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## Simply Shaker: The Rise and Development of Popular Images of the Shakers

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SIMPLY SHAKER: THE RISE AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF POPULAR IMAGES OF  
THE SHAKERS

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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

NEW ENGLAND STUDIES

BY  
SCOTT F. DE WOLFE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE  
NEW ENGLAND STUDIES

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We hereby recommend that the thesis of Scott F. DeWolfe  
entitled Simply Shaker: The Rise And Development of Popular  
Images of The Shakers be accepted as partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts.

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# ABSTRACT

Generations of Americans have been fascinated by a small religious group known as the Shakers. This thesis traces the evolution of the Shaker image through time. Much of the paper centers on the current view of the Shakers as a simple, agrarian and non-technological movement whose members lived a stress free live. The development of this modern image is addressed by studying the convergence of several trends in the late nineteenth century. The colonial revival and the anti-modernism movement helped to shape how we perceive the Shakers today.

Aspects that are discussed in this paper include the historical roots and changing views on the Shakers. The development of Shaker museums and their style of interpretations are also developed. The growing market for Shaker antiques and reproductions is studied in relation to America's search for the simple life. Finally, the rise of Shaker inspired voluntary associations is examined as an example of the search by many Americans for experiences that transcend the mundane of urban, industrial life.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Dwellers of Shaker Village were  
a race of smiling, happy workers in  
those by-gone years!

Thousands of visitors travel to Shaker villages and Shaker museums each year bringing with them preconceived notions of the life and history of the Shakers. These notions compare Shakers with the Amish and portray the Shakers as quaint, old fashioned, simple and as living peaceful lives without technological aid. The social production of this Shaker image developed over time from a number of sources including didactic material in Shaker museums, books, films, periodicals, and popular magazines. These sources, along with Shaker-inspired products, all help in fostering a particular image of Believers. While in recent years the study of the Shakers has enjoyed much popular and scholarly attention, little thought has been given to the origins of today's popular images of the group. This thesis argues that America's interest in nostalgia and the search for "pure" American design converged in the early twentieth century and that from this convergence grew today's mythic Shaker image.

The contemporary perception of the Shakers will be set in

historical context by examining the image of the group in earlier times. The nostalgia that is the focus of this study will be discussed in relationship to what T.J. Jackson Lears terms the Antimodernism movement of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. In his book, No Place of Grace Lears argues that the antimodernist perspective grew out of a response to the industrialization and bureaucratization of American and European life.<sup>2</sup> Proponents of this movement searched for what Lears terms "real life" experiences such as home crafts, hunting and mystical religious experiences to help fill the void left by modern society.

This study will examine the social production of the Shaker image, a process drawing upon a shared system of beliefs and symbols held by non-Shaker followers or afficianados of Shakerism. By "social production" of an image, the author means the process of developing a stereotype through information imparted by the press, by literature (both scholarly and popular), by museum exhibits, by Shaker related voluntary associations and by consumer goods.

Indeed a distinction must be made between the Shakers, the actual historic group, and the prevailing symbols that "Shaker" has come to represent. Henceforth for clarity the term Shaker will refer to the actual Shaker movement while

"Shaker" will refer to the symbols or metaphors that have developed over the years.

Shakerism is considered to be the most successful communal experiment in United States history. The Shaker movement was founded by Ann Lee who, as a young adult in eighteenth century Manchester England, became the leader of a small group of religious dissenters.<sup>3</sup> In 1774, Mother Ann, as she came to be called, and eight followers left England and eventually settled in New York State just west of the city of Albany.<sup>4</sup> Here they eventually purchased land and started an agrarian based communal village.

For several years the Shakers were ignored by their neighbors. Public attention first became focused on the Shakers in 1780 when a series of New England religious revivals caused many Americans to examine their religious beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Mother Ann took advantage of the religious unrest; actively proselytizing she converted several thousand Americans before her death in 1784. Interestingly, though converts were numerous, there was much anti-Shaker sentiment in New England. Indeed, Mother Ann's death was due in part to the intense religious persecution the group faced in the early years of the movement in America. Shakers threatened the social order of early New England by splitting up families and believing in social equality, thus threatening

the normal pattern of gender and social relations.<sup>6</sup> The established leaders of New England society were often extremely anti-Shaker.

As Mother Ann was illiterate, we know little of her vision of the future of her movement as a religious order. In fact, many of the traits and social customs that we equate with the Shakers had not yet been developed when Mother Ann died. At the time of her death, converts were scattered across New England and were still living in small biological families. In the years following Mother Ann's death, it was left up to subsequent leaders to organize the scattered converts into large communal villages. By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century between four and six thousand members lived in twenty villages that spread from Maine to Indiana.<sup>7</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century religious revivals lost their intensity and fewer converts were attracted to the faith. The Shakers attempted to forestall decreases by raising large numbers of indentured children, although as few as one out of ten of the children remained in the faith as adults. Throughout the twentieth century lack of members caused a gradual abandonment of communities; today Shakers continue to occupy only two communities. The Canterbury, New Hampshire, community has one elderly member while the Sabbathday Lake, Maine, community has a total of eight men

and women ranging in age from their mid-twenties to their nineties.

The Shakers attempt to live the life of Christ. Shakers believe that the Second Coming of Christ will not be in the body of one individual but rather that Christ's spirit can enter each person and that individuals can live a Christ-like life. The lives of Christ and his Apostles as recorded in the Bible are the basis for beliefs in celibacy and communalism. In addition, the Shakers view God as a simultaneously male/female entity and base their belief of gender equality on this viewpoint.<sup>8</sup>

Shaker villages from the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century were composed of multiple communal units called families, each having between 30 and 100 members. Shakers believed in racial and gender equality, but unlike the Quakers they did not believe that all members were equal. Each family and community had a hierarchy of leaders with male and female leaders filling each position of power.<sup>9</sup> Each family had its own leaders and businesses but all the families in a community were tied spiritually to the Church Family. The Church Family was where the leading religious leaders, known as the Ministry, lived.<sup>10</sup> In theory the Church Family was made up of members who were very much dedicated to the faith. Other communal families often consisted of other segments of the Shaker population; for

example, some families acted as homes for the indoctrination of novitiates or the housing of elderly members.<sup>11</sup>

Communities in the same geographical area were split into bishoprics that shared religious leaders.<sup>12</sup> The bishoprics were in turn under the supervision of the religious leaders at Mount Lebanon, New York, which was for most of Shaker history the center of Shakerism.

Today the Shakers are often described in terms that portray the group as old-fashioned and as technologically and socially unchanged from the nineteenth century. This image is not historically accurate. Technologically, Shakers have been at the forefront in American society. The group has been credited with many inventions, ranging from a commercial washing machine to the circular saw.<sup>13</sup> Shaker communities have been quick to adopt outside technology. Often they were the first people in their localities to own automobiles. Even today Believers keep pace with the changing world. For example, the Sabbathday Lake Shakers<sup>14</sup> utilize three computers, a VCR and a microwave oven.

Progressive in their attitude toward technological advances, the Shakers were also committed to solving problems in American society. Members have written about world peace, animal rights, the rights of minorities, and the plight of the poor.<sup>15</sup> At times they championed issues

before the problems were widely recognized by the rest of America. In particular their insistence on racial and gender equality within their communities predated wide acceptance among the public.

This thesis addresses several issues in the development and spread of the Shaker image. Chapter One will discuss the spread of the popular image of the Shakers, due in large part to scholars and collectors Edward and Faith Andrews. From the 1920's through the early 1960's the Andrews set the tone for the interpretation of Shaker life. The Andrews became interested in the Shakers during a period of great change in America. Immigration, the urbanization of America and the Great Depression fueled the search by many Americans for symbols with which to add meaning to their lives. Much of this search can be understood in terms of Lears' antimodernism thesis. America's privileged classes increasingly turned to nostalgic symbols of the American agrarian past as a way of dealing with the problems of the present. The trends of social unrest and antimodernism had an important effect on how the Andrews chose to interpret Shaker life. The first chapter traces the historical roots of today's Shaker image and discusses the particular role that the Andrews played in developing popular interest in Believers.



Chapter Two discusses the development of Shaker museums, paying special attention to interpretation. Shaker museums, for the most part, have chosen to highlight one short period of Shaker history (1820-1860) instead of portraying the entire two hundred year history of the Shakers.

The social production of the Shaker image and its relationship to a consumer economy, is discussed in Chapter Three. The prevailing image of the Shakers is fostering a growing array of "Shaker" and "Shaker-like" products eagerly acquired by Americans. This in turn promotes and sustains an image of Shakerism as simple, static, and pristine. The popularity of such perceptions becomes clear in a burgeoning market for Shaker antiques where some pieces sell for over two hundred thousand dollars.

Finally, the Epilogue explores the development of Shaker related voluntary associations which have made Shaker history, beliefs, and material culture a major part of popular culture. Shaker study groups, dance groups, acting clubs and seminars create renewed interest in the followers of Mother Ann. Why, we will ask, are people attracted to Shaker culture and what do they gain from their association?

This study traces the development of the prevailing Shaker image and will illustrate why the Shakers are consistently portrayed as a simple, unchanging sect. The

romantic antimodern view of the Shakers frequently presented by museums and popular writers has directly stimulated the development of a synchronic image. Synchronic interpretation is centered on one short historical period as opposed to diachronic interpretation which highlights change over time. Shaker museums that use synchronic museum displays tend to focus on restoring buildings to how they looked during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In stripping away later styles and changes these museum are at a disadvantage in not being able to easily show change over time. A diachronic approach utilizes materials from all periods of Shaker history illustrating architectural and cultural change over time. The advantage of this approach is the ability to see cultural continuity and flexibility.

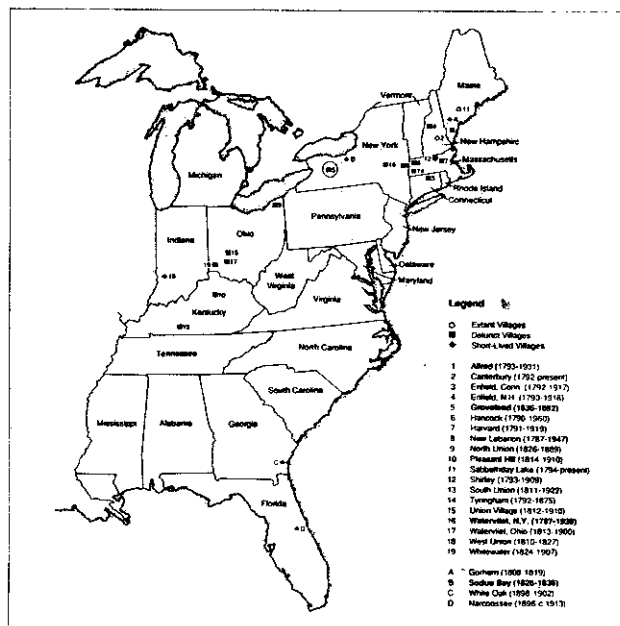
Sources for this study include a wide range of material that has, for the most part, not yet been tapped by scholars. Photographs, periodical articles, museum and business ephemera, and related books all provide information from which the popular image of the Shakers can be constructed and documented. Most of the material consulted for this research is housed in the Shaker Library at the Sabbathday Lake, Maine, Shaker Community. The Sabbathday Lake library contains one of the foremost collections of Shaker material. The Library staff is particularly diligent

in collecting ephemera, periodical articles and related items from the recent surge of "Shaker" products.

Several problems confront researchers interested in the study of contemporary Shakerism that will be discussed in this study. Most critical is the lack of Shaker manuscript records from the twentieth century. While in the nineteenth century members were encouraged to keep journals and account books, the twentieth century saw a great decrease in accurate records. In addition, the one library that contains some extant manuscript material dating from 1925 to the present is unavailable to researchers, sealed by the Shaker community out of respect for living members. An additional potential source of information is found in private collector's records. Yet few of these documents have been donated to Shaker museums. Indeed, until recently there has been little effort to preserve modern museum ephemera, articles or photographs. In addition to demonstrating the origins and development of the contemporary Shaker image, this research illustrates the utility of utilizing previously untapped information such as museum and business ephemera, photographs, postcards, and periodical accounts. In this way, this research acts as a model for conducting research using non-traditional sources.

# NOTES INTRODUCTION

1. Circa 1930 post card in the collection of the United Society of Shakers, Sabbathday Lake, Maine.
2. T.J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4-5.
3. Edward D. Andrews, The People Called Shakers: A Search For The Perfect Society (New York: Dover, 1963), 5.
4. Anna White and Leila Taylor, Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message (Columbus: Press of Fred J. Heer, 1905), 28-30.
5. *ibid.*, 37.
6. Andrews, People Called Shakers, 44.
7. Shaker Communities were located in the following locales:



Kramer, Fran, Simply Shaker: Groveland and the New York Communities. A Catalog of an Exhibition at the Rochester Museum & Science Center (Rochester: The Rochester Museum & Science Center, 1991), 10.

8. For a complete treatment of Shaker religious beliefs see

Calvin Green and Seth Wells, A Summary View of the Millennial Church, or United Society of Believers, (Commonly Called Shakers)....(Albany: Printed by C. Van Benthuysen, 1848).

9. Andrews, People Called Shakers, 58.

10. ibid., 59.

11. Calvin Green and Seth Wells, A Brief Exposition of the Established Principles and Regulations of the United Society Called Shakers....(New York: E.S. Dodge Printig Co., 1879), 11-18.

12. Andrews, People Called Shakers, 59.

13. White and Taylor, Shakerism, 312-313.

14. For more information on modern Shakerism at Sabbathday Lake see Gerard Werkin's, Four Seasons of Shaker Life; An Intimate Portrait of the Community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986). For a Social Historians view of Shaker history see Priscilla Brewer's Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986).

15. Elder Frederick Evans of the North Family at Mount Lebanon Was one of the most prolific writers in the sect having written over one hundred books, pamphlets and broadsides. In addition, he also wrote many periodical articles. His topics ranged from labor problems in America to the wearing of beards. See Mary Richmond's Shaker Bibliography for summaries of his more important writings.

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE SHAKER IMAGE

Much of the attention given to the Shakers focuses on what has become known as the classic period of Shaker history. The classic period (1820-1860) is a relatively short period in Shaker history when the products, furnishings, and dwellings of the group were simple and unadorned. The stress on the classic period promotes a portrait of the group that allows the public to easily confuse the Shakers with other rural, agriculturally based communities. Most commonly Believers are confused with the Amish.<sup>1</sup> The two orders are actually quite different. Where the Amish eschew modern technology, Shakers utilize all modern conveniences. The Amish live in biological families where new members are born into the faith, while the Shakers live celibate, communally based lives and rely on adult conversion for the recruitment of new members. The two groups also differ in their historical roots and religious beliefs. Today's popular misconceptions promote the Shakers as a traditional society with a rich unchanging way of life yet, as with all cultures, Shakers have always been changing and evolving. Terms such as "traditional culture" or "folk culture" often do not adequately take into

consideration change and the dynamic, fluid process of cultural identity.

This chapter traces the developing Shaker image by examining the historical context in which literature about Believers was written. Particular emphasis is placed on the many works written by Faith and Edward Andrews. Many of today's representations of what constitutes "Shaker" design can be traced to the writings of the Andrews.

Periodical articles concerning the Shakers are perhaps the best way to chronicle the constant evolution of the group's image through the end of the nineteenth century. The importance of periodical articles in documenting changes in representations of Shakers becomes critical with the lack of books written about the group during the nineteenth century. The few nineteenth century books written about Believers were apostate accounts that provide a wealth of detail on the internal workings of Shaker communities but tell us little about the outside world's perceptions of the group. Additionally, accounts by apostates, former Shakers who have left the faith for the outside world, are frequently biased with anti-Shaker sentiment. An infamous apostate, Mary Dyer, published seven anti-Shaker works between 1818 and 1847.<sup>2</sup> Dyer, and those like her, helped to keep alive anti-Shaker

sentiment among the public. Again, from such accounts we learn of the day to day internal workings and problems of a Shaker community, but gain little information on the popular view of the Shakers, only the apostates' view. It is this perception of Shakers by outsiders that we are interested in. More than simply one individual's view (such as a single apostate's description), it is the image of the Shakers generally agreed upon by the more or less homogeneous population at large. William Jansen, a scholar of folklore, defines this cross perception phenomena as the Esoteric-Exoteric factor. The Esoteric factor concerns itself with how one group thinks about itself, as well as what it imagines other groups think about it. For example, the Shakers see themselves as a progressive, modern religious group but believe that non-Shakers do not see them in these terms. On the other hand, the Exoteric factor focuses upon what one group thinks of another, along with "what it thinks that other groups think it thinks."<sup>3</sup> For example, non-Shakers see the Shakers as a simple, quaint religious group and may believe that the Shakers perceive non-Shakers as believing in and supporting their way of life (i.e., non-Shakers may think that Shakers are glad to have so many dedicated interested visitors). The purpose of this distinction is not to isolate the "truth," but rather, to



concentrate on perceptions of self and of others.

Through periodical articles, one can trace the exoteric perceptions over time in the context of the historic period in which they were written. It is the exoteric factor upon which this paper focuses: the image non-Shakers hold about Shakers.

Believers and their villages have been described by reporters and writers from the very beginning of the movement in America. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Shakers were often viewed as misguided fanatics.<sup>4</sup> Much hostility surrounded the Shakers for they were perceived as an active threat to the social and cultural beliefs that dominated America. In particular beliefs such as celibacy, communal ownership of goods, and gender, social and racial equality caused many early Americans to vehemently oppose the Shakers. This opposition often turned violent and many early believers were beaten or whipped for their beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Much of this early literature also repeated allegations that Shakers were abusing converts and authors often questioned the morals of the leaders of the movement.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, many of the early writers predicted that the Shakers would last only a few years, arguing that the communities would be in trouble due to a lack of members.<sup>7</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed much of the early religious fervor that fueled large scale conversions to Shakerism died down. The nation's growing industrialization and urbanization increasingly eroded interest in living the rural monastic life of the Shakers.<sup>8</sup> With the decline of mass conversions Shakers were no longer viewed by the public as a viable threat to established social norms. Public sentiment then shifted from Shaker religious beliefs and centered more on the economic and agricultural practices of the Shakers. In the periodical literature after the first quarter of the nineteenth century numerous articles describe the positive aspects of Shaker farms, farming techniques and orderly villages.<sup>9</sup> Benson Lossing's 1857 illustrated article on New Lebanon was typical of this shift in attention to Shaker practices. He wrote:

It was Saturday evening. The weekly toil of the community had ceased, and a Sabbath stillness brooded over the populous town. Immense dwellings filled with men and women, and extensive workshops supplied with choicest implements, lined the one broad street. Order and neatness there held high court with a majesty I had never before seen. The very dust in the road seemed pure, and the virtue 'next to godliness' was apparent upon every stone.<sup>10</sup>

Lossing's article was one of the first to speak of Shaker villages as a place of refuge from the troubles of the world and to view the Shakers in romantic terms. However, the bulk

of the article is devoted to an objective description of the every day life of the Shakers. In this account Lossing accurately describes a number of Shaker practices and also many of the industries that helped support the community. Lossing brought the Shaker way of life to the American public and helped to popularize Shaker communities as places where one could escape the pressures of the modern world.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as Shaker communities became smaller and the percentage of older members grew larger, interest in Shakers shifted towards a more nostalgic view of Believers. While many members in the early years of this century were arguing that they had a place in twentieth century America, the public increasingly saw the Shakers as archaic reminders of an agrarian way of life from an earlier time. This change in the popular image of the Shakers was due, in part, to industrialization and urbanization in America. As America rapidly changed many Americans began to look with nostalgia at images that were perceived as vestiges of a simpler time. Shakers<sup>11</sup> increasingly were connected to this simpler time.

Late nineteenth century articles that began to appear in the popular press, described the Shakers nostalgically. Typical of this romantic imagery is Madeline Bridges' article entitled "A Wonderful Little World of People" which

appeared in the Ladies Home Journal in June 1898. The piece discussed the simple, serene life that Shakers were living. The article was critical of modern life and the author viewed Mt. Lebanon as a refuge from the day's problems. She wrote: "In the rush and turmoil of the city streets often the sense of its sweet loneliness comes back to me-its restfulness, security and calm." <sup>12</sup> Bridges' article and those like it, including the earlier article by Benson Lossing, ignored the fact that to be a Shaker was not entirely stress free. Though Shakers were perceived as enjoying a life free from pressures that concerned people in the world, in reality the Shaker communities faced problems common to all agricultural societies. Poor crops, a sluggish economy, internal dissent and hostile neighbors are just three problems that at times were present among Believers.

It is possible to view early twentieth century representations of Shakerism not only through periodical accounts but also through books. The turn of the century also witnessed a great rise in romantic stories with Shaker settings culminating in two books that were written in the first decade of the twentieth century. Kate Douglas Wiggin's Susanna and Sue, 1909 and Margaret Deland's Way to Peace, 1910, were stories that tackled gender issues by spinning tales of love in Shaker villages. Both books also

helped foster the increasingly romantic view many Americans had of the Shakers. In the story Susanna and Sue, for example, the primary female character leaves her intemperate husband to live in a Shaker Community. This causes the husband to reevaluate his life and by the book's conclusion he becomes "domesticated," giving up drinking for planting plants and flower gardens. In this story, a woman uses the Shaker lifestyle as a springboard for changing what is bad in her worldly life.

In Way to Peace a young married couple visits a Shaker village where the wife decides that the simple Shaker life is how she wants to live. The woman joins the Shakers while her husband rents a small house next to the village, knowing that his wife will eventually have enough of the romantic and idyllic life and return to him. In the meantime the husband is slowly converted by one of the Shaker Elders and when the wife finally announces her wish to return home, the husband tells her that he is going to remain as a Shaker. The book ends several years later with the wife dying just as the husband, now a Shaker, arrives to visit his sick wife. This story of a man and woman on two separate courses serves as a metaphor for a rapidly changing society that was moving in several directions simultaneously.

The texts of these books portray the Shakers and Shaker

villages in romantic terms. Wiggins describes the village in the following manner: "To such a spot as this might any tired or sinful heart come for rest....."<sup>13</sup> Deland's book has the added facet of describing a Shaker community in deep decline. Shaker characters are described as middle age or elderly and promote the general feeling that the world has passed the community by. The accompanying illustrations support a romantic overtone. Illustrations in SUSANNA AND SUE by Alice Barber Stevens and N.C. Wyeth feature muted colors, abundant evidence of agricultural activity, reverent Shakers at prayer, and are drawn with an impressionistic, sketch-like quality.

As the twentieth century progressed one finds an acceleration of nostalgic representations of Believers in the popular press. Not only did the Shakers come to be understood almost entirely as a pre-industrial people but the whole Shaker movement became to be seen as on the brink of extinction.<sup>14</sup> From a population height of four or five thousand in 1840 the Shakers had decreased to under one thousand in 1900.<sup>15</sup>

It is likely the Shakers had a difficult time adjusting to a changing world. The need of the movement to have a place in the modern world coupled and contrasted with the nostalgic needs of the public led to different methods of

dealing with change. On one hand, the early twentieth century saw the Shakers continuing their interest in the welfare of the world around them by hosting an important peace conference in 1905. Conference participants called for "reduced armaments, an international police force, international arbitration, a strengthened world court, and the neutrality of the great waterways of commerce." In<sup>16</sup> hosting this event, the Shakers demonstrated their interest in bettering the world of the present and future, rather than focusing on the world of the past.

On the other hand, Shakers and Shaker communities were increasingly being treated as vestiges of the nineteenth century in such popular literature as Deland's The Way to Peace. In fact, in some instances Shakers themselves fostered the nostalgia associated with the movement, thus supporting the exoteric image as promoted by the press. With a great rise in tourism Shaker communities began to produce a variety of fancy work that could be sold to visitors. In some cases industries that had been abandoned years before were revived to help satisfy tourist demand. For example, basketmaking in Maine was revived in the late nineteenth century as a means of making money. Instead of making large utilitarian baskets, as had been made for nineteenth century community use, the industry shifted to small decorative

baskets that were sold to visiting tourists.<sup>17</sup> A similar event occurred at Sabbathday Lake when, in the 1890's, Brother Delmer Wilson began to make baled oval wooden carriers. The Sisters lined these carriers with satin and attached sewing items to the interiors. This product was an adaptation of the Shaker box and carrier making industry that had been important many years before. Brother Delmer began to make carriers in the late 1890's and continued until the late 1950's. In a record year (1923) Brother Delmer produced 1,083 oval carriers. His total production numbered in the tens of thousands.<sup>18</sup> The large numbers attest to the popularity of this product with the public.

In addition, by the early twentieth century many Shaker communities were selling antiques in response to the thirst of the American public for nostalgic items with which to decorate their colonial revival homes. The antiques sold included both surplus Shaker goods as well as non-Shaker antiques that had been brought into the communities by converts, who years before had joined the Shakers. The colonial revival coupled with the antimodernism movement helped focus attention on the agrarian and craft-based past of the Shakers.

Popular interest in the Shakers began to accelerate in the 1920's with the opening of Clara Endicott Sears' Shaker



museum in Harvard, Massachusetts. More importantly, in 1923 Edward Andrews (1894-1964) and his wife Faith (1897-1990) became interested in the Shakers. Born into a prosperous family, Andrews received his B.A. from Amherst in 1916 and received a Doctorate from Yale in 1930.<sup>19</sup> Edward Andrews worked as a newspaper reporter and as a teacher.<sup>20</sup> By 1921, when Edward Andrews married his wife Faith the couple was already collecting early American antiques.<sup>21</sup> He and his wife happened to stop at the Hancock Shaker village in Massachusetts in 1923 because they had heard one could buy bread from the community.<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter the Andrews began to actively collect and deal in anything related to the Shakers.<sup>23</sup>

After receiving his doctorate Andrews and his wife spent much of their time building their Shaker collection. The Andrews' Shaker collection was expansive and included furniture, baskets, tools, books, manuscripts and ephemera. The Andrews apparently were financially secure as Edward gave up his teaching career during the Depression to devote even more time to his Shaker interest.<sup>24</sup> Andrews' resumed teaching in 1942 when offered a position at Yale and he continued to teach until 1956.<sup>25</sup>

Andrews and his wife produced a number of books, articles and exhibits concerned with the Shaker movement. The

writings of the Andrews focused on a forty year period: the years between 1820-1860, which have become known as the classic period of Shaker history. The Andrews decidedly ignored later Victorian trends in Shaker design in focusing on this one period. Indeed, most of the objects they utilized as illustrations in their books and exhibits can be dated from the short period from 1820 to 1860.

Why was only one period of Shaker history emphasized by Andrews? Clues found in Andrews' own writing help answer this question and suggest that he felt the classic Shaker aesthetic had much to say to twentieth century Americans.

Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect, first published in 1937, provides a wealth of information on Andrews' and his contemporaries' views of the Shakers. The preface of Shaker Furniture was written by the editor of The Magazine Antiques, Homer Eaton Keyes, and reads in part:

Their book is of singular timeliness. It comes to hand when many dwellers in the United States are concerned about prospects of change in the social structure of the nation. Under such circumstances, information is needed regarding the causes and results of whatever social experiments have hitherto been undertaken by protagonists of the perfect state.<sup>6</sup>

The writings of Keyes and Andrews illustrate several important points. From the standpoint of the authors, early

Shaker design was a way of coming to grips with a changing America. The Depression of the 1930's and the social unrest it caused made Americans wonder about the future of the country. America in a new age, Keyes believed, might learn from Shaker simplicity and build a utopian society. The symbols of simplicity, frugality, product quality and honesty might be used to help reorient the United States back to beliefs that were common in the agrarian past.

Andrews elaborated on his views of the importance of Shaker design when he wrote: "Shaker furniture, in particular, merits an important place in the field of applied arts, not alone for its perfected design but as a symbol of one of the purest cultures."<sup>27</sup> He developed his argument by describing his view of why the Shakers designed their furniture with simple lines. "Independence of thought and action soon showed itself in the development of forms expressive of original ideas on purity, simplicity and utility."<sup>28</sup>

The writings of the Andrews' are rooted in trends of anti-modernism and progressive simplicity. T.J. Jackson Lears argues that the period between 1880 and 1920 witnessed a movement in America towards anti-modernism. Lears reasons that many people were dissatisfied with the increased industrialization and bureaucratization of American life.

People turned to what Lears' termed "real experiences" to add meaning to their lives.

Coupled with anti-modernist sentiments was the movement that David Shi has termed "progressive simplicity".<sup>29</sup> Shi argues that between 1890-1920 many middle class Americans attempted to change their lifestyles to live more simply.<sup>30</sup> This development, may be best described in terms of the Arts and Crafts Movement in furniture design with its simple lines and uncluttered atmosphere. Progressive Simplicity was a response to the overly ornate and cluttered style of the Victorian period. Proponents of this movement included, Ladies' Home Journal Editor Edward Bok (1863-1930). Bok's position allowed him to influence the lifestyle of middle class Americans through his popular publication.<sup>31</sup> Bok felt that middle class Americans homes were filled with redundant possessions.<sup>32</sup> Utilizing his editorial column Bok published several pieces describing the simple lifestyle that he challenged readers to attain. His writings helped propel the emerging trend toward a romantic view of the "simple life." It is interesting to note that Ladies' Home Journal published two articles on the Shakers during this period, Madeline Bridges' article "A Wonderful Little World of People" which was discussed earlier in this chapter, and Marion Wire's "What the Shakers make for Christmas." The

latter article highlights the many crafts that were being produced by the Mount Lebanon Shakers for sale to the world.

Like Bok, the Andrews realized their work could serve as a way to influence the public. While their writing dates from after the periods discussed by Lears (1880-1920) and Shi (1890-1920), the Andrews were raised during the early twentieth century and their beliefs and cultural orientation were rooted in this period. Indeed, the Andrews sought what Lears would term "real experiences." For example, although the couple generally lived in urban areas they bought an old neglected farm house in rural Richmond, Massachusetts, in 1937.<sup>33</sup> This summer house was restored and outfitted with Shaker and early American furnishings. Interestingly, the home was restored without electricity or indoor plumbing.<sup>34</sup> Here the Andrews could escape the stress of the modern world and surround themselves with the simple products of the Shakers.

Despite the Andrews' strong reverence for Classic Period furniture, it is important to note that in the nineteenth century Shaker furniture was often described as drab and unattractive. One writer describing a Shaker village in the 1840's wrote that "the rooms and furniture are as plain and homely as the external architecture."<sup>35</sup>

Charles Dickens, in his American Notes For General Circulation, penned one of the more entertaining descriptions of a Shaker room at New Lebanon, New York. He wrote:

We walked into a grim room, where several grim hats were hanging on grim pegs, and the time was grimly told by a grim clock which uttered every tick with a kind of struggle, as if it broke the grim silence reluctantly, and under protest. Ranged against the wall were six or eight stiff high-backed chairs, and they partook so strongly of the general grimness, that one would much rather have sat on the floor than incurred the smallest obligation to any of them.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike Keyes and Andrews, Dickens, writing a century earlier, welcomed a world where furniture was richly ornamented. Here we see the role of culture as it informs taste, style, and concepts of a "pure" aesthetics. There is no intrinsic element, nothing is inherent but rather style, taste and aesthetics become part of a complex construction that is rooted in time and place. Shaker furniture may be considered beautiful in the 1980's but in the future its popularity may be surpassed by appreciation of another style.

This emphasis on Shaker form as "art" was expressed in the choice of illustrations Andrews used in his books. In his selection of a photographer, Andrews chose a man who likely shared many of the author's views on designs. This

man was William F. Winter (1899-1939).<sup>37</sup> Winter and Andrews combined their talents to depict Shaker life by photographing Shaker furniture in unused rooms of the then still active Shaker settlement at Mount Lebanon, New York. Rooms were chosen that appeared as they did in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Rooms that showed evidence of change over time, such as linoleum and the presence of victorian furniture, were not utilized as photographic sets. Furnishings from Andrews' collection were brought into the chosen rooms to be photographed. One recent biographer of Winter writes: "Many of the photographs portray natural groupings in appropriate early Shaker rooms, conveying an almost overwhelming impression of calm and gracious beauty."<sup>38</sup>

Considering Andrews' emphasis on form and the absence of people in room settings, one is not surprised that the rooms were furnished to give an impression of calm. However, the photographs did not portray "natural groupings." Shaker communities have always been in a state of flux. With internal problems and sizable numbers of people joining and leaving Shaker communities every year, Shaker life did not always fit the notion of a simple, steady existence. Furthermore, as converts joined Shaker communities, they brought household goods with them. At least some Shaker Families have always had a mixture of Shaker-made and

non-Shaker made furnishings. This was particularly true of poorer communities such as Sabbathday Lake, Maine. What has survived at Sabbathday Lake is a mixture of furnishings attesting to the Community's willingness to use furnishings from several sources.

Importantly, what has become known as the classic period (1820-1860) of Shaker material culture may actually be a shorter period than is often stated. The Shaker movement witnessed an intense period of religious revival in the 1840's. During this period many spirit messages were received from dead Shakers such as Mother Ann. Some of these messages included admonishments against using decorative embellishments in furniture making.<sup>39</sup> That this chiding was given at this time makes one question the apparent simplicity of Shaker furniture before the 1840's.

At any rate, from surviving late nineteenth century interior photographs we know that by the 1880's many Shaker communities had large amounts of non-Shaker furnishings and accessories. Late nineteenth century Shaker photographic evidence supports this intermixing of furniture and decorating styles. Indeed, many interior photographs show amazingly cluttered rooms. Some of William Winter's less known photographs show rooms still in use in Shaker communities furnished in a mixture of styles.<sup>40</sup> Additionally,



Shaker furniture was constantly evolving as style and tastes changed. In fact, after the Civil War Shaker furniture became increasingly Victorian. Eventually, by the late nineteenth century, Shaker furniture became as Victorian as anything made in the outside world, complete with ornate and heavily carved trim.

Critical to understanding Andrews' portrayal of the Shakers is the absence of any photographs of Shaker furniture from the western-most communities in Ohio and Kentucky. Andrews never accumulated much material from the Ohio and Kentucky Shaker communities primarily because he lived in the East. However, it is possible he simply dismissed Western Shaker furniture because it did not adequately fit into his typology of what constituted classic Shaker furniture. Western furniture makers often were bolder in design and ornamentation than their Eastern counterparts. Some Western furniture was available to Andrews as a large quantity was shipped from the defunct Union Village, Ohio, community to Canterbury, New Hampshire in the 1920's.<sup>41</sup> Most of this material was probably shipped east for sale to antique collectors through the village at Canterbury.

Nevertheless, Andrews and Winter chose to focus on Shaker furniture of the classic period and from the eastern communities. The rooms were not natural settings but rather

a skewed view of purported period Shaker rooms. The Winter photos Andrews used ignored the layering of furnishings found in each Shaker community as successive generations of Shakers decorated and furnished rooms according to their particular tastes. It was this very synchronic approach to Shakerism that later scholars used as a foundation for subsequent interpretation.

With the numerous books and articles that Edward and Faith Andrews wrote, it is not surprising that they have been considered the authorities on Shaker history, beliefs and artifacts, though there have been some critics of the Andrews' interpretation. When the Andrews' work was first published there was virtually no criticism as the Andrews were the first to publish widely distributed popular and scholarly works on the Shakers. Only recently has their work been looked at critically and in its proper historical context. Priscilla Brewer, for example, in her recent social-history of the Shakers writes that the Andrews wrote historically "chronological...[but] dispassionate" books about the Shakers.<sup>42</sup>

While Shakers generally did not often openly challenge Andrews' interpretations there was one exception. Brother Ricardo Belden was the last male member of the Hancock, Massachusetts, community. Interviewed shortly after one of

the Andrews' books was published he stated:

I consider it very unfair writing about the Shakers. Some of it will be misleading to the outside world, and some absolutely false statements are made about the Shaker order. Andrews, or any other person in the outside world, can not be an authority on the Shakers. There is no authority on the Shakers except the Shakers themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Belden, though, was virtually the only Shaker to publicly challenge the Andrews' work. What Shakers said about the Andrews in the privacy of their communities may never be known. Publicly, in fact, the Andrews had the support of many important Shakers, illustrating that the Andrews research, as with most research, was accepted by many and criticized by others but nonetheless made a strong impact in the rising interest in Shakerism.

Many of the pieces written about the Shakers overlook the point that for the most part Shakers in the early nineteenth century were generally poor rural Americans. Poor rural Americans of the period lived in plain buildings and had simple furniture. Shaker rooms may have, in fact, been more ornate in the early period (1795-1860) than many of their neighbors could boast. For example, the 1794 Meeting House at Sabbathday Lake has dark blue molding throughout the building and the floors were originally painted a bright mustard yellow. The floors were also covered with brightly woven rugs and most early Shaker pieces were painted in

vibrant colors. In addition, the Shakers themselves dressed in colorful clothing. Shaker rooms of 1840 were brighter, cleaner, and more colorful than many of their poorer rural neighbors.<sup>44</sup> Rooms in the Sabbathday Lake Meeting house may appear simple from our late twentieth century perspective, but this is not the same perspective shared by a poor rural New Englander of 1820 who would view the room in a different way.

The contemporary view of Shaker rooms as simple utilizes a skewed definition of decoration and ornament. Shaker rooms that are described as being free of ornament ignore, as mentioned above, bright colors. Furthermore, attributes such as beaded moldings, panelled doors and boxed-in beams, while not overly ornate, certainly were more than simply functional. The relative definition of "decoration and ornament" is as culturally determined and as fluid as the determinants of "taste and style."

The writings of the Andrews popularized Shaker and constructed many representations of Shaker design. Not suprisingly, the Andrews' writings have influenced most subsequent Shaker related literature. The 1940's and 50's witnessed a surge of articles about the so-called classic period (1820-1860). Americans, deeply mired in the materialism of the modern age, increasingly turned towards

this era of simplicity as a means of dealing with a stressful way of life. Later periods of Shaker history were dismissed as not as important as the classic period. A reporter in the late 1940's writes:

Perfection was the aim of the work of their hands and their furniture reflected it until 1870 when enough of the prevailing bad taste in home furnishing outside the communities seeped in and coarsened their products.<sup>45</sup>

Ormbee's quotation is typical of an important trend in writings about the Shakers where later periods of Shaker history have consistently been dismissed as unimportant.

The simple, almost sterile view of Shaker roomscape persisted through the 1980's. Most recent books have used descriptions and photographs that reinforce the Andrews' emphasis on the classic period of Shaker history. Works in this vein include John Shea's The American Shakers and Their Furniture (1971) and June Sprigg and David Larkin's Shaker (1987).

During the late 1970's and into the 1980's as more museum and scholarly attention has been focused on the Shakers much of the Andrews' work is beginning to be reevaluated. While their work is still lauded for preserving and popularizing the Shakers, much of Andrew's formalist and synchronic historical interpretations that emphasize one period of Shaker history are giving way to diachronic interpretation

that utilizes anthropological and social historical methodology and take into consideration change over time and the dynamic element of cultural fluidity.

NOTES  
CHAPTER ONE

1. The official title of the movement is The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing. Members generally refer to themselves as Believers. The term Shaker developed as a derogatory word used to describe early Shaker religious meetings. Eventually the group popularly became known as the Shakers.
2. Richmond, Shaker Bibliography, 75-77.
3. Wm. Hugh Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Prince-Hall, Inc., 1965), 46.
4. Paige Lilly, "The Shakers and the Media: An Examination of the Shaker Library," The Shaker Quarterly, Vol. xvii, No. 3 (Fall 1989):107.
5. White and Taylor, Shakerism, 47-60.
6. Lilly, "Shakers and the Media", 107.
7. *ibid*, 111.
8. Brewer, Shaker Communities, 156.
9. The Farmer's Monthly Visitor was published in Concord, New Hampshire and had the largest number of articles devoted to the agricultural practices of the Shakers. At least seven articles were written about the Shakers in the issues published in 1839 and 1840. See Richmond, 177 for a summary of these articles.
10. Benson Lossing, "The Shakers," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 15 (June 1857):166.
11. Brewer, Shaker Communities, 156.
12. Madeline Bridges, "A Wonderful Little World of People," Ladies Home Journal (June 1898):6.
13. Kate Douglas Wiggin, Susanna and Sue (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 7.
14. See Paige Lilly's "Shakers and the Media" for further information on the treatment of the Shakers by the press.

15. Priscilla Brewer's Shaker Communities (1986) has been the most recent attempt at ascertaining the numbers of Shakers during several periods of the group's history. Unfortunately she does not include membership in Western Shaker Communities in her count. See pages 209-238.
16. Flo Morse, The Shakers and the World's People (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), 244.
17. Martha Wetherbee and Nathan Taylor, Shaker Baskets (Sanbornton: Martha Wetherbee Basket Shop, 1988), 89.
18. Jerry Grant and Douglas Allen, Shaker Furniture Makers (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 162.
19. "Edward D. Andrews Dies; Noted Expert on Shaker," Berkshire Eagle (June 8, 1964):15.
20. A.D. Emerich, "A Conversation With Faith Andrews," in Shaker; Furniture and objects from the Faith and Edward Deming Andrews Collections Commemorating the Bicentary of the American Shakers (Washington: Renwick Gallery, 1973):23.
21. *ibid.*, 23.
22. *ibid.*, 24.
23. Morse, World's People, 266.
24. Emrich, A Conversation, 32.
25. Edward D. Andrews Dies, 15.
26. Edward Andrews, Shaker Furniture. The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect (New Haven: Yale University, 1937), vii.
27. *ibid.*, 1.
28. *ibid.*, 3.
29. David Shi, In Search of the Simple Life (Layton: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 1986), 177-182.
30. *ibid.*, 177.
31. *ibid.*, 208.



32. *ibid.*, 208.
33. Edward D. Andrews and Faith Andrews, Fruits of the Shaker Tree of Life (Stockbridge: The Berkshire Traveller Press, 1975), 184.
34. *ibid.*, 186.
35. Morse, World's People, 88.
36. Charles Dickens, The Life And Adventures Of Martin Chuzzlewit And American Notes In Two Volumes (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, MDCCCXCIV), 2:566-567.
37. David Schorsch, The Photographs of William F. Winter, Jr. 1899-1939 (New York: David A. Schorsch, Inc., 1989), 35.
38. *ibid.*, 5.
39. Mary Lyn Ray, True Gospel Simplicity: Shaker Furniture in New Hampshire (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society), n.p.
40. See Morse, World's People, 273.
41. Grant and Allen, Shaker Furniture, 11.
42. Brewer, Shaker Communities, x.
43. C.R. Roseberry, "New Book Records: Few of Once Thriving Organization Survive," Times Union (November 15, 1953).
44. For a study of Shaker paint and washes see June Sprigg's, Shaker Original Paints and Patinas (Allentown: Muhlenberg College).
45. Tom Ormsbee, "Facts on Heirlooms," New Hampshire Sunday News (June 5, 1949).

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE SHAKER IMAGE AS PORTRAYED IN MUSEUM SETTINGS

The rise of Shaker museums could only occur as the public became aware and appreciative of the Shaker movement. Edward and Faith Andrews' writings popularized the Shaker way of life and spurred institutions and individuals to collect Shaker material. Shaker museums have, in turn, contributed much toward the popularization of the Shakers, until today there are several Shaker museums with thousands of visitors per year.

Only one Shaker museum pre-dates the Andrews' interest in researching and writing about the Shakers. In 1922 the first Shaker museum was opened by Clara Endicott Sears in Harvard, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> Sears (1863-1960), a wealthy Bostonian and descendant of two colonial Governors, devoted much of her long life to the establishment of a small museum known as Fruitlands.<sup>2</sup> Fruitlands was the site of a nineteenth century Transcendentalist community led by Bronson Alcott, father of the popular writer Louisa May Alcott. Sears restored the Alcott's house just before World War I. In her restoration she followed house museum restorers in stripping the house back to its mid-nineteenth century appearance. During the restoration project (c.1918) Sears wrote: "The

fine old chimneys must be put back in their places from which they had been ruthlessly torn down to make room for stoves." <sup>3</sup> We see from the quotation that the trappings of the modern age needed to be removed in order to glorify the past.

Over the years Sears constructed several other buildings near the Alcott house to house her collections of Indian artifacts and Hudson River School paintings. Sears viewed her museum as a <sup>4</sup> place of inspiration during periods of national stress. She also hoped that the museum would help youth come to terms with industrialization. Harriet O'Brien, author of an early museum guide, expressed this hope in 1929:

If, as modern educators claim, visual education leads all others in efficacy, the work fostered by Miss Sears affords the youth of America their best opportunity to learn something of the great spiritual influences of the past-influences which the crass industrialism of today threatens to stifle at their very source.<sup>5</sup>

We see then that Fruitlands was not only a place for those seeking inspiration but also a tool to help educate the younger generations in the face of increased industrialization.

Sears' choices of museum topics illustrate her nostalgic and idyllic view of the past. Her interpretations of Indian and Shaker life in particular helped foster popular images

which these two groups have come to represent. In many ways Sears represents what T.J. Jackson Lears describes as antimodernism. As Lears writes, "modern culture promoted a spreading sense of moral impotence and spiritual sterility".<sup>6</sup> In reaction to this impotency and sterility Lears argues that there was an attempt by many Americans to experience what he calls "real life".<sup>7</sup> "Real Life" experiences can be seen as attempts to transcend the mundane bureaucratic lives that most Americans were living. People did this, Lears argues, by taking part in a number of "real life" experiences, one example of which would be spiritual or mystical experiences. Sears, as we have seen, viewed her museum as a place where visitors could transcend the mundane. Her activities support much of Lears' arguments; she even became a confirmed spiritualist after encountering a Shaker ghost while visiting the Harvard Shaker community.<sup>8</sup>

It was the work of the Andrews more than Sears' museum, however, that seems to have widened institutional interest in the Shakers. The most important institutional collector of this period was the New York State Museum in Albany. The 1920's saw the New York State Museum Director, Charles Adams, begin to salvage as much material as possible from the recently sold Church Family at Watervliet, New York. The Church Family closed in 1927 because of lack of members and

the remaining Shakers moved to the South Family, leaving behind a staggering amount of artifacts. The State had recently purchased the property and was in the process of tearing down or greatly altering the remaining Shaker structures. Large amounts of material were in danger of destruction and Adams salvaged what artifacts he could.<sup>9</sup>

While Adams shared a Shaker interest with Andrews the two differed slightly in museum interpretation. Adams, as a trained museum professional, used an exhibit style popular at the time. The approach of Adams and many of his contemporary museum professionals treated artifacts as part of a linear progression in the development of civilization. Emphasis was placed on the function of the artifact and historic fact.<sup>10</sup> Michael Ettema describes this approach as Formalistic "because it usually seeks to explain the development of physical forms of objects; it emphasizes the concrete aspects of history-both fact and artifact."<sup>11</sup>

The formalist perspective has been particularly popular with American educators as a means to teach "proper" morals and aesthetics to the masses. Ettema points out that:

Many museum founders and governors-particularly those descended from wealthy families-believed that their forbears possessed in greater measure those qualities thought to be essential to social order: individualism, self-reliance, economic initiative, courage, simplicity, honesty, and taste.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to teaching the native-born masses, museums were seen as a way to Americanize immigrants so that these groups would not challenge the current social order.

The Formalistic perspective led to cluttered exhibits with an almost overwhelming amount of artifacts that explained the use of specific objects rather than using objects as a means to explore Shaker culture. While often set up in room settings, the purpose of these exhibits was to demonstrate the history and use of similarly classed artifacts. Adams' formalist interpretation differed slightly from Andrews who centered his displays on the form and style of particular pieces. Andrews was interested in the artistic nature of what he collected. As discussed in the previous chapter, Andrews did in fact view items produced by Believers as examples of pure design while his friend Homer Keyes saw the supposed purity of design as a means to shape America's destiny. Andrews and Keyes recognition of the potential influential role of artifacts was in keeping with early formalist beliefs that museum displays should highlight the white, Anglo-Saxon rural past of America. This mythic past could then be used in socializing the young and Americanizing immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

Andrews also attempted to move a step forward toward what Ettema termed an analytic approach to artifacts. In

this approach, one views artifacts as tools with which a museum or museum professional can elicit past cultural meanings and webs of significance.<sup>14</sup> The analytic approach is concerned with explaining why and how a group developed the way it did. Andrews' writings, while often formalist, also included some analytic portions where he tried to grapple with changing Shaker life. However, Andrews' analytic interpretations fell short of what could have been done with the information available to him. He never was able to come to grips with change in Shaker communities and eventually regarded later Shaker history as of little importance.

The 1930's and 1940's saw several Shaker exhibits in New York and other cities. The 1930's also witnessed the opening of a small museum at the Sabbathday Lake Community. In 1931 the Alfred, Maine, community combined with Sabbathday Lake. The resulting overflow of furniture was stored in the meeting house. Eventually the meeting room became an antique shop for the disposal of unwanted material while the second floor was turned into a museum. From photographic evidence dating from the 1950's and early 1960's, it can be determined that Sabbathday Lake's Museum was similar in exhibition style to many museums of the time.<sup>15</sup> Large numbers of artifacts were grouped together providing an almost

overwhelming feeling of clutter.

By the 1950's Old Chatham, New York, became a leading center for the interpretation of the Shaker experience. The founder of the museum, John Williams, began collecting Shaker artifacts a number of years after Andrews. Though not living on an original Shaker site, Williams constructed a variety of buildings on his property to house his collection. Old Chatham displays have traditionally been somewhat cluttered like many early museums. Like Adams, Williams was interested in artifacts as tools of a culture, but unlike Andrews, Williams was not concerned with emphasizing the artifacts form or style. Williams writes:

One major aim has been to give a broad picture of Shaker life and culture, and therefore great emphasis has been laid on those tools with which the Shakers worked, as well as many simple things with which they lived. The primary effort has not been to illustrate the Shaker cultural achievement in furniture design and interior architecture; rather this has been allowed to speak for itself.<sup>16</sup>

To Williams' credit, he was willing to display a wide range of artifacts from classic examples to objects from the Victorian period. He also filled room settings with a great variety of artifacts that he obtained from Shaker Communities but which were not of Shaker manufacture. This mixing of classic with Victorian and Shaker with non-Shaker artifacts provided a more accurate interpretation of Shaker rooms.



The 1960's witnessed increased interest in Shaker museums. Museums were started at the former Shaker communities at Hancock, Massachusetts, and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Also by this time the two surviving Shaker Communities at Canterbury, New Hampshire, and Sabbathday Lake, Maine, had developed their small museums into major revenue generating businesses. Shaker museums that developed or expanded during the 1960's often followed the lead of non-Shaker museums by moving towards a living-history mode of interpretation. Living history museums increased in popularity in the 1950's and by the 1960's, when many Shaker museums were founded, the living history style of interpretation was firmly established.<sup>17</sup> Unlike traditionally static museums, living history museums use costumed guides and craftspeople to give visitors the illusion they have stepped back in time and can actually participate in history being retold. Static museums, on the otherhand, display artifacts in a more traditional museum setting and the visitor is distanced from the historical experience.

Notable for a living history style of interpretation are Hancock, Massachusetts, and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Using costumed interpreters to illustrate the lifestyle and work of a certain period, the authenticity of interpretation at living history museums can vary. At Plimoth Plantation

interpreters are so totally immersed in seventeenth century life that they will not answer questions requiring knowledge from beyond that time period.<sup>18</sup> At Hancock Shaker village interpreters are dressed in quasi-Shaker garb, demonstrate Shaker crafts and will answer questions from a modern perspective. There are many difficulties in the use of living-history interpretation. A major criticism of American living history museums is the prevailing glorification of only the Northern European agrarian history of America.<sup>19</sup> While the 1980's have seen major living-history museums such as Old Sturbridge Village incorporate social tension into their interpretation, such a development has yet to spread to Shaker museums. Often referred to as "peaceable kingdoms," museums such as Hancock downplay controversial aspects of community life in favor of more popular aspects of Shaker history such as craft demonstrations.<sup>20</sup>

Pleasant Hill and Hancock have for the most part been restored to their supposed early nineteenth century appearance. This of course means that many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century building alterations were removed during the restoration process. Both villages give a synchronic view of Shakerism. In many ways the two communities were responsible for forming the post-1960 public image of the Shakers as Hancock and Pleasant Hill are

two of the most visited Shaker museums. In the first seven years of operation (1968-1975) Pleasant Hill was visited by 587,000 people and over 850,000 ate meals at the museum restaurant.<sup>21</sup> Pleasant Hill also provides a number of rooms in Shaker buildings where guests can spend the night surrounded by Shaker reproduction furniture. Hancock also has been visited by tens of thousands of people each year. With larger budgets and staff, frequent visitation, and similarity in interpretive style, the major Shaker museums have a much more lasting effect on the image of the Shakers than smaller institutions, especially when one is aware that Sabbathday Lake, Maine, has only six thousand visitors a year.

The image of the Shakers that is portrayed at both Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, and Hancock, Massachusetts, is one that downplays change within the community. Simplicity and serenity of Shaker life is shown through plainly furnished rooms and with suitably clothed interpreters working at mid-nineteenth century crafts.

One might expect museums such as Hancock and Pleasant Hill to have been popular in the 1960's, for they highlighted social order, peace and a simple agrarian lifestyle. Indeed, in a history of the Pleasant Hill Museum, Earl Wallace writes that there had been several

attempts by local citizens to preserve Pleasant Hill but  
none were successful until the 1960's.<sup>22</sup> The 1960's were a  
time of great social upheaval in America. It can be argued  
that Pleasant Hill and Hancock offered opportunities for an  
elite class to cast aside social disorder in favor of a  
museum setting that stressed peacefulness and serenity.  
Shaker museums became a place where a visitor could look  
back nostalgically at what was perceived as a much less  
complicated past. With an emphasis on traditional crafts,  
the simple agricultural lifestyle and the perceived  
anti-materialism of the early believers it is likely that  
the younger generation and members of the counter-culture  
movement of the 1960's also were attracted to Shaker  
museums.

The placid interpretation at Pleasant Hill is not  
surprising considering where the museum turned for  
assistance during its formative years. The founders of  
Pleasant Hill received much help from the administrators of  
Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>23</sup> Established by John D. Rockefeller,  
Williamsburg was a selective reconstruction which left out  
tension and any hint of social inequality. Rockefeller went  
so far as to leave blacks out of his reconstruction.<sup>24</sup> James  
Cogar, the first Director of Pleasant Hill, was formerly a  
Curator at Williamsburg and thus one is not surprised that

Pleasant Hill chose to interpret Shaker life as calm and serene.<sup>25</sup> The founders of the museum at Pleasant Hill were able to accomplish quickly many of the restoration plans because they received two million dollars from the Department of Commerce in 1964.<sup>26</sup> This money helped initiate the restoration of the village and allowed the museum to become an important Shaker site in a very few years.

In restoring Pleasant Hill the fact of the Shaker's willingness to change with the time was forgotten. The successive layering of taste and adaptation was stripped away and the buildings were returned to the classic period. Modern conveniences are used at Pleasant Hill but are hidden from public view.

Hancock was in many ways founded in a similar manner. In 1960 the Parent Ministry of the Shaker movement chose to sell the Hancock Community. While developers showed much interest in the property, the village and land were eventually sold to a group of local citizens. This group was led by Amy Bess Miller, a wealthy local woman.<sup>27</sup> Under her direction, Hancock was restored to resemble a circa 1840 Shaker Community. Many architectural features that had been added to buildings over time were removed to fit better the 1840 image. The Trustee's Office is the only building that retains Victorian architectural features and furnishings.

Interestingly, Hancock was furnished with many pieces that were donated by Edward and Faith Andrews. Edward Andrews<sup>28</sup> became the museum's first curator. He not only hoped to restore the Shaker buildings but to also restore: "the spiritual character of the culture. We wanted to conserve values, to create a setting which breathes the spirit of the original culture- to make the community again a living organization."<sup>29</sup> A 1961 brochure adds to what Andrews' wrote by saying that the buildings would be restored:

to the condition which existed when the Shakers created a distinct culture here in the late 18th and early 19th century. We plan to give a fourth dimension, to evoke again the spirit of consecration, of peace, order, simplicity, and quiet industry which once prevailed here, and for which there is a great need, amid the stresses and strains of the present age.<sup>30</sup>

We see that the aim of Hancock was similar to how Clara Sears envisioned her museum at Fruitlands some forty years before. We see then that the perceived ability of Shaker museums to help heal social disorder in America has been a continuing theme among Shaker museum founders.

By 1963 Andrews became disenchanted with the attempt to create a living history museum at Hancock and resigned. He left much of his collection at the museum although some material was withdrawn from Hancock and was later placed at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.<sup>31</sup>

Though many museum professionals have had reservations about the interpretation found at living history museums such as Hancock and Pleasant Hill, the public seemingly embraces the interpretations wholeheartedly. Hancock and Pleasant Hill rely on admissions revenues for a major part of their operating budget. It can be argued that the accurate historical interpretation takes a back seat to the often historically inaccurate desires of the fee-paying public.

A simple example of inaccuracies at both Pleasant Hill and Hancock would be the extremely well-kept grounds. While both sites attempt to recreate circa 1840 agrarian based villages there is a notable absence of the sights, sounds and smells one should associate with a working farm. Both villages have some livestock but they are peripheral to village interpretation. For example, the famous round stone cow barn at Hancock has been restored, yet the barn is not used today to house cows and the ground around the barn has been planted with grass. The barn sits almost as a sculpture on a bed of fine grass. This is in stark contrast to nineteenth century photographic evidence that shows that historically the barn was surrounded by a muddy working barn yard. In part because of modern day concerns for safety, insurance liability, and tourist demands to visit the barn,

the structure must be kept clean and lifeless. The importance of this single structure for the tourist can not be underestimated. One tourist became quite agitated when he was told that the interior of the barn was closed for the day. The man stated he had come from Michigan to see the barn and argued with museum staff for over half an hour.<sup>32</sup>

In recent years Hancock has mounted exhibits that highlight later periods of Shaker history. In 1990, for example, two exhibits were opened that take a more diachronic approach to Shaker history. One exhibit focused on Shaker Sisters fancy work and included many Victorian pieces. A second, permanent display highlights the history of the Hancock village using historic photographs and artifacts from throughout its two hundred year history.<sup>33</sup> Visitors can now gain information on later Shaker history. Despite this, the more romanticized view of Shakerism is not completely absent from Hancock. As recently as the mid-1980's brochures described the Shakers as follows: "Their days were structured, their lives guided by rules, but in all they did, there was joy and peace as they served their God."<sup>34</sup> The 1990 version of the Hancock brochure does not contain as much flowery language as the 1985 version, illustrating how it is possible to trace changing museum interpretation through brochures and other museum ephemera.



Many of the criticisms that could be levelled at living-history Shaker museums may be eventually eliminated as the museums professionalize and increase their staff. The area of accurate museum interpretation is relatively new to living history museums and we can expect some of the improvements that have occurred at sites like Old Sturbridge Village to eventually trickle down to the much smaller Shaker museums. Shaker museums may follow other museums in the years to come by taking a more diachronic approach to interpretation and by beginning to view buildings as living entities. Successive layering of styles and building functions can then be highlighted to provide visitors with a realistic and dynamic view of Shaker history.

During the 1960's, museums became important sources of revenue for the two remaining Shaker communities at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and Canterbury, New Hampshire. Prior to 1960 both villages had small museums that were secondary to the more economically important antique shops.

Brother Theodore Johnson came to live in the Sabbathday Lake Community in 1960. A multi-talented man, Brother Theodore began to change museum displays from a formalist view of interpretation to an analytical view which used artifacts as a means of explaining culture. He also moved

the antique shop out of the meeting house and was responsible for reintroducing the building as a place of worship for the first time since the 1880's. It was at this point in the 1960's that the Shakers took control of their own image. Concurrent with trends of self-determination, exploration of one's roots and cultural heritage, and a greater focus on self over society, the Shakers, under the strong direction of Brother Theodore, began to use the museum setting as an active tool for promoting the Community's view of Shakerism. Museum exhibits, travelling exhibits, conferences, and other educational endeavors helped to spread a different view of Shakerism than what was given at museums such as Hancock and Pleasant Hill.

Over the years, many Sabbathday Lake exhibits have focused on the Classic Period of Shaker history and design. However, Brother Theodore also was very much dedicated to bringing other, later periods of Shaker history to the attention of the public. In promoting exhibitions on later periods, the Shakers acknowledged their diverse history as important, both in understanding the past as well as the present. Two travelling exhibits that were developed in the mid-1980's illustrate this point.

An exhibit entitled Ingenious & Useful: Shaker Sisters' Communal Industries, 1860-1960, highlighted many colorful

and fancy products that Shakers Sisters produced for sale to the public. The aim of the exhibit was in part to bring examples of Victorian Shaker products to the public.<sup>36</sup> Items used in the displays included brightly colored pincushions, paper boxes, sewing boxes and dolls dressed in Shaker clothing. Most of these items are very different from what is commonly thought of as Shaker products and illustrate how Shakers changed their industrial pursuits in response to changing social and economic forces over the course of one hundred years.

The second exhibit was entitled In Time and Eternity and contained a collection of enlarged turn of the century photographs of Maine Shakers. The photographs were important because many were informal views of Shaker life. Interior views often pictured the cluttered rooms of the Victorian Shakers and other images illustrated what Shaker life was like at the turn of the century.<sup>37</sup> The exhibition photographs help to dispel common misbeliefs concerning Shaker life as simple and ascetic. In organizing exhibits the Shaker museum has made a commitment to reach-out in explaining their own history. In generating interest in Shakerism exhibitions bring information to the people in a focused, concentrated manner.

The Sabbathday Lake Shakers have supplemented their displays by hosting several important conferences. The most recent conference was in 1989 and was entitled Labor For A Gift Of God: The Shakers In A Changing Age, 1860-present. This event focused attention on the post Civil War history of the Shakers. Speakers addressed topics such as reconceptualizing Shaker history, Shaker photography, the lives of several latter day Shakers and a study of a specific Shaker family.<sup>38</sup> The speakers included recognized Shaker scholars, interested individuals, and even several actual Shakers and the varied backgrounds of the speakers provided a view of Shakerism from multiple perspectives. The presentations of the speakers have reached a wide audience with the recent publication in the Shaker Quarterly, a journal of research published by the Sabbathday Lake Shakers.<sup>39</sup>

Brother Theodore also added a Victorian period room to the museum display. This room contains both Shaker and non-Shaker furniture in a bedroom setting. A stereopticon rests on a marble topped table and a Shaker crafted painting is hung on the wall. However, if one compares this display with a circa 1900 photograph, taken in the same building, one would find the Victorian display quite tame. Photographs of Victorian Shaker rooms show an array of material culture

including displays of souvenirs and knick-knacks, multiple fabric table coverings, rugs on the floors and pictures on the wall framed in ornate Victorian style. Brother Theodore was also important in training Sabbathday Lake interpreters to convey an ongoing, dynamic view of Shakerism and Shaker history.

Sabbathday Lake's museum staff is fortunate because they have personal relationships with a working Shaker community. This provides much first hand knowledge of how a Shaker community works and provides a realistic view of the joys and sorrows of being a Shaker. This of course is in contrast to Pleasant Hill and Hancock where most of the interpreters are far too young to remember the communities when they were still active. Armed with personal knowledge and extensive training, guides at Sabbathday Lake are able to provide a diachronic view of the Shakers that is unmatched by interpreters at any other Shaker museum.

Additionally, in organizing exhibitions and conferences and publishing journals, in addition to agricultural pursuits, the Shaker community presents the dynamic history of Shaker adaptation in their active, contemporary lives. The Shaker museum at Sabbathday Lake thus becomes much more than a didactic display, but rather becomes a mirror of a multi-faceted group with a firmly rooted yet flexible

lifeway.

The Shaker museum portrays Shaker history as a dynamic force, responsive to changes in society and economics. Further, the Shaker movement is portrayed as active in the present, not just in the past. Yet despite the presence of Shakers in the modern world, visitors to Sabbathday Lake view with suspicion any information which challenges the static image. In an era where bigger is better, the smaller museum is seen as less knowledgeable than the larger Hancock or Pleasant Hill. Ironically, the smaller, Shaker run museum at Sabbathday Lake is overlooked by visitors in face of larger, more impersonal museums. Reminiscent of an increasingly impersonal society, though visitors go to Shaker sites for "real experiences," they buy the experience more keyed to contemporary life- visitors in large numbers (thus validating their choice), glossy brochures over hand-printed, and familiar, expected information rather than a novel, different approach.

In the 1960's Canterbury, New Hampshire was unsure of its future role as a museum. With this uncertainty the Shaker library at Canterbury was given to the Old Chatham Shaker Museum for safekeeping. In the early 1960's Canterbury hired a person to organize and run their museum. Charles "Bud" Thompson was involved in organizing the museum, but he was

also the recipient of large amounts of Shaker material from the remaining Canterbury Sisters. In 1972, realizing that their days were numbered, the few Canterbury Sisters signed over their property to a non-profit corporation that now runs Canterbury as a museum.<sup>40</sup> Canterbury's displays are made up of material from all periods of Shaker history although again, playing to the desires of the public, the emphasis is on the Classic Period. Some guides at Canterbury have, over the years, had some direct contact with the last Shakers in the village which allows some chance of a diachronic tour. Canterbury changed from an active religious community to a non-profit museum where a few Shakers happened to live and where visitors could greet elderly Shaker Sisters. Unlike Sabbathday Lake, here Shakers were seen as removed from the history of the Shakers, mere observers representing the past, rather than writing the present.

Canterbury has also mounted exhibits that spot-light the Victorian period of Shaker history. Indeed, one of the crafts that is demonstrated at Canterbury is the making of very fancy sewing baskets. The Canterbury museum was also a partial supporter of a 1974 exhibit developed by the New Hampshire Historical Society. True Gospel Simplicity; Shaker Furniture in New Hampshire focuses much attention on Shaker furniture made after the Civil War. The author of the

exhibit catalogue, Mary Lyn Ray, makes a point to down play the classic period, writing that pre-civil war Shaker furniture did not: "represent a distinct style. It is a paring down of vernacular forms."<sup>41</sup> She saw very little that is unique in early Shaker furniture. Rather, she saw the classic style as vernacular furniture that was simplified, not for the sake of simplicity, but because the large Shaker communities in New Hampshire needed a great deal of furniture. Ray's catalogue is interesting, not only for its treatment of the Victorian period but also because she includes four late nineteenth century photographs of Shaker interiors. We see in these pictures how the Shakers lived rather than how museums interpret how the Shakers lived. All four images show a great mixing of furniture styles with Shaker made Classic and Victorian furniture mixed with pieces that were not of Shaker origin.

The 1960's-1980's have seen the rise of many smaller Shaker museums on or near the site of former Shaker communities. The 1980's especially saw an increase in these smaller museums with new institutions being established at Enfield, New Hampshire, Watervliet, New Lebanon, and Groveland New York. Most of these museums are small in terms of their physical plant and collections. For the most part they tend to focus on the classic period of Shakerism in



their interpretation. In the shadow of larger Shaker museums and faced with the difficulty of starting a viable Shaker museum with the high costs of assembling an adequate collection, the image of the Shakers portrayed at these museums is dictated more by economic need than by historical accuracy.

The museum at Mount Lebanon, New York, is one example of a small museum that is on uncertain ground. The beginnings of this museum can be traced to the 1930's when the Church Family at Mount Lebanon sold its property to a group wishing to establish a private school. The Darrow School took possession of the Church Family buildings and an array of Shaker artifacts. Though a small museum has always been a facet of the Darrow School, it was not until the mid-1980's that an actual museum director was hired and a corporation was set up to develop the museum as an institution separate from the school. The school retained ownership of all the artifacts, which placed the museum in a dubious position as the school has had a tradition of selling its Shaker artifacts whenever money is needed. Indeed, even after the museum was organized, several major pieces were removed by school officials and sold for over one hundred thousand dollars.<sup>42</sup> This has been particularly troubling to supporters of the museum because the institution has received a one

million dollar challenge grant from the state of New York which would be used to buy the buildings from the school and begin restoration. Despite this, the entire collection of remaining artifacts was recently sold to a Washington D.C. collector for an undisclosed sum. For now the collector has agreed to leave the collection at Mount Lebanon.

Similar conditions plague the small museum at Enfield, New Hampshire. Without a substantial collection to lure visitors the museum staff has developed other methods to entice people to visit. The complex now includes an inn and a woodworkers shop and the museum also hosts a yearly antique show. These strategies along with a large variety of workshops and talks are marketing strategies aimed at increasing awareness of their site.

Shaker Museums have played a primary role in the development of the Shaker image. Relying on admissions income to run the museums, most Shaker villages have had to compromise accurate interpretation to provide the public with what they expect. It is in some ways ironic that the Sabbathday Lake museum, a museum run by living Shakers that does not rely only on admission income for survival, often comes under public scrutiny for displaying accurate Shaker history and contemporary life. Visitors do not want to visit Shaker villages where modern conveniences and tastes

are evident. Therefore, as at Hancock and Pleasant Hill, rooms and entire buildings have been stripped of their more recent alterations so that they can be restored to interpret the classic period of Shaker history. At Sabbathday Lake, a compromise of sorts is reached. Visitors see artifacts from a variety of periods and are informed of the contemporary lives of the Shakers, yet accept only what they wish to believe and disregard any information that contradicts their preconceived notions.

The formalist view of museum interpretation is still very much apparent in today's Shaker museums. Most Shaker museums do not attempt to explain the complex social relationships that were present in Shaker communities. Instead visitors are led on nostalgic tours during which they learn how the Shakers lived carefree and peaceful lives. Few Shaker museums have moved towards an analytical approach. Sabbathday Lake is one museum which broadens its interpretation to include information on every day life and decision making within Shaker communities. It is also one of the few Shaker museums teaching their guides to talk about Shakers in regard to changes across time. This diachronic approach should become more popular in the future with the professionalization of museum staffs.

The period from the 1920's through 1989 has witnessed

increasing interest in Shaker museums. Organized during the 1960's, a period of social upheaval, the large restored villages generally portray a stagnant, simplified version of Shaker history centering on the classic period of Shaker history. This emphasis on one very short period has shaped the popular image of the Shakers as having enjoyed a golden age in the mid-nineteenth century. The image of the Shakers fostered by a formalist approach has helped to generate a growing interest in Shaker antiques and reproductions. The next chapter will address the rise of Shaker products in the marketplace.

NOTES  
CHAPTER TWO

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3. *ibid.*, 69.
4. *ibid.*, 137.
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6. Lears, Place of Grace, 4-5.
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8. Barton, History's Daughter, 85-86.
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12. *ibid.*, 68.
13. *ibid.*, 64-65.
14. *ibid.*, 63.
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Shaker communities over time.

16. John Williams, The Shaker Museum; Old Chatham, N.Y. (Old Chatham: Shaker museum, n.d.), 1.
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18. *ibid.*, 88.
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21. Earl Wallace, Shakertown At Pleasant Hill: The First Fifteen Years (Harrodsburg: Pleasant Hill Press, n.d.), 19.
22. *ibid.*, 2.
23. Samuel Thomas and James Thomas, The Simple Spirit; A Pictorial Study Of The Shaker Community At Pleasant Hill (Harrodsburg: Pleasant Hill Press, 1973), 17.
24. Leon and Piatt, Living Hsitory, 74.
25. Thomas and Thomas, Simple Spirit, 17.
26. *ibid.*, 17.
27. Emerich, A Conversation, 37.
28. Andrews and Andrews, Fruits, 199.
29. *ibid.*, 201.
30. Hancock Shaker Village brochure c.1961. Located in a scrap book compiled by Margret Mayo. United Society of Shaker, Sabbathday Lake, Maine.
31. Andrews and Andrews, Fruits, 201.
32. This occurrence was observed in the Visitor's Center at Hancock, Massachusetts during the annual antique weekend in October 1989. The barn was closed for security reasons because the antique show dealers were utilizing the barn for

display purposes and the antique show was not scheduled to open to the public until the next day.

33. These exhibits were observed during a visit to Hancock Shaker Village in August 1990.

34. Hancock Brochure in the collection of The United Society of Shakers, Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

35. Ettema, History Museums, 63.

36. Theodore Johnson, Ingenious & Useful; Sisters' Communal Industries, 1860-1960 (Poland Spring: The United Society of Shakers, 1986), n.p.

37. David Richards, In Time And Eternity (Poland Spring: The United Society of Shakers, 1986).

38. Labor For A Gift Of God; The Shakers In A Changing Age, 1860-present. Information Packet.

39. The Shaker Quarterly. Vol. xvii, No. 4, Winter 1989.

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41. Mary Lyn Ray, True Gospel Simplicity: Shaker Furniture In New Hampshire (New Hampshire Historical Society, 1974), n.p.

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CHAPTER THREE  
THE RISE OF A MARKET FOR SHAKER  
ANTIQUES AND REPRODUCTIONS

The image of the Shakers developed by the Andrews and by museums have stimulated a growing business in selling Shaker and "Shaker" related products. This chapter will begin by examining the historical background of the interest in Shaker antiques and conclude with a discussion of the rise of the multi-million dollar business in "Shaker" inspired products and reproductions.

The Colonial Revival, in part, instigated the beginnings of a market for Shaker antiques. With the Centennial Celebration of 1876, Americans became increasingly interested in their colonial and pioneer pasts.<sup>1</sup> Generations of Americans have decorated their homes in colonial symbols ranging from exact furniture reproductions or genuine antiques to the mass produced quasi-colonial material such as plastic eagles and wallpaper with patriotic emblems.

The Centennial Celebration stimulated nostalgia for the past, perceived as a simpler time, and created a market for the material symbols of America's agrarian roots.<sup>2</sup> The last hundred years has witnessed impressive growth in the market place for reproductions of colonial and early American



furniture and architecture. Indeed, entire towns have been "restored" to fit the perception of how a colonial town should appear.<sup>3</sup> Museum Curator William Butler studied the early twentieth-century restoration of Litchfield, Connecticut, and he pointed out that the restoration created a mythic view of how the town appeared in the colonial period.<sup>4</sup> This mythic colonial image can easily be compared to restoration projects at a number of Shaker sites such as the previously discussed sterile "barnyard" at the Hancock Village.

This interest in the colonial and early American past has helped to stimulate an expanding market for original Shaker antiques. The Shaker antique market can be traced as far back as the 1880's when Sabbathday Lake created its first antique shop. Photographic evidence of the interiors of several Shaker stores documents that by the early twentieth century other Shaker villages were also engaged in selling antiques. For example, a circa 1915 post card of the exterior of the store at the North Family Shakers of Mount Lebanon, New York, clearly depicts a sign that lists several types of tourist goods for sale including antiques.<sup>5</sup> Interior postal views of the same period also show surplus china, curios and Shaker artifacts being sold.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, Shaker furniture and accessories were not

collected for the sake of their Shaker history but rather as relics of the colonial era. For example, in the 1920's when the Andrews began to collect Shaker furniture there were very few trestle tables left in Shaker Communities. The Andrews maintain that the majority of the tables had been purchased by antique dealers years before and sold to customers as colonial pieces.<sup>7</sup>

Shaker communities also became a source for inexpensive furniture for middle and upper income Americans looking for furniture with which to furnish country homes and cabins.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, even today good quality Shaker furniture can occasionally be found in hunting camps or lakeside cabins.<sup>9</sup> To fit the expectations of the colonial revival, however, many Shaker pieces had their original finishes altered. Colonial revival tastes tended toward highly refinished furniture that highlighted the natural grain of the wood.<sup>10</sup> As discussed in chapter one, most Shaker furniture and accessories of the classic period were painted or had a colored wash applied as a finish. From the late nineteenth century through the 1950's most Shaker pieces that were sold from Shaker communities were either refinished before they were sold or shortly thereafter.

The market for Shaker antiques was rather small until Edward and Faith Andrews began aggressively to collect and

deal in Shaker material in the 1920's. At the time most Shaker communities were faced with economic hardship and declining numbers and were willing to sell their surplus goods. The Andrews amassed a large personal collection but they were also instrumental in bringing new collectors to the Shaker field. The Andrews expanded the market for Shaker material by publishing books and articles and by exhibiting their collection. The Andrews also sold many pieces of Shaker furniture to new collectors.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1940's many Americans were collecting Shaker material and articles were appearing in the popular press concerning Shaker artifacts and their collectability. A 1945 House and Garden article entitled: "THE SHAKER LOOK: AUTHENTIC FURNITURE AND DESIGN GIVE A SMALL HOUSE FORTHRIGHTNESS" celebrates America's "indigenous past" by arguing that "Shaker design is a native tradition with a future."<sup>12</sup> The post-war boom saw Americans searching for roots with which to glorify their past. The making of Shaker reproductions was in the opinion of a second writer in House and Garden a way of resocializing lives that had been disrupted by World War II. The article states:

"Rehabilitation programs will also find the reproducing of Shaker design an inspiration to those who will need to work with their hands to restore mind and body."<sup>13</sup> This example of

antimodern sentiment illustrates once again how a "real experience" could be used to enrich a life.

In 1975 Faith Andrews published the couple's memoirs of the trials and tribulations of collecting Shaker material. Entitled Fruits of the Shaker Tree of Life; Memoirs of Fifty Years of Collecting and Research, the book is an often candid work which provides insight into the Andrews' collecting methods and style. The Andrews were aggressive in their methods of acquiring antiques even to the point of entering unlocked, privately-owned Shaker buildings in order to search for artifacts.<sup>14</sup>

The Shaker response to the Andrews' collecting was at best mixed. In their memoirs the Andrews write that they were never able to buy much from the Second Family at Mount Lebanon because the remaining Shakers were too attached to their goods. Indeed, when the Andrews visited the Second Family, the members often would not stop working to speak to them.<sup>15</sup> The Andrews also had to deal with the fact that all the community goods were consecrated property and only the Community Trustees could properly sell the pieces. The Andrews sometimes bypassed the trustees by developing friendships with individual Sisters. Through these friends they purchased much of their collection, at times causing conflict within Shaker communities. In one case the Andrews

were caught by a Trustee removing a sewing desk and were  
forced to return the piece.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these admissions and the number of years the Andrews' collected Shaker material, only a small portion of this text's twenty-seven chapters deal directly with their methods or goals of collecting. The balance of this work consists of short reminiscences of particular Shakers, brief descriptions of Shaker buildings, and reprinted essays published previously. These (and other) topics are placed in the text neither chronologically nor thematically, resulting in a disjointed book.

The 1940's witnessed a growth in the number of people collecting Shaker antiques. Shakers were often not very impressed with antique collectors. One Shaker Sister had this to say about the state of interest in the Shakers in the 1940's:

Most our visitors these days are antique collectors, and all they're interested in is buying up what little fine old handmade Shaker furniture we have left. Why, those people would grab the chairs right out from under us if we'd let them. Our furniture is very fashionable all of a sudden, you know.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1940's, there was little left at Mount Lebanon for antique collectors to purchase. Buyers could still find a wide selection of material for sale at Sabbathday Lake and Canterbury. Through the early 1960's it was possible to

still visit Shaker Communities and purchase material directly from the Shakers. However, by the 1960's all but two of the Shaker communities had closed their doors leaving less and less Shaker material available for direct purchase. In addition, as former and still active Shaker communities developed their museums, there was an attempt to safeguard what was left for museum purposes.

A shrinking source and an increase in demand for Shaker material has caused prices for artifacts to continually rise. With the great price increases Shaker furniture and artifact collecting began to be a pastime of the wealthy rather than of the average American who could no longer hope to furnish a home in original Shaker pieces. The demand for Shaker pieces at affordable prices led to a great rise in the manufacture of Shaker reproductions.

At first reproductions seem to have been created by individual craftspeople, but as demand increased several companies became interested in producing "Shaker" style furniture for the masses. Interestingly, one of the earliest attempts to commercially reproduce Shaker products was undertaken by none other than Faith and Edward Andrews. A 1963 newspaper article credits the Andrews with reviving  
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several Shaker industries. The article goes on to report that a number of items were being reproduced including

trays, carriers, clothing and dolls.<sup>19</sup> The business apparently was discontinued with Edward Andrews death in 1964.

By 1970 a major attempt to reproduce Shaker design in large quantities was begun. A company known as Shaker Workshops began to reproduce a variety of items. This Massachusetts based company continues to manufacture "Shaker" furniture and accessories that can be purchased completely finished or in kit form for the home craftsman.

In their first catalogue (1971) the founders point toward the increased interest in the Shakers as a reason for making reproductions. The owners were "dedicated to perpetuating the high standards of the Shakers" and believed that their reproductions would fit nicely in homes decorated with "American Colonial, Swedish Modern or [it could be used in] contrast with the ornate turnings common to many European pieces."<sup>20</sup> Reflecting antimodernist sentiment, the company also had lofty ideas about the potential benefit of their furniture kits for the public. The company authors describe possible uses for their furniture writing that the kits were:

ideal for young marrieds who enjoy today's simple functional furniture, and can be the answer to a

difficult gift problem. Your youngster may need something to do, so why not let him make a chair of his own.<sup>21</sup>

The founders of Shaker workshops saw the construction of Shaker furniture as a means to help socialize youth. Making a chair, we might surmise, could build self-confidence and teach the work ethic.

In his book, No Place of Grace; Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920, T.J. Jackson Lears devotes a chapter to the revival of interest in preindustrial craftspeople among affluent Americans of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Lears argues that white collar workers could vent their antimodernist feelings by taking part in home projects such as furniture making. The period that concerns Lears (1880-1910) saw little or no interest in making Shaker reproductions. With almost no popular interest in Shaker material culture there was no demand for Shaker reproductions. However, Lears' arguments for the need of white collar workers to escape the pressure of modern life was as true in the 1970's as it was at the turn of the century. Shaker Workshops makes it possible for even the most harried American to have a "real experience" by putting together and finishing a furniture kit.

Compared to similar companies, Shaker Workshops has been the most stringent in making their exact reproductions.



However, in recent years Shaker Workshops has been attempting to increase its market by adding such products as a Chinese-made, grass reproduction of a Shaker meeting house and oval serving trays that resemble the fingered tops of oval Shaker boxes.

Recently, Shaker Workshops has begun to successfully market its furniture in England. The owner of the London, England Shaker store became interested in the Shakers after a visit to the Hancock, Massachusetts museum. He writes:

In the United Kingdom we had gone through ten years of materialism and 'instant style'. It was not a religious conversion but it was certainly a spiritual awariness that happened to me at Hancock.<sup>23</sup>

Like America, England has experienced a rediscovery of the past as a means of dealing with problems of the present. Indeed, the Shaker aesthetic is now an international image. In the mid-1980's Canterbury, New Hampshire, was visited by 32,000 people from each American state and 34 foreign countries.<sup>24</sup> The other major Shaker museums are also being visited by tourists from around the globe. In the future it will be of great interest to study how the Shakers are represented as related material culture and literature spread worldwide. A review of the extensive periodical clippings in the Sabbathday Lake library reveals articles about the Shakers in British, French, German, Dutch, and

Japanese publications of the 1970's and particularly the 1980's.

The 1980's witnessed a great growth in Shaker related or inspired products. Products now include furniture, children's books, tinware, clothing and even house plans. Some companies, such as Shaker Workshops, produce quality Shaker reproductions. Other companies produce products that have no connection to the Shakers except the use of the name to sell the product. For consumers it does not seem to matter whether the Shakers actually used particular items. The term "Shaker" sells a product. For example, the Crate & Barrel company connected sex and the celibate Shakers to produce the following advertisement:

Shaker but sensuous....The new hope series. Shaker styled four poster beds, armoires, chests, and side tables. Who knows? If the Shakers had bedrooms like this, there might be more of them around today .<sup>25</sup>

Such advertisements serve as an indication of what a catch word "Shaker" has become for many Americans in the 1980's. When used in the marketplace the term no longer has a connection with the religious group. It is now secularized and used by businesses to connect the image created and held by the buying public to the material goods provided by the businesses. "Shaker" as a catch word can be utilized by retailers to exploit the public's need for symbols of

nostalgia. "Shaker" products symbolize a peaceful, old-fashioned and agrarian lifestyle fast disappearing in America.

Invariably companies and craftspeople are producing "Shaker" furniture and accessories that many consumers connect with the group through visitation to museums. One magazine recently devoted a lengthy article to six craftspeople who "are keeping the Shaker spirit thriving through their work."<sup>26</sup> Yet these people are not creating Shaker reproductions from all periods of the group's history but rather, with few exceptions, concentrate on the classic period. Additionally, these reproductions are modified in their design to agree with what their buyers perceive to be authentic Shaker design. One example of this trend is that the vast majority of reproduced "classic" furniture is finished naturally with the wood oiled or lightly stained. These pieces, if produced by Believers in the nineteenth century, would almost always have a painted finish. The public is at this time more responsive to naturally finished Shaker products than painted examples, leading craftsmen to produce what the market wants and expects.

Even the Sabbathday Lake Shakers have been involved in the rise of interest in Shaker and "Shaker" inspired

products. A popular notion about the Believers suggests that their cooking utilizes a great variety of herbs. The members at Sabbathday Lake have fueled this image in order to sell their extensive herb line. Nineteenth century Shakers did in fact produce large amounts of herbs for sale to the public. Indeed by 1860 Sabbathday Lake was producing over 155 varieties of herbs, roots and barks. However, only four of these numerous products were for cooking while the remaining one hundred and fifty one were for medicinal purposes.<sup>27</sup> The Sabbathday Lake herb industry ended in 1911 due in part to new Federal Food and Drug regulations coupled with an inadequate community membership to maintain the many Shaker industries.<sup>28</sup>

The herb business was revived in 1962 by Brother Theodore Johnson. Brother Theodore took advantage of the back to earth movement and began to produce herbs for sale. In a way, the industry was a reproduction of the nineteenth century herb business with herbs being packaged in replicas of early tins that were used by the Community. The revival of the herb industry was in keeping with the Shaker's ability to restructure their industries to take advantage of changing conditions and buying habits of Americans. This time, however, most of the herbs were for cooking or for use as tea. As the herb business grew, more and more articles

and attention was focused on herbs and in a domino fashion one began to see other Shaker museums offering herb dinners and herb cooking workshops. Most museums also began to plant herb gardens and today an integral part of many visitors' perceptions of the group is that herbs have always been an important part of Shaker cooking. This popular conception is reinforced by a number of Shaker cookbooks, including one<sup>29</sup> written and published by the Sabbathday Lake Shakers. The herbal component adds an important element in the image of the Shakers. To peaceful and simple we can add "in tune with nature" as the perceived "healthful herbal cookery" sustained the community in their agrarian pursuits. In many ways, the idea of Shakers understanding the uses of herbs ennobles them and aligns them with the Indian noble savage who also lived in communion with nature.

The 1980's not only witnessed a surge of Shaker reproductions but also saw continued interest in Shaker antiques. Shaker material has become increasingly scarce and prices have reflected this scarcity. Another reflection of scarcity is the growing problem of misrepresented antiques and outright fakes. So many people wish to own Shaker items that there is now a large business in selling simple country furniture as Shaker. Unscrupulous dealers have occasionally produced fakes to help satisfy the market's thirst for

Shaker artifacts.

One of the more important events in the Shaker antique market today is Willis Henry's annual Shaker auction. In recent years the auction has been held at Shaker museums at Hancock and Mount Lebanon. Henry has skillfully parlayed limited knowledge of Shaker material with a good business sense to form a very successful Shaker event. The quality of the Shaker material in Henry's auction varies greatly from extremely rare pieces to obvious fakes. The Shaker setting and hype surrounding the event combine to produce record prices. While Shaker dealers spurn the obvious problem pieces the questionable material finds ready bidders among neophyte collectors. Henry's gross sales have grown dramatically in the 1980's. His first auction in 1982 grossed \$140,000 while the 1990 event brought in \$1,100,000 from eager buyers.<sup>30</sup>

The auction is more than an event, it is a drama. All major Shaker dealers and collectors attend this auction to take part in the adventure. At the 1990 auction the auctioneer played his part by strolling into the tent wearing a "Shaker" straw hat while Shaker music played in the background.<sup>31</sup> The day is usually filled with intrigue as people try to guess who is after which piece and who is making deals with whom.

Individuals collect Shaker antiques and reproduction for many reasons. Some see their purchases as an investment while others use what they buy to build a sanctuary in which they can escape the worries of the modern industrial age.<sup>32</sup> Many collectors of Shaker reproductions and antiques tell of an affinity with what they collect. A recent reviewer of a BBC documentary on the Shakers sarcastically describes one collector's thoughts on the artifacts he owns:

One New York dentist, almost slavering over his collection of delicate chairs and servicable baskets, said: 'Shaker means an aspiration to perfection. This chair is so delicate I can pick it up with my pinky (small finger). It whispered to me 'take me home.' Ever since then it's been whispering to me, 'I am Shaker, I am honest'<sup>33</sup>

Not only can Shaker material provide a financial investment, the passage reveals to us the deep emotional investment that some individuals have in the reproductions and antiques that they own.

There are many ways of dealing with the stress of modern life. By choosing to furnish their homes in Shaker antiques or reproductions some people build a sanctuary which symbolizes their nostalgic view of the Shakers. Shaker museums allow people to have "real experiences" for a day but owning Shaker antiques or reproductions allow the public transcend the mundane without leaving home. Buying "Shaker" is buying an image filled with nostalgia for a simpler, less

stress-filled era. Indeed, antiques and reproductions go beyond their simply decorative or even functional purposes; their more critical purpose can be seen as symbolic. As Christian crosses serve to announce to visitors that the occupants hold a certain set of beliefs, Shaker artifacts act as an icon in announcing an affinity, with if not a desire for, a simpler, more "natural" life. In this way individuals do more than obtain a momentary escape from modern stress. Owners of "Shaker" reproductions and Shaker antiques are able to escape in a visible and tangible way by collecting symbols around them.



NOTES  
CHAPTER THREE

1. For a description on some aspects of the Colonial Revival see Alan Axelrod, ed., The Colonial Revival in America (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985).
2. Kenneth Ames, "Introduction," in Alan Axelrod, ed., The Colonial Revival in America (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), 11.
3. William Butler, "Another City Upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival," in Alan Axelrod, ed., The Colonial Revival in America (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985).
4. *ibid.*, 51.
5. Post card in the collection of the author.
6. *ibid.*
7. Andrews and Andrews, Shaker Tree of Life, 23.
8. Grant and Allen, Shaker Furniture, 11.
9. See for example "The Shakers Have Shaken the Hesses," in The Shaker Messenger 7(Sumer 1985), 9.
10. June Sprigg, Shaker Original Paints and Patinas (Allentown: Muhlenberg Collxge, 1987):7.
11. Andrews and Andrews, Shaker Tree of Life, 190.
12. "The Shaker Look: Authentic Furniture and Design Give A Small House Forthrightness," House and Garden (March 1945):39.
13. William Lassiter, "The Shaker Legacy," House and Garden (March 1945):134.
14. Andrews and Andrews, Shaker Tree of Life, 25.
15. *ibid.*, 64.
16. *ibid.*, 190.
17. Berton Roueche, "A Small Family of Seven," in The New

Yorker 23(August 23, 1947), this version of the quotation was taken from Grant and Allen's Shaker Furniture, 13.

18. "Faith for the Family: Varied Crafts Display Rare Purity of Design. Dr. & Mrs. Andrews Have Revived Products of Diligence and Intelligence," Springfield Union, January 22, 1963.

19. *ibid.*

20. Shaker Workshops, Concord, Massachusetts. Prices Effective July 1, 1971, n.p.

21. *ibid.*

22. Lears, Place of Grace, 60.

23. Tim Lamb, "Shaker Store Opens in London," in The Shaker Messenger 12(Winter 1990):26.

24. Eldress Bertha Lindsay, "Home Notes For Canterbury, New Hampshire," The Shaker Messenger 8(Winter 1986):18.

25. Crate & Barrel ad in The Boston Globe, June 19, 1988.

26. Polly Bannister, "Inspired by the Shakers," Yankee (February 1989):74.

27. Catalogue of Herbs, Roots, Barks, Powdered Articles, Etc. Prepared in the United Society, New Gloucester, Maine (Portland: B. Thurston, Printer, 1864).

28. Sister Frances Carr, Shaker Your Plate: of Shaker Cooks and Cooking (Sabbathday Lake: United Society of Shakers, 1986), 41.

29. *ibid.*

30. Fran Kramer, "Shaker Antiques in the Marketplace: Oprah Winfrey New Shaker Buyer," The Shaker Messenger 12(Fall 1990):18.

31. This event was observed by the author on August 5, 1990.

32. Lears, Place of Grace, 190.

33. Susan Young, "Last Night's View: Big Business Shakes Gently Crafted Lives," in Daily Express, October 18, 1990.

## EPILOGUE

### TOWARD VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

The previous chapters have traced the rise of what at best can be termed a hybrid "Shaker" image. In the early years of the movement Believers were often viewed as fanatics who were challenging the social hierarchy of early New England. Outsiders focused on the perceived potentially disruptive nature of the Shaker message and manner of living. As the nineteenth century progressed and the age of science and reason grew, the emotional tension that marked the early years of the Shaker movement dissipated. The Shaker image as recorded in popular publications of the time now focused on the agricultural and industrial acumen of this successful communal society.

As America became more socially, economically and technologically complex the white middle and upper class began to feel unfulfilled in their work and in their lives as they became increasingly distant from the end point of production. This lack of craftsmanship and personal satisfaction in production endeavors spurred the anti-modernist and progressive simplicity sentiments and was also a catalyst for the initiation of the Colonial Revival. These movements share common threads, including the need for

individuals to have "real experiences" to add meaning to their lives. Anti-modernist and progressive simplicity advocates promoted activities such as furniture making and decorating as a means of connecting people to what they produce. Individuals swept up in the Colonial Revival restored and decorated their homes with reproductions and antiques from earlier eras. All three movements used symbols to represent what was perceived to be a simpler time to enable participants to forge a connection to the past and add meaning to their present. At this point, individuals begin to refer to the Shakers in nostalgic terms, seeing them as a remnant of a simpler past. By the 1920's, Faith and Edward Andrews, with their new-found interest in the Shakers, were able to bring together these trends to create an image of the Shakers that appealed to people affected by the dogma of Anti-Modernists, Progressive Simplicity, and the Colonial Revival.

This thesis has argued that trends in anti-modernism, progressive simplicity and the Colonial Revival have persisted and influenced American thought throughout the twentieth century. Clara Endicott Sear's Fruitlands as a place for thinkers, Shaker style as a pure American style during the Great Depression, the supposed benefit of making Shaker reproductions for both returning World War Two

veterans and the youth of the 1970's, all point to the same sources for their inspiration. Uniting and underlying these movements was the need for middle and upper income groups to have real experiences to make sense of their often fragmented lives.

The 1960's were pivotal in the development of the Shaker image. The earlier work of the Andrews had created a growing interest in Believers but it was not until the 1960's that the Andrews perceptions of the Shakers found secure homes. With the founding of museums at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, and Hancock, Massachusetts, the Andrews' interpretation was codified and the message was spread to hundreds of thousands of museum visitors. As we have seen, these "peaceable Kingdoms" greatly influenced the public's view of the Shakers as a simple, unchanging sect who lived carefree lives.

With the broad-based public influence of institutions such as museums we can see why "Shaker" reproductions have generally been produced only from the classic period. In order to sell, today's "Shaker" products must fit the public view of what is Shaker. Not only is the Shaker image hybrid, gathering bits and pieces over two hundred years, it is also selective in choosing those elements that appeal in a certain moment in time. Finally, it is not the Shakers,

nor in reality the institutions, which select those "bits" to construct the image. It is the public, who with needs unfulfilled, turn to "Shaker" and in effect create their own prescription for what ails them. Stephen Weil writing of new challenges in museum interpretation reflects this idea when citing Anthropologist Chris Miller-Marti. Miller-Marti argues that in museum interpretation, and by extension public interpretation, we learn "more about ourselves than our ancestors, more about our own values and concepts than those of the culture they profess to portray."<sup>1</sup> In addition to seeing our values and concepts, we see reflections of needs and desires and how they change over time by studying the esoteric image of Shakers.

These developments lead to a final aspect of the "Shaker" experience. Not surprisingly interest in the Shakers has led to the development of a wide range of voluntary associations where individuals share their interest in the Shakers and satisfy needs and desires left unfulfilled in "routine" life.

Briefly, voluntary associations can be described as groups composed of individuals who are involved in activities in a part time, non-paid manner. These associations tend to be non-profit and require of their participants varying levels of involvement.<sup>2</sup> Examples of

voluntary associations include church groups, softball leagues, boy scouts, and singing groups. These associations meet needs and allow individuals to play roles not available in other arenas of an individual's life. As part of the wide array of organizations, clubs, associations and other such groups, Shaker-related voluntary associations specifically address the desires of individuals wishing to attain for themselves a part of the Shaker experience, codified in the popular image developed through popular literature, museums, and material goods.

Shaker-related voluntary associations include singing or dancing groups, "Friends" organizations tied to museums, and study groups. Each requires different levels of commitment time, knowledge, and money (in some cases). All are similar because of the participants' interest in "Shaker" and in the ability of associations to meet various needs of individuals by providing a venue for experiencing various "Shaker" ways.

The creation of diverse "Shaker"-related voluntary associations is a relatively recent event. In the period previous to the 1960's, when individuals first joined forces to preserve and restore Shaker sites such as Pleasant Hill, there are no records of any Shaker related voluntary organization.

It was in the 1960's that the first Shaker related voluntary associations emerged in conjunction with the newly opened living history museums. Many of the Shaker museums developed "Friends" organizations, voluntary associations developed to help support museums which in turn helped preserve history. Friends groups can be joined for a small fee. All Shaker museums maintain Friends organizations and most offer special Friends Days when members can come together and socialize. At Sabbathday Lake, for example, the Friends meeting allows a large number of people to take part in various aspects of Shaker life for a weekend. During Friends Weekend participants join with the community in meals, in worship, and in work activities such as painting or general repairs. In a letter to the editor of the Shaker Messenger, one member of the Sabbathday Lake Friends organization maintains that membership in the Friends group is important for collectors because it connects living Shakers with Shaker artifacts<sup>3</sup>. In other words, to truly understand Shaker material culture one must know something of the Shakers' social customs and beliefs. This is an interesting reversal of early twentieth century museum philosophy where instead of using artifacts to understand cultural practices, cultural practices are seen as a way through which one can gain greater understanding of material



culture.

"Friends Day" at Shaker museums allow one to participate in the life of the community (either extant or replicated in living history fashion) both by actual labor and by extension via the label "Friend." The group of "Friends" itself becomes a Shaker-like community working together for the good of the museum. Friends groups at museums, in helping with general upkeep of the physical plant or simply in monetary donations, make a connection to the historic past by assisting the museum in preserving the past. In maintaining buildings, one maintains the culture and thus the museum site serves as the focus through which Friends activities recreate the Shaker past in the present. An individual can thus reaffirm the popular image of serenity and cooperative community by participating in this real life experience. Here again, Shakerism is seen as an object of the past, not as an exsisting entity of the present. Further, the prevalence of Friends groups reaffirms, for individuals, the desire to preserve the past and the necessity to keep the simple, serene past visible in the complex chaos of the present.

Another organization that is in many ways a formally organized study group is the Shaker Seminar. The Shaker Seminar was founded in 1975 and consists of an intensive one

week long program devoted to the Shakers.<sup>4</sup> The Seminar travels to a different Shaker site every year and usually upwards of fifty people attend each year's program. Visiting scholars and museum professionals lecture on a variety of topics. Participants are also encouraged to give presentations on their particular interests. It is even possible to obtain college credit for the week long program.

Many of the individuals who belong to the Shaker study groups also attend the annual Shaker Seminar. Indeed many people attend the Seminar year after year in a family-reunion like manner. Like the "Friends" organizations, the Shaker Seminar enables individuals to experience "community" by creating a "family" of individuals who share similar interests and beliefs.

Certainly one of the most prevalent expressions of interest in Shakerism is seen in the rapidly growing number of Shaker study groups. Groups of interested people gather in several areas of the country to share information informally on their interest in the Shakers. Currently there are study groups in New England, Michigan, California, Ohio, and New York. Members work on a variety of projects including visiting Shaker sites, giving lectures, and providing support for preservation projects. While primarily social organizations, some study groups attempt to develop

useful educational projects that enhance members' knowledge of Shaker topics.

The Boston Area Shaker Study Group, for example, frequently invites speakers at their meetings to discuss selected aspects of Shaker history or material culture. These presentations have ranged from discussions of specific Shaker sites to talks on aspects of collecting Shaker artifacts. Founded in 1982 the Boston Area Shaker Study group is large, with forty one members in 1990.<sup>5</sup> In addition to lecture oriented meetings, this particular study group has also mapped a Shaker grave yard at Harvard, Massachusetts. The Rochester, New York study group has been particularly active in attempting to save the remaining Shaker buildings at Groveland, New York. The group went to court to try and stop the State of New York from altering the remaining Shaker buildings and later fought an attempt by a museum to move one of the Shaker buildings off the Groveland site.<sup>6</sup>

Shaker singing and dancing groups have also become popular. These groups usually dress in Shaker style clothing and attempt to recreate the zeal of early Shaker meetings. Dressing in Shaker garb has quite an effect on many participants. One singer writes about her first performance at Pleasant Hill:

For the first time, on that occasion, I pulled the soft blue cotton folds of the Shaker Sisters' summer dress over my head, and learned how to arrange the bodice cover, with ends tucked neatly into a snowy apron. Unexpectedly, a strange sense of slight reserve seemed to settle over us as we eyed one another in our Shaker clothes. It began to seem as if we had entered a different era. By our decision to sing their songs, we were also committed to entering their world, and to recreating their context as reverently as we could.<sup>7</sup>

Participants in this performance activity recreate the past and live that past in the present. The performers feel the presence of "Shaker" in donning Shaker dress and recreating songs and dance. They also feel a responsibility for the accuracy of their performance. Folklorist and Anthropologist Richard Bauman, in his study of the nature of performance, illustrates that performance is a particular mode of communication which involves "on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out."<sup>8</sup> Here the dancer feels accountable to her audience and to the Shakers of the past. The power inherent in performance brings a "heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer."<sup>9</sup> It is in this intensive dramatic arena that the message and image of "Shaker" is passed from performer to audience.

"Shaker" voluntary associations have several functions on

different levels. Ostensibly, individuals join these associations to meet others who share similar interests and to further those interests by educational activities. Yet looking deeper, participation in "Shaker" related voluntary associations meet several needs. One clear example reflects Lears' notion of "real experience." Individuals today need an escape from the tensions of the world as much as was needed during the period which Lears discussed (1880-1910). By joining Shaker study groups, seminars, and singing groups people can have experiences that fill the lacunae of their lives and provide an escape to the past. Further, these groups create a linkage with the past and bring desirable elements or symbols of the past into the realm of the present.

Joining a voluntary association also builds a feeling of community in what has become an increasingly transient world. Americans today are extremely mobile, with several moves in a lifetime a common occurrence. This mobility creates a feeling of displacement and a sense of being torn from historical roots, a personal past, and from a community. Voluntary associations help construct social connections that are lacking in many people's lives. Sociologist Judy Levine found in her study of contra dancing in New York City that these dance groups helped members deal

with urban pressures.<sup>10</sup> The dances fostered a small town atmosphere and provided people with lasting community as members were able to join new contra dance groups as they moved around the country.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly Shaker study groups, seminars and singing groups bring people with shared interests together for fellowship. Members are able to build friendships across the country creating a network upon which one can turn for information and assistance. Membership in several groups allows individuals to feel part of a local community by, for example, being part of a study group and as part of a larger community through nationwide Friends organizations.

Historical roots also become apparent. Many Americans no longer have a single hometown to look at nostalgically. Old home weeks that were popular in the early twentieth century no longer occur with any frequency. Those interested in the Shakers transfer their nostalgia to Shaker communities and museums. Shaker museums, as we have seen, highlight one period of Shaker history and do not radically change as the years go by. This is not true of many hometowns which have changed dramatically over the last thirty years. Shaker museums and other living history museums become then one of the few stable places to which people can refer.

NOTES  
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1. Stephen Wells, Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 61.
2. David Sills, "Voluntary Associations: Sociological Aspects," in David Sills, ed., International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), 16:363.
3. Flo Fertig, Letter to the Editor, The Shaker Messenger 5(Winter 1983):4.
4. Thirteenth Annual Berkshire Shaker Seminar at Harvard and Shirley, July 26-31, 1987. Photocopied hand-out in the collection of The United Society of Shakers at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.
5. Boston Area Shaker Study Group informational packet. In the collection of the author.
6. Fran Kramer, "Rochester Study Group Fights Move," in The Shaker Messenger 7(Winter 1985):25.
7. Dianne, Schneider, "Pleasant Hill Singing Brought Career Change," in The Shaker Messenger 11(Fall 1988):11.
8. Richard Bauman, Verbal Art as Performance (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984), 11.
9. *ibid.*, 43.
10. Judy Levine, "Contra Dance in New York: Longways for as Many as Will," in Meaningful Play, Playful Meaning, Gary Fine ed. (Champaign: Human Kinetics Inc., 1987), 201.
11. *ibid.*, 201.

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