Form No. 10-300 Rev. 10/4

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

NAME

HISTORIC
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse

AND/OR COMMON
Saylesville Meetinghouse* (preferred name)

LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
Smithfield Avenue

CITY, TOWN
Lincoln

STATE
Rhode Island

CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP
PRIVATE

STATUS
X.OCCUPIED

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE

BUILDING(S)

PUBLIC

COMMERCIAL

SITE
PUBLIC ACQUISITION

EDUCATIONAL

OBJECT
IN PROCESS

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

BEING CONSIDERED

COMMUNITY CENTER

SITE
GOVERNMENT

PRIVATE

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Fernand J. St. Germain

STATE CODE
44

COUNTY CODE
Providence 007

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Providence Monthly Meeting, Society of Friends

STREET & NUMBER
99 Morris Avenue

CITY, TOWN
Providence

STATE
Rhode Island

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Lincoln Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER
100 Old River Road

CITY, TOWN
Lincoln

STATE
Rhode Island

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE
1937

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN
Washington

STATE D.C.
DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
GOOD
FAIR

DETERIORATED
RUINS
UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
ALTERED
ORIGINAL SITE
MOVED

DATE

DEAL THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Lower Meetinghouse in Lincoln is set at the edge of the manufacturing village of Saylesville, which has grown up around the building since its construction. Located between Smithfield Avenue and the steep banks of Barney Pond, the meetinghouse is set about forty feet back from the street and faces south.

The meetinghouse consists of two sections, built over forty years apart; the original section (1704) now forms a small wing of the later section (c. 1745). The original meetinghouse is a tiny, almost square (21' by 25') single room of two bays on each facade, sheltered by a gable roof, and set upon a stone foundation over a full-height basement dug to accommodate a furnace. The building's walls are covered with clapboards -- those on the north wall are six inches wide; on the west and south walls the clapboards are feathered and lapped, and graduated in width from four to two inches. These narrower clapboards may have been applied when the c. 1745 meetinghouse was built, since they match the wall cover of the newer building. Wide sill and corner boards outline the building. The fenestration and double-hung sash of this older portion of the meetinghouse vary on each side, probably due to occasional updating and repair. On the north wall, the paired windows have 8/8 sash, flat surrounds, and a double cyma curve molding at the sill; on the west end, the two windows are surrounded by flat boards, with splayed lintels, and 6/6 sash; the frame of the single window on the south side matches that of the north, but the panes are 12/12/

The meetinghouse entrance is located at the southeast corner, where rough granite steps lead to a plank door surrounded by plain flat boards. Some of the original hardware remains on this door; long iron strap hinges still hold it; a thumb latch now opens the door, though the space cut for a large box lock is visible. The door itself is protected by a storm door of tongue-and-groove vertical siding.

The new meetinghouse, joined to the older at its east wall, is two stories with a gable roof. The building is rectangular (29' by 39') and, like its older counterpart, rests on a stone foundation. A full height basement has been excavated under one third of its length to accommodate the furnace. The exterior walls are covered by feathered and lapped clapboards, although the upper section of west side is shingled; wide sill and corner boards mark the edges of the building. Although the meetinghouse door was probably originally located in the east facade, facing the road, the entrance is now in the center of the south facade, where a five-panel door (a Victorian replacement) is surrounded by a simply-molded frame. The windows of this section are arranged symmetrically, two on each level, on the north and south facades, two on the first floor of the east side, and three on the second story. The windows are double hung, with 6/6 sash, flat surrounds and splayed lintels.

See Continuation Sheet 1
On the interior of the meetinghouse, the newer building forms a single large room with a three-sided gallery, while the original section now forms an adjunct to the meeting room; it is used for smaller meetings, food preparation, and the like. The two rooms are joined by a series of large interior windows which are now curtained, but were once closed with large plank panels mounted from above with iron strap hinges, and by a plank door with strap hinges and thumb latch.

Both sections of the meetinghouse have undergone alterations since their construction, but much remains to testify to their original character. In the original section, a small vestibule and a lavatory have been created by the construction of a wall across the interior, east to west. Modern kitchen apparatus has been installed in the west end of the room. A narrow chimney, now unused, has been substituted for a much larger chimney and fireplace which were probably located on the west wall. Within the meeting room proper, some of the heavy framing is still visible; while the beams are covered by a lowered ceiling, the posts, now cased, remain visible. The walls are covered with the same rough plaster which covers the ceiling; on the west and east ends, wide vertical planks panel the wall to a height of about four feet. On the north wall, these have been replaced by a new shallow bench whose back is made of similar horizontal planks.

In the new meetinghouse, the frame of heavy oak posts, beams and curved braces, is still visible--hand hewn, mortised, pegged, and chamfered. The stair to the gallery, now built against the south wall and on the left as one enters, rises in a single run with winders. It has been enclosed by a wall of tongue-and-groove vertical boards which also forms a vestibule inside the entrance. The stairs may originally have been located in the northeast corner adjacent to the original door.

The walls of the new meetinghouse are covered with the same rough plaster as in the older section. A wainscot of tongue-and-groove vertical boards is now covered in some sections by large painted plywood sheets. Similar match-boarding covers the gallery breast, while above the breast, the gallery is now closed into a series of small rooms by plywood panels hinged from above. Heavy vertical planking covers the lower part of the gallery wall in a few places where it has not been replaced by new benches, plaster, or narrow vertical boards.

See Continuation Sheet 2
The windows of the meetinghouse are covered by modern shutters. On the first level, the windows are framed by wide heavy moldings, probably installed at the same time as the vertical boarding. On the upper level, the original narrow and unornamented frames remain.

A variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century lighting fixtures exists in the meetinghouse. A heavy etched and cut glass chandelier hangs from the ceiling center above the gallery level. On the lower level, brass fixtures with white glass shades line the walls, and domed electric fixtures have been installed on alternating cross beams.

The meetinghouse benches are simple and lowbacked, painted white with curved and scrolled ends. These pews were not part of the original furniture, though they have been in place since at least 1909. The benches are presently arranged in a square; this pattern has been changed several times over the past two centuries, though a long bench has always occupied a low dais along the north wall, the "facing bench" which is typical of meetinghouse arrangement.

The meetinghouse is surrounded by wide lawns and old trees. Its cemetery (R. I. Historical Cemeteries, Lincoln #24 and #25), probably used since its earliest years, though only stones from the 1750s onward survive, is located on the western end of the property and is surrounded by chain-link fencing. A simple mounting stone is located at the eastern edge of the meetinghouse yard; it consists of a six-foot-long section of rough field stone propped against a shorter upright stone. A large carriage shed formerly located near the meetinghouse has been demolished.
The Quaker Meetinghouse at Lincoln, Rhode Island, is significant for its antiquity, its architectural quality, and its role in the history of the spread of Quakerism in America.

The Society of Friends, harried as fanatics inimical to civil order from other New England colonies, were welcomed in Rhode Island as early as 1656, when banished Quakers from Massachusetts Bay settled on Aquidneck Island. In the following year, Quaker missionaries arrived on Aquidneck and many leading families of Newport, Rhode Island's pre-eminent settlement, prepared by the antinomian creed of their early years, became converts. By the 1660s monthly and yearly meetings had been organized here, the beginnings of the Quakers' elaborate institutional framework devised for social control and efficient operation. Throughout the 1670s and 1680s the Friendly sentiment flourished and spread throughout Rhode Island, even to its northern reaches of the Providence settlement; by 1691, when William Penn's proprietary charter for Pennsylvania was issued, over half the population of Rhode Island were of the Quaker persuasion and the colony was the center of Quaker life in North America. Friends dominated much of the colony's commercial and religious life throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century and, in addition, played a major role in its political life, providing an inordinate number of public officials to both the towns and the colony.

The growth of Quakerism in the lower Blackstone Valley, north of Roger Williams' settlement at Providence, proceeded somewhat more slowly, Quakers finding in these "North Woods" a relatively cooler atmosphere than Friends at Newport. While Newport was developing into an urban center by the turn of the seventeenth century, the Blackstone Valley remained a backwoods connected to Providence by a few roads and populated largely by farmers, rural artisans, and limestone miners scattered across the landscape or settled in tiny villages along highways such as the Great Road, laid out through this region in 1683. After the devastation of King Philip's War in the 1670s, however, the Quaker doctrine spread among these outlanders as well.

See Continuation Sheet 3
First-day meetings among these rural Quakers were held in private houses until the construction in 1704 of the tiny, one-room meetinghouse which now forms the side wing of the Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse. This small meetinghouse was built adjacent to the Great Road on land belonging to Eleazer Arnold, a prosperous farmer and later a tavern-keeper, whose own house (c. 1687) still stands a scant quarter of a mile north of the meetinghouse. (The Eleazer Arnold House is a National Historic Landmark and a key building in the Great Road National Register Historic District). This first meetinghouse in the Blackstone Valley was constructed between June, 1703, and July, 1704; not until 1708, however, did Eleazer Arnold give the land in trust to the leading worthies of the meeting: Thomas Smith, Joseph Smith, Jr., Samuel Wilkinson, Jr., Samuel Comstock, Jr., Thomas Arnold, Jr., Eleazer Arnold, Jr., and Joseph Arnold, among them were two of his sons and his nephew.

This modest meetinghouse became the home of the Providence Monthly Meeting which was set off from the East Greenwich Meeting in 1718, and became the focus of Quaker life from that point on north to Massachusetts. The following year, a second meetinghouse was built for this monthly gathering in what is now Woonsocket; since this great northern region was set off from Providence in 1731 as the town of Smithfield, these two houses became known as the Upper and Lower Smithfield Meetinghouses.

Quakerism remained the dominant creed of the region well into the eighteenth century. Despite the availability of the Upper Meetinghouse, the Lower House was substantially enlarged c. 1745, expanding the building into a substantial place of worship, able to hold well over a hundred people on its first floor and in its gallery.

The leading families of the region maintained their adherence to Quaker ideals throughout the eighteenth century, but Quaker dominance of the religious life of the region diminished under the impact of the industrial revolution. The development of mill villages along the Blackstone and Moshassuck Rivers drew increasing numbers of residents committed to other creeds; Quakers, once a majority, have since the early nineteenth century been a minority in the region. Today, Quaker families belong to the Providence Monthly Meeting, though their Preparative Meetings are still held in the Lower Meetinghouse.

See Continuation Sheet 5
The architectural quality of the Lower Meetinghouse is still informative not only of the nature of worship among eighteenth century Quakers and the longevity of their presence here, but also of the material achievements of the day and region. By way of contrast with the Aquidneck settlements, especially Newport, where the Quaker community was led by affluent shipholders, merchants, professionals, and artisans, the Smithfield Meeting was always a less urbane and more parochial Quaker center, populated by farmers, often substantial but rarely rich. To a Newport Friend, the Lower Meetinghouse would have seemed a very small affair indeed, the house of worship of sturdy farmers rather than Quaker "Grandees."

Despite the alterations to this house, it remains a vivid testimony to the ideals of the congregation which built it: simplicity in life and worship. Both on its exterior and its interior, the meetinghouse is a handsome building -- serene in its plainness, lacking in superfluity, fit for its purpose, its beauty arising not from the studied elegance of academic knowledge, but from the craft exhibited in its materials, such as the feathered clapboards and the chamfering of the beams.


Pawtucket Times, June 27, 1908, p. 7.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
Bayles, Richard M. History of Providence County, Rhode Island, New York: W. W. Preston Company, 1891, Vol. II.

See Continuation Sheet 6

GEORAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY about 3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 19, B 11, C 1410101, D 113,6,01.

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Plat 9, lots 141 and 142.

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE Pamela A. Kennedy, Senior Historical Preservation Planner
ORGANIZATION R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
DATE Sept. 16, 1978

STREET & NUMBER 150 Benefit Street
TELEPHONE 401-277-2678
CITY OR TOWN Providence
STATE Rhode Island

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 September 29, 1978
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse
Smithfield Avenue
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Photograph by: Warren Jagger
Negative at: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
150 Benefit St.
Providence, R.I.

Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse, seen from southwest;
1704 section on left, c. 1745 section on right.

Photograph #1
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse
Smithfield Avenue
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Photograph by: Warren Jagger
Negative at: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
150 Benefit St.
Providence, R.I.

Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse, seen from northwest corner of 1704 section and showing door of 1704 section, wall separating two sections, and interior of c. 1745 section.

Photograph #2
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse
Smithfield Avenue
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Photograph by: Warren Jagger
Negative at: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
150 Benefit St.
Providence, R.I.

Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse; west end of gallery
(now closed), showing framing.

Photograph #4
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse
Smithfield Avenue
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Photograph by: Warren Jagger
Negative at: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission
150 Benefit St., Providence, R.I.

Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse, seen from southeast corner of c. 1745 section and showing framing and gallery (now closed off).

Photograph #3
Smithfield Lower Meetinghouse
Saylesville Meetinghouse
Lincoln, Rhode Island

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