

## A Basket with a Past

by Galen Beale

Last September, Dr. Kenneth W. Smith, a long time supporter of the Enfield Shaker Museum, donated the large handsome basket seen here. As with all gifts, the Collections Committee began to investigate the origins of this basket.

Many Shaker villages made, used, and sold baskets made from the black ash tree, and Enfield was no exception. Early Shaker baskets were large utilitarian containers like this one, and in the construction of this basket were many techniques that echoed the skilled hands of a Shaker basket maker. The basket's patina spoke of its age, perhaps as early as the 1850's, and the careful preparation of the black ash splint, the thin strips of wood woven together to make a basket, indicated excellent craftsmanship. Other clues to its construction were found in looking at the uprights, weavers and rim. The uprights were nicely beveled and the weavers well cut; the substantial rim had been carved with a hand plane; the rim was wrapped with sap wood – the most pliable and strongest choice; and the bottom of the basket was reinforced with splint 'runners' to protect it from dampness.

I sent photographs to Martha Wetherbee, who is renowned for her reproduction Shaker baskets, and she and her husband Alan Litchfield came up to the Museum to take a closer look. Before they arrived, I gathered more information from Dr. Smith. He graciously shared what he knew, and it was immediately clear that his family had a long acquaintance with the Shakers. Dr. Smith's uncle, Josiah Lincoln, had a cottage at the head of Mascoma Lake where Dr. Smith had spent many happy hours. He remembers his mother rowing across the Lake to buy peas from the Shakers.

We also found in the July 1898 "Home Notes" section of the Shaker newspaper, *The Manifesto*, a notation that Dr. Smith's grandfather, Elias Cheney, visited the Enfield Shakers that year. Elias Cheney had been the editor of the Lebanon, New Hampshire, newspaper, *The Granite State Free Press*, for many years. In 1867 he became a State Representative and then joined the U.S. Consular Service and was appointed to Matanzas, Cuba. In 1898 his successor was apparently visiting, and Mr. Cheney took him on a visit to the Shakers.

So often we want something to be Shaker, and there is evidence to suggest that possibility in this basket. But it is important to broaden the search to consider other alternatives. Martha and Alan are also very knowledgeable of the broader New England basket tradition. They both joined former Museum employee Michael O'Connor and me again to examine the basket. We agreed it was very well made, had a beautiful patina and had very little damage. But there were



## Ash Work Basket

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth W. Smith in memory of Dr. Smith's parents, William A. and Helen K. Smith

other clues as well. We examined the "hole handles" which eliminated the need for an overhead handle and thereby made the basket easier to stack. The wide band of splint seen at the top of the weaving under the handles was not a Shaker technique. This type of wide band is reminiscent of an Indian basket, but we agreed it was more probably the maker's stylistic choice rather than a Native American basket. Martha pointed out that the basket had an "industrial" look. This, coupled with the wide band at the top and the lack of a handle, drew us to the conclusion that this basket had probably been acquired from a local basket factory, such as those in Peterborough, New Hampshire, or in Western Massachusetts.

Dr. Smith continued to add to the basket's history. He had found this long-forgotten basket in the cellar of his Lebanon, New Hampshire, home and recognized it as the basket he used when he worked at *the Granite State Free Press*. Here, he was instructed to carefully place the ordered newspapers that were going to the post office. *The Granite State Free Press* had started in Lebanon in 1861 with Elias Cheney as editor. Elias Cheney was once the publisher of the *Peterborough Transcript* and was probably familiar with the many basket factories in the area.

While we do not know this basket's history before it arrived at the *Granite State Free Press* building, there are many possibilities. The basket is in excellent condition, indicating light use. The Lebanon/Enfield area was full of textile mills, laundries and other mills where baskets were employed. Dr. Smith also recalled seeing a photograph in Robert Leavitt's "Lebanon, New Hampshire in Pictures" of a sponge factory that showed similar large baskets. The Shakers, too, would have used such a basket.

The Enfield Shakers had many close connections with the surrounding community, and Dr. Smith's basket shows how hard it is to untangle fact from speculation with some artifacts. Until we can connect more dots together, it will remain a beautiful New England basket, similar to those used by the Shakers. It will be very useful as an exhibit piece, as it reflects a moment before New England's population began to shift towards the cities, and rural areas began their slow decline. It was at this time that baskets were replaced by other containers.

Galen Beale is a past president of the Museum's Board of Trustees and chairs the Collections and Exhibitions Committee. She is a former basket maker and herbalist at Canterbury Shaker Village. She has written extensively on the Shakers and co-authored *The Earth Shall Blossom*.





**Old-Fashioned Winter Days**  
**Saturdays in January: 15, 22, 29**  
**11 a.m. – 3 p.m.**

Bring your snowshoes, sleds, tubes and skis! After your outdoor fun, warm up with a hot meal! Indoor activities include Shaker crafts, singing, storytelling, and more! Take our new tour, "Growing up as a Shaker." \$10/adult; \$5/child. Members half price; includes lunch, tour and activities.

**Valentine's Dinner**  
**Saturday, February 12, 6:30 p.m.**

Enjoy a romantic dinner in the elegant Great Stone Dwelling. Begin your meal with hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. Delicata Catering will present Baby Spinach Salad; Roasted Beets and Goat Cheese Crostini; Roasted Butternut Squash Caponata and Carmelized polenta bites; Penne Pasta with Grilled Onions; Sliced Peppercorn Steak Parmesan. Our Dessert Extravaganza will amaze you! \$30/member; \$35/non-member.

**Valentine's Dinner and Overnight**  
**Saturday & Sunday, February 12 –13**

Sign up for a romantic getaway on our site! The Great Stone Dwelling's spacious rooms and baths, serene atmosphere and breathtaking views will give you many fond memories. Your stay includes a welcome basket, romantic music for listening and dancing, dinner, dessert extravaganza, breakfast, Museum Store discounts. \$275 per couple; \$150 per person.

**5th Annual Family Fun Day**  
**Saturday, February 26, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.**

What do you do on a wintry day? Take a horse-drawn wagon ride! Enter a snow sculpture contest. Make s'mores by the campfire! Learn how to track animals in the snow. Sled down Shaker Hill! Indoor activities will include storytelling, singing, making cookies, and more! \$7.50/family; members half price. Hot lunch extra.

**2nd Annual Bridal Show**

**Saturday, March 5, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

With so many buildings and beautiful sites to choose from, the Museum property is an ideal place to hold a wedding. We offer many choices to suit your needs and budget. To showcase the possibilities, we are hosting the Museum's 2nd annual Bridal Show. Chat with a wide variety of vendors. Take home samples, business cards and door prizes! Admission is only \$6/person and includes a tour of the Great Stone Dwelling. The first 50 brides to pre-register have free admission. Contact Events Coordinator Sara Parris at (603) 632-4346 or [events@shakermuseum.org](mailto:events@shakermuseum.org).

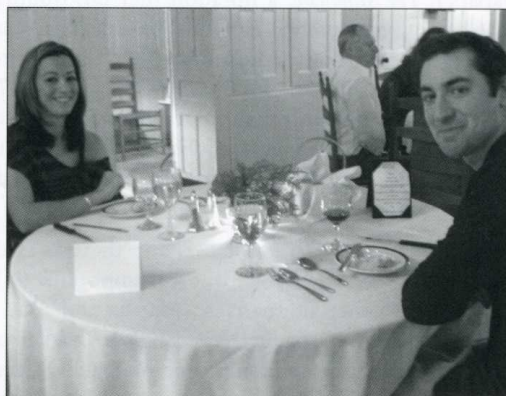
**Sugaring Off Dinner**

**Saturday, March 12, 6:30 p.m.**

Embrace the season with our Sugaring Off Dinner! This elegant meal will be served in the Great Stone Dwelling, where the Enfield Shakers dined for nearly a century. Mount Cardigan Catering will serve you Pumpkin Rolls with Maple Butter; Garden Salad with Crasins and Maple Vinaigrette Dressing; Cream of Leek and Sausage Soup; Stuffed Woodland Chicken with a Mushroom Sauce; Yukon Gold Mashed Potatoes; Green Beans; Maple Pecan Squares with Whipped Cream. \$30/member; \$35/non-member.

**Maple Sugar Overnight**  
**Saturday-Sunday, March 12-13**

Celebrate our New England traditions with sugar house tours, sleigh rides, demonstrations and more! After an invigorating and informative day, relax for a while in your own room. At 5:30 p.m. enjoy a house-warming reception with cocktails, and our annual Sugaring Off Dinner. On Sunday, complete your stay with a "Simply Shaker" breakfast and more optional activities. The fee of \$129/person double occupancy and \$149/person single occupancy, includes dinner, breakfast, reception, activities and overnight stay. Only \$30/child includes meals, activities, overnight.





## Festival of Trees and Cookie Fair: Both a Success!

The winner of our 2nd annual Festival of Trees was the *Chrismons Tree*, decorated by the Women's Fellowship of the Community Lutheran Church and sponsored by HVAC Guru LLC. A decorated tree was on view in at the east entrance of the Great Stone Dwelling and in each of the 20 retiring rooms. The trees were gifts of Jim and Carol Baum. The event raised \$4,000. On Dec. 12, the Cookie Fair, organized by volunteer Barbara Brady, grossed nearly \$1,200.

### Tree Sponsors

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Enfield Shaker Museum (Board of Trustees, Dragonfly Ball Committee and Garden Committee)  
Ford Bookkeeping, LLC  
Kate Plumley and A.J. Stewart (for Fox Tree)  
Arthur and Gail Gagnon  
Hair Salon of Enfield  
Schiffman, Dattilio & Liepmann, PC  
Shaker Farm B&B  
Wendell & Ginger Smith  
Safflowers (2009 award winner)  
Brenda Sturtevant, Dominic Albanese, 1 West-DHMC  
Lynn Wachler  
Women's Fellowship, the Community Lutheran Church



Board President Mardy High (left) and Executive Director Mary Boswell (right) present a \$100 cash prize to Mariann Shaffer, who received the award on behalf of the Women's Fellowship of Community Lutheran Church. Visitors to the Museum voted *The Chrismons Tree* as their favorite tree.

### MUSEUM STORE SALES

Our Museum Store is open daily. We ship nationwide. Browse for deals after the holidays! Contact Store Manager Hollyann Martin at (603) 632-4346 or [shakermuseum.giftshop@gmail.com](mailto:shakermuseum.giftshop@gmail.com). Look for our new online store coming in late January!

### Call for Papers

**Spring Forum, Friday - Sunday, May 7-9**  
**Sponsored by Shaker Workshops**

We are seeking papers for the 5th Annual Spring Forum on the Shakers, May 7-9, a weekend of tours, lectures, performances, meals. The presenter demonstrating outstanding research in Shaker Studies will be awarded a \$500 cash prize from Shaker Workshops. Send your abstract (max. 500 words) to [maryboswell@shakermuseum.org](mailto:maryboswell@shakermuseum.org) by **March 1**. Lectures must be 45 mins or less with 15 additional mins for questions and answers. Applicants will be notified by April 1. Each presenter will be offered two meals and one overnight stay. **Sign up today for this fabulous weekend! Contact the Museum for more information or check the website at [www.shakermuseum.org](http://www.shakermuseum.org).**

### Capital Campaign Progress

The restoration of the east porch of the Great Stone Dwelling was completed in October. A new secondary energy efficient heating system was installed to reduce the load of the main furnace. To meet code, a new bathroom exhaust system was also installed. Property Manager Tom Boswell is working with the Building Committee, chaired by Trustee Paul Wachler, on insulation projects this winter. The restoration of the main roof, cupola, and cornice will begin this spring. A full report will be sent to the members and donors.



**Enfield Shaker Museum**

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