

DRAFT

Compiled by Nancy Osborn Johnsen, beginning in 2017; last revised 1/28/2023.

Bear Creek Friends (Conservative) Meeting House

An Historical Narrative

The transfer to the current Bear Creek Friends Meeting House

For at least a quarter of a century the Conservative Friends of Quaker Divide had met in their meeting house east of the Bear Creek cemetery, with its small abandoned predecessor standing not far away [see historic photos of the two meeting houses]. The legal description of the area within which these meeting houses were located is the NW 1/4, NE 1/4, NW 1/4, SW 1/4 of Sec. 23, T78N, R29W (Union Twp.), Dallas County, Iowa. By the end of the first decade of the 1900s, for various reasons the Conservative Friends' membership on the west side of the area then known as "Quaker Divide" had decreased, while the membership of the same group was increasing toward the east. Finally it was decided to dispose of the property upon which the meeting house(s) east of the cemetery sat, and to establish a meeting house location nearer to where most of the members lived. Since the Earlham Meeting had been laid down in the early 1900s, this opened the way for the Conservative Friends to re-utilize the no-longer-in-service meeting house located in town. Therefore, a decision was made to transport that meeting house 4 miles to the north and across Bear Creek. Of this move, Henry Standing wrote:

I had disposed of an acre of land for our school house lot, and the meeting at Earlham being laid down, it was decided to move the Meeting House from Earlham to our school house lot. Accordingly a basement was excavated and walls built and William Mott of Iowa City undertook the job of moving the Meeting House and placing it on the new foundation. This was done to perfection, without damage to the building—not even cracking the plaster on the walls. (Bedell 1966: 58) [See photo of conveying the building across Bear Creek in 1916 and the Mott Brothers' business card].

The preparation and moving of the Meeting House from Earlham to its countryside location required about a month, from 8-28-1916 through 9-27-1916, according to E. Gilbert Standing's account book for that year. He helped tear down the building's chimneys in town prior to the move, helped prepare the relocation site formerly owned by his father, worked on digging the basement, participated in the actual moving of the building, and later helped to rebuild the chimneys. It took in all the better part of 11 days for the Mott Brothers to transport the building the 4-mile distance, which included getting the structure across Bear Creek.

By late 1916 or early 1917, the members of Bear Creek Friends Meeting (Conservative) were in full use of the recently-moved meeting house next to their little school in Adams Township [see 1917 photograph of the meeting house and associated school]. The hand-crafted solid walnut benches, most of which had originally been in the North Branch Meeting House, were also transported to the Bear Creek location for their use. A few of the benches placed in the basement of the Bear Creek Meeting House had come from the earlier Bear Creek Meeting House that had been east of Bear Creek Cemetery (*oral history from Bernard Standing, 1988.*)

Architectural Changes to the Bear Creek Friends Meeting House

By 1994 it was evident that some structural changes would be necessary to expand the usable space within the Meeting House, upgrade the restroom facilities, and generally make it more handicap accessible. A rather large monetary donation from an anonymous source was made available and – in addition to donations from members of Iowa Yearly Meeting-Conservative -- made the changes possible, with a stipulation that Meeting members would provide a great deal of the “sweat equity” to the project. William “Bill” Wagner (1915-2001), a well-renowned regional architect, undertook the plans for renovations that would be needed to meet the goals of the Meeting and also would be historically sympathetic to a traditional American Conservative Friends Meeting House. Fortunately Roy Knight, a member of the Meeting, was also a professional building contractor. Roy – along with his crew and some Meeting members - took on the responsibility of bringing the project plans to fruition in the summer and fall of 1994. [Documentation, in the form of photographs taken of the project as it progressed, are located at Bear Creek Friends Meeting House.]

Sources of Information

Bedell, L. Frank

1966 Quaker Heritage, Friends Coming into the Heartland of America: A Story of Iowa Conservative Yearly Meeting. Self-published. [Copy is with Nancy Osborn Johnsen]

Cook, Darius B.

1914 Memoirs of Quaker Divide. Dexter, Iowa: The Dexter Sentinel.
[Copy is with Nancy Osborn Johnsen]

Standing, E. Gilbert

1910 – 1916

Accounts Ledger, kept from 6-9-1910 through 1916. Handwritten in pencil. [Purchased from the E. Gilbert Standing estate by Nancy Osborn in 1977.]

Standing, Henry

1882 Hand-written letter to Harper Bros., ordering school books. [Original is with Nancy Osborn Johnsen]

Standing, Henry

1882 - 1908

Diary Entries, unpublished, originally written in a form of shorthand that was transcribed into notebooks by his son, E. Gilbert Standing, in the 1950s. Transcribed onto the computer & annotated further by Henry’s great granddaughter, Nancy Osborn Johnsen, beginning in 2002.

Standing, Herbert C.

1977 Historical Notes Concerning the Conservative Friends at Bear Creek. Unpublished ms.
[Copy is with Nancy Osborn Johnsen]

Note - Herbert writes on page 23 that "a well written record has been compiled of the history of Cedar Grove School, so little additional reference will be made to it in this paper." The written history source to which he refers is probably Bedell 1966.

Standing, Herbert C.

1976-2011 Personal communications with Nancy Osborn Johnsen

Photographs taken by members of Bear Creek Friends Meeting in 1994. Now on file in a 3-ring binder at Bear Creek Friends Meeting House.