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Voices That Heard and Accepted the Call of God

By Stephen J. Paterwic

A review of: *Shaker Autobiographies, Biographies and Testimonies, 1806-1907*, edited by Glendyne R. Wergland and Christian Goodwillie. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014. 3 volume set.

Let the Shakers Speak for Themselves

In 1824 teenager Mary Antoinette Doolittle felt drawn to the Shakers and sought every opportunity to obtain information about them. By chance, while visiting her grandmother, she encountered two young women who had just left the New Lebanon community. “Mary” was thrilled with the opportunity to hear them tell their story.¹ Suddenly “something like a voice” said to her, “Why listen to them? Go to the Shakers, visit, see and learn for yourself who and what they are!”² This idea is echoed in the testimony of Thomas Stebbins of Enfield, Connecticut, who was not satisfied to hear about the Shakers. “But I had a feeling to go and see them, and judge for myself.” (1:400) Almost two hundred years later, this is still the best advice for people seeking to learn about the Shakers.

Why This Compilation Is an Important Resource

When there were many Shaker villages, anyone making an inquiry about them could visit and call at the Office.³ Today the number of Shakers is few and the remaining society somewhat isolated, yet there continue to be many who have an interest in them. As always, however, the Shakers still speak loudly in their writings. Therefore, the editors of *Shaker Autobiographies, Biographies and Testimonies, 1806-1907*, really understate the case when they say that “there is much to be learned from studying the Shakers’ lives as recorded in their own words.” (1:xii) Actually, it is essential for anyone serious about Shaker Studies to be thoroughly familiar with such Shaker voices.

As the editors considered the large number of Shaker testimonies and

biographical works, they chose to include “texts that had been previously available only in manuscript form, or as rare imprints.” (1:xxxiii) In fact, since February 2012, all of the *Testimonies* of 1827 have been available from the Sabin Americana database in the form of high-quality digital scans via print on demand. If it were of utmost importance to just make the stories available to interested readers, then having the 1827 *Testimonies* readily accessible in this format would be enough. Anyone involved in Shaker studies, however, needs more comprehensive goals besides a wider access to original texts. A good work on the Shakers has annotations and footnotes that are as interesting, useful, and accurate as the body of the text itself. This is the true genius of *Shaker Autobiographies, Biographies and Testimonies, 1806-1907*. The annotations, endnotes, and footnotes of the three volumes are simply overwhelming in the most positive sense. For every name and important concept there is an easy-to-read explanation. The editorial notes number 1205, and this does not include the hundreds of source notes for the introductions to each piece. Collectively, these would be a valuable even without the selected testimonies and biographies, and they help make this compilation an indispensable, must-have resource for anyone who wants to understand Shakerism as it expressed itself during the nineteenth century.⁴

In addition, the compilers provide a very strong general introduction to the Shakers. They do not fall into the temptation, however, of attempting to tell the whole Shaker story.⁵ They provide a factual history of the earliest years and show how Shaker writings slowly appeared as the needs of the community changed. In this way they provide a smooth introduction to the testimonies. These accounts, the earliest collected over thirty years after they occurred, form the first section of the three-volume compilation.

Part One: The Testimonies

What the Testimonies Offer

The editors correctly point out that except for the testimonies, there are very few records covering Shaker history from 1774 to 1784. This makes reading them the easiest way to discover how Shakerism developed in America. Speaking about the important role that these testimonies play, contemporary Shaker brother Arnold Hadd commented, “It’s all

in there.”⁶ The testimonies of these first witnesses tell the story of the earliest years of Shakerism in America. This alone makes them worthy of note. In addition, they are interesting to read because they include a human element that makes some of the testimonies quite touching. For example, it is delightful to read about Elizabeth Wood’s first encounter with Mother Ann. Seventy years after the event, she writes, “The first time I saw Mother I was out at the side of the road picking strawberries. I heard a wagon coming & I thought it was Mother Ann.... I immediately left my employment & followed the Wagon & pulled down the bars to let her through & followed the wagon to the house.” (1:448) By the time she wrote her testimony in 1851, she could say, “I am often with mother in my sleep & daily feel her blessing resting upon me & I have always labored to be in the gift & have ever kept my union to my lead which has always been a guide to my feet.” Sister Elizabeth, born in 1768, was a child of one of the first converts at Enfield. Her witness is an example of the type of treasures to be found in the testimonies.

Another aspect of the testimonies is the use of humor. This belies the stereotypical view that the first Shakers lacked warmth. For instance, Abijah Worster of Harvard was not in any haste to see the Shakers. He still felt very disillusioned since he had been a follower of Shadrack Ireland’s doomed community. His interest peaked, however, when he heard that some citizens of Harvard were raising a mob to drive the Shakers away. He told Elijah Wilds that he would go to see the Shakers, “for there must be something of God there, else Satan would not bark so.” (1:219-20)

As mentioned, the testimonies tell the history of the Shakers, and a thoughtful reading of them provides connections that lead to understanding of how Shakerism developed in certain locations. The key is that so many of the converts were biologically related, an idea that has yet to be fully explored by scholars. As we grow in this insight, the testimonies give us the starting points to explore familial relationships. Besides learning about parents and siblings, information is provided that helps indicate the migration patterns that settled the frontier towns. For instance, we learn that the family of Elizabeth Williams (East Family, New Lebanon) was originally from Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and David Spinning (Union Village) was born near Elizabethtown, New Jersey. (1:250, 312) Without the testimonies it would be much more difficult to chart the movement of pre-Shaker families.

Structure and Theme of the Testimonies

Twenty-one testimonies in the compilation date during or before 1822. Every one of these begins with the Gospel already opened and the person giving the testimony an established Believer. Except for the testimony of Samuels Rollins, a western Shaker, there is no mention of details from a pre-Shaker life. Nineteen of the testimonies are from eastern Shakers and these include information on the activities of Mother Ann, Father James, and Father William during the early 1780s.

Forty-six testimonies date between 1826 and 1829. These testimonies follow a particular format. The “formula” or structure of the testimonies consists of a four-step progression. The first involves the person’s preoccupation with salvation, but not finding it in other churches, or by trying to gain happiness in sinful living. Next, or step two, the person hears of the Shakers. In the third part of the process, the person either seeks out Mother and her companions or receives the faith from other converts. This is the most important aspect because after some spiritual laboring, the truth of the Gospel becomes evident and a spiritual transformation results. Finally, having lived as a Shaker for decades and having no regrets, the person, as a credible witness, refutes the scandalous accusations made by apostates. The compilers point out that the testimonies collected in the mid- to late 1820s were for a common purpose, an attempt by the Shakers to counter the awful accounts being circulated by apostates, the most infamous being Eunice Chapman and Mary Dyer.

Eliphalet Comstock’s testimony is typical of the conversion process most people went through before they became Shakers. As a youth he was sensitive to religious feelings and feared going to hell, and at about age fourteen he stated: “I began to be greatly concerned for the salvation of my soul.” Instead of falling away from faith and consorting with bad influences, Comstock continued on in the Calvinistic church of his parents, and although called a Christian, did not feel any conviction. In the meantime, he got married and moved to Somers, Connecticut. In 1777 a small revival raised his hopes but enthusiasm diminished, and after two years he was discouraged. Nothing quite satisfied until “in the latter part of the year 1780, we received intelligence of a strange people who had come from England and lived above Albany, and were in possession of a strange religion.” Father Joseph Meacham and Samuel Fitch had to visit him twice before he converted, but it was during Mother Ann’s first visit to Enfield that he really believed “that Christ had made his second appearance in

Mother Ann, as much as I ever believed there was a God, or that the sun ever shone upon the earth.” When he wrote his testimony, Comstock had been a Shaker for forty-six years, and he offered a strong rebuttal to apostates and their tales:

As to the moral characters of mother and the Elders, I do certainly know that all the slanderous reports concerning them are false; and I feel under no necessity of going to any of their enemies to obtain information about them: for I have been intimately acquainted with them, and do know of a certainty that they were moral in their characters, pure in their lives, and honest and upright in all their conduct. (1: 243-47)

From the Shakers’ perspective, hearing for the first time about Mother Ann was merely the staging for the more essential parts of the testimony to follow—the conversion after discovering the truth and the refutation of false accusations. As a result, individual accounts of first learning of the Shakers are reduced in most cases to a “stock” description. Thirty-three of the testimonies collected between 1826 and 1829 were from people who received their faith through Mother Ann and her companions before the great missionary tour of New England which began in the summer of 1781. Twenty-one of these or 64 percent, have phrases that include the words “strange people,” “singular people,” “living above Albany” or “people called Shakers.” The most “classic” and often quoted of these is the one by Thankful Barce: “In the spring of 1780, I heard of a strange people living above Albany, who said they served God day and night, and did not commit sin.” (1:187) Furthermore, this part of the testimonies seems to have been so uniformly edited that some include the same peculiar punctuation. For example, the account given by Lucy Wight says, “In the spring of the following year, (1780,) there were various reports in circulation about a strange sort of people living up above Albany.” Almost identical in form and the same in content, Amos Stower says, “In the spring of the following year, (1780,) there was a report in circulation concerning a singular people who lived above Albany.” (1:169, 182) It would appear that the compilers did not overly concern themselves that this part of the testimonies would appear the same, because they were far more concerned with the more individualized parts that showed how the lives of each convert were permanently changed for the better, and with

how moral and honest Mother Ann and her companions were.

The difference between the testimonies during or before 1822 and those between 1826 and 1829 is evident by reading the two testimonies of David Slosson. He is the only person in this compilation to have a testimony in each of the time periods. His four-page testimony from 1810 is entirely concerned with his relationship with Mother and the elders and their miraculous powers. By contrast his 1826 testimony includes many stock phrases and closely follows the format outlined above.

The remaining thirty-six testimonies in volume one were written between 1830 and 1862. Six of these closely resemble the style and theme of the testimonies written during or before 1822. Although four of them date between 1830 and 1835 and two between 1844 and 1855, they could all easily date from that earlier time.⁷ Twenty-three of the testimonies were written during the Era of Mother's Work and they affirm the visitations of the spirits. Sophia Wood of Enfield, Connecticut, sums these feelings up when she writes: "I am thankful for the many Blessings and beautiful Gifts That I have had, And the rich presents that I have received from our Heavenly Parents and Holy Angels and from the Glorified Spirits and also for the healing Power of God." She concludes her testimony with a five-stanza poem. The third stanza says:

The Trumpet then, Mother did sound,
I then did come, on Shaker ground.
When I was 37 years of age,
A battle then I did engage.

Filled with her resolve to continue in the course of the Christlife, the last stanza reads as a warning so typical of works from the time of the Manifestations and also bringing to mind an Adventist tone:⁸

Now 15 years is almost fled,
Sins I've been rising from the dead,
And I can say unto you all,
This is the last and final call. (1:410)

While not as poetic as Wood, Thomas Stebbins of the same community reflects what may have been a widely held belief among Shakers. He

says that the Era of Mother's Work occurred because "The Lord is fully determined to have a pure church upon earth." (1:401)

The Testimonies after 1830 in General

Just as the testimonies before 1830 offer details about early Shaker life that could not be gained in another way, the later testimonies, with the six exceptions already noted, offer a look into the everyday functioning of Shaker society when it was strongest. When Grove Wright lived at Tyringham (1798-1819), Mother Lucy was the Lead, new societies were forming, and all the communities were gaining members.⁹ It is easy to think of that time as calm and free of the major problems that would plague the Shakers by mid-century. Yet, life was a struggle, especially for the young, as they sought to subdue their natural tendencies. We may not think about those years in this way, but for the young Grove Wright, it was a dangerous time and the devil was real. He writes, "It being the age at which the artificial insinuations of the adversary generally lure with the greatest power to decoy & lead the young mind astray in & by forbidden paths, & when his many fair promises of great rewards & much pleasure, & everything attractive to the inexperienced, are most deceiving." (1:364) Wright's aunt was Mother Lucy Wright, and he resided in an isolated Shaker society rarely visited even by Shakers. If he experienced serious temptations to abandon his faith, how much more intense must have been the tribulations of the young who had no natural ties to the Shakers and lived in communities that were near large towns and had their public meetings on the Sabbath crowded with hundreds of spectators from the world!

The testimonies also chart the development of Shakerism as it adjusted to changing times. For example, when Seth Youngs Wells wanted to join the Shakers in the late 1790s, he found the society "shut up" and not accepting converts. (1:434) His testimony and that of others show what it was like to convert before a Gathering Order developed. By the time Daniel Sizer joined in 1827, the Gathering Order was fully functional in all the communities and his conversion process indicates how it worked. Moreover, he first heard about the Shakers by reading one of their books, *A Summary View of the Millennial Church* (1:368-72), ironically coauthored by Wells. At the time Seth Youngs Wells first developed an interest in the Believers, there was not even a single book written by the Shakers.

Testimonies and Subsequent Shaker History

One cannot read these testimonies without marveling at the strength of faith of these early converts. The testimonies of Benjamin Whitcher and of Father Job Bishop are very powerful in this regard. (1:227-40) These two leaders at Canterbury possessed a deep and solid understanding of Shakerism. Whitcher offers what in essence is a thumbnail definition of what Shakers believe when he recalls the message delivered by the earliest Shaker missionaries to come to Canterbury from New York. He says “They ... testified that Christ had now made his second appearance, by his Spirit, without sin unto salvation, which was the final and last display of God’s grace to a lost world.... God now required man to confess and forsake all sin, and take up a full and final cross against every evil propensity of the carnal mind, in order to find justification.” Both Whitcher and Bishop unashamedly embraced the work begun by Mother Ann “to complete the work of salvation and redemption.” As a result, the New Hampshire societies were well-grounded spiritually and the momentum from this kept them going forward along these lines well into the nineteenth century, long after the initial impetus was lost. Indeed one section of Father Job’s testimony is supremely ironic when seen in the light of the antics of those running the affairs at Canterbury during the last seventy-five years of that society’s existence. He devotes a lengthy paragraph on how a community should be governed by consensus and collegiality and states: “If any Elder or leader should usurp any authority over his brethren or sisters ... he would thereby dishonor his calling, and forfeit his place.” Father Job served longer than anyone else of his generation among those chosen by Father Joseph to gather the church in the various places. After over three decades of ministerial leadership, he could humbly say, “No one is considered as capable of standing in the place of an Elder or leader, unless he is able to teach and lead by example, as well as by precept.”¹⁰

Knowing the subsequent fate of the various communities helps give the testimonies collected after 1830 added interest, because one can project into the future to see what was in store for the person. Unlike the earlier testimonies, which were collected from the aged, many of the testimonies compiled between 1830 and the 1860s, were given by men and women who were young enough to have many years of Shaker life before them. For example, two of the leaders at Mount Lebanon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were Eldresses Harriet Bullard and Emily Smith, born less than five months apart in 1824. They gave

their testimonies in 1841 as part of the excitement of the Era of Mother's Work. Little did sixteen-year-old Harriet Bullard realize the truth she was speaking when she said, "I know, I shall have to pass through many trying scenes, and shall need your prayers and strength." (1:348) After she went into the Ministry of Mount Lebanon in 1881, she spent over thirty years trying in vain to keep Shakerdom from collapsing. Over and over again she witnessed capable members leaving, as well as consolidations and closures. She resigned from the Central Ministry in 1914, when she turned ninety years old. Her companion and successor was M. Catherine Allen, best known for her efforts in preserving Shaker records and manuscripts for the future by sending them out of the communities, most notably to the Western Reserve in Cleveland, Ohio. Thus Bullard, during the final years of her life, presided over a religion that seemed to have no hope for survival. Bullard's contemporary, Emily Smith, actually Jane Emily Smith, traveled the same path of trials. She lived at the Second Family of New Lebanon and witnessed its shrinkage from 137 members in 1850 to just fourteen members at the time of her death in 1912. Appointed in 1879 as eldress, she was unable to do anything to reverse the decline. Realizing this, her testimony in 1841 is quite poignant: "When I waded through tribulation, and pass through dark trying scenes – I will cleave to my most Holy faith, which I firmly believe will carry me safely through." (1:352) No doubt her good example and unshakable beliefs were what carried her through the desolations, and was the reason that during her memorial service, her casket was covered with flowers placed there by those she lived with.

Western Testimonies

Shaker studies have always been from the perspective of the eastern communities, especially that of New Lebanon. Yet many of the largest Shaker communities were in Ohio and Kentucky. As the compilers point out, however, "We have found that fewer narratives exist from the western communities." (1:xxxiii) There are a number of reasons for this. First, so many of the eastern testimonies were written to preserve the memories of those that knew Mother Ann and her companions. In addition, they were written to refute false accusations brought against the first Shakers by apostates or anti-Shakers. The western societies were formed after this time so the members never knew Mother Ann. In addition, by the 1820s, the Shakers had works that explained their theology and even a collected book of testimonies. These could help answer anti-Shaker attacks on the

Believers in the West. Most important, however, is that western Shakerism never seems to have been at peace after Father David Darrow died at Union Village in 1825. Mass apostasy among the young robbed western Believers of the children of the first converts. Ineffective leadership compounded the situation. While eastern Shakers, in spite of defections, could boast of three strong generations by the 1830s, western villages struggled with retaining members from almost the beginning. Many joined in the West but many also left. Furthermore, two of the most stalwart first parents of the West, Richard McNemar and Malcolm Worley, were shamefully treated during the Era of Mother's Work. All of these conditions, in combination, do not make a fertile ground for testimonies.

The testimonies of seven westerners are included in volume one. The two longest ones, from Samuel Rollins and David Spinning, tell of their experiences of the Kentucky Revival and how they came to be Shakers. It is difficult to imagine such intense religious feeling today. The testimony of Samuel Rollins, written in 1806, is the first and the oldest one in the compilation. He was just four years removed from the scene he was describing when he writes, "It felt to me that the Great God had opened the windows of Heaven and Poured forth Such a flood of Life light and power as would Shortly put a finishing Stroke to the whole world." (1:3) Like the eastern Shakers before him, Rollins had sought salvation by joining a church. In his case, not only was he a member of the Presbyterian faith, he wanted to be a preacher in that denomination so that he "might have the Chief Seat in the Synagogue and of men be called rabbi." (1:2) He was confident that God was leading him to do great things, and he would retire "to the Silent woods in the heat of my Spirit. With my Bible in my hand carefully examining & Standing on my watch tower looking out for charrots [i.e., chariots] of God, to come & blow the trumpet Saying Babylon is fallen is fallen, that mother of witchcraft & Abominations of the Earth." (1:5) When he heard of the Shaker missionaries in March 1805, he immediately turned his attention to them and converted. Contrasting his Shaker life with how he lived just the year before, he says, "The Kingdom is now come the Substance of which I then had the Shadow, is now come that happy Day for which I groaned is no commenced." (1:5) Rollins never wavered and died a Shaker elder. His "mere sketch" offers an uncommon glimpse of the Kentucky Revival seen from a Shaker perspective.

David Spinning's thirty-six-page testimony, collected in 1841 during the Era of Mother's Work, follows the same formula as those written in the

East at the same time. He relates that by the age of eight, “I was so much concerned about my soul as to be much engaged in secret prayer.” (1:312) Although following the Presbyterian religion, his behavior alternated between seeking God and “roaming in the wild woods and associating with loose and vicious boys.” (1:313) He became a teacher and began a serious quest for God. This led him to the Kentucky Revival and Richard McNemar. When the Shaker missionaries arrived in his vicinity he visited with them the next day. In spite of strong opposition from his family, he converted and immediately began his work as a Shaker missionary. Later he served as an elder and later was in the Ministry at North Union. He died in 1841 at Union Village.

What makes Spinning’s story so unique is that from his youth onward, he is preoccupied with matters concerning diet and dietary reform. At every stage of his life, he mentions the food he ate. In fact he unites his religious pilgrimage with this. It seems appropriate, then, that in 1837, he learned of the dietary system of Sylvester Graham and in 1838, of the Manifestations. He listened to the visionists and was dismayed to learn that “Mother was displeased with us for our lack of charity by the poor.” (1:327) This prompted him to reflect on “whether there was not some useless expenditures, which by lopping off we might have something to give to the poor...I soon discovered there were some useless articles used on our table which cost money, and were no real benefit if not an injury.” (1: 327) Not satisfied with eliminating coffee and tea, he decided to include bread and “pye.” The sisters who served in the Ministry of North Union with him warned that he “was going too far,” but he persisted. Eventually he wore himself out and was recalled to Union Village. As his health ebbed and flowed, he wrote of the truth and power of the Shaker Gospel and at the same time tried to live so plainly that there was something left for the poor. Ironically, he smoked for twenty-five years. He began this habit on the advice of a doctor. While attempting to regulate his diet and live the healthiest way possible, he found it very difficult to overcome his addiction to tobacco.

While David Spinning was writing his sketch, twenty-six “instruments” at Pleasant Hill were also giving testimonies. As the editors of the compilation point out, however, these testimonies “were so similar that they resembled each other more in writing than they could possibly have been in person,” indicating that the Pleasant Hill Ministry had tight control of the visionists. (1:355) Two of these testimonies have been included in

the series and each share a common theme of thankfulness that they have been among “the chosen people of God” since childhood, and are grateful to be part of Mother’s Work. (1:360)

The Practice of Following the Hand

Carol Medlicott in her review of *Writings of Shaker Apostates and Anti-Shakers, 1782-1850*, notes, “Several of the earliest reports from the 1780s portray the Shakers engaged in the peculiar practice of ‘running after the hand.’” She also mentions “an anonymous account by a satirical anti-Shaker writer” who says that “it is unlikely that anyone will be ‘so fortunate as to meet a Shaker when he is not running after his own finger.’”¹¹ It is not surprising that apostate and anti-Shaker literature should include commentaries on these practices because some of the early testimonies record this practice as well. For example, in a testimony that prophesied the opening of the Gospel in Ohio and Kentucky, David Slosson says that he saw Mother Ann “lift up her left hand and point to the southwest.” (1:18) In his second testimony, David Slosson, while at work in an upper room of his father’s house, “saw thro the window, a man [Samuel Johnson Sen.] coming, with his arm extended towards the house... He followed his hand into the house & directly up the stairs into the room where I was at work, & laying his hand on my head, he told me some of the secret transactions of my life, which I knew none but God could reveal to him.” (1:86) In another example, Peter Dodge recalled that “Mother came through the multitude... and taking me by one of my fingers, she led me through the crowd into the meeting-room. The moment she took hold of my finger, I felt the power of God, from her hand, run through my whole body, and all my tribulation was instantly gone.” (1:208) Clearly, Mother Ann used her hands and fingers as part of the laboring process as she evangelized. The Shaker Gospel forbids unnecessary touching but holding someone by the finger allowed contact at a safe distance. The laying on of hands to impart a blessing has long been a part of Christian ritual and the prospective converts would have been very familiar with it from their backgrounds as New Lights. It would seem only natural to them that Mother Ann and her companions used their hands in this way. That the Shakers followed their hands toward a person implies that they were being led by God who was calling them toward a soul in need of salvation. Apostates and anti-Shakers would have seen this as an example of delusion.

Sayings and Prophecies

The testimonies can serve another purpose. Mother Ann was not able to write and she did not leave any written accounts using scribes, yet there are many sayings and prophecies attributed to her. Attempting to locate the origin of these can be tedious and often inconclusive. It is possible, however, to use the testimonies to find the most well-known words that have long been associated with Mother Ann. Here are the ones found in this compilation:

Regarding the future opening of the Gospel in Ohio and Kentucky:

“Being present with Mother one day, I saw her lift up her hand and point to the southwest, and say, there is a good level country in the southwest in which God will raise up a great people, which shall be his people.” — David Slosson (1:18)

“She prophesied repeatedly of a great work of God, which she said would take place at a great distance in the southwest; ‘but (said she) I shall not live to see it.’” — Peter Dodge (1:209)

Regarding the conversion of Mother Lucy Wright:

“She said, ‘Take faith; Lucy may be gained to the gospel, and if you gain her, it will be equal to gaining a nation.’” — Elizur Goodrich (1:23)

Regarding the primacy of Father Joseph Meacham:

“Mother said Joseph Meacham is the wisest man that has been born of woman for six hundred years. God has called and anointed him to be a father to all His people in America.” — Elizur Goodrich (1:24)

“The time will come when the Church will be gathered into order and then it will be known who are good believers. But that is not my work; it is Joseph Meacham’s work.” — Richard Treat (1:154)

Regarding doing work to the best of one’s ability:

“Do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live, & as you would if you knew you must die tomorrow.” — Lucy Wright (1:28)

Regarding thriftiness:

“It is a sin to waste soap or any thing God has given us.” — Rebecca Slosson (1:40)

Regarding using one's natural gifts and the wise use of time:

“You have been coming to serve the Devil & now you must be cunning to serve God. You must not lose one moment of time for you have none to spare.” —Hannah Goodrich (1:43)

Regarding children:

“You must bring up your children in the fear of God, & not give them play things, but let them look at their hands & fingers, & see the work of God in their creation. When your daughters have grown so large that men will lust after them, you must put caps on their heads, & not build them up in pride.” —Hannah Goodrich (1:43)

“You ought not to cross them unnecessarily, it will make them ill natured – and little children do not know how to govern their natures.” —Jennet Davis (1:56)

“If you bring up your children in idleness, the devil will set them to work.” —Daniel Goodrich (1:214)

Regarding hospitality:

“Come in, brethren and sisters, come in; we have but little room in our house; but we have a great deal of room in our hearts.” —Richard Treat (1:152)

Regarding right living:

“Taking our leave of Mother, we never failed to receive her parting blessing in some virtuous and wholesome counsel or instruction, either of spiritual or temporal nature, and generally both. She would sometimes say, Go home and put your hands to work and your hearts to God; pay all your just debts, and right all your wrongs. Remember the poor; if you have but little to spare, give to them that need. Be neat and clean, and keep the fear of God in all your goings forth.” —Zeruah Clark (1:172)

“As many of us were poor, the next requirement was, to put our hands to labor and our hearts to God, and pay all our just debts.” —Jethro Turner (1:180)

“Be neat and clean; for no useless thing can enter Heaven. Put your hands to work, and your hearts to God.” —Eliphalet Comstock (1:245)

Regarding dependency on God:

“You cannot make one spier of grass or one curnel of grain to grow” —John Robinson (1:275)

Additional Quotes

The testimonies also include a few noteworthy quotes from other Shaker leaders. One that is particularly of interest is from Father James Whittaker. It was a favorite quote of Brother Ted Johnson (1930-1986) of the Sabbathday Lake community, and it is still periodically used by them at public meeting on Sundays: “Seem what you be, and be what you seem to be.” (1:52) Another quote from Father James that is memorable reflects his many years of laboring among the people: “We have given you the gospel; – see to it, that you keep it, and make good use of it.” (1:154) Finally, Father Joseph Meacham said, “Gather up the fragments let nothing be lost.” According to John Robinson, he was referring to Christ’s words. (1:277)

Part Two: “Biographic Memoir of the Life and Experience of Calvin Green”

The testimonies offer multiple entry points into Shaker studies. From them, it is possible to delve into the history of a particular community and try to recreate the many forces that came together to make it a dynamic place. As we have seen, the testimonies also offer us information about Mother Ann and her companions. These Shaker voices tell us a host of individual stories. In contrast, “Biographic Memoir of the Life and Experience of Calvin Green” goes beyond the confines of an individual testimony and provides a detailed and lengthy history of Shakerism from the perspective of a New Lebanon Shaker leader. Green includes everything that he thought was of importance in his life from his childhood in the 1780s to the 1860s.

Importance of the “Memoir”

Adhering to the theme of letting the Shakers speak for themselves, no better person could be found to comment on the memoir’s value than Brother Theodore Johnson of Sabbathday Lake. In 1970 Brother Ted wrote, “It is indeed strange that so little attention has been paid by contemporary

students of Shakerism to Calvin Green, one of the most important figures in the development of Believers' life and thought during the first half of the nineteenth century." After discussing Green's preeminence in the field of Shaker theology, Brother Ted notes, "He is equally important as a chronicler of Shaker history. His monumental accomplishment in this field is, of course, his yet unpublished *Biographic Memoir* begun in 1861. This magnificent inside view of Shaker history by one intimately involved in its making is without doubt not only the most valuable, but also the most ambitious accomplishment by any Believer in the field of autobiography."¹²

Since Brother Ted wrote these comments, Calvin Green has attracted more attention, and many years ago Brother Arnold Hadd of Sabbathday Lake transcribed the entire "Biographic Memoir" for use in the community's Wednesday evening Shaker studies meeting. This transcription has long been available for use in their library. At Sabbathday Lake, the "Memoir" in three-volume manuscript form runs 795 pages. The transcribed form published by Pickering and Chatto is 427 pages long and comprises the entire second volume of the series and over one third of the third volume.

Shaker History from the Perspective of Calvin Green's Life

Green was an eyewitness to the development of Shakerism from the time of Mother Ann until the Civil War. In fact, he was among the few that could say that he had always been a Shaker.¹³ That he was born the very year the Gospel opened was a tremendous source of pride to him. He writes, "My Birth fortunately took place the same year that, the gospel opened in this favored land & region; ...I was born just four months & twenty two days after the First Public Discourse opening the testimony of 'our gospel' was delivered by Elder James Whittaker, at Watervliet." (2:11)

Green's birth took place in the house of Hezekiah Osborn, an early convert. Mother Ann told his mother that should she become a Shaker and live in accordance with the Gospel, she would not suffer the troubles or pains of childbirth. Since his mother remained faithful, Mother Ann's promise came true, and "she was under the operations of heavenly power, singing & talking in other tongues ... she sensed none of that birth troubles & difficulties, any more than if it had not taken place." (2:12) Thus from the moment of his birth, Green was a special child earmarked for greatness in the Shaker ranks. As he grew up, the Church Family was gathered into three orders and the out-families—called the Order of Families until 1814—formed clusters of Believers on the periphery. Green's early life was

spent in these out-families until he received the special privilege of being allowed to come into the Church Family in 1790. It was not a smooth experience, however, and he suffered many trials. His account of these years offers a rare glimpse of the forces that shaped the new community and tell us how a young child lived.

Recognized for his religiosity and speaking ability, Green eventually was called by Mother Lucy to help in the newly formed Gathering Order. For twenty-five years and twelve days he served faithfully at the North Family. (2:29) During these years he provides very detailed information about Shaker missionary efforts at Cheshire, Savoy, Wilmington, Saybrook, Sodus, and Philadelphia, as well as many smaller individual labors. These were main sources of converts for the New Lebanon society before 1830. As important as the history of these openings of the Gospel is, however, Green offers critical commentary that reveals the tensions and politics among Shaker leaders. Although many Shakers may have shared his thoughts, no surviving manuscripts provide the information that he does. Green freely wrote about his perceptions, and it is this aspect that makes his memoir even more valuable. An example of this is Green's account of the appointment of leaders for the North Family. He tried to balance being an obedient, good Shaker with his serious misgivings about people who were put in charge but not capable of carrying out their duties.

Although he does not say it directly, Green heavily implies that he did not think that Peter Pease had the ability to be an elder in a Gathering Order. Pease went out to Ohio in 1806 to be a deacon (trustee) and served as "superintending Deacon" at Union Village "till his health failed & his mental powers were unable to bear the burden." (2:202) He returned to the First Order of the Church at New Lebanon on May 28, 1820, but almost immediately, on June 1, was sent to be the principal trustee at the North Family where Green lived. According to Green, Pease "was then more worn out, & broken down than but few were aware of." This assessment was after the fact, however, since according to Green, Pease took the job at the request of the North Family elders who did not have anyone else in the family able to do the job after the decease of Samuel Ellis. One of these elders was Green who went along with whatever the first elder, Ebenezer Bishop, wanted.¹⁴

Less than a year later, Mother Lucy Wright died and Elder Ebenezer Bishop, first elder of the North Family, was chosen as her successor in the Lebanon Ministry. Green may have hoped to be chosen to fill the

vacancy since he had been second elder since 1807. It must have been a real disappointment to him that Peter Pease, who had only lived in the family for eight months, was chosen by Elder Ebenezer as first elder. No doubt the Ministry hoped to replace Pease with another more capable trustee, and they knew that Calvin Green could always be counted on to do his job no matter who was first elder. That the Ministry did not just replace Pease, but made him an elder tells a good deal about what really mattered to the Shakers. It would seem that expertise in money matters was the priority, so an incompetent trustee was not tolerated and quickly removed. Avoiding confrontation must also have been important since the Ministry did not remove Pease from office but gave him another job—one that was, at least in theory, far more important. The duty of the first elder of the North Family was to gather converts, something the society needed to survive. Green, as a good Believer, went along with the appointment but could not resist saying that Pease’s “faculty was to be a domestic temporal Caretaker – he had not the talent to be a minister, tho he would do as well as he was able.” (2:202) For Green this was not good enough and nothing showed this more than what happened at Savoy.

While Mother Lucy lived, there was a strong possibility that Savoy would become the first new society in the East since the 1790s. There was confidence that Savoy “would remain there & also that the few at Wilmington [Vermont] would gather there & for a society – by my advise & assistance, a suitable House was built.” Elder Peter Pease did not see Savoy in the same way, however, and thought the land, when compared to that in Ohio, as “unfit for a society of Shakers.” Green, on the other hand, thought that the Believers’ land at Savoy “was handsomely situated, & level enough, its exterior appearance to my view was superior to Mt. Lebanon had good water power, & soft water – It was good pasture land, tolerable meadows – as excellent for good potatoes as any I ever saw.” (2:128) Green did not prevail although he had labored for years at Savoy and Wilmington. Ultimately, about eighty people from Savoy were gathered to New Lebanon and Watervliet. Of these a remarkable forty-three or forty-four of them remained faithful and “have proved pretty good Shakers.” The rest “had not faith to stand the trial” of having to live under the ministration of those they were not accustomed to, and they left. Green was pleased to be able to say, however, that none of the former Savoy Shakers ever spoke against the Believers. (2:129)

Not long after this, when the Shaker missionaries were gathering

converts at Sodus, Green was only too happy to go there and help, in spite of the same reluctance on the part of the Ministry to commit to found a new community. Sodus was not as near to New Lebanon as Savoy, however, and the illustrious Pelham family was involved.¹⁵ In addition, the number of converts was very large. If they had been forced to relocate to Watervliet or New Lebanon, it is unlikely that many would have done so. Still, the Ministry moved cautiously. For thirty-two years after Sodus opened in 1826, no new Shaker community was founded.¹⁶

Filled with enthusiasm from success at Sodus, in 1827 Green began a lengthy missionary tour to Philadelphia to preach to the disillusioned members of the short-lived Owenite community at Valley Forge. He writes about “my long Narrative of my Mission in Pennsylvania” and states, “I think it is the best Gospel fishing place that I was ever in – Could Believers have spared strength enough to begin a new Branch In the vicinity of Philadelphia, I believe there would been a large & respectable society there at this time.” As with Savoy, he laments, “But for some reason this was not the case – Therefore we could do no better than to receive all on trial that would come under a profession of Faith.” He thinks some wealthy people would have joined and twice as many as the eighty people that eventually gathered to New Lebanon would have gathered had a colony been started in Pennsylvania. (2:256) Those that remained faithful from this group became some of the most talented Shakers at New Lebanon.¹⁷ Levi Shaw, George Wickersham, and those with the surnames Dodgson, Sidell, Wilson, and Lapsley were some of those that came from Philadelphia.

The same Ministry team of Elder Ebenezer, Brother Rufus Bishop, Eldress Ruth Landon, and Sister Asenath Clark served from 1821 until 1849. The timidity of this Ministry in trying to found new villages is illustrated in particular by Green in his accounts of missionary efforts at Savoy and Philadelphia. Green had already been undercut by the appointment of an unsuitable person as first elder. This left him and others to do the missionary work. Under this Ministry, the work of the Gathering Order was further undermined, not just at New Lebanon, but all throughout Shakerdom when the policy of adopting children without believing parents came into widespread practice. From the 1820s until 1850, a fundamental shift in the make-up of Shaker society occurred, and this was to prove fatal. Green did not like this policy and states that he “often heard Mother [Lucy] & Father Job [Bishop] speak in this line.” They said, “Children of a low vitiated class had better remain in the world;

for if they were taken among Believers, they were not sufficiently matured in rational human nature to understand & reach the spiritual element of Believers; ... But children of Believing Parents that were owned were heirs to a trial & should be taken in and proved." Mother Lucy and Father Job further warned, "If Believers deviated from this rule it would run down the society." Writing in the 1860s, after this advice had been disregarded for over forty years, Green states, "And it appears to me that facts prove its verity & wisdom." (2:263)¹⁸

In 1826, Elder Pease was thrown from a horse and seriously injured. The ever-hopeful Green had a vision revealing that "El- Peter would fail & have to be removed – And I should have to take place of first in the order." (3:30) Due to the infirmity of Pease, Green was finally made first elder of the Gathering Order on December 31, 1826. When Pease died in 1827, Elder Calvin was urged to deliver the main address at the funeral, and he was more than pleased to oblige. It seems in the spirit of a "left-handed compliment" when Elder Calvin admits, "As the most part did not know of his struggles to maintain his faith – I related them, as before recorded in this work." (2:210-11)

As the head of the Gathering Order at Shakerism's "center of union" and its largest community, Green was constantly busy. In addition to settling the large number that came from Philadelphia, "The multiplied concerns spiritual & temporal of the order, causes our hearts & hands to be full: But we labor unitedly to do all we are able to fulfill every requirement." He continues, "We are almost continuously visited from the world by all kinds of people, that come to see the Shakers, & enquire into the principles & order of 'this strange people['] – Our public meetings are generally thronged – I generally deliver a pretty full sermon every Sabbath – And the spectators appear to be greatly attracted with the meetings." (2:263)

Although it would seem that Green was a zealous worker and doing everything he could to gather souls, he must have clashed too often with the Ministry, perhaps over Philadelphia, and what he felt they should be doing. Another reason may be that by the 1830s, Shakerism at New Lebanon was ripe for a change in leadership from the "ancients" who were steadily dying off, in favor of a new generation that had come of age in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Whatever, the actual reasons may have been, it is interesting to realize that it took an accident to remove Peter Pease after nearly six years in a job he was not suited for. Green, who was a tireless missionary, lasted just five years and three months before he was

released and returned to live at the First Order. He records that he had been “dismissed” and “hesitated not but submitted to their gift.” In spite of serious misgivings, he writes, “But it was my firm faith that obedience to the visible Lead of God’s people was the safe path of protection, & if I submitted to this whatever might occur, I should not be responsible.” (3:29) In hindsight, it was a grave mistake to remove Green and trust that the newer generations of Shakers would be able to maintain the same enthusiasm for gathering converts.

It does not seem possible that Green would ever have left the North Family on his own accord, but another vision helped him reconcile his conflicted emotions and showed him that he had to “begin a new Era of life,” and he moved to the First Order of the Church and gave up missionary work. (3:31) He tried hard to blend into the established manner of living there and “find the spiritual element the order was in, & to come right into its life – also to obey all the orders, rules & regulations.” (3:32) He spent time working on his writings, but could not help notice that a spirit of worldliness had gotten in among the young and some of the older members. In his view, it was time for God to redirect the Shakers back on to the correct path.

Often the Era of Mother’s Work has been seen as an aberration in the scheme of Shaker history. For Green, however, it was simply the natural unfolding of Shaker history according to a divinely inspired plan. It was happening because “there appeared to be an indispensable need of a new spiritual manifestation, that would cause such as had never seen our spiritual Parents in the body, to know them in spirit, and there was a general labor & prayer among the faithful; that God would send forth his spirits & work for the help of his people.” (3:33) The manifestations would be a correction to keep Believers from straying any further away from the Gospel as proclaimed by the first parents. In fact, a spirit showed Green that in the fiftieth year after the date of the gathering of the Church “there would be a wonderful outpouring of the spiritual powers and elements.” (3:34) For almost thirty pages, Green gives an account of the manifestations which began as he predicted in 1837. He provides a detailed account of his role in these remarkable visions.

As always, however, he is unable to resist the urge to make critical observations. One of his most important during this era concerned the Adventists. He did not think enough had been done by the Shakers to reach out to the Adventists following their Great Disappointments. He believed

that they had been led to the Shakers by the spirits, and he implies that had he still be an elder in the Gathering Order, “a rich harvest would have been gathered of souls prepared for the Gospel.” (3:50) Instead of direct missionary work, however, the Ministry asked him to edit Paulina Bates’s *Divine Book of Holy and Eternal Wisdom* in preparation for its publication. In addition he completed biographies of Father Joseph, Mother Lucy, Elder Henry Clough, and many other writings at the request of fellow Shakers.

By 1860, all of the members of the Ministry appointed by Mother Lucy to succeed her were dead, and the new leadership floundered over the changed nature of Shaker society and what had to be done to stop the decline in membership. It says a good deal about the desperation of the situation among the Shakers in 1861 when Green, who was almost eighty-one years old, was asked to go to Groveland to be in charge of the Gathering Order there. He was pleased to go, however, and worked diligently and made much progress to build up the place, but it was frustrating work. The world had changed and few wanted the Gospel. His detailed account of his two and a half years at Groveland are quite a contrast to what he described thirty-five years earlier when he helped gather Sodus. His enthusiasm remained high and even in the midst of discouragement, he retained his strong faith.

Feeling his work was done at Groveland, he returned in 1863 to the First Order at Mount Lebanon to live out his final years. He had been working on his autobiography since 1861 and continued at least through 1866 and possibly longer, as indicated by the six appendices he added after officially finishing it in 1865.

Calvin Green died at the First Order of the Church at Mount Lebanon on October 4, 1869. His “Biographic Memoir” concludes with a description of his physical and intellectual characteristics by William Calver, and a tribute by Alonzo Hollister.²⁰ His own words, however, serve as the best epitaph: “I subscribe myself A real Shaker and am not, nor want anything else – I gives all I Desire. Amen with grateful aspirations of thanks for that salvation I have found from the God of Heaven in the Holy, this kingdom of Heaven on Earth.” (3:143)

Information from the “Memoir”

Maximum Number of Shakers:

“The whole society then [1830] numbered 5000 souls this is largest number they have ever been.” (2:129)²¹

The Importance of the Bible:

“Above all others, Shakers should never disparage the scriptures, but if they can show indisputably that there are miss transcriptions – and correct ambiguities – or point out apparent discrepancies... all this may be useful – But just as much as they invalidate the scriptures, they inevitably weaken their own Testimony.” (2:24)

The Importance of Prayer:

“Why is it that Believers have so little faith in prayer – so little confidence in the guardianship of angels & the protecting power of God? Has not that God who has a beneficent care over all his works, promised to ‘give his angels charge over the righteous that trust in him.’” (2:29)

Attracting Converts:

“And I now feel equal assurance that if the members of the Church & society were united & as earnestly labored & prayed for an opening of the Gospel, with a willingness to make any sacrifice to obtain it...an effectual & real opening & ingathering of souls to the Israel of God could not be long delayed – But without such labor a great increase in the Gospel never did take place, neither in the 1st nor 2d appearing of Christ & never can – for ‘Zion must labor & travel to bring forth children.’” (2:47)

Children Who Make the Best Shakers and Those Who Do Not:

“This in the course of my experience I have found that at a very early age many children have had the ground of faith in their souls as really as grown persons – Such children will draw to Shakers whenever they see them, & if they can get a privilege will generally make good Believers – While those who appear more attracted by foolish toys & animals than Shakers, are in an animal state & are not sufficiently humanized to receive any higher spiritual order, & rarely ever make anything but nuisance [these last two words crossed out in the original] among Shakers.” (2:57)

The Importance of the Gathering Order:

“I will here remark that, it was ever my sentiment & also of Elder Ebenezer’s & Mother Lucy’s – that all who were old enough to chuse for themselves – should be proved in the gathering order, long enough to see whether or not they were willing to submit to the faith of the Gospel & to good order. And that none who did not appear to be Believers, should be sent into forward orders.” (2:263)

Dancing and the Scriptures:

“There is no principle that is more fully [fully is crossed out] obviously supported by scripture, than Dancing as religious worship – There are 17 passages which record Dancing as religious worship & rejoicing – And not one that speaks against this practice.” (2:272)

The Significance of Certain Colors when Seen in a Vision:

“Every color has its peculiar meaning, to such as understand all such appearances are instructive.”

Green—“a sign of increase”

White—“pure from the stains of sin”

Yellow or gold—“pure rich in goodness”

Blue—“heavenly”

Azure blue or peach blue—“love”

Silver—“union ... for it is common currency” (3:30)

Shakerism in the 1830s:

“For a considerable time before I left the gathering order – I was greatly exercised in mind concerning the state of Believers – I saw that many sentiments & practical operations were coming in among Believers in every society, which were not in accordance with the original principles upon which the system and order of our Institution was founded by Divine Revelation.” (3:33)

Reinstating the Use of Parental Titles for the Ministry:

“In my understanding propriety shows that, the first in the parental order [Ministry], ought to represent their order, Hence should by all means preserve the parental Title, of both the Male & female – for certainly they represent & are the repositories of the primary spiritual parentage of the whole society of Believers – Hence it would be congenial to give them the Title that truly shows the order in which they stand.” (3:146)

Conditions at Groveland in 1861 prompted Green to write these last five items.

Dwelling Houses:

“But if there was a covered way built out a suitable distance & then a kitchen, this might be fully aired during the night, & there need not be

beds and cloths to be scented thereby. It also has been a marvel to me why Believers should get into the way of erecting such very large Houses for such cannot possibly be made so convenient, it is quite labor to have to go up & down much as needful & carry wood & water with every thing necessary several times a daily, to a very high loft. Besides middle rooms cannot be well aired nor lighted, also the cooking fires in warm weather diffuse a disagreeable heat thro' the House, which increases the nuisance.” (3:118)

“Again [if] the house get on fire – Imagine the danger of any that are a sleep in fourth story – If the large Houses ie the same room, was divided into two dwellings, this would be more convenient & safe, and in my view more becoming the humble followers of the meek & lowly saviors in Christ Jesus, & Mother Ann, & far more attractive to souls who are prepared for their self denying Gospel – Which can never [be] promoted by conformity to the popular sense of the world.” (3:119)

Hired Help:

“Making such great buildings & extending their business beyond their own help, induces hiring the world in among them. This is indisputably one of the most fatal spiritual nuisances that ever got in among Shakers – for even if such are of a moral cast, (which in general they are not) not one of them has ever proved friendly at heart to the cause of Believers, but are ever ready to throw something into the minds of the young to excite them to the pleasures of the world if they can slyly do so.” (3:118)

Running into Debt:

“This extending their business beyond their own help, has been the main cause together with their running into popularity, of the Believers contracting debts with the world. This is the worst fatal course they can pursue in external things. And it is utterly contrary to the nature of the Gospel.... It is certain that some societies have been nearly ruined by the violation of this Rule, clearly set forth by all our testimonies from Mother Ann's Day to the present – There never has & never can be any thing but a curse follow this open & presumptuous disobedience.” (3:118-19)

The Uniqueness of Shakerism:

“I labored to set forth the genuine principles of the gospel clearly to their

understanding ... to show that it was not of the world but was a system entirely distinct ... that the Gospel could not be mixed with the highest spirit spirituality of the world for all their systems & views were in nature & under power of death. Therefore all of them combined could not save one soul from a sinful nature nor raise it into the kingdom of Christ.” (3:120)

Spiritualism:

“They had brot in those papers & Books filled with views & sentiments of the spiritualism now so rife in the world, which rises no higher than nature; & if it can do any good in the world, all these principles being of the natural affinity of the life of the world, will be a curse to Believers just as much as they blend with the them.” (3:120)

Part Three: Autobiographies, Biographies and Testimonies 1864-1935

After reading Calvin Green’s “Biographical Memoir,” the remaining works in the third volume seem rather anti-climactic, but they all offer important information about the mindset of Believers when the society was in decline. Nine of the twenty-four works are lengthy and are as close to a biography of the individuals as it seems a Shaker can write. Most Believers have a difficult time separating their lives from opportunities to extol and describe their faith, and they move back and forth between the two topics. Often the reader would like to know more about what is happening or what occurred later, yet having even a little material about the person is valuable, and what is omitted may, in fact, tell its own story. In addition to the larger biographies, the other works in the third volume are a real mix of biographical sketches, reminiscences, and testimonies, and include a letter and an obituary.

Glimpses into the Shaker World of the Nineteenth Century

One advantage of reading Calvin Green’s “Biographical Memoir” before reading the works that follow it in volume three is that one gets a strong sense of having heard some of the information before. As the editors point out, this is certainly very evident in “A Sketch of the Life and Experience of Rhoda Blake, also a Narrative of things which have taken place since 1808.” Once again the history of the Shakers’ involvement at

Savoy is told, but this time “from the vantage point of a convert.” (3:151) Taken together, a fairly complete picture is gained about this remote and short-lived community. A good deal of information is also provided on the building of the new meetinghouse and what was happening at New Lebanon after Blake moved there from Savoy. (3:166-70) The highlight of her sketch, however, is her 1868 visit to the eastern societies that she recorded in a lengthy poem, full of allusions to pivotal scenes from Shaker history. For example, while at the Church Family at Enfield, Connecticut, she writes:

A memorable building at the Church we found standing,
In which our good Father James often spoke. (3:175)

This is a reference to the first meeting house at Enfield, a building that predated the one later built in the gambrel style favored by Father Joseph.²² Other buildings, such as Elijah Wilds’s house, where Mother Ann hid in a closet, and the Square House, the only house Mother Ann ever owned, are also found in the poem, but perhaps the most moving allusion is to the site in Harvard where the Shakers had been whipped. Today a marker and cairn mark the spot and visiting Shakers still place a stone on the pile in remembrance. Blake says:

On the memorably spot where two loving Parents
Did patiently suffer and bear for the truth, we
Selected some stones from the wild wood around us,
And laid up an altar, where silence declares
Our unchangeable memory of the valiant Leaders,
Who bore their afflictions, yet felt a compassion
Believing that God would shield them from harm. (3:177)

Blake certainly believed that God was protecting the Shakers. At the age of eighty-four in 1892 when all around her every external aspect of Shakerism was in serious decline, she had a vision that offered reassurance. A cloud from the Ark of God enveloped her and she saw “shining myriads of spirits, sparkling like the Stars on an August night, and they were beautiful indeed. While viewing the scene before me, I heard a gentle voice say, I will show you the work of God for ages and ages. It will never end, no more than the earth will cease to roll, for the Son and Daughter have laid the foundation

so deep, that no power can overthrow it.” (3:179)

Stalwarts like Blake and Green continued to be faithful and work hard until they were very advanced in years. In a similar way, Freegift Wells, in spite of being eighty-two and suffering from many ailments, ruined his health by answering “the many calls” that other Shakers made to him daily for help, and he says, “I have gone beyond my strength in hand labor.” (3:186) Freegift actually had little choice. By the time he wrote his remarks, men were at a premium in Shaker communities and those who remained had to make up for the many who had died or left.

This dedication is also reflected in the seven-page sketch of the life of Enfield, New Hampshire, Shaker Jane E. S. Blanchard. She wrote her autobiography in 1868 during the time Enfield was suffering from the negative after effects of the murder of Caleb Dyer. Although she was forty-three years old at the time, she recalls how she came to be a Shaker and echoes the enthusiasm she had at her conversion when she was eighteen. Signing herself a “lover of the gospel,” Blanchard writes, “The world was nothing but vanity to me now. I could take no more pleasure living with my parents. I rent the ties of natural affection ... & turned my face Zionward.... Go to the flames all carnal enjoyments Which yield to my hungering soul no support.” (3:201)

The writings of the Shakers in the final volume were composed during the years of decline and retrenchment, but the letter from Sarah Bates to the Lebanon Ministry written in 1870 is uncommon because it contains a direct reference to the decline. She says, “I have seen the increase & waning of Zion’s number;” but she remains unaffected and states, “In all its phases, I never one moment slackened my strong cord of love, to the pure way of Eternal Life.” This is hardly a surprise, for earlier she said that since she was eighteen she had always been treated “like a Princess in a Palace.” (3:211) Bates was seventy-eight when she wrote her letter so her royal treatment had been going on for sixty years!

Sarah Bates also wrote another item the next year. Her sentiments and manner of expression are identical to those of Calvin Green whom she knew in the First Order of the Church. Her testimony is direct and pure, allowing for no deviation from the gospel “as it has been handed down to us by Mother’s faithful followers.” The younger generations, even in the Church Family, had been hesitant to believe or declare their faith. She writes in response that the gospel must be kept sacred: “We must strictly keep the orders of God, as they are given. And this, will shut out all evil.

Not pass them by, as though they were old Fables. And too frivolous, for our great minds to bend to.” (3:227)

Periodical Accounts

One method the Shakers used to reach out to the world for wider recognition and more converts was publication. Starting about 1860 and continuing for the next fifty years, the Shakers, especially those at New Lebanon, published newspaper articles, books, and tracts.

One of the most ambitious of these efforts was the Shaker newspaper, commonly called the *Manifesto*, founded in 1871. Eliza Sharp, former first eldress in the First Order of the Church at New Lebanon, was an “interested reader” of this Shaker newspaper and wanted to share her story. In the spirit of “the widow of old” casting her mite, Sharp related her early experiences hoping to offer something “that would benefit its readers.” (3:231) While Sharp wrote when the newspaper was fairly new, Mary Hazard provided her “Autobiography” during the newspaper’s final year of publication in 1899. Her faith-filled account belies the fact that her home, the Church Family at New Lebanon, was a mere shadow of what it had been when she went there in 1837. Nonetheless, her final line sums up her consecration: “I love and bless all my faithful Brethren and Sisters, praying that my advanced age may never find me a burden where I have always determined to be a blessing.” (3:333)

The three published accounts by Julia Johnson, former Tyringham and Hancock Shaker, contrast with the autobiographical testimonies of Eliza Sharpe and Mary Hazard. Johnson wrote two of her pieces, “Reminiscences of Shaker Life” and “Among the Shakers,” for non-Shaker publications, and she was an apostate. Often apostate literature is filled with denunciations and ridicule of Shakerism. The reader expects this because Johnson’s “reminiscences” begins with a somewhat sarcastic tone when she says that “our lives, indeed, were one witching rural romance, as it were” and that the aged members of the society (when speaking about how the community at Tyringham started) “used often to rehearse it for the benefit of youthful years. We were sometimes thought a little ungrateful for the many privileges enjoyed, and needing a reminder of the sufferings and adversities the original founders of the home endured for the sake of future generations as well as their own.” (3:313) Her attitude towards the Shakers, however, mellows as she recalls her youthful home and the people who lived there. By the end of the narrative she openly admits that she

wished she had never left the Shakers and laments that she took Shaker life for granted. Longingly she says, “Why, it is a relief to feel your life’s necessities and a good home secured to you, without the heavy burden resting on your own shoulders. I really never knew the burden of life until a few years ago, when I left for the sake of other and broader experiences.” (3:315)

It is quite a sad commentary that Johnson missed her Shaker life for the material comforts that it provided and seemed uninterested in the spiritual aspects of the calling. This same attitude is evident in her other two works, “Among the Shakers” and “Tyringham, Mass.” Both describe the spirit manifestations at Tyringham during the Era of Mother’s Work, yet a real distance exists between her account of the Era of Mother’s Work and her involvement or interest in it. She reports what she experienced and puts nothing of herself into it, except for flippant remarks. Johnson had once been an eldress at the Church Family, and was the roommate of Eliza Chapin, one of the principal instruments, but she does not show any faith. In fact her comments about the Bible in “Among the Shakers” shows that she may have been a freethinker. (3:322)

Shaker Leaders

Volume three also contains published autobiographies and biographies by Shakers who were notable Shaker leaders. Giles Bushnell Avery, Mary Antoinette Doolittle, George Wickersham, and Daniel Fraser lived either at the Church Family or North Family at Mount Lebanon. All of them, except Daniel Fraser, were in the Elders Order there at one time or another. Daniel Fraser, while not ever an elder at Mount Lebanon, did serve for a number of years as the elder of the North Family at Shirley. Henry Clay Blinn of Canterbury served in numerous capacities at his home village and was a member of the Ministry of New Hampshire.

Avery and Doolittle wrote their autobiographies “by especial request of friends.” (3:251) Blinn’s “Autobiographical Notes” was published by the Canterbury Shakers as part of his memoriam book. These lengthy works contain a good deal of biographical information and show the fervor of Shakers who formed part of the third generation in the East. This important group, born approximately between 1795 and 1825, was the first generation not to be related to the first converts or their children. They form a large company and supplied strong leadership in the East through much of the nineteenth century. Almost all of the best known post-Civil

War Shakers are from this generation.

Avery, Doolittle, and Blinn each came into the Shakers in a different way. It is important to note they were not in the category of the children that Calvin Green warned against. None was an unwanted child dropped off or sent to the Shakers by relatives nor were they from orphan asylums or workhouses. Avery was gathered as a result of the North Family's successful missionary efforts at Saybrook, Connecticut. Practically his entire family joined, including his parents, and all but one of his large family of aunts and uncles remained faithful to the Shakers. Doolittle, a young teenager, had seen Shakers in her hometown of New Lebanon and decided to join them in spite of great opposition from her parents. Blinn's acquaintance with the Shakers came through a chance encounter with a Shaker trustee in Providence. Blinn, who was fourteen years old, had a home, a mother, and a job, yet he sought out this Shaker trustee. This was far from the typical situation. Usually trustees went to places to trade, and in the course of their business found children in need of a home whom they brought back with them and indentured them to the community.

Avery's life runs parallel to that of Calvin Green. Both lived in the Church, but Giles was from the Second Order, and he moved smoothly through the ranks from boys' caretaker to family elder to the Ministry. Like Green, but in much less detail, he records his perception of Shaker history at New Lebanon. Doolittle's account is more about the long process of her conversion to Shakerism, and interested readers must read other sources to get details of her later life. Blinn's account along with the unpublished "Autobiography" of Abraham Perkins, tells the story of New Hampshire Shakerism as they experienced it.

Earlier it was noted that between Calvin Green and Rhoda Blake there is a strong history of Savoy. The same can be said of the story of the Shaker missionary efforts in Philadelphia during the late 1820s. Not only does Calvin Green devote many pages to this mission, but two published autobiographical accounts also deal with the topic. Green offers a more generalized sketch in the context of his many missionary journeys of the time. The particulars with much elaboration can be found in Jane Knight's *Brief Narrative of Events Touching Various Reforms* and George Wickersham's *How I Came to Be a Shaker*. (3:271-84, 303-10)

Alonzo Hollister

It is appropriate that the last lengthy autobiography in the three volumes

is that of Alonzo Hollister. His “Reminiscences by a Soldier of the Cross” can be seen as a continuation of the “Biographical Memoir” of Calvin Green. Both works were unpublished and largely forgotten by those who have written about the Shakers. These men, however, shared a common vision of Shakerism that allowed for no compromise, and both men include many references to politics and policies that thwarted the progress of the gospel. Like Green, Hollister includes information that otherwise would have been lost. It is unfortunate that Green and Hollister have not taken their rightful places in Shaker studies.

It is not possible to do true justice to Hollister in this article, but a few snippets from his “Reminiscences” provide an insight into his life as a good Shaker and give us his essence.

At New Lebanon some questioned the reason to have public preaching when hardly anyone from the audience ever converted? While on a visit to Groveland in 1857, Hollister asked their public preacher Joseph Pelham about this. Pelham replied, “The good that our public preaching did was this. It created a public opinion that bridged the chasm between Believers & the world, so that they feel they comprehend us. Otherwise we know not what strange stories & fanciful conjectures would be circulated about us.” Hollister, as time went on, came to agree with this and took the idea a step further. He thought that “it strengthens & confirms the faith of the assembled Believers – plants the seed of faith in the young, & probably in a few outside – & doubtless converts many Seekers, who have left mortality.” Hollister felt that these spirits are “perhaps always present at our meetings for worship, & as Mother said on this subject, ‘I say it does good. If the living will not fear the word of God, the dead will. There is not a word of God lost, that ever was spoken.’ When the Gospel is preacht in this world, it is heard in both worlds at once.” (3:389)

While the new dwelling house was being built for the Second Order of the Church at New Lebanon, one summer during the mid-1860s the family had to cook and eat in the wood house. Hollister lamented, “I felt the absence of the home feeling. – that is as if without a home.” Two paragraphs later, he continues, “Reading the paragraph relating of the absence of the home feeling, reminds me that bringing hired men to board in our kitchen, was a great detriment to the union of the family, & to the home feeling – so much so, that we could not keep any young people after they became old enuf to take care of themselves, & some, not so long, if they had friends to go to.” (3:390)

While visiting Canterbury during the summer of 1890, Hollister was asked by Eldress Dorothy Durgin who he thought would succeed Daniel Boler in the Ministry of Mount Lebanon. Daniel Boler, who had served in the Ministry since 1852, was eighty-six years old. He had been head of the Ministry with Giles Avery as second elder since 1858. It was evident that soon a replacement would be needed. Elder Giles had recently spoken about this to Hollister and told him that “he did not see but he would have to take me to live with him.” (3:405) Avery also asked Hollister to write down all the details of the extract business presumably so that another could do that work when Hollister went into the Ministry as second elder. Hollister had the forbearance not to mention any of this to anyone. This turned out to be a wise decision because a few months later Avery died and Joseph Holden was chosen by Daniel Boler to come into the Ministry.

Elevation to the Ministry would have allowed Hollister a wider audience at a crucial moment in their history when the Shakers needed all the spiritual guidance they could get. His strong faith and the willingness to explain it to others were the reasons why Hollister was favored by Avery. At the same time, Elder Giles had spoken to Hollister about going into the Ministry, he was asked to go on a visit to the eastern communities. Elder Giles said, “They thot I would do good. I was being fed with Parasidic fruit, & this journey was an opportunity to pour out to attentive listeners without stint, the mental treasures I had been gaining in 50 years.” (3:405)

Hollister did not become embittered when he was passed over for ministerial leadership, but continued on as he always had. Since the great fires of February 1875, Hollister slept in the extract shop. The First Order had lost its dried-herb business when an arsonist burned their herbarium. Hollister did not want the same fate to befall to the medicine industry, which was the principal industry of the Second Order. Hollister was pleased with this arrangement because “there was considerable opportunity to read & write – particularly mornings & evening & Sabbath days – & other times, [erasure] when resting, or waiting to begin a job, or watching the liquor in the evaporating pan.” (3:411)

The main issue was that “some of the middle & younger class have doubted the utility of my writing... & seemed to think it money & time wasted to have them printed.” When he asked one of the trustees for help in this regard he was told, ‘It will do no good. It is money thrown away.’” (3:411) This attitude is indicative of a sad state of affairs in the society. During the 1890s Shaker trustees at Mount Lebanon and elsewhere

squandered tens of thousands of dollars on get-rich-quick schemes such as prospecting for gold in the Klondike, buying cemeteries, purchasing hotels, and, what some might say was the biggest waste of all, going into serious debt to purchase land in Florida for a new community. In order to publish his work, Hollister had to grub money here and there from a few sympathetic Shakers. The account of the almost sadistic treatment of Hollister by trustee Benjamin Gates involving the sale of Skeen's *Genealogical, Chronological, and Geographical Chart* in New Haven is very painful to read. (4:416) What Hollister does not say is that a number of his fingers had been partially amputated during the 1860s in a work accident. Carrying those cumbersome charts around and displaying them to people who did not care must have been tortuous for him. This example perhaps shows how little this holy, devout Shaker really mattered in the eyes of the trustees and how, much like Green, he was willing to endure.

In the context of this atmosphere, it is not a surprise for Hollister to write that in 1843, both orders of the Church numbered 240, one fourth under the age of sixteen, but by 1907 the entire Church had just twenty adults and four school girls. (3:415)

Closing Thoughts

The Shakers believe that all who have contact with them are involved in the work of the Christlife at some level. Certainly no one who reads these testimonies and biographies can remain unaffected. When leaving to go home to their various communities, Shakers would sometimes sing a farewell song. It is in union with this same spirit that a portion of Mary Partington's testimony is offered. She knew Mother Ann very well and came to America with her from England. In 1822 she wrote a note of encouragement to the Canterbury Shakers and says that although Mother never was in New Hampshire, "she sent faithful messengers, who planted the Gospel there ... and I hope they will be faithful to keep it." (1:79) As each of us continue forward in Shaker studies may we be faithful witnesses to the accounts we have just read from Believers whom we will never see in this life.

Notes

1. The word “Mary” is in quotes because after she joined the Shakers she was universally known as Antoinette Doolittle.
2. Glendyne R. Wergland and Christian Goodwillie, eds., *Shaker Autobiographies, Biographies and Testimonies, 1806-1907* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014), 3 vols., 3:261. Hereafter only the volume and page number will be given for citations from this source and these will be placed in the text.
3. For various reasons, many who wrote and spoke about the Shakers did not necessarily ask the Shakers for information. Too many presentations, books, and articles suffer from lack of familiarity with primary sources.
4. A bit of caution is in order, however. Although the annotations, etc. are highly accurate, they should not be taken as the final word or used without attempting to look at the primary sources connected to them. For example, quite frequently references are made to Cathcart’s list of Shakers in the Western Reserve Historical Society. This list is very incomplete and is even missing information about many of the Shakers it enumerates. Just because a Shaker is not in Cathcart should not be taken to mean that no information is to be found on the person. There are other lists of Shakers that can be used. Various indexes of names have been compiled for a number of the communities and some of these are online.
The same caution must be used in interpreting information in the notes. For example, Mother Lucy Wright’s husband Elizur Goodrich did die at the Second Family, New Lebanon, in 1812 as indicated by note 1 on page 27. In those days, the Church Family was in three families or orders. The Second Family was actually the Second Family of the Church. Two years later, however, the Shakers reorganized the families at New Lebanon, and the three families of the Church were merged into two orders. All of the small peripheral groups of Shakers in what had been known as the Order of Families became the Second Family. This later Second Family, much more familiar to most people, lasted until 1940 and had no connection with Elizur Goodrich or the Church Family.
5. This desire to tell the story of the Shakers has sidetracked and weakened the focus of many works on the Shakers. Almost always these histories rely on tertiary sources and perpetuate myths.
6. Telephone conversation between Brother Arnold Hadd and Stephen Paterwic, June 24, 2014. Each Wednesday the Shakers have “Shaker Studies.” The members gather and read something written by a Believer. A number of years ago I had the privilege of being with them when they were reading and discussing the *Testimonies* published in 1816. Though I had read them many times before, never did I see the power in them until I heard them read and commented upon by Shakers. Those sisters who had grown up at Alfred were

especially conversant in the *Testimonies* since they were taught them in their youth.

7. These six testimonies are: John Robinson, 1830; Jonathan Clark, 1835; Rebecca Clark, 1853; James Bishop, 1835; Elizabeth Wood, 1851; and Thankful E. Goodrich, 1844-53.
8. The Adventists were very active in New England at that time, and they had not as yet experienced the great disappointments of 1844 and 1845 when Christ did not come again as they had hoped. Many former Adventists found their way into the Shakers.
9. Grove Wright joined the Hancock community with his parents, but in 1798 when he was nine years old, he was sent to live at Tyringham because it had very few children. This is quite a contrast to the situation there sixty years later when well over half that society's membership was composed of children and teenagers.
10. Following this advice would have certainly changed the dynamics that helped contribute to the extinction of Shaker life not only at Canterbury, but also at Hancock. Father Job's counsel could also have aided the pre-1970 leadership at Sabbathday Lake in avoiding the untold problems caused by autocratic leadership not based in any way in the Shaker Gospel.
11. Carol Medlicott. "Zion's Whistleblowers: Reflections on Shaker Apostate and anti-Shaker Writings." *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 8 (January 2014): 20.
12. Theodore E. Johnson. "Biographic Account of the Life, Character, & Ministry of Father Joseph Meacham." *Shaker Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1970), 20-21.
13. Calvin's mother, Thankful Barce, and his father, Joseph Green, converted months before his birth. Mary Walker of Harvard and Harvey Eades of South Union are two of the most notable others who were born Shakers.
14. There is much more to this story than Green tells. Pease had to have been cantankerous and left Union Village reluctantly and only when certain of a job when he returned east. Mother Lucy must have been well aware of this. Ebenezer Bishop, as her close confidant, must also have known. That would explain the rapidity of his appointment to the North Family as the principal trustee as soon as he came back to New Lebanon.
15. The Pelhams were missionaries and leaders in the West.
16. In 1836, the Sodus Shakers moved to Groveland. The Philadelphia Shakers were founded in 1858 but did not own permanent buildings. They disbanded after 1896. The Florida society opened in 1896 and closed in 1924. The Georgia society was founded in 1898 but closed in 1902.
17. For example, someone from this group was in the trusteeship at the North Family from 1832 until 1891 when trustees for the collective families at Mount Lebanon were appointed. Shaw became a member of these trustees

and served until his death in 1908 while also serving as a trustee of the North Family at Enfield, Connecticut.

18. By the 1860s the communities were filled with pre-adults and those over fifty years of age. Almost none of the children remained when they came of age and as the older members died, the decline in numbers was rapid by the 1870s.
19. Once again, letting the Shakers speak, Brother Arnold, who has done extensive study on Philemon Stewart of New Lebanon's Church Family, believes that it was Philemon's long standing resentment of Green that prompted the Ministry to remove him. Phone conversation between Arnold Hadd and Stephen Paterwic, August 2, 2014.
20. The editors of the compilation identified the handwriting as that of Hollister though the text does not indicate an attribution.
21. A critical look at membership statistics actually puts the number closer to 4,500 than to 5,000.
22. Buildings in this style have been somewhat inaccurately referred to as Moses Johnson meeting houses.