

The Friends' Quarterly

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Sister Flora Appleton

by Darryl Thompson

I was only five years old when she died in 1962, but my family and I have never forgotten her. Her name was Sister Flora Appleton and she was the very last survivor of the Shaker community at Enfield, New Hampshire. Flora was born in 1881. At the age of 4 she and her older sister Margaret came to live at Enfield. They were joining their sister Abigail, who had become a Shaker the year before. Flora was a member of the Enfield Shaker Community until November 7, 1918, when the prospect of the eventual closing of the Enfield village (which would not be fully completed for a few more years) prompted the removal of the most aged sisters. Flora, a comparatively young woman, went to Canterbury with her elderly sisters to help care for them. In her late years she lived at the Infirmary and was cared for by Sister Marguerite Frost.

When my father came to work for the Canterbury Shakers in the late 1950s and brought our family to live among the surviving sisters there, Flora was a wonderful presence in our lives. She deeply desired to do her share to support her community, and Flora's hands were constantly in motion. My father affectionately called her "The Beaver" because she worked so hard. On her tiny loom she wove yard after yard of the woven poplar that her fellow Shaker sisters would make into their famed boxes. She made potholders for the gift store, and whenever my father came down the stone lined path she would

stand in the doorway of the Infirmary, greet him with a cheery "How are you doing today?" and then proudly announce how many potholders she had produced over the preceding hours.



Sister Fannie Fallon and Sister Flora Appleton (right) of the Enfield Shaker Community.

She was a woman of sweet, simple innocence. When my father was facing a serious operation, she told him "I'm praying for you." The gentle caring and concern evidenced in that statement so deeply touched his heart that he has never forgotten it.

Whenever I visit the Great Stone Dwelling at Enfield Shaker Village, I imagine Flora as a young woman bustling about the rooms, and I am reminded again why it is so vital to preserve that magnificent structure. Much has been written about the architectural significance of the building; the fact that it is the largest communal dwelling ever erected by Shakers; its status as the tallest domestic building north of Boston at the time of its construction; its importance as one of New England's splendid and early examples of granite masonry. But, for me, the reasons for preserving the Great Stone Dwelling are rooted in more humanistic values. To me, the walls radiate the spiritual energy that they absorbed from such beautiful souls

as Flora. The building is a storehouse of stories of lives like hers, and it needs to go on whispering those tales to generations yet unborn. (Darryl Thompson is a historian who has lived at Canterbury Shaker Village off and on for the last 30 years.)

"Great hope for the Museum's future..."

(The following is a condensed version of Mary Boswell's first Executive Director's Report to the Membership delivered at the 2006 Annual Meeting.)

It is a pleasure to be among so many talented and dedicated people gathered together with one united purpose. The exhibit *An Ever Widening Circle of Friends* is an inspiring way to mark the first 20 years of the Museum's history. In the words of Canterbury Trustee and Deacon Francis Winkley, Oct. 2, 1842: "We have finished our harvesting which is very abundant ... The blessing of God seems to rest upon our labors and Heaven to smile upon the resolu-

tions manifested by us to do our own work ... What a happy sensation that it was all done among ourselves ... we have been blessed in our basket and in our store, for all of which, thanks are due to our heavenly Father."

The cause for his exuberance is that the hard work is paying off, everyone is taking part, and there is great hope for the future. Today, we also have cause for celebration, because your hard work is paying off, you are all taking part, and there is great hope for the Museum's future. (Continued on page 2.)

