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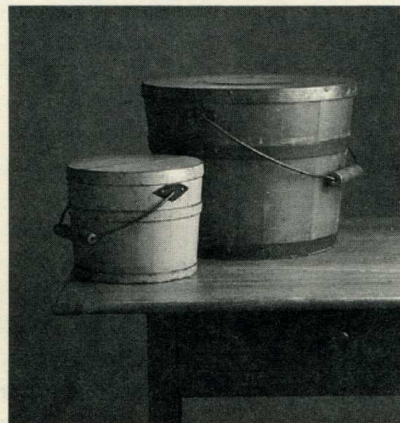
The Cooperage Industry of Enfield's North Family

by Galen Beale

Cooperage—the manufacture of wooden staved tubs, pails and buckets—was a vital early American industry. The earliest tubs and pails were laboriously made entirely with hand tools. However, the craft was rapidly mechanized and by the 1830s machine companies were producing pail and tub lathes, barrel saws, and a variety of other labor-saving equipment. The machine companies revolutionized the industry and spawned many tub and pail mills throughout New England and the Midwest. Enfield's North Family Shakers bought this modern equipment and developed a business that successfully competed in the World, and not only paid their debts, but supported the Family almost until its closing.

When the Enfield Shakers first established their community on the shore of Lake Mascoma, they built water-powered mills in which to do their woodworking. The equipment found in these mills gives an indication of the type of industries being carried on by the Shakers; as the equipment changed over time, so did the volume, quality and type of their mill products. This early machinery was both home made and commercially made, and planing machinery for the manufacture of bucket staves was an important part of early mill equipment. Water-powered planes were found in the community's first Grist Mill, built in 1798, as well as their 1812 Grist Mill. Two types of planes were described in

Enfield's first Grist Mill: a flat planer, still commonly used today by woodworkers to smooth wood to an even thickness, and a stave planer which planed the wood concave on one side and convex on the other.



"The building was about 60 x 32 feet, two stories in height....The power was furnished by an overshot water wheel thirty feet in diameter; buckets eight feet long. The north part of the mill was occupied by various minor machines for various uses. Among those were a fine edging and cut-off saws for staves, pails and tubs, also a plane for planing bottoms, for pails and tubs and for grain measures. This was like an ordinary hand smoothing plane, only it was wide enough to plane half bushel bottoms whole 16 to 18 inches wide. The motion was up and down, moved by a crank, the stroke about 24 inches. There was also another similar plane for planing staves for pails and tubs outside and inside with concave and convex blades for any desired size, there

was also a wood turning lathe."

By the mid-19th century all three of Enfield's families were making buckets. When the Church Family's mill burned in 1849, the Shakers immediately rebuilt a fireproof, stone mill building which stands today, and in 1850 three coopers were making pails and tubs there. That same year, the 2nd Family was also enlarging their cooperage business. Their Trustee, Jason Kidder, reported investing \$1,000 in a water-powered tub mill in which three coopers produced 600 tubs valued at \$900. Ten years later, they were producing 12,000 pails annually. The remaining Family at Enfield, the North, was also making buckets on a small scale.

The growth of the North Family's cooperage industry can be attributed to financial necessity. By 1855 this Family had built almost all their buildings, and all their bills were paid. They supported themselves by making brooms, selling lumber and other trades. But on April 10, 1856, tragedy struck the family. A fire destroyed 11 buildings. The family immediately set about to recover from this devastation and among the new buildings was a new mill, "a substantial two story and basement structure with slated roof," which in 1869, would become the Tub and Pail Factory. Recovering from the Fast Day fire was a financial drain on this small Shaker family and they needed to find additional sources of income. Three years after the fire, Enfield's North Family began to set up their cooperage business again with "more extensive, and better

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