1816 FARMINGTON QUAKER MEETINGHOUSE & MUSEUM

REMEMBERING HISTORY, COMING TOGETHER: OCTOBER 1916 AND NOW

A History Spotlight article by Judith Wellman
October 2026

Quakers don't always agree with each other, but they often share an odd sense of humor. They will sometimes say. "If there are two Quakers in a room, there will be three different opinions." You may have heard some version of this story. And it may fit your own sense of what happens at family gatherings and neighborhood potlucks. We share community, but we do not always—or even often—agree with each other.



Farmington Meetinghouse, Centennial Celebration, 1917| Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore

How do we handle the tension between our sense of community and our awareness of—and respect for—differences? Quakers in Farmington were not exempt from this struggle.

As we savor these crisp, bright October days, we are reminded of earlier Octobers when large numbers of people gathered at the 1816 Farmington Quaker Meetinghouse to commemorate its history. Beginning in the early twentieth century, Quakers came from all over the country to hold annual meetings in the 1816 Meetinghouse to share their memories. One such meeting took place on a Sunday in early October 1916, when Quakers gathered to commemorate the 99th anniversary of the Meetinghouse. They would return a year later to celebrate its 100th anniversary.

A reporter for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* described a memorable image: "On Sunday last a Hicksite sister and an orthodox sister sat side by side in their 'drab' and 'bonnet' and made a picture not soon to be forgotten. Into the past have faded the sermons and the meetings, but the hospitality, the hearts, and the doors thrown wide open to receive new friends and old cannot fade from the mind." One of those women was likely Sarah Durfee Peckham (1828-1917), Orthodox Friend and the last local Quaker to wear traditional Quaker dress.



Sarah Peckham| Courtesy Farmington Town Historian

This image struck home to many Quakers as a symbol of creating community across differences. Quakers, like the rest of us, had their share of disagreements. A major split occurred in 1828, when Quakers in Farmington and elsewhere had split into Orthodox Friends and Hicksite Friends.

In Farmington, both groups worked on abolitionism and the Underground Railroad, but they met in two different Meetinghouses right across the street from each other.

Hicksite Friends used the 1816 Meetinghouse, but, in 1848, they in turn split into two different groups. Some Hicksite Friends focused on holding quiet meetings focused on worship. Others began to work with "the world's people" to implement ideals of equality in the larger world.

Quietist Friends continued to meet in the 1816 building, but reformers among them left to form the Congregational Friends (later called the Progressive Friends and then the Friends of Human Progress). They held annual meetings in the Junius Meetinghouse in the Town of Waterloo. There, they invited "Christians, Jews, Mahammedans, and Pagans, men and women of all names and no name" to meet with them for "the promotion of truth and practical goodness." This group--including Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Charles Lenox Remond—became national leaders in movements for the rights of women and people of color, working for universal voting rights through the American Equal Rights Association after the Civil War.

By the early twentieth century, Congregational Friends had died out as a separate group. Orthodox and Hicksite Friends still maintained their differing beliefs, but Quakers worked to respect those differences while highlighting their common values. It wasn't easy, but history helped them do that.

Farmington Quakers continued to meet in October "Homecoming Days," and they held them at least until World War II, moving them to the current Farmington Friends Meetinghouse after the 1816 Meetinghouse was turned into a barn in 1927. They invited not only Quaker families but also congregations from churches in surrounding towns.

As those two women sat in the 1816 Meetinghouse that day, they reflected efforts across New York State to bridge their differences. Orthodox and Hicksite Quakers began holding joint committee meetings in 1904. By 1953, they were officially re-united into one body of New York Yearly Meeting of Friends.

Just as commemorating the history of the 1816 Meetinghouse brought people of differing beliefs together in the early twentieth century, so it can do so for all of us in our own time. Practicing a respect for differences while promoting shared values of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, and equality was not an easy task for earlier Friends. It is not an easy task for us now. The 1816 Meetinghouse project helps us do that.

Thanks to Emily Morry from the Rochester Public Library for finding many articles relating to the 1816 Meetinghouse in the early twentieth century.

"Congregational or Progressive Friends," Frederick Douglass Paper, May 26, 1854.
"Sesqui-centennial to be Observed in Farmington," Shortsville Enterprise, August 23, 1939.
"Friends for 150 Years," Democrat and Chronicle, August 27, 1939.
"Descendants of Quakers Greet Pilgrimage Leader," Democrat and Chronicle, July 30, 1939.
"Farmington Friends Church," Shortsville Enterprise, October 6, 1937.
"Sarah Durfee Phetteplace Peckham,"
https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/113969477/sarah_durfee-peckham
"Services Are Held Once a Year in Old Meetinghouse, Democrat and Chronicle, October 13, 1916.