

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume VII/No. 2

Fall 1995

Scrumptious Shaker Spuds: 1839 In Enfield

by Daniel Eastman, member, Board of Directors, Education Committee

"Fruitful in every good work"

In *The Farmer's Monthly Visitor*, Vol. 1, No. 8, published in Concord, N.H., in 1839, the Editor, Isaac Hill, writes an interesting and unsolicited "World's People" accolade for the Shakers:

There is a class of people who exceed all others within our knowledge in the application of means to ends, in the methods of giving to domestic life all its comforts, in making and preserving every thing useful, in preparing their meat in due season, and in furnishing, not expensively, but in the best manner, such food as is conducive to health. That class is the people called Shakers.

He proceeds to describe his experiences while tarrying with the Enfield, N.H., Shakers on the night of 27th July, 1839, most particularly with regard to the subject of potatoes.

It was a matter of general complaint that potatoes, for some reason, were not good in 1838. They were wet and soggy when cooked, and were most disagreeable to the taste, everywhere, apparently, except at Enfield's Chosen Vale. For the Enfield sisters brought to Hill's table some which, as the potatoes appeared, so they proved to be:

not less welcome to the taste than any we have ever eaten: they were

mellow and mealy, and their flavor was all we could desire.

The sister in charge of cooking discovered the whole process of preparing old potatoes for the table nearly a month later than it is common to make use of the last year's supply. The preparation is begun by taking a quantity of potatoes, sufficient to last three or four days, from the cellar (where they should always be kept until needed), washing them clean and removing the sprouts. One day's potatoes only should be pared, not entirely, but two thirds of the outside skin, then soaked several hours in cold water. This operation is said to extract all those deleterious qualities which are disagreeable both to the eye and to the taste. The potatoes are boiled in a large kettle of water until about two thirds cooked, then most of the water is poured off, leaving the remainder to evaporate in steam over and through the potatoes. The result is that even those potatoes which are shrivelled with the lateness of the season will come out as mealy and fresh as the best of potatoes when taken ripe from the ground.

And now, a special Enfield Shaker potato recipe:

Potato Pie with Buttered Onion Crumb Top

4 cups mashed potatoes
1/2 cup cream
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 1/2 cups cubed sharp cheddar cheese
1/4 cup finely chopped raw onion
1 cup buttered bread crumbs

Beat potatoes with the cream to make them fluffy. Season; put in baking dish and push little pieces of cheese within the potatoes. Mix onions and bread crumbs together and let this form the crust of the pie. Bake in 350° oven for 30 minutes; serves 4.

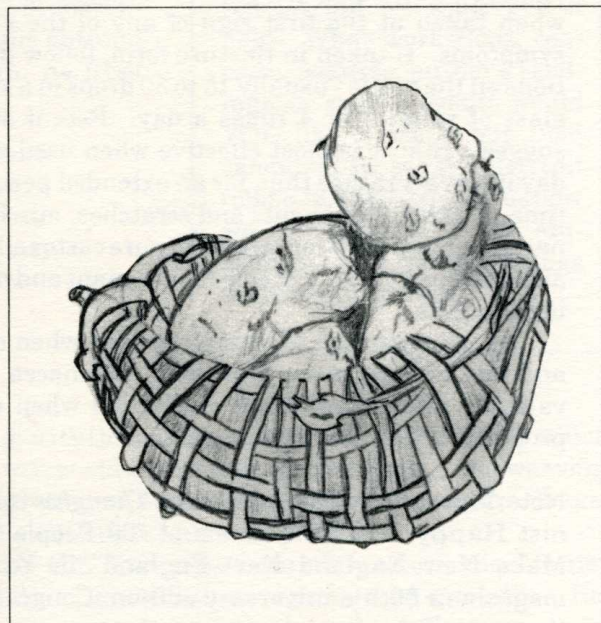


Illustration by Sarah Shaffer

