

Research Guide to Finding Your Quaker Ancestors

About half of people in the United States today who had ancestors living in or moving through the Mid-Atlantic region between 1680 and 1780 have at least one Quaker ancestor. If you have Quaker ancestry, consider yourself lucky. From their beginnings in the 17th century, Quakers were meticulous record keepers.

Who Are the Quakers?

Quakers are members of a religious group known formally as the Society of Friends or the Religious Society of Friends. George Fox founded the society in England in the mid-1600s, and its early adherents were mainly urban, middle-class merchants and manufacturers. They were classified as Nonconformists because they did not belong to the Church of England. Quakers tried to live their religion in a way that did not separate religious and secular life and were known for their integrity. For their commitment and efforts toward peace, the Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

Quakers first came to America in the mid-1600s as missionaries. William Penn established Pennsylvania in 1682, and many Friends settled there. So many Quakers made their home in Rhode Island that 36 of Rhode Island's early governors were Quakers. Others found a place further down the Atlantic seaboard into the Carolinas. Eventually, they moved west into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

Quaker Records

Quakers kept records from their earliest days. Monthly meeting records are where you'll find most of the details about your Quaker ancestors. To get the most out of the Quaker Collection on Ancestry.com, you'll need to know a few things about Quaker meetings and various types of records, which can include meeting minutes, births, marriages, burials, memberships, records related to discipline, memorials, and others.



In Charles T. Webber's *The Underground Railroad*, Quaker abolitionists Levi and Catharine Coffin and Hannah Haddock assist a group of fugitive slaves.

The Quakers and Slavery

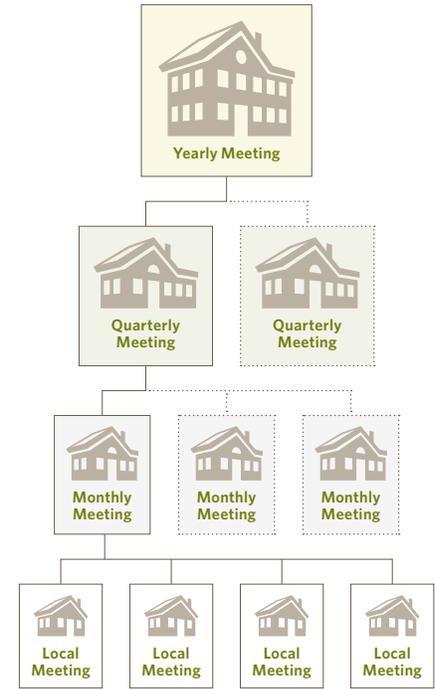
Quakers believed in equality for men and women and between races. They eventually became known as staunch abolitionists. In 1688, four Quakers from Germantown, Pennsylvania, produced the first recorded written protest against slavery in the Colonies. During the late 1700s, slaveholding became grounds for disownment (disfellowship), and Quakers had helped establish the Underground Railroad. In the early 1800s, entire congregations of Quakers left the South and moved to southern Indiana and Ohio when Congress declared these new territories non-slave states.

What Is a Quaker Meeting?

“Meeting” has multiple applications in the Quaker religion. First, a Quaker meeting refers to a Quaker congregation. While many Christian churches are organized by parishes, Quakers in America organized hundreds of local Quaker “meetings.” These local congregations typically gathered on Sunday morning for a worship service called “meeting for worship.” So a Quaker meeting may refer to a unit in the church or an actual gathering—a meeting.

From there, Quaker meetings are organized in a hierarchal structure based on geographical area.

Local meetings (sometimes referred to as “preparative” meetings) belong to a **monthly meeting**, where representatives from local meetings gather monthly to discuss and conduct business. Monthly meetings send representatives to **quarterly meetings**, which cover an even larger area and in turn send representatives to yearly meetings. **Yearly meetings** sit at the top of the Quaker meeting hierarchy, something like an archdiocese, and their jurisdiction can cover all the meetings in or around a city (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting) or in a region (New England Yearly Meeting).



Quaker meeting structure

Monthly Meeting Minutes

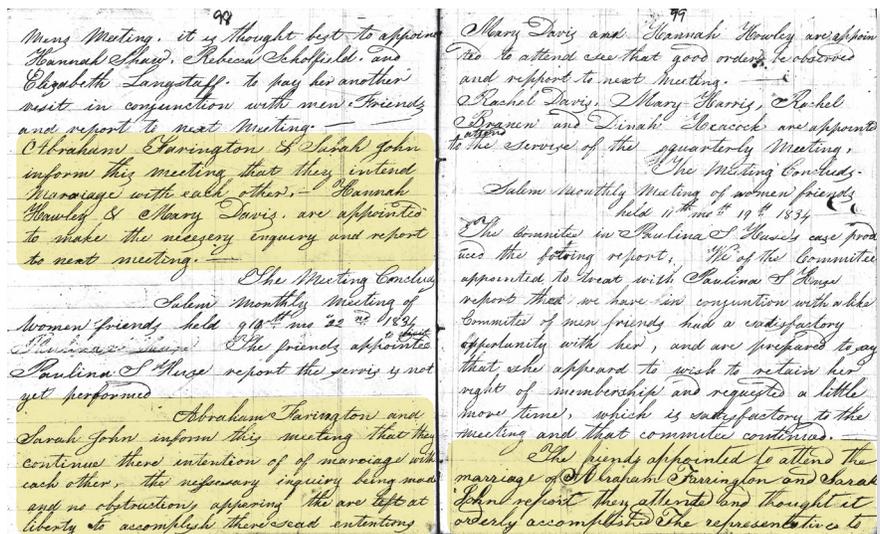
Monthly meeting minutes were originally kept by both the men’s group and the women’s group (for years they met separately). Meeting minutes contain a record of all business conducted in the meeting, which will include members who had joined or left the meeting, matters of discipline, and other items that may mention your ancestor.

One example of an event you’ll find recorded in the minutes is an **intention to marry**. When a couple decided to marry, the bride and groom requested that the meeting “oversee” the wedding. This request generated entries in the monthly meeting minutes for three consecutive months.

First, two people from the “Overseers Committee” or “Committee on Oversight” were assigned to visit with the groom and bride in their homes and report back.

You’ll find the Overseers’ report recorded in the minutes of the women’s meeting for the next month. Often the minutes will indicate only that the couple are “cleared for marriage.” Sometimes a Date of Liberation certificate was given to the couple, especially if they were going to be married later or elsewhere, indicating the date they were cleared by the meeting to be married.

The third entry will be a report that the wedding was accomplished.



Monthly meeting minutes: There are typically three entries for a marriage, which will appear in three consecutive months.

Birth Registers

Monthly meetings often kept birth registers. Births are sometimes listed by date and sometimes by family group. If the births were recorded at a later date, registers may name each child in the family in succession.

Along with names of children, birth dates, residence, and parents' names, registers sometimes include details about marriages or deaths of children listed. You may also find details on the mother's parents.

Notes on mother's parents, marriages, and deaths in Quaker birth register

Names of the children	When born	Names of the Parents	Their residence	Occasional Notes
Jonathan Jenkins	20th. of 1 ^{mo} . 1783	Jabez and Patience Jenkins	Canaan Delaware	This Patience Jenkins was the daughter of J ^o & Ann Shinn
Joseph Jenkins	14th. of 9 ^{mo} . 1784	do	do	son of J ^o & Ann Shinn
Jabez and Thomas Jenkins	24th. of 7 ^{mo} . 1787	do	do	Married Catharine Vagbit
Robert Holliday Jenkins	14th. of 10 ^{mo} . 1788	do	do	no marriage
Thomas Jenkins	15th. of 7 ^{mo} . 1790	do	do	no marriage
Ann Jenkins	17th. of 11 ^{mo} . 1791	do	do	no marriage
Jabez Jenkins	14th. of 10 ^{mo} . 1793	do	do	Married Michael Souter of France
George Washington Jenkins	25th. of 2 ^{mo} . 1796	do	do	no marriage
Miriam Jenkins	12th. of 3 ^{mo} . 1799	do	do	Patience Shinn of Erie Pa
Ezekiel Jenkins	21st. of 6 ^{mo} . 1802	do	do	Elera Ann Lobb of Fehew
Nathaniel Jenkins	11th. of 1 ^{mo} . 1804	do	do	Patience M ^{rs} Risher, widow of J ^o & daughter of J ^o & Ann Shinn
Holliday Jenkins	14th. of 5 ^{mo} . 1807	do	do	no marriage
				die ^d 11 ^{mo} 1841 no marriage

Tip: Look for the parents in older registers or meeting minutes. You may discover another generation or two.

Death Registers

Death registers list deaths among members of a Quaker meeting. Along with names of the deceased, death date, and place of residence, they will sometimes list the deceased's parents. The term "Late Residence" was used in the 18th and 19th centuries to refer to the deceased's most recent residence.

Tip: Look for a note in the meeting minutes about the passing of the deceased; you'll usually find these somewhere near the date you see in the death register. You may find details about the cause of death, especially if there was a protracted illness.

Name of deceased friend	date of death	Age	Late residence	Remarks
Edward Jarnall	1 ^{mo} 13-1856	73½	Brandywine	
Albert Pusey			Wilmington	son of J ^o & Sarah 1788
James P. Stapler	1 ^{mo} 10 th 1857		Wilmington	son of Sarah Stapler
Sarah Ann Edge	5 ^{mo} 1857		do	
Sarah Weaver	12 ^{mo} 1858		New ark	

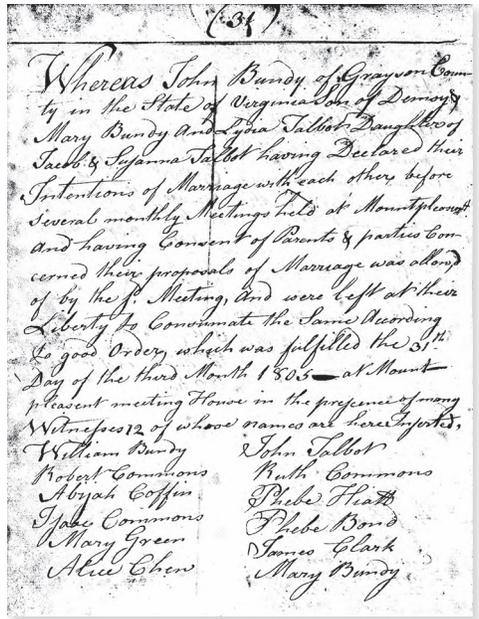
Death register

Marriage Records

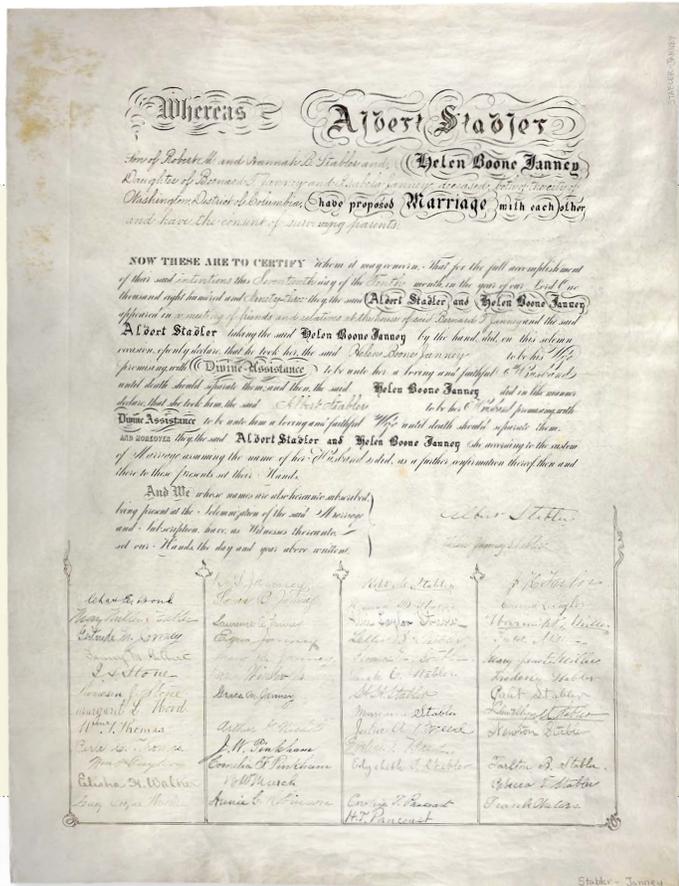
In the early days, Quaker meetings could oversee marriages only when the bride and groom were both members of that meeting (congregation) and where the meeting entered the details into the minutes as proof that the marriage took place. A Quaker marriage certificate takes the place of a civil document and is proof that the wedding took place. All the people in attendance signed as witnesses. Details from the certificate were copied into meeting minutes in early Quaker records.

You'll find the name of the bride and groom, a date, and often where they're from. Entries may include names of both the bride and groom's parents as well, whether they are living or deceased, and sometimes where they're from.

Tip: Among the signatures, look for names of family members, relatives visiting for the wedding, prominent Quakers, and even children.



Marriage record



A poster-sized certificate with signatures of all witnesses becomes the property of the bride and groom, but not until it is read aloud to all gathered for the ceremony. Marriage certificates become treasured heirlooms in Quaker families and are often passed down through the generations. You'll find a few copies of certificates in the Quaker Collection on Ancestry.com.

Note the different handwriting for the signatures on the marriage certificate. On the record above, the witnesses' names were copied into the minutes by the clerk.

“Out of Unity”

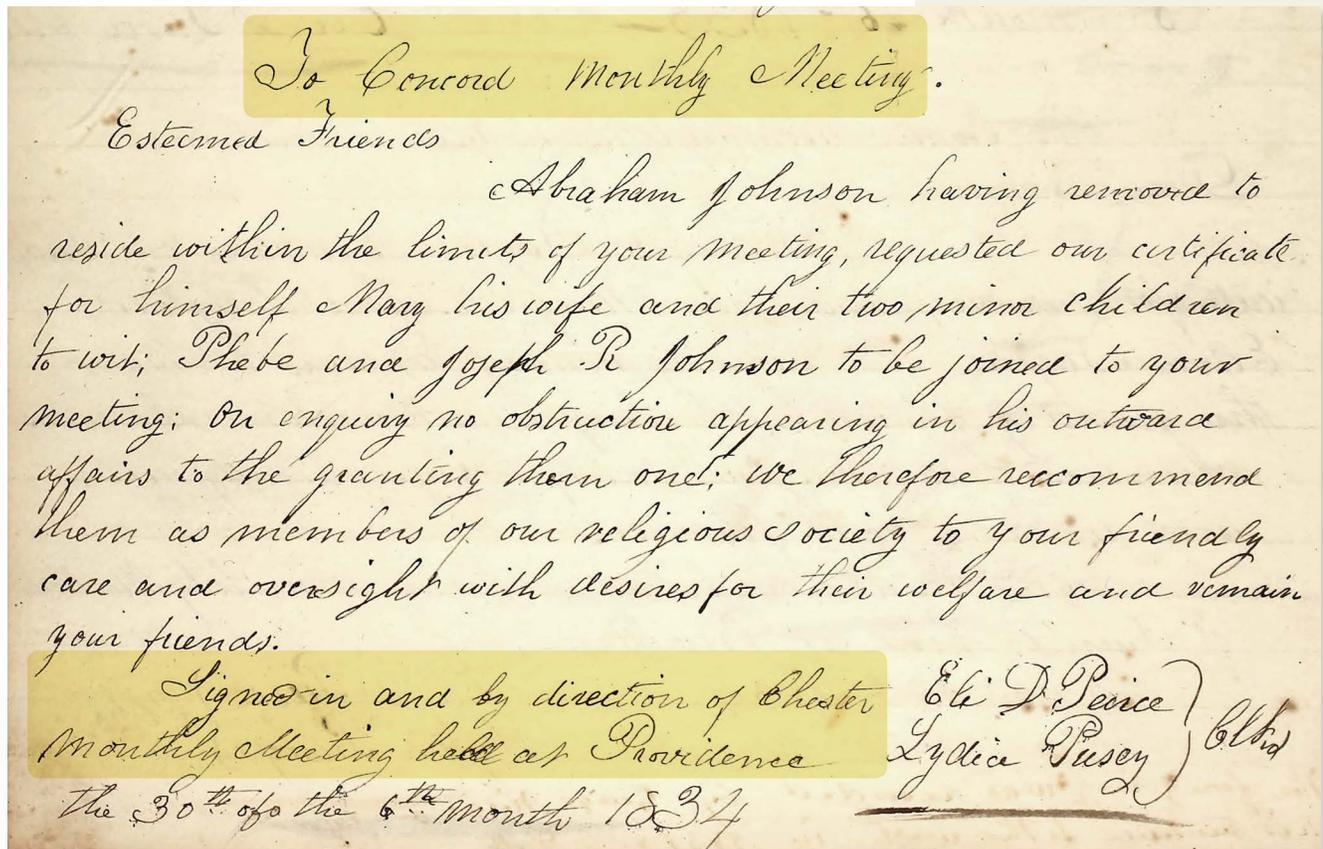
A search in the minutes will reveal that couples were sometimes disowned for “marrying out of unity.” Marrying out of unity could include marrying outside the faith, marrying a first cousin, or marrying without parental consent. The location and date of such a marriage will not appear in the minutes, but the name of the member will be found when disciplinary action is taken. If the nonmember spouse wanted to eventually join the meeting, the couple could submit a request to the meeting with an acknowledgement of their infraction.

Certificates of Removal

A Certificate of Removal is a letter of transit for a person or family that is leaving one meeting and seeking to join another (*removal* is an English term meaning “to relocate”). The document assured the new meeting that the newcomers’ former meeting knew the family well enough to vouch for them. With this certificate, a new arrival would be welcomed to the new meeting and given any assistance needed to get settled.

Certificates typically include the current and destination meetings, a date, and the name of the individual or family moving. They may also include a statement about the bearer’s general financial welfare, such as “no obstruction appearing in his outward affairs.” After about the mid-1700s, you can usually track a family’s moves using Certificates of Removal.

This Certificate of Removal is addressed to the Concord Monthly Meeting and comes from the Chester Monthly Meeting.



Tip: Some meetings kept removal registers with requests for certificates and approvals given. Others recorded requests and approvals only in the body of the minutes. Check for both possibilities in the Quaker Collection by using the Browse feature for the meeting where your ancestor lived. If there is no register of removals, check the meeting minutes directly.

Disownments and Apologies

Meetings sometimes took disciplinary actions to reinforce the basic tenets of the religion. These included Disownments, in which a meeting affirmed that it did not “own” the offender and denied responsibility for his or her behavior.

*Whereas Richard Mason of this City Merchant, who has long
made a Religious Profession amongst the People called Quakers, has so far given
way to an undue desire of Gain, as to engage in much Traffick of a doubtful
and dangerous Nature, particularly in being Concerned in fitting out a Vessel
for Trade provided to Repel in a Warlike Way any Attack which might be
made upon it, which has been attended with Sorrowsful Consequences, in Shedding
Human Blood and Loss of Life: It became our Concern to treat with him there
but without the desired Effect, as he does not appear Convinced of our Religious
Principles against Warr's and Fightings - We think it our duty therefore to
declare our Disunity with the S^r Richard Mason, and that we cannot hold
him in Religious Fellowship with us, till from a true sense of his Deviation
from our Christian Testimony he Condemns the same to the Satisfaction of
this Meeting!*

Disowned for violating “Principles against Warr’s and Fightings”

If the offending Friend repented, they wrote a letter of apology to the meeting acknowledging that the misdeeds were offensive to Friends’ principles and discipline. These records are called Apologies or Acknowledgements and will appear either in the meeting minutes or in separate books.

*To the monthly meeting to be held at Durdley 4th
Day of the 6th month 1777*

*Friends for as much as we have in our marriage gone contrary
to the good order Established among the people called
Quakers by which we have brought trouble upon our
selves & Friends for which we are sorry & Desire our of-
fence may be passed by and we received so far into
unity as you may think we Deserve and hope through
Divine assistance to behave more becoming for
the future*

*John Ball
Sarah Ball*

Apology for
marrying out
of unity

Quaker Discipline

Quakers could face disownment for numerous reasons. Since the Quakers believed in the New Testament teachings of the King James Bible where man is taught not to swear, swearing and other vulgar language was considered inappropriate for believing Quakers. Since the Quakers believed that a person’s appearance in public was a reflection of their character and also on the meeting, appearing intoxicated in public was considered inappropriate. Here are some other reasons for disownment you might find in meeting minutes:

- marrying contrary to discipline
- fornication
- theft
- debt
- military activity
- assault
- loose morals
- marrying too close a relative
- neglecting family responsibilities
- slander
- slaveholding
- fraud

Tip: Disciplinary actions were formal procedures, and an offender was counseled in private by a small group of Friends about the offending behavior. A summary of the discussions will appear in the meeting minutes. Disownment was never final, although the passing of a year or more was the norm before an offender could apply for reinstatement.

Hinshaw Records

William Wade Hinshaw (1867-1947) was a noted opera singer and producer who began researching his Quaker ancestry in the 1920s. As he learned the value of monthly meeting records, he determined to track down and extract pertinent genealogical details from every set of Quaker monthly meeting minutes he could find or access. This led to the 6 volumes of the *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy*.

Entries from Hinshaw's *Encyclopedia* can include details such as name, birthplace and date, marriage, death, children, residence, disciplinary actions, and more. The key to reading the entries is understanding the abbreviations. For example, the first entry below tells us that Mary Adair was disowned on 4th month, 1st day, 1797 (April 1, 1797).

MINUTES AND MARRIAGE RECORDS

ADAIR.

1797, 4, 1. Mary dis.

ALBERTSON.

1797, 7, 1. Elizabeth & dt, Jane, Mary, Elizabeth, Lydia & Milicent, rocf Back Creek MM, dated 1797,6,24.

You'll find a list of common abbreviations you can print off for your reference at the end of this document.

Hinshaw's work also left behind a card file with names and details from some 300 meetings up to about 1930 that were never published. These are found in the *U.S., Hinshaw Index to Selected Quaker Records, 1680-1940*, database. Again, these cards list abstracted details, and deciphering the abbreviations is key to reading the cards. For example:

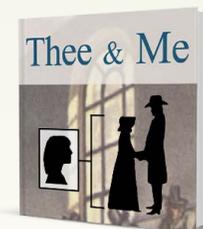
PNDP
p.406-3
1795-5-26
PARRY, David: w Elizabeth
dt Martha

rocf Horsham(?) M.M.
dated 4-29-1795

This card tells us that a family moved from one congregation to another. Detail: On 26 May 1795 (date in upper-left corner) in the Philadelphia Northern District Monthly Meeting (PNDP, upper-left), David Parry; his wife, Elizabeth; and their daughter, Martha, were received on a certificate from (rocf) Horsham Monthly Meeting. The certificate from Horsham MM was dated 29 April 1795.

Reading the introduction to volume 1 of Hinshaw's *Encyclopedia* will provide a good introduction to Quaker records.

There are some limitations to the *Encyclopedia*. It references only about 25 percent of American Quaker meetings, and at the request of some of the yearly meetings, some private details were "scrubbed" from the data.



For a more in-depth look at tracing your ancestors using the Hinshaw index cards, review the case study in chapter 14 of [Lisa Parry Arnold's *Thee & Me: A Beginner's Guide to Early Quaker Records*](#).

You'll find a list of common abbreviations you can print off for your reference at the end of this document.

Other Records

These are only a sample of the records in the Quaker Collection on Ancestry.com. You can also find Quaker periodicals, genealogies, a small collection of yearbooks, cemetery records, and others.

Researching Quaker Records Not Online

The Quaker Collection does not include records from every Quaker meeting in the United States. To research a Quaker who doesn't appear in the collection, start by finding out what state and then what county they lived in. Use the *U.S. and Canada, Quaker Monthly Meeting Historical Data, 1671-2010*, database to look for meetings in the areas they lived in and find out what records are known to exist for that meeting.

Lisa Arnold's *Thee & Me: A Beginner's Guide to Early Quaker Records* is another excellent tool for help with researching your U.S. Quaker ancestors.

Quaker Dates

You may notice that the names of the days and months are a little different in Quaker records. Quakers chose not to use names of the days and months, which were often based on the names of gods from Greek and Roman mythology. Instead, they used terms such as First Day, Second Day, Third Day for Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. They also used First Month, Second Month, Third Month, and so forth for names of months.

Keep in mind that the Quakers changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, so the months listed prior to that year are in the Julian calendar, which means First Month refers to March. So, 2nd day 6th month 1750 would be August 2, 1750, since the year started in March.

U.S. and Canada, Quaker Monthly Meeting Historical Data, 1671-2010	
Meeting Name:	Buckingham
Latest Yearly Meeting:	Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
State or Province:	Pennsylvania
County:	Bucks
Physical Location:	Lahaska 18931, 5684 York Rd., Rte. 202 At Rte. 263
Latitude:	40.34592° N
Longitude:	075.03694° W
Records Known Extant:	Swarthmore: Minutes 1720-1966, Women Minutes 1722-1891, Births and Deaths 1699-1815, Marriages 1721-1947, Removals 1778-1957, Births 1742-1920, Burials 1930, Deaths 1772-1936, M and E 1787-1815, 1867-1928
Date Granted:	24 Nov 1720
Date of First Meeting:	06 Dec 1720
Date Laid Down:	Active
Branches:	Hicksite 03 Sep 1827 - 1955
Affiliations:	Bucks Quarterly Meeting
Subordinates:	Plumstead Pm 1731-1867; Solebury Pm 1806-1811; Wrightstown Pm 1724/12-1734; Plumstead Worship 1969-2002; In 1752 Meetinghouse
Before and After:	Pm 1705-1955 From Falls Monthly Meeting
Local Related Histories:	Anna Miller Watring, Bucks County, Pennsylvania Church Records Of The 17Th and 18Th Centuries, Volume 3, Pp 141-191 (1994)

Sample image of Quaker monthly meeting data

Days of the Week

Quaker Day	Translated Day
First Day	Sunday
Second Day	Monday
Third Day	Tuesday
Fourth Day	Wednesday
Fifth Day	Thursday
Sixth Day	Friday
Seventh Day	Saturday

Julian Months (Pre-1752)

Quaker Month	Translated Month
First Month	March
Second Month	April
Third Month	May
Fourth Month	June
Fifth Month	July
Sixth Month	August
Seventh Month	September
Eighth Month	October
Ninth Month	November
Tenth Month	December
Eleventh Month	January
Twelfth Month	February

Gregorian Months (Post-1752)

Quaker Month	Translated Month
First Month	January
Second Month	February
Third Month	March
Fourth Month	April
Fifth Month	May
Sixth Month	June
Seventh Month	July
Eighth Month	August
Ninth Month	September
Tenth Month	October
Eleventh Month	November
Twelfth Month	December

Abbreviations

Here are some common abbreviations found in Quaker meeting minutes and that appear in the Hinshaw collections:

<i>acc</i>	accept; accepted; acceptable	<i>form</i>	former; formerly	<i>prlf</i>	produced letter from
<i>ack mo</i>	acknowledged marriage out	<i>Frds</i>	Friends	<i>QM</i>	quarterly meeting
<i>alto</i>	at liberty to marry	<i>gc</i>	granted certificate	<i>rcd</i>	recorded
<i>ami</i>	announced marriage intentions	<i>gct</i>	granted certificate to	<i>rec</i>	received; recommended
<i>amist</i>	announced marriage intentions second time	<i>gc efms</i>	granted certificate excusing from military service	<i>recrq</i>	received by request
<i>att</i>	attached to; attended	<i>gl</i>	granted letter	<i>relrq</i>	released by request
<i>b</i>	born	<i>h</i>	husband	<i>rem</i>	remove; removed
<i>BG</i>	Burial Grounds	<i>jas</i>	joined another society	<i>rem cert</i>	removal certificate
<i>bur</i>	buried; burial	<i>jG</i>	joined Gurneyites	<i>ret mmbp</i>	retained membership
<i>c.</i>	circa (about)	<i>jH</i>	joined Hicksites	<i>rm</i>	reported married
<i>cd</i>	contrary to discipline	<i>jO</i>	joined Orthodox	<i>rmt</i>	reported married to
<i>cert</i>	certificate	<i>JP</i>	Justice of the Peace	<i>roc</i>	received on certificate
<i>ch</i>	child; children	<i>jW</i>	joined Wilburites	<i>rocf</i>	received on certificate from
<i>chr</i>	charter	<i>ltm</i>	liberated to marry or left at liberty to marry	<i>rcl</i>	received on letter
<i>clear</i>	clear with respect to marriage	<i>m</i>	marry; married; marrying; marriage	<i>rclf</i>	received on letter from
<i>co</i>	chosen overseer	<i>ma</i>	marriage authorized	<i>rpd</i>	reported
<i>com</i>	complained; complained of	<i>mbr</i>	member	<i>rq</i>	request; requests; requested
<i>comm</i>	committee	<i>mbrp</i>	membership	<i>rqc</i>	requested certificate
<i>con</i>	condemned	<i>mcd</i>	married contrary to discipline	<i>rqct</i>	requested certificate to
<i>d</i>	died	<i>MG</i>	Minister of the Gospel	<i>rqcuc</i>	requested to come under care (of meeting)
<i>dec</i>	deceased	<i>MH</i>	meeting house; church	<i>rqlt</i>	requested letter to
<i>dis</i>	disowned; disowned for	<i>MM</i>	monthly meeting	<i>rst</i>	reinstate; reinstated
<i>div</i>	divorced	<i>mos</i>	married out of society	<i>rtco</i>	referred to care of
<i>dmi</i>	declared marriage intentions	<i>mou</i>	married out of unity	<i>s</i>	son; sons
<i>dmist</i>	declared marriage intentions second time	<i>mtg</i>	meeting	<i>twp</i>	township
<i>dp</i>	dropped plain dress and/or speech	<i>neg att</i>	neglecting attendance	<i>uc</i>	under care (of meeting)
<i>dr</i>	drinking spirituous liquor to excess	<i>ni</i>	not identified	<i>unm</i>	unmarried
<i>dt</i>	daughter; daughters	<i>nm</i>	nonmember	<i>upl</i>	using profane language
<i>dtd</i>	dated	<i>nmtm</i>	not a member of this meeting	<i>w</i>	wife
<i>end</i>	endorsed	<i>ou</i>	out of unity	<i>w/c</i>	with consent of
<i>exms</i>	excused from military service	<i>PM</i>	particular or preparative meeting	<i>wd</i>	widow
<i>fam</i>	family	<i>prc</i>	produced certificate	<i>YM</i>	Yearly Meeting
<i>FBG</i>	Friends Burial Ground	<i>prcf</i>	produced certificate from		