

SHAKER SONG:  
THE LITTLE i AND THE RHYTHMS OF EQUALITY

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(Maryland)

They remembered her singing when they met Mother Ann Lee, those Americans who early found in her vision and voice fulfillment of the promise of true freedom and community which their society fostered and frustrated.

*'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free / 'Tis a gift to come down just where you ought to be.*

Joseph Main remembered her "sitting in a chair, and singing very melodiously, with her hands in motion; and her whole soul and body seemed to be exercise". Main sensed coursing in Lee's song "a stream of divine power".

*Lovely love is flowing sweetly / From the lovely host above. / What can fill the soul completely/ Like the lovely gift of love?*

Elizabeth Johnson first saw Mother Ann when she "came singing into the room where I was sitting", and immediately felt absolute "inward evidence that her singing was in the gift and power of God".

*How this lovely love advances / Springing from the lovely root. / Love puts forth her lovely branches / Love produces lovely fruit.*

Timothy Hubbard recalled her standing in a trance singing "chiefly in unknown tongues" that created truth beyond words.

*Woben mesa crelana plorada sele. / Meclana predale plorada sele.*

Trans. *O Mother, O Mother how blessed thou art / I love thee sincerely, sincere from my heart.*

Angell Matthewson's deepest memory of the mother of his faith pictured her in a circle of dancing children, making the music for them by singing "with much glee and politeness".

*Hop up and jump up and whirl round, whirl round. / Here is love flowing round / Catch it as you whirl round / Reach up, reach down, here it is all round.*

These Americans responded in part because Mother Ann's Songs were not hers; like all things in Shaker life they were a gift and not a possession, belonging to them and anyone who would but shake off the carnal lusts of ownership to share, quite literally, the things God meant for all.

*Come life, Shaker life, / Come life eternal! / Shake off, shake off / All that is carnal.*

The best description of the very early singing and dancing together came from apostate Valentine Rathbun, after he chose again the worldly way, remembering

slowly the path not taken of Shaker melody. In 1781 he wrote:

some will be singing, each one his own tune; some without words in an Indian tone, some singing jig tunes, some tunes of their own making in an unknown mutter.

By 1782 when he expanded his account, Rathbun remembered not just the odd freedom and singularity of the music, but, with clear sense of loss, its intense charm and moving movement to e pluribus unum:

And after awhile they all fall in, and make a strange charm: some singing without words, and some with unknown tongue or mutter, or some with a mixture of english: the mother, so-called, minds to strike such notes as make concord, and so forms the charm. When they leave off singing, they drop off one by one, as oddly as they come on.

*O ho, the pretty chain that binds us all together / O ho, its links are love that's wrought by faithful labor. / And while this love we do maintain our spirits flow together. / Within this chain we will remain, it's linked in pretty mother's.*

No one composed or made or owned such music where each person's song was part of Mother Ann's and part of divine joy beyond possessing. Thankful Goodrich remembered these early services of dancing, leaping and shouting until "the spacious apartment would ring with beautiful songs which no man could learn" ... much less copy or copyright.

*Come brethren, let us play in the new and living way. / Come sister, skip away, we'll be free in all we say. / Then like a good believer sing and make your heavenly music ring / In songs of love and union.*

It was for Shakers proof of their faith's harmony with the world in plumb with divine intent.

*And when we find ourselves in the place just right / I Will be in the valley of love and delight.*

When Valentine's brother, Daniel Rathbun, another wobbly convert, found himself harassed "with trouble and distress" over his pride, Mother Ann would set him dancing "to labor it off" after which he would "resume great cheerfulness again".

*When true simplicity is gained / To bow and to bend we won't be ashamed. / To turn, turn will be our delight / Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

Even such heavenly therapy, however, could not prevent Daniel from, as he put it, again "gendering to bondage" outside Shakerism.

For the life of their faith, Shakers made music because it was the deepest voice of their peculiar vision, born of woman, raised in the United States, and open to all.

*Come, dance and sing around the ring, / Live in love and union. / Dance and sing around the ring, / Live in sweet communion. / Sing with life, live with life, live with life and power.*

Most Shaker songs have been lost; in the eighteenth century no one thought of trying

to "write down" in any way the music that went up to heaven. Individual creativity was a worldly concern, and it was folly to worry about preserving in the formaldehyde of written forms what God's gift was always renewing. Still, almost all Shakers, unlike their founding mother, were literate, and they wanted to share. A few of them knew systems of recording the world's music when they entered Shaker life, and worked to write down, in many forms, the melodic truths that sang from their co-believers. The best historian of Shaker song counted some 800 surviving Shaker song collections, with "between 8,000 and 10,000 different songs, some in as many as 40 variants" in them. Such is the saved remnant of the overflowing cup of folk rhythm that intoxicated this people, never numbering more than 6000 believers.

*Holy Mother gave to me / A pretty little cup for thee / Filled with wine, purest wine. / Take the cup and drink it up.*

We know of nothing like this fermentation of song in the world's history, brewed in the hearts of people with the hops of belief that they'd escaped the world's formulas, formalities and strivings, for a God who assured them:

*The proud and lofty I despise / And bless the meek and low, / I hear the humble heart that cries, / And comfort I bestow. / Of all the trees among the wood / I've chose one little vine, / The meek and low are nigh to me / The humble heart is mine.*

The Shakers simply accepted seriously the idea that all persons were created equal and that in God's equality lay an end of bondage to the world's "Great I", but liberty for the "small i" of the true self. This better, smaller self often took physical form, much like the tiny trueselves in the paintings of black folk artist, Harry Taylor. Eunice Wyeth recognized "almost from infancy a tawny image peering over my shoulder always bringing sunshine with him" and Calvin Green found his "guardian and helper" in "a lovely little" child spirit clad in green whom Mother Ann, also dressed in green, brought to him.

*Great I little i - / Great I can see / Little i is pretty, / So little i will be. / Little i is pretty, / And little i is free. / Little i is pretty, / So little i will be.*

They believed that all quest or concern for the superiority of my – my money, my family, my child, my learning, my chair, my music – destroyed wholesome union with others, God and self.

*Love is little, love is low / Love will make my spirit grow- / Grow in peace, grow in light, / Love will do the thing that's right.*

The hauntingness of Shaker song grew from the purity of its folk inspiration, its rootedness in the need to express rather than impress, but also from the purity of its acceptance of the ideal of equality that the United States paraded and parodied.

*Depart I say, flee far away / Your ways no more I'll practice / For all who try to be Great I / Are vicious, proud, and fractious.*

## History and Faith

Born in 1736 to a blacksmith and his wife in Manchester, England, Ann Lee was

to develop a faith to counter the economic, gender and legal hardships of her early life. Deprived of an education as a child, probably working in textile mills, she later was employed as a cook in a public infirmary. Lee in 1762 married blacksmith John Standerin, and within the next five years bore four children all of whom quickly died. As her domestic labors developed more tragically than had her former hard hired labor, Lee turned decisively to the religious group she had joined in 1758, a congregation of "shaking Quakers", whose inner light often showed in ecstatic physical, verbal, and musical manifestations. After Lee' traumatic child-bearing experiences led her to conclude true spiritual rebirth demanded celibacy, Lees began to lead more actively the small religious group of mostly poor people, supported by three or four merchant converts.

*The first Eve was tempted and led into sin, / The second, more faithful, was led out again. / With firm resolution (her word was a sword), / She fought her way through, and creation restored.*

Two tailors, James and Jane Wardley, had long led the group, but Lee's intensity and warmth and voice, and perhaps more radical doctrines, gave her growing prominence in the group.

She was jailed briefly in 1772, in one of several legal repressions of the sect, perhaps because they at times took their message into the streets or the established church.

*The rulers called, "Delusion! / Who can these Shakers be? / Are these the wild fanatics, / Bewitched by Anne Lee. / We'll stop this noise and shaking, / It never shall prevail; / We'll seize the grand deceiver, / And thrust her into jail".*

According to Shaker tradition, it was after her jailing that Ann Lee first made her broad religious claims: that she walked "in fine vallies with Christ as with a lover", that she was "married to the Lord Jesus", that she was "Ann the Word". How much these truths of belief were in the beginning and how much in the development between the events of 1772 and their publication forty years later is shrouded. But there is no doubt that this small group had a new leader, that "Mother" Jane Wardley became "the John the Baptist in the female line", and the world had the start of revelations of a new faith with gender-equality in the Deity and in the prophets sent to earth to reveal Her/His divine will.

*Let names and sects and parties / Accost my ears no more, / My ever blessed Mother, / Forever I'll adore.*

However inchoate the doctrine of this illiterate 38-year-old woman in 1774, her powerful hold on the confidence and affection of her Believers allowed her to shape an always small but long lasting and highly influential faith from her experiences. Out of both the unhappiness of her outer life and the ecstasy of her inner one, Mother Ann labored to bring forth Shakerism, and it was to be no still-birth. God revealed through her the wrongness of what had cost her so much pain, the price of poverty and persecution and child-bearing in the prideful world of conventional economic and legal and gender realities.

*She was the Lord's anointed / To show the root of sin; / And in its full destruction, / Her gospel did begin.*

She had a vision of a new world order, and she'd heard doubtless of a new world where people had begun to argue it was possible simply to set up a better and fairer society not in the hereafter but in the here-and-now.

*To mark their shining passage, / Good angels flew before, / Towards the land of promise, / Columbia's happy shore.*

A male follower had a vision of Mother Ann's church transplanted, a tree, whose leaves "shone with such brightness, as made it appear like a burning torch". There was the threat of additional persecution and the reality of minuscule growth in England, and there was this living flame of the promise of American life. There, Lee knew, "God had a chosen people" whom she'd seen "in a vision", so that "when I met them in America I knew them". At a meeting of the sect, many showed "gifts" that confirmed the decision to emigrate, "and we had joyful meeting, and danced until morning". Mother Ann and eight believers followed their faith to the new world in 1774.

*We've crossed the Red Sea; we're happy and free, / We rejoice on its beautiful banks. / Our harps are a-stringing, sweet music is singing, / As forward we move in our ranks.*

The American years of Shaker trial, uncertainty and founding of the "United Society of Believers" paralleled precisely those of the "United States" to achieve independence and structural stability. Ann Lee and her followers arrived in New York in the late summer of 1774, just a month before the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. The years to follow were ones of economic and social hardship for the colonies which had decided to risk war to gain independence.

*Rights of conscience in these days / Now demand our solemn praise. / Here we see what God has done / By His servant Washington, / Who ... led forth in Wisdom's plan / To secure the rights of man.*

This situation complicated the lives of the poor English religionists who had been led to seek their greater independence in a new home, both by persecutions and limits they wished to avoid and the oddly amorphous promise of American life, its "better" always shaped by the dreams of those who dreamed. The small group had to weather poverty, mobs and legal persecutions in these years, in part because of their oddities of faith and in part because of their rigid adherence to the pacifism of their Quaker heritage.

*Through storms of persecution / The truth she did maintain, / And showed how sin was conquered / And how we're born again.*

It took nearly half a decade to gain the money to give secure communal shape at Watervleit to Mother Ann's intense visions, during which period she worked as domestic servant in New York City. Slowly she began attracting American converts.

*Near Albany they settled / And waited for awhile, / Until a mighty shaking / Made all the desert smile.*

Mother Ann's American decade ended the year after Yorktown, when she died shortly after the death of her brother, friend and faithful support, William Lee.

*Our Mother has finished her work here on earth / And gone to the mansions of heavenly mirth.*

When the British were leaving Yorktown, their band played ironically the old folk song "The World Turned Upside Down". This was one of the ballad tunes that Mother Ann sang with words from her new language of faith. And the American world that had tipped things slightly in a new direction continued to wonder and to ponder, as well it might, about the full turn Shakers gave to conventional power realities.

*You were fighting on one side / To build up your lust and pride; / God was bringing on a plan / To defeat the pride of man.*

Her other most respected English follower, James Whittaker, became "Father" for the growing group for three years until his death in 1787. That year the Shaker's first American-born leader, Father Joseph Meacham, began the work of codifying and consolidating the Believers into a permanent communal context that assured the survival of their egalitarian vision of things, much as other "founding fathers" established a constitution and nation for the worldly context in which Shakers would live. Meacham died at Mount Lebanon, New York in 1796, the same year George Washington returned to Mount Vernon, both of them having presided over the institutional buttressing of social structures and human hopes that were to have long duration.

*Now the flame begins to run, / Now the shaking has begun. / He that gave creation birth / Shakes the heavens and the earth.*

One of Meacham's contributions was to assert gender equality in all formal Shaker political structures, making Lucy Wright his co-elder at the head of the church, and leaving this able woman, for the next quarter century, to continue and extend his work, and to decree to leaven the legalism of the faith's founding fathers with the founding Mother's mystical vibrancy.

*Then our father Joseph, whom God did prepare, / By faith and obedience became the true heir. / Then our mother Lucy, who now is our guard / Became a true helper to him in the Lord. / A Father and Mother we children have found. / From fleshly relations our souls they unbound.*

Under Wright, the Shakers founded new settlements in the West, especially Ohio and Kentucky, which flourished and vitalized the United Society's musical traditions. Under her, Shakers also began to publish books on their history and theology, and to write down their "worded songs".

*I want to feel little, more simple, more mild, / More like our blest parents, and more like a child. / More thankful, more humble, more lowly in mind, / More watchful, more prayerful, more loving and kind.*

After Wright's death in 1821, no Shaker "elders" took on the central influence of the early leaders, nor their honorific title of "Father" and "Mother". During the period of numerical decline after the Civil War, Frederick Evans and Antionette Doolittle and Anna White, through their writings and broad reform interests, involved many Shakers in "Progressive" reforms such as labor's cause, the peace movement, and woman's suffrage. Yet their position and reputation in the world's eyes were greater than among Believers, though all remained faithful and respected in their communities.

It was not leaders but thousands of "undistinguished" Shakers who led the faith at its height to its most intensely spirited and creative outpouring between 1837 and 1850. In full accord with Shaker principle, spiritual gifts of music, objects, lessons, songs, dances and designs were given through a host of God's favored "humble and low".

*Leap and skip, ye little band, / Shaker faith will fill the land. / Oh, the comfort, life and zeal / Little Shaker children feel.*

To such Shakers, Spirits of all kinds from Divine Wisdom to historical personages like Washington and St. Patrick and Queen Elizabeth, to symbolic people and animals like the "little shepherdess" and message-bearing doves and birds of paradise, to representatives of exotic cultures like Eskimos, Turks, and especially Native Americans – brought gifts of song and design and ritual and advice.

*I have a little noggin full of love, sweet love. / Mother sent me here with it to feed her sweet doves*

Mother Ann was the most frequent visitor, directly or through a host of emissaries, so this period of intense visions and creativity was called "Mother Ann's Work".

*I'll be simple, I'll be lowly / In it flows such heavenly mirth. / To be humble, to be holy / Is the prettiest thing on earth.*

It was the time of flowering for Shakers in the non-practical arts, particularly music, as individuals shared their pretty divine gifts with their eager community, and eventually with a receptive world.

## Theology

This Shaker alternative world grew from a theology that owed something to the Quakers and to the evangelicals, especially the Methodists and Baptists, of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Yet Shakers sharpened the leveling tendencies of these faiths: the definition of God less as Divine Sovereign than as Loving Diety or at least Constitutional President bound by moral law; the availability of salvation to all who honestly sought it; the ability of the individual to communicate directly with God; the possibility of achieving a kind of perfection once the right relation to God was accepted, and of perfecting one's world, too.

*Let none refuse, but all may choose, / A savior now in Zion stands. / Now in this day all who obey / May shout and dance and clap their hands.*

All these faiths, in their creative phases, criticized self-seeking in this world and glorified self-finding with God and those who accepted His true way outside of the usual worldly hierarchies.

*Of their honors I own I desire to have none, / For their titles are only a lie. / When the bishop and squire are brought into the fire / They'll not be a whit greater than I.*

Such was the central tenet of the Shakers. An early critic expressed exactly the tap root of the Believers' basic views: "The predominant principle in the heart of man is the love of domination and preeminency. Pride is the root of all sin. From this principle, the whole fabric of that religion is founded".

Shakers largely gave social structure to these faiths' determination to cut involvement with all carnal temptations to worldly superiority.

*As the mighty and rich must fall in the ditch, / Then let me have my victuals and clothes, / And I ask not a cent, but shall still be content, / And I care not much how the world goes, goes, goes.*

To delight in being "low", to treasure generous equality and loving community rather than to seek personal advantage was the way of Holy Wisdom, and this required an end to use of power, position, money, race or gender to abet the corrosive sin of egoism, of "old stiff self conceit" and "the love of domination."

*Low down in the beautiful valley, / Where love crowns the meek and the lowly, / The loud storms of envy and folly / May roll on like billows in vain.*

The ties of definitions of divine and human nature to gender-power was the area where this first modern western woman to found a faith made her most distinctive contribution. Mother Ann denied a Deity created in the image of a dominant sex; "Our Father who art in heaven" Lee joined to a Mother ensconced in equal dignity, the Divine Power of the one balanced, and in fact directed, by the Holy Wisdom of the Deity's female half.

*His person was then a vexation, / But, how the wicked will rail, / To see his last manifestation / In female as well as in male.*

In addition, the salvational life and message of their Son was united and supplemented by that of their Daughter, Ann Lee.

*'Twas Jesus the Anointed / That first revealed the plan, / And now it is renewed again / By our good Mother Ann.*

And this truly holy family, in which the divine was not essentially male giving His power to the world only through those with the anatomical vestments most faiths glorified as essential, taught that all humans could transcend the lust for power and the power of lust. Holy Wisdom was ready to bring pretty gifts to all who would truly forsake the trappings and traps of worldly super- and subordination.

*I have a plum cake, a pretty little plum cake / Will you eat a piece of it?, says blessed Mother.*



The millenium was ready at hand, so close in fact that both the melodrama of premillennialism and its puzzled epilogue of post-millennialism were beside the point. It came wherever an individual chose to live for God and others rather than in the carnal bonds of satisfying self first.

*Then let no one their trust betray / To seek their own self-pleasing way, / But move along this holy way / With cheerfulness and pleasure.*

The individual's ability to choose, the democratic arminianism of these faiths, the Shakers, like the Mormons later, carried to new American lengths, insisting that not only the living but the dead as well could be ex post facto inducted into the true church.

*'Tis Mother bids her children come / And feeds them with the heavenly crumb. / The Father greets them, Welcome home, / With music and with dancing.*

Mother Ann in the spirit world, along with other Shakers there and here, labored to bring St. Patrick and Mohammed and Isaac Watts and Ben Franklin and George Washington into the true faith. This communication, in terms of visions and voices and visits, between those on earth and in the spirit, were central to the Shaker faith. Shaker life in fact involved large movement out of the world into that of the spirit, a journey that death merely forwarded.

*And should I live to 85 / I hope to be awake – alive! / And when I close my days on earth / Straight forward I 'll procede in mirth.*

Hence like their Methodist forebears and Finneyite contemporaries, the Shakers argued that acceptance of their and God's way was the beginning of perfection for them, the perfection of love and union in a society that rejected the ugliness of human power and cast out the bedeviling desire for personal distinction and advantage.

*Mother's way's a pretty way. O how I love it! / Mother's way's a pretty way. O I'll be in it! / Love, love, love, O what pretty loves! / Father loves us, Mother loves us / I love you and we love one another / O what pretty love! O what good pure love.*

Shakers, like other perfectionists, had no doubts about human weakness, their own and others; they had to deal steadily with wobbly converts quickly backsliding toward the pleasures of capitalism, competition and carnality.

*Come ye sinners, poor and needy, / Try the cross as we have done. / You will find the yoke is easy / If you'll only put it on.*

But if one bore "the easy yoke", perfection toward love and expressiveness freed from the shackles of self-worship could get joyously underway during life.

Despite the world's insistence that Shakers were repressed and glum, their faith was remarkably free from an emphasis on sin and suffering. They stressed good work, good food, good music and dance, good laughter and love for those who just shook off all carnal lusts.

*We'll be shaken to and fro / Till we let Old Adam go.*

The spirit world toward which one moved was comfortably neat and warm and affectionate, the Shaker village purged of its last earthly imperfections. Mother Ann herself warned converts against melancholy and "set them laughing and dancing".

*Why I wonder you don't laugh a little / Laugh a little and laugh a little / Backwards, forwards, sideways, downward.*

In Christ's earthly journey, he came to the cross; Mother Ann came to America. Shakerism was a faith that had, as central imagery, not the sacrificial lamb, but that of lambs frisking in green valleys.

*Like mother's little lambs / We will skip and play.*

Their religious world was not a vale of tears, but a valley of love and delight.

## The Freedoms of True Equality

### A. Owning Up

Those divisions in the human family most commonly evoked in contemporary scholarship of otherness and oppression, class, race and gender, Shakers also saw among those most central to the carnal world order. They also saw, more clearly than is general today, how such systems of power need be no more significant than the power of knowledge or cunning or beauty or favor or strength or physical health or position or reputation in twisting human bonds to the bondage of dominance.

*If you will have salvation / You first must count the cost / And sacrifice that nature / In which the world is lost.*

They also recognized the truth that personal use of one's attributes and situation rather than social inevitabilities dictated the oppression one experienced or meted out in a world where people sought their way rather than God's, and superiority rather than union.

*Old Cross and Crabbed I will shun, / They make me feel so ugly. / I'd rather speak with Mother's tongue, / And keep her blessings snugly.*

Hence the grossest symbol of power, the gun, with which the worldly tried to satisfy their political lusts and quests, as well as often their personal furies, was anathema to them – so determinedly that it became one reason a people using guns to achieve their view of greater social justice justified mobbing and jailing them. But Shakers argued that guns were no worse than the killing words most humans keep at the ready to slay opposition.

*With a new tongue now I will speak, / And keep the valley lowly. / I'll watch my thoughts and words this week / And have them pure and holy.*

The Shakers believed a changed heart came first and remained the superstructure

of decency, but, once one accepted the simplicity of the little i freed from the lusts for ostentatious glorifying of self of the Great I, one wanted a society that cherished rather than challenged ideals of truly equal love and respect. Like other religious people who felt they'd found the place of God's perfection, they wanted to live in a community whose soil fostered rather than choked the true vine of their belief.

*The clusters are all holy, and precious in my sight / Each living vine is lovely, and gives me much delight.*

Their radical reshaping of the world's economic and gender systems was what chiefly attracted the worldly's derision and desire, amusement and amazement. Much less noticed, though equally worth noting, were Shaker attitudes toward race and slavery in a nation that could steadily prate about its contributions to human liberty only by determined neglect of its central commitment to others' total bondage. Unlike adherents of every other major faith in the era, Shakers north and south, offered their clear testimony that, in Abraham Lincoln's later words, it was "strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces".

*They spare no idol, great or small, / But pass one sentence on the them all, / To cut and slash, on every hand, / To purge all evil from the land.*

In the nineteenth century, the worldly expressed most respect for the equality of labor and consumption in Shakerism's economic system where bread for everyone, of good quantity and quality, came from the pretty unexcessive sweat of those able to work.

*And, then, as a brother, it is understood / That I be employed in doing some good. / In uniform clothing we're equally dressed / And to the same table I go with the rest. / In health and in sickness, as long as I'm here, / In all their enjoyments I equally share.*

The Shaker "model" for this, as for other things, was the "primitive" church, their favorite historical dream for the community they, quite literally, envisioned into being. There may have been a model closer to their new home as well. Seeds of economic communalism lay in Mother Ann's egalitarian stance, which were planted in the first community, New York, by Ann's English followers.

*Com, Com, the gospel feast is open, / com bye milk, Com bye wine, / Without money, without price.*

Yet the person who assured that this general vision of a different world, so common to dissenting religionists, took physical and communal shape was the group's first American "father", Joseph Meacham of Connecticut. And the eighteen Shaker villages that eventually existed under the "order" Meacham set up bore remarkable similarity to the literary idealization of the New England village, "Greenfield Hill", the poem Timothy Dwight wrote to glorify the moral superiority of the American system in 1794. Dwight raised his hymn to the good society on the economic foundation of "competence", everybody's having enough because no one took too much, in terms and images that would radiate in Shaker thought and song:

Yes! let the proud despise, the rich deride, / These humble joys, to  
competence allied. / Unprison'd thus from artificial joys, / Where pomp  
fatigues, and fussful fashion cloys,

*Pinch'd up, nip'd up, starch'd up and done up, / O Mother hates it, O Mother hates it, /  
O Mother hates your bashful lusts.*

The soul, reviving, loves to wander free / Thro' native scenes of sweet  
simplicity; / Thro' Peace's low vale, where Pleasure lingers long / And  
every songster tunes his sweetest song –

*O living friends, do give us free / Some crumbs of true simplicity.*

With what new joy I walk thy verdant streets! / How often pause to breathe  
thy gale of sweets; / To mark the well-built walls! Thy budding fields! /  
And every charm that rural nature yields; / And every joy to Competence  
allied, / And every good, that Virtue gains from Pride!

*All pride and bondage we'll disown / And strive to make these gifts our own.*

Dwight's social utopia, with its intense denigration of the conspicuously proud,  
pretentious, and rich, was based on an American economic theory of a divine order  
where a benevolent God provided well for all so long as the few did not grossly  
aggrandize more than their share. And in the decade of the 1790s when Dwight  
wrote his poem about the Connecticut village in which he lived, Joseph Meacham  
built villages, including one in his native Enfield, that gave social structure to what  
he, Dwight, and others wished to be.

*Come, come, partake of this heavenly fare / For here's a full supply, and all may have  
their share, / For 'tis sweet manna..., For 'tis Mother's love and manna.*

Some thirty years later, long after Meacham's death, Dwight was to write about the  
Shakers, finding their theology "monstrous beyond any modern example" and their  
"gifts" ludicrous, but their villages much like that of his earlier Greenfield home  
and dream. In Meacham's Shaker villages "whatever they do is well done, and  
whatever they offer in the market is in good reputation and sold at a good price",  
while their relationships with each other were "very harmonious and friendly", and  
their dealing with others "fair, sincere and obliging", and, in cases requiring charity,  
"very honorable and liberal".

*By temperance, prudence, industry and care / My faith is to lay up in store / A good  
gospel treasure, enough and to spare, / To give to the needy and poor.*

Although competitive capitalism became the way of the nineteenth-century  
United States, so little was laissez-faire an ideal that, like Dwight, most observers of  
Shakerism found much to praise, and little to criticize, in its economic system where  
private ownership was non-existent and where "distribution was made unto every  
man according as he had need" so that their society could recognize that all had "a  
just and equal right to the use of things", as their first broad theological statement  
made clear.

*O I will labor for love, love, love, / Pure love, / O I will labor for love / Pure self-denying love-this will make me happy.*

Participants in the world's system, repeatedly noted, as did Dwight, how well the Shaker way worked and paid in practical terms, as well as its ties to the special harmony and generosity of their communities. John Melish found their villages "all activity and contentment", because all were "on an equal footing" and "equally interested in the good of the society".

*No idle drone within here hive / Will ever prosper, ever thrive. / Then seeds of Industry I'll sow / That I may reap where ere I go.*

For critics of the world's system, the Shaker economic experience pointed the better way from the competitive insecurities and sufferings of capitalism toward communal sharing and caringness where all gave what they had – possessions, skills, and labor – so everyone's needs could be securely met. John Humphrey Noyes, America's most intellectual founder of theories and a community to escape the dog-eat-dog realities of capitalism, pointed out that, for the broad ferment of communalism and communism in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States, the Shakers alone "provided the solid capital that has upheld all the paper theories, and counteracted the failures, of the French and English schools". All who wished a real social alternative were "more indebted to the Shakers than to any or all other social Architects of modern times".

*The grinding work is going on, / It is the work of Mother. / And when we've ground up every wrong, / Then we shall love each other.*

Friedrich Engels pointed out that "the first people in America, and actually in the world, to create a society on the basis of common property were the so-called Shakers", who alone had set up an effective alternative to capitalism where "there are none who work against their will and none who search for work in vain".

*In point of distinction I want nothing more / Than just to be servant of all. / I peaceably work at whatever I'm set, / From no other motive but love, / To honor the gospel and keep out of debt / And lay up a treasure above.*

Frederika Bremer, the Swedish reformer, labeled the Shaker villages "the most rational, and perhaps the happiest of all conventual institutions". Of all these people who saw among the Shakers an answer to capitalism's competitive insecurity, none better than Horace Greeley saw the deeper moral reasons for their proof of "the possibility, the practicality, of a social condition from which the twin curses, pauperism and servitude, shall be utterly banished". They had built their community "upon the conquest of the inexorable appetites: lust, avarice, ambition, revenge", and had proved "how pleasant may be the labors, how abundant the comforts of a community wherein no man aspires to be lord over his brethren, no man grasps for himself, but each is animated by a spirit of devotion to the common good".

*I want freedom, I want love, / I want the pretty gifts that come from above. / I hate bondage, and I'll not be bound, / Come, pretty freedom, and love flow around.*

In every Shaker community, the prosperity, the inventiveness, the comfort, the generosity toward one another and toward strangers, the broad charity for those who suffered in the outer world, proclaimed that the competitive market was not the law of nature and nature's God, but society's choice to create a world of great wealth for some, great oppression for others, and an abiding insecurity for all. Shakers chose differently, and, English economist John Fitch noted, "Here none are overworked, and none ever want a day's labor; none live in luxury, and no man, or woman, or child, lacks anything.

## B. Ungendering Bondage

*Come sister, come, let's all be one / For you're as good as I am. / There is no cause for picking flaws / For we 're all going to Zion.*

Gender-equality, as the Shakers developed and practiced it, drew less attention, much more opposition, and almost no support from ante-bellum observers, either men or the fewer women who commented. Bremer didn't mention it, and Charlotte Cushman, American spinster and career woman Par excellence, lamented in a poem that Shaker women gave up the happy "bridal scene" for a "cold and passionless" life among a male "monkish band". Spinster reformer and able intellectual Elizabeth Peabody complained that Shakers desecrated "the sacredness of family" so that "men have ceased to be men in some degree", while her English counterpart, Harriet Martineau lauded the economic result "of co-operation and community of property" among the Shakers, but lambasted Shaker "mental torpor", born especially of concern about celibacy. She also felt distaste for the sexuality with which their religious exercises were "disgustingly full".

*I love the sisters, the sisters love me. / O how happy, how happy I be.*

Men mentioned the gender realities less, except for the gross "humorous" remarks of the likes of Charles Dickens and Artemus Ward about how the ugliness of Shaker women made their spiritual commitments to celibacy the wisest policy.

*How pretty they look, how clever they feel, / And this we will sing when we love a good deal.*

Yet in three areas, Shaker faith contributed to gender-equality in ways that contemporary feminist scholars have deemed important, if not wholly up to ideal snuff: a gender-neutral theology, a community based on shared gender power, and celibacy, or freedom from what some feminist scholars judge the degradation of women born of child-bearing or heterosexual intercourse. To all these areas, the faith's founding by a woman owed most.

All three gender-bending aspects of Shaker faith were at least as radical as their economic system, in fact so disturbing that almost no one in the world even tried to take them seriously until the twentieth century. Perhaps most fundamental was the theological. At the heart of the theology of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing was that God's second human representative on earth was Ann Lee. Christ did not reappear, because this final message from God was destined to

come not through the Son but through the Daughter. Over time this led the Shakers not to deify Lee, but to humanize Christ; the two came into the world not as the Deity, but to pass on fundamental revelation from, in the Shaker view, Him/Her.

*Thro' the male and female united in one / Shall the glory of God and his kingdom be known.*

Feminist theologians have argued that the Shaker position deviated from their wiser vision, especially by giving some suggestion of precedence to Almighty Power and Jesus Christ and by retaining metaphors of maleness and especially familial relation in describing both the Deity and his Word made flesh through Christ and Lee.

*Since Mother sent the Gospel / And spread it in the west, / How many sons and daughters / Are nourish 'd from her breast.*

Yet this suggests that the starting truth is superior to the culminating one, and neglects Shakerism's greater emphasis on and closeness to Divine Mother Wisdom and the woman who for them represented the higher revelation of the second coming which united them in belief.

*Now Christ is revealed in the Woman / And makes her as pure as the light. / This sets the old serpent a-foaming, / But let him come on to the fight.*

In the first full statement of their theology, Shakers recognized how profound a change lay in their dual-gendered God, bringers of revelation, and theology:

*And under foot the truth was trod / By their mysterious threefold God: / But while they placed in the He / Their sacred co-eternal three, / A righteous persecuted few / Adored the Everlasting Two.*

Joseph Meacham obviously duplicated this concept of the Everlasting Two in the temporal governance he formalized for the faith. Mother Ann's dedication to spiritual experience and sharing made her, so far as the evidence suggests, indifferent to formal structures of organization, but Meacham translated her theology into Shaker political structure, by making Mother Lucy his equal in position and by placing "co-elders" at the head of every village and each family (as the large communal houses within them were called), one woman and one man to head their sex within the units. Differences in actual power between these co-elders might be great, but depended on personal qualities and effectiveness rather than gender expectations.

*Love the inward new creation, / Love the glory that it brings; / Love to lay a good foundation, / In the line of outward things.*

While Father Joseph lived, he was recognized as the faith's central figure; during the next twenty-five-years, Mother Lucy always worked along side a male designated her equal, but remained, seemingly in everyone's eyes, clearly the person in charge and venerated. Only in the area of broad village financial strategy did the brethren have more formal power, though here too the integrated parallelism of gender led to women's control of their side of the finances, and of course supervision of their own labor, which always provided a substantial part of Shaker profit-making as well as community-sustaining work.

*Now in this highly favored land / Let us like faithful soldiers stand / For God in justice will demand / According to our measure.*

The "separate but equal" political structure was paralleled in Shaker work structure, which has provided the core complaint of feminist scholars about Shaker gender-equality. The gender work patterns within the community replicated broadly those of rural America generally: men worked more outside and women in; men did the heavy building and farming and women the cooking and washing and cleaning; women sewed coats and men made shoes; for sale, women made hats and "fancy" articles, wove baskets, canned food, gathered herbs and packaged seeds, while men made furniture, produced lumber, built wagons and agricultural tools, and sold animals and crops.

*With my broom in my hand, / With my fan and my flail, / This work I will do. / And I will not fail, / For, lo, I have come, / And I've not come in vain.*

Commonly women had predominance in the dairying, silk-growing, and fowl-and-egg enterprises. Men and women, again as in the larger society, shared lighter agricultural work in times of labor need, seeding, weeding and especially fruit, vegetable and seed harvesting. Shaker inventions showed the intellectual sharing between the sexes, despite their separate work spheres: men invented the flat broom and better washing machines and a woman the circular saw and cut nails. Only traditionalist valuation of gender labor makes Shaker male work more valuable or satisfying: why is mucking out a stable better than sweeping a floor, or making a chair more creative than weaving a rug? Certainly men and women shared the chief benefits of the Shaker labor system: varied tasks, cooperative effort, shared responsibility, and essential contribution to both domestic and monetary sustenance.

*Love a life of true devotion, / Love your lead in outward care; / Love to see all hands in motion, / Love to take your equal share.*

In the ante-bellum Shaker world, there was also division of intellectual labor. While women gained "gifts" of song at least as often as men, and more frequently created manuscript song books of other's musical gifts, men wrote all the Shaker works on music theory and notation. Men also wrote all the early works of Shaker theology, though they came out with Mother Lucy's close approval. The books of Shaker revelation, published in the years of Mother Ann's Work, however, fitted the faith's gender dualism, Philemon Stewart revealing a text from, primarily, Almighty Power and Paulina Bates passing on truths from, centrally, Divine Wisdom.

*Let music roll through every soul, / And everyone that hears that sound, / With heart and hand may join the band, / And let their voices echo round.*

While spirits passed on gifts of divine truth equally though men and women, men predominated in making formal short addresses to Believers, especially in meetings open to the worldly public. Such discriminations related partly to the social realities of those from whom Shakers drew most of their adherents: middling or poor people, where education and religion had opened up generally larger areas of public activity and learning for men than for women. For example, the Shakers who wrote on



music theory and notation were men who had learned about such things in their prior experience in the "world". Too, the Shakers, especially early on, went their own way with much awareness and concern for the world's opinion and expectations; hence Joseph Meacham in the 1790s avoided mentioning almost all highly distinctive Shaker beliefs and practices to present the group's millennial claims in their most palatable form to the world.

Most important, early Shakers viewed books and formal knowledge askance, while they saw all important truth in the gifts of the spirit which women got and gave at least equally with men.

*How excellent it is to be little, / To be little, and not know much.*

Their faith paralleled in telling ways the gender lessons Margaret Fuller culled from transcendentalism: the higher intuitive truths of "reason" or God were those to which woman's socialization and perhaps nature especially geared her, though the good society would encourage people to be fully human by denying the barriers raised by society's sharp gender straight-jacketing.

The most distinctive gender feature of Shaker life was their sexual orientation to celibacy, or sublimation of sexuality to spiritual ends.

*The pride of all flesh must be stained, / And Satan no longer shall reign, / Since Christ has a helper obtained / And God has united the twain.*

About this they were strict, in line with Mother Ann's vision, though their founder herself had insisted that only "perfection", and not the process of moving toward it, required cessation of all sexual intercourse. The rules about it, and recognition that it was one of the hardest of many carnal lusts to control, contributed to Shaker emphasis on "separate spheres", so that men and women might not come privately together, though integrated singing, dancing, worshipping, planning, pleasuring and conversation in group settings were encouraged.

*Come, brethren, cast your anger off / And every passion bury. / Come in and share the fatted calf / And let us all be merry.*

Celibacy, of course, freed Shaker women from child-bearing, which feminists like Shulamith Firestone see as the superstructure of all destructive social divisions, and also from the heterosexual intercourse that Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon see as the root of male domination and debasement of women.

*Go off, great I, and come not nigh / But quit my habitation / And come no more within my door / Corrupting my sensation.*

Shaker men shared equally in the communities' child-rearing responsibilities, extensive because of Shakers' providing perhaps the nation's most humane orphanage system, as well as communal families for the biological units that were dissolved when parents and children entered the order.

*Only look, look and see, pretty treasures given me / One and two, three and four, all of*

*these and many more. / Mother says that we may play, in this simple pretty way.*

Aside from the fairly rare cases of handling infants, which the women did, Shaker men lived with and raised boys from toddler-age on and Shaker women girls.

While this sexual system was grounded in religious rather than gender beliefs, and in the ante-bellum years attracted nearly as many male as female adherents, celibacy may have had some special appeal to women, or been harder for men to accept over time. The sexes joined the group in equal numbers, but men left oftener, so the ante-bellum Shaker community was about three-fifths female.

*Now like an outcast I do wander / Thus I seek a union pure. / No strife would I or discord  
gender / Therefore I all things endure.*

When actress Charlotte Cushman wrote a poem lamenting her sense of human waste in Shakerism because men didn't pursue high worldly goals and women didn't grace "the bridal scene, the banquet, or the bowers" of the outer world, a "Shaker Girl", – in fact a Shaker man – from Kentucky poetically replied, pertly and pertinently enough. "She" mocked Cushman's glorification of the world's possibilities as a plea "to live in filthy lust or cruel pride" and expressed disgust that the bridal scene should be presented as women's "end and aim":

*"If so – weak, pithy, superficial thing – / Drink, silent drink the sick hymeneal  
spring".*

Cushman's claim that beauty should be cultivated because "man owns its powers", particularly touched this writer's feminist and communal sensibilities.

*Man owns its powers? And what will not man own / To gain his end . . . to  
captivate . . . dethrone? / The truth is this, whatever he may reign, / You'll  
find your greatest loss his greatest gain: / For like the bee he will improve  
the hour,*

*Like the little busy bee / I'll fly around and be so free, / I'll sip the honey from the hive /  
And this will make me all alive.*

*And all day long he'll hunt from flower to flower, / And when he sips the  
sweetness all away, / For ought he cares, the flowers may all decay.*

*Like the little busy bee / I'll gather sweets continually / From the life giving lovely flowers  
/ which beautify fair zion's bowers.*

*But here each other's virtues we partake, / Where men and women all  
their ills forsake.*

ooo

*And when the matter's rightly understood, / You'll find we labor for  
each other's good.*

For Shaker men and women both there was acceptance that celibacy lessened abuses of personal lust and power to promote the common good and a less sullied

love and union among the two sexes and all people. And at least one contemporary feminist, Dr. Harriot Hunt, praised Shaker celibacy in 1856 as the better way, given the "general abuse" in marriage "in a most gross and sensual form". Sexual intercourse could become decent only when "physiological laws" regulated marriage, Hunt concluded, and "not until the rights of women shall be acknowledged and secured".

*He may plead that he's bound to replenish the ground, / But his lusts are his motives he knows. / Then I gladly retreat from this sink of deceit / And care not much how the world goes, goes, goes.*

Shakers themselves integrated shrewd feminist social observation into their religious argument for celibacy. Women faced often "the pains and sorrows of childbirth" and "the libidinous passions" of a husband so that the "slavish subjection" became "shocking" and led to "unnatural and premature death". Thousands could "bear sorrowful testimony", these male Shaker theologians wrote in 1823, to the costs of "unreasonable and excessive indulgence of this passion in the man".

### C. Skin Glory

Less commonly noted and less tied to the personal experiences of Lee was the racial egalitarianism of the Shakers, grown simply of their hatred for all manifestations of worldly pride and superiority. The first published record of Mother Ann's words included her vision of "the poor negroes who are so much despised, redeemed from their loss, with crowns on their heads". Some blacks were Believers within the eastern societies by 1800, and more joined the western villages, especially in Kentucky.

*Now every soul that would do right / Is welcome to enlist and fight.*

ooo

*No soul of man does God exclude / From hating sin and doing good.*

In the North "Mother" Rebecca Jackson organized the largest group of African-Americans in the 1850s in Philadelphia after herself spending some time at Watervliet. Her commune consisted of ten or twelve black women and comprised the only urban outpost of Shakerism. Several blacks wrote songs, including John Robe from the island of St. Croix.

*Come, dear children, freely gather, / Learn to love and bless each other. / This will bind our hearts together / In love, love, heavenly love.*

Ex-slave Patsy Williamson was brought into the faith by her North Carolina master, and then her freedom purchased by the Shakers when her white owners left the community, so that Williamson could "continue in the zealous cause" for the next fifty-one years until 1860.

*O my pretty mother's home, / Sweeter than the honey in the comb, / Come love, pretty love, come, come, come. / Come love, pretty love, I want some.*

Robe and Williamson received typical Shaker gift songs, but the musical gifts brought by some minority Spirits had a more rollicking, minstrel quality.

*For Mother's wine I've got a small portion, / And it sets me into a staggering motion.*

The integration of blacks without any discrimination into Shaker communities and life contrasted with almost all social and religious practices in the North; nor did Shakers alter their practices in Kentucky at Pleasant Hill. The only communal compromise with racial prejudice occurred in the Shaker's southern most settlement at South Union, Kentucky, in deep slavery country.

*With all this you're not content / Still on bondage you are bent / Binding the poor negro, too, / He must be a slave to you.*

Here "local feeling" was respected so that blacks were housed in a separate family under black co-elders. In the mid-1850s, a mob threatened the South Union village, but Shaker leaders found enough good will toward them to divert the meeting called to sponsor the mobbing. While there is no evidence of Shaker hostility toward or discrimination against blacks, there is also no evidence of African-Americans rising to the position of elder or elderess except in the black units of Mother Rebecca and at South Union.

In one of the many visitations during Mother Ann's Work, some young sisters at North Union, Ohio, reported visiting the "City of Delight" in heaven and seeing slaveholders serving their former slaves, while those masters who clung to their pride and refused such acts of elemental justice were cast away and made to suffer.

*Can't you bend your necks a little, just a little, little, little / Can't you bend your necks a little to receive a Mother's love. / Mother says: tis not the haughty who can share her love so freely / But those who're truly simple who receive a full supply.*

The sisters underwrote the moral of their vision, "God is just, and all wrongs must be righted". Such simple principles made slavery hateful to Shakers, and the church, even in its early impoverished years, refused to have anything to do with it, or the profits therefrom.

*We'll travel on in peace and love, / And keep our souls from sin, / And seek a glory far above / The glory of the skin.*

When wealthy North Carolinian Willie Jones decided to unite at South Union in 1804, he suggested bringing along his 107 slaves to join, too. The Believers foresaw problems with both their Kentucky neighbors and their own principles should they take in so many people of doubtful conviction. Jones offered to sell the slaves and give the \$20,000-\$30,000 they would bring to the community still struggling to establish itself. The Kentucky Shakers rejected this alternative as well, and it was decided that Jones' attorney would present the slaves as a gift to whomever the slave chose. Four newly freed slaves chose to follow Jones to South Union.

*Come, let us labor to be free, / Now's the time to travel / In the way we should be / Free from every evil.*

Moral issues like this were not easy to handle, but there is no doubt that the Shakers brought a conscience to these cases broader than any other ante-bellum religious group. South Union's elder John Rankin, for example, wrote for advice from the central elders about whether the church could accept money related to slaves and "how far removed from the sweat and blood of the slave" things must be to be acceptable. Probably the elders allowed them to buy coffee and sugar, even though it came "directly from the toiling slave", but the \$2000 being inherited by a longtime sister from her slave-holding father was probably given, as was a later one, to "some emancipating society, or some like charitable uses". To become a member required freeing of slaves, and, when tentative joiners refused, Shakers would buy slaves who wanted to stay.

*Liberty is but a sound / If the conscience still is bound.*

They also hired slaves whom they couldn't buy who wanted to stay with them, and tried to give them wages to buy their freedom. Worldly paternalists were often willing to sell slaves when they aged, and because of this Shakers were finally able to buy Anthony Chism's freedom after he'd attended Sunday meetings at Pleasant Hill for forty-one years, and Jonas Crutcher's, three years before his death, after nineteen years as a hired Believer, so he could finish his life "on equal terms with the rest of us".

*Well, I'm willing to stagger, / Stagger, stagger away from bondage. / Well, I'm willing to reel, / Reel, Reel into freedom.*

He died "much respected and beloved".

Kentucky Shaker Journals attest the anger felt at the money-lust of slavery's gross mockery of their principles. In 1829 South Union noted the passing of a group of slaves close chained "to keep them from skedadelling", followed by some mules "to the same profitable market!!!" "Does God see this?", the scribe asked, perhaps remembering an old Shaker anthem; "Rather think he does".

*Did you think in seventy five, / When the states were all alive, / When they did for freedom sue, God was deaf and blind like you ?*

Shaker songs made clear that their acts of neutral benevolence during the Civil War in no way kept them from sharing the sense of Jubilee of their fellow blacks.

*With freedom I'm delighted, / I will not feel affrighted, / Come let us be united / And sound the jubilee.*

Right principles of course, didn't prevent problems. As with their white members, Shakers had trouble with black seceders, too. They bought Sampson Anderson but he left them for steamboating after a trip to New Orleans, informing the faithful: "Talk to me about me Eternal Hope! Why Jesus Christ never saw a steamboat!"

## Power

It was generally not steam, but other aspects of worldly power or pleasure that drew some explorers and adherents of Shakerism back to the world. And those who returned and wrote "exposures" of the Shakers complained most of power within the community which they'd left, a position taken also by many contemporary and scholarly critics of the group. In formal terms, given American definitions of democratic structure, Shaker hierarchy contradicted ideals of voting, of equality, and of freedom. Leaders chose leaders, and obedience was a cardinal virtue, though it was defined largely as adherence to the society's rules rather than its rulers.

*That this is the gospel I have not a doubt, / Nor am I a tittle afraid, / But in true obedience  
my strength will hold out / Until the foundation is laid.*

Seceder Amos Taylor in 1782 claimed ordinary Shakers had "no will of their own", but were wholly ruled "by a few Europeans conquering their adherents", and David Lamson after leaving the group claimed it was nothing other "than a system of slavery, carried on by cunning and fraud". Subsequent historians have repeated this charge of "highly authoritarian".

Yet to look closer at what critics and Shakers said and how they described the workings of power is to get a much stronger impression of decisions through communal consensus than of hierarchical dictation, and to find much less tyranny than mutuality of influence.

*I am in my senses, I'm candid and free, / There is no imposition practiced on me; / The  
terms of the gospel I well understand; / I'm bound to observe them, as witness my hand.*

The greatest source of denunciation of most of the apostates was the passional religious expression of Shakers, the dancing, singing, shouting and variety of "gifts" that came from ordinary members. And the tyranny of religious leaders toward them seems gentle, exhortatory and involved with upholding central principles of Shaker faith. God could roar in anger, but both theology and community dictated Shakers could not.

*I will roar, roar roar, I will roar, roar, roar, / Yea, I'll howl, howl, howl, in my fury, saith  
the Lord, / Because of the abominations in my Zion.*

In Lamson's case, which he presents honestly, he came to find the "gifts" in Mother Ann's Work blasphemous, and, in Shaker eyes, Lamson blasphemed them by publicly labelling them as "silliness". The elders encouraged him to be tolerant, or at least to be silent, but it seems improbable that they had to stimulate, as Lamson felt, coldness toward him by common Shakers whose spiritual gifts he insisted on deriding. The charges that Shakers were verbally harsh to those who left the faith were true, but could have been equally well made about any church's attitudes toward its apostates.

*All sense the awful situation, / Of souls that turn away, / They lose all hopes of their  
salvation, / For them, Believers cannot pray.*

The Shaker seceders' perception that the average Believers were dumb dupes of a manipulative hierarchy simply duplicated all anti-Mormonism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Protestantism.

As in any communal group, the maintenance of unity on basic principles had to take precedence over individual proclivity to the contrary. Anyone living in a village, small town, or suburb knows how communal concern can focus on pressuring to accepted standards of conventionality, manners, and morality. Such pressures were greater in a community whose survival depended on higher, or at least different, standards than the world around.

*With the saints I unite, and will do what is right, / For the pure obligation of love.*

The practice of personal confession of sin, in Shaker villages as in Oneida and in Catholicism, helped direct bonds and conduct, as did everyone's active responsibility, communal and personal, to watch and nudge gently to the good way. And elders and eldersses had some formal authority and much moral force, if they were respected.

*I still realize that my elders are nigh, / Their modest example I view, / By which I am furnished with power from on high, / The beastly old man to subdue.*

Yet they too were watched closely, especially by a community that emphasized so strongly humility, simplicity, the desirability of lowliness, and the danger of power.

Shaker communities were democracies not in an American system of competitive majoritarianism, but in Rousseau's sense of a general will that in fact united all in a sense of common objectives and caringness. It asked a lot of people, and a lot of people left, sometimes with hard feelings on both sides. But Shakers never, so far as the records show, ever tried to compel continued allegiance from anyone who wished to leave. To bend rather than break was the heart of their theology and song, as well as their political structure.

*I will bow and be simple / I will bow and be free / I will bow and be humble / Yea, bow like the willow tree.*

And they tended to act with fairness and generosity to those who left, though they faced a few hard wrangles over the money and the children of a handful who turned back to the world. There were internal arguments, too, and steady tension, but never did either the general society or any of the villages collapse or face long disruption in any kind of leadership crisis. Leaders were "elders" and when they died or lived beyond practical effectiveness, their community had others becoming more wisely "elderly" to take their place. In particular activities those who provided direction were called not leaders, but "Leads". Control was great, but grew from self and communal pressure rather than dictatorial authority.

*O Brethren ain't you happy, / O Sisters ain't you happy, / O Shakers ain't you happy, / sing on, dance on, ye followers of the lamb.*

Generally the system encouraged the warmth, affection, mutuality, and gentle

correction that characterized the Shaker ideal and enough of the reality so that their system survived two hundred years without real political crisis. This created an atmosphere that almost all of those who visited with them for long, even those who left in anger, found one of "genial warmth and social ease", even their strictness about celibacy led to steady "kind and tender attentions" between women, men, and children. The Shaker God though not His/Her people, could roar, but primarily He/She brought gifts, ordinary and extraordinary of love and union.

*We bow our faces to the floor / In thankfulness for heaven's store. / All pride and bondage we'll disown, / and strive to make these gifts our own. / O, loving friends....*

## Song

Without formal prayer, with only short and semi-spontaneous exhortations, with little stress on scriptural or other reading, music was the core of Shaker communal expression, in formal religious services, in spur-of-the-moment religious and pleasurable exercises, and in the daily and social activities of the villages.

*And let us dance in love and peace, / And sing that song which cannot cease...*

It was also the heart of the spiritual "gifts" Shakers received from above and shared with the faithful, though these took the form as well of drawings, letters, objects (crafted or seen only by the spiritual eye), divine poems, food and drink, dramatic rituals and even books.

The formal Sunday village services were the best described because for years, but especially in the 1820s and 1830s, the worldly attended these as spectators in large numbers. The reports were commonly not favorable, but fascinated, because here was an alternative faith, where the constraints that were not the world's were integrated with communal and personal intensity, joyousness and passion that was also not its.

*I love to see them stamp and grin / And curse the flesh, the seat of sin, / To all such souls I feel akin, / I will love them forever.*

The Shakers would enter quietly, while fashionable visitors like Fanny Appleton "awaited the performances as at a theatre". Appleton noted how quietly they sat, after hanging up their unfashionable bonnets, in "rigid repose like jointed dolls", "corpses" or "sphinxes", even the young girls lacking "the fidgetiness of youth". An elder offered the fashionable audience some "drawling scraps of morality", asking them to be civil and not stand on benches, and mentioned that the Shakers were the "salt of the earth" and that the worldly had at best a sense of old miracles, but not of God's continuing ones. Then the Shakers sang some "very gay airs, terribly shrill under the sounding board but sometimes sweeping through the gamut with great effect".

*I am a little bird, I sing complete, / Time the tune, with my little feet. / I can dance and I can hop, / I can shout and wake you up!*



Songs alternated with formal dances, with voices "chanting these wild airs" around a stationary group of singing people, very old and very young, while younger dancers skipped in double time.

*O how I love to skip and play /In innocent devotion. /I love, I love the pretty way, /I love to be in motion.*

"No bacchanal procession could be more unearthly, revolting, oppressive, bewildering", Appleton wrote; it was "fit only for the dancing hall of the lower regions".

*One-two-three steps – foot straight, at the turn /One-two-three steps, equal length, solid pats. / Strike the shuffle, little back – make the solid sound. /Keep the body right erect, and every joint unbound.*

Even more disturbing were the rituals of individual shaking and twirling, one woman "spinning like a dervish, twisting her arms around her head like snakes". For Appleton it was "the most frightful gesticulation ever perpetrated", especially performed "in such a dress". The soon-to-be Mrs. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was glad to escape such "pitiful delusions" to the fresh air and "maturer judgement" freed from this "witch's sabbath" that the fashionable had somehow been "forced to endure for so many hours".

Horace Greeley reacted similarly, if less superciliously to the musical service, performed not to stately or solemn church airs but "to a melody as lively as Yankee Doodle".

*Ho, ho, I've been drinking /Out of Mother's good wine lunkin. /Lo, it takes my every feeling, / Sets me turning, twisting, reeling. /See, it takes my head in earnest, /Hands and feet, too, at its service.*

Greeley thought he was witnessing "the battle ground of a war against all carnal impulses," but as "devotion became enthusiasm", a "wild, discordant frenzy" replaced "all apparent design or regulation," with men and women "whirling round and round, two or three in company, then each for him or herself, in all the attitudes of a decapitated hen, or an expiring top".

*To turn, turn, will be our delight, /Till turning, turning, we come down right*

The war against carnal impulses ended in expressive frenzy that both Appleton and Greeley handled in shocked metaphors of mechanism and mindlessness, so far did it go in physical and musical abandon beyond their fashionable gentility or liberal ideas.

*A good Believer loves to dance, /A good Believer loves to spring. /Then like a good Believer sing. /And make your heavenly music ring, /In songs of love and union.*

This was the Shaker faith: body and mind, once freed from the world's carnal goals, could be one with spirit, with song and rhythm providing union between self and each other and God. Sister Lilian Phelps, long after her body and the body of Believers was too old to use dances in this way, remembered how "perfect rhythmic body motions" tied to "a deep mental and religious fervor" brought fulfillment and

God to the Shakers. No prayer could be so intense as “when a soul combined the physical motions, the singing voice, and the dedicated heart, in giving praise and thanks to God”.

*For dancing is a sweet employ, / It fills the soul with heavenly joy./ It makes our love and union flow, / while round and round and round we go.*

Little wonder that nineteenth-century observers felt uneasy seeing faith made physical in the control and the abandon of these Americans dervishing with the divine.

Shakers called their dances laboring exercises to connect them both to the work which they saw as another form of their relation to God, and to suggest giving birth to the spiritual person that replaced the labor of giving carnal birth. The music and actions of these formal laboring services became more ritualistically varied during Mother Ann’s Work, so much so that the Shakers in this era closed their Sabbath meetings to the worldly public. A description from a Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, journal makes clear why. Meetings during the past four months, the writer explained, had been “very powerful – abundance of outward exercise, such as turning, shaking, speaking with tongues, . . . mighty stompings and rearings against the flesh, violent jerking and rolling and tumbling on the floor”, lasting hours “without a moment’s cessation”.

*Fall on the rock and be ye broken, / For my holy word is spoken. /Lie beneath the raging billows, / Twist and wave and bend like willows.*

When the service ended, Shaker neatness wasn’t in evidence: “The floor would be effectually strewed with caps, handkerchiefs, fillets, hair pegs, hair strings, pins, garters, shoes, and the like”.

Nor were such outpourings confined to Sabbath meetings. Most Shaker “families” or dwelling places would have a service during the week and on special occasions.

*Good evening, my friends, /And how are you tonight? / We’ll see you in meeting / With pleasing delight.*

On Christmas, 1837 the “West Family” in the Enfield, Connecticut village began a meeting at 2:00 p.m. that soon attracted people from both the Church and South Families by its “divine manifestations, . . . such as shaking, reeling, clapping of hands, speaking in an unknown tongue, kneeling with their faces to the floor . . . some rolling, some turning down on the floor, while some had new songs given them, with beautiful words”.

*I have found the true vine, and have tasted its wine / Which has made me to stagger and reel. / And to such it belongs, to break forth in songs / To express how delightful they feel.*

The exercises went on for eight hours, though ecstasy didn’t keep those with chores to do from slipping out long enough to do them. Elder Joshua Bennett from the South Family stayed overnight in the West House, during which time he had a vision of all the Believers in a group worshipping, more beautiful than anything he’d seen before: “They were dancing in complete harmony, and singing the most

melodious songs, without a jarring note among them". Then angels surrounded them, who "began to sing new songs in a quick manner", and soon "the angels learnt them a number of songs, which were very beautiful".

*O what pretty souls! All joined heart and hand, / Singing on their way. Angels guard the band*

As the angels flew off carrying the Gospel truth "to them that dwell on earth", they left a song, "O, What Pretty Souls", with Elder Joshua, the only one of the many "new songs" that came as gifts that 1837 Enfield Christmas to be surely given to us.

Such indoor meetings were only a part of the graffiti of song that festooned Shaker life. On a particularly pretty spring day, the Shakers of Lebanon, New York, went to the orchard "where the apple trees are all in a blow" and spent the day dancing and singing beneath their canopy of white against blue.

*Like pretty birds among the trees, / I will be all in motion, / And sing and skip upon the breeze / Of love and sweet devotion.*

On one May night, flooded with a full moon, Lebanon's Church family "felt a gift" to sing their way down the road to the East Family, who, hearing them or feeling a similar gift, met them halfway for a pleasant "feast of love" that lasted until eleven.

*For lo, it is a happy time, / A time of making merry, / Of heavenly comfort all divine, / And very cheering, very.*

Daniel Sizer heard the singing and dancing, followed the groups on their long moonlit revel, and soon became a Shaker, one of their best singers, and eventually an elder. Music very often converted people from the carnal to a spirited life, like the 23-year-old Sizer who, at the first notes of Shaker song, was touched "with an inexpressible something that filled me with awe", while the singers seemed "more like the inhabitants of heaven than of earth".

*We love to sing, and dance we will, / Because we surely, surely feel / It does our thankful spirits fill / With heavenly joy and pleasure.*

Hymnals were never used in Shaker services; they would have much encumbered the freedom of movement in which worship centered, and countered the sense that the sounds came not from artifact but reverberated between the Believers and God. Hence the melodies and words to the countless songs that bound them in union had to be learned, sometimes quickly in meetings, but more often in the interludes of quiet labor and leisure in Shaker life. The many Shaker songs related to the rhythms and actions of daily life – sewing, sowing, sweeping,

*Sweep, sweep and cleanse your floor. / Mother's standing at the door. / She'll give us good and precious wheat, / With which there is no chaff and cheat.*

reaping, chopping, scrubbing, baking,

*Welcome here, welcome here. / All be alive, and be of good cheer. / I've got a pie all baked complete / And pudding too that's very sweet.*

ironing – grew from the fact that during these activities songs were created, shared, learned, and adapted. Shaker Journals record that gift songs came while recipients were “splitting wood”, “cutting apples”, or “on the mountain blackberrying”. Mother Lucy’s Spirit brought one “to those that worked in the kitchen”.

*For I have love and so have you, / And we will mix it through and through.*

During Mother Ann’s Work, when Spirits showered music upon the Shakers, some complained, as did Isaac Youngs in 1848 at Lebanon, that learning these songs required “much patience and perseverance”. If Youngs’ estimate that 3,850 songs had come to Shakers in this one village during the decade, his comment certainly seems justified, as was his opinion that they had “enough to sing, without introducing a great many new ones for some time”. Yet Youngs noted how Mother Ann herself had come to a meeting one time to tell them that, though some felt “that the time taken to learn so many songs was lost time”, these “pretty songs” were “all sent to do good”.

*I have a little simple song / I sing it as I jog along, / Jog along, jog along. / One foot up the other down, / Tread the serpent to the ground, / This the way I jog along.*

She assured the community that she had “been by your side while you were writing and noting these songs, and I seen how you did it”, she dictating some of them and others coming from “other good Spirits”.

The music came to those who distilled it from the divine promptings in many circumstances. Abraham Perkins couldn’t explain how he came by “the songs innumerable . . . engraven on my soul” which he passed on to the Shakers after he joined them when twenty in 1827.

*Low, low! Low, low! In this pretty path I will go. / For here Mother leads me, and I know it is right. / I will sweep as I go, I will sweep as I go / For this Mother bids me, and it is my delight.*

He did remember that one came to him to soften a ten-mile hike home he had when the Believers forgot to send the wagon to the station for him when he returned from a trip.

*To live and walk in approbation / Before my God with conscience free, / Is my desire, my consolation, / And gives my soul true liberty.*

Elder James Smith, very ill with a cold and with a sense of spiritual coldness, was given a vision and a song to effect his recovery. His visions included that of the “adorned soul” after he saw one of the “Man of Sin in the Church”: one who questioned the Believer’s rites and dancing, and was irritated at their generosity to that age’s “welfare queens”, the “ungrateful and undeserving poor”. A voice ordered him to sing and when he protested he was too weak, the Spirit told him, “You are as large as a grasshopper, and it can sing”. So he tried, a song came to him, and he sang and coughed – till the cough subsided”.

*We’ll blow the trump as we march round, / While virgins dance to the heavenly sound. / Let Love and union here abound / Thro’ out Zion’s holy borders.*

This music that did ungender discord within the community was sometimes a joint effort. Eunice Wyeth wrote poems out of the sadness of her hard life, especially the decision of the Shaker elders that she should go back to the world to live with her crippled daughter and husband, as he demanded when he seceded from the community. The elders also asked her not to take home copies of Believer songs, because her oldest daughter used them at times to mock the faith. To compensate for this loss, Wyeth herself became "inspired with a poetic spirit", and wrote, often copying golden letters she saw shining in a darkened room, 600 songs to share with Believers when she could return for a service. Some of these songs attacked, with vernacular vigor, those who left the faith, such as the carnal family Wyeth spent her life serving.

*Let them take to their heels and see how it feels / To roam in the devil's broad way. / Let them sell their birthright, for carnal delight / We want no such creatures to stay.*

In 1808 her husband, the hard-drinking Joseph, renewed his faith, but the Shaker elders took seventeen years to renew their faith in him. Wyeth's song that became most popular, "The Humble Heart", she wrote in 1820, with Elder Thomas Hammond, Jr. giving the music, a gift of both the spirit and an old ballad.

*Tall cedars bow before the wind, / The tempest breaks the oaks, / While slender vines will bow and bend / And rise beneath the shock.*

Her beloved niece and sister Believer, Eunice Bathrick, provided the music for Wyeth's happiest songs, written when she, now 69, returned in 1825 to the Shaker village after her hard life in the carnal world and creative one in that of the spirit, to spend her final five years at "home", free at last in the love of "Mother's golden chain".

*Lovely Parents, lovely children / Joined in Union's lovely band, / Lovely love from Heaven descending, / In the love of God they stand.*

Such collaborations must have been common and in fact often communal, in a world where no one wrote or owned the music they heard. Songs existed simply as pretty blessings that Shakers had been given and wanted to share, part of a revelation that had no final form, but that was being always finely formed.

*I want to be like the willow, bending at every breeze / Not like the stubborn oak trees, let me not be like these / And like our Heavenly Parents so, pure and undefiled, / That I in Mother's kingdom may be a humble child.*

Mother Ann herself told Lebanon's Shakers about their songs that she hoped they would "improve them all". But sometimes the particular human collaboration was clear. A letter from Union Village, Ohio, told how 18-year-old Genny Badget had a song brought by an Elder Sister in a vision who sang it to her until she learned it. The next morning the Spirit sister returned with a crowd of other Believers to teach Badget "the other two verses". This vision group sang the song for Badget, but told her to take the words to a "goodly young man" in the village, Maurice Thomas, for music. When Badget worried about the propriety of this, the spirit of Elder Sister insisted, repeating thrice: "It is mine, and it is thine".

*Go off, stay away, / Oh, you old deceiver. / Now from you I will be free / And be a good Believer.*

So Badget did as she was instructed, and, when Thomas then sang the song just as she had heard it in her vision, Badget “burst into tears” of joy at this proof of the song’s spiritual composition.

“It is mine, and it is thine” was the non-ownership heart of Shaker sharing that underlay their community property, their communal family, and their common music. Since all that was good came from outside individuals and was meant for all others, there was no self-consciousness about origins, or originality, or intellectual property or musical proprieties.

*Come old and young, come great and small / There’s love and union free for all. / And everyone that will obey / Has the right to dance and play.*

The principle of non-ownership made Shakerism, in Thomas Merton’s words “attuned to the music intoned in each being”. What Shakers had heard and were hearing wove in their hearts and minds freely with what they believed, so that, in a modern psychological sense as in their spiritual one, the songs were gifts that wrote themselves from their experiences, memories, and dreams. Hence Eunice Bathrick lived listening “to delightful music, which seemed to flood the air high above my head”, in which voices joined with bells “of different sizes and tones, but in perfect harmony”. Listening to this spiritual musack that hovered over her day’s work, Bathrick felt her soul “filled with music”, so that she “sat at twilight”, returning to the Spirits who had given her so much melody,

*Love has formed the New Creation, / Breathing life from breath to breath, / Love has brought our restoration, / Love completes the day of rest.*

“one new song after another till they seemingly numbered hundreds, all joined together like links in a chain”. Freed from all sense of barrier between “my song” and thine or theirs, probably thousands of Shakers wrote probably hundreds of thousands of songs each linked in the easy chain of the world’s and Mother’s melody.

*O how lovely is simplicity! It’s a treasure and a blessing! / O lovely simplicity, O how pretty, O how pretty!*

Shaker music was distinctive in many ways. Like most folk and unlike most church music, it was not harmonic but monophonic. No instruments were used so the wordless music was hummed or sometimes “played” by the voice (or percussive feet and fists) in imitation of instruments.

*I have a little drum that Mother gave to me, / The prettiest little drum you ever did see. / I’ll drum night and day, I’ll drum night and day, / To call volunteers to fight sin away.*

Even more than most folk music, it didn’t balk at irregularities, so that shifts in beat and slides between notes were common. Those who wrote it down suggested how hard it was at times to put it precisely in the formulas of established notation. Isaac Youngs, who amid a myriad of Shaker tasks, noted many songs, found them often

"very difficult to time", despaired at the variations singers kept introducing, and puzzled over how to fit "long groups of notes to one syllable".

*As long as working is the cry / How can I e'er find time to die? / Must I be sick to get away? / That is harder yet, I say.*

Songs were also commonly acted, so that gesture and dance often modified or provided counterpoint to the music. To watch Sister Mildred Barker "gesture" "Mother's Tongue" shake her head, stamp her foot, clench her fists on the words "crossed" and "crabbed" and, more sharply, on "shunned" and "ugly" and to cross her arms over her breast and bow on "snugly" is to hear the music differently. So would it be to see Sister Sadie Neale turning in "Simple Gifts" and accompanying the last three words with vigorous stomps to "come down right". Similarly the gesture of scowling and then tearing away the vertical crease of the brow gave life to one of the many attacks on the Great I.

*The devil in walking the earth to and fro / He stamped the whole human race; / This awful impression Believers do know, / Great I in the front of the face.*

Yet the clear way in which Shaker music retained a certain developmental openness contributed to its special and unitary qualities. And it sang a distinct social vision.

Shaker song was free to borrow as the spirit moved, but chose much less influences from the corpus of evangelical music of the eighteenth century that fed both the black and white spiritual traditional, than from the worldly folk airs of the eighteenth century: jigs, dances, marching songs, folk ballads and comic airs.

*We'll take the choicest of their songs / Which to the Church of God belongs / And recompense them for their wrongs, / In singing their destruction.*

Perhaps a half dozen tunes were borrowed or adapted from the evangelical repertory, and an occasional Shaker tune used the response and repetition of the black spirituals. Yet Shakers primarily "plundered balladry" for their hymns; perhaps no tune had greater influence on their music than Yankee Doodle.

*Drink ye of Mothers wine, drink, drink, drink ye freely. / Drink ye of Mother's wine, it will make you limber.*

Apostate Mary Dyer professed shock that it, with "Over the River to Charley" and other "merry love songs" were so important to Shaker worship. British Lieutenant A.M. Maxwell decided that, if the Shaker doctrine were true, churches should give up their solemn prayers and heavy hymns for "singing merry songs and dancing Scotch reels".

*Leap and shout, ye living building, / Christ is in his glory come. / Cast your eyes on Mother's children, / See what glory fills the room.*

During the Shaker service he heard clear echoes of a "heart-stirring old English hunting song", "Chevy Chase", "Nancy Dawson", "The Devil Among the Tailors", and, "Moll in the Wad".

The unity of Shaker life, with a world constructed to fit their faith, caused them to create not a separate sphere of the elevated spiritual, but to adapt to the Spirit the world's melodies.

*If it makes you reel around, / If it makes you fall down, / If it lays you on the floor, / Rise and drink a little more!*

The serious and the light, the high and the everyday, the transcendent and the comic, segregated in the life and ideology of the outer world and its churches, became one in the Shaker village.

This gave Shaker music its special flavor: intensely spiritual, but also full of liveliness, fast tempos, a sweet comfortableness, humor, vernacular and even slangy language, everyday events and activities spiritualized, warm love and salty observation.

*Wake up, stir about, be more spry and nimble, / Brush off this nasty Pride that binds Mother's children.*

Just as their theology tended to humanize Christ, so their songs tended to tie the divine to the human, or perhaps elevate the everyday to the spiritual. One can see this in how the songs take the sublime imagery of traditional religion and turn it into the vitally vernacular: the sacrificial lamb becoming the frisking one or Christ's vine becoming a vineyard in need of pruning and preparing, in each case the image usually related to the Deity now being applied to the laity.

*O here's a beautiful, spreading vine / My little ones' twill cover / And all who will be truly mine / Must neath its branches hover.*

The mysticism of their music lies not in abstraction but in the infiltration of the most commonplace of activities, scrubbing a floor or cutting a crop, with intense spiritual significance.

*Bow down low, bow down low, / Wash, wash, clean, clean, clean, clean, / Scour and scrub, scour and scrub, / From the floor the stains of sin.*

Whether warring on the carnal world or rejoicing in their own, Shakers did so with sense that the unpretentiously human is the truly divine.

The central words and images of Shaker song stress how divine everything becomes if divested of its distorting warp of egoism. To be low, to be humble, to be simple, to bow and bend, to be limber, is to be free from the starch of self-importance so that one can truly love and live. The vital religious feeling is not that of the "mountain", the transcendent height, but that of the valley, the shelteringly fruitful place of easy habitation.

*I want to gather down, down in the valley / Where the gifts of God are found. They are for the lowly.*

One doesn't rear portentous power structures on the rock, but falls upon it, because religious exaltation comes not in rising above the ordinary, but in falling into union with the commonplace. Not the towering oak of paternalist Protestantism, but the



bending willow or the creeping vine was the botanical emblem of a good Believer.

*Shall I stand like the oak unbending, / When all around me in motion is set, / Or shall I be like the supple willow / rather than the tall tree standing erect?*

The language of Shaker song reflects commitment to “turning” and non-pretension. “Little” and “low” and “humble” are the great honorifics and “down” or “around” are the good directions.

*Lay me low, lay me low, lay me low, low / Where Mother can find me, where Mother can own me, / Where Mother can bless me.*

No word is used more to suggest the perfect in Shaker song than the colloquial “pretty”, wholly unused in the hymns of other faiths which viewed the religious as rising above, rather than living in, the commonplace. Occasionally Shakers used the conventional “beautiful”, and often “lovely”, although lovely was tied intricately to its root in love, suggesting its life in their everyday emotion.

*Love repays the lovely lover, / And in the lovely ranks above. / Lovely love shall live forever, / Loving lovely loved love.*

But “pretty” is much more emphasized, clearly the best emblem of Shakers determination to find the highest spiritual truths in the most diminutive child-like and casual terms. The Good Parents in Heaven wanted simply happy children. Other ordinary phrases, not found in other hymns, took on spiritual life in Shaker songs: ugly, snugly, slug, pinch’d up, slick, a-plenty, a good deal, squirming, making merry, reeling, ketch it, snuffles, grin.

There was also a strong vein of humor in the Shaker hymns, rough folk humor at their pinched-up opponents, and at their own need to steadily keep limber, to be willing to reel toward union, to shake out the “starch and stiffening” of egoism. Theirs was a faith that led toward laughter, even when fighting the devil, not to cajole a proper audience toward considering higher truth, but as itself a climactic music of union with others, Mother and God.

*I hate the Old Deceiver / He is an unbeliever*

ooo

*And when he comes round / I will tell him, leave the ground, / Or the first he will know, / He ‘ll receive a heavy blow.*

Laughter was the heart’s reeling toward truth, and many Shaker hymns are rollicking in that direction.

While laughter rang in many Shaker songs, so spiritual drunkenness also flourished. “Mother’s wine” was a heady vintage, making Shakers, every bit as much as Emily Dickinson, devoted “debauchees” and “tipplers”.

*Oho Oho! I love Mother’s wine. / Oho Oho! I’ll drink every time.*

Several Shaker songs were drinking songs, as vigorous as any found in the folk or popular or operatic repertoires.

*By a bountiful use of this heavenly juice, / I forget all my sorrows and woes. / Give me plenty of this, I want no other bliss, / And I care not much how the world goes, goes, goes.*

Such music showed how Shakers, who became temperance people at about the same time as other religious Americans, found in their spirited play land music perfect translation of the old carnal pleasures, without their limitations in pain and power. Shaker "spirits" did two things that ordinary alcohol performed: allowed a sense of unencumbered rousing joy in part by making the carnal body reel, twist, and topple.

*Lo, lo this wine of mother's makes both bone and muscle quiver. / Cramp and stiff, it will dissolve them, / Bend you down, again 'twill straighten. / Try it, try it, drink it hearty. It will give you joints aplenty.*

Mother's wine overcame worldly stiffness and pretension, allowing real inebriation of the senses and human bonding. And the hangover bore signs of the positive experience rather than its opposite.

The strongly joyous quality of the Shaker vision shows up well in their treatment of the natural disasters of life. The huge earthquake of 1811 was for many Americans, as Cotton Mather had put it much earlier, "most moving proof of God's power". Shakers felt the same way, but for them too it was an emblem of their dance, of God's shaking the world out of its stiff carnal pretensions to self-solidity.

*When his power is to be proved / to convince the stupid soul, / If he says, "O, earth be moved". / "Lo, it rocks from pole to pole".*

ooo

*Fields and forests fall to dancing, / Dwelling houses crack with joy.*

Disaster like death could be cheerfully accepted because it was part of the shaking toward a better life and world.

*Ye joyful mountains skip like rams / While Edom melts away; / And all the little hills like lambs / shall clap their hands and play!*

Shaker mysticism was intense, but what most distinguished it was its rootedness in the cheerful spiritualizing of everyday things and thoughts and activities. This mysticism of the mundane was almost the opposite of the kind that found truth in uncommon visions or numbers or symbols or through a process of intense weaning away from the things of the world. "The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair", noted Trappist monk Thomas Merton, "is due to the fact that it was made by someone capable of believing that an angel might come and sit upon it", and in fact that "their furniture was designed by angels".

*May angels attend our devotions tonight / And freely assist us to worship aright.*

Indeed angels did often, the historical records show, sit upon them to dictate songs or to transcribe letters from those who had died or to guide the human hand in vision drawings. The many Spirits with whom Shakers dwelt – from God, prophets

and angels through Father William, Napoleon, the little shepherdess and the Eskimos – sat, swept, chatted, joked, especially sang and danced. George Washington once brought a gift of brooms, and at another time sang in tongues.

*Via lo via le via le er lan de / via lo via le via lo ra lorum.*

They were just folks, though perfectly pretty ones.

The outpouring of spiritual gifts during the revival of Mother Ann's Work was only an intensification of the ordinary processes of Shaker life, a renewal of the dramatic expressiveness of Mother Ann's own day and of the spiritual vivacity of the mid-days of Mother Lucy, when Shakers shared and benefitted from the evangelical revival that swept the west. The inspiration for Mother Ann's Work began among the girls and young women, and remained slightly centered there.

*How happy pretty angels are, O, how happy.*

Good Spirit Sister Rachel gave to teen-aged Sally Van Vike, "uncommonly bashful" and with "but little gift in singing", seventeen songs in as many nights.

*Love, love is pretty, flowing from our Mother, / Love, love is pretty flowing from the fountain, / Low, low, low.*

In Union Village, Vincy McNemar, the daughter of Richard who brought so much music to the Shakers of the early western villages, fell on the floor one evening in 1838 "sung a beautiful new song" and then two others. When she was taken to another room to rest, she sang another song – and then "was able to go home". Young Elleyet Gibbs went into a trance for three hours, producing "a number of beautiful songs",

*Love, love, O – I love, love, love, O – / I love, love, heavenly love, O yes 'tis' –*

two of them coming from Father William (Ann Lee's brother) and also making marches which she "drummed with her fists on her knees, and at the same time with her feet on the floor as no mortal could do without supernatural power".

Some historians have argued that the Shaker elders were threatened by and resisted or manipulated these visions by the group's youngest Believers, but the evidence points much more in a welcoming direction. Elder Rufus not only recorded Gibb's trance songs and drumming, but pointed out how such gifts helped the faith of the "weak and wavering", and removed "everyone's doubts."

*And all our kind elders, how pleasant they feel. / Their cry is be good, what can equal their zeal?*

It was the official journals of the village societies that recorded most of the Spirit's hyperactivism in these years. A journal from Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, suggested the rich rituals where Spirits led the Shakers in mystic exercises sweetly linking the heavens with the here-and-now. After a few songs, the Angel Love "made his appearance through one of the inspired". He'd brought wings full of heavenly treasure he wanted to share as soon as the Believers would shake off everything

“contrary to Love’s blessing”. So the Shakers shook away, until the Angel Love wanted to sing with them “in praise and Thanksgiving to our Eternal Parents, and all joined him in “labouring a few songs with considerable life and liberty”.

*I’ll not be bound by any man / Nor yet by woman’s fancies. / I am a merry, merry soul / I’m lively in the dances.*

Then another “messenger” brought in the Angel of Light to shower “from his wings balls of light and liberty for us to gather” and “a ball of our Heavenly Savior’s love” especially for “E. Br. to burst for us to gather”, and the Shakers danced around “with thankfulness” to catch the bouncing balls of light and liberty they’d been given.

*I’ve got some little balls of simplicity, / My blessed father James did give them unto me, / O, will you have some, they will make you free.*

Next came former eldress “Mother Hannah with many pretty angels”, who showered down “heavenly fruits” for a gathering and eating dance.

*See the angels all around us / Pouring out their sweetest love – / Bless the Lord, I’m happy.*

As often happened, Mother Hannah showed her special ties to Divine Wisdom by close attention to gifts that met communal and personal needs. She’d thoughtfully filled the baskets of all youths with roses to give to “their aged brethren and sisters”, which were doubtless given and received with love. Then Hannah handed Eliza Gregory “a bush filled with little white Doves for her to shake for all to gather in remembrance of our ever blessed Mother Ann”. Gregory danced, shaking her gift bush, and the Believers followed cooing with the doves of Mother Ann’s blessing.

*Here is love love love / From Mother’s little dove.*

Then the Angel of Light “scattered bright bands of love and union for us to bind each other to gather” and the Shakers danced among one another with these ribbons so “that we might be bound in cords of sweet union never to be broken”. So concluded one 1846 Pleasant Hill meeting where everyone “continued to receive good”

*Here’s some pretty little baskets filled with love, / And many precious treasures, says Mother’s little dove,*

all occurring, the journal precisely noted, in “one hour lacking five minutes”.

Of course, Shakers were far from fools and knew that such ecstatic gifts could be self-induced or evilly-directed. Some people, like John Allen, left the community because people doubted the purity of their visions and some left because they doubted the purity of those of others. David Lamson left. He’d come from the secular commune at Hopedale because he found among the Shakers the truly sharing spirit that he missed in both the outer world and in the Hopedale alternative. Lamson left to write an accurate description of Shaker “gifts” that he’d decided were not necessarily showered from above and that offended his intellect.

*Come, come, who will be a fool? / I will be a fool –*

Sadder was the leaving of long-time Shaker Hervey Elkins. He'd had his own "gift", though initially he'd resisted the Spirits' movements in his village, a "cup of solemnity". Taking it with "a flood of tears, shed for joy and gladness", he drank deeply with others in "a halo of heavenly glory".

*Don't be dry ... Don't be dry- / Now's the time to gather. / Come and drink – Come and drink / Drink and live forever.*

This gave him for two years his "highest enjoyments and pleasures" in the "inward contemplation of the beauty, love, and holiness of God" and an ecstatic sense of living "in the hollow of His hand", but he slowly came to feel that the continuing gifts didn't suit the seriousness of his more conventional religious expectations and experiences, and duped simpler Shakers.

*Since my sins I confessed, some are greatly distressed / And lament how deluded I be. / But at every fresh draught, I have heartily laughed / At their crocodile weeping for me.*

Most Shakers cared little for Lamson's rationalism and defined their faith in less elevated abstractions than Elkins. Shakers found less disturbing what the more thoughtful of them knew was the mixture of the personal and divine in these manifestations, because their Spirits and their persons worked in such intimate union. When people were a bit bad, bad spirits would have their say, and, when people were perfecting, their spirits and those of Divine Power and Holy Wisdom and Jesus and Mother Ann, or any other dead Shakers or George Washington or Pope Leo or Xerxes might happily collaborate.

*O the simple gifts of God, / They're flowing like an ocean, / And I will strive with all my might / To gather in my Portion.*

Eunice Bathrick who not only made music but was a medium for the letters from Spirits that came to Shakers in these years, worried about how her ideas and those of the dictating Spirit, or of conflicting dictating Spirits, intermingled, but for most it didn't matter much so long as many Believers "continued to receive good" from the union.

Shaker humor also mediated puzzlement between mystic message and communal need. David Lamson saw "hypocrisy" and "manipulation" in a Hancock, Massachusetts, elder's "vision" to control a gift in one meeting, but he failed to plumb how much psychological acumen accompanied the Shaker spirit. Young John Valin had a "gift" of a bowl of manna with one spoon in it to which he invited all to come and eat "of love and union".

*Lord give me thy living bread / On manna may my soul be fed.*

The Believers came and found it tasty, but it was a slow and somewhat boring process with so many people and but one spoon. So the elder had his vision that the precious bowl had lots of spoons, and the Shakers could dance up rather than line up for their manna.

*I love, I love the gifts of God, / I love to be partaker. / And I will labor day and night / To be an honest Shaker.*

Shakerism lasted so long in part because of this “know how:” They wanted not just mystic joy and community, but ones that worked. And this involved caring about others enough to understand how to contribute, and they worked to shape steadily as well as share truly the good world that they made together. The elder at Hancock was moved by precisely the same “gift” of Divine Wisdom to quicken, to keep filled with life, the ritual, that had led the anonymous Pleasant Hill Shaker who brought Mother Hannah’s spirit to encourage the young to dance roses to the elderly.

*Here take this lovely flower thy Mother sent to thee, / Cull’d from her lovely bower of true simplicity.*

Shaker union bore strong ties to all who had gone before as well as to each other. Divine Power and Holy Wisdom, bands of angels, the revealing Son and Daughter, deceased Shakers (prominent and obscure), and Biblical prophets and characters brought gifts to Shakers in these years,

*A cup of rejoicing my Mother gave me / 'Tis full to the brim, 'tis full to the brim / Sure these are the waters Ezekiel did see, Sure these are..., / Wherein we can swim.*

but also all the historical characters individuals admired: Benjamin Franklin, William Penn, Pope Leo, St. Patrick, Mohammed, Tecumseh, Red Hawk, Xerxes, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Queen Charlotte, Lafayette, and many others. It was fitting that such Spirits gave gifts to the Shakers, because Mother Ann had brought her truth to them in the Spirit world, for which they were appropriately grateful.

*Ye lone sons of misfortune, come hither / Where joys bloom, and never shall wither, / where faith blinds all peop/e together, / In firm love to the sovereign I Am.*

Isaac Watts, who’d written hymns himself, came back to reveal how Mother Ann had ended his uneasy wandering among the Spirits to show him the true direction; he now brought musical “gifts” to the Shakers, his music now attuned to their theology. Like the Mormons, Shakers believed in a loving God generous to all – and worked out a theology of allowing all in whom could be glimpsed any worth, and who could be remembered, His/Her grace, although death had long preceded conversion.

*Our Father’s hands so liberal are / He wants his children all to share / And to partake this heavenly fare, / Prepared by our Mother.*

It only seemed fair: a Divine Power and Holy Wisdom so ready to shower blessings on Eunice Wyeth and Richard McNemar would surely arrange to do no less for Mohammed and Benjamin Franklin and William Henry Harrison.

Shakers were no real respecters of position, however, and as prettily welcomed into their faith Spirits of the oppressed as of the powerful. Hence Mother Ann and Jesus and others worked in the Spirit world to bring the truth to every group of people the Shakers knew about: Chinese, Ethiops, Persians, Turks, Patagonians,

Cossacks, Hottentots, Arabs, Madagascarians. And Spirit representatives of these people, pleased to have found love and union with the Shakers, came to visit those still living with "gifts" of song or ceremony related to Shaker visions of their culture. The Shakers, literalist Walt Whitmans, were "large and contained multitudes".

*More life and zeal, more love and union / Then good spirits will assemble / And join us in communion.*

And their disappointment when it became clear that most in the living world were not going to join them in their snug Shaker villages turned to universal Spirit inclusiveness. Shakers believed, as others have suspected, that death much weakened the counterpull toward carnal self-conceit and self-seeking.

Blacks were liberally included as gift-givers of the Spirit; one Shaker song manuscript claims that it was an African American Spirit who presented the Shakers with what was to become their most famous song, "Simple Gifts".

*For freedom of the spirit is my motto you'll see / and with this every motion shall fully agree / Now in limber zeal, I will twist and reel / and show how I feel full of Mother's love.*

But the most frequent and dramatic of Spirit visitors during Mother Ann's Work were Native Americans. They came by the tribeful to teach Shakers the excitement of their old warring habits (now safely integrated to the Shaker battle against human pride), their chants and dances, and rituals like smoking the peace pipe.

*Me can step de tune complete, / De gospel shoes be on my feet.*

They also gave the Shakers many gifts of song, loving and lovely like most Shaker music, if expressed in a dialect peculiar to Native Americans who had discovered the truth of Mother Ann's revelation.

*Wake up e wake up an dant one toe / Wake up e wake up, and let de debil go / O take limber teps and make fly / All dat belong to great big I.*

Advanced scholarship would suggest that Shaker interaction with these tribal Spirits was neither anthropologically nor politically correct.

*Me love me hills and mountains / Me love me pleasant groves / Me love to ramble round / As me feel, as me choose.*

Yet one might reasonably ask: is such child-like appreciation of strange cultures, where the simplicity, freedom and equality found in Indian Spirits represented the Shakers, highest ideals, less acceptable to Indian Spirits and Great Spirit, than self-righteous and self-importantly inconsequential scholarly exposures of "genocide"?

Scottish and other Spirits who brought their dialect to Shaker song sounded notes much like the blacks and Indians.

*I'm a scotch bonnie wee one, my mither so gude / Has sent ye le la some sa fane and fude. / 'Tis a toch and a tether, fra the bonny highland heather. / Will ye hae it, will you hae it? It will do ye mickle gude.*

Hardest to learn were the songs given by Spirits in tongues that were not recognizably English. Shakers sometimes grumbled – like American scholars at European conferences – that it was unreasonable to expect them to memorize all these hard words, but Mother Ann came back to explain to them that they had to welcome and treat respectfully all the beautiful Spirits that had not yet learned Mother’s tongue. While living, Ann Lee had sung often in tongues, and the tradition continued. Shakers must have appreciated the shortness of a Turkish song,

*I ole zello vo ole villow / I ole zello vi ole volin.*

and been pleased that the “villow” bore so much similarity to their beloved willow. Music was a universal language, and “little birds of Paradise” sang remarkably like the Chinese to the Shakers, with the letter v prominent in most Spirit tongues. There was carnal skepticism about the accuracy of this spiritual linguistics, of course. When some Shakers tried to prove their gifts to Timothy Dwight by speaking in tongues, Dwight tartly suggested that the gift was gibberish representing no real language, and offered to be impressed if they would summon a Spirit to speak through them in good Latin or French. This was impossible at the moment because, Shaker David Meachem explained, the gifts were presently being given by Hottentots.

*E ne me ne mo del e / Sanc to luro lu ral / ee*

The Shakers were pleased to learn that Dwight, for all his education and carnal pride, could not authoritatively say the tongue was not that of the Hottentots.

Of course, Shakers knew that their own spirits were entangled with those of the distant peoples who spoke in tongues to and through them.

*Acren vacren waney vo, Mother’s love is even so / Uni ene ine va, Now in love we’ll dance and play.*

If languages grew a bit intermixed, this was surely the way of loving union. And to reject the power of the world, they and other Pencostals knew, was to reject the power of its words as well. To speak in tongues was to say nay most effectively to the structuring of reality Shakers were rejecting in order to find the “place just right”, to fight the power of the world and its words, which people like Dwight mildly or Charles Dickens nastily, used against the Shaker’s marching to a different drummer.

*Tho’ I could speak all human tongues / And those of the angelic throngs / And heaven and earth compass, / without the gift of charity, / A tinkling symbol I should be / Or like the sounding brass.*

The Shakers dreamed the world newly writ, with the power of naming restored to God and the power of words to the least literate.

To listen closely to Shaker songs is to hear how intricately the faith developed its special egalitarianism of love and union. None are typical, and almost all deserve close analysis, but two, one famous and one neglected, reveal as well as any the sweetness of the spiritual and social vision to which Shaker music gave voice.

*Who will bow and bend like a willow, / Who will turn and twist and reel / In the gale of simple freedom, / From the bower of union flowing .*



The first stanza set up the invitation to Shaker truth in the song: who will be as flexible as a willow, as willing to drunkenly dance as its branches and leaves in "the gale of simple freedom", simplicity and liberty joined terms that promise a joy that flows from the bower of being able to love and belong if one escapes stiff egoism.

*Who will drink the wine of power, / Dropping down like a shower, / Pride and bondage all forgetting, / Mother's wine is freely working.*

The second stanza attaches to the natural gale of the first one the spiritual intoxication that allows humans the bending and fluttering qualities of the willow, again if the world's values of pride, which provides its own bondage and creates others' bondage, is left behind. Mother's "wine of power" does not puff up but drops "down like a shower", falling on all equally, working to permit escape from the prison of competitive self-assertion.

*Oh ho! I will have it, / I will bow and bend to get it, / I'll be reeling, turning, twisting, / Shake out all the starch and stiff'ning!*

The final stanza is the Shaker's response to this invitation Divine Wisdom gave to all. The "Oh ho! I will have it" is the colloquially enthusiastic response to the one possession, love and union, for which all other things that possess the carnal are a world well lost. For this one gladly bows and bends and drunkenly staggers, shaking out or away, as one could, all the world's "starch and stiffening", the things that the carnal ironed into their clothes to make them proper and respectable and important and, physically and spiritually, miserably constrained. For these celibates, stiff pride and potency in all its forms was the enemy.

*A companion to stiff I will not be, / I'll drive you off, I will be free.*

The message is much the same in the best known Shaker song. "Simple Gifts" has taken its place within American popular and classical music, its melody writing in people's hearts the often uncoded message of its words.

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, / 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, / And when we find ourselves in the place just right, / 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

The gift, what really matters, is, again, to be both simple and free, truly at liberty from the rites of pretension and power that bind others. And this leads to the gift of wholeness and happiness, of sensing one's life and all life are part of a loving order. This pretty place involves not striving up, but coming down, not advancing to the superior position where most people want to be, but to the low one where one finds one's own will wholly in accord with the ought of Holy Wisdom. And this "place just right", the colloquial comfortableness of the phrase suggesting its human cosiness, will be not at the top but in the valley where human love and pleasure can live uncontaminated by selfseeking.

*When true simplicity is gain'd, / To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd, / To turn, turn will be our delight, / Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

There pretty simplicity is found and the ability happily to bow and bend to all others and things because all belongs to all. There turning not marching upward, not getting ahead – is the source of joy, and this swirling union in ecstatic step with others, allows humans to come round right, because they have not pushed forward from union with their own – and others’ – better small i.

Shakers danced and played and laughed and sang to their mundanely mystic music to expel carnal pride, to shake out all the starch and stiffening, to revel in the gale of rollicking freedom that came from escaping the bondage of egoism.

*Be joyful, be joyful / For Old Ugly is going. / Good riddance, good riddance, / Good riddance, we say, / And don't you never come here again.*

Their song, like their social structure, taught that to bow, to bend, to reel, to turn, to fall upon the rock and floor, to be broken, to be low and limber was to let one live in the village and the “valley of love and delight” of human union and creativity, safely free of the Great I who depended for his uneasy bloated life on the sorry rights and rites of property, propriety and human proprietorship.

*Come brethren and sisters, pull low and pull high / Pull away with a free heart and hand; / O pull away, pull away, pull down great I, / Then we who are little may stand –*

The American world listened intently, if uneasily, to the music of Shaker lives and community, because Shakers bore such practical testimony to one half of the American ideal, that of community caringness and mutual helpfulness, of simple integrity and generosity of heart and mind, of spirited creativity unleashed from unpretentious people.

*Mother's love is like an ocean, / Mother's love will make me free. / Mother's love it is so wholesome, / I can skip and dance and play.*

This “equality of respect and affection” was different from “equality of opportunity” that pretended an equal starting point and posited an on-going race toward an end point seldom reached, where the rabbit of more would suddenly become the feast of enough. The Shaker goal was equally distant from that “equality of result” invented by conservative thinkers to make coarse diatribe of the richest dilemmas of American life. The Shaker “place just right” required much “equality of condition” and a giving rather than an aggrandizing ethic so that “equality of opportunity” would encourage the development of individuals’ special humane and spiritual work and gifts rather than entail steady pursuit of more personal cash, things, and power, that solid but shoddy happiness money can best buy. Shakers were true to what Thomas Merton called “the original American vocation to be a new world of almost infinite hope, a paradise of refuge, security, peace and productivity” where “the kingdom of God would become an earthly reality”.

*This lone vale is afar from contention, / Where no soul may dream of dissension; / No dark wiles of evil invention, / Can find out this valley of peace.*

Clearly this was the path not generally taken in the United States, which was one reason for the intensity of its attraction. It remained close to heart of the

nineteenth-century nation's sentimental and genteel traditions of "Old Oaken Buckets" and "Home, Sweet Homes" and latchkeys always out, in those remembered or invented good old days and homes and communities where kindly generosity and decent values had reigned – until just before the present generation.

*Midst a world fill'd with sorrow, vice, folly & crime, / And with mis'ry replete in each nation & clime, / How sweet to the soul that in sorrow did roam, / To find with believers a sweet tranquil home. / Home, home, Sweet, Sweet home / There's no place on earth like a true Shaker home.*

Doubtless like all ideals, this one leavened the competitive determination to get more for me of the "equality of opportunity" that pushed toward striving to best one's neighbor and prove one's superiority, at worst under the moral guise that those who got, deserved – and should get more – and those who failed to get deserved that, too. The general economic success of a nation dedicated to monetary competitiveness under the rubric of "equality of opportunity" made this alternative communal ideal of "equality of respect" a pleasant and readily affordable sentimental luxury.

What Americans found disturbing was that the Shakers should make it real, make equality in its richest sense pay, and at the same time make pies and chairs and barns and crops and dramas and songs whose creativity and utility the self-complacent and self-competitive carnal world couldn't match.

*Let's turn around and shake off, and break away the bands, / Till we are free and simple enough to shake hands, / And now we'll unite in the dance and the song, / Come turn away from evil and all that is wrong. / Then O how happy we'll be / When from all evil we're perfectly free.*

ooo

### **A Note on Sources**

(If anyone wishes a fully annotated copy of the essay, I would be glad to provide it: Department of History, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742)

### **Primary Sources**

The "testimonies" of early Shakers, collected 1810 to 1822, are widely used here. While having the problems tied to long memory and church editing, they are honest, deeply felt, and by far the best source available for the church's early years. For the nineteenth century, letters, diaries, memoirs and communal journals are extant in manuscript form, most richly in the Western Reserve Historical Society (Cleveland). I also used the Shaker manuscripts at the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library. Beside the Testimonies, the most useful publications are the early theological/historical works by Joseph Meacham, Richard McNemar, Ben-

jamin Youngs, Seth Wells and Calvin Green (between 1807-1825) and the 1840's "spirit" works of Philemon Stewart and Paulina Bates. The Shakers in these years also published two song collections, *Millennial Praises* (1813) and *A Selection of Hymns and Poems for Use of Believers* (1833).

Valuable material also comes from the published works of apostates, particularly those whose hostility does not decrease honesty such as Thomas Brown (1812), David Lamson (1848) and Hervey Elkins (1853). Even the angrier diatribes contain important material: Valentine Rathbun (1781), Daniel Rathbun and Amos Taylor (1782) and Mary Dyer (1822 on). Comments from outside observers from Thomas Jefferson to Fredrich Engels, to Fannie Appleton Longfellow are useful, plentiful and widely quoted in secondary works. A broad selection are reprinted in Flo Morse, *The Shakers and the World's People* (1980). Recently published collections of Shaker writings are Diane Sasson, *The Shaker Spiritual Narrative* (1983), and Jean M. Humez's *Mother's First Born Daughters* (1993) and *Gift and Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson* (1981).

### Secondary Works

Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (1904) is an intelligent Shaker version of the faith's history. Edward Deming Andrews began outsider's historical interpretation of Shakers, completing several major books, especially *The Community Industries of the Shakers* (1933) and *The People Called Shakers* (1953). Andrew's books remain the most sensitive work done on the faith. Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (1992) is a highly able recent account, the best work on the Shakers after the Civil War, and thorough on the earlier, more creative years, though without Andrews' emotive-aesthetic responsiveness. I think Stein's interpretation of the early years hampered, like several recent studies, by hesitancy to use the earliest Shaker writings to work toward an understanding of the formative eighteenth century years. For this period, Stein tends to follow Clark Garrett, *Spirit, Possession and Popular Religion from the Comisards to the Shakers* (1987) rather than Stephen Marini's *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (1983) which places Shakerism within the evangelical ferment of the late eighteenth century. Priscilla Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (1986) developed about the eastern Shaker many of the themes Stein and recent feminist scholars have elaborated.

Several feminists have written books about the Shakers recently: Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Women in Shaker Community and Worship* (1985) and *Shakerism and Feminism* (1991); Linda Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine and God: The Shakers and Contemporary Theology* (1990); and several articles in Wendy Chmielewski et. al., eds. *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies* (1993). Celibacy is the focus of interest in the Shaker sections of studies by Lawrence Foster and Louis Kern (both 1981) and Sally Kitch (1989).

Much of value is found in local studies, especially those of the Kentucky groups by Julia Neal (1947, 1977); of the black Philadelphia group by Richard E. Williams (1981); of Harvard, Massachusetts by Edward R. Horgan (1982); and on three Massachusetts-Connecticut villages by Deborah Burns (1993). On Shaker gift drawings, Edward and Faith Andrews did pioneering work (1967), supplemented by later studies by Daniel Patterson (1983) and Sally Promeay (1993).

## On Shaker Music

Three good scholarly studies of Shaker music have been essential to this paper. Edward D. Andrews, *The Gift to Be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers* (New York, 1940) shows the shrewd respect and aesthetic sensitivity Andrews brought to all his work. Harold E. Cook, *Shaker Music: A Manifestation of American Folk Culture* (1973) deals well with the technical aspects of Shaker music, despite occasional dubiousness of generalizations. Daniel W. Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual* (1979) is the fullest of these accounts, essential for placing Shaker songs within their broad musical context. Patterson's account, extraordinarily researched with excellent identification of many of the people who wrote songs, introduces his selections with personal-social sketches that make his account also the most moving and valuable, if ungeneralizing, of the social histories of the community. The fact that all three works, despite being at heart compilations of songs, overlap so little is testimony to the incredible abundance of good music Shaker produced.

I have also used some songs from other sources, especially Clara Endicott Sears' *Gleanings From Old Shaker Journals* (1916), Julia Neal's *The Kentucky Shakers* (1977), and Stephen Marini, *Radical Sects* (1982). some songs also come from other works by Patterson – *Nine Shaker Spirituals* (1964) – and by Andrews: *The People Called Shakers* (1953) and, with Faith Andrews, *Fruit of the Shaker Tree of Life* (1975).