

Quaker Meetinghouse

The Puritans in Massachusetts, having traveled here to escape English tyranny, [endorsed religious freedom—but only when applied to themselves](#). And, at times, they [barely tolerated each other](#). In 1649, for instance, [Governor Endicott and other magistrates proclaimed](#) their “dislike and detestation against the wearing of such long hair, as against a thing uncivil and unmanly, whereby men doe deforme themselves and offend sober and modest men, and doe corrupt good manners.”

The Quakers, or Society of Friends, with their repudiation of church hierarchies, nonviolent protest, and women at the forefront in spreading the word, were [banned in Boston](#). Many [accounts offer the same story](#): “The first known Quakers to arrive in Boston and challenge Puritan religious domination were Mary Fisher and Ann Austin. These two women entered Boston’s harbor on the *Swallow*, a ship from Barbados in July of 1656. . . . The two were strip searched, accused of witchcraft, jailed, deprived of food, and were forced to leave Boston on the *Swallow* when it next left Boston eight weeks later.”

This unfriendly Puritan welcome prevailed in official West Newbury, as well. [Historian Joshua Coffin](#) noted that in 1663, Newbury west-ender [John Emery](#) was “fined four pounds for entertaining quakers. His offence consisted in granting food and lodging to two men and two women, who were traveling farther east. One of the witnesses testified that he [John Emery] took them by the hand and bid them welcome.” Quakers were active in Amesbury early on, and [built a meetinghouse there in 1705](#). But as late as

1716, “the first church in West Newbury observed a day of fasting and prayer, one object of which was to pray ‘that God would [prevent ye spread of errors in this place, especially the errors of the Quakers](#).’”

By the late 1720s, somewhat more tolerant laws were enacted. The [Ecclesiastical History of Essex County](#) reported that a Quaker society was formed in Newburyport in 1744, and “[i]n 1822, they changed their place of worship and built a new house at Turkey Hill, near the eastern line of West Newbury, which was occupied for the first time on the 25th of Dec. of that year, and in which a few families of excellent people, numbering about forty persons, are still [at this book’s publication in 1865] accustomed to meet for religious worship, according to the usages of their sect.”

It can be no coincidence that the West Newbury Quaker Meetinghouse is very close to the [John Brown](#) homestead where the 1695 Indian raid occurred. A [genealogy](#) stated that John Brown’s grandson “Stephen Brown, of old Quaker stock, was born on Turkey Hill, West Newbury, Massachusetts, and was a farmer.” [Stephen Brown’s](#) son John had the farm when the 1822 Quaker Meetinghouse was established. The story of [James](#) in the next generation illustrates the demise of West Newbury’s Quaker community. He was born here in 1817, worked on the farm, made shoes in winter, and participated in the Society of Friends of his forbearers. In later years, however, he [moved to Lynn and joined the Congregational church](#). And so the Quakers drifted away and their [Meetinghouse was razed in 1917](#).

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Quaker Meetinghouse photo West Newbury Historical Society

Marker Location: 114 Turkey Hill St., West Newbury, MA Latitude: 42.795828
Longitude: -70.925840