

The Culture of Shaker Placenames: Sacred Geography and Communal Biography

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Abstract

From 1776 to 1898, the Shakers established over twenty villages across the eastern and midwestern United States. Shaker theology and communitarianism defined the basis for the spiritual names of these settlements and the pragmatic descriptors that identified sites and buildings within each village. Despite a fluid doctrinal system and a geographic reach that extended across a third of the continent, the church's values remained remarkably consistent throughout its two centuries of development: purity, unity, simplicity, equality, and industry. As a reflection of these values, Shaker placenaming practices helped shape the movement's history into a communal religious biography.

During the nineteenth century, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, commonly known as the Shakers, became the largest, most productive, and best-known millennial movement in the United States. Spreading from Watervliet, New York, across New England, into the Midwest, and ultimately as far south as Florida, Shakers established more than twenty utopian communes where members lived together in what they called "gospel order." Each of these villages was recognized not only by its common placename, usually predating Shaker settlement, but also by a spiritual name bestowed as part of the church's official history.

The spiritual names of these settlements served a dual purpose: first, to locate the villages within the bounds of a

religious geography; second, to unite isolated groups of believers, spread over a thousand miles from east to west and almost twice that distance from north to south, in a communal biography of the movement and its members. Inside these villages, too, theology and community directed the selection of names for sites and buildings. Both internally and externally, then, Shaker placenaming practices reflected the society's deeply embedded ideals. An understanding of Shaker culture can help the twenty-first-century non-believer appreciate the harmony of form, function, and faith from which its placenames emerged.

The earliest sites for Shaker activity predate communal settlement by several decades. Founder Ann Lee was born near Manchester, England, where she experienced a mystical epiphany through her affiliation with a group known as the Shaking Quakers and where, in 1770, she established the United Society of Believers.¹ From the start, the church attracted attention for the twirling, stomping, and frenzy that marked its prayer, in worship services that earned for members the mocking title of "Shakers." As Frederick W. Evans would record in his 1859 history of the movement, "These exercises, so strange in the eyes of the beholders, brought upon them the appellation of Shakers, which has been their most common name of distinction ever since" (1972).

Hoping to escape derision and the persecution that already hounded them, Lee, known as "Mother Ann," emigrated with eight believers to New York City in 1774.² Two years later she moved northwest of Albany to Niskayuna (alternatively *Niskeyuna*). First settled about 1640, the place had likely taken its name from a corruption of *Nistigioone* or *Conistigione*, a Native American term (specific provenance unknown) for 'extensive corn flats' (Vasiliev 2004). There Lee's group leased land from the Rensalaerwyck estate of the Stephen Van Rensalaer family, in an area known as Watervliet (occasionally *Water Vliet*) since the 1790s, when Dutch settlers

had named it for the 'flowing stream' or 'overflowed flats' of the Hudson River (Vasiliev 2004).

Ever more convinced of the urgency of her beliefs and the evangelical mission that accompanied them, Lee made a number of converts in Niskayuna before spreading her gospel to Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. The tenets she preached included a conviction that Christ, born and risen in Jesus, had returned in spirit presence (the Second Appearing); that this presence was made known among believers by the confession of their sins and the dedication of their lives; and that the necessary sign of their commitment was total sexual abstinence, the only means by which creation could be restored to its divine order. Spent from imprisonment, missionary labors, and maltreatment, Lee died in 1784, mourned by fifty or more believers scattered among a dozen towns.³

It was Lee's successor, James Whittaker, who saw in her millennialism the need to gather members for protection and support. At New Lebanon, New York, already a center for the movement, he proposed a model community, where members raised the first meeting-house in 1785. Whittaker died the following July, but new leadership under Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright shared his admiration for the apostolic ideal of common life.⁴ During the next century, Shaker communitarianism, theology, and toponymy would evolve together around a central metaphor of the church as family.⁵

Despite what looked to outsiders like conformity, this Shaker family was founded on highly individualized, even idiosyncratic, revelation. The charismatic nature of the faith's early decades exerted a force antithetical to formal theology, leading to a diffuse and often self-contradictory creed. Doctrine was promulgated orally; Lee herself was illiterate, and early followers reproduced her bias against written documents. Nonetheless, as the group expanded in numeric and geographic reach, its ministry made a virtue of necessity

and began recording both doctrine and progress. Eventually, Shaker theology acquired a codified base and Shaker records evolved into meticulous church chronicles, village archives, and business reports, as well as prolific personal diaries.⁶

Even before doctrinal and economic development inspired these changes, the movement's growth could be charted toponymically, in its progress on the map of the newly constituted United States. By 1800, a quarter century after their arrival, the Shakers had matured into a thousand-member society, gathered into eleven settlements. Still, these villages remained within a circuit of 175 miles from New Lebanon, and even the newest converts had direct communication with elders who had known Lee personally. In 1805, however, the society's mission impelled Wright to authorize an expedition to the Ohio Valley. There Union Village, near Dayton, Ohio, was founded, and from it six satellites, some of them a thousand overland miles from New Lebanon. By the 1820s, an estimated four thousand Shakers lived in sixteen villages; they would grow to six thousand souls by mid-century, when their membership peaked. [See table.]⁷

Initially, eastern Shaker settlements were known simply by the names of their pre-existing township or village, as indicated by the first column of the table (these remain the designations by which Shaker locations are known today). Even the names of New Lebanon and New Canaan, despite their obvious biblical sources, were inherited rather than selected by the Shakers.⁸ In some areas of the Midwest, however, believers established original settlements and assumed naming rights themselves, their emerging theology evident in names that recognized communal ideals of harmony and concord. Thus, the Shakers designated their first Ohio Valley outpost Union Village (Ohio, 1805), from which they founded South Union (Kentucky, 1807), West Union (Indiana, 1807), and North Union (Ohio, 1822), and the rest of the western settlements.

PLACENAMES OF SHAKER VILLAGES

Village	History	Spiritual Name	Sacred Site
Alfred, ME	1793-1931	Holy Land	Holy Hill of Zion
Canterbury, NH	1792-1992	Holy Ground	Pleasant Grove
Enfield, CT	1790-1917	City of Union	Mount of Olives
Enfield, NH	1793-1923	Chosen Vale	Mount Assurance
Gorham, ME	1808-1819	Union Branch	-----
Groveland, NY	1836-1892	Union Branch	Holy Ground
Hancock, MA	1790-1960	City of Peace	Mount Sinai
Harvard, MA	1791-1918	Lovely Vineyard	Holy Hill of Zion
Narcoossee, FL	1895-1924	Olive Branch	-----
New Canaan, CT*	1810-1812	-----	-----
New Lebanon, NY	1787-1947	Holy Mount	Mount of Olives
North Union, OH (Warrensville)	1822-1889	Valley of God' s Pleasure (or) Holy Grove	Jehovah' s Beautiful Square
Pleasant Hill, KY (Shawnee Run)	1805-1910	-----	Holy Sinai' s Plain
Sabbathday Lake, ME	1794- present	Chosen Land	Mount Hermon
Savoy, MA*	1817-1821	-----	-----
Shirley, MA	1793-1908	Pleasant Garden	Holy Hill of Peace
Sodus Bay, NY	1826-1836	-----	-----
South Union, KY (Gasper River)	1807-1922	Jasper Valley	Holy Ground
Tyringham, MA	1792-1875	City of Love	Mount Horeb
Union Village, OH (Turtle Creek)	1805-1912	Wisdom' s Paradise	Jehovah' s Chosen Square

220 • NAMES 51.3&4 (September & December 2003)

Watervliet, 1776-1938 Wisdom' s Valley Center Square
NY
Watervliet, 1806-1900 Vale of Peace Holy Circle
OH (Beaver Creek)

West Union, 1807-1827 -----
IN (Busro/Busseron Creek) -----
White Oak, 1898-1902 -----
GA -----
Whitewater, 1822-1916 Lonely Plain of Chosen Square
Tribulation

* not formally gathered

SOURCES:

- Andrews, Edward Deming. 1953. *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, Stuart. 1994. *Shaker Heritage Guidebook: Exploring the Historic Sites, Museums & Collections*. Spencertown, NY: Golden Hill.
- Stein, Stephen J. 1992. *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

These missions configured a Shaker geography around a new hub for ministry, distinct from yet subordinate to New Lebanon. Its center grew from an Ohio congregation of New Lights, a branch of schismatic Presbyterians, on Turtle Creek at Beedle Station. William Beedle, for whom the settlement was named, along with other New Light leaders converted to Shakerism, and the community became Union Village when its formal covenant was signed in 1812 (Boice, Covington, and Spence 1997; Andrews 1953). (Two miles west of the Warren County seat of Lebanon, named after the biblical Mount Lebanon for the area's indigenous cedars, Union Village remained the center of western Shakerism until its closing in 1912 [Miller 1996]). Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, another site of early missionary success, was established at Shawnee Run, just off the Kentucky River, where scenic lands and Shaker hopes for prosperous growth in faith suggested its name.

(Now a national historic landmark, the restored village has also been called Shakertown [Rennick 1984].)

Rapid conversions also led disciples to Beaver Creek, an outpost that New Lights called Beulah, 'married,' a biblical name for the land of Israel.⁹ Certainly an ironic precedent for a celibate community, the village was renamed Watervliet, in honor of Lee's New York home, when the Shakers covenanted in 1818 (Andrews 1953). (Beavercreek, Ohio, named for Big Beaver Creek, was not separately incorporated until 1980, nearly a century after its Shaker community closed [Miller 1996].)

The Shakers reached further into their religious history at South Union, where they built a mill by the Gasper River, which had taken its name from early settler Gasper Butcher, as did the valley and a local spring, the area having formerly been called Big Boiling Spring (Rennick 1984). The community changed the name to Jasper, after the gems that decorated the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, according to the Book of Revelation.¹⁰ Isaac Newton Youngs, touring the village in 1834, recounted the renaming ritual, based on the fortuitous similarity between its previous name and this biblical stone. Youngs's journal recorded George Walls's prophetic declaration decades earlier: "'This shall no longer be called Gasper but Jasper, for here the Lord shall build the New Jerusalem'" (1834). (South Union has preserved its name in a post office and historical site. Butcher's name, however, has suffered a series of erasures: Gasper Butcher's Spring or Station, later Cook's Station, in 1792 became Logan Court House, after pioneer General Benjamin Logan; the county seat was later moved east of South Union to Russellville, named after another Revolutionary War general, William Russell [Rennick 1984].)

West Union was founded on the banks of Busseron Creek, which had been named for Francis Busseron, a judge in the Northwest Territory (Baker and Carmony 1975). Just off the Wabash River, the settlement was known informally as

Busro, a corruption of *Busseron*, until the Shakers christened it West Union with their 1816 covenant (Boice, Covington, and Spence 1997). (The current village of Busseron was laid out in 1854, three decades after disease, mismanagement, and conflict with natives had forced the Shakers to abandon West Union in 1822 [Baker and Carmony 1975]).

While missionaries were spreading the Shaker gospel, Meacham and others were shaping its beliefs into an elastic creed, the theological basis for the movement's placenames.¹¹ As a Christian derivative, Shakerism taught that divine promises to Abraham and Moses had been fulfilled in the First Appearing of Christ. This dispensation yielded now to the Spirit, manifested in Lee and realized in the Shaker community, whose pillars were celibacy, confession of sin, community of goods, and sexual equality.¹² Fusing the sacred with the secular, Shaker theology considered "travail," in the dual sense of "travel" and "labor," a cornerstone of religious practice. Shakers viewed spiritual growth as "Gospel travel" and their energetic worship services as "laboring." Both usages were closely related to the "travail" of childbirth, which they associated with the maternity of their chaste Mother Ann. Metaphorical "travel/travail" paralleled the literal journeying and laboring that traced the paths of connection among their far-flung villages and built their church into a model of industry, thrift, enterprise, and prosperity.¹³

As pastoral ecclesiology developed, so did systematic theology and with it the apotheosis of Lee, whose words and wisdom Shakers now took pains to preserve. Initially, their human, if charismatic, founder required legitimization before a world that derided her. Thus apologist Seth Y. Wells, in *Testimonies Concerning the Character and Ministry of Mother Ann Lee and the First Witnesses of the Gospel of Christ's Second Appearing* (1827), refuted the two most frequently leveled charges against her, drunkenness (her visions supposedly alcohol induced) and lewd behavior (her rituals reputedly

enlivened by naked dancing). His compendium offered over thirty tributes to her character, in patterned statements invoking a litany of Shaker placenames:

I visited Mother Ann and the Elders often at different places—at Ashfield, Harvard, Hancock, and New-Lebanon, and always found them very exemplary and goodly in all things. (Testimony of Abigail Cook)

After this [confessing her sins to Lee at Watervliet] I had many opportunities with Mother and the Elders. I saw them at Harvard, Ashfield, Stonington, Richmond, Stockbridge, and New-Lebanon. I have seen Mother Ann in many different places, and under various circumstances . . . [b]ut I never saw in her any thing immoral or unbecoming, in word or deed. (Testimony of Elizabeth Johnson)

The placenames that featured prominently in these statements, typical of all Wells's entries, lent support to Lee's character by cataloging multiple sites in which her model behavior could be documented. The roster of towns, dating from her missionary journeys, likewise validated the writers' claims to belong to the group's most vibrant history, so that Wells could weave from their stories a collaborative biography of their founder.

Wells's work, however, would seem not just to exonerate Lee but to deify her, in what he called the "joint parentage" of Jesus and Ann. The binary order of the Shaker universe rested on just such a gender-balanced fulcrum. As Evans later explained, "An all-important, sublime, and foundational doctrine of the Shakers is the Existence of an Eternal Father and an Eternal Mother in Deity—the Holy Parents of all angelical and human beings" ([1859] 1972). The male principles of creation (in the Father) and redemption (in Jesus the Son) met their complement in the female principles of generativity (in Holy Mother Wisdom) and redemption fulfilled (in Ann the Daughter), replacing the Christian trinity

with what Edward Deming Andrews has characterized as a Shaker "quaternity" (1953). From this divine four-in-two emerged the fundamental Shaker principles of balance, order, harmony, symmetry, and equality.¹⁴

Shaker equality extended not only to gender but to every classification of members, recruited among Protestants, Jews, Catholics, and agnostics, former slaves and former slaveholders, immigrants and American-born. The Shakers were the nation's only multiracial and multiethnic utopian group: a former slave, Anna Middleton, was the second convert in the Ohio Valley; an African-American family was established in 1813 at South Union; an "out-family" under the free Eldress Rebecca Jackson lived at Philadelphia and Watervliet, New York.¹⁵ In addressing each other, Shakers replaced status-conscious titles such as "Mister" or "Madam" with the familial democracy of "Brother" or "Sister" and by 1826 reserved the honorific "Mother" and "Father" to historic leadership. Their code of language was formalized in *The Millennial Laws*, which regulated even minute details of Shaker life.¹⁶ Ultimately, every prescription for praying, working, eating, dressing, bathing, or sleeping was founded on the separate-but-equal organization of difference revealed in the binary of divine gender.

These laws and the theology behind them were promulgated by the central ministry through memos and circuit letters sent via Shaker postal routes that linked all the settlements. Along this circuit, two groups enjoyed a fair degree of mobility: the ministerial leadership, with its pairs of male and female elders, organized into bishoprics; and the deacons, or trustees, who had responsibility for the church's temporal affairs. By contrast, rank and file members seldom left their villages. For a sense of the communal whole, they relied instead on the letters and newspapers that circulated regularly once the church's antipathy toward literacy had subsided. By 1834, the Ohio Valley Shakers were publishing *The Western Review*, the first of many periodicals to emerge

from around the network.¹⁷ Individuals were encouraged to keep private diaries for faith testimonies and spiritual messages in parallel with oral confessions. Submissions based in part on these reflections appeared in the magazines, largely without attribution, along with local news, farm information, household tips, poetry, and obituaries, complete with advertisements. Read in formal and informal gatherings, the whole approximated a communal biography, composed in discrete parts by anonymous authors for an audience of members who often knew of other villages by name only.

The move toward structure, code, and record was both tempered and supported by a spiritualist revival that originated in 1837 with a group of girls in Watervliet, New York. Known variously as Mother Ann's Work, Mother Ann's Second Appearing, or the Era of Manifestations, the phenomenon swept Shaker communities, transforming placenames, literature, and ritual. Third-generation leaders had feared that distance from Lee would prompt declension; the gifts of this era, however, reconnected believers to their founder through revelations, "gift drawings," and "spirit writings."¹⁸ The revival, lasting twenty years, marked a dramatic renewal of faith among Shakers and had two direct effects on their placenames.

First, and most prominently, the Era of Manifestations suggested the value of supplying a spiritual name for each village as marker of its rededication. These spiritual names, listed in the second column of the table on page 219, demonstrated one of two patterns. First, they might unite a topological feature to a biblical allusion, explicit or implicit. Examples of such pairings include Holy Land, Holy Ground, Chosen Vale, Lovely Vineyard, Holy Mount, Holy Grove, Chosen Land, Jasper Valley, and Lonely Plain of Tribulation. Alternatively, the names might invoke a Shaker ideal, as in City of Union, Union Branch (appears twice), City of Peace, Valley of God's Pleasure, Pleasant Garden, City of Love, Wisdom's Paradise, Wisdom's Valley, and Vale of Peace.

For obvious reasons, settlements closed prior to the revival did not have spiritual names, nor did Pleasant Hill, possibly because it already bore a name akin to the spiritual naming impulse. The last two villages to be established, late nineteenth-century attempts at survival by expansion, chose contrasting approaches to the tradition. Narcoossee, Florida, founded in 1895, assumed the spiritual name of Olive Branch, an allusion to the biblical Noah, who rejoiced when a dove brought an olive branch from dry land, ensuring the survival of the human race.¹⁹ For White Oak, Georgia, however, no spiritual name was recorded, possibly because it was active only from 1898 to 1902, hardly enough time for a viable tradition to take root.

A second consequence of the revival was the consecration of new outdoor worship sites, whose names are listed in the third column of the chart. Semi-annual feasts at these shrines invited believers to share spiritual water, wine, and manna and to receive blessings from Lee or other heavenly spirits. The original celebration, conceived as a ritual Passover, was held in the spring of 1842, near the summit of what the New Lebanon community called the Mount of Olives. Soon prescribed for all Shaker villages, these sites were usually found near a hilltop, in an elaborately prepared clearing marked with an engraved "fountain stone" and surrounded by a hexagonal fence. Immediately popular, the shrines became destinations for what amounted to Shaker pilgrimages, recorded in the travel journals of more mobile members.

In naming these locations, villages sought conspicuous geographical elements that could be linked to biblical topology. Thus, every entry on the chart makes reference to the terrain, if human constructs like "square" and "circle" are included, and over half of the entries adopt overt biblical allusions: Holy Hill of Zion (appears twice), Mount of Olives (appears twice), Mount Sinai, Holy Sinai's Plain, Mount Hermon, and Mount Horeb. As with spiritual names,

settlements closed prior to 1842 had no sacred site; neither did villages opened after the Civil War, because the shrines quickly fell into disuse once the revival waned (Stein 1990).

The appearance of "square" and "circle" as features in Shaker placenames is itself a manifestation of theology, as Sally Promey demonstrates in her study of the revival (1993). The Shakers' divine quaternity found expression on earth in all things square: fenced fields; roads perpendicular to cross paths; right angles on buildings; four members, two male and two female, at each level of leadership. A map of the Holy City Jerusalem, popular in the gift images of the era, traced squares inscribed in circles, after the perfect dome of heaven. The harmony of the heavenly spheres was reflected in the harmony of the Shaker community, both oriented around a divine center (Promey 1993). The same sacred geometry was evident in Shaker dance, which by the nineteenth century had become marked by choreographic order rather than ecstatic frenzy. The "labor" of dance could express joy, suppress lust, and assimilate the individual into the group, thus ordering body and soul.²⁰ Under Meacham's leadership, intricate dance worship included the square-order shuffle and various circle, line, and chain formations. In ritual, architecture, and government, the patterns of these uniform, bounded shapes matched the order that Shakers sought in the regularity of their lives and the symmetry of their godhead.

Shaker practice in constructing and identifying buildings within their villages reflected the same ideals, which Evans summarized in mid-nineteenth century ([1859] 1972):

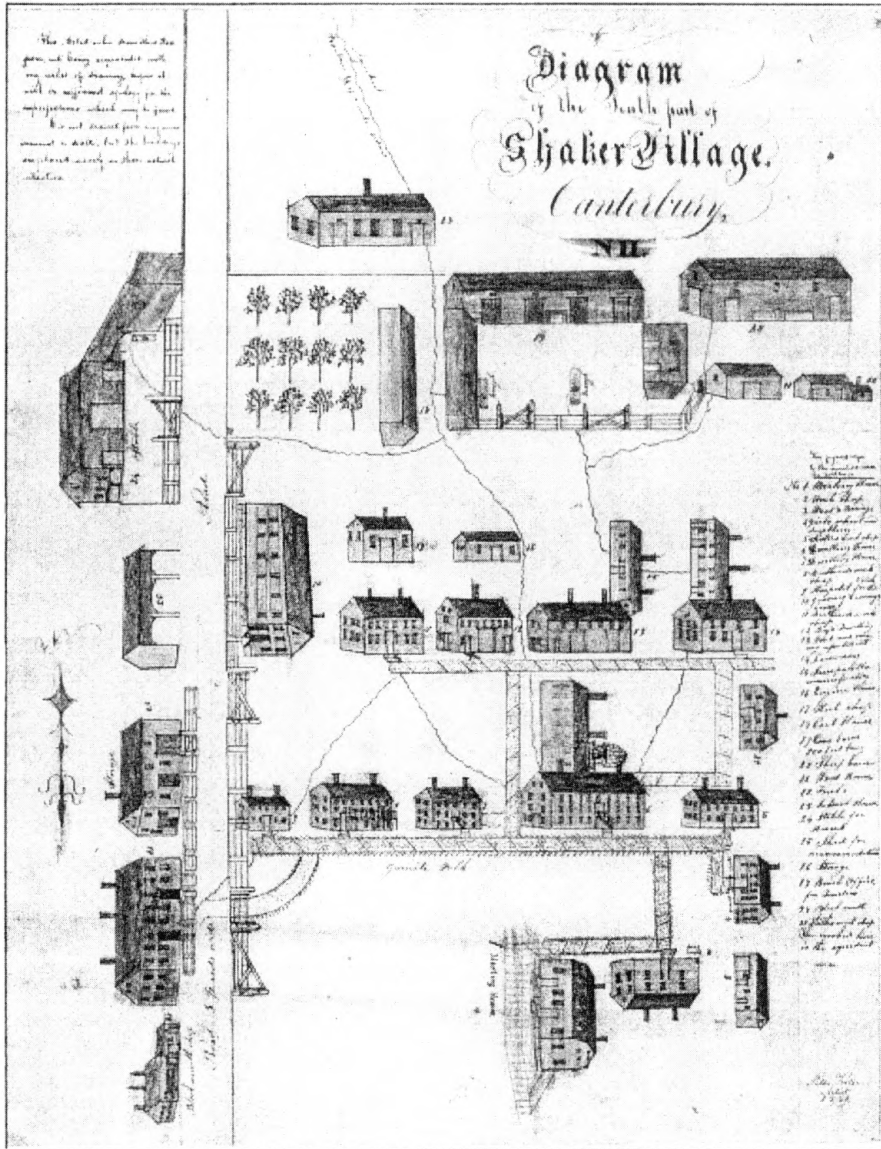
Entire sexual purity, temperance in food and all other things, plainness and simplicity of dress, neatness, industry, peace, charity to the poor, and a prudent, saving economy in all temporal things, are among the virtues inculcated and practiced by the various fraternities of Shakers, wherever located.

Theology was concretized, eschatology was realized, in each building, field, or artifact that a village designed.

A family structure, with men and women living in close proximity even while separated at work, rest, and prayer, dictated village layout. Meacham early conceived a hierarchical community after descriptions of the courts of the Temple in Jerusalem. His "first order" included the holiest believers, gathered into the innermost court and assigned largely to indoor manufacture; the "second order" included younger members, less advanced in the faith and responsible for most of the outdoor work; the "third order" included the elderly and infirm, as well as the newest converts, those who had not yet committed all their goods to the community.

As Meacham's model was adapted during the era of expansion, members advanced in "Gospel travel" were sent to found new settlements. Forming a "family," these members and their converts would erect their dwelling at the interior of the available acreage and build a meeting-house close by, buffered from the world by the lands around them. Their function suggested their name, typically the *Church Family* or *Center Family*. As membership grew, additional families would be named in chronological or geographical reference to this first: *Second Family*, *East Family*, *South Family*, etc. Larger settlements might also establish a *Children's Order* and a *Gathering Order* for the instruction of neophytes (Stein 1997). In the early nineteenth century, New Lebanon even initiated a *Backsliders Order* for penitents, but it was disbanded by 1828 (Andrews 1953).

On the maps and landscapes that became a functional form of nineteenth-century Shaker art, every element of the built environment was clearly named by use, like the meeting-house that was central to each village.²¹ Structures were assigned short, clear descriptors, based on such elementary principles as color, chronology, or location, the name coinciding with purpose. Buildings were grouped together for efficiency of use, the laundry house near the well house, the barns near the workshops, and the kitchen near the garden (Emlen 1987). If necessary, buildings with similar functions



From the collection of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress.

were differentiated by visual clues: *Tan Shed*, *Brown Shed*, etc. When Brother Peter Foster drew the map of the Church Family at Canterbury in 1849, for example, he numbered each building and listed it by name in the margin of his map [see map]. He began with the meeting-house and continued through the family's twenty-nine structures, including such sites as the *Sisters workshop*, *Brethren's workshop*, *Granary & Carriage House*, *Laundry*, *Sasparilla manufactory*, *Herb shop*, *Goat House*, *School House*, and *Brick Office for Trustees* (Emlen 1987).

A number of the structures named on Shaker maps were peculiar to the movement, the practical result of its communal lifestyle. Established villages built common infirmaries, called *Nurse Shops*, in isolated areas that gave rest to the ill and protected the well from contagion. The remains from village stoves were collected in stone *Ash Houses* and saved to make lye or fertilizer. Each Shaker family required a *Dwelling House* for its members. At Watervliet, New York, the South Family built separate Men's and Women's Dwellings, but more typically male and female lived in one building, with "retiring rooms" on opposite sides of wide central hallways and reached by separate stairways, one for men and one for women, in perfect symmetry. Even after death the sexes were kept apart in communal cemeteries, the sisters and brothers lined out in separate rows.²²

Only rarely were personal names applied to Shaker structures. The earliest extant Shaker map, a sketch of Union Village drawn by Richard McNemar in 1806, records the fact that its Shakers initially lived in separate cabins, each identified by name: "Malcalm [Worley]," "El[der] David [Darrow]," "C[alvin] Morrill," "Richard [McNemar]," etc. (Emlen 1987). Three decades later, when Isaac Newton Youngs and Rufus Bishop were sent from New Lebanon on a circuit of the western settlements in 1834, Youngs sketched each one in his journal.²³ On his map of Union Village, the East House Family had grown up around McNemar's log cabin, and all the founders' names had been properly erased, except for the

tiny cabin still labeled "R.M.'s old h[ouse]." Other than this historical site, only a single one-room building at the South House Family bore a personal name, "blind Daniel's" [Daniel Stag], a believer whose special circumstances apparently merited this accommodation (Emlen 1987).

Among the eastern villages, personal names were equally unlikely to appear. When Henry Clay Blinn drew a map of Canterbury in 1848, the only building identified with a specific individual was "Peter Ayres' House" (Emlen 1987). Then eighty-eight years old, Ayres was the last of the village's residents to have known Lee personally; the single residence and its imprint on the map are evidence of the reverence in which they held him. By assimilating these few exceptions, Shaker villages affirmed their belief in the group that embraced and enclosed members in a communal history.

The support of like-minded believers, the promise of a regenerate society, and the release won by song and dance proved a solid basis for Shaker faith. Ultimately, however, the movement was unable to withstand the post-Civil War pressures of industrialization and urbanization, the temptations of mobility and secular freedom, and the crises of failing farms and finances that plagued each village with increasing force as the century progressed. More than two hundred years after their founding, it has become common to reference the Shakers by their single remaining settlement, at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, where a small number of believers still live together in Gospel order. While only this single family carries Lee's legacy into the twenty-first century, the Shakers have left multiple impressions on the land, in buildings preserved by historical societies and in placenames passed down to new generations.

My home in the inner-ring suburbs east of Cleveland lies within the bounds of North Union, a prosperous community that grew from a handful of converts to over 150 members.²⁴ Begun in 1822 by Ralph Russell, North Union ultimately occupied 1400 acres of Warrensville township,

named for Daniel and Margaret Warren, who had settled the area in 1809 (Groppe 2003). At its peak in 1860, North Union ran a grist mill, a sawmill, a woolen mill, and a stone quarry and took advantage of its proximity to Cleveland by developing extensive milk routes and market gardens. Beset by declining membership, the village was closed in 1889, when the remaining residents were moved south to Watervliet, with a few venturing as far as New Lebanon to the east.

The Shaker property was sold in 1905 to Oris Paxton and Mantis James Van Sweringen, brothers who developed it as Shaker Village, which in turn became the suburb of Shaker Heights, Ohio. A main north-south thoroughfare across it, Lee Road, was named not for Mother Ann but for Elias Lee, a farmer who had donated much of the land on which the road was built in 1813 over an early surveyors' trail ("Lee Road" 1968). What is now Shaker Boulevard, in honor of North Union, once connected the Center and East Family farms with the meeting-house, which stood on the northeast corner of its intersection with Lee Road. A nature preserve established by a 1911 trust grew into a park known as Shaker Lakes, encircling Upper Lake (also called Horseshoe Lake, after its shape) and Lower Lake, both created by the Shakers out of Doan Brook for power to operate their mills (Groppe 2003). More recently, when developers built town houses on Warrensville Center Road near Shaker Boulevard in 1988, they fenced them with Ohio limestone and named them Prescott Place after James Prescott, the Shaker school teacher and stonemason who had laid the foundation for several North Union buildings, including the meeting-house and the Center Family dwelling (Klyver 1988).

These examples from northeast Ohio demonstrate the tenacity of the Shakers' influence on the land that their founder adopted as her home. Two centuries of "Gospel travel" took them into ten different states, across thousands of earthly miles, where their "labor" built a unique indoor and

outdoor environment still admired for its utility and beauty. Today Shaker Heights, with 30,000 residents, is the largest of nineteen places on the U.S. map that incorporate "Shaker" in their title. Thus the Shaker legacy is preserved in name, as well as artifact and archive, among the non-believers of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Ann Lee's surname is listed as "Lees" in the Manchester registry of births and on her marriage license to Abraham Standerin (on other records *Standley* or *Stanley*) (Stein 1992). Shaker histories of the American movement typically shorten her surname to "Lee," but Robert P. Emlen reports from communication with Brother Theodore E. Johnson, late of Sabbathday Lake, that this change was not effected until her death (1987). In keeping with the church's prohibition against marriage, Shaker records never refer to Lee by her husband's surname; in any event, by 1776 she had separated from him (Andrews 1953).
2. The Shaking Quakers had begun under the leadership of James and Jane Wardley (or *Wardlaw*), and the group originally referred to Jane Wardley as "Mother." By 1770, however, Lee's ascendancy was apparent and even Wardley herself began calling Lee "Mother" (Andrews 1953; Garrett 1987).
3. Lee and two of her companions had been jailed in Albany for six months during 1780 on suspicion of pro-British activities. The warrant for her arrest identifies her as "*Ann Standerren*" (Andrews 1953).
4. Prior to conversion, Wright had wed Elizur Goodrich, but within the movement she is always known by her name outside of marriage (Stein 1992).
5. It is Kathleen Deignan who calls attention to the familial metaphor (1992).

6. Etta Madden estimates that Shaker print records comprise over 12,000 items (1998). The largest collection of manuscripts is housed at the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
7. Accurate census figures for Shaker villages are difficult to obtain. I follow Andrews (1953) and Stein (1992); Brewer is somewhat more conservative (1986). Andrews estimates that the total Shaker population approached 17,000 over time.
8. New Lebanon, New York, had been named for Lebanon, Connecticut, where cedar forests reminded early settler Fitch of the biblical cedars of Lebanon (Vasiliev 2004; Hughes and Allen 1976). New Canaan, Connecticut, like the towns of Canaan and North Canaan in the northern parts of the state, had been named after the biblical Canaan, 'lowland' (Hughes and Allen 1976). Since the Civil War, New Lebanon has often been known as Mount Lebanon, a mark of Shaker influence (Stein 1992).
9. Isaiah 62:4.
10. Revelation 21:18-19.
11. For the development of Shaker theology, see Deignan (1992) and Madden (1998). The critical Shaker histories by Andrews (1953) and Stein (1992) also contain thorough discussions of the movement's doctrines.
12. Although never fully formalized, Shaker theology took written form in Meacham, *A Concise Statement of the Principles of the One True Church* (1790), which represented an early attempt at ecclesiology; Benjamin Seth Youngs, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (1806), which became known as the "Shaker Bible"; John Dunlavy, *The Manifesto; or, A Declaration of the Doctrines and Practices of the Church of Christ* (1817), which was written for a public audience; and Calvin Green and Seth Youngs Wells, *Summary View of the Millennial Church* (1823), which raised the spiritual

- dimension of Shakerism to new prominence (Green referred to Lee as the “Mother Spirit,” for example).
13. The travel metaphor is pervasive in Shaker theology and life-writing. For amplified discussion, see Andrews (1953); Madden (1998); and Sasson (1983).
 14. With characteristic fluidity, Shaker theology continued to evolve; by the second half of the nineteenth century it disavowed any worship of Lee and viewed her, again, as a merely human exemplar of the potential for progressive perfection.
 15. Linda Mercandante notes that it is difficult to determine how many minorities belonged to Shaker communities because membership roles did not distinguish among races. She cites the 1830 U.S. census figures for Watervliet, listing 2 African Americans and 20 unspecified aliens among 246 residents (1990).
 16. *The Millennial Laws*, rooted in early oral instructions of Meacham, were first recorded at New Lebanon in 1827. They were revised and promulgated for the whole church in 1845. Andrews, after noting that they were never printed and seldom even written, appends a text of the statutes (1953).
 17. Subsequent publications include *Day-Star* (1846-49); *The Shaker* (1871-72); *Shaker/Shakeress* (1873-75); *The Shaker* (1876-77); *The Shaker Manifesto* (1878-82); *The Manifesto* (1883-99). See Deignan (1992).
 18. Sally Promeny (1993) observes that the cover design for George R. Stewart’s *American Given Names: Their Origin and History in the Context of the English Language* (1979) borrows one of the gift drawings from this era, the “Tree of Life” attributed to Hannah Cohoon, who may have adapted it from a quilt pattern. The design was a popular New England family record decoration, with names inserted among the branches.
 19. Genesis 8:10.

20. For analysis of the purposes of Shaker dance, see Kern (1981), Thurman (2001), and Wergland (1995). Thurman observes that even the practiced, choreographed Shaker dance rituals remained wildly aberrant by mainstream Protestant standards of the nineteenth century.
21. *The Millennial Laws* of 1845 specified that only the meeting-house was to be painted white: "The meeting House should be painted white without, and a blueish shade within"; "No buildings may be painted white, save meeting houses" (Andrews 1953) Emlen notes that white was a symbol of purity and the most expensive pigment (1987).
22. As spiritualists, Shakers believed that souls continued to commune freely after death, and cemeteries were conspicuously absent from early villages. By the nineteenth century, however, Shaker funeral rites were being articulated and burial grounds accorded special reverence (Madden 1998).
23. Youngs's original 1834 journal was lost, but the maps were copied by George Kendall of Harvard village in 1835; Kendall's bound copy is currently in the Library of Congress (Emlen 1987).
24. I am grateful to Mary Jo Groppe, librarian at the Nord Library of the Shaker Historical Museum, for her assistance with research on North Union placenames.

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