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Enfield Shakers Welcomed the Railroad

by Wendell Hess

In the early 1840s there was in New England, as well as elsewhere all over the country, a tremendous burst of railroad building. Rail lines had already been built from Boston to Concord, N.H.

Other lines were being built or projected from White River Junction, Vt., to the west and north into Canada, thus opening up great new areas for trade, travel and transportation.

A link from Concord to White River Junction was surveyed over three possible routes to connect Boston to points in the north and west. The shortest route, with the lowest hills to negotiate, was planned to follow the route of the existing 4th New Hampshire Turnpike which went down the west side of Mascoma Lake and on to White River Junction.

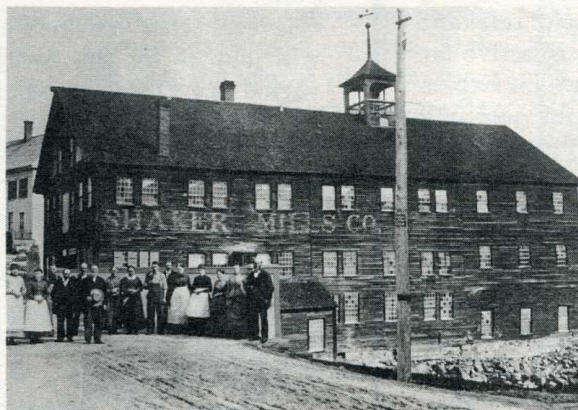
The Shaker village was located on a narrow plain between the lake and the mountain range running parallel; and so, the rail line would have to cut right through the very center of the homes and farmland of these cloistered people.

Trustee Caleb Dyer, who was the greatest leader in the material aspects of the Enfield Shakers, upon hearing of these plans, made many trips to Concord to meet with and to try to dissuade the railroad folks from running their line through the village.

What actual "deals" Caleb made with them is not exactly known. However, the net results of his efforts are history.

First, the railroad was rerouted over a more northerly way through North Enfield. It was some nine miles further than the more direct route. Many cuts through solid granite hills had to be made.

Second, the Shakers donated to the railroad the land they owned along the northern side of Mascoma Lake on which the line was to run and with no strings attached.



Shaker Mills Co., taken about 1880

Photo Courtesy Viola Hess

Also, as an inducement for them to run the road over the longer route, the Shakers gave money, reputed to have been \$500 toward the purchase of a locomotive which was called "Shaker."

The Boston and Maine Railroad locomotive roster gives the following data on the Northern Railroad No. 6 locomotive.

Built in Nov. 1847 by Hinckley and Druary. Builder's # 127. Wheel arrangement — 4-4-0. Cylinders 15' x 20'. Drivers 50'.

* * *

Transferred to B. & M. in 1884. Their # 279. Re-built by B.

& M. — 0-4-0. Cylinders 15' x 22'. Drivers 50'. Sold to Odell Paper Co., Groveton, N.H. in 1899, their # 3. Scrapped in 1904.

From the above, it would appear that the "Shaker" had a long and useful career.

It was also known that the Enfield Shakers bought some 50-60 shares of Northern R.R. stock. The railroad issued lifetime passes to the elders and trustees.

Furthermore, it was reported in the "deal" that Caleb made with the Northern R.R. that all passenger trains would stop at Enfield. That they did was a fact; even the through express trains stopped, whether or not passengers got on or off. This was done until the 1930s by which time Shakers had long departed.

A corollary to the above story is also of interest, insofar as it related to the Enfield Shakers. The population center of Enfield at the time the railroad

was completed was some three miles east of the Shaker village and North Enfield was sparsely populated with mostly farms.

At this period in the existence of the Shakers, they were at their greatest strength in numbers and also affluence. Under the aegis of the talented Caleb Dyer, the Shakers became a major factor in the growth and prosperity of North Enfield, until it finally became the actual center of town.

The "Shaker Mills Co." was built by the Shakers in 1841 and leased

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