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Village of Benjaminville, Illinois

Benjaminville was founded in 1856 when three Quaker families, those of Joseph Marot, Isaac Clement and Timothy Benjamin, arrived in the area. Settlement followed and was closely tied to the Society of Friends and the local church. The town grew gradually. In 1859 the first Meeting House was erected at a cost of \$1,000 and a burial ground was established soon after.



The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House and Burial Ground is a Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Through the 1860s a slow but steady stream of Quakers moved to the area. In 1874 the Benjaminville Friends Meeting House was erected, the only structure still standing from the town of Benjaminville. Settlement continued through the 1870s and Benjaminville became a social, political and religious hub for Friends from Illinois. An 1879 history of McLean County called Benjaminville "one of the strongest settlements of Friends that is to be found anywhere in the state."



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The Benjaminville Friends Meeting House was exclusive to the members of the Society of Friends who often took political stances on issues of the day. Among these were, peace, Indian affairs, women's suffrage, and the evils of boxing, lotteries and gambling. Throughout the 19th century Benjaminville was home to a distinct local community of considerable political importance. Benjaminville never grew very large though it did contain at least two churches besides the meeting house and a few shops. By 1870 the town's fate was sealed when the Lake Erie Railroad opted to bypass the town because of the elevation of its terrain. The local churches eventually moved closer to the new railroad and the town's businesses shut down.



The cemetery was established soon after the original meeting house was built in 1859. Burial grounds were typical accompaniments to Friends meeting houses. While burial grounds were encouraged in the 1825 Quaker Rules of Discipline, the burial of non-Quakers in a Quaker cemetery was not. To satisfy this rule burials at Benjaminville were separated into two separate sections to allow an area for non-Quakers. A newer section contains a mix of Quaker and non-Quaker descendants of those originally buried there.

Non-Quaker burials were originally confined to the northern section of the cemetery, the portion directly behind the meeting house. Members of the Society of Friends were buried in the middle portion of the cemetery, today surrounded by a loop in the gravel road that traverses the site. The most recent burials are found in the southernmost section of the cemetery, furthest from the meeting house. The entire burial ground is approximately 160 by 200 ft, for a total area of 32,000 sq ft.



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Burials are oriented east-west. The burial ground covers most of the site's land and is planted with grass and trees. The surrounding land is predominantly of agricultural use but there are some nearby residences. To the east a wind farm is under construction.



The village of Benjaminville was located near the present-day community of Holder, Illinois, east of the city of Bloomington. The town was founded on an elevated area of flat, treeless prairie. Today, much of the area is used as crop land. Near the site of Benjaminville is the present-day unincorporated community of Bentown, Illinois. The town site lies in both Dawson Township and Oldtown Township.

In 1981 the only other remaining structure, an old wagon shop, was destroyed by fire, leaving the meeting house as the last remnant of the town. The Benjaminville Friends



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Meeting House and its burial ground were listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on December 13, 1983.

Illinois Historical Marker erected May 12, 1995 reads: *"Benjaminville was founded in the 1850's by Quaker farmers looking for rich prairie soil on which to grow their wheat. The Friends Meeting House, built in 1874, has changed little since then. The adjacent Burial Ground is divided into two sections: one for Quakers and a second for non-Quakers. When the expected Lake Erie Railroad went elsewhere, the town eventually died. The Meeting House and Burial Ground are all that remain of Benjaminville. The site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984."*

