



# Quaker Hill Quill

Quaker Hill Historic Preservation Foundation  
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Wilmington DE 19801

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## Origins of the Friends Meetinghouse at 4th & West

By Lisa Samson

Anyone who walks or drives the streets of Quaker Hill is familiar with the Friends Meetinghouse at 4th and West streets. This lovely old building, completed in 1817, sits in the middle of a full city block of green space — mostly the Friends' cemetery — surrounded by iron fences on three sides, and a brick wall and iron fence on the fourth. Walking or driving by it, do you ever ask yourself, "What's its history?"

As the historian for the Wilmington Monthly Meeting of Friends (Quakers), whose meetinghouse this is, I have had the privilege of being able to explore its early history through the records of the period, which are housed in Pennsylvania at the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. It is a testimony to the diligence of many generations of Quaker record-keepers who both created and preserved these documents that, almost two hundred years after the meetinghouse was built, we are able to review detailed records that document its construction almost 200 years ago. In this and future issues of *The Quill*, I will share some of these documents and the stories they reveal.

The history of the current meetinghouse begins with the decision of Wilmington's Quakers, in the second decade of the 1800s, that it was time to build a new meetinghouse (as shown in this report):



Here is a transcription:

*The Committee appointed by the Preparative meeting to consider the propriety of providing for the better accommodation of this meeting agree to Report --*

*That having several times met and deliber-*

*ately considered the various branches of the subject referred to them, they are of the opinion that a new house is necessary for the use of Friends in this place, having also in view the accommodation of a Quarterly Meeting, that the Lot of Ground on which our Meeting house now stands will under all circumstances be the most eligible site and that the size of the building should be forty-eight feet wide by seventy-six feet long.*

Committee members Cyrus Newlin and Samuel Canby signed the report:

As with any building project, the challenge to bring it to fruition depended to a great degree upon the Meeting's ability to finance the new meetinghouse. A committee began to collect donations from members, and kept track of them in a small notebook, *A List of the names of the Contributors to the*



*fund for building a new Meetinghouse*, noting how much each contributor pledged to the building fund and the payments that they made. Its frontispiece (*next page*) shows the design for the building:

There is much more documentation for this 1815-1817 building project. The next article will introduce you to the person responsible for the

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## Origins of Friends Meetinghouse

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brick and stone work for the Meetinghouse and the West Street wall: Thomas Spackman.

Like the bricks that make up that wall, this and subsequent articles will in time build a picture of how this historic building came to be.

**Archivist Lisa Samson is Historian of the Wilmington Friends Meeting and a QHHPF Board Member**

(All images are from Wilmington Monthly Meeting records, archived at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, PA.)



*Design of the new Meetinghouse, as depicted on the frontispiece of the notebook recording donations toward its construction.*

## Abolitionist Petitions

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state". This wording would allow state officials to free slaves at their leisure putting no pressure on anyone to let their slaves free. After 1833 the wording in the petitions became more aggressive. The word "immediately" was added to the text without any mention of compensation (payment) to the slave holders as there had been in earlier petitions.

This shift in tactics that came with creation of AASS was a controversial step for the movement. The abolitionist petitions provide fascinating, detailed information about the signers, such as race, gender, county of residence, and the approximate date of collection of signature (this date was sometimes ten years after the creation of the petition, as mail travelled very slowly). In this article I have tried to provide a more complete picture of who signed the petitions than we may be able to get from other sources. These petition signatures provide concrete documentation of how some Quaker Hill residents felt about slavery.

In *The Journal of Rachel Pusey Webb* we get some idea of what it was like to attend a meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society where abolitionist petitions were circulated and signed after hearing an AASS agent speak:

*On May 30th, 1839: In [the] evening went to the Academy to hear C.C. Burleigh lecture, of course on immediate emancipation of slaves. Oh, what powerful reasoning we listened to, such native eloquence, the words glide from his lips like the waters of a brook with scarcely a ripple to interrupt their smoothness. The interest of the subject lent a lustre [luster] to his eye which added to the mild dignity [dignity] and grace of his demeanor and had such a stilling effect that stones thrown at the windows by idlers outside were little noticed by the audience.*

Charles Calistus (C.C.) Burleigh was a great AASS agent lecturer. He spoke in Wilmington at the New Hall of the Academy of Natural Sciences (The Academy) at Seventh and Shipley Streets. [This] was a converted tenement building. Efforts to raise money for a new building did not succeed. Such efforts were supported by the "Delaware State Journal" whose edi-

torial November 19, 1839, asked: "Who would imagine that the white washed [out] old tenement about to fall into ruins is the abode of our Academy of Natural Sciences." Drs William and Henry Gibbons, head of the Abolitionist Society, owned the building.

Around 1849, an abolition petition (the Library's Petition Record #10384913) was submitted to the Senate and House of Representatives of Delaware by forty women residents, "inhabitants of the State of Delaware, respectfully ask that you will enact such laws as in your wisdom, may be deemed necessary for the immediate abolition of slavery in Delaware, with the least possible injury to vested rights." Some of the signers from Quaker Hill are Rachel Garrett and Rachel Pusey Webb. Petition signers were generally divided into gender and racial groups. All of the interested women signed the same petition while the interested men signed another petition. Jacob Pusey, who was related to Rachel Pusey Webb, lived at West Seventh Street in Quaker Hill. In 1845 he was one of 44 Delawareans to sign a similar petition (Petition Record #10384519). Joseph Pusey lived at Front and Tatnall Street. He signed another petition in 1853 (#10385308). Thomas Worrell, an Underground Railroad stationmaster from Hockessin, lived at 811 Washington Street with his daughter Emma, who taught at Wilmington Friends School. He signed yet another anti-slavery petition in 1849 (#10384910).

The American Anti-Slavery Society agents worked very hard in Wilmington and in other cities and towns both in and outside Delaware to gather petitions to submit to the government. Petitions such as these helped the government know how the common person felt about slavery. C.C. Burleigh was a very gifted speaker and his words educated and helped people to understand the horrors of slavery. The War between the States would take almost another 30 years from the onset of the AASS. With the digital research possible today we can look at large number of documents previously unavailable, and learn more about what the people of previous eras thought about the events of the day. To visit the Digital Library on American Slavery, go to <http://library.uncg.edu/slavery>.

**Darleen Amobi is a retired school teacher and is on the board of QHHPF and the Hockessin Historical Society**





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### Upcoming: Underground Railroad Workshops for Children (January and February, 2013)

The Quaker Hill Historic Preservation Foundation will offer three free Underground Railroad workshops for children at 10:00 a.m. on certain Saturdays in January and February 2013 at the Wilmington Friends Meeting at 401 North West Street, Wilmington, DE.

The first workshop, presented by Barbara Randolph on January 26, 2013, features a film about a real-life family that escaped on the Underground Railroad; a dramatization by the participants of an escape using coded spirituals; the creation of collages by the children using pictures of abolitionists; a brief lecture on local Underground Railroad history; a visit to the grave of Underground Railroad Stationmaster Thomas Garrett.

The second workshop, presented by Darleen Amobi on February 16, 2013, will feature the story of Henry Box Brown, both read aloud and on video; a re-enactment by Willis Phelps of the life and times of a Civil War veteran; a visit to the grave of Thomas Garrett.

The third workshop, presented by Patricia Lewis and Mia Muratori on February 23, 2013, will feature a story about Thomas Garrett; an arts-and-crafts project about articles to take on an escape.

The programs are free and open to the public, and will include refreshments.

### Upcoming Lecture: Wilm. African Americans' Public Recognition of Thos. Garrett, 1846 - 1871

On May 11, 2013 Local Historian Peter Dalleo will speak at the Wilmington Friends Meeting House, 401 North West Street, Wilmington, DE 19801, about his research into instances from 1846 to 1871 of public recognition of Thomas Garrett by Wilmington African Americans for his support of their community.

### Statue Honoring Harriet Tubman, Thos. Garrett & Underground Railroad Dedicated 10/3/12

On October 3, 2012, a specially-commissioned statue by Mario Chiodo paying tribute to Underground Railroad heroes Harriet Tubman and Thomas Garrett was unveiled and dedicated, fittingly located in Wilmington's Tubman-Garrett Park on the Christina Riverfront. Mayor James Baker and other local and state dignitaries were present, along with descendants of both Tubman and Garrett. QHHPF Board member and Garrett descendant Robert Seeley, dressed as his forebear, gave a heartfelt speech marking the occasion, in which he quoted an 1868 letter from Garrett to Sarah Bradford in which he spoke of Tubman's courage and trust in God:

*In one instance, when she had two stout men with her, some 30 miles below here, she said that God told her to stop, which she did; and then asked him what she must do. He told her to leave the road, and turn to the left; she obeyed, and soon came to a*

*small stream of tide water; there was no boat, no bridge; she again inquired of her Guide, GOD, what she was to do. She was told to go through. It was cold, in the month of March; but having confidence in her Guide, she went in; the water came up to her arm-pits; the men refused to follow till they saw her safe on the opposite shore. They then followed, and if I mistake not, she had soon to wade a second stream. When she called on me two days after, she was so hoarse she could hardly speak, and was also suffering from a violent toothache, I am sure Thomas Garrett's son Dr. Henry Garrett took care of her toothache.*



# 1889: From Roller Skates to Row Homes, a Wilmington Block Finds Its Bearings

by John Kurth

The ongoing stabilization and revitalization projects taking place over the past several years in Quaker Hill and surrounding West Center City neighborhoods serve to remind residents and visitors alike of the vitality and durability of the city's 19th century residential architecture. The focus of this article is the row of twelve semi-detached, three-story brick houses on the south side of 4th Street, between Washington and Jefferson Streets. Specifically, the homes are known as 500 – 522 W. 4th Street, and are great examples of late 19th century vernacular Victorian residential architecture.

These masonry-clad, timber framed homes were constructed in 1889 on the site of the former Citizens Rink and Natatorium (renamed the Washington Street Market House in 1887). During the decade of the 1870s and early 1880s, this block had also been the site of the Lindley, Kent & Company lumber yard. When the lumber yard relocated to a site near the Christina riverfront in the mid-1880s, the site became available for another use.

As illustrated in the portion of the 1887 atlas reproduced for this article, the southerly side of the 500 block of W. 4th Street was dominated by the Washington Street Market House. Originally built as the Citizens Rink & Natatorium (indoor public swimming pool) in 1885, the masonry structure was short-lived and only used for a season or two as a roller skating rink.

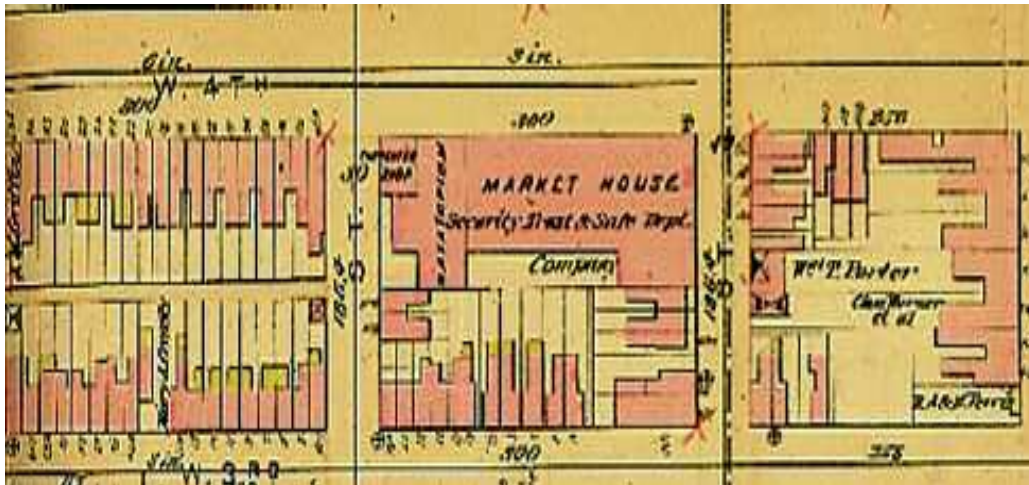
According to *The Great Delaware Sports Book* by Doug Gelbert, the invention of the pin ball bearing in 1884 led to lighter weight, better functioning roller skates and a national roller skating craze began shortly thereafter. This fact is reinforced by an article written for the *Trinity Times* in May 2003 that outlined the history of a roller skating rink-turned-auditorium that used to exist at 704 W. 11th Street, between Madison and Monroe Streets (now the site of Trinity Church's auxiliary parking lot). This 60' wide by 230' long building was built in 1884-85, at

precisely the same time the Citizens Rink & Natatorium was being built seven blocks to the south.

While the 4th Street building had a very brief career as a skating rink and the building itself was demolished after only about five years, the 11th Street structure served as a roller rink for more than a dozen years and the building survived for some 70 years. It served its original function as a roller skating rink until 1898, when it was converted into a livery stable. By 1904, it had reverted back into a roller rink. In 1906, a Washington, D.C. outfit, the Capitol City Roller Rink Company, had purchased the 11th Street building and made major improvements, such as installing a new maple rink floor and adding a 60' wide by 50' deep two-story lobby /office addition in a Spanish Revival architectural style. After various uses, including a laundry facility (1910 – 1918) an auditorium (1915 – 1919), DuPont Company's fabric engineering site (1919 – 1924), a sports and entertainment complex (1924 – 1941), and finally, a furniture showroom and store (1941 – 1956), the building was demolished and the site turned into a parking lot.

In *The Great Delaware Sports Book*, Gelbert speculates that a city the size of Wilmington likely could not support two roller skating rinks, which could explain why the Citizens Rink & Natatorium folded so quickly. Ownership of the rink and natatorium reverted back to the Security Trust & Safe Deposit Company, and by April 1887, the Citizens Rink & Natatorium had been transformed into the public market house incorporated as the "Washington Street Market House Company."

By 1889 the former site of the roller skating rink was ready to give way to residential development. The June 29, 1889 edition of *The Every Evening* newspaper noted that building permits were issued to William F. Seeds for "twelve dwellings, south side of Fourth, between Washington and Jefferson Streets." According to City of Wilmington deed







records, within just seven months of permits being issued, ten of the twelve semi-detached twin homes were finished and deeded to new owners, a testament to the experience of Seeds and his crew of tradespeople.

William Franklin Seeds (born 1854) was a second-generation carpenter/builder who received on-the-job training in post-Civil War Wilmington by working for his father, Joseph R. D. Seeds, and alongside his brother Henry B. Seeds. By the mid-1880s, having accumulated enough experience in the family business, William formed his own enterprise and was listed in city directories as a sole proprietor “architect / builder.” Joseph R. D. and Henry B. continued to work together, incorporated as Joseph R. D. Seeds & Son.

Collectively, the three Seeds family members designed and built hundreds of homes in late 19th century Wilmington. Their 1870s and early 1880s commissions are located primarily throughout the westerly portion of the city, in neighborhoods now known as Cool Spring and Trolley Square. For example, William F. Seeds, working as a sole proprietor, built the homes on the easterly side of the 700 block of Franklin Street, known as 700–720 N. Franklin Street, in 1887. Less than a mile away, his father and brother were building most of the homes on both sides of the 1300 block of W. 13th Street, an odd-shaped parcel of land bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, Broom Street, Franklin Street and the rear lot lines of homes along the 1300 block of Delaware Avenue.

An article printed in the April 19, 1931 edition of the Sunday Star noted that “[Prior to 1900], practically all buildings were erected of red brick and to such an extent that in many quarters, Wilmington became known as a ‘red brick town.’” This observation is certainly reflected in William Seeds’ speculatively-built homes known as 500 – 522 W. 4th Street. The remaining homes on this block, 524 – 532 W. 4th Street, were built in the early 1890s for Joshua E. Smith on the site of the natatorium and a carpenter shop. The continuity of design and features suggest that Smith may have collaborated on these last few homes closer to the intersection at N. Jefferson



THE AUDITORIUM MAKES ITS LAST STAND... Now a condemned building, it will be razed in the near future. The 704 West Eleventh Street property recalls memories of its quiet and multiple past.

**The former roller skating rink on 11th St. survived some 67 years longer than the one on 4th Street, before also being demolished shortly after this 1956 newspaper item.**

Street, but further research has not been done to confirm this possibility.

Interestingly, Seeds alternated pairs of homes in twos and fours, and the differences in massing, scale and finishes adds character and a sense of uniqueness to this particular block. Character-defining features of the subject homes include impressively-corbelled second- and third-floor brick cornice lines, the use of molded bricks as accents in some cornices, and the use of rough-faced stone in upper-floor window lintels. Pressed metal cornice accents, end cap finials and coping add contrast to those homes that feature faux Mansard roofs finished with a variety of shapes of slate shingles. Homes such as 508 and 510 W. 4th Street uti-

lize shaped and paneled wood surrounds for the mulled pairs of windows in the 3rd floor dormer, while other homes such as 504, 506, 516 and 518 W. 4th Street feature stepped, solid brick surrounds for the pair of windows located in the 3rd floor of the façade. Durable red pressed brick, originally finished with a complementary red-tinted mortar, adds to the character and texture of these twelve (12) homes. Sadly, only 504 and 516 W. 4th Street retain their original porch structures, although all homes on this side of the 500 W. 4th Street originally had distinctive shed-roofed wood porches.

Quaker Hill should take pride in having several homes designed and built by the immensely- talented architect / builder William Franklin Seeds, still mostly intact, in its midst. While the Seeds family’s impact upon Wilmington’s urban fabric is more pronounced in the neighborhoods to the north and west of Quaker Hill, this row of vernacular Victorian gems adds a lot of character to a neighborhood already rich in history and architectural variety.

**John Kurth is a Planner for the City of Wilmington and a QHHPF Board Member**



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## DIGITAL RESEARCH ON SLAVERY SHOWS QUAKER HILL ABOLITION PETITIONS

By Darleen Amobi

Modern technology, in the form of computers, databases, digital scanners, and the World Wide Web, allows us to access faraway libraries and repositories of information without ever leaving the comfort of our home or office. Such faraway sources of information can actually help us to learn about the history of our own local neighborhood and city. The Digital Library of American Slavery at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has assembled a searchable database of historical documents it has scanned and catalogued. Searches can be done by subject, name, by year or by keyword. According to the Library's Web page

*The Digital Library on American Slavery offers data on race and slavery extracted from eighteenth and nineteenth-century documents and processed over a period of eighteen years. The Digital Library contains detailed information on about 150,000 individuals, including slaves, free people of color, and whites. These data have been painstakingly extracted*



*Thousands of anti-slavery petitions are catalogued at the Library on American Slavery at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

*from 2,975 legislative petitions and 14,512 county court petitions, and from a wide range of related documents, including wills, inventories, deeds, bills of sale, depositions, court proceedings, amended petitions, among others.*

What follows is the results of a search of the Library's petition records, and offers some interesting information about the attitude toward slavery of individual residents of Quaker Hill some 175 years ago.

More than thirty years before the Emancipation Proclamation the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) decided to restructure its organization. Previously the AASS was organized around the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS). This movement was not effective and its attempts to end slavery were deliberately mild to avoid any unnecessary conflict with slave holders. In 1833 the PASS became AASS. The language of the AASS changed dramatically. Before 1833 petition were written to state legislators gently asking for "the gradual abolition of slavery in the

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