

Nehemiah

Hello, my name is Nehemiah White. It is the year 1833 and I am nine years old. I came to live with the Shakers in Wisdom's Valley near Albany on December 4, 1830, when I was six. Every day my wake-up call is 4:30 am in the spring and summer and 5:30 am in the fall and winter when I attend school. I drag myself out of bed and say my prayers. Next I get dressed, wash my face, and pull back the sheets on my bed. The Dwelling House bell rings and I head out to help tend the animals before breakfast.

We have cows, sheep, and chickens to name a few. My favorite sheep, Stanley, comes to greet me as I approach. I give him some food and talk to him for a few minutes. Then I have to move on and feed the other animals. I must not be late for breakfast at 6:30 am. I finish feeding the rest of the animals and head back to the Dwelling House.

The Brothers and I enter on the right while the Sisters and girls enter the dining room on the left. Breakfast today consists of oatmeal, sausage, meat, potatoes, milk, and a variety of other foods. There is always enough food for everyone. Before we eat, we say a prayer. Talking during meals is prohibited.

After breakfast I head out again to help repair a fence surrounding the sheep's pasture. I hate fixing fences! I have to wear work gloves to prevent splinters and they itch! The Dwelling House bell rings at noon and it is dinnertime. I enter the same door I did for breakfast. Dinner consists of ham baked in cider, dumplings, chocolate bread pudding, and milk. Delicious! We eat in silence.

The rest of the afternoon is spent planting broom corn, cleaning out the chicken coops, or gathering ashes that the Sisters use to make soap. After I finish these chores, two other boys and I head to the Brick Shop, sometimes called the Brethren's Workshop. Here we are helping the cabinetmaker make chairs, oval boxes and broom handles.

The Dwelling House bell rings at 6:00 pm and it is time for supper. Tonight we are having spoon cakes which I love! These little cakes made out of corn are one of my favorite foods. After supper I go up to the boys' room in the Dwelling House, and before I fall asleep, I kneel and say my prayers.

Tonight I decide to read by candlelight for a while. The candle doesn't give off much light, and I have a hard time seeing. However, the story I am reading from the Bible is an interesting one, and I have a hard time putting it down. Finally, I can't stay awake any longer. I blow out the candle and fall asleep thinking that I only have a few hours before I wake up and start a new day.