

# The Friends' Quarterly

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## "Dr. Brown Has a method peculiar to himself, of extracting the acid of the Valerian..."

by Galen Beale

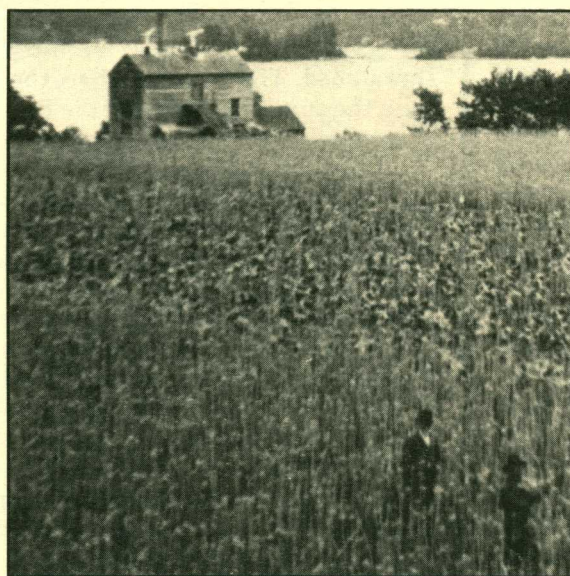
Dr. Samuel Brown, Physician of the Second Family of Enfield, New Hampshire Shakers, worked out a formula for an herbal medicine called "Brown's Pure Fluid Extract of English Valerian" in the late 1840s, and turned it into a profitable business for the Family for many years

Born in 1797, Brown became interested in medicine as a young man and apprenticed under Brother Ezekiel Evans who was in charge of the Second Family's medicinal herb business. Largely self-taught, Brown also learned his trade from the physicians of the Church Family and doctors from Enfield Center who regularly assisted these Shaker physicians.

While the medicinal qualities of valerian had been known throughout history, the herb was available in America only in dried form, and the large amount of the dried root necessary for an effective cure caused many unpleasant side effects(2). Its use had been largely abandoned as a result, and opium or morphine was used instead, with their attendant side effects.

The Second Family imported valerian roots from England and planted them in their gardens(3). Brown was able to extract the essential oil of the fresh root, and with this oil, make a medicine that was powerful but had no side effects. The medicine was prepared from a 20 gallon formula(4) which called for eight ounces of valerian oil dissolved in two gallons of alcohol. To this was added four ounces

of poppy extract and one ounce henbane (opium poppy and henbane are both strong narcotics.)



Enfield Shaker Valerian Distillery

Four gallons of burnt sugar were then added and the rest - almost half of the recipe - was alcohol.

Brown's Extract of Valerian was recommended for "every disease arising from mental affection and nervous exhaustion"(5), and could be used internally or externally. Brown submitted his medicine to the sixth Exhibition of the Mechanics Association held in Boston, September, 1850, and it was awarded a medal by the Committee of Chemicals for the purity and strength of its preparation.

Dr. Brown died in 1856, but the Enfield Shakers continued to sell the Extract of Valerian. They published several catalogs filled with testimonials and distributed the medicine through wholesalers in Boston and New York.

In 1879, the Church Family took over the business(6) and reported they were manufacturing over 50,000 bottles a year, at the cost of 35 cents per bottle(7). The Enfield Shakers were still selling Valerian in 1918, when they reported over \$400.00 of income from the medicine on their tax return(8).

Valerian, (*Valerian officinalis*) also known as garden heliotrope, is a perennial herb which spreads slowly by rope-like white runners. Its hairy foliage is topped in June and July by tight clusters of pinkish-whitish tubular flowers. The root, harvested in the fall, is the medicinal part of the plant. Valerian is a powerful nervine, stimulant, carminative and antispasmodic, and the extracted drug remains valuable today.

In the home garden, valerian is a good companion plant for vegetables, and a spray made from the plant is said to both strengthen plants and attract earthworms.

References:

1. Facts Concerning Brown's Pure Fluid Extract of English Valerian (Enfield, New Hampshire, 1879). Manuscript in Western Reserve Historical Society Shaker Collection, Cleveland Ohio.

2. & 3. Ibid.

4. A Receipt for Compounding the Celebrated Brown's Shaker's Pure Fluid Extract of English Valerian, made in Enfield, New Hampshire, S.F. (n.d.) Manuscript in Canterbury Shaker Village Archives, Shaker Village Inc., Canterbury, New Hampshire.

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