

The Friends' Quarterly

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The Mob at Enfield - Part I

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For five days in May 1818, a mob set fear into the hearts of the Enfield, New Hampshire, Shakers. This little known confrontation, provoked by two women whose husbands and children were with the Enfield Shakers, rallied public opinion against the Shakers and their way of life. In addition to very real dangers from physical violence, the Shakers were publicly accused of immoral deeds and charged with

conduct "subversive to Christian morality," and "detrimental to the well-being of society."

Shaker Believers were targets of public scorn and collective violence from their earliest days in post-Revolutionary New England. From harassing mobs that stoned and assaulted founder Ann Lee and her followers on their proselytizing journey, to an enormous mob of more than 500 that descended on the Shaker community in Union Village, Ohio, the non-believing public had used mob activity in attempts to force Shakers to act more in line with societal norms.

At issue in Enfield were the rights of wives whose husbands and children were members of the Shaker religious sect. Mary Dyer and Eunice Chapman were outspoken in

arousing public opinion against the Shakers. They forced Enfield into the forefront of legal controversy by demanding support from their husbands who were living with the Shakers, and demanding access to or release of their Shaker-held children. Gaining widespread attention from the local community, this conflict brought notoriety to the Shakers, publicly questioned their claims to retain rights to children, and resulted in an eventual change to New Hampshire divorce law.

In the broadest view, the Shakers and the surrounding townspeople were one large community. They shared a geographic location, history, business relationships, and kin connections, for the Shakers were largely converts from the local area.

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SPRING FORUM APRIL 12 "SHAKER JOINERY IN NEW HAMPSHIRE"

Have you ever found yourself wondering what characteristics make a piece of furniture "Shaker"? Did you marvel at the red-painted Enfield blanket chest that *Art & Antiques* magazine recently chose as one of its "Top 100 Treasures of 1996"? Would you like to know more about collecting or appreciating the buildings and furniture made by the Shakers of Enfield and Canterbury, New Hampshire?

Come to the Museum's Spring Forum on Saturday, April 12, and get some answers. Three recognized experts will discuss "Shaker Joinery in New Hampshire" in a day-long presentation that will include lectures, a diagnostic workshop, and walking tours of the Village and Dana Robes Wood Craftsmen.

Presenters will be Scott T. Swank, Director of Canterbury Shaker Village, Canterbury, N.H., Jean M. Burks, Curator of Decorative Arts, Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vt, and co-author with Timothy D. Rieman of *The Complete Book of Shaker Furniture*, and Philip Zea, Deputy Director and Curator of Historic Deerfield, Inc., Deerfield, Mass., who, as a Museum trustee, conceived and organized this conference. Registration of \$70 (\$60 for Museum members) includes lunch and all events from 9 am to 4:30 pm. To register or for more information, call the Museum office.



Enfield or Canterbury, NH, blanket chest.

Photo courtesy of Skinner, Inc.

