseech you, remember the frequent entreaties of your father, and be steady to your business, to your home, to your learning; dwell together in love, being exceeding kind and tender to your mother, and do nothing without her counsel. . . . Godliness, with contentment, is great gain; keep an eye to this, my dear children, I beseech you all, and remember the precious soul is more than meat that perisheth. My soul is in travail for you, that none of you may stray from the fold of everlasting rest."

Nathan's letters give us a good sense of his theology. When the Hicksite Separation took place in 1827-1828, he and the rest of North Carolina Yearly Meeting placed themselves firmly with Orthodox Friends, although his daughter Sarah Harlan in Ohio made the opposite choice. Nathan denounced "Hicksism" as "the great leviathan, the monster of human reason and human wisdom, who is endeavouring to lay waste the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and the blessed plan of salvation proposed

by Him. It is a dark delusive spirit; it worketh in the secret chambers of darkness; in the mystery of iniquity it lives." He did not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of fellow Friends. Unable to attend yearly meeting sessions in 1839, he sent a letter: "I think I have seen that Zion will be redeemed through judgments, and her converts through righteousness; and that the Lord will turn his hand upon his people in this part of his vineyard, and purely purge away all their dross and take away all their sin, and restore judges as at the first and councillors as at the beginning." He could be equally scathing toward non-Friends. Once he encountered some Methodist ministers who boasted of the number of converts made at one of their revivals, including a few nominal Friends. "We got some of your sheep today," they said. "Only some hogs; sheep do not wallow," Nathan replied.

One account has it that he single-handedly prevented a separation in the 1840s. When he reached eighty, Nathan asked that he no longer sit at the head of Springfield meeting; he feared that as his faculties declined, he would not be able to sense when the time had come to break meeting. Nevertheless, he lived to the age of 95, spending his last years in the home of his daughter Abigail Stanley at Centre. But when he died, his body was brought back to Springfield to rest.

When Nathan Hunt died in 1853, North Carolina Yearly Meeting may well have had fewer members than it had 95 years earlier. Certainly, there were fewer than half a century earlier. North Carolina Friends had been central to what became known as the Great Migration of Friends into the Ohio Valley between 1800 and 1850. Anyone who has visited Henry or Wayne or Grant or Randolph counties in Indiana will immediately be struck by the familiar names: Center and Salem and Hopewell and New Garden and Springfield Meetings, Back Creek, Greensboro Township. Quakerism in the west was in large part the offspring of North Carolina Friends.

Westward movement was the rule in nineteenth-century America, of course, but the Quaker migration out of North Carolina differed from the predominant pattern. When Friends left North Carolina, unlike most of their neighbors, they did not head due west, or south and west. These migrants were almost always farming families in search of new, cheap land, and Friends were no exception. But Friends went north and west because of their opposition to slavery.

North Carolina Friends, like other Friends, had once tolerated slaveholding by members. But by the time of the American Revolution, they had realized that enslavement was contrary to the will of God, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting ruled that members who were enslavers

must emancipate their slaves or be disowned. Many Friends did liberate their slaves at a considerable financial sacrifice, although there were others who chose to keep their slaves and lose their membership. Such a commitment did not endear Friends to many of their non-Quaker neighbors. In the 1790s, grand juries in at least sixteen North Carolina counties sent memorials to the state legislature, asking it to do something about the subversive activities of the Quakers, who were giving slaves ideas of freedom and equality.

The accounts left by migrating Friends highlight their fears. Some were convinced that slavery was such an evil that God would inevitably judge the United States for tolerating it, and they would be caught up in those judgements, whether they took the form of war or slave rebellions or other visitations. And there was the fear that associating with slaveholders would corrupt young Friends. Such fears had foundation. A great-nephew of Nathan Hunt himself, Tilmon Hunt, became a slave trader and was killed by some of the people he was enslaving in Edgecombe County in 1851.

North Carolina Friends did not stop with freeing their own slaves. In 1816, they took the lead in forming the North Carolina Manumission Society. At its first meeting, twenty-two of the twenty-five delegates present were Friends. Springfield Friends were not founders, but by

1817 they had formed an auxiliary branch, and would remain active until the group dissolved in 1834.

Truth be told, the Manumission Society had little impact on slavery in North Carolina. It was a marginal effort of a marginal group. Indeed, by 1834 many of its members had joined the migration to Indiana. But it was forthright in condemning slavery as unchristian.

Some Springfield Friends kept up a strong antislavery testimony. Part of my wife's family history is Benjamin Millikan, whose wife Margaret Bales was her third great-aunt. Born in 1783, Benjamin encouraged his children to leave for Indiana, which most did. But he remained at Springfield, was part of the North Carolina Manumission Society until it folded, and was active in aiding fugitive slaves as well as free people of color threatened with enslavement.

In 1832 Benjamin's daughter Susanna had married a non-Quaker named Clark Elder. This was the kind of marriage that Friends feared, since Clark Elder was a slaveowner, and apparently an abusive one. In 1844, one of Elder's slaves, an elderly man, came to Benjamin Millikan and told him that Elder treated him so badly that he feared for his life. Benjamin sheltered the man, and then made arrangements for him to escape to the free states. Enraged, Elder filed criminal charges against his father-in-law, but that backfired.

Benjamin Millikan found proof that the elderly man was entitled to freedom and countersued for unlawful detainment and back wages. Elder lost the case and was ordered to pay \$250. In an angry frenzy, he went home and hanged himself.

The forebodings of Friends about judgments hanging over slaveholders were fulfilled, of course, between 1861 and 1865. The outbreak of the Civil War found Springfield the largest monthly meeting in North Carolina Yearly Meeting, and its members were almost unanimous in their support for the Union. Some, especially young men, made desperate attempts to reach the North before war cut them off completely.

Those who remained found themselves facing a variety of hardships. Not until the last weeks of the war did warring armies come to this area, but shortages of various goods quickly developed. With Confederate paper money quickly depreciating, commissaries simply seized supplies they needed.

In 1862, the Confederacy adopted a policy of conscription, which initially did not make provision for conscientious objectors. Significantly, two of the four members of the committee North Carolina Yearly Meeting appointed in July 1862 “if way should open for it to have an interview with the Secretary of War and others in authority of the

Confederate States either personally by letter or by attorney, in regard to military service” were from Springfield, John Carter and Allen U. Tomlinson. They were able to have an interview with Jefferson Davis himself. A family story has it that when John Carter started his testimony before a committee of the Confederate Senate, he got their attention by opening his remarks: “Why men, we Quakers are just like other men, our mouths open up and down just like other men’s.” They sought complete exemption from military service for Friends. The concession secured was far from ideal: Friends were exempted only the payment of hefty commutation fees of \$500, which could be imposed more than once. Drafted Friends often found themselves facing hostile military and civil officials and real sufferings.

When the war ended, this area was ragged and exhausted. In 1865 and 1866, there was a new burst of migration north, to Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa. There was serious discussion about whether ALL Friends should be encouraged to leave North Carolina. But others had a different vision.

Editor’s Note: We are featuring some stories written by the Society’s own Linda Willard, a member of Jamestown Friends Meeting. She lives in High Point with her husband Harold. She is the author of three books about Quakers: *Trivia; Quaker Preserved* and *Quakers in Conflict*.

HIGH POINT BUGGY COMPANY “WHEN YOU RIDE, RIDE RIGHT” BY LINDA WILLARD

High Point, North Carolina, has long been known as the Furniture Capital of the World. However, in the late 1880s and early 1900s, High Point was known for a much different product. It was the center of buggy manufacturing. Yes, buggies! As in a horse-drawn vehicle.

High Point Buggy Company had its start in 1881 as Briggs Brothers Buggy Company in Florence, North Carolina. The company was organized by three Quaker brothers, A.M. Briggs, H.C. Briggs, and J.R. Briggs and located on family property.

In 1900, a group of High Point businessmen approved the Briggs brothers moving their shop to High Point, and forming a new company known as the High Point Buggy Company. The Briggs brothers combined their Florence shop with the proposed shop in High Point. Local Quaker banker and businessman J. Elwood Cox was very enthusiastic regarding the possibilities of a buggy factory in High Point, North Carolina. The new buggy company was capitalized at \$25,000. J. Elwood Cox was the President, A.M. Briggs, Vice-President, and Superintendent. Henry A. White was the Secretary-Treasurer. H.C. Briggs was Foreman Smithing Department while J.R. Briggs was Foreman Woodworking.

The Directors were: J. Elwood Cox, E.A. Snow, J.J. Welch, R.R. Ragan, Henry A. White, and A.M. Briggs. In addition to the Briggs brothers, Cox, Ragan, and White were Quakers.

In 1901 the move was made and High Point Buggy Company was born. The company was located on Reid Street near where present-day Slane Hosiery Mill is. It would remain at this location for the duration of its operation from 1902 until 1927.

The first order of buggies, consisting of twenty-one vehicles, was shipped in April of 1902. During the first year, High Point Buggy Company shipped 377 units for a net profit of \$58.91. The firm grew steadily and by 1910, they were shipping 2,403 buggies per year.

At the end of the first year, High Point Buggy had made enough money to pay its taxes and come out even. According to Cox and Snow, High Point Buggy Company was only the second business in High Point, North Carolina, to come out even during their first year in business.

High Point Buggy Company flourished and grew until the company, like many others, was impacted by World War I and a new invention, the automobile. The company had anticipated that 1914 would be a banner year of High Point Buggy Company. Unfortunately, World War I created a shortage of

cotton and other materials needed in the buggy industry.

By 1922, it became apparent that the need for buggies and other horse- or mule-drawn vehicles was coming to a close. The automobile was quickly taking over the market for buggies.

After the death of J.R. Briggs in 1917, the business was reorganized under the name Briggs manufacturing to make furniture. There were no buggies produced after 1928. During the twenty-six years High Point Buggy Company was in business they manufactured 31,368 buggies. With the demise of the High Point Buggy Company, Henry A. White opened a Buick dealership in High Point, North Carolina.

High Point Buggies

Ask your dealer for them or call at the Factory.
They are right in material and finish.

**A FEW OF
OUR VEHICLES:**

No. 1.
With or without top.
Surreys Ready For Delivery In June.

No. 2.
With extension or canopy top.
Place your order now and secure prompt service.

No. 3.
What about a Gentleman's Bike Runabout this spring?
We build them on special orders.
These kind cost considerable but we can give you the same kind of body and seat on an ordinary gear at a very moderate price.

High Point Buggy Company.
Other Styles on Exhibition at Factory.

Sold in High Point by
The High Point Buggy Company



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NCFHS Newsletter

No. 71 Fall 2023

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by Linda Willard

SPECIAL NOTE: If you have not done so, please take this opportunity to renew your membership in the North Carolina Friends Historical Society for 2024. Thank you!