



Girl's shop, Church Family, Alfred Shaker Community, Circa 1917

The Alfred Shakers and a Small-town Newspaper

Published from November 11, 1915 to September 28, 1916, *The Alfred Advocate* was a typical small-town newspaper with a mix of local, state, national and international news. Intertwined with columns (but few if any headlines) on business, agriculture and religion, were anecdotes and local news dealing with fairs, lodges, social gatherings, illnesses, visitations, births, deaths and school concerns. The towns of Alfred, Alfred Mills, Lyman, Milton Mills, Parsonsfield, and Waterboro were mentioned in the issues reviewed. Throughout the short existence of the paper, the editor Grace Akers pleaded with folks to provide information. Perhaps as a filler, several issues included partial reprints of Dr. Usher Parson's history of Alfred. The *Advocate* ceased publication in 1916 in protest over the rising price of paper – the paper companies trying to “make ten years profit in one year”.

Thirty-three references to the Alfred Shakers are made during its brief existence in the *Advocate*, and from this we can gain a glimpse, though an incomplete one, of the Alfred Shaker village in this time period. These snippets deal with the interactions Shakers had with non-Shakers, the work and health of the members of the village and the Shaker school.

Visitors to the village included Mr. Fred Rankin of Gorham who was visiting his daughter; Mrs. Oliver Prime; Stephen Gowen's sister Mrs. Lizzie Rumery of Danville NH and Dr. Brock of Portland, a frequent visitor to the Shakers. The Shakers visited other folks/places for pleasure

and business. Elder Henry Green motored to Hiram with Dr. Brock; later Stephen Gowen accompanied Dr. Brock to Portland. Eldress Mary Walker as well as Sisters Edith Gardner and Eva Libby went to Portland. While Brother Stephen Gowen went to Sabbathday Lake to visit, Elder William Dumont and three Shaker Sisters from Sabbathday Lake spent a weekend in Alfred.

References to haying, harvesting ice on Shaker Pond, and cutting 70 cords of wood with their gasoline engine are made in the *Advocate*. Here are several interesting quotes illustrating the work of the Village.

“The Shakers in this town raised this season the stalk of a single bean 860 beans; a cabbage that weighed 21 ½ lbs.; and a radish that weighed 2 ½ lbs.”

“Several members of the Shaker family attended the poultry show at Sanford last week. Miss Ethel Peacock obtained second prize and special mention on her entries.”

The Shakers also “lost a valuable cow last week” and “recently bought a pair of steers for \$300.”

But in the June 13th issue it was reported, “A three-legged chicken was found among the number recently hatched at the Shakers. The chicken was normal in every other way and lived several days when an accident occurred which made it necessary to kill it.”

Thus, was the news available from this local newspaper.

Most of the Shaker communities that existed in the early 1900's had an aging membership. Alfred had its share. Brother Frank Butler was reported on several times. “Frank Butler, the aged brother at the Shakers, had an unusual and trying experience one day last week. Mr. Butler started to walk to the home of H. B. Fernald across the fields and woods, and became dazed and wandered unheedingly. After several hours he was found by Mr. Hersey at some distance from the place he had intended to go, but suffered no ill effects from the exposure.” Brother Frank would later suffer from a shock and Stephen Gowen would take care of him. Ethel Peacock underwent a surgical operation. In February, “Grip is prevailing at the Shakers. Seven or eight of the sisters are sick at present.” Just a month earlier the Shakers had celebrated the birthday of long time Trustee Lucinda Taylor. She was 82 years old.

We also know that the Shaker school (that will remain active until 1931) was being repaired per request of the Superintendent of Schools and that Etta Goodwin would be the teacher for the 1916-1917 school year. Through the years many children from town had attended the Shaker school.

These entries demonstrate the degree to which the Alfred Shaker Society was integrated into the life of Alfred and other surrounding communities. Of all the Shaker communities, Alfred was the one physically closest to a town center and perhaps the town's heart as well.