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## **"Father retains his love of Shakerdom"<sup>1</sup>: The Journals of Wendell P. Elkins, 1874-1929**

*By Galen Beale*

In 2012, a set of forty-eight journals which followed the life of Wendell Elkins until his death, were donated to the Andover (N.H.) Historical Society. Written by the son of a Shaker apostate, these journals provide a new look at how the relationship between the Shakers and their former Believers had evolved by the late nineteenth century. The earlier, stricter edicts separating Believers and apostates had softened with time. The Elkins family's relationship with the Enfield, New Hampshire, Shakers was neither combative nor dismissive, but rather, kind and loving. The journals' many Shaker-related stories which are extracted here give credence to the idea that it is likely there were many more apostates who maintained intimate relationships with their former communities.

Wendell Elkins was the only son of former Shaker James Hervey Elkins, a fifteen-year veteran of the Enfield community, and once a promising Believer. The story of Hervey Elkins' Shaker life is found in his 1853 book, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*, in which he related his experiences of growing up in a Shaker village, his carefree youth, his growing responsibilities, and finally his discouragement and departure from the society in 1852. Hervey was twenty-nine years of age when he left the community and, like most apostates, he disappeared from view in the Shaker records. Wendell's journals relate the continuing story of Hervey Elkins and his family.

After his departure from the Enfield Shakers, Hervey married a former Shakeress and hoped to pursue a career as a Universalist minister. But Fate intervened, and both Hervey's wife and young daughter died within a few years. Hervey then moved to Vermont to preach and there he met his second wife, Eleanor. In 1860 Hervey gave up his unsuccessful preaching career and settled down to start a family and to farm with his wife's family in Fairfield, Vermont. Ten years later, Hervey, his wife, and their two young children, Mattie and Wendell, returned to Andover, New Hampshire, to

live on the Elkins family farm. Here, Wendell, as a twelve-year-old boy, began his journals, recording his life as well as his impressions of his father's ongoing relationship with the Shakers. Wendell lived with his parents until he was in his thirties and was strongly influenced by his father's connection to the Believers. In three generations, there had been sixteen Elkinses who had joined the Enfield Shakers and many of them—some apostates, some Believers—appear in Wendell's journals.

As a teenager Wendell farmed with his father and recorded the activities on the farm; he described his neighborhood and town as well as visits to the Enfield Shakers. The extant Shaker records do not document these visits, nor the many visits the Shakers made to the Elkins household. This unofficial record of one apostate's family gives a rare glimpse into the more private, day-to-day lives of the Shakers.

The journals show an Enfield community of steadfast Believers who were often able to overcome the hurt and disappointment caused by their apostates. The Shakers strove to maintain long-term family relationships

with many of their converts, partly as a recruitment tool, but also out of a deep love for many of their former Shaker friends. This story of the Elkinses' continuing friendship with the Enfield Shakers is most likely the more common story of apostates and Shakers, and it is a much different view than the more familiar, dramatic stories of disgruntled apostates and angry family members seeking redress.



Wendell Elkins

(Courtesy of Andover Historical Society, Andover, N.H.)

Wendell's journals are predominately about his growing up and his search for a religious identity, set in a neighborhood of struggling New England farms. The journals begin in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when agriculture in New England was fast disappearing and the mills were rising. The Industrial Revolution had begun. The journals show a family determined to cling to their agricultural way of life as the world changed around them. The Andover farm provided only a meager living and Wendell became convinced that education would be the way out of a life of grinding farm work. He fought with his father to leave the farm. Finally breaking away from his father's grasp, and with the help of his mother, he graduated from Harvard College and then Harvard Divinity School. During those years, as his father became ill with cancer and became increasingly eccentric and impaired in his thinking, Wendell assumed the role as head of the family.

As the journals began in 1874, Wendell's father, Hervey, was fifty-one years old, and was now twenty-two years away from having left the Enfield Shakers. As his brother, Samuel, neared the end of his life, Hervey had left his farm in Vermont and moved his wife, Eleanor, and two children to Andover, New Hampshire, to take over the now-bankrupt family farm. Returning to the family farm in Andover was Hervey Elkins' lifelong dream, but as the youngest child, he had to wait until his older brothers passed it on to him. This farm on Beech Hill was the legacy of Captain Samuel Elkins who settled in Andover in 1792 and it provided the next four generations of Elkinses with a home.

The Beech Hill section of Andover was composed of a small group of farms that were within walking distance of town. The Elkinses referred to their farm as both Beech Hill and Dumblane.<sup>2</sup> The members of this community were dependent on each other in order to sustain their lifestyles, and, with the passage of time, some of these hilltop hard-scrabble farmers became successful. But for the most part, the land was poor, with steep, rocky slopes and the Elkinses, who were not skilled farmers, never achieved prosperity. They lived constantly on the edge of bankruptcy, selling milk and butter and raising chickens and fruit trees. This had also been the lifestyle of Hervey's father, Josiah, and of his brothers, Samuel and Josiah, Jr., when they had tried to run this farm.

Yet, despite his financial insecurity, Hervey Elkins had created the world he wanted. Their two-story farmhouse hosted a large and ever-changing group of family members. Visitation to the farm burgeoned in the summer

when travel was easier and extra labor was needed. On those occasions most of the family slept out of doors, or in the barn when it rained. Hervey and Eleanor had gathered their extended families together to live with them on Beech Hill, and at times there were ten people living in the house as well as other family members living nearby. Included in this group were the families of Hervey's deceased brothers, Samuel and Josiah, Jr., as well as Eleanor's two sisters and their children. The intellectual atmosphere of the household served as a welcome alternative to the monotonous farm life Eleanor's sisters and their families would have had to look forward to had they stayed in Vermont. Hervey spent his years at Beech Hill trying to hold this family together, even when logic would indicate that they needed an outside income. He wanted the boys to farm with him, and to remain completely interdependent. Hervey fought every attempt of family members to leave the clan. Out of necessity, the young women did work outside as teachers and mill workers to support themselves, lessening the burden on the farm, but they always returned to the farm. While necessity brought compromises, the Elkins household's communal heart was reminiscent of Hervey's earlier life at the Enfield Shakers.

The Elkins home was different from that of its neighbors, for it was a center for intellectual discussion among the family and with the neighbors. All of the Elkinses were voracious readers and they discussed their books together each day. Religion was a major topic of the time and the differences between the Catholics, Baptists, Unitarians, and Shakers were hotly discussed while raking hay with the neighbors, playing croquet after work, and again around the kitchen table at night. Hervey would read and reread Shaker apostate Mary Dyer's books to be able to counter the anti-Shaker arguments.<sup>3</sup> Friends Hervey had known from his previous ten years working as an itinerate minister in Vermont also visited and they joined in these discussions. The Shakers visited regularly and added their thoughts, and Eleanor's family, raised in a strong Christian tradition, joined in. As Wendell grew up and attended Harvard Divinity School, he too brought many ideas to the table. Throughout the seasons the Elkinses were also host to a variety of peddlers and salesmen of many nationalities who brought new points of view to the discussions.

While Hervey was happy on the farm, young Wendell wanted a different life. Throughout these journals we see Wendell trying to figure out how he could pull his family out of debt. He daydreamed about fantastically detailed schemes to make money. At times he invented an alternate,

successful Wendell who worked his way around the world, and summered at Beech Hill. At other times he was the conductor of the financially successful, but imaginary, Andover Symphony Orchestra. Reading these journals is at times difficult because in addition to the magical thinking, they are strewn with passages written in his own code, alternating with passages written in one of the five languages Wendell spoke. These flights of fancy were his attempts to escape from his life of unrelenting farm work. He was deeply grateful for the sacrifices his family made to send him to Harvard, and he was committed to financially supporting his family.

Wendell's journals reflect a family life that was infused with many Shaker values, and was also colored by what drove his father from the Shakers: intellectual freedom. As Wendell recounted the daily rhythms of the farm, one sees that, like his father, he loved their farm and farming and he had a strong desire to follow his father's example. The ongoing presence of the Shakers and the many stories told about the Shakers seeped into Wendell's consciousness. He viewed the Shakers as kind and helpful, but never as an alternative to the privation of their lives because he could not accept their religion. Time and again Wendell and his father would engage in raucous arguments about the value of Shakerism, and many times Hervey was joined by his friend and fellow Universalist preacher, George Severence. The two were unshakeable in their beliefs as they defended Spiritism.

From the Shakers' point of view the Elkins household was a good stopping-over place on their travels outside their community. They already knew many of the family members and it was a friendly place for the sisters to stop during their sales trips as well as a getaway for some of the leadership. Their time together was spent playing games, such as croquet and cards, and talking about the books they borrowed back and forth. With the building of the Northern Railroad, it had become quite easy to travel from Enfield to Andover.

Orville Dyer, who held the positions of elder and trustee for many years at Enfield, was a frequent visitor to the Elkins farm. He enjoyed the Elkins family, and they liked his matter of fact, easygoing ways. Dyer appears to have used his visits to the Elkinses as respite from his stressful life,<sup>4</sup> and was often found in Andover during the winter holidays. Dyer died on his birthday in 1882 at age seventy-eight, but the memory of this fine old man continued to impress Wendell years afterwards when he reflected, "The people at Dumblane don't see good old Elder Orville driving up

any more. How he watched our movements and inwardly commented on them.”<sup>5</sup> Christmas was always a time the Elkinses remembered Dyer’s visits and Wendell recalled, “Elder Orville would bless any Christmas. Ten years ago we began to have a series of slim Christmas celebrations, but now there is no Elder Orville to give Mother a broom.”<sup>6</sup>

One of Hervey’s Shaker friends was Henry Cummings. For years they visited and carried on a correspondence. Cummings kept trying to get his friend to return to the Shakers where he was so needed. In Cummings’ 1874 Christmas letter to Hervey, he recalled his visit to Beech Hill the previous summer: “What in the world there could be on Beech Hill that ever attracted you there or that could hold you there a single day, I must confess I utterly fail to comprehend.”

Cummings went on to ask his friend how he could

... squander the useful years of your life on that miserable, bleak, weedy, barren old potato patch of a farm when you have the power and the opportunity to use that power ... for good upon immortal souls. Who can even estimate the moral influence that a man of your education and experience would have for good and strength among such a class of young people as we have here, destitute as they are of just such older brethren to look up to and respect and love.<sup>7</sup>

Henry Cummings, as leader of Enfield’s North Family, was a persuasive and popular spokesman for Shakerism. A few months earlier he had spoken at the Universalist Church in Concord, New Hampshire, to an audience of a thousand people.<sup>8</sup> But Cummings’ oratorical skills did not persuade Hervey Elkins. He would not leave his farm, for he had his family and the intellectual stimulation he needed right on Beech Hill.

Wendell no doubt read Cummings’ letter and was shocked when this notable Shaker left the community seven years later. Cummings married a former Shaker and eventually settled in Enfield, making brooms. Wendell’s recordings of Cummings’ visits to the farm show a comfortable lifetime friendship: “Henry Cummings here. He has a beard, and is canvassing for fruit trees. He talked of creamery, Shakers &c.”<sup>9</sup> A few years later Cummings appeared again: “Henry Cummings spent the afternoon here. He is a bright, good man. Is in the broom business at North Enfield. Told how lightning shivered a pine tree in Lebanon, about the Shaker lawsuit,

Shaker theology, &c. Mr. Clark called. He and Mr. Cummings discussed the resurrection of Jesus."<sup>10</sup>

The Shaker sisters frequently stopped at the Elkinses' for the night. Both Caroline Whitcher and Rosetta Cummings often stayed overnight during their sales trips. Caroline Whitcher who was both a Church Family eldress and trustee for many years, kept close track of her cousins, the Elkinses. She was the main contact for them with the Shakers and she never faltered in her concern for them. In an effort to strengthen family ties, Caroline would bring the Shaker cousins, Odillon and Mary Ellen, down to Andover to visit their relatives.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the Elkinses lived conveniently near the Enfield Shakers no doubt enhanced their relationship. Andover, New Hampshire, had been the central meeting place for the Canterbury and Enfield Shakers, as it was halfway between the two villages. It was here that the Canterbury and Enfield Shakers brought their children for picnics with each other in an effort to have these young Shakers become acquainted. There were frequent Shaker visitors to Andover, preaching and building relationships, and there were several families in town with Shaker members, including Caroline Whitcher and Abraham Perkins.

The biggest Shaker-related event in Andover was the court case *Davis v. Dyer*. Lasting for weeks, the Elkinses' households were filled with visiting Shakers attending this trial. In January 1879, the already eight-year-old case began in Andover. An 1873 attempt at arbitration between trustees Orville Dyer and John Bradford with David Davis had failed, and the two sides had stubbornly fought on. The Shakers' lead council was the Hon. J. Y. Mugridge. David Davis and Alpheus Conant, partners in the old Shaker Mills Company, had argued that the Shakers were recipients of a substantial quantity of flannel cloth manufactured by the company, and they intended to collect for the labor used in production of that material. The Shakers were never able to make their case that Caleb Dyer had supplied money and/or services to those who had been running the Shaker Mills.<sup>12</sup>

Excited by all the commotion of Shakers staying at his house, at the home of his cousins Jasper and Emma Elkins, and at his Aunt Grace and Uncle Loren's home, Wendell detailed the ensuing days:

Is yet a whirl at Ems. Also brought up Wm Denton's *Theology*.  
Elder Henry sent it down.



Jan 29, 1879 Father went to mooseum; bot beans..He and mother went down in evening. Visited with the Shakers, Orville, Abram, Henry, Caroline, Mary and Joanna.

Jan 30. Father attended court in afternoon. Mother rested. Eldress Joanna stays at Jap's tonight.

Jan 31 Eldress Joanna went to Canterbury on the Peanut. Jap and I were there to see her off. Mattie and I saw Caroline and Mary off in the morn train.

Feb 1. Amanda Curtis came. She is down to the Proctor House to the trial. She related her Shaker experiences.... Elder Orville was there and we all stayed over night.

Feb 3 Amanda went down to Proctor House. She is either at Jap's or at Enfield tonight.... Elder Orville sees the court proceedings throughout the weeks.

Feb 19 Father and Em spent the day at the court. Mayridge is making his plea.... Melinda Hubbard is at Jap's and Odillon is here. He has a beard. There are lots of Shakers there.

The Shakers used their time in Andover to their advantage. With Hervey's help, they arranged for Henry Cummings to give a lecture in town. Hervey printed up and distributed flyers for Cummings' lecture on Bible history. Wendell continued his description of these exciting days:

Feb 20. Ody, Jap and I went down in the morning. I was late. Found Eldress Caroline and Mary at Grace's. Loren stayed out of shop. Father went down at noon.

Feb 21 Father attended court in p.m. M. Blodgett was making his plea.... Elder Henry comes up at night.

Feb 24 Jap got Pickles and brought Eldresses Caroline and Isabella up.

Feb 25 Mattie went with the Sisters at attending court. She liked Mayridge and Bingham. Grace liked Pike. Father went down in p.m.<sup>13</sup>

The most captivating Shaker stories in Wendell's journals are those of his visits to the Enfield Shakers as a young boy. These trips give an intimate glimpse into day-to-day life in a Shaker village. The Elkinses' visits back to the Enfield Shakers are not mentioned in the community records and yet it was these tender, unrecorded moments spent with the Shakers that bound the Elkins family to the Believers. When the children were young, Hervey and Eleanor took them to visit the Enfield Shakers and as they grew older, the Elkins children visited on their own, bringing their cousins and friends along. There were still four Elkins relatives living at Enfield—Eldress Caroline Witcher and some of the children of Hervey's brother, Josiah. After Josiah's untimely death, his wife Almira brought their four children to live with the Enfield Shakers. The mother, Almira, died at a young age, leaving Almira, Jr., Jasper, Odillon, and Mary Ellen. Odillon and his brother Jasper had left the community together but Odillon returned to the Shakers. Jasper had chosen a life with Hervey instead, but he returned to see his family often. The following visit to Enfield was recorded when Wendell was thirteen years old:

Father, mother and myself started for the Shaker Village in Enfield, with old Tan and the carriage at half-past-nine, a.m. Warm in the morning, but bitter cold on the way.... Took dinner at Martha Patty's and she lent mother her shawl. Arrived at Enfield at sundown; and after dusk we descended into the dining room and eat a good supper. In the evening Almira, Mary Ellen, and Odillon came up to the office to see us; and Elder Abram Perkins arrived here in the evening.

Saturday, September 11. Had a nice time visiting. Mother, Almira and myself went over the big stone dwelling house. Odillon and myself went down to the infirmary to see Auguste Eastman, and at night I went to the cow-barn and saw the sisters milk. The Church Family milk about thirty cows. All Durhams. We became acquainted with Abbie, a handsome young sister, who was Nora's playmate fifteen years ago. Pleasant.

Sunday, September 12. Sunny but cold. Went to Shaker meeting, which commenced at ten o'clock and ended about noon. Elder Henry Cummings sermon on progress was as true as steel. Yesterday forenoon father, mother and I went down to the North

Family and I looked at Elder Henry's natal history - the first volume. Eldress Caroline got up a singing school where we heard some splendid singing. Eldress Caroline, father, mother, Odillon, Mary Ellen and I took a walk in the garden, and eat some melons, after which we walked to the shore of the pond. Mother and I visited Odillon's shoe-shop and father and I saw the Shaker's hens. Father, mother, Odillon and myself went down to the North Family and took supper.

Monday, September 13. I went down to Odillon's shoe-shop, and he mended my shoes. Ody and his two boys [Edmund and Abram], and I borrowed Elder Henry's boat and went out on the Lake. Out on the lake was a sail boat and to this we steered, and found that William Wilson was in it. He gave us a ride to the Church family's boat house where we jumped ashore and went to dinner. Father took dinner at Martha Patty's and supper at home, for he started for Beech Hill at ten o'clock. After dinner over 50 of us - the majority women - went out in the Great Eastern - as the Shakers call it. There was not much breeze and the Great Eastern moved so slow that the row boat took out companies to the North Enfield bridge and back to the sail boat. I went in the row boat and did the steering every time but once. We did not get through boat-riding till dusk! In the evening we (Ody, mother and I) went to a cutting bee at the North family. I was sick all the evening.

Tues. September 14. I did not eat either breakfast or dinner. Mother, Sarah, Stuart, Almira and I went down to the flower-garden and picked some bouquets. Mother and I bid good-bye to the Shakers and took the stage for North Enfield. About noon. <sup>14</sup>

In another visit five years later, the eighteen-year-old Wendell described the joy of being able to share in the Shaker's abundance. Now visiting without his parents, Wendell had brought his sister, Mattie; Odillon's brother, Jasper; and Jessie, the daughter of Hervey's other brother, Samuel Elkins. Both Mattie and Jasper visited the Shakers frequently and the Shakers were particularly interested in their welfare. Perhaps a life as a Shaker would have been a good fit for them for they both struggled in the World. Wendell described their visit:

Rise at 3, at 8:30 we started for Shaker village ...The horse was slow, and we arrived at noon. Sister Caroline, now trustee, received us. Ody and Mary Ellen afterwards came up. In the evening we (Jap, Mattie, Jessie and I) walked to Shaker Bridge, which is impassable, this end having crumbled. We found that the ministry were there and the Mt. Lebanon ministry too.

Sunday, September 19 Fog and clouds and sunshine. Melons! Cheese! Apples! Grapes! Pudding! Wittles! O! wittles!<sup>15</sup>

They are going to repair Shaker Bridge with dirt and brush.

R. at 6:30 Jap and I went to North Enfield where he got shaved. We came back on the Helena, it's a staunch little craft, a steamer, then went to church. Elder Giles Avery, of the Mt. Lebanon Ministry preached. He is able and eloquent, and a staunch Unitarian. The girls came up after dark and sang for us. Elder Giles visited with us. At 2 p.m. there was a singing-school, and it was directed by Professor Perkins of Lebanon. Mary Ellen played the organ.

Monday, September 20. Elder Daniel B [oler] the head Shaker on the Earth, who no earthly power can remove from his high office, is nearer 80 than he is 70, is bent with years, has an ugly face but a deep, powerful and sonorous voice.

R at 6:30 Tuesday. At Jap's request Caroline showed us over the stone house. Mary Ellen and Ody visited with us, but Almira merely run up to say goodbye, and Mattie cried, and Jap was angry. Caroline told Jap "he was getting sweet on Jessie" and that made him angry. Elder James K[aime] of the NH Ministry, didn't speak to us, but insulted Mattie by walking around her and looking mad. Elder Orville was as good-natured as ever. We started home at 3 and arrived at 8:30. I drove all of the way.

September 21 ... Elder Giles B. Avery, 2nd to Dan [Boler] is 6 feet and peculiar looking. He has a fine voice and is a Christian gentleman, quite unlike James [Kaime].<sup>16</sup>

Most of the members of Hervey and Eleanor's family stopped at the Enfield Shakers routinely as they visited back and forth between Fairfield, Vermont, and Andover, New Hampshire. The girls found the Shakers a

safe, welcoming stopover and family news was carried back and forth.

Martha and Grace come from the Shakers to Dumblane. Having had a good time. Being met by Elder Abram, delighted with Eldress Rosetta, charmed with the school teacher and beloved by Almira. Mary Ellen has to be kept in solitary confinement.<sup>17</sup>

Two of Almira's children, Mary Ellen and Odillon, were fragile, but well protected by their community. Mary Ellen eventually went insane, and after years of caring for her, she was institutionalized to give the Shakers a rest from her care. The Shakers kept the Elkins family in touch with everything they did for Mary Ellen and the Elkins family continued to visit her. One spring day Wendell walked from Woodsville, New Hampshire, to the Grafton County Farm where she was interred and recorded his disturbing visit in his journal. The conditions in this state facility are in sharp contrast to those found in a Shaker village, and one can only feel grateful for the Shaker's care for their helpless members:

The poor devils caged up in little rooms are to be pitied.... The women seemed worse, but quiet. Some had no bedsteads, but had beds on the floor. One lay on her bed, all cuddled up and completely covered with the bedding. One sat stretched out, [staring] at me, her feet and calves bare, clothed only in a cotton wrapper. One was clothed only with a quilt and would have divested herself of that if the keeper hadn't had her cover up. One sits still and voids excrement where she sits, and has to be taken out by force and washed 2 or 3 times a week. Up garret was an old hag with a hair lip and a big hole all over the front of her face. One trembling epileptic confronted us ... only a few children.... I asked if there were any Shakers. He said there was one Shaker woman there: she was wild if a man went near her. He showed me the door of her room; no grating; closed up; he said he had never been in, women take care of her. Poor Mary Ellen! Afterward I left I was sorry I hadn't inquired if she had lucid moments.... I followed the tracks back to Woodsville.<sup>18</sup>

From an early age Wendell Elkins understood the importance of the Shakers to his father. Wendell was surrounded by Shaker stories, told by his father and by Shaker visitors and friends. As time passed, he and his

father saw the Enfield Shakers decline, and in 1888 Hervey was informed that the "Second Family of Shakers [would] unite with the church."<sup>19</sup> As Hervey became increasingly ill, he stopped visiting the Shakers, but his remaining friends continued to visit him in Andover. Hervey Elkins died in 1895. But the visiting pattern to the Shakers had been well established, and the extended Elkins family continued their visits to Enfield.

As a young boy, Wendell was in awe of the Shakers, he enjoyed his visits with them, and thought of them as a part of his family. As he grew to manhood, he grew more conflicted about the Shakers' philosophy. He appreciated their kindness to him throughout his life; for example, while at school in Cambridge, as he was struggling to make ends meet, Caroline Whitcher mysteriously appeared and offered him a good suggestion for cheaper housing; and again, while struggling to define his faith after Divinity School, he encountered Caroline Whitcher and "she gave [him] some good advice, and said no one could follow the Savior without suffering."<sup>20</sup> Wendell found great comfort in this advice from her. Yet Wendell also bore a deep resentment toward the Shakers for what he perceived was their impact on his father. He believed that the years his father spent with the Shakers limited his vision, although he retained his vast intelligence. Upon hearing that his father's friend Henry Cummings had departed the Society, Wendell wrote:

Henry Cummings has left the Shakers; taking with him, Arabella Churchill, who is 6 years his senior and whom he intends to marry. Hiram Baker takes Henry's place as elder and trustee. These two facts bore a large hole in the foundations of the society at Enfield, and I rejoice at the prospects of a speedy fall of the entire structure.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout their years on Beech Hill, it was Hervey's wife, Eleanor, who worked the hardest to make the needed adjustments to support her family in the times ahead. She was eleven years younger than Hervey and recognized that something needed to change. Like her son, she came to know the Shakers well, and the Shakers had provided her with steady support. During her bleakest moments she thought of joining the Society, but, with the support of her own kin, she developed a longer vision for her family.

Through the good fortune of living in a town with a strong educational

institution, Proctor Academy, Hervey and Eleanor were able to provide Wendell and most of the other young adults in the household with a good education. It was at Proctor that Wendell was introduced to the principal, William Lloyd, and his wife, Julia. They encouraged him to go to Harvard College, where he belonged to Phi Beta Kappa. It was his mother, Eleanor, who quietly found ways to pay for Wendell's education using every available resource. Bright, but indecisive, Wendell used his father's Shaker experiences to drive his life forward. Unable to decide if he should leave the farm or not, because of his father's incessant pressure to stay, Wendell finally concluded that his father had left the Shakers at about the same age, and this knowledge gave him the courage to start at Harvard Divinity School. The Lloyds continued to guide Wendell's life for many years afterwards, helping him achieve his goal of being able to support his family. The Shakers slowly faded out of Wendell's life but they remained prominently fixed in his memories.

Wendell's journals are told from the unusual perspective of a member of a large family upon whom the Shakers had focused their recruitment efforts for many years. In the journals it is possible to see the years of groundwork the Shakers had laid with each family member and how both sides continually considered their options. Many of Eleanor's family were determined not to let any more Elkinses join the Shakers, and they offered what help they could. Unfortunately, this help often came in the form of asking them to leave the farm on Beech Hill, and that was never to happen. Wendell Elkins' descendants continued to hold onto this farm until the last one died in 1995.

Wendell had spent much of his life with his father trying unsuccessfully to dissuade him of his Shaker beliefs. Their frequent discussions often became heated, and Wendell lost his temper at times which he recorded in his journals: "March 26, 1889. Sawed wood. Father and I ... argued about the Shakers and about Prof. Sewell. I called Shakerdom an artificial, mushroom growth, and he called Prof. Lowell a worldling."<sup>22</sup>

In the end, Wendell was left with mixed feelings about the Shakers and their influence on his father. This uncertainty colored his own striving to find a religion he could believe in. Wendell was eventually ordained a Unitarian minister. In a few years, he began to feel that Unitarians only knew what they didn't like and he rejected the faith. Wendell knew what he didn't like about the Shakers as well. In addition to disliking their religion, he felt the Shakers were undemocratic, too cloistered, uncharitable, and

hoarding of their land and possessions. In the decade after his father's death, Wendell would move from one denomination to another, searching for what he did believe in.

The last Christmas before his death, Hervey Elkins gave his son a copy of his book, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*. Wendell read this book through the long days of his father's illness and he finished it after Hervey's death.

Later, as he critiqued his father's book, Wendell picked at its faults, but also recognized that his father had, in his life as a Shaker, many moments of peace and quiet simplicity and he realized that his father had found a faith that could sustain him.

October 7, 1895 I finish reading Elkin's *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*. A small book, the only one ever written by a member of our clan. The valuation of facts is well done and very interesting. There is much of talent in the language and of acuteness in the matter, though the fondness for sonorous synonyms leads the author into inelegant and even inaccurate expressions.

The best part of the book is to be found in the simple touches of healthy enjoyment and attachment to the ordinary, daily life at Enfield. There is a pathos in those touches,... Oh, the broken ties of this queer world. Poor old Father! Thank God for the opportunity of an endless life~!<sup>23</sup>



## Notes

1. Wendell P. Elkins Journals, July 27, 1886, Collection of the Andover (N.H.) Historical Society [hereafter known as WPE Journals]. The original quote is “Fad, retains his love of Shakerdom.” “Fad” was one of Wendell’s nicknames for his father, Hervey Elkins. I have changed the name to avoid confusion. The forty-eight volumes of the Wendell P. Elkins collection of journals, ledgers, and scrapbooks are in the collection of the Andover (N.H.) Historical Society [hereafter AHS].
2. “Dumblane” was the name Wendell gave to the family’s Beech Hill farm. Dumblane is a Scottish town north of Stirling. It is possible the family saw a print of Sterling Castle after which they named their home.
3. WPE Journals, February 21, 1885, AHS.
4. In 1876 Orville Dyer contracted typhoid, and while these years of Wendell’s journals are missing, it is likely that Orville stayed at the Elkins’ home during some of his recovery. Dyer was released as elder the following July 3, 1877; Eldress Joanna to Hervey Elkins, August 26, 1876, The Galen Beale Collection; “A Record of Admittances, Apostasy, Death, Removal, Change, Office of Members in the Church of the United Society of Enfield....commencing September 1, 1845 “ [1845-1899], p. 37, Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village, Canterbury, N.H.; Orville Dyer obituary 1882, Leavitt Collection, *Enfield Advocate* newspaper clipping, Collection of the Enfield Shaker Museum.
5. WPE Journals, February 1, 1888.
6. WPE Journals, December 24, 1888.
7. Henry Cummings to Hervey Elkins, Enfield, N.H., December 25, 1874. The Galen Beale Collection. See also, Mary Ann Haagen, comp., *The Collected Writings of Henry Cummings (1834-1913)* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Cooper Press), 2012.
8. Henry C. Blinn, “Church Record, 1784-1879, October 17, 1874.” Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village, Canterbury, N.H.
9. WPE Journals, July 18, 1890.
10. WPE Journals, July 18, 1892.
11. Caroline Whitcher, child of Joseph and Nancy Elkins Whitcher, left Andover, New Hampshire, at age nine. At her death in 1902 she was described as “probably the most widely known financier in the entire Shaker societies.” *Special to the Union*, “Death Claims Noted Woman ...,” March 26, 1902. Collection of the Enfield Shaker Museum.
12. Walter A. Backofen, “Alpheus Conant and his Contemporaries,” October 30, 1898 (copy in the Collection of the Enfield Shaker Museum); *Granite State Free Press*, January 31, 1879. These court cases can be found in the collection of the New Hampshire State Library. This case concluded with the Shakers owing Davis \$20,000. Henry Cummings felt that Conant blatantly falsified the now-missing records.
13. WPE Journals, January 29, 1879-February 25, 1879. “Mooseum” was a local name for the downtown section of Andover, N.H.; “Jap” is Jasper Elkins; “Peanut” is the name of a train. The Shakers referred to are: Henry (Cummings), Orville (Dyer), Abram(ham Perkins), Caroline (Whitcher), Joanna (Kaime), Mary (Fall).
14. WPE Journals, September 10-14, 1875; WPE Journals, April 22, 1875-October 9, 1875. The local newspapers often kept track of what the Shakers were doing and they recorded William Wilson’s efforts to create new sources of income for the Second

Family. The boat described below is the one Wendell called "The Great Eastern." *Granite State Free Press* (Enfield, N.H.), August 20, 1875. "William Wilson has re-rigged his sail boat and added much more sail to it, and now it is in fine condition for excursion parties who wish to take a sail on Mascoma Lake. It will accomodate [sic] 75 or 100 persons, and being built quite flat there is not the least danger of its capsizing. Parties wishing to use it can be accomodated (sic) by applying to Mr. Wilson in person or by letter. He has spent considerable money in getting it in good order and we hope will be well patronized. No name appears on the boat but by common consent she is called the 'Sally Ann' in honor of a good old Shaker sister, Sally Ann Tucker."

15. In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens used the term "wittles." This refers to food, more specifically a stock or supply of food, and is derived from the words victuals and vittles. Annotated Literary Texts, Geneseo Wiki. Wiki.geneseo.edu.
16. WPE Journals, September 18-24, 1880.
17. WPE Journals, August 26, 1893.
18. WPE Journals, May 21, 1895.
19. WPE Journals, March, 1888.
20. WPE Journals, May 9, 1894.
21. WPE Journals, May 24, 1881.
22. WPE Journals, March 26, 1889.
23. WPE Journals, October 7, 1895.