

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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received **MAR 16 1989**

date entered

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections**1. Name**

historic Dutchess County Quaker Meeting Houses Thematic Resources

and/or common

**2. Location**street & number <sup>See</sup> component forms \_\_\_\_\_ not for publicationcity, town <sup>See</sup> component forms \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_

state New York code 036 county Dutchess code 027

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> thematic resources	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Grange; vacant

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple ownership - see component forms

street &amp; number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state New York

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk's Office

street &amp; number The County of Dutchess, 22 Market Street

city, town Poughkeepsie state New York 12601

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**title HABS <sup>Federal</sup> has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate unknown ☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state DC

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☐ altered

### Check one

☐ original site  
☐ moved date N/A

As noted on individual inventory sheets

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Dutchess County Quaker Meeting Houses Thematic Resources nomination includes eight buildings constructed between 1777 and 1928. The properties included in this thematic nomination were initially identified as part of a comprehensive inventory/survey conducted for a 1982 conference on "Quaker Life In The Hudson Valley" sponsored by the Dutchess County Historical Society. In the course of their history in Dutchess County, members of the Society of Friends constructed at least twenty-four separate buildings. Of the fourteen meeting houses still standing, the Oblong Meeting House (1764) in Pawling is already listed on the National Register and the Pleasant Valley (1810), Stanford Hicksite (1800), Stanford Orthodox (1829) and the Oblong Orthodox (1830) no longer retain sufficient integrity to render them eligible for the National Register. An active meeting, known as Bulls-Head Oswego, functions in a moved and altered one-room schoolhouse that does not meet the National Register criteria. This nomination includes the eight surviving meeting houses that retain sufficient integrity to meet the National Register criteria: Creek (1777-1782), Nine Partners (1780), Oswego (1790, Crum Elbow (1797, enlarged c. 1810), Beekman (1809), Montgomery Street (1863, altered 1890), Clinton Corners (1890, altered 1915), and Poughkeepsie (1928). The eight components include eight contributing buildings, one contributing structure, one contributing object and five contributing sites. There are also two non-contributing buildings and one non-contributing site. The eight meeting houses included in this thematic group are nominated for both their historical and architectural merit: each represents a distinct stage in the evolution of meeting house architecture in Dutchess County and each retains its integrity of location, materials, design, form, workmanship, feeling and association with the Quaker aesthetic that produced them.

Dutchess County, New York, located mid-way between Albany and New York on the east side of the Hudson, was one of the original twelve counties of the Province of New York, established in 1683.

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Early Dutch, English and Palatine settlement in the county centered on the western edge, bordering the river.

Quaker settlement, which diverged from this pattern, occurred in three stages. From 1728 to approximately 1780, Dutchess County meetings were established by Friends who migrated to the county from other regions, most notably from Nantucket and Dartmouth, Massachusetts. By approximately 1780, a Quaker region had been defined that stretched from the southeastern corner through the middle of the country and extended as far northwest as Clinton Corners. (see map 2)

By 1780, Friends' migration to Dutchess County had dwindled--partly in reaction to the proliferation of military encampments in the county and partly to avoid areas where population was booming. The second stage of Quaker settlement in Dutchess county evolved in response to these events and was characterized by an intra-county movement that saw Friends moving out and establishing their meetings closer to lines of trade on or near major transportation routes. By 1811, when Friends reached Poughkeepsie, meetings were found throughout all of inland Dutchess County and only the river corridor, previously settled by the Dutch, English and the Palatines, was untouched by Quaker settlement. (see map 3)

The third period of development began with the Separation of 1828, which divided the Society of Friends into two separate groups, Orthodox and Hicksite. While Friends did not tend to resettle as a result of the Separation, new meeting houses were frequently built in existing Quaker areas to accommodate one or the other of factions. After the Separation, Dutchess County Quakerism began a period of decline that lasted throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. During this period many meetings with insufficient memberships were "laid down" and their meeting houses were either abandoned or taken over for other purposes. Gradually, the Quaker architectural presence became less visible on the Dutchess County landscape.

Generally, the meeting houses in this thematic group incorporate Anglo-American vernacular building traditions in their construction. These traditions, which formed the builder's repertory, were modified according to geographical and environmental factors. The result was a regional, rather than an academic style. The appearance of Quaker meeting houses contrasts dramatically with the more typical forms and styles

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used in American church architecture. Typical American church buildings were based on the Wrenian type that had been brought to America early in the eighteenth century. This academic church form was usually a long, aisled structure with either a single tower and spire or cupola at the front or rising from a columnar porch.

The Society of Friends, in its intent to focus on the individual's relationship with God and remove the trappings of churchly behavior, gravitated to vernacular residential building forms that embodied the regional architectural practices of the areas in which the Friends settled. Dutchess County meeting houses reflect the rural vernacular building tradition of the Hudson Valley English and New England community in their form, materials, method of construction and decoration. The floor plan, fenestration and functional considerations were the determining features of the type. Evidence of craftsmanship appears to be more pronounced in meeting houses yet may only reflect the general rural trend towards conscious restraint rather than outwardly symbolizing the Quakers' "plain" demeanor.

Historically, meeting houses were largely built of wood. The majority of the surviving meeting houses are of frame construction. Nine Partners is constructed of brick and Creek is constructed of stone. Both of these meetings had previously had a frame meeting house destroyed by fire and probably chose masonry construction as a safer alternative. The two Poughkeepsie meeting houses were also built of brick and reflect urban architectural trends. The 1928 Poughkeepsie Meeting House was built of brick to embody a historic material and craftsmanship in its Colonial Revival style design.

The most recognizable form of the meeting house is a rectangular frame building, one-and-one half or two stories in height, with a gable roof. The facade is invariably located on a long side with separate entrances for men and women arranged within symmetrical fenestration. Porches often shelter the entrances, but there are usually Victorian period additions. The buildings are generally devoid of detail, overhangs and ornamentation. The balanced pairing of features on the exterior reflects the equal division of meeting space on the interior. This fully developed Quaker meeting house form evolved during a period beginning in the 1780's, in which a major building campaign occurred in response to expanding numbers and efforts within the Society to codify its practices and to project an

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image of simplicity, equality and stability. In 1828, the Separation disrupted the organization of the Society; yet, both Hicksites and Orthodox Friends continued to meet in traditional meeting houses (and build them if necessary, although at a declining rate) until it became more acceptable for Friends to meet and worship in a church-like fashion in the 1860's and 1870's. Two exceptions to this typical meeting house form exist in Dutchess County at Crum Elbow and Oblong and illustrate the imbalanced and randomly planned character of meeting houses of the early (pre 1780) period. Though built in 1797, the original portion of the Crum Elbow Meeting House appears to have been built as a squarish, two-story building with two asymmetrically divided meeting rooms on the interior and entrances in different elevations (see plans accompanying component form). Perhaps the peculiar arrangement of this building was intended to be temporary, the result of the meeting's intention to double the plan and create a symmetrical and balanced meeting house at a later date. At Oblong, however, it is evident that the building was erected in 1764 with a large meeting room occupying the entire first floor and most of the present gallery. A second, much smaller meeting room for women was enclosed on the upper floor. Separate entrances were provided at opposite ends of the building. The paired doors are later additions that occurred when the interior was renovated to create two equal rooms, side-by-side, divided by a moveable partition. Most of the meeting houses nominated here are the second or third building constructed by the Friends on a given site. Documentation is scanty, but together with the physical evidence noted above and surviving in other states and countries, it appears that the traditional meeting house type, with its rectangular form, gable roof, and two equal rooms divided by a moveable partition, is the most representative Quaker religious building; however, it is not necessarily the only or earliest type of Quaker architecture.

Although the traditional meeting houses varied in size, the arrangement of interior space generally remained constant. The building was divided down the middle by some form of partition, frequently a waist-high double wooden wall that enclosed counter-balanced panels that could be raised or lowered to divide the space into two separate areas. Partitions of this type are still in evidence at Nine Partners, Oswego, and Oblong meeting houses. Although interior partitions no longer survive at Beekman, evidence remains that clearly indicates that it, too, incorporated a center partition in the building.

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On the walls opposite the entrances were two or three rows of wooden benches raised on tiered platforms facing a main body of benches separated by an aisle. Known as facing or rising benches, these seats were reserved for older and/or more experienced Friends who had been designated as ministers, elders or overseers. The interior was originally left unpainted as in Oblong and Nine Partners, but occasionally, as at Crum Elbow, it was later whitewashed.

The benches that remain in these early buildings can also be considered as architectural elements. Simple and austere, they co-exist harmoniously with the building surrounding them. Varying only slightly, the extant Dutchess County benches at Oblong, Nine Partners, Crum Elbow, Creek and Oswego were constructed of boards for backs, sides and seats. The sides are modestly curved, with a small triangular piece cut from the bottom to form feet. The backs and seats of all the benches are aligned at an uncomfortable angle of almost 90 degrees.

Fifteen separate meetings were established during the 1780-1828 period, and records indicate that all of them built meeting houses that conformed to the traditional meeting house form. Eight of these early structures survive and only the ones at Pleasant Valley and Stanford have been significantly altered. The others, including Oblong, Nine Partners, Oswego, Creek, Crum Elbow, and Beekman, display a rigid adherence to balance and symmetry in the placement of the doors and windows. While it could be said that this characteristic also existed in Georgian and Federal buildings of the same period, the meeting house form is further defined by the stylistic restraint, even austerity, of the building. The decorative porches that presently adorn Oswego, Creek and Crum Elbow all appear to be later Victorian additions.

One type of fenestration seems to have been particularly popular among Friends who were building in Dutchess County in this period. Employed at Nine Partners, Oswego, Crum Elbow, Beekman and Stanford (before it was altered), this consists of two side-by-side groupings of an entrance door flanked by two windows. Rear windows are smaller and, on the first floor, elevated to correspond with the raised platform for facing benches.

The meeting houses in this group can be subdivided into two groups: those with and those without galleries. Larger meeting

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houses, such as Oblong, Nine Partners, Crum Elbow and Creek, had a second story containing a gallery that was also divided by a central partition and fitted with benches. These upper galleries would be closed off from the lower meeting rooms by planks spanning the void when space requirements or the nature of the meeting obviated the need for additional seating. In all cases the decision to construct a two-story galleried meeting house seems to have been based on the size of the meeting. Nine Partners and Stanford, largest of the Dutchess County structures, were commonly the sites of regional and quarterly meetings and were expected to accommodate up to 1000 Friends. Except for the Oblong, which had its largest membership around the time of its construction, the membership of two-story meeting houses exceeded 200 at the time of the Separation. Meetings with smaller memberships, such as Beekman and Oswego, seemed to prefer, or could only afford, simpler ungalleried meeting houses.

No meeting houses have survived from the early pre-Separation period in more urban areas of Dutchess County, but drawings and descriptions of several that were constructed in Poughkeepsie during this early period indicate that there was no significant deviation from the traditional pattern on the part of urban Friends.

Three nineteenth-century buildings constructed by Orthodox Friends after the Separation are extant in Dutchess County: one in Stanford (1829, altered 1892), another in Poughkeepsie (Montgomery Street--1863, altered 1890), and the third in Clinton Corners (1890, altered 1915). At the time of their initial construction, all three of these meeting houses contained elements that tied them to the traditional form. Based on an early photograph, it is apparent that Stanford's Orthodox Friends built their 1829 meeting house strictly along traditional lines. The Poughkeepsie (Montgomery Street) and Clinton Corners meeting houses, however, built later in the century, retained some traditional elements but began to display characteristics more similar to other nineteenth-century ecclesiastical architecture. Records indicate that while the Montgomery Street Meeting House used a single entrance, Friends still set aside separate areas for men's and women's meetings and included tiers of facing benches in the design of their 1863 meeting house. The Clinton Corners Orthodox Friends constructed a new meeting house in 1890 that remained visually traditional in its use of two entrances. Not part of the Quaker tradition, however, were the stylish

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porte-cocheres, the Victorian "eye-brow" louvers and the decorative clapboards.

Each of these three structures was later remodelled and virtually all traces of traditional Quaker architecture were removed. The renovated buildings, now called churches, were altered to reflect such contemporary styles as Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival and Shingle, and incorporated numerous church-like elements. Stanford Friends applied decorative shingles to the gable end of their building and inserted a leaded, diamond-shaped window. At Montgomery Street, Friends incorporated round arches, corbelled brickwork under the fascia and a circular window. Clinton Corners Friends added round-arched windows, a tower and a projecting transept. In deference to their origins, however, none of the three meetings used a cross on their building and even though Poughkeepsie and Clinton Corners Friends added stained-glass windows, they were floral in their design and devoid of any scriptural representation.

The last meeting house to be constructed by Dutchess County Friends was finished in 1928 at a time when Orthodox and Hicksite Friends were beginning a process that would lead to reunification. The two groups joined together to build the Poughkeepsie Meeting House (Hooker Avenue) and the resultant building successfully incorporated elements from both traditional and church-like meeting house architecture. Designed by Alfred Bussell, a New York City architect educated at the Quaker Haverford College, the Colonial Revival style building is a skillful blending of the old traditions and the new practices of the Friends. The building, a simple brick structure with clear rectangular small-paned windows and white trim, is in the style of eighteenth-century Georgian architecture. The single door is placed in the gable end. The interior of the building is elegantly simple. Pews are placed parallel to the gable end of the building, church axis style, and a contemporary facsimile of the rising bench has replaced the pulpit. Other traditional Quaker architectural elements were also incorporated into the interior of the building. Wainscoting in the formal meeting room is rendered of hand-planed boards of random widths. A sliding panelled partition reminiscent of earlier designs separated the meeting room from a Sunday School room.

Together these eight meeting houses embody the characteristics of form, design, materials and craftsmanship



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associated with Quaker building tradition in Dutchess County from the late eighteenth century through the early twentieth century.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

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**Specific dates** 1777–1928      **Builder/Architect** Noted where known on individual inventory forms

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Dutchess County Quaker Meeting Houses Thematic Resources consist of eight religious buildings erected between 1777 and 1928 that are both architecturally and historically significant. Their historical significance is based on their association with the Society of Friends, a community important for its role in the physical, spiritual, social and intellectual history of the region. As one of the earliest settlement groups in Dutchess County, their ideas, values and taste influenced cultural development within the country. Architecturally, the meeting houses are significant as distinctive examples of vernacular religious architecture that embody the characteristics of form, design, materials and craftsmanship associated with the Quaker aesthetic. The surviving Dutchess County Quaker meeting houses range in period from the pre-Revolutionary War Oblong Meeting House in Pawling (listed on the National Register 1973), built in 1764, to the Colonial Revival period Poughkeepsie Meeting House (Hooker Avenue), built in 1928. Most of the meeting houses (eight of thirteen surviving are included in the thematic group) were built between 1777 and 1838 during the Federal period and reflect the local rural vernacular interpretation of that style. Also included in the thematic group are two later nineteenth century Quaker "churches" that in design embody features of a more generalized small-scale architecture. The Poughkeepsie Meeting House (Montgomery Street) (1863, altered 1890) is representative of regional urban brick architecture and the Clinton Corners Friends Church (1890, altered 1915) resembles small, informal church architecture of the period. Because of their visibility and prominent role in the community, these buildings are especially significant as manifestations of Quaker beliefs and lifestyles. As a group these buildings constitute an inventory of exceptional meeting house types that chronicle the evolution of meeting house architecture through 150 years of development and change within the Society of Friends. The

## 9. Major Bibliographical references

See continuation sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of nominated property** See continuation sheet

**Quadrangle name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Quadrangle scale** \_\_\_\_\_

## UTM References

**A**

Zone Easting Northing

**B**

Zone Easting Northing

**C**

D

E 

F 

**G**

H | | | | | | | | | |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See component forms

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries** N/A

state	n/a	code	county	code
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state	n/a	code	county	code
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**11. Form Prepared By**

**name/title** Neil Larson/ contact: Kathleen LaFrank, Program Analyst

**organization** NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation **date** December, 1986

<b>street &amp; number</b>	Empire State Plaza Agency Building #1	<b>telephone</b>	(518) 474-0479
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**city or town** Albany **state** New York

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

**The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:**

       national             state        X   local

**As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.**

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation date 3/7/09

**For NPS use only**

**I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register**

By James H. [Signature] Date 7/21/01  
Keeper of the National Register

**Attest:** \_\_\_\_\_ **date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chief of Registration**

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survival of this group of representative examples from various periods also allows for a study of changing Quaker theology throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Society of Friends was one of a number of religious sects formed in the seventeenth century in reaction to the excesses of the Anglican Church. With the King as its sovereign head, the Anglican Church had been established in the 1530's by Henry VIII and its theological structure was close to that of the parent Roman Catholic Church, from which it had broken. For many, the theological similarities were too great and a strong dissenting tradition grew up throughout England. Small groups of individuals, desirous of a more inward, less formal religion, objected strongly to the forms of the liturgy, the Eucharist, and the use of music and ornaments. Separating from the main body, they organized themselves into less formal religious groups such as the Seekers and the Ranters. Unlike the Puritans, some, like the Quakers, chose to discard all religious ceremony and emphasized the priesthood of all believers. George Fox, the principal founder of Quakerism, began preaching in England in 1647 and by 1653 he had coalesced a number of groups into one body called the Society of Friends; this group came to be known derisively as "Quakers."

The body of beliefs associated with the Society of Friends is based on the reality of a person's individual religious experience, not on the symbols by which he tries to describe that experience. Individual experience is based on the doctrine of the "Inner Light," which holds that God has enlightened mankind with a measure of saving light and is himself present within every man. This doctrine has come to be recognized as the distinguishing feature of Quakerism. The theoretical rejection of symbolism that it suggests is manifested by the "Testimony of Plainness," the belief that plainness in everyday life would free the Friends from the distractions of the world and allow them to concentrate on their own internal religious experience. The testimony of plainness was evinced in Quaker life by a studied simplicity in speech, dress and material life, including architecture. The preoccupation with internal religious experience encouraged the development of mysticism among Friends and was reflected in a growing desire on the part of the Quakers to separate themselves and their settlements from the "World." Further, based on their belief in each person's capacity for religious experience, the meetings established by Friends tended

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to be non-hierarchical and organized based on the equality of members. Thus, throughout much of the eighteenth century, the Society of Friends in both England and America was characterized by an attitude of simplicity, individuality and withdrawal.

In England, the period during which the Quakers emerged was one marked by social upheaval, civil war and religious persecution. During the 1650's, radical Puritan Oliver Cromwell, who led England as Lord Protector for a brief period, was aroused by the bickering of various Protestant sects and began a period of intense religious persecution. Many Quakers were thrown into prison, ill-treated and even martyred. As a result, Friends looked to the opportunity for freedom of worship offered by the New World. Yet, during the early years of Quaker settlement in the New World, Friends were the subject of much persecution. The Quaker response was marked by an increased zeal to spread the "truth" in spite of opposition. Endangered as a religious body, they actively sought ways to promote their beliefs and secure their rights.

In July 1656, two Quakeresses landed in Boston and immediately began to try to spread the Quaker message to residents of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They were persecuted and sent away. Others continued to migrate to the New World. New Amsterdam rejected the Quakers, as had the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Flushing Remonstrance of 1657, however, caused the Dutch West India Company to direct New Netherlands governor Pieter Stuyvesant to uphold guarantees of liberty of conscience according to the custom and manner of Holland, without molestation or disturbance. While this did not automatically ease the persecution of Quakers, it did mark the beginning of the process, and by the turn of the eighteenth century Friends were enjoying a more secure life.

Other colonies were less hostile and Friends were allowed to settle in North Carolina, New Jersey, Maryland and Rhode Island, places where freedom of conscience had already been established. In 1681 William Penn, one of the leaders of the Quaker movement in England, obtained a grant of land in the New World from King Charles II for the purpose of establishing a colony for Quakers. The Pennsylvania Colony, with Penn as its proprietor, became the largest Quaker colony in the New World. By 1750, American Quakers outnumbered their English counterparts.

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Freed from the necessity to defend their faith and, frequently, their lives, Quakers entered into a period of greater mystical inwardness. This period saw an emphasis on life in the home, meeting and community. Free to conduct their meetings openly, Friends began to construct meeting houses and emerged as a visible presence on the landscape.

The traditional American Quaker meeting house form as it developed in the eighteenth century is a physical manifestation of the Friends' religious philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just as the founding Quakers rejected the formality and hierarchy of the Anglican church, so too did they reject the form and decoration of Anglo-American church architecture. In both England and America, the Quakers developed an architectural aesthetic that reflected the three central Quaker beliefs: plainness, equality of members and individuality of experience.

The most recognizable characteristics of Quaker meeting houses in England and America are simplicity and symmetry. Given the informal, non-hierarchical nature of Friends' faith, it is not surprising that the construction of these early meeting houses was not codified. Built by local meetings, meeting house forms and designs were conceived within the vernacular traditions in the areas in which they lived. Meeting houses were based on residential forms and were constructed according to regional building practices and with local materials. They were entirely equal with other buildings in the community and embodied the integrity and simplicity of everyday life, rather than a religious hierarchy.

Nevertheless, meeting houses are characterized by a remarkable uniformity of style and accommodation within regional networks. For the most part, this homogeneity is attributable to two things: the regular interaction of Friends within the hierarchy of meetings and the Quakers' studied emphasis on simplicity in material things.

The structure of the Society of Friends included business meetings at numerous levels, and Friends traveled frequently to other meetings. This network of meetings allowed for a thorough exchange of ideas and information and provided a means of transmittal for the developing Quaker form as Friends discussed,

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observed and disseminated information about the design and appearance of the various meetings that they were building.

Adherence to the testimony of plainness, however, is most directly responsible for the distinctive execution of traditional building forms in a Quaker "style" that represented a direct expression of Quaker philosophy. Believing that plainness would free their minds from worldly pursuits and protect them from vanity, Friends eschewed the use of ornamentation on their buildings and sought an atmosphere free from distraction or intrusion that would be most conducive to religious experience.

Although consciously avoiding fashionable church design, applied decoration and imported materials, these simple and unadorned buildings are nevertheless distinguished by a certain sophistication of execution as evinced by their orderly design, well-proportioned spaces, quality materials and fine craftsmanship. The central role that the idea of plainness assumed in the Friends' philosophy and intellectual dimensions that led to its symbolic manifestation in Quaker buildings. Plainness and simplicity were achieved through conscious effort rather than through intuition. The pejorative element in the Friends' withdrawal energized their interpretation of the rural vernacular. This seemingly paradoxical emphasis on restraint and the artful plainness that was the basis of Quaker design is what distinguishes its architectural expression from more conventional manifestations of local vernacular building traditions.

Other Friends' tenets were also influential in the evolution of a distinctive Quaker form. Belief in the individuality of religious experience is evident in the division of interior space, which has no visible point of concentration, thus directing worship inward toward the gathered group. Believing that God exists in all men and women, Quaker builders designed meeting houses so that no individual group is more prominent than another, thus reaffirming the equality of members. The balance and symmetry of these buildings, exhibited in the composition of primary facades and the orderly division of interior space, is an expression of the balance that Quakers sought in their lives.

As a result, in Dutchess County, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Quaker meeting house was generally a rectangular frame building, one and one-half stories tall with a gable roof,

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consistent with regional traditions. Its balanced fenestration was arranged to accommodate two separate entrances on the principal facade and varying levels and partitions on the interior. Decoration was restrained but all surfaces were finished and details were well crafted. Larger meeting houses were often raised to a second story to allow for a gallery. Placement of doors and windows did not vary substantially from the one and one-half story types. More important meeting houses, such as the Nine Partners Meeting House in Millbrook, were more consciously and conspicuously crafted. As in the community-at-large, economics played a role in the construction of meeting houses. While the forms and construction methods were in the vernacular tradition and the design was house-like, the fenestration and interiors were arranged to accommodate religious practices. Stylistic elements that were based in the general local taste were emphasized to reflect Quaker doctrine better.

Quaker migration to Dutchess County was initiated by Nathan Birdsall, who arrived in 1728 from Long Island via Danbury, Connecticut. In 1730 he was joined on Quaker Hill in present-day Pawling by Benjamin Ferris Sr., a Quaker minister. By mid-century, the Quaker population there was sufficient to merit a meeting house and preparative meeting status.

The "Quaker Hill" in which this first Quaker settlement occurred was located in a tract of land known as the Oblong. Sixty miles long and nearly two miles wide, the Oblong, or the Equivalent Land, as it was called, ran north-northwest from Norwalk to Ridgefield, in Connecticut, then almost due north to the Massachusetts line. Approximately fifty miles of this lay in old Dutchess County as it existed before present-day Putnam County was cut off.

Border disputes over this land plagued the provinces of New York and Connecticut for over a hundred years until the 1731 Treaty of Dover. The hostilities had not deterred settlement, however, and it has been suggested that Birdsall, who had been one of the surveyors of the region, and some of the early settlers came in anticipation of obtaining free land in the confusion over the title to the Oblong. Once the long dispute was settled, this excellent strip of land, settled primarily by non-militant Quakers, provided a buffer between the disaffected Presbyterians who had settled in Connecticut and the Dutch and English of the Hudson Valley.



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The most likely cause for the Quaker migration to the Oblong seems to have been the emerging desire of Quakers to separate themselves from the world. Growing tensions between the colonies and Great Britain, tensions that promised military confrontations, had provoked a crisis of conscience, and Quakers who had previously been able to participate in government activities and still maintain their beliefs now found this involvement untenable. Withdrawal from the world and all its distractions was believed necessary to create the perfect spiritual environment. The ensuing period of "quietism" required removal from society. Southeastern Dutchess County in the first half of the eighteenth century was an environment conducive to this aloofness, isolated as it was by a lack of roads and the general remoteness of the area. The anchoritic attitude which led to Quaker settlement in the remote Oblong was so accurately perceived by the non-Quakers of Pawling that they named the hill between Quaker Hill and the village in the valley "Purgatory Hill" because it lay halfway between Quaker Hill and the world.

Friends first built a meeting house at Oblong in 1742. This eventually proved to be too small. In 1764 the present structure was built. The Oblong Quaker Meeting House (National Register, 1973) is a rare example of a meeting house that stands substantially as it was erected. A large, two and one-half story shingled frame structure with a gable roof, this meeting house embodies characteristics of eighteenth-century Long Island residential architecture in form and materials. Features of the evolving traditional meeting house form, such as a symmetrical facade composition with double entrances and equal meeting spaces divided by an interior sliding partition, were added in the early 1800's, as well as additional facing benches and an expanded gallery. Gradually the "Hill" began to fill up and Quakers moved out and established new settlements. In each of these settlements, Nine Partners, Oswego, Creek, Beekman and Crum Elbow, as they had at Oblong, they built a meeting house that manifested their testimony of plainness. With the exception of Creek, all the meeting houses at these locations today are later buildings. Rejecting all forms of ornamentation and iconography, the Quakers never considered the buildings themselves as an ornament of the faith; instead, they served only the utilitarian purpose of accommodating the regular gatherings of Friends. Separate entrances and the internal organization of space allowed for the practice of separate business meetings for men and women. Size of the meeting house was predicated on the size of the

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meeting. Those meeting houses, like Nine Partners, Creek, Stanford, Oblong and Crum Elbow, that accommodated a great number of Friends were built in two stories. The early meeting houses were especially devoid of any decorative elements. Oswego, one of the finest examples of this "plainness," is significant for the total absence of any superfluous elements in the original fabric. While the quality of craftsmanship is evident in buildings such as Nine Partners, it is equally apparent that the goal of the craftsman was to stress the functional aspects of the building and eschew the ornament. Frequently, as at Crum Elbow, additions or later interior modifications do not relate stylistically to the already existing structure. While the work was skillfully done, no attempt was made to duplicate old elements in the new construction. This level of pretension and vanity was avoided by the Quakers.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Dutchess County Friends had begun to spread out and establish their meetings on the fringes of the previously established region. The new meetings, located at Crum Elbow, Chestnut Ridge, West Branch, Beekman, Stanford, Nine Partners, Bethel, Pleasant Valley and Poughkeepsie, the last to be created before the 1828 Separation, were located primarily on or near major transportation routes. The willingness of Friends to establish themselves in areas more readily accessible to the "world" clearly indicates that the previous attitude of withdrawal and separation was weakening and that Friends were being drawn into the mainstream of the county's social and economic life.

The social and cultural stability of eighteenth-century America had provided a climate that was compatible with the prevailing Quaker philosophy. The emerging new nation of the nineteenth century challenged all this. Transportation was improved, new forms of economic organization were tried, manufacturing grew, and agriculture was becoming more commercial. In short, America was on the verge of an industrial revolution. Accompanying this radical change in the socio-economic foundations of America were unsettling changes in the religious and political structures of the country. Politically, the common man became the "central theme of political debate" and the emphasis on opening up opportunity and removing special privilege acted as a wedge between social classes and made people more aware of their position in society. The simultaneous religious revivals of early nineteenth century America produced an

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atmosphere in which doctrinal issues were routinely debated. Religious controversy was rampant and members of the Society of Friends, no longer as insular as they had been, were as susceptible to change as everyone else. Transportation advances and an increase in communication broke down the isolation enjoyed by the Quakers and they were no longer able to protect their traditional values from the world around them.

The earliest meeting houses built in these newly settled areas did not differ in form from those that had been built in more remote areas. Crum Elbow and Creek, although built of different materials, did not differ in form or in the organization of space. Beekman reproduced the simple vernacular meeting house that existed at Oswego.

The Separation of 1828, which divided Friends into two separate groups, occurred as a result of a conflict between mysticism and evangelicalism, a conflict fanned by the winds of change inherent in America during the early nineteenth century. Hicksite, or Liberal, Friends were rooted in the rationalistic thinking of the eighteenth century. Opposed to dictation by elders, they assumed a position that allowed for a wide variety of theological opinion and a greater emphasis on the inward being, equality and tolerance. Orthodox Friends, more in favor of authority regarding doctrine, tended to be more evangelical in their beliefs. Initially more xenophobic than the Hicksites, they soon fell under the influence of English minister Joseph John Gurney, who supported tenets that conformed more closely to the orthodox and evangelical ideas of mainstream Protestants. This tended to end their traditional isolation. Gradually the Orthodox Friends adopted many of the religious practices of other Protestant groups such as Sunday School, singing, the use of a professional minister and programmed services.

Orthodox Friends, more in tune with mainstream American life, began during the second half of the nineteenth century to express their affinity to the world by casting off the traditional meeting house form in favor of prevailing architectural styles. By the early twentieth century, both Poughkeepsie and Clinton Corners meetings had constructed buildings that contained more church-like elements than they did traditional meeting house elements. Now called churches, these new buildings were designed to accommodate the changes in theology and included special spaces set aside for Sunday School classrooms, pulpits for

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professional ministers and organs or pianos to provide accompaniment to singing.

Poughkeepsie Friends chose to build in the Romanesque Revival style. The selection of this style still allowed Friends to avoid the Gothic Revival style that was so closely tied to the ecclesiastical architecture of England and the Anglican church from which Friends had originally disassociated themselves. Interestingly, as churchly as Orthodox Friends appear to have become by this time, the Montgomery Street Meeting House, built in 1863 and remodeled by 1890, was so devoid of ecclesiastical ornamentation that the Clinton Corners Friends followed their example when they built and later renovated their own church. Built in the Shingle style, its wooden shingle siding, porte-cocheres and complex roof design have no relationship to the traditional form of the eighteenth century. Church-like components incorporated in the building include a center aisle leading to a pulpit or a raised platform, standard pews and a projecting transept.

By the early twentieth century, Friends were searching for ways to end the exhausting conflict that had divided their numbers for nearly one hundred years. Just as Friends sought to restore some sense of the historical Quaker order and unity to their theology, so too did architects of the early twentieth century look to restore order to American architecture, and many of them began working in styles that evoked the nation's Colonial era. Significantly, the only Quaker meeting house built in the twentieth century in Dutchess County was built in this style.

In 1926 the Orthodox Poughkeepsie Friends decided that the Montgomery Street area was "overchurched" and began construction of a new meeting house on Hooker Avenue. By this time, the meeting membership consisted of both Orthodox and Hicksite, the latter having been forced by dwindling numbers to abandon their own meeting houses. The existence of members from both branches of the Society of Friends in the meeting influenced the selection of the design of the meeting house. Alfred Bussell, a New York City architect, was selected to interpret the "sense of the meeting" and to design a meeting house that would satisfy all. Bussell's studies at Haverford College, a Quaker college, doubtless made him conscious of their traditions. Oral tradition

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indicates that Bussell was presented with the desire for stained-glass windows, an organ and a steeple from one faction, while the other side suggested replicating an old-style meeting house.

The result is a skillful blending of the old and the new, not unlike the blending that was occurring within the society itself. Traditionalists were pleased with the Colonial Revival style exterior that evoked the eighteenth century, the hand-planed boards and the contemporary rising bench that replaced the pulpit. Orthodox Friends' sensibilities were accommodated by pews, a space for Sunday School classes and the church axis orientation of the building.

Coming nearly two hundred years after Nathan Birdsall initiated Quaker settlement in the Oblong, the Poughkeepsie Meeting House (Hooker Avenue) represents the final historic stage in the evolution of the Quaker community in Dutchess County. The group of meeting houses that survive from this period embody the continuity and change of both the religious group and the Quaker community. The Friends' philosophical and intellectual presence had far reaching impact on the values and taste of society in the religion. Their religious buildings survive as emblems of a developing rural culture as well as landmarks in the Friends' remarkable geographical and social network.

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**11. Nomination Sponsored By:**

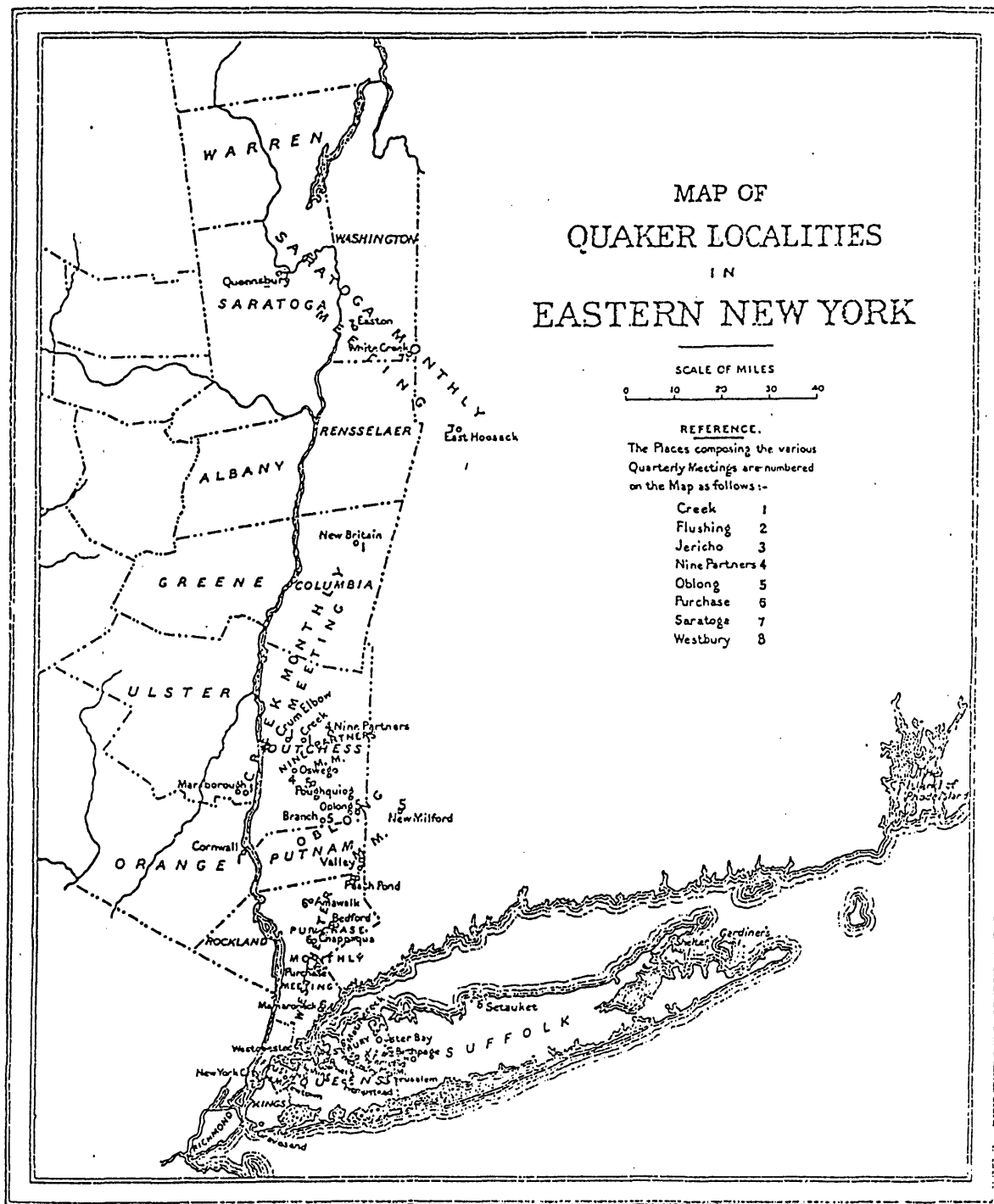
Dutchess County Historical Society  
c/o Clinton House State Historic Site  
Poughkeepsie, NY

**Research and Draft Nomination by:**

Melodye Moore  
Former Director  
Dutchess County Historical Society  
Poughkeepsie, NY

**Additional Research by:**

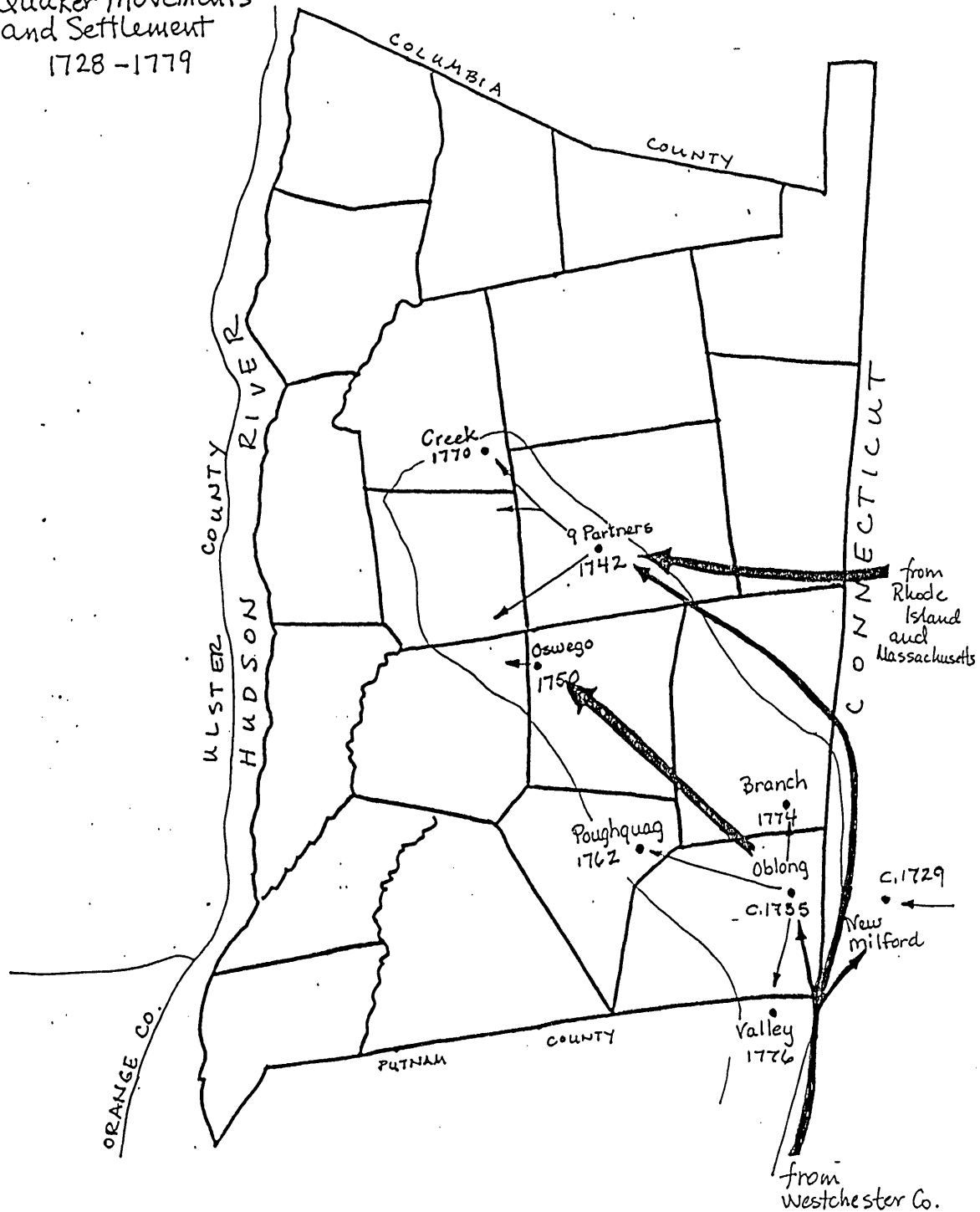
Alson Van Wagner  
Quaker Historian for Dutchess County Quarterly Meeting  
Pleasant Valley, NY



Map 1 From: Gaustad's Historical Atlas of Religion in America  
New York, 1962, 1976.

Dutchess County Quaker Meeting Houses  
Thematic Resources  
Dutchess County New York

Map 2  
Quaker Movements  
and Settlement  
1728-1779



Dutchess County Quaker  
Meeting Houses Thematic Resources  
Dutchess County New York

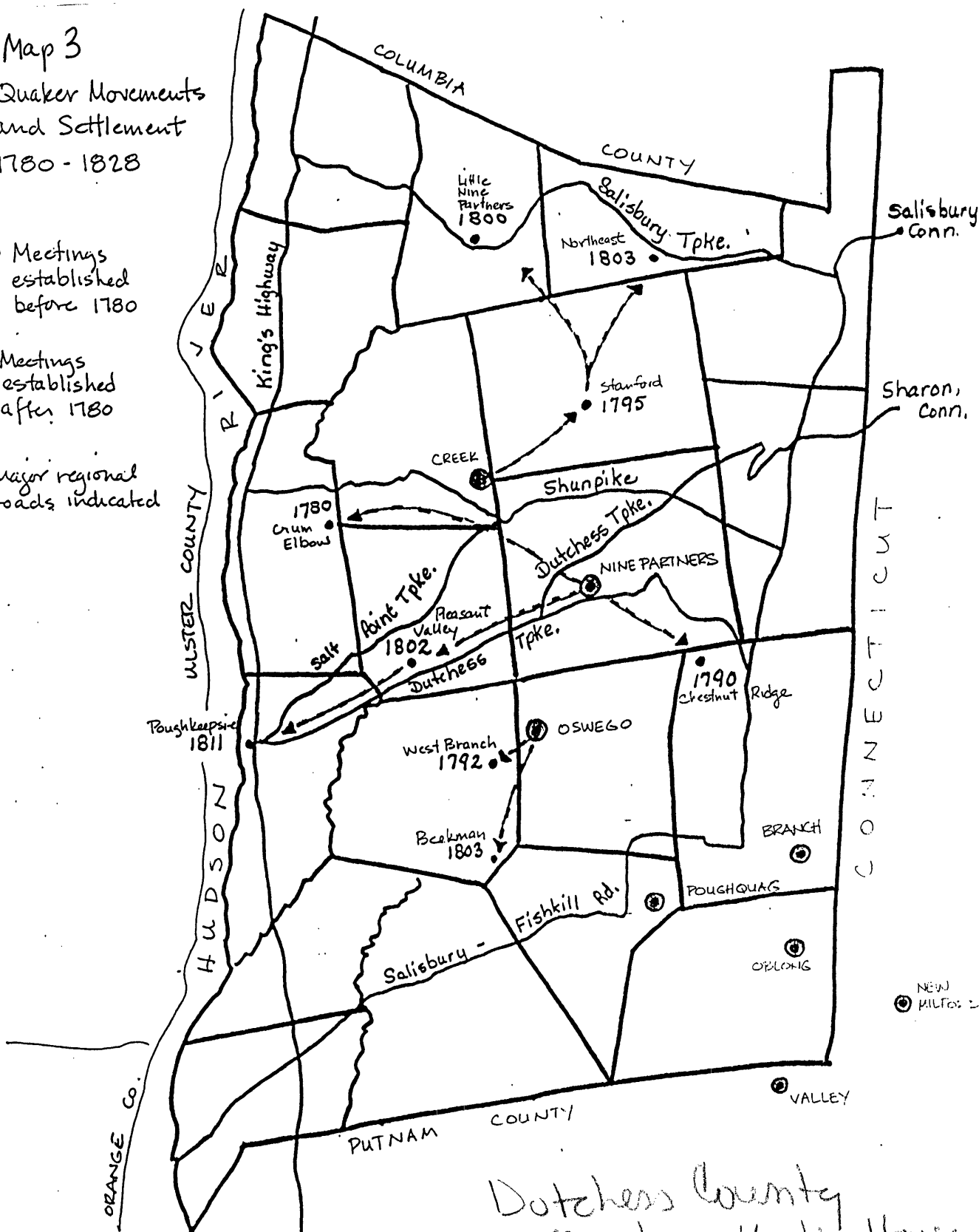
# Map 3

## Quaker Movements and Settlement 1780 - 1828

⊙ Meetings  
established  
before 1780

• Meetings  
established  
after 1780

Major regional  
roads indicated



Dutchess County  
Quaker Meeting Houses  
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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic GroupName Dutchess County Quaker Meeting Houses TR  
State Dutchess County, NEW YORK

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

Cover

Substantive Review

for Keeper

Beth L. Savage 4/27/89

1. Beekman Meeting House and  
Friends' Cemetery

Substantive Review

for Keeper

Beth L. Savage 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

2. Clinton Corners Friends Church

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

3. Creek Meeting House and Friends'  
Cemetery

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

4. Crum Elbow Meeting House and  
Cemetery

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

5. <sup>SN</sup> Nine Partners Meeting House and  
Cemetery

Substantive Review

for Keeper

Beth L. Savage 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

6. Oswego Meeting House and Friends'  
Cemetery

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

7. Poughkeepsie Meeting House  
(Montgomery Street)

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

8. Poughkeepsie Meeting House  
(Hooker Avenue)

Entered in the  
National Register

for Keeper

Sharon Byrum 4/27/89

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

9.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

10.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_