

The Proto-Ideal Meeting House

In 1738, Friends in Springfield, Pennsylvania erected a doubled meeting house

featuring two doors on the facade, one for each sex. This new meeting house (Figure 27)

was a one-story, five-bay building with a gambrel roof and doors in the second and fourth

bays. The erection of Springfield represented a critical step in meeting house construction

because for the first time a men's door and a women's door existed on the same facade.

Like Radnor, it seems that Springfield had a smaller room for the women Friends, since

the window in the middle bay is directly in the center of the building. Springfield marks

an important step towards granting women a more equal status. Instead of entering on a

different side, women had a separate but equal door on the same facade and an almost

equal room on the interior. Later examples of the Proto-Ideal Plan were erected

throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century, including at Evesham (New Jersey)

in 1760 (an early two-story Proto-Ideal) and Hardwick, New Jersey (Figure 28) in 1763.

When a separate room for the women was added at Mansfield (New Jersey), it also

reflected the Proto-Ideal Plan.⁶¹

A late example of the five-bay proto-ideal Plan is the South River Meeting House

in Lynchburg, Virginia (Figure 29). This stone meeting house was a one-story, end-

gabled building with doors in the second and fourth bays. Abandoned around 1840, the

⁶¹ Illustration of Springfield Friends Meeting, Campbell Collection, vol. 17, p. 201, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Tvaryanas, pp. 67, 175-176; Bonner, p. 15. Tvaryanas wrote that Hardwick was the earliest example of this style, although he also mentioned Evesham. Both of these buildings were erected after Springfield.