

Allen's Neck Friends Meeting

A Welcoming Quaker Community in Dartmouth, Massachusetts

Excerpted from *A History of Allen's Neck Friends Meeting*, by Mary Sullivan, 1979

In 1620, a date familiar to all Americans, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. The ranks of these first settlers were augmented by colonists landing from the "Fortune" in 1621, and the "Ann" in 1623, and several other ships of later date. In the meantime, patents had been granted by the king, for various colonies, called the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the land called New England became widely settled.

These were hard and stern times, and stringent laws were made by the Plymouth Colony, as to the worship of God and the general conduct of the colonists. Gradually, a certain group rebelling against the orthodox religion of the colony, swelled by the ranks of the members of the Society of Friends, commonly called 'the Quakers', settled in the present town of Dartmouth.

Many of the men and women who settled here were substantial people; some came to make iron from the bog ores nearby, and others came to till the land on the banks of the peaceful Paskamansett River. All of them came to leave the impression of their character and enterprise on the new and rapidly developing religious sect which brought our meeting place, and Dartmouth Monthly Meeting into being.

Around the same time that Friends from Rhode Island and Sandwich began emigrating in large numbers to Dartmouth, Puritan legislators directed their first ordinance against Quakers in a law that was passed in Boston on October 14, 1656. It provided severe penalties for the master of any vessel who knowingly brought any Quaker into the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It further provided that Quakers who came from any direction, were to be imprisoned, severely whipped, kept at work, and allowed to converse with no one. Anyone who imported or concealed Quaker books or writings was also to be severely punished.

But Quakers continued to come, so the Boston legislators passed more severe laws and Plymouth took similar action. An enactment of May 19, 1658, forbade Quakers to hold meetings in public or in their homes. Nevertheless, Quakers were greatly interested in the beginning of the settlement of Dartmouth. Given the religious climate of the times, it is easily understandable why early Friends were willing to take their chances with Ponegansett Indians, rather than with the Puritan officials of Boston, Marshfield or Sandwich.

Most of Dartmouth's first Quaker settlers chose home sites in the southern part of the new territory. This was a natural outcome of the wish of these settlers, to keep in touch with their friends in Portsmouth and Sandwich. Both of these places could easily be reached by water, though to reach Sandwich, one had to travel a few miles by land across Cape Cod, at the head of Buzzards Bay. In this day and age of space travel, we may tend to forget how much travel was accomplished by the use of small boats in the early days.

Many are curious to know the effect of the King Philip's War, fought in 1675 and 1676, on the community of Friends. Diaries are scarce for that period, but town records do indicate that most of the houses in Dartmouth were burnt in Indian raids of that era. In the absence of records to the contrary, it is assumed by many historians, that Dartmouth Quakers either remained quietly on their farms on the little

necks running out into larger waters, whereby an easy escape could be made if the need arose; or, what is an equally plausible explanation, Friends went off to Portsmouth or Sandwich, and stayed with relatives and friends for the duration of the war.

In any case, during the twenty years following this War, from 1676 to 1696, many more people came to settle in Dartmouth. Those houses that had been burned were rebuilt, and others were erected on newly laid out farms. The trails became wider paths, a ferry was put into operation at Hix Bridge, and a town house was built at a spot later called Perry's Grove. Among the newcomers were many Quakers, and the meetings they held in the homes of the more active or concerned Friends were increasing in size.

The Meeting at Apponegansett was not to be the only one within the limits of the newly established Dartmouth Monthly Meeting. The members were too scattered throughout the township, which covered at that time an extensive area; and their numbers were increasing so constantly, that other meeting places were demanded. It would appear that there were about 1,250 Friends in Dartmouth. John Griffith, here in 1766, estimated the number of Friends at Apponegansett at one meeting as 2,000. If it seems surprising that people assembled at Apponegansett by the hundreds, we must keep in mind the number of separate congregations of Friends that would be represented at such a gathering.

The first mention of Allen's Neck Meeting is found in an old manuscript, which reads:

"In the year 1758 there was a great revival and the Meetings were held around at different houses of the families in the community. As they had no house of Worship, the people decided they needed one, with deliberation and prayer, they decided to build. They chose a beautiful location upon a hill overlooking Buzzards Bay and the surrounding country. The community were mostly farmers but some carpenters so they gave their time and talents to the work. They hewed timber, sawed shingles, did mason work and whatever else was needed and so the structure grew for the people had a mind to work. In 1761 it was finished for occupancy with a large membership. "

The name "Allen", comes from Ralph Allen and his descendants. Originally from Sandwich, the early Allens were so persecuted that they fled to Dartmouth, for peace and security. Four sons of Ralph Allen settled on Barneys Joy, and around Allens Pond, and gave their name to the 'neck'. The Neck could be plainly seen from this meeting house site in the early days with no trees to obstruct the view of the bay.

Friends from Allen's Neck may be interested to read the following excerpt taken from "Friends Review", A Religious, literary and Miscellaneous Journal, published in Philadelphia, Tenth Month, 4th day, 1873. It was written by Thomas Kimber, Jr. 9th month, 23rd, 1873, for inclusion in the periodical noted above. In part, it reads as follows:

"Perhaps, however, the most interesting meeting of the three (Newport, R.I. and Vassalboro, Maine were the other two he writes of) was held at Allen's Neck, near New Bedford, Mass. , the latter part of Eighth month. Retreating from Boston and Plymouth before the persecutions of the Puritan Fathers, they made a determined stand at this place; and when it was sought to quarter a minister of the established Church upon them, they appealed successfully to the English King who reversed the colonial Edict and released the Quakers of Dartmouth from the operation of this tithe law.

What persecution could not do, however, prosperity and worldly ease have done pretty effectually in the destruction of the Quaker element as a spiritual power in that neighborhood. Yet most of the families were descended from Friends or connected with them in some way; and when they heard of the revivals amongst the people elsewhere they longed for a General Meeting to be held at Allen's Neck. And so it was arranged to make preparations for an event a long time beforehand.

The meeting-house at Allen's Neck being thoroughly out of repair the people within the past year had built a new one, although many contributing to its construction were not members of the Society of Friends. So that when the time for holding the General Meeting drew nigh a commodious house was finished, painted and cushioned and all things were ready.

Moreover the good people had erected a tent with convenient arrangements for meals between the meetings, and abundant provision was made daily for all who were in attendance from other parts. The people flocked in from far and near, and the woods adjoining seemed filled with their horses and vehicles. Most of the residents of the neighborhood were indentified with the whaling or else the coast fishing business; and it was a touching sight to witness bronzed and weather-beaten faces of sea captains, against which the storms of forty or fifty winters had beaten in vain, overflowing with tears or moved with emotion, on being reminded of the wondrous love of their Heavenly Father... Perhaps the distinguishing feature of the work in this place, was the earnest maintenance of devotional exercises, morning and evening, in the houses of the neighbors, who had accommodated Friends from other localities. Many instances of Divine awakening both among the older and younger members of these families, attested the results of these devotional labors. Friends all parted from the kind people of this neighborhood with mutual prayer for the Lord's richest blessings on one another, and great love prevailed. . . ”

THE FIRST CLAMBAKE

One of the primary interests of Allen's Neck Meeting, has long been that of maintaining an active First Day (Sunday) School, to benefit both the children in the Meeting, as well as many of the children in the larger community. To help support this project, Meeting members serve an annual clambake. This 'bake' is not just a meal served to five-hundred guests, but a real gathering of people from far and near. The meal is served not just by Friends, but by people of all faiths in our community, and the feeling generated at this annual gathering is clearly one of good fellowship.

The first Allen's Neck Clambake held at Horseneck Beach, was really only an outing for the Sunday School. It was held, in August of 1888, in the pines in the south end and west side of what was then Reed Road (now State Road). Early on that August morning, a few of our menfolk sailed out on Buzzards Bay, for fresh fish, and others dug clams. Our womenfolk were also busy preparing the brown bread, vegetables, coffee, and the other 'goodies' that accompany a 'bake'. Soon "outsiders" wanted to come, and initially, they were charged 50 cents for the privilege of attending.

According to records, a picnic was substituted in 1910, but it apparently did not quite "fill the bill", because a clambake was resumed in 1911. For that year, the advertisement in a local newspaper read: "Clambake, Allen's Neck Sunday School will hold their Annual Clambake, Thursday, August 24th in the grove at Church. Bake opens at 1PM. Tickets 75 cents Children under 12 years 50 cents Pie, Cake and Coffee served at Dinner. If stormy, next day. Please bring knife, fork and napkins. "

The last bake at Horseneck was held in 1903. From 1904 to 1960, they were held in the grove across from the Meeting House, on land loaned to the Meeting. Workers knew every stump, stone and tree in the paths and looked each year for familiar faces among the attendees. In 1959, the Meeting purchased our present site on the corner of Allen's Neck and Horseneck Roads, using a legacy from a devoted member.

With the passage of time, citizens from this part of town continued to maintain an active interest in the spiritual concerns and social life of Allen's Neck Meeting. In 1914, a hall was added to the Meetinghouse. Many were its uses: as a classroom area for Sunday School, as a meeting place for

various church organizations, as a Boys' Club, as a Library, and as a supper room where upon rare occasions, eager patrons partook of a wild goose supper!

On a Saturday night in November of 1949, a fire practically destroyed the Meetinghouse hall, and severely damaged the Meetingroom, where Meetings for Worship were held despite the fire, Meeting for Worship was held next day as usual, in the near-by home of two good friends and neighbors, John and Bertha Waldo. A short time later, the neighboring Second Christian Church of South Westport, offered to the Meeting, the full use of its facilities; and Meetings for Worship were held at this South Westport Church for quite awhile. Meetings for Business, then called 'Meetings of the Congregation', were held in the homes of various Meeting members.

With the old enduring faith, and with the proud knowledge of the high regard in which it was held by its friends and neighbors, Allen's Neck Friends Meeting, as it had in 1873, appealed to the community for help. Reconstruction of, and repairs to the building's interior, were begun in early spring of 1950; and the new hall was substantially enlarged in the process of its re-building. From the generous response of concerned friends and neighbors, the Meetinghouse Hall on view today, was gratefully acknowledged in a dedication ceremony, held in the summer of 1952.

In 1979 Allen's Neck Monthly Meeting of Friends had a membership of just under one hundred adults and children combined, as well as a large and lively First Day School. Our Meeting, insofar as we can objectively recount for future historians, leads a rich and full spiritual life. Those of us who belong to the Meeting Family consider ourselves fortunate indeed; and it is the hope of we who write this history today, in 1979, that Friends who may come after us, will look as favorably upon our present efforts, as we today do, upon the efforts of those who have come before us!