

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

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Fall, 1987

Spiritual Feasts: A Shaker Tradition

by Greg Schwarz, Museum Trustee

The use of a Holy Ground among the Shakers began at the New Lebanon, NY community in early 1842 and was an outgrowth of the wave of spiritualism that had characterized Shaker religious services since 1837. Early in 1842 Brother Philemon Stewart of New Lebanon had a spiritual revelation that the community should establish a "Feast Ground." This consecrated spot was to be high on the nearby mountain which the Shakers had begun calling "The Holy Mount of God." Through Shaker mediums, referred to as "instruments," the spirits pointed out the exact spot. The Feast Ground was to be 168' x 136' in size, made completely level and cleared of rocks and trees. In the center was a hexagonal shaped area delineated by a low fence. This was the spiritual "Fountain", meant to be the holiest spot in the Shaker community. This was also the focal point of ceremonies at the site, around which the believers marched and gathered.

At the head of the Fountain stood the "Lord's Stone," the most remarkable feature of the site. A marble slab five and a half feet high, two feet wide and three inches thick, the surface was engraved with a long passage in biblical language as prescribed by the spirits. Included on each of the Lord's Stones was a curse intended as a warning to vandals. The curse on Enfield's stone read: "Whosoever shall mar this stone or that which is dedicated to me shall feel the justice of my fury to their shame. For I will bring a heavy curse upon them in my own time."



Greg Schwarz and Cathy Newman, of National Geographic Magazine, inspect the base of the Lord's Stone.

Soon the spirits dictated that other Shaker communities should also establish their own holy ground. Each would also be given a spiritual name as were the communities themselves. New Lebanon became known as "Holy Mount," Canterbury "Holy Ground," Hancock "City of Peace." Enfield, known as "Chosen Vale," found its holy ground in early 1843, and like many of the sites, it required extensive labor to properly prepare the places according to the spiritual directive. The Enfield site, called "Mount Assurance," was placed in the side of a hill and required much digging and fill to level

it. The Fountain House at Enfield was constructed in 1845, and the Lord's Stone erected there on October 6, 1846.

Each year in May and September, the entire Shaker community was required to hold a special service or "Feast" on the site. Two by two the community marched up to the site, beginning in the early morning and staying until mid-afternoon. In addition to the singing, dancing and speaking in tongues that characterized meetings, the believers also partook of a spiritual feast provided by the spirits.

Sometimes an instrument under direction of a spirit, would ask believers to erect an altar. Each of the brethren and sisters were to retrieve a stone from a nearby field and place them in a pile upon a spot chosen by the spirit. This was to be done as testimony to their faith so the participants were warned that only true believers should attempt to put a stone upon the altar, lest they incur the wrath of God. At Enfield, such an altar still remains along the eastern edge of the site, directly opposite the Fountain. From this altar they beheld a beautiful panorama with the Shaker holdings and Mascoma Lake spread out below.

The use of Feast Grounds lasted at most communities until the mid 1850's. The last meeting at New Lebanon was in October 1854, at which point a spirit message told them such services were no longer required. As they did with their buildings, once something was no longer used it was dismantled rather than left to fall into disrepair. During the early 1860's most of the villages dismantled their Holy Grounds and hid the Lord's Stones to make them safe from the world's people. Only two stones are now extant, those from Canterbury, NH and Groveland, NY.

It is still unclear when Enfield ceased using Mt. Assurance. M. Melcher, author of *Shaker Adventure*, claimed that Enfield continued to hold services until about 1880. Once one has seen what a beautiful spot the Enfield Feast Ground is, it is easy to understand why the Shakers would wish to continue holding outside services.

Today, except for Harvard, MA and Enfield, NH, most of the Feast Grounds are overgrown and visited only by a small number of Shaker enthusiasts. Some of the holy grounds have been totally obliterated by development. At Enfield, however, we have the opportunity to preserve this unique part of the Shaker legacy for future generations.

This summer saw the beginning of an archeological dig under the supervision of Greg Schwarz, at the Enfield Holy Ground. Watch for an update on the progress of the dig in the next issue of The Friends' Quarterly.

Sage Thoughts

by Happy Griffiths, Herbalist

"Sage Thoughts" will be a regular feature of The Friends' Quarterly. You can look forward to everything from tips for your herb gardening to ways of using your herb garden produce.

I will remember the Summer of 1987 as the year the Herb Gardens returned to Lower Shaker Village. After much research and historical documentation, the land between the West Brethren Shop and the Shaker Cemetery was plowed and harrowed and beds were laid out establishing the 100' x 110' Herb Garden. Historic rose plants gathered from the home of Mrs. Helen DenFord in Enfield were carefully planted in their new location paralleling the access road leading down to the 1854 barn. Many of these roses actually came from a garden in the Enfield Shaker Village.

In May and June the rest of the garden beds were staked out and planted. The Medicinal, Culinary, Dye and Fragrant beds all contain herbs the Shakers used for these specific purposes. The remaining beds of Everlasting herbs and flowers were planted for use in the workshops given throughout this summer and fall at The Museum. Rounding out the design, the shrub bed was planted with the types of flowering shrubs that were grown in the Enfield area during the time the Shaker Village was most active. Next spring this should be ablaze with color as there are many lilacs and other early flowering shrubs growing here.

During July and August most of the time spent in the garden was devoted to weeding, placing the permanent boards around the beds and laying down mulch for the paths. A great sigh of relief was heard when this task was finally accomplished! September and October produced a bountiful harvest and herbal vinegars, pestos, dried flowers and herbs and their related crafts are now for sale in The Museum store.

Now after all the hustle and bustle of the summer activities, attention has turned to putting the garden to bed. The annuals and trimmings of flowering stalks from the perennial herbs have been taken to the compost pile. Care has been taken not to cut back too severely from the hardy perennials or they may not be able to survive the harsh New England winter. Among the tender perennials, Rosemary, Lemon Verbena and Sweet Marjoram plants have been potted up and brought inside, and cuttings of the Scented Geraniums have been placed in a light potting mixture. By the time we are ready to begin next summer's garden these will have grown into good sized plants.

Most herbs are very hardy and will winter over as long as they don't sit in puddles of late fall or early spring rains. A lack of snow cover on this wind-swept, sunny location could also lead to winterkill as the soil continually heats and cools causing the plants to heave. For this reason we have taken every precaution in putting the garden to bed and after there have been a few good freezes a straw mulch will be placed around the Lavenders, Santolinas, Roses and other less hardy perennials.

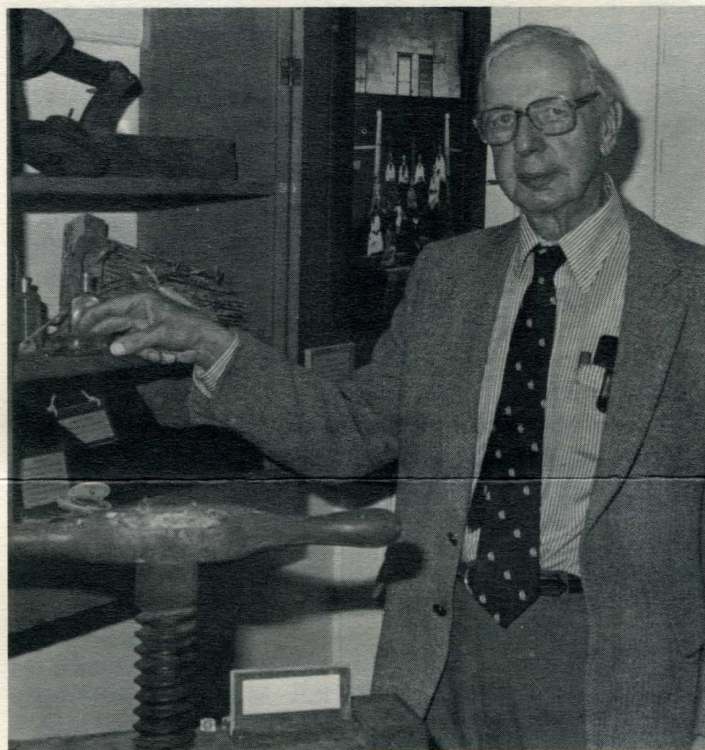
I am very pleased with the fruits of the labor spent in the Herb Garden. Ideas have been written down on improvements for next year drawn from the wealth of the past summer's experience. To "Encourage onward" was a Shaker motto meaning to excel, to improve the world with works which were "useful to man". We have only just begun...

Chair, Anodyne Bottle and Rug Beater Added to The Museum's Collection

Of all the Shaker chairs now famous for their design and craftsmanship, the ladderback side chairs made in Enfield, New Hampshire are considered the most graceful. Now The Museum owns one of these chairs, thanks to the generosity of **Mrs. Dorothy Dane Sargent** of Woodsville, NH.

The chair was purchased directly from the Enfield community early this century by Mrs. Sargent's grandmother, Anne Campbell of Hudson, New Hampshire. It has its original caned seat and original finish. At one time "tilters" were affixed to its rear legs. This was a Shaker innovation that allowed a person to tilt backwards in the chair without damaging either the chair's legs or the floor.

This acquisition is one of three in recent months. In September, **Dr. Ralph Hunter** of Hanover, New Hampshire presented The Museum with a Shaker Anodyne bottle, label intact. As the production of Valerian extract (the principal ingredient of Anodyne) was one of the Enfield community's major industries, the bottle is an important addition to The Museum's permanent collection.



Dr. Ralph Hunter adds Anodyne bottle to Museum display.

Earlier this summer a hickory and maple rug beater made circa 1870 in Canterbury, New Hampshire was presented to The Museum. The donor was **Nancy King**, a Museum Trustee.

The three pieces will be on view throughout the fall and winter. You will also have the opportunity to view rare historic photos of the Village in a newly created introductory slide show.

THE SUMMER IN REVIEW

THE MUSEUM INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Volunteer power was behind much of the Museum's success this summer. A new "Museum Intern" program attracted five hard-working volunteers who served as historical interpreters and herb gardeners, as well as participated in several special projects.

"If I had gone out and hand-picked them, I couldn't have found five more qualified people," said **Caryn Bosson**, the program's coordinator, of the five applicants who filled the positions. The summer's interns were **Victoria Beecher**, **Rebecca Brady** and **Kim Newhall** of Enfield, and **Andrea Green** and **Mary Noordsy** of West Canaan.

These volunteers, whose backgrounds and interests ranged from wildflower gardening to architecture, went through a two-day orientation which steeped them in Shaker history and the history of this community. They continued to learn throughout the summer as they shared their knowledge with visitors to the Museum and grounds. (You may have noticed them in their distinctive Shaker Brethren hats!)

We plan to expand this successful program next year, with opportunities for volunteers to conduct group tours of the Village and pursue a number of Shaker-related interests. If you are interested in participating in the summer of '88, or have some time to volunteer before then, please call Caryn at the Museum.

TWO CONCERTS AND THREE FESTIVALS

This past summer was our busiest to date — we expanded our workshop schedule, and even ventured into new ground. The Museum successfully put on two major outdoor concerts and three festivals this season, certainly an ambitious undertaking for our second summer of operation.

These experiments not only achieved our aim of raising funds, but they helped attract a wider audience to the Village, putting us on the map as a vital, active cultural center.

June's Festival of Shaker Crafts and Herbs brought over 600 visitors and 40 exhibitors to the Village. Displays ranged from poplarware-making (a dying Shaker craft once practiced extensively at Enfield) and demonstrations by a sheep-to-shawl team to rare potted herbs, ready for planting in the garden. Visitors could also attend numerous educational programs and craft demonstrations, including a talk on "Cooking with Herbs" by James Haller, noted chef of the Blue Strawberry.



By popular demand, the Festival of Shaker Crafts and Herbs will be repeated next year, with even more exhibitors and activities.

Over 400 car enthusiasts turned out for an Antique Auto Show in July to see vintage vehicles ranging from a 1912 Maxwell to a restored milk wagon. The old-time fiddling provided by Applejack lent a festival air to the day.

Over one hundred dealers at the Antique Show and Sale in August featured many impressive Shaker pieces, as well as fascinating examples of Americana. The show, fast becoming an Upper Valley tradition, attracted over 1000 visitors from all over New England.

Despite a gentle drizzle, nearly 1500 people came to hear Paul Winter and the Paul Winter Consort in August. The Consort's blend of classical music and jazz was especially fitting in the beautiful lakeside setting of the Village "green" (once the Shakers' seed gardens). One of the most magical moments of the season came during their rendition of "Simple Gifts" — an experiment which pleased the group so much they plan to keep the song in their repertoire!

The summer's final event was a moonlight performance by two of New England's favorite singer-songwriters, Bill Staines and Sally Rogers. The two artists performed solo and for the first time had a chance to blend their voices in sweet harmony.

These rather bold experiments worked. We will continue to offer you special and exciting events, particularly during the busy summer season. The emphasis will continue to be on educational Shaker-related programs or pure, musical celebrations presented with imagination and care. (Remember, Museum Friends receive advance notice of all Museum events and special admission prices!)

SUMMER WORKSHOPS

The summer of 1987 saw the return of "Hands to Work" in the Shaker tradition here at Lower Shaker Village. Workshops ranging from herb gardening to tin-smithing attracted more than 100 participants from all over New England. Highlights of the summer sessions include:

- **Happy Griffiths**, the village herbalist, conducted four workshops and had participants trying their hands at everything from planning an herb garden to using dried herbs in a wreath.
- Handcrafted Shaker benches, stepstools and woodchip boxes went home with their proud makers following classes taught by **Dana Robes**, woodcraftsman.
- The West Brethren Shop, once a Shaker woodworking shop, was home this summer to our resident tinsmith, **Roger Gibbs**. At the end of his workshop on July 20 a variety of reproduction tinware was finished and ready to go home.
- **Liana Haubrich** guided her students through a three-day splint basketmaking experience. The group began with black ash logs on Monday and left with baskets complete with handcarved handles and rims on Wednesday.
- Rag rug weaving was the topic of **Brian MacPherson's** class on August 15. Beginning to expert weavers spent an enthralling day exploring design and color options for wool rag rugs, a Shaker specialty.

Educational programs are one way to preserve and continue the rich Shaker legacy of fine craftsmanship. These and other workshops provided opportunities for people to learn the skills and crafts perfected by the Shakers and then use these skills to enrich their lives. Plans for next year's workshops are already underway, so if you have suggestions for topics and/or instructors, please contact Carolyn Smith.

Thank You, John Markowitz

John Markowitz, director of The Museum at Lower Shaker Village, will be putting his creative talents to work at Eastman in Grantham, NH as of November, 1987.

John's strong design and artistic ability will long be a part of The Museum's image. His involvement with The Museum over the years has resulted in a number of innovative and exciting programs. John plans to support The Museum's growth and development on an informal basis and we wish him the best of luck with his new endeavors. His efforts here will always be appreciated and remembered.

Museum Board of Trustees Appointed

The Museum at Lower Shaker Village is pleased to announce the appointment of its first Board of Trustees. Following confirmation of our tax-exempt status, the Board of Trustees began to meet on a monthly basis to plan for and direct The Museum's development.

Current members of the board include: **Wendell Hess**, **William Kmon**, **Harry Auger** and **John Carr** of Enfield, NH; **Greg Schwarz** of Enfield Center, NH; **Kevin O'Reilly**, **Toby Hoare**, **John Hayes**, **Julie Adams** and **Nancy King** of Massachusetts and New Hampshire and **Jonathan Rose** of Hanover, NH.

Each of these individuals brings to the Board a variety of experiences and skills that can benefit The Museum and help steer it in positive directions. They have already been instrumental in making the 1987 summer events and activities successful.

The Board closed the summer season with an archeological dig party at the Feast Ground, followed by a cookout on the hill. Plans are now underway for a three-session planning process aimed at developing a comprehensive mission statement for The Museum.

If you have questions or concerns for the Board, you can reach them by writing to them in care of The Museum office.

The Shaker Store *for your holiday giving...*

Oval Boxes
Books
Gift Baskets
Handwoven Wool Afgans
Holiday Decorations
Special Order
Shaker Christmas Cookie Baskets

Saturday 10:00 - 4:00

Sunday 12:00 - 4:00

Monday 10:00 - 4:00

*For information or mail orders call:
(603) 632-5533 or 632-4838*

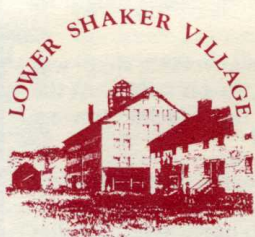
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Holiday Candlelight Shaker Dinner

December 12th — 6:00 p.m.

Creamy Egg Nog
Sparkling Cranberry Punch
Shaker Herb Soup
Roast Turkey with Sage Dressing
Broccoli with Dill Sauce
Agreeable Onions Baked Yams
Mushrooms in Sherry Butter
Caraway, Lemon and Pumpkin Breads
Cranberry-Apple Pie

Served in the Great Stone Dwelling
\$12 / Friends: \$10 / Children under 12: \$6



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