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The Quaker Community in Alamance County, NC

The Quakers—also known as the Society of Friends—originated in the Americas in the mid seventeenth century after fleeing religious persecution in England. By the mid eighteenth century, the Piedmont region in North Carolina (NC) grew exponentially due to the large influx of Quaker migrants from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia—who traveled along the Great Wagon Road (Allen).

The warm climate, affordable land, and long growing seasons in the west are what had attracted their arrival throughout the 1740s (“Cane Creek Meeting”). As Quakers became settled in the area, different Quaker groups emerged. Cane Creek—a robust Quaker community—was established in 1751 in present-day Snow Camp, Alamance County, where they had inaugurated their first *Cane Creek Friends Meeting* (Jordan). Abigail Pike and Rachel Wright were faithful Quakers who were diligent in establishing Cane Creek; they traveled 200 miles on horseback to Perquimans County in hopes of being granted permission to initiate their local meetings. Luckily, their requests were granted, and Pike was appointed as the minister of the organization. At the end of 1751, sixty-eight certificates had been successfully granted to Quakers in the area (“Cane Creek Meeting”). Pike pieced together a strong governing body in the Piedmont region throughout subsequent years, and as a result of her tireless efforts, the first official Cane Creek Meeting House was built in 1764.

Modest and peaceful, the Quakers lived by the S.P.I.C.E.S. principle: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (“Quaker Values”). They believed that there was no need for clergy, and that the true path to Jesus was through individual prayer. They believed that humans were essentially in charge of their own destiny; that “an ‘Inner Light’ was

attached to all human souls” (Maren). Instead of having clergymen governing the Quaker congregations, the committees were led by both men and women. In these groups, women had the authority to lead—something that was considered radical in the seventeenth century (Maren). With Cane Creek’s strong advocacy, not only did it become a chief area of Quakerism in the south, but it also became a major influence that led others to establish their own religious groups. Cane Creek became known as the “Mother of Meetings,” giving rise to “several other Quaker meetings in the area including the Rocky River, New Garden, Spring, Centre, and Deep River meetings” (“Cane Creek Meeting”).

Although their religious ideals persisted throughout the years, the Cane Creek Quakers had unfortunately entered a period of decline during the War of the Regulation, as well as during the American Revolution. They stayed true to their pacifist principles, refusing to take part in the bloodshed that warfare had inevitably introduced. Because of this, they were often shunned by other colonists, who believed that “Friends benefited from [their] sacrifices and yet refused to participate in the financial or human cost of warfare” (Maren). The tension between the Quakers and Anglicans led to two large rebellions that eventually halted the political influence of the Quakers (White 6).

Quaker immigration to the Piedmont region of NC stopped in the aftermath of the American Revolution. Many fled to the west to escape slavery, while others chose to stay in NC and “turned from a life of public displays to one of quiet spiritual existence and community service” (White 7). In 1866, the Cane Creek Quakers decided to build a school—“Sylvan Academy”—with the support of the Baltimore Association (“Cane Creek Meeting”). The school operated under the Quakers until 1903, and it eventually became what we know today as the Sylvan Elementary School in Alamance County.

However small the Society of Friends became; the Snow Camp historic site and the Sylvan Elementary School are modern reminders of Quaker core values. They remind us to serve the greater good; to serve people through peaceful, humble, and meaningful ways—no matter who they are, or where they come from. This is precisely why I am fond of the Cane Creek Quakers: they promoted equality, governing their lives in ways that empowered humanity on local, national, and global scales. Their values have convinced me that I, too, can find my Inner Light, and celebrate the beauty of the world.

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