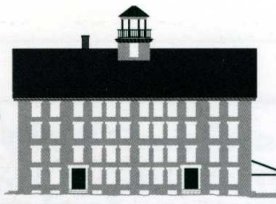


The Friends' Quarterly



A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

The Order of Young Believers at Enfield, New Hampshire

Stephen Paterwic

Starting in 1787, Shakers began to gather into communities in the pattern known as Gospel Order. By the late 1790s, however, it was clear that the system had to be changed. The most pressing need was to add a new category of membership called the Order of Young Believers or the Gathering or Novitiate Order. Until that time all Shakers had been divided into those of the Church Order and those in the Order of Families. There was no means to gather new converts or accommodate them. One of Mother Lucy Wright's major accomplishments was to fill this need by creating the Order of Young Believers.

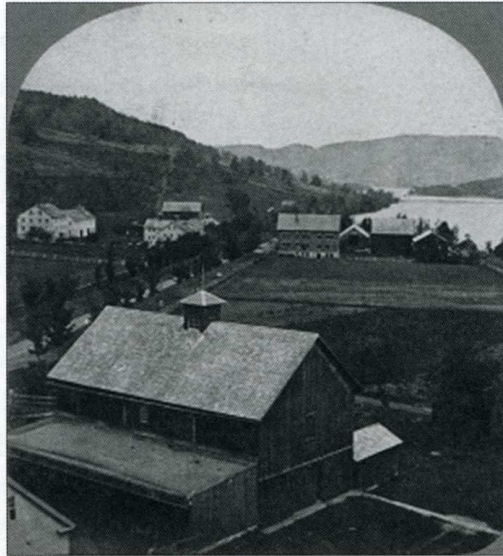


Image of the Enfield North Family, taken by C. E. Lewis of Lebanon, N.H. Collection of the United Society of Shakers, Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

Consequently, in 1799, the Order of Young Believers was started at New Lebanon, New York, in the North Spin Shop at the Church Family. It was first thought that gathering orders might be regional in nature and gather people for various communities. This proved to be impractical. In addition, it was determined that it was unwise to place it within the Church Family or have its temporal interest intertwined with the Church. In time, as the Gathering Order took shape, modifications were made until it was decided that each Shaker society should have at least one separate family for a Gathering Order. Between 1807 and 1819, all of the eleven Shaker communities in the East began novitiate families. Most of the communities took an existing Shaker family from the Order of Families and re-organized it. The members who had lived there were sent to live in other families and specific elders and eldresses were chosen to take charge of the new order. Two societies, Harvard and New Gloucester, had to purchase additional land to accommodate the new order. At Tyringham, the number of Shakers was so few that the Second or North Family doubled as a Gathering Order. In the West, Gathering Orders were added as communities were founded.

The NH Shaker society at Enfield faced a unique situation when it started its novitiate family in 1810. The first Shakers at Enfield lived on individual farms on the **east** side of Mascoma Lake around Shaker Hill. Through land trades and purchases, when it was time to organize Enfield into Gospel Order, the Shakers moved to the **western** side. Thus Enfield did not have multiple small groups making up an Order of Families. Instead, there was the First Family of the Church (Church Family) organized in 1793 and the Second Family of the Church (Second Family) organized in 1794. Until large dwellings could be erected, Believers lived in small houses but belonged to

either the First or Second Families of the Church. In contrast, the Shakers of New Lebanon ended the Order of Families in 1811 and gathered them into the Second Family of the Church. When the two families at Enfield were started, they numbered 40 each. By 1803, numbers had increased to 132. Sixty-one lived in the Church Family and seventy-one in the Second Family. This increase was not due to an influx of outsiders but rather to an effort to gather in as many as possible of the first people who had become Shakers in the 1780s. Henry Cumings writes: *After the families were organized they lived very secluded, had no public meeting and received but few accessions for several years, the object being mainly to get things into good working order.* Yet people were seeking to join, and it was inevitable with the impetus from New Lebanon that Gathering Orders would be formed in the two NH communities.

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This article is based on a presentation that Paterwic will give at the Enfield Shaker Museum's Spring Forum on May 7, 2011. He received the Shaker Workshops Award for Outstanding New Research at the Forum in 2010. He is the author of many published articles and the Historical Dictionary of the Shakers. He is a past president of the Boston Area Shaker Study Group, an overseer at Hancock Shaker Village and a corporator at Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village. He serves on their Friends of the Shakers board.

