

Dicks, Zacharias ^[1]

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by Algie I. Newlin, 1986

ca. 1728–late 1809

Zacharias Dicks, pioneer, itinerant Quaker ^[2] minister, and abolitionist, was born in Chester County, Pa., the son of Nathan Dicks, Sr., who had moved to Pennsylvania in 1686, and the grandson of Peter and Esther Dicks of Chester, England. In 1755 Dicks and his brothers, Peter and Nathan, were among the early settlers in the New Garden settlement (now Guilford College ^[3] community) in North Carolina. They were also members of the Warrenton Friends (Quaker) Meeting in Pennsylvania. On 7 Dec. 1756, at New Garden, Zacharias married Ruth Hiatt, daughter of George and Martha Wakefield Hiatt of Rowan County ^[4]. She was born "1st of 4th Mo. 1735." They had eight children: Deborah, Martha, Nathan, Esther, Lydia, Peter, Ruth, and Mary.

As a minister in the Society of Friends Dicks spent much of his time on religious visits to Quaker communities widely scattered from Georgia to New Hampshire and in the British Isles. He is believed to have visited most of the Quaker meetings in these areas. In 1761 and again in 1767, he with William Hunt ^[5], a noted Quaker minister, made the rounds of the American meetings, traveling most of the time on horseback. For nearly three years (1785–87), he visited among the Quaker meetings in England and Ireland.

In 1775 Dicks, his wife, and their children moved from the New Garden community to a 770-acre tract of land located on both sides of Cane Creek in the southern part of what is now Alamance County ^[6]. Their new home was situated one mile west of Lindley's Mill and two miles west of Spring Friends meetinghouse. On 13 Sept. 1781 the sharp Battle of Lindley's Mill ^[7] was fought between Tory and Whig ^[8] armies within a mile of the Dicks home. Immediately after the battle the Tory army began its hurried march toward Wilmington with the Whig army in pursuit, leaving their dead and seriously wounded where they fell. Dicks said that he and his Quaker neighbors buried the dead, variously estimated at between 50 and 100. The greater task was the care of the seriously wounded, estimated at between 100 and 150. The people of the community took these soldiers into their homes and assumed complete responsibility for their care.

In his home community and on his extensive travels, Dicks was recognized as a powerful minister. He was said to possess prophetic insight and the gift of prophecy. According to tradition, he exercised this power on at least two occasions. About the time of the Declaration of Independence he told New Garden Friends that blood would flow in their meetinghouse. Five years later, on the morning before the Battle of Guilford Court House ^[9] (15 Mar. 1781), the advance guards of the American and British armies fought on the grounds around the meetinghouse, which served as a temporary infirmary for those injured in the conflict. Two days later Lord Cornwallis ^[10], the British commander, sent more than seventy of those most seriously wounded in the Battle of Guilford Court House to New Garden to be attended by the Quakers. Some of them were placed in the meetinghouse. From all these wounded men much blood did flow in the New Garden meetinghouse, as Dicks had predicted. It seeped into the floor and scrubbing with soap and sand did not remove the stain.

The most noted of his prophecies of which we have any knowledge related to the migration of Friends to the Middle West. Dicks was an abolitionist and a major objective in his religious visits among Friends in America was to warn of the dangers of slavery. In 1803 this concern led him to travel through the Quaker communities in Georgia and South Carolina. Deeply shaken by the massacres accompanying the recent slave uprising in Santo Domingo, he warned Friends in those states that a similar fate awaited them if they did not leave their slave-ridden communities and migrate to free territory north of the Ohio River. Though such a migration had already begun, the dire warnings of this able minister created something close to a panic. In the rush to leave, Friends sold their lands and homes at a fraction of their true value and abandoned much personal property.

Between 1793 and 1798 Zacharias and Ruth Hiatt Dicks were members of Centre Quaker Meeting near the southern border of Guilford County ^[11]. It is not known just where they lived, but his brother Peter, who belonged to the same meeting, had been active in the development of light industry on Deep River in Randolph County ^[12]. After this sojourn they returned to their home on Cane Creek.

In May 1808 Dicks and his wife were caught up in the wave of migration to the area where Zacharias had been urging Friends to relocate. They settled in Clinton County, in the southeastern part of Ohio, and on 23 Sept. 1809 became members of Centre Friends Meeting. On 7 Mar. 1810 it was reported that Dicks had died a few months after reaching the new community but the exact date of his death is not known.

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