NOTES AND QUERIES

In the possession of Mr. W. H. Farquhar, of West Brownsville, Pennsylvania, are the original manuscripts of the Westland (Washington County, Pennsylvania) Monthly Meeting Minutes of the Society of Friends from March, 1791, to March, 1792, inclusive, and of Extracts from the Minutes of the Yearly Meeting held in Baltimore for the western shore of Maryland and the adjacent parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia dated from 1791 to 1795 inclusive, and from 1802 to 1805 inclusive, and made for the Westland Monthly Meeting. To Professor Harry R. Warfel, of Bucknell College, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, whose article on "David Bruce, Federalist Poet of Western Pennsylvania" we published last year we are indebted for calling our attention to these manuscripts. To Mr. Farquhar we are indebted for the good will and promptness with which the material was submitted to us for examination and transcript.

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, as they are more commonly known, were closely organized. In fact to one only acquainted with their religious tenets and social customs the fixity of their organization is a matter of peculiar interest greatly intensified by the examination of original minutes such as those mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The Friends were organized in monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings with definite geographical boundaries. The monthly meeting, the local unit is subordinate to the quarterly meeting embracing several monthly meetings, and the quarterly meeting to the yearly meeting embracing several quarterly meetings. The yearly meeting is the source of discipline and the final judge of all questions.

Westland, according to the map in James Bowden's History of the Society of Friends in America (2 vols. London, 1854), I, facing p 1, was west of the Monongahela River near the present site of West Brownsville, Pennsylvania. Here was found the first monthly meeting of the Society of Friends west of the Allegheny Mountains.

The Quaker migration into Western Pennsylvania began before 1770. Henry Beeson, from Virginia, seems to have been the first. From Berkeley County, Virginia, he moved west and made the first settlement in what was afterwards Uniontown, Pennsylvania. By 1773 a little group of Friends had established homes in this new settlement. In 1782 these settlers, mainly from Virginia and steadily increasing in numbers, requested of the Hopewell Monthly Meeting of Virginia the privileges of having a Preparative Meeting set up in the new settlement and by 1785 their numbers justified the establishment of the Westland Monthly Meeting "to be held alternately on the east and west side of the Monongahela River," according to Rufus M. Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism (2 vols. New York, 1921), I, 387, a work from which most of the information here is derived.
Until 1789 the Westland Monthly Meeting, the Hopewell Monthly Meeting from which it was derived, and the Fairfax Quarterly Meeting to which they belonged were subordinate to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. After this date they came under the Baltimore Yearly Meeting, which included Pennsylvania west of the Susquehanna River.

According to Jones (op. cit. I, 388), "So rapidly did Friends increase in the Monongahela region of Pennsylvania that a second monthly meeting was organized there on the west side of the river in 1788, named Redstone Monthly Meeting. To this or its companion monthly meeting on the west side of the river, all the early pioneers coming from the east and south carried their remoral certificates."

In 1797, a date included in the years covered by these old documents under consideration, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting granted the Friends along the Monongahela River a quarterly meeting of their own, named Redstone Quarterly Meeting.

Some idea of the numbers of the Friends in this immediate region can be gathered from the statement of Jones (loc. cit., 388) who says, "According to the minutes of this Quarterly Meeting [Redstone] there were one hundred and eighty-one families in its membership in 1812, but this was after multitudes of Friends had passed through and gone further on to Ohio and Indiana."

Official documents rarely contain graphic historical materials. Jones (loc. cit. 393-395) discusses this aspect of Quaker minutes. But they nevertheless, in spite of recognized short-comings, are of high value.

The documents under consideration, which we hope to publish in this volume of this magazine, throw light on the early settlement of Western Pennsylvania. Plainly, as one may judge from such dry material as the lists of names in these minutes, not all the pioneers were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians.

From the minutes of the Westland Monthly Meeting the first installment of which follows, one gathers among other things the following impressions: The organization of the Friends, as already mentioned, was tight. They were a select group with rigid requirements for membership association. They frowned upon intimate association with others, as is illustrated by repeated complaints against marriage without the Society.

In the broad sense of the word puritanism, these Western Pennsylvania Quakers were as puritan as the contemporary inhabitants of Boston and Salem. These old minutes reveal also a deep spirituality not surpassed anywhere in New England. The prudence and common sense of the leaders crops out of these minutes as a general revelation. Deliberation, consideration, patience, appear in combination with intensity, seriousness, and solidity. Jones (loc. cit., 393) points out that such minutes throw light on
the moral conditions of the age. Human society even in such select circles has always had its shortcomings. As one gathers from these minutes, but more particularly from the Extracts, this well-known fact was not comprehended by the Friends themselves.

From the Extracts of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Minutes even more definite revelations stand out. The good business sense of the Friends is apparent. The anti-slavery sentiment and interest of these people in the black people are clearly revealed. Their interest in the moral and religious education of the youth is vigorously stated. Their well-known friendly attitude toward the Indians is manifested even in these troublous years of border welfare. Business dishonesty and the love of wealth are regretted and roundly condemned. And the critics of the Volstead Act can find no comfort in the Friends' opinion of the manufacture and use of spirituous and intoxicating liquors.

One may find in these old records ideas with which he does not sympathize, such for example as hostility to participation in government, but on the whole these old documents are highly creditable to those Friends from whom they have come down to us.

The Westland Minutes are written in an old bound notebook from which the cover has disappeared. The sheets are badly worn and the handwriting faded. The Extracts are written on foolscap sheets folded on the side. While the handwriting is more legible in the Extracts the paper is poorer and much worn by folding. The names of the writers of the Extracts are attached thereto.

In general, in editing the documents, "The Suggestions for the Printing of Documents Relating to American History" reprinted in this magazine, VII. (1924), 252-255, have been followed. But obvious abbreviations, especially where consistency was lacking, have been written out without brackets. Four words particularly are thus handled. These are "mo." or "mon." for "month" or "monthly"; "Comtee." for "Committee"; "mtg." or "meetg." for "meeting"; and "fds." for "friends." Obvious defects in punctuation have been corrected. The sign "&", everywhere it occurred, which was not always, has been changed to "and". Capitalization, spelling and paragraphing are left as in the original.

A. P. James.