

# The Friends' Quarterly

A publication of the Enfield Shaker Museum

## Maple Sugaring: A Rite of Spring By Glendyne R. Wergland

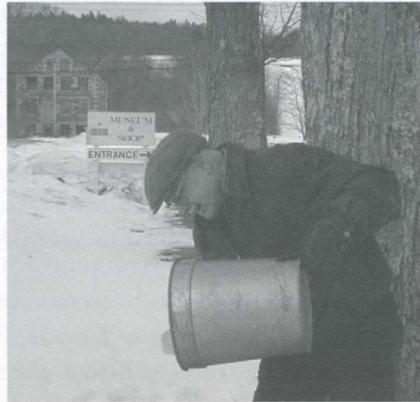
Shakers began sugaring after they immigrated to America. Colonists learned sugar making from Native Americans who collected maple sap and boiled it into sugar. Maple sugar was not a trivial thing for either the Indians or the immigrants they taught; sugar provided calories at winter's end when other food ran short. A good stand of maple trees was insurance against starvation.

Sugarmaking evolved into an economic strategy. Maple sugar was one of the few cash crops a farmer could reap from steep, rocky hillsides. The sugar harvest was so important in the nineteenth century that the *New York Times* printed front-page articles on it. One said that farmers with 600 to 1,000 maple trees made more money from this crop than from any other. Furthermore, sugar is made in late winter, so it fills a seasonal niche in the farmer's annual expenditure of labor.

Maple sugaring yielded several benefits. In 1857, when the price of imported cane sugar rose, the New Lebanon, New York, Church Family saved money by increasing their sugaring operation. The Tyringham, Massachusetts village was recognized for its sugarbush. In 1846, a visitor commented on their "towering and majestic" maple trees, the largest he had ever seen. Tyringham Shakers tapped five thousand trees. One family made a ton of sugar and syrup each year, maximizing their return from otherwise marginal land.

For Enfield, New Hampshire Shakers, sugar making provided another economic opportunity. Sugaring required sap buckets, which were made in winter when farm work was minimal. Each tap needed a bucket, and larger trees supported three or four. Enfield Shakers profited from that demand, making sap buckets for sale. They also made sugar, and made 1,750 new buckets for their own trees in 1881.

Depending on weather and elevation, sugar time starts when the sap rises in the trees. The sap flows best when the sun shines warm after a freezing night. Just as farmers have to "make hay when the sun shines," sugar makers have to tap trees when



Board President Doug Smith recreates the Shaker tradition by tapping the trees at the Museum.

the sap runs. In the early nineteenth century, hollow sumac twigs were used as spiles (or taps) for conveying sap from trees into pails. Boys whittled the spiles and burned the pith out of the center of each with a red-hot poker. Men and boys chiseled or drilled openings into the bark of each sugar maple tree, tapped the spiles in place, and hung buckets to catch the dripping sap. Sometimes sap ran faster than it could be collected. They boiled the sap until it became syrup. During a good sap run, sugar makers boiled sap day and night. The process was lengthy because it takes about forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup.

It was not a foregone conclusion that Shakers would follow the same division of labor that the world's people used. Brethren may have done the outdoor boiling at the sugar camp. The sisters, however, probably did the sugaring off, when they finished boiling the syrup down into sugar. The sisters may have finished the sugar on the kitchen stove, where the heat could be more easily adjusted to keep the product from scorching. The fact that sisters made maple candy suggests that the final stage of sugar making was gendered female as other indoor cooking was.

Sugaring was important in yet another way. In New England, winter meant spending a lot of time indoors. When snow was deep or weather bitter, some Shakers

worked in their dwellings so they wouldn't have to heat their shops. In December 1835, Samantha Fairbanks noted, "Mercury 8 degrees below cypher. The sisters stay in." After spending weeks indoors, they looked forward to sugar making. In April 1836, she noted that the sisters had walked into the maple grove. "This seems like something new," she wrote, "after being confined at home for a long and cold winter." A nineteenth-century poem says, "Though sugarin' ain't a snap, The year don't bring us any fun / That's ahead o' boilin' sap." Enfield, New Hampshire's young Believers visited the sap works to swing, eat "chopstick" (maple candy cooled on snow), and have a good time. Everyone enjoyed a "holly day" or "season of recreation" in the sap woods, playing in the sunshine.

Shakers continued making maple sugar as long as they had the manpower to do it. In 1890, the Canterbury Shakers made more than 500 gallons of syrup and the Enfield, New Hampshire Shakers reported that their sugar harvest was above average because the sap had a higher-than-normal concentration of sugar. In 1894, Enfield made 500 gallons from two orchards, but the North Family reported their harvest was down, because they tapped only 500 trees and did not hire extra help. As young men left the society, the manpower shortage limited their production. By 1891, the dwindling Hancock Shakers reported they were making "very small quantities," and the scribe wrote, almost with envy, "we are reminded of the toiling ones in our sister societies (particularly those in New Hampshire,) who are manufacturing such large quantities of both syrup and sugar, and we wonder how so much labor can be accomplished." In 1896, one Hancock brother made twenty gallons of syrup, and they were grateful for that. Nevertheless, they called sugartime a season of "celebration." Like other farmers who appreciated nature's bounty, Shakers counted maple sap as a special blessing and the resulting sweets as rewards for their hard work. Maple sugaring was their rite of spring. (Endnotes are available at the Museum.)

### **Sugaring Off Dinner: Saturday, March 15, 6:30 p.m.**

Enjoy a traditional meal featuring maple syrup from the trees at Enfield Shaker Museum! The menu will be Wild Rice and Broccoli Soup, Beet Salad with Maple Vinaigrette, Apple Nut Rolls with Maple Butter, Roast Pork with Cranberry Maple Sauce, Potato Pie with Buttered Crumbs, Green Beans and Walnut Maple Cream. Museum Executive Chef Betsy Oppenneer studied at the Culinary Institute of America, the ATA School of Gourmet Cooking in Portafino, Italy, Cornell University's Intensive Gourmet Cooking Program and the Yankee Kitchen Certificate Series. She is an award-winning member of the International Association of Culinary Professionals. Her television appearances include *Cookin' USA* and *CBS This Morning*. Admission is \$30 per member or \$35 per non-member and includes a complimentary glass of wine. Register by Mar. 12.



*Museum Executive Chef  
Betsy Oppenneer*

### **Discovering A Sense of Place: Discussion Series**

#### **Sundays, March 30 – May 4, 4:00 – 5:30 p.m.**

This series is designed to increase awareness of and appreciation for, the place we call Enfield. Early survival required an intimate understanding of, and respect for, the bioregion, including the soils, climate, waterways, flora and fauna. Trustee Barbara Woods, Brattleboro Course Coordinator for the Vermont Earth Institute, will lead discussions on how indigenous peoples, the Shakers, the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette and developers have altered the landscape. The course will help bring people together to raise ecological awareness and facilitate change in caring for the environment. The Museum's mission is to protect, enhance and utilize its historical structures, landscape and Shaker cultural heritage. Enfield residents are welcome. To register, a purchase of a \$20 handbook is required. Contact Barbara Woods @ 802-345-4292 or woods.barbara@hotmail.com.

### **Spring Forum on the Shakers: Friday - Sunday, April 4-6**

Immerse yourself in Shaker culture for a full weekend! On Friday, guests will tour the new exhibit *Shaker Yokefellows: Enfield Shakers from Vermont* (see back page) while sampling Vermont wines and cheeses. Willem Lange will entertain guests with his views as to why no Shaker community was



*Columnist, author and host for VT Public Radio, NH Public Television and VT Public Television, Willem Lange is among the most beloved New England storytellers. After 40 years in NH, he now lives in VT.*

formed in Vermont. On Saturday, scholar, author and past trustee Robert P. Emlen will speak on the Enfield Shakers' landscape of Gospel Order. Scholar Roben Campbell will give a new twist on Shaker textiles. Galen Beale, past board president, will talk about the industrialization of the Enfield Shakers. Former staff member Suzanne Hinman will lead a tour of downtown Enfield, pointing out the Shaker structures. Pontine Theater will perform a beautiful brief play, *Journey to Heaven*, based on Shaker documents, music, art and architecture. On Sunday, Property Manager Tom Boswell will give a tour of capital projects in the Great Stone Dwelling. Trustee Donna Butler and organist George Butler will host a program of spiritual, meditative music in the Mary Keane Chapel. Trustee Carolyn Smith will interpret images of the Enfield community, this year focusing on the Enfield Shakers. Package rates, including rooms and meals, are offered. Call (603) 632-4346 to register.

*In psychology, pontine is a process, a bridge over which dream images travel. Pontine Theater entrances audiences through mime, dance, music, literature and theater. Co-Artistic Director Marguerite Mathews is the Artist Laureate of New Hampshire.*

*Thanks to Corporate Sponsors*

**MASCOMA SAVINGS BANK and SHAKER WORKSHOPS**



### School Vacation Week: April 14 – 18

Children aged 7-10 and adult caregivers will work together on daily hands-on Shaker crafts. Children aged 11-14 will have projects they can work on progressively through the week, without adult supervision. Pre-registration is encouraged for the younger children; pre-registration is required for the older group. Call 632-4346.



### Simple Gifts Spin & Spa Retreat: April 18-20

The Borderline Spinners Group is coordinating this event with the NH Spinners and Dyers Guild. Enjoy two relaxing days of spinning, sightseeing, shopping and hiking. Bring a spinning wheel or knitting projects. A "stash reduction sale" will be held on Saturday. Contact emily@rknight.net by March 15 for the "knitty" details.

### Service Elderhostel: April 20 – 25

Learn about the Shakers and put your "hands to work, hearts to God" with lectures, demonstrations, tours and hands-on projects. Rooms and meals included. Call Deb Williams, the Hulbert Outdoor Center, 802-333-3405.



### Enfield Shaker Singers Concert Wednesday, April 23, 7:15 p.m.

This a cappella vocal ensemble is led by volunteer and former trustee Mary Ann

Haagen. Dressed in authentic costume, the performers recreate the Shakers' traditional song and dance. Free admission.



### Business After Hours

#### Hanover Area Chamber of Commerce

Thursday, May 8, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Network with professional colleagues, take a tour, sample wines and enjoy delicious Shaker recipes. Take a chance to win a prize!

### Shaker Dinner: Saturday, May 17, 6:30 p.m.

Enjoy a traditional dinner in the Great Stone Dwelling, the Shakers' greatest architectural achievement. Designed by Ammi Burnham Young (later the architect for the U.S. Treasury), the "stone house" captures Shaker ideals of order, simplicity and spirituality. \$30 per member or \$35 per non-member includes complimentary wine. Register by May 14.

### Benefit Yard Sale: May 23-24, 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

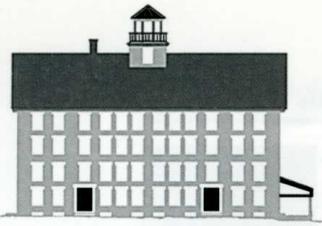
This sale, held in the 1849 Stone Mill, will offer books, furniture, household items, toys, sports equipment and much more!

### Country Life Festival : Saturday, June 7

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Celebrate living in harmony with the land! Sample Upper Valley cheeses, honey, herbs, cider, maple syrup and more! Meals, demonstrations, horse-drawn wagon rides and music are scheduled. Many activities will be held in the historic buildings, so this event will be held rain or shine. Admission fee includes Museum tour.





**Enfield Shaker Museum**

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**Enfield Shaker Museum Opens New Exhibit  
Premiers Friday, April 4**

“Shaker Yokefellows: Enfield Shakers from Vermont” opens on Friday, April 4 to coincide with the Spring Forum on the Shakers (see inside for details.) The exhibit takes its name from Robert Frost’s epic poem “New Hampshire,” in a book that earned him the first of four Pulitzer prizes for poetry.

As did the Enfield Shakers before him, Frost lived and worked on a northern New England hill farm. After studying at Dartmouth College, he lived in both states. The landscape in his mind was similar to that of the early Vermonters who became Enfield Shakers. He called the two states “yokefellows in the sap yoke from old.” Frost mulled over which state he preferred and came down on the side of New Hampshire, much as the earlier Vermonters had: “I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer.../It’s restful to arrive at a decision,/And restful just to think about New Hampshire./At present I am living in Vermont.”

Research has revealed that 193 Shakers moved to Enfield from Vermont. They range from Zadock Wright, one of the first Believers, to Franklin Young, the last Shaker Brother who lived on the site until 1923, the year Frost’s book was published. Curatorial Committee Chair Galen Beale said, “We began with a question: ‘Why was there no Shaker village in Vermont?’” The exhibit, along



with an engaging commentary by Will Lange on April 4 (see Forum details inside) provide the answers. As did Robert Frost and 193 Shakers before him, Lange has lived in both states. The title of his presentation is, “At present I am living in Vermont.”

*On the steps of the Vermont History Center in Barre, Vermont, members of the Museum’s Curatorial Committee, Cathy McGree, Barbara Woods, Cynthia Barton and Galen Beale, prepare to spend a day researching the upcoming exhibit. Missing from the photograph is Jean Beard.*