

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 5, 2015

The Friends Home in Kennett: In the last decade of the 19th century, a wealthy Quaker woman in Philadelphia named Anna Jeanes needed a nice place to live in her declining years. She promoted the idea of Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting (a grouping of eight or 10 Friends Meetings in the city) building a nice "home" to accommodate elderly members who could not or should not live alone. She financed the building of Stapeley Hall on Germantown Avenue, a beautiful building for its time that could accommodate up to 75 residents. Anna Jeanes herself was one of the first to move in when it opened about 1895.

A conference of Quakers is called a Yearly Meeting and is divided into several Quarterly Meetings, each having from four to 12 individual Meetings (like Hockessin). Philadelphia is the oldest and the largest Yearly Meeting in the Northeast, going back to the time of William Penn. Anna Jeanes was not content to stop with the building of Stapeley Hall; she suggested that each Quarterly Meeting under the Philadelphia umbrella should be encouraged to have such a retirement home. Western Quarterly Meeting, in which Kennett Square was the largest borough and centrally located, bought a house on West Linden Street and opened the Friends Boarding Home of Western Quarterly Meeting in 1898 with three residents. Although a much larger building nearby was purchased in 1901, the original name was "official" for 106 years.

Responsibility for owning and operating such a facility was vested in the Quarterly Meeting. Each Meeting in the Quarter could have up to three members on the "Friends Home Committee," which met monthly. The committee hired a "matron," who in turn would hire a housekeeper, a cook, and others, as required. The building bought in 1901 had been a 19th-century school, and 14-year-old Israel Marshall and his cousin Marshall Hannum attended Eaton Academy there at the end of the Civil War. The Friends Home had a major expansion in 1912 and another in 1951-52. In 1969, a home next door was purchased and converted to four apartments. Linden Hall, a 16-bed skilled nursing facility, was built on the grounds in 1980 (four more beds were added about 10 years later). Finally, a second adjacent home was purchased in 1982, which allowed for three more apartments.

Western Quarter was not alone in caring for the elderly. Concord Quarter's home in West Chester was known as the "Hickman" (and another branch of the Quakers operated the "Barclay" about two blocks away). The Bucks Quarter home was in Newtown. In New Jersey, Burlington Quarter had a home in Moorestown, and Salem Quarter's was at Woodstown. There were others. To my knowledge, all may be in operation today, with the exception of Stapeley Hall in Germantown, which succumbed to the deterioration of the surrounding neighborhood.

Over the 117 years of the Kennett Friends Home, it became larger, expanded services, and experienced much more government regulation. Probably for the past 50 years, not more than 15% of the residents have been Quakers. In 1945, Clarence Marshall, my father, joined the Board and immediately became treasurer. In 1968, I took his place and served for 36 years. A much more elaborate operation today, several important changes were made in the first decade of the 21st century, such as ending the "quota system" for membership on the Board, which now includes several non-Quakers, and changing the official name to "Friends Home in Kennett."

The more modern type of retirement living began about 1965, allowing for more spacious quarters with special medical back-ups when needed. The Quakers opened Foulkeways (near Gwynedd in Montgomery County) and Medford Leas in South Jersey. Wilmingtonian Alexis Tarumianz built Foulk Manor, followed by Foulk Manor North and then several others. Kendal-at-Longwood opened in 1973, followed by Crosslands. At present writing, there must be 50 such facilities within a 25-mile radius of Auburn Heights. Older places, such as the Friends Home in Kennett, now offering a private bath with every room, cater to those whose income is more modest.

This begins a new year with the “Weekly News.” There are now about 500 stories, written over a 10-year period. In 2015, it is likely some of the better ones from the past may be repeated, as the well may be running dry. So, look for both old and new in 2015, provided that there is demand for either.