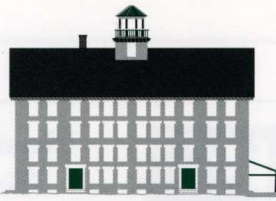


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A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

## The Noble History of the Second Family of Shakers, Enfield, NH, 1794-1894

By Mary Ann Haagen

It would have made things easier for the Ministry and Church Elders of the Enfield Shaker Community if the Second Family had quietly and willingly closed their doors and united with their fellow believers at the Church. Certainly there was plenty of room for them in the Great Stone Dwelling. And the Church desperately needed the financial resources that would accrue from the sale of the Second Family's valuable farm and timber holdings. The Church could absorb their still profitable industries like broom making and the valerian extract business, and the income could be used to defray debt. Real estate taxes and maintenance costs could be eliminated, and Second Family elder, William Wilson, could redirect his energy to assisting aging Elder Abraham Perkins at the Church. It seemed quite logical to everyone – everyone except the Believers being asked to leave the home they loved.

To understand why a move to the Church Family felt so difficult we need only to look at the family's long and proud history. The Second Family was organized in 1794, one year after the Church Family was called into order. These were not "second tier" believers. Its members had been essential participants in Shakerism's exciting formative years. Like the Church they had a full measure of commitment. Molly Estabrooks had visited Mother Ann and been converted by her. Moses Johnson had built the meetinghouses that Shaker Church families throughout New England were gathered around. Fortune Peters, a former slave, was a full member, a living testimony to Shakerism's commitment to gender and racial equality. Nathaniel Barker had come to Enfield from Warner, NH, bringing thirteen other Shaker converts to strengthen the core of new believers here. When James Jewett's home was burned on Shaker Hill, Nathaniel's residence became the gathering place for worship until the society relocated across the lake. Once the Second Family was established, Nathaniel was "named its first Trustee, had the management of the farm, and had general charge of the business of the family." When he retired his sons Samuel and John took up his responsibilities, serving the family faithfully until their deaths in 1852 and 1860. Nathaniel, Samuel and John became so strongly identified with the interests of the Second Family that it was often referred to as "The Barker Family" by local residents.

Members of the family signed a covenant almost identical to that of the Church. Their leadership structure was also identical. Several large kinship groups joined the Shakers at the Second, giving that family the benefit of two generations of committed believers. But though they operated under a parallel spiritual and governmental structure they maintained a respectful independence from the Church. Second Family trustees held the family property. The



*The Enfield Shaker Second Family, n.d. Image from the Collection of the Dartmouth College Library.*

products of their farm and profits from their industries were for their exclusive support. Visiting with other Enfield Shaker families was extremely limited. A separate school was maintained, and except for special occasions, the family worshipped in their own meeting room. Like the Church, they did all they could to model their community life on the example set by the Shaker society at New Lebanon, NY. When visitors from the societies in Kentucky visited in 1869 they praised their adherence to Shaker ideals.

*"This family cultivate Valerian and make extract to sell, and raise Garden seeds and carry on the coopering business, farming and gardening in a small way. And everything is as neat and as clean as a penny, and the folks seem as pure minded and bright as Saints ought to be. We had a delightful visit with them, and found them social, free and pleasant."*<sup>2</sup>

The Second Family was consistently fortunate in its leaders. Not only were its business and farm interests well managed, but Shaker Elders and Eldresses like Abraham Blodgett, Phebe Kidder, Timothy Randlett, Nancy Allard, Hannah Taylor, William Wilson and Betsey Hartford, provided strong, inspired spiritual leadership. To its credit the New Hampshire Ministry and Church Elders tried not to raid the family's leadership pool to fill gaps in other places. In 1843 New Lebanon brother Giles Avery reported back to his Ministry, "I went to the Second family on a visit. There is here about 114 souls, a powerful strong family, particularly on the sisters side." And when Schubel Prentis came in 1847 to teach the family new broom making techniques he found them filled with spiritual zeal.

*Went to the Second Family; took a visit until evening. Then we assembled with the family in the meeting room. Sat down and visited one hour then put our chairs away. The singers pitched a quick song. All were in motion. I never saw such dancing before. The Brethren and Sisters took in Spirits freely, and they brot many precious gifts for the visitors.*<sup>3</sup>

Like Shaker families everywhere, the Second Family also suffered losses both material and spiritual. In 1851 the New Hampshire ministry reported that fifteen children and adults had left the family that year. In their opinion, however, those defections made the family "none the worse. Disorderly members bring no blessing." In 1866 fire took its toll on the community's resources.

*Sept 8, a large fire at our South Family consuming two barns, one broom shop, one tool house, one shed and one house which had been occupied by swine with most of contents 40 tons hay, one ton broom brush, 25 bushels peas, 25 doz brooms, broom machines, a large assortment of farming tools of almost every description, a good assortment of Carpenter and Joiners tools &c &c besides damaging the house which was barely saved by means of Engine from Second Family.*<sup>4</sup>

*(Continued on page 6.)*

