

# The Friends' Quarterly

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## The New Hampshire Bishopric

By Mary Rose Boswell, Executive Director

As the Shakers formed new societies, they organized a structure to ensure efficiency in their communication and decision-making. The New Lebanon society in New York became the central authority. Bishoprics, consisting of two or more communities in close proximity, were formed to assist the Lead Ministry. Within each Bishopric were two Ministry Elders and two Eldresses who oversaw their communities' spiritual needs.

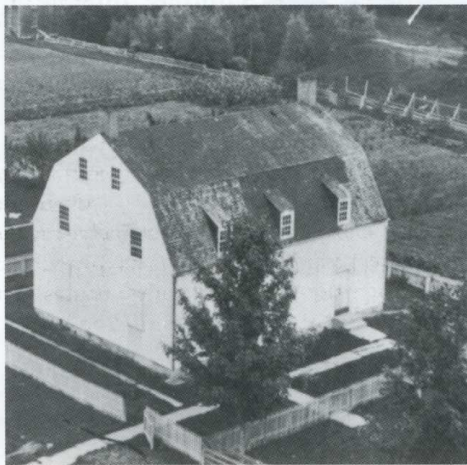
The Canterbury and Enfield societies formed the New Hampshire Bishopric. By 1792 Job Bishop was appointed to oversee both communities, even before Enfield was officially formed. Edmund Lougee, who had been gathered from Canterbury to New Lebanon, arrived with Elder Job Bishop at Canterbury on February 10, 1792. In May Hannah Goodrich and Anna Burdick rode horseback from New Lebanon and Hancock respectively to aid the new bishopric. In September Job Bishop, Hannah Goodrich and Anna Burdick traveled to New Lebanon, presumably to report on their progress. The next month Job and Hannah returned to Canterbury, but Anna remained at Hancock, and Hannah Lougee succeeded her as Ministry Eldress. Hannah Goodrich assumed the title of Mother, and in 1795 Job Bishop assumed the title of Father. The purpose was to provide spiritual leadership. As Ministry parents, they made policy, settled disputes, enforced regulations and facilitated communication. Enfield and Canterbury's stability and economic prosperity were largely due to Goodrich and Job's long tenure and capable leadership.

The New Hampshire Bishopric alternated their time between Enfield and Canterbury, staying several weeks at each community. Occasionally they traveled to New Lebanon and other societies. Their travels often averaged 1,400 miles or more per year. After sojourns to New Lebanon, they often brought back instructions regarding their ritualistic dances, songs and marches.

Only the Ministry was permitted to visit other villages with any regularity until 1799. Travel on horseback was the norm. In 1802 the Canterbury Shakers built a "pleasure carriage" for the Harvard Ministry. The New Hampshire Bishopric continued to ride on horseback, and they rode to Enfield that winter in a sleigh.

The Ministry's mode of travel improved with the railroad. It not only saved them time but exposed them to new experiences as well. In 1876 their trips included a tour of the Centennial Exhibit in Philadelphia, visits to the beach, a picnic at Northfield Depot, a spiritualist camp meeting and a temperance convention.

The length of time an individual served as a Ministry Elder or Eldress depended on many factors. Often they stepped down to help in other areas as needed. After 13 years as Ministry Eldress in New Hampshire, Hester Ann Adams was appointed to the order of the Ministry at Alfred and Gloucester. Apparently this move was



*New Hampshire's Bishopric often stayed overnight in Enfield's Meetinghouse. (Detail, Enfield Shaker Museum, Leavitt Collection.)*

highly beneficial, for Canterbury Shaker John Whitcher reported in December, that the Ministry Order in Alfred was *wholly renewed*. Father Job served as spiritual leader for 39 years until his death in 1831, and Benjamin Whitcher of Canterbury filled the position with Joseph Johnson of Enfield. To ensure that the communities had trained leaders, "junior" elders were appointed to prepare for the role and be able to step in as needed.

The Ministry Elders and Eldresses did not sleep in the Dwelling Houses and or work with the other Shakers. They had their own workspaces and initially slept upstairs in the communities' Meeting Houses. Later, they had their own residences. In 1848 the Canterbury Shakers built a new Ministry House on the site of their former one. The Enfield Shakers built their first Ministry House in 1800, and their second one in 1880.

While their focus was on spiritual matters, the New Hampshire Ministry was also expected to participate in temporal concerns to help the economy of the communities under their care. In her spare time, Eldress Lucy Williams operated a "Pleasant Spinner" on the second floor of the 1808 two-story Work Shop at Canterbury. The spinning mule was probably made at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, and it ran the length of the room when in use. The Brethren occupied the two rooms below.

New Hampshire's Bishopric had many progressive leaders who faced change as necessary for survival. The Ministry could be drawn from either society. Enfield provided several important leaders with considerable tenures: Esther Ferrin, Joseph Johnson and Abraham Perkins. Canterbury's Henry C. Blinn wrote histories of the Enfield and Canterbury and recorded a biography of Mother Ann Lee. While she served in the Ministry for only one year, Eldress Dorothy Durgin had a significant impact on the United Society. She was a strong advocate of equal authority between the male and female leaders and helped establish the role of female trustees, which allowed the Sisters to handle money, necessary for the operation of their lucrative trades.

These leaders encouraged the United Society of Believers to meet contemporary needs. They proposed how to handle economic, behavioral and leadership challenges that had plagued the sect for decades. They advocated abandoning outdated practices, increasing their missionary efforts and marketing their progressive beliefs. This approach appalled many conservative leaders, who argued in favor of a more limited separation from the World.

When Henry C. Blinn died in 1905, no one replaced him as Ministry Elder. The New Hampshire Bishopric was dissolved on December 16, 1918. Enfield closed its doors from 1918 to 1923, and the remaining Shakers there moved to Canterbury.

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