

A Chronological History of Schuylkill Friends Meeting

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This history was compiled from historical documents and oral history obtained from Chester County Archives, Chester County Historical Society, Phoenixville Historical Society, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library., Chester County Library, the Internet, and the files of Schuylkill Friends Meeting. Major sources for this history were Samuel Pennypacker's *Annals of Phoenixville and its Vicinity* and Sarah Pennypacker's *A History of Schuylkill Friends Meeting*. We consider Sarah Pennypacker's document to be the single most important historical document. We have tried to supplement her original work.

Special thanks to the staff of each of the above mentioned institutions. Without their help we would not have been able to complete this document. Also, we would like to thank our “Friends” of Schuylkill Meeting, who encouraged our efforts and greatly helped by providing information and by reviewing drafts of this document.

Respectfully Submitted,
Carol and Bob Herbertson
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1682	<p>In 1682, William Penn arrived in the New World in what is now Pennsylvania. In settlement of a debt owed to Penn's father, King Charles II had granted William Penn 45,000 square miles of land. Penn had “well thought-out ideas” on how this land should be developed. He planned that the countryside would consist of agricultural villages set in the middle of small rural townships. Penn stated that the purpose of a township was “for the more convenient bringing up of youth... so that neighbors may help one another... and that they may accustom their children to do the same.”¹</p> <p>Soon after the settlement of Philadelphia, Charles Pickering, an Englishman who had crossed the Atlantic Ocean with William Penn, traveled the Schuylkill River upstream from Philadelphia in search of treasure. After “a long and tedious journey” on water and on land, Pickering came upon a stream that had “never been trodden by the foot of European before”. The stream was later named Pickering Creek in his honor.</p> <p>In the sand on the banks of the creek, Pickering noticed shining particles and thought them to be silver washed down from the adjacent hills. Samuel W. Pennypacker states: “...believing that fortune had dawned upon him, he returned to Philadelphia and succeeded in obtaining from Penn a grant for several thousand acres of land bordering upon the stream (1683).”</p> <p>The township of Charlestown, which originally included the present township of Charlestown, the township of Schuylkill and the Borough of Phoenixville, was also named alter Pickering.</p> <p>Charles Pickering drowned crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a return trip to England. His land (5368 acres), which was</p>
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1713	<p>designated as Pickering Tract or Mine Hole Tract, was divided equally among sixteen friends. One of those friends was John Moore.²</p> <p>European settlers came to Manavon, the original name given to the Phoenixville area, in approximately 1713. At this time an Indian village existed on the land near the Schuylkill River, just south of the mouth of Pickering Creek. The area surrounding the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers was inhabited by the Lenni-Lenape Indians. They were called the “Delaware” Indians by the settlers.³</p> <p>The Lenni-Lenape were a peaceful people. They were hunters and gatherers, and they also farmed - raising corn, beans and squash, which were staples of their diet.⁴</p>
1724	<p>In 1724 John Moore built the first grist and saw mill, in this vicinity, on the land that had been given to him by Charles Pickering.⁵ A trail extended from the Lenni-Lenape village across the creek below the mill, and through Corner Stores.⁶</p>
1729	<p>John Moore, who lived in Philadelphia, gave his property, which bordered Pickering Creek and was adjacent to the Schuylkill River, to his son, William Moore. William, soon after, erected a frame house for himself and a stone house for his slaves. After a number of years William “built a mansion so elegant and capacious, and gave the grounds about it so much ornamentation with gardens, lawns, shrubbery and other luxurious devices, that it received the imposing and dignified title of 'Moore Hall,' by which it has ever since been known.”⁷</p>

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1749	<p>The first store at Corner Stores was established by Philip Housekeeper. Corner Stores, for a short period of time, was called Perryville in honor of Captain David Perry who was a soldier (1758-1762) in the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Phoenixville residents were dependent on Corner Stores for their supplies.⁸ “It was customary for people to make but the most ordinary purchases at the Corner Stores.”⁹</p>
1770	<p>“About the year 1770, it was customary for (the Lenni-Lenape) to assemble with the young men and boys of the neighborhood, at the Corner Stores, and with their bows and arrows practice shooting at a mark for pieces of money.”</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: It is quite possible that some of these games took place on the property on which the Schuylkill Friends Meeting House now stands. This may be the source of the arrowheads that have been found on the property.</i></p>
1773	<p>The Lenni-Lenape disappeared from the area by 1773, partially as a result of hardships caused by the French and Indian War and also because of the increase in settlers in the area.¹⁰</p>
1776	<p>By the time of the American Revolution, the population of the vicinity, at this time called Charlestown Township, numbered about 450 living within 66 households. Many of the inhabitants of the area were Mennonites and Quakers. There were also a few slaves,¹¹ but no freed slaves. William Moore owned 6 slaves: George, Old George, Solomon, Leath and two girls.¹²</p>

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1782-1794	<p>William Moore died at Moore Hall on 30 May 1782. His wife, Williamina, continued to live there until her death on 6 December 1784.¹³ The property was inherited by their daughter, Williamina, who was the widowed wife of Phineas Bond. The deed for this property is dated 1788.¹⁴ Phineas Bond, a physician, had been “instrumental in the organization of the Pennsylvania Hospital” and had played a role in establishing the American Philosophical Society.¹⁵</p> <p>In 1794 the property was deeded to Thomas W. Smith of the City of Philadelphia.¹⁶</p>
Pre-1807	<p>The following families were identified with the area: Coates, Longstreth, Robinson, Roberts, Jacobs, Maris, Eldridge, Fussell and Walker. The majority of Friends of Charlestown Township seemed to be affiliated with Valley Friends, which was “southeastward, over the hills and five miles away.” Friends of the area “found attendance at 'Meetings for Worship and Discipline' both laborious and difficult and hence desired an authorized and permanent meeting in their midst.”¹⁷</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: The reference for this paragraph is the “History of Schuylkill Friends Meeting”, a document researched and read by Sarah C Pennypacker, the daughter of Elijah F. Pennypacker at the 100-year celebration of the Meeting. It is not known why this celebration took place in 1909.</i></p>
1800	<p>On 31 March 1800 Thomas W. Smith deeded Moore Hall to Enoch Walker. Moore Hall at this time consisted of 340 acres on the west side of the Schuylkill River.¹⁸</p>

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1807	<p>The west room of the Meeting House was built in 1807 on land owned by Enoch Walker, who resided at Moore Hall. The building was completed within a few weeks and cost five hundred dollars and 85 cents. The building was used for public purposes. Meetings were held for traveling Friends¹⁹, and Benjamin Moore, who lived on property that adjoined that of Enoch Walker²⁰, had a private school. The school was intended to be a private school for boys. Moore envisioned a boarding school housing approximately 100 boys. Enoch Walker felt that the land was adequate to have a school, to meet the needs of Friends, and to have a burial ground. The school for boys never materialized. Instead a day school serving the area was carried on here for many years.</p>
1812	<p>Radnor Monthly Meeting records the following minute (13 February 1812). “The Valley Preparative inform that they have united in a belief that the time had arrived that our members in Charlestown might be indulged with a Meeting for Worship, to be held at their School-house in that place on the third Fifth-day and the last First-day in every month. Permission was not granted, at least partially because a report from the Men's Meeting in favor of an established meeting for Charlestown members was defeated by non-approval in the women's branch of the Monthly Meeting. Charlestown Friends made their request to become an Indulged Meeting several times.”²¹ The reason for the 3 year delay appears to have been undocumented.</p>
1814	<p>The building was conveyed by Enoch Walker to Radnor Monthly or Valley Preparative Meeting on 30 September 1814.²²</p>
1815	<p>On 6 April 1815 Enoch Walker deeded to Daniel Conard, Cornelius Conard, Joseph Roberts, Thomas George et al. “that part of Moore Hall bounded as follows”:</p>

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“Beginning at a stone in the middle of Moore Hall Road at the distance of one pole and sixty five hundredths from white oak tree standing in the line between Enoch Walker and Benjamin Moore, Thence North three degrees thirty minutes, West thirty-four perches and eighty hundredths to the middle of the Long Ford road thence along said road thirty nine perches and three tenths to a stone. Thence South eleven perches four tenths to the aforesaid Moore Hall Road. Thence along the said road north eighty six degrees East ten perches and three tenths to the place of the beginning.”

The property contained “Two acres one hundred and nine perches and including half of the aforesaid roads ...”

The deed stipulated that “the present standing timber only excepted and reserved and to be cut and removed as it becomes on the decline unless it is to make room for improvements and a ‘burrying’ place ...”

The deed also stipulated: “but to and for the use intents and purpose herein after mentioned limited and appointed and for no other use intent or purpose whatsoever _____ [unrecognizable word] to and for the use benefit and behoof of the Society of Friends which now or hereafter may belong to the said Religious Society of Friends in the Township of Charlestown and places adjacent and to the use and benefit of the said society which now are or hereafter may be in said neighborhood to erect and maintain one or more meeting houses or places of religious worship and to and for a place for the burial of their dead and also for a school under the direction of said Religious Society in the township aforesaid and places adjacent members of the same Monthly

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1816	<p>Meeting or the greater number of them shall at any time direct and appoint in conformity with the uses and purposes above mentioned”²³</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: The term perch is used as both a measure of length and as a measure of area. A perch (distance) =16.5 feet; a perch (area) = 272.25 square feet. There are 160 perches to an acre (43560 square feet). The term pole is synonymous with the term perch, as is the term rod.</i></p> <p>The original building was added to and the Friends of Charlestown were granted the privilege of having their first regular Meeting for Worship, functioning as an “indulged” meeting under Valley Preparative Meeting and Radnor Monthly Meeting. The first Meeting for Worship as Charlestown Meeting occurred on 12 November 1815.²⁴</p> <p>Radnor Monthly minutes record the fact that a regular meeting was established (date of record: 9 Nov 1815); Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting records the fact that a regular meeting had been established (date of record: 11 Nov 1815).²⁵</p> <p>The building was altered by the addition of “wings” (1816).²⁶</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: There are conflicting dates for the addition to the building. Because the first Meeting for Worship did not take place until November of 1815, the building of the addition may have begun in 1815 and ended in 1816.</i></p>
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	<p>Local tradition is that the original stone steps at the front door of the Meeting House were a gift from Louis Wemway, a noted German engineer who built the first great bridge across the Schuylkill River to Philadelphia.²⁷</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: Other references indicate the engineer's name was Lewis Wernwag, not Louis Wemway, and that the bridge, which was referred to as "The Colossus at Philadelphia" or "The Colossus at Fairmont", according to some authorities, was the second longest single-span bridge in the world.^{28 29} A deed, dated 1816, was filed with Chester County and indicates that Lewis Wernwag was a resident of Charlestown Township.³⁰</i></p>
1818	<p>According to Samuel Pennypacker, the Friends Meeting House at the Corner Store was first used as a place of worship in 1818.³¹</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: This date (1818) conflicts with the 1815 date, which is documented by minutes of the Schuylkill Meeting.</i></p> <p>The First Day School held in the adjoining room was probably under the care of Elijah F. Pennypacker.³²</p>
1823	<p>In 1823 Charlestown Indulged Meeting was started by the Valley Preparative Meeting with the permission of Radnor Monthly Meeting.³³</p>
1824	<p>In 1824 Phoenixville had 40 families. Corner Stores was a more</p>

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	<p>important business center at that date than Phoenixville, because the stage coach made a stop there. Also, women from miles around went to Mrs. Coates' stores to buy dress materials and bonnets.³⁴</p>
1826	<p>In 1826 Charlestown Township was divided. The eastern part became Schuylkill Township.³⁵ As a consequence, the name of the Meeting was changed from Charlestown Indulged Meeting to Schuylkill Indulged Meeting.^{36 37}</p>
1828	<p>In 1828 the orthodox branch of this meeting was discontinued.³⁸</p>
1837	<p>“An organization laboring under the rather ponderous title of the ‘Schuylkill Township Literary and Scientific Society’ was founded in 1837, under the direction of Elijah F. Pennypacker, Isaac A. Pennypacker and Samuel A. Whitaker. This society met at the Friends' meeting house, at Comers Stores. Occasional lectures were delivered upon literary and scientific subjects, and a collection of botanical and mineralogical specimens was added to the library.³⁹</p>
1843	<p>In 1843 Schuylkill Meeting asked to become a Preparative Meeting to Valley (which by this time was a Monthly Meeting).</p> <p>This request was granted. Valley Preparative Meeting proposes the establishment of a preparative meeting to be composed of Friends within the limits of Charlestown Meeting (8Jun1843). Radnor Monthly Meeting unites to establish a preparative meeting (13Jul1843)^{40 41}</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">1844</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Editorial Note: One reference refers to Valley Preparative Meeting, whereas another reference refers to Valley Monthly Meeting.</i></p> <p>Graceanna Lewis (1821-1912) lived with Elijah F. Pennypacker while teaching at Pennypacker’s school in Phoenixville in 1844. Lewis had been exposed to the sciences at a very early age, and was trained in the natural sciences, as were many Quaker women. She wrote and illustrated <u>A Natural History of Birds</u> in 1844. Her scientific work attracted the attention of Professor Thomas H. Huxley, “the foremost British champion of Darwinism.”</p> <p>Social responsibility was a trait of the Lewis family. Her father, John, once stated that slavery was “one of the greatest of crimes against humanity. Before she was a scientist, Lewis was an abolitionist. Her home in Kimberton, Pennsylvania served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.^{42 43}</p> <p>Sarah R. Adamson Dolley (1829-1909) was educated at the Schuylkill school run by her cousin Graceanna Lewis. Her studies on physiology under Lewis “first fascinated, and then led to the determination to make medicine a special study and its practice her life-work.” Dolley became the second woman M.D. in the United States after graduating from Central Medical College in Rochester, NY in February, 1851. She was also the first woman to complete a hospital internship.^{44}</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1843-1848</p>	<p>During the years 1843 to 1848 the Meeting remained a</p>

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1849	<p>Preparative Meeting. For reasons unexplained in the records, it became an indulged meeting again in 1848.⁴⁵</p> <p>The Meeting merged into Valley Preparative Meeting (1849).⁴⁶</p> <p>A committee appointed by Radnor Monthly Meeting encouraged the men and women of the meeting to hold their preparative meetings “separate and apart each other”. The committee believed “it would be more in accordance with the order and practice of society”, This suggests that Schuylkill Meeting may have been one of the first meetings to have joint worship sessions.⁴⁷</p>
1850-1875	<p>In 1850 the preparative meeting was discontinued and members were attached to Valley Preparative Meeting.⁴⁸</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: The 1850 date above conflicts with the 1849 date listed above, During the period 1850 to 1875, little information about Schuylkill Meeting was recorded probably because of the war consequences.</i></p> <p>However, it is known that during this period Schuylkill Meeting hosted speakers who were friendly to the abolitionist cause, Only one reference stated that the Meeting House was a station on the Underground Railroad.⁴⁹</p> <p>James Wood succeeded Enoch Walker as owner of Moore Hall. It was through Wood that Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier came to Schuylkill Meeting to worship. Whittier worshipped (and</p>

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perhaps spoke) at Schuylkill Meeting.⁵⁰

James Wood felt so strongly on the subject of race prejudice that he requested his body be buried in the modest ground of Schuylkill Meeting rather in the family enclosure at Laurel Hill.⁵¹

Other well-known people who attended the Meeting or spoke at the Meeting House included Sojourner Truth, George Truman, Elijah F. Pennypacker, Charles Burleigh, Governor Samuel Pennypacker. Also, local oral history states that Lucretia Mott spoke at the Meeting House,^{52 53} and Henry “Box” Brown visited the Meeting House. Brown gained freedom by having himself nailed in a box with water and biscuits and shipped to the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee.^{54 55}

Charles Adamson and James Wood, both of whom are buried in the Schuylkill Friends cemetery were “ever willing to assist all who came to them.”⁵⁶

Elijah F, Pennypacker reunited himself with the Society of Friends soon after his retirement from public life. However, he “was much too radical to be an acceptable addition. For a long time he was endured rather than endorsed, and it was only when such anti-slavery feelings as he cherished became generally diffused through-out the Society, that he found the unity he desired and expected.”⁵⁷

Sojourner Truth, a friend of Elijah F, Pennypacker, was a “remarkable colored lady.” “She was a perfect type of her race, uneducated, but possessed of strong common sense. She was a

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	<p>slave forty years of her life, and when liberated, and an attempt was made to educate her, she declares she could never get beyond her a, b, abs.” She was eighty-three years old.</p> <p>“Sojourner was in the anti-slavery movement in its palmiest days, and was associated with the shining lights of that struggle, and now that the wildest dreams of those she considered enthusiastic have been abundantly realized, she has turned her attention to the amelioration of her race, and considers her mission to be the establishment of a home for old and feeble colored people in the far West, for which purpose she is endeavoring to arouse public sentiment and to interest the government.”</p> <p>“On Thursday afternoon she addressed the ladies of the neighborhood in the Friends' meeting-house, at the corner stores.”</p> <p>Sojourner Truth was eighty three years old at the time she spoke.⁵⁸</p>
1868	<p>(Isaac) Wayne MacVeagh (1833-1917), U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (1870-71) and Italy (1893-97) and U.S. Attorney General (1881) under President James Garfield was once a student at the Schuylkill school. MacVeagh, “sat at the council table of the nation”. He was removed from the school when his father “became alarmed at the anti-slavery and reformatory bias given by his preceptor”.^{59 60}</p>
	<p>A receipt, dated 1868, indicates that building materials were purchased for the purpose of erecting a wall along the eastern side of the property and for repair of the wall between the sheds and the Meeting House. The receipts also indicate that graveyard repairs were made.⁶¹</p>
1878	<p>A receipt, dated 1878, indicates that materials were purchased for the purpose of building a shed.⁶²</p>

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1881	<p>At this time the land between the Meeting House and Nutt Road was owned by Isaac Price.⁶³</p>
1909	<p>In 1909 Schuylkill Meeting held a celebration of its 100 Year Anniversary. At this celebration Sarah C. Pennypacker read the history of the Meeting House, which was based on her research.⁶⁴</p> <p><i>Editorial Note: This document is perhaps the best single source of information of the history of Schuylkill Friends Meeting.</i></p> <p>Attendees at the celebration included members of the Moore, Walker and Pennypacker families.⁶⁵</p> <p>The wooden partition dividing the men's sessions from the women's sessions have not been lowered since the one hundredth anniversary in 1909.</p>
1914	<p>During World War I (1914-1918) American Red Cross made clothing at the Meeting House.⁶⁶</p>

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1930	<p>A description of the Meeting House at this time follows:</p> <p>“The House is a rough-cast structure facing the south, the western end being the part formerly used for a school. There are still a dozen or more old trees left in the grove, facing which are the stone wagon-sheds. A stone wall incloses (sic) the graveyard at the back of the Meeting House and sheds, and a noticeable feature of many of the memorial stones in it is their simply bearing the name of the dead without date of any kind.”⁶⁷</p>
1935	<p>Schuylkill Meeting remained an “indulged” meeting until 1935, when it was “laid down” (i.e., ceased to exist).⁶⁸</p>
1938	<p>As late as 1938, the area was still referred to as Corner Stores. The local paper (Daily Republican) published a photo of the Meeting House.⁶⁹</p>
1939	<p>In 1939 a group of Friends led by Mary Vanderslice and Donald Baker reopened the Meeting. The Meeting re-opened after being closed for a period of approximately 5 years. At this time the building lacked central heat, light and water.⁷⁰</p> <p>The Meeting House was described by The Daily Republican as a</p>

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	<p>“typical old-fashioned meeting house with rough benches put together with hand-wrought nails and wooden pegs. The old windows in the building have many of the original six-by-eight panes of glass with waves of color and unevenness which denotes this age. There is a quant old door, with an equally quant old key, the latter shaped like the capital letter ‘S’ - Schuylkill.”⁷¹</p>
1941	<p>In 1941 the building was centrally heated for the first time (circulating hot air heater). Also a sign was placed on Nutt Road.⁷²</p>
1942	<p>In 1942 the average attendance was 15 people.⁷³</p>
1944	<p>A photograph was taken in 1944 of First-Day School (held in the West Room).⁷⁴</p>
1949	<p>In 1949-1950 the old horse sheds were converted into a place for First Day School.⁷⁵</p>
1954	<p>Schuylkill Friends continued to grow in numbers and activity and in 1954 asked to become a Monthly Meeting. This request was granted by Valley Meeting in November, 1954. However, Valley Meeting continued to hold title to the property.⁷⁶</p>

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	<p>Schuylkill Monthly Meeting was formed on 14Nov1954. A minute was adopted on 4Dec1954 at the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting forming Schuylkill Monthly Meeting.⁷⁷</p>
1972	<p>The title to the property was transferred to Schuylkill Meeting.</p> <p>The title is now held by Friends Fiduciary Corporation as Trustee for the Meeting.⁷⁸</p>
1994	<p>The First-Day School was renovated.⁷⁹</p>
2000-2001	<p>In 2000 and 2001 major renovations of the Meeting House were made. More than 80 feet of stone wall surrounding the cemetery had fallen, and the old wooden floor in the Meeting House was “shifting like the ocean”.</p> <p>A new floor, kitchen and heating system were installed. Also, the stucco was removed from the exterior to expose the original stone, and the stone wall was repaired.^{80 81}</p>

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- ⁶⁰ Internet Site: Attorney General: Isaac Wayne MacVeagh (1881-1881)
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- [61](#) Miscellaneous papers 1805-1935 RG2/Ph/S3 2.1-2.2, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.
- [62](#) Miscellaneous papers 1805-1935 RG2/Ph/S3 2.1-2.2, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.
- [63](#) Minutes of Schuylkill Meeting, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.
- [64](#) The Daily Republican (Phoenixville): 21 October 1909.
- [65](#) Pilgrimage to Schuylkill Friends Meeting: [visitors' register] 1909, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.
- [66](#) The Daily Republican (Phoenixville): 21 October 1938.
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- [68](#) Schuylkill Meeting Pamphlet
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