

The Secret Behind Lot 227 Grave 2

Bringing an Obscure Family to Light

by Rob Gregg

Despite her seclusion of 59 years in a Shaker community, Marinda Melissa Keniston attained stature and wisdom far exceeding many women of her era. Her life is an example of dedication, perseverance, and progressive thinking.

One of the numerous religious sects who emigrated to American shores in search of religious freedom, the Shakers followed Mother Ann Lee to the United States in 1774. Here they established several colonies whose governing principals included celibacy and agrarian communal living.

The Shakers practiced a religion that was also a lifestyle. The members lived in gender segregated, dormitory-like housing, but came together to work, and pray. Like the Quakers they believed in personal communication with a God who was both male and female and in the ability to find and give voice to the Inner Light.

Besides leading a simple but comfortably self-sufficient existence from the fruits of their land, the Shakers came to be known for their architecture, crafts, and furniture. Shaker design, with its clean, economic lines, is the quintessential statement of the happy marriage of form and function--a tangible embodiment of the Shaker credo: "Beauty rests on utility."

In 1852, Canadian-born 4 year-old Marinda Melissa Keniston entered the Enfield, New Hampshire Shaker community along with her brother Samuel, age 11, and her sister, Sarah, age 17. Their father Francis (1801-1875) had determined this to be the best place for his children after the previous year's death of their mother and his wife, Harmony (1804-1851). Eventually Samuel seceded from the Shakers in 1867 and Sarah left sometime before that. Three of Marinda's other siblings never were placed in the Enfield sect.



Marinda Melissa Keniston

By the age of 18, Marinda had become an Associate Eldress (a junior leader) in her spiritual family. Her daily toils included being a tailoress, a houseworker, and dairyhand. By 1900 she had risen to a top leadership position as a Deaconess.

For more than two hundred years Shakerism ran alongside American history, sometimes heralding things to come, usually reflecting trends, events, and ideals from a slightly different angle. In 1890 when she was just 52 years, Marinda expressed her progressive thinking in the community's newspaper, *The Manifesto*.

"Why should not House Keeping and Home Making be considered occupations for Women and of no less account than Stock raising or Farming are to men?"

Why should not the home duties usually assigned to Women tend just as really toward the important duty of earning an honest livelihood, as do those assigned to men?"

Why should a woman who faithfully devotes herself for the comfort and well-being of the home feel that she is in any degree dependent on another for support?"

Are not her brothers equally as dependent on her, as she is on them?"

When there is a proper growth, and better understanding of the ways of life throughout so-called Christendom will there not be more enlightenment on the proper duties of both Man and Woman?"

Marinda died at age 62 from influenza on April 6, 1911 in Enfield and was buried two days later in Medfield's Vine Lake Cemetery, Section A-4, Lot 227 Grave 2, in the Keniston-Dobyns family lot. Why Medfield?



Vine Lake Cemetery, Lot 227

Her brother Samuel (1841-1905) had removed to Medfield in 1900 where he worked as a grocer and resided in a home which still stands at the corner of Frairy and Cottage streets. He and his wife Adelaide Louise (Lowell) Keniston (1845-1905) died just two days apart from pneumonia; they were interred in Graves 3 and 4, respectively. Their daughter Mabelle Wendell (Keniston) Dobyns (1882-1961) and husband Robert (1873-1923) were buried in Graves 1B and 1, respectively. The final memorial (Grave 1A) was for Mabelle and Robert's daughter, Alice Elizabeth (Dobyns) Gordon (1912-1961).

Today, Marinda's 7th cousin resides in Medfield, with a great-grandniece in Mattapoisett, a great-grandnephew in Brookfield, Colorado and other cousins living throughout the United States.