

The Friends' Quarterly



A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

A Murder in Enfield

By Arthur Gagnon, Jr., Enfield Shaker Museum Interpreter

Caleb Dyer and Thomas Wier were very different men who became involved in one of the most intriguing dramas in Shaker history. Thomas Wier was a family man, a shoemaker by trade, who worked for the Shakers part-time. Caleb Marshall Dyer was a devoted Shaker leader and one of the most respected men in Enfield. The conflict that developed between these two men left Caleb Dyer dead and Thomas Wier sentenced to hang. Their tragic story began with Thomas Wier's response to the Civil War. Former Shaker Henry Cumings gave this firsthand account:

In June 1861, Thomas Wier, being at work with me at the North Family, suddenly broke out with, "Well I am going to enlist and go south and get Jeff Davis' head." This was said in an earnest, impulsive way very common with him. He said he was going to put his two youngest girls, aged about 8 and 10 years old, at the Church Family Shakers ...!

After some initial resistance, the Shakers relented and agreed to take the children.

Most of the Shakers were opposed to taking these children, knowing the man and the family so well, but Caleb favored it on the ground that Wier was going in the Army, and he thought they ought to help him in that way."

So on August 29, 1861, Thomas Wier placed his two youngest daughters, Sara and Ellen, with the Church Family Shakers.³ The following is an excerpt from the Covenant he signed together with Trustees Caleb M. Dyer and Mary Fall:

Sara Wier born Dec. 6th 1850, Ellen Wier born Dec. 28th 1852 have been placed by me in the Society of Believers... with the intent that they should remain with the Society... so long as they shall with their own consent remain with the same Society... where I have placed them afore said until they shall arrive at lawful age...⁴

During this period in Wier's life, he reported a wife "sick unto death," he placed his two youngest daughters with the Shakers, and his two oldest daughters had died! Apart from "getting Jeff Davis' head," one can only speculate on his reasons for joining the Union Army. Military records show that he enlisted in the Fifth NH Volunteers, Co. C, on August 23, 1861, and was mustered in on October 12, 1861, as a corporal. Wier's military service was brief, just eight months. His regiment was in the Battle of Rappahannock, which occurred on March 28, 1862. Conditions during this campaign were severe, and Wier's health failed. He was discharged "for disability" on May 1, 1862. After his separation from the Army, he returned to Enfield.⁵

By and by, Wier's health failed and he returned home; his wife had become better and they wished their children returned. C. M. Dyer replied, saying if the girls desired to go they could do so...⁶

The next move was Thomas Wier's. His wife had regained



Thomas Wier. Image from the collection of the Enfield Shaker Museum.

her health. Caleb indicated he would release the girls, and the Wiers were in a position to take them. But, when Wier visited his children to take them home "they told their father that they had a good home and were happy and contented." This must have been discouraging news for a father trying to reunite his family, especially so, since two of his daughters had died within the year.

After failing in this attempt to take his children home with him, Wier persuaded Squire W. C. Smith to visit and talk with his daughters.

Then Wier got Squire W. C. Smith to go over and see the girls, which he did having them alone. But all he could say to them, they would not consent to go with their father.⁷

Note that Smith was a civil engineer, town official and respected resident of Enfield.⁸ It is unlikely he would have interceded for the Wiers if he thought them unfit parents.

Conversations between Wier and Dyer up to this point had been civil, but they had reached an impasse. Dyer's position was, "if the girls desired to go then they could do so, but as their guardian he should protect them in their choice," and they had chosen to remain with the Shakers.

Urged on, no doubt by his wife and friends, he visited them again and...tried to persuade them to go with him; not succeeding, the next time he went to see them, he made a demand that the children be given up to him, nolen volens.⁹ This, of course, was not complied with and he left, swearing that, "as true as there was a god in heaven, he would have the girls dead or alive."¹⁰

Matters escalated, and "the next attempt was made by his wife and daughter Martha (to) seize them and drive off with them." This also failed. Following this attempt at kidnapping, Wier was "refused the privilege of seeing them, and forbidden to come into the door yard of the Society." It was then that "Elder Dyer received an anonymous letter, threatening his life unless he gave up the children."¹¹ The whole thing came to a head on July 18, 1863.

Wier came over to the Society... met Elder Caleb who was going from the North to the Church Family. He asked him if he could see the girls? Elder Caleb's answer was, "It's a Saturday night and not a proper time for such visits." Then, "You will take this," said Wier, drawing his revolver and firing immediately. "I am shot, but not killed," was Elder Caleb's remark, as he passed on and into the office.

(Continued on page 2.)

Arthur Gagnon, Jr. has been giving tours at the Museum for 15 years. His article "Shakerism and the Godhead" appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of The Friends' Quarterly. He has been researching Thomas Wier for some time, but a recent donation of a photograph of Wier (shown above) to the Museum inspired him to write this article.

A Murder in Enfield (*Continued from page 1*)

Despite the best efforts of local surgeons, the wound was fatal, and on July 21, 1863, Dyer passed away. Immediately after the shooting, Wier gave himself up to Wyman Pattee, who was the High Sheriff at the time. He was indicted for murder by the Grand Jury and trial was set for April 1864 at Haverhill, NH. The trial lasted four days. The jury's verdict was guilty of murder in the first degree, and the judge sentenced Thomas Wier to be hung on April 21, 1865. The time of execution was one year and one day from the date of sentencing. Wier's lawyers filed an appeal and a second trial was granted. At that time Wier pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 30 years in Concord State Prison.¹³ After his incarceration, petitions were filed requesting his pardon. Wier's supporters would file a petition with each new governor and council; all were either withdrawn or denied. The petition of 1878 for the pardon of Thomas Wier brought by one of his leading supporters, Nellie (Ellen) F. Wier of Enfield was rejected mainly due to a petition remonstrating against the pardon. The remonstrance was signed by local people and the Shakers, including Sara Wier.¹⁴ She also testified against her father's release at the pardon hearing, saying that she could "not trust any man who had taken a life, not even [her] father." In a dramatic turnabout, Sara Wier signed the 1880 petition request for her father's pardon and disclaimed any previous statements. She then wrote a personal letter recanting her testimony at the pardon hearing. The following is the complete text of Sara Wier Dillingham's letter:

Goffstown, NH March 20, 1880

Why I testified as I did at the hearing was because I was told by the Shakers at the time my father shot C. M. Dyer that he came to get us, my sister and myself, and would have us dead or alive and I have always been led to believe that my life was in danger with others, and I was afraid of him up to the time I see him, but now I know my father is harmless, and I want all done that can be for his release.

Yours respectfully, S. M. Dillingham¹⁵

What caused Sara Wier's sudden and dramatic change of mind? The answer is in the historic record:

After the murder we preferred that the children should go to their mother, if they would willingly do so... but they chose to remain with us. The mother, however, decided to keep the younger and sent to us the older girl, who was determined not to remain with her mother. She has since left the Society, choosing the marriage relation.¹⁶

The older girl, who was returned to the Shakers, was Sara Wier! Sara was still a member of the Enfield Shaker community and under their influence when she signed the "remonstrance" of 1878! It wasn't until February 4, 1879, that Sara finally left the Shakers, apostatising with Edward Dillingham, "choosing the marriage relation."

After leaving the Shakers, Sara gave birth to a son and was reunited with her family. It was then that she made the decision, based on a completed life, to join her sister Ellen in support of her father. Her letter was direct evidence of Shaker influence. Her document, along with letters from other "former Shakers" Enoch P. Cumings, Juliet Cumings, and George W. Aiken, who had also become parents, made the difference. The letters from real people, written from the heart, carried more weight than all the hundreds of signatures on rejected petitions. After years of waiting, Thomas Wier's case for release was won in the court of public opinion, where the argument had been made and won that pitted the "traditional family" against the Shakers. Finally, on July 23, 1880, Thomas Wier received his pardon.

Wednesday evening a dispatch was received here from Concord, saying that Thomas Wier had been pardoned from State Prison by the Governor and Council.¹⁷

Sara (Wier) Dillingham met her father at the prison and took him home.

About 9 o'clock, Converse J. Smith, and a daughter of Wier's, Mrs. Dillingham of Goffstown, went to the prison for him.¹⁸

¹Henry Cumings, "A Sketch of the Life of Caleb M. Dyer," *Enfield Advocate*, Part 2, January 6, 1905.

²Ibid.

³The Shakers were celibate, and they did not have traditional families.

⁴Indenture Document, August 29, 1861, New Hampshire State Archives.

⁵Files of Richard Henderson.

⁶Abraham Perkins, Letter to Natt Head, June 15, 1880, in "Petitions for the Pardon of T. Wier," N.H. State Archives.

⁷Cumings, "Sketch of Dyer."

⁸Details are from "Granite State Press," November 7, 1873.

⁹Latin: unwilling or willing.

¹⁰"A Biography of the Life and Tragical Death [of] Elder Caleb M. Dyer," Gage and Moore & Co. (Manchester, N.H., July 21, 1863).

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Files of Richard Henderson.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵"Petitions for Pardon of T. Wier," Box 42, N.H. State Archives.

¹⁶Abraham Perkins, Letter to Gov. Head, "Petition for Pardon of T. Wier," 1880, NH Archives).

¹⁷Granite State Free Press, Enfield News.

¹⁸Independent Statesman (Concord, NH. July 29, 1880).

Enfield Shaker Museum Programs and Events

Benefit Yard Sale: Friday - Saturday, May 21- 22, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.



We all need bargains, and you will find what you are seeking at this giant sale: furniture, toys, dinnerware, tools, linens, jewelry, antiques, books, equipment, appliances, office equipment and more!

Country Life Festival: Saturday, June 5, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Live in harmony with the land! Sample Upper Valley cheeses, honey, herbs, cider, maple syrup, homemade ice cream and more! Ride a pony; explore old cars, hike Shaker trails, and listen to music of The Frost Heaves! Lunch will be available. Admission:

\$6/adult; \$3/ages 10-17; free for children under 10. Members \$5.

Sponsored by the Enfield Energy Emporium and Fox Tree & Landscape.



Shaker 7 Road Race: Sunday, June 27, 9 a.m.

Organized by the Enfield Village Association, the race starts at the Museum, runs through downtown and across the bridge. The Museum will host the post-race brunch @ \$4/person in the 1849 Stone Mill for race competitors and the public. To enter in the race, go to <http://www.enfieldmainstreet.org> and click on the Shaker 7 Road Race logo, email eva@interdial.net, or call (603) 632-7197.

BBQ Buffet, Beer and Band: Saturday, July 10, starts at 4 p.m.

Celebrate summer with a live band and your favorite barbecue, including ribs, chicken, hamburgers, hotdogs, corn on the cob and more! In the event of rain, our party will be held in the Stone Mill. Only \$25/person, \$11.50/child; kids under age 3 free - includes great music and food. Cash bar.

Chair Taping Workshop: Saturday, July 10, 1 - 4 p.m.

Barbara Brady will teach you how to tape a chair with fabric Shaker tape. Your chair must be in good condition and finished. The tape, in a beautiful array of colors, is for sale in the Museum Store. Registration is limited; \$35/member; \$40/non-member.

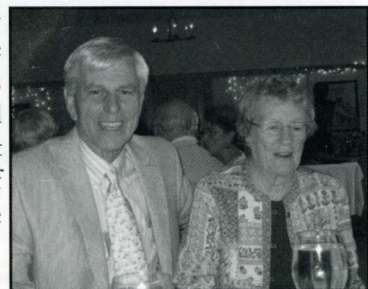
Shaker Summer Quest: A Day Camp for Ages 5-11: July 19-23 OR August 2-6



Sign up your children and grandchildren to experience traditional Shaker values through exciting activities! Pick your session period in July or August. Activities include history, the environment, arts, crafts, swimming, gardening, hiking and more. Musical programs will include a hands-on organ "informance." Each camp is separated into four age groups. Fees start at \$200 per child; discounts are available for multiple children. A scholarship is sponsored by the Woman's Fellowship at Community Lutheran Church.

Dragonfly Ball: Saturday, August 14

Experience a luminous evening of music, magic and memories! Dance the night away surrounded by candlelight. Our band, East Bay Jazz Company, is back by popular demand! Our menu will include a wide variety of fresh and delectable choices. Music for dining and dancing will be provided by East Bay Jazz Company. Just \$60/Member and \$80/Non-Member. Table of eight: \$450/Member and \$600/Non-Member. Overnight packages are also available and include this dinner, dance and breakfast.



Concerts

Chosen Vale International Trumpet Concert Series

The Center for Advanced Musical Studies, based in Hanover, N.H., presents the annual Chosen Vale International Trumpet Seminar at the Museum, with 50 world-class trumpeters from across the globe. Free public performances will be held in the Mary Keane Chapel, each preceded by a 30-minute introduction presented by Seminar Director Edward Carroll:

Tuesday, June 15, introduction 7:30 p.m.; concert 8 p.m.

Experimental music by the celebrated Australian soloist Tristram Williams

Saturday, June 19, introduction 7:30 p.m.; concert 8 p.m.

Music from the 17th century to the present, performed by Edward Carroll, Gabriele Cassone, Mark Gould, Tristram Williams and others.

Friday, June 25, introduction 7:30 p.m.; concert 8 p.m.

Sounds Like Now! will feature Stephen Burns, Edward Carroll, Håkan Hardenberger, Thomas Stevens and others showcasing music from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Saturday, June 26, introduction 3:30 p.m.; concert 8 p.m.

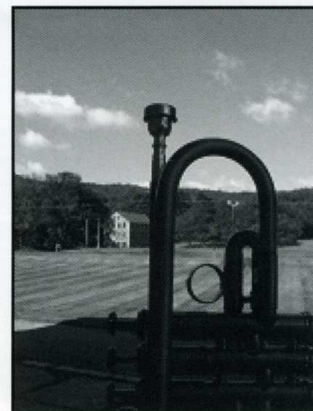
Stephen Burns, Edward Carroll, Håkan Hardenberger, Thomas Stevens and others will perform a program of virtuoso music from the 16th century to today.

Patriotic Sing-Along: Sunday, July 4, 4 p.m.

To celebrate the nation's holiday, George & Donna Butler will lead this popular participatory program in the Mary Keane Chapel with patriotic ballads and folk songs. Bring your flag to wave! Veterans are invited to appear in uniform.

Organ Recital with Harold Stover: Sunday, July 18, 4 p.m.

Maine organist-composer Harold Stover's concert career spans more than 40 years and includes appearances at The Riverside Church in New York, the National Cathedral in Washington DC, Westminster Abbey in London, and many other distinguished venues. The *New York Times* called his playing "splendid" and praised his "multiplicity of talents." This will be his second recital at the Mary Keane Chapel. Admission of \$15 benefits the Museum's Capital Campaign.



Faith and Industry: The Second Family of the Enfield Shaker Community New Exhibit Opens Saturday, June 19

The Enfield Shakers' Second (South) Family was formed in 1794. Despite rising and flourishing in lockstep with the Church Family, its land was sold in 1903, and little remains today to stand testament to their many achievements. In their time, the Second Family oversaw a successful herbal medicine business, ran a cheese factory, owned and operated a hotel, helped create a reservoir high on the hillside, and even ran a steamboat on Mascoma Lake. Staff members Richard A. Burley and Nicole Ford are curating this exhibition, which explores the lives and livelihoods of this important chapter in the community's history.

Shaker Workshops Donates 50 Reproduction Drawers

The Great Stone Dwelling, the largest Shaker dwelling house ever built, has impressed visitors since its completion in 1841. Standing tall above all the buildings surrounding it, its six floors were built entirely of matching gray granite with 155 windows, and topped by an impressive cupola and bell tower. Elder Giles Avery of the Ministry in New Lebanon, New York, proclaiming "A beautiful situation truly, but O! what a stone palace!"¹

Not only were the quality of materials used in construction remarkable, but also the unique appearance of the interior spaces. In 1853, former Brother Hervey Elkins wrote, "The interior of the edifice is finished with beautiful white pine, and not a knot, blemish, or nail head was any where visible, *before painting*, from the cupola to the cellar. The finish is painted white, and varnished, and shines with the brilliancy of reflected light."² He also noted, "In the house are eight hundred and sixty drawers, or about nine to every individual who inhabits it."³

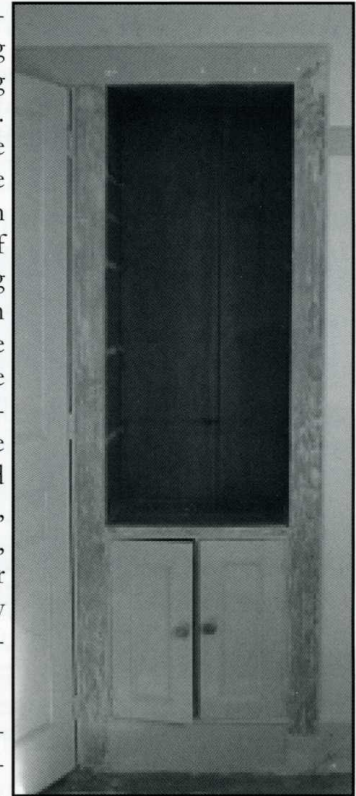
Over the past 160 years, there have been many changes to the Great Stone Dwelling. It has been home to the priests and seminarians of the Missionaries of La Salette. It has provided classrooms, library and dining hall for a boys' high school. It was used as an inn and restaurant. Today it is the Museum's center of operations. Each group has adapted the building to meet various needs. The large Shaker rooms have been divided into smaller spaces, built-in cupboards removed, drawers lost, doors relocated, and virtually all of the woodwork and walls repainted. In fact, fewer than 200 of the original 860 built-in drawers that were a point of pride to the Enfield Shakers have survived.

In October, as a gift to the Capital Campaign, Richard Dabrowski, President of Shaker Workshops, offered to reproduce 50 of the missing drawers in the Great Stone Dwelling. Trustee Paul Mirski suggested that the gift include replacement drawer runners and front aprons. Paul also proposed that the drawers be finished in the original Shaker colors. Shaker Workshops agreed to the suggestions and began to determine which drawers to replace.

Shaker Workshops' Production Manager, Guy Biechle and Richard Dabrowski spent time on site, evalu-

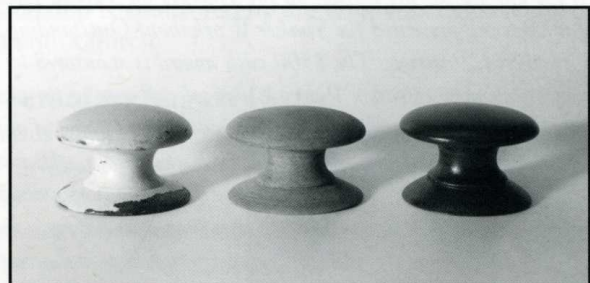
ating the built-in cupboards with missing drawers and taking detailed measurements. The decision was made to reproduce 50 of the drawers missing from the doorway units of six of the retiring rooms (bedrooms) in the Sisters' end of the building (nearest the lake). Like the originals, the drawers were to be made of solid Eastern white pine, with dovetailed sides, molded-edge drawer fronts, and precisely turned knobs of imported mahogany.

Following the measurements, Guy completed computer assisted (CAD) drawings of the front and back dovetail patterns so that special cutters could be made to replicate the hand-cut dovetails on the original drawers. With the planning done, making the drawers could begin, but there were still several challenges ahead. To reproduce the drawer runners and front aprons, Guy utilized the technique of blind mortise-and-tenon construction so that the replacements would fit securely into the surviving Shaker built-in units to support



Doorway built-in with missing original drawers. Some paint was removed as part of the restoration process.

(Continued on Page 6.)



Left to right, are drawer knobs: original; hand-turned reproduction raw wood; and reproduction stained and varnished.

Shaker Workshops Drawers (Continued from page 5)

the new drawers. Because knobs of this quality have never been available commercially, Guy hand-turned precise copies of the originals using a knob borrowed from the Museum as his pattern.

The Museum's Property Manager Tom Boswell was charged with coordinating the paint research and preparing the doorway units to receive the reproduction drawer runners and front aprons. Sarah Chase, a well-known historic paint consultant, analyzed a Shaker built-in that had been moved to curatorial storage. She confirmed that the original finish was indeed white paint coated with linseed oil over a wash coat of white primer. Collaborating with Susan Buck, known for her work on Shaker paint colors, Sarah reported that Benjamin Moore brand paint color #OC-33 ("Opaline") in a latex base with a high-gloss finish would most closely duplicate the color and sheen of the original white paint coated with linseed oil the Shakers used.

In April 2010, after the drawers were assembled and primed, the on-site installation began. Richard Dabrowski, Guy Biechele and I removed the paint on the built-in door units to allow the drawers to fit properly, attached the drawer runners and front aprons, applied two coats of the new paint color and installed the drawers. Everything fit perfectly - the machine-made 21st c. drawers, runners and aprons, and the original doorway units - a testament to the uniformly high standard of Enfield Shaker craftsmanship.

Today, Sisters' Retiring Rooms 3, 9, 10, 12, 20 and 23 have a full complement of reproduction drawers in their doorway built-in cupboards. The result is impressive!

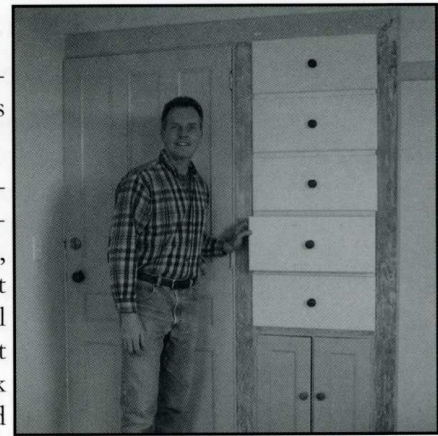
- Carolyn Smith, Sales Manager, Shaker Workshops

1. Giles Bushnell Avery, "Journal of a trip to the Eastern Societies" [1843]. MS 12744, Emma B. King Library, Shaker Museum, Old Chatham, N.Y. p. 42.
2. Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen years in the Senior Order of the Shakers* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth Press, 1853), pp. 39-40.
3. Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 40.

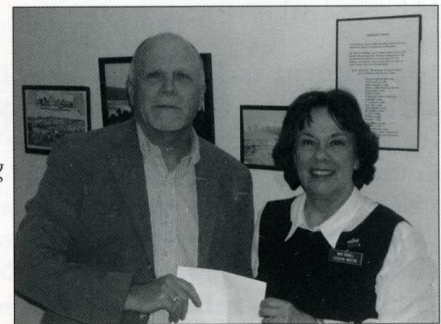
The Enfield Shaker Museum is deeply indebted to Shaker Workshops for taking the Capital Campaign projects to another level. In the past our projects have focused on behind-the-scenes maintenance. Now we are beginning the restoration of the Great Stone Dwelling. The precision and fine craftsmanship of Shaker Workshops upholds the high standards of the Shakers. The Museum is seeking gifts of \$250 to "adopt" a drawer. Donors may honor an individual by having his/her name inscribed in the base of the drawer. Proceeds will benefit the Capital Campaign.

Shaker Workshops Awards Stephen Paterwic Cash Prize for Outstanding Scholarship

At the annual Spring Forum on the Shakers on May 8, Executive Director Mary Boswell presented the Shaker Workshops Outstanding Scholarship Award to Stephen J. Paterwic. The \$500 cash award is sponsored by Shaker Workshops to encourage new research. Paterwic was selected among the presenters at the Spring Forum. The decision was made by an independent panel of outstanding scholars from different universities and academic backgrounds. After studying abstracts and papers submitted by the Forum presenters, and after much serious debate, the selection was finally made. Paterwic was judged as having a very informative, tightly focused paper, cogently written, easy to follow and accessible to people of all backgrounds. In the words of one panelist, Paterwic allowed the reviewer to see the Shakers with new eyes. Those familiar with Paterwic's past work felt it was time to recognize his long-term contribution to Shaker studies. In presenting the award, Boswell thanked Shaker Workshops for their generosity and for enriching the field of Shaker studies in this way.



Guy Biechele, Production Manager of Shaker Workshops, shows the doorway built-in with reproduction drawers in place.



Museum's New Head Gardener Goes Back to Her Roots

Having worked as an attorney for Martin, Lord & Martin in Lebanon, New Hampshire, for 18 years, Melissa Martin joins the Museum as the new Head Gardener. She brings to the job much experience she gained living on Kindred Spirits Farm in Gilford. In her words:

We cleared much of the land and grew strawberries, high bush blueberries, raspberries and semi-dwarf apples (we were a test orchard for Cornell University's Integrated Pest Management program, now an industry standard). We cultivated extensive vegetable and perennial beds and a small kitchen herb garden. We had a sugar house....Our farm received several conservation awards for our sustainable forest practices....We kept a dozen hives and harvested the honey. We also harvested several wild crops ... to add to the assortment of jams, jellies and preserves we made....Anything not sold or used fresh, we canned, jellied, processed, froze or otherwise preserved for later sale and consumption. We also shared a cow with a neighbor for milk and butter... when I was in my teens, I kept my own chickens for eggs and meat for our family and baked endless muffins, pies and cakes to sell at the farm stand for my own spending money....The practical skills and lessons I learned and the true sense of joy and satisfaction I felt working on the land have stayed with me always."

Melissa began working with the Village Gardeners on May 13. Village Gardeners must volunteer a minimum of two hours each week in the Herb Garden. In exchange, they are given eight classes on soil preparation, garden planning, composting, mulching and propagation. Melissa and Herbalist Happy Griffiths will also discuss the growth, maintenance and use of the "herb bed of the week" (culinary, medicinal, fragrant, everlasting, dye, lavender), followed by an herbal craft activity. If you wish to be a Village Gardener, contact Happy Griffiths at 448-2966 or happyventures@interdial.net.

Community Garden Opens May 22

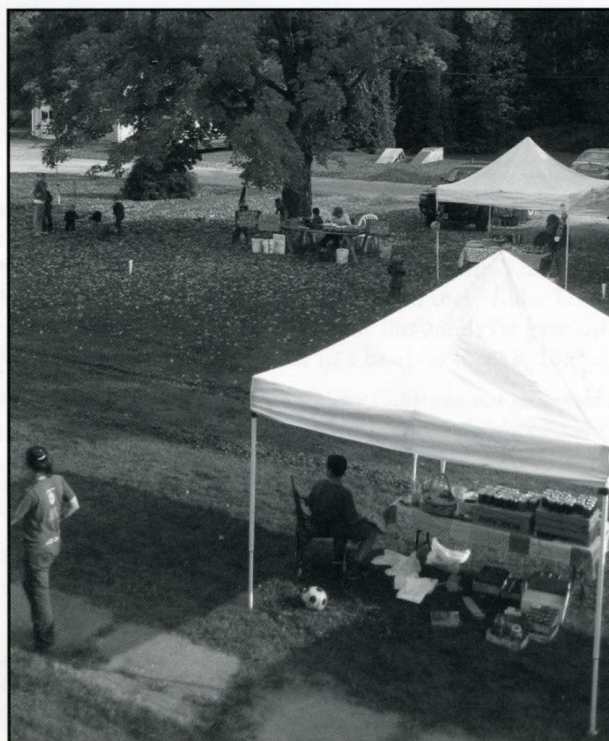
With a grant from Hypertherm, the Museum's Sustainability Committee is organizing a grand opening of the new Community Garden.

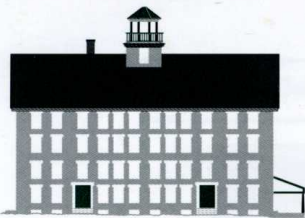


Enfield Farmers Market Returns to the Museum

June 9 - Sept. 15, 3:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Responding to a community need, the Museum is hosting the Farmers' Market again this year on Wednesdays. Events Coordinator Sara Parris is meeting with past vendors and new vendors to organize the program. In addition to fresh local produce, meats, flowers, crafts and prepared foods, a variety of music, entertainment and gardening classes will also be offered.





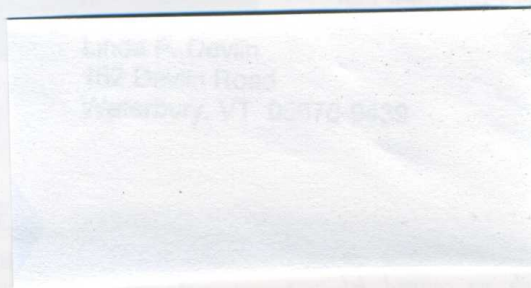
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