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## Seeking Shakers: Two Centuries of Visitors to Shaker Villages

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**SEEKING SHAKERS: TWO CENTURIES OF VISITORS TO SHAKER  
VILLAGES**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**BRIAN L. BIXBY**

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Department of History

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## **DEDICATION**

My parents, Rudolph Varnum Bixby and Isabel Campbell Bixby, both fostered my love of history. I wish my father had lived to see the end of this work. This dissertation is dedicated to the both of them.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In my case, as for many others, the doctoral dissertation represents the sum of many, many years of education, conversation, and reading. My intellectual debts are numerous. I can only list a few of them here.

First of all come the dissertation committee members, each of whom has provided a different and helpful perspective on my work, while patiently encouraging me through the long process of writing the dissertation. Thank you, Prof. David Glassberg for chairing my committee, Prof. Mario De Pillis for breaking his retirement to support this dissertation with his detailed knowledge of the Shaker world and history, Prof. Heather Cox Richardson for her suggestions on writing and the nineteenth century, and Prof. H. Martin Wobst for serving as the outside member and bringing an anthropological perspective to the subject.

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Eleanor J. Barnes has offered advice, criticism, and moral support from the start, as she well knows. Thank you, dear.

## **ABSTRACT**

SEEKING SHAKERS: TWO CENTURIES OF VISITORS TO SHAKER VILLAGES

FEBRUARY 2010

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The dissertation analyzes the history of tourism at Shaker communities from their foundation to the present. Tourism is presented as an interaction between the host Shakers and the visitors. The culture, expectations, and activities of both parties affect their relationship to each other. Historically, tourists and other visitors have gradually dominated the relationship, shifting from hostility based on religion to acceptance based on a romantic view of the Shakers. This relationship has spilled over into related cultural phenomena, notably fiction and antique collecting. Overall, the analysis extends contemporary tourism theory and integrates Shaker history with the broader course of American history.

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## INTRODUCTION

*The accounts written by such visitors are for the most part repetitious and prejudiced reactions . . . and are of little value as firsthand observations of Shaker life. — Mary L. Richmond, 1977<sup>1</sup>*

Many Americans have been curious about Shakers. Popular interest in the tiny religious group that arrived from England in 1774 intensified as the Shakers organized their own villages to house an expanding population of believers. By the mid-nineteenth century, visiting these villages, and reading accounts of other visitors, became an important way Americans learned about these unusual neighbors. Today, the modern tourists are more likely to visit a former Shaker community that has been turned into a museum, and to read tourist guidebooks instead of travelogue accounts, but the visit is still an important way for Americans to learn about Shakers.

This dissertation traces the history of visitors to Shaker communities in the United States, from the beginnings of the first Shaker settlement at Niskeyuna, New York in the late 1770s, up to the present. It examines the process of visitation as an interaction between visitors and would-be visitors on the one hand, and the people, sites, and objects with which the visitors interacted on the other. Much tourism theory and research analyzes tourists, and some analyzes tourist sites, but few examine the tourists and the sites as an integral whole.<sup>2</sup> Tourists do not merely “gaze” at the places they visit,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary L. Richmond, ed., *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography* (Hancock, Mass.: Shaker Community, Inc., 1977), vol. 1, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990) both emphasize the role of the tourist in interpreting the site, which in their theories is essentially passive. In

passively taking in what is presented to them. They come with expectations. These expectations are based on their own past lives and what they have read or heard about the places they are visiting. They are affected by the physical and symbolic structures of the site. They are affected by the other people present, whether other visitors, inhabitants, or staff. Visitors interpret what they experience. If they write or talk about their visits, they interpret their experiences for a specific audience. By what they did at the site, and how they reported it later, they may affect the subsequent development of the site.<sup>3</sup> This interaction between tourists and tourist sites is easier to trace when people who live and work at a tourist destination leave accounts of tourists, and how those visits affected them. Shaker villages offer a long history of inhabitants who interacted with visitors. Indeed, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the interaction proved significant to both the visitors and to the Shakers, so much that both the popular view of Shakers today and the contemporary life of the Shakers themselves cannot be explained without it.

Scholars debate about how far back “tourism” extends. Some argue that the rise of quick and cheap transportation, either the railroad or the airplane, has changed tourism into a phenomenon of the masses, quite different from its genteel precedents. Others have claimed that the development of industrial employment, with its demanding schedule of regular hours and occasional vacations, has changed tourism into a socially-sanctioned alternative to work. Both arguments suggest that the travelling experience in the past was

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counterpoint, there are many such volumes as Greg Ringer, ed., *Destination: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) that emphasize the geography and social construction of tourist destinations.

<sup>3</sup> Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, offers a more complex analysis of the “gaze.”

so different from today's tourism that they should be considered different phenomena. As a corollary, much tourism theory is oriented to the near-present, from about 1960 onwards.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation probes the origins and transformation of tourism by analyzing the history of one kind of site over a span of two centuries. The Shaker example, in its popularity, long history, and complexity, provides an outstanding test of theory and a window on American cultural history. By examining in detail how "visiting" changed historically, this dissertation assesses how well contemporary tourism theory explains visitors from earlier times.

Because it focuses on interactions between Shakers and American visitors, this dissertation necessarily examines some of the ways in which both Shakers and Americans have changed since the 1770s. Visitors carry their values when they visit. Their writings indicate not just what interested them on their visit, but also what ideas and values shaped the interpretation of their visits. For example, visitors could not admire "quaint" Shaker furniture until the rise of machine-made furniture could create an anti-industrial notion of quaintness for hand-crafted furniture.<sup>5</sup> In addition, by looking at the accounts of how Shakers saw their visitors, we can obtain yet another perspective on American society and

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<sup>4</sup> Urry, *Tourist Gaze*, p. 4-5, notes earlier tourism but argues that mass tourism became common in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century. MacCannell, *The Tourist*, discusses tourism with respect to his sociological definition of "modernity," and casually claims that "modern mass tourism" was in place by the beginning of the twentieth century; see chap. 1-3 and p. 59 in particular. Typical of the focus on post-1960 tourism is Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> For the rise of anti-modernism as a broader trend, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880 – 1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

culture. For most of the Shakers after the founding generation were Americans themselves, albeit atypical ones in their choice of a Shaker life. How they viewed their visitors, who for the most part were their fellow Americans, was certainly shaped by their upbringing in America.

Over historical time, the external world's interest in "Shaker" has expanded well beyond the living Shakers themselves. Scholars have collected Shaker documents and written histories of the sect. Collectors have admired and purchased Shaker furniture for its aesthetic and spiritual qualities. Indeed, given that only a handful of Shakers remain, this "Shaker world" has become the dominant force in the world's interpretation of the Shakers, particularly since the start of the twentieth century. Accordingly, the focus of the dissertation shifts in later chapters to examine the contribution of these other parts of the "Shaker world" to people's expectations and understandings of what "Shaker" means.

One important reason for examining the connection between the Shakers and their visitors is to bring the treatment of the Shakers into the historical mainstream. The Shakers, mostly Americans themselves, lived within American society, even if they chose to live at some distance from it in their villages. They raised the same crops as their neighbors, they were subject to the same laws, and they were affected by the same social, economic, and political changes that swept America, though not always in the same ways. Nor, despite their paltry numbers, did they leave America unaffected. Shaker communitarianism inspired many nineteenth century Americans, just as Shaker simplicity inspired many in the twentieth century. The interrelationship between Shakers and Americans deserves a prominent place in Shaker historiography. Yet much Shaker

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historiography is so centered on the Shakers that connections to broader trends in American history are few, if not absent altogether. This is not necessarily a fault, but it does tend to keep Shaker scholarship an isolated field.<sup>6</sup> Symptomatic of this has been the treatment of visitor accounts in Shaker historiography. Mary Richmond's statement on the subject, which opens this introduction, expresses the usual attitude: accounts are valuable only insofar as they provide an accurate (and favorable) view of the Shakers. Their value in understanding the *visitors* and the *interaction* between Shaker and visitors, has been neglected up to this time.<sup>7</sup>

The seven chapters are organized chronologically. Each chapter covers a distinctly different period in the Shaker-tourist relationship.

In chapter one, I examine the years 1780 to 1787, the earliest moment of interaction between Shakers and visitors. During those years, the Shakers reached out and converted thousands of Americans in upstate New York and New England. At first, the Shakers did not keep themselves apart from the rest of "the World" (as they called non-Shakers). They were hungry for recruits to accept this faith imported from England. They

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of a recent work that emphasizes the interactions between Shakers and non-Shakers, see Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, *Shaking the Faith: Women, Family, and Mary Marshall Dyer's Anti-Shaker Campaign, 1815-1867* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Among scholars who have treated visitor accounts at length, Flo Morse, *Shakers and the World's People* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987), restricts her comments to individual accounts; Glendyne R. Wergland, ed. *Visiting the Shakers: Watervliet, Hancock, Tyringham, New Lebanon 1778-1849* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2007), p. 3-10, adds the desire to preserve status to the motives of visitor. To be fair to these scholars, their interest was primarily in the Shakers, not their visitors; even so, Richmond did go on to add that accounts were "of interest in recording visitors' reactions . . ."

succeeded in finding many converts among those who had been caught up in the “New Light” revival of the period. The issue of conversion was in the forefront of the minds of the religious pilgrims who visited the Shakers. Some stayed and became Shakers. Most did not. A few became outspoken apostates, enemies of the Shakers. But not everyone who visited was a religious pilgrim. The Shakers rapidly developed a reputation for odd beliefs and behaviors. News of these brought in the curious, who had their own agendas. Those who left behind detailed written accounts were often of a higher social class, and used their accounts to mark the social and cultural distance between themselves and the Shakers. They were the first prominent group of visitors whose interest in the Shakers had nothing to do with the Shakers’ religious message.

Chapter two digresses from discussing visitor accounts to describe how the Shakers strove to distance themselves from the world between 1787 and 1842 by building their own villages, where they could live away from “the World” in their own communities. The Shakers, as a growing and prosperous sect, used their new villages to control themselves and their interaction with visitors. Visitors would not be allowed to interfere with the Shakers, but would have the opportunity to appraise their religion and lives. It was also during this period that the Shakers had their second and last great geographical expansion, spreading out in the wake of the Second Great Awakening to Kentucky and Ohio.

In Chapter three, I return to discussing interactions between visitors and Shakers between 1787 and 1842. Conversion remained a major theme of Shaker-visitor interactions. Visitors still came to inquire about the Shakers, and the Shakers obliged them by producing several books explaining their faith. Not that every religious seeker

was friendly, any more than they had been in earlier years. This was the great period of apostate literature, as many people who left the Shakers wrote about their experience. And the mob violence which had afflicted the Shakers before their consolidation revived with their expansion and success.

Yet most of the visitors in this period had no interest in converting to Shakerism. This was the great era of the multi-volume travelogue written by touring Europeans and the Americans who imitated them, describing the wonders of the new United States. They were written by people wealthy enough to travel extensively, and were written for people at least wealthy enough to afford multi-volume travelogues. Many of them stopped by a Shaker village or two, to catalogue one of the new and strange sights of the United States. Their descriptions shifted from being about Shakers and their religion, as in accounts from the 1780s, to being more about Shakers living in their communal villages. These authors continued to reject the religion and dancing of the Shakers, but they began to see the cleanliness, neatness, and work habits of the Shakers as exhibited in their villages as redeeming features. The focus of visitors' writings began to shift from Shaker faith to the Shakers' villages and other works, such as the merchandise visitors began buying at Shaker Office stores. Along the way, the distance between Shakers and the World began to diminish. This chapter closes by examining how the Shaker revival of 1837-45, often known as the "Era of Manifestations," demonstrated how some Shakers were worried about this growing accommodation to the World.

Chapter four describes the major turning point in Shaker-visitor relations, when "the World" redefined the Shakers as part of the World's past in the years between 1842 and 1889. The rise of monthly magazines brought a new breed of visitors, reporters, to

the Shakers, and the Shakers invited them in. The Shakers themselves were suffering a steady decline in membership and a concomitant economic decline. Even their religious fervor seemed to flag. By a perverse logic, their decline made them quaint in the eyes of the urban taste setters of the period. The reporters and most other writers praised the Shakers for their rustic qualities and their sturdy handmade goods, items from another era. Their religion was all but ignored. No longer able to survive in isolation, the Shakers increasingly came to terms with the World, and even catered to it. The Shaker store became the Shaker gift shop, where Shaker goods could be bought and carried away as souvenirs of a visit.

Not every visitor bought into this romanticization of the Shakers. Some complained loudly of Shaker faults. Others thought the Shakers could be enlisted in programs of social reform. But like the romanticizers, they wanted the Shakers on their own terms, not the Shakers'.

The closing of many Shaker villages alerted the World to the probable passing of the Shakers. In chapter five, covering the years 1889 to 1940, I discuss how Americans used their wealth and leisure to try to capture Shaker culture before it vanished utterly. People from the World wrote historical works about the Shakers. They bought up Shaker goods and Shaker documents. They celebrated the image of the Shakers that had been constructed in previous years, not so much the reality of the Shakers still among them.

During the years 1940 to 1985, the efforts by the World to preserve Shaker culture reached a peak. Chapter six discusses how the work of Edward Deming Andrews constructed an attractive image of the Shakers that emphasized their past, while still trying to stay connected to the Shakers of the day. Andrews's work helped make

Shakerism a serious historical subject. But it also made Shakerism a popular subject. The image of the Shakers as the simple, rustic remnants of an earlier age made them appealing as the antidote to the problems of contemporary society. This combination of genuine historical interest and casual entertainment provided the foundation for the reconstruction of former Shaker communities as heritage museums. It also brought the remaining Shakers back into prominence, as arbiters in a limited way of what could be considered Shaker. This accommodation had its limits. Much of the interest in “Shaker” was independent of anything the remaining Shakers might say or do. For example, the interest in Shaker antiques had become part of a larger antiques trade and hobby, and was shaped more by its own dynamics than by advances in Shaker historical research or the lives of the remaining Shakers. On the other hand, the Shakers themselves had to contend with the popular image of “Shaker” being far removed from the reality of a sect that seemed to be finally dying out.

Finally, chapter seven brings the account up to the present day. The Shakers have endured, but most “Shaker visitors” and parties interested in the Shakers never meet a Shaker. Nor might they recognize one if they did, for the popular image of the Shakers is rooted in the Shaker past, not the present of the remaining Shakers. More generally, being interested in “Shaker” has taken on many meanings. Sadly for the Shakers themselves, rarely does that meaning include accepting their faith. The works of the Shakers, their land and their artifacts, have become the embodiment of “Shaker” for most people.

In the conclusion, I review the transformation of “Shaker” from the description of a despised sect to a prized set of commodities and a historical image. Visiting the Shakers, one way or another, has increasingly become what the World wants from the

Shakers, not what the Shakers would offer the World. What the World has wanted from the Shakers has itself changed over time, both as America has changed and as the interpreters of “Shaker” have changed. The context of those wants has developed into a complex filter through which Americans see the Shakers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For another example of interpreting through a filter, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

## CHAPTER 1

### PILGRIMS TO PERFECTION (1780-1787)

*“Come All Ye Zion Travelers” — Shaker song from South Union c. 1840<sup>9</sup>*

A contemporary tourist interested in Shaker villages and their history might well start with the village called Watervliet, in New York State. Watervliet is where Shaker history really begins in America.

Yet Watervliet is by no means among the more popular Shaker sites. A popular *historical* tourist site should be easy to reach, offer interesting attractions in a pleasant environment, provide services for tourists, and have a good story that appeals to many people.<sup>10</sup> Watervliet does not rank high on any on these requirements.

The remnants of the Shaker village are not easy to find. Thanks to changing political boundaries, the Shaker village is no longer in the town of Watervliet, but in Colonie, northwest of Albany. The tourist must get off the New York State Thruway at an exit with no sign on the highway identifying it as the route to the village. The central part of the village with the museum is among a maze of streets in a state home for the aged. The other parts are located on other nearby roads, are unmarked, and are in private hands.

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<sup>9</sup> South Union Shaker Quartet, *Awake My Soul*, compact disc, n.d.

<sup>10</sup> There are exceptions to all of these requirements. Some tourists are attracted by places that are unpopular, difficult to reach, and challenging to explore. The author has personally searched for an eighteenth century Courland manor house because of its associations with the adventurer Cagliostro, hiked through New Zealand’s temperate zone rain forest for four days, and crawled through a lava cave in Oregon, all to see particular tourist attractions. There is even travel literature on visiting places “off the beaten track,” such as Pico Iyer, *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

The museum sits in the midst of the state geriatric facility, which is named for the founder of American Shakerism: the Ann Lee Home. There are two buildings open to the public. There are no flashy exhibits, few Shaker artifacts apart from the buildings themselves, little space for parking, and not even a soda machine for refreshments. There is a museum gift shop, at least. To the casual visitor, the few such as pass by, the site must seem unattractive and only minimally accommodating.

But if one is an aficionado of Shakerism, the sort of person who uses the *Shaker Heritage Guidebook* to visit every Shaker site, then Watervliet has a very interesting story to tell among its buildings and grounds. The large brick building, operated by the Shaker Historical Society as a museum, was the village's meeting house. After passing by the gift shop on the left, the present-day visitor enters a large room, the actual place where the Shakers gathered to worship for many decades. There are no supporting pillars in the room, because the Shakers needed a large open space for the group dances that were a major part of their worship, and a major attraction in antebellum years. The benches along the side were for visitors, who were invited to come watch the Shakers at worship on Sundays. Once, hundreds would come on a Sabbath to stare amazedly at the Shakers. It is possible today's visitor will see the building's cat patrolling his domain. He bears a bit of history as well, for he is named William, after Ann Lee's brother, who was her faithful assistant in the spreading of the Shaker faith.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook: Exploring the Historic Sites, Museums & Collections* (Spencertown, N.Y.: Golden Hill Press, Inc., 1994). Description of meeting house based on personal experiences.

The visitor who looks at the exhibits in another room or talks to the staff will find out that the meeting house is just one of several Shaker buildings that still stand on the grounds. These include workshops, barns, and administrative offices. Like the meeting house, these buildings were constructed before 1860, when the Shakers enjoyed their greatest growth. All these buildings were for the Church Family at Watervliet, the grouping of most faithful of the Shakers in this village. The grave of Ann Lee, who died in 1784 only a few years after founding Shakerism in America, is within walking distance in a nearby cemetery. Visitors willing to explore by car can also drive past buildings that once belonged to the South Family and the West Family. They are now in private hands, and not open to the public. The visitor will not be able to find any North Family buildings, though; they were torn down to make way for the airport.<sup>12</sup>

### **The origin of the Shakers**

None of those buildings existed in 1780, when Valentine Rathbun came visiting the Shakers. Instead, he saw a frontier settlement called Niskeyuna<sup>13</sup>, a place that hardly deserved the name of a village. The land thereabouts was swampy and thought to breed disease. It required work to clear and drain, and was not especially fertile. The Shakers lived in a log cabin. Rathbun, who came from the long-settled community of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, might well have been depressed at the sight of this wretched place. One

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<sup>12</sup> This description is based on Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 154-61; [Shaker Historical Society,] "Educational and Research Resources: History and Origin of the Shakers," <http://www.shakerheritage.org/education.htm>; and personal observation.

<sup>13</sup> Various spelled. Shaker villages went by several names during their existence. See Appendix for a list of the major Shaker villages and some of their more common alternate names.

might wonder why he was visiting Niskeyuna? Why, indeed, were the Shakers living there?<sup>14</sup>

According to Rathbun, the Shakers were recent arrivals in Niskeyuna.

These people are Europeans, a part of which came from England to New York on the year 1774 . . . and in 1776 [they] made a purchase of land, in a place called Nisqueunia (*sic*), about nine or ten miles north west from Albany, where they immediately settled, and went to clearing their land, and following their several occupations, of blacksmithing, weaving and shoe making, and were unknown and unnoticed, unless by a few of their neighbors . . .<sup>15</sup>

Rathbun said nothing about the Shakers' history prior to their arrival in New York. Perhaps he knew nothing more about it. Yet certainly the Shakers who came over from Britain did talk about their history among themselves, for their heirs would publish a history of the founding of their religion in Britain and the decision to come to America.<sup>16</sup>

The Shakers began among dissenters in Manchester, England in the 1740s. By their own account, they were influenced both by the Quakers and the Camisards. The latter were a group of Huguenots with a tradition of spirit possession who fled France to England after the revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes, which had granted the

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<sup>14</sup> [Shaker Historical Society,] "History and Origin of the Shakers"; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 184; Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 10, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Valentine Rathbun, *An Account of the Matter, Form, and Manners of a New and Strange Religion: Taught and propagated by a Number of Europeans, living in a Place called Nisqueunia, in the State of New-York* (Providence: Bennett Wheeler, 1781), p. 3-4. At 2009's Shaker Seminar, David Newell provided a bibliographical and textual analysis of Rathbun's pamphlet, arguing that the various editions reflect two different source manuscripts. I have not had the opportunity to compare the different editions, but, based on Newell's analysis, do not think the differences affect my argument significantly.

<sup>16</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 76-82.

Huguenots religious toleration. Fired with religious fervor, seemingly possessed by spirits, the Shakers openly challenged the established Anglican Church by disrupting their services. For their efforts, they were fined and jailed. Among their number was a young woman named Ann Lee, who emerged as their leader by the 1770s. Having had enough of persecution in England, and, according to later accounts, following a vision, Ann Lee and eight other Shakers came to New York in 1774. These few émigrés became the nucleus of Shakerism, while their English counterparts died out.<sup>17</sup>

Within a few years, they had relocated to Niskeyuna, where some members had rented land in the last of the old Dutch feudal estates left in the United States, Rensselaerwyck. There they lived apart from “the World,” as they called those not of the Shaker faith. Their past persecution in England, and their religious differences with their neighbors no doubt seemed to them adequate ground for their isolation. But their reasons for living apart were not confined to maintaining religious purity. They were pacifists, pacifists in a war zone, for British and Patriot forces had been contending for the Hudson Valley as part of the Revolutionary struggle since 1776.<sup>18</sup>

Because they kept to themselves, the Shakers were something of a mystery to both sides in the war. The earliest account of them on record came from the pen of a Patriot military physician, James Thacher, reporting rumors that came to his attention on July 28, 1778.

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<sup>17</sup> Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 7. Rensselaerwyck would endure as a feudal estate until the 1840s.

We are just informed of a new order of fanatics, who have recently introduced themselves into our country, pretending to be a religious sect; but, if reports be true, they are a disgrace both to religion and to human nature. They are called Shaking Quakers, or dancing quakers [*sic*], though they have no affinity either in principle or character to the established order of Quakers. Their leader is a female by the name of Ann Lee, niece of General Lee, of our army. She is lately from England, and has brought over with her a few followers, and has had the address to seduce several individuals of our country to her party. She is known by the appellation of Mother Ann, and pretends to have received a revelation from heaven. The method which they practice under the idea of religious worship, is so obviously impious, as to exceed the bounds of credibility; but we have the particulars from eye-witness, who have been admitted to their midnight orgies. They spend whole nights in their revels, and exhibit the most unbecoming scenes, violating all rules of propriety and decency. Both sexes, nearly divested of clothing, fall to dancing in extravagant postures, and frequently whirl themselves round on one leg with inconceivable rapidity, till they fall apparently lifeless on the floor. A spectator asserts that the fantastic contortions of body in which their pretended religious exercises consist, bear the semblance of supernatural impulse, and that no imagination can form an adequate idea of the extravagant conduct of these infatuated people - a burlesque on all moral and religious principle.<sup>19</sup>

This was typical of early accounts of the Shakers: a combination of facts (religious sect), rumor (orgies), and errors (Ann Lee being no known relation of General Lee). Even in this early account, the Shakers stood out for their ecstatic dancing. If their “orgies” made them dubious neighbors, their pacifism and British origins made them even more so. They were suspected of being Tories out to betray the Revolution. Indeed, several Shakers would be arrested by Patriot authorities as suspected Tory agents, though they would soon be released on terms of good behavior.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> James Thacher, *A Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War from 1775-1783* . . . (Boston: Cottons & Barnard, 1827), p. 169-70. Thacher appended a footnote to this account when it was originally published in 1823, noting that the Shakers of 1823 were an “orderly and civil people.”

<sup>20</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 14; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 13-14.

### **Enter the “New Lights”**

Prior to 1780, the Shakers of Niskeyuna had made little headway in proselytizing. By one account, only a single individual converted to Shakerism.<sup>21</sup> Yet by 1794, the Shakers had expanded across the Hudson Valley and into New England, reaching all the way to Maine (then a district of Massachusetts). They owed this expansion to a loose group of Christians called the “New Lights.”

The New Lights were revivalists. They found the existing beliefs and practices of religion in their communities inadequate. When the Puritan Church had been founded in Massachusetts-Bay Colony in the 1630s, it had offered a powerful sense of identity to its believers, with a definitive view of reality in its metaphysics, a code of conduct in its ethics, a sense of worthiness through salvation, and a sense of community through its social practices. But religious fervor had been in decline ever since. The Congregational Church that was heir to the Puritans offered a faith that was neither rigorous nor satisfying to many parishioners.<sup>22</sup>

New Englanders were no longer communities of religious believers carving out religious communities on the edge of a howling wilderness. Those along the coasts were living in communities that had been settled for more than a century. On the upland

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), vol. 1, chap. 10; Bryan F. LeBeau, *Religion in America to 1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 48; Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton . . .* (Boston, T. R. Marvin, 1848) offers a perspective from a half century later approving of the latitudinarian tendencies of the Congregational Church prior to the split between the Trinitarians and Unitarians in the 1820s.

frontier across New Hampshire, Vermont, and western Massachusetts that had opened after the end of the French and Indian Wars in 1763, families were buying land from speculators and settling on it to farm, often far from any village center. The people in the newly settled regions often came from many scattered towns and did not know each other. They had outpaced the network of parish churches, and the established churches of New England could not train ministers fast enough to supply them.<sup>23</sup>

Revivalism began as early as the 1720s in parts of New England. The First Great Awakening, conventionally dated to a revival in Northampton, Massachusetts led by Jonathan Edwards in 1734, was part of this larger process of trying to revive religious faith in the region. Revivals would continue in the northern United States, with breaks, at least through the 1840s.<sup>24</sup>

The “New Lights” shared the revivalism of Edwards and the itinerant English preacher George Whitefield. Their faith was one of hope, that sinners could seek redemption, feel the grace of the Holy Spirit come upon them, know by that grace that they were certainly saved, and that they could reconstitute a church of the truly saved.

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 5, 27-39. David Newell, through personal communication, offered an overview of Savoy, Massachusetts as a sample frontier community in the 1740-1820 period. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) describes how some social tensions arose in a settled community.

<sup>24</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *Religious History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), vol. 1, chap. 18-19; Bryan F. LeBeau, *Religion in America to 1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 41-42, 46-53; Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Octagon Books, 1981). The witch craze of 1692 was in many ways a revival gone wrong, an attempt to purify the community by finding sin in scapegoats instead of grace within one's self.

Central to their faith was the conversion experience, what Whitefield called the “New Birth,” in which repenting sinners would be overcome by the Holy Spirit. They might tremble, shout, produce signs, speak in tongues, and manifest other spiritual gifts of apostolic time. Initially, many stayed within the Congregational Church, just as the early Lutherans had not broken with the Catholic Church, hoping to reform the church from within. However, the logic of their position tended toward separatism, since the true church should include only the saved, that is, only New Lights. Only in that way could they reconstitute a combination of personal salvation and communal solidarity that had characterized the Puritan church. Some formed Calvinist Baptist churches, demanding that the rebirth in faith be conjoined with baptism, the sacrament of rebirth.<sup>25</sup>

The New Light movement took a radical turn, called the New Light Stir, in the hill country and along the frontier of New England during the years of the Revolution. Settlers confronted a general collapse of authority, as both civil and ecclesiastical governments crumbled. Many settlers had come from regional hotbeds of the New Light, such the Connecticut River valley, and carried their faith with them into the hills and frontier. Perhaps because as pioneers they were self-reliant, perhaps too because they could get no regular ministers, they embraced the separatism implicit in the New Light position, rejected Calvinism completely, and broke from the established churches. Inspired by the political ideas of the Revolution, they looked for a similar revolution in religion, and decided that the Millennium was at hand. Indeed, they adopted what might

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<sup>25</sup> LeBeau, *Religion in America*, p. 62-63. Steven A. Marini, *Radical Sects in Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), chap. 1.

be considered the most positive form of millennialism available to them: post-millennialism, the belief that the thousand years of Christ's reign among the saints would take place on earth before the judgment day. And if Christ were soon to reign on earth with the saints, then it seemed quite possible that the current generation would join the saints. Through their faith, the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would live sinless thereafter: they would become perfect.<sup>26</sup>

By the time Valentine Rathbun visited Niskeyuna in 1780, he had already been minister to a New Light Baptist congregation in Pittsfield, Massachusetts for eight years. He was worried about the growth of sin, believed that he lived in the last days, and that the millennium of Christ's rule was about to begin. In the summer of 1779, his congregation was one of several in the neighboring towns of New Lebanon, New York, Hancock, Massachusetts, and Pittsfield (in order from west to east) to experience a New Light revival, complete with visions, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and ecstatic possessions by the Holy Spirit. The revivalists were convinced of the imminent coming of Jesus. When Christ failed to arrive by fall, 1779, many New Lights became depressed, caught between their faith and their apparently incorrect reading of the signs of His imminent arrival. Some continued to hope and search for a more satisfying faith.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 1, 6, 30-48. On the collapse of government in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, where Pittsfield, Hancock, and Tyringham were situated, see Richard D. Birdsall, *Berkshire County: A Cultural History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), chap. 8. The terms "pre-millennialism" and "post-millennialism" have been used with a variety of often contradictory meanings. The definition here offered for post-millennialism is used throughout.

<sup>27</sup> Birdsall, *Berkshire County*, p. 78; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 27; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 11, 15; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 52-53; Valentine Rathbun, *An*

### The Shakers and New Lights meet

According to Valentine Rathbun, “[On] the 17<sup>th</sup> day of April last [1780] . . . one Talmage Bishop brought tidings to New Lebanon of a number of strange and wonderful Christians; the people . . . were filled with desire to see new things, and run to see them.” This was the first recorded meeting of the New Lights and the Shakers. Bishop had been traveling with a friend, Reuben Wight, when they stumbled across the Shakers, and accepted their invitation to stay the night. They were sufficiently impressed with the Shakers to take back word of them to their fellow New Lights in New Lebanon and adjacent communities.<sup>28</sup>

Talmage Bishop and Reuben Wright began the first significant trend of visitors to Shaker communities, that of religious seekers. Hence the importance of understanding the religious backgrounds of the Shakers and their visitors. These early religious seekers might not be tourists in our modern sense, because they did not travel for leisure, but they were travelers “filled with desire to see new things,” which is indeed an important trait of tourists.

Rathbun was one of those who were “filled with a desire to see new things.” They were the first real group of visitors the Shakers ever had — religious pilgrims seeking salvation. Rathbun himself went to visit the Shakers on May 26, 1780.<sup>29</sup> A year later,

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*Account of the Matter, Form, and Manners of a New and Strange Religion . . .*  
(Providence: Bennett Wheeler, 1781), p. 14-15, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 18; Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 27.

after he had become disillusioned with them, Rathbun published an account of how the Shakers treated religious seekers such as himself:

When any person goes to see them, they all meet him with many smiles, and seeming great gladness; they bid him welcome, and directly tell him they knew of his coming yesterday. This sets the person wondering at their knowledge, and presently they get the person some victuals; then they sit down and have a spell of singing . . . After singing they fall to shaking their heads in a very extraordinary manner, with their eyes shut and their face up; then a woman about forty years old sits and makes a sort of prayer, chiefly in an unknown tongue (if I may so call it) then one of the men comes to the person, and pretends to interpret the woman's prayer; after which they tell the person he has come to the right place to be instructed; they enquire the person's name, and ever after call him by his Christian name . . . If the person has long hair . . . they bring the bible [*sic*], and read to him 1 Cor. xith chapter and 14th verse, then telling him if he intends to be instructed, he must have his hair cut short; telling of him that he bears the mark of the beast . . . [A]fter it is done they come round him, and touch him with their fingers here and there, and give him a sly cross, and in a very loving way, put their hands on his head, and then begin to preach their doctrine to him.<sup>30</sup>

According to Rathbun's account, that doctrine matched the dreams of the New Lights. The Shakers, so he wrote, believed that all churches since apostolic times were fallen churches. Only the Shaker faith was true. Shakers possessed the apostolic gifts, could see angels, and hear angelic songs. They were often possessed by the spirit, and would fall to shaking their heads, hopping, jumping, and dancing; hence their popular name of "Shakers" or "Shaking Quakers."<sup>31</sup> Five of the existing twelve members were perfect (free from and incapable of sin). Shakers could become immortal and ascend directly into heaven. Whether they did or not might be of little significance, however, for

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<sup>30</sup> Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Although the Shakers were influenced by Quaker thought in their early years in England, the two groups emerged out of English Dissent at different times and with different doctrines and practices. The similarity of names has caused confusion to this very day, as the author has experienced in explaining this dissertation to acquaintances.

the End Times were coming, when Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years. One among them, the perfect woman identified as “mother” [certainly Mother Ann Lee], was the queen of heaven, the wife of Christ, the second Christ, that woman clothed with the sun mentioned in chapter twelve of Revelations. She was in herself one of the signs of the End Times.<sup>32</sup>

But there was a price to be paid for receiving these blessings, beyond just getting one’s hair cut. The Shakers disclosed their full doctrine only piecemeal, demanding the seeker advance step by step in Shaker ways as well as Shaker ideas. The religious seeker had to confess all their sins to the Shaker leaders, the elders and eldersses. They had to renounce “all works of the flesh:” celibacy was mandatory, even for married people. They had to abandon politics and become pacifists. And in all matters of faith they had to submit to the direction of the elders; believers could not even interpret the Bible for themselves. In effect, the seeker who went to the Shakers had to discard all their former ideas and likely their former associations and become a new person. So Valentine Rathbun felt when he accepted the Shaker faith in 1780.<sup>33</sup>

For the New Lights along the Massachusetts-New York border, this meeting with the Shakers permanently changed their society. Many went as visitors, pilgrims, to see the Shakers at Niskeyuna. Many of those chose to convert, making their experience a spiritual as well as a physical pilgrimage. By 1790, there would be about 370 Shakers in

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<sup>32</sup> Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 3, 5, 7, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 4-5, 8, 10, 18. Isolating a recruit and gradually revealing truths at variance with the predominant modes of thinking makes a great deal of sense from the perspective of a radically different religious group, but is often characterized unfavorably as the manipulative behavior of a “cult” by those outside of it.

the three villages of Watervliet and New Lebanon, New York, and Hancock, Massachusetts. To judge from some fragmentary evidence from a decade later, these converts were a fair socio-economic cross-section of the communities from which they came. Most notable among the converts at the time was Joseph Meacham, the leader of some New Lights in New Lebanon, New York. As Rathbun noted of his own conversion, becoming a Shaker meant a rejection of many of one's previous views, as well as a change in one's habits, thinking, and associations. New Lights who converted rejected those who did not for failing to see the truth. Indeed, Shakers claimed that the only people who would never enter heaven were those who rejected the Shaker faith when it was presented to them. Along with the requirement for celibacy, this religious difference split many families. Yet the power of family ties meant that many New Lights went over to the Shakers as families; kin ties would paradoxically be a powerful bond among the early American Shakers.<sup>34</sup>

If the New Lights who converted to Shakerism rejected their former religious companions, the rejection was often mutual. Valentine Rathbun serves as an example. After only six months with the Shakers, Rathbun left them and published an exposé of their sect. He claimed that the Shakers were cunning, insincere, and ignorant. He argued

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<sup>34</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 10-12, 91-92; Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 4, 8, 10, 12; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 31, 85-86, 95-100. Rathbun states that rejecting the Shaker faith after hearing its testimony was grounds for eternal damnation; later Shakers seem to have limited such damnation to true apostates, those who had joined and then rejected the faith. For population figures, see Priscilla Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), appendix B. Steven Paterwic has informed me verbally that Brewer's counts understate Shaker numbers because Shaker villages often spilled across county lines, a point Brewer seems to have missed. As yet, no better population figures have been published.

that their perfectionism was a religion based on works, not faith, a serious accusation among Protestants since the days of Martin Luther. And he claimed they practiced witchcraft.<sup>35</sup>

The hostility between those who became Shakers and those who did not was part of a larger pattern of sectarianism in New England and New York. As Stephen Marini defines it, a sect is “a new form of religious culture that emerges from and in opposition to an antecedent tradition.” To establish itself, a new faith has to differ from the old in some matter of theology or practice that is meaningful and important to contemporaries. So Protestantism had emerged out of Roman Catholicism over such issues as justification, papal authority, and use of church monies, causing a century and more of religious wars and persecutions. So had the New Lights emerged out of the Congregational church by emphasizing the conversion experience, causing bitter dissension between New Lights and Old Lights. And so those sects that emerged out of the New Light Stir, such the Freewill Baptists and Universalists, were hostile to those New Lights who remained in the Congregational church. Indeed, the new sects were hostile to each other, as well, because they offered competing alternatives to the New Lights.

Shakerism did not quite emerge out of the New Light faith, but it was similar to those sects that did, for it offered the fulfillment of New Light hopes while denigrating the New Lights as unsaved. It was only natural, if unchristian, for the New Lights to

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<sup>35</sup> Birdsall, *Berkshire County*, p. 78; Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 4, 8, 13, 16, 17, 19.

return the compliment. In his bitterness at being misled and disappointed, Valentine Rathbun did not just condemn Shaker religion as false. He attempted to connect it to unholy beliefs most New Lights would condemn. He likened Ann Lee to Jemima Wilkinson, a heretical Quaker from Rhode Island who also preached celibacy. He implicitly characterized both women as among the false prophets predicted by the Bible for the end days. By claiming that Shaker perfectionism was a grace of works, he was implying that they were more Catholic than Protestant. (Later critics of Shakerism would echo his claim by calling Ann Lee the “pope” of Shakerism.) The diabolical import of his charge of witchcraft is obvious.<sup>36</sup>

Even though not all New Lighters became Shakers, the meeting with the New Lights marked a critical turning point in Shaker history. They no longer were isolated. Their early success in converting visiting New Lights encouraged them to preach openly. Heaven itself seemed to recognize the significance of this change, for on the first day of their public testimony, May 19, 1780, the sun was obscured and darkness fell upon New England and New York even at high noon. Among their many new converts were several who would play leading roles in Shaker history, most notably Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, the future leaders of the Shakers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*, quotation from p. 1; Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, p. 14-15, 16, 17, 20. For an example of Ann Lee described as the Shaker “pope,” see Don Gifford, *An Early View of the Shakers: Benson John Lossing and the Harper’s Article of July 1857* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), p. 55. Rathbun, *ibid.*, p. 20, also likened Ann Lee to Eve, a comparison that ironically would become a description of Ann Lee’s sanctity in Shaker theology; see Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 18-26; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 10-12, 18. The cause of the legendary “Dark Day” is uncertain; one theory is that smoke from extensive forest fires accumulated at a great altitude.

### **The Shakers spread the word**

In the spring of 1781, the Shakers decided to send out missionaries. Converts returning home from Niskeyuna had spread stories of the Shakers across the New England hill towns and frontier, the hotbed of the New Light Stir. The Shakers saw an opportunity to gain many more converts. They may also have been interested in reducing the demands on their hospitality of the many potential converts visiting Niskeyuna, by going to visit the converts instead.<sup>38</sup>

In general, the missionaries went where the New Light Stir had had its greatest successes, which communities were naturally also the places from which visitors to Niskeyuna had come. The most famous of these missionaries, Ann Lee, her brother William Lee, and another English member, James Whittaker, together toured southern New England from May, 1781 to September 4, 1783, helping to establish what became the Shaker villages of Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts, and Enfield, Connecticut. Other missionaries ranged into Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, helping to establish Shaker centers in Canterbury and Enfield, New Hampshire, and at New Gloucester in Maine.<sup>39</sup>

Judging from the stories of converts, the Shakers simply carried their conversion methods with them. They settled at the homes of new converts, turning each new base

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<sup>38</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 19; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 90.

<sup>39</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 3; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 18-25; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 93. The New Gloucester Shaker settlement later took the name Sabbathday Lake. Note that just as there were two Enfield Shaker villages in different states, so, too, there were two Watervliet Shaker villages, the one in Ohio being named after the village in New York.

into a recruitment center just as Niskeyuna had been for such as Valentine Rathbun. Potential converts were attracted by stories to come visit. They were offered a meal, lodging, and enveloped into the community of Shakers. The Shakers claimed spiritual gifts, including their shaking, and insisted that all who would be saved must join them.<sup>40</sup>

Among those who converted was Jemima Blanchard. She had heard about the Shakers from friends. Their accounts “affected my feelings so,” as she said in a subsequent account, that she thought the Shakers “were the only people of God.” Finally she went to the Shakers’ headquarters in Harvard, the Square House, to meet these remarkable people in person. The person who made the strongest impression on her was Ann Lee.

Mother [i.e., Ann Lee] was in the kitchen washing herself. She turned and looked at me with such a pleasant heavenly countenance, that it absorbed my whole soul, so that I scarcely heard what my companions said to me. She took me by the arm and said, “Will thou be a daughter of Zion, and be searched as Jerusalem with candles?” I answered not, for I knew not what to say. Her voice seemed to me to be like the voice of God.<sup>41</sup>

Ann Lee’s power over Jemima was such that Jemima was persuaded first to stay the night, then not to go home the next day, then to stay and become a Shaker.

As yet another New Light sect, the Shakers found themselves competing with other New Light sects for converts. In Harvard, they took over an existing millenarian perfectionist sect which practiced celibacy and whose leader, Shadrach Ireland, had died in 1778. The Shakers at Canterbury were converted from being Free Will Baptists. In

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<sup>40</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 27-39. Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 89, argues that Shaker hospitality was crucial to their expansion.

<sup>41</sup> Morse, *The Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 30-31.

New Gloucester, the Shakers, Free Will Baptists, and Universalists all successfully competed for converts. The Free Will Baptists, unhappy with this competition, went so far as to call for a day of fasting and prayer in 1784 to combat the Shakers.<sup>42</sup>

Not every visitor was favorably inclined to the Shakers. Some roundly rejected this new-fangled sect, and were willing to resort to violence to demonstrate their disapproval. New Light leaders had met with violence at the hands of the Old Lights before, and the Shakers came into their share along the way. The mission of the three Shaker leaders seems to have been particularly troubled by violence. No doubt part of the opposition was because they were English and pacifists at a time when the outcome of the Revolution was not certain. But the religious uncertainty must have also contributed to the use of violence. One of the worst incidents happened at Harvard, where Jemima Blanchard met Ann Lee. Harvard's religious situation was very unsettled. The Congregationalists were without a minister, a breakaway Baptist group had just formed, and the followers of the recently deceased prophet Shadrach Ireland were looking for a new leader. The Shakers' success in converting people, especially Ireland's sect, enraged locals. At one point in 1783 a mob seized William Lee and James Whitaker, took them away, and whipped and beat them bloody. The abuse that William Lee and Ann Lee suffered in their travels may have shortened their lives, for both died the next year.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land: A Community Portrait* (Harvard, Mass. The Harvard Common Press, 1982), chap. 3; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 37-38. Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 85-86, 100, 104, 126.

<sup>43</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 65, 91-92. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 22-25, 32; Morse, *Shakers*, p. 35-39.

Not everyone who visited the Shakers in these early years was looking for a new faith or rejecting a blasphemous cult. Even in these early years, some who visited were just curious, looking for new experiences. Among them was a young man named William Plumer. Plumer (1759 – 1850) came from a prosperous farming family, studied law, and became a prominent New Hampshire politician. Before he became a lawyer, he had been caught up in the New Light revival and become a Baptist lay preacher, only to subsequently lose faith in Christianity after about eighteen months and become a Deist. It was as a Deist that he ventured to visit the Harvard Shakers in 1782 and the New Hampshire Shakers in 1783.<sup>44</sup> His account of those visits demonstrates both the tenor of his critical thinking and the nature of Shakerism in its early days.

“Last week I paid the Shakers a visit at Harvard. I was received with civility and treated with kindness. I did not contradict them, but candidly and moderately inquired of their origin and progress, their tenets and practice. . . . Anne Lee . . . is the famous matron known as ‘The Elect Lady.’ . . . She frequently removes from town to town, and constantly sends forth ‘laborers’ as she calls them, to preach and teach her religion to the world. In some towns mobs have abused and insulted them; this they call persecution, and a proof of their being the true followers of that religion which is not of this world.

“. . . They are very kind and attentive to strangers, so long as they have any prospect of converting them to their faith; but as soon as a man contradicts, or asks questions hard to answer, they become sullen, — pronounce him ‘damned,’ and avoid his company. Like the ancient Church, they consist principally of the lower class of people . . . They were formerly of different sects, but chiefly of those called ‘New Lights’ . . . They affirm that they have the spirit of discerning and gift of prophesy . . .

“They generally assemble every evening, and frequently continue their exercises till after midnight. I went with them one evening to their meeting, and though they had cautioned me against being surprised at their worship, yet their conduct was so wild and extravagant that it was some time before I could believe my own senses. About thirty of them assembled . . . for dancing. . . . Some had their eyes steadily fixed upward, continually reaching out and drawing in their arms and

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<sup>44</sup> William Plumer, Jr., *Life of William Plumer* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1856), p. 24-40.

lifting up first one foot, then the other, about four inches from the floor. Near the centre of the room stood two young women, one of them very handsome, who whirled round and round for the space of fifteen minutes, nearly as fast as the rim of a spinning-wheel in quick motion. The violent whirl produced so much wind as kept her clothes as round and straight as though fastened to a hoop. As soon as she left whirling she entered the dance, and danced gracefully. . . . At other times some were shaking and trembling, other [*sic*] singing words out of the Psalms . . . while others were speaking in what they called 'the unknown tongue,' — to me an unintelligible jargon . . . At other times the whole assembly would shout as with one voice, with one accord. . . .

"I have lately paid a visit to the Shakers who reside in New Hampshire. . . . They say their number in America is now near 7,000,<sup>45</sup> and that in three years their religion will universally prevail throughout North America and Great Britain . . . and in ten years their religion will prevail with all nations. . . .

"These Elders preach up the exploded doctrine of having all things in common . . . Their 'church' consists of seven or eight persons only; no person can be a member of it till he is perfectly free from all sin and impurity; that these are more pure than angels, and can never sin . . . they will never be subject to death, unless to violent death from the hands of wicked men, as Christ was. . . . They say that those who are of their society, but not of the Church, and under the operation of the divine Spirit, begotten, but not born again. . . .<sup>46</sup>

Judging from his account, Plumer seems to have had no interest in converting to Shakerism, just an intellectual curiosity to understand them, the same intellectual curiosity that had led him into Deism. His account was filled with details. He correctly noted the main elements of the Shaker faith: communalism, confession, obedience to the elders, and belief in the special role of Ann Lee, as well as the prominent role of dancing. He also noted beliefs in the imminence of the Millennium and the possibility of perfectionism (that is, having such perfect belief that one no longer sins or is subject to

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<sup>45</sup> Probably a gross overstatement; the true number was probably closer to 1,000. Plumer expressed skepticism about the number of Shakers and their likelihood of taking over the world.

<sup>46</sup> F. B. Sanborn, ed., "The Original Shaker Communities in New England. (From the Plumer Papers)," *New England Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly*, n.s., vol. 22, no. 3 (May, 1900), p. 303-09.

“the wages of sin” including death), beliefs that would gradually die out among the Shakers. Generally his account was neutral, save when he characterizes the Shakers as demanding that one give up use of one’s reason, an element of the faith he condemns, understandably given his own religious development.<sup>47</sup>

Plumer was an early curiosity seeker among the visitors to the Shakers. Unlike the converts or the apostates, he was remarkably neutral in his appraisal of the sect, probably because he had no vital religious interest in examining them. Yet, like the religious seeker, his quest was about the Shakers as they defined themselves: a religious group with specific beliefs and practices. For the early converts, apostates, and curiosity seekers, the Shakers defined the nature of the interactions between themselves and their visitors.

#### **Close of the Shakers’ founding era**

The first period of Shaker expansion, when their visitors were usually religious seekers, came to a close not long after the three leaders returned from their tour of southern New England. First William Lee died on July 21, 1784, to be followed to the grave by his sister Ann, on September 8. The Shakers turned to the remaining member of that missionary triumvirate, Father James Whitaker, to take over the role of leader. He, in turn, would die on July 20, 1787. Within three years, the Shakers had lost the most important of the original English members.<sup>48</sup>

Father James took several measures that started the transformation of the Shakers from a scattered group of people into a society of religious communities. He seems to

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; Plumer, *Life of William Plumer*, p. 24-40.

<sup>48</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 32, 36.

have been concerned with reinforcing the faith of the existing Shakers. To that end, he encouraged the Shakers to gather together and hold property in common. He was also concerned with protecting them from the rising hostility they provoked. Closing off the missionary effort served both purposes.<sup>49</sup> Finally, he had the Shakers in New Lebanon put up a house of worship made for the purpose, demonstrating that, at New Lebanon at least, the Shakers were here to stay.<sup>50</sup>

Upon Whitaker's death, the mantle of leadership fell to Joseph Meacham of New Lebanon, one of the earliest converts from the New Lights. It would be Father Joseph who would found the Shaker villages as institutions of the Gospel Order, inaugurating the next phase in the history of the Shakers and their visitors.

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<sup>49</sup> This did not mean that the Shakers refused to accept converts, just that they did not actively spread the word outside of their communities.

<sup>50</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 111; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 34-36. The large building identified today as the meeting house at Mount Lebanon (which is what the village was renamed in 1861) is not Whittaker's, but a later structure.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONSTRUCTING A WORK-A-DAY SANCTUARY (1787-1842)

*The Shakers have the oldest existing communistic societies on this continent. – Charles Nordhoff, 1875*<sup>51</sup>

A casual contemporary tourist is more likely to visit the site of the Shaker village at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, than that of Watervliet, New York. The Watervliet museum has only two buildings open, is tucked into a state institution, and is wedged in between an interstate highway and an airport. The non-profit organization that runs it as a museum does not advertise extensively. Pleasant Hill, in contrast, is a village apart, sitting amidst the blue grass fields of Kentucky, offering more than a dozen buildings with costumed interpreters. The museum runs a bed and breakfast in one of the Shaker buildings, and restaurants in others. One can even take a boat ride at nearby Shaker Landing. The museum has a sizable advertising budget, large enough to recruit a “name” Hollywood actress to pitch the village in a video on their web site. Plainly, the museum at Pleasant Hill wishes to entertain its guests with recreational options as well as history. Indeed, Pleasant Hill’s role as a history museum is only the fifth item on the menu of web pages to greet the Internet visitor to their home page, after the inn, dining, recreation, and bringing a group.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States . . .* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 117. Strictly speaking, this claim is limited to Protestant societies.

<sup>52</sup> “Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill,” <http://www.shakervillageky.org/>, accessed May 7, 2009. The actress is Ashley Judd, whose family is identified with the state of Kentucky.

The village is laid out along the old main highway through the region. The tree-lined avenue provides shade for strollers to go visiting from one building to another, from watching a demonstration of Shaker women's textile work at the East Family Sisters' Shop, over to the Trustees' Office, where they can sit down to a meal. From there they can visit the grand Centre Family dwelling house and run across the lane to the Meeting House, where the interpreters will explain the Shaker religion and sing Shaker songs. Finally, a typical visitor will end up at the museum gift shop in the Carpenters' Shop, and still have more buildings to visit the next day.



**Figure 1: Pleasant Hill's central lane**



**Figure 2: Staircase at Pleasant Hill**

On a summer day, Pleasant Hill is a lovely spot. The highway has been rerouted around the village, so it's quite peaceful. One can sit in the shade and look down the road at all the fine buildings, or look out to the bluegrass fields stretching off in every direction. A place like Pleasant Hill must have been a powerful attraction to those considering becoming Shakers. That was part of the intention in building it.<sup>53</sup>

### **Creating the Shaker village**

One of the first people to see a Shaker village being built was Rev. Ezra Stiles (1727-1795). In 1786, Stiles was not just an Old Light Congregational<sup>54</sup> minister, but a famous scholar and President of Yale College. That fall, he was taking a month-long trip combining business and pleasure. He gave sermons and dined with friends. He stopped to visit the battlefields of Saratoga, New York and Bennington, Vermont from the recent War of Independence. He visited the resorts springs at Ballston, Saratoga, and Lebanon, all in New York, to try their waters and scientifically measure their temperatures. Lebanon Springs was only a few miles away from the New Lebanon congregation Joseph Meacham had brought into the Shakers. As Stiles recorded in his diary, he took a trip from Lebanon Springs to see the Shakers on October 15, 1786:

The Shakers have a Meetinghouse . . . about 40x50 feet. I entered it 10:30 A.M. & found them singing & dancing with all their strength, which continued till XI when they ceased dancing and retired standing in a semi-circle — then sang in a mixture of words & unknown sounds as of words, in a pretty solemn & melodious Tone for five Minutes: then two men preached or spoke for about a Quarter of an

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<sup>53</sup> This description of a visit is based in large part on the author's own visit in 2004, also the source for the two pictures.

<sup>54</sup> "Congregational," capitalized, refers to the Trinitarian Church that was heir to the Puritan faith. The term "congregation" without capitalization refers to an individual community's church members.

hour each on the increasing Dispensations of Light &c: then sang five min. & dismissed the Congregation just before Noon. There were about 80 or 90 Males Men & Boys and near as many Females. I pitied their Delusion.<sup>55</sup>

Reverend Stiles was one of the first members of “the World,” as Shakers referred to non-Shakers, to attend a public Shaker worship service in a Shaker meetinghouse built for the purpose. As mentioned in the previous chapter, James Whittaker, who had succeeded Ann Lee, had ordered the erection of the meetinghouse at New Lebanon in the previous year, 1785.

Under the direction of Whittaker and his successor, Joseph Meacham, the erection of the meetinghouse was a visible sign of a major change in strategy for the Shakers. In the years from 1780 to 1784, they had spread across New York and New England, capitalizing on the religious fervor of the people. Valentine Rathbun’s account, discussed in the previous chapter, well describes how the Shaker recruiting method relied on intense interaction with existing members. But these new converts were often left on their own, surrounded by neighbors who were hostile to their particular choice of faith. Whittaker and Meacham decided to pursue a strategy of consolidation, to preserve the faith of their new recruits and to protect them from the potential hostility of their neighbors.<sup>56</sup>

To preserve and strengthen their faith, the Shakers gathered themselves into communities of believers: the Shaker villages. Physically, the core of each new community was usually one or more farms owned by Shakers. They would then acquire

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<sup>55</sup> Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., President of Yale College* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), p. 240-43; quotation from p. 243. I have modernized the text in five places to comply with the university’s typeface uniformity standards for dissertations.

<sup>56</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 4; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 40-49.

surrounding land to support their members and to round out their holdings. The Shakers favored farms with good land. Hence it is not surprising that so many village sites remain attractive spots even today, for example, Enfield, New Hampshire along the shores of Lake Mascoma, Hancock on a plain nestled by the Taconic Hills, and of course Pleasant Hill in the bluegrass country. The Shakers also favored sites with good transportation. Major roads ran past many communities; Pleasant Hill even had a ferry landing nearby.<sup>57</sup>

Socially, the fundamental structure of the new community was the “family.” Although many early Shakers joined as entire families, the Shaker family was not made up of biologically related members. Instead, it was a group of men and women who lived and worked as a religious, economic, and social unit, owning and managing all their property communally. Each community had from one to eleven families. Each family had about 20 to 150 people, depending on Shaker success in gaining adherents and the past history of a village. The most religiously advanced members formed the Church or Center Family. Other families were often designated by their geographic relationship to the Church Family, such as the North Family at New Lebanon.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Martha Boice et al., *Maps of the Shaker West: A Journey of Discovery* (Dayton, O.: Knot Garden Press, 1997) offers maps and text to describe the acquisition and development of the western Shaker villages. Frederic J. Wood, *The Turnpikes of New England* (Pepperell, Mass. Branch Line Press, 1997), describes the Third Massachusetts, Union, and Fourth New Hampshire Turnpikes, which ran by Hancock, Harvard, and Enfield, N. H. Shaker villages, respectively. James W. Hooper, *The Shaker Communities of Kentucky: Pleasant Hill and South Union* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2006) includes pictures of the Pleasant Hill ferry landing on p. 91.

<sup>58</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 4; Stephen J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), entries on the various villages and on “Family.” Note that family names might change over time. Communities that never acquired sufficient land or believers to form families either moved to a more

With the gathering of believers into families and villages, the Shakers constructed a social and physical environment that reflected their beliefs. They believed that living and working together supported their faith, so they constructed residential buildings and work places on a scale suitable for their families. Shaker buildings were often much larger than those of nearby family farms. Two examples of large Shaker buildings that still dominate the landscape today are the Round Barn at Hancock and the Great Stone Dwelling House at Enfield, N.H., the latter said to have been the largest building in the United States north of Boston when it was constructed.

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successful community or became “out-families;” see Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 133. Apart from the black out-family in Philadelphia, there is very little scholarship on the out-families; for Philadelphia, see Jean McMahan Humez, ed., *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).



**Figure 3: Great Stone Dwelling House at right, Enfield Shaker Village**

Because they believed in celibacy, but not a complete separation of the sexes, they structured their buildings and laid out their villages to allow men and women to come together only for specific reasons. The sexes lived on opposite sides of the same buildings and used different staircases and doors. (In the above picture, the central windows on the front of the dwelling house mark the hallway separating the two sides.) They went to the meeting house through separate doors and sat on opposite sides of the central hall. They worked in different shops. These were often laid out to keep the men and women in different parts of the family's grounds. For example, at Canterbury, the men's shops were

closer to the road, the women's behind other buildings, thus providing an additional layer of protection for the sisters from the eyes of the World.<sup>59</sup>

Yet men and women were not entirely separate. They came together for worship. They ate meals together, though they ate in silence and segregated by sex. Women were responsible for the upkeep of men's clothing. The Shakers even scheduled a real social hour, the "union meetings," described in 1853 by the apostate Shaker Hervey Elkins as follows:

For the union meetings the brethren remain in their rooms, and the sisters, six, eight, or ten in number, enter and sit in a rank opposite to that of the brethren's, and converse simply, often facetiously, but rarely profoundly. In fact, to say 'agreeable things about nothing,' when conversant with the other sex, is as common there as elsewhere. And what of dignity or meaning could be said? Where talking of sacred subjects is not allowed, under the pretext that it scatters those blessings which should be carefully treasured up; and bestowing much information concerning the secular plans of economy practiced by your own to the other sex is not approved; and where to talk of literary matters would be termed bombastic pedantry and small display, and would serve to exhibit accomplishments which might be enticingly dangerous. Nevertheless, an hour passes away very agreeably and even rapturously with those who there chance to meet with an especial favorite; succeeded soon, however, when soft words, and kind, concentrated looks become obvious to the jealous eye of female espionage, by the agonies of a separation. For the tidings of such reciprocity, whether true or surmised, is sure before the lapse of many hours to reach the attention of the elders; in which case, one or the other party would be subsequently summoned to another circle of colloquy and union.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Andrews, *ibid.*; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 44-45, 98-99; Ellen-Rose Savulis, "Vision and Practice: Resistance and Dissent in Shaker Communities" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1998), chap. 3. Not every family practiced such rigorous geographic division of work, as a glance at the 1820 map of the Hancock Church family demonstrates; see Robert P. Emlen, *Shaker Village Views: Illustrated Maps and Landscape Drawings by Shaker Artists of the Nineteenth Century* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987), p. 40-41. In addition, note that the demands of agricultural work sometimes required men and women work together.

<sup>60</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 140-42. Quotation is from *ibid.*, p. 175-76, quoting Hervey Elkins, *Sixteen Years in the Senior Order of the Shakers: A Narrative of Facts Concerning that Singular People* (Hanover, N.H., 1853).

To manage these communities and unify the believers, Joseph Meacham instituted a hierarchy of leaders. It was a dual hierarchy in several ways. There were secular leaders, called deacons and deaconesses, and religious leaders, called elders and eldresses. There were separate but equal leaders for men and women, whose authority was normally limited to those of their own sex.<sup>61</sup> And many positions, especially the more senior ones, had a junior and senior occupant.<sup>62</sup>

The secular leadership was subordinate to the religious leadership, at least in theory. Indeed, *all* members owed absolute obedience to the religious leadership. The elders and eldresses heard the mandatory confessions, led worship, offered guidance, and appointed the subordinate officers of each community.<sup>63</sup>

There were three levels of religious leadership. Each family had its own elders and eldresses. Over them were the elders and eldresses of the bishopric, a grouping of families that always included at least one entire village, and often more. The Hancock bishopric, for example, included Hancock and Tyringham in western Massachusetts, and

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<sup>61</sup> A dominant figure such as Lucy Wright had the prestige to guide the Shakers as a whole. Later, when there were too few men to fill the leadership positions, women increasingly became the dominant figures.

<sup>62</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 63, "Elder and Eldress." Confessions were required upon joining the Shakers, and at least annually thereafter.

nearby Enfield, Connecticut. The ministry of the New Lebanon bishopric had authority over the other bishoprics, and was often referred to as the Central Ministry or Lead.<sup>64</sup>

Shaker nomenclature reflected the exalted position of the elders and eldersses. They, and they alone, were addressed by their titles. All other Shakers were addressed as “Brother” or “Sister,” as implied by previously quoted writing of Hervey Elkins. For example, Frederick Evans, the mid-nineteenth-century elder of North Family at New Lebanon, who will be mentioned frequently in later chapters, was known as Brother Frederick before he became an elder, and then as Elder Frederick once he assumed that post.<sup>65</sup> The early elders and eldersses were usually called “Father” and “Mother,” hence Mother Ann Lee and Father Joseph Meacham; however, this practice was forbidden for elders and eldersses appointed after Mother Lucy Wright’s death in 1821.<sup>66</sup>

One other office among the Shakers deserves special mention. While the Shakers held their property communally, they existed in a world of private property. Deacons were specifically appointed to hold title to the land and to conduct business dealings with the World. These were eventually called trustees. Like others, they were responsible to the religious leadership. Unfortunately, many became so extensively involved in financial

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36, “Central Ministry;” p. 145, “Ministry;” Deborah E. Burns, *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1993). The designation “Central Ministry” will be used hereafter as clear and in common use, though Paterwic notes that it was a *geographic* as much as a *hierarchical* designation when it came into use in 1893.

<sup>65</sup> He would have once again become Brother Frederick when he relinquished the eldership, although in his case that was less than three months before his death. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 69-72.

<sup>66</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 123-24.

dealings with the World by the mid-nineteenth century that they escaped effective supervision, leading to several financial setbacks for the Shakers.<sup>67</sup>

The gathering into villages offered the Shakers a radically different yet still familiar solution to the spiritual and secular problems of the hill country frontier. The revivals in those regions occurred because the settlers were looking for religious beliefs and leadership to meet their needs. The Shakers' post-millennialism and family elders supplied both. Indeed, the Shaker community reinforced belief constantly, through the company of other believers, the encouragement to work as a religious duty, and the frequency of regular religious services. Family and community structures had been battered by the migration to the frontier. The Shaker family structure, while not based on biological kinship, provided a replacement family, just as the Shaker village provided a replacement community. To summarize, the Shakers had used the radically different ideas of a millennium heralded by a female Christ, celibacy, sexual equality, and communal living to redefine the familiar concepts of Christianity, family, and community.<sup>68</sup>

In building their families and villages, the Shakers also developed an economically advantageous form of rural life over the World's family farms in the antebellum era. The large number of adults in a Shaker family were able to clear land and build accommodations faster than any single biological family, an advantage that was

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<sup>67</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 105-06; for the financial problems caused, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 143-48; DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, p. 181-82.

<sup>68</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 4, 6, 7, 9; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 148-153. For a discussion of the concepts of family and gender in this context, see Suzanne R. Thurman, "*O Sisters Ain't You Happy?*": *Gender, Family, and Community among the Harvard and Shirley Shakers, 1781-1918* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2002), "Introduction," chap. 2-3.

critical in frontier country. Once the land was under cultivation, the Shakers could practice economies of scale to make their farms more efficient than their neighbors. Many of the celebrated Shaker inventions and innovations were the result of Shakers thinking and experimenting with ways to conduct work more effectively or efficiently.<sup>69</sup>

To strengthen their faith and remove themselves from the World's hostility, the Shakers strove to live in isolation, apart from the World. Shaker villages sat apart at some distance from the communities of the World. Neither outsiders nor outside publications were allowed into Shaker communities except by permission of the Shaker elders. The Shakers even stopped sending out missions between 1785 and 1798.<sup>70</sup>

Yet the Shakers could not live completely apart from the World. Both their economic and spiritual orders required contact with non-Shakers. No farm or even village could be self-sufficient in antebellum America. Shakers had to trade for the metals, foods, and fabrics they could not produce themselves. To trade, they would need to grow surplus crops, or, later, engage in manufacturing goods for sale to "the World." Because theirs was a celibate faith, they could not expect to continue it by rearing their own

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<sup>69</sup> On clearing hill country land, see Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), chap. 2-5. On Shaker economic advantages, see John E. Murray and Metin M. Coşgel, "Between God and Market: Influence of Economy and Spirit on Shaker Communal Dairying, 1830-1875," *Social Science History* 23, no. 1 (Spring, 1999). On Shaker inventiveness, see Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 41-46, 98, 203-04; Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 16; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 133. To my knowledge there has been no systematic survey of the distance between Shaker villages and their neighbors. Tyringham, Massachusetts is usually cited as the Shaker village nearest a Worldly village, being one-and-one-half miles from its counterpart.

offspring. The converts were needed not only to keep the faith alive, but to keep the villages going. For without a steady stream of young men and women joining, the membership would age and be less able to carry out the hard labor necessary to keep the families productive. Finally, the Shakers had to comply with the World's laws, lobby legislatures when anti-Shaker measures were introduced, and circulate Shaker publications to attract interest.<sup>71</sup>

The Shakers were going to have to go out into the World, and they were going to have to let the World into their villages. To safeguard their faith and community, the Shakers placed strict controls on both processes. Shakers who went out into the World were expected to obey the rules of their faith and avoid entertainments of a un-Shaker-like spirit. When they returned, they underwent a ritual cleansing, including a confession, before being readmitted to their past status. Visitors to Shaker villages were expected to go to the Office building, where financial affairs with the outside world were conducted, and to transact their business there. Because the Office building was usually placed along a main road, visitors were thereby restricted to the margin of the village. They were not to venture further into the village unless given permission by the elders. According to one analysis, the Shakers even arranged the buildings within the village in such a way that the

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<sup>71</sup> Murray, "Between God and Market;" Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 6, 7; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 135. Apostates created several of the political problems requiring the Shakers to work with local and state governments; see DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*.

women, presumably in the most danger from passing strangers, were shielded from the World by having their work placed away from the roads and Office building.<sup>72</sup>

There was one other place in the village that the Shakers created to receive visitors. This was the meetinghouse. The meetinghouse was important to Shaker villages as a place of worship for themselves. Hence one was usually built early in the development of each village; at New Lebanon, it was the very first building the Shakers erected. But it also was used to attract the public and bring in potential converts. To accommodate these two functions, Shaker meetinghouses had an unusual design. Like the Office building, they were located along the main road, as at Pleasant Hill, or at the end of the village, as at Canterbury. This helped keep visitors away from the rest of the village. The meetinghouses were large buildings, meant to accommodate up to five hundred or more Shakers and visitors. The greatest part of the building was a large hall without any supporting pillars or other subdivisions. Visitors were segregated by sex and entered through separate doorways, to sit on benches built along opposite walls. The Shakers also entered segregated by sex, and sat on movable benches, which they could remove from the center of the hall when they danced as part of worship. Father Joseph Meacham instituted group dancing during his years in the Central Ministry, and they

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<sup>72</sup> “Millennial Laws,” Western Reserve Historical Society Shaker Collection microfilms (hereafter WRHS), I.B.37; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 151; Savulis, “Vision and Practice,” chap. 3; Emlen, *Shaker Village Views*, offers the Shakers’ own view of their village layouts. Because each family conducted its own business as a rule, there could be multiple Office buildings in each village.

became a regular part of Shaker worship. The dances were one important reason the meetinghouses had such large halls without interior obstructions.<sup>73</sup>

Shaker villages were the result of careful planning, hard work, and religious zeal. They were created by Shaker order, and they helped create Shaker order. The villages were created as instruments of the Shakers, but they eventually became part of the essence of Shaker life, in the eyes of believers and the World alike.

### **Expanding into the Midwest**

By 1798, the Shakers had finished gathering in their members. Eleven Shaker villages, with a population of almost 1400, were scattered across the northeastern United States: two in Maine, two in New Hampshire, four across Massachusetts, one in Connecticut, and two in New York. The Central Ministry had survived the death of Father Joseph Meacham in 1796, with Mother Lucy Wright providing continuity and leadership right up until her death in 1821. Mother Lucy had even reopened the Shaker testimony in 1799 to actively recruit new members. Mother Lucy's decision was very timely, because the start of the Second Great Awakening was to give the Shakers their second great period of expansion.<sup>74</sup>

The Second Great Awakening began with a series of revivals that struck Kentucky and adjacent states in 1797-1801. Like the New England hill country before the New Light revivals, Kentuckians previously had few ministers to cater to their spiritual needs.

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<sup>73</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 51-53, chap. 4, 7; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 34, 35, 99; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 141-42, "Meeting House;" locations of meetinghouses at Canterbury and Pleasant Hill confirmed by observation.

<sup>74</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 215; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 48-54.

Many of them were Scottish or Scotch-Irish, traditionally Presbyterian. Their congregational communion services had a revival tradition of their own from the old country. That tradition played a significant part in the camp meeting and revivals, including the most famous one, at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801.<sup>75</sup>

Just as the New Light revivals had split the Congregationalists, so, too, did the Presbyterians split over the Kentucky revivals. The emphasis on the emotional experience of receiving the spirit and on the “physical exercises” or “jerks” that convulsed so many was contrary to the Presbyterian’s equal emphasis on emotion *and* intellect in conversion. Many of the newly awakened Christians went over to the Methodists and Baptists, who were competing with the Presbyterians in Kentucky and had a more emotional texture to their worship. The more extreme ministers saw great hope in the “jerks” and visions of the revival, and adopted an Arminian theology (rejecting Calvinist predestination, as had their New Light predecessors). They broke away entirely from any established church. Among them was Richard McNemar, of Scotch-Irish heritage, who moved over to minister to a congregation in Ohio, after being accused of heresy by the Presbyterian Kentucky Synod in 1802.<sup>76</sup> To McNemar, the revivals were a crucial religious event:

But the *Kentucky Revival*, from the beginning, spoke better things. Those who were the genuine subjects of it, ever expressed the fullest confidence that it would not terminate as revivals had generally done. . . . It was the near prospect of the

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<sup>75</sup> Paul K. Conklin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

true kingdom of God, into which many were determined to press at the expense of all that they held dear upon earth.<sup>77</sup>

The events in Kentucky set off a wave of revivals that spread across the United States. By 1802, they had reached New England. The Shakers, once again actively seeking converts, scored some minor successes in New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York.<sup>78</sup>

Their successes in the East encouraged the Shakers to send three missionaries to the West at the very beginning of 1805. The missionaries first encountered revivalists having the “jerks” in Tennessee, but it was in Turtle Creek, Ohio that the Shaker missionaries made their first converts. Among those first converts were Richard McNemar, his wife, and their children. McNemar saw the Shakers as fulfilling the promise of the Kentucky Revival, bringing in the “true kingdom of God” to be won “at the expense of all they held dear on earth.” He became a powerful spokesperson for the Shakers in the West. From their base in Turtle Creek (eventually renamed Union Village), the Shakers fanned out along the lands bordering the Ohio River, founding Watervliet in Ohio (named after the New York Shaker village), Pleasant Hill and South Union in Kentucky, and West Union in Indiana, all by 1807.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Richard M’Nemar, *The Kentucky Revival, or, A Short History . . .* (Albany: E. and E. Hosford, 1808), p. vi-vii. McNemar’s surname was rendered several different ways, even by himself, in his lifetime.

<sup>78</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 70-71. The New State village in Savoy, Massachusetts, which briefly became a Shaker village between 1816 and 1819, might be classified as the last product of this revival in New England.

<sup>79</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 72-73; Cheryl Bauer and Rob Portman, *Wisdom’s Paradise: The Forgotten Shakers of Union Village* (Wilmington, O.: Orange Frazer

This expansion was not unopposed, any more than the previous Shaker expansion in the Northeast. The religious divisions that emerged after the Cane Ridge revivals spilled over into a bitter pamphlet war. The Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all tried to take credit for the revivals, and condemned each other as well as the new upstarts such as the Shakers and Disciples of Christ. Barton Stone, a founder of the Disciples of Christ, called the Shakers “our bitter enemies,” though he had once stood with Richard McNemar in seceding from the Presbyterian Kentucky Synod. The Methodist Peter Cartwright, self-described “backwoods preacher,” described the beliefs of Stone and McNemar as a “*trash trap*,” and rejoiced in converting eighty-seven Shakers at West Union from their “dreadful delusion.” And McNemar published his pamphlet *The Kentucky Revival* in part to justify his position against his former allies.<sup>80</sup>

So pleased were the eastern Shakers with the western expansion that they repeatedly sent money to help the western Shakers develop villages like those in the east. They also sent two of their best, the first elder and eldress of the Church family of New Lebanon, to provide spiritual leadership for the new western bishopric. Mother Ruth Farrington would be first eldress in the west until she died in 1821; Father David Darrow

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Press, 2004), chap. 1, 2; Boice, *Maps of the Shaker West* is a very handy book to use in tracking these developments.

<sup>80</sup> Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, chap. 2-3; Barton Warren Stone, *Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. James, 1847), p. 61-64; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, and Co., 1862), p. 8, 18; McNemar, *Kentucky Revival*. Conkin, *ibid.*, p. 97, fn. 22, claims that the accounts of Cane Ridge by the leading preachers are the least reliable, due to their self-justification.

(for whom the private school now at Mount Lebanon is named) would be first elder in the west until his death in 1825.<sup>81</sup>

By the end of 1807, the Shakers had expanded about as far as they ever would. In the next twenty years, the western Shakers would add two more villages in Ohio, Whitewater and North Union, while closing West Union in Indiana. In the east, the Shakers would send out missionaries to the “burnt-over” district of New York, famed for its numerous revivals, and establish one more village, Sodus Bay. Except for a short-lived effort to establish Shaker communities in the South at the end of the nineteenth century, those would be the limits of the geographical expansion of Shaker villages. The Shakers had settled in. To visit the Shakers, there were only so many places to go, and they were all in the Midwest and Northeast.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. chap. 1, 2, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 52-53; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 112-13, 126. West Union was poorly situated and prone to epidemics. On Sodus Bay's relocation to Groveland and the Florida communities, see Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 147-49, 197, 239-40.

## CHAPTER 3

### SPECTATORS OF THE SACRED (1787-1842)

Anyone interested in Shaker history should go to Mount Lebanon (originally called New Lebanon<sup>83</sup>). Here the Shakers made their headquarters in the years after Mother Ann Lee's death, and here it would remain until the village closed in 1947. There are probably more visitor accounts written about Mount Lebanon than any other Shaker village. For the village was near the community of Lebanon Springs, a popular resort for many decades in the nineteenth century.

Mount Lebanon is nestled in the Taconic Hills, among the rural villages of the Hudson River valley. Many tourists in earlier days approached the Shaker community from Lebanon Springs. There is little sign today that Lebanon Springs was once a resort for fashionable people. It looks like any other rural town in upstate New York. The biggest building these days is not a hotel for people "taking the waters," but a twentieth-century school. Still, it is a convenient place to pick up the road to Mount Lebanon. One heads up the main road into the Taconic Range for a few miles. In the old days, the main road used to run through the Shaker village. But the engineers of the twentieth century have routed the main road a bit to the north. One has to turn off on to a side road, now called Darrow Road, to get to Mount Lebanon.

Immediately, one is enveloped by forest. Off to the left, the trees rise up a steep grade, forming a barricade in that direction. To the right, the ground is covered in brush and small trees, and slopes away gradually. Then the ruins of a building appear on the

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<sup>83</sup> The name changed due to the establishment of a post office in the village called "Mount Lebanon" in 1861.

right. It was the Shaker's North Family stone barn, five stories tall, but reduced since a fire in 1972 to its four walls, supported by metal braces. Beyond the barn, the land opens up on the right, where several wooden Shaker buildings stand. These were the North Family buildings once. They have become a Shaker museum, but the museum's ongoing financial difficulties have meant that the buildings have not been open to visitors in recent years, and they look a trifle worse for the wear. Still, the lot nearby makes a convenient place to park. It is not likely to be crowded, as few visitors stop to stay and look around.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Barn fire: Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 138. Unless otherwise noted, the rest of this present-day survey is based on personal experience.



**Figure 4: North Family barn ruins**

From the museum, one can often hear the sound of running water. A short walk across another side road and up a slope reveals a dammed pond. This is a remnant of what was once an extensive system of storage and transportation that provided drinking water and hydraulic power to the village buildings. Similar systems existed in many other villages, though finding traces of them can be difficult.<sup>85</sup>

If one heads back to Darrow Road and continues along from where one first turned off, the forest pulls back from both sides of the road and reveals a large number of handsome brick and wooden buildings on both sides of the highway. Many of these used to be the Church Family buildings. Among them is the second Shaker meetinghouse with its distinctive barrel roof, built in 1824.<sup>86</sup> These buildings are now part of the campus of the Darrow School, a private boarding school. The Shakers preferred selling their villages to people who could put them to morally good uses, which explains why much of Watervliet is a nursing home and Mount Lebanon a school. Like the Ann Lee Home of Watervliet, the Darrow School is named after a prominent Shaker, the elder who helped found and governed the Shaker communities in Ohio and Kentucky from 1805 to 1825.<sup>87</sup>

Thanks to the Darrow School, the most common visitors to Mount Lebanon Shaker village are not tourists, but pupils, parents, and teachers. The Darrow School is

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<sup>85</sup> Present-day tours of Hancock identify some pieces of the water system for that village. For Canterbury, see David R. Starbuck, *Neither Plain nor Simple: New Perspectives on the Canterbury Shakers* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2004), chap. 2. For Union Village, note Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 171-72. For Pleasant Hill, see Hooper, *Shaker Communities*, p. 49.

<sup>86</sup> Hence, not the one Ezra Stiles visited in 1786.

<sup>87</sup> On David Darrow, see Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 32-34, 61, 77-79, 90; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 60, 110-11.

aware of its Shaker heritage (with that name, how could it not be?), but it is running a school, not a tourist destination, and asks Shaker enthusiasts not to disrupt school activities.

Beyond the Darrow School, Chair Factory Road goes off to the right, recalling the principal location at which Shaker chairs were made. But the factory is long gone, burned down in 1923. The most obvious Shaker structure left on that road is a cemetery with a single stone labeled “SHAKERS:” one stone to represent the collective graves of a Shaker village.<sup>88</sup> The Darrow Road continues on to a Sufi ashram, which also has several Shaker buildings. But there the road dead-ends, the piece reconnecting it to the main highway having been closed off for years. A visitor wanting to travel into Massachusetts to nearby Hancock Shaker village will have to turn around and drive back to the highway.<sup>89</sup>

### **Village visitors**

Reverend Ezra Stiles had been one of the first visitors to take the road from Lebanon Springs and see the Shakers at worship in their new meetinghouse in 1786. He observed the Shakers singing and dancing and listened to a Shaker sermon or two on their theology. His experience was typical of many visitors to come. He had come up from the Springs, knew something about the Shakers before visiting them, saw the Shakers at worship, and indicated his disapproval of their religion.

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<sup>88</sup> There are almost certainly other Shaker cemeteries nearby, unmarked.

<sup>89</sup> On the factory fire, see M. Stephen Miller, *From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands: A Survey of the Industries* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2007), p. 144.

Stiles had been touring the several springs in upstate New York. These springs became the first major resorts for American tourists as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth. They were not only attractions in their own right, but also a convenient stopping place on the Great Northern Tour up the Hudson and over to Niagara. The fashionable people stopped at the springs, perhaps to take the waters for a cure, but more likely to socialize, to see and be seen. While Lebanon Springs never acquired the prestige of Saratoga Springs, or even Ballston Springs, it did attract a fair share of tourists coming up the Hudson in the antebellum years. Once there, a side trip to New Lebanon became commonplace. In consequence, there were more than twice as many visitor accounts published about New Lebanon between 1787 and 1842 than there were for Watervliet. Many specifically mention arriving via Lebanon Springs.<sup>90</sup>

Stiles was an informed visitor, in fact probably better informed than most, as he had met the Shakers before. Back in 1781 he had passed through Harvard and noted how Mother Ann Lee had taken over the followers of a previous prophet located in that town.<sup>91</sup> Besides that personal acquaintance with them, he had read Valentine Rathbun's account, and spoken with other visitors to New Lebanon. As a Congregational minister, he could be expected to understand and disagree with the basic elements of Shaker faith.

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<sup>90</sup> On the springs and the Great Northern Tour, see Richard H. Gassan, *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790 – 1830* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008). On visitor accounts for New Lebanon and Watervliet, see Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*.

<sup>91</sup> The prophet was Shadrach Ireland, who had also enjoined his followers to celibacy. Ireland died in 1780. The building his followers erected, the Square House, became the Shaker headquarters in Harvard when Mother Ann converted his followers in 1781. See Thurman, "*O Sisters Ain't You Happy?*," p. 12-13.

Whether Stiles knew or understood any details of their faith beyond the basics is another matter. His account gives no indication that he talked to the Shakers at any length about their beliefs. Nor could he have read any theological work published by the Shakers, since they did not offer any statement of their faith in print until 1790.<sup>92</sup>

While not every visitor came with as much information as Ezra Stiles, visitor accounts indicate they generally did know something about the Shakers. The Marquis de Lafayette, who had fought on the side of the Patriots in the American revolution, stopped by to see people thrown into religious convulsions when he visited Watervliet in 1784. Moses Guest stopped by the same place in 1796 “[h]aving heard various accounts of the very singular mode of worship practiced by the people called Shaking Quakers . . .” A tourist attraction has to become known as a tourist attraction before many people will visit. Shaker villages were already well known as attractions, at least in New England and New York, by the late 1780s.<sup>93</sup>

### **Dancing before the Lord, dancing before the World**

Reverend Stiles had attended the Shakers’ public service in their meetinghouse on a Sunday. That was the most common visitor experience of the Shakers. If there was one element of that worship that stood out for most of them, it was the dancing. Elkanah

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<sup>92</sup> Stiles, *Literary Diary*, vol. 2, p. 509-11, 558; vol. 3, p. 225. For Stiles’s life, I have consulted John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 20, p. 771-72.

<sup>93</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 15, 24.

Watson, a notable progressive farmer who founded the Berkshire Agricultural Society, visited the Shakers in New Lebanon in 1790, and left the following account.<sup>94</sup>

. . . The men advanced to the church in procession, in an Indian file; all entered at the same door, and took their seats on the right side of the building. The women entered at another door, and occupied seats on the left side . . . There were about sixty of each sex.

The spectators were arranged on benches against the wall, facing an open area appropriated to the dancing. At the word, the Shakers formed into solid masses, of a triangular form; the brethren in one column, and the sisters in another. One of the Elders then advancing to the front, addressed first the spectators, soliciting silence and decorum — and then the fraternity, exhorting them to keep in their own path, exhibiting the outer world as lost, but that the Shakers are sure of entering the straight and narrow way which led to life eternal. He was grossly ignorant, had a hoarse and unpleasant voice, but spoke with much animation.

. . . The discourse finished, the Elder ordered them ‘to prepare to labor, in the name of the Lord.’ At once they broke their ranks; the men stript off their coats, the women divested themselves of all superfluous articles of dress. They then re-formed in the same order with the celerity and exactness of a military column.

The day was hot. Two or three Elders commenced a strange cadence, in hollow guttural voices, rendered into a sort of dancing tune. The whole mass — men, women, and children, old and young, black and white, began to dance or rather move most awkwardly, raising their right knee high up, and dropping on the balls of their feet, the left foot performing a short up and down motion; all advancing and retiring three or four steps, and at every turn of the tune, whirling around with three steps. It seemed to me very like the movement of boys at school, in former days, when punished by stepping the bare feet upon a hot stove. Among the women were some tall oaks, some shriveled dwarfs, and some young saplings. Their white capped heads of various heights, bobbing up and down in the maze of the dance, had a queer and ridiculous appearance.

Although friendly to religious toleration in its widest latitude, I was disgusted and sickened at heart in contemplating the revolting scene. My aversion was excited in witnessing the dignity of man debased, and his destiny perverted by this strange fanaticism. I was distressed by this solemn mockery, but felt no disposition to laugh or sneer. . . .<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> On Watson, see Birdsall, *Berkshire County*, p. 173ff.

<sup>95</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 135-36.

Watson's disgust with the Shakers' worship was by far the more common reaction in visitor accounts in this era. That disgust was based on two different views of dancing that came together in the late eighteenth century. First, the Puritans had opposed dancing in mixed company on Biblical grounds, arguing that dancing was invented by the devil, that it was disorderly, provoked lust, was of ill repute, and not conducive to the solemnity and gravity of good Christian behavior. Second, the New Lights accepted the argument of the revivalist George Whitefield that dancing was a frivolous worldly activity that distracted Christians from directing their thoughts on God and the next life. Dancing was a worldly pleasure of the body that debased the dancer.<sup>96</sup>

This opposition to dancing was not universal in the new United States. Puritanism had little effect on the attitudes of Americans outside of New England (and those parts of New York settled by New Englanders, such as New Lebanon). In the South, the dominant tradition among white settlers identified dancing with the arts cultivated by gentlemen and ladies. This attitude had even seeped north during the eighteenth century; by the 1740s, there were enough dancing masters and schools in New England to serve as targets of George Whitefield's wrath.<sup>97</sup>

Given that New Lights generally opposed dancing, it seems paradoxical that so many accepted Shakerism. What made Shaker dancing acceptable was that it was a spiritual activity. Ecstatic dancing by individual Shakers was a mark of spiritual rapport with God. The later group dances were a "laboring," striving for the spirit. Even Increase

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<sup>96</sup> Ann Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance: From the Puritans to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 50-55, 84-90.

<sup>97</sup> Ann Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance*, chap. 4.

Mather had accepted that the Old Testament contained examples of single-sex dancing as religious worship. The Shakers knew and cited such Biblical passages, even referring to them in their songs, as in this one from 1835,

Come life, Shaker life,  
Come life eternal,  
Shake, shake out of me  
All that is carnal.  
I'll take nimble steps  
I'll be a David  
I'll shew Michal twice  
How he behaved.<sup>98</sup>

The Biblical reference, to 2 Samuel 6, was most appropriate in the eyes of the Shakers. Like David, they would earn honor in the eyes of the Lord by dancing, while carping critics such as Elkanah Watson would be cursed, as Michal was cursed for criticizing David.

### **Theological conflicts**

Neither Reverend Ezra Stiles nor Elkanah Watson approved of the Shakers. Stiles condemned their delusions, while Watson thought them “debased” and “perverted.” Strong terms, but typical from visitor accounts of this period. Indeed, most visitors’ accounts published in the antebellum period harshly criticized Shaker worship.<sup>99</sup> Scholars of Shaker life, such as the indefatigable bibliographer Mary Richmond, have noted this

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<sup>98</sup> Sabbathday Lake Shakers and Joel Cohen, *Simple Gifts: Shaker Chants and Spirituals* (1995), p. 22. Ann Wagner, *Adversaries of the Dance*, p. 50.

<sup>99</sup> Ezra Stiles’s account was not among these, as it would not be published until the twentieth century.

critical attitude, but have generally explained it as the result of ignorance and pre-existing sentiments, and left it at that.<sup>100</sup>

As noted above, the idea that visitors were ignorant does not stand up when analyzing their accounts. Visitors who took the trouble to write and publish accounts of their visits may not have known the details of Shaker faith and practice, but they did generally know something about them. Otherwise they would have had no reason to come visiting. Admittedly, some of what they knew probably came from unfavorable sources, such as Valentine Rathbun's account, as was the case with Stiles. Even so, most visitor accounts that go into detail refer to specific Shaker actions and speeches to explain their repulsion. Ignorance fails as an explanation for visitor hostility to the Shakers.

Pre-existing sentiments explain most of the hostility. Visitors disliked the Shakers because of their theology, their religious practices, especially the dancing in worship, and the social status of their membership.

Ezra Stiles was typical in objecting to the Shakers on all three grounds. As an "Old Light," a Congregationalist who persisted in adhering to the Calvinism of the Puritan church, Stiles rejected the Shakers for the same reason they appealed to some of the New Lights: their belief that each person's salvation was in their own hands. Stiles himself had flirted with such Arminian notions in his youth; his personal rejection of such New Light ideas no doubt fueled his disapproval of other people who accepted them. In rejecting their doctrines, Stiles also rejected Shaker practices designed to bring the

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<sup>100</sup> For Richmond, see quotation on page 1. Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, restricts her comments to individual accounts. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 3-10, adds the desire to preserve status to the motives of visitor.

individual's inner light into communion with God, such as their dancing. He regarded their visions as workings of Satan. Nor did he have a high opinion of the Shakers as people. Stiles was a respected member of society and a noted scholar, the president of Yale College in fact. The New Lights, on the other hand, were generally regarded as backwoods riff-raff by the Old Lights, even though they included men of property. In labeling the Shakers he saw at New Lebanon as mostly being former New Light Baptists from Rhode Island (where he had preached a decade before), Stiles was not so much making a statement of fact, as conveying his judgment on them. Since it is likely that most of the New Lebanon Shakers of that period were from the communities near New Lebanon, not Rhode Island, Stiles was letting his dislike of the New Lights get the better of his judgment.<sup>101</sup>

Elkanah Watson may not have been the theological scholar the Reverend Ezra Stiles was, but he, too, rejected the Shakers for their theology, their practices, and their social status. Like Stiles, he thought their faith a delusion, rejected their dancing as a form of worship, and thought the elder preaching to be "grossly ignorant." To top off these criticisms, Watson also noted that the absolute obedience the members owed to the elders gave the latter a "despotic power" over the membership, certainly a sensitive point in the new American republic.<sup>102</sup>

It was in that same year of Watson's visit, 1790, that the Shakers published their first theological publication, *A Concise Statement of the Principles of the Only True*

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<sup>101</sup> Garraty, *American National Biography*, vol. 20, p. 771-72; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 95-98; Stiles, *Literary Diary*, vol. 2, p. 509-10; vol. 3, p. 209, 243.

<sup>102</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 135-37.

*Church*. Valentine Rathbun had accused the Shakers of revealing their beliefs only gradually. *A Concise Statement* seems to bear him out. The tract offers a view of history based on successive dispensations of God's word and hopes of salvation to mankind, a concept that would have been familiar to contemporaries.<sup>103</sup> Ann Lee's role, the requirement for celibacy, the need for confession, and the entire gospel order of the villages are all missing from that document. It is possible that the Shakers felt those beliefs were unnecessary in an initial statement, or that they withheld the more controversial beliefs out of fear of discouraging religious seekers. It is even possible that Shaker theology was still evolving.<sup>104</sup>

Despite any Shaker reticence, enough information came out through the speech and writings of apostates and visitors that an anonymous individual could publish an account of the history and theology of the sect in 1795. The author was hostile to the Shakers, not surprising since the account appeared in an Old Light periodical, the bimonthly *Theological Magazine*. He echoed Valentine Rathbun, whom he had probably read, by likening the Shakers to Roman Catholics. His sources were of uneven reliability. He correctly identified Talmage Bishop as one of the first converts, but referred to the Shaker founder as "Jane Lees." He noted the requirement for confession, but stated that it had to be done in public, a "humiliation." Nevertheless, his summary of Shaker theology

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<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Ezra Stiles mentions it as the "increasing Dispensations of Light." See above, chapter 2.

<sup>104</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 138-39; [Joseph Meacham?], *A Concise Statement of the Principles of the Only True Church . . .* (Bennington, Vt.: Haswell & Russell, 1790). Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 47.

included their true beliefs: Ann Lee as the second Christ heralding a new dispensation, perfectionism (the belief that one can rise above the need to sin), celibacy, the eventual redemption of sinners in the afterlife, and the need to labor for spiritual grace. By 1801, Hannah Adams would incorporate the *Theological Magazine*'s article into the description of the Shakers for her "alphabetical compendium" of religious sects in America.<sup>105</sup>

From at least 1795 onward, people in the World could learn about the Shakers' history and theology from published sources. Although these sources were often unfavorable to them, the Shakers did not respond in any hurry. Their slowness to respond has often been attributed to an aversion to the written word grounded in Mother Ann Lee's illiteracy. Critics of the Shakers, including the anonymous 1795 author, would probably have added that the Shakers were stupid and ill-educated; indeed, it is said that there was only one college graduate among the early Shakers. In any case, the Shakers would not issue their next major theological and historical work until 1808. If the World misunderstood them in the meantime, the Shakers had to shoulder some of the blame themselves.<sup>106</sup>

If the Shakers' religion remained central in visitors' accounts, it also naturally remained central to the Shakers themselves, notwithstanding their slowness in publishing

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<sup>105</sup> "A Short Account of the People, known by the Name of the Shakers, or Shaking Quakers," *Theological Magazine* 1, no. 2 (September-October, 1795), p. 81-87. "Jane Lees" is probably the result of confounding Ann Lee (whose name is also rendered as "Lees") with Jane Wardley, an earlier leader of what became the Shakers in Manchester, England. Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions in Two Parts* (Boston, Manning and Loring, 1801), p. 254-57.

<sup>106</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 9, 66-87; "Short Account of the People," p. 86-87; Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives*, p. 7.

their side. For the Shakers, converting visitors was the ultimate goal. If visitors would come and listen to the Shakers, and see how the Shakers lived, and worship with them, they might ultimately join the Shakers. Sometimes it worked out that way. Consider how the Shaker missionaries of 1805 were received by one of the powerful leaders of the revivals in Kentucky and Ohio, Richard McNemar.

. . . they came to my house . . . We spent the remainder of the day principally in conversation on the most interesting points of religion, and from all the evidence I could collect, I judged them to be men of honest principles, singular piety, and a deep understanding in the things of God . . . These things they delivered, not as matters of mere speculation, but as things that had for many years been reduced to practice, and established by the living experience of hundreds in the church of Christ . . . I acknowledge that nothing ever presented itself to me, that so powerfully interested my feelings as the above testimony. . . . Thus in the midst of reasonings, doubtful disputations, and close examinations, the testimony was investigated . . . from house to house until it obtained the full credit of a number who had been leading characters in the revival.<sup>107</sup>

McNemar himself was one of those “leading characters” who converted. He became one of the great leaders of the Shakers in the Midwest, preaching, writing, organizing villages, and even establishing a printing press for the Shakers.<sup>108</sup>

For McNemar, as for many other converts, the process of converting to the Shakers involved deep religious turmoil. For many, their ultimate conversion would be based on a spiritual revelation. Even a former staunch materialist such as Frederick Evans credited his conversion to spiritual revelation.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> M’Nemar, *Kentucky Revival*, p. 75-77, 82.

<sup>108</sup> Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 134-37, “McNemar, Richard.”

<sup>109</sup> On the role of spiritual experiences in Shaker conversions, see Diane Sasson, *The Shaker Spiritual Narrative* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983). On

The Shakers prayed for me, and I was met in my own path just as the Apostle Paul was met in *his* own path, by spiritual manifestations made to myself when quite alone, for time to time, during several weeks, until my reason was as entirely convinced, by the evidence received, of the existence of a spirit-world, as I am, by the evidence that is presented to my outward senses, of the existence of our material earth.<sup>110</sup>

For all their hope in recruiting converts from the World, the Shakers did not forget they were the saved, and the World was not. They made a point of telling the World this in a sermon or lecture as part of their Sunday public worship, as Elkanah Watson noted. Which elders spoke in meetings is rarely clear in early visitor account. Perhaps the task was shared at first, and the amateur speakers good or bad as it fell out. The Shakers did recognize the need for a good speaker and were appointing specific individuals to the job by 1807. Eventually, the job fell to the senior elder of the family responsible for managing the new recruits for each village.<sup>111</sup>

Watson disliked the Shaker worship, but at least he did not rudely interrupt it by making a disturbance. On other occasions, the Shakers were not so fortunate. Whether provoked by the Shakers' claim to a superior state of grace, or bemused by the singing and dancing, or even just being bored and restless, visitors would sometimes interrupt services with laughter, conversations with neighbors, moving about, and other

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Frederick Evans's materialism, see Frederick William Evans, *Autobiography of a Shaker and Reflections of the Apocalypse* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1973), p. 13-14.

<sup>110</sup> Evans, *Autobiography*, p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> New Lebanon journal entry dated March 10, 1807, WRHS I.B.30; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 85-86, "Gathering Order;" p. 156-58, "North Family."

inappropriate activities. Hence the reason the elder lecturing would ask spectators to observe good order during worship.<sup>112</sup>

The Shakers had great success in converting people in the wake of religious revivals on the frontiers. As described in the previous chapters, they spread across upstate New York and New England during the 1780s and 1790s in the wake of the New Light revival, and again across Ohio and Kentucky in the 1800s and 1810s. Otherwise, their success in recruiting was quite limited. No doubt the aspects of their life that drew hostility and dislike limited their appeal.

One people who proved resistant to Shaker proselytizing were American Indians. While the early Shakers at Niskeyuna had encountered the Mohegan Indians around 1776-1779, they do not seem to have proselytized them. The Shakers of Union Village, Ohio<sup>113</sup> were bolder. They heard of a religious revival going on among Indians, and decided in 1807 to send out missionaries to convert them. They attached considerable importance to this mission, for they included Brother Richard McNemar among its members. So it came about that two of the most significant religious figures in Ohio met. For the Indians were Shawnee, and their religious leader was Tekswatawa, the Prophet, younger brother of the rising leader Tecumseh. The Shakers did hold religious conversations with Tenskwatawa, though they did not convert him or any other Shawnee. But they did invite the Shawnee to come visit them in Turtle Creek, which the Shawnee did twice in 1807. But neither those contacts, nor later contacts between the Shakers of

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<sup>112</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 6-7.

<sup>113</sup> At that time still called Turtle Creek.

West Union in Indiana and neighboring Indians, resulted in any significant number of conversions. The spiritual interests of the Indians were presumably too different from that of settler-revivalists.<sup>114</sup>

Not everyone who converted stayed a Shaker. Valentine Rathbun was but the first of many Shakers to apostatize and write a book against the Shakers. Those apostates who followed his path echoed Rathbun in charging the Shakers with bewitching their followers and practicing an unnatural faith. Others revived the rumors that the Shakers participated in orgies or otherwise behaved scandalously. Two apostates, Eunice Chapman and Mary Marshall Dyer, added the claim that the Shakers had divided their families and taken their children from them. The Shakers were slow to respond to these accounts. Hence for several years the predominant accounts of the Shakers in print were negative ones.<sup>115</sup>

Given the generally negative press they received for their religious views, it is not surprising that Shaker villages were repeatedly attacked by mobs. The Shakers had already suffered mob violence during Mother Ann Lee's proselytizing trip into New England in 1781-83. They had withdrawn into their villages in part to avoid that sort of mob violence. Nevertheless, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the mobs came

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<sup>114</sup> Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 49-52, 67-74; M'Nemar, *Kentucky Revival*, p. 111-19. No account survives from the Indians concerning these interactions. The Indian Shaker Church originated in Washington State in 1881 and has no connection to the followers of Ann Lee and her successors.

<sup>115</sup> On apostates and their literature, see DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, which covers the case of Mary Marshall Dyer in great detail; also Ilyon Woo, "Rational Renegades: Antebellum Anti-Shakers, Shaker Apostates, and the Literary Imagination (Thomas Brown, Eunice Chapman, David Lamson, Hervey Elkins)" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2004).

to them. Union Village was attacked in 1810, twice in 1813, again in 1817, twice again in 1819, and 1824. Enfield, New Hampshire was invaded by a mob in 1818, Harvard, Massachusetts in 1823, and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky in 1825.<sup>116</sup>

Yet it was not so much the Shakers' religious faith alone that caused mobs to attack them. Instead, it was the mob's belief that the Shakers were acting against community standards, which the mobs acted to (try to) restore. For example, the mob that invaded Union Village in 1810, estimated to number up to 2,000 people, demanded that some children be taken away from their Shaker parents in village and given to their non-Shaker grandparents. The mob simply saw the raising of children by a celibate community as unnatural, and sided with "natural" parents (or in this case, grandparents). Custody fights over children were behind almost all of the other mob attacks as well.<sup>117</sup>

It is a wonder the Shakers were not attacked more frequently. They practiced an unorthodox form of Christianity, which broke up some families upon conversion. Their

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<sup>116</sup> The information on Shaker village riots in this section comes from Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 76-83, 93-94, 114-15; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 97-98; DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, p. 86-97, 153. DeWolfe's book provides a rich context for the 1818 Enfield, New Hampshire mob attack. There were additional reasons behind the 1810 and second 1817 attacks on Union Village, but it seems unlikely that they would have been sufficient on their own to incite mobs. There were several acts of vandalism by outsiders in Union Village in 1805, but I have not found enough information on them to determine if they were the results of mob action. If they were, they would be closely related to the types of attacks that afflicted the touring Shakers of 1781-83: attempts to expel outsiders introducing a new faith into the region. The 1802 attack on Shirley was carried out by a very small group of apostates, who scarcely qualify as a mob.

<sup>117</sup> See previous footnote for sources. The two exceptions were the 1823 attack on Harvard, over the allegedly cruel treatment of a mentally ill individual, and possibly the ill-documented first attack on Union Village in 1813, which may have been about a conflict between a Shaker wife and non-Shaker husband.

pacifism seemed unpatriotic, particularly at the end of the Revolution and during the War of 1812. Their anti-slavery stance was unpopular with their Kentucky neighbors. And their purchasing and holding land communally was sometimes seen as threatening to destroy neighboring farms. However, people seem to need a specific incident to galvanize them into forming a mob. That was clearly the case for all the attacks on Shaker villages, which were about specific people being held in the Shaker village, usually children. Mobs also need to believe that the authorities cannot or will not act to rectify their grievances. Since the Shakers usually did have the legal right, either by a parent's rights or by an indenture contract, to hold the children who were the root cause of most riots, they usually did have at least some of the authorities on their side.<sup>118</sup>

The Shakers' response to these most unwanted visitors was usually to call in the authorities and try to talk the mob down. The militia was called in to keep the 1810 Union Village mob in order, while town officials served as intermediaries in the 1818 Enfield riot. Brother Richard McNemar preached to the 1817 Union Village mob until it dispersed. Ultimately, the Shakers strove to prevent troublesome family break-ups by requiring potential members to settle such matters before joining the Shakers.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Requirements for mob violence are taken from Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001). On pacifism, slavery, and property ownership, see Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 212-18. While the Shakers were usually in a legally defensible position, they were on the wrong side of the law in the Eunice Chapman case; see DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, p. 87-94.

<sup>119</sup> Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 77, 112-13; DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, p. 88-93; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 266-67.

### Good businessmen, good neighbors

The mob attacks demonstrated a new and startling truth about the Shakers: they were not just a religious group, they were a religious *community*. Organizing into communities had made the community a part of the Shaker identity, for better or worse. When it was a mob attacking them, clearly it was for the worse. But there were features of the new Shaker villages that helped the Shakers' reputation.

As mentioned above, *The Theological Magazine* had published a generally negative article about the Shakers in 1795. The Shakers did not respond in print to this article. But others came to their defense in the very next issue. Part of the defense came from an account signed by "A Traveller."

Their houses have a neatness beyond anything I have seen in our country. Their farms, their gardens, their manufactories in iron, in brass, and in tin, bear traits of order and neatness, as well as marks of good heads for contriving, and good hands for executing. Their agriculture and horticulture are beyond anything I have seen in my journey. They themselves are plain, decent, and grave in their dress, language, and deportment. As to integrity, their character is established among all considerate people in this quarter, but the very vulgar still entertain idle and shameful stories of this virtuous, honest, and industrious society. The contortions, grimace [*sic*], and promiscuous dancings, which marked and disgraced their conduct, when they first arose among us, have given way to a mode of worship, which tends to inspire sentiments of solemnity, rather than derision.<sup>120</sup>

Central to the phenomena "A Traveller" praised was the rapid success of the Shaker work ethic and communal organization. Mother Ann Lee is said to have told the Shakers to put "hands to work, hearts to God." Work was consecrated labor, and hence demanded high quality, simplicity, orderliness, and cleanliness. Under the direction of the

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<sup>120</sup> Philo, letter to the editor, incorporating an essay by "A Traveller," *Theological Magazine* 1, no 3. (November-December, 1795), p. 232-3.

deacons, the Shakers allocated labor as needed to construct and maintain the villages, manage the farms, and develop workshops.<sup>121</sup>

The most obvious results of Shaker labor were the clean and orderly villages with their impressive buildings. The American frontier has rarely been orderly, and the hill country was fairly poor, which made the handsome Shaker villages stand out even more. The encomiums of “A Traveller” were repeated over and over again. Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, a Harvard Medical School professor, visited New Lebanon in 1794 (a year or two before “A Traveller” wrote). He not only thought the village clean and orderly, but went so far as to write that “their meeting house . . . is the neatest of all. It seems as if they meant to express by it an holy place, pure and undefiled.” Other villages had much the same appearance. The well-known author of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, James Fenimore Cooper, visited Hancock and Watervliet around 1828; while he thought the Shakers “deluded fanatics,” he noted, “I have never seen, in any country, villages so neat, and so perfectly beautiful, as to order and arrangement, without, however, being picturesque or ornamented, as those of the Shakers.” The Shakers were no doubt aware of the impression their villages made; they cleaned and swept on Saturday, the day before visitors came to the public worship. This was specifically encoded in their first set of written regulations, the *Millennial Laws*, when they were drawn up in 1821.<sup>122</sup>

The Shaker demand for hard work and high quality also translated into a good reputation in business. As “A Traveller’s” account indicates, within a decade of their

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<sup>121</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 6.

<sup>122</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 44-46, 141-45; “Millennial Laws,” WHRS I.B.37.

founding Shaker villages were becoming famous for the quality of their agricultural and manufactured products, and for their honesty in business dealings. Early businesses included garden seeds and chairs, to be followed later in the antebellum period by such products as herbal preparations, dried sweet corn, and brooms. The Shakers revolutionized the seed business around 1800 by selling them in little paper envelopes. This became a national business within a few years. “Shaker” became a label for a quality product. This is not just a figure of speech: Shaker products were soon labeled specifically as such, and sometimes carried the initials of the responsible Shaker Trustee as an additional guarantee of quality. Visitors came to expect they could obtain Shaker goods at their villages, causing the Shakers to outfit their Office buildings with retail stores at least as early as 1820.<sup>123</sup>

Finally, the Shaker demand for quality work in a communal organization led to changes in their dancing. Early Shakers had danced ecstatically as individuals, caught up in possession by the Holy Spirit. As mentioned above, during his years as elder (1787-1796), Father Joseph Meacham instituted ritualized group dances, sometimes called marches or shuffles. These were exercises in “laboring,” a concept familiar to New Lights, meaning to strive for faith. The Shakers rehearsed these dances before performing them in public, and are thought to have used marks on the floor of the meetinghouse to guide their steps. Ecstatic individual dancing did not die out; indeed, it would see a

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<sup>123</sup> Edward Deming Andrews, *The Community Industries of the Shakers* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, Inc., 1972); Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship: The Economic Order of the Shakers* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1974); Miller, *From Shaker Lands*; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 181-87.

notable revival in the 1830s. But during the antebellum period, the dominant form of Shaker dancing in public worship was the carefully rehearsed group dance.<sup>124</sup>

“A Traveller” was impressed by the results of Shaker work and order. He was willing to dismiss stories of wild or scandalous behavior as rumors or behavior since modified. Indeed, he was so impressed with the Shakers at worship that he compared their solemnity and Christian humility favorably with a high mass he had witnessed, held for a king and queen by an archbishop.<sup>125</sup>

Timothy Bigelow, the 38-year-old Federalist Speaker of the House in the Massachusetts General Court (legislature), had an even more positive experience with the Shakers in 1805. “[I]n pursuance of an intention which some of us had for many years,” he set off with four friends to see Niagara Falls, “purposing, however, to examine all the natural curiosities to be met with in or near our route.” In the days before a major tourist trade had developed at Niagara Falls, getting there was an adventure, some would say a harrowing one. There was no Erie Canal, just the Genesee Road and other poorly maintained dirt roads, and not much in the way of facilities for tourists once one got there. Only someone with wealth and leisure could consider traveling to Niagara. Bigelow had a lucrative legal practice, which gave him both, so much so that he could take the time to indulge in side trips as it suited him and his companions.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 10, 47-48; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 7; Marini, *Radical Sects*, p. 118; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 18-20.

<sup>125</sup> Philo, letter to the editor. No doubt some of the readers interpreted this comparison as indicating a similarity between Shakers and Catholics.

<sup>126</sup> Timothy Bigelow, *Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls in the Year 1805* (Boston: Press of John Wilson and Son, 1876), p. 3, 5-6. William Irwin, *The New Niagara: Tourism*,

Apparently the Shakers qualified as a “natural curiosity,” as Bigelow and his friends stopped on July 11 by the Shaker village in Hancock on their way west.

. . . We left the direct road to New Lebanon Springs . . . to view the village and observe the manners of the Shakers, at the confines of Pittsfield and Hancock. The number here is about one hundred and fifty; at their village at New Lebanon, they estimate their number at three hundred.

At the Hancock village, we saw Daniel Goodrich, Jr., son of the principal overseer . . . who showed us their garden, where we regaled ourselves with currants and gooseberries in great abundance. He next conducted us into a small, neat house, which he told us the society had erected for the purpose of receiving and entertaining visitors, and which neatly and commodiously fitted up for that purpose, being even furnished with beds. Having refreshed ourselves with a draught of excellent cider, we took our leave.

The extent of the Shakers’ lands is easily ascertained by the most transient observer; for they are more highly cultivated, laid out with more taste and regularity, and much better fenced than any other in their vicinity. . . .<sup>127</sup>

Like Bigelow, Daniel Goodrich, Jr. was a notable person, at least among the Shakers. His father’s family had joined the Shakers in the 1780s and donated the farm that formed the nucleus of the Hancock village. Daniel, Sr., had briefly been the second elder for the Hancock bishopric, and in 1805 was the deacon for the Church Family (which Bigelow recalled as “overseer”). His aunt Hannah had been second eldress for the Hancock bishopric, then first eldress in the New Hampshire bishopric. His uncle Jeremiah had preceded his father as second elder before moving on to New Lebanon, and his sister Cassandra was first eldress in 1805. Mother Lucy Wright was Daniel, Jr.’s aunt by marriage. And Daniel, Jr. himself had served as a deacon and as a family elder in Enfield,

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*Technology, and the Landscape of Niagara Falls, 1176-1917* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), chap. 1; John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 3-4; Jane Louise Mesick, *The English Traveller in America, 1785-1835* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>127</sup> Bigelow, *Journal of a Tour*, p. 5-6.

Connecticut, and would become second elder in the Hancock Bishopric in 1812. While the Goodriches were exceptional in the number of leading positions they held, they were but one example of how families and near relations would all join the Shakers together in the early years.<sup>128</sup>

On behalf of the Shakers, Daniel Goodrich, Jr. offered refreshments to Bigelow and his companions. As noted in chapter 1, the Shakers had developed a reputation for hospitality even in Mother Ann's day. The Shakers had commonly eaten with potential converts. Once they settled into villages, they ceased to eat with the World. But they still offered food and drink to visitors. This was such a common Shaker practice that it was encoded into their first set of internal regulations, the Millennial Laws of 1821: "If strangers are here at meal time they must be invited to eat."<sup>129</sup>

Despite their strictness about not eating with strangers, Bigelow's account indicates that even in 1805 the Shakers did not try to keep visitors closely confined to the Office and meetinghouse. Bigelow ended up in what was clearly the Office, but only after being given a tour of the gardens, already famous for their quality. Other visitors' accounts in this era demonstrate an uneven approach to visitors, from giving them tours

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<sup>128</sup> Deborah E. Burns, *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 35-41, 199-211. This is not to say that every member of a family joined; many families were split when some members joined the Shakers.

<sup>129</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 30-32, 37; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 100; WRHS I.B.37, chap. 13. Whether the cider offered to Bigelow was alcoholic is not possible to determine from the passage, though the July 11 date indicates it was not fresh cider; early Shakers are known to have produced and consumed spirits; see Wergland, *ibid.*, p. 186.

to specifically banning them from some buildings. Bigelow may have fared well because he was clearly an educated man and was only stopping by with a few friends, as opposed to being one of the numerous observers at Sunday public worship.<sup>130</sup>

Bigelow's description is important as much for what it doesn't include as for what it does. He already knew who the Shakers were when he wrote his journal, for he does not bother to describe them as if they were something unfamiliar. Although Bigelow resembled Rev. Ezra Stiles in social prominence and scholarship (reading the Old Testament in the original Hebrew), unlike Stiles he did not criticize the Shakers for their religion or their social status. If anything, the account sounds like the encounter of two prosperous gentlemen farmers, which is pretty much what it was. The Shaker villages in the east were by 1805 prosperous going concerns, while the west was just opening up for them.<sup>131</sup>

Already by Timothy Bigelow's visit in 1805, the Shakers were as well known for being productive citizens as well as religious oddities. Their care for quality and cleanliness was rescuing their reputation in the eyes of the World. But this was at the risk of it becoming the most important part of their reputation.

### **Tourists and travelogues**

A different kind of visitor came to Union Village, Ohio on Sunday, July 13, 1817. He was an Englishman named John Palmer. He was interested in encouraging emigration to the United States and Canada. To this end, he wrote a travelogue of the two countries,

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<sup>130</sup> Different responses to visitors can be found in Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 114, 141-145, 154.

<sup>131</sup> Bigelow, *Journal of a Tour*, p. xvi-xvii.

based partly on the experiences he recorded in his notebook, and (where he had not traveled) the works of previous visitors. Of his visit to the “celebrated settlement of the *Shakers*,” he wrote,

. . . On approaching Union, we were surprised to find these eccentric people possessed of the best farm we had seen in America, with an orchard, a garden, and nursery, all under superior cultivation, and their cows and horses looked remarkably well. The settlement consists of several large frame and log-houses, and one or two smaller, all neatly painted and finished. In front of the meeting-house a number of light waggons [*sic*] and horses were ranged, belonging to persons, who had been drawn together, from the adjoining settlements, out of curiosity. The meeting was beginning when we arrived . . . I was struck with astonishment by the scene. On the left hand sat sixty or seventy men, squatting on the floor, with their knees up and their hands clasped round them, their hats were off. Opposite, in exactly the same curious posture, sat as many women; both men and women were dressed very plain, like the stiffest of the Friends. The women looked like dead bodies; and never did I see such a sepulchral appearance as their dress and colourless faces exhibited, they were all dressed alike in drab gowns, white neck kerchiefs, and a cap fitting close over their ears, and fastened under the chin, the same sort as are placed on a corps [*sic*]. Each held a small chequered pocket handkerchief in their hand. After setting some time, they all rose and sang a pleasing, yet melancholy hymn, expressive of their contempt of death and the world. During singing, the women kept time by elevating themselves on their toes in a ludicrous manner. After the hymn, a leader stepped forward and explained their tenets. He said, his call was from God, many years ago, when he lived in Kentucky; that in consequence, he had given his slaves their liberty, and with some others, came over to the present situation, and established a church; that, their principal tenets were, they considered themselves perfect; that, confession of sins, one to another, was necessary to this state of perfection; that, a true church of Christ ought to have all things in common; and that, none of the church ought to marry, or, if previously married, to have any intercourse, after joining the society, but be literally virgins. To dance and be merry, is a principal part of their creed; see Jeremiah, 31st chapter, from whence he deduced that part of their faith. The discourse being finished, at the close of which he severely reprehended some of the spectators, who were, and had been laughing and talking, I observed an uncommon bustle, and pulling of their coats and waistcoats amongst the men. When all was prepared, one of the brethren stepped forth in the center of the room, and gave out, with a Stentorian voice, a quick tune, beating time violently with his foot, and singing the following words *lal lal la, lal lal la!* &c. in which he was joined by the whole society, men and women, all jumping as high as they could, clapping their hands; and at certain parts, twirling round to out great

amazement. They kept up this violent exercise, about a quarter of an hour, the prime mover still keeping up his *lal lal lal la*. I have no doubt it is this exertion, together with other causes, which makes them, particularly the women, such a death-like assemblage. . . . However sensible men must reprehend such a form of worship, it, and all other forms, that do not interfere with civil order, are equally protected by law. . . .

It being Sunday, we could not look over their establishment. . . .<sup>132</sup>

One may well question what John Palmer was doing visiting the Shakers. His purpose in writing was supposed to be to encourage emigration, a common endeavor among British travelers in this period. It is hard to imagine how a somewhat unfavorable account of a people Palmer calls “bewildered jumpers” (as opposed to “Shaking Quakers,” a common terms for the Shakers) could encourage migration to the United States. The extended title to Palmer’s book offers a clue: besides such things as “the prices of land” and “account of the commerce,” Palmer also claimed to offer “interesting anecdotes.” The Shakers, for Palmer, were an interesting anecdote, the “celebrated settlement of the *Shakers*,” just as they were apparently a “natural curiosity” for Timothy Bigelow.<sup>133</sup>

John Palmer heralded a new wave of visitors to Shaker villages. The Napoleonic Wars and their American offshoot, the War of 1812, had curtailed travel for years. But with the coming of peace in 1815, both Europeans and Americans began traveling across the United States in unprecedented numbers. These were the first major wave of tourists in the United States. They came to see the sights, for what wonder or entertainment they

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<sup>132</sup> John Palmer, *Journal of Travels in the United States of North America and Lower Canada, Performed in the Year 1817*. . . (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1818), p. 4, 89-94.

<sup>133</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, title page, p. 2-4, 94.

could get out of them. Moreover, they regularly put their observations into book form as a travelogue, which the declining cost of printing made more widely available. The most famous or notorious travelogues, such as those of Captain Basil Hall, Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and Charles Dickens, contributed to the ongoing popular controversies over the quality of American life. So many of these visitors stopped by to see the Shakers, making this the golden age of Shaker village visitor accounts.<sup>134</sup>

These new visitors were hardly religious seekers in the tradition of Valentine Rathbun or Frederick Evans. They were truly curiosity seekers, more like Timothy Bigelow. They came to have a Shaker experience, an exposure to the wonders they had heard about. The shape and content of their accounts reflects the nature of their interest, concentrating on the Shakers' unusual features: their neatness, their religion, and their dancing.

Palmer's account, while more favorable than many, was typical of visitors between 1815 and 1842. Just as "A Traveller" did in 1795, Palmer remarked on how neat and prosperous Shaker villages were. Even visitors who intensely disliked the Shakers, such as the Englishman William Tell Harris, were willing to grant as much in their favor. Union Village was still a relatively new community when Palmer visited it, but even so he was impressed by the buildings. Other visitors expressed similar sentiments, especially about the meetinghouses and their large unbroken halls where the dancing took place.

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<sup>134</sup> Gassan, *Birth of American Tourism*, chap. 2-5; Mesick, *English Traveller*, chap. 1, 10. Sears, *Sacred Places*, p. 3-6. Hall, Dickens, and Trollope all wrote about the Shakers, though Trollope never visited them. Of books listed in Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 2, specifically involving accounts of visits, the majority were written between 1787 and 1860.

Reverend David Dudley Field, a Congregational minister who was no friend to religious diversity, could not help but admire Hancock's round stone barn, a unique structure that stands to this day.<sup>135</sup>

Most accounts, including Palmer's, focused on the public worship of the Shakers on a Sunday. As Barnabas Bates put it, describing his visit to Lebanon Springs in 1832,

No visiter [*sic*] ever thinks of leaving the Springs without visiting the Shakers, and as their mode of worship is so singular and different from all other people, they generally contrive to remain till after Sunday, when they can have the opportunity of visiting their settlement and attending their meeting.<sup>136</sup>

While there were variations, most of these services included a lecture or sermon from a Shaker spokesperson, and dancing and singing by the Shakers. Sometimes (though not during Palmer's visit) the service included spontaneous testimonies from the Shakers; James Silk Buckingham, an English visitor at Watervliet, New York on July 15, 1838 mentioned a Shakeress who spontaneously addresses the meeting that day, though she had been a member forty years and never felt the need to do so until that moment.<sup>137</sup>

The lecture, as John Palmer reported it, was a prepared speech by an appointed spokesperson explaining Shaker beliefs. Possibly the spokesperson that day was Brother Richard McNemar, as the details of personal history match up. Palmer's recollection of the Shaker beliefs covered in the lecture is more detailed than in most accounts. It

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<sup>135</sup> Philo, letter to the editor. Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 91-92; William Tell Harris, *Remarks Made During a Tour through the United States of America, in the Years 1817, 1818, and 1819: In a Series of Letters to Friends in England* (London: Sherwood, Nealy, and Jones, 1821), p. 122; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 112-13, 172, 175, 210.

<sup>136</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 165.

<sup>137</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 73.

included several already discussed, such as perfectionism, confession of sins, celibacy, and dancing as a method to reach God. While Palmer only attributed the rejection of slavery to the speaker, that, too, was a Shaker belief. One of the very first people to join the Shakers in Ohio was Anna Middleton, a former slave from Virginia.<sup>138</sup>

Palmer's account of Shaker theology contains two interesting omissions. First, Ann Lee's role was not mentioned. It might still be that the Shakers were downplaying some of their more controversial doctrines, but as the speaker did mention celibacy and communism, this seems unlikely. By 1818, Ann Lee's role in Shakerism was so well known that Palmer may have simply passed over it. Second, he also did not mention the Shakers' belief in spiritual development in the afterlife, which would ultimately make everyone a Shaker, once they were properly tutored by other spirits. This may have been too esoteric a doctrine to explain in a lecture. But it may also have been too esoteric for Palmer to understand. English travelers generally did not understand any belief involving the eventual redemption of all mankind, the central belief of the Universalists. The Shaker belief in spiritual development in the afterlife was so akin to Universalism in this respect that the Shakers were sometimes categorized as a branch of the Universalists, an ironic sequel to their rivalry during the New Light Stir.<sup>139</sup>

Equally interesting is that Palmer also mentioned communism as a Shaker belief. While it may have initially been a practical response to persecution by the World, communism had become an essential part of the Shaker religion in the eyes of both the

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<sup>138</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 93; Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 24.

<sup>139</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 68-75; Mesick, *English Traveller*, p. 262. Why English travelers were so lacking in understanding is not clear.

Shakers and the World. To the World, it was becoming one of the most important parts, for it was among the most visible.

That Palmer related a more detailed and correct version of Shaker theology was not a chance event. Driven in part by a need to explain the tenets of the faith to the westerners and the rising generation, neither of whom had known the founders, the Shakers produced several theological and historical works between the times of Timothy Bigelow's visit in 1805 and John Palmer's in 1817. The "Shaker Bible," *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, a six-hundred page theological work, was first published in 1808. The first Shaker history of their origins, *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee*, followed in 1816. Other works followed. These books not only circulated among the Shakers themselves, but were offered to the outside world. In his 1824 travelogue, Isaac Candler offered a summary of two unnamed volumes some New England Shakers lent him on their theology, one of which is almost certainly the *Testimony*. Captain Donald MacDonald, a follower of the utopian communalist Robert Owen, bought a copy of a history of the Shakers, most probably the *Testimonies*, at the Office store of the Watervliet, New York community in 1824.<sup>140</sup>

John Palmer could not have bought either book at the Office store in Union Village, for there was no store there in 1817, or for several years thereafter. But stores did

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<sup>140</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 66-87; [Candler, Isaac.] *A Summary View of America . . .* (London: T. Cadell, 1824), p. 225-27; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 34-37; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 35-36, notes how the circulation of Shaker publications led to some conversions from the World. Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 1 is a bibliography of all Shaker publications up to the date of its compilation.

exist at several of the Shaker villages. They were outgrowths of the Shakers' trade with the outside world. The Shakers had quickly established a reputation for high quality foodstuffs, seeds, and manufactures. People who came to see the Shakers dance stopped to buy at the Office. Besides the Shaker history, Donald MacDonald also bought two silver pens and a whip. A Philadelphia Quaker named William Savery Warder gave a long list of items one could purchase in the Hancock store in 1818: "leather, hats, cards, measures, boxes of beautiful workmanship, wire sieves, wax combs, wagons, ploughs, rails, wooden ware, and brooms." In her travelogue, the American writer Anne Newport Royall noted in 1826 that the Shaker women produced "fancy goods" (ornamented small items primarily for women), and added, "Every stranger who visits them, generally buys something as remuneration for the trouble they give." So many visitors bought things, for whatever reasons, that New Lebanon had two stores by 1842.<sup>141</sup>

There were a lot of visitors to buy those Shaker goods. John Palmer noted the visitors' "waggon and horses" outside the meetinghouse. The New Lebanon meetinghouse, the size of which had so impressed Reverend Ezra Stiles, was found crowded by an anonymous 1823 visitor. He thought the visitors came from the Springs, because an excursion from there to the Shaker village was "an accustomed item in the tour of fashion." Many other visitors to New Lebanon echoed that belief. An 1831 newspaper report noted that carriages from both neighboring towns and more distant places filled up the Shirley meetinghouse. Out in the west, the May 18, 1834 meeting at

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<sup>141</sup> Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, *Travels through North America, During the Years 1825 and 1826* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Carey, 1828), vol. 2, p. 140; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 36, 100, 206, 295.

South Union, Kentucky drew 400 visitors. James Silk Buckingham figured there had to be about 200 visitors filling up the benches designated for them in the Watervliet, New York meetinghouse in 1838. The increasing popularity of Shaker Sunday worship would draw up to 300 people at a time even to remote Tyringham, Massachusetts by the 1850s.<sup>142</sup>

Those writers who mentioned their fellow visitors were generally not pleased with them. John Palmer's characterization of the visitors as there "out of curiosity" was echoed by other writers. Palmer was at the Shaker meeting for little else himself, though he could offer as a rationale his greater purpose of informing possible emigrants of conditions in the United States. The anonymous 1823 visitor to New Lebanon previously mentioned explained his presence by claiming he was "studying the phenomena of the mind . . . to the good of mankind . . ." Such protestations might well have been sincere, or not, but they were also a convention of the travel literature of the era. In order to establish their authority, travel writers had to establish themselves as genteel. They could not be part of the common herd. Sometimes the distinction was both explicit and paper-thin. Thomas Hamilton, a Scottish traveler, noted in his 1833 visit to Watervliet, New York, that he did not ridicule the Shaker dancing, but that he was hard put not to laugh at it.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 92; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 70, 199; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 72; Julia Neal, *By Their Fruits: The Story of Shakerism in South Union, Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 66; Burns, *Shaker Cities*, p. 133.

<sup>143</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 92; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 50-52, 199; Sears, *Sacred Places*, p. 10-18; Mesick, *English Traveller*, chap. 9.

However, many visitors did laugh at Shaker dancing, or otherwise disrupt the Sunday worship. Not that any writer ever admitted doing so; that would undermine their claim to cultural authority. As noted above, the Shakers had already started asking the spectators not to disrupt the service at least as far back as Elkanah Watson's visit in 1790. Things did not change much in the decades thereafter. John Palmer noted visitors "laughing and talking" during the lecture in 1817. Thomas Hamilton was cautioned against disrupting the service in 1833, and as just related he had trouble restraining himself. Matters got so bad that in 1838 several newspapers ran an article deploring how visitors from Lebanon Springs had so disrupted a New Lebanon Shaker dance that the meeting broke up altogether.<sup>144</sup>

Though they might laugh at it, the dancing was the main attraction of a visit to the Shaker village, as Palmer's account exemplifies. The occasional visitors who missed seeing the Shakers dance, such as the Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenbach on his 1825-26 trip, felt they had to offer an explanation for their failure. There were probably few places in the United States where one could see a hundred or more people (Palmer counted 140 or so) perform intricate dances with nary a misstep. While a first glance the visitor accounts appear repetitious, in fact they describe a changing repertoire of dances. For example, Margaret Hall, the wife of travelogue writer Captain Basil Hall, described a Shaker dance in an 1827 letter that scarcely resembled the jumping seen by John Palmer.

"[T]o work they went with one accord, singing or rather screaming, tunes of a kind of jig time, at the same time walking round the room with a swinging step

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<sup>144</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 92-93; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 52, 271; Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 164-65.

somewhat between a walk and a dance and flapping their hands with a penguin kind of motion.”<sup>145</sup>

Horace Greeley described more than one kind of dance in his magazine article published in 1838:

The first movement is very simple, consisting of a lively dancing march by the whole company, up to the farther wall of the temple, and then back to the close vicinity of the spectators. . . .

Wilder and louder swells the music; quick and more intricate becomes the “labor.” Now all are prancing around the room, in double file, to a melody as lively as Yankee Doodle; now they perform a series of dexterous but indescribable maneuvers; now they balance; now whirl one another round . . .<sup>146</sup>

Visitor accounts of Shaker dance could vary so much because the Shakers kept instituting new group dances. For example, the motioning of the hands that Margaret Hall noted was introduced into the dances in 1815. Ring dances, which were later immortalized in a striking magazine engraving, were introduced around 1822. Ecstatic dancing while possessed by the spirit was not prohibited, but was rare after the 1790s until the spiritual revival that began in 1837.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 93-94; Bernhard, *Travels Through North America*, p. 141-42; Margaret Hunter Hall, *The Aristocratic Journey, Being the Outspoken Letters of Mrs. Basil Hall Written During a Fourteen Month's Sojourn in America, 1827-1828* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 40-44.

<sup>146</sup> H[orace] Greeley, “A Sabbath with the Shakers,” *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, July 23, 1838.

<sup>147</sup> On the new dances, see Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, p. 142. Brian Bixby, “Consuming Simple Gifts: Shakers, Visitors, Goods” in *The Business of Tourism: Place, Faith, and History*, edited by Philip Scranton and Janet F. Davidson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 89 offers an excellent reproduction of what was originally a full-page engraving of a ring dance. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, includes no visitor accounts of ecstatic dancing in Watervliet, New York, New Lebanon, Hancock, or Tyringham between 1796 and 1837.

### **Fanatical sacrilege**

As has been noted before, most antebellum writers treated the Shakers and Shaker dancing with contempt. Earlier sections of this chapter discussed why Shaker theology was anathema to Old Lights and other varieties of New Lights, and the religious opposition to dancing at the end of the eighteenth century. But by 1817, when John Palmer visited Union Village, a generation had passed. Opposition to dancing as such was in decline. The specific theological battles of the New Lights and the Kentucky Revivals were quieting down, and in any case would have been of little importance to foreign visitors such as Palmer.<sup>148</sup>

The source of visitors' disgust with the Shakers in the early nineteenth century was rooted in the cultural significance of tourism and the social class of the visitors. The Shakers appalled because they were the wrong kind of people with the wrong kind of ideas in the wrong place.

John F. Sears has argued that American tourists in the antebellum period were looking for the sacred in their landscapes as a means of identifying what it meant to be American. Tourist sites such as Niagara Falls were supposed to evoke a feeling of awe and worship of the sublime. Sears allowed that popularization of sites as spectacles undercut the sacredness in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But a careful reading of Sears's work suggests that the sacred element was inevitably undercut from the

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<sup>148</sup> On the decline of opposition to dancing, see Wagner, *Adversaries of Dance*, chap. 5-6.

beginning. Not everyone felt the reverence, and those that did not turned to irreverence in disappointment or mockery. For such people, Niagara was a spectacle, an amusement.<sup>149</sup>

The accounts of most visitors, whether American or foreign, suggests they found both the sacred and the profane in the Shakers and their worship. The one place antebellum visitors most definitely expected to find the sacred was in a church, which is what a Shaker meetinghouse is. Yet there they confronted a people, rituals of worship, a belief system, and a social structure that contravened their ideas of the sacred.<sup>150</sup>

In the antebellum years, leisure travel was still confined mostly to the wealthy, even more so if they were traveling from Europe. The Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, who visited Union Village during an 1825-26 trip, was exceptional in having a title, but along with the other travelogue writers of this period, he had the wealth needed to travel and the importance to get his account published. These travelers usually moved in refined circles, in which manners served both to restrain emotional expression and distinguish upper from lower classes. Their own religious practices were more likely to be “high church,” as evinced by the favoritism of English visitors for Episcopalian and Presbyterian worship in this country. Their religious views were likely to be tempered by rationalism. Shaker dancing looked not just eccentric, but unreasonable in attempting to contact God through physical motions.<sup>151</sup> Horace Greeley captured this attitude, and yet

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<sup>149</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, introduction, chap. 1, 8.

<sup>150</sup> Greeley, “Sabbath with the Shakers” is perhaps the most sensitive portrayal of this conflict between the sacred and profane among visitor accounts in this era; see quotation from this article below.

<sup>151</sup> Gassan, *Birth of American Tourism*, chap. 3-5; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994);

also transcended it, in his account of visiting the Shakers at Watervliet, New York, as published in 1838:

“Absurd!” says the cynic; “a handful of miserable fools and bedlamites making themselves ridiculous in a Shaker meeting — what has that to do with exciting devotional feelings in the breast of any rational being!”

. . . But who shall decide that this which I see is mockery? Who shall pronounce these actors hypocrites? Nay, who shall say that their worship is all displeasing to the Great Being to whom words are nothing, and who knows no other offering than the broken and contrite spirit? We will worship according to the dictates of a more rational but colder sentiment; let us not too rashly nor too loudly condemn what we esteem our brother’s error. . . .<sup>152</sup>

In contrast, the Shakers belonged to a faith associated with American backwoods revivals, even though its origins were English. Hence they were assumed by visitors to be ignorant and uncultured farmers and mechanics, an assumption that often enough was true. In their early years they disdained education beyond that “necessary for the common purposes of life,” as an English visitor was told in the early 1820s. Learning was a distraction from pursuing their salvation. Their clothing seemed old-fashioned even to the Ohioans who met the missionaries of 1805; an English visitor in 1838 characterized the cut of the men’s waistcoats as “used a century or two ago.” Their speech was noted for saying “yea” and “nay.” In sum, they were a group that by nature and religion were supposed to be of a lower class than that claimed by visitors from the cities or from Europe. Even James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote the famous *Leatherstocking* romances

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Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982); Sears, *Sacred Places*, p. 10-18; Mesick, *English Traveller*, chap. 9. Mesick notes that English travelers deluded themselves into thinking that the Episcopalian Church would eventually become the dominant church in the United States. Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 157, offers a twentieth century Shaker defense of dancing as a way to worship God.

<sup>152</sup> Greeley, “Sabbath with the Shakers.”

of the frontier, characterized the Shakers in his travelogue as “deluded fanatics” whose doctrines appealed to the “grossly ignorant.” But then, Cooper belonged to a family of social climbers, and Cooper himself was solidly Episcopalian.<sup>153</sup>

The difference in faith was not just one of reputation. Shakerism belonged to a cluster of faiths that rejected or altered critical theological elements of mainstream Christianity in ways unacceptable to many visitors. Few reacted as strongly as the English visitor William Tell Harris, who visited Union Village on September 27, 1818, a bit over a year after John Palmer. Upon asking the Shakers about their beliefs, Harris described

their answers as to the character of the person claimed as their founder, — the essentials necessary to become one of their body . . . appears to me so nearly allied to blasphemy, that you will readily excuse me for not presenting you with them. Their explanation of the terms on which what they term marriage is allowed . . . was so opposite to anything like decency, that none but the filthiest pen could prostitute itself in detailing it.<sup>154</sup>

John Palmer, along with many other travelogue writers, was willing to “prostitute” his pen, for in his account he identified the offending doctrines: perfectionism and celibacy. More mainstream Christian faiths, even those that rejected predestination, generally accepted the sinful nature of man, which perfectionism rejected. To the more orthodox, the Shakers seemed to be dispensing with the need for redemption through Jesus; hence Valentine Rathbun’s criticism that the Shakers had a faith of works. And

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<sup>153</sup> Marini, *Radical Sects*; Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, chap. 3; [Isaac Candler,] *A Summary View of America . . .* (London: T. Cadell, 1824), p. 230-31; Bauer, *Wisdom’s Paradise*, p. 57; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 70, 101, 192-93, 202; [James Fenimore Cooper,] *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), letter 31; Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*.

<sup>154</sup> Harris, *Remarks Made*, p. 121.

much like homosexual marriage at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Shaker celibacy was seen as an attack on the family, on man's nature, and even on God's provisions for the world, not to ignore its possibility of ending the progress of human history. The famous English writer Harriet Martineau combined the ideas of Shaker backwardness with their attack on human nature by claiming, "No person of mental power would join a society whose principle is to crush human nature, to extinguish the intellect, and disappoint the affections."<sup>155</sup>

The two major tenets not mentioned by Palmer were equally controversial. Ann Lee's role as the incarnation of the Christ in female flesh was, if anything, even more blasphemous than perfectionism, though one writer noted that Jesus' contemporaries probably had thought the same of him. And Universalism was abhorred by most American Christians. They saw it as a rejection of God's justice, namely the eternal punishment of sinners and unbelievers in the next life. If there was no punishment for sin in the afterlife, then there was no longer any guarantee of law, order, and morality in the world. If the visitors had been aware that the Shakers still received revelations from God, they would have seen them as antinomians entirely.<sup>156</sup>

In going to a Shaker Sunday meeting, visitors were entering a sacred space, a church by another name. Yet there they confronted ignorant folk who openly espoused ideas that contravened the sacred laws of God and Man, and confirmed their folly by a

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<sup>155</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 117, 172, 273.

<sup>156</sup> Candler, *Summary View*, p. 217-18; Mesick, *English Travellers*, p. 262. Most visitors do not mention the Shaker belief in continued revelation, though there was at least one popular story treating the matter as a joke; see Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 181, 196; for exceptions, see Wergland, *ibid.*, p. 185, 198.

ludicrous, yet impressive performance. And they did this in the name of Christianity! It is no wonder that visitors were repulsed, not just by what they saw, but by what they thought it stood for. As Mary Richmond noted in compiling a bibliography of Shaker-related literature, these antebellum visitors were “prejudiced.” But they were prejudiced for what in their own eyes were good reasons.<sup>157</sup>

Yet they kept coming to see the Shakers. There were no doubt at least three reasons for this. First, confronting people who are unacceptable is a way of establishing what one is and what the bounds of acceptable behavior are. By visiting the Shakers, the writers could demonstrate to their own satisfaction that they were cultured, sophisticated people who were real Christians, unlike the Shakers. Second, Shaker dancing really was spectacular in scope and usually perfect in performance; one nineteen-year-old visitor likened Shaker dancing in their meetinghouse to a theater. It was so impressive that it did eventually make its way into theaters, as several groups of apostates would tour the northeast in the late 1840s, performing and explaining Shaker dances. Finally, the Shakers became established as a sight to see. Guidebooks referred to them. Travel writers read previous travel writers who had written about the Shakers, as Palmer read Thomas Ashe’s account of the Shakers in his 1806 travelogue, and wrote about them in turn.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 1, p. xix.

<sup>158</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 173-75; Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 207, 209; “Novel and Moral Concert by the Shaker Vocalists” (advertisement), *The Boston Daily Atlas* (April 10, 1846). Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 2, p. 12-13, 50, lists some gazettes and guides from before 1842 that probably served as guidebooks. Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 3; Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America . . .* (London: Richard Phillips, 1808), vol. 2, p. 211-18. Ironically, the reliability of Ashe’s account is questionable.

### **Those who did not publish**

While accounts by relatively wealthy, educated people dominated the antebellum press, they were probably not representative of those who visited Shaker public meetings. An analysis of the visitors' register at the Enfield, Conn. Shaker village for June through August, 1856 shows that 64% of visitors came from nearby communities. While some traveled from the cities of Hartford and Springfield, many probably were from farming families not much different from the Shakers, except in religion and community organization. This is not surprising. In antebellum times, roads were often poor and travel accommodations dismal. One had to be wealthy to travel long distances, for such a journey could take months. Other Shaker villages would probably also show a preponderance of local visitors, if they had kept registers that survived. The Shaker villages of Ohio and Kentucky had been founded in the tradition of camp meeting, where neighbors came from miles around for a revival service. No doubt Shaker meetings continued to draw visitors on that basis; that would explain the wagons John Palmer saw. Such neighbors visited to see the odd Shaker worship, perhaps even to be converted. But they came also to see relatives and transact business with the Shakers.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Enfield visitors' register: WRHS III.B.1; the local area was defined as a rough circle bounded on the north by Springfield and neighboring communities, on the south by Hartford and neighboring communities. On antebellum traveling, vacations, and camp meetings, see Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 1; Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, chap. 2-3; Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, chap. 1-2. Possibly New Lebanon, Pleasant Hill, and Sabbathday Lake might show a preponderance of visitors from a distance, due to nearby tourist attractions: Lebanon Springs, Mammoth Caves, and Poland Spring, respectively. But these attractions were not a constant draw, so their effects on attendance at Shaker villages cannot be assumed to be constant.

Many of these neighbors would write letters matter-of-factly mentioning their visits to Shaker villages, yet few such neighbors published accounts. Unlike the travelogue writers, these neighbors visited the Shakers as a matter of course. To them, the Shakers were acceptable neighbors and good business partners. What strangeness they exhibited had long since lost its novelty through repeated acquaintance. There was nothing special about the Shakers to write about that all the other neighbors didn't already know.<sup>160</sup>

### **The Shakers' perspective**

Considered as a tool for recruiting, the Shakers' Sunday public meeting was a failure. Indeed, no recruiting tool, whether meeting, missionary, or printed work, proved very successful. Apart from the aftermaths of three religious revivals (including the two already mentioned and the Millerite revival in the early 1840s), the Shakers were never able to gain young adult members faster than they lost them, due to death or apostasy. One good month's worth of visitors, had they all converted, would have easily doubled Shaker numbers. But nothing close to that ever happened.<sup>161</sup>

The Shakers must have realized early on that they would not secure many converts from the Sunday public meetings. The repeated rudeness of some visitors at the Sunday

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<sup>160</sup> For letters written by nearby farmers, see the Dec. 23 letter from Ashton Willard to the Hon. C. W. Willard, in doc. #28 (Willard Papers), and the October 12, 1857 letter from Austin E. Simmons to Achsa W. Sprague, in doc. # 181, both in the Vermont Historical Society Library. De Wolfe, *Shaking the Faith*, p. 32 notes the Enfield Shakers were generally accepted by their neighbors by 1813.

<sup>161</sup> On visitor numbers, besides the references in fn. 65, see Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman's Experience in America* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), p. 119. Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 1, 3, 8 covers recruitment in the aftermath of revivals and demographic trends.

public worship was evidence that the Shakers were not gaining the sympathies of their audience. As early as 1794, when Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse visited the Shakers to learn about their beliefs and practices, they were already so used to visitors who came “for the sake of laughter and ridicule” that it required repeated visits and an explanation of his own unusual religious background as a Quaker before they would take him seriously. By the 1810s, a Hancock Shaker referred to the visitors at meetings as “spectators” in his private diary, certainly not a hopeful label for prospective members. This was an unusual reference, for early journals typically do not refer to the visitors at all. Indeed, the term “visitor” was usually used for Shakers visiting from other villages.<sup>162</sup>

The failure of all proselytizing methods to produce many new converts left the Shakers in a demographic bind by the 1830s. The members who joined in the early years had often come with families, of which the Goodriches were but one notable example. There had been many young men and women able to do work and lead the families. But as the original members aged and died, they were not being replaced by new members. In particular, young men, the most valuable workers, were not joining the Shakers. The Shakers kept their numbers up in part by accepting children. The results were villages with many children and old people, but few young adults. Worse, the children rarely stayed upon reaching adulthood. The continued losses were demoralizing and threatened to undermine both Shaker faith and family economics.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 141; Calvin Ely diary, WRHS V.B.11; “A Journal of Domestic Events,” entry for June 21.

<sup>163</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 30, 47, 87-94, 113-116.

The Shakers had to keep Sunday public meetings going, in hopes of attracting new members. To do otherwise would be to accept the decline of their villages and raise doubts about the truth of their faith. It would take a crisis in Shakerism to close Sunday meetings to the public.

There were several other reasons to keep holding Sunday public worship in the village meetinghouses. The Shakers sustained their own faith through worship. They had many private worship services through the week, but Sunday meetings gave them yet another opportunity, one that had become a tradition. Moreover, just as the World defined themselves against the Shakers by coming to Shaker worship, equally so the Shakers could define themselves against the World. The lecture in the Shaker Sunday service may have been originally aimed at the World, but the insistence on the one true faith of the Shakers in the lecture no doubt served to reinforce the Shakers' own belief in themselves. Finally, the constant exposure of the Shakers to the public eye probably reduced their vulnerability to the types of rumors that plagued them in their early years. Apostates and neighbors still circulated some bad stories about the Shakers. But they never faced a major political attack as was mounted against the secretive Freemasons after the mysterious death of William Morgan in 1826.<sup>164</sup>

Sunday public meetings kept the Shakers engaged with the World. It was not the only way the Shakers related to the World. But it was a weekly event. Those services may

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<sup>164</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 7; Candler, *Summary View*, p. 221-22; DeWolfe, *Shaking the Faith*. Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) offers an account of how Masonic secrecy hurt their survival in New England.

well have represented the most extensive contact many Shakers had with the World on a regular basis. The Shakers could observe, understand, and possibly envy some of the changes going on in the World by watching their visitors. It would be unlikely if seeing the World at Sunday meeting didn't encourage some Shakers to apostatize.

Sunday public meetings led to other engagements with the World. As noted above, the Shaker reputation for high quality goods led to a retail trade and the development of stores. A visit to the Shakers was no longer complete until one stopped by the Office store to buy some Shaker goods, as Harriet Martineau did in 1837. This trade grew in importance until Office buildings were remodeled specifically to create room for a retail shop geared to tourists. Marianne Finch, another English traveler, thought the Office building was nothing but a store when she visited in the early 1850s.<sup>165</sup>

Partaking of a Shaker village meal became another part of the visitors' experience. It had long been traditional for Shakers to offer visitors a meal, a practice encoded in the 1821 Millennial Laws. As with the other goods they produced, the Shakers became known for laying a good table. The physical distance separating most Shaker villages from the World meant that a visitor was not likely to get a meal anywhere else nearby. For example, Harriet Martineau reckoned it several miles from Lebanon Springs to the Shaker village at New Lebanon, and depended on Shaker hospitality to get a meal there when she visited in 1837. Yet she was almost disappointed. Feeding for free the hundreds who might come to Sunday public meeting was beyond the long-term capability of any Shaker community. At New Lebanon, the Shakers had discontinued the practice by the

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<sup>165</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 95; Finch, *Englishwoman's Experience*, p. 140.

time of Martineau's visit, being "overrun with company from Lebanon Springs." They did make an exception for Martineau (after some pleading on her part), and served her "delicious bread, some wheaten, some of Indian corn, and some made with molasses; cheese, butter, spring water, and excellent currant wine." Later the Shakers began to charge tourists for meals, while still being willing to give free food to those in need. The regulation requiring a meal to be offered was dropped when the Millennial Laws were revised in the 1840s.<sup>166</sup>

In much the same way, the Shakers found themselves running boarding houses. Traveling businessmen, workers with skills the Shakers lacked among themselves, and no doubt visitors stranded by weather had to be put up somewhere overnight. Since the Shakers in theory required all outsiders (except Sunday worshippers) to stop first at the Office, each community included rooms for boarding visitors in their Office buildings. Hancock's Office building could board twenty people in 1818. These rooms also housed outside day laborers, an increasing need as the number of able-bodied Shaker men declined. Because the Office building was within the village, the Shakers enforced rules of conduct compatible with their beliefs, including men and women sleeping apart from each other. As with meals, the Shakers offered lodging for free at first, but eventually began to charge their overnight guests.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Millennial Laws: WRHS I.B.37, I.B.50, I.B.52; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 40, 100, 254; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 269; Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 223; W[illiam] D[ean] Howells, "Shirley," in *Three Villages* (Boston: James K. Osgood and Company, 1884), p. 78.

<sup>167</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 100-01; Moritz Busch, *Travels Between the Hudson and the Mississippi, 1851 – 1852* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), p. 60;

The result of this engagement with visitors was an erosion of the barriers between Shakers and the World that undercut one of the reasons for the gathering into villages. Visitors might be on the grounds to attend Sunday worship, to buy from the store, or to stay for a night. It would have been difficult to keep them only in the Office or meetinghouse. The Shakers occasionally reverted to restricting visitors. For instance, in 1835 Hancock announced it would no longer admit casual visitors to the “Dwelling-House” because it was a private residence, not a “public promenade.” That regulation itself showed how much the barrier between the Shakers and the World had eroded. While some visitors such as John Palmer were told they could not tour the village, many another visitor did receive a tour, or at least wandered about the village. Donald MacDonald made his purchases from the Office store only after being given a tour of the shops, kitchens, dwelling houses, fields, and the school at Watervliet, New York. The Shakers would on occasion even invite visitors to their private weekday worship.<sup>168</sup>

One last example of this gradual erosion of barriers needs to be mentioned. As mentioned above, the Shakers had originally used the term “visitor” to mean Shakers coming from other villages. The Shakers started a record in 1840 of visitors to Union Village, Ohio. This was not meant to be a record of Shakers coming to pay a call, but of potential converts. So few were the potential Shakers that the accounts were extended to

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“Journal of the Gathering Order Concerning those who visit or Stay over Night,” Library of Congress Shaker collection microfiche, reel 17, container 19, item 239; Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 125, but see Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 1, p. 162-63 on the problem of dating this item.

<sup>168</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 32, 34-37, 114; Palmer, *Journal of Travels*, p. 94; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 101-02, 162.

include visiting relatives and the occasional traveling businessman. "Visitor" no longer just meant other Shakers; it now also meant those people of the World once called "spectators."<sup>169</sup>

Probably a decline in the separation of Shakers from the World was inevitable. After 1787, the leadership and the majority of Shakers were Americans, drawn from the very World the Shakers were trying to escape. Valentine Rathbun had claimed that becoming a Shaker meant having an entirely new outlook. Yet despite their new faith, the Shakers brought some of the World's goods and attitudes with them. Archaeological work at Canterbury Shaker village has turned up many fragments of fancy ornamental china, which may have been carried in by new members or even purchased by the existing members. The World remained attractive enough to ensure a significant rate of apostasy during the antebellum years.<sup>170</sup>

### **The crisis of the Era of Manifestations**

By the mid-1830s, the Shakers were in a decline. The elders in the Central Ministry, who had ruled without a change in membership since the death of Mother Lucy Wright in 1821, lacked the charisma of their predecessors. Their attempts to encourage the faith of the believers through revivals did not seem to work. The children they were raising as the hope for the future were almost all leaving upon reaching adulthood. The slow erosion of barriers between the Shakers and the World raised the question of

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<sup>169</sup> "Journal of the gathering Order;" WRHS III.B.4.

<sup>170</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 30, 38, 64, 145, 210; Starbuck, *Neither Plain nor Simple*, chap. 3, 5.

whether there should be any barriers at all, whether Shaker life was distinctive enough to be worth living.<sup>171</sup>

And then in Watervliet, New York, in 1837, there was a remarkable upsurge in spiritual life. Starting among some teenage girls, spiritual possession and spiritual gifts appeared in great number, after being rare for some decades. The Shaker leadership welcomed this development (some would argue they started it) as a sign from heaven, a chance to renew their faith, and the opportunity for younger members to experience the same level of enthusiasm that the Shakers of the 1780s had felt. And so it happened. God the Father and Holy Mother Wisdom, the male and female parts of the godhead, manifested themselves repeatedly among the Shakers. Many of the great leaders from the Shaker past returned, including the greatest of all, Mother Ann Lee. Hence this period is sometimes called “Mother’s Work.”<sup>172</sup>

From a visitor’s perspective, the rise in spirit possession meant a return of ecstatic dancing, along with the similar “whirling gift.” Shaker meetings became even more exciting, and attendance rose.<sup>173</sup>

In fact, meetings became too exciting. The spiritual manifestations became increasingly bizarre in the eyes of the World. Trances, speaking in tongues, the whirling gift, and other performances not only interrupted the usual course of worship, but provoked merriment among the visitors. By the time Charles Dickens, already famous for

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<sup>171</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 6-7.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 8.

<sup>173</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 7; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 74-75, 264-65.

*The Pickwick Papers* and *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, came to visit New Lebanon Shaker village in 1842, he was told that Sunday meetings had been closed since May of that year.<sup>174</sup>

That the Shakers closed their worship to outsiders speaks of an embarrassment that implies the Shakers were sensitive to the opinion of the World. Yet there were also religious reasons for closing worship. To the Shakers, these phenomena were the manifestation of true spirits. Hence these were sacred phenomena, and not to jeered at by unbelievers.<sup>175</sup>

Mother's Work was not just a spiritual revival; it was also a purification movement. The spirit-possessed individuals laid down so many new regulations for Shaker behavior that, to include them all, the leadership had to revise and expand the Millennial Laws in 1841, and again in 1845. Among those spiritual gifts were new regulations about the presence of outsiders in Shaker communities. One sacred writing, said to be from the spirit of Father Joseph Meacham, criticized the Shakers for feeding visitors too elaborately, and called for no more "than eight or nine different kinds of food

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<sup>174</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 69, 264, 276; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 171-76; Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 156, 179; Savulis, "Vision and Practice," p. 73-74; Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 257-58. Some Shaker villages did not follow New Lebanon's lead, and kept Sunday meeting open to the public in the 1840s. Neal, *By Their Fruits*, p. 141.

<sup>175</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 8. Ironically, the development of outdoor hillside services around the same time exposed the most extreme forms of Shaker communal spiritualism to the eyes of any curious neighbors, and Shaker journals indicate there were such spectators; see "A Journal of Domestic Events & transactions In a brief & conclusive form, Commenced Jan. 1st, 1843 . . ." from Hancock Shaker Village, Inc. Shaker microfilm series, reel 2, entries dated May 14, June 4, August 13, all 1843.

upon [the table] at once.” The same writing specifically demanded an end to all visitors trampling through the village, and their confinement to restricted areas at the leadership’s direction. Clearly the policy of confining visitors to the Office and the meetinghouse had broken down, as contemporary visitor accounts such as those mentioned in the previous chapter indicated. Yet this attempt to confine visitors was only a part of a larger effort to restrict contact with the World, by tightening up access to outside publications and restricting travel in the World.<sup>176</sup>

Within the Shakers, the new spiritual activity and the drive for purity created a crisis. The spiritual “instruments,” as those possessed were called, potentially had greater authority than the Central Ministry, which led more from its official position than from possession of any spiritual gifts. Symptomatic of this conflict was downfall of Brother Richard McNemar, who, after being a leading Shaker for over three decades, was banished from Union Village in 1839 at the behest of an instrument. McNemar went east and was absolved by the Central Ministry, but the experience broke him, and he died not long after returning to Ohio.<sup>177</sup>

The odds might have been too much against the Central Ministry, had it not been that many Shakers did not accept the validity of the phenomena they were seeing. Hervey Elkins’s account of the spiritual activity, particularly the new outdoor services begun in

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<sup>176</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 8; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 165-200; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 7 – 8, p. 163-64; “The Holy Order of the Church,” dated February 18, 1844, Hancock Shaker Village, Inc. Shaker collection microfilm reel 1; “Millennial Laws,” WRHS I.B.37 for 1824 rules, I.B.50 for 1845 rules.

<sup>177</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 7-8; Bauer, *Wisdom’s Paradise*, p. 151-54.

1842, makes it clear that he was just one of many Shakers who had doubts about at least *some* of the phenomena. Many Shakers also resisted some of the new rules, such as those banning pork, tea, and coffee. The increasingly bizarre gifts, the unstable characters of many of the early instruments, and the resistance to rules closing the Shakers off from the World in so many ways ultimately helped the Central Ministry regain control and led to the gradual decline in spiritual activity.<sup>178</sup>

From 1837 until well into the 1840s, the Shakers were focused inward. In reviving their spirituality, they had closed themselves off from the World, literally in the case of Sunday worship. With the gradual decline and end of the Era of Manifestations, the Shakers once again had to decide on what terms they would deal with the World. Would they retain the new strict rules embodied in the 1845 Millennial Laws, or return to the more relaxed relations with the World that were prevailing before 1837? As it turned out, the more important question was not how the Shakers would deal with the World, but how the World would deal with the Shakers.

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<sup>178</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, p. 236-44; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 7; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 8; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 165-98.

## CHAPTER 4

### FLAWED ARCADIAS

Like Watervliet and Mount Lebanon, New York, the Shirley, Massachusetts Shaker village had its origins in the days of Mother Ann Lee, who came to Shirley on her trip into New England in 1780-82. Unlike the other two communities, Shirley never grew very large, never exceeding about 120 Shakers at its height.

There are *no* casual tourists to see what is left of the Shirley Shaker village, none at all. Visiting requires special permission, for the remaining buildings in the village are within the bounds of a Massachusetts Correctional Institution, otherwise known as a prison. Naturally, prison authorities do not want stray visitors about. Those who do want to visit the former Shaker village arrange their trips through the Shirley Historical Society.<sup>179</sup>

For those who make the effort, visiting Shirley is a very mixed experience. After the village closed, the Shakers sold it to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which first turned it into a boys' industrial school, and then into a prison. Many of the buildings were heavily used and abused for decades. Others were simply torn down when they did not fit the Commonwealth's plans. And yet others suffered from decades of neglect once they ceased to be used. Still, there are about a dozen Shaker buildings left, and in them one can still find traces of Shaker craftsmanship: a balustrade with an elegant curve, a floor of fine wood laid out in a pleasing rectangular patten, even a row of Shaker pegs at knee level that might possibly have been used by children.

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<sup>179</sup> All of the information about the current state of the Shirley Shaker village is based on two of these arranged trips, in 2004 and 2009.

Recently the Shirley Historical Society managed to secure one-time funding and the cooperation of the Department of Corrections (DoC) for stabilization and restoration of *some* buildings. One Shaker “shop” building has been renovated as DoC offices and a visitors’ center (though visitors still need DoC permission). (See figures 5 and 6.) Still, several of the buildings are not safe to visit, and one, the great laundry building, is visibly collapsing and may soon be beyond hope of restoration. (See figure 7.)



**Figure 5: Exterior of new visitor’ center, Shirley**



**Figure 6: Visitors' center conference room**



**Figure 7: Laundry building, Shirley**

Perhaps the most bittersweet site in the former village is the location of the meetinghouse. It is no longer there. There are just the walkways to where the two doors (one for men, one for women) used to be. For the meetinghouse was moved to the Hancock Shaker Village museum in 1962, where it replaced a similar building torn down decades before. Of all the Shirley Shaker buildings, it is the one in best repair, having been restored to its original appearance. But that, sadly, is because it is no longer in Shirley.

Not all the buildings owned by the Shakers ended up in the prison. One small building has been moved to Shirley Center and renovated. (See figure 8.) And if one leaves the prison grounds from the south entrance and crosses over route 2, there is a

large building sitting at the corner. That is the tavern the Shakers operated in the late nineteenth century, when William Dean Howells came to visit.



**Figure 8: Restored Shaker building**

### A welcome visitor

When he spent six weeks one summer at Shirley Shaker village's tavern, Howells was well on his way to becoming the representative of respectable middle-class tastes in the northeastern United States. Although his career as a successful novelist was still in the future, in 1875 he was the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, one of the most influential magazines in the country, as well as a frequent contributor to its pages.<sup>180</sup>

Howells's account of his visit, published in the *Atlantic* the following year, illustrates a radical change in the attitudes of the wealthy and cultured to the Shakers. In Howells's own opinion, the Shakers

are chiefly known to the world-outside by their apple-sauce, by their garden seeds so punctual in coming up when planted, by their brooms so well made . . . by the quaintness of their dress, and by the fame of their religious dances. It is well to have one's name such a synonym for honesty that anything called by it may be bought and sold with perfect confidence, and it is surely no harm to be noted for dressing out of the present fashion, or for dancing before the Lord.<sup>181</sup>

Howells' description of the other facets of Shaker life were just as positive. Instead of dismissing the dancing as "ludicrous," he saw it as uplifting the Shakers spiritually. He found the Shakers' attire simply old-fashioned, possessing "quaintness" and "charm." Similarly, he rhapsodized about the village's location.

The village is built on each side of the road, under the flank of a long ridge, and the land still falls, from the buildings on the eastern side, into a broad, beautiful valley (where between its sycamores the Nashua runs unseen), with gardens, orchards, patches of corn and potatoes, green meadows, and soft clumps of pine

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<sup>180</sup> Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, *William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chap. 5, 6, 8.

<sup>181</sup> Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 69-70.

woods; beyond rise the fertile hills in a fold of which the village of Harvard Shakers lies hidden from their brethren at Shirley.<sup>182</sup>

Howells's comments demonstrated how the trend toward emphasizing the Shakers' works over their religion, already apparent in John Palmer's 1817 travel account, had come to predominate by the time Howells wrote in 1875. To Howells, the Shakers' works were what they were "chiefly known" for; their faith came after, and in its performances, not its meaning.

The Shakers had invited Howells into their homes, to their worship, and even to their funerals. They discussed their faith, their lifestyle, their economics, and their declining membership with him. This was *not* because they thought of him as a potential convert. He came to them as a known figure, one who had published the spiritual autobiography of Elder Frederick Evans of the North Family at Mount Lebanon. They knew about him as well as they knew about Mark Twain (who was a friend of Howells's) and Bret Harte.<sup>183</sup>

The Shakers had opened up one of their villages to Howells. Howells in turn treated them quite fairly. The old opposition between the Shakers and the World clearly had greatly declined since the Shakers had closed their Sunday worship to the public in 1842. This was partly due to changes among the Shakers. But it was even more due to changes in the World.

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76, 89-90, 102. An obvious typographical error in the quotation from p. 76 has been silently emended. Alas, the view down the slope is now dominated by the maximum security prison buildings.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*; Frederick William Evans, "Autobiography of a Shaker," *Atlantic Monthly* vol. 23 (April, May, 1869), p. 415-26, 593-605.

### Effects of Mother's Work

As can be seen by Dickens's account, the Shakers did not close themselves off entirely from the World in 1842.<sup>184</sup> But spiritually they retreated from the World. Their interests were focused inward to the spiritual revival in their midst. They gave up some worldly practices and added new provisions to the Millennial Laws limiting the interaction between themselves and the World.<sup>185</sup>

The end of the spiritual revival by the late 1840s left the Shakers with many of the same problems they had had beforehand. During the 1840s they had acquired a substantial number of new members from the collapse of the Millerite movement, such that their peak membership of about 3,200 was recorded in the census in 1850. Yet their demographic situation had not really improved: they still had too many old people and children, and not enough young men and women.<sup>186</sup>

Worse yet, the end of Mother's Work seemed to leave the Shakers burnt out spiritually. Several of the instruments were discredited or apostatized. Many of the more extreme rituals were abandoned and their traces hidden away. Never again would the

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<sup>184</sup> Indeed, some Shaker villages did not follow New Lebanon's lead, and kept Sunday meeting open to the public in the 1840s. Neal, *By Their Fruits*, p. 141.

<sup>185</sup> See previous chapter.

<sup>186</sup> The Shaker situation is best described in Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 6-8; Priscilla J. Brewer, "The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee," in Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 51. On the collapse of the Millerites, see Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). Canterbury, Harvard, Union Village, and Whitewater received the greater share of Millerites; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 1, "Adventists."

Shakers ever engage in such an exuberant display of religious enthusiasm. The Shakers had become a faith and community in decline.<sup>187</sup>

Many reasons have been suggested for the decline of the Shakers. James Fenimore Cooper suggested the “fanaticism and folly” of the faith and its followers ensured it would not survive long. Less biased observers, among the Shakers and in the World, recognized the difficulty of attracting adherents to a celibate faith, a difficulty compounded by the decline in missionary work by the Shakers. William Dean Howells thought the increasing secular spirit of the age and the worldly opportunities available limited the appeal of the Shakers. In the last sixty years, most analysts have noted the Shakers’ economic problems: the declining labor pool, competition from the massively capitalized factories of the World, and the decreasing competitiveness of Shaker agriculture with the World’s farms, partly due to the abandonment of raising swine in obedience to a spiritual command during “Mother’s Work.”<sup>188</sup>

Strangely absent from these explanations is the simple passage of time and generational turnover among the Shakers. By 1850, the Shakers were on their fourth generation of leaders and 66 years had passed since the death of Mother Ann Lee. The people who had known Mother Ann were dead; no doubt most of the people who had

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<sup>187</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 7-8; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 183-204.

<sup>188</sup> [Cooper,] *Notions*, p. 461; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 11; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 210; Howells, “Shirley,” p. 101-02; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*; Metin M. Coşgel and John E. Murray, “Productivity of a Commune: The Shakers, 1850 – 1880,” *The Journal of Economic History* 58, no. 2 (June, 1998), p. 494-510. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 223-26, notes a new surge in missionary work after the Civil War, but this was of a fundamentally different nature than the successful missionary efforts of the early Shakers.

known Mother Lucy Wright were dead, too. The third generation of leaders in the Central Ministry from 1821 to 1849 included no individuals with charisma and leadership talent equal to that of the previous generations. The constant need for internal revivals to keep up religious enthusiasm and the growing insubordination among discontented Shakers suggests that the original religious fervor and inspiration were dying out, and that a charismatic leadership had been replaced by one based on holding office. It is no wonder. The Shakers had been promised in the 1780s that the Millennium had already begun. Yet the world seemed no closer to being Christ's Kingdom in 1850.<sup>189</sup>

Even as Shaker numbers were declining due to death and apostasy, they were still taking in new members. Notwithstanding the official asceticism of their new faith, the novice Shakers brought some of the World's goods and attitudes with them. Archaeological work at Canterbury Shaker village has turned up many fragments of fancy ornamental china, which probably were carried in by new members or even purchased by the existing members. It was but one indication of how Shaker simplicity in decoration gradually gave way to Victorian ornamentation, culminating in the lavish "Marble Hall" Office building at Union Village in the 1890s. (See figure 9.) The introduction of outside values caused even more substantial changes. The Shakers had initially provided only practical schooling for children, and restricted the circulation of newspapers and magazines to the leadership. These measures were out of step with American ideas about

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<sup>189</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 4-8; Neal, *By Their Fruits*, p. 212-13, 234, 240, 247-53. I have counted the English leaders as the first generation, Meacham and Wright as the second, and the members of the Central Ministry who held office continually from 1821 to 1849 as the third generation. The transition from charismatic to office leadership is taken from Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), vol. 1, p. 246-54.

education and freedom of thought, a point made by several critics of the Shakers, such as the Vermont writer Daniel Peirce Thompson. The Shakers had to upgrade their schools repeatedly to satisfy parents and retain children upon reaching adulthood. The ban on outside periodicals, although restated in the 1860 Millennial Laws, had collapsed by the early 1870s.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> This is a recurring theme in Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, although her treatment is more complex; see p. 30, 38, 64, 145. Canterbury archaeology: Starbuck, *Neither Plain nor Simple*, chap. 3, 5. Marble Hall: Bauer, *Wisdom's Paradise*, p. 240-41. Education and periodicals: Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 100-01, 153, 160, 203-04; Millennial Laws, WRHS I.B.50, I.B.52. Critics: [Daniel Peirce Thompson,] "Shaker Lovers," in *May Martin and Other Tales of the Green Mountains* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1890), p. 253-306; "C.B.," "A Second Visit to the Shakers," in *The Lowell Offering; A Repository of Original Articles written exclusively by Females Actively Employed in the Mills* (Lowell: Powers & Bagley, [1841]), vol. 1, p. 337-40.



**Figure 9: Marble Hall of the Shakers' Union Village**

The visitors attending Sunday worship helped sustain contact with the World. Those services may well have represented the most extensive contact many Shakers had with the World on a regular basis. There may have been even more tourists in the 1850s than in previous decades due to improvements in transportation. The advent of railroads made transportation speedier and cheaper. Some Shaker villages benefited greatly from this, and began to draw more tourists from the cities. By 1850, Harvard and Shirley Shaker villages became a convenient day-trip from Boston, as was the Enfield, Connecticut Shaker village from Hartford. New Lebanon and Watervliet, New York, were already within easy reach of Albany. More remote locations, such as South Union, Kentucky and Enfield, New Hampshire became much more accessible when railroads ran

within a few miles of each village. The Shakers continued to have extensive opportunities to observe, understand, and possibly envy some of the changes going on in the World by watching their visitors. They became sensitive to the World's opinions.<sup>191</sup>

The result was an erosion of the barriers between Shakers and the World. Most tellingly, Shaker spiritualism gradually lost the distinctive spiritualism of Mother's Work. New members brought in the methods and language of the World's spiritualism, such as the rappings made famous by the Fox sisters and the euphemism "Summer Land" for death (and the life thereafter). These importations gradually took over Shaker spiritualism in the years after the Civil War. It was no accident that Howells, a sensitive observer, had a spiritualist from the World come visit the Shakers in his first novel to mention them, *The Undiscovered Country*. Even Shaker clothes and furniture would develop Victorian flourishes before the end of the century.<sup>192</sup>

The Shakers' treatment of visitors also became more accommodating and less distinctive. By the 1840s, visitors' accounts no longer focused only on public worship, but extended to Shaker-led tours of their villages. For example, the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson went walking with Nathaniel Hawthorne one morning in 1842 to visit the Shaker village at Harvard. They conversed with two of the brethren, whom Emerson

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<sup>191</sup> Harvard and Shirley: Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 85. Enfield, Conn.: Burns, *Shaker Cities*, p. 107. For the general effects of railroads, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 288-89. The Enfield, N.H. Shakers, by offering the railroads a right of way, obtained a commitment that every passenger train passing through Enfield had to stop at the station.

<sup>192</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, parts 3 and 4, especially p. 320-37; W[illiam] D[ean] Howells, *The Undiscovered Country* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880).

described as “not stupid, like some I have seen of their society, and not worldly like others.” After being served breakfast by the sisters, one of the brothers

. . . showed us the farm, vineyard, orchard, barn, herb room, pressing-room, etc. The vineyard contained two notable arcades of grapes, both white and Isabella, full of fruit; the orchard, fine varieties of pears and peaches and apples.<sup>193</sup>

How the Shakers thought of visitors also changed. Early Shaker records about “visitors” do not normally describe visitors from the World; they concern visits of Shakers from other communities. Gradually, the Shakers gave formal recognition to the tourists. A notable example of this transition was the record the Shakers started in 1840 of visitors to Union Village, Ohio. They originally intended to record only potential converts, but soon extended their accounts to include visiting relatives and the occasional traveling businessman. By 1856, the Enfield, Conn. village had a visitor’s register similar to those seen today at many tourist stops. And by the 1890s, the Shirley Shaker village visitors’ register included Shakers and the World alike, with no distinction drawn between them.<sup>194</sup>

Just as some Shakers had not accepted the spiritualism or restrictions of Mother’s Work, so, too, some did not approve of this growing accommodation to the World and its tourists. Elder Freegift Wells argued in 1850 that visitors corrupted the Shaker youth. He described how visitors, after buying goods at the Office store, would go sauntering in

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<sup>193</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 190.

<sup>194</sup> Erosion: examples in Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 78, 85-86, 100-02, 162, 167, 172-73. Visitors touring the village: Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 190ff. Other Shakers as visitors: “A Journal of Domestic Events,” entry for June 21. Registers: “Journal of the gathering Order;” WRHS III.B.4, III.B.30.

mixed company through the village, showing off their fine clothes and lustful behavior.

Wells saw communities having problems disciplining and holding on to young believers, and feared these activities by visitors would encourage younger Shakers to disobedience and even to depart to the World.<sup>195</sup>

One of those Shakers who did not accept the idea of pulling away from the World was Frederick W. Evans. Evans was an atypical Shaker, for his time or any other. He was an Englishman by birth, a materialist in religion, and a socialist in politics. He visited the Shakers in 1830, when he was 22, in hopes of learning some tips from them in setting up a socialist community. When he first spoke with them, Evans was so impressed with the reasonableness of the Shakers that he “pronounced them a society of infidels; which indeed was paying them the highest compliment of which I was capable.” Yet, eventually he experienced so many and so powerful spiritual manifestations that his “reason was as entirely convinced, by the evidence received, of the existence of a spirit-world.” On that basis, which in his autobiography he repeatedly emphasized as evidentiary, he became a Shaker.<sup>196</sup>

Elder Frederick Evans, for so he became in 1838, was an individual with powerful convictions, a passionate nature, and the ability to speak to crowds. In those ways, if in no others, he greatly resembled Richard McNemar. Elder Frederick was determined to spread the Shaker word to the outside world. He not only served in Mount Lebanon as the senior elder for the North Family, the family that gathered in new converts in that village,

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<sup>195</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 163.

<sup>196</sup> Evans, *Autobiography*, p. 2-25; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 205-06.

but spread the word in the World's halls and churches, even traveling back to England. It was his autobiography that Howells published in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*. In the eyes of the World, Frederick W. Evans became the leader and spokesperson for the Shakers from the 1850s to the 1880s.<sup>197</sup>

One reason he was able to become so prominent was because of the weakness of the official leadership. For a generation, from 1821 to 1849, the Shakers had been led by the same four people in the Central Ministry. While in retrospect they seemed a bland collective, they at least had had the prestige of their long tenure and of being Lucy Wright's heirs. They had even managed to survive the upheavals of Mother's Work. But they did not live much longer, dying between 1849 and 1857. Several of their successors held office for only a short time before dying or laying down their office. In the 26 years between 1849 and 1875 (the year of Howell's visit to Shirley), there were six eldresses and five elders in the Central Ministry. They were unable to provide strong leadership for many years. Evans stepped into the gap. While there were other important leaders in other communities during his era, he was the one best known in the World.<sup>198</sup>

The leadership was weakening because the Shakers were declining. And the weakening of the leadership helped ensure further decline. Within a few decades of each village's founding, the number of young, vigorous adults, particularly men, had started to decrease, while the number of aged members and children increased. The pool of

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<sup>197</sup> Evans, "Autobiography," *Autobiography*; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 221-28.

<sup>198</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 144-45; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 257-58. Paterwic, *ibid.*, p. 20-22, argues that the longest-serving elder in this period was particularly ineffective.

potential leaders declined, so that it became increasingly hard to find capable people to fill all the needed positions. Indeed, one of the Central Ministry elders of this period resigned because he was needed even more as the first elder in a troubled Shaker family. Fewer good leaders meant fewer minds addressing the Shakers' problems, fewer elders and elders able to attract, inspire, and retain new members. And so membership and leadership both spiraled downward.<sup>199</sup>

Howells had claimed in his account of the Shirley Shakers that the spirit of the age had affected the Shakers. That spirit came in through their new recruits and through their interactions with visitors. It eroded and transformed their subculture. But it also brought a new leader in Elder Frederick Evans. Thanks to him, the spirit of the age would even bring the fourth estate to their door, over and over again.

### **Reporters and romanticism**

The Shakers had sent out missionaries, they had printed and distributed publications, and they had invited people to visit their Sunday public worship. But prior to the 1840s, they do not seem to have solicited the attention of writers of any kind. Travelers went where they willed and wrote what they wanted. All the Shakers could do was to talk at length with visitors they considered more open to Shaker ideas, as mentioned in the previous chapter. There was no convenient way to respond to any misrepresentations in a travelogue.

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<sup>199</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communitas*; Priscilla J. Brewer, "The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee," in Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 51.

The advent of cheap magazines starting in the 1830s offered the Shakers a new opportunity for communicating with the World, if they were willing to take advantage of it. In the early days of the Republic, newspapers had often covered phenomena of cultural significance, such as the Shakers, through what we would now call feature articles. After 1835 newspapers increasingly becoming the prime vendors of day-to-day news. Magazines became the medium to cover culture and politics at length for the increasing number who had the cash to buy and the leisure to read and discuss the issues of the day. Growing in number and published many times a year, the magazines needed a great deal of new material, including feedback from their readers.<sup>200</sup>

One of the early celebrated magazines was the New York *Knickerbocker*. In 1846, it published a favorable review of a book critical of the Shakers. This was not the first time an unfavorable view of the Shakers had appeared in the *Knickerbocker*; actress Charlotte Cushman had condemned the Shakers as bereft of strong emotions in a poem published in 1837. The Shakers had not responded directly to *that* item, but by 1846 at least one member was willing to hazard a letter to the editor objecting to the critical perspective the review offered of the Shakers, and suggesting the editor come visit the Shakers at New Lebanon. Subsequently, editor Lewis Gaylord Clark did visit the Shakers in New Lebanon and Hancock, publishing an account of his stay in the July, 1848 issue.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741 – 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 14-22.

<sup>201</sup> For *Knickerbocker* material, see Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 166-69; Richmond, *Shaker Literature* 1:245, 2:121, 2: 160-61; Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 333-40.

Clark's account of his visit was uniformly laudatory. He praised the scenery, "the level-green valley, the richly-variegated upland slopes, the 'irregular patchwork of nature' . . . such matchless beauty." Next came the gardens, "where every species of rare plants and esculents were growing in the richest profusion." Since "Shaker fare" was already a commonplace in Clark's day, he did not feel the need to detail his praise of their food. In contrast, he gave his readers a detailed description of the "orderly" and "handsome" cows with their "sweet clover-breath." The Shakers themselves were "cheerful, hopeful people." Clark even admired the gravity and sincerity of Shaker dancing, and dismissed its strangeness as just being a difference of custom.<sup>202</sup>

Clark's praise of the scenery and the farms, while not without precedent, was more extensive and lyrical than his predecessors. This reflected a change in American aesthetics. Just as the taming of the countryside had given Americans an appreciation for wilderness, so the growth of the industrial cities in the decades before the Civil War lent a charm to the settled and cultivated countryside. The well-off built their homes in the suburbs, those grassy intermediaries between city and country, and buried their dead in garden cemeteries. The countryside was the good place Americans had come from, and from their cities they began to look at it with all the charms of absence and nostalgia. The Hudson River school of artists rose to fame in depicting the countryside, both wilderness and civilized nature; Clark thought that one of their greatest figures, Asher Brown Durand, was needed to depict the Shaker landscape in all of its charm. For the Shaker village fit this image of a placid and scenic countryside almost perfectly. If their villages

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<sup>202</sup> Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, p. 335-40.

were a bit different from the communities people had actually come from, it was generally to their credit. They were neat, orderly, and quiet. They were surrounded by well-cultivated fields. Their inhabitants even dressed in garb that was now several decades out of fashion, a point Clark specifically noted. And they managed this without the frantic competition between individuals common to urban life.<sup>203</sup>

Clark's account all but ignored their religious beliefs. He claimed that some Shaker beliefs were worth imitating, but did not think them worth discussing at length in this account. Clark also passed over their holding property in common, alluding to it indirectly and without comment.<sup>204</sup>

Clark's disinterest in Shaker religion reflected broader changes in American life. The social and sexual experimentation of the years after 1815 was coming to close, with the remaining experiments isolated (e.g., the Oneida community) or expelled (the Mormons, Thomas Lowe Nichols) from the mainstream of society. The Shakers' celibacy and unconventional equality of the sexes ceased to be a radical challenge to society, instead looking like an irrelevant anachronism. The religious fervor of the revivals was also dying out by the end of the 1840s. The failure of the Millerites' prediction of the coming of Christ in 1843-44 marked the decline of post-millennialism in American Christianity. The Shakers' post-millennialist belief in Mother Ann Lee as the incarnation

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<sup>203</sup> Wergland, *ibid.*, p. 337. On suburbs, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), chap. 2-4. On garden cemeteries, see David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>204</sup> Wergland, *ibid.*

of the Christ would seem less persuasive in the future. Newer religious controversies took up the attention of Americans. The Irish and their feared Catholic faith provoked riots where they settled. The moral, social, and economic problem of slavery and abolition would split the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers (the first three of which had been among the principal beneficiaries of the revivals). While the Shakers' anti-slavery position caused them some trouble at their two Kentucky villages, they no longer figured prominently in the controversies of the era. One has to wonder if the main Shaker teachings Clark would have recommended to other denominations would have been for unity and the peaceful settling of differences.<sup>205</sup>

Another magazine reporter, Benson John Lossing, followed in Clark's footsteps almost a decade later, in August of 1856. He may well have owed his interest in visiting the Shakers to a blunder in his historical writings. His *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, published serially in 1850 to 1852, had given an unfavorable and erroneous account of Mother Ann Lee. No doubt the Shakers requested he revised this, which he did in some matters of fact when the book was reissued in 1855.<sup>206</sup>

To judge from Lossing's account, he had been invited by the Shakers, much as Clark had, but unlike Clark his invitation had probably come from someone in the Shaker leadership, quite possibly Elder Frederick Evans. Besides Evans, Lossing met with at least three other notable Shakers at New Lebanon: Elder Richard Bushnell, senior

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<sup>205</sup> Doan, *The Miller Heresy*, chap. 7 and Conclusion; Tager, *Boston Riots*, chap. 5; LeBeau, *Religion in America*, chap. 7; Neal, *By Their Fruits*, chap. 13-14.

<sup>206</sup> Gifford, *Early View*, p. 64. Shakers were still displeased with the tone of his treatment, and told him so as late as 1879. The Shakers had certainly become more communicative with the World than they had been before the 1840s.

spiritual leader of the North Family and shortly to be called to the Central Ministry, Isaac Newton Youngs, a lifelong Shaker trusted by the leadership, and Edward Fowler, who combined in his person the roles of both deacon and trustee, responsible for some of the work within the community and for its business relations with the external world. Lossing was also allowed to see activities normally not open to the World, such as the Saturday evening worship. Clearly the Shakers were deliberately cultivating Lossing on his visit, in order to improve their image in the World.<sup>207</sup>

Lossing's article was published in 1857 in *Harper's New Monthly*, one of the first major mass circulation illustrated magazines of the 1850s. *Harper's* was originally founded in 1850 as a way to advertise the books and authors published by the Harper brothers in New York. They molded its contents to suit the tastes of the educated and upper class, now both numerous and wealthy enough to support literary magazines and authors. *Harper's* offered the talents of such writers as Hawthorne, Emerson, Twain, Dickens, and Trollope, along with discussions of the social and political issues of the day.<sup>208</sup>

Lossing himself owed his then-recent fame to the changes in printing and publishing that gave rise to the illustrated magazines. He had developed the largest wood-engraving business in New York City, supplying illustrated magazines such as *Harper's*.

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii-ix, 32, 65-69. On Youngs, see Glendyne R. Wergland, *One Shaker Life: Isaac Newton Youngs, 1793-1865* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

<sup>208</sup> Tebbel, *Magazine in America*, p. 14-22.

He had also started what would be a prolific career writing books on the early history of the United States.<sup>209</sup>

If Evans was looking for favorable coverage, he must have been pleased by Lossing's account when it was published the next year in *Harper's*. Lossing did not just reiterate the old praises of neatness and orderliness offered by so many previous writers. He praised the Shakers' industry while describing several of their businesses. In his account of both the private Saturday family worship and public Sunday meeting house worship, Lossing praised the Shakers for their "dignified, solemn, and deeply impressive" services, echoing Clark. Unlike Clark, Lossing did discuss Shaker theology at length, based on his interviews with Elder Evans. Unlike most accounts before 1840, Lossing was notably impartial in describing Shaker thought. He frequently pointed out the common beliefs the Shakers shared with the World, and portrayed their unique history fairly and without immediate criticism. Again, unlike Clark, Lossing did not even offer a harsh word for that old bugaboo, celibacy, save to attack it indirectly through quoting poetry. He concluded with the following encomium, "They are hospitable to strangers, and kind and benevolent to the community around them. In morals and citizenship they are above reproach; and they are loved by those who know them best." A far cry from the past charges of disloyal pacifism, unnatural religion and sexuality, and buying up all the best land!<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Gifford, *Early View*, p. 60-63.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29-58.

Lossing outdid Clark in offering a romantic image of a Shaker village. In his introduction, he came “from no matter where,” a mysterious traveler, to the “beautiful Lebanon Valley.” Rarely had he “ever enjoyed a journey more. The air was pure and invigorating . . . and over hill, and valley, and intervals, broad shadows, like phantoms, were chasing each other in the noonday splendors that filled earth and air.” After going on in this vein about the fruitful countryside, he noted that “stretching along upon a noble mountain terrace, half way between the deep green valley and the bending sky, lay the Shaker village.” After a brief stop by Lebanon Springs, the famed resort, he announced his mission, “to visit the people in that quiet Shaker village upon the mountain terrace, and learn what I could of their history, their social condition, their daily avocations, industrial economy, and religious beliefs.” He “entered the mysterious village from the north a little before sunset, beneath the arching and interlacing boughs of grand old trees.” So powerfully did Lossing frame his entry into the Shaker village as a romantic trip into a country both strange and familiar that the reader is more likely to remember the scenery and the quaint clothing, featured in many of the illustrations, than the modern machinery used in the seed business. And even that was used for businesses related to agriculture: seeds, herbs, and extracts, not the chairs or mills he would have found elsewhere in Shaker communities.<sup>211</sup>

Lossing’s view was so positive that he overlooked signs of decline among the Shakers. He did notice, without however realizing its significance, the presence of children. He thought this odd in a community of celibates, and correctly attributed their

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5-31, 49-51. On other Mount Lebanon industries, see Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 195.

presence to the Shakers' practice of taking in orphan children from the World. In earlier days, when the Shakers were taking in many people, the children would have been members of families that had joined the Shakers and brought their children with them. They would have grown up to become Shakers. With the declining number of people joining the Shakers, that was no longer common. The children accepted from the World came without family, and left the Shakers once they became adults. Nor did Lossing attribute any significance to the way the Sunday service was orchestrated. To him, it looked like a well-managed expression of true religious belief. But it is clear from his article that some parts of the service, such as testimonies, were planned in advance in 1856, as opposed to being spontaneous expressions of faith that they had once been. In subtle ways, the Shaker display of the faith was becoming more display, and less faith.<sup>212</sup>

Together, Clark's and Lossing's accounts signaled two shifts in travelers' accounts of the Shakers. First, the increasing importance of a professional press meant that the most widely read accounts of the Shakers would in future come from professional writers, and would often appear in magazines. The World's press, not the Shakers, would explain who the Shakers were and interpret their significance. Second, the romanticization of the Shaker village, which Lossing carried out even more effectively than Clark, became an enduring feature of travelers' accounts. Even today, writers describing Shaker villages emphasize the pleasant settings of the remaining villages.

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<sup>212</sup> Gifford, *Early View*, p. 29-58, especially p. 31, 3739, 49-52. For an example of how families dominated the early days, see Deborah Burns, *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1993).

When she wrote an introduction for a reprint of Lossing's article in 1988, the author and collector June Sprigg could not resist opening with an equally romantic meditation on late summer days in August in the area around Mount Lebanon. And by propinquity, the haze of romance spilled over onto the Shakers themselves.<sup>213</sup>

So generally positive was the view of the Shakers by 1850 that even Shaker apostates took a kindlier view of their former faith. Earlier apostates such as Valentine Rathbun and Christopher Clark, the author of *A Shock to Shakerism* (1812), had been the most hostile witnesses against the Shakers. However, Mary Dyer, who had been writing bitterly against the Shakers since 1818, found her books no longer sold in the 1850s. Instead, people were reading the more recent accounts of David Lamson and Hervey Elkins, apostates who valued the good among Shakers even though both men had left them.<sup>214</sup> In the opening "advertisement" for his book, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers*, Elkins strove to portray himself as impartial but friendly to the Shakers, while denouncing the more extreme criticisms of previous apostates:

Some things have been written about them; highly colored and exaggerated statements corroborated by witnesses and oaths, -- fevered denunciations issuing from credulous and rash minds have been vociferated against them; and on the other hand, the Shakers have endeavored to show, to the world, the seductive harmony of the New Heavens and New Earth wherein dwell righteousness; the one surmising, and perhaps sincerely believing, that they indulge in practices too gross for civilized humanity; the other wishing to exhibit a life too abstract and angelic for terrestrial practicability. I would trim between the two extremes. I

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<sup>213</sup> See below and chapters 5 and 6 for other magazine accounts. Gifford, *Early View*, p. vii.

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, *Shaking the Faith: Women, Family, and Mary Marshall Dyer's Anti-Shaker Campaign, 1815-1867* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 163-66.

would exhibit them as they are; — a singular class of people, and rendered so by their dogmas and formulary injections.<sup>215</sup>

### **Opponents of Shaker romance**

Yet not every writer who visited and wrote about the Shakers in this period agreed with this favorable view. Nathaniel Hawthorne visited the Shakers in 1851 and denounced their cleanliness as a fraud. In his short stories, he even interpreted Shaker celibacy as a form of death. The same year as Hawthorne's visit saw the publication of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which he tossed a prophet from "the crazy society of Neskeyuna Shakers." Since he was writing *Moby Dick* while living in the Berkshires, close by the Shaker villages of Hancock and New Lebanon, one wonders if he had run across some old apostate literature, perhaps Valentine Rathbun's old pamphlet, for where else would he get the old name Niskeyuna for Watervliet?<sup>216</sup>

The popularity of the play *The Shaker Lovers*, first produced in 1849, indicates that the common perception just before the Civil War was probably closest to Clark's of the writers just mentioned. In the play, two Shaker couples wish to wed, and therefore contemplate leaving their celibate sect. Conspiring against one of the couples is an elder who embezzles money and attempts murder and seduction. In the denouement, the elder is exposed as a criminal, and the Shakers, with a wink, let the two couples leave. The

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<sup>215</sup> Hervey Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Senior Order of Shakers: A Narration of Facts, Concerning That Singular People* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth Press, 1853), "Advertisement."

<sup>216</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 192-94; John Lauber, "Hawthorne's Shaker Tales," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 18, no. 1 (June, 1963), p. 82-86; Herman Melville, *Moby Dick, or the White Whale* (New York: New American Library, 1961), chap. 71.

play's primary target for criticism was the Shaker practice of celibacy, condemned as against God's will. Indeed, the play implied that many Shakers might be glad to cast off that practice, a theme that has recurred in fiction up to the present day.<sup>217</sup>

The play *The Shaker Lovers* differed significantly from the short story of the same name on which it was based. Daniel Pierce Thompson (1795 - 1868), its author, had struggled for an education and took great pride in his personal freedom as part of his Revolutionary heritage. While he structured his story around the melodramatic romance of the young couple threatened by an elder, much of his criticism was directed against the Shaker rules demanding absolute obedience to the leadership, and forbidding outside reading. Both of these critiques vanished from the play. Instead, the author of the play introduced a second couple, in order to reinforce the critique of celibacy by making it explicit and separating it from the melodrama. Presumably, the playwright altered the story to emphasize the most popular message and seems to have been successful.<sup>218</sup>

In sum, the play condemned the Shakers only when they committed misdeeds, such as preventing lovers from marrying or allowing corruption. This seems to mirror the general attitude toward Shakers by their neighbors, once the communities had become firmly established. They were good neighbors, so long as they played fair in business and stuck to themselves otherwise.

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<sup>217</sup> Samuel D. Johnson, *The Shaker Lovers: A Drama in One Act* (n.p., 1849). For a recent fictional work treating Shaker sexuality, see Deborah Woolworth, *Death of a Winter Shaker* (New York: Avon Books, 1997).

<sup>218</sup> Johnson, *The Shaker Lovers*; Thompson, "Shaker Lovers." My thanks to Jill Mudgett for information on Thompson. We are jointly writing a more extensive article on the two versions of "The Shaker Lovers."

### Utilitarian views of the Shakers

Not every writer who opposed a romantic interpretation of the Shakers was hostile to them. Some saw the Shaker villages as serving for models to solve the World's needs.

Harriot Kezia Hunt was an early female physician and women's suffragette who visited and ministered to Shaker sisters from Canterbury, New Hampshire to North Union, Ohio. In her 1856 memoirs, she proposed the Shaker villages as possible refuges for women and children, whether fleeing from abuse or poverty. This was no casual idea on her part, for her memoirs speak of a passionate commitment to equality of the sexes in a Christian society. She was clearly fond of the Shaker sisters she knew. Several of the sisters confided to her their histories of tragedy at the hands of fate, or sometimes at the hands of a husband. Based on these examples, Hunt argued that the Shakers made an excellent refuge for abused women, and was happy that the Shakers took in the battered of the world. On this last point, Hunt may have let her own enthusiasm overstate the Shakers' willingness to serve as a refuge. Ever since some early controversies with the World over Shakerism dividing spouses and families, the Shakers had required that prospective members resolve their worldly affairs before joining. The Shakers did not want to be seen as a refuge, and Howells would note the Shakers were unhappy with writers who depicted them solely as a refuge. Hunt certainly let her own views get the better of her in discussing the Shaker attitude to marriage. She was certain that it came from a rejection of the unequal role of women in marriage and their consequent suffering. Once women gained equality, Hunt thought it quite possible that Shakers would then welcome marriage among their members. Perhaps she was misled by one of her principal contacts, Eldress Roxelana Grosvenor, whose advocacy of spiritual marriage in later years

led to her expulsion from the Shakers and a lawsuit filed by her against the Shakers for back wages.<sup>219</sup>

Charles Nordhoff was perhaps more fortunate in his principal contact among the Shakers in the early 1870s, for it was Elder Frederick Evans. Evans spoke at length to Nordhoff not just because he was a journalist, but because Nordhoff spoke to one of the central concerns of Evans's own beliefs. In the tumultuous period following the Civil War, the "labor question" had become a major issue in American life. The collapse of the Southern economy, the legal emancipation of the slaves, and the business depression of 1873 all put pressure on "free labor," to the point that many workers began to organize into labor unions or societies such as the Knights of Labor. Evans had never given up his belief in the benefits of socialism as an alternative to capitalism; moreover, he fervently believed in Shaker socialism as an instructive lesson for mankind. Nordhoff was also looking for a solution to the labor question, and came to Mount Lebanon to see Evans because he was researching and writing a book, *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, on the Shakers and other communal societies then in existence. Judging from how often his words and works were quoted, Evans must have welcomed Nordhoff with open arms. Perhaps he hoped lightning would strike twice: Nordhoff had been an editor at *Harper's* when Lossing visited the Shakers in 1856. Indeed, Nordhoff, whose book would

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<sup>219</sup> Harriot Kezia Hunt, M.D., *Glances and Glimpses; or Fifty Years Social, including Twenty Years Professional Life* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), p. 219-20, 228-35. Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 74. On Roxelana Grosvenor, see Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 103-04. Grosvenor lost the suit; the Shaker covenant, by which a full member gave up all right to economic compensation should they depart, had already withstood several court challenges.

be published by the Harper Brothers, would reuse several of the illustrations from Lossing's article to illustrate his own chapter on the Shakers.<sup>220</sup>

Nordhoff's interest in the Shakers and other communes was based on his belief that the nation's prosperity depended on laborers having readily available avenues to financial independence. He did not see the trade union movement as a help, since he was convinced it tended to keep men in servitude, and hence ignorant, vulgar, and unsettled. In contrast, he thought the ready availability of cheap farm land had been one of the great blessings of the Republic. He wrote *The Communistic Societies* to explain and publicize yet another option: working men banding together to farm land in common. Nordhoff examined thirteen different kinds of communistic and semi-communistic societies in depth in the course of his work. Notwithstanding the present day's tendency in America to consider "communism" and "Marxism" interchangeable, none of these communes had a Marxist ideology. They took their inspiration from earlier thinkers, such as Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, or from religious leaders, as the Shakers had from Ann Lee and the Harmonists did from George Rapp. After visiting them all, Nordhoff concluded that communes were a viable route to financial independence even for poor workers. He demonstrated in his detailed studies and comparisons that if the founders of a commune eschewed luxuries and worked together, they could achieve independence and even prosperity without excessively hard work in a matter of years.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, p. 11-22, 153-70. Gifford, *Early Views*, 1-27. On Evans, see Evans, *Autobiography*; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 205-06.

<sup>221</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, p. 11-22, 385-418.

The Shakers dominated *The Communistic Societies*. They were the oldest and most numerous communal society. Evans and others gave Nordhoff access to their villages, their accounts, and their published writings. Nordhoff cited 72 different works on the Shakers in his bibliography, ranging from histories to apostates' accounts, to Evans's own writings. The chapter on the Shakers was by far the longest in the book, offering an examination of the Society in general and a description of almost every village. Nordhoff's analysis and conclusions about communal societies mentioned the Shakers on almost every page.<sup>222</sup>

As befit his purpose, Nordhoff's description of the Shakers, possibly the most detailed published in the nineteenth century, was the opposite of romantic. His descriptions of the villages emphasized their acreage, their farming and industries, and their financial status. He recognized and reported how Shaker membership had dropped by half since its peak in antebellum times, without waxing sentimental over this decline. From his perspective, despite their loss in numbers, the Shakers were prospering, and that was the essential point of his work. About the only romantic touch Nordhoff offered was the occasional compliment on the setting of a few of the villages. Otherwise, his treatment was relentlessly factual and detailed. Clark and Lossing could rhapsodize over the scenery; Nordhoff discussed the Shaker villages as working communities with

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115-256, 385-428. Nordhoff's detailed descriptions of each Shaker village did not extend to Hancock and Tyringham except to say that they were "small, and have no noticeable features," and he treated Whitewater and Watervliet, Ohio as satellites of Union Village.

acreage. His target audience was not the upper class readers of *Harper's*, but working men interested in alternatives to laboring at a day job for the rest of their lives.<sup>223</sup>

Because his purpose was not just to demonstrate that communes could prosper financially, but that they could also be flourishing societies, Nordhoff's treatment of the Shakers extended into facets far removed from their economy. He told their history, explained their theology, examined their way of life, and even quoted their lyrics and spiritual writings. And he did this all with the same relentless detailed examination and analysis, pointing out the positive and negative aspects of Shaker life. He could praise them for health and long life on one page, then condemn them for their limited supply of books and magazines on the other (echoing Thompson). Even as he was trying to make the case for communal societies, Nordhoff noted how the Shakers increasingly were having to rely on hired labor to make up for their own declining numbers.<sup>224</sup>

### **Visiting in fiction and fact**

By the time William Dean Howells came to Shirley in 1875, the Shakers had become even more open to the World. Howells had more access to Shirley in 1875 than Lossing did to Mount Lebanon in 1856. It was not just that Howells stayed at the village longer. The Shakers were making greater accommodations to guests from the World. Previously, visitors who had lived for some time at a Shaker village had stayed at the Office, and were expected to obey Shaker rules, most notably celibacy, during their stay.

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154 is one of Nordhoff's rare lyrical descriptions, of Mount Lebanon; more typical is p. 193-95 on Shirley.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196-98 on Watervliet, N.Y. offers one example of long lives, little reading, declining membership, and hired labor; p. 256 summarizes the demographic decline.

This changed just after the Civil War when two villages opened taverns just beyond their village limits as hotels for visitors from the World. Shirley was one of these villages, having acquired a tavern on a nearby main road that had been something of a nuisance before then; Howells stayed there during his 1875 visit. In contrast, South Union built their own tavern by the side of the nearby railroad. (See figure 10.) Not that this meant the Shakers were willing to open themselves completely or to just anybody; note that both taverns were outside the limits of their Shaker villages. Howells made it clear in his article that his access was exceptional, and that the casual visitor should not expect to be shown through private dwellings. With his greater access, Howells could cover events and topics not explored by Lossing, such as observing a Shaker funeral and noting differences in theology and dietary prohibitions.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 71, 75-79, 84-85, 109. On the Shirley tavern, see Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 114. South Union, Kentucky built their tavern in 1869; see Hooper, *Shaker Communities of Kentucky*, p. 101. Both buildings still stand. South Union's serves as a bed and breakfast for the Shaker village museum. Unlike most of the Shirley Shaker buildings, which are under control of the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, the Shirley tavern is a private residence on a public thoroughfare. See Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 87-91, 221-226.



**Figure 10: South Union tavern**

The Shakers also resumed efforts to reach out to the World. The Gathering Order at Watervliet, New York, started up a newsletter in 1871, originally called *The Shaker*, to explain Shaker life to the World. Elder Frederick Evans, always looking for another way to get out the word, ran the newsletter for several years out of Mount Lebanon, before it was moved to Canterbury, where it continued to bring the news and the ideas of the Shakers to the World and to fellow Shakers until 1899. The Shakers also began to preach not just from their own meetinghouses, but in the forums of the World. Evans, for one, would even lecture in the churches of England in the 1880s.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 138-39, “Manifesto;” Evans, *Autobiography*, p. 219-23, 241-58.

Despite Evans' efforts to reach out to the World, the Shakers continued to decline in numbers. During his visit of 1875, Howells noted that Shirley had lost so many members that they had to resort to hired labor to keep the community running. The South Family had consolidated with the other two families, and its buildings were let out to the hired labor and other tenants. Even with, or perhaps because of the hired help, Shaker agriculture was in trouble. Cutting timber produced more profit for the Shirley Shakers than raising crops. Nor were these problems unique to Shirley. Membership was down in every village. In the very year Howells visited Shirley, the Shakers closed Tyringham, Massachusetts, relocating the few remaining members, and selling a village of well-tilled fields for an allegedly more profitable wood lot in Pennsylvania. Even finding good leaders was becoming difficult, one of the Shirley elders having been brought out of his retirement at Mount Lebanon.<sup>227</sup>

The Shakers' decline affected Howells's account, but in most respects it resembled Lossing's and Clark's. Howells praised the Shakers for their faith, for their honesty, and for their hard work. His account of their faith was as impartial as Lossing's, although much shorter, since he referred interested readers to Evans's autobiography for details. Howells indulged in depicting the Shaker village as a rustic refuge, the "plain, quaint village" inhabited by quaintly dressed people. And like Lossing, he emphasized the agricultural basis of the community. Shirley's often-unprofitable Phoenix mill,

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<sup>227</sup> Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 76, 92, 98. On membership numbers, see Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 256. On Tyringham, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 233-34, 276; Burns, *Shaker Cities*.

constructed in 1849-1851, was not mentioned at all by Howells, possibly because it had been sold by that time.<sup>228</sup>

Howells's major contribution in this article to the romanticization of the Shakers was adding an elegiac note to his depiction of them. He described them as relics of the past, more spiritual than their contemporaries, and keeping apart from the hustle and materialism of the World. Howells made of the Shaker village a modern Arcadia, a refuge from the sordid realities of everyday life. There was irony in this depiction, for in his article Howells denounced those who thought of the Shaker communities as being refuges for the unfortunate, as Harriot Kezia Hunt had done. Instead, he depicted Shirley as a refuge for modern man generally. Yet Howells saw Shirley as a flawed Arcadia on two counts. First, he thought those who decided on celibacy had missed many of the blessings of life, such blessing as might even outweigh "the hope of winning heaven." Second, he tied the Shakers' decline to the equally visible decline in New England farming and the popular theory of degeneration of the old Puritan stock of rural New England, ideas that had become current among urban New England elites in this period. Thereby he asked his readers, no doubt other urbanites of old New England stock, to imagine the Shakers' fall as their own.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 69-75, 83, 102-03. On the Phoenix mill, see Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 144-45; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 194.

<sup>229</sup> Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 70, 74, 95, 99-101. On perceptions of decline in rural New England, see Hal S. Barron, *Those who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chap. 3. As noted below, this will be one of the major themes in Clara Endicott Sears, comp., *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916).

After visiting them in 1875, William Dean Howells was inspired to write at least four fictional works featuring the Shakers. While *A Parting and a Meeting* (1894-95) and *The Day of Their Wedding* (1895) are minor works about Shaker celibacy, and have little new to add on the subject, *The Undiscovered Country* (1880) and *The Vacation of the Kelwyns* (published posthumously, 1920) helped significantly reshape the image of the Shakers among the cultured readers of the *Atlantic* and other literary magazines. Following in the direction set out by Clark and Lossing, and indeed his own visit, Howells romanticized the Shakers.<sup>230</sup>

In *The Undiscovered Country*, published in 1880, Howells drew on the experience of his trip to portray a fictional Shaker village, Vardley (combining the last syllables of the real Shaker villages of Harvard and Shirley), as just such a flawed Arcadia. The novel's major theme was the harm in pursuing concerns about the next world at the expense of this one. Vardley served as the stage for this drama. On one hand, it was a terrestrial paradise, in which Nature's bountiful gifts were everywhere. On the other hand, the Shakers were a community of older people, spiritualists who mostly lived apart from the world. Out in that world, a young woman, Egeria, was gradually losing her vitality because her father demanded she function as a spirit medium. Due to a series of misfortunes, they ended up at Vardley as refugees. Egeria, allowed to play in the fields and orchards of Vardley, recovered her health, eventually to depart, engaged to be married. The Shakers, as inhabitants of Arcadia, could sympathize with Egeria enough to

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<sup>230</sup> Note that while *The Undiscovered Country* was originally published in the *Atlantic*, *A Parting and a Meeting* was published in *Cosmopolitan*, and *The Day of Their Wedding* in *Harper's Bazaar* (a successor to the magazine that carried Lossing's article); *The Vacation of the Kelwyns*, unlike the others, was originally published as a book.

wish her well in the world, but they must remain behind. Her father, unable to give up his spiritual preoccupations, died at Vardley. For Egeria and her father, Vardley was indeed a flawed Arcadia, a place that could restore them to life in this world or send them into the next.<sup>231</sup>

In *The Vacation of the Kelwyns*, published in 1920, Howells brought Arcadia into the world, with dire results. Kelwyn, an underpaid lecturer at a Boston-area college, was in need of a place for a rest from his mentally taxing job, and to take his family on a summer vacation. Afflicted with a declining population and failing agriculture, the Shakers decided to rent out a vacant building on the edge of their village to the Kelwyns. Thus the Kelwyns came to the Shaker village, not as refugees like Egeria and her father, but as paying customers of Arcadia. The mix of personal and commercial relations, absent in *The Undiscovered Country*, turned the vacation into a disaster. The Kelwyns were unable to get the local hired help to do what the Kelwyns wanted, but felt constrained by their relationship to Shakers from disciplining them. The local help believed they were doing as the Kelwyns wanted, hearing nothing to the contrary, and then could not understand why the Kelwyns were dissatisfied with them. The Shakers believed they had thoughtfully provided for the Kelwyns, only to find everyone unhappy with each other. The whole situation echoed the real conflict in the 1890s between

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<sup>231</sup> Howells, *Undiscovered Country*.

Vermont farmers and their summer guests from the city described by Dona Brown in her book on New England tourism.<sup>232</sup>

Howells's last novel was no airy piece of fantasy. If the early relationship between the Shakers and the World had been one of access granted primarily on the Shakers' terms, by the late nineteenth century the weakened Shakers increasingly found themselves dancing to the World's tune. And the World wanted a picturesque rural retreat, an Arcadia. Experts of various kinds argued that "brain workers," whom today we would call white collar workers, required regular rest and relief from their jobs. This the Shakers could offer. Indeed, at least four Shaker villages set up hotels to cater to such guests in this period. There people of the World could come to stay, living leisurely in the World while having the Shaker village within walking distance. No longer were they bound by the Shakers' terms of living celibate lives while visiting. Howells was just one of the many who lived on such terms at Shirley.<sup>233</sup>

The romantic turn Howells and other writers gave the Shakers served the World better than the Shakers. It gave the World a rural retreat it could admire, visit, and even stay at for a while. While that made the Shakers more popular as a people, it hindered them as a community of faith. Clark, Lossing, and Howells had downplayed Shaker

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<sup>232</sup> W. D. Howells, *The Vacation of the Kelwyns: An Idyl of the Middle Eighteen-Seventies* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920); Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), chap. 5.

<sup>233</sup> Tourism in late Nineteenth Century: Aron, *Working at Play*, chap. 1, 2, 5. Harvard and Shirley: Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 114, 121. Travel to resorts: David L. Richards, *Poland Spring: A Tale of the Gilded Age, 1860-1900* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005).

religion; among the things Lossing went to Mount Lebanon to investigate, religion came last. The writers made Shaker religion less controversial, at the cost of making it less interesting. Howells argued that the Shakers were attracting fewer people because the spirit of the age turned men's minds towards cities and worldly concerns, and away from the contemplation needed for the truly religious. He might have added, though it would have reflected on his own description of the village, that few would want to take up residence in a declining farming community.<sup>234</sup>

The romantic interpretation of the Shakers gained ground during the remaining decades of the nineteenth century, while the view of the Shaker community as a practical refuge died out. By the end of the century, the *Ladies Home Journal* could offer an article entitled, "A Wonderful Little World of People" which positively gushed over the Shakers. A picture showing Mount Lebanon sitting in the country complemented the text describing the Shaker village as "a palm tree and fountain in the desert," a comparison that would have startled even Lossing, who had thought well of the Hudson Valley countryside. The author went so far as to stand past controversies on their head. No longer were the Shakers ignorant and unlearned sectarians. "Here are men and women, intelligent beyond the average, who have found a life of good works". This as a time when the Shakers were having trouble finding qualified elders and trustees! The Shaker creed, far from being unusual, was "based on the simple precepts of Jesus . . .". So much for Mother Ann. Celibate women did not pine for love, rather "[t]he Shaker girls typify the poet's ideal of maidenhood." Perhaps one reason this was such a glowing article was

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<sup>234</sup> Gifford, *Early Views*, p. 31. Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 101-02.

that the author, hiding behind a pseudonym, had a Shaker sister. It certainly celebrated in emotional language many features of Shaker life that had been condemned as deviant a century before.<sup>235</sup>

If the romantic view had triumphed in the minds of Howells's readers, the reality of their declining membership lent a different view to the Shakers. By 1889, when the North Union, Ohio Shaker village closed, membership was less than half of what it had been at the peak in 1850. Charles Dickens had called the Shakers "grim" when he tried to visit them in 1842; it seemed a more fitting description of their secular situation in 1889.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Madeline S. Bridges (pseud. for Mary Ainge De Vere), "A Wonderful Little World of People" in *The Ladies Home Journal*, vol. 15, no. 7 (June, 1898), p. 6-7. Pseudonym identified in Gregory Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 64-66. Lossing's feelings about the Hudson Valley landscape can be found in Gifford, *Early Views*, p. 29-30.

<sup>236</sup> Charles Dickens, *American Notes: For General Circulation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 257-60.

## CHAPTER 5

### COLLECTING AND SALVAGING “SHAKER,” 1889-1940

There are not many visitors to see the old Shaker village of North Union in Ohio. The problem isn't restricted access, as with Shirley. It's more fundamental. There is almost nothing left of North Union. It was the next village to close after Tyringham, shutting its doors in 1889. Its great gristmill had already been destroyed three years earlier, blown up deliberately as part of a Fourth of July celebration. The rest of the Shaker village followed. In 1905, the Van Sweringen brothers bought the site, eradicated what was left of the Shaker village, and built a model suburb in its place. With perhaps unintended irony, they called the new community “Shaker Heights.” North Union had farmed and lived by selling food to the people of Cleveland. Shaker Heights became the place where the wealthier people of Cleveland lived.

Shaker Heights remains to this day a pleasant and wealthy suburb, planned without being uniform, part of the city but with many trees and parks. It is actually easier to find traces of the Shakers in the parks, for the lakes in the northwestern part of town were constructed by the Shakers to power their mills. There is a Shaker Historical Museum, which represents both what was and what is. The building looks like many another house in Shaker Heights, but it sits on the foundation of a Shaker Church Family dwelling. Inside, the museum has exhibit rooms on both the Shakers and on the Van Sweringen brothers.

No other major Shaker village has had all its buildings lost, though some are down to a very few. North Union suffered its ignominious fate because in 1889 no one cared or saw any need to preserve things Shaker. But that was soon to change. The

Shakers were dying out, and as they disappeared, a few collectors began rescuing bits and pieces of Shaker life.

### **The spirit diminished**

The closing of North Union started a period of rapid geographic decline for the Shakers. Previously, the Shakers had coped with declining membership by consolidating families; for example, Howells in his 1875 visit had noted that Shirley's three families had shrunk to two. Tyringham had been the first of the eighteen major villages to close in that same year of 1875, but it had seemed an exception at the time. No longer. North Union started a trend, with Groveland closing in 1892, Watervliet, Ohio in 1900, Shirley in 1908, Pleasant Hill in 1910, Union Village in 1912, White Water in 1916, Enfield, Connecticut in 1917, and Harvard in 1918. South Union, Kentucky, the last remaining western village, was sold off in 1922, to be soon followed by two New England villages, Enfield, New Hampshire in 1923 and Alfred, Maine in 1931. In 1938, the Shakers even closed down their American birthplace, Watervliet, New York, the old Niskeyuna, where Mother Ann had lived and died. Membership dropped from over 500 in 1900 to 92 in 1936. By the time Watervliet closed, there were only four small villages hanging on.<sup>237</sup>

The Shaker decline was unmistakable. Not even hired labor could keep a community going if there were not enough Shakers there to run it. By the time most villages closed, they were reduced to a few old people. Though in theory they owned

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<sup>237</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 114-15, 242-56. Brewer, "Shakers of Mother Ann Lee," p. 49; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*; Howells, *Three Villages*, p. 76. New Lebanon Shaker village had changed its name to Mount Lebanon in 1861 when a post office was established there. In numbering the old villages at eighteen, I have disregarded some of the short-lived communities, such as Busro, Narcoosee, and Gorham.

nothing, to the remaining Shakers each village was their sacred home, the place where they had been enjoined in a holy communion with their Shaker family, the repository of their memories and affections. Many had hoped to stay in their villages until the end of their days, but they were to be disappointed. Some would choose to relocate, others would be pensioned off, and a few even stayed behind after their villages were sold.<sup>238</sup>

Mary Dahn, who relocated from lowland Watervliet, New York to hilly Mount Lebanon explained her feelings about the move in a letter:

Any little reminder of my home and friends is a great comfort at the present. The sisters are very kind but this dark house is very depressing to an already broken heart. [T]he hills smother me and this room crushes me. Home is where the heart is and mine is not here.<sup>239</sup>

Despite the activities of Shakers such as Elder Frederick Evans, preaching to the World, and despite the publication of a Shaker newsletter, to acquaint the World with what was good about Shakerism, the faith was dying out. Howells's talk about the spirit of the age only partially explains this continued decline. There had been an internal fall-off in spirituality. The Shakers were abandoning the more distinctive elements of their faith. Dancing ceased in many villages in the late nineteenth century. There was no wave of new spiritual revelations after the end of Mother's Work in the 1840s, and the revelations of that period were set aside or ignored.<sup>240</sup>

As hostility to the Shakers declined, the Shakers had dropped much of their isolation and differentiation from the World. The trustees, who moved out in the World

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<sup>238</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 242-56.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295-96, 320-37; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, chap. 8-10.

of necessity, may have been the first to adopt worldly garb, but by the end of the nineteenth century it was common practice. The prohibitions against outside reading material and personal possessions fell into abeyance.<sup>241</sup>

The Shakers and the World increasing mixed with each other in ways unimaginable in Mother Lucy's heyday at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Howells was hardly the only visitor allowed in to see the workings of a Shaker village in its decline. The Enfield, New Hampshire Shaker village allowed townspeople to camp on its grounds toward the end of the century. Photography was becoming a popular hobby at that time, and photographs of Shakers in their villages posing with visitors are quite common. Nor was the traffic one way. By the 1890s, Shaker sisters would be going over to the resort hotel at Poland Spring to sell their wares.<sup>242</sup>

The breakdown of barriers between the Shakers and the World created problems that further disillusioned Shakers. Hired men disturbed the peace of Shaker villages repeatedly, particularly annoying the women. Trustees engaged in unwise financial speculation on a grand scale, none more so than Joseph Slingerland, who was responsible for the gaudy "Marble Hall" and the opening of a very short-lived Shaker community in Georgia, efforts that probably hastened the end of the western villages. South Union's Eldress Harriet Bullard perhaps summed it up best, saying, "Disorders of various kinds

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<sup>241</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 295-96, 318-19; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 182-84, 190-92.

<sup>242</sup> Suzanne Hinman, "Tangled Skeins: Enfield Village and the Shakers," Enfield Shaker Museum Spring Forum lecture, 2008; Hooper, *Shaker Communities* offers good examples of tourist photography; Richards, *Poland Spring*.

exist to blight this once flourishing society,” thus connected the decline and the troubles of the Shakers.<sup>243</sup>

To external observers, the Shakers increasingly looked like a fringe religious group that was dying out. As early as 1897, *The New England Magazine* concluded its article on Union Village, Ohio by noting that “the total extinction of the community will only be a question of time.” This would be a recurrent theme in the popular media, right to the present. And it led to a logical conclusion, expressed in a magazine article as far back as 1910: “the religious idea . . . is dying. The socialism . . . is a failure. . . . [The Shakers’] mission is ended.”<sup>244</sup>

Yet for those rock-solid in the faith, the declining numbers did not mean a decline in their religion, in their faith. Sisters Anna White and Leila S. Taylor were among those for whom the Shakers’ worldly circumstances did not alter the promise of the Shaker faith. In 1904, they published *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message*, the last major theological work published by the Shakers. In its pages, they drew a subtle distinction between two questions that lay at the heart of their belief. Asking whether the Shakers were dying out as a people, they acknowledged it was so, but claimed that the Shakers were moving on to another form of existence in which they would continue to work for humanity. Asking whether Shakerism was dying out as a faith, their answer was a resolute “Nay! not unless God and Christ and the eternal verities are failing!” With such

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<sup>243</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 253, 286-307.

<sup>244</sup> James K. Reeve, “A Shaker Community” in *The New England Magazine*, n.s. vol. 6 (May, 1897), p. 349-53. Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 259.

an outlook, they could look calmly on the worsening temporal situation of the Shakers, and even hope and expect a revival in the near future.<sup>245</sup>

As it turned out, there was no revival in the near future, at least not of the kind Sister Anna and Sister Leila hoped for. As communities of religious believers, the Shakers were dying out. But as providers of collectibles, they were just beginning to flourish.

### **Collecting “Shaker”**

It’s a paradox of Shaker history that the decline of Shaker believers helped make Shaker goods collectible. Obviously, as the Shakers died out, they stopped making things, and Shaker items became scarce. But there was much more to the rise of collectors’ interests in the Shakers than just scarcity.

Purchasers of Shaker goods in antebellum times bought them for their quality. With their community-organized production and their work ethic, the Shakers had rapidly acquired a reputation for producing good foodstuffs and manufactured goods. They capitalized on this reputation as they expanded their production for external markets. For example, the Shakers successfully pioneered the sale of packaged seeds on a nationwide basis by guaranteeing their freshness; their traveling salesmen reclaimed unsold packets at the end of each year. This was remarkable in a country where most farmers previously got their seeds from their own farms or a neighbor’s. Likewise, Shaker medicines set a standard of quality for the patent medicine industry, due to the care members took in preparing them consistently. Chairs, perhaps the most famous kind of Shaker good, were

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<sup>245</sup> Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, O.: Fred J. Heer, 1904), p. 389-395.

something of an exception; while some were sold before the Civil War, it was not until after the war that the chair factory at Mount Lebanon would manufacture for a national market.<sup>246</sup>

The Shakers certainly realized the value of this reputation for quality. They used visual markings to identify their products as authentic, to protect them against fraudulent competition, and to command higher prices for the quality of their goods. This included distinctive packaging for their seeds and medicines even in antebellum decades, and trademarks for their chairs in the decades after the Civil War.<sup>247</sup>

Shaker goods back then were not collectibles. For something to become a collectible, it has to be perceived as scarce and meaningful.<sup>248</sup> Shaker goods were neither. Their agricultural products were commodities, similar, if of better quality, to what every other farmer in the area was producing. Their manufactured products, such as chairs and clothing, were by and large in common styles of the era, and so not distinguished. Indeed, the Shaker chair was originally nothing more than a variation of the New England slat

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<sup>246</sup> Seeds: Andrews, *Work and Worship*, p. 53-63. Medicines and herbal extracts: *ibid.*, p. 63-74; James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires; A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 199. Chairs: Charles R. Muller and Timothy D. Rieman, *The Shaker Chair* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

<sup>247</sup> Miller, *From Shaker Lands*; Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 144-46.

<sup>248</sup> The speculative bubbles associated with the “slabbing” of coins and comic books (having them graded and packaged by professional services) in the last two decades demonstrated how perceptions of scarcity can diverge from reality. The fad of pet rocks demonstrates how meaningfulness can be created out of almost nothing at all, and just as easily lost.

back chair. To the extent that Shaker manufactures were distinctive, it was initially because they were *simpler* in design than what other people built.<sup>249</sup>

In the years after the Civil War, machine-made goods, produced cheaply and in large quantities, supplanted hand-made products across the country. Only people with discretionary income could afford to buy hand-made goods. They became a custom-made luxury. They became evidence of what Thorstein Veblen called “conspicuous consumption:” the ostentatious display of money spent to demonstrate the taste and power of the rich.<sup>250</sup>

Further enhancing the appeal of hand-made goods was the development of the Arts and Crafts movement. This movement, which originated in Britain, linked the qualities of the worker to the qualities of the object the worker produced. For example, a worker motivated by pride in sewing would make a fine shirt, while a shoddy shirt no doubt reflected the careless work of someone just trying to make a buck.<sup>251</sup> No doubt there was some truth in this theory, if only because mass production swamped the low end of the market, driving out of business all but the best at their craft. Even the Shakers stopped making their own cloth, and began buying it from the World, because the machine-made stuff was so much cheaper, even though it did not last as long.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Muller, *Shaker Chair*, p. 2-4.

<sup>250</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899).

<sup>251</sup> The theory of the movement resembles Karl Marx’s theory of the alienation of labor under capitalism, but attributes it to a different though related cause.

<sup>252</sup> Pamela Todd, *The Arts & Crafts Companion* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2004), p. 32; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 161.

The Arts and Crafts movement spread to the United States in the wake of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876, where British examples and Shaker furniture stood out compared to the machine-made furniture that dominated the exhibition. Owning handcrafted products soon implied that one had the good taste and judgment to appreciate how the craftsman expressed his values in his work.<sup>253</sup>

The Shaker maxim, “Hands to work, hearts to God,” fit nicely with the ideology of the arts and crafts movement. By the logic of that movement, Shaker goods must embody and express their makers’ strong religious beliefs and character. The deliberate attempt to suppress worldly materialism with communal property had its parallel in the suppression of unnecessary ornamentation in Shaker goods. This alignment of early Shaker design philosophy and the rationale of the arts and crafts movement has dominated the interpretation of Shaker-made goods ever since.<sup>254</sup>

Given the alignment between the Shaker design ethic and the ideology of the arts and crafts movement, it is not surprising that Shaker furniture influenced the work of several American members of the arts and crafts movement in the period 1890-1910. For example, Gustav Stickley’s commitment to the imperatives of honesty and integrity in design led him to adapt Shaker designs for some of the furniture his firm produced. Another figure in the movement, Edward Pearson Pressley, cited the Shaker experience as

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<sup>253</sup> Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). David M. Cutler, *Gustav Stickley* (New York: Phaidon, 2003).

<sup>254</sup> John T. Kirk, *The Shaker World: Art, Life, Belief* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), particularly p. 39-62, 82-100.

one of the influences in founding his arts and crafts commune, New Clairvaux, in Montague, Massachusetts.<sup>255</sup>

For the Shakers, the rising interest in handicrafts after 1876 was a fortuitous turn. Many of their old industries had collapsed by then, due to loss of markets during the Civil War, as happened with the seed business, or competition from machine-made products, as happened to their cloth manufacturing. Their workforce increasingly consisted of older women, who could not engage in the heavy labor of commercial farming or industrial production.<sup>256</sup>

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Shakers began to emphasize production of fancy goods and foodstuffs, items that would appeal to the tourists visiting their villages, ones they had both the ability and talents to make. The Shakers also adapted more to the World's tastes by making goods more in the World's styles. Ironically, just as the Arts and Crafts movement was discovering the simplicity and integrity of Shaker design and craftsmanship, the Shakers themselves were moving away from it. Chairs

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<sup>255</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 160; Todd, *Arts and Crafts Companion*, p. 156; Bert Denker, ed., *The Substance of Style: Perspectives on the American Arts and Crafts Movement* (Winterthur, Del.: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1996), p. 161-83, 375-95. Stickley's commitment to the design theory of the arts and crafts movement was much stronger than his commitment to actual hand crafting, as he used factory methods, such as machine tools and task separation in the mass production of his furniture; *ibid.*, p. 164-65. Some of the other connections between these earlier figures are explored in Mario S. De Pillis, "The Edward Deming Andrews Shaker Collection: Saving a Culture," in Mario S. De Pillis and Christian Goodwillie, *Gather up the Fragments: The Andrews Shaker Collection* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>256</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*; Orvell, *Real Thing*; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p.269-70; Burns, *Shaker Cities*, p. 150, 171; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 164, 189; Andrews, *Community Industries*, p. 248-54

developed Victorian flourishes. Boxes sported ribbons. The Shakers even added dolls to their goods for sale. The stylish Dorothy cloak became a famous Shaker-produced product during this period, even though the Shakers did not wear it themselves and had stopped making most of their own clothes. One of the most popular Shaker products, their line of chairs, were no longer purely hand crafted but were built using power hand tools in the Chair Factory constructed in the 1870s by Mount Lebanon's South Family.<sup>257</sup>

Moreover, their methods of selling changed to please the World. On one hand, they adapted to the ways of impersonal commerce by distributing catalogues of their chairs. The Office building, originally a place for conducting business, devoted more space to conducting retail sales. Several villages' Office buildings were remodeled in the late nineteenth century to resemble a modern museum gift store. Indeed, Hancock's store was called a "gift shoppe" in the early twentieth century. (See figure 11.) On the other hand, the Shakers took advantage of their image to help sell their handicrafts. A quaint woman dressed in the old-fashioned Shaker style could be a more effective salesperson, as she fit the romantic image of Shaker life that had developed in previous decades. Canterbury's Shaker women traveled as far as Florida to sell their fancy work, an activity that would have been unimaginable under the 1821 Millennial Laws.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Andrews, *ibid.*; Kirk, *Shaker World*, p. 196-218; Marion Wire, "What the Shakers Make for Christmas" in *The Ladies Home Journal*, Vol. 26, no. 1 (December, 1908), p. 77; Timothy D. Rieman and Jean M. Burks, *Encyclopedia of Shaker Furniture* (Atglen, Penn.: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 46-48.

<sup>258</sup> Michael S. Graham, "The Sabbathday Lake Shakers and the Rickers of the Poland Spring Hotel: A Scrapbook History" (exhibit brochure, The United Society of Shakers, Sabbathday Lake, Inc., 2002); "Trekking New Hampshire: Tourism in the Granite State



**Figure 11: Hancock sisters' gift shoppe. Courtesy Hancock Shaker Village, Inc.**

Shaker goods became souvenirs, one kind of collectible. One way to look at souvenirs is as articles which remind one of experiences that are no longer present, either because they have become remote in time or space. A souvenir is equivalent to a material memory: both souvenirs and memories recall and connect to a past experience. (Vacation photographs serve the same function, offering a sweet reminder for many tourists, if not always so sweet to their friends and family.)

Now, anything bought at a Shaker village *could* have been a souvenir. But in the early days, this normally would have been an unimportant motivation for buying Shaker goods. Visitors from the World did not see Shaker goods as distinctive, even though they

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through a Shaker Lens,"

<http://www.freewebs.com/shakerexhibits2/touriststocsvhistory.htm>.

were well made. A seed packet was a seed packet, a Shaker chair was a chair; both were good for what they did, but their being Shaker conferred no additional value beyond a reputation for quality. There was little reason in antebellum times to memorialize the Shakers, for they were only one of many odd religious communes, made commonplace through their endurance and success.

However, once cultured people such as Lossing and Howells romanticized the Shakers, an object they produced could easily become a souvenir for people who accepted that romanticization. It could represent an image as well as could the actual Shakers, perhaps even better, because of the difference between the charming Shaker image, rooted in the past, and the sad Shaker reality of the present. Howells's Mrs. Kelwyn in *The Vacation of the Kelwyns* demonstrated this distinction perfectly. She wanted Shaker furniture in the house they rented from the Shakers, but had little interest in the Shakers themselves. The ideology of the arts and crafts movement assisted in turning goods into souvenirs by providing a rationale for the attribution of Shaker qualities to Shaker goods. A Shaker chair no longer was just a chair. It was a chair handcrafted (sort of) by people who had dedicated their lives to worshipping God and making things with care and craft. It could take the place of a Shaker in exhibiting Shaker values. And with the decline of the Shakers, it became easier to find Shaker goods than meet actual Shakers. A Shaker object became something one could display to indicate a connection to those rare folks, thus demonstrating not only good taste, but the extent of one's travels.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Howells, *Vacation of the Kelwyns*. For other examples of how the image was preferred to the reality, see Brown, *Inventing New England*, especially chap. 4, 5.

The demand for Shaker souvenirs paralleled the expansion of tourism in the late nineteenth century. But the Shakers could capitalize on this rise only in limited ways. They could no longer offer a spectacle. Fewer of the aging members were spry enough to dance, so that Shaker tradition began to die out. In any case, dancing had become more respectable, and was not the spectacle it had been when Shaker apostates toured on Broadway. Even the Sunday public meeting died out at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>260</sup>

What the Shakers could offer, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was a retreat from the busy world. Shirley and South Union had set up taverns before 1870. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, other villages also made efforts to attract tourists. Pleasant Hill, Kentucky opened a former East Family dwelling as the “Shaker Hotel” in 1897. For a brief period the Harvard, Massachusetts Shaker village rented out a North Family dwelling, advertising it as “The Rural Home . . . a refuge from the annoyances of city life and the summer heats.” Likewise, Mount Lebanon fixed up a North family dwelling and rented it out as the “Ann Lee” cottage.<sup>261</sup>

Inviting tourists to stay was just one sign that the remaining members no longer maintained such a distance from visitors as they had done in antebellum times. Accounts from the late nineteenth century onward frequently refer to visitors being greeted by elderly female Shakers like old friends. Some visitors, such as the historian and former

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<sup>260</sup> Aron, *Working at Play*, chap. 1, 2, 5; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 331; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, p. 195; Bauer, *Wisdom’s Paradise*, p. 228.

<sup>261</sup> Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 92, 114, 120-22, 126-28; “Shaker Museum at South Union” travel brochure, c. 2004, page labeled “bed & breakfast;” Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 6-7, “Ann Lee Cottage;” Hooper, *Shaker Communities*, p. 111-12.

Boston mayor Samuel A. Green, returned year after year, making friends with the Shakers. The Shakers even allowed marriages to be celebrated on their property. And every visitor could take away a souvenir, whether a box or chair or doll, to remind them of their stay in a Shaker Arcadia as they went back to deal with a busy, commercial world.<sup>262</sup>

One didn't even have to visit a Shaker village to come away with a Shaker souvenir. Shakers went out into the World, too. The Shakers had had a relationship with the Ricker family of Poland Spring since 1793, when they had engaged in the land swap that gave the Shakers their Alfred village site and the Rickers the future site of the Poland Spring Hotel. Shaker women from Sabbathday Lake went over to the Rickers' hotel to sell their wares from the 1890s to 1920. Visiting the Rickers gave the Shakers the opportunity to sell their wares to a well-heeled clientele, while it helped reinforce the image of a peaceful rural retreat the Rickers wanted for Poland Spring.<sup>263</sup>

Not every Shaker village was as successful in capitalizing on the tourist trade. Mount Lebanon suffered from the decline of Lebanon Springs as a resort in the late nineteenth century. Bryan's 1887 guide to the Berkshires, which devoted pages to communities in proportion to their social importance, gave more space to the closed Shaker community of Tyringham than to Lebanon Springs and Mount Lebanon together.

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<sup>262</sup> Horgan, *ibid.*. Pleasant Hill hotel: Hooper, *Shaker Communities of Kentucky*, p. 103. Friendships with tourists: Frances E. Howe, *14000 Miles: A Carriage and Two Women* (Fitchburg: Sentinel Printing Company, 1906), p. 4, 8, 31, 185, 210, 213-14. Wedding: Burns, *Shaker Cities*, p. 187. Note the parallels to the experiences of the tourists in Brown, *Inventing New England*, especially chap. 3-6.

<sup>263</sup> Graham, "Sabbathday Lake Shakers." Richards, *Poland Spring*.

Tyringham was mildly fashionable, while Lebanon Springs was no longer so. Not surprisingly, the Ann Lee Cottage at Mount Lebanon lasted for only two seasons. Harvard's "rural home" didn't last much longer before being converted into a sanitarium in 1897. And neither its "Shaker Hotel" nor its proximity to Mammoth Caves saved Pleasant Hill from closing in 1910.<sup>264</sup>

### **Visiting and remembering lost communities**

Of course, there were no Shaker tourists at North Union after 1889. The Shakers were gone, their buildings leveled, and the new suburb of Shaker Heights was installed in its place. Yet North Union's demise gave birth to a new type of Shaker souvenir hunter: the professional collector.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two men working for the Western Reserve Historical Society became interested in the Shakers as their lost village of North Union was being converted into a suburban development. John Patterson MacLean became the Shakers' first serious outside historian, starting with an account of the North Union village. Wallace H. Cathcart became the greatest collector of Shaker documents, accumulating the core of the Shaker collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society, the largest such collection in the world.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), p. 85; Hooper, *Shaker Communities*, p. 111-12; Medicus [pseud. for Daniel Denison Slade], *Twelve Days in the Saddle: A Journey on Horseback in New England . . .* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1884), p. 51-53. Bryan, Book, p. 181-84, 264-66. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 6-7; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 126.

<sup>265</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 370-72; J[ohn] P[aterson] MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio: Fugitive Papers Concerning the Shakers of Ohio, with Unpublished Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), especially p. 112-89.

MacLean and Cathcart, like many subsequent collectors of Shaker memorabilia, had complicated motives for their work. Both men were religious; MacLean was even a Universalist preacher, ironic given the competition between the Shakers and the Universalists during the New Light revivals of the 1780s. Both were great book lovers. And both built relationships with Shakers in pursuit of their acquisitions.<sup>266</sup>

Most importantly, both men wanted to salvage what Shakerism had been, and what it still was. MacLean, who had intended to write only a few pieces on the Shakers, decided to research and write about them at greater length because “many of their MSS. had been lost or destroyed; I had gained the confidence of those in authority, and what was to be done should no longer be delayed.” Besides two major books and many articles, MacLean would compile the first major bibliography of Shaker writings. Cathcart, who read MacLean’s bibliography, established a relationship with Eldress Catherine Allen of the Central Ministry, and eventually supplanted MacLean as the primary beneficiary of Shaker donations of papers and manuscripts.<sup>267</sup>

For such as these two, collecting “Shaker” was both a supplement and a substitute for visiting the Shakers. If a souvenir is a material representation of a visit, collectables such as Shaker documents and furniture can be thought of as souvenirs for visits that never have occurred, but that someone wished for. MacLean and Cathcart did meet with Shakers. But collecting their documents gave these two men the opportunity to visit the Shakers world they were born too late to see. North Union had been the nearest Shaker

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<sup>266</sup> Stein, *ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, p. 9; Stein, *ibid.*

village to their homes in Cleveland, but North Union had been destroyed before either man developed his interest in the Shakers. And the Shakers of MacLean and Cathcart's day were no longer what they once were. Clara Endicott Sears and Edward Deming Andrews would later develop these ideas to its logical conclusion: the eventual disappearance of the Shakers meant their culture could only be preserved through their artifacts presented in context. For Andrews, that most definitely included *all* forms of artifacts, from documents to furniture, needed to recreate the culture.<sup>268</sup>

Among the Shakers, some worked to save the memory of their faith. Elder Alonzo Hollister and Eldress Catherine Allen took an active role in saving manuscripts and passing them on to collectors and museums. Eldress Josephine Jilson went a step further. In the waning days of the Shirley community, she used a spare shed at Shirley to set up what was probably the first Shaker museum. She moved it to Harvard's Square House when Shirley closed, but her museum did not survive Harvard's 1918 closing.<sup>269</sup>

The closing of Shaker villages greatly increased the potential supply of collectibles. The Shakers were repeatedly burdened with selling off land, buildings, moveable property, and records. With their shrinking population, there was little point in moving things from one decaying village to another. Hence their willingness to work with early collectors such as Cathcart and MacLean: those gentlemen were offering them a way to get rid of what they didn't need while preserving their history. But the Shakers could not always wait for collectors. The closing of several villages witnessed auctions of

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<sup>268</sup> Stein, *ibid.*

<sup>269</sup> Stein, *ibid.*; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 143, 149.

the remaining moveable property. The broadside for the auction at South Union in 1922 advertised “antique furniture,” highlighting the fine woods used. In this way, many pieces made it into the hands of neighbors and dealers. When Shaker furniture became a recognized popular style, there would be a supply out there in the World.<sup>270</sup>

In many ways, the Shaker collectors were recapitulating the general history of collecting objects in the United States. The earliest collectors, such as the Reverend William Bentley (1759-1819) of Salem, Massachusetts, had gathered relics, bits of history, just as Cathcart did with the Shakers. Early New England collectors would bequeath their collections to such institutions as the American Antiquarian Society and the Peabody Essex Museum; similarly among Shaker collectors, Cathcart would collect for the Western Reserve Historical Society, MacLean for the Ohio Historical Society, the Library of Congress, and other institutions and clients.<sup>271</sup>

But the real rise of a sustained, systemic interest among Americans in collecting old objects only started near the end of the nineteenth century, in other words, not long before MacLean and Cathcart. Two major developments helped bring this about. One was the increase in wealth and accumulation of significant fortunes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. To acquire a souvenir, or an antique, takes a bit of money. But to collect in quantity requires substantial personal and institutional resources. The

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<sup>270</sup> Hooper, *Shaker Communities*, p. 117-19. In general, the earlier a community closed, the fewer of its documents survived.

<sup>271</sup> Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. 17-18, 69-78. The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, *New England Collectors and Collections* (Boston: Boston University, 2006); Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 371-72.

millionaires of the Gilded Age, who could erect summer “cottages” in the Berkshires and endow universities such as Stanford and the University of Chicago, had those types of resources.<sup>272</sup>

The other major development was the realization that there were good American artifacts worth collecting. The Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia sparked interest in a colonial revival that persisted for decades. The publication in 1891 of Irving W. Lyon’s *The Colonial Furniture of New England* conclusively demonstrated that many good colonial pieces with historic and aesthetic merit had been produced in America, and not imported from Europe as earlier collectors had believed. Lyon’s work became the handbook for serious and patriotic collectors.<sup>273</sup>

If Shaker goods were to become collectibles of interest to the general public, and not just a few individuals such as MacLean and Cathcart, they would need the same sort of treatment Lyon and others gave colonial furniture. Colonial furniture was significant because it connected to an important process: the settlement of the United States by the ancestors of the collectors. Colonial furniture was collectible on its own merits because it demonstrated quality craftsmanship. Hence, to collect colonial furniture was to celebrate the virtues of this country’s pioneers, embodied in their household goods. The general public would have to be shown that the Shakers were a significant part of American

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<sup>272</sup> Carole Owens, *The Berkshire Cottages: A Vanishing Era* (Stockbridge, Mass.: Cottage Press, Inc., 1984) offers an anecdotal account of the wealthy developers of the Berkshires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>273</sup> Stillinger, *Antiquers*; Dublin Seminar, “*New England Collectors*”; Nineteenth century collectors often bequeathed their collections to museums, libraries, or colleges, as did Cathcart and MacLean.

history, that theirs were goods of quality, and that their goods embodied those qualities, connecting their owners to the Shakers.<sup>274</sup>

### **Creating the legend of the Shaker Golden Age**

Clara Endicott Sears (1863-1960) offered the general public the first appealing full-length story about the Shakers as an integral part of American history. Like MacLean and Cathcart, Sears had complicated motives for becoming interested in the Shakers. She was a wealthy Boston Brahmin who viewed the world around her as the decayed remnant of the virtuous New England of yore. Sears wrote many books which were neither pure history nor total fiction, celebrating the admirable qualities of New Englanders' forbearers. This is what she did for the Shakers, or, perhaps it should be said, to the Shakers. She had moved out from Boston to Harvard, Massachusetts to be close to the idealized New England past about which she wrote. There she discovered the Shaker villages in Shirley and Harvard and became a frequent visitor to them in the years before they closed, in 1908 and 1918 respectively. Based on her conversations with the Shakers and with documents they supplied her, she published *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* in 1916.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Stillinger, *Antiquers*.

<sup>275</sup> On Sears and her background, see Megan M. Kennedy, "'This Place is not Meant for Recreation. It is Meant for Inspiration.': The Legacies of Clara Endicott Sears" (M.A. thesis, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 2005). I have not read all of Sears's books, but offer *The Great Powwow: The Story of the Nashaway Valley in King Philip's War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), with its depiction of noble colonists and "red men," as a representative example of how Sears recast history to fit her notions of New England virtue.

Sears described her role on the title page of *Gleanings* as the compiler. That is far too modest a description for what Sears did. She created the story of the Shaker golden age, which has influenced every subsequent historian. Sears carried on the sentimental interpretation of Clark, Lossing, and Howells, but adapted it, along with the by now evident decline of the Shakers, to her own views. Instead of being a quaint people, they became the sad remnants of a vibrant and virtuous people, the stuff of heroic stories. They had had a golden age, that of the founders and the antebellum Shakers up to 1853. Over two-thirds of her book covered that golden age, retelling the early days of the Shakers as legendary tales. Readers could wonder at accounts of the origins of the Shakers, thrill to the story of early Shaker persecution in Harvard, or be amazed by the spiritual marvels of “Mother’s Work.” Sears even injected an element of mystery and veiled erotic romance by quoting love poetry written by an otherwise unknown Shaker styled “Leoline.” These Shakers were strong in their faith, willing to face their enemies, and capable of building their new Jerusalem. Implicitly, they were much like the Puritan founders of New England.<sup>276</sup>

But this wonderful story was framed by sad reflections on the present. Sears did not so much describe the decline as allude to it and explain it. (Almost forty years later, Edward Deming Andrews would do much the same in his history of the Shakers.) “A little band of loyal souls still keep the candle of their faith burning in their secluded village . . . .” But the remaining Shakers were only “the outer shell” of “the spiritual fire that swept these men and women[.]” In her conclusion, Sears closed the books and

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<sup>276</sup> Clara Endicott Sears, comp., *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), especially the introduction, chap. 18, 24, 30 and conclusion.

papers, leaving the Shakers to remember their glorious past with an old song. Like the Puritans of rural New England, the Shakers once had their era of greatness. And like the Brahmins, the Shakers could look back on that past before fading into oblivion. Thanks to Sears, the Shakers acquired significance to Americans, at least among those of old Yankee blood who bought her books.<sup>277</sup>

Besides giving the Shakers significance, Clara Endicott Sears made another major contribution to the collecting of Shaker goods: she set up the first permanent Shaker museum. Not only did she acquire many Shaker items from Shirley and Harvard in the years before they closed, she even purchased a Shaker building to house them all. Sears bought the Office building from Harvard when it closed, and moved it to her estate, Fruitlands, in 1920. Some of the items in the museum she got from Eldress Josephine Jilson, trying to save for posterity what she could when the village closings made an end to her makeshift museum. The Shakers joined American Indians and Transcendental Utopians, for which Sears also set up museums, as representatives of New England's noble past.<sup>278</sup>

Sears's portrayal of the Shaker golden age and decline was to become the accepted view of Shaker history for decades to come. In some respects, this updated romantic interpretation of Shaker history and life was accurate: the Shakers were no

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<sup>277</sup> Sears, *ibid.*; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 11; Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind*. Sears's books apparently had a limited audience and did not sell very well. Still, her audience would include many people with the money and desire to collect antiques.

<sup>278</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 370-71; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 143, 149, 152; Kennedy, "This Place is not Meant for Recreation," p. 22.

longer what they once were. But Sears' interpretation departed from reality on two points. First, she depicted the golden age of the Shakers as a legendary heroic time, without considering how social and economic forces had shaped the Shakers then as at the present. Shaker history became discontinuous. Second, she treated the golden age as the norm, as the way Shaker life properly was. This may have been excusable in Howells's day, when the decline had only been evident for a few decades. But by the time *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* was published in 1916, the Shakers had been in decline for at least half their existence in America. By continually referring to the present-day Shakers as a remnant, Sears indicated a preference for viewing Shakers in idealized rather than historical terms.<sup>279</sup>

Accurate or not, Sears's story of the golden age and decline served to connect the Shakers to American history. To Sears, they were examples of New England virtue. They *had* represented what was good in America. Hence their history ought to be important, and their material legacy became collectible embodiments of that history.

#### **Edward Deming Andrews popularizes the Shakers**

Despite the work of the early collectors and historians, interest in the Shakers seemed to be in decline in the early twentieth century. The Ann Lee cottage at Mount Lebanon had lasted only a few seasons. The Shirley village guest book had few entries in it in the years before the village closed in 1908. The financial situation of the all the remaining villages continued to deteriorate throughout this period; selling to what tourists

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<sup>279</sup> Sears, *Gleanings*.

there were did not pay enough to cover the expenses of an aging population.<sup>280</sup>

Newspaper and magazine articles repeated the story of decline, as in this extract from the

*New England Magazine* from 1910:

[T]he force which made the Communal system successful . . . the religious idea — is dying. The socialism . . . equally is a failure. The spiritual life and teaching of these people have been a good influence in American life. The Shakers have handed down to us an ideal, strained and impracticable, perhaps, but still an idea of purity, and having done this, their mission is ended.<sup>281</sup>

In general, tourism was on the increase in the United States: the availability of cheap automobiles in the 1920s, and the extension of paid vacations in the 1930s meant that those Americans with jobs could travel great distances for leisure. Yet they saw few reasons to visit a Shaker village. Nothing there was terribly interesting to see, for Shakers looked more and more just like the World's people. Neighbors came to buy goods as they would from any nearby store; as a child, the cyberneticist Norbert Weiner used to purchase peppermints from the Shaker store in Harvard. Otherwise there was no reason to see the Shakers unless one was attracted by the romantic image. Judging from the reports of declining numbers of visitors, the romantic image remained confined to elites, such as the Brahmins for whom Clara Endicott Sears wrote. Few others seemed to have shared Sears's view of the Shakers, which was unfortunate, for Sears had anticipated in concept many of the heritage museums that were constructed in this period. She may not have operated on the scale of a Henry Ford with his Greenfield Village (opened only nine years

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<sup>280</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 343-44; Shirley guest book, WRHS III.B.30.

<sup>281</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 259.

after Fruitlands), but the concept was similar: to show the present how a part of the past worked.<sup>282</sup>

Similarly, Shaker furniture became a popular collectible only gradually. Even its embodiment of Arts and Crafts values and its resemblance to colonial furniture gave it only limited appeal well into the 1930s. The Shackletons, a couple who wrote on furniture collecting for the popular press at the beginning of the twentieth century, mentioned having Shaker furniture in 1906, but they were exceptional. And even for them, it was a minor part of their “colonial” furniture collecting. One might have expected Wallace Nutting to collect Shaker furniture. Very much like Sears, Nutting came from an old New England lineage, if not old New England wealth. He carried his vision of the past, his “Old America,” into photography, architecture, art, and furniture. Yet his *Furniture Treasury* (1928-33), the standard reference on antique American furniture for decades, has no mention of “Shaker” in its index, despite its enormous size. Many other books on furniture collecting ignored Shaker furniture, or gave it a cursory mention, as late as 1940.<sup>283</sup>

Edward Deming Andrews (1894-1960) changed all that. He was not the first to collect Shaker goods, nor the first to write about them, but he shaped the World’s

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<sup>282</sup> Aron, *Working at Play*, chap. 7-9; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 140; Kennedy, ““This Place is not Meant for Recreation,”” p. 27ff.

<sup>283</sup> Robert and Elizabeth Shackleton, *The Quest of the Colonial* (New York: The Century Company, 1913); Wallace Nutting, *Furniture Treasury (Mostly of American Origin): All Periods of American Furniture with some Foreign Examples in America, also American Hardware and Household* (Framingham, Mass.: Old America, [1928-33]); Thomas Andrew Denenberg, *Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), especially chap. 1, 5.

perception of the Shakers and their artifacts for half a century. Between 1928 and 1940, Andrews contributed three essential elements to the development of Shaker goods as collectibles. He interpreted Shaker goods in terms similar to those of the Arts and Crafts movement by infusing Shaker goods with a religious ethos. In effect, he attributed to Shaker objects the characteristics of Shakers. With the help of photographers such as William Winter, Andrews provided an aesthetic view of Shaker furniture. And through his collecting, exhibiting, and writing, he popularized and provided an institutional framework for Shaker collecting.

Andrews' own interest in the Shakers was perhaps even more complicated than the collectors already mentioned. Both he and his wife, Faith, grew up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which included the easternmost buildings of the Hancock Shaker village. Andrews was brought up in a religious Congregational household, which seems to have given him a thirst for spiritual meaning in his life. As a young man, he was sent to Camp Devens during the First World War. Devens sprawled across Harvard and Shirley, Massachusetts, and placed Andrews within a long walk of the dying Harvard and defunct Shirley Shaker villages. It made him a neighbor of Clara Endicott Sears, who had been quite upset to lose some of Fruitland's fields to the Army when Camp Devens was created. And it propelled him into an intellectual circle in Shirley organized around Frank Lawton, which both raised important questions of faith and meaning in Andrews's mind and exposed him to Shaker writings.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews," p. 2-8. Note that Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews's memoir *Fruits of the Shaker Tree of Life: Memoirs of Fifty Years of Collecting and Research* (Stockbridge, Mass.: The Berkshire Traveller Press, 1975), chap. 1-2 tells a completely different story about the Andrews' first experience with the

Andrews went on from the Army and Camp Devens to earn a doctorate in education and earn his living teaching, but his interest increasingly centered on collecting antiques. By 1925, he and Faith were concentrating on Shaker antiques. Shaker furniture in particular resembled and was sometimes mistaken for colonial furniture, among the most popular and valuable American antiques at the time. Andrews looked at Shaker furniture and saw, not some cheap imitation of colonial furniture, but instead craftsmanship that was related to the Shakers' religious vocation. Not that he was the first to do so; as noted above, some designers in the American arts and crafts movement had made the same connection. But they had used it as inspiration for making new furniture. Andrews used it to demonstrate the value of the old Shaker furniture by attributing to it the religious values of the Shakers. Judging from his memoirs, he had been struck by the religious values of the Shakers, values he would later liken to those of the Essenes, a Jewish sect from the time of Christ.<sup>285</sup>

His interpretation of Shaker furniture as embodying Shaker values was one of Edward Deming Andrews' most influential contributions to the popular view of Shakerism, and also one of the most confusing. Andrews wrote many works embodying different versions of his interpretation. At its simplest, his interpretation resembled a Marxian mystification of commodities: Shaker goods exhibited Shaker values. They became rather like talismans or sacred relics, conveying Shaker simplicity and virtue

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Shakers, dating it to 1923. Whether this was due to a faulty memory or a desire to offer a neat and symbolic story, it has been oft-repeated, among other places in Bixby, "Consuming Simple Gifts."

<sup>285</sup> De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews," p. 7-14; Andrews, *Fruits of the Shaker Tree*, chap. 1-2.

simply because they were produced by Shakers. Andrews said as much, often enough, that many others adopted this viewpoint. For example, Thomas Merton offered the following thought in an introduction to Andrews's aptly titled *Religion in Wood*: "Indeed, one is tempted to say that [Shaker furniture form] is a better, clearer, more comprehensible expression of their faith than their written theology was." Yet an examination of some of Andrews' other writings suggests that his interpretation was actually more complex. Andrews believed that part of the value of a collectible was in knowing its context. Collectibles were truly material culture: they embodied the values of the culture that produced them, should be understood in terms of that culture, and lost most of their meaning if separated from their context. It was not that religious values were inherent in a Shaker object, but that the Shaker object took its form from those values, which had to be understood by analyzing the culture that held those values. Interestingly, what this meant was that he would have been compelled to learn about both their religion and their products to understand either. This is precisely what he did. Hence, this broad range of study required by his perspective explains the wide range of topics Andrews tackled in his Shaker writings. The Andrews were eventually to write at least six major books and many pamphlets and articles, ranging (and often combining) art, religion, farming, cooking, history, and manufacturing.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Religion in Wood: A Book of Shaker Furniture* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1966) offers the simpler interpretation. The more complex interpretation can be deduced from Andrews, *Fruits*, with chapter XIX offering much supporting evidence. The Andrews' writings are listed in Richmond, *Shaker Literature*, vol. 2, p. 6-8, 147-150.

Andrews began collecting Shaker artifacts just about the time taste setters in America were opening up to American folk culture. The colonial furniture collectors of Lyon's day, around 1910, had an aesthetic of wealth and refinement as their ideal. But even in Lyon's day collecting refined colonial pieces had become practically and financially impossible for all but a few, as so many pieces were already in permanent collections or museums. Collectors began to turn to nineteenth century furniture. Now the interest in American antique furniture had been accompanied by a nationalistic reaction to European cultural dominance. In the 1920s, this naturally led to an interest into pre-twentieth-century folk culture, a mere century or so after a similar development in Europe. Folk art exhibits, including furniture exhibits, started to appear, in American art museums by 1924, when the Whitney Museum (then called the Whitney Studio Club) offered an exhibit entitled "Early American Art." That same year, the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened. Bearing out the need for wealth to form a serious collection, these shows were sponsored and supported by wealthy collectors such as Henry Francis du Pont and Henry Ford.<sup>287</sup>

It was only four years later, in 1928, that Edward Deming Andrews published his first article, "Craftsmanship of an American Religious Sect," in the magazine *Antiques*, whose editor, Homer Eaton Keyes, encouraged Andrews in writing about and exhibiting Shaker culture. Andrews not only contributed objects to the New York State Museum exhibit on the Shakers in Albany, which had opened in 1927, but wrote a book loosely based on the exhibit. *The Community Industries of the Shakers*, published in 1932 was

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<sup>287</sup> Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1990), p. 201-02. See also Stillinger, *Antiquers*.

remarkable for combining stylized photographs by William F. Winter of some of the exhibits, with Andrews's extensive analysis of the development of Shaker industries based primarily on manuscripts from Mount Lebanon. The work is a monument to Andrews's insistence that Shaker artifacts be understood within the context of Shaker life. It also demonstrated through Winter's photographs Andrews's view of a Shaker aesthetic of elegant simplicity. Objects were shown in stark black and white, arranged to convey an image of a spare life, free of clutter — a modernist interpretation of folk art.<sup>288</sup>

Andrews and Winter reiterated these ideas in 1937's *Shaker Furniture*, the book that helped make the reputation of Shaker furniture, Winter's photography, and Andrews's interpretation of the Shakers. *Shaker Furniture* elaborated Andrews' complex vision of the relationship between Shaker culture and Shaker goods in the essay accompanying the plates. Andrews explained Shaker furniture as the embodiment of religious labor. This was the key to giving Shaker furniture an attractiveness that went far beyond its aesthetic merits. Twentieth century Americans did not normally work for religious purposes. They worked to live, and to buy things. Work was often spiritually vacant. If they had spiritual yearnings — and judging from the continued vitality of Christian religious movements in this country, many did and do — they pursued these in their leisure time. The Shakers, in contrast, engaged in religious activity while working, and they were by reputation working most of the time. Hence in buying Shaker artifacts,

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<sup>288</sup> Andrews, *Community Industries*; De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews;" Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 376; Kirk, *Shaker World*, p. 231-43. As Kirk points out, Winter had independently arrived at similar ideas about Shaker aesthetics, as had Charles Sheeler; see *ibid.*, p. 232-37, 242.

people could make contact with a culture which seemed more spiritually fulfilling than their own. And this was true whether that contact was an intellectual appreciation of the Shakers' accomplishments, an emotional sympathy for Shakers as religious seekers, or a mystical bond between the new owner and the Shakers. By buying Shaker goods, people could also symbolically reject the economic system of their lives that forced them to work and encouraged them to consume new products, a motivation that would become more powerful in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>289</sup>

Edward Deming Andrews became a focus for interest in Shakers and Shaker artifacts, a focus much more visible than the Shakers themselves. Much as the Walpole Society provided a focus for antique collectors and their museum colleagues in the years after it was founded in 1909, so Andrews provided a similar focus for Shaker interest. He was more visible and active than the collectors before him. He exhibited repeatedly, most notably at the Berkshire Museum in 1932 and 1940 and at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1935. And, as noted above, he and his wife published frequently. As a result, he was eventually connected with almost every major figure in Shaker studies and collecting.<sup>290</sup>

The published accounts of the Shakers' reaction to these developments convey mixed feelings. Many of the Shakers were interested in seeing their history preserved, and

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<sup>289</sup> Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect* (New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1950); Boris Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Pergamon, 1996), chap. 1.

<sup>290</sup> Stillinger, *Antiquers*, chap. 17; De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews," p. 12, 14-15, 18, 21. Marguerite Melcher, *The Shaker Adventure* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. vii, included Andrews among her acknowledgments; Melcher acknowledged MacLean's pioneering role by placing him first.

actively worked with the collectors. Eldress Catherine Allen offered Cathcart boxes of documentary materials, hoping that these would not only preserve Shaker history, but help the Shakers understand their own place in the nation's and the world's history. Clara Endicott Sears acquired much of Eldress Josephine Jilson's collection for her museum. Edward Deming Andrews and his wife Faith made purchases from the Shakers for decades, and in their memoirs mention a number of friendships with the Shakers. Certainly the collectors had pragmatic reasons to stay on the good side of the Shakers. The converse was also often true, for during this period the Shakers were happy to supplement their declining incomes with a few dollars from selling off artifacts. Indeed, sometimes they refinished them to meet expectations of "colonialness" and simplicity. Yet there was also a feeling that the collectors were intruders, distractions from living the Shaker way, and sometimes overbearing in their acquisitiveness. Nevertheless, the Shakers kept on selling as they shut down villages and tore down buildings, and they made no major effort to counter the interpretations of MacLean, Sears, and Andrews.<sup>291</sup>

The coming of the Second World War interrupted many people's plans. But just before the war broke out, Marguerite Fellows Melcher published the first history of the Shakers as a whole. It was a harbinger of a wave of Shaker scholarship after the war. And

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<sup>291</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 370-384. De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews;" Andrews, *Fruits*; Kirk, *Shaker World*, p. 243.

one of the people who would be at the head of that new scholarship would be Edward Deming Andrews.

## CHAPTER 6

### MUSEUM SHAKERS, 1940-1985

The Shaker village at Hancock, Massachusetts<sup>292</sup> stands in marked contrast to the site of the village at North Union. Not only are thereabout a score of Shaker buildings still standing, but they have even been restored and kept up. For Hancock was the first Shaker village to be converted into a museum of Shaker life. Dominating the village is the great Round Stone Barn, which has become the symbol of the village. Restoring the barn was a major task. It had to be partially disassembled to be restored in 1968, in the first decade of the museum's operations. More recently, the museum engaged in a much simpler restoration: several buildings were repainted to match their original yellowish color from the early nineteenth century. The effect is startling, as the color is uncommon today. For those who saw the buildings with their previous white paint job, the change is a visible reminder that restoration is a continuing challenge.

Also unlike North Union, there are tens of thousands of paying customers who come to visit each year. They follow the signs for "Hancock Shaker Village" into the rolling hills and valleys wedged in between the New York state line and the city of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The village itself sits in a valley, with only a few other homes nearby. There is ample parking at one end of the village. Visitors enter the village through a modern visitors' center, which includes a brief video about the Shakers, two rooms of

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<sup>292</sup> Despite its name, the Shaker village of Hancock lies only partly within the boundaries of the town of Hancock, and is not the same place as the central (non-Shaker) village of that town, also called Hancock, which lies several miles to the north. The situation is sufficiently confusing that the village is sometimes said to be in Pittsfield, which part of it actually is. Indeed, the East Family's buildings (not part of the museum) were entirely in Pittsfield.

exhibits, a gift shop, a restaurant, and a library (open by appointment). If they arrive in the warmer part of the year, visitors will be given a map of the village and allowed to wander about as they please. Many of the buildings include staff and exhibits to explain who the Shakers were and what they did in each building. The gardens use heirloom varieties that are the same or similar to what the Shakers once used. The animals on the farm are likewise of authentic varieties.

Hancock has authentic buildings<sup>293</sup>, authentic furniture, authentic plants, authentic animals . . . but no authentic Shakers. It doesn't even have people portraying Shakers. The last Shakers left when they sold the village to the museum corporation in 1960. And the museum no longer offers people portraying Shakers, out of deference to the wishes of the remaining Shakers.

### **Making the Shakers into history**

Hancock did not become a museum village through happenstance. It was the result of years of effort by many people to reintroduce the Shakers to America at large. Prominently among them were Edward Deming Andrews and his wife, Faith. For the Andrews, collecting artifacts were only part of the Shaker story. Shaker products emerged out of a lifestyle, out of a culture. The Andrews would not succeed in their mission unless the people who appreciated the furniture learned to appreciate the Shakers who produced

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<sup>293</sup> The museum specifically acknowledge that the meeting house at Hancock is not the original building, but one of very similar design relocated from Shirley, as mentioned in a previous chapter.

it, and how the two were connected. This was why the books Edward and Faith put out, even for exhibits, always tried to put the artifacts into a broader context.<sup>294</sup>

Like the Andrewses, Marguerite Fellows Melcher developed an interest in the Shakers through personal connections and her own interest in religion. She was raised near the Shaker village of Enfield, New Hampshire, and had a Shaker great-aunt and great-uncle in her family tree. And like the Andrewes, Melcher developed a wide interest in the entire range of the Shaker experience.<sup>295</sup>

Melcher synthesized her research into the first full history of the Shakers, *The Shaker Adventure*, published in 1941. As the title implies, for Melcher, “[a]bove all, the Shakers were spiritual adventurers.” Melcher cast the story of the Shakers in terms of a human struggle between adventure and security, a struggle she also saw in the founding of Christianity. Adventurers challenge the world and are willing to forsake security, particularly the security of established religions. Jesus challenged the Judaism of the Pharisees, while Ann Lee challenged first the Anglican Church in England, then the prevailing Calvinist orthodoxy in the northeastern United States. To support her interpretation, Melcher framed much of the story in terms of heroes: Ann Lee and the other founders, the leaders who built up the Shakers in Kentucky and Ohio, and Elder Frederick Evans striving to bring Shaker socialism to the World. For Melcher, the willingness to stand apart from the world to live one’s principles is *the* great adventure, one the world needed in her day. But the Shakers, through their worldly success, lost their

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<sup>294</sup> E.g., Andrews, *Community Industries*.

<sup>295</sup> For an example of her writing on Shaker furniture, see Marguerite F. Melcher, “Shaker Furniture,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 57 (273) (Spring, 1962), p. 89-92.

sense of adventure and became content with security. And that spelled the beginning of the end of their adventure.<sup>296</sup>

In bringing her history down to the present, Melcher described what a tourist would encounter visiting the Shakers in 1941. It is noteworthy how Shaker commercial activity dominates her portrayal.

Four Shaker communities still remain open today . . . New Lebanon . . . last summer . . . sold its Second Family dwelling house, and moved the few survivors to the North Family where visitors are received and Shaker articles are sold. Shaker chairs may still be ordered . . . but the entire membership is probably well below twenty. Hancock, just over the mountain, likewise has a gift shop where small Shaker-made articles such as pincushions, sewing-boxes, baskets, etc., are sold, as well as maple sugar and candy. Some of its farmlands are still being cultivated, but with hired labor. . . . Canterbury seems the more active and prosperous of the two [in northern New England]. It sells food-stuffs such as baked beans and brown bread in Concord [New Hampshire], has a good gift shop in its office building where many small articles of Shaker make are sold, and an antique shop in the old schoolhouse.

Sabbathday Lake has a similar gift shop in its office building, and it now uses its church for an antique shop. In the upper story, where the elders used to dwell, is a museum containing exhibits from most of the different Shaker communities. . . . The only men left are very old. Most of the sisters are past sixty. The Shakers themselves admit quite frankly that their course on earth is nearly run. . . .<sup>297</sup>

Melcher also traced the history and fate of the Shaker villages that had closed. In many cases, there was little for a modern tourist to see. In some places, like North Union,

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<sup>296</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, quotation from p. 3. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. xiii, 445, in claiming his own work as the first general history of the Shakers, describes Melcher's book as "a sympathetic portrait, not a general history," apparently because it did not cover the "full range" of the Shaker experience. While Melcher's history is not as extensive as Stein's, it definitely tried to cover a broad range of Shaker experiences over their entire history.

<sup>297</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, p. 262-64. The large chair factory at Mount Lebanon had been destroyed by fire in 1923, but limited production continued.

there was nothing at all to see. Elsewhere, while there were still buildings standing, they were in private or institutional hands. Three villages had been turned into prisons, surely a grim fate. Apart from a small museum in one building at Pleasant Hill, only some names and buildings remained of thirteen former Shaker villages.<sup>298</sup>

Melcher's interpretation was rooted in the progressive view of society and science common to her time. Her favor was for progressives, those who challenged the existing wisdom, just as the New Deal had challenged the existing notions of government. (She even noted that the Shakers, like the New Deal, offered a successful economic alternative to competitive capitalism.) She celebrated Elder Frederick Evans, who sought to carry the Shaker message to the World, while giving only passing mention to his conservative opponents such as Elder Harvey Eads. Her interpretation of social development was grounded in a social psychology that explained religious phenomena in Freudian terms.<sup>299</sup>

Melcher's interpretation offered a reasonable perspective on the Shaker experience at the time. But changes in American society over the next few decades would soon make her perspective seem very dated. The vogue for Freudian interpretations at the social level would pass. And her call for progressivism would not resonate with Americans coping with a Cold War and trying to formulate a consensus view of American history and society.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, p. 255-62.

<sup>299</sup> Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), originally published eight years after Melcher's book, offered an analysis of the 1692 witch craze that was similarly grounded in Freudian psychology.

<sup>300</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*.

The end Melcher foresaw seemed to come a lot closer six years later, in 1947. The last remaining Shakers at Mount Lebanon left, ending that community's century and a half as the headquarters of Shakerdom. There were just too few Shakers there to justify keeping the village in operation. The World little noted its passing. The *New Yorker* ran an article that summer on Mount Lebanon, noting how many of the buildings were vacant and how quiet the village was. Once the Shakers left, many of the buildings were turned into a boarding school, since then renamed in honor of Father David Darrow, the long-time leader of the western Shakers in Mother Lucy Wright's day.<sup>301</sup>

By June of 1951, there would be only forty Shakers living at the three remaining communities. For the World, as for the Shakers, the end of the Shaker adventure seemed to be truly a matter of only a few years more. Not surprising, then, that *Life* magazine's 1949 article featured a photograph of the monument in the Canterbury Shaker cemetery with the words, "Death of a Sect." They were merely repeating what had been said for sixty years, by Shakers and the World alike.<sup>302</sup>

While the Shakers' end seemed inevitable, the World's indifference was not. The rising tide of interest in Shaker artifacts was about to revive interest in the Shakers.

Twelve years after Marguerite Melcher wrote her history of the Shakers, Edward Deming Andrews published his most important historical work on the Shakers, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society*. Considering that Melcher had

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<sup>301</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 350, 359-60; Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 135-41; Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 286-89.

<sup>302</sup> Stein, *ibid.*; "The Shakers: A Strict and Utopian Way of Life Has Almost Vanished: Death of a Sect," *Life*, vol. 26 (March 21, 1949), p. 142-48.

read Andrews's published work before writing her history, and that he read her history, it is amazing how different the two works are. Melcher's book is a history of the Shakers and how they fit into American society. *A People Called Shakers* is a historically-grounded description of an American subculture.<sup>303</sup>

Edward Deming Andrews stated his goal for his history at the very beginning: "The Shaker society . . . was a closely integrated, a homogeneous culture [*sic*]." It was the story of how that culture developed, and of what it consisted, that he wanted to tell. Hence even the organization of his history differed from Melcher's. Melcher chronicled the rise and fall of the Shakers, devoting two detached chapters out of fifteen to Shaker culture as such. Andrews devoted three meaty chapters out of eleven just to Shaker culture at its peak, and covered the decline of the Shakers only from an analytic perspective.<sup>304</sup>

To tell that story of the Shakers, Andrews drew on his years of scholarship and collecting Shaker papers to offer extensive quotations from Shaker writers on virtually every subject he touches. The effect is as if the reader is being immersed in Shaker life.

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<sup>303</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*; Andrews, *People Called Shakers*. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. xiii, noted Andrews's sympathy with the Shakers and the chronological limitations of *A People Called Shakers*, but did not consider why Andrews framed his history in the terms he chose.

<sup>304</sup> Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*; Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*; quotation from page v of enlarged edition. The original edition contained a similar if comparatively muted statement on the first page of the "Introduction." I have seen no evidence that Andrews intended to write his history to correct Melcher's occasional errors, such as her describing Elder Frederick Evans as "the head of the Shaker Church." See Melcher, *Shaker Adventure*, p. 179.

Melcher quotes writers to support her points. For Andrews, quoting the Shakers (or pertinent material from “the World”) is part of the point.<sup>305</sup>

Andrews recast the golden age myth, used by Sears and Melcher, in terms meant to explain Shaker life more meaningfully. The antebellum period of stability was not just a period of economic prosperity and demographic stability in his view. It was also the period when the Shakers could effectively practice their religion and their economics as an integrated whole. To Andrews, this was the key to explaining the elegant simplicity of the functional arts in the antebellum period, and the exuberance of the spiritually-related arts. The songs and dances were the expression of the Shakers’ religious enthusiasm harnessed to group worship, while the chairs and clothing reflected how worldly work was harnessed to necessity.<sup>306</sup>

Andrews presented the Shakers as an alternative to the mainstream American culture, an American alternative to be sure, but still an alternative. This gave his book something of a timeless quality. It would allow people to draw their own conclusions about how significant Shaker culture was. That helps explain why *The People Called Shakers* became the most influential book on the Shakers in the last half of the twentieth century. Readers could see the Shakers as the nostalgic fulfillment of their desire for a

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<sup>305</sup> The most common editions of Melcher’s and Andrews’s books are approximately the same size in appearance. Thinner pages, a smaller typeface, and the thin coverage of the post-Civil War period explain how Andrews could cram in so much quoted material. My survey of two chapters indicates that about one-fifth of Andrews’s text consists of block quotations.

<sup>306</sup> Andrews, *People Called Shakers*, chap. 6, 7, 9. Might this explain why the gift drawings and sacred writings of “Mother’s Work” fell out of favor and were all but deliberately suppressed? They were no longer seen as an expression of the Shakers as a group once “Mother’s Work” faded.

simpler America, whether it was the mainstream desire to return to tried and true virtues, or the counterculture's rejection of American materialism.

### **Making Shaker museums**

Prior to the publication of *The People Called Shakers*, there had been little interest in preserving Shaker buildings or communities. Louis St. Gaudens had moved the Enfield (New Hampshire) meeting house to his estate in Cornish, New Hampshire in 1902. Clara Endicott Sears had acquired the Office building from Harvard and moved it to her Fruitlands museum back in 1920. Electra Havemeyer Webb acquired a shed from the Enfield, New Hampshire community and moved it to her Shelburne Museum in Vermont in 1951. There had been no attempt to preserve any of the villages as such. As Marguerite Melcher had noted, many of the villages had been sold to institutions, which used, renovated, or demolished Shaker buildings according to their own needs. So, too, did the private owners of buildings in the other villages. And North Union had been obliterated at the beginning of the Twentieth Century to make way for the suburb of Shaker Heights, Ohio.<sup>307</sup>

Edward Deming Andrews's interpretation of the Shakers, which he and Faith had built up over decades, provided a reason for trying to save a Shaker village. The Shakers had produced a unique *communal* culture that could best be appreciated in a communal setting. It was a part of American history, and could be used to better understand America

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<sup>307</sup> For Sears, Melcher, and North Union, see above. Louis St. Gaudens was the brother of the more famous Augustus Saint-Gaudens; for the Shaker meetinghouse, see <http://www.crjc.org/heritage/N08-22.htm>. For Webb and the Shelburne museum, see [http://www.shelburnemuseum.org/about\\_us/museum\\_story.php](http://www.shelburnemuseum.org/about_us/museum_story.php) and [http://www.shelburnemuseum.org/buildings\\_and\\_grounds/detail.php?id=26](http://www.shelburnemuseum.org/buildings_and_grounds/detail.php?id=26).

and religion. Because Shaker culture was disappearing, it had to be preserved soon, before it was lost. Given normal life expectancies and the lack of new recruits, the Shakers looked to be extinct by the end of the twentieth century. The buildings might not last much longer. Unless people started seeing them as valuable artifacts of this strange and significant culture, they might be demolished for a new highway, as happened with Harvard's East Family buildings, or because they no longer fit the needs of the owning institution, as has happened at Shirley and Union Village.<sup>308</sup>

If Andrews offered the motivation for saving a Shaker village, the Shakers themselves offered the opportunity. By 1957, when only three sisters remained at Hancock, the Shakers decided to close the village. The most obvious buyer was a group representing racing interests. But the Shakers wished to follow a past practice of selling the property to a worthy institution. Fortunately the Berkshires have attracted a number of wealthy people since their heyday as a vacation resort for New Yorkers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these were collectors of Shaker artifacts and friends of Edward and Faith Andrews. They formed a committee with the Andrewses and proposed to buy the remaining Shaker property and turn it into a heritage museum similar to Old Sturbridge Village. The Shakers were taken with the educational ideal of the museum and gave it their approval. Although the museum group made an offer said to be only five-eighths of the asking price, they won their case and purchased the Hancock Shaker village in 1960. The money had come not just from the original group, but from Shaker enthusiasts in

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<sup>308</sup> Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, p. 167. As noted in a previous chapter, at least one Shaker building at Shirley is on the verge of being lost, as it no longer serves the prison and is collapsing.

many other states. And the new owners named Edward Deming Andrews as their first curator.<sup>309</sup>

Alas, Andrews's tenure as curator was short-lived because of a fundamental conflict in aims between himself and the board of trustees headed by Amy Bess Miller. The Andrewses had spent years trying to develop an institution for teaching their approach to studying Shaker culture as a whole. In their eyes, the village should have been the material equivalent of *The People Called Shakers*, a place where visitors could see and study Shaker culture as a whole. It would be something like a university program. In contrast, the board, led by Amy Bess Miller, needed to develop the village to quickly return adequate revenue to service the loans they had taken on to make the acquisition possible. Had they even shared the vision of Edward Deming and Faith Andrews, they would have found it too ambitious and expensive to implement. Instead, the board decided to make the village a tourist attraction, similar to such familiar places as Plimouth Plantation and Old Sturbridge Village, with more emphasis on entertainment and a more leisurely and less holistic approach to education. The relationship between the board and the Andrewses soured when the Andrewses realized that they had donated much of their collection to an enterprise that would not fulfill their vision. They left within a few years of the purchase of the village, ultimately giving most of the rest of their collection to the Winterthur Museum.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Amy Bess Miller, *Hancock Shaker Village / The City of Peace: An Effort to Restore a Vision 1960-1985* ([Hancock, Mass.: Hancock Shaker Village,] 1984), p. 19-31.

<sup>310</sup> De Pillis, "Edward Deming Andrews," p. 32-50.

Hancock Shaker Village opened in 1961, but it was barely ready for business. Major restorations, most notably of the famous Round Stone Barn, were carried out during the first decade the museum was open. Perhaps the oddest “restoration” was to move the meeting house from the former Shaker village in Shirley (in those days a state-run boys’ industrial school) to the original site of the Hancock meeting house, demolished in 1938. Emphasizing its role as a tourist attraction, a “visitors center” was added in 1972. This was expanded in 2000, adding a library and research center.<sup>311</sup>

Hancock Shaker Village gradually became a successful if complex educational and entertainment business enterprise. Besides the restoration of buildings, the museum also trained knowledgeable staff, purchased or borrowed artifacts, developed exhibits of Shaker work and worship, and sponsored special Shaker-related events. The effort paid off. Attendance increased from 4,500 the first year to about 45,000 per year by the 1970s.<sup>312</sup>

Hancock did not remain the only Shaker museum village for long. There was a rising interest in historical preservation in Kentucky in the aftermath of the 1955 destruction of the Thomas Hart house in Lexington. Nearby was Pleasant Hill, “Shakertown,” which had rivaled Union Village as the largest Shaker community in the west. Several groups of Kentuckians investigated restoring and preserving Pleasant Hill as early as 1956, but it was not until 1961 that a group headed by Earl Wallace formed a corporation to buy and operate Pleasant Hill. Pleasant Hill has many more buildings than

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<sup>311</sup> John Harlow Ott, *Hancock Shaker Village: A Guidebook and History*, revised (sixth) edition (n.p., n.d.).

<sup>312</sup> Miller, *Hancock Shaker Village*, particularly p. 162-63.

Hancock, and required even more money for restoration. Like Hancock, the restoration of Pleasant Hill would be a compromise between depicting Shaker culture and creating an entertaining and financially successful tourist attraction. On one hand, the corporation would invite Edward Deming Andrews to a scholarly conference in 1961; on the other, the corporation used one of the first buildings restored to serve as an inn and restaurant when the museum opened in 1968. Like Hancock, it would be many more years before all the buildings on the site were restored. Also like Hancock, Pleasant Hill as a museum village would gather more and more visitors, bringing in 150,000 visitors a year by 1972.<sup>313</sup>

Hancock and Pleasant Hill share one other important feature as restorations: they look like complete Shaker villages, but they are not. Both villages once included outlying families whose buildings have long since been lost and whose lands are not part of the museums. Moreover, in the twentieth century, the Shakers pulled down buildings they were no longer using to avoid paying unnecessary property taxes. The museums are made up of what buildings survived up to the time of their restoration. Trying to restore the villages to what they were in their heyday would require a massive rebuilding program based on very scanty evidence, as the attempt to construct an online model of the Whitewater Shaker village has demonstrated. Heritage museum villages in general have been criticized for offering a partial and artificial recreation of the past. Given that they

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<sup>313</sup> Clay Lancaster, *Pleasant Hill: Shaker Canaan in Kentucky: An Architectural and Social Study* (Salvisa, Ky.: Warwick Publications, 2001); Thomas Parrish, *Restoring Shakertown: The Struggle to Save the Historic Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005). In fact, some buildings at Pleasant Hill have still not been restored as of 2009.

have only parts of the former villages, Hancock and Pleasant Hill can never fully recreate a Shaker village as its height. To that extent, the Andrewses' goal of presenting Shaker culture as a whole is unattainable. The museums can only offer fragments and try to link them together with narration and explanation.<sup>314</sup>

No other defunct Shaker village offered the same opportunity to work with so many buildings, so there have only been a few significant efforts to restore them. Local supporters, who it is said got together while playing cards, opened four of the remaining buildings at South Union as a museum in 1971, using one, the old tavern, as a bed and breakfast. The La Salette brothers, who had bought the Enfield, New Hampshire village, had themselves so declined in numbers that they turned around and sold five of the Shaker buildings, and their 1930 chapel, to a nonprofit museum corporation in 1985. The "Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc." have in recent years been working with the Hamilton County (Ohio) Parks department to open up some of the White Water buildings as museums, but that effort is still in the planning stages.<sup>315</sup>

Where conversion to a museum wasn't possible, Shaker enthusiasts pursued other strategies to preserve the remaining communities in the years after Hancock Shaker

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<sup>314</sup> Compare maps of the villages in the nineteenth century in Emlen, *Shaker Village Views*, with maps of the museums today in Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*. On the Whitewater model, see <http://sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse/cldetails?mid=24dc4f813da4f421424577ee7f384bd0&prevstart=0>. On criticism of heritage museum villages, see Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), chap. 3.

<sup>315</sup> Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 61-68, 221-28. "Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc.," <http://whitewatershakervillage.org/default.aspx>.

Village opened. They secured listings on the National Register of Historical Places and had historic districts designated for the remaining Harvard, Tyringham, Watervliet (New York), and Enfield (Connecticut) buildings. The Shirley Historical Society tries to keep a watchful eye on what the Massachusetts Correctional Institution system does with the Shirley Shaker buildings and recently acquired funds to stabilize and restore some of them, as mentioned in a previous chapter.<sup>316</sup>

Attempts at preservation came too late to Watervliet, Ohio, which was demolished for an office park built in the 1980s; two buildings were moved off-site. While much of Mount Lebanon is in the hands of the Darrow School, which celebrates its Shaker history, attempts to preserve the North Family buildings as a heritage site have repeatedly foundered, and it is currently closed to visitors. Most of the other village sites and remaining Shaker buildings remain in private hands.<sup>317</sup>

### **Shaker issues and reactions**

The Shaker reaction to the resurging interest by the World in things Shaker was shaped by three internal issues. First, the Shakers recognized that they were finally really dying out. Second, they suddenly found themselves well-off. Third, a split developed between the last two Shaker villages.

While the World had been predicting the end of the Shakers almost from the beginning of the sect, even the most optimistic Shaker had to recognize at mid-century

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<sup>316</sup> For more information, see “Shaker Historic Trail: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary,” <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/shaker/index.htm>.

<sup>317</sup> Muray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, especially p. 131-43, 193-98; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 403; “Shaker Museum and Library at Mount Lebanon Shaker Village,” <http://mountlebanonshakervillage.org/>.

that the end was almost certainly near. Even apart from all the village closings, there were many additional signs that Shakerism was dying out. The last male member of the Central Ministry died in 1939. The last new member admitted by the Central Ministry was in 1948. The last brother died in 1961. Thereafter, it appeared that a few aging women would wait out the decline and end of the United Society of Believers. In general, the Shakers accepted their decline with a combination of bitterness at the pain of the process, resignation to its culmination, and hope that the Shaker spirit would nevertheless continue in some form. "The Principles, the light and the truth will live on forever," declared Eldress Emma B. King in 1956.<sup>318</sup>

It was the next year, after the death of trustee Sister Frances Hall of Hancock, that the Shakers generally became aware that they had considerable financial resources. The Shakers had been selling off village property for over eighty years, and while they had not always received the best price, the sums had been considerable. As far back as 1899, the land and buildings of one family in remote Maine had been sold for \$7,500. The main part of Union Village had been sold for \$325,000 in 1912. Hancock would add another \$125,000 in a few years. The sudden appearance of wealth rescued the Shakers from fear of poverty, and offered opportunities to shape their future. But at the same time, it opened up a new risk: that people would seek to join not out of faith but out of greed. Another communal society, the Harmonists of George Rapp, had been taken over by new

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<sup>318</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 347-85; quotation from p. 363.

members, looted, and destroyed between 1899 and 1916. The Shakers determined they would not meet the same fate, and put their wealth into a trust.<sup>319</sup>

How to cope with the end and with their wealth were contributing factors to the split that developed in the 1960s between the last two Shaker villages. Various accounts exist explaining the nature and cause of this split, and the matter remains unclear and controversial to this day. Central to almost every account is the advent of Theodore Johnson at Sabbathday Lake in the late 1950s. Johnson helped revive the spiritual life of the community. The spirit Johnson brought gave the Sabbathday Lake believers the hope that the Shakers need not die out after all. But Johnson also instituted changes in the spiritual activities at Sabbathday Lake, restoring some abandoned practices such as Sunday public meetings while adding elements derived from his Episcopalian background, such as wearing a clerical collar. The Shakers at Canterbury, who included the official leadership, looked askance at Johnson, his ideas, his practices, and probably his personality as well. Apparently they did not see any way for Shakerism to continue in its traditional form, and rejected the direction Johnson was leading Sabbathday Lake.<sup>320</sup>

Most accounts claim that the Central Ministry, based in Canterbury, decided to forever close out the possibility of a revival or of admitting Theodore Johnson by closing the membership books for good, which they believed they had the right to do. Whether this happened, or whether the Central Ministry had that right, is unclear. Accounts offer dates between 1957 and 1965, without tying the decision to any publicly available

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<sup>319</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 234, 247, 254-55, 345, 364, 366; Pitzer, *America's Communal Utopias*, p. 81.

<sup>320</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 384-94.

document. In any case, the Shakers at Canterbury refused to recognize any new members accepted after that date at Sabbathday Lake as legitimate Shakers, and that most definitely included Theodore Johnson. That decision hardened the split between the two villages. Thereafter, Canterbury was committed to decline and extinction; Sabbathday Lake to maintaining a more vibrant community that was illegitimate in Canterbury's eyes.<sup>321</sup>

With these developments in mind, the Shakers' attitude toward the World in this period makes more sense. They wanted to emphasize their spiritual heritage, dismiss worldly concerns they saw as irrelevancies, and maintain control over their own fate. It was the Shakers who chose to allow Hancock to be turned into a museum village. It was the Shakers who started up a new periodical, *The Shaker Quarterly*, in 1961 to communicate with the world. It was the Shakers who kept their internal disputes over membership and the trust fund mostly to themselves (such that exactly what happened is not clear).<sup>322</sup>

Tourists continued to visit the Shakers, though Shakers were increasingly hard to find. Many of the collectors and historians active in the early and middle part of the twentieth century traced their interest to visits and encounters with the Shakers, by those times usually Shaker sisters. Shaker sisters continued to produce fancy goods to sell in their shops through the 1950s. The Shaker reputation for hospitality continued, though transformed from a way to recruit members to personal and commercial ends. There would still be new friendships made, such as the one June Sprigg recalled in her memoir

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<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*; Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 309ff.

about Canterbury, *Simple Gifts*, though there would be far fewer than earlier in the century.<sup>323</sup>

On the other hand, the Shakers tended to discourage casual requests about becoming a Shaker, particularly if they came in the wake of publicity. The 1949 *Life* article stimulated many queries, which ultimately produced no new members. Similarly, the Shakers dismissed any suggestions about how to dispose of their property as they were dying out. From the Shaker perspective, these were all idle queries.<sup>324</sup>

The Shakers' newfound wealth, and few remaining villages, meant that they were no longer sources of Shaker furniture and other antiques. But this hardly ended the interest in Shaker goods, thanks to the work of the Andrewses and others. One of the first major sales of Shaker furniture took place in 1947, when Juliana Force's collection went up for sale. The Shaker Museum in Old Chatham, New York, featuring Shaker goods, opened in 1950. A trade magazine for the Shaker market, *World of Shaker*, appeared in 1971. In its early years, it reported prices for Shaker furniture in the hundreds and thousands of dollars, goods which could have been picked up for a perhaps twenty dollars a few decades before.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> June Sprigg, *Simple Gifts: A Memoir of a Shaker Village* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988). Besides individuals previously mentioned, Julia Neal, the historian of the Kentucky Shakers, visited South Union before it closed. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 361, 378.

<sup>324</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 359-60.

<sup>325</sup> Bow, *Selling Shaker*, p. 33; Kirk, *Shaker World*, p. 242-43; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 379, 403, 405.

To the Shakers, if the appreciation of the furniture did not extend to the values behind it, then it was a worldly distraction. That was the feeling behind Sister Mildred Barker's famous complaint, "I don't want to be remembered as a piece of furniture."<sup>326</sup>

This aversion to the trade in Shaker goods did not extend to the museums. On the contrary, the remaining Shakers supported the development of the museum villages. As noted above, they agreed to sell Hancock at a discount to the museum corporation.

Eldress Emma B. King specifically cited the museum's role in "the preservation of the Shaker traditions and the education of others in the Shaker crafts and industries."<sup>327</sup>

Having set a precedent by selling Hancock for a museum, the remaining Shakers at Canterbury decided to take control of their history and representation by creating a non-profit organization to run the unoccupied parts of the village as a museum. Canterbury officially opened as a museum village in 1969, and became as notable an attraction as Hancock and Pleasant Hill, if a bit more out of the way. The sisters continued to come out to greet visitors at Canterbury until they became too weak and feeble.<sup>328</sup>

### **Shakers as museum pieces**

The success of *The People Called Shakers* and the village museums went hand in hand in the 1960s and 1970s. Andrews had presented the Shakers as near-legendary figures, offering an alternative to the dominant culture, emphasizing faith and a simple life. The museums incorporated this view into their interpretations. Together, they offered

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<sup>326</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 240; Daniel Patterson offered the same analysis, *ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>327</sup> Miller, *Hancock Shaker Village*, p. 25.

<sup>328</sup> Murray, p. 51-60.

a family-friendly history experience at a time when millions of Americans and their baby-boomer children were exploring the country over the new Interstate highway system. At the same time, the Shaker experience offered an alternative to the mainstream of American culture, one that could appeal to the growing counter-culture of the 1960s. It is no coincidence that Shaker village museums became popular at the same time young people were setting up communes all over the country.

But that image came with a price. It was a new version of the golden age legend. It defined the “real” Shakers as those who had lived a century and more earlier. It removed the Shakers from the world of today, and made them most definitely a part of the past. Like previous golden age images of the Shakers, it made them attractive as curiosities, not as a living force in contemporary America. No clearer statement of this disconnection between Shakers past and present can be found than in Tim Clark’s *Yankee* magazine article from 1980.

One day last summer, I was preparing to visit the Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. The temperature was hovering near 100 degrees, and I was debating what to wear. The practical garb – shorts and a T-shirt – was clearly out of the question. After all, I was visiting a religious community, one with more than 200 years of history and tradition . . . Shorts, I decided, had a slightly irreverent, even carnal air about them. So I drove up to Sabbathday Lake wearing a short-sleeved shirt and slacks, and put on a tie just before going in. There I was greeted by my Shaker host – who was wearing shorts.

We all come to the Shakers with certain preconceived notions . . . We carry an image around in our heads of an austere, highly disciplined . . . sect, living in nearly bare rooms, speaking in stilted Old Testament English, refusing to have any truck with the . . . twentieth century. . . .

But what we discover, when we arrive, are people, not caricatures. They wear shorts when it is hot, and blue jeans when they work in their herb gardens. . . . The Shakers of today are proud of their past, but they live in the present.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 343-44.

Four years after Clark's article, Ken Burns attempted to bring the Shaker past and present together in his documentary, *The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God*. While not the first documentary on the Shakers, it became the most influential, partly because it was broadcast on the PBS network, and partly because of Burns's subsequent fame as a maker of documentations about America. Burns mixed archival material, interviews with some of the remaining Canterbury Shakers, scenes from the remaining Shaker villages and museum villages, and a soundtrack of Shaker tunes to create a visual history of the Shakers. Burns's history is a variant of Andrews's history: he concentrates on the origins of the Shakers and their golden age in the antebellum period, and gives short shrift to the decline. Given the difficulty in presenting religious content in a visually stimulating manner, Burns deserves credit for trying to treat equally both halves of Mother Ann's famous maxim: the visuals definitely describe how hands worked, but the narration and the interviews with the remaining sisters explain how the Shakers gave their hearts to God. Still, the narrative and the heavy use of sepia photographs and landscapes empty of people conveys the feeling that the Shakers were much more a thing of the past than the present.<sup>330</sup>

Clark and Burns were lucky in their timing. They met with actual Shakers. Every one of the Shakers Burns interviewed in his documentary would be dead within six years. Seeing an actual Shaker has become a rare event. For most people, that is not how they

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<sup>330</sup> *The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God* (documentary film, 1984; issued as a digital video disc, 2002). The historical incongruity of illustrating a story about the origins and golden age of the Shakers with late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs might be easily missed by viewers.

will experience what “Shaker” means. They will see chairs, books, and museums. But not Shakers.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 434-36.

## CHAPTER 7

### SEEING GHOSTS, 1985-PRESENT

Unless one lives in Maine, visiting the last remaining active Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake will probably involve a long drive. It may seem rather remote today, out in the countryside as it is, but a century ago, Sabbathday Lake was only a few miles away from a popular resort, Poland Spring (these days famous for its bottled water). Indeed, in Poland Spring's heyday as a resort, visiting the Shaker village was a common diversion for the tourists.<sup>332</sup>

Like many Shaker villages, Sabbathday Lake was originally located on a main road. But in recent years, the State of Maine has relocated the highway to bypass the village. The majority of travelers now barrel past Sabbathday Lake, paying only passing attention to the sign pointing them to the Shaker village.

At first sight, Sabbathday Lake is remarkably unimpressive. It is no sprawling community like Pleasant Hill, has no massive buildings such as the Great Stone Dwelling at Enfield, New Hampshire, and certainly has no modern visitors' center like the one at Hancock. Even at its most populous, Sabbathday Lake was never a large community, so there were never that many buildings. Many of those were pulled down in the twentieth century when they fell out of use, as happened at other Shaker villages. If there was a crossroad, Sabbathday Lake would be a crossroad hamlet. There are only about fifteen buildings, including barns, in the village.

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<sup>332</sup> Richards, *Poland Spring*.

One of the buildings has been turned into a museum. Another, the Office building, carries on the tradition of being the Shakers' store, a gift shop with Shaker literature, foodstuffs and knickknacks. For the casual visitor, that is all that is to be seen.

If one has more time, one can go on a tour that includes several other buildings. However the tours only run at set times and accommodate only small groups. On seasonable Sundays, one can attend the public worship service in the meeting house, for the Shakers have restored that custom, albeit without the dancing of a century and more ago. Visiting and using the Shaker library, housed in the former schoolhouse, requires an appointment. There is neither food nor lodging at Sabbathday Lake for casual visitors.

Clearly, the Sabbathday Lake Shakers have the confidence and control to welcome visitors only on their own terms. Sabbathday Lake is a working village, and the inhabitants expect to have their privacy from the World. Visitors may imagine Shakers, but they are unlikely to encounter them, and might not recognize them if they do.

### **The last ones standing**

The dispute between the last two Shaker communities, Sabbathday Lake and Canterbury, continued so long as both villages existed. But time and actuarial statistics favored Sabbathday Lake. The youngest Shaker admitted before the dispute broke out lived at Sabbathday Lake. And Sabbathday Lake was accepting new members, even if Canterbury did not recognize them as such. In the event, the last Canterbury Shaker died in 1992. Ironically, Theodore Johnson, whose activities helped precipitate the dispute, had died unexpectedly six years earlier at age fifty-five.

The membership dispute between the villages became moot: no one now can gainsay the Sabbathday Lake Shakers' authority to decide whom they will consider a

Shaker. Many reference books had stated that there were only female Shakers left, and Ken Burns showed none of the brothers at Sabbathday Lake, out of deference to the Canterbury Shakers' feelings, but there were male Shakers at Sabbathday Lake then and are ones there in 2009.<sup>333</sup>

Considering that the dispute was about admitting new members, one might expect Sabbathday Lake to be striving to get people to join. Brother Arnold Hadd, the senior male Shaker, has stated, "[O]ur intention is that there *will* be more Shakers."<sup>334</sup> Yet the Shakers have made no major effort to recruit new members. The *Shaker Quarterly* ceased to publish in the 1990s, eliminating one possible vehicle for bringing the Shaker message to the World. Another possible vehicle, the village's web site, offers only a veiled and guarded encouragement to potential members. There is no statement saying they want to recruit, but there is a page recapitulating their history, generally and for Sabbathday Lake in particular, which concludes with an invitation to write to them for further information. The history itself concludes with the following paragraph:

Shakerism is not, as many would claim, an anachronism; nor can it be dismissed as the final sad flowering of nineteenth century liberal utopian fervor. Shakerism has a message for the this present age--a message as valid today as when it was first expressed. It teaches above all else that God is Love and that our most solemn duty is to show forth that God who is love in the World. Shakerism teaches God's immanence through the common life shared in Christ's mystical body. It values human fulfillment highly and believes that we fulfill ourselves best by being nothing more nor less than ourselves. It believes that Christian love is a love beyond disillusionment, for we cannot be disillusioned with people being

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<sup>333</sup> Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 51; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 434.

<sup>334</sup> Stacey Chase, "The Last Ones Standing," *Boston Globe* July 23, 2006.

themselves. Surely God would not have it otherwise for it is in being ourselves--our real selves--that we are most like Christ in his sacred oneness.<sup>335</sup>

Judging from this, the Shakers see the popular view of Shakerism, and in particular the golden age myth, as much a problem as a help. The golden age myth gets people interested in the Shakers at the same time it depicts them as being, to use the web site's term, "an anachronism." The web site itself does not offer that much encouragement to potential recruits trying to visualize what being a Shaker would be like. The contemporary life and belief of the Shakers amount to about half the history page, with the daily life reduced to a short schedule. In contrast, the history pervades the rest of the web site. Curiously, it is the village's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that gets the most extensive coverage; this is because the website contains two brochures describing exhibits put up at a building used as a museum.<sup>336</sup>

Even by Sabbathday Lake's more open criteria, membership has stayed below six in the twenty-first century, despite having at least 18 novices try out the life for a year or so over the last two decades. They can control who joins their community, a control now undisputed, but they cannot control how many people will express interest. The Shakers are still hanging on, but barely. They have reached the point allegedly prophesied by

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<sup>335</sup> "Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village: About the Community," <http://www.shaker.lib.me.us/about.html>

<sup>336</sup> "Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village," <http://www.shaker.lib.me.us/index.html>. The paucity of photographs before the late nineteenth century surely accounts for the lack of emphasis on earlier times, when Sabbathday Lake was more populous.

Mother Ann, when they would not have enough members to bury their dead. Whether they will experience the revival also called for by the prophesy remains to be seen.<sup>337</sup>

### **The inner circles: Friends and friends**

Thanks to the interest in the Shakers, their faith, their history, their artifacts, their villages, and their continued existence, the “Shaker World” extends far beyond the actual Shakers themselves. The Shakers retain firm control over themselves. But they have only limited control, if that much, over the rest of the Shaker World.

Probably the people most closely connected with the Shakers are the “Friends of the Shakers.” The Friends have been formally organized since 1974 to assist the Sabbathday Lake Shakers through money, effort, and physical labor. The Friends get their hands dirty by traveling to Sabbathday Lake twice a year to spend weekends laboring to fix up the Shaker village and keep it in shape. Their website offers a description of typical tasks the Friends perform:

On spring work day volunteers paint fences, mow lawns, weed flower beds, pack herbs, do carpentry work and lend a hand to spruce up the village for the upcoming summer months.

On fall work day Friends help ready the village for the upcoming winter months. Raking leaves, stacking wood, mowing the grass, more painting, and picking apples are some of the things that get done before winter arrives.<sup>338</sup>

There have been about sixty active members showing up for the weekends in recent years. Enough people return every year that these working days are social get-togethers as well.

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<sup>337</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, p. 442; Chase, “The Last Ones Standing.”

<sup>338</sup> This quotation, and the other material on the Friends, comes from “The Shaker Village at Sabbathday Lake: The Friends of the Shakers,” <http://www.maineshakers.com/friends.html>.

When labor can't do the job, the Friends turn to fund-raising. Back in the early 1990s, they raised \$37,000 to do major structural repairs to the Office building. In this decade, they have been raising over \$200,000 to implement conservation easements to preserve the property in its current state. If one is not going to become a Shaker, then this is about as close as one can get.

Another way to be close to being a Shaker is to stay at a Shaker village for a long period of time as William Dean Howells did. At the very end of the 1990s, the genre of Shaker visitor memoir writing revived with two full-length books, June Sprigg's *Simple Gifts* and Suzanne Skees's *God Among the Shakers*. Both books recount some Shaker history, pay homage to the spirit of the Shakers, and record the lives of individuals the authors clearly saw as friends and remarkable people.<sup>339</sup>

Skees's book is more typical of the visitor accounts of the past, for she went to stay with the Shakers for several months in the 1990s. She lived outside the village, but went in every day to work with the Shakers from sunrise to evening. She was suffering from a religious crisis of her own, came, examined Shaker life, and left, unconverted.<sup>340</sup>

Skees's book embodies the tensions of the contemporary enthusiast for the Shakers. To someone like Skees, the Shakers are different people, people with a fearsome spiritual force.

. . . I risked losing my life as it was, forsaking my family, orphaning my children, and throwing away everything I have loved in my life to embrace the Shaker way. One cannot open up to let in new views and new truths without risking a soul-

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<sup>339</sup> Sprigg, *Simple Gifts*; Suzanne Skees, *God Among the Shakers: A Search for Stillness and Faith at Sabbathday Lake* (New York: Hyperion, 1998).

<sup>340</sup> Skees, *ibid.*

shattering conversion. Others had, after all, come to visit Shaker communities and never wished to return to the world. And with the kind of spiritual power these Shakers supposedly wielded, who knew but that I might fall under their spell?<sup>341</sup>

Yet, as Skees stays among the Shakers, she learns to see them as more normal people. Much of her memoir is taken up with accounts of daily household chores, such as making breakfast or nursing sheep. Other parts consist of conversations between Skees and the Shakers about how they think and feel. Brother Wayne talked about losing his temper, Brother Alistair about giving up smoking.<sup>342</sup>

Overall, Skees draws a line between living in the World, as she sees herself doing, and living with God, as she sees the Shakers doing. As she states at the beginning of her book, “I went to the Shakers to look for God, who lately had been absent from my harried distracted days.” Whether the subject is work or sex, in her conversations with the Shakers, Skees comes to view the Shakers as dedicating their lives to living for God, as opposed to her own fervent desire to live in the World. She is caught between her admiration for the Shakers, and her unwillingness to give up the World. She lives with the Shakers, but goes away each night to be with her infant son. Even her understating of the Shakers is shaped by this tension, as she juggles between accepting the Shakers on their own terms, and interpreting them according to the World’s light. She envies Shaker spiritualism, and yet could also view it as an outlet for repressed sexuality. She left still debating whether Ann Lee had been a religious savior or “mentally unbalanced.”<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-32, 87, 149.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1, 24, 28, 79-81, 129-94, 267.

Skees's memoir is but one kind of evidence that spiritual yearnings do seem to drive many Shaker enthusiasts. The general decay of conventional religious belief and observance in favor of scientism and consumerism has left many Americans searching for a connection with something above and beyond themselves. Enthusiasts interpret Shaker artifacts in spiritual terms, fall silent when entering Shaker sacred spaces in the company of other enthusiasts, and invoke blessings on the acquaintanceships made at the annual Shaker seminar. They speak with reverence of the remaining Shakers. Yet they do not become Shakers. It is as if they need to be in touch with the sacred, to know it exists, perhaps even to envy it, while getting along with their own lives. Certainly that would explain why so many non-Shakers who write about Shakers were heavily motivated by their contact with Shakers.<sup>344</sup>

Skees herself summarized her experience by comparing the Shakers to a light in the World. She felt she had taken some of that same spirit away with her. She made it part of her life, on her terms, not the Shakers'. Ultimately, that is what visitors do. The difference between Skees and someone like Howells reflects both personal and cultural circumstances. Howells was a successful editor and author in a period when mainstream Christianity dominated the outlook of people such as himself. Skees was going through a personal and spiritual crisis in our more secular times, when she felt free to question her earlier faith.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Personal observations from Shaker Seminars, visits to Shaker village sites; personal communication from David Newell about visitor behavior at Savoy, Massachusetts Shaker sites.

<sup>345</sup> Skees, *God Among the Shakers*, p. 269-70.

### **Enthusiasts: not quite friends**

The Friends and friends are a small part of a much broader range of Shaker enthusiasts. Enthusiasts might best be described as people who have a serious interest in the Shakers and their history, either as part of their work or as their most important hobby. Such people work on Shaker-related projects, study Shaker history and artifacts, and continue to buy Shaker furniture and reproductions at steadily increasing prices.<sup>346</sup>

Several groups of enthusiasts are well organized. Some are even visible on the Internet. For example, the Western Shaker Study Group, formed in 1985, holds meetings every other month that include both research papers and social events. Members produced the award-winning *Maps of the Shaker West* in 1997. From their membership sprang the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc. in 2001. White Water was once described by a Shaker as the “Lonely Plain of Tribulation.” That name might more aptly be applied to the feelings enthusiasts have had in trying to work with the Hamilton County Park District, which owns most of the remaining buildings, but does not consider maintaining them one of its primary missions. The Friends formed to develop a program with the Park District and raise funds for the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the Shaker buildings. (See figure 12.)<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Although the author did not start this dissertation as an enthusiast, he has had to become one to finish it.

<sup>347</sup> “Western Shaker Study Group,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohwarren/Shaker/wssg.htm>; “Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc.”



**Figure 12: Unique brick meetinghouse at White Water, in use as private residence**

Similar groups of enthusiasts serve as volunteers for the Shaker museum and museum villages, filling out their staffs. They help maintain gardens, conduct tours, demonstrate crafts, help out on special events, and carry out other chores common to such institutions.<sup>348</sup>

Other groups of enthusiasts organize for more specialized purposes. Particularly notable are the various groups dedicated to performing Shaker music. The Shakers wrote thousands of songs, adapting a variety of musical traditions. The Enfield Shaker Singers

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<sup>348</sup> Canterbury's description is typical: "Canterbury Shaker Village: Get Involved: Volunteers," [http://www.shakers.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=49](http://www.shakers.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=49)

have been the most durable group performing these songs, having released three albums of Shaker songs since 1989. The group went so far as to defy a long-standing request by the Shakers *not* to perform Shaker dances, and released a DVD of performances in 2008.<sup>349</sup>

The knowledge and interest enthusiasts bring to “Shaker” makes them a different class of visitor than a casual tourist. Casual tourists typically visit a Shaker museum village on a whim, or as part of exploring a region (see below). Shaker enthusiasts want to visit every village, whether there is a museum there or not. They work their way through *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, which lists twenty-six sites in detail and over thirty other places with Shaker manuscripts, printed material, and artifacts. Shaker enthusiasts are the ones most likely to ask where the Shakers held their outdoor worship during “Mother’s Work.” They explore the less well-known Shaker sites: villages with no museums, short-lived villages, and even out-farms (farms the Shakers acquired and worked that were not near any Shaker village). One has to be an enthusiast to take a ride in a prison van to see what is left of Shirley Shaker village. They are the visitors who hike through Savoy, Massachusetts to see a depression in the ground that marks where the Shakers worshipped for only four years. It’s for these enthusiasts that the annual Shaker Seminar labors to get access to Shaker buildings not usually open to the public, and

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<sup>349</sup> “The Enfield Shaker Singers,” <http://www.shakersingers.org/>, with supplemental information on their recordings from my personal collection and from a conversation with their director, Mary Ann Haagen, in 2009.

travels to such obscure locations as Sodus Bay, the site of a Shaker village for only ten years. (See figure 13.)<sup>350</sup>



**Figure 13: Shaker building at Sodus Bay**

### Collectors

Faith and Edward Deming Andrews did their work publicizing the qualities of Shaker furniture quite well. Shaker artifacts, ignored by most collectors before the Second World War, have become a recognized segment of the antiques business. Reference

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<sup>350</sup> Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook*, p. 81 being an example of a map pointing out the outdoor worship site for Harvard; Shirley: personal experience; Savoy: personal communication from David Newell, the guide for Savoy tours. The Shaker Seminar visited Sodus Bay in 2008. The building pictured has since been destroyed by fire.

works in the field that used to ignore Shaker artifacts now devote specific sections to them. One of the premier periodicals in the field, *The Magazine Antiques*, which first published an article by the Andrewses in 1928, now publishes an article on the Shakers on average of once a year.<sup>351</sup>

Hence collectors are a special type of enthusiast, partly in the world of “Shaker” and partly in an overlapping world of the antique collectors and museums. Enthusiasts content with professional collectors to drive the prices of Shaker-made furniture higher and higher. In the last decade, prices have risen into five figures for many prized objects. For example, a 6½ inch oval box, with an opening price of \$8,500, went for \$23,100 in 1999. A wall cupboard with an expected sale price of about \$15,000 went for \$63,250 in 2004. Interest in collecting “Shaker” has spread from the traditional interest in chairs and boxes to a greater range of items, a trend marked by Stephen Miller’s book on such printed Shaker ephemera as seed packets and medicine bottles, published in 2007. Overall, there is usually a major auction every year, and a single auction can generate as much money in a few days as the Friends of the Shakers take years to raise. The Skinner auction of Shaker goods in 2003 generated \$258,270 in one day by selling lots of Shaker goods in prices ranging from \$59 to \$31,725.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> A sampling of lengthy antique guidebooks written prior to 1950 show only scattered references to Shaker artifacts, while they routinely appear in their own section by 1970. For an example, see Marshall B. Davidson, *The American Heritage History of American Antiques from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1968), p. 366-73, “Hands to Work, Hearts to God.” I examined listings of *The Magazine Antiques* for the years 2000-2008.

<sup>352</sup> Fran Kramer, “A Little Box with a Big Price,” *Maine Antique Digest*, 1999; <http://www.artfact.com/auction-lot/shaker-pine-1-piece-wall-cupboard-0-s-o74q8twma9;>

According to one account, despite the rising prices, the number of Shaker enthusiast-collectors has been stable for most of the last quarter century. That would place the last wave of collectors in the 1970s, baby boomers who picked up on the revived interest in “Shaker” in the 1950s and 1960s. Since Shaker antique prices continue to rise, these aging collectors are apparently being replaced as they retire or die out.<sup>353</sup>

Those with a more casual interest, or a more limited budget, will make do with Shaker reproductions. It’s impossible to say exactly how many firms offer reproductions of Shaker furniture, furniture in the Shaker style, or furniture inspired by Shaker design; Internet searches turn up scores of companies that offer *something* with *some* connection to the Shakers. One of the better known firms, Shaker Workshops of Ashburnham, Massachusetts, recently offered a Hancock sewing stand made of cherry wood for \$503.75, a Shaker Straight chair for \$297.50, a box of 12 Shaker pegs in maple wood for \$5.00, a “Shaker Workshops® Home Office” for \$1,708.75, and an “oval tissue boxes” for \$62.50. As can be seen from this list, the company offers everything from pieces that copy specific Shaker examples, identified in the descriptions, to pieces inspired by Shaker style. That appears to be typical for the better Shaker artifact reproduction businesses.<sup>354</sup>

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Miller, *From Shaker Lands*;  
<http://www.skinnerinc.com/asp/searchresults.asp?pg=1&ps=50>.

<sup>353</sup> David Hewett, “New Collectors Help Prices Rise at Shaker Auction,” *Maine Antique Digest*, Dec. 13, 2007.

<sup>354</sup> Shaker Workshops, *Fall 2008 Catalog*.

### **Visiting a Shaker museum village today**

If there is a focal point for “Shaker” activity today, it is the museum village. The museum villages host the enthusiasts and cater to the casual visitors. For most people, the closest they will come to engaging the Shakers is to visit a Shaker museum village.

Despite their substantially different sizes, all offer fairly similar experiences. Each provides an orientation, offers an informative walk through the buildings, and makes use of its grounds for educational and recreational purposes. Most stage temporary exhibits on changing subjects. And all of them have a gift shop, these days renamed the museum store.<sup>355</sup>

Once a visitor had paid for admission, each village offers some sort of orientation. While placards with text and pictures have been the standard method of orienting the tourist, some villages have moved to an introductory video. The one at Enfield, New Hampshire, is typical of the lot. With a run time of twelve minutes, it resembles a condensed version of the Ken Burns documentary, long enough to get across a simple message, short enough that people will sit through it. The introductory video cuts between old photographs and engravings on one hand, to pictures of the present-day village on the other. It covers the rise and golden age of the Shakers, and then quickly mentions their decline. Like Burns, the video attributes the decline of the Shakers to the Industrial Revolution. The rest of the content covers Enfield specifically: its history and architecture, and the current museum village’s resources. Village orientations, including

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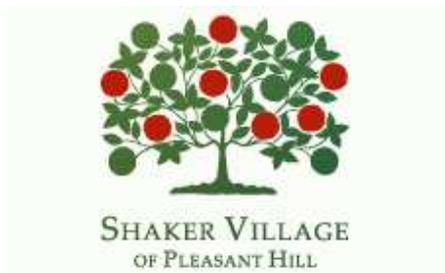
<sup>355</sup> Material in this section is drawn primarily from personal observations made during the years 2004 through 2008, during which I visited the five Shaker museum villages at least once. Because it is still a functioning Shaker village, I have excluded Sabbathday Lake, though the tourist experience there is similar but simpler than at the museum villages.

Enfield's, usually include the spiritual name of the village from Mother's Work; Enfield's is "Chosen Vale". And every orientation also bows to the present, making an implicit or explicit request for funds to keep the museum going.<sup>356</sup>

The spiritual names have become a prominent part of most village's identity.<sup>357</sup> Along with variants of the spirit drawing of the "Shaker Tree of Life," they serve to mark the villages as sacred space. The Shaker Tree of Life is also used by other institutions with Shaker affiliations. (See figures 14 – 17.) The irony is that the Shakers suppressed or abandoned most of the unique practices from Mother's Work in the succeeding decades.



**Figure 14: Canterbury adaptation of Shaker Tree of Life<sup>358</sup>**



**Figure 15: Pleasant Hill adaptation of the Shaker Tree of Life<sup>359</sup>**

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<sup>356</sup> *The Shakers of Enfield, New Hampshire* (digital video recording, n.p., n.d).

<sup>357</sup> Pleasant Hill has no spiritual name that is known; apparently Pleasant Hill was pleasant enough. I doubt White Water will ever prominently use the "Lonely Plain of Tribulation," however.

<sup>358</sup> Black-and-white reproductions will not reveal that the fruit is red, standing out against a gray background.



**Figure 16: South Union's adaptation of the Shaker Tree of Life**



**Figure 17: Shaker Museum (Chatham, N.Y.) adaptation of Shaker Tree of Life**

While Hancock provides tours during the winter, usually villages give one a map and let one wander about the grounds. Maps identify the buildings in the village by the names Shakers gave them to designate how they were used, e.g., the Smoke and Milk House at South Union, or the Centre Family Dwelling at Pleasant Hill. Smaller buildings generally only show some of the equipment that might have been used for work in each building, if they have anything in them at all. Larger buildings, particularly at the bigger villages, will contain explanatory placards, a staff member to explain when and how the building was used, and perhaps some interpreters working with the tools of the period. One might find a blacksmith in a blacksmith's shop, using mid-nineteenth century tools. The major interpretive work is usually done in the large dwelling houses and meeting houses. There, interpreters will explain the Shaker religion and lifestyle in some detail, pointing to fixtures about the building as they go. The twin doors in dwelling houses and

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<sup>359</sup> Black-and-white reproductions will not reveal that the fruit are a mix of reds and greens in this image.

meeting houses, the bedrooms and dining rooms in the dwelling houses, and the need for a large central space in the meeting houses are always covered by interpreters.

Every Shaker village museum takes pride in presenting Shaker artifacts from that specific village's existence as a live Shaker community. For Hancock and Canterbury, this is easy, as both were converted from villages to museums with no period of time devoted to other uses. Hancock also benefited from obtaining a large part of the Andrewses' collection when the museum first opened, as mentioned above. Enfield and South Union, representing smaller communities whose buildings were put to other uses for decades, have a harder time supplying artifacts apart from pictures.

Those with the land and manpower raise heritage herbs, crops, and animals. Hancock does all three. Enfield has only an herb garden, but in season will allow visitors to sample the herbs. A tourist can almost make a meal out of the Enfield herb garden in the right season. Fortunately, the museum villages are all set in the countryside, and quite attractive countryside at that. (See figure 18.) The grounds allow people to picnic, to stroll about, and to study nature. The more adventurous can walk to the sites of the spiritual fountains and feasting grounds used by the villages during Mother's Work.



**Figure 18: Enfield Shaker village on Lake Mascoma**

Some of the museums devote space to special exhibits, which are changed periodically. They range from specific Shaker subjects, such as Enfield’s comparative study of Shaker chairs, to understanding Shaker life in a broader context, such as Hancock’s exhibit on Charles Nordhoff’s *Communitistic Societies of the United States*. (Ironically, Hancock was one of the two Shaker villages Nordhoff dismissed as not worth describing in detail.)<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, p. 195: “The societies of Hancock and Tyringham lie near the New York State line, among the Berkshire hills. They are small, and have no noticeable features.”

The Shakers have persuaded the villages to adopt certain limitations on what interpreters can do. There were some first-person interpreters acting as if they were Shakers in the early days, but no new ones have been trained for years. The Shakers did not want people mistaking interpreters for the real thing. People wanting to see Shakers in the museum villages must imagine seeing the ghosts of departed Shakers. Interpreters can sing Shaker songs, but not dance Shaker dances. The Shakers feel the dances are a sacred part of worship, and have been offended at people staging them as far back as the 1840s. However, the recent decision by the Enfield Shaker Singers to release a video of their interpretation of Shaker dance, as mentioned above, drew no adverse criticism from the Shakers after the fact; indeed, the recording is being sold at the Sabbathday Lake gift shop. So perhaps this limitation is crumbling.<sup>361</sup>

Thanks to the decline of Shaker manufacturing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the subsequent destruction of unneeded buildings, there is very little evidence in the villages of any industrial past beyond artisan's shops. Several villages engineered water supply and power systems in their Shaker days, but only Hancock demonstrates machinery run by water power. The ponds at Canterbury, including one graced by an elegant swan, give the village a bucolic air. One might never

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<sup>361</sup> Since many Shaker songs were also used in worship, the Shakers have been inconsistent in their treatment of songs and dances. Perhaps they recognized that with the songs, the horse had already left the barn, so many songs having already become publicly known and performed.

realize that they form a system of dammed ponds once used to power Canterbury's factories.<sup>362</sup>

On a nice day, a Shaker village museum recalls William Dean Howell's fictional Vardley in *The Undiscovered Country*. All five of the villages have pleasant settings in the countryside. Thanks to the fact that the villages were originally built to accommodate hundreds, on an average day there is little crowding by tourists. One may stroll about the grounds without a care in the world, soaking up the peaceful atmosphere, much as Egeria did in Howells's novel. A visitor trying to visualize the ghosts of Shakers past, with their communal work and routines, will be hard put to overcome the atmosphere of the village.

All visitors must eventually leave Shaker land and return to the World. Usually that means going through the gift shop, especially at Hancock, where there is no other visitor exit. These museum gift stores sell books about the Shakers, books about Shaker food, books about Shaker furniture, recordings of Shaker songs, small batches of herbs that had been grown by the Shakers (and in some cases actual herbs grown by the Shakers at Sabbathday Lake), reproduction Shaker furniture, reproduction Shaker fancy goods, postcards, Shaker-inspired jewelry(!), and the sort of small knickknacks that can be found in any museum gift shop. The museum gift shops have taken over from the Shakers' Office stores, though in most cases they offer reproductions, not the real thing.

A Shaker village is a good way to get acquainted with the history of the Shakers, within its limitations. Having the lands, buildings, and artifacts around one gives the

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<sup>362</sup> Starbuck, *Neither Plain nor Simple* offers an archaeological perspective on Canterbury's decline as an industrial center. The only obvious evidence of the most famous Shaker industrial site, the Mount Lebanon chair factory, is a road sign.

Shaker story a physical reality no book or video can quite equal. But it can give only a partial idea of what it meant to be a Shaker. The village lacks psychological realism: tourists are not organized to work and worship as the Shakers did during their days. And even the largest village museum lacks the facilities to offer every aspect of Shaker life.

### **The decline of the casual visitor**

At least some evidence suggests that the typical visitor to a Shaker museum is a casual visitor. One survey, conducted at Hancock in 2005, recorded that approximately 85% of all visitors were first-time visitors, that just under half had decided to visit only upon arriving in the region, and that most spent about three to four hours in the village.<sup>363</sup>

For all that they offer so many things to see and do, the Shaker museum villages have experienced a sharp decline in visitor numbers. Attendance is off by as much as half since its peak in the late 1980s.<sup>364</sup>

Several of the villages have tried to respond to this by diversifying. Enfield, Pleasant Hill, and South Union have run hotels and restaurants in their Shaker buildings. Several of the villages stage “Shaker dinners,” craft demonstrations and workshops. Pleasant Hill offers boat trips from the nearby Shaker Landing on the Kentucky River. Hancock holds seasonal farm animal events, often geared to children. Several of the villages link with other tourist attractions, whether by just listing web links to other sites as Enfield does, or engaging in reciprocal admissions policies, as Hancock does. All the

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<sup>363</sup> Hancock Shaker Village Survey, Fall, 2005.

<sup>364</sup> Personal communications from staff at Pleasant Hill, Hancock, and Sabbathday Lake.

villages have spread on to the Internet with web sites, and often with e-mailed newsletters.<sup>365</sup>

The decline in attendance has affected other heritage villages besides the Shaker ones. Both Old Sturbridge Village and Plimouth Plantation have made severe cuts in staff in the wake of falling attendance figures. This suggests that some general change in American society and culture has made heritage villages less attractive. Many reasons have been offered: the declining numbers of school visits after the baby boomers reached adulthood, the proliferation of electronic and virtual reality entertainment with its “larger than life” images, and the collapse of the post-World War II celebratory narrative of the nation’s history without any replacement, to name a few. Certainly all of these *could* be affecting attendance at the Shaker museum villages as well as elsewhere.

Yet it is tempting to believe that a declining interest in the golden age myth of Shakerism may be a particularly important contributory cause. When the Shaker song “Simple Gifts” was used to celebrate an expensive new automobile, then the appeal of “simple living” to Americans generally would seem to be quite low. *The People Called Shakers* and the Shaker museum openings of the 1960s may have caught the crest of an interest in simple living and alternative lifestyles, an interest that has declined since then. If the collectors are a representative sampling of enthusiasts, and there is reason to think

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<sup>365</sup> Not all these ventures have been successful. For example, Enfield gave up using the Great Stone Dwelling House as a hotel and has converted it back to a museum, though it still rents out rooms on occasion. Sabbathday Lake has made another type of linkage, joining the “Maine Folk Art Trail,” a group marketing effort.

they are, then Shakerism had failed to interest the generations after the baby boomers to the same degree.<sup>366</sup>

The 2005 Hancock survey indicated that approximately 61% of all visitors were between the ages of 45 and 70. This could support explanations based on the decline of the golden age myth, or a generational shift in desired entertainment. But it may also indicate that children and people in the early phases of their careers simply do not take many trips for pleasure in the fall, when this survey was conducted.<sup>367</sup>

### **On the outer fringes of the “Shaker” world**

There are other activities in the world of “Shaker,” not all of which have that much to do with the Shakers. In their efforts to stay financially afloat, the Shaker village museums offer events that range from educational seminars about the Shakers to events with at best a tenuous link. On the educational side, Hancock took over organizing the Shaker Seminar, a multi-day event that has been held annually since 1975. The seminar usually covers a range of topics from history to collecting. Enfield has in recent years offered a Shaker Forum over a weekend in the spring with a similar agenda. All the Shaker village museums put on one-day workshops on everything from making Shaker-style oval boxes and timber framing (both at Hancock) to broom making (at South Union) to cooking with Shaker recipes and a “natural bodycare gifts” seminar featuring herbs (at Canterbury). Hancock offers special events for children involving the heritage breed farm animals, an event that falls on the borderline between Shaker-related and not. And most

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<sup>366</sup> Attendees at the annual Shaker Seminar are generally middle-aged or elderly, a supporting datum.

<sup>367</sup> Hancock Shaker Village Survey.

village museums hold exclusive and high-priced receptions to give favored donors and would-be donors the opportunity to appreciate the museum and each other. Hancock puts on a wine tasting for members only, to help attract and retain people who pay from \$50 to \$500 per year to support the village. Every village offers visitors the opportunity to eat “Shaker” through specially scheduled meals; one need not survive just by grazing Enfield’s herb garden!<sup>368</sup>

The Shakers have appeared in fiction and drama as far back as Hawthorne and Howells. Writers continue to use and misuse them to this day. 1972’s *A Day No Pigs Would Die* became a modest hit. Set in a Shaker village in Vermont, where there weren’t any, its claims to Shaker expertise seemed dubious to the more knowledgeable enthusiasts. Deborah Woodworth began writing a series of detective novels in 1997 featuring a Shaker sister solving mysteries in a fictitious Kentucky Shaker village. Six have appeared to date. Like *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, the first was set in a historically impossible place and time, Kentucky in the 1930s. And along with Shaker stories going all the way back to Hawthorne, the possibility of Shakers having sex was used to liven up the book.<sup>369</sup>

The Shakers’ reaction to such literature, and indeed most of the attempts to use their history for *any* purpose, has generally been similar to thoughts they expressed in the *Shaker Quarterly* in 1991:

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<sup>368</sup> All events drawn from village web sites, December, 2008. The author did once make a meal out of herbs at Enfield.

<sup>369</sup> Morse, *Shakers and the World’s People*, p. 306. Deborah Woodworth, *Death of a Winter Shaker* (New York: Avon Books, 1997) was the first of her books.

When word reached us that a playwright in England planned on doing a play on the life of Mother Ann, we were concerned to say the least. So often the media and those engaged in publicity have the best of intentions when writing about the Shakers, but, due to a lack of communication with the Shakers themselves, these projects are very often unacceptable to us.<sup>370</sup>

This statement may be read as either an expression of group displeasure, or an assertion of the right to review and pronounce on the acceptability of Shaker projects. It's probably best read as a bit of both. Just as they've kept their archives from recent decades closed, the Shakers of Sabbathday Lake might like to control how the Shakers are depicted, and certainly expressed their displeasure at certain types of depictions. But there is too much evidence out there, and too many writers and scholars for the Shakers to review them all, even if they wanted to.<sup>371</sup>

#### **“Shaker” on the Internet**

If books and social events are the traditional outer fringe of “Shaker,” the Internet has become the newest element on the fringe. Shaker village museums have the premier web sites. But Shaker museums, academic sites, enthusiast groups, and furniture makers are also well represented on the web. Shakerism has its own articles in Wikipedia, and its own Facebook entries.

Possibly the most extraordinary web content is the virtual Shaker Village of White Water. Begun as a course project at the University of Cincinnati, the virtual village is now

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<sup>370</sup> “Home Notes,” *Shaker Quarterly* vol. 19, no. 3 (Fall, 1991), p. 88.

<sup>371</sup> For another example of the Shakers expressing their displeasure at an unfavorable depiction, see Morse, *Shakers and the World's People*, p. 338-39.

a virtual three-dimensional structure visible through Google Earth. It's the largest attempt to recreate a village in its entirety in existence.<sup>372</sup>

With their staffs and facilities, the Shaker museum villages have the most significant web sites. In general content, they resemble each other a great deal. They all describe the history of the Shakers in general and at their specific locations, describe the village itself and the tours available, list activities and special events, describe levels of membership for giving different amounts of money, and mention their gift shops.<sup>373</sup>

Pleasant Hill has the most sophisticated website. The opening page greets you with the following message:

WELCOME TO SHAKER VILLAGE.

Discover America's largest restored Shaker community, where a remarkable society once flourished and where today, you can experience a true national treasure.

This 3,000 acre National Historic Landmark charms guests with distinct Shaker style and the beauty of Lexington's [Bluegrass Region](#). A stay at the Inn offers peaceful accommodations, gracious dining, exceptional shopping, historical activities and invigorating recreation.

On the same page are constantly changing pictures of the village, a Shaker tree as logo, blurbs for events, the inn, and the store, and a celebrity endorsement from actress Ashley Judd, whose family has Kentucky roots. Click on the endorsement, and one can watch a three-minute video in which Judd talks like a travel brochure while the video shows many scenes about the village and its environs. From the Pleasant Hill website,

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<sup>372</sup> <http://www.cetconnect.org/MediaPlayer.aspx?vid=1717>

<sup>373</sup> Canterbury: <http://www.shakers.org/>; Enfield: <http://www.shakermuseum.org/>; Hancock: <http://www.hancockshakervillage.org/accounts/28/homepage/>; Pleasant Hill: <http://www.shakervillageky.org/>; South Union: <http://www.shakermuseum.com/>; information on web sites based on viewing in December, 2008. I have received e-mail newsletters from Hancock and Enfield, sent out to museum members.

one can get the day's schedule of events, enroll on the museum's e-mail newsletter, order items from the gift shop, and even make reservations at the inn.<sup>374</sup>

Other village museum sites are less sophisticated, but they offer the same message. One can relax, enjoy the history, and shop. And one doesn't even need to go to the museum village to do the shopping.

So much of the Shaker museum village experience is online that the casual visitor need never even make a visit. Perhaps, like newspapers, Shaker villages are harming their revenue streams by putting so much information online. On the other hand, they may be encouraging visitors. No studies have been conducted on the subject as yet.

The Shaker museums not in museum villages also have web sites. In general, they are more serious, as they do not have the entertainment possibilities available at the museum villages. Given Clara Endicott Sears's interest in promoting contemplation, not entertainment, it is ironic that the Fruitlands website is closest in spirit to the museum villages. The rest are more for the enthusiast, not the casual visitor.<sup>375</sup>

### **To sum up**

While the Shakers' internal conflict has ended, and the world of Shaker has crept onto the Internet, there have been few fundamental changes in the world of Shaker since

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<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.* The celebrity endorsement video is a recent addition.

<sup>375</sup> Sabbathday Lake: <http://www.shaker.lib.me.us/>; Watervliet: <http://www.shakerheritage.org/>; Whitewater: <http://whitewatershakervillage.org/>; Fruitlands: <http://www.fruitlands.org/>; Old Chatham: <http://shakermuseumandlibrary.org/>; Shaker Heights: <http://www.shakerhistory.com/>.

1985. What is most apparent is how the range and diversity of enthusiasts, collectors, and visitors has increased.

With the Shakers reduced to a very few members at Sabbathday Lake, their control over the world of “Shaker” is very weak. The Shaker museum villages have become the most visible players in the Shaker world. They are also the only places where all the different kinds of people interested in “Shaker” meet. The continued decline in museum attendance raises the question of whether they will continue to be the leading players in future. While the enthusiasts are displaying increasing energy, and the Internet offers them a cheap way to make their presence known, they lack the financial and material resources of the villages. It may well be that the villages are on the best path they could take, setting up groups of enthusiasts and supporting those (with encouragement and a meeting place, if nothing else) that form independently.

## CONCLUSION

This work began by considering how Shakers and people from “the World” have interacted with each other for over two hundred years. While initially the interaction was confined to face-to-face contacts, it has gradually broadened out to include the printed word, Shaker artifacts, village museums, and, most recently, the Internet. The content of the interactions has also changed radically, from the initially confrontational tone of religious disputes to such subjects as Shaker history and the appreciation of Shaker history and antiques.

### “Shaker”

Over time, the ability to define what “Shaker” means has shifted from the Shakers to the World. To be sure, the World always did have a considerable say in saying what “Shaker” meant. In the first few decades after the Shaker gospel was opened at Niskeyuna in 1780, apostates such as Valentine Rathbun published descriptions of Shaker faith more frequently than Shakers did. The majority of visitors, who published accounts, including many famous figures in the antebellum period, did not join the Shakers. Yet Shaker success in spreading the faith across the Northeast and Midwest, along with their economic success as producers of high quality commodities, gave them the resources and opportunity to present their case to the World through their theological and historical works.

In the years after Mother’s Work, the balance shifted decisively against the Shakers. The World’s interest shifted away from the religious issues that had made the Shakers successful in the United States. The rise of cities, railroads, and industrialization created a new image of a progressive America, an image in which the Shakers looked

quaintly nostalgic. They became where the World had come from, rather than where it might go. The Shakers' own declining demographic and economic situation made it difficult for them to make any claim to offer a successful alternative vision of themselves or of America. Clara Endicott Sears completed this transition in her *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*. In her interpretation, not only were the Shakers quaint and nostalgic, but the *real* Shakers had been the ones from the Golden Age, the antebellum years. The Golden Age myth cut contemporary Shakers off from the World's image of the Shakers.

Other rural locations experienced a similar loss of power to define their image in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Nantucket found itself transformed from a failing whaling community to a successful tourist colony celebrating what whaling was imagined to be like. Vermont farmers had to alter their food styles to accommodate visitors with different expectations about farm food. Berkshire farmers and their children became the servants and caterers to the *nouveau riche* from the nation's financial centers who settled among them. The money and the command of the printed media gave the professional writers, reporters, and the well-heeled the power to define the countryside, and they defined it in terms of the nation's past.<sup>376</sup>

The second major shift in the meaning of "Shaker" was the rise of Shaker goods as collectibles in the late nineteenth century. "Shaker" increasingly came to mean, not a particular kind of religious believer, but things made by those believers. To be "Shaker" meant to be a handcrafted item of high quality. Thanks to the work of Edward Deming Andrews and others, "Shaker" shifted a bit to mean "elegantly simple with clean lines."

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<sup>376</sup> Brown, *Inventing New England*, chap. 4, 5; Owens, *Berkshire Cottages*. Not all redefinings were positive; see Barron, *Those who Stayed Behind*.

To be “Shaker” came to mean fitting a style. And once it was the style that was important, the goods did not even have to be made by Shakers. Hence the Shaker-influenced furniture produced by some members of the Arts and Crafts movement at the end of the nineteenth century, and the proliferation of “Shaker style” furniture manufacturers by the end of the twentieth.

Ironically, the Shaker museum villages, which Andrews hoped would be the best way to preserve and present Shaker culture, have in many ways done the opposite, by combining the Golden Age story with the celebration of Shaker artifacts. The seriously interested visitor *can* find out a lot about Shaker life and religion, and even that there are still Shakers. But it’s quite easy for a casual visitor to spend the day at a Shaker museum village and come away with the image of the Shakers as a dead people who made neat stuff.

### **Incorporating the part into the whole**

“Shaker” would never have become a valued term, unless the Shakers presented to the World aspects of their life that the World would want to adopt into its own positive stories. Shaker honesty and quality in business was a great help in making the strange sectarians acceptable to their neighbors. Their persistence in engaging in agriculture and wearing old-fashioned clothes allowed writers like Lossing and Howells to depict them as charming rustics. Later, Sears would reinterpret them to be the heirs to Puritan virtue. Their dedication faith and their simplicity, as depicted in the works of Andrews, made them the type of soundly religious simple lifers that Americans wanted to celebrate during the Cold War and the tumultuous 1960s.

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No other religious communal society has been so fortunate. More typical is the case of Ephrata Cloisters, in Pennsylvania. This social commune was settled by Germans in 1732 and flourished for several decades. Apparently the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which owns the site, thought that there was so little interesting about the commune *per se*, that the plaques and literature at the site emphasize its slim connections to the Revolution (nursing sick Continental troops) and the Constitution (an early example of religious toleration).<sup>377</sup>

At the other extreme, the Perfectionists of the Oneida Community have never been portrayed in a way convincingly appealing to Americans. Their sexual regime, while titillating, was too promiscuous for the more prudish, too heavily controlled by the leadership for the libertines. Bear traps and the Oneida factory that produced them will continue to seem less romantic than Shaker chairs and farms, unless American culture develops a post-industrial nostalgia for factories and machines.

### **Professionalization of interactions**

The early interactions between Shakers and the World were at best loosely structured. The Shakers came to visit (as at Harvard) or visitors came in the early days to Niskeyuna with little ceremony and less planning. People got together, talked about religion, and ate meals together. If things worked out, they worshipped together.

Just as the Shakers organized themselves into villages, so they organized the visiting experience. Visitors went to the Sunday public service, or if they had actual

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<sup>377</sup> Based on personal visit, 2005.

business, to meet with the trustees in the Office. The elder from that village's gathering order usually gave the talk at the Sunday meeting.

Similarly, the experience of visiting became more organized, and more professional. The earliest visitor accounts were written by religious seekers or casual visitors. But after 1815, first professional travelers, then magazine writers became the most important visitors, as they passed on their experiences to their American audiences, setting expectations for future visitors. Ken Burns's documentary film was just the most recent development in this process.

With the conversion of some villages into museums, the process has run to its completion on the host's side. The museum staffs at villages like Hancock and Pleasant Hill do their jobs for their living. The process is not so complete on the visitors' side. While most printed travel literature on Shaker villages is written by professionals, amateurs can still make their mark these days by publishing on the Internet.

### **Specialization**

In the earliest days, there were only two kinds of visitors to the Shakers: religious seekers, and the curious. The development of Shaker villages added businessmen and neighbors. The growth in printing and reading added reporters and authors.

The growing interest in Shaker artifacts and Shaker culture toward the end of the nineteenth century spawned a number of specialized interest groups in the World, which continue to proliferate to this day. Collectors, museum staffs, and academic researchers have all become frequent visitors to Shaker sites and seekers after Shaker artifacts. Each of these groups in turn has developed many specialties. Some academics are interested in the gift drawings, others in specific villages, and so on.

Those interested in Shakers were fortunate, in that their expansion and decline produced so many objects and documents for study, making this specialization possible. Consider that a complete set of recordings of Shaker songs would likely run to thousands of volumes using current technology; Shaker singing groups are in no danger of running out of material. In contrast, study of the Oneida Perfectionist commune, although a fascinating subject, has been greatly retarded because so many relevant documents were locked up or destroyed by the Oneida Corporation.

### **Commercialization**

Just as significant a change was the increasing importance of commercial transactions in Shaker-visitor relations. The Shakers had initially welcomed visitors with a free meal, a way to make friends and share fellowship. By the middle of the nineteenth century that practice had dropped out of the Millennial Laws and the Shakers were charging for meals. After the Civil War, several villages bought, built, or converted buildings to serve as commercial lodging establishments.

The Office had originally been designed for business relationships between the Shakers and the World. They gradually developed stores to sell Shaker products to visitors. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, they had taken on the role and appearance of gift shops. The Shakers peddled their goods in their gift shops, and out in the World, because their previous economic enterprises were declining or defunct. Making a buck off the tourists had become essential to their economy.

These days a “Shaker” transaction is most likely going to be a commercial one. Visiting a Shaker museum village or buying a Shaker or Shaker-style artifact costs money. Indeed, thanks to gift shops, one can do both at a museum village. Acquiring an

actual Shaker antique rises from being just a commercial transaction to a capital investment at the high end.

### **Interactivity**

Above all, the story of the Shakers and visitors is one of interactions. The World and the visitors who came from it were the dominant partner in this relationship most of the time, but it was still an interaction. Both sides changed in response to changes in the other.

The implication for Shaker studies is clear. Any study attempting to describe and explain the development of Shakerism must consider how the World may have influenced the Shakers. Too often, Shaker historical studies read as if Shaker society evolved as an autonomous entity between the establishment of villages and their closing. There may well be subjects within Shaker history for which such an approach may be valid. But for most subjects, grounding Shaker history in the World around them will promote a richer and more accurate understanding of this curious religious group.

### **Tourism and history**

Arguing whether tourism has changed greatly over the last two hundred years, or remained the same, depends on what one selects as the “essential” elements of tourism. In the specific case of the Shakers and their visitors, three elements in particular stand out.

First, while the experience of Shakers and visitors has always been an interaction, the visitors have become the dominant force in shaping that interaction, by weight of numbers, by better access to the media, and by sheer economic weight. The end result approximates the ideal of the “tourist gaze:” that visitors with their preconceptions define the experience. But at the same time, this analysis indicates that a pure tourist gaze is an

extreme case. What visitors see also shapes their experience. Certainly it did in the early days of the Shakers. And even the visitor experience today is anchored in those earlier experiences, as witness the perpetuation of the Shaker golden age as the common interpretive story.

Second, a proper analysis of tourist activity should also include related cultural activity to place the experience in its proper context. Journalists, fiction writers, collectors, and scholars all shaped how the World saw the Shakers. In particular, it is impossible to understand contemporary Shaker tourism without appreciating the contribution of furniture collectors and the museum village developers.

Third, the content of Shaker tourism has changed greatly over time and become more complex. Hostility to the Shakers has vanished, to be most often replaced by sentimentalism. People take an interest in more things Shakers do and have done. And the Shakers have accommodated the World to a greater degree.

These features of Shaker tourism do not refute contemporary tourism theory; they expand it. Contemporary theory emphasizes the role of the tourist as tourist. This history demonstrates that tourists only became the dominant force over time, that their views developed in interactions with what they visited, and that their perspective is shaped by related cultural phenomena. None of these conclusions would startle contemporary theorists. But they do not receive the emphasis they deserve when theoretical studies consider only contemporary practices.

## APPENDIX

### SHAKER VILLAGES

In the over two centuries since the Fathers James Whittaker and Joseph Meacham ordered the Shakers to gather, there have been many Shaker villages. They were referred to by many names. Their fortunes and population waxed and waned. Once they were closed, Shaker villages were put to a number of different uses.

To help the reader, the following is a listing of Shaker villages running roughly from east to west on a state-by-state basis. Excluded are a number of short-lived communities that were never formally organized into full Gospel Order, such as Savoy, Massachusetts, and the two communities in the South, which seem to have functioned more as vacation and retirement communities.

#### General explanations

Spiritual names: Assigned during the period of Mother's Work (around 1840).

Other names used: Shaker villages are usually designated by the principal township in which they lay. But other names were used a various times.

Date gathered: The year in which the village was formally inaugurated. Often this was some years after the Shakers made converts in the area.

Maximum number of families: As Shaker villages grew, they created additional families to organize the members. As membership declined, families were consolidated. The leading family with the most holy Shakers was usually called the Church or Center family. Family names changed repeatedly; the ones given are from Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers*.

Maximum population (year): Best figures available.

Date closed: The year in which the village was formally closed. Some members may have lingered years afterwards.

Current use: The most conspicuous use of the Shaker lands and buildings. In every case, at least some buildings have been destroyed, and some of the land is in private hands. If there are accommodations for visitors, they are mentioned.

Other: Miscellaneous notes.

### **Maine villages**

#### **Sabbathday Lake**

Spiritual name: Chosen Land

Other names used: New Gloucester

Date gathered: 1794

Maximum number of families: 3 (Church, North/Poland Spring, Square House)

Maximum population (year): 187 (1784)

Date closed: Still open; fewer than 5 Shakers remain in 2009.

Current use: Only Shaker village still occupied by Shakers. Guided tours available; gift shop.

Other: Last village organized in Eighteenth century; eastern village most distant from Mount Lebanon.

#### **Gorham**

Spiritual name: (Not open during Mother's Work.)

Other names used: Union Branch

Date gathered: 1807

Maximum number of families: 1

Maximum population: approximately 60.

Date closed: 1819; members moved to Sabbathday Lake's North family.

Current use: Entirely in private hands.

Other: Due to its short duration, not always counted among Shaker villages.

### **Alfred**

Spiritual name: Holy Land

Date gathered: 1793

Maximum number of families: 3 (Church, Second, North)

Maximum population (year): 200 (1823)

Date closed: 1931; many members moved to Sabbathday Lake.

Current use: Owned by a Catholic religious order, the Brothers of Christian Instruction.

### **New Hampshire villages**

#### **Canterbury**

Spiritual name: Holy Ground

Date gathered: 1792

Maximum number of families: 4 (Church, Second, North, West)

Maximum Federal census population (year): 260 (1840)

Date closed: 1992

Current use: Canterbury Shaker Village, Inc., set up by the Shakers, has operated the site as a museum since 1969. Between 1969 and 1992, the community was both a functioning Shaker village and a museum.

Other: Headquarters of Central Ministry from 1957 until 1990, when the last surviving  
eldress died.<sup>378</sup>

### **Enfield**

Spiritual name: Chosen Vale

Date gathered: 1793

Maximum number of families: 3 (Church, North, and South)

Maximum Federal census population (year): 297 (1840)

Date closed: 1923; most went to Canterbury

Current use: Some Church Family buildings and lands are run by The Museum at Lower  
Shaker Village. Some North Family buildings are used by the Catholic monastic order,  
the Congregation of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Sallette, which also owned the  
Church Family buildings as well between 1927 and 1985. One building moved to  
Shelburne Museum in Vermont.

Other: Not to be confused with Connecticut Shaker village of same name.

### **Massachusetts villages**

#### **Harvard**

Spiritual name: Lovely Vineyard

Other names used: South Groton, Groton Junction, and Ayer used as mailing addresses;  
these all refer to the same nearby community in the World.

Date gathered: 1792

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<sup>378</sup> Steven Paterwic has recently argued that, according to the terms of the Shaker  
covenant, the Ministry dissolved in 1988 when the membership fell below the minimum

Maximum number of families: 4 (Church, North, South, and East)

Maximum Federal census population (year): 178 (1850)

Date closed: 1918; remaining members moved to Mount Lebanon

Current use: Entirely in private hands; on National Register of Historic Places. Office building moved to Fruitlands Museum, where it opened as a Shaker museum in 1922.

Other: Square House, still standing, originally erected by the followers of Shadrach Ireland, who led a community of celibate followers until his death in 1778.

### **Shirley**

Spiritual name: Pleasant Garden

Date gathered: 1793

Maximum number of families: 3 (Church, North, and South)

Maximum population (year): 118 (1820)

Date closed: 1908; the three remaining sisters moved to Harvard.

Current use: Part of a prison under the authority of the Massachusetts Correctional Institution. Tours arranged through Shirley Historical Society. Two buildings outside the prison are in private hands. Meetinghouse moved to Hancock in 1962.

Other: When the Shakers sold the site to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, it was originally used as a boys' industrial school.

### **Tyringham**

Spiritual name: City of Love

Date gathered: 1792

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number of two. See Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, p. 261.

Maximum number of families: 2 (Church and North)

Maximum population (year): 101 (1830)

Date closed: 1875; most went to Enfield, Conn.

Current use: Entirely in private hands; on National Register of Historic Places.

Other: Was run as a vacation resort and sanitarium in the first decades after it was closed and sold.

### **Hancock**

Spiritual name: City of Peace

Other names used: Pittsfield

Date gathered: 1790

Maximum number of families: 6 (Church, Second, North, West, East, and South)

Maximum Federal census population (year): 338 (1830)

Date closed: 1960

Current use: Sold by the Shakers to Hancock Shaker Village, Inc., which operates it as a museum.

Other: Headquarters of Central Ministry, 1946-57.

### **Connecticut village**

#### **Enfield**

Spiritual name: City of Union

Date gathered: 1790; visited by Mother Ann Lee in 1781.

Maximum number of families: 5 (Church, North, South, West, East)

Maximum population (year): 215 (1850)

Date closed: 1917; remaining Shakers went to Mount Lebanon and Watervliet, N.Y.

Current use: Part of a prison since 1931. Some buildings in private hands are on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **New York villages**

#### **Mount Lebanon**

Spiritual name: Holy Mount

Other names used: New Lebanon, Canaan. The name "Mount Lebanon" was adopted when a post office was erected in the village in 1861.

Date gathered: 1787

Maximum number of families: 8 (Church, North, Center, Second, East, South, Upper Canaan, and Lower Canaan)

Maximum population (year): 615 (1842)

Date closed: 1947; last Shakers moved to Hancock.

Current use: North Family is now a museum (currently closed). Church Family buildings are part of the Darrow School, a private secondary school.

Other: Headquarters of Central Ministry from 1787 until 1946.

#### **Watervliet**

Spiritual name: Wisdom's Valley

Other names used: Niskeyuna

Date gathered: 1787, but sometimes given as 1775 (the date Mother Ann Lee arrived).

Maximum number of families: 4 (Church, North, South, and West)

Maximum Federal census population (year): 304 (1840)

Date closed: 1938; remaining Shakers moved to Mount Lebanon and Hancock.

Current use: Church Family is the Ann Lee Home, geriatric nursing community operated by Albany County since 1926. Meetinghouse operated as a museum by Shaker Heritage Society.

Other: Original Shaker settlement in the United States. Mother Ann Lee buried here.

Sponsored primarily “colored” Philadelphia outfamily (1858-1896?) and Narcoossee, Florida community (1895-1924). Watervliet, New York is not to be confused with the Ohio Shaker village named after it.

### **Sodus Bay**

Spiritual name: (Not open during Mother’s Work.)

Date gathered: 1826

Maximum number of families: 4 (Church and 3 others)

Maximum population: about 150 (1835)

Date closed: 1836; moved to Groveland.

Current use: Entirely in private hands.

Other: Sold to speculators planning a canal, which was never built.

### **Groveland**

Spiritual name: Union Branch

Other names used: Sonyea

Date gathered: 1836 (moved from Sodus Bay)

Maximum number of families: 2 (West and East)

Maximum population (year): 148 (1836)

Date closed: 1892; most of the remaining Shaker moved to Watervliet, New York.

Current use: Most remaining buildings are part of a New York State prison. One building moved to Mumford, where it is part of the Genesee County Museum.

Other: When the Shakers sold the site to the State of New York, it was originally used as a facility for epileptics.

### **Ohio villages**

#### **North Union**

Spiritual name: The Valley of God's Pleasure

Other names used: Shaker Heights (only after closure of Shaker village)

Date gathered: 1822

Maximum number of families: 3 (Center, Mill, and East)

Maximum population (year): said to have reached 300; highest Federal census return was 188 (1840).

Date closed: 1889; most remaining Shakers moved to Union Village or Watervliet, Ohio

Current use: Developers began construction of the suburb of Shaker Heights in 1905. No Shaker building remains. The Shaker Historical Society operates a museum on the site of a Shaker building.

#### **Union Village**

Spiritual name: Wisdom's Paradise

Other names used: Turtle Creek, Shakertown; the name Union Village was adopted in 1808.

Date gathered: 1805

Maximum number of families: 11 (Center, Brick, North, South, Square House, Grist Mill, North Lot, West Lot, East, West Brick, and West Frame)

Maximum population (year): 634 (1818)

Date closed: 1912; last Shakers left in 1920 to go to Canterbury.

Current use: Otterbein United Methodist retirement community. The Marble Hall, formerly the Shaker Office building, has had some Shaker exhibits open to the public since 1987.

Other: First formally organized village in the west. Sponsored short-lived White Oak, Georgia colony (1898-1902).

### **Watervliet**

Spiritual name: Vale of Peace

Other names used: Beulah, Beaver Creek; the name Watervliet was in use by 1813.

Date gathered: 1806

Maximum number of families: 5 (First, North, West, Mill, and School)

Maximum population (year): about 100 (1823)

Date closed: 1900; members moved to Union Village.

Current use: Much of the land was turned into an office park in the 1980s. No Shaker building remains at the original site. Two buildings were moved to the Kettering-Moraine Museum in Kettering.

Other: Sometimes considered a satellite community of Union Village. Not to be confused with the New York Shaker village after which it was named.

## **White Water**

Spiritual name: Lonely Plain of Tribulation (status of this name is in dispute).

Other names used: Whitewater

Date gathered: 1824

Maximum number of families: 3 (Center, North, and South)

Maximum population (year): said to have reached 200 (1846)

Date closed: 1916

Current use: Owned by the Hamilton County Park District, which has rented out most of the buildings to private occupants.

Other: Sometimes considered a satellite community of Union Village.

## **Kentucky villages**

### **Pleasant Hill**

Spiritual name: Despite being open during Mother's Work, Pleasant Hill apparently did not receive any new spiritual name.

Other names used: Shakertown, Shawnee Creek

Date gathered: 1806

Maximum number of families: 5 (Center, West Lot, North Lot, East, and West)

Maximum population (year): about 490 (1820s)

Date closed: 1910; some Shakers stayed on, the last dying in 1923.

Current use: Shakertown at Pleasant Hill started acquiring buildings in 1961 and has operated the site as a museum since 1968.

### **South Union**

Spiritual name: Jaspar Valley

Other names used: Gaspar, Shakertown

Date gathered: 1807

Maximum number of families: 4 (Center, North, East, and West)

Maximum population (year): 350 (1827)

Date closed: 1922

Current use: Shakertown at South Union, Inc. started acquiring buildings in 1971 and operates those they own as a museum.

### **Indiana village**

#### **West Union**

Spiritual name: (not open during Mother's Work)

Other names used: Busro

Date gathered: 1807

Maximum number of families: 4 (Center, Office, South Lot, and 1 other)

Maximum population (year): 300 when evacuated in 1812

Date closed: 1827; many Shakers moved to Whitewater, Pleasant Hill, South Union and Union Village.

Current use: No Shaker buildings remain.

Other: Temporarily evacuated during War of 1812; Shakers returned 1814.

Sources: Stuart Murray, *Shaker Heritage Guidebook* (especially for current use); Martha Boice, Dale Covington, and Richard Spence, *Maps of the Shaker West: A Journey of Discovery* (Dayton, O.: Knot Garden Press, 1997) (for western villages); William Sims Bainbridge, "Shaker Demographics 1840-1900: An Example of the Use of U.S. Census Enumeration Schedules," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 4 (Dec., 1982), p. 352-365 (for western village census figures); Priscilla Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (for eastern population figures); Steven J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers*.

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