

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROARING CREEK FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

HABS NO. PA-6691

Location: Meeting House Road, Numedia, Columbia County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Roaring Creek Meeting House, built in 1795, is of interest for both its log construction and its two-cell design with unequally sized meeting rooms for men and women. The latter was indicative of an early English Quaker pattern of meeting, and was generally not incorporated into American Friends' meeting house designs of this period. And while log meeting houses were often built during the period of early settlement within the Delaware Valley, they were quickly replaced with more permanent construction. Roaring Creek and nearby Catawissa are the only extant log meeting houses built under the care of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Roaring Creek's rustic construction and out-dated plan may be indicative of its "frontier" location, far removed from the direct influence of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Description: Roaring Creek Meeting House is a single-story, four-bay-by-two-bay structure built of hewn logs, with chinking and corner boards. It measures 30'-4" x 36'-5", rests upon a rubble stone foundation, and has a side-gable roof covered with wood shingles. This two-cell structure is unequally divided on the interior into apartments, with the larger, western section constituting three of the four bays across the front and rear. The principal entry is the center bay of the western section and has an opposing carriage door to the rear. In the eastern section, there is a single door to the front, with a window opposing it to the rear. The front doorways are both single-door entries with plain, butt-joint surrounds and plank doors. The carriage door to the rear is similar, but set slightly higher to accommodate the interior facing bench and has no exterior hardware. A large, batten door appears in the western gable end to provide access to the attic. There are no porches or stoops, only a simple set of stairs provide access to the principal, western front entry. The meeting house is lit by six-over-six-light sash all around, with batten shutters. There are no extant chimneys.

The interior plan features two apartments of unequal size separated by a retractable wood partitioned space. The partition is located just west of the eastern front doorway and consists of a series of three wood panels with the center panel sliding up to open. A doorway to the center allows for passage between the apartments. The log walls and the ceiling are covered with planking. The facing benches are located along the rear (north) wall and consist of a single tier with two rows of benches.

There is a walled burying ground to the north of the meeting house.

History: Roaring Creek Meeting House was built in 1795.¹ A meeting for worship was established at Roaring Creek by Exeter Monthly Meeting in 1786. In 1796, a preparative meeting was set up by Catawissa Monthly Meeting, and the current meeting house was erected. In 1814, a monthly meeting was established here, a reestablishment of Catawissa Monthly Meeting. Elias Hicks is said to have spoken at this meeting house.² In 1916, it was reported that meetings were only being held once a month. With membership in decline, the meeting was laid down and an indulged meeting established. It is currently owned by the worship and maintained by the local garden club. A meeting for worship is held here once a year, in June; local Friends meet at Millville.

At the time of the separation into Hicksite and Orthodox factions in 1827, the original Roaring Creek Preparative Meeting was laid down and the meeting house retained by the Hicksite meeting.

Sources:

Pennsylvania Historical Survey, Division of Community Service Programs, Work Projects Administration. Inventory of Church Archives, Society of Friends in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Friends Historical Association, 1941.

Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, 2001

¹ Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, Minutes, 8mo. 1795. A historical marker on site, however, reads 1796. The discrepancy may reflect the start of construction versus the year of actual completion.

² Elias Hicks was the leader of the "Hicksite" Friends that formed from a schism that divided the Friends into Hicksite and Orthodox groups in 1827. The schism was ostensibly based upon differences in biblical interpretations presented by early Friends versus those being offered by Evangelical Christians, but also fell out along economic lines with the more rural and traditional Friends forming the Hicksite contingent, and more urban and wealthy forming the Orthodox