

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

Volume XVI/No.2

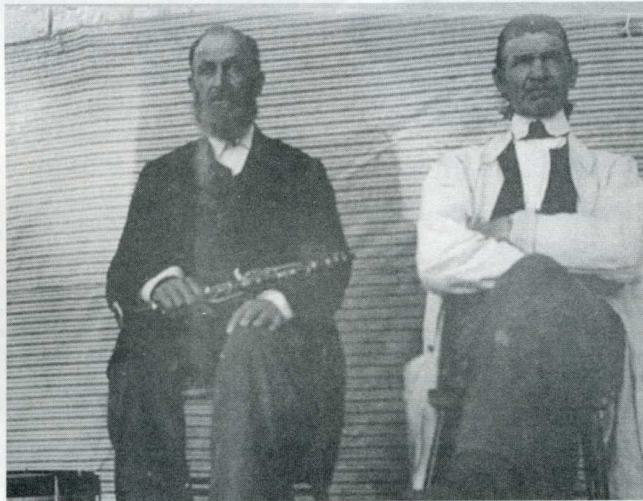
Summer 2006

"Reminiscences of Shakers I knew."

by George Ulysses Lincoln Leavitt

John Whittaker (1815-1886)

"Another "character" among the Barker, or South Family of Shakers, was John Whittaker. He was a very large man standing about 6 foot 4 inches tall and had broad shoulders and a long face. Would weigh well over 200 pounds. He was the "butcher" at the Barker Family for many years, and I have had quite a few meals of meat that he brought over across the lake to my camp. He always staid to dinner when he brought over any meat, and always seemed to enjoy eating. I remember one occasion when there were quite a lot of us in camp that he came over with his friend and companion Elias Smith, in his boat that he had "builded himself" and called his "Mighty Runner." (It was a very long heavy boat, and one side of it was nearly straight, while the other was more nearly curved, as the side of a boat should be.) So we invited them to stay to dinner. After the dinner we passed around slices of watermelon and he had a slice the same as everyone else. I asked him if he would like another slice and he said, "yea I would." He ate five or six slices before he went back home, on top of a hearty dinner. I noticed that he saved all of the seeds and put them in his vest pocket, so I said, "I see you saved the seeds", and he replied, "Yea I would not have ate so much melon, but those seeds looked black and good to plant." He was not a



Elias Smith (left) and John Whittaker of the Enfield Shaker Community.
Photo: Robert Leavitt Collection, Enfield Shaker Museum

fool, but just a simple Shaker. They said of him that he was one of the best workers that they had on the place. He lived in a three story building near the road, at the South Family, which building was one of the very last Shaker Buildings to be taken down."

Elias Smith (1810-1890)

"I have spoken of Elias Smith as being a close friend and companion of John Whittaker. They were always together when out of doors, and no doubt lived in the same building. Elias Smith was a brother of Mrs. Willis Johnson, who for many years owned and operated the 'Quincy House' hotel in Boston. He had lived with the Shakers from a child, and was a nice looking man of about 50 years old when I first knew him. He played a "flute" quite well and I used to ask him to play out on the lake evenings, when we had

company. For he did enjoy playing, especially if there were ladies to listen. I asked him once if he knew how to play "Money-musk" and he said, "Nay, I am not allowed to play worldly tunes, but I can play this" and he played it, keeping very good time. He died some time before the Shakers left Enfield.

("Reminiscences of Shakers I knew." A series of short essays from the Robert Leavitt Collection, Enfield Shaker Museum is featured in the current exhibition "An Ever Widening Circle of Friends".)

Good News from the President of the Board

I am thrilled to be able to tell you that the tax debt to the Town of Enfield has been paid in full!! The Museum recently paid approximately \$47,000 to the Town and is now completely current in all its tax payments. After paying approximately \$35,000 in back taxes in April, the Board immediately set to work addressing the remaining tax balance.

After discussing several different means by which the issue could be resolved, the Board decided to make personal loans to the Museum at an interest rate that is much

more favorable to the Museum than the 18% rate the Town is charging. This arrangement allows the Museum to repay the tax debt over 2 1/2 years, a timetable that fits within the Museum's projected budget. In addition, by paying the Town of Enfield now, we are looking at the possibility of a partial abatement of the interest already accrued on the debt. Thanks to 100% Board participation in this effort we were able to pay off this debt in early August.

