

HISTORY of OLD WESTFIELD CHURCH

The Old Westfield Monthly Meeting of Friends is the oldest church organization in Surry County and probably the oldest religious group in northwest North Carolina this side of the Moravian settlements at Wachovia, now the Winston-Salem area, and the Quaker group that centered around New Garden Monthly Meeting at Guilford College.

The Old Westfield church was not formally organized as a Monthly Meeting until after the American Revolution, but it was set up as a charge of the New Garden Monthly Meeting at Guilford College as early as the 1760's, the decade before America gained her freedom from England.

The decade of the 1760's saw thrifty Quakers from Guilford County moving into the fertile valleys of Big Creek, Tom's Creek and other streams in the Westfield section and, since they were deeply religious, they made the long trek back to Guilford College to attend meetings of their church.

It was not long before they, held back by the difficulties of frontier travel, began gathering in small groups, possibly in individual homes, and this was followed by the sending of representatives from New Garden in Guilford to conduct meetings for them.

This is said to have led to the name of Westfield, which was given to the community since the Quakers leaders at New Garden referred to it as "the western field" or "the west field" of their church endeavors. Travel back and forward between Guilford and Westfield was through a low gap in the Sauratown Mountain range, which to this day bears the name of Quaker Gap.

The charter members of the Westfield Monthly Meeting, when it was formally organized, are found in the Quaker records of North Carolina, and the names listed in that charter group are still familiar in this section, although many families migrated from Westfield to Indiana, Iowa, Ohio and other western Quaker settlements in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This list includes BYROM BALLARD, DAVID BALLARD, GARMAN BALLARD, MOORMAN BALLARD, THOMAS BALLARD, John Bowater Beales, William Beales, Amasa Beeson, Samuel Bond, Gardner Bryant, John Bryant, John Burris, Sr., John Burris, Jr., Benjamine Carr, John Carson, Thomas Davis, Sr., Thomas Davis, Jr., William Hiatt, Curtis Jackson, Jacob Jackson, John Jackson, Joseph Jackson, Samuel Jackson, Hannah Jessup, Joseph Jessup, Thomas Jessup, Timothy Jessup, William Jessup, Issac Jones, JAMES McKINNEY, Richard



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Pinson, Thomas Puckett, David Reece, William Reddick, Royal Simmons, Bowater Sumner, Caleb Sumner, Thomas Sumner and William White.

It will be noted that Hannah Jessup was the only woman included in this list, although it is known there were other women in the group. However, the Quakers kept their records separate for men and women, as a rule, and the oldest women's records are not now available. Bowater Sumner was the clerk of this meeting in December 1786, but other officials are not now known.

The clerk of the meeting kept very detailed records of the births, deaths and marriages of its members, and also recorded the coming and going, along with their shortcomings, and it is not unusual to find a record of a member "churched" and having fellowship withdrawn for some violation of the strict religious creed then in force. If a member married "out of the meeting", you might see his name on the records as dismissed, for the Quakers allowed their members to marry only other members of the same faith.

Names that are found on the charter list that are still common in this part of North Carolina today include the Beesons, Bryants, Burrises, Jacksons, Carsons, Davises, Jessups, Jones, the McKinneys, Pucketts, Hiatts, Reeves, Sumners and the Whites.

The western migration took a heavy toll of the Old Westfield community, and the Quaker records show that a total of thirty-six families left Westfield Monthly Meeting between 1801 and 1822, taking a total of fifty nine members. This eventually so depleted the church membership that the regular monthly meeting was discontinued in the early 1830's and was not reestablished until a decade after the Civil War.

Rev. Albert Peele was one of the leaders in reorganizing the Westfield Monthly Meeting after the Civil War, and again it was organized because the faithful Quakers found it difficult to make the long trips to Guilford County to join in the regular religious services. However, many of them did make those trips, and the records of the meetings at New Garden, Deep River and other Guilford County points show in the 1870's that many Pells, Carsons, Cooks and the Jessups were members of their groups.

The Quakers have always been deeply interested in education, and before 1800 they had their school committee listed in their records, members designated to provide educational facilities for their children. The school committee for 1817 included Abijah Pinson, Jacob Beales, Nathan Beales, JAMES MCKINNEY, Lazarus Denny, Joel Jessup, John Jackson and John Carson.

A very fine school was operated after the Civil War under the auspices of the church. Among the teachers was Miss Ellen Minthorne, an aunt of President Herbert Hoover. She later married a Marshall and lived at White Plains in Surry County.

The Old Westfield Quaker Church was first housed in a log building on land that was deeded to the church by the Jackson family, one of the pioneer Quaker families. The present large frame building stands only a few feet from the site of that original structure.

The present building was remodelled in 1939, and on March 26, 1939, a large group of descendants of the earliest members gathered at the church for the rededication ceremonies. The church stands about a quarter of a mile south of the village of Westfield on the Westfield-Pilot Mountain highway. Just across from the church is the historic Old Westfield cemetery, where rest the remains of hundreds of the pioneers who brought their religion along with them when they invaded this primitive mountain section of North Carolina to found new homes, and those men and women of old no doubt rest the better because the church they founded is still kept alive by a people who continue more than a century later to cling to "the faith of their fathers".

**** This was written circa 1950 by Mrs Luther Byrd. Permission given to print this in a publication, prior to her husband's death.

The only time I saw this church was in 1978. I took a photo which I have misplaced. The building then was brick and very pretty for a country church. It was almost at the highway and the cemetery across was very disappointing as all the stones were mostly rocks, no names or dates showing. It was not well kept either, at that time. I include this because it gives us a deep insight into the religious aspects of our early McKinney family. There are many of this family today who are still practicing this simple religion of The Religious Society of Friends known as Quakers.

