

PERQUIMANS MONTHLY MEETING
(now Piney Woods Monthly Meeting)

Perquimans County, North Carolina

North Carolina Quakerism had its beginning, toward the end of the seventeenth century, in the Precincts of Perquimans and Pasquotank. A full account of this beginning is given by Dr. Stephen B. Weeks in chapters III and IV of "Southern Quakers and Slavery."

The earliest existing records of a monthly meeting in Perquimans County begin with 1680. In that year Christopher Nicholson and Ann Atwood were married in a meeting held at the house of Francis Toms. Witnesses to this marriage included Charles Prows, William Bundy, Jona. Phelps, Joseph Scott, John Peirces, James Hogg, Henry Prows, James Hill, Francis Toms, Henry White, Hannah Hill, Mary Peirce, Dorothy Prows, Ann Prows and Priscile Toms. In the following year Henry White and Damaris Morison were left at liberty to proceed in marriage by "a monthly meeting held at the house of Henry Prows in Little River." In 1683 William Bundy and Mary Peirce published their intention of marriage at a quarterly meeting held at the house of Christopher Nicholson. They were married 15th of 10th month at the house of Mary Peirce. Witnesses included Jno. Thuspane(?), Christo. Nicholson, William Bundy, Hannah Phelps, Ann Wilson, John Johnson, Joseph Scott, Mary Bundy, Hannah Hill, Mary Scott, Ann Nicholson, Jno. Nicholson, Jona. Phelps, Joshua Scott and Robert Wilson. On the 19th of 8th month, 1687, John Belman and Sarah Wilson were married at the house of Jona. Phelps. Witnesses included Hannah Hill, Hannah Phelps, Johannah Jenkins, Elizabeth White, Robert Beasley, Isaac Wilson, Jona. Phelps, Ann Wilson, Robert Wilson and William Bundy. Five or six other marriages which are recorded were accomplished prior to 1700. Prior to 1690, most of the meetings appear to have been held at the houses of Jonathan Phelps and Christopher Nicholson. Between 1690 and 1700 they were more frequently held at the house of Francis Toms. Dr. Weeks ("Southern Quakers and Slavery," page 47) concludes that in 1700 there were two monthly meetings and a quarterly meeting in Perquimans County. One of the monthly meetings, he says, was held at the house of Francis Toms, the other at the house of Jonathan Phelps. In 1698 it was agreed by the quarterly meeting that the last seventh day of 7th month in every year should be yearly meeting at the house of Francis Toms, the elder. In 1717 week day meetings were directed to be held at the houses of Timothy Clare and Samuel Nickolson. The Upper Meeting House and the Lower Meeting House are mentioned as places of worship as early as 1720. In 1725 a first day meeting was ordered established on the Southwest side of the Perquimans River, to be held alternately at the houses of Gabriel Newby and Thomas Pearce.

The existing minutes of Perquimans Monthly Meeting (except those relating to marriages as referred to above) begin with 1706 in a book discovered in an abandoned house in Perquimans County in 1936. This book contains minutes from 1706 to 1736. Besides the minutes, which mostly relate to marriages, the book contains records of births and deaths and of marriage certificates.

Preparative meetings and meetings for worship mentioned in the minutes between 1736 and 1770 as being subordinate to Perquimans Monthly Meeting include Piney Woods, Suttons Creek, Vosses Creek, Wells, Old Neck and Tar River. The latter meeting was set off with Rich Square Monthly Meeting in 1760 and transferred to Contentnea Monthly Meeting in 1782.

Prior to 1764 the meeting is usually designated, in its own minutes, as "a monthly meeting held at Perquimans" or "in Perquimans County." From 12th month, 1764, to 9th month, 1794, it is "a monthly meeting held at Wells in Perquimans County." In the minutes of other meetings it is usually referred to by the name of Perquimans; occasionally as Wells Monthly Meeting during the period from 1764 to 1794. In the latter part of 1794 it was agreed to divide the monthly meeting. A new one was established at Suttons Creek and the old one moved to Piney Woods where it took on the name of Piney Woods Monthly Meeting.

About the end of the eighteenth century there began a great migration to the Middle West which reduced the strength of all the meetings in North Carolina. Many meetings were so depleted of their membership that they were laid down. Piney Woods suffered heavily during the first years of the nineteenth century and, to a lesser degree, in later years. It has, however, been able to withstand the drain and remains as the sole survivor of the monthly meetings in Perquimans County.