

Belfit Family
Auction, Aug. '80

Nov 16, 1971. (1)

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With background of many years interest in the Shakers, as the lady of the house was born in Pittsfield and her husband had worked there, fortunately we were anxious to own a Shaker Chair.

Stopping at the North Family Store we were shown an early straight chair, priced at \$12.00 which we thought was beyond our budget at the moment. But when we arrived home, and with further thought, we decided to buy that chair. So, soon again we visited the North Family Store and regretfully learned that the chair had been sold.

The Sister suggested a visit to the Second Family where Bro. William Perkins was ^{sitting} on an outdoor double swing. In reply to our question, "Do you have chairs?" He quickly said "you don't expect to find pairs at the Shakers, do you?" After better enunciation, Bro. William and Sister Lillian Barlow showed

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(2)

us an antique Shaker Chair that started our collection of Shaker items but especially our most pleasant associations with many Shaker Sisters and Brothers at Mt. Lebanon and Watervliet in New York State; Hancock, Mass.; East Canterbury, New Hampshire; and Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

Insert opposite ^{what} shortly before our first visit to the 2nd Family, Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., they had lost by fire their chair and box making brick building ~~by a fire~~. This could have been a depressing situation but Brother William with the help of Sister Lillian resolved ^{to carry on and} started to get replacement machinery, etc. for use in an unused wood structure. Many friends gave them equipment; I especially remember that the Works Manager of the Pittsfield General Electric Co. was very generous.

They were soon producing by the score those exquisite oval boxes with fine fingers. Most of them had pine tops and bottoms with maple sides. Brother William experimented with mahogany for the sides and tops with pine as the base. ~~There were between~~

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 visit ~~to visit~~ a couple in Pittsfield, who
 were long time friends and very much interested
 in antiques. They had for several years collected and
 sold some antiques out of their spacious barn.
 We had purchased several Hitchcock type
 chairs "in the rough" ~~for as little as~~
~~50 cents each.~~ ^{for as little as} 50 cents each. ^{our friend} Ted ^{in the car} ^{noticed} ^{our} chair
 and asked where we got it. Our
 answer was "at the Shakers in Mt. Lebanon" to
 which he replied to the effect that these
 furniture wasn't early enough. ^{They} had been
 dealing ^{mainly in American Colonial} in Pilgrim, Queen Anne and Chippendale
 type antiques. However, on our next visit
 Mr. + Mrs. E. D. Andrews were almost daily
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 Their researches and classically written
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We have an oval cherry table, on which she with Sister Alice, [illegible] enjoyed tea together, see picture. We were able later to purchase this table when the Hancock Family was about to be closed.

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They also made a limited number of boxes out of gum woods. (3)

boiling and steaming for bending around their molds, so that their production was not continued. Being partial to mahogany we purchased six of them. These not only had mahogany handles. The boxes were 9 1/4" x 6" and the steaming of the other wood for the sides was very important and required several hours. When the sides were properly steamed and glued on to the base, the box would be perfectly shaped. The copper brads are not found in these mahogany boxes as Bro. William and Sister Lillian said they were unnecessary.

We were firmly instructed that when a cover is put on a box, it should be so placed that the "finger" in the carrier is directly over the fingers on the box proper.

The finish on the boxes was that which is known as "French Polish." It is essentially orange shellac applied in very thin coats. The first three or four coats of thinned shellac were applied with a brush. Each coat was lightly sanded with 0000 aluminum oxide paper. The final coats were applied with a swab treated with a little linseed

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The thorough boiling and steaming of the then 10 1/4 x 7" wood for the sides was stressed by them as very important and required several hours. When the sides were properly steamed and glued on to the base, the box would be perfectly shaped. The copper brads are not found in these mahogany boxes as Bro. William and Sister Lillian said they were unnecessary.

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William's letter in Zinsser's "Bull's Eye" publica-
 oil and the orange shellac as explained by Bro.
 As soon as Bro. Wm Perkins knew that
 one of us was a chemist and had industrial
 experience with shellac, he asked where he
 could obtain shellac that would dry
 hard and not tacky. He was having trouble
 with tacky shellac.* So, the Wm
 Zinsser Co. was recommended, as they are
 direct importers of shellac.

The connection solved his shellac
 problem and in 1929 he wrote ^{to} Zinsser's a
 letter in which he stated that the
 shellac is applied with a "loving touch."
 Plate No. shows a copy of that letter as
 printed in Zinsser's "Bull's Eye", also a picture of
 Brother William's Wood Working business card.
 He was a master craftsman (joiner) and
 sometimes carved designs in the covers of boxes as presents
 to the Sisters.

Footnote { * Old solutions of orange shellac solutions
 in alcohol, slowly react with the alcohol
 to form esters which are non-drying
 and tacky. Shellac solutions are now dated
 and packaged in cans with tin plated ^{or glass} which
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Mortar + Pestle

5.

This help for Brother William with the shellac situation led to a close relationship.

With Sister Lillian Barlow (Deaconess), Sister _____ and Brother Curtis and Brother William directing, we ^{often} all joined in singing Shaker songs.

While no longer making any medicines, they had no further use for a mortar and pestle. See plate # _____ The mortar is hewed out of marble while the working end of the pestle is polished granite with a handle of apple wood. All Shaker made.

We were primarily interested in acquiring antiques ^{for our own} use in the furnishing of our home. A second chair that was available was a low, early Shaker rocker that belonged to Eldress Margaret ^{Eggleston} who at this time was not active in the production programs of the Second Family. She admired our petite daughter so that she parted with the chair providing that it was to be Carmen's.

So to Eldress Margaret sold us a small cherry table with one drawer, the top, 20" x 27", with an applied rim and delicate tapering legs. If one didn't know that this table was definitely Shaker made, it might be classified as Hepplewhite. See Plate # _____

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Later Eldress Margaret sold us a small cherry table with one drawer, the top, 20" x 27", with an applied rim and delicate tapering legs. If one didn't know that this table was definitely Shaker made, it might be classified as Hepplewhite. See plate.

Picture ^{Eldress} Margaret Eggleston
 " Eldress Sarah Collins's Hands
 " Clarissa Jacobs
 " Deaconess Lillian Barlow
 " Eldress Rosetta Stephens + Eldress Ella Winship

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Sarah Collins - So. Family - 2nd Family - No. F →
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Desiring to have Shaker dining room chairs, we purchased one at a time straight Shaker chairs with seats that were approximately 17" high. A large percentage of the early chairs are lower ^{so that we were selecting} than that. The exceptions are the one and two slat chairs that they made expressly for use in the dining rooms where they could be pushed under the table to facilitate cleaning of the floor. None of this type of early dining chair available to us. However, Bro. Wm Perkins made a limited number of similar dining chairs with two horizontal rungs ^{instead of slats} and rounded acorn finials. ~~rungs in the back instead of seats. One of these was purchased for use as a "telephone" chair.~~

These chairs and contemporary stools were made by Bro. William and Sister Lillian in about 1926 and one low back chair and a stool in which Mrs. Belfit installed the tape (listing) seats.

at this time - about 1925 - chairs and boxes were being made to ^{use} score at the Second Family. The four workers were Brother William Perkins, Sister Lillian Barlow, Sister Emeline(?) and Brother Curtis. They were filling orders from other Shaker communities as well as direct sales to furniture stores and individuals as distant as South Africa.

early dining

Perkins

see p. 12

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At this time—about 1925—chairs and boxes were being made by the score at the Second Family. ^The taped seats were put in by Eldress Sarah Collins at the South Family. The four workers were Brother William Perkins, Sisters Lillian Barlow, Sister Emeline(?) and Brother Curtis. They were filling orders from other Shaker Communities as well as direct sales to furniture stores and individuals as distant as South Africa.

2B. 7.

The thin sides of the boxes were boiled and steamed for hours so that they ^{would} maintain their oval shape for decades. Sister Lillian ^{emphasized} that when the side was glued to the base, the fit was so exact that the box would stay together without the copper brads. They used hot animal glue and applied it sparingly. ~~Before applying the brads, fine holes were made using a hand drill press.~~

In the glueing operation the fingers were held tightly by clamps—made by Brother Perkins—very similar to our present day, mass produced, spring type clothes pins. He may have been the inventor of that type of clamp.

Brother William Perkins had his training in England. On the back of his business card is recorded: pattern making, model making, turning, polishing cabinet making, wood carving, band sawing, antique restoration and all fine ^{See Plate #} woodwork. Referring to "antique restoration," they ^{for repair} received at times chairs similar to the three slat back Shaker chairs but with vertical round ^{rungs} instead of the slats. ^{Sister Lillian and Brother William} always said that these chairs had not been Shaker made but were built by imitators, although museums

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Early bottles
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It was because of such outside imitators that the Shakers started to apply the decalcomanias to definitely identify their chairs. The use of this label started at about the time of the Centennial in Philadelphia in 1876, where the Shakers exhibited and received several awards. This method of exact identification is credited to Robert Wagan, who expanded the production of Shaker Chairs and Boxes at the Second Family and the South Family at Mt. Lebanon.

When the Second Family Shakers, Bro. William ^{Perkins} and Sister Lillian ^{Barlow} were constructing ^{the} chairs, they would be sent to Eldress Sarah Collins at the South Family for the finishing and seating. If the chair was to be "mahoganzed" or "ebonized" it was dipped into a vat of dye.* They would then be finished with three or four coats of orange shellac, rubbing with 0000 paper after each coat. The final finish was with 7 ought, fast cutting paper. The seats were woven with bought tape usually in the checkerboard pattern, with two different colors. At this time the tape was cotton and the colors were not fast. Several years later, when Eldress Sarah was nearly 90, Sister Lillian ^{also} assumed the finishing and weaving of the tape in the chairs. She was not satisfied with the degree of permanency of the available dyes for cotton.

Sarah Collins at
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(9.)

at her request we suggest the Du Pont Co. as a prime manufacturer of dyes and furnished her with the address of their New York City office which we obtained for her. Sister Lillian ^{Barlow} made a special trip to New York for consultation. The representative was cooperative, so that she obtained more permanent dyes for coloring the natural color tape that she had previously purchased.

When Eldress Sarah Collins was finishing chairs at the South Family, Mt. Lebanon, Elder Walter Shepard was also there but ~~was~~ because of ^{advanced} age, he was no longer active. He had been an Elder at Enfield, Conn. before that Society closed in 1904(?)

The view from Eldress Sarah's second floor room was truly ^{of the Lebanon Valley + Berks Hills} magnificent panorama. Her workshop was connected by ^a suspension-like bridge at the second floor level. See plate #1 Eldress Sarah enjoyed our apprehension as we crossed that warring bridge on the way to her work-room. While she tried to assure us of its safety with "the Shakers built it so it will last forever", we were still glad to get to the end.

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9A.

When chair finishing and taping became too arduous for Eldress Sarah, she moved up to the Second Family where Sister Lillian Barlow could attend to her needs. Although in 90, we remember seeing Eldress Sarah at the ^{2nd Family} braiding an oval rug that was approximately 10 feet in diameter.

The ^{2nd Family} dwelling house (torn down by the purchasers) had five floors. The stair rails were made of cherry with the simple, proportional Shaker design. And after being polished by the "hands of time" they were works of art. Where are they now?

Brother William Perkins had built a small "greenhouse" addition in which Sister Lillian Barlow raised from seeds her flowers and vegetables. She was the first one, that I knew, who treated her seed corn with tar to discourage the birds from stealing it. Her Marglobe tomatoes were extremely healthy plants so I bought my plants from her for several years. She potted them in large tin cans (multiple use). All of the Shakers that we know had "green thumbs" and enjoyed the growing

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Bro. Curtis had chickens so that they
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Sister Lillian had come to the Shakers
when a small girl in about 1890. She said
that she remembered vividly her first day at
the Second Family. She rode with the
Elder and Eldress from the station after they
had just sent \$10,000.00 to the
Enfield Conn. Shakers in payment for a like
amount that had been borrowed from them
to meet a crisis. Sometime previously a brother
of German birth had become disgruntled and
had mixed up some seeds. The loss to
the purchasers of the ^{mixed} Shaker seeds had amounted
to 10 thousand dollars. So, of course, the
Shakers rectified the situation as equitably
as possible.

As a girl Sister Lillian (now a
Deaconess) used to attend the Sunday
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the North Family. He was noted as an
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while sitting on backless benches.

When Sister Lillian was getting ready to move to the North Family after the sale of the Second Family, she had accumulated a basket—about 4 ft. in diameter—full of letters to Sister Clarissa Jacobs who had run a Shaker Cloak business. These letters were dated between 1880 and 1900.

The letters all expressed satisfaction with the cloaks that they had bought. The writers were all persons of prominence in the literary, art, industrial, or scientific world. We will quote a letter from Mrs.

Madame Duse
Sections of letters regarding cloaks.

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9D

Another choice note was written to
Clarissa Jacobs when she was a little girl who
had been naughty but was penitent. Because of
Sister Rice's exquisite handwriting ^{and Shaker forgiveness} we are
reproducing the note. See #

Another choice note was written to Clarissa
Jacobs when she was a little girl who had been naughty
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9E.

After Sister Lillian Barlow and Bro. Curtiss moved up to the North Family, I found two large sized one dollar bills in one of ^{Sister Clarissa's} envelopes. We then gave Sister Lillian two new bills for them. She ~~was~~ reluctantly accepted the new bills, as she said they were scheduled to be burned up. So, before we left Sister Lillian insisted that we take home a dozen eggs. Why didn't we save all of those letters.

The removal and installation of the machinery for making chairs, etc. became an expensive and tiring task, costing almost as much as the Shakers received by the sale of the Second Family property. Before Sister Lillian could operate at the new location, she became ill and died. She was, therefore, the last Shaker chair maker. This was 1940?

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Watervliet

10,

With Ted Andrews we had ^{very} pleasant visit at the Watervliet Colony where we met Eldress Anna Case ^(see picture) when she died a few years later, the New York Times carried an appreciative obituary of praise for her.

at Watervliet we learned that their revered Ann Lee was buried in ^{well kept cemetery} that the Albany Air Field had previously been Shaker Land as well as the Home for the Elderly.

Besides Eldress Anna ^{Case} we also met Sisters Mary and Grace Dahm who were first sisters, and whom we later got to know very personally when they moved to the North Family, Mt. Lebanon, upon the closing of Watervliet following the passing of their Eldress, Anna Case.

Plate # Picture of Anna Case taken during that visit. Picture of sister Grace ^{Dahm} at her Watervliet loom.

Plate # Step Stool, Watervliet

" # Round Shaker box, Watervliet

Diameter of Box
5 Fingers on base.

Watervliet

10.

With Ted Andrews we had one ^very pleasant visit at the Watervliet Colony where we met Eldress Anna Case, ^see picture) When she died a few years later, the New York Times carried an appreciative obituary of praise for her.

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Whenever, we wanted a relief from the turmoil of our "worldly" civilization we visited our relatives and friends in Pittsfield and then on to Mt. Lebanon and after they closed our visits continued at Hancock. While our first friends were at the Second Family with Deaconess Lillian Barlow and Brother William Perkins, we soon met and enjoyed the friendships of Eldress Sarah Collins of ^{the} South Family; Eldress A. Rosetta Stephens, Eldress Ella Winship (formerly at Groveland and Watervliet, N.Y.) and Sisters Jennie Wells (formerly at Groveland and Watervliet, N.Y.), Martha Wetherill (formerly at Harvard, Mass.) ^{all at the North Family;} and Eldress Emma Neale and Sister Sadie Neale of the Church Family.

The Neale sisters had previously conducted a thriving Shaker Cloak business. At this time they were no longer weaving the cloth for the cloaks and were having some difficulty in obtaining ^{satisfactory} cloth. So, we mentioned the Consumer's Union which was evaluating materials. Being interested in ^{progress & quality} ~~they were interested in progress,~~ the Neale sister immediately wanted their address.

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During another visit, Mrs. B. bought a silk scarf from Sister Sadie Neal, when the Sister promptly turned to Mr. B. and said, "I'll give you one." This is now one of our choice remembrances. Then, she showed us some book marks (see plate) - - - -

Contrary to published statements, these silk book marks were not woven by the Shakers. Sister Sadie Neale said that they had them woven in Lyons, France. They did not want the advertizing that was incorporated so that they had never sold them. With that explanation she was willing to sell us several of the book marks that were woven in many colors. (name colors)
Color of.

When the Shakers sold the Church Family property to the Lebanon School for boys, the office and dwelling of the Neal sisters was to remain their living quarters for as long as they lived. We understood that they employed a Mr. Roberts to make some boxes. We have never classified those boxes as truly Shaker as they were not made by one living the communal Shaker life.

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one day at the Church Family home where we had gone with Sister Martha Wetherill of the North Family. Sister Martha told Sister Sadie Neale that last Sunday Mrs. Owen Young wanted to buy thirty boxes and you wouldn't see her. To which, Sister Sadie said you ought to know that I do not do business on Sunday and furthermore, that I haven't that many boxes for Mrs. ^{Owen} ~~Young~~ ^{Martha} (who was 82) was then told ^{emphatically} that when she was older she would possibly comprehend.

~~at another visit Mrs. B. purchased a sister kerchief made of Kentucky Shaker silk, Sister Sadie Neale turned abruptly to Mr. B. and said, "I give you one."~~

one day at the Church Family house where we had gone with Sister Martha Wetherill of the North Family. Sister Martha told Sister Sadie Neale that last Sunday Mrs. Owen Young wanted to buy thirty boxes and you wouldn't even see her. To which, sister Sadie said you ought to know that I do not do business on Sunday and furthermore, that I haven't that many boxes for Mrs. Young or anyone else. Martha (who was 82) was then told emphatically that when she was older she would possibly comprehend.

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14

mt. Lebanon
 Eldress A. Rosetta Stephens, North Family,
 became an ^{especially} close friend. She was born in England
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Picture No. _____ shows the desk of Giles Avery. It was made by himself and is mostly constructed of maple. This desk was for sale at that time for a ^{very} reasonable price but we considered it to be too large for use in our house. We didn't purchase anything for accumulation ^{or resale} but only for our own needs of those of our three children.

In a letter to us under date of March 30, 1942 from Eldress A. Rosetta Stephens, she mentions the passing of Sister Lillian Barlow. Quoting: "It is indeed a sad time for us, and our trouble would seem unbearable if we did not consider the agony that ^{is} spread over the whole world at this time." (World War II). Later in that same letter, "And here is something more pleasant. We have been tapping the maple trees, have had a fine yield of sap, and so we reason, life still goes on despite reverses, and the sap still rises."

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During the trying period of World War II, when we had two boys in the service—one in India—we would conserve our gasoline for a visit to Eldress Rosetta and Sister Lillian Barlow where serenity was supreme. They were relaxing times.

The North Family maintained a store in the building north of their five story dwelling house, where they sold to the public newly made boxes, handiwork etc.

Martha Wetherill was at this time in charge of the store and practically every day—except Sundays—carried over some hand made articles in a large carrier, ^{Plate #1} Later when the store was no longer kept open and she had no longer that use of the carrier, she sold it to us. It is one of Mrs. very useful boxes. Martha had been a Sister at the Harvard, Mass. Shakers and when they closed in that community, she brought with her what she called her antique collection which was kept in a locked room in the laundry house. Late, one afternoon she said to us, "You must see my antiques, do you want to go now?" We replied that it was late but that we would like to see them on our next visit. But, before our next trip, Sister Martha died suddenly. So we never saw her "Harvard Antiques" but from her descriptions

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they consisted of a valuable collection of American glass, pewter etc. as well as Shaker artifacts. They came under the control of Sister _____ a Trustee of Hancock. We were never privileged to see the collection and do not know how they were disposed.

After the death of _____ who lived in a separate house, alone, at Hancock, we purchased ^out of that house a curly maple framed mirror 8" x 12" and a comb rack, see plate #. Both are exquisite illustrations of perfect Shaker craftsmanship. The rack is made of butternut. The workmanship is so superb that an antique cabinmaker said "It is a privilege just to hold it." It is probable that both the mirror and comb rack were made by one of the fine cabinmakers in the Harvard Society. Incidentally, Mrs Sears book, _____, published in 19 reveals an early recognition by her of the desirability to preserve the many virtues of the Shakers.

The mention of the Harvard Shakers reminds us that our most outstanding piece of Shaker furniture is the glass top cupboard which has eight panes of glass in each of two doors that are above a 7 inch shelf, below which are six graduated drawers in two tiers. Illustrating the Shaker desire for perfection

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in detail, each pane of glass was made so that the partitions were directly in lack of separating molding. The economical use of wood is noticeable as one observes that the ledge is only one quarter of an inch. All wood is pine with a yellowish wash of shellac. While the Shakers-as a rule- did not sign their work, this cupboard has written in pencil the following:

On the separating board below the left bottom drawer:

"The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom.

1836 G. W.

Harvard, Mass."

On the bottom of the right top drawer is written in pencil:

"My time and talents great and small
Henceforth devoted here

In grateful praises for my call
to live in purity"

"January 1836"

This cupboard shatters the assertions that the Shakers never used glass. They used every construction material that was available and in their opinion best suited for the particular purpose. Except for chairs, boxes, seeds

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This glass cupboard occupies the most important corner of our living room where it functions in a way that we believe the Shakers would use it. The upper four shelves are full with glass and china of the 19th century—perhaps more crowded than the Shakers would have them.

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The five storied North Family dwelling house, Mt. Lebanon was the home of the last Shakers in that colony. It was here Frederic Evans lived from _____ . He was born in England, became a very devoted Shaker, personally a vegetarian, an orator, editor of the Shaker Manifesto, prolific writer on controversial subject, an unflinching peace activist and anti-war advocate, and a Shaker who went twice back to England to obtain converts.

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We have a tall son, over six feet, and when inquiring about the possibility of purchasing a Shaker bed, Eldress said we have the bed that was made especially for Elder Frederic Evans, who also was over six feet, "would you like to buy that one?" Of course, we were glad of the opportunity to own Elder Evans own bed. Plate #

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