

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume IX, No.2

Summer 1997

'Precious Gospel Kindred' Exhibit Opens June 28th

The voices of generations of Enfield Shakers will be heard again in the Stone Mill Building this summer, as a new exhibit tells the story of the Enfield Shaker Village through the lives and writings of 28 community members. Organized by Mary Ann Haagen, Precious Gospel Kindred is the result of a year of concentrated manuscript research, and a milestone in interpreting Enfield Shaker Village history.

Presented in the first person, the exhibit narrative covers five chronological periods from eighteenth century occurrences of Shaker preaching in the area to the closing of the village early in the twentieth century. In its first section, "Opening the Testimony," the exhibit describes the religious fervor from 1782-1793 that resulted in the formal organization of Enfield Shakers as the eighth Shaker village in America. Early communal life, or "Gathering Into Order,"

was a period of optimism and organization that extended through the 1830's. The height of the Shakers' influence and prosperity that followed forms the heart of the exhibit, spanning the years 1837 to 1863, and ends tragically with the murder of their great leader, Caleb Dyer.

Declining membership was a fact of life for all Shaker villages in the later nineteenth century, and at Enfield the Believers adapted by looking outward

to find sympathetic minds among spiritualists, dietary reformers, and medicinal healers in the world. This exhibit section, "Lowering Zion's Walls" ends with the 1882 judgement against the Shakers that finally settled the Conant case in 1882, and cost them \$20,000. "For Want of Believers" concludes the exhibit with the final

narrative. An audio tape will contain readings and anecdotes about the Enfield Shakers, taken from interviews with local sources. Charlie DuPuy developed the exhibit design for the Shaker-built Stone Mill Building, and, with help from many volunteers, has done all the major construction.

Former Museum director Carolyn Smith has edited an exhibit catalogue with biographies of the 28 Shakers whose stories are told through the exhibit. A limited edition booklet of the sayings of Rosetta Cummings will be produced and sold as well.

The Shaker Singers will perform a program of all-Enfield music at the opening, and during the season. They have learned several new marches from rare manuscript sources that include diagrams of the steps.

Precious Gospel Kindred is dedicated to Wendell and Viola Hess, long time Lake Mascoma residents and friends of the Shakers, who have

generously shared their stories and knowledge with Shaker researchers over the years. Funding for this exhibit has been provided by the New Hampshire Humanities Council, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, and Mascoma Savings Bank Foundation. An accessibility grant from the New Hampshire Council on the Arts has made possible a new ramp at the entrance to the Stone Mill Building.



Volunteers at work in the Stone Mill Building in preparation for Precious Gospel Kindred exhibit opening June 28th. Non-Shaker wainscoting was removed and windows restored to provide a more authentic and comfortable exhibit gallery.

reorganization that ended with the sale of the property and the remaining Enfield Shakers moving to Canterbury in 1923.

Visitors to the exhibit will see a rich visual record as well as being able to read the words written by Shakers. Photographs of Believers were common in the later years, and many of these were borrowed for reproduction in the exhibit. Original paintings by Dona Meyer complement the **textual**

