

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume III/ No. 2

Winter 1990

"Our home-made cloth is much better.."

by Becky Powell

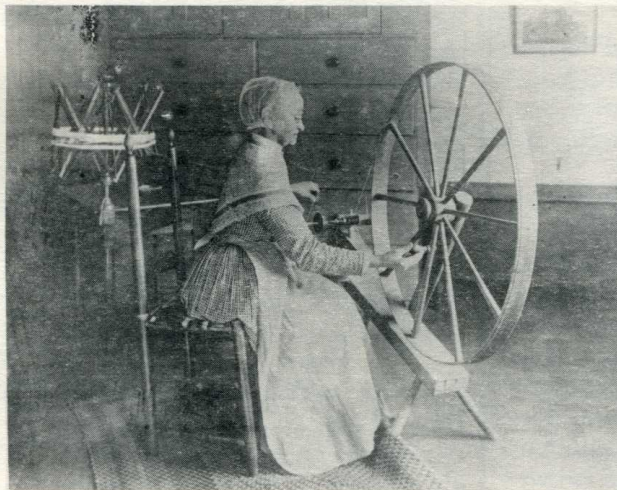
Mention Shaker furniture and an image springs to mind of graceful chairs and well-proportioned blanket chests and washstands. Mention Shaker weaving and the response is not so immediate: what can be said about the woven tape seats of the chairs, the blankets that filled the chests, the towels that hung from the washstands?

Shaker woven furnishings are often overshadowed by their wooden counterparts, partly because we take curtains and towels for granted, and partly because much of Shaker weaving is, in fact, less distinctively "Shaker" than the furniture. But Shaker weaving bears closer examination. Beautifully executed fabrics exist, which represent the Shaker striving for order, unity and perfection in craft.

Handwoven cloth was a major Shaker industry. Thousands of yards for towels, curtains, bedding, rugs, chair tapes, feed sacks, and the surprisingly ample wardrobe of each Shaker came from the Sisters' looms. As commercially produced cloth became more readily available, the Shakers wove less and less of their own. But this occasioned some regret; as Elder Frederick Evans said in 1875, "We used to have more looms than now, but cloth is sold so cheaply that we gradually began to buy. It is a mistake, we buy more cheaply than we can make, but our home-made cloth is much better."

Shaker weaving generally paralleled in materials and designs the weaving of non-Shaker colo-

nial America. Shaker experiments with materials and methods, however, produced some notable exceptions. Wool, linen, and commercially available cotton were in common use. But Shakers in the western communities wove silk from their own silkworms. Shaker poplar cloth, woven from strips of poplar and made into sewing cases



Shaker sister spinning with a great wheel

and other saleable products, created a practical use for a tree usually considered worthless.

Wherever design was used, the emphasis was on balance and symmetry. Many textiles were completely plain, but designs of stripes, checks, contrasting color or textured borders, and delicate pattern weaves also appeared. The pattern weaves were often used in linen towels to create a more absorbent cloth, so that what appears decorative is also practical, not surprising in Shaker work.

Certain ways of using color stand out as Shaker innovations. using contrasting colors for the warp and weft (lengthwise and

crosswise) threads produced fabric with an iridescent shimmer, especially effective in the Shakers' silk weaving. Another Shaker technique was the twisting together of two different colored yarns. When woven, the twisted yarns created a diagonal color effect that is unexpectedly complex. The Shakers' taped chair seats owe their pleasing appearance to the interplay of weave against weave: the woven texture of the striped or plain tape is echoed and magnified in the pattern of the interlaced tapes. Such carefully planned and executed techniques resulted in Shaker cloth that is balanced and harmonious, and deceptively simple.

More than many artifacts, textiles are subject to deterioration from exposure to light, frequent washing, and plain hard use. Surviving examples, then, are precious. To supplement the collection of Enfield Shaker pieces at The Museum at Lower Shaker Village, a series of reproduction textiles is currently being researched and produced. These will allow visitors a closeup look at the type of textiles made and used by the Enfield Shakers. Without the need for protection from light that original textiles have, the reproductions will illustrate well the structure, designs, and materials of the Shakers' beautiful home-made cloth.

References: Andrews, Edward Deming: *Work and Worship Among the Shakers*, Gordon, Beverly: *Shaker Textile Arts*. Sprigg, June: *By Shaker Hands* and *Shaker Life, Work and Art*.

Sage Thoughts

by Happy Griffiths

An herb garden will give you many years of garden pleasure if a few basic rules are established in the beginning. The size and type of a garden will depend on time, interests, space and your family needs. First consider the three S's—site, soil and sun.

Site: If you are planning a kitchen garden, place it as close to the house as possible. You want to be able to run to the garden to pick that special herb for your culinary delight! A garden of herbs, flowers and vegetables should be planted where you and your guests can enjoy it. A more formal planting requires walkways, which can be made from a number of materials such as stones, woodchips, bricks or cut pieces of logs. Raised beds lend themselves to an intensive and orderly garden. This type of gardening has gained popularity in recent years.

Sun: An herb garden needs at least six hours of sunlight each day, although each herb has its own needs. For instance, basil needs full sun, while chervil is happy in a semi-shaded location.

Soil: The most important element in your garden is the soil, for it is the source of all the nutrients plants need to sustain growth. If you are starting from scratch, plan to till the ground with a tractor, rototiller or garden fork. A heavy clay soil can be improved by the addition of organic materials such as manure, compost and sand. A sandy soil needs organic materials plus peat moss. Garden areas should be well drained, in order to have satisfactory growth. Once established, most herbs prefer a moderately dry condition and require watering only during times of drought.

The pH factor of the soil is important and can be determined by sending a soil sample to your local county extension office or with a home test kit available at your local garden center. Herbs are happy with an almost neutral soil condition, a pH of 6.5. If you have a lot of pine trees growing around your house you can spread lime, to help raise the pH. Your lavender and rosemary plants will be forever grateful!

A garden diary can be an invaluable aid in your planning stages and in the years to come. Enter the last frost date of the spring and the first one in the fall. Note when you planted each variety and when it

(Continued on Page 4.)

Laundry/Dairy News

The move is complete—all of the Museum's functions are now located in the Laundry/Dairy building. On the last day of January, the staff—with considerable help from **Barbara Brady**, **Sonia Swierczynski** and the LSV crew—hefted and hoisted furniture, files and various sundry from the Ministry Building to the Laundry/Dairy complex. Outfitted with carpet remnants and ceramic electric heaters, the Museum offices are spartan but quite satisfactory.

Along with the new location are some new systems. If you come to the Museum mid-week, you will need to ring a doorbell (installed by **John Taylor**) located at the Shaker Store door. A staff member will come to lead you through the labyrinth to the offices. If there is no one in the office when you call, an answer phone will record your message. Most important of all our new and only phone number is **(603) 632-4346**. Many thanks to Dana Robes, who donated his former phone system to the Museum, thus enabling us to reach a higher level of technology.

The Museum re-opened its doors the weekend of January 20. Part of the collection has been remounted in wooden and plexiglass cubes (a donation from the Hood Museum in 1988) which were recovered and re-painted. Small items are displayed in Shaker cupboards and some of the furniture is in an alcove designed to look like a Shaker sewing room. The slide

show has been set up in a room off the Shaker Store, where Museum visitors are also treated to samples of Shaker herb tea from Sabbath-day Lake. Thanks must be given to **Jay Boucher** who donated a light for a dim stairwell and to **Earl and Barbara Brady** who hung shelves and lights, constructed and painted a new peg rail and made minor repairs to the Museum's built-ins.

The Shaker Store, a bit frigid (20° one morning) during the cold snap in December, has been fortified to the best of our ability. **John Taylor** and the staff spent several days sealing the windows with ribbon caulking and shrink wrap and forming a wind block between floors with Tyvec. **Brownie Smith** has lent us her Jotul wood stove, which combined with a borrowed kerosene heater, now keeps the store quite warm.

While all this work has transpired, the Board continues to negotiate the purchase of the building with First Leader Corporation. The Museum hopes to have the matter resolved in the next few months so that we may begin making plans for the fundraising.

Finally, we would like to thank all of our Friends who have continued to make contributions to the 1989 Annual Fund. Your generous donations have made it possible for us to relocate and re-establish our administrative functions in the Laundry/Dairy building.

Many Thanks To . . .

Galen L. Beale
Richard and Ruth Blodgett
Jay and Linda Boucher
Elizabeth Cattabriga
Daniel Bruce Eastman
Howard S. Fisher
Ruth and Edmond Guerin
Nancy Haller
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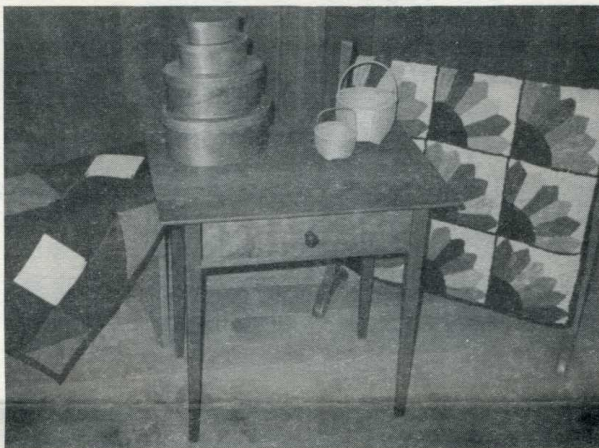
Museum to Hold Silent Auction

The number of people, especially in New England, who are actively keeping the handcraft tradition alive is remarkable. From May 19 through June 2, visitors to Lower Shaker Village will be able to view and bid on the work of nearly 100 of New England's finest craftspeople, at a silent auction to benefit the Museum.

Items to be auctioned include Martha Wetherbee baskets, ironwork by Dimitri Gerakaris, a Brian McPherson rag rug, Dana Robes furniture, an oval box by John Wilson, North Woods Chair Shop, Roger Gibbs tinware and poplarware by Beale & Gibbs, among many others. Each item will be handmade and derive its inspiration from the designs, the lives and the work of the Shakers.

A silent auction is different from a regular auction in that there is no auctioneer. Participants place bids by taking a number, writing their number at the bottom of the list posted next to each item, and indicating the bidding amount. Minimum bids begin at half the retail value of each item.

Bidding may take place between May 19 and June 2, from noon to 5 on Mondays through



Silent Auction to feature fine handcrafts.

Fridays, and 10 to 4 on Saturdays. All items will be on display at Dana Robes Woodcraftsmen in Lower Shaker Village. Bidding closes at 4 PM on Saturday, June 2, with each item going to the highest bidder.

Museum Friends and others interested in handcrafts are invited to attend a special Patron's Reception on the evening of Friday, June 1. This will be an opportunity to meet many of the craftspeople in person and place bids close to the deadline. This is an ideal way to make a personal investment in fine handcrafts, and benefit the Museum, which is working to preserve the Shaker handcraft tradition. For further information about the Silent Auction and the reception, please call the Museum at (603) 632-4346.

Museum Awarded Grant

The Museum has received word that it has been awarded a grant under the Conservation Assessment Program (CAP). The grant is administered by The National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, a nonprofit corporation working to conserve and preserve the nation's cultural heritage. The funding is being provided by the Institute of Museum Services.

The goal of CAP is to provide general conservation assessments of an institution's collections and

facilities. The on-site assessments will be performed by a conservation professional and an architectural conservator. They will produce a plan for collections care and preservation. This plan will help us articulate conservation needs and objectives while seeking funding sources to address those needs.

The Museum is seeking ways to restore and protect the Shaker buildings and the collection of artifacts. The CAP grant will provide a solid basis for long range planning.

Cast Call for '90 Shaker Revels

The high pasture and feast ground on Mount Assurance will again resonate with the music of the Shakers as Shaker Revels returns to Enfield in July. Following last year's format, this summer's performances will take place Thurs.-Sun., July 5,6,7,8 at 6:00 pm.

Auditions for this year's cast will be held in the Great Stone Dwelling at 7:30 pm on Tuesday, May 15. Anyone interested in participating is urged to come. Rehearsals will be Tuesday evenings beginning the next week, May 22. People interested in helping with technical aspects of the production are also needed and urged to make themselves known. If you have questions about being involved in this Revels production call the Museum at (603)632-4346 or the show's director, Mary Ann Wilde at (802)649-2933.

The Friends' Quarterly is a publication of The Museum at Lower Shaker Village. It is mailed as a service to Museum Friends. For information on the Friends program write: Membership Coordinator, The Museum at Lower Shaker Village, Route 4A, Enfield, NH 03748, or call (603) 632-4346.

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From Sap to Sugar

All old sugar makers will remember the season of 1881 as the great sugar season. The winter had been an ordinary one, the ground was frozen only moderately, and the snow the first of March lay about knee deep in field and forest alike and was drifted but little. February had been a steady cold month with no let-up till about the fifth of March, when there came quite a change. The seventh was a frosty morning but by 9:00 the air began to have that peculiar mellow felling known as sap weather, the wind Westerly and mild.

So ran (former) Elder Henry Cumings account of the 1881 sugar season in a 1906 issue of the Enfield Advocate. The Enfield Shakers produced ample amounts of syrup, both for themselves and for sale to the Boston market.

After a one year hiatus the Museum will once again be tapping the North Family sugar bush. **Richard Dionne**, resident maple sugaring expert, is in charge of the operation. He has already laid the tubing in preparation for the sugaring season. Museum visitors may take part in the process by attending pancake breakfasts and sugaring tours scheduled for March 17 and 24. Breakfast will include an assortment of pancakes (with our own syrup) meats and beverages. There will be two seatings, at 9:00 and 10:00 am, reservations are required.

The tours, scheduled for 10:00 and 11:00 am., start with a description of sap collection and end in the sugar house where the sap is boiled, graded and packaged. If you would like to join us for breakfast or a tour, call (603) 632-4346 for reservations.

National Coverage

If you did not happen to see the January issue of National Gardening magazine, you missed a news item about the Museum. The "Grist" section (page 13) featured an article and color photograph of the Enfield seed box.

The seed box (see Friends' Quarterly, Summer 1989) will be on display in a new exhibit opening this coming June. Look for details in the next issue of this newsletter!



"Doesn't look like syrup to me."

Shaker Music Now on Tape

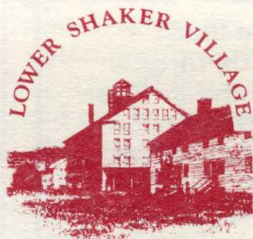
Thirty-three Shaker songs digitally recorded in the Great Stone Dwelling will be available on cassette tape. O' Hear Their Music Ring reflects only a small portion of the thousands of Shaker spirituals but represents the variety and power of this music. With simplicity, they speak of the faith and spiritual vision of the people called Shakers.

This collection of Shaker songs includes the well known 'Tis the Gift to be Simple" as well as lesser known pieces such as "In My Father's House" and "I Will Bow and Be Simple". In keeping with the Shaker tradition most of the music is performed a cappella by the Singers of Lower Shaker Village as directed by Mary Ann Wilde.

The production of this tape was made possible by a grant from Martha and Dana Robes and is available from the Museum for \$12.95 plus 2.50 shipping and handling after April 1.

(Sage Thoughts-Continued)

was ready to harvest. You can record where you bought your seeds and plants and unusual weather conditions. As these records grow they will become an interesting record of your accomplishments.



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