The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing is a religious sect, also known as the Shakers, founded in the 18th century in England, having branched off from a Quaker community. They were known as "Shaking Quakers" because of their ecstatic behavior during worship services. In 1747, women assumed leadership roles within the sect, notably Jane Wardley and Mother Ann Lee. Shakers settled in colonial America, with initial settlements in New Lebanon, New York (called Mount Lebanon after 1861) and what is now Watervliet.

Shakers today are mostly known for their celibate and communal lifestyle, pacifism, and their model of equality of the sexes, which they institutionalized in their society in the 1780s. They are also known for their simple living, architecture, and furniture.

During the mid-19th century, an Era of Manifestations resulted in a period of dances, gift drawings and gift songs inspired by spiritual revelations. At its peak in the mid-19th century, there were 6,000 Shaker believers. By 1920, there were only 12 Shaker communities remaining in the United States. In the present day, there is only one active Shaker village, Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, which is located in Maine. Their celibacy resulted in the thinning of the Shaker community, and consequently many of the other Shaker settlements are now village museums, like Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts.
Origins

The Shakers were one of a few religious groups formed in 18th century in the Northwest of England;[1] they branched off from a group of Quakers in England. James and Jane Wardley and others left[2][3] at a time when the Quakers were weaning themselves away from frenetic spiritual expression.[4] The Wardleys formed the Wardley Society, which was also known as the "Shaking Quakers". Future leader Ann Lee and her parents were early members of the sect. This group of "charismatic" Christians became the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (USBCSA), or the Shakers. Their belief was based upon spiritualism and included the notion that they received messages from the spirit of God which were expressed during religious revivals. They also experienced what they interpreted as messages from God during silent meditations and became known as "Shaking Quakers" because of the ecstatic nature of their worship services. They believed in the renunciation of sinful acts and that the end of the world was near.[3][6]

Meetings were first held in Bolton,[6] where the articulate preacher, Jane Wardley, urged her followers to:

Repent. For the kingdom of God is at hand. The new heaven and new earth prophesied of old is about to come. The marriage of the Lamb, the first resurrection, the new Jerusalem descended from above, these are even now at the door. And when Christ appears again, and the true church rises in full and transcendent glory, then all anti-Christian denominations—the priests, the Church, the pope—will be swept away.[7]

Other meetings were then held in Manchester, Meretown (also spelled Mayortown), Chester and other places near Manchester. As their numbers grew, members began to be persecuted,[6] mobbed, and stoned; Lee was imprisoned in Manchester.[8] The members looked to women for leadership, believing that the second coming of Christ would be through a woman. In 1770, Ann Lee was revealed in "manifestation of Divine light" to be the second coming of Christ and was called Mother Ann.[6]

Mother Ann Lee

Main article: Ann Lee

Ann Lee joined the Shakers by 1758 and then became the leader of the small community.[9][10] "Mother Ann", as her followers later called her, claimed numerous revelations regarding the fall of Adam and Eve and its relationship to sexual intercourse. A powerful preacher, she called her followers to confess their sins, give up all their worldly goods, and take up the cross of celibacy and forsake marriage, as part of the renunciation of all "lustful gratifications".[11]

She said:

I saw in vision the Lord Jesus in his kingdom and glory. He revealed to me the depth of man's loss, what it was, and the way of redemption therefrom. Then I was able to bear an open testimony against the sin that is the root of all evil; and I felt the power of God flow into my soul like a fountain of living water. From that day I have been able to take up a full cross against all the doleful works of the flesh.[12]

Having supposedly received a revelation, on May 19, 1774, Ann Lee and eight of her followers sailed from Liverpool for colonial America. Ann and her husband Abraham Stanley, brother William Lee, niece Nancy Lee, James Whittaker, father and son John Hocknell and Richard Hocknell, James Shephard and Mary Partington traveled to colonial America, Ann and her parents were early members of the sect. This group of Quakers were at a time when the Quakers were "Shaking Quakers". This group of "charismatic" Christians became the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (USBCSA), or the Shakers. Their belief was based upon spiritualism and included the notion that they received messages from the spirit of God which were expressed during religious revivals. They also experienced what they interpreted as messages from God during silent meditations and became known as "Shaking Quakers" because of the ecstatic nature of their worship services. They believed in the renunciation of sinful acts and that the end of the world was near.

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Community growth

Aside from the first community, Mount Lebanon, a number of new Shaker communities formed during the 5-year-period between 1787 and 1792. Also in New York, there was Groveland and Watervliet Shaker Villages. In Massachusetts were Hancock, Harvard; Shirley and Tyringham Shaker Villages. Other locations were Enfield Shaker Villages in Connecticut and New Hampshire; Canterbury; and in Maine the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village in New Gloucester and Alfred Shaker Historic District.[15]

Joseph Meacham and communalism

After Ann Lee and James Whittaker died, Joseph Meacham (1742–1796) became the leader of the Shakers in 1787. He had been a New Light Baptist minister in Enfield, Connecticut, and was reputed to have, second only to Mother Ann, the spiritual gift of revelation.[16]

Joseph Meacham brought Lucy Wright (1760–1821) into the Ministry to serve with him and together they developed the Shaker form of communalism (religious communism).
By 1793 property had been made a “consecrated whole” in each Shaker community. Shakers developed written covenants in the 1790s. Those who signed the covenant had to confess their sins, consecrate their property and their labor to the society, and live as celibates. If they were married before joining the society, their marriages ended when they joined. A few less-committed Believers lived in “noncommunal orders” as Shaker sympathizers who preferred to remain with their families. The Shakers never forbade marriage for such individuals, but considered it less perfect than the celibate state.

Lucy Wright and westward expansion

After Joseph Meacham died, Lucy Wright continued Ann Lee’s missionary tradition. Shaker missionaries proselytized at revivals, not only in New England and New York, but also farther west. Missionaries such as Issachar Bates and Benjamin Seth Youngs (older brother of Isaac Newton Youngs) gathered hundreds of proselytes into the faith. Mother Lucy Wright introduced new hymns and dances to make sermons more lively. She also helped write Benjamin S. Youngs' book The Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing (1808).

Shaker missionaries entered Kentucky and Ohio after the Cane Ridge, Kentucky revival of 1801–1803, which was an outgrowth of the Logan County, Kentucky, Revival of 1800. From 1805 to 1807, they founded Shaker societies at Union Village, Ohio; South Union, Logan County, Kentucky; and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky (in Mercer County, Kentucky). In 1824, the Whitewater Shaker settlement was established in southwestern Ohio. The westernmost Shaker community was located at West Union (called Busro because it was on Busseron Creek) on the Wabash River a few miles north of Vincennes in Knox County, Indiana.

Era of Manifestations

The Shaker movement was at its height between 1820 and 1860. It was at this time that the sect had its most members, and the period was considered its "golden age". It had expanded from New England to the Midwestern states of Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. It was during this period that it became known for its furniture design and craftsmanship. In the late 1830s a spiritual revivalism, the Era of Manifestations was born. It was also known as the "period of Mother's work", for the spiritual revelations that were passed from the late Mother Ann Lee.

The expression of "spirit gifts" or messages were realized in "gift drawings" made by Hannah Cohoon, Polly Reed, Polly Collins, and other Shaker sisters. A number of those drawings remain as important artifacts of Shaker folk art.

American Civil War period

As pacifists, the Shakers did not believe that it was acceptable to kill or harm others, even in time of war. As a result, the Civil War brought with it a strange time for the Shaker communities in America. Both Union and Confederate soldiers found their way to the Shaker communities. Shakers tended to sympathize with the Union but they did feed and care for both Union and Confederate soldiers. President Lincoln exempted Shaker males from military service, and they became some of the first conscientious objectors in American history. The end of the Civil War brought large changes to the Shaker communities. One of the most important changes was the postwar economy.

The Shakers had a hard time competing in the industrialized economy that followed the Civil War. With prosperity falling, converts were hard to come by. By the early 20th century, the once numerous Shaker communities were failing and closing. Today, in the 21st century, the Shaker community that still exists—the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Community—denies that Shakerism was a failed utopian experiment.

Their message, surviving over two centuries in America, reads in part as follows:

Shakerism is not, as many would claim, an anachronism; nor can it be dismissed as the final sad flowering of 19th century liberal utopian fervor. Shakerism has a message for this present age—a message as valid today as when it was first expressed. It teaches above all else that God is Love and that our most solemn duty is to show forth that God who is love in the World.
Theology

**Dualism**

Shaker theology is based on the idea of the dualism of God as male and female: “So God created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This passage was interpreted as showing the dual nature of the Creator.\[25\]

**First and second coming**

Shakers believed that Jesus, born of a woman, the son of a Jewish carpenter, was the male manifestation of Christ and the first Christian Church; and that Mother Ann, daughter of an English blacksmith, was the female manifestation of Christ and the second Christian Church (which the Shakers believed themselves to be). She was seen as the Bride made ready for the Bridegroom, and in her, the promises of the Second Coming were fulfilled.

Adam's sin was understood to be sex, which was considered to be an act of impurity. Therefore, marriage was done away with in the body of the Believers in the Second Appearance, which was patterned after the Kingdom of God, in which there would be no marriage or giving in marriage. The four highest Shaker virtues were virgin purity; communalism; confession of sin—without which one could not become a Believer; and separation from world.

**Celibacy and children**

Shakers were celibate; procreation was forbidden after they joined the society (except for women who were already pregnant at admission). Children were added to their communities through indenture, adoption, or conversion. Occasionally a foundling was anonymously left on a Shaker doorstep.\[26\] They welcomed all, often taking in orphans and the homeless. For children, Shaker life was structured, safe and predictable, with no shortage of adults who cared about their young charges.\[27\]

When Shaker youngsters, girls and boys, reached the age of 21, they were free to leave or to remain with the Shakers. Unwilling to remain celibate, many chose to leave; today there are thousands of descendants of Shaker-raised seceders.\[28\]

**Gender roles**

Shaker religion valued women and men equally in religious leadership. The church was hierarchical, and at each level women and men shared authority. This was reflective of the Shaker belief that God was both female and male. They believed men and women were equal in the sight of God, and should be treated equally on earth, too. Thus two Elders and two Eldresses formed the Ministry at the top of the administrative structure. Two lower-ranking Elders and two Eldresses led each family, women overseeing women and men overseeing men.\[29\]

In their temporal labor, Shakers followed traditional gender work-related roles. Their homes were segregated by sex, as were women and men's work areas. Women worked indoors spinning, weaving, cooking, sewing, cleaning, washing, and making or packaging goods for sale. In good weather, groups of Shaker women were outdoors, gardening and gathering wild herbs for sale or home consumption. Men worked in the fields doing farm work and in their shops at crafts and trades. Shakers thus simultaneously valued women's status in society and realized the importance and difficulty of women's work, not following traditional prejudices that would consider women a "weaker sex" simply to elevate the male, as it was unnecessary in their egalitarian social structure to do so. This also allowed the continuation of church leadership when there was a shortage of men.\[30\]

**Worship**

Shakers worshipped in meetinghouses painted white and unadorned; pulpits and decorations were eschewed as worldly things. In meeting, they marched, sang, danced, and sometimes turned, twitched, jerked, or shouted. The earliest Shaker worship services were unstructured, loud, chaotic and emotional. However, Shakers later developed precisely choreographed dances and orderly marches accompanied by symbolic gestures. Many outsiders disapproved of or mocked Shakers' mode of worship without understanding the symbolism of their movements or the content of their songs.\[31\]

**Shaker communities**

Main article: Shaker communities

The Shakers built more than 20 Shaker communities in the United States.\[32\] Women and men shared leadership of the Shaker communities. Women preached and received revelations as the Spirit fell upon them. Thriving on the religious enthusiasm of the first and second Great Awakenings, the Shakers declared their messianic, communitarian message with significant response. One early convert observed: “The wisdom of their instructions, the purity of their doctrine, their Christ-like deportment, and the simplicity of their manners, all appeared truly apostolical.” The Shakers represent a small but important Utopian response to the gospel. Preaching in their communities knew no boundaries of gender, social class, or education.\[33\]
Aurelia Gay Mace, leader of Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, New Gloucester, Maine. She was the author of *The Aletheia: Spirit of Truth, a Series of Letters in Which the Principles of the United Society Known as Shakers are Set Forth and Illustrated*, 1899, and *The Mission and Testimony of the Shakers of the Twentieth Century to the World*, 1904.

Shakers ran a variety of businesses to support their communities. Many Shaker villages had their own tanneries, sold baskets, brushes, bonnets, brooms, fancy goods, and homespun fabric that was known for high quality, but were more famous for their medicinal herbs, garden seeds of the Shaker Seed Company, apple-sauce, and knitted garments (Canterbury).[35]

The Shaker goal in their temporal labor was perfection. Ann Lee’s followers preserved her admonitions about work:

> "Good spirits will not live where there is dirt."
> "Do your work as though you had a thousand years to live and as if you were to die tomorrow."
> "Put your hands to work, and your heart to God."

Mother Ann also cautioned them against getting into debt.[36]

Shaker craftsmen were known for a style of Shaker furniture that was plain in style, durable, and functional.[37] Shaker chairs were usually mass-produced because a great number of them were needed to seat all the Shakers in a community.

Around the time of the American Civil War, the Shakers at Mount Lebanon, New York, increased their production and marketing of Shaker chairs. They were so successful that several furniture companies produced their own versions of "Shaker" chairs. Because of the quality of their craftsmanship, original Shaker furniture is costly.

Shakers won respect and admiration for their productive farms and orderly communities. Their industry brought about many inventions like Babbitt metal, the rotary harrow, the circular saw, the clothespin, the Shaker peg, the flat broom, the wheel-driven washing machine, a machine for setting teeth in textile cards, a threshing machine, metal pens, a new type of fire engine, a machine for matching boards, numerous innovations in waterworks, planing machinery, a hernia truss, silk reeling machinery, small looms for weaving palm leaf, machines for processing broom corn, ball-and-socket tilters for chair legs, and a number of other useful inventions.[38]

Shakers were the first large producers of medicinal herbs in the United States, and pioneers in the sale of seeds in paper packets.[39] Brethren grew the crops, but sisters picked, sorted, and packaged their products for sale, so those industries were built on a foundation of women’s labor in the Shaker partnership between the sexes.[40]

The Shakers believed in the value of hard work and kept comfortably busy. Mother Ann said: “Labor to make the way of God your own; let it be your inheritance, your treasure, your occupation, your daily calling”.

**Architecture and furnishings**

*See also: Shaker furniture*

The Shakers’ dedication to hard work and perfection has resulted in a unique range of architecture, furniture and handicraft styles. They designed their furniture with care, believing that making something well was in itself, “an act of prayer.” Before the late 19th century, they rarely fashioned items with elaborate details or extra decoration, but only made things for their intended uses. The ladder-back chair was a popular piece of furniture. Shaker craftsmen made...
most things out of pine or other inexpensive woods and hence their furniture was light in color and weight.

Early 19th-century Shaker interiors are characterized by an austerity and simplicity. For example, they had a "peg rail," a continuous wooden device like a pelmet with hooks running all along it near the lintel level. They used the pegs to hang clothes, hats, and very light furniture pieces such as chairs when not in use. The simple architecture of their homes, meeting houses, and barns have had a lasting influence on American architecture and design. There is a collection of furniture and utensils at Hancock Shaker Village outside of Pittsfield, Massachusetts that is famous for its elegance and practicality.

At the end of the 19th century, however, Shakers adopted some aspects of Victorian decor, such as ornate carved furniture, patterned linoleum, and cabbage-rose wallpaper. Examples are on display in the Hancock Shaker Village Trustees' Office, a formerly spare, plain building "improved" with ornate additions such as fish-scale siding, bay windows, porches, and a tower.

Culture

Artifacts

By the middle of the 20th century, as the Shaker communities themselves were disappearing, some American collectors whose visual tastes were formed by the stark aspects of the modernist movement found themselves drawn to the spare artifacts of Shaker culture, in which "form follows function" was also clearly expressed.[41] Kaare Klint, an architect and famous furniture designer, used styles from Shaker furniture in his work.[42]

Other artifacts of Shaker culture are their spirit drawings, dances, and songs, which are important genres of Shaker folk art. Doris Humphrey, an innovator in technique, choreography, and theory of dance movement, made a full theatrical art with her dance entitled Dance of The Chosen, which depicted Shaker religious fervor.[43]

Music

The Shakers composed thousands of songs, and also created many dances; both were an important part of the Shaker worship services. In Shaker society, a spiritual "gift" could also be a musical revelation, and they considered it important to record musical inspirations as they occurred.

Scribes, many of whom had no formal musical training, used a form of music notation called the letteral system.[44] This method used letters of the alphabet, often not positioned on a staff, along with a simple notation of conventional rhythmic values, and has a curious, and coincidental, similarity to some ancient Greek music notation.

Many of the lyrics to Shaker tunes consist of syllables and words from unknown tongues, the musical equivalent of glossolalia. It has been surmised that many of them were imitated from the sounds of Native American languages, as well as from the songs of African slaves, especially in the southernmost of the Shaker communities[citation needed], but in fact the melodic material is derived from European scales and modes.

Most early Shaker music is monodic, that is to say, composed of a single melodic line with no harmonization. The tunes and scales recall the folksongs of the British Isles, but since the music was written down and carefully preserved, it is "art" music of a special kind rather than folklore. Many melodies are of extraordinary grace and beauty, and the Shaker song repertoire, though still relatively little known, is an important part of the American cultural heritage and of world religious music in general.

Shakers' earliest hymns were shared by word of mouth and letters circulated among their villages. Many Believers wrote out the lyrics in their own manuscript hymnals. In 1813, they published Millennial Praises, a hymnal containing only lyrics.[45]

In the late 19th century, the Shakers published several hymnbooks with both lyrics and music in conventional four-part harmonies. These works are less strikingly original than the earlier, monodic repertoire.

The surviving Shakers sing songs drawn from both the earlier repertoire and the four part songbooks. They perform all of these unaccompanied, in single-line unison singing. The many recent, harmonized arrangements of older Shaker songs for choirs and instrumental groups mark a departure from traditional Shaker practice.
“Simple Gifts” was composed by Elder Joseph Brackett and originated in the Shaker community at Alfred, Maine in 1848. Many contemporary Christian denominations incorporate this tune into hymnals, under various names, including “Lord of the Dance,” adapted in 1963 by English poet and songwriter Sydney Carter.

Some scholars, such as Daniel W. Patterson and Roger Lee Hall, have compiled books of Shaker songs, and groups have been formed to sing the songs and perform the dances.[46]

The most extensive recordings of the Shakers singing their own music were made between 1960 and 1980 and released on a 2-CD set with illustrated booklet, “Let Zion Move: Music of the Shakers.”[47] Other recordings are available of Shaker songs, both documentation of singing by the Shakers themselves, as well as songs recorded by other groups (see external links). Two widely distributed commercial recordings by The Boston Camerata, “Simple Gifts” (1995) and “The Golden Harvest” (2000), were recorded at the Shaker community of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, with active cooperation from the surviving Shakers, whose singing can be heard at several points on both recordings.

Aaron Copland’s iconic 1944 ballet score Appalachian Spring, written for Martha Graham, uses the now famous Shaker tune “Simple Gifts” as the basis of its finale. Given to Graham with the working title “Ballet for Martha,” it was named by her for the scenario she had in mind, though Copland often said he was thinking of neither Appalachia nor Spring while he wrote it.[48]

Works inspired by Shaker culture

Shaker lifestyle and tradition is celebrated in Arlene Hutton’s play As It Is in Heaven, which is a re-creation of a decisive time in the history of the Shakers. The play is written by Arlene Hutton, the pen name of actor/director Beth Lincks. Born in Louisiana and raised in Florida, Lincks was inspired to write the play after visiting the Pleasant Hills Shaker village in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, a restored community that the Shakers occupied for more than a century, before abandoning it in 1927 because of the inability of the sect to attract new converts.


In 2004 the Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen and Boston Camerata music director Joel Cohen created a live performance work with dance and music entitled “Borrowed Light.” While all the music is Shaker song performed in a largely traditional manner, the dance intermingles only certain elements of Shaker practice and belief with Saarinen’s original choreographic ideas, and with distinctive costumes and lighting. “Borrowed Light” has been given over 60 performances since 2004 in eight countries, recently (early 2008) in Australia and New Zealand, and most recently (2011) in France, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In addition to Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham and Tero Saarinen cited above, choreographers Twyla Tharp (“Sweet Fields,” 1996) and Martha Clarke (“Angel Reapers,” 2011) also set movement to Shaker hymns. Playwright Alfred Uhry collaborated with Martha Clarke on “Angel Reapers” and used Shaker texts as source material. The music of “Angel Reapers” was successfully and uniquely arranged by Music Director Arthur Solari.

In 2009, Toronto-based, American-born poet Damian Rogers released her first volume of poetry, Paper Radio. The lifestyle and philosophy of the Shakers and their matriarch Ann Lee are recurring themes in her work.

Education

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The Shaker educational system was very advanced. The educational subjects included reading, spelling, oration, arithmetic and manners. The boys would attend class during the winter and the girls in the summer. Parents outside of the community respected the Shakers’ schooling so much that they often took advantage of schooling that the Shaker villages provided. Parents would drop their child off at the village to be educated, only to return several years later to pick up the children. Those who were removed from the Shaker community by their parents were not the only ones to leave. Once the child reached 21 years of age, they were given the option to remain Shakers. Less than 25% of the young adults remained in the community.

Modern-day Shakers

Turnover was high; the group reached maximum size of about 5,000 full members in 1840.[49] and/or 6,000 believers at the peak of the Shaker movement. There were only 12 Shaker communities left by 1920.[50] The Shaker communities continued to lose members, partly through attrition, since believers did not give birth to...
children, and also due to economics; hand-made products by Shakers were not as competitive as mass-produced products and individuals moved to the cities for better livelihoods.

The only remaining active Shaker community in the United States is Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village in Maine, which as of 2010 had one novitiate and only three full members: Sister June Carpenter, Brother Arnold Hadd, and Sister Frances Carr. See also

- Anti-Shaker
- Thomas Corbett (Shaker doctor)
- Corbett's electrostatic machine
- Heart in Hand
- Peace churches
- Shaker Farm
- Simple living
- The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God
- Shakertown Pledge
- Shaker tilting chair
- Shaker broom vise

Notes

1. Brethren, Mennonites and Quakers are the three "historic peace churches." Other religions were pacifists who eschewed violence and war, including the Shakers.

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External links
Wikimedia Commons has media related to [[commons:Category:[#property:P373]]Shakers]].

Living Shakers
• The United Society of Shakers at Sabbathday Lake (includes Museum and Library), Maine

Museums
• Shaker Historical Society
• Shaker Heritage Society
• Fruitlands

Other sites
For the Indian Shaker Church, see Indian Shakers. For other uses of Shaker, see Shaker. United Society of Believers. Life of the Diligent Shaker, Shaker Historical Society. Total population. 2 (as of 2017). For children, Shaker life was structured, safe and predictable, with no shortage of adults who cared about their young charges.[41]. When Shaker youngsters, girls and boys, reached the age of 21, they were free to leave or to remain with the Shakers. Unwilling to remain celibate, many chose to leave; today there are thousands of descendants of Shaker-raised seceders.[42].