

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume III/ No. 1

Fall 1989

The Bridge to Enfield

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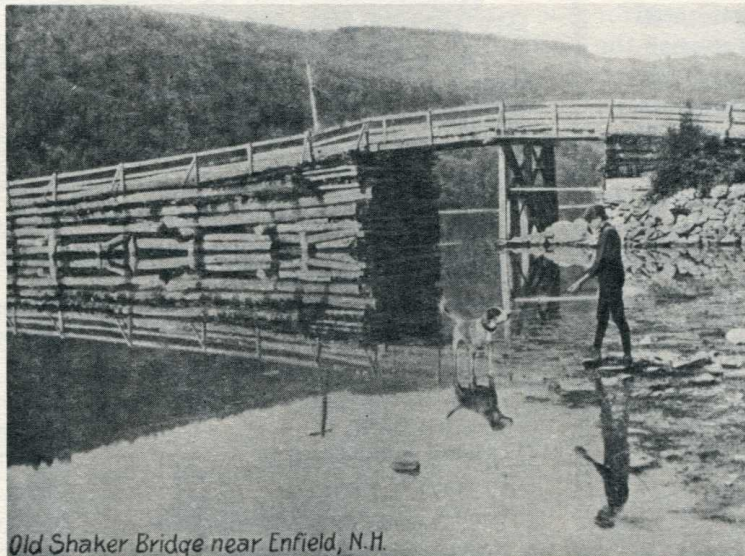
For 90 years the old Shaker bridge provided a convenient, time-saving crossing over Lake Mascoma. The unique bridge was only a few feet above the water and had the appearance of a causeway. Frequently it had to be repaired because of the ravages of water and weather. Sometimes the bridge listed, sometimes it was awash, sometimes swimmers reported that it could not last, but the Shakers had built it to endure; and so it did until the vicious 1938 hurricane destroyed it.

The completion of the railroad in 1847 along the northeastern shore of Lake Mascoma provided the motiva-

tion for building the bridge. The Shakers wished to shorten the five-mile trip they needed to make around the lake in order to ship their products from the Enfield railroad depot. They secured the services of John "Boston" Clark to oversee the venture.

In the fall of 1848, before the lake froze, two rows of piles about 30 feet apart in both directions were driven to mark the location of the bridge and to keep the construction in place. Early in 1849, countless yokes of oxen and a team of horses hauled great 60 foot long hemlock and spruce logs over the ice to the construction site. These were laid side by side crosswise on the ice between the piles, forming a

platform that stretched nearly 2,000 feet from shore to shore. The platform was held together by more logs running lengthwise on the out-



Old Shaker Bridge near Enfield, N.H.

side of the piles. After these logs were bolted securely to the platform, additional logs were piled one upon another so as to form a series of open compartments, or cribs, that extended the entire distance of the platform. Stones and brush were used to fill the cribs.

As the weighted cribs increased in height and weight, the ice broke, or was cut. As logs were added to the compartments the structure gradually sank to the lake bottom, settling in the mud that extended some 30 feet beneath the 40 feet of water. Although water flowed through the log construction, at various places some sections were left open and were referred to as water passes. Logs were added to

the top of the structure until it rose a sufficient distance above the ice, and then the whole was covered with a log floorway. Gravel was added to form a surfaced roadway.

Late in the summer of 1849 the Town of Enfield accepted the bridge and paid the Shakers \$5,000 for it, a small compensation. The Shakers agreed to keep the bridge in repair for the next ten years. In return they were excused from paying their highway taxes during that time.

In 1878, thirty years following the completion of the bridge, the town hired the Shakers to replace the eastern end of the

bridge with a drawbridge. This provided a passageway for steam boats to all points on the lake and make public transportation available to lakeside residents. In 1900 the town replaced the drawbridge with an arch.

As one year followed another the bridge witnessed many events: most were functional: many were pleasurable; a few were tragic; but in mid-September of 1938 a devastating hurricane brought the 90 year old creation of the Enfield Shaker community to an end. When daylight arrived the morning of September 22, all that could be seen of the Shaker bridge was a lone telephone pole near the western end.

