

# The Friends' Quarterly

## Newsletter of the Enfield Shaker Museum

Sharing history and hospitality.



Vol. XXIX No. 2  
Spring/Summer 2019  
UPCOMING EVENTS

For more details, visit our website  
at [www.shakermuseum.org](http://www.shakermuseum.org)

- Sept 1 **Eco-Dyeing Workshop**
- Sept 10 **Material Culture Tour**
- Sept 10 **Herbal Jelly Making Workshop**
- Sept 14 **Shaker Harvest Festival**
- Sept 14 **Widor's Symphony No 6 for Organ**
- Sept 24 **Enfield Shaker Water System Hike**
- Sept 28 **Beginning and Intermediate Timber Framing Workshop**

A publication of the Enfield Shaker Museum  
Enfield, NH 03748  
(603) 632-4346  
[www.shakermuseum.org](http://www.shakermuseum.org)  
[info@shakermuseum.org](mailto:info@shakermuseum.org)

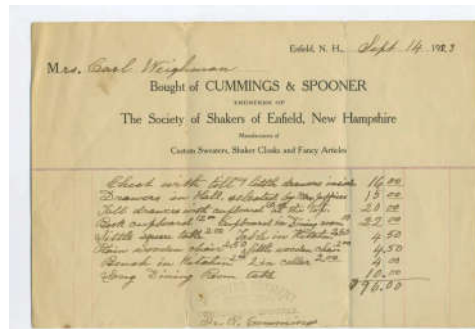
### A Tale of Three Tables

by Richard Dabrowski

The Tale of Three Tables all began with an invoice dated September 14, 1923, which was discovered at the bottom of an oval sewing box that once belonged to Sister Rosetta Cummings of the Enfield, NH Shaker community. Mrs. Carl Weihman, a native of Narbeth, PA, had a summer camp in Bristol, NH and according to her granddaughter made several visits to Enfield to buy old things.

In the last several years, we have located four of the items on the invoice—The first item, “Chest with till and little drawers inside”, was discovered in a collection near Philadelphia. In Dec 2018, it was purchased by ESM and is now on display in the Rosetta Cummings exhibit. The third item, “Tall drawers with cupboard on the top”, is still owned by Mrs. Weihman’s grand-daughter. On the fifth line, the second item, “Table in kitchen”, was sold at a Willis Henry auction in 2007 and is now in a private collection. However, it was the last item that drew our greatest interest, “Long Dining Room table”

because we had often wondered why the long dining tables used at Enfield had not yet turned up at auction. The answer turned out to be that they had, but none with a correct attribution.



From our work with stereoviews, we knew that in the dining room of the Great Stone Dwelling there were originally four long dining tables, made for the building when it was first occupied in 1841. In “Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers,” former Enfield brother Hervey Elkins wrote in 1852, “The tables are long, three feet in width, polished high, without cloth, and furnished with white ware and no tumblers.” Henry Cummings, a former Shaker Elder writing in the *Enfield Advocate* in 1906, described the dining room as having quote “four long tables,

which each seat twenty persons”.

About the time that Henry Cummings wrote his article in the *Enfield Advocate*, a photograph was taken in the dining room of the Great Stone Dwelling. In it, we note several changes—only three full length dining tables remain in use; the table at the back on the right has been cut down to accommodate the installation of a soapstone sink with running water; table cloths are now in use; and there are significantly fewer chairs. We also get a clearer look at the shape of the arched foot on the tables themselves.

What ultimately became of these tables?

*Continued on page 2.*



**A Tale of Three Tables** - *Continued from Pg. 1* The “Long Dining Room table” listed on the Weighman invoice in September 1923 was eventually taken to Pennsylvania, where it was used as a display table in Mrs. Weighman’s flower shop and remained in the family until her death in Nov 1975. At this point we have no idea where the Weighman table is located, or even if it still exists in its original form. Nevertheless, three Enfield, NH Shaker dining tables have come to auction in recent years.

Jerry Grant (Shaker Museum | Mt Lebanon) discovered an article that appeared in “Antique Collecting” magazine in 1978: “Manhattan Dealer is High Bidder. Like a private collector, museums occasionally have reason to part with a significant piece of their collection. Such was the case recently when the Winterthur Museum offered their 21’ 6 1/2” long Shaker table to a selected group of museums, collectors and dealers. In a sealed bid mail offering to the highest bidder, the museum opened all written bids in one witnessed session. This method of bidding seemed more than fair and we particularly commend the museum for including antiques dealers in the offering. New York art/antiques dealer, John Gordon of the John Gordon Gallery was the successful high bidder on the table.”

In a 2014 email Leah Gordon, John Gordon’s widow, recollected that they had owned a large Shaker table that they sold to Adelaide de Menil and Ted Carpenter. We were able to trace much of this table’s history using documents generously provided by Sotheby’s. We received copies of invoices, correspondence between Winterthur and Sotheby’s, accession sheets from the de Menil/Carpenter collection, and a photograph of the table from 1978.

I am delighted to report that the de Menil trestle table is



now in the collection of ESM and on exhibit in the Dining Room of the Great Stone Dwelling. The table is constructed entirely of yellow birch. The top measures exactly 21 feet 6 inches long by 35 inches wide, made up from two boards that are joined with a full-

length spline joint. The two boards are of unequal width, which means that the spline joint is slightly off-center.

Now let’s consider the second table: In Nov 1994, at an auction in Sturbridge, MA, Willis Henry offered as Lot 80 a trestle table described as “Birch two-board top, retains original finish, rounded corners, three cherry trestles with chamfered shafts, double pinned into simple arched base and foot, deaccessioned from Winterthur Museum, 1994, originally sold to H. F. duPont by Edward Ford, Marshfield, MA, dealer who purchased directly from the Shakers of Canterbury, NH

in late 1920’s.” The table measured 21 feet 5 inches long by 36” wide. It was 29 1/8” in height.

Although the table did not sell during the auction, it sold afterwards to theatre historian Stefan Brecht. Brecht died in 2009 and in 2013 Will Henry arranged the sale of the table to Philippe Segalot, a New York-based private art dealer. It is presently located in Segalot’s Paris apartment.

Let’s now consider the third table. In Oct 1985, Skinner Auctioneers held an auction at a very large home in Gloucester, MA known as Stillington Hall. The mansion had been built in 1926 by Col. Leslie Buswell. A 1967 photograph from the *Boston Globe* shows a former ballroom in the house. It features a long table that was used by the family. In fact, this is the last of our three Enfield Shaker dining tables.

The auction catalog listed as Lot 257 a “Shaker Maple Community Table, possibly New Hampshire, mid-19th century, the rectangular two board top with rounded corners, rests on three flat flange arched legs (originally with six drawers under top, three drawers missing).” The table measured 21 ft 3 in long by 35 in wide, made up from two boards that quite clearly have parted at the middle joint.

The successful bidder for the Stillington Hall dining table was a collector of American decorative arts from Shelburne Falls, MA—Bill Cosby. It remains in the Cosby collection today.

And that completes the Tale of Three Tables—except for one unanswered question: how is it possible that Winterthur actually owned and deaccessioned two Enfield dining tables?

Eldress Josephine Wilson wrote in her diary on Aug 6, 1924, “Eld[er] Arthur goes to Enfield by train to meet Mr. Ford from Marshfield who wants to buy the long Dining Room tables at that place.” On the same day, Brother Irving Greenwood wrote in his diary, “Richmond takes Arthur to Concord early this morning. He meets Mr. Ford an antique collector & [they] go up to Enfield on the early train. Mr. Ford buys dining room tables & some other old things.” In fact, Edward C. Ford was not an antique collector, but an established antique dealer from Marshfield, MA. According to Willis Henry, who has located the Edward Ford Journals, in a letter he wrote to Robert Trent at Winterthur, Ford purchased two long Enfield dining tables from the Canterbury Shakers and sold them to H. F. DuPont. The tables were not immediately accessioned into the Winterthur collection.

One of the dining tables was accessioned in 1965. This was the table deaccessioned in 1994 and sold by Will Henry, first to Stefan Brecht and second to Philippe Segalot. The only record that Winterthur appears to have of the second table appears to be a photograph, perhaps circulated before the sealed bid sale. This was the table sold in 1977 to John Gordon, then to Adelaide de Menil and Ted Carpenter, and in 2019 to Enfield Shaker Museum. Make sure to stop by and see the table on your next visit to the Museum.