

THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
WEST BRANCH, IOWA

by
Sally Johnson Ketcham

Furnishing Plan
Section E

October, 1972
Omaha, Nebraska

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QUAKER MEETING HOUSE WEST BRANCH

The old Quaker Meeting House was built in the mid 1850's. Herbert Hoover's mother often spoke before the congregation that worshipped in this building. Hoover, as a child, attended meetings here with his parents. In 1964-65, after being moved to its present site on the east side of Downey Street opposite the Presidential Library, it was restored to its near original appearance.

SKETCH BY
BILL WAGNER

DESCRIPTION OF RECOMMENDED FURNISHINGS

"The West Branch Meetinghouse
was originally located on the site of the present brick Friends Church
on North Downey Street."
Built in 1856 from lumber hauled from Big Grove (now Newport), Iowa, it was a substantial building. In later years, a porch, a room for the babies, sheds for the teams and horses, and fences were added. Trees shaded the grounds and cooled hot summer days. Here, Jesse and Huldah Hoover, devout Quakers, came to worship, bringing with them Tad, Herbert, and May. Perhaps there was special pressure on the boys to be "good" on meeting days, for their mother, Huldah, was a minister in the church and highly respected.

There were two entrances into the Meeting House, one for women and the other for men. A doorway led into a room at the west of the structure in which the women left their babies, while the meeting was in progress. A partition down the middle divided the Meeting House into two sections. This partition was about four and a half feet high; and a man standing near could see over it only when standing. Shutters could be raised to the ceiling, making two separate rooms. These were needed when "business sessions" were being conducted. Questions that involved the entire meeting were solved by the men sending a messenger to confer with a messenger from the women's side regarding the result of each's deliberations.^{1/}

^{1/} Edwin C. Bearss, "The Hoover Houses and Community Structures," Historic Structures Report (November 30, 1971), pp. 129-130.

There was no pulpit. ~~Instead~~ "Instead, two tiers of seats, one above the other 'like seats in an amphitheater, running the width of the house' was built.^{2/}" ~~the width of the house" was built.~~^{2/} On the lowest tier of seats sat the elders, with the ministers above them. The most important or a visiting minister sat on the topmost seat next to the partition, with those of lesser importance grading off away from him to the left. This was duplicated on the women's side.

There was no formula for service observation. When someone was moved by the "guiding of the Spirit" he would preach or pray; but if not, silence was maintained throughout the meeting, until one of the ministers indicated by shaking the hand of his neighbor that the session was at an end. There was neither choir nor organ; and Huldah Minthorn Hoover ^{was among the} ~~had broken~~ ^{first to break precedent} ~~precedent~~, when moved by the Spirit, she had raised her voice in hymn during the funeral services for her father. Hannah Bean, the Hoover boys' step-grandmother, sang old hymns at meeting, but "there were many of those who greatly feared that she was moved by vanity."^{3/} The pews were narrow and had straight high backs, which must have been uncomfortable for small children whose feet did not yet touch the floor.

To the north of the Meeting House lay the old cemetery, which was replaced in 1879 by a new cemetery. Ironically, the first burial in the latter was to be Jesse Hoover in the winter of 1880.

^{2/} Ibid., p. 130.

^{3/} Ibid.

3

In 188³, there was a schism in the membership of the West Branch Meeting House. This led to changes in the building itself. The partitions were removed and ~~everything was modernized.~~ ^{the interior made to} ^{4/} conform to the evangelical standards of Turneyite Quakers. The Meeting House continued to served as the Friends' Church until 1915, when a new brick Friends' Church was constructed. The old Meeting House became a theater and then a garage. It was not until 1964 that the structure was rescued by West Branch citizens, moved near the Herbert Hoover Birthplace, and restored to its early appearance by the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation. The building's exterior was restored; and seats and interior fixtures for the restoration were salvaged from the Hickory Grove Meeting House, a contemporary structure. It is planned that the Meeting House will be refurnished to the period 1884, before the removal of the partitions and other remodeling took place.

Mrs. Harriette Odell discussed the interior furnishings of the Meeting House with Tad and Herbert Hoover. Her description, with an accompanying diagram, is the best we have today. The cousins agreed that the room was divided by a partition, which could be completely closed by shutters. Opposite the doorways, there were the raised tiers of seats for the ministry and elders. Below these seats were tables for the clerk of the meeting, and then the pews. The women, during cold weather, entered the Meeting House carrying soap stones, which they placed on the rail of one of the stoves used to heat the building. The stones

4/ Ibid., 111-112.

would then be slipped into a flannel bag and placed under the feet of the women in the pews to keep them warm.^{5/} In the room in which the babies were cared for, there were rocking chairs, a warm stove (in the winter), and a cradle.^{6/}

The interior today is painted a soft gray; and it is recorded that in 1879 painters used a coat of "dove colored paint" to freshen the interior of the building. Ten years later, new paint and mahogany finish were applied.^{7/} In December, 1883, "four hanging lamps suitable for lighting the house better" were purchased; and one of the duties of William Miles, the janitor, was to see that the lamps were clean and "in good condition to give a clean bright light."^{8/} He was expected also to light the lamps at the porch when these were needed. The new lamps purchased in 1883 do not appear to have been adequate, for in the spring of 1890, the trustees purchased a set of "new and better lamps" and disposed of the old.^{9/}

FURNISHINGS

The Meeting Rooms

Both sides of the meeting rooms were furnished alike, so that whatever is proposed for one side of the house, with minor exceptions, is proposed for the other side also. The present furnishings came from the Hickory Grove Meeting House, which is said to be contemporary with the West Branch Meeting House. There

^{5/} See diagram and accompanying notes, p. 5.

^{6/} Ibid.

^{7/} Bearss, op. cit., p. 113.

^{8/} Ibid., pp. 112-113.

^{9/} Ibid.

PLATE XXVI

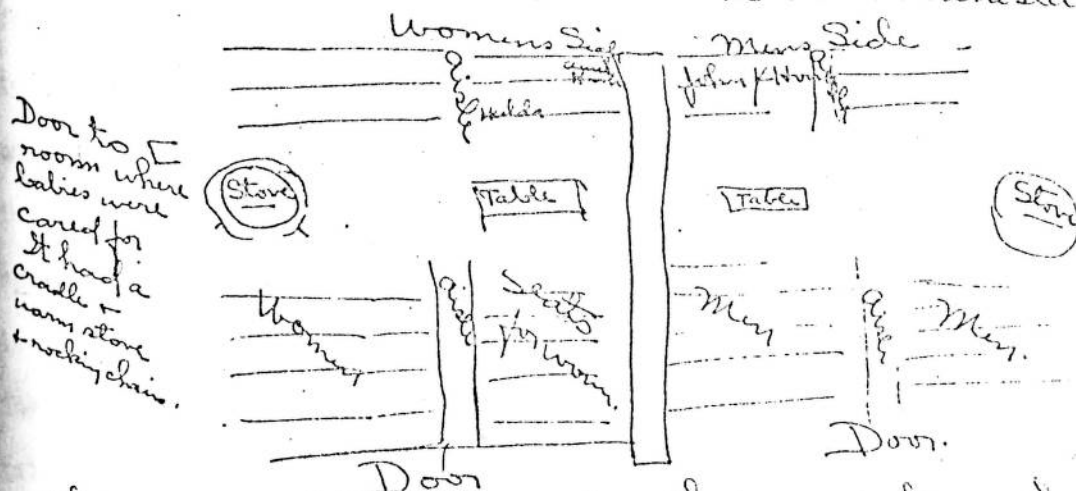
Friends Meeting House

The interior arrangements of the Meeting House, circa 1832, as recalled by Harriette Odell, and Theodore and Herbert Hoover. From Letter Harriette Odell to Lou Henry Hoover, undated, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Post-Presidential Years--Birthplace.

Once in California Tad and Bert and I had a merry time trying to remember all about that meeting. It filled me with awe it was so different from the noisy Indian Sunday School that was my only church experience.

The room was divided through the center with a partition about 6 feet high. From the ceiling shutters could be rolled down to the partition making two separate rooms. This was not often done.

At the far end of the room as one entered were raised seats for those of ministry and elders. Just below these was a table for the clerk of the meeting (for mid week meetings) then the pews. On the top row on the men's side sat John Y. Hoover. On the top row on the woman's side sat Aunt Hannah Bean. These were the elder ministers.



The women would enter carrying their soap stones place them on the nail around stove to heat. They slip them into a flannel bag and quietly slip into a pew placing the warm stone under their feet. (We have mother's stones). The pews were narrow and straight high back very severe for restless children.

From Bearss, op. cit., p. 216.

are differences, however, in these furnishings and those used in the West Branch Meeting House. The Hickory Grove pews, occupied by the ministry and elders, had a hinged folding desk attached to the back of the bottom row of tiers. This was for the use of the clerk during mid-week meetings. In the West Branch Meeting House, two tables were located near the partition for the clerks to write upon. Opposite these tables were located the heating stoves. In the Hickory Grove Meeting House, the stoves were situated farther back amid the pews occupied by the congregation. At the present time, the furnishing plan of the Hickory Grove Meeting House has been followed in the West Branch Meeting House; however, it is recommended that the furnishings from the Hickory Grove Meeting House be adjusted to the plan provided by Mrs. Odell and concurred in by the Hoovers.

Partitions The partitions were not removed from the Meeting House until 1885, a year after the period of restoration and re-furnishing. A note on the HABS drawings of the Meeting House indicates that the partitions taken from Hickory Grove were originally at opposite ends of the meeting room. "To make fit in this [the West Branch Meeting House] it was necessary to change sections as the facing bench step ups were different in the two meeting Houses;" however, it was noted that "otherwise the partition fit perfectly." ^{10/} It is recommended that these be retained, since there is little likelihood that the original partitions

^{10/} HABS Drawing, Sheet 10.

survived.

Pews The number of facing benches poses somewhat of a problem. The sketch that Mrs. Odell made may be interpreted two ways. There were three tiers of raised seats for the ministry and elders; or Mrs. Odell's top line, which extends across the partition, was intended to indicate the wall of the building. Since contemporary partitions are difficult to locate; and the present partitions cannot be adjusted to a third tier of seats, it is recommended that the latter interpretation be accepted. The third or top line of the diagram is considered the outer wall; and on each side of the partition there are two tiers of seats divided by an aisle.

Mrs. Odell commented that the seats in the West Branch Church were narrow and straight and high back, which were very severe for restless children.^{11/} The present benches from the Hickory Grove Meeting House fit the above description. They are made of wood, approximately one foot and five-eighths inches deep and two feet four inches high. It is recommended that the present seats for both the facing benches and the congregation be retained. It should be noted, however, that in 1889, when the church was overhauled with new paint, mahogany finish was applied to the interior. It is quite possible that the benches were stained mahogany and not painted, as they are today, in the West Branch Meeting House. It is recommended that the benches, if possible, be refinished to a mahogany stain.

^{11/} Bearss, op. cit., p. 131.

As the benches are now located, the stoves are in the midst of the pews. Their placement is indicated by the flues in the center of each outer wall. The diagram of Mrs. Odell, however, indicates the stoves were located between the facing benches and the pews, opposite the clerk's table. This placement necessitates the use of longer stove pipes. Nevertheless, it is recommended that Mrs. Odell's diagram be adhered to as much as possible. The pews for the members of the Meeting House should be arranged in rows, as indicated by Mrs. Odell, with no provision for stoves inbetween the rows.

Stoves The present base burners in the Meeting House appear to be of recent vintage. It is recommended that these be replaced by two matching heating stoves, c. 1855-1884. Although there is no indication that the stoves were replaced in the Meeting House, it is unlikely that the original stoves would have been retained over a thirty year period. Probably, sometime in the 1870's, it would have been necessary to obtain new and larger stoves to heat the structure during the harsh Iowa winters. The stove recommended would be similar to the Acme Cannon stove, which was cast iron, burned either coal or wood, and was intended for stores and large rooms. Each stove should rest on a protective metal plate.

Beside the stoves, there should be a pile of split wood for keeping the fire going. A small bucket near each stove should contain pieces of coal to be used for additional heat in the winter. In the summer, the wood and coal may be removed from

the rooms.

Encircling the stove in the women's side, there should be a low rail, approximately ^{24-30 inches} ~~two feet~~ high, with regularly spaced spindles, c. 1860's. Preferably, this should be made of metal, brass or iron. The rail probably served a dual purpose. It may have been used by the ladies to heat their soap stones in the winter; but it also may have prevented small children from toddling into a potentially dangerous area. In the winter it may be desirable to place a few soap stone foot warmers against the wall to illustrate early warming devices.

"Tables. As indicated on page 6, there are hinged tables on the backs of the elders' tier of seats from Hickory Grove, West Branch did not use this type of clerk's table. Instead tables were placed on the floor in front of the facing benches near the doorway in the partition. To do this the Hickory Grove seats will have to be altered.

It is recommended that the front pews on each side of the meetinghouse be removed to make room for the clerks' tables and at the same time do away with the hinged tables on the backs of these seats.

The tables, one on each side of the partition, should be similar in appearance. The style recommended should be plain with a rectangular top approximately 45-48 inches long and 24-28 inches deep. It should be large enough for a clerk and his assistant to work comfortably. lla/ A table with one or two drawers and simply turned legs is preferred. There should be no other decorative motif. This style table, c1850's or 1860's, is usually walnut or stained mahogany."

"lla/ See memorandum from David L. Hieb to Director, Subject, Furnishing Plans, HEHO; May 31, 1973"

*Raise
to rest*

The chairs recommended are the "Common Read Seat Chairs," which were produced over an extended period and seem to have been very popular. Cheapness probably recommended them. The chair had two slats across the back, supported by two rounded side rails that became the rear legs of the chair. The seat was usually a flag seat, although some had a woven seat. The front legs were rounded, tapering at the bottom. The two sides and front were supported by double stretchers; and the back legs had a single stretcher.

Lighting At the present time, lighting is provided by a series of bracket lamps attached to the wall behind the facing benches. The records, however, indicate that four hanging lamps were purchased in 1883 for the room; and these were replaced in 1890. It is not possible today to know exactly what type of "hanging lamp" was used; but the strong possibility exists that these were similar to the store and hall kerosene hanging lamps of the period.^{12/} These had embossed brass fonts, glass chimneys, wire frames, tin or glass shades, and smoke bells. The light generated by this style lamp probably was inadequate; and seven years later, the need would justify the purchase of a chandelier-type light, with several arms radiating from the center to give greater illumination.

It is recommended that two hanging lamps, similar to those described above, be hung in each meeting room. These

^{12/} Angle lamps are a second option, but in this structure, the open lamp is preferred.

should be suspended from the ceiling and centered over the aisles between the pews.

It was William Miles' job to "light the lamps on the porch when needed." To meet this requirement, it is recommended that two brass kerosene lamps, with glass chimneys and metal reflectors, be attached to the wall beside the doorways leading into the meeting rooms.

Floors The present floors are bare; and it is recommended that these remain so. Runners of a dark plastic protect the aisles; and it may be, when the runners are outworn, clear plastic runners will be preferred.

The Nursery

The Cry Room is not original to the church. It was removed from another Meeting House and added to the women's side, where originally such a room existed before renovations were made. This addition is an interesting one; and it, too, should be furnished to complete the interpretation of the Quaker Meeting House. The room has two windows on the north and south walls. Entry is gained through a door on the west wall; and a second door on the east partition opens to an attached privy.

Mrs. Odell has given us the only description of this room, which she said contained a cradle, rocking chairs, and a stove.^{13/} This room unfortunately is not included in her diagram.

Clothes Hooks Surrounding the room, on each wall, are metal, two-prong hooks for the women to use to hang their wraps.

^{13/} See Mrs. Odell's notes, p. 5.

This is an interesting feature and should be retained. Nine of the original hooks, however, are broken or missing; and these should be replaced.

Stove A stove should be placed in the northwest corner of the room and connected by stove pipe to the existing flue.^{14/} The stove recommended may be either a small pot-bellied heating stove, c. 1880's, or it may be the earlier rectangular heating stove, with ornate metal design, popular from the 1840's through the 1860's. The stove should set on a metal protective mat; and a small pile of split wood should be placed beside the stove. Since the hooks go entirely around the room, it is possible that the stove was removed during warm weather and stored in one of the sheds nearby. This practice may be followed by the area also.

Curtains It is recommended that plain gray calico curtains, with a small design, be hung at the south and north windows. Preferably, this should be a reproduction of an early pattern. The curtains should be hemmed at top and bottom approximately two inches; and the top should be double stitched to permit a brass curtain rod to pass through. These curtains should be hung from the brass rod and to approximately three inches below the sill. Bright light, especially in the summer, would have kept small babies awake.

Cradles Mrs. Odell mentions one cradle only; however, in a letter, Huldah Hoover wrote that nine babies had been born in West Branch in two weeks, six of them within a forty-eight

^{14/} The exact location of the stove flue cannot be determined from present HABS drawings, with supplement by Architect Wagner, at hand.

period.^{15/} More than one cradle or crib would have been needed to accommodate the babies. It is recommended that two walnut spool-turned cribs be set against the east wall. These should have four baluster-or spool-turned posts, plain top and bottom rails, with interspaced spool-turned spindles.^{16/} *Plain, rectangular or also.*

One cradle on rockers also should be in the Cry Room for the smaller or fussier babies. The cradle should have simple ~~carved~~^{curved} head and foot boards. The sides should be plain; and hand holes may or may not be cut into the sides.

Both cribs and cradle should have small husk-filled mattresses. No quilts are recommended, since each mother probably brought her baby in its coverings.

Chairs A straight chair should be set beside the east doorway and against the partition. The chair should be similar to the "Common Reed Seat Chairs" recommended for the clerks' chairs in the Meeting House. The back of each chair should have two slats fitted into two round side rails, which become the back legs of the chair. The seat should be rush. The front legs should be rounded and slightly tapered at the bottom. The legs should be braced by double stretchers. The chairs preferably should have the old popular red stain finish.

Two rocking chairs are recommended. These should be placed near the north window and in the southwest corner of the room. The chairs should be simple ladder-back rockers,

^{15/} Maud Stratton, Herbert Hoover's Home Town (Private Publishing, 1948), p. 44.

^{16/} Thomas H. Ormsbee, Field Guide to American Victorian Furniture (New York, 1952), pp. 344-345.

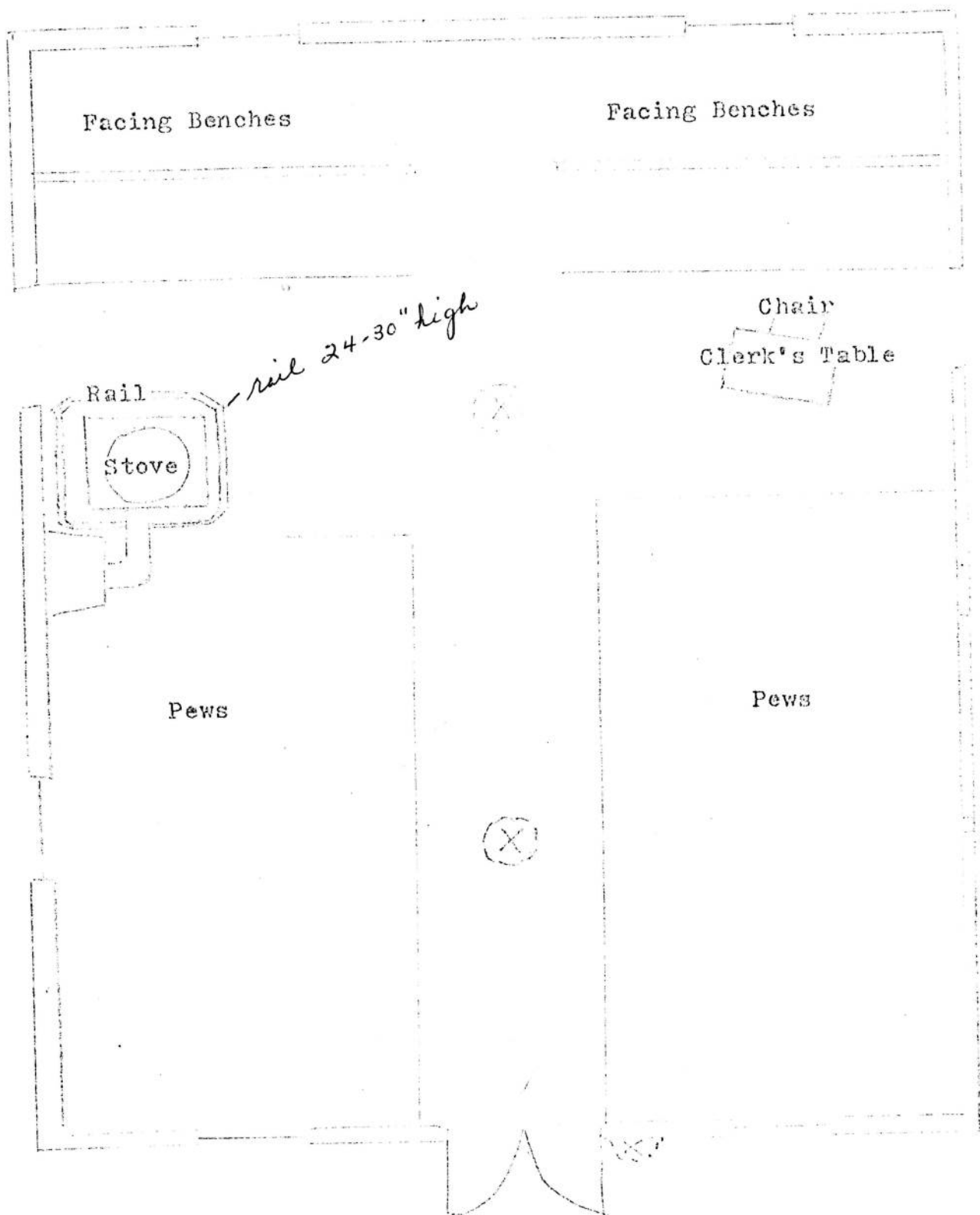
with rounded side rails, rush seats, rounded an tapering front legs, and balanced rockers. Neither chair should have arms. This style rocking chair was popular over an extended period of time; and the simplicity of the style may have appealed to the Quaker ladies.

Table A small table should be set under the south window. This would have been used for extra baby supplies such as diapers or medicines, which the mothers brought, and perhaps even to change the baby. The table should have a small rectangular overhanging top, with a plain three or four inch skirt. The four legs should be squared and slightly tapered at the bottom. The table should be stained the old red color.

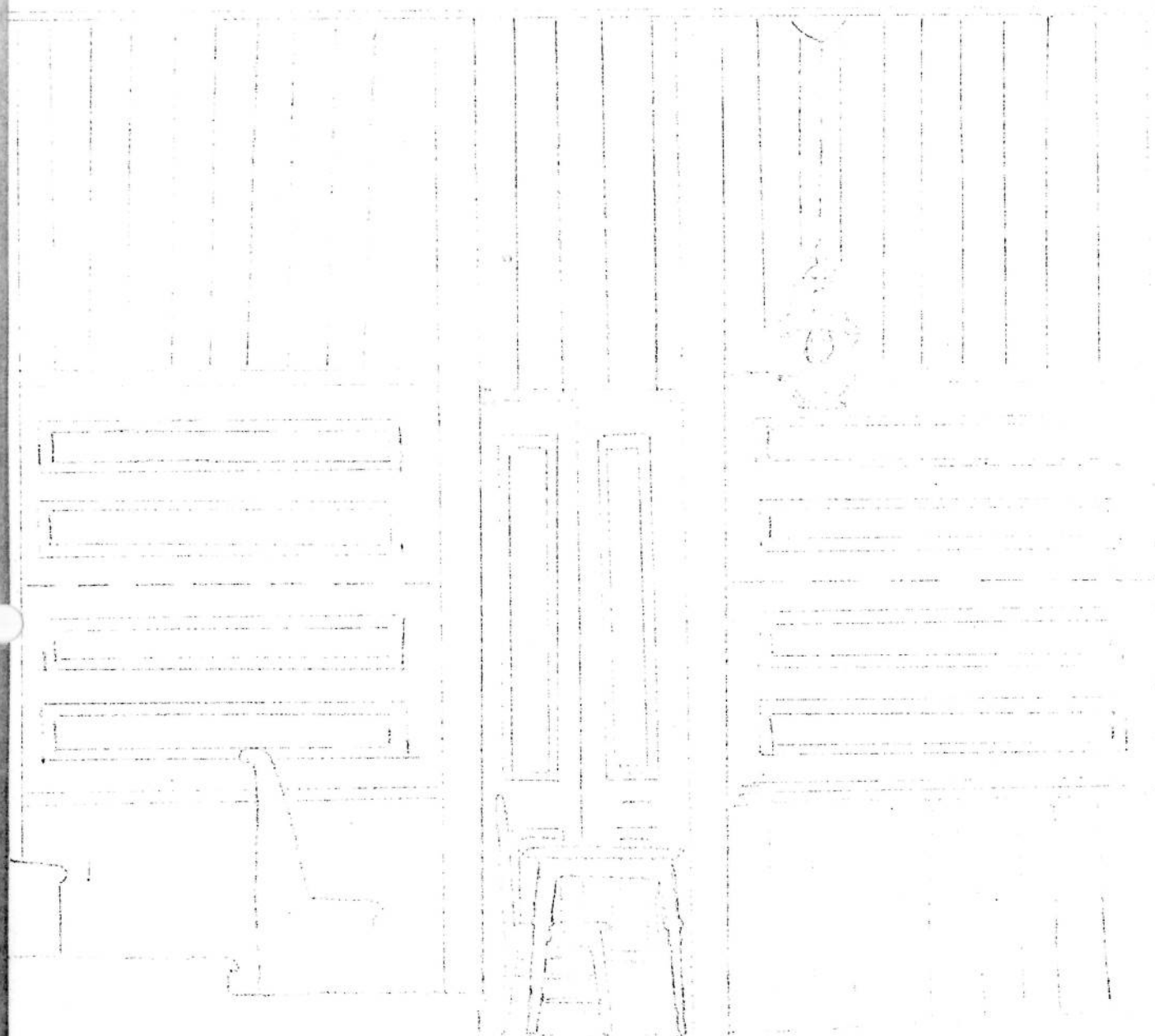
Lighting There was no indication of the walls of the present addition that lamps were once attached to them. It is recommended, however, that two cast iron bracket lamps be fastened to the walls, one near the east doorway and the other near the west or outer door. These should have mercury reflectors behind them.

Floors No carpets are recommended for this area. The floor should be swept clean periodically and left bare.

FLOOR PLANS AND ELEVATIONS

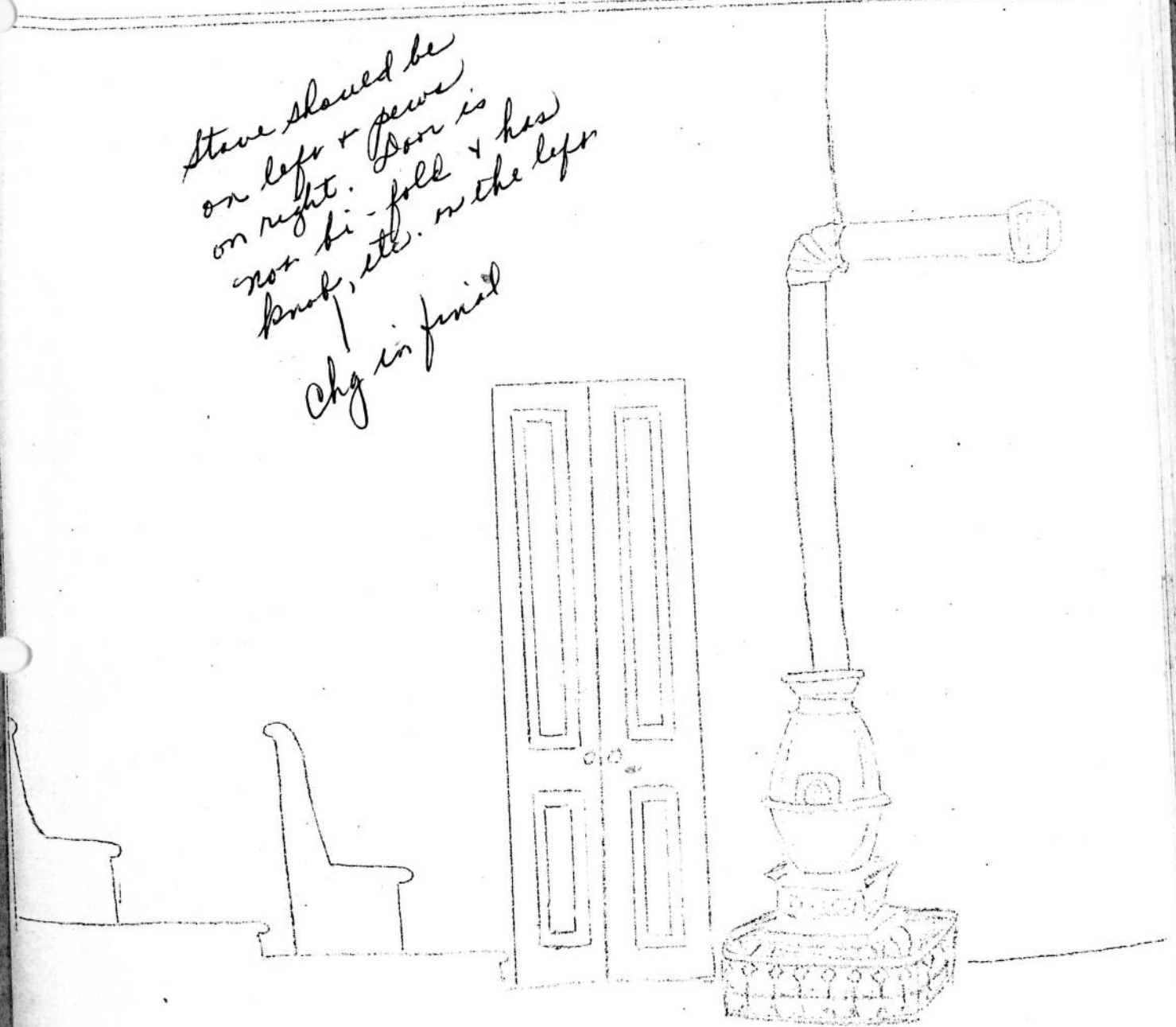


Approx.
1/4" = 1'0"

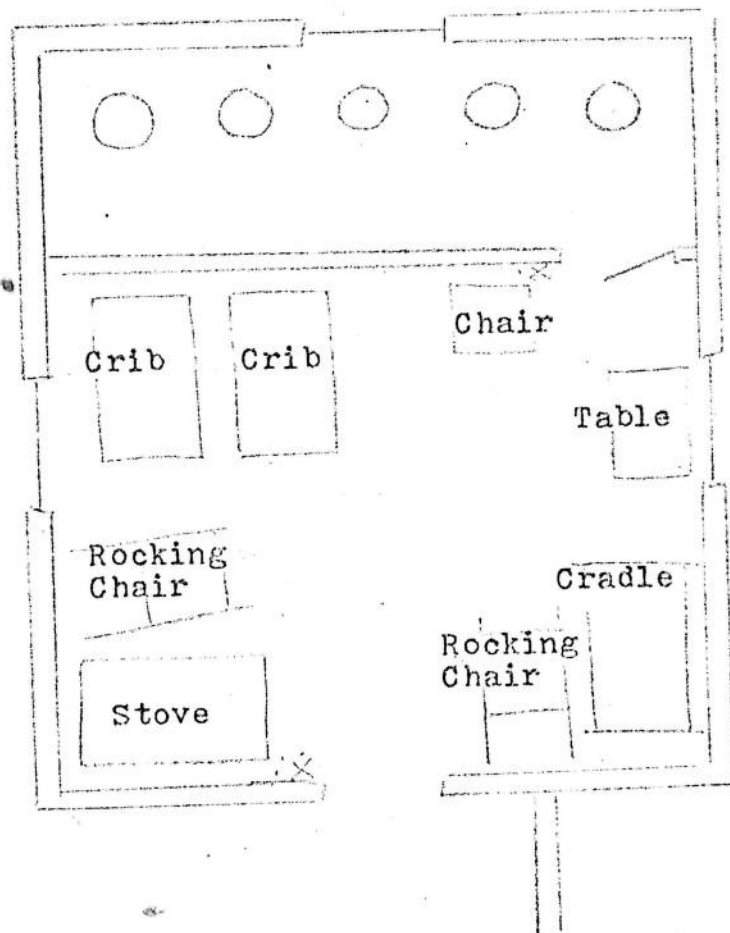


MEETING ROOM (WOMEN'S)
South Elevation

Stove should be
 on left + pewe
 on right. Door is
 not bi-fold + has
 knob, etc. on the left
 Chg in final



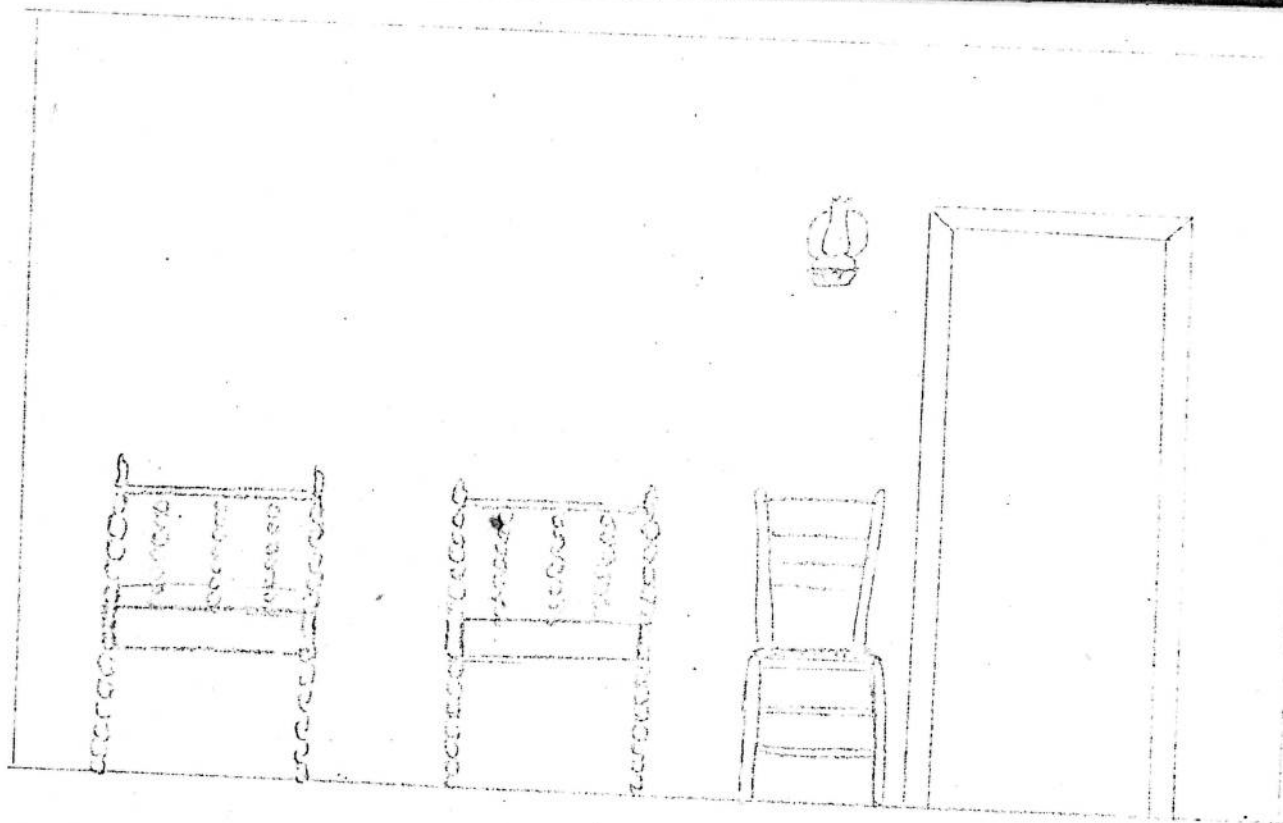
MEETING ROOM (WOMEN'S)
 North Elevation



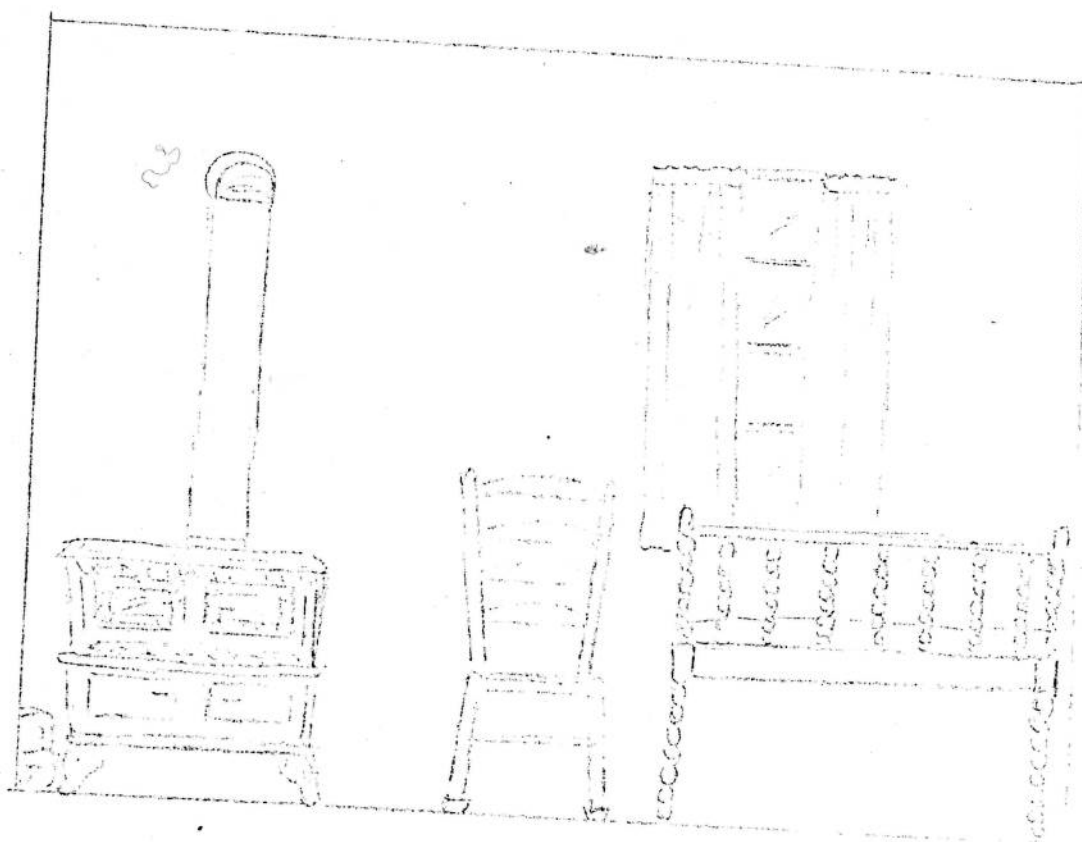
NURSERY OR CRY ROOM

N

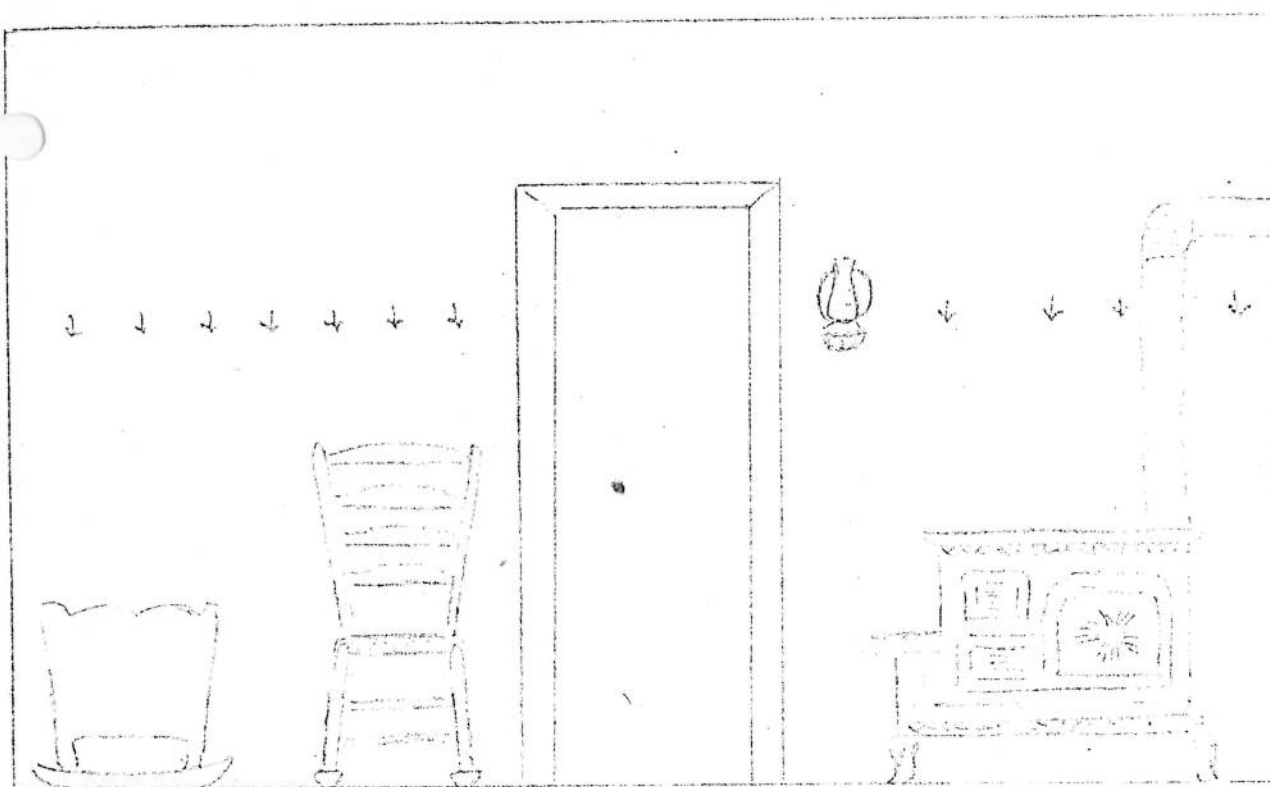
Approx.
 $1/4" = 1'0"$



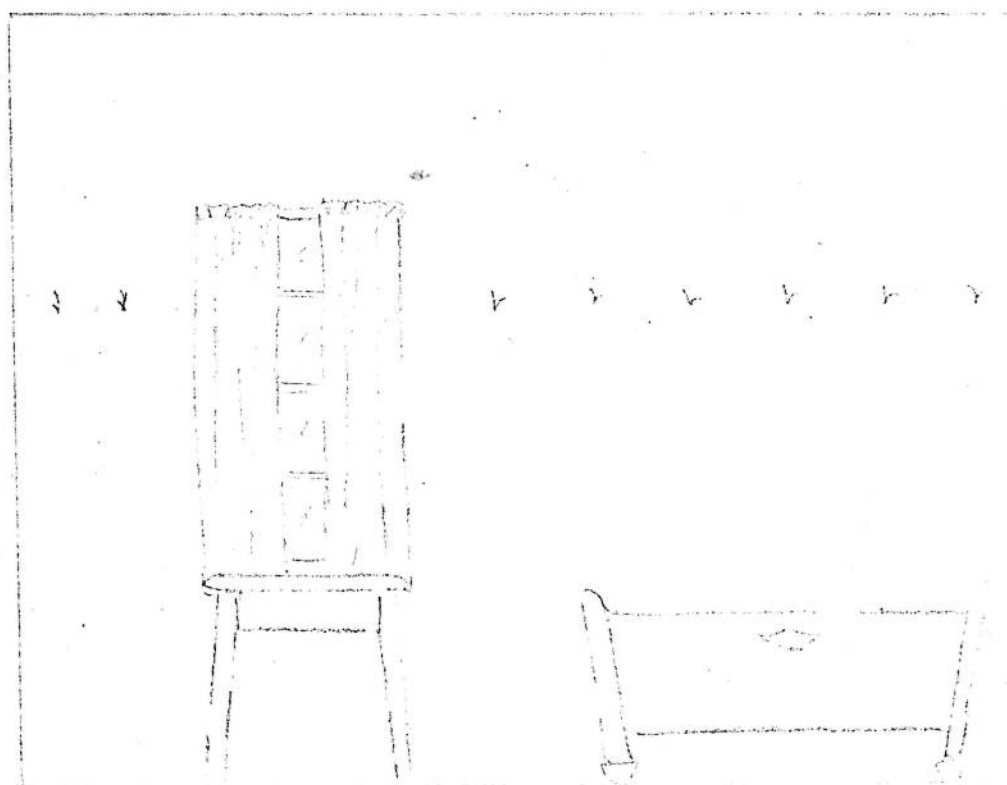
East Elevation



North Elevation



West Elevation



South Elevation

ESTIMATES

Estimates

Meeting Rooms

Cost of making hinged table	200.00
Pews, staining	\$750.00
Stoves, two	~~150.00~~ 300.00
Railing	~~75.00~~ 200.00
Soapstone warmers, three	55.00
Tables, ~~two~~	~~110.00~~
Chairs, ~~two~~	~~90.00~~
Hanging lamps, four	~~260.00~~ 600.00
Porch lamps, two	~~80.00~~ 100.00
	~~1570.00~~
	2,205.00

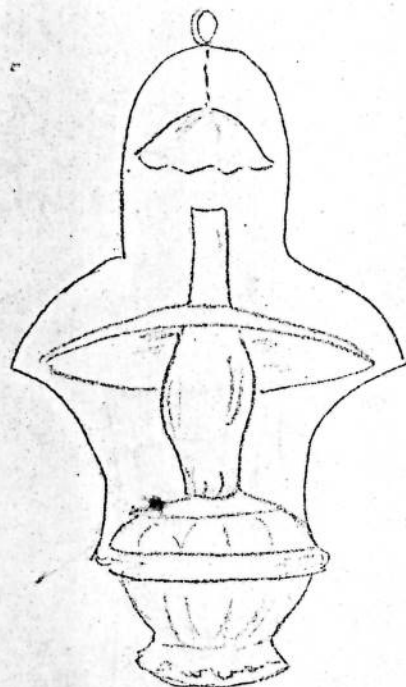
Nursery

Clothes hooks, nine	27.00
Stove	~~110.00~~ 175.00
Curtains, calico	40.00
Brass rods	~~8.00~~ 15.00
Cribs, two	~~190.00~~ 400.00
Cradle	~~65.00~~ 150.00
Chair, straight	~~45.00~~ 75.00
Rocking chairs, two	~~100.00~~ 300.00
Table	~~50.00~~ 85.00
Bracket lamps, two	~~120.00~~ 160.00
	~~765.00~~
	1,427.00

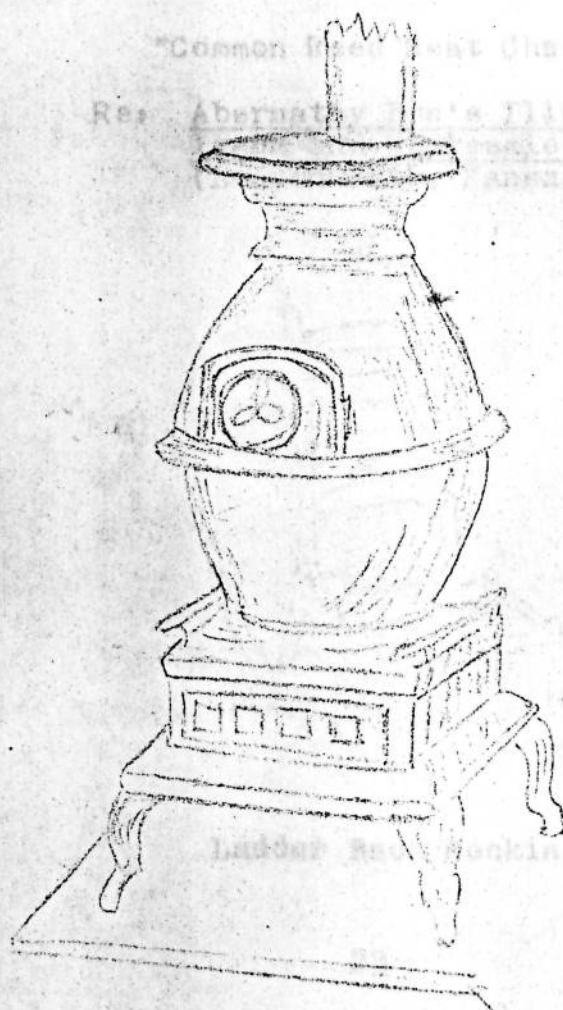
Grand Total

~~\$2935.00~~
3,632.00

APPENDIX

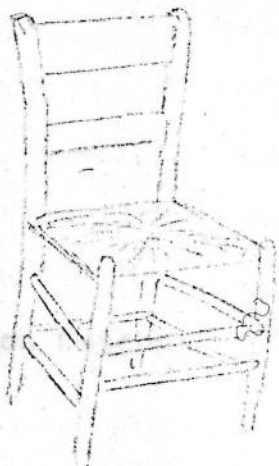


Hanging lamp with smoke bell.



Heating stove, burning either coal or wood.

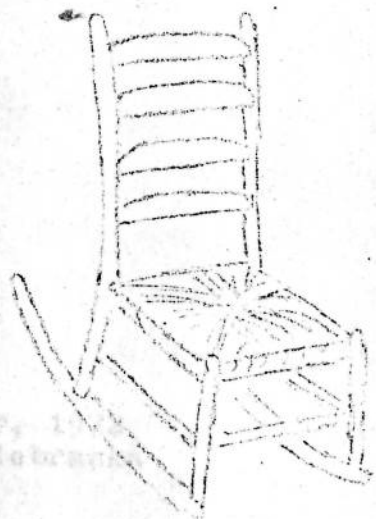
THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
WEST BRANCH, IOWA



Sally Johnson

"Common Reed Seat Chair"

Re: Abernathy Bro's Illustrated Cata-
logue and Wholesale Price List
(Leavenworth, Kansas, 1872).



October, 1872
Omaha, Nebraska

Ladder Back Rocking Chair

THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
WEST BRANCH, IOWA

by
Sally Johnson Ketcham

Furnishing Plan
Section F

October, 1972
Omaha, Nebraska

INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE AND PROTECTION

At the present time, the Meeting House is open to visitors, but guided tours are given only upon special occasions or upon request. An audio talk is available in the Meeting Room; and the talk apparently is popular with visitors, who do not miss the opportunity to press the button to commence the speech. ~~Since the Meeting House presently is owned by the Herbert Hoover Birthplace Foundation, the principal responsibility of the Park Service has been to provide house-keeping and maintenance.~~

~~When the National Park Service assumes ownership of the Quaker Meeting House and a~~ ^{when the} furnishing plan is instituted, the area may plan to have conducted tours of the Meeting House, at least during the summer. Since only a minimum of furnishings are projected, protection principally will be focused on breakable items, such as the porch lamps, which have glass chimneys, and attempts to leave mementos, such as carved initials on pews or on tables. The clerks' chairs are not constructed sturdily; and being antiques, these should be protected from visitors' attempts to sit on them. This may best be accomplished by drawing the chair to the table completely. Visitors, however, may wish to rest and to contemplate in the quiet of the congregation's pews. Since this is a part of the total experience of the visit, this moment of relaxation should not

be discouraged. The pews are not original to the West Branch Meeting House and appear to be sturdy enough to sustain such use.

The Nursery or Cry Room will interest women and children especially. It is important that the cribs and cradle have mattresses on them; and these should be shaken regularly, so that dust does not appear on them. No self-respecting Quaker mother would have permitted her baby to lay in a dirty crib. The calico curtains should be kept crisp and fresh. All of the furniture here, as in the Meeting House, should be cleaned regularly, so that the furnishings are spotless. Regular attention should be paid to the condition of the floors and windows.

No barriers are planned for the Meeting Rooms. The runners on the floor help to direct visitors; and to date the latter have been able to enjoy the rooms freely. Continuance of this policy is recommended. Barriers are not recommended for the Nursery at this time; however, the area may discover that barriers will be necessary in the future, if the Meeting House remains unmanned. The temptation to sit in the chair or rocking chairs may lead to the destruction of these fragile items.

LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE CALL RECORD

DATE: 3-21-75

To: Vera Craig Office: Harpers Ferry
From: Lauretta Mintzmyer & Pat Wheeler Office: Herbert Hoover
Subject: Historical furnishings and costumes

Consulted with Vera Craig about furnishings in the cry room of the Quaker Meetinghouse. She approved change of Furnishing plan from suggested spool turned crib to a cradle of similar design or bentwood style cradle of relative plain design of the same vintage.

Also ask if a gaberdine type fabric would be appropriate for Quaker costumes of 1875-1880 in this area. She assured us this would be alright as they used a corded fabric very similar in looks to gaberdine.

cc: Vera Craig
Regional Director
Furnishing Plan Quaker Meetinghouse

Pat Wheeler
(Signature)