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The Agricultural Industries
Of the Early Shakers
By Henry Cumings
Part 2

(Continued from last week)

The farm crops, besides hay, were potatoes, corn, oats, beans, barley, rye, and in the early years a little wheat was grown on the hill farms. The raising of fruit was one of the early and important items, several orchards having been started before 1800. As there were no nurseries in the country then they raised their own trees, etc. and several fine varieties originated with them, notably the Quince apple, the Shaker Pippin and Shaker Greening and several fine sweet apples, also the Ahimaaz pear. They also had lots of small fruits, cherries, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, and later raspberries and blackberries. They also made many trials to grow peaches and quinces, but never succeeded with either.

Another important farm product has always been the making of maple sugar and syrup. They have also given some time to bee culture. I think the nearness of the lake has been a handicap to that industry, as many of the busy workers would fall in when loaded with their sweet gatherings, and be drowned.

The attention of the community was very early turned to the raising of garden crops, particularly seeds, and medicinal roots and herbs. They were in very favorable conditions for doing this as they had seven or eight acres of most excellent land for the purpose. The lower flats next to the lake are a rich, deep sandy loam, free from even small stones and with a gravelly subsoil. They began with a few of the common vegetables, and as the seeds became known for quality and the demand increased, they added to their catalogues until a quite full variety of vegetable seeds were grown and sent out in boxes by them; (they never grew flower seeds at all). This business was quite remunerative and for many years they had almost a monopoly of the trade. Later other parties took up the business, getting out fancy boxes and packets with pictures, etc. The Shakers, not attempting to keep up with the times, soon lost most of their trade, and finally abandoned the retail trade altogether about 1880.

Another branch of gardening pursued by them was the growing and preparing for market of medicinal roots and herbs, and making extracts and oils, etc. The most extensively grown were yellow dock, lovage, valerian, dandelions and poppies. They also gathered many wild herbs, which they dried and pressed into cakes for the market. Those most used were Bounsit, (Thoroughwort) peppermint, spearmint, pennyroyal, wormwood, tansy, catnip, etc. The oils most made were checkerberry, peppermint, wormwood and valerian. The solid extracts were dandelion, henbane and cicuta, etc.

They also for awhile made several patent medicines, the formulas of which were originated by them. The best known of these were Shaker Anodyne and Brown's fluid extract of English Valerian, two preparations of *Valeriana Officinalis*. They also made an

Alterative Dock Syrup and a cough syrup. All of these, except the valerian, were long since dropped off, and the herb or medicinal garden was abandoned many years ago, but lovage and dock root still continue to be grown to some extent. Also a few varieties of seeds, as onions, beet, lettuce, sweet corn, beans, etc. These are sold to seed dealers at wholesale prices.

One thing worth noting is the fact that the Shakers, in farming as in other things, were pioneers in the introduction of labor saving machinery. The first mowing machine used in this town was a Ketchum machine. This was tried by them in 1856, and the next year they purchased two of the Allen machines made by the Bucks at Lebanon. They used a horse rake of their own invention previous to 1840. They were also the first to use a tedder. They very early churned by water power and had a machine to grind or cut curd for them, and to assist in turning the cheese while being cured.