

= Benjaminville Friends Meeting House and Burial Ground =

The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House and Burial Ground is a Friends Meeting House of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) , located north of the rural village of Holder in McLean County , Illinois . It was once the site of a now @-@ defunct village called Benjaminville , founded in 1856 after Quakers settled the area . More Quakers followed , and the burial ground , then the current meeting house in 1874 , were constructed . This site , listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places since 1983 , is all that remains of that village .

The burial ground preceded the meeting house , as the site was home to another meeting house that was constructed in 1859 . The Benjaminville Meeting House represents a well @-@ constructed example of Quaker meeting house architecture and contains within its design many of the major elements associated with the style . It is unique in that it allowed both male and female friends to worship together in the same room . The burial ground , however , maintains a strict separation , not by gender but by religious affiliation ; there are three sections , one for Quakers , one for non @-@ Quakers , and one for distant relatives of both .

= = Building = =

= = = Location = = =

The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House is located on a relatively elevated area of land east of Bloomington , Illinois , near the community of Holder . The land was originally flat , treeless prairie but today is designated mostly for agricultural use . The unincorporated community of Bentown is located nearby as well . To the east a large wind farm is being constructed within Arrowsmith Township . The building is the last extant structure in the now @-@ defunct village of Benjaminville , Illinois .

= = = History = = =

In 1859 , three years after the first Quaker settlers arrived in the area , a meeting house was constructed on the site of the present @-@ day Friends meeting house for US \$ 1 @,@ 000 . Quakers continued to flow into the area through the 1860s and in 1874 the current Friends meeting house was constructed and it has seen little change since it was built . Some minor alterations have taken place , including the addition of a concrete porch to the entryway and a shed on the east (rear) facade . The shed was added around 1910 to serve as a storage space and a privy . The building became a social , political , and religious hub for the area Quakers and the site was visited by Friends from other meeting houses around the state . The building is no longer owned by a religious institution , though there are occasional services held there .

= = = Architecture = = =

The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House is located on a 2 @.@ 5 acres (10 @,@ 000 m2) site planted with grass and native deciduous trees . The location is surrounded by crops and is well isolated from other nearby structures . The rectangular , balloon framed building is situated on an east @-@ west axis , with its front facade facing west . The long side measures 42 ft (13 m) and the shorter gable ends of the building measure 32 ft (10 m) . The building 's entrance is found on its south elevation and consists of dual doors which bisect the walls at the jambs . The Friends meeting house in Benjaminville is a typical example of traditional Quaker meeting houses . Elements common to Quaker meeting houses east of the Allegheny Mountains and found on the Benjaminville example are : plain , undecorated interiors , lack of stained glass , rectangular shaped log or frame construction , some type of partition within the interior space , an attached burial ground , exterior simplicity , separate men 's and women 's entrances , and the entryway location along the long wall .

The interior room , like the exterior , is oriented east @-@ west . The most prominent decorative element inside is the hand graining detail on the wood surfaces . An elevated gallery lines the north wall facing the pews which are bisected by 3 ½ ft (1 @. @ 1 m) tall , 5 in (13 cm) wide beaded board partition . The pews , partition , door , and window trim are all hand grained . The interior walls are covered with 6 in (15 cm) pine wainscotting . The original iron stoves have been replaced with oil @-@ burning stoves , set into the original flues .

The building is considered a fine example of traditional Quaker architecture because it contains all of the elements found in the typical meeting house . However , the building does have one major difference on its interior when compared with most meeting houses . Traditionally , Quaker meeting houses had two rooms , divided by a movable partition , termed " shutters , " meant to separate men from women during meetings ; these shutters are noticeably absent on the Benjaminville Meeting House . The members of the meeting at the Benjaminville Meeting House were among " pioneers " within the Society of Friends in that they were one of the first seven groups to allow men and women to meet as one group of Friends . The room inside the Benjaminville building was simply divided with a waist @-@ high partition as opposed to the movable wall .

While most Friends meeting houses were very plain in their designs and ornamentation , individual craftsmen were encouraged to be " guided by (their) own inner light " when working on building a meeting house . As such , the dominant decorative element on the Benjaminville building is fine hand graining on most of the interior wood surfaces . The decoration should not be seen as an affront to the traditional and typical Quaker style used in meeting houses . Instead it stands as a testament to the fact that the Society of Friends encouraged craftsmen to create as " the spirit moved them . "

= = Cemetery = =

The cemetery was established soon after the original meeting house was built in 1859 . Burial grounds were typical accompaniments to Friends meeting houses . While burial grounds were encouraged in the 1825 Quaker Rules of Discipline , the burial of non @-@ Quakers in Quaker cemeteries was not . To satisfy this rule burials at Benjaminville were separated into two separate sections to allow an area for non @-@ Quakers . A newer section contains a mix of Quaker and non @-@ Quaker descendants of those originally buried there .

Non @-@ Quaker burials were originally confined to the northern section of the cemetery , the portion directly behind the meeting house . Members of the Society of Friends were buried in the middle portion of the cemetery , today surrounded by a loop in the gravel road that traverses the site . The most recent burials are found in the southernmost section of the cemetery , furthest from the meeting house . The entire burial ground is approximately 160 by 200 ft (49 by 61 m) , for a total area of 32 @, @ 000 sq ft (3 @, @ 000 m2) .

Burials are oriented east @-@ west . The burial ground covers most of the site 's land and is planted with grass and trees . The surrounding land is predominantly of agricultural use but there are some nearby residences . To the east a wind farm is under construction .

= = Significance = =

The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House is a particularly well @-@ preserved example of a Quaker meeting house . For several years after 1874 the building was the focus of settlement in Benjaminville , a town one author described as " one of the strongest settlements of Friends that is to be found anywhere in the state " in 1879 . The structure is of historical and architectural significance . As an example of the meeting house style used by the Society of Friends , the Benjaminville building is representative of an architectural type that remained virtually unchanged from the colonial American period through the 19th century . The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House and its burial ground were listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on December 13 , 1983 .

