

# The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume IV/No. 1

Winter 1991

## The Enfield Shaker Rooms at Winterthur Museum

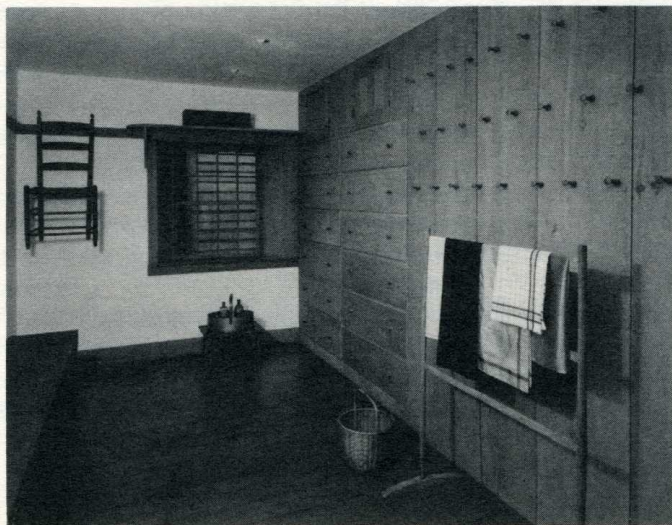
by Robert P. Emlen

In the spring of 1962 a new exhibition of Shaker artifacts was opened to the public at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum in Delaware. Visitors to Winterthur saw the Museum's Shaker collection displayed in room settings with architectural woodwork from the Shaker village at Enfield, New Hampshire. The following year, when the first photographs of the two rooms were published in *Winterthur Illustrated*, their built-in cupboards were described as having "come from the large stone dwelling house built about 1840 in the Shaker community at Enfield, New Hampshire." By 1966, when Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews illustrated the Museum's installation in their book *Religion in Wood*, the rooms at Winterthur were among the best known Shaker exhibitions in the country.

I got to know the Enfield Shaker community in the mid-1970's when, with the help of Robert Leavitt and Wendell and Viola Hess, I was preparing the nomination of the village to the National Register of Historic Places. I examined each of the buildings, but as I went through the Great Stone Dwelling, I could not imagine where Winterthur's woodwork had come from. I could find no evidence of existing built-in cupboards with vertical panelling, nor evidence that anything like that had been removed from the building. Besides, the dimensions of the rooms now at Winterthur were wrong for the proportions of the stone dwelling.

I set off for Winterthur to see the

Shaker rooms for myself. After reading through the archives, examining the woodwork, interviewing the curator who had purchased it, and reviewing the installation with the architect who had designed it, I learned that the wood-



Courtesy, The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum

work had indeed been purchased from the Enfield community, but had not come from the Great Stone Dwelling. The story goes like this.

In the summer of 1957, while the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette were constructing the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, they were dismantling old buildings on the site and selling building fragments. Word reached Winterthur Museum that a particularly fine storage wall of built-in cupboards was available. Winterthur's curator, who wanted to install a Shaker exhibition at the Museum, drove to New Hampshire to investigate. He was shown to the North Family's 1831 Laundry and Dairy, where a wall of cupboards and drawers had survived unscathed over the years.

The woodwork he discovered there was a wonderful example of Shaker cabinetry, complete with its original painted finish. It was designed in alternating bays, so that one half contained eighteen-inch deep built-ins, and the other half was vertical board panelling. The wall was double sided, so one set of built-ins backed up to a reciprocal arrangement on the opposite side of the wall. The woodwork was approximately the right dimension for the new Museum gallery, and a deal was struck.

At Winterthur, the architect had to work around existing structural supports and ventilation shafts, and the design and installation of the new Shaker exhibition was not completed for many years. By the time the rooms were finished, their

provenance had unaccountably drifted across the road from the stone Laundry and Dairy to the Great Stone Dwelling.

In 1975 a La Salette brother, who had been at Enfield when the wall was sold, took me to the third floor of the Laundry and Dairy and pointed out the site in the northwest corner where it had originally stood. It is a much smaller space than Winterthur's gallery, the room in the old building having evidently been used as a storage and workroom. Sheltered in this far corner of the village for 144 years, the storage wall is now the focal point for a large gallery of decorative arts, and the pride of one of the great museums of America.

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