

# The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume II / No. 1

Fall 1988

## A Reluctant Mother, A Miraculous Path and Other Mysteries

by Elaine P. Loft

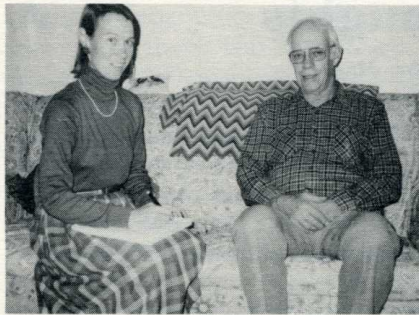
*Elaine P. Loft is the volunteer coordinator of The Museum's new Oral History Project. Since August, 1988 she has been soliciting memories of the Enfield Shakers and their village from local residents. To date she has talked to nearly a dozen people and has recorded their stories for The Museum's archives.*

One of the Oral History Project's most interesting stories resulted from a visit with Webster and Mary Hill of Enfield. Mr. Hill's great-great grandmother (four generations, if you are counting), Dorcas Ferrin Huse, had several sisters who became Shakers. According to family history, Dorcas' parents were divorced, and her mother brought her daughters to live in Enfield. As far as the Hills knew, Dorcas' sisters were buried in the Shaker cemetery.

Surely enough, the Church Family cemetery plot plan, now on exhibit at The Museum at Lower Shaker Village, contains the following entries:

Hannah Ferrin Died July 21, 1793 Age 23	Mary Ferrin Died Feb. 4, 1827 Age 84
Eldress Esther Ferrin Died Jan. 19, 1845 Age 72	

Confident I had found Dorcas' Shaker siblings, I returned to share my news with the Hills. We used the tombstone entries to calculate when each Ferrin was born. Simple subtraction revealed a new angle. Although Hannah and Esther were only three years apart in age, Mary was nearly thirty years older. Obviously, Mary Ferrin was not one of Dorcas' sisters, but her mother. Now a new set of questions arose. Did Mary join the



*The author talks with Webster Hill, whose great-great-great grandmother and great-great aunts were among the first Shaker converts in Enfield.*

Shakers because as a divorced mother in the 1700's she could not provide for her daughters? And why, if her mother and sisters became Shakers, did Dorcas not join the faith?

I continued my research at the Enfield Public Library. In the town's genealogical records I found entries for Mary, Hannah, Esther and Dorcas, as well as for a "missing" sister, Rhoda. There were no records listing a Mr. Ferrin, though Mary's entry stated that she had married a Phineas Ferrin.

With the assistance of librarian Marjorie Carr, I began leafing through the library's Shaker notebooks, searching for further references. The journals of Shaker Henry Blinn yielded some answers. The section on "Deaths from 1792 to 1820" contains a reference to Hannah, the oldest Ferrin child. Hannah Ferrin was born July 23, 1770. She entered the society in March, 1793. She was one of the first sisters that accepted the faith of Believers in Enfield. Hannah was the daughter of Mary Ferrin. Hannah was the first person who died after

the organization of the society and her burial was in the North cemetery. Died July 21, 1793. Age 22 years, 11 months and 28 days.

Another entry discusses Esther, and also suggests that Mary Ferrin did not approve of the Shakers:

Eldress Esther Ferrin was born Jan. 15, 1773, joined (the) Society in March, 1793, died Jan. 19, 1845. Before (the) Church family was organized, Esther lived with her mother and sister in a house where the North family (house) now stands. (Her) father had died some time before the arrival of the Shakers. (The) girls wanted to join, but (their) mother did not favor it. Neighbors interfered. (The) girls had their hair cut close to their heads hoping they would be left alone. Esther went to live with Molly Brooks on George Hill.

Molly Brooks (or Estabrooks) and her husband Josiah were two of Enfield's first converts to the Shaker faith. My search into a paper entitled "A Concise Account of the Commencement and Early Progress, Shakerism or Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, in the Town of Enfield, County of Grafton, and State of New Hampshire" brought to light a fascinating passage, narrated by Molly, containing one of the famous Shaker "visions."

Esther Ferrin, when she was a youth, worked with me, as I needed some help and she was striving to be a Believer...Someone would generally inform us when there was going to be a meeting. One night we were told they were expecting a very long meeting. We started in the evening, winter weather, as soon as our work was done, and arrived at the Meeting House before the meeting commenced. We had a powerful meeting; it lasted until nearly 3 o'clock the next morning. When we went to the door thinking to go home, we saw the snow had fallen so that it was ankle deep. I said to

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