

Hancock Bishopric

THE BISHOPRIC LOCATED in western Massachusetts and Connecticut was formed by the communities of Hancock, Massachusetts (1790–1960), Tyringham, Massachusetts (1792–1875), and Enfield, Connecticut (1792–1917). The ministry seat was located at Hancock, which at its peak in 1830 consisted of six families and 338 members, situated on two thousand acres of property.¹ The Enfield society was founded on the homestead of Joseph Meacham (see pp. 19, 23), who succeeded Father James Whittaker as the head of the Shaker ministry in 1787. The community eventually was organized into five families and grew to 113 members by 1830.² The small community of Tyringham, with fewer than a hundred members, was the first of the three villages to close.

Sister Rebecca Clark offered a glimpse of community life at Hancock during the eighteenth century in the following recollection, written when she was eighty-five years old:

In the year 1791, at the age of 21 I was gathered into the Church at Hancock, Mass. . . . There were nearly a hundred in the family where I lived. When the shell was sounded (a token to rise in the morning) we all quickly rose; and we had but fifteen minutes to dress and get ready for meeting. Fourteen of us slept in one room. When we arose, some packed the beds on one another; some swept the room; others got water to wash in. After our morning meeting, we went to our several employments. Some to getting breakfast for the brethren, as they ate first. Our buildings were small and we had to eat and live accordingly. We worked diligently, early and late, and lived sparingly. Our beds, bedding, and clothing that we brought with us, we all divided among the members of the family, as equally as could be. We had but few feather beds, our beds were mostly straw; and we made them on the floor. Many of us slept three on one bed; and when we washed our bedding, we had to dry it the same day, and put it on at night. We were all much engaged to build buildings, and to



and Stand
Connecticut

of pine
eter of top 16 3/4"
lection

courtesy David A. Schorsch, Inc.

ual stand is noteworthy for its
n design and diminutive propor-
ent in the thin top with sharply
ge, the minimally turned and taper-
al, and the extremely delicate snake
two very finely dovetailed drawers,
under a circular rather than a
rectangular top, may have been
by the Shakers themselves shortly
piece was completed. This maple
been attributed to Enfield based on
g detail just above the leg-to-stem
is similar to that on other Enfield,
at stands.

Office, Hancock, c. 1895. Private