

History Of Friends, Area Are Entwined

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Knowing our love for history, Melva K. Greene brought a copy of "Carolina Quakers," by the office of *The Mount Airy News* some time back.

The publication, edited by two of North Carolina's better-known Quakers, Seth Hinshaw and his wife, Mary Edith Hinshaw, is one designed to delight history buffs, particularly if the history enthusiast happens to be a Friend.

While we are not a member of the Friends, the publication, which marked the Quakers' tercentenary - 1672 to 1972 - is one that we enjoyed, for the history of the Friends and Surry County are closely entwined. The Hinshaws are to be congratulated for the obvious hard work and expertise that went into the publication they masterminded.

Of particular interest to us is the Table of Dates. Historian Ruth Minick is responsible for our longtime interest in the Westfield Friends because of some of her columns and our conversations on the topic.

It was recorded in the Table of Dates that Westfield Friends (Toms Creek) was begun in 1773, becoming a Monthly Meeting in 1787.

The Westfield Monthly Meeting of Friends is the oldest church in Surry and Stokes counties, according to the book. It is also probably the oldest religious group in this general area of the state, next to the Moravians of the Old Salem settlement down in Forsyth County.

The community was settled in the 1760s when Quakers came from the New Garden area, crossed Quaker Gap in the Sauratown Mountains and came on into the valleys of Big Creek and Toms Creek.

Meetings for worship were held in Westfield as early as 1772. As we had heard from Ruth on several occasions, it was referred to as "The Western Field," hence its name.

The Monthly Meeting officially was established Nov. 13, 1786.

The Westfield congregation was one of those drastically affected by the exodus of Southern Quakers, who moved westward during the 75 years preceding the War Between the States.

Precipitating the migration was the Ordinance of 1787, when the Northwest Territory was declared a land forever free of slavery.

As the Hinshaws write in their publications, the Quaker population of the South was decimated. The Virginia Yearly Meeting declined and finally was "laid down."

"All Meetings in South Carolina



THE WAY THEY WENT: These were the major routes followed by N.C. Friends on their westward migration.

and Georgia disappeared, and the continued existence of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting was for a time uncertain," they reported.

Between 1800 and 1860 it was estimated that at least 6,000 Friends settled in the Midwest, most of whom were from North Carolina.

Some 36 families from "The Western Field" moved westward during the period of the great migrations, and the Monthly Meeting was discontinued in 1832, remaining inactive for 36 years. It was revived again in 1868 when about 150 people held an open-air meeting.

The Hinshaws reported in their book that the Surry Quarterly Meeting was the newest in the N.C. Year-

ly Meeting. It consisted of Meetings located in Surry County and also around Galax, Va.

The new Meeting was requested by the Yadkin Valley Quarter, which asked that it be composed of White Plains, Westfield and Mount Airy monthly meetings.

It isn't known when the first Westfield Meeting House was constructed, but a deed for nine acres of land "including Westfield Meeting House" in 1797 indicated that a building went up soon after the establishment of the meeting.

A school facility was built nearby, maintaining a well-known practice of the Friends and other church groups in the area before the advent

of the public school system. One of the teachers in that predecessor to Westfield Academy was Ellen Minthorne, a sister of the mother of President Herbert Hoover.

We told you at the onset that the history of the Quakers and Surry County was closely interwoven.

If Melva will leave her copy of "Carolina Quakers" in our possession a bit longer, we will report in the future on more of the other interesting stories to be found in those pages.

Appreciation also goes to Seth Hinshaw, who gave permission, through Melva, to use his publication for *The News'* history page.