

The Friends' Quarterly

A Newsletter from The Museum at Lower Shaker Village

Volume II / No. 4

Summer 1989

To Deceive No Purchaser

by Kyle Roberts

The raising and packaging of garden seeds for sale to the world was one of the Shaker's earliest and most profitable industries. At Enfield, the selling of garden seeds to the world was the largest source of revenue for the Shakers from the late eighteenth century to the mid-1880s, when the business was abandoned. Enfield was one of the first Shaker communities to sell seeds to the outside world, beginning in 1795, just one year after New Lebanon, NY started to raise seeds for sale. Nathaniel Draper (1757-1838) was the first Trustee of the Church Family and the man who initiated the sale of garden seeds at Enfield. Under his leadership, the selling of seeds grew to be a most profitable industry. From 1793 to 1838, the years Br. Nathaniel served as Senior Trustee, anything made by the Shakers and sold to the outside world had to be inspected by him and marked with his initials. The markings "N.D." assured the world that an item was well made and had passed his standards.

In his book *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*, Hervey Elkins describes the Shakers' desire for high quality in their seed industry. "From the earliest foundation of the Church, we have been taught to let nothing go out from us, for to be vended in the markets of the world, but what will bear the test of strict examination; to de-

ceive no purchaser, either in quantity or quality; to do all work in fear of God; and as though setting a pattern for the children of men to follow."



The only complete Shaker seed box known to exist was donated to the Museum. See Donation story on page 3.

The raising of garden seeds grew originally out of necessity. With over sixty Believers in the Enfield Church Family in the mid-1790s, the farmers would have to save many seeds in order to grow food the following year to feed them all. The cost of purchasing seed each year was way beyond the means of this infant society. So the Shaker farmers would have to let certain numbers of vegetables go to seed and then collect and dry the seeds. If they had any extra seeds that year they would sell them to the world. As the Shaker reputation for honesty and quality grew, so did the sale of garden seeds.

Early each spring the Shaker Brethren would deliver the seeds in red painted pine seedboxes to

the merchants. They were delivered not only to the surrounding towns in New Hampshire and Vermont, but as far away as Canada. The merchants were given a commission of 33 1/3% on all the seeds they sold. Almost all the different types of vegetable seeds that were widely grown at that time were offered by the Shakers including beets, corn, peas, cabbage, cucumber, lettuce, squash, beans, and melons. Even some more obscure vegetables were offered, like "Vegetable Oyster", which is a small parsnip sized vegetable with a taste that some people say is comparable to fresh oysters.

For many years the Enfield Shakers had a monopoly of the garden seed business until other companies entered the market in the 1850s. These new companies had fancy seedboxes and seed packages with color pictures. The Shaker's plain boxes and packages seemed dull by comparison. The Shaker's business gradually decreased until the 1880s when they were finally obliged to withdraw from the market.

The prominence of the seed industry in the history of the Enfield Shaker community makes it especially exciting that The Museum has recently been donated an intact Enfield Shaker seed box complete with printed label and seed packets. See "Museum Receives Important Donation" on Page 3 for more details.

Sage Thoughts

by Happy Griffiths, Herbalist

Our romance with the rose has been well documented in both history and legend. The Shakers began using roses and rose geraniums during their early experimentation with herbs. Every Shaker community had its bed of roses which were grown for their scent and utility, not for ornamentation purposes. When the roses were in bloom, it was common to see the Shaker sisters collecting the fragrant petals in the morning after the sun had dried the dew. So that they would not be tempted to pin a rose on their dresses, the rules stated that the flowers be picked without stems. The baskets of petals were then taken to the herb house where they were made into rosewater. This was used in the infirmary to bathe patients when they were not feeling well and was also used in the kitchen to flavor apple pies and other culinary delights.

Rosa gallica officinalis (red rose) was considered the most useful for medicinal purposes, hence the word *officinalis* after the name. It was also called the apothecary rose and was used extensively for making rosewater. This rose has outstanding 'hips' which were made into rose hip jam and mixed in some of the Shaker teas. The petals of the *rosa centifolia* (cabbage rose) had medicinal uses and the *rosa damascena* (damask rose) was considered the best source of petals, as the blossom of the flower is very full. Many a fragrant potpourri was made with these highly scented petals and used to perfume the Shaker's rooms.

The two 40' x 8' rose beds in the gardens at The Museum at Lower Shaker Village were planted three years ago, at the same time the herb garden was established. All 40 of the rose bushes came from the garden of Mrs. Helen denFord of Enfield. Included in the bed are: Jacobite rose, wild pasture rose, *rosa mundi*, moss rose, damask rose and apothecary rose.

This spring, all the roses in our bed produced a great quantity of fragrant petals. The petals were harvested by the Village Gardeners and dried on trays in the West Brethren Shop. Herbs and spices were then added to the petals to make a wonderful smelling potpourri, which is being sold in the Museum gift shop. Rosewater may also be purchased for those wishing to try their skills at making Shaker rosewater apple pie.

For those considering planting antique roses, here are two recommended sources: Pickering Nurseries, 670 Kingston Road, Pickering, Ontario, L1V1A6 and Roses of Yesterday and Today, 802 Brown's Valley Road, Watsonville, California 95076.



More Revels

If you have not heard, the Shaker Revels performances on July 13-15 were a resounding success. Nearly 1,000 people climbed to the top of Mt. Assurance to watch the cast of 50 adults and children sing, dance and dramatize many aspects of life in the Enfield Shaker community.

Inspired by the cast's beautiful harmonics and the many months of research and preparation which went into the performance, Board member and local craftsman Dana Robes has offered to underwrite the cost of having the Shaker Revels repertoire professionally recorded. The cast will make a tape (potentially on site in Enfield) in mid-October and copies will be available before Christmas. All proceeds from the tape sales will benefit the Museum.

A note of consolation to those who missed Shaker Revels. Plans are underway to bring the Revelers back to Enfield next summer and possibly take the cast "on the road" to other Shaker communities. The dates of the 1990 performances will be printed in the Museum's Calendar of Events.

New Membership Campaign Initiated

The Museum has embarked on a campaign to increase its local membership. Dubbed "Quality of Life," the campaign offers a 10% discount at ten of the region's finer retailers to people who become Friends of the Museum (or renew their membership) before December 31, 1989. Ads detailing the program are currently running in three Upper Valley publications and flyers will be sent to 3,000 local Museum supporters.

It is gratifying that so many regional business people are willing to help us in our latest fund raising effort. We hope that all our local members will consider renewing before December 31 to take advantage of this special offer. The "Quality of Life" discount will certainly come in handy during the pre-Christmas shopping season.

Museum Awarded Planning Grant

In July, the Museum received a \$1,200 grant from the Ella F. Anderson Trust. The monies, distributed by the New Hampshire Charitable Fund, helped to pay for the cost of the second in a two part series of planning workshops aimed at developing guidelines for the restoration and preservation of the site.

As detailed in the spring issue of *The Friends' Quarterly*, the Museum held two planning workshops (May 5-7 and June 30-July 1) which were led by two professional facilitators and attended by Museum staff and volunteers. Although not all the results of the workshops are immediately tangible, the participants feel that the Museum and the site's owners (First Leader Corporation) have come to a better understanding of each group's hopes and plans for the property. The Museum is now working more closely with First Leader Corporation as the restoration and renovation work on the property gets underway.

The Friends' Quarterly is a publication of The Museum at Lower Shaker Village. It is mailed as a service to Museum Friends. For information on the Friends program write: Membership Coordinator, The Museum at Lower Shaker Village, Box 25, Enfield, NH 03748, or call (603) 632-5533 or 632-4838.

Museum Staff:

Carolyn Smith, Assoc. Director
Elaine Loft, Education Co-or.
Caryn Bosson, Development Dir.
Happy Griffiths, Herbalist

Board of Trustees:

Gregory C. Schwarz, President
Dana Robes, Vice President
Stephen Powell, Treasurer
John Taylor, Secretary
Julie Adams
Harry Auger
Charlotte Barrett
Sister Frances Carr
Marga Griesbach
Thomas Hoare
Nancy King

Museum Receives Important Donation

The Museum has recently been donated the most complete and intact Shaker seed box known to be in existence. This acquisition was a gift from the Green Mountain Perkins Academy of South Woodstock, Vermont. Not only is the seed box unique of its kind, but it comes from the Enfield Shaker community.

The box, containing 92 Enfield seed packets, has been so little altered it appears to have been put away and forgotten shortly after it was delivered by the Shakers. "The integrity of the contents within the box is so complete it is as if that moment had been frozen for 100 years and just now thawed out," observed Dr. M. Stephen Miller, a Shaker collector, researcher and writer who saw the box when the Shaker Seminar visited the Museum this summer. Gregory C. Schwarz, president of the Museum's board of trustees, was the first Museum official to see the

box. "When it was opened, it literally took my breath away," he said. "There's nothing like it that we know of in the Shaker world." June Sprigg, curator at Hancock Shaker Village confirmed this by saying, "[The box] is the only one I've ever seen of its kind. It's a unique and wonderful artifact."

The Green Mountain Perkins Academy does not know how the seed box came into its possession. "It was there when I became curator," according to Dorothy Goldsmith. The decision to donate the seed box to The Museum at Lower Shaker Village was unanimous by the Academy's trustees. "We felt it was only right that [the Museum] should have it," said Goldsmith.

The seed packages give a glimpse of many long-forgotten vegetable varieties, 35 in all, packed in envelopes of brown, pink, off-white, and yellow. The varieties are as follows (the order in which they were found):

Beet: Early Red Turnip French Sugar Common Blood Mangle Wurtzel Corn: Sweet Peas: Bush Champion of England Early Daniel O'Rourke Early Marrowfat Early Strawberry	Cabbage: Green Globe Savoy Large Drumhead York Low Dutch Premium Stonemason Early Winningstandt Cauliflower: Paris Cauliflower Cucumber: Common	Cucumber: Early Early Cluster Long Green	Lettuce: Early Curled Silesia Green Head Melon: Musk Water Sage Squash: Butter Winter Golden Crookneck Bush Summer Hubbard Scallop Summer	Turnip: Flat English Purple top Rutabaga York Sweet Vegetable Oyster
---	---	--	---	--

Each package is initialled "N.D.", presumably after Brother Nathaniel Draper who served as Senior Trustee from 1793 to 1838. Interestingly enough, these initials were used nearly 50 years after his death, as the box dates from the 1880's (an intact label on the interior of the states "188_"). It is possible that John T. Bradford (1823-1904), who was in charge of the seed industry at that time, continued using Nathaniel Draper's initials as a symbol of quality.

As the seed industry was abandoned in the mid-1880's, the box is likely to have been one of the last distributed. The Enfield Shakers' seeds began facing competition in the marketplace in the 1850's, and by the 1880's were regularly being outsold by companies using fancier and more popular packaging. The late date might explain the mystery of the seed box's nearly full contents. Perhaps it was put away with its unsold packages at the end of a season and forgotten.

Intern Completes Second Summer

For the past two summers, Kyle Roberts of Duxbury Massachusetts has spent several weeks here at the Museum researching the Shakers who once lived in this community. Last summer, Kyle assisted Board president Greg Schwarz with the cataloging of the collection and pored over the extensive Shaker archives at Dartmouth's Baker Library. During his stay this past July, Kyle began a card file detailing information about all known members of the Enfield community, completed a bibliography of the Museum's library, dug for artifacts at several areas on site, made a pictorial record of the Laundry/Dairy building, helped accession



the Shaker seed box (see cover story) and even performed in the Shaker Revels.

Kyle's ample contributions are even more so considering that he is 15 years old and has opted to spend a portion of his summer vacation at the Museum rather than at home

relaxing with his family and friends. Kyle has been interested in the Shakers for many years and has already begun to amass a collection of Shaker artifacts. He has also written a number of papers about the Shakers, including "This Meeting Will Do Much Good: A Study of the Effects of the 'Era of Mother's Work' on the Shakers of Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts."

The Museum would like to thank Kyle for all of the time and effort he has contributed during the past two years and hopes that his interest in the Shakers will continue to grow.

Museum on the Move

In the past issues of the Friends Quarterly we have been keeping you apprised of our efforts to secure the Laundry/Dairy building as the Museum's permanent home. This summer, the Museum used the building for a wide range of activities, including Shaker Revels rehearsals, oval box making and herbal workshops.

Although negotiations are still underway to acquire the building, the Museum is taking a giant step forward; the Shaker Store will move

to the Laundry/Dairy complex on September 26. The Museum collection and administrative offices will follow in the coming months, after a number of technical problems have been resolved.

Obviously, a move of this magnitude involves many factors. Aside from such base issues as heat, electricity, phone service, lighting and security, the Museum staff also has to consider how to rearrange and relabel the collection. A gigantic volunteer cleaning party on

September 23 and a tag sale of the multitude of items which have been left behind by previous tenants should go a long way towards readying the Laundry/Dairy building for occupancy.

Still at issue—how to raise the money needed to get The Museum at Lower Shaker Village up and running in the Laundry/Dairy complex. Watch the Friends Quarterly for further information about the next stage of our development.



The Museum
Box 25 / Route 4A
Enfield, NH 03748
(603) 632-4838 or 632-5533