

The Great Stone Dwelling of the Enfield, New Hampshire Shakers

ROBERT P. EMLÉN

In the dusk of a May evening in 1843 Giles Avery arrived at the Shaker village in Enfield, New Hampshire (fig. 1). During the last leg of his journey the sun had set, and, weary from an eight-hour stagecoach ride, he exchanged introductions with his New Hampshire brethren and gratefully retired to the lodging they had prepared for him in the ministry's dwelling. Elder Giles had come from the Shakers' parent ministry in New Lebanon, New York, on a visit to the other New England Shaker communities, and after two days on the road he was glad to find himself received among Believers, as the Shakers were formally known.

At half past four the next morning he was awakened by the tolling of a nearby bell. Day was breaking at the village. He rose and ventured forth to explore his new surroundings, recording his first impressions in the journal of his trip. "We arise this morning in good health and fine spirits, crawl out a little & view the place; so dark last evening we could see nothing," he wrote. "A beautiful situation truly, but O! what a stone palace!"¹

Elder Giles stepped out of the ministry's dwelling rooms into the sunlight, and stood in awe before the new dwelling house of the Enfield Shakers' church or center family (fig. 2).

Completed only two years earlier, the Great Stone Dwelling, as it was known in the community, towered over the scores of buildings which comprised the largest of the three "families" at Enfield. One hundred feet long and fifty-eight feet wide, its roof peak loomed sixty feet above

Avery's head.² The visiting elder faced a massive wall of meticulously fitted granite, punctuated with scores of large, regularly spaced openings. There were twelve bays of windows, double hung, stretching the length of the dwelling, and, before him on the first floor, framed in massive granite posts and lintels, were two doorways—one for the brethren and one for the sisters, as prescribed by Shaker law. It may have been the largest building Avery had ever seen; it was certainly the largest Shaker dwelling house ever built, and its presence in the lakeside village was, to say the least, unexpected. The structure was, he wrote, "one of the most stately, magnificent, and solid buildings I ever saw."³

I

The second quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of prosperity for the Enfield Shakers. The community's growing number of converts had been cramped in their 1794 dwelling, built according to Shaker decree that no building exceed the meetinghouse in size—thirty by forty-two feet.⁴ Additions and renovations were not sufficient to comfortably house the increased membership, which would reach an estimated high of 350.

The management of the Enfield Shakers' temporal affairs was entrusted to the industrious and aggressive Caleb Dyer. Named assistant trustee in 1824, Brother Caleb

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FIG. 1. "COMMUNITY AT ENFIELD, N.H." Line drawing, ca. 1880-84 from *A Concise History of the United Society of Believers Called Shakers* by Charles Edson Robinson (East Canterbury, N.H., 1893), p. 59; after a photograph by C.E. Lewis. This line drawing first appeared in *The Manifesto* (October, 1884), p. 225.

gradually assumed more and more duties; by the time he rose to first trustee in 1838 he had been running the Shakers' business matters for years. A man who thought in large terms, Dyer would during his stewardship build the famous Shaker bridge across Lake Mascoma and create the complex of mercantile ventures which turned the community into a major economic force in the state. With the vast resources of the Shaker society at his disposal, he had the confidence to plan and manage the construction of a building containing almost 30,000 square feet of living space, designed for a community whose purpose was to create a perfect life on earth.

Planning for the structure started years before construction. A letter sent by the ministry at Enfield to the parent church at New Lebanon in 1834 outlined the proposed building:

I do not know but that it would be agreeable enough to you to hear a little what we are doing in the temporal line. The church in this place have been making preparations this winter for building a dwelling-house of stone . . . It is intended to have the meeting-room the whole width of the house & 38 Ft. lengthwise of the house which will make upon the inside 38 Ft. by 54 Ft. It is to be in the 2nd story, thro the center of the loft, having two rooms on the East & two on the West of the same. The kitchen will be under the meeting-room. The two upper lofts will contain two tiers of rooms each with halls running lengthwise of the building between them.⁵

That same year a location was chosen for the new dwelling, and two buildings which stood on the proposed site were skidded 220 feet to the north. When the space had been cleared and Lake Mascoma had frozen solid, the Shakers began to quarry and

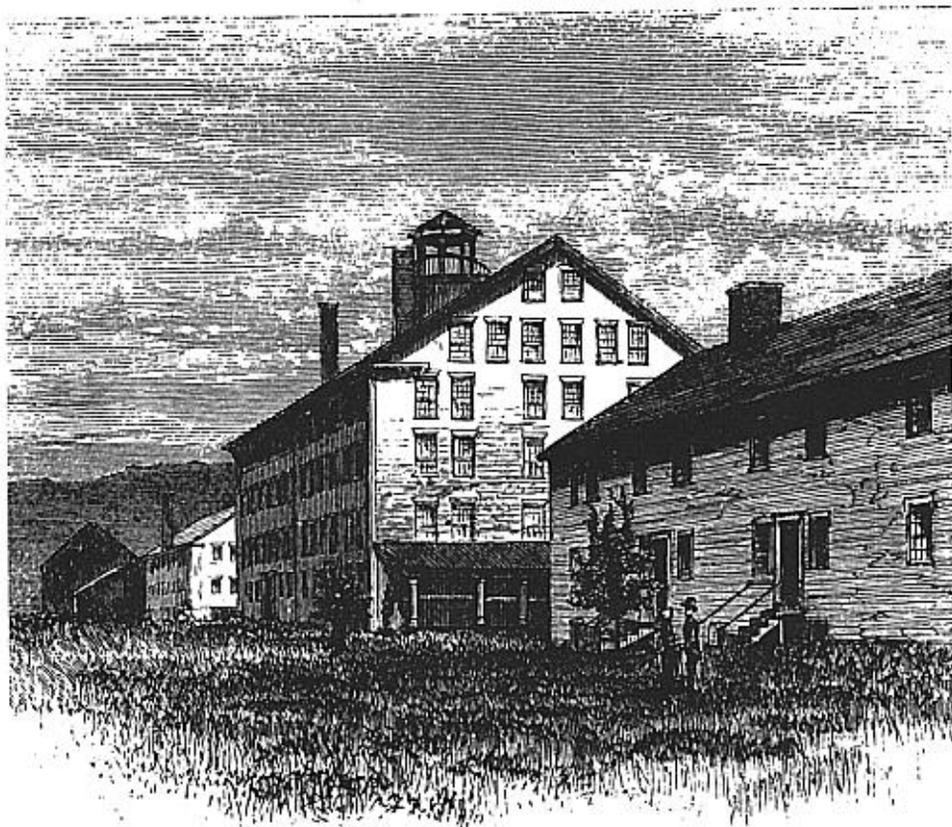


FIG. 2. "GRANITE DWELLING OF THE ENFIELD SHAKERS." The Great Stone Dwelling (left) and the 1794 dwelling (right), ca. 1870-75. Line drawing from *The Communistic Societies of the United States* by Charles Nordoff (New York, 1875), facing p. 134; after an anonymous photograph, ca. 1870.

draw across the ice hundreds of blocks of granite needed to construct the outer walls of the dwelling.⁶

The Enfield Shakers drew their converts from a region of good and plentiful building timber, in which the majority of the structures were of wood frame construction. There were very few stone buildings in the Upper Connecticut River Valley. In fact, the North Family Laundry and Dairy, a two-and-one-half-story granite workshop built in 1831, was said to be the first stone

building in the town of Enfield.⁷ The Believers were accomplished at laying foundations and fieldstone walls, but they had not gathered any trained stonemasons into their society. Recognizing the practical limits to their ingenuity, they decided to seek outside assistance for designing and constructing their Great Stone Dwelling.

This departure from self-sufficiency was not without precedent. The granite foundation for the 1829 Brick Shop at the New Lebanon, New York Shaker community

had been quarried with hired help and its brick walls raised by the masons of a local construction company.⁸ New Lebanon elder Isaac Youngs commented on the Shakers' lack of expertise in masonry construction:

We have but little of much interest to say about this occupation, tho' it has been important to our concerns in life. It has never exhibited much change or improvement, except that workmen, by experience have learned to be more thorough and perfect in their work, especially in the foundation work of buildings, to guard against frost. This business has not been performed among us by experienced workmen appointed expressly to that work, but more by those who had but little experience in that line, according to circumstances.⁹

The Shakers at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky hired white masons and their black tenders to build the stone Trustees' Office in 1839,¹⁰ and the pragmatic Dyer hired masons at Enfield, even for more ordinary stonework.¹¹ Indeed, the Shakers' practice of employing stonemasons "from the World" would continue through the construction at Sabbathday Lake, in 1883, of their last masonry building.¹² It was not only practical, therefore, but in accordance with their custom, for the Enfield Shakers to seek outside assistance in planning and erecting this monumental granite building (fig. 3).

Architect Ammi Burnham Young was born and raised in the neighboring town of Lebanon, New Hampshire. In 1829 he held architecture classes there, and in newspapers read by Shaker trustees Young advertised his services as a designer and draftsman.¹³ His early commissions at nearby Dartmouth College had brought him local renown, and by the late 1830s his State Capitol Building at Montpelier, Vermont would establish Young's reputation for designing large-scale granite structures. The Enfield Shakers were familiar with Young's work, and hired him to design their dwelling. Noted former elder Henry Cum-

ings, "The cost of this very fine building has never been exactly known, partly because the labor was done by members of the family, and no account was kept of the time, etc. The architect was Prof. Ammi B. Young, then of Dartmouth College."¹⁴

As the Shakers prepared to implement the architect's plans they found they had questions about roofing design and materials, and Brother Caleb decided to research recent developments in roofing technology. Most of the structures at Enfield were roofed with wood shingles from the Shaker sawmills, but that traditional material, though durable, would be out of place on a large, modern stone building. Before dawn on a July morning in 1836, therefore, Dyer set out for Boston, to learn about sheet metal and slate roofing.

In his capacity as trustee Dyer was required to keep detailed accounts of the money he spent on behalf of the society, and to justify his expenditures to the elders. Because of the unprecedented size of this undertaking, and because he was being considered for the position of first trustee, Dyer was anxious to fulfill his duties conscientiously, and made extensive notes on his research in Boston, excerpted from here:

C Coolege is one of the stronges advocates for Zinc & is using it[;] he also said nothing bad of slate The zinc costs from 12 to 14 cts per foot—Slate from 9 to 10 cts per foot.

Dyer's tour took him to a rooftop, where a sheet-metal roofing salesman was hard pressed to explain away his faulty zinc:

We went on to the roof of one store partly covered with Slate & Partly with Zinc Which they said had not leaked but there was considerable large stains on the floor which he charged to the cats—so much for that—so far as we have examined this day we find that there is ten times as much Slate a using in the City as Zinc and that it is the unanims voice of the people that occupy the buildings say Slate

Dyer visited Boston's largest buildings,

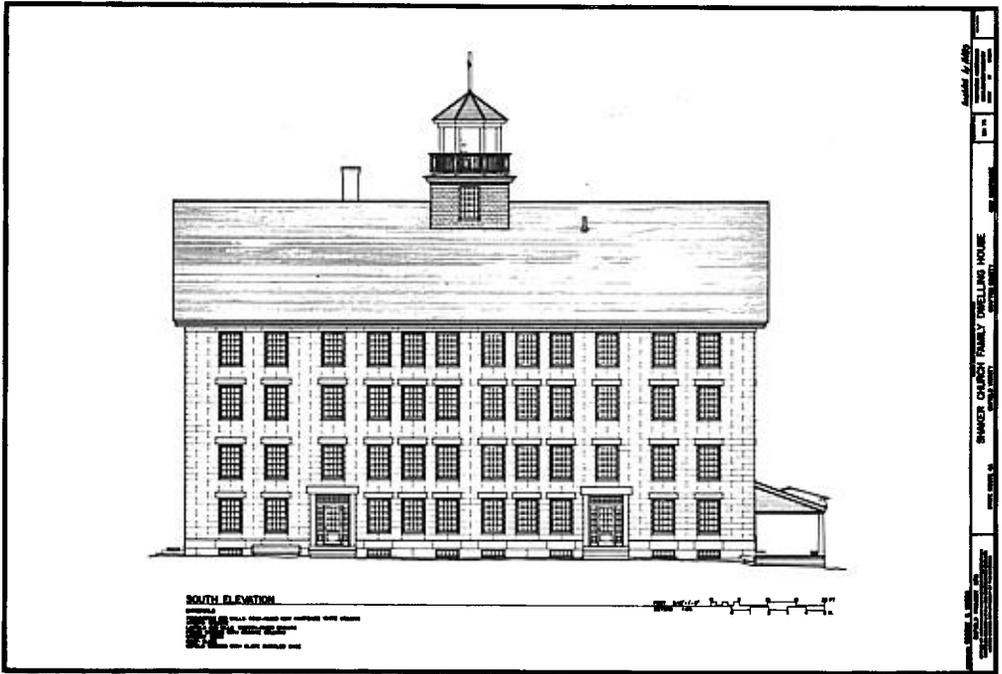


FIG. 3. THE GREAT STONE DWELLING, SOUTH ELEVATION, 1978. Drawing by the Historic American Buildings Survey (unedited by HABS). The symmetry of the building is not solely attributable to its Greek Revival architect; Shaker custom required separate and equal doorways and living spaces for brethren and sisters alike.

inspected their roofs, and interviewed their owners and occupants, all the while making notes in his journal:

The America house the second Tavern in boston . . . was covered a part with zinc & a part with slate.[T]his was done the last season in the latest manner.[T]here we could see what they had to say on the subject[,] there we found a hot fever against the Zinc and in favour of the slate as the zinc had leaked bad and the slate had been perfectly dry

And, while he was in Boston, Brother Caleb sought the advice of some prominent citizens:

We called H G Otis and learned by him that his house had been covered with Slate for ten years and had never leaked nor lost off a piece to his knowledge—he concedered it the best kind of Covering &c¹⁵

II

While Dyer was seeking this information in Boston, work progressed at the building site. Teams of oxen harnessed to earth scrapers and driven repeatedly over the length of the building cut away the stony soil to form a cellar hole. Ditches were dug and filled with loose stones to form drains for carrying water away from the building. A special shed was erected for drying the thousands of feet of lumber needed for the new building.¹⁶ In a year's-end letter in 1836, the New Hampshire ministry brought the parent church up to date: "It is the calculation to lay up their big stone house and cover the roof with slate next summer; and to close the outside with windows and doors will probably be enough to accomplish in one season."¹⁷

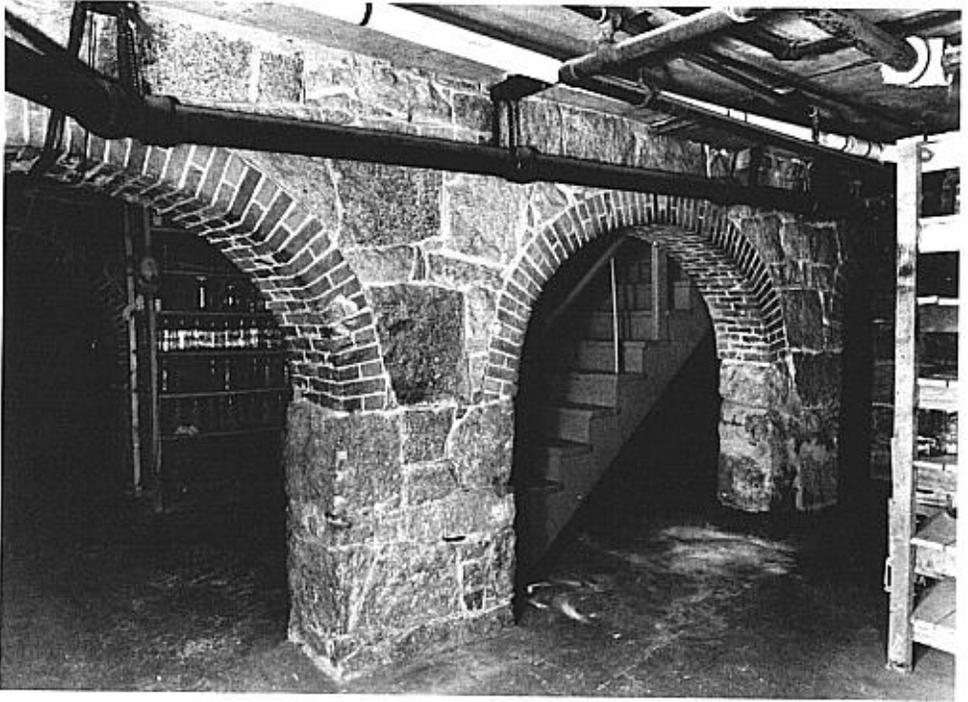


FIG. 4. CELLAR OF THE GREAT STONE DWELLING, 1970. Photograph by the Historic American Buildings Survey. The two granite and brick partitions which run the length of the building are pierced with stilted arches to permit passage across the cellar.

When the ground thawed in the spring of 1837 the Shakers prepared to lay the huge building's foundation. It was designed to have a full cellar, with over 4,500 square feet of kitchen and storage space. While the stonework would not be finished below grade, the plan did call for two granite partitions to run the 100-foot length of the cellar to carry the load of the building's broad central hallways (see figure 4). These walls were designed with stilted arches, to permit easy access from one side of the cellar to the other; for construction of this relatively sophisticated work the Shakers brought in an entire crew of professional stonemasons. "The master workman," wrote Henry Cumings, "was a Mr. Kings-

ley from Boston and Lowell, all work being done by the day. But all the teaming, drawing of stone, lime, sand, etc., was done by their own teams, driven by members of the family."¹⁸

As masonry construction began, Dyer noted in his account book for May 1, 1837, "Luther Kingsley & his hands as masons commenced work upon the cellar walls of the stone Dwelling house."¹⁹ This was one of the very few occasions on which the Enfield Shakers hired construction crews to work in the village,²⁰ and Brother Caleb meticulously recorded a week-by-week summary of the progress of construction on the dwelling:

July 29 Raised the flooring timbers on the

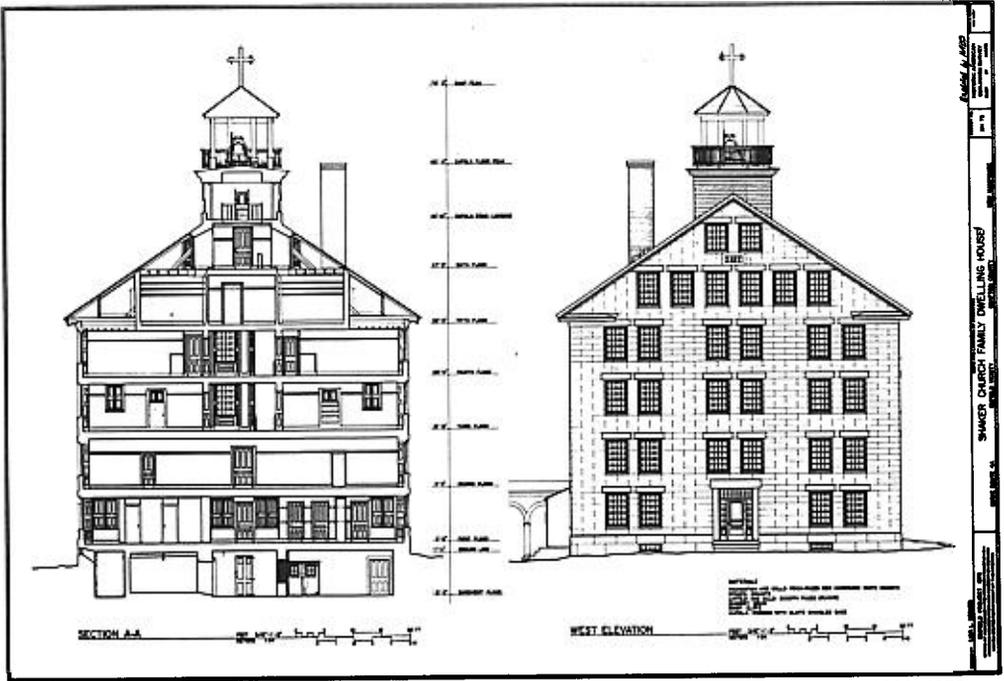


FIG. 5. THE GREAT STONE DWELLING, CROSS SECTION AND WEST ELEVATION, 1978. Drawing by the Historic American Buildings Survey (unedited by HABS).

fourth Loft. [S]tone work all done up to the top of the window Caps of the third loft and Stagins Raised all in readiness for commencing on the fourth loft—The stone work of the third loft was layed in $9\frac{1}{2}$ days.

Brother Caleb had been convinced to use slate on the roof, of course, and in the fall a second crew arrived to roof the building:

Sept 19—Tuesday[.]The Slaters arrived here a little before noon[;] 3 of them & a tender trimming slate building stages etc. till 22nd then Commencing putting on the slate

By November the stone building was closed in and weather-tight. The stone construction sheds were taken down and the ground around the site was cleaned up and levelled off. The elders and eldersses were

expected any day from the Shaker community at Canterbury, New Hampshire, and it was important that the new dwelling look presentable. Dyer noted:

Nov 3rd have dismissed all our hands except Burpee & Flanders. The Ground all leveled off and slicked up so that it looks nice. The Ministry arrive here from Canterbury.²¹

As they finished laying up the gable ends the masons set a date stone in the wall of the dwelling. The year "1837" was carved prominently in a block of New Hampshire granite and set high in the roof peak, where it could be seen by whoever travelled the road through Shaker village (fig. 5).

Two years later Isaac Hill passed by the Great Stone Dwelling on his way from

Lebanon to Grantham, and stopped to visit at the Shaker village. "The best dwelling house in the state is now erecting on their premises," he wrote in *The Farmers' Monthly Visitor*, continuing:

Although their carpenters and principal masons are hired . . . the cash expense has been lessened by their ability to furnish excellent lumber and granite bricks from their own premises and by their own hands: their planing machine, preparing finishing materials of almost any pattern, has saved much: their ample previous preparation of every necessary article economizes the time of the hired mechanics.²²

The Enfield group was probably the first Shaker community to use Shaker saws, having invented one around 1803, but they were only used for light work. Shaker sawyers at Enfield continued into the twentieth century to saw dimension lumber with vertical reciprocating saws.²³ Construction crews used this vertically-sawn lumber to frame the interior walls and partitions as they raised the granite shell to each new floor or loft of the dwelling. After that, Shaker craftsmen took over. Wrote Cummings, "When it came to finishing or joiner work a large part of that was done by members as they had, at this time, several fine workmen in this line, making doors, sash shutters, panel work, drawers, etc., all hand made."²⁴

The work went steadily on, but another year passed before the building was ready for habitation. During this time, despite the resources of manpower and materials available to them, the Shakers were still required to spend enormous amounts of cash on the new building. Pullies and sash weights for its double-hung windows cost \$261; \$1,000 worth of slate and zinc was purchased for the roof.²⁵

Although its expenses were mounting, the society decided to buy a bell to place in the new cupola. Since the society's establishment at Enfield the family had been summoned to meals and prayers by the blowing of a horn;²⁶ finally, with the plan-

ing for this magnificent new dwelling, money had been allotted for a bell which could be heard throughout the village. In 1838 the Shakers purchased a bell weighing almost half a ton, and proudly installed it in the two-story cupola of the Great Stone Dwelling. It was rung eight times a day, for rising, for meals, and for calling the faithful to prayers.²⁷ A tremendous bell, it could be heard for miles.

In February of 1839 the ministry again reported to New Lebanon:

In our temporal concerns we are onward. By industry, economy, and close application to duty, we acquire a competency for our support, and have added some to our buildings. The great stone house . . . which was commenced in the Church here some years since is still not finished. It is now ready for the plasterers. It will not probably be completed until some time in the year 1840. This building with other important additions and repairs to mills and other buildings, have absorbed the principal part of their surplus capital, but as the Church here are quite efficient and able bodied; and having been successful in disposing of their wares and garden seeds, we believe they may be able to complete this house without any actual distress. The building is much needed, particularly the meeting room which is 58 by 40 ft.²⁸

III

For weeks, throughout the winter and spring of 1839, the Shakers nailed strips of wood lath to the walls and ceilings; then, when summer came and the stone building warmed up, they were able to start plastering its interior.²⁹ Observed Giles Avery, "The plastering, throughout, is the neatest I ever saw, not the whitest, altho it is sufficiently white to look well." He noted the process used at Enfield, and described it in detail for further reference:

The wood work or finish of the houses is all put upon what they call a ground, that is, casings, pin boards, mop boards, &c., are all thin stuff just trued by running thro the planing machine & put on the studding first. The plastering is then done & spread on even, in thickness, of course forming a



FIG. 6. INTERIOR OF DINING ROOM, STONE HOUSE, CA. 1870. Photograph by C.E. Lewis or W.M. Culver, Enfield, N.H. Each table is set for from 14 to 16 Believers, though there was room for up to 20 places. Built-in cupboards and folding shutters can be seen in the background; first-floor shutters were made with a single solid panel; on the second floor and above they were hinged to fold double. (Collection of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.)

guide to the trowel for trueing the work. When the plastering is all done & dry the casing is done, being put upon this ground.³⁰

In November the New Hampshire ministry penned another progress report to New Lebanon. It reflected the enormity of the work to be accomplished, while revealing some of the community's anxiety at having hired help in the midst of the cloistered religious community:

The brethren get along with the stone

house as fast as can be expected. There has been and are now 10 to 12 joiners finishing the rooms & halls & laying the floors. There is equal to 2 stories completed ready for staining . . . & making the drawers. There are about 1000 drawers to be made for the whole house It is thought the family will not be able to move into the house in the fall of 1840 It takes more time and money to complete the house than was anticipated; but as the family need the house very much, and as our dooryard is constantly annoyed with the presence of the world,

the finishing will be expedited as fast as practicable

...³¹

The work of completing the great building dragged on; four years after the masons had laid the foundation the Shakers were still adding finishing touches. At last they built furniture for the new dwelling and painted the woodwork.³² While the construction crew's staging was still in place the Shakers climbed to the roof and painted the raking eaves and boxed cornice. Recalled a man who lived there at the time, "The jut and eave and projections were of a deep, rich green."³³

The fall of 1840 came and went, and by the next spring the dwelling was still unfinished. Now, the plastering done, every door and window, every drawer and cupboard, every baseboard and pegboard in the dwelling had to be painted. "The paint is very smooth and glossy," wrote a visitor to the new building. "Elder Orville says they finished by dipping the paint brush in boiled oil just as the paint is drying, and brush it over. By this means the oil becomes a varnish which looks elegantly when dry."³⁴

By May the work was finally coming to an end, and in a letter to New Lebanon, the ministry could announce that construction was virtually complete:

We expect the new Stone house will be so far finished, that it may be wholly occupied in the course of next month, except the Kitchen which probably will require more time, to put in the sink, and getting in water. It is wholly painted, and the pins & knobs are all put in. The tables are made. The chairs will soon be finished. The stair carpets will soon be put down and lamps hung in the meeting room. So that we have little doubt if our good Friends should visit us this season, they will see it nearly completed.³⁵

For years the Shakers had paid daily wages to carpenters and stonemasons, to slaters and sheet-metal workers. They had paid cash for building material which they could not produce themselves—\$350 for

paint and oil, \$300 for nails and iron fasteners.³⁶ Community industry had provided the money, and now, after five years of construction, the house was finished and paid for.

No doubt Giles Avery was impressed as he stood in the dooryard and considered the building. In 1843 there were no domestic structures of comparable size north of Boston. The commitment of money and resources required to support an equivalent undertaking could have only been amassed for the construction of a public building, and the State House at Concord, to which it was most often compared in terms of cost, was dwarfed by the Shakers' stone dwelling. The mill buildings along New England's rivers might have equalled it in sheer mass, but they were designed and built without the fine cabinetwork which the Shaker craftsmen lavished on every room of the building. Amazed with what he saw, Elder Giles decided to "look over [the stone dwelling] from top to bottom."³⁷

The eastern end of the dwelling faced the sisters' shop; they had taken over the old dwelling house and had converted it into workspace. Their retiring rooms were in the eastern end of the new dwelling, and they entered the building from the doors on this end. Another set faced west, leading to the mills and hayfields, and these were used by the brethren. Elder Giles made his way to a brethren's entrance, and, starting on the first floor, made detailed notes as he went along:

In the dining room [fig. 6] there are cupboards and drawers which occupy the whole side of the room, on either side. Drawers under the tables, to put in salt cellars & other things for seasonings; which are not commonly put on the tables. A large sitting room to go into when coming into victuals, around the sides of this, are drawers and cupboards to put clothes in which are brot from the wash, in order to save sisters from going into brethren's rooms to put away such clothes.³⁸

Ascending from floor to floor, Elder

Giles described the plan of the building (see figure 7) and related how the Shakers at Enfield lived in it:

Each room is accommodated with a closet which lies between the rooms and each room has one side of it. The chimneys which accommodate the rooms, run up in this apartment. An offset in the partition is also made to accommodate a case of drawers and cupboard which is attached to the room, of course the room is clear, no cases of drawers, or chimney corners, neither woodboxes to run against. The woodbox for the house, is situated in the hall of the kitchen loft, and from this the wood is carried in small baskets to each room as needed There are 8 dwelling rooms on a loft, and two large closets, 8 chimneys which run thro the closets between the rooms, & which combine into four which come out at the roof.³⁹

Elder Giles remained at Enfield for a week, visiting, teaching, counseling. On the day before his departure the family rejoiced with him on the broad south lawn of the stone dwelling (see figure 8). "We went out with the Ministry, Elders & a large number of the Brs and Strs to sow some spiritual seed. Sowed a large field and the dooryard, meeting house yard, &c. This being done we returned into the dooryard, and had a very joyful dance together."⁴⁰ In the morning he left the village, and headed south to visit the Canterbury Shakers.

IV

Virtually all contemporary accounts of the stone dwelling were written by visitors like Giles Avery. The Enfield Shakers seem to have turned their energies to other than literary tasks, and, with the exception of the Great Stone Dwelling construction account book, almost no written records of their most prosperous years survive. It was the apostate Hervey Elkins, who, after living with the Enfield Shakers for fifteen years, left the most complete account of the stone dwelling:

The interior of the edifice is finished with

beautiful white pine, and not a knot, blemish, or nail head was any where visible, before painting, from the cupola to the cellar. The finish is painted white, and varnished, and shines with the brilliancy of reflected light The construction of the whole house, for beauty and convenience, is unsurpassed.⁴¹

In his memoirs Elkins described the building in detail. The only account known to be written by someone who had actually lived there, his observations are distinguished by his personal reaction to the solemn beauty of the great building:

From the lower corridors, two flights of stairs, one at each end of the house, lead to the second loft. Near the head of those stairs, two wide doors, exactly opposite each other, open upon the sanctuary. The males enter the western, the females the eastern door. This hall of worship is immediately above the dining hall in the center of the house. It is fifty-eight by forty feet, and is lighted by twelve large windows. Not a post, or support of any kind interrupts, in this place, the felicity of space.⁴²

It was customary for Shakers travelling to other communities to record interesting aspects of their trips for their brethren and sisters at home. An 1847 narrative reveals one journalist's impressions of the dwelling:

Wednesday the 24. At the first Order a large Stone House The stone are a beautiful grannite, and all of one thickness, one foot thick, and of uniform length It is a very convenient house. It is finished from bottom to the top. The bell weighs 1008 lbs. It makes a large noise. I think it must have taken all of the wise heads in the valley, both brethren and sisters to contrive so many conveniences as there is in that house.⁴³

The great bell had been flawed in the casting, however. After ten years of use it cracked. In 1848 the Shakers ordered another, and this time they sent to the Holbrook Bell Foundry, in East Medway, Massachusetts. Major George Holbrook had apprenticed in Paul Revere's bell foundry and had learned the business well.

By 1816 the Holbrook's own foundry was the only one of its kind in America, and shipped bells all over the world.⁴⁴ In 1848 Holbrook cast the Shakers a replacement bell for the cupola of the stone house, one "remarkable for its sonorousness and sweetness of tone."⁴⁵ "The present bell weighs rising 600 lbs," wrote a visitor in 1850. "The first, which weighed about 1100 lbs, cracked, & was knocked to pieces & thrown off the building."⁴⁶

Each visitor to the stone house seemed to come away impressed by it, and each noted something of particular interest. The following is from the 1854 journal of Eldress Nancy Moore:

September 20 We were invited by the Ministry (after having a pleasant visit with them) to go over to the center house, which is built of Granite; we all went thro' it, from the cellar to the garrett, and up into the bellphry. It is confessed by all that it is the most convenient & elegant house we have yet seen among believers There is twelve dwelling rooms for the brethren and the same number for the sisters The house is all painted white inside, and well furnished with drawers and cupboards. There are 800 drawers in the house. One side of their dining room wall which is set full of door cupboards & drawers. Elder Orville said there was not a box or chest in the house.⁴⁷

This convenient house was so well designed that it could accommodate the functions of the smaller buildings which flanked it. As she was preparing to leave Eldress Nancy remarked,

On Sabbath we had a good time in Church meeting. They held their Church meeting in the meetingroom of the dwelling house: it is large and spacious, and there being but one family in the church they seldom go to the Meetinghouse to worship, and they have no need to, for they have enough room at home.⁴⁸

The visiting journalists invariably took note of the large meeting room in the center of the second floor, where the brethren and sisters gathered for religious service. Their numbers had continued to increase, and

every year it became more difficult to hold services in the old meetinghouse.⁴⁹ The "felicity of space" which Elkins had praised represented more than an aesthetic benefit; the sacred marching and dancing which prompted skeptical onlookers to call the Believers "Shakers" required open spaces, unbroken by posts and partitions. In the new stone dwelling the meeting room spanned the entire width of the building, and was, noted Elder Giles, "much larger than the outside measurements of the Meeting house."⁵⁰ Though the membership at Enfield was booming, there was sufficient space for all to join in the worship:

After dinner I was conducted thro' the great Stone House from bottom to top, by Brother Abraham Perkins & Chase Al-lard. I found it to be a stupendous structure indeed. The Meeting Room was sufficiently large to accomodate 150 in their worship, & this was the number of their family, being the largest family in these Eastern States.⁵¹

As first trustee, Caleb Dyer had tremendous influence on the directions in which the society grew, as for almost twenty-five years he developed and managed the community's temporal life. With his aggressive management the Shakers' lands increased, their villages grew, and their industries flourished. Brother Caleb gradually assumed great control in the community, and eventually began to neglect his obligation to account to the elders for his activities. Finally he stopped writing all but the most cursory reports. He was spending the society's money freely, and when he died unexpectedly in 1863 this economic empire collapsed. The records of his business transactions existed almost entirely in his head, and his death left the society's business matters in a mess that took the Shakers years to unravel. The Shakers were faced with a crushing debt and with extensive, debilitating litigation. Suddenly they found themselves without strong direction. The society seemed to falter, and to lose its

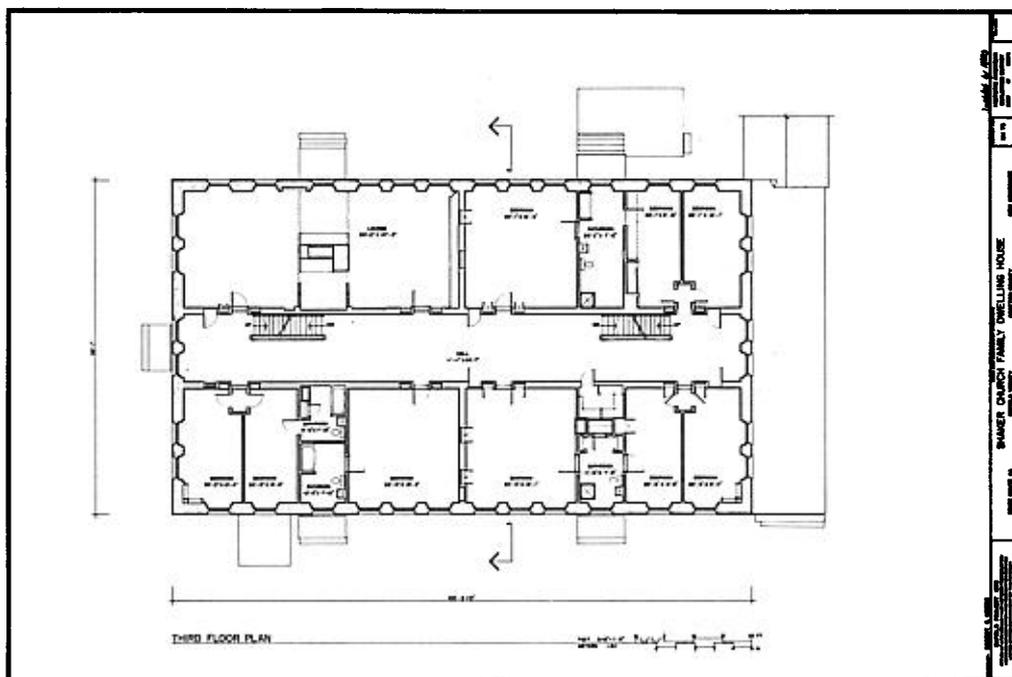


FIG. 7. THE GREAT STONE DWELLING, THIRD FLOOR PLAN, 1978. Drawing by the Historic American Buildings Survey (unedited by HABS).

momentum. In time the Shakers were able to reorganize their leadership and resolve their financial affairs, but the impetus which had once created the dynamic society at Enfield had lost its vitality.⁵²

The forces which had gathered enthusiasts into the faith were no longer able to attract great numbers, and the Shakers' membership started to diminish. As fewer converts came to Enfield to consecrate themselves to the Shaker way of life, the Believers were no longer able to fill their great stone house. The dwelling had been designed to accommodate a hundred souls. Now, as its rooms began to be unneeded, more and more were left closed and unused.

Improved networks of transportation brought travellers to New Hampshire in

increasing numbers, however, and published gazetteers provided them with descriptions of the local features of interest. Accounts invariably mentioned the Shaker village at Enfield, and remarked on the Great Stone Dwelling as particularly worthy of note. In fifty years it had become part of the landscape, and the purpose of the monumental building, the reasons for its creation, and all that it symbolized for the Shakers, had become obscured over the years. Visitors from the world beyond Shaker Village regarded its presence as nothing more than a local curiosity. As each successive gazetteer reworked the text borrowed from its predecessor, descriptions of the stone dwelling became superficial and cursory.

In 1886 *Child's Gazetteer* erroneously

described the stone dwelling as being a scant fifty-six feet wide, and this measurement, regularly repeated in print over the next seventy-five years, gained spurious authority.⁵³ Charles Nordhoff visited Enfield in 1874, and noted with uncharacteristic inaccuracy, "The dwelling of the church family is of a beautiful granite, one hundred feet by sixty . . ." ⁵⁴ Nordhoff had added two feet to the building, and his misrepresentation of its actual dimension became part of a body of legend about the structure which has stayed in print for a century.

A stream of travellers now came to Enfield to see the Shaker village, among them

commercial photographers with stereopticon cameras. Scores of photographs of the village were produced, many of them portraying the famous stone house. The Shakers' most promising years were behind them, however, and their Great Stone Dwelling survived not as a symbol of the permanence of their kingdom on earth, but as a towering reminder of their former prosperity, and as a spectacle for the summer tourists who were beginning to find their way to Lake Mascoma.

The Shakers' membership continued to dwindle. Finally, they no longer had the manpower to sustain their major indus-

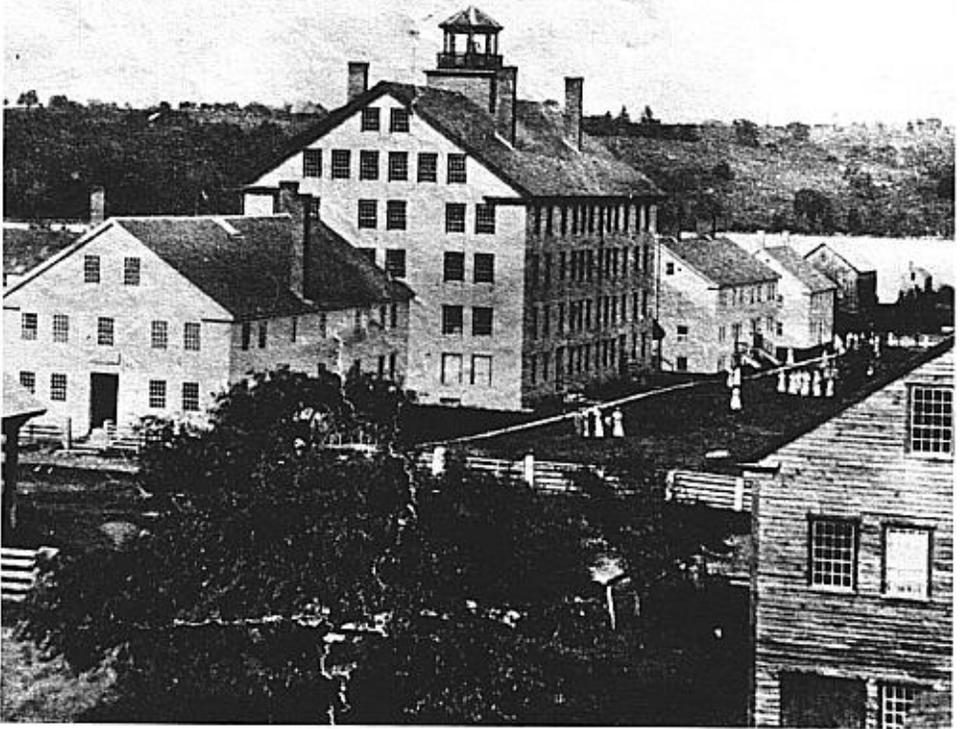


FIG. 8. SHAKERS ON THE SOUTH LAWN OF THE GREAT STONE DWELLING. Photograph by E. J. Brigham, ca. 1870. By the time this photograph was made, the practice of religious dancing on the lawn had ceased. (Courtesy of the Shaker Library, Sabbathday Lake, Me.)

tries. The great mills passed from Shaker ownership and hired hands managed their farms. Their sources of income declined, and maintaining their buildings became a burden for them. In 1892 income from the sisters' garden was used to provide much-needed paint for the stone house's woodwork.⁵⁵ Six years later they were able to report, "An important and lengthy work of painting the one hundred and eighty-two windows of our Dwelling house is being done by Sisters Ann Cumings, Marinda Keniston, and the writer, George H. Baxter."⁵⁶

Painting 182 windows is a great deal of work for so few hands. The end was in sight; twenty years later preparations were started to sell the community. The last of the Believers left the village for good in 1923, locking the doors of the Great Stone Dwelling behind them. They were unable to sell the property until 1928, and the mammoth stone house stood for years, shuttered and uninhabited.

"Shaker Village, a landmark on Lake Mascoma for 150 years, is at last abandoned," reported the *Boston Post* in 1923. The village was left by "the wealthy, well-disciplined, well fortified Shaker folk, who bulwarked themselves in their great granite farmhouse on the lakeside and compacted to shut out of their lives the love of man for maid, the love of husband for wife, and the love of parent for child . . . It has been hard to find young men and women who want to live alone and unloved," the newspaper editorialized.⁵⁷

Such harsh observations seemed to

typify the accounts of latter-day chroniclers of the Shaker scene. Shakerism must have seemed a quaint anachronism to a Boston of the 1920s; the press had noted the passing of the community at Enfield, Connecticut in 1917, and of those at Shirley, and Harvard, Massachusetts in 1909 and 1919. In fifteen years four Shaker societies in Ohio and Kentucky had been forced to close. If the *Post's* account seemed patronizing and shallow, it was only because it reflected a view of the Shaker way of life as merely curious and insignificant. The point of the Shaker experiment was no longer evident to the journalists who described it.

Elder Giles, dancing for joy with his brethren and sisters on the lawn of the Great Stone Dwelling, would have thought it odd to be described as living alone and unloved. Certainly, the stone house was no stern, forboding fortress. The Enfield Shakers, wrote Elkins, created their monumental dwelling "with an architectural taste which introduced to the interior a combination of space, beauty, symmetry, and the light and beauty of a summer's day."⁵⁸

The Great Stone Dwelling was indeed a bulwark, but in a sense which escaped the *Post*. It stood as a testament to and a symbol of the hope and faith of the Enfield Shakers. As in all else they did, they built their stone house to last for eternity. They had built well, and when the times had changed and passed them by, the Great Stone Dwelling outlasted the Enfield Shakers themselves.

NOTES

1. Giles Bushnell Avery, "Journal of a Trip to the Eastern Societies" [1843], MS 12744, Emma B. King Library, Shaker Museum, Old Chatham, N.Y., pp. 42-43. The author wishes to acknowledge his debt to the late Daniel Charette, M.S., who identified, collected, and preserved research materials essential to the preparation of this article, and to the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Enfield, N.H., who made Fr. Charette's notes accessible to him.

2. Measurements of the Great Stone Dwelling House were taken during the summer of 1978 by a team from the Historic American Buildings Survey, under the supervision of Patrick Burkhardt. The drawings were made with the sponsorship of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Department of the Interior, and the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Enfield, N.H.

3. Avery, "Journal," p. 43.

4. Henry C. Blinn, "Historical Notes Having Reference to the Believers in Enfield, N.H." [1897], Shaker Village Inc., Canterbury, N.H., p. 33.

5. The New Hampshire Ministry to the Ministry at New Lebanon, 20 February 1834, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.

6. "A Historical Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the United Society of Shakers, Enfield, N.H., 1858," manuscript in the collection of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Enfield, N.H., on deposit with the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H., p. 107.

7. Author's conversation with Robert H. Leavitt, city historian, The Lebanon Historical Society, Inc., Lebanon, N.H., March 1975. This building was pictured in *Old-Time New England* (July 1934), p. 63, but was identified incorrectly as belonging to the Enfield, Ct. Shaker community.

8. "An Account of the Building of the Brick Shop" [Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., 1829], Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.

9. Isaac Youngs, "A Concise View of the Church of Christ" [1858], The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur Museum Libraries, Winterthur, Del.

10. Freegift Wells to the Ministry at New Lebanon, N.Y., 19 August 1839, MS IV:A-54, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.

11. *Shaker Examination Before the New-*

Hampshire Legislature, November Session, 1848, examination of Caleb Dyer (Concord, N.H.: Ervin B. Tripp, 1849).

12. Aurelia Gay Mace, *The Altheia: Spirit of Truth* (Farmington, Me.: Knowlton, McLeary & Co., 1899), pp. 32-45.

13. *New Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette, 7 December 1829.* A copy of this newspaper bearing the signature of Canterbury Deacon Francis Winkley is in the Shaker Collection of the Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vt.

14. Henry Cumings, "A Sketch of the Life of Caleb M. Dyer," *Enfield Advocate*, 30 December 1904. Although Cumings' information seems to be substantially correct, he is in error about Young's association with Dartmouth College. Ammi Young did receive an honorary degree from Dartmouth in 1841, but it was his brother Ira who was on the college faculty. A series of axonometric drawings in the library of Shaker Community, Inc., Hancock, Mass., and in the Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Winterthur Museum Libraries, Winterthur, Del., depicts a four-story Shaker dwelling house built of granite. The drawings reflect several elements found in the Great Stone Dwelling House at Enfield, but attempts to identify them as Ammi Young's work have so far been unsuccessful.

15. Caleb Dyer, "Trustee's Account Book 1836-1837," manuscript in the collection of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Enfield, N.H., on deposit with the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H. The building described in the previous note is designed with a sheet-metal roof. It is assumed that Dyer was familiar with the drawings and for this reason went to great lengths to research and report on the effectiveness of zinc roofing. The author is indebted to Viola Hess for transcription of this manuscript.

16. "A Historical Narrative," p. 107.

17. The Ministry at Enfield to the New Lebanon Ministry, 28 December 1836, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.

18. Cumings, "A Sketch."

19. Dyer, "Trustee's Account Book."

20. Henry Cumings, "The Rise and Decline of the Shaker Society," *Enfield Advocate*, 30 March 1906.

21. Dyer, "Trustee's Account Book."

22. Isaac Hill, "A Grand Edifice," *The Farmer's Monthly Visitor* 1:9 (20 September 1839), p. 142.
23. "A Historical Narrative," p. 99. Also, Henry Cumings, "Some Early Industries and Inventions of the Shakers," *Enfield Advocate*, 31 March 1905; and "The Shaker Society: An Experiment in Socialism," *New England Magazine* (August 1910), p. 671. The circular saw was being used at Enfield, N.H. six years or more before Shaker tradition attributes its invention to the Harvard, Mass. Shaker community.
24. Cumings, "A Sketch."
25. Dyer, "Trustee's Account Book."
26. Enfield, N.H. Shakers, *One Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the Shaker Church* (Enfield, N.H.: Abbott's Power Print, 1893), p. 14.
27. Henry Cumings, "The Shakers in 1853," *Enfield Advocate*, 20 July 1906.
28. The Ministry at Enfield to the New Lebanon Ministry, 18 February 1839, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.
29. "A Historical Narrative," p. 108.
30. Avery, "Journal," pp. 55-56.
31. The Ministry at Enfield to the New Lebanon Ministry, 13 November 1839, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.
32. "A Historical Narrative," p. 108.
33. Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of the Shakers* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth Press, 1853), p. 105.
34. Eldress Nancy E. Moore, "Journal of a Trip to the Various Societies, Sept. 1854-Oct. 1854," Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O., p. 60.
35. The Ministry at Enfield to the New Lebanon Ministry, 5 May 1841, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.
36. Dyer, "Trustee's Account Book."
37. Avery, "Journal," p. 49.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-55.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
41. Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, pp. 39-40.
42. *Ibid.*
43. "Journal of a Trip to Canterbury and Enfield, N.H. [from Watervliet, N.Y.], February, 1847," Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O.
44. E.O. Johnson, ed., *The History of Medway, Massachusetts, 1713-1885* (Medway, Mass.: Town of Medway, 1886), pp. 197-99.
45. Edwin Alonzo Carlton, comp., *New Hampshire as It Is* (Claremont, N.H.: Tracy and Company, 1856), p. 200.
46. "Journal of a Trip to the Eastern Societies" [1850], MS SA 800, The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum Libraries, Winterthur, Del.
47. Moore, "Journal," pp. 57-60.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
49. Robert P. Emlen, "Raised, Razed, and Raised Again: The Shaker Meetinghouse at Enfield, New Hampshire, 1793-1902," *Historical New Hampshire* 30:3 (Fall 1975), pp. 133-46.
50. Avery, "Journal."
51. Freegift Wells, "Journal of a Visit to New Gloucester by Way of Enfield, Canterbury, and Alfred, 1851," Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, O., p. 8.
52. Cumings, "A Sketch."
53. Hamilton Child, comp., *Gazetteer of Grafton County, New Hampshire* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Journal Co., 1886), p. 247.
54. Charles Nordhoff, *The Communitic Societies of the United States* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1875), p. 187.
55. Julia Russell, correspondent, "Home Notes," *The Manifesto* (September 1892), p. 235.
56. George H. Baxter, correspondent, "Home Notes," *The Manifesto* (February 1898), p. 45.
57. "Enfield Shaker Village is Gone," *Boston Post*, 9 December 1923.
58. Elkins, *Fifteen Years*, p. 49.

Correction

A cock-hat grand piano made by the Chickering Piano Manufactory and illustrated on page 45 of *Old-Time New England*, Vol. LXIX (Spring-Summer, 1978) was incorrectly identified, due to a proofreading error. The

piano, the dimensions of which are, height, 39 in., width, 55½ in., and depth, 78 in., is part of the William E. Garlick Collection.