

Western Quarterly Meeting Report on Historic Meeting Properties
Discussion draft prepared by Mark Myers

The Western Quarter Meeting established an ad-hoc committee to evaluate the state of historic meeting houses under the care of the QM and affiliated MM's. Historically a general pattern¹ developed as meetings were laid down for the QM to assume the role of property oversight for the meeting buildings and burial grounds if no longer used as an active Monthly Meeting. In Western Quarter, we currently have eight active meeting houses, six historic meeting houses, five support buildings, and eighteen burial grounds under our collective Monthly and Quarterly Meeting care. There is a question of whether the laid down properties create a growing unfunded responsibility for the remaining active constituent meetings. If this responsibility remains or rises, the question must be addressed as to whether the QM needs to create a contingency reserve for laid down meeting house and burial ground care and/or a process for the transfer of these properties to non-Quaker ownership uses.

An ad-hoc property committee² was appointed to bring to the QM an assessment of these questions. The committee focused on the historic meeting houses as properties with current relationships to either the QM or MM's. Those included Old Kennett, New West Grove, Colora, Parkersville, London Britain and Pennsgrove.

The work outline was as follows:

1. Meet with the local committee attending the meeting house to check how it is working.
2. Inquire into the level of activity for the building.
3. Ask about the overall maintenance needs of the building.
4. Developed a visual impression of the building's exterior and interior.
5. Observe any specific issues with the foundations, window frames and sashes, roof, and chimneys.
6. Ask how much capital might be needed for immediate needs.
7. Determine whether restricted endowments exist for future repairs.
8. Consider what are options for this building for its care and best use.

¹ "In the case of the laying down of a preparative meeting, monthly meeting or regional meeting, all rights and responsibilities of property vested in it and all responsibility for records shall be transferred to the larger meeting of which it has been a part." 1997 Faith and Practice, p203. A question does rise for cases where the meeting has been incorporated under the laws of Pennsylvania, Delaware or Maryland with appointed trustees and whether that arrangement takes precedent over the transfer described above. In that case, the assigned trustees would be charged to dispose of the property and expected to seek the advice of the Quarterly Meeting to confirm the appropriate disposal.

² Those participating on the committee or contributing to its were Sarah Kastriner, Shelley Hastings, Ariana Langford, Mary Sproat, Lars Farmer, Bob Frye, Margaret Moore, and Mark Myers.

An initial concern for the formation of this ad hoc committee was whether the laid down properties create a growing unfunded responsibility for the remaining active constituent meetings. Addressing that concern's possible financial needs were discussed with the local committee and estimates were made of the amounts needed for reserves. Rather than report detailed individual fund levels, the financial reserves are described broadly by the use of the following ranges. The broad ranges allow normal level fluctuation of funds use and maintains an appropriate level of confidentiality.

\$1,000 to \$9,900	Four-figure fund
\$10,000 to \$99,000	Five-figure fund
\$100,000 to \$999,000	Six-Figure fund
\$1,000,000 and greater	Seven-Figure fund

Old Kennett Meeting House, 1710, 1718, 1731



1. The QM committee met with Lars Farmer and Margaret Moore who are members of Kennett Monthly Meeting and the local committee. The Kennett Meeting has been responsible for the care for the Old Kennett Meeting House since the meeting was laid down in the 1950's.
2. The meeting house is open for public worship the last Sunday during the June, July and August months. It also is open by arrangement for special occasions.
- 3.-4 The committee discussed the maintenance of the building. New roof shingles were applied in 2010 as well as a security system. Overall the Old Kennett Meeting House is in good condition with no issues apparent with roof and foundations.
5. The Old Kennett Meeting website has a detailed listing of maintenance needs along with an ask for donations for its repair. Of note was the need of repair of wood materials including windows, a need which was observed during the visit.
6. The capital need estimate on the website is about \$20,000.

7. The Old Kennett Meeting House does have a restricted reserve fund in the lower quarter of the five-figure range.

8. The Old Kennett Meeting House should remain in its current use as an important historical and architectural resource to the greater Philadelphia region. It ranks in importance along with regional historic structures Caleb Pusey House, 1683, Brinton 1704 House, Barnes Brinton House, 1714, John Chadd House, 1725 and Primitive Hall, 1738. Given this role, it is felt that the site would be more secure with a factor 10 greater restricted financial reserves, i.e. in the six-figure range. It would be a recommendation to the Kennett Monthly Meeting to consider how that level might be achieved. The QM would be available to explore ideas for that effort.

Parkersville Meeting House, 1830



1. We met with Bill Parker and his daughter as well as Mary Sproat and Dale Frens, all part of the local committee. During our visit Lars Farmer volunteered to join their committee. Bill was the financial supporter for restoration of the Meeting House. He has since passed away. The Meeting House is under the care of the Quarterly Meeting without an association with a Monthly Meeting.

2. A group met in the meeting house for a period after its restoration. Currently the meeting is opened annually on the second First Day of the Ninth Month. It also opens for special occasions such as reunions, memorials and special meetings.

3.-4.- 5. Because the building was recently restored its overall condition is good. The local committee described a number of repointing and roof tile maintenance actions they are pursuing.

6. The immediate maintenance would be at the low end of four figures.

7. There is a substantial restricted endowment in the six-figure level.

8. The Parkersville Meeting House has been closely associated with the Parker family. With Bill Parker's passing it remains to be seen how this will evolve in later family generations. It has an active burial ground which should be considered in relationship to future uses. A recommendation is that the local committee and the family define their future working relationship.

New West Grove Meeting House, 1831



1. We met with Kathy Kirk of the West Grove meeting who was assisted by Mary Sproat a member of that meeting as well as the ad hoc committee. The meeting house is under the care of West Grove MM.
2. An annual Meeting for Worship and Carol Sing has been held just before Christmas.
3. There are serious structural issues in the meeting house and a burial ground retaining wall adjacent to the road. The meeting house has cracks at both gable walls ends suggesting that the rear wall is pulling away from the structure. This is most likely caused by a failure of foundation under the wall. It is possible the wall is now held in place by the ceiling rafters. It is also noted the failing of a number of roof shale tiles. The retaining wall along the road is leaning toward the road and will eventually collapse. These issues can be addressed but with significant work and investment.
4. See 3.
5. The repair of the building will require a new foundation as well as repair of the masonry cracks in the gable ends. There are two approaches to address the failure of the retaining wall. One, rebuild it with a new foundation underneath, Two, remove it and regrade to a stable slope to the road. The latter would require the move of a number of graves.
6. The building and burial ground could be restored with an investment of high six to seven figures.
7. Endowment funds were not mentioned. However, given that West Grove MM has care for its current meetinghouse and the Colora meetinghouse that would be a challenge for its current membership base.
8. This is an historic meeting house which in its current condition should not be available for use. A future possible use would be to repurpose the site to a private residence. This would require careful planning with respect to lot size and responsibility for the burial ground.

Pennsgrove Meeting House, 1833



1. We met with Bob Frye and Mary Sproat, members of the local committee. The meeting house is under the care of the Quarterly Meeting without association to a monthly meeting.
2. Meeting for Worship is held here during the summer months at 10 AM on the fourth Sunday of June, July and August
3. The overall condition of the meeting house is good. The building had recently undergone extensive repair from the damage of a tree falling on the front porch.
4. See 3.
5. See 3.
6. Since repairs were recent, there were no immediate needs observed.
7. The meeting house and burial grounds have significant financial reserves in the six-figure level.
8. The interest in Penn's Grove is supported by families with commitments to the burial ground. In particular the Pusey family has a long history supporting this facility. The burial ground is in active use and a future purpose of the meetinghouse could support that use.

Colora Meeting House,



1. The committee met with Steve Balderston and committee member Mary Sproat. The Colora Meetinghouse is closely associated with the Balderston family. It came under West Grove MM as a laid down Orthodox meeting.
2. The Meeting house is opened once a year and by arrangement for special occasions.
3. Currently the condition of the meetinghouse is good. This is due to roof repairs required after a large tree fell on the building. Just before our visit additional repairs were required due to vandalism
4. This is a very attractive historical building. However, the site has limited access for parking and the burial ground.
5. With recent repairs, the building appears to be sound.
6. The maintenance and associated capital have come from the Balderston family. This does not appear to be available in the future as they have closed their orchard and plan to retire away from the area.
7. When the tree damage required extensive investment, the monies appeared to come from the family.
8. The building's future use as an area historical asset is at issue because in a straight line of 12 miles there are four historic meeting houses, Deer Creek, Colora, Little Brick and Brick. Of these only Dear Creek in Darlington the other side of the Susquehanna River is an active meeting. With the exception of Colora the others are now in the region of Baltimore Yearly Meeting rather than Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The site possibly could be creatively developed for a residence, but preserving the meetinghouse and providing access to the burial ground would be complex. It is believed that the Balderston farm is for sale, if they move away the West Grove and Western Quarterly Meetings will be faced to find a new use and sponsor for the property.

London Britain Meeting House



1. Met with the local committee caring for the meeting house and checked how it is working. Members of Newark Meeting reported their recent maintenance actions and plans for the future. Although the meeting house is under the care of the Quarterly Meeting it receives loving attention from the Newark MM.
2. Newark Meeting gathers here for worship each Sunday through the summer months.
3. The condition of the building was sound.
4. See 3
5. See 3
6. Although the property belongs to the Quarter, the funding of maintenance and repairs is supported by the Newark MM. The availability of restricted capital funds was indicated but the amount was not reported.
7. The relationship to the Newark Friends and this meeting building is a commitment that has worked for years. In the past Western Quarterly Meeting has offered ownership of London Britain to Newark MM. They have declined under a principle that they do not want to own property. That offer still should stand and Newark should be encouraged to consider.

All of the historic meeting houses have associated burial grounds as listed in Table 1. Although it was not in the initial charge, it was obvious that consideration of the burial grounds was important in resolving questions of the sites. We did organize a meeting to consider the best practices of management of these grounds. In many cases, even though the meeting house is no longer in use, there were currently burial sites being sold and burials taking place.

At the burial ground conference, we discussed;

1. What are the legal regulations governing burial grounds? Which of the regulations apply to church bodies?
2. What are our obligations for the future, both ethically and operationally. A sale of a burial plot is a legal easement contract in perpetuity, which is a long time.
3. If burial plots of the historic meetings are sold it is important to place part of those funds in reserve to support future maintenance of the grave and burial grounds.
4. We called on burial ground expertise to describe best practices at London Grove and Old Kennett burial grounds. They shared best practices for

- a. Sale agreements
- b. Plot maps
- c. Locating the site for interment.
- d. Burials
- e. Maintenance
- f. Financial budgets and reserves.

Importantly for the future use or disposal of a historical meeting house, consideration must be given to the associated obligations of the burial grounds.

Alternatives considered in the past:

Establishing laid down Quaker Meeting houses into museums is a recent practice. Traditionally Quakers held the spiritual gathering as sacred not the building containing the gathering. Hence one finds former Meeting Houses turned into residences, barns or other uses. That has been a practice within Western Quarterly Meeting as well.

Alternate uses of Western Quarter meetinghouses include:

1. Residences, New Garden (Orthodox), London Grove (Orthodox), Coatesville (Orthodox), Doe Run (Derry) (Hicksite), West Grove (Hicksite)
2. Burial Societies; Homeville (Hicksite)
3. Non Quaker Church; Unionville (Hicksite)
4. Information Center; Longwood (Progressive)

Final Thoughts:

We were charged to answer the following: “There is a question of whether the laid down properties create a growing unfunded responsibility for the remaining active constituent meetings. If this responsibility remains or rises, the question must be addressed as to whether the QM needs to create a contingency reserve covering laid down meeting houses and burial ground care and/or a process for the transfer of these properties to non-Quaker ownership uses.”

The immediate capital requirements of the historic meetinghouses appear to be covered and their overall physical conditions are sound with the exception of New West Grove. Thus, there does not appear to be a need to use resources to create a Quarter capital reserve to cover risks of future maintenance needs beyond the funds currently associated with each facility. It is noted however that the capital coverage is thin and events such as storms, fire and vandalism could create immediate crises.

The recommendation to the Quarter is to focus on an active oversight management process with fully appointed meetinghouse committees³ and for scheduled assessment of the site conditions. It is also recommended that the Quarter establish an emergency fund that would be available for problem assessment and crisis management for unexpected events affecting

³ It is noted that the Quarterly Meeting heavily depends on Mary Sproat to carry out its oversight responsibilities. Her commitment is vital but cannot continue forever.

the historic buildings and sites. The amount of that fund should be in the range of \$25,000. This fund would also be available as well for the planning and implementation of re-purposing of historic meeting houses and sites.

We have an issue of priorities. We have eight meetinghouses with active congregations. These meetings must care for their members, attract new members and play active roles in their communities. The source of Quarter funds comes from these bodies. These Meetings are the location of the future membership growth and health of the Quaker body. We must have immediate priority for resources to support the health of their programs or instead of six historic meeting houses we could have fourteen. We are challenged to find ways that our commitments to historic meeting houses assure our future.

Table 1 Summary of Western Quarter Meeting Properties

MM	Active (note)	MH	Historic MH	Building(s)	Burial Ground(s)
Centre Meeting MM	1			2	
Hicksite BG					1
Fallowfield MM	1				1
Hicksite BG					1
Orthodox BG					1
Doe Run Hicksite BG					1
Hockessin MM	1			1	
Hicksite BG					1
Kendal MM					
Kennett MM	1				
Old Kennett Meeting House			1		
Hicksite BG					1
London Grove MM	1			1	
Hicksite BG					1
Orthodox BG					1
Mill Creek MM	1				
Hicksite BG					1
New Garden MM	1				
Hicksite BG					1
Orthodox BG					1
Newark MM					
West Grove MM	1			1	
Orthodox BG					1
New West Grove MH			1		
New West Grove Hicksite BG					1
Colora Meeting House & BG			1		1
London Britain House			1		
Orthodox BG					1
Parkersville House			1		
Orthodox BG					1
Penns Grove House			1		
Hicksite BG					1
Total	8		6	5	18
note: there are 10 active meetings and 1 active worship group with Kendal, Crosslands, and Newark not having meeting houses.					

