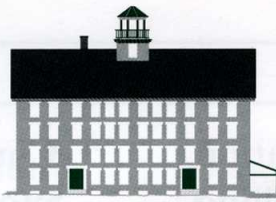


The Friends' Quarterly



A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

Ties That Bind: The Diary of Perry Kidder

By Mary Ann Haagen

On July 4, 2011 the town of Enfield officially celebrates the 250th anniversary of its founding. Inspired by this milestone, the Museum's current exhibit *The Ties that Bind* explores many historic and contemporary connections between the town and the Shakers. A diary kept by Enfield resident Perry Kidder between 1854 and 1858 was one of the resources used to look afresh at the mid-19th century economic and social ties between the Shakers and the local community.



The Second Family Shakers' Smith Pond, one of Perry's most often mentioned fishing haunts. Collection of Dartmouth College Library.

Perry Kidder had a short and by some standards, unremarkable life. If we had only the public record, we would know little more than that he was born in 1828, was the second son of Noah and Betsy Fox Kidder, husband of Minerva Flanders, and father of Fred, Walter and Albe. He died in 1863 at age 35, a landless farm laborer. He left a pregnant wife and a four-year-old son. He was buried in Purmort cemetery, near his father's homestead, next to his five-year-old son Fred, who had died two months before.¹

During their married life Perry and Minerva never had a home of their own. His father was a shoemaker by trade and owned a 17-acre farm where they lived in the south west corner of Enfield.² When there was work elsewhere, they moved into other temporary quarters. But the farm was the refuge they returned to again and again when that work dried up.

For students of Shaker history, the frequent references to interaction with the Enfield Shakers make Perry Kidder's diary particularly significant.³ There are few reflections on those interactions, only matter-of-fact notations of exchanges, mostly of a business nature, or about fishing on Shaker property. In their simplicity, the entries provide an important, if limited record of the relationship between the Shaker Society and citizens of the surrounding community. In August of 1854, he writes about working for the Shakers, haying on the Smith farm, and reaping rye. On Wednesday, August 16 he buys a stove from them. In May 1855 he considers selling them his oxen, but doesn't make "any certain bargain." In September he notes "Minerva went off with some herbs to the Shakers." During his spare time, he went fishing and had "good luck," catching fish in Shaker Pond. In May of 1855 he drew a load of bass logs so the Second Family Shakers for

broom handles. He sold a cord for \$1.50. Later that month, he drew 3 cords for \$4.50.

These and many other short entries remind us that although the Shakers were not heavily dependant on hired help in the 1850s, they were a possible employer for day labor, odd jobs, and piecework.⁴ Locals could generate a cash crop by supplying Shaker industries with raw materials readily available in the woods and fields. In addition to basswood logs harvested for the Shaker broom shop, the Kid-

ders gathered pennyroyal and other herbs needed in the medicinal herb industry. The Kidders also purchased supplies from the Shakers, used their gristmill, and frequently went to one of the Shaker families "on business." A particular skill they offered the Shakers was shoemaking. In April 1856 Perry wrote, "Father is to the Shakers cutting out shoes & boots to bring home to make."

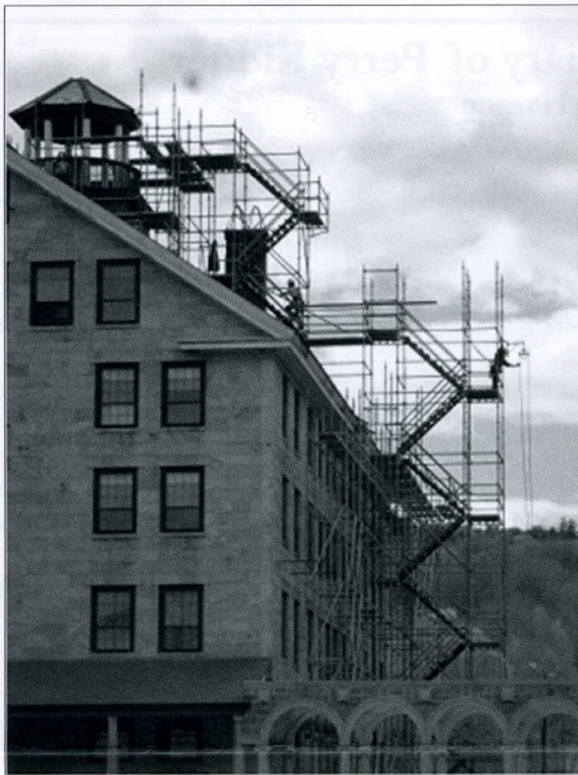
The Shakers had a reputation for self-sufficiency and strove for strict separation from "the world." This modest diary records some of what were thousands of small exceptions to that principle. When the Enfield Shakers needed new shoes or boots and did not have a competent shoemaker in their family they called on their worldly neighbors.

The Shakers valued formal education and prided themselves on the learning opportunities afforded Shaker children. Since they were part of the town's public school system they were evaluated by its school superintending committee. They consistently received high marks for the quality of their facilities, the regularity of student attendance and the abilities of the Shakers assigned to teach.⁵ Conditions in the West Enfield neighborhood were apparently very different. In 1854 it was determined that the school building was "not fit for housing swine." On March 17, 1855 Perry Kidder noted that the community "has voted to build a new school house to be finished by the first of November next." Perry was chosen clerk, helped raise the new school building, and on November 17 recorded the school meeting "voted to accept of the house."

In the 1850s Shaker children and most children of Enfield families ended their formal schooling at the eighth grade. In

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Progress on the Restoration of the Great Stone Dwelling



Work on the Great Stone Dwelling's main roof, cupola, cornice and chimney began on April 15. The methods and materials follow Federal guidelines for historic preservation. The staff and work crew have discovered that the cornice, which was previously thought to be slanted, is in fact curved, as are cornices on buildings in the Central Ministry in Mount Lebanon, New York. The staff have also determined that the cornice and cupola columns were originally painted dark green, matching the window trim.

The Butler Foundation funded the restoration of the cupola. The Timken Foundation in Canton, Ohio, is providing support for the restoration of the roof. The Museum must raise \$12,000 to complete the project. Individuals may help with a \$500 gift to "adopt" a window of their choice, a \$250 contribution to "adopt" a drawer in one of the restored built-in cabinets, or a \$20 purchase of one of the original slate shingles.

Couch Family Foundation Sponsors Family Programs

Studies show that hands-on programs for families in museums provide a bonding experience that lasts many generations. Interactive, multi-disciplinary programs can encourage active lifestyles and improve social behavior. Some children who do not perform well in a classroom often fare better in a museum environment.

The Couch Family Foundation recently donated \$5,000 to support the Museum's existing family programs and to develop new ones. The grant will help maintain the Harvest Festival, Country Life Festival and Shaker Summer Quest. Sharon Roth, a Museum member who has a Ph.D. in early childhood education, is developing activities that target different age levels and satisfy a broad range of interests. She plans to introduce a pilot project in July. These new activities will be based on primary research about young people who were raised in Shaker societies.

"The Couch Family Foundation is helping us give family visitors choices so that they will return and keep learning something new," said Mary Boswell, Museum Executive Director.



Volunteer Mariann Shaffer teaches children a Shaker song as part of the Shaker Summer Quest. This summer camp is funded in part by the Couch Family Foundation.

