



More than just Oatmeal!

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# Overview of Quakers

The town of Pawling, located roughly 20 miles from the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College, was once home to the largest community of Society of Friends (Quakers) in the Mid-Hudson River Valley region. The Quakers of Quaker Hill and Pawling brought with them a conservative Christian view, a unique perspective on society and culture, and a long tradition of close community. Nathan Birdsall moved to the Pawling area in 1728, bringing with him his family and Quaker religion. Over the next several years more Quakers followed suit and established a community on what is known as Quaker Hill.

The Quaker religion was founded by George Fox during the 1600s in England. Fox believed that Christianity needed to focus more on the aspect of spirituality with the human rather than institutionalized tradition. Fox's goal was not to break from orthodox religion, but his views were so radical within acknowledged religious standards that he was shunned from society. George Fox and his followers were persecuted, forcing them to flee for safety elsewhere. Nathan Birdsall, one of Fox's followers, moved to the American Colonies and initiated the creation of Pawling.

# Overview of Quakers

The Quakers believed it was important to capture the spirituality of the early Christian Church. If they more closely followed the examples of Jesus and the Apostles, they would find themselves with the spiritual power to teach, heal, and prophesy. They did not feel that rituals and priests were necessary. Rather, they gained their spirituality through personal experiences. Quaker meetings, held in the Oblong House, were carried out in silence. They believed that God would speak to their hearts during these meetings. According to Quakers, each person had the power of light within them, which gave them a stronger connection to God as they grew spiritually. Meetings of worship were a central part of their lives because they helped the Quakers to reflect on their day to day lives. They also found comfort in hearing the insights of other community members.

The Oblong Meeting House, located on Quaker Hill, was the focal point of the Quaker society and religion. Home to the Quaker's religious and social meetings, the Oblong Meeting House remains one of the most significant structures of Pawling's colonial history. Quaker's from surrounding communities in the Hudson River Valley met once a month during the second half of the 1700s at what became known as the Monthly Oblong Meeting House. This meeting became the highlight of the relationship built between local Quaker populations. In 1767 at one of the Monthly Oblong Meetings, the Quaker's made a landmark judgment abolishing slavery within their communities.

# Overview of Quakers

The traditions, society and religion of the Quaker's have had a lasting effect on the Mid-Hudson River Valley region. While the number of Quakers has diminished over the years, their history has becoming an important part of Pawling. The Oblong Meeting House still stands as a testament to the original founders of Pawling and as a reminder of the peace and equality that the Quaker religion has taught throughout the centuries.

Today, Pawling offers a variety of historical sites that make a journey to the quaint town worthwhile. You can visit the Oblong Meeting House, the John Kane House, and the Akin Free Library, while simultaneously meeting your recreational needs. Dine at Zagat rated restaurants, shop in the village, and take part in a variety of activities from kayaking to bird watching. The rest of this site further describes the many different elements that makes Pawling a great historical spot to visit. Enjoy!!

# Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** Kindergarten- 5th grade

**Objective:** For children to understand what it was like to live as a Quaker in Pawling during the 18th and 19th century.

**Materials:** Crayons and paper

**Method:** After visiting the Akin Free Library...

- Have each child draw a picture of what their home would be like if they lived in Pawling during the 18th- 19th century.
- Have each child draw themselves as they would appear in the 18th-19th century.
- Have each child describe the job they would have had. (farmer etc.)
- Once each child is done with their drawing, ask them to describe each feature of their picture.

# Heritage Tour Plan

**Focus/ Objectives:** To get the most historical information and experience the atmosphere of the Town of Pawling.

**Method:**

- Pick up The Pawling Guidebook, a complimentary feature from The Chamber of Commerce.
- Visit the Akin Free Library. (97 Quaker Hill Road, Pawling)
- Take note of the late Victorian architectural style.
- Check out the large library located on the first floor.
- Visit Historical Society Museum exhibits on the second floor, with information on Quaker clothing, tools and artwork.
- Note the commemorative exhibits displaying Albert J. Akin's contributions to Quaker Hill.

The Akin Free Library contains many exhibits that will fill tourists' historical needs.



# John Kane House

126 East Main Street

Pawling, NY 12564

(845) 855-5099



**Hours:** Saturday – Sunday, 2 pm – 4 pm (May – October)

**Historical Description:** John Kane arrived in Pawling from Ireland in 1752. Quickly gaining wealth and fortune as a prosperous merchant and livestock trader, John Kane and his wife Sybil Kane resided in the home that still bears his name. During the War for Independence, Kane initially supported the colonists but later became known for supporting the king as a Tory. In the summer of 1778 when George Washington moved his army northward, he needed a headquarters between Danbury, Connecticut and Newburgh, New York. He selected the John Kane house, where he stayed from September to November of that year.

**The Site:** Over the years, the house has passed through many owners before being acquired by the Historical Society of Quaker Hill and Pawling in 1982. While most of the house was razed and rebuilt in 1820, the kitchen area of the original house remains. The house currently displays Revolutionary Era furnishings and houses a large collection of historical artifacts. A gift shop is also operated on the site of the house.



# Oblong Meeting House



Meeting House Road  
Pawling, NY 12564  
(845) 855-5099



**Hours:** Currently closed for refurbishing.

**Historical Description:** The first Quaker meeting house in Pawling was constructed in 1742, but as the population continued to grow a larger meeting house was needed. The present structure was built in 1764 to house the growing amount of Quakers. During the winter of 1778-1779, the meeting house was used by the Continental Army as a military hospital. The meeting house remained in use until 1885 when membership became too small to keep it in operation.

**The Site:** The meeting house remains the same as it was centuries ago. Obtained by the Historical Society of Quaker Hill and Pawling in 1936 and has remained open to the public.

# Akin Free Library

97 Quaker Hill Road  
Pawling, NY 12564  
(845) 855-5099



**Hours:** Thursday – Sunday, 2 pm – 4 pm (May – October),

**Historical Description:** With construction beginning in 1898, the Akin Free Library was the last gift to the community by Albert J. Akin. Akin was responsible for founding the Bank of Pawling, bringing the railroad to the town, and promoting the Mizzentop Resort as a premier vacationing spot. The library contains books by local authors, the genealogies of the early town, and other rare volumes. Also within the Akin Free Library is a Quaker Museum run by the local historical society and the Olive Gunnison Natural History Museum.

**The Site:** Located within the library are rare and local books and historical records. A museum on the second floor contains photographs and memorabilia from the town's history including farm equipment and traditional Quaker clothing. The lower floor is home to the Olive Gunnison Natural History Museum, home to plants and animals from the surrounding landscape and even a shrunken head.

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# Related Links

- <http://www.pawlinghistory.org/index.htm>
- <http://www.nyym.org/>
- <http://pawlingny.virtualltownhall.net/Pages/index>
- <http://www.quaker.org/>
- <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/quakers.htm>
- <http://www.poughkeepsiequakers.org/>