ABSTRACT

“A PROMISING LITTLE SOCIETY”: KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY AMONG THE WHITE WATER SHAKERS 1824-1850

by Lindy Cummings

This study examines the relationship between biological kin and Shaker community at the White Water Shaker village, tracing the transformation of natural kinship ties into a religious community designed to replace the biological family with a spiritual family. The role of the family in Shaker faith remains one of the hidden aspects of establishing what Jonathan Andelson calls an “intentional community.” While becoming a Shaker was constituted upon the premise of rejecting one’s biological kin, the Shakers continued to rely upon natural kinship connections for leadership and membership among the various communities. The end result was the fragmentation of kin and the emphasis on building new, fictive kin networks based on the Shaker model from the older eastern communities that used the language and structure of biological family to bind its members to one another. The role of the family opens new avenues of exploration into the process of Shaker community formation and persistence.
“A PROMISING LITTLE SOCIETY”: KINSHIP AND COMMUNITY AMONG THE WHITE WATER SHAKERS 1824-1850

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Dedication

To the women who taught me history:

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Introduction

Turn south off Hamilton-Scipio Road onto Chapel Road in southwest Ohio and you will find yourself driving through wide, fertile farm fields that hearken back to the days when the United States was a primarily rural, agricultural nation. A wooden sign announces that you have entered Morgan Township, Butler County, Ohio—established 1811. The first time I had driven this road, the fields were planted in beans; the next summer it was emerald green corn that grew taller than anything I remembered from my rural Northeast Indiana community.

Stay on Chapel Road and you’ll wind through countryside that gradually gives way to gentle rolling hills. The nearby towns are Shandon (originally called Paddy’s Run), Reilly, and New Haven, all established early in Ohio’s history. Chapel Road tees into another country lane, which in turn becomes Race Lane. Once you pass into the next county (Hamilton), a sign announces you’ve entered Crosby Township. It’s here, just after you go through the intersection of Race Lane-Howard’s Road that you’ll notice two large brick structures built close to the narrow paved road. Aside from their imposing size, and the fact that they appear quite old, there is little else remarkable about them. It is not until you have gone on and passed a larger, three-story white brick house with a state historical marker on the front lawn that you realize you have entered lands once owned by the nineteenth century communal religious sect, the Shakers. With many of the original buildings destroyed by what were then called “conflagrations” (now called house fires) as well as the erosion of both natural and human destruction, time has whittled the community down to a few architectural remnants that dot the landscape.
When I visited White Water for the first time, I was a new graduate student, fresh from a brief career in retail sales and eager to begin once more the work of a historian. The previous summer I had visited Pleasant Hill, outside of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, and although I was familiar with the Shakers, my understanding was limited to the stereotypical fixation with their mystifying belief in celibacy. During this first visit to White Water my perception of the complexity of Shaker life took on new dimensions. Jim Innis, a former Proctor & Gamble employee, dedicates a significant portion of his time to preserving what remains of White Water, as well as educating the surrounding community about its history. After listening to him briefly outline history of the settlement, I was transfixed. This study is born out of that original fixation, rooted in the clean, open spaces of Pleasant Hill and brought into fruition by White Water. My original interest has also evolved over the two years that I’ve studied the community, originally beginning as a study of Shaker women and ending up as a study of kinship and family (although the two subjects are most certainly related).

The Shakers’ unique socio-religious beliefs have elicited curiosity from the general public, both in 1780 when they settled in upstate New York and through the 1950s when Edward Deming Andrews and his wife, Faith Andrews, revived interest in Shaker architecture and handcrafts. Nineteenth century Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer expressed admiration for the religious sect as an assertion of “the essentially ascetic…spirit of Christianity” that was missing from other forms of Protestantism.¹ French sociologist Henri Desroche theorized the Shakers as a proto-communist society, but outside of his work (not translated until the 1970s), interest in the Shakers lay primarily in their material culture. In 1978 D’Ann Campbell’s essay, “Women’s Life in Utopia: The Shaker Experiment in Sexual Equality Reappraised—1810-1860,” truly opened the Shaker way of life to serious scholarly treatment.² Since Campbell’s essay appeared in The New England Quarterly, the historiography of primarily eastern communities has blossomed, from general histories to narrowly focused monographs on particular aspects of Shaker life.

In many ways, Shaker scholarship has yet to move past the initial impetus of Campbell’s work. In the quest to uncover the specifically female aspects of communal histories—and indeed,

histories in general—historians became fixated on the Shakers as a rich theoretical example of sexual equality. This fixation on the sociological and gender shifts represented by the Shaker beliefs of celibacy and communal living has eclipsed the contextualized placement of the sect within a larger historical framework. There are studies examining the architectural and material culture, such as those by Julie Nicoletta and John T. Kirk. Priscilla Brewer’s *Shaker Community, Shaker Lives*, and Steven J. Stein’s definitive history, *The Shaker Experience in America* examine Shakers in the context of community. Religious historian Stephen Marini contextualizes the Shakers in the broader framework of New England’s religious heritage in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, showing how the Shakers drew on prevalent Protestant religious language in order to attract converts. Jean Humez has provided critical analysis of women in Shaker communities, and especially the role of founder Ann Lee. The work of these scholars—along with many others—gives us a window into the Shaker experience.

This study seeks to address a gap in current Shaker scholarship by examining three critical aspects of Shaker kinship and community. The first is the role of and relationship between preexisting kinship structures and Shaker faith. The presence of family and kinship networks has been noted, but never satisfactorily explored. For example, in his comprehensive history of the Shaker movement, religious historian Stephen J. Stein remarks that “a number of the chosen [Shaker] leaders were also biological relatives, even though in theory the Shakers had given up traditional blood relationships for the family of Believers.” White Water’s own elder during its formative period was Archibald Meacham, son of Joseph Meacham, who had been chosen to succeed Mother Ann Lee after her death in 1784. Stein adds that “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that ‘natural relations’ . . . still counted in the world of Believers.”

The goal of this study is to expand on Stein’s conclusion in order to better understand the relationship between Believers and their biological kin relationships. Secondly, the study seeks to establish the process by which people, especially families, were attracted to the Shaker faith. What motivated converts to enter a utopian community that emphasized celibacy, confession, and community over the individual and individual property ownership? A third aspect is to address the history of Shakerism in the west. Since original interest is rooted in Shaker material culture,

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the west has been neglected in part by the fact that so little of the material culture of these communities is extant. Ongoing efforts at South Union and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, coupled with that of the Friends of White Water Shaker Village, will hopefully remedy this neglect in part.

*A Promising Little Community* specifically examines the paths of two families that formed an extended kinship network in early Ohio. The Agnews and the McKees established themselves in Morgan Township and were the earliest converts when the Shaker gospel was introduced in 1822. The process of forming a community centered on the village at White Water was not a simple task. The end result was the fragmentation of kin and the emphasis on building new, fictive kin networks based on the Shaker model from the older eastern communities that used the language and structure of biological family to bind its members to one another.

**The Founding of Shakerism and Ann Lee**

The Shakers were founded as a radical offshoot of the Quakers in Manchester, England. Initially known as “shaking Quakers,” a small group immigrated to the colony of New York in 1774. Ann Lee had emerged as the group’s leader while in Manchester, and it was under her authority that the little band of seven followers (including Lee’s husband, brother and a niece) established themselves in the wilderness outside of Albany. In 1780, acting on the promise of revival, Shakers began to gather converts to their celibate, communal religious life at their Niskayuna settlement. Because of the strangeness of their dancing in worship and emphasis on celibacy, the communities around the settlement perceived them as a threat to both sociopolitical and religious order. Lee and her followers endured intense persecution, both from those outside of the faith and also from apostates who then wrote about their experiences. Despite opposition, at the turn of the century the Shakers had a network of villages throughout the states of New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, with missionary work spreading the faith into the Ohio River Valley.

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5 Lee’s husband, Abraham Standle, abandoned her and apostatized from the Shaker faith because she refused to cohabit with him.

In her role as the leader of the Shaker faith Ann Lee is an enigmatic figure, reflecting a dual role of spiritual and social revolution. Born in 1736 in Manchester, England, her father was a blacksmith and her mother a pious woman. According to accounts of her life, Lee did not attend school, but went to work in a cotton factory, “preparing cotton for the looms, and in cutting velvet.” At a young age, Lee experienced mystical visions. The nature of these visions is unclear, but Lee claimed to see angels as a child, but as an adult she would claim to see the future. Lee was unwillingly led by her family to marry Abraham Standley and the marriage produced four children, all of whom died in infancy or early childhood. It was during this period that Lee began to physically manifest intense spiritual turmoil that would eventually lead to the central tenants of Shaker faith. She underwent periods of fasting, accompanied by “severe tribulation of mind, and the most violent temptations and buffetings of the enemy,” refusing nourishment to the point that she was so weak that others had to support her. In 1770, at the end of a particularly strong bout of suffering, Lee experienced the full revelation of the rot and foundation of human depravity, and of the very transgressions of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden. By the immediate revelation of God, she henceforth bore an open testimony against the lustful gratifications of the flesh, as the source and foundation of human corruption.

No soul, Lee declared, “could follow Christ in the regeneration, while living in the works of natural generation, and wallowing in their lusts.” According to Lee, instead of eating the fruit of the tree, as related in Genesis, chapter three, the original sin had been Adam and Eve’s participation in sexual intercourse, the result of which was woman’s condemnation to pain in childbirth and having her desire turned towards her husband.

Celibacy, along with the practice of confession of sins and living in community, were the three tenants brought by the Shakers first to New York and subsequently put into practice in the hinterlands of upstate New York. This region provided a unique environment in which Shakerism was nurtured and brought to full bloom. New England offered a unique religious microcosm containing “all the elements requisite” required for a sound analysis of religious

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8 Stein, The Shaker Experience in America, 3; Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee… 3.
9 Testimonies… 4. Her periods of fasting may have induced amenorrhea, or the absence of the menstrual cycle brought on by a variety of causes, including emotional disturbances or eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa.
10 Testimonies… 4-5.
sects, as well as the longest and most distinct religious culture of any of the British colonies. In this long, rich history, two events in particular were critical to the development of the Shakers: The first was the Great Awakening, taking place both in England and in New England; the second was the American Revolution.11

George Whitefield served as the archetype for the changes of the Great Awakening. Whitefield emphasized what historian Steven Marini calls “radical piety:

> The Whitefieldian gospel was comprehensive but not systematic. It was Calvinist, but it neither dilated on theological problems nor spoke the language of doctrine and hermeneutic. It was more a matter of style and emphasis, drama and rhetoric designed to move emotions and change hearts. The center of Whitefield’s message was a new metaphysic of experience that located the crucial transaction between God and humans in an instantaneous conversion of the soul.12

Through this experience, called “New Birth” by Whitefield and others drawing on his example, emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This increasingly drew power away from the Congregationalist church firmly entrenched in New England. While this set of beliefs had potentially “anarchic” consequences, Whitefield was not ambivalent towards church membership, although he certainly was ambivalent about church denomination. To Whitefield, the importance lay in the personal experiences of the members of the church, regardless of whether they were Anglican, Congregationalist, or any other breakaway sect. So conscious was he of the individual salvation experiences that, in Marini’s words, he “outlined a social and cultural structure for the saints to adopt and urged them to do so regardless of the consequences to themselves or to worldly institutions.”13

The results of the Great Awakening in New England were incomplete; although “New Light” groups impacted by Whitefieldian rhetoric did try to reform the Congregational church from within, it would take the stress of the American Revolution to bring radical changes to complete fruition. The result of the Revolution was “cultural fragmentation” that came from two major sources: migration and war. New territories to the north opened in Maine, Vermont and the upstate Massachusetts region surrounding the Berkshire Mountains. As noted by both Shaker historian Priscilla Brewer as well as Marini, the majority of settlers flocking to these frontier

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12 Ibid., 11-12.
13 Ibid., 13-14.
regions were New Lights: Radical Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Separatist Baptists, etc. The topography of the region did not easily lend itself to agricultural work and so many were reduced to subsistence farming. Families adjusted to the demands—people married younger and women gave birth to more children. The tensions of the war left local political institutions unstable, leading to a series of revivals that swept through the area between 1776 and 1783, the exact period during which the Shakers came to American and established themselves in New York. The strain of the war, coupled with the challenges of settling the frontier produced an environment ripe for the stability that Shakerism offered.

There are clear parallels between the situation in the hinterlands of New England and the newly opened western territories of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. First, these territories offered rudimentary sociopolitical and religious institutions to settlers migrating into the region. Much as the arm of the Congregationalist Church could not maintain order in the further regions of New England, so too the lack of an established religious network in the Midwest territories allowed for a multiplicity of practices to spring up. The unrestricted environment was attractive to not only the Shakers, but also to Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Universalists, and—sometime later—Mormons, Amanas, Rappites, and New Harmonists. Secondly, although the farmland was perhaps more arable than that of upstate New York and New England, the distance from more settled regions coupled with the lack of good roads created a sense of isolation demanding the need for religion’s spiritual comfort. The War of 1812 (affecting the Shakers at West Union, Indiana directly), the financial panic of 1837, and the immeasurable pull of true belief, all would have served to draw converts into the Shaker fold, which was stable and thriving into the mid-nineteenth century.

Did early nineteenth century Shaker elders in New England recognize these parallels between themselves and the situation developing in the west? They certainly saw an opportunity in the reports of spiritual revival that began to trickle back east in the winter of 1804. Following Lee’s death in 1784, leadership passed to James Whittaker, an English convert who had emigrated with Lee in 1774. Under Whittaker and his successor, Joseph Meacham, the Shakers

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14 Ibid., 5.
15 Marini, Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England, 29, 31, 32.
worked to create an ordered movement that would avoid public censure. After Whittaker’s death, Joseph Meacham shared leadership with Lucy Wright, an American convert. Although members had not objected to Lee’s leadership, Wright was not accepted without resistance. The last strong female leader of the faith, historian Priscilla Brewer credits Wright with the “organization and regulation” of Shaker communities. It was Wright who looked beyond the collection of New England villages towards the Ohio River valley and the fertile plains of the western territories. Wright commissioned John Meacham, Issachar Bates, and Benjamin S. Youngs to bring the Gospel to those experiencing the power of God in the west. In 1805, these three men arrived in Ohio where the first of six permanent Shaker societies would be established.

16 Julie Nicoletta argues that in ordering the faith, Whittaker and Meacham radically altered Lee’s original design and fundamentally disenfranchised women within the faith. See Nicoletta, “The Gendering of Order and Disorder: Mother Ann Lee and Shaker Architecture.” *The New England Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (June 2001): 303-316.
Chapter One: Kinship and Community in Early Ohio

On December 12, 1852, Elder Sister Hannah Boggett died.1 She had suffered from various symptoms for twenty-three days, and her death left her fellow White Water Shakers in shock. Writing to Union Village three days later, Elder Ebenezer Rice lamented that she was the “first that has been taken from the Elders lott by death since we received Mother’s Gospel… You know how we must feel… that we have lost a loving, kind, Motherly friend.” At the time of her death, Boggett was only 44 years old, and “in the prime of life… willing to bear a great burden.” Rice described their sorrow and sense of tribulation as something White Water had never experienced.2

A member and beloved leader among the White Water Shaker community in Hamilton County, Ohio, Boggett had been counted among the Believers3 since the community’s earliest days in 1822.4 She was also part of an extended kinship network that had provided the initial foundation for Shaker expansion in the White Water River valley. Although most of the extended family members gradually drifted away from Shakerism, Boggett and her parents, several cousins, and a half-brother, remained Believers until their deaths. Boggett represents two unique facets of Shakerism. The first is illustrated by her kin connections with many other Believers at White Water, a distinctive yet overlooked characteristic in current Shaker scholarship.5 Secondly, as a part of the first generation called to Shaker faith in the west, Boggett

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1 The actual date of Boggett’s death is obscure; the White Water Church Records give the date of December 23, 1852, while a letter dated December 26, 1852 says she died on the 12th. See A Church Record…WRHS V B 357, 97; Elder Ebenezer Rice to Beloved Ministry, 26 December 1852. WRHS IV A 86.
2 Ibid. Hannah Boggett kept a tiny notebook from 1827-1852 detailing the dress measurements of the sisters at White Water; her writing is meticulous. There is a noticeable break in the 1850s when Adeline Wells, also the daughter of early Shaker converts, took over the record. In contrast to Boggett’s neat record, Wells’ penmanship is a wild scrawl, difficult to decipher; see Hannah Boggett’s Book, WRHS III B 40.
3 In order to distinguish between those who believed the Shaker message, I chose to capitalize “Believer” when it specifically means a Shaker, such as “White Water Believers.” Although capitalization is sporadic, many of the primary sources identify fellow Shakers as “Believers” and I take my model from those correspondences.
4 This date is also contested. Richard Pelham’s unpublished memoir states that the first Shaker missionaries went to White Water in 1823. Morgan Township, Butler County records indicate that one of the first believers, Brant Agnew, refused his election to a three-year term as Justice of the Peace because of “religious scruples” in April of 1823, contesting Pelham’s recollection. There are also official letters from Union Village to eastern Shaker leaders indicating White Water’s inception around 1822. See Richard Pelham, The Narrative and Testimony of R. W. Pelham, 1843, LC Shaker Manuscripts, item 283, box 24; Township book of Morgan Township, Butler County, Ohio, SL, 12; Richard McNemar to Seth Wells, 22 March 1822. WRHS IV A 70.
5 See Stephen J. Stein, The Shaker Experience in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 92. Stern asserts that Shakers relied upon biological relatives to form leadership networks through the eastern and western communities (an assertion supported by the fact that western leaders were drawn from eastern communities and were often related to influential leaders there. One good example is Archibald Meacham, an elder at White Water from the 1830s to the 1840s. His father was Joseph Meacham, the first American convert to Shakerism. Archibald’s
represents one of the few who committed her entire life to what her contemporaries viewed as a peculiar religious way of life with its emphasis on celibacy and confession of sins, coupled with a communal way of life. I argue in this chapter that the process of organic kinship development (by which I mean the process of families choosing to settle in proximity to relatives and intermarry with other families, as exemplified by Hannah Boggett’s extended family), set up a framework that Shaker missionaries drew on in the 1820s to gather converts and establish a community at White Water.

**The Advent of Shakerism in the West**

When Shaker missionaries John Meacham, Issachar Bates, and Benjamin S. Youngs arrived in Ohio, they found a small gathering of New Light believers who, under the influence of the Kentucky revivals, had separated from the Presbyterian Synod and established their own fellowship at Turtle Creek in Warren County, Ohio. Their leader was Richard McNemar, a charismatic preacher of the gospel who would later write an account of the early nineteenth-century Kentucky revivals. When the three missionaries arrived at the Turtle Creek church on March 22, 1805, they had in hand a letter from the central Shaker leadership at New Lebanon, New York, which they read aloud to the congregation. The letter, dated from the prior December, greeted the members of the revival and laid out the basic tenants for Shaker faith, including belief “in the manifestation of Christ, and in the messengers that he had sent. Secondly to confess all our sins; and, thirdly, to take up our cross against the flesh, the world & all evil.”

Although Ann Lee was not mentioned specifically in the letter, Shaker tradition held that she was the second manifestation of Christ. Writing to his son in 1859, Joseph Agnew of White Water declared, “I love [Christ’s] appearing in the female, and also crown’d with a Crown of Righteousness.”

The message conveyed by the three eastern missionaries struck a chord among those at Turtle Creek in much the same way that the Shaker use of Whitefieldian rhetoric had struck a chord among the settlers in upstate New York and Massachusetts. According to Issachar Bates, one of the members at Turtle Creek responded to the missionaries’ declaration, “Salvation is

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8 Joseph B. Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 11 October 1859. Friends of White Water Shaker Village MO3-06.
come! Here goes wife & children, house and lands for the kingdom of heavens sake." His zeal for the newly revealed truths led him to willingly give up the relations of the flesh in order to attain a higher spiritual promise. Rapid conversion of the members at Turtle Creek followed the missionaries’ announcement in church that day, last but not least of all being Richard McNemar himself. By June, Meacham, Bates, and Youngs reported to eastern Shaker leaders the news of forty-five adult converts, along with their children. Lucy Wright sent a second contingent of missionaries thereafter. Under the leadership of David Darrow, land purchases were gotten underway and the young believers at Turtle Creek entered enthusiastically into the work of building the first Shaker community in the west.\(^9\)

As the first western Shaker converts were busy constructing what would become known as Union Village, Hannah Boggett’s mother, Margaret Brant Agnew was burying her first husband. Born sometime around 1730 in Northern Ireland, William Agnew immigrated to the colonies with his young son, Samuel. In 1785, he and Margaret married and had eight children. Sometime between the turn of the century and 1805, Agnew moved his second wife and family to Hamilton County, Ohio, where his son Samuel had married and settled.\(^11\)

In 1805, standing beside her husband’s grave with seven children in tow and a wailing infant son in her arms, Margaret Brant Agnew’s mind must have wandered back to the moment when they had decided to leave New Jersey and build a new home on the frontier. In the years following the conclusion of the war with Britain, and as his family expanded to include a number of young sons who would undoubtedly wish to establish their own families, William may have looked about him and realized that opportunities were limited. It was a situation in which many parents found themselves as the eighteenth century drew to a close. New Englanders in particular liked to keep their families together, farming in the same areas. However, the demand for land in

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9 Quoted in Dawn Bakken, “Putting the Shakers ‘In Place’: Union Village, Ohio, 1805-1815.” (PhD Diss., Indiana University, 1998), 79-80.
10 Bakken, “Putting the Shakers ‘In Place”’, 82-83, 98-90.
the Mid-Atlantic region prompted many to seek new homes in the territories of Ohio and Kentucky, where land was plentiful and a man could keep his children close about him.\textsuperscript{12}

As a widow with young children, Margaret’s opportunities were limited. Upon marriage she had surrendered her identity, including her right to act for herself both legally and economically. In turn, she had gained economic provision, which her husband could no longer offer.\textsuperscript{13} She was thirty-eight years old with an infant son who had been born that same year; her eldest child, Brant, was nineteen. William’s older son, Samuel, who was ten years his stepmother’s senior, had his own wife and family to provide for. It was also sometime between October and December, so the threat of winter was bearing down on the little family. The best thing for Margaret to do was to remarry as quickly as possible. After presiding over the settlement of her husband’s estate, Margaret remarried that same year to Joseph Boggett, who had probably been in the Ohio country since 1790.\textsuperscript{14} In 1808, Hannah Boggett was born. Sometime between Hannah’s birth and 1813, Margaret and Joseph moved their family (which had expanded to encompass a daughter-in-law and a grandson) to Morgan Township, Butler County, Ohio.

\textbf{Kinship in Early Ohio}

At the turn of the nineteenth century, family represented a crucial unit of survival and mutual support. In established regions such as the eastern seaboard, dependence upon extended kin networks would reach a saturation point, based upon limited arable land and the inability to split family farms into smaller tracts without compromising a family’s economic stability. But in places like Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, land was plentiful and pioneers from the east came to the former Northwest Territory and established extended kin networks much in the same manner as they had existed in the New England region. Following these general patterns, Margaret Agnew, her new husband, and her children settled in rural Butler, County, Ohio, and began to solidify their kinship connections through intermarriage with other families. It was this extant

\textsuperscript{12} Tamara Gaskell Miller, ““My whole enjoyment & almost my existence depends on my friends.’ Family and Kinship In Early Ohio.” In \textit{The Center of a Great Empire: The Ohio Country in the Early American Republic}, by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Stuart D. Hobbs, 122-145 (Athens: The Ohio University Press, 2005), 122.


\textsuperscript{14} Carol Willsey Bell, \textit{Ohio Wills and Estates to 1850: An Index} (Columbus, Ohio: Published by Carol Willsey Bell, C.G., 1981), case number A31. A Joseph Bieget is listed in the 1790 census of the Ohio territory; \textit{Ohio Census 1790-1890}.
web of relationships, both personal and familial, on which the Shakers were able to initially depend for converts in the 1820s.

The kinship model brought to southern Ohio by settlers had its roots in New England. In studying the patterns of kinship in the east, historian Daniel Scott Smith has established high rates of kin density, meaning that people were often connected to more than one other family by way of marriage. Scott Smith regards the kin propinquity in New England to be unique to that region, due in large part to the unique cultural heritage of the region, stemming from its Puritan roots. Nevertheless, the general trend of forming communities based on kin relationships, although deeper in New England, was certainly true of other regions as well.\footnote{Daniel Scott Smith, "‘All in Some Degree Related to Each Other’: A Demographic and Comparative Resolution of the Anomy of New England Kinship," in \textit{American Historical Review} 94, 1 (February 1989): 45. Smith is also interested in explaining why, when the nuclear family began to emerge in the 19th century, New Englanders also tended to live further from kin—the exact inverse of earlier periods.}

In identifying kin-dense communities, Smith discerned a pattern of communal development that involves four stages. The first period is characterized by settlement. This initial period is followed by rapid increase in the population due to high birth and low death rates, and few families choosing to migrate out of the new community. During this phase, the arable land is put into use and the community stabilizes. Following stabilization, a gradual strain produced by continued population growth and division of land eventually induces migration. As Smith notes, the development of a subsequently high kin density marks the passage from one stage to the next. At the point of density, kin members may choose to move, either as whole groups, or as individual families.\footnote{Ibid., 58.}

This pattern also held true in early Ohio. Once these families made the choice to move further west, historian Andrew Cayton argues, families “overwhelmingly sought to live with people they knew.”\footnote{Andrew R. L. Cayton, \textit{Ohio: The History of a People} (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 14.} In her study of kinship in early southeast Ohio, Tamara Gaskell Miller has established a continued reliance upon kin networks by immigrants to the region. In Miller’s study, one third of the households in 1800 Marietta, Ohio, shared a surname. The stability of these families who shared an extended kin network is shown by the evidence that half of those who shared surnames remained in the region at least ten years, while those who did not share kinship with others in the region remained less than half that period of time. Shared surnames, of course, “share only half the story” writes Miller. “Could female kinship ties be easily identified,
the relationship between the presence of kin and persistence would undoubtedly be even more striking.”

The patterns of relationship shown by surnames in Gaskell Miller’s study are analogous to the surname persistence in Morgan Township, where Joseph and Margaret Agnew Boggett settled in the 1810’s with their families. According to Daniel Scott Smith, high rates of kin density take time in order to establish. Morgan Township, however, showed high rates only ten years after establishment of the township, and only twenty-some years since initial immigration had begun. Originally a part of Ross Township, Morgan Township was divided off in 1811. Settlers consisted mainly of Welsh immigrants such as brothers Morgan and William Gwilym, who had come in the last decade of the eighteenth century, settling first in Pennsylvania and then moving on to southwest Ohio after the turn of the century. They were joined by other Welsh families who made up the backbone of the settlement along Paddy’s Run Valley in the southeast corner of Morgan Township, including Edward Bebb, the father of future governor William Bebb, and the large Jones clan. The only event that briefly stopped the flow of Welsh settlers was the United State’s war with Britain in 1812. From 1820 to 1840, half of the households in Morgan Township shared a surname with at least one other family (see Table 1). Immigrants chose to settle near family members, like the Gwilym brothers and the Agnews, and tended to remain in the region for long periods of time. Like Gaskell Miller, these relationships do not account for female relationships; thus, the density rates are probably far higher.

In settling, marrying, and connecting to kin in early Ohio, Margaret Agnew’s children followed a similar pattern to the larger township. In 1810, Margaret’s eldest son, Brant, married Catherine (Caty) Ann Myers, the daughter of a Hessian soldier who had remained in the new United States following the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. His younger brother Joseph’s marriage to Miriam McKee, however, was the first in a series of intermarriages with the large McKee family that also had settled in the vicinity. The McKees had originally purchased one hundred and sixty acres of Congress land in Hamilton County in 1814 with a down payment of $80.00 (the land was priced at $2.00 an acre), but James McKee was listed in Ohio as early

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18 Tamara Gaskell Miller, “’My Whole Enjoyment,’” 125-126.
19 Daniel Scott Smith, "’All in Some Degree Related to Each Other,’” 58.
20 Stephen R. Williams, The Saga of the Paddy’s Run (Oxford, Ohio: 1945), 18-20. Paddy’s Run was supposedly named for an Irish scout who drowned in the waters of Paddy’s Run Creek. Early census records from Morgan Township show a high percentage of householders with Welsh surnames.
21 Guide to Agnew/McKee Lineage, 7. FWWSV.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Decade:</th>
<th>1820</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Household</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heads of household sharing a surname with at least one other head of household.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This accounts only for shared surnames among male heads of household; it does not account for female intermarriages.

Table 1: Morgan Township Heads of Household and Shared Surnames, 1820-1840.

As 1810, counted among Hamilton County taxpayers residing in Mill Creek Township. Miriam McKee was the eldest daughter of James and his wife, Sarah Guest; Joseph’s younger brother David subsequently married Miriam’s younger sister Josinah, and sisters Phoebe and Nancy Agnew married Miriam and Josinah’s cousin, William and their brother, Anthony Wayne, respectively. By 1820, the two families were enmeshed by marriage and settled in proximity to one another in Morgan Township, Butler County.

Once families were settled in the new region, supported by the proximity of biological kin, the real work of eking out an existence could begin. Writing to a brother who remained in South Wales, Morgan Gwilym enthusiastically reported, “We have done very well in this country. Have a fine farm which would sell for about 6000 Dollars and every other thing in proportion.” Gwilym’s neighbors, Margaret and Joseph Boggett, bought a mill that functioned as a distillery on Howard’s Creek in Morgan Township. An 1883 encyclopedia and history of Butler County identified numerous distilleries in Morgan Township; in 1813, George Isiminger advertised lots for sale adjoining his distillery on the Dry Fork of the White Water River. The Boggetts’ nearest neighbor, Jonathan Vantrees, reportedly distilled the local peaches into a very fine brandy. Joseph Boggett and his fellow distillers worked to refine their neighbor’s perishable goods into alcohol, which was easier to transport to the markets of Cincinnati, which, although not distant, were sometimes prohibitive merely by the undeveloped character of the region.

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22 Copy of land certificate in Agnew/McKee Lineage Info, 75. FWWSV; Marjorie Byrnside Burress, *Early Rosters of Cincinnati and Hamilton County* (N.p., 1984), 42. Samuel Agnew was also living in Mill Creek Township in 1810.
24 *A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio.* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1882), 422-426; Karen Mauer Green, *Pioneer Ohio Newspapers 1802-1818* (Galveston, Texas: The Frontier Press, 1988), 130; *A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio.* (Cincinnati,
The transformation of short-lived foodstuffs into durable products such as alcohol illustrates one of the many economic challenges to those living in undeveloped, or underdeveloped, regions. According to historian Daniel Walker Howe, transportation was one of the major economic barriers in the early republic:

“The 'frontier'... was not so much a specific line on a map as any area where it was hard to get produce to market. In such a place, economic self-sufficiency was involuntary, forced upon the settlers. They had traded consumer civilization for land, but they did not want the trade-off to be permanent. With few exceptions, westward migrants worked impatiently to liberate themselves from the oppression of isolation.”

One early Butler County settler reported that trees grew thick and packs of wolves roamed the forests. Once cleared, however, the land surrounding Paddy’s Run proved highly fertile and desirable. While Morgan Gwilym remarked in the letter to his brother on the prices of wheat, rye and corn, getting those goods to market were a challenge. Roads were no more than muddy ruts between farms. Waterways were the primary avenues for transporting goods to markets, thus the importance of cities like Cincinnati, situated at the nexus of several minor state waterways as well as the Ohio River, which allowed goods to be taken to more distant markets such as St. Louis and New Orleans. It was far cheaper to ship goods via boat than by road.

The Agnew sons had also established themselves well in Morgan Township. A year after his marriage to Caty Myers, Brant served as a witness for the sale of a section of land between George Shuck and Walter Armstrong of Hamilton County. By 1818, in addition to witnessing the sale of land between his neighbors, Brant served as Justice of the Peace in Morgan Township, a position to which he was elected for a three-year term of service. Township records indicate he served as Petit Juror in 1817, and was elected to a second term as Justice of the Peace in 1820.


28 Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 40; according to Howe, it cost nine dollars to ship goods thirty miles by wagon; for the same amount, you could ship goods “three thousand miles across the ocean.”

29 Mikesell, *Butler County, Ohio Land Records*, vol 1, 103. According to Smith Regional History Librarian Valerie Smith, a witness to a land sale was usually a respected and upstanding member of the local community.

Joseph Agnew also served in prominent positions within the community. Along with acting as a witness for land sales, he was a petit juror, a collector of the poor tax, and in 1820, was elected constable.31

The Agnew children also had rapidly expanding families. In 1813, Brant and Caty’s first child, John Myers Agnew, was born in Butler County. The same year, Joseph and Miriam’s first child, a daughter named Susan, was born. By 1820, Joseph and Miriam had six children; Brant and Caty had four. Brant and Joseph’s younger brother, David, who had married Miriam’s sister, Josinah McKee, had two children. Miriam and Josinah’s brothers all had large families (see Appendix). Remarkably, the majority of the children born into the Agnew/McKee kin network survived into adulthood. Their pattern of reproduction and survival fits that of early frontier regions in general; the relative health of the individual was correlative to the abundant land and distance from epicenters of contagious diseases, such as Cincinnati.32 The only recorded instance of one of the families losing a child in infancy was that of Joseph and Miriam’s infant son, Chester, who died in 1821 and was buried in a private graveyard on the farm of Warner Wynn in Morgan Township.33

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31 Township book of Morgan Township, flyleaf, 4, 6, 7, 10. Smith Regional History Library.
33 A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio. (Cincinnati, Ohio: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1882), 426; Martin Simmons, listed among those at White Water at its initiation, is also buried in this same graveyard.
Large families ensured that more work could be undertaken and completed. Like the first settlers in New England, the Agnews, McKees, and their neighbors rapidly expanded and intermarried, for there was plenty of land on which to settle their children; by the 1830s, however, the newly opened territories of Indiana and Illinois would lure further west the sons of Morgan Township’s first settlers. In the meantime, survival meant utilizing kin connections and the ready supply of labor from one’s own children. Unlike other areas of economic production (and certainly more so in the south), where “a labor-scarce economy [necessitated] great incentives or strong compulsion [to] secure the assistance of others,” the settlers in southern Ohio had only to rely upon their own families. Thus, rooted “in the household structures… the… economy continued to largely rely… on transactions conducted within the framework of personal relationships” between kin and neighbor.34

Aside from establishing themselves in Morgan Township, the families valued education, even in so rural a setting. Based on their signatures and notations on dozens of land deeds, both Brant and Joseph Agnew could read and write. Even Margaret, in a letter to her daughter Phebe in 1830, was able to write and spell with remarkable clarity. In 1821, Brant and his younger brother David bought $3 shares in the Union Library Association of Morgan and Crosby (Hamilton County) Townships. The books, including Plutarch, Aesop’s Fables, a history of the United States, and Lewis and Clark’s Expeditions, were kept at a central grist mill where most of the community took their grain to be ground. Along with the lending library, the first school had been established in Morgan Township around 1807.35

The Agnew’s level of education, however, was not mirrored in their McKee kin. In 1821, a now-widowed Sarah Guest McKee signed a deposition granting her children William R., Mary, James, Miriam McKee Agnew, Anthony Wayne, John, Josinah, Phebe and Reily, possession of the land purchased by her late husband, James. Sarah did so in order to marry William Wrench, who lived and farmed in Morgan Township. While the siblings signed over the property to their brother, Anthony Wayne, James, Josinah, and Reily were able only to put an X under their names, while William, Mary, Miriam, John, and Phebe signed for themselves. Witnessing the transfer was Brant Agnew, currently serving his second term as Justice of the Peace; witnesses (who both signed for themselves) were brother Joseph Agnew and Brant’s wife, Caty. In a later

34 Christopher Clark, Social Change in America (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 5, 115.
profile of Brant’s son, John Myers Agnew, it was reported that Brant Agnew “was a man remarkable for intelligence and industry. He gave his children a moderate education.”

Thus, by 1820, the Agnew and McKee families were firmly woven into the larger sociopolitical fabric of Morgan Township. In an 1825 tax record for Butler County, Joseph Boggett, and Brant and Joseph Agnew were paying taxes on multiple parcels of land, livestock, and capital for merchandise or manufacturing. Their success allowed them to turn their minds to other ventures. In 1818, Joseph and Margaret Agnew Boggett donated a quarter acre of farmland for a Methodist Episcopal Church and burial ground. Named Mt. Tabor, early members included the Boggetts’ in-laws, James and Sarah Guest McKee, as well as their neighbor to the west, Jonathan Vantrees. Trustees for the church included Joseph Agnew and Anthony McKee. Morgan Gwilym painted a diverse religious picture of the township, stating that even though he chose to “live according to the good old rule do as you would be done by,” the various denominations in the area included Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, “[a] few Universalists,” and some Unitarians. Like Kentucky at the turn of the century, the fire of revival swept northward through Ohio. Butler County supported a substantial Methodist resurgence that led to an active traveling route for local Methodist preachers. The benefit of such diversity, in Morgan Gwilym’s words, were “Every one worships Almighty God according to the dictates of his own Conscience, thank God no orthodoxy no tithes no high church no king but good and wholesome laws.”

The year Hannah Boggett celebrated her sixteenth birthday, however, something shifted within her kin group. Mt. Tabor experienced a spiritual revival. In the religious environment of the area, a revival was not an uncommon occurrence. In 1801, revivals flared in Kentucky, exciting great interest both among local folk as well as those dwelling in the old thirteen colonies, where religious revival had been sparked during the Great Awakening in the mid-

36 Quoted in Guide to Agnew/McKee Lineage, 10. FWWSV.
38 A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio. (Cincinnati, Ohio: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1882), 426-427. The original deed, dated 29 May, 1820, can be seen on microfilm at the Smth Regional Library of History, Oxford, Ohio, although it is extremely difficult to read. I have relied heavily here on the 1882 History of Butler County, as well as a microfilm of a badly burned deed copy at Western Reserve Historical Society, I A 23 (reel 2). The church building was later moved to Harrison, Ohio, where it was demolished (conversation with James Innis, no date).
41 Stephen Riggs Williams, The Saga of Paddy’s Run, 43.
eighteenth-century. During the first Great Awakening, revivals had taken place mainly in more urban areas (although the revivals in the hinterland of upstate New York and Massachusetts, primarily those among the Shakers, were certainly rural revivals). However, the flame that sprang up and burned so bright in Kentucky in July 1800 at the Gasper River Church in Kentucky was rural, relying on careful construction by fervent ministers in order to induce the spirit of revival among the settlers.\footnote{In their study of religion in the United States, Roger Finke and Rodney Starke draw on a number of scholars who suggest that the Second Great Awakening was any but spontaneous; rather, they were carefully crafted events by preachers such as Charles Finney, whose “actions were as direct and rational as his [religious] advice.” Other scholars suggest that the Great Awakenings were “Interpretive Fiction” created by those constructing the environment conducive to revival. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, \textit{The Churching of America 1776-2005}, 3rd edition (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 88-89, 90.} The success of this first “camp meeting” prompted Presbyterian minister Barton W. Stone to organize another meeting similar to Gasper River, but this time located at the Cane Ridge Meeting House in Logan County, Kentucky. The success of this second event—which drew a reported 10,000-20,000 participants and resulted in 3,000 conversions—was so large that it “came to the attention of the eastern press,” as well as setting off a chain of other local revivals. Eastern leaders hailed the success as a sign of the “greatest outpouring of the Spirit since Pentecost.”\footnote{Quoted in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, \textit{The Churching of America}, 94.} These same reports piqued the interest of Lucy Wright and her fellow leaders at New Lebanon, New York.

Union Village had undergone a similar revival during the same period. Former Presbyterians under the leadership of Richard McNemar had already developed styles of worship and social structure that closely resembled the initial Shaker period in New England. The people gathered at Turtle Creek experienced ecstatic worship accompanied by what McNemar called “voluntary acts” and ‘involuntary exercises” that were often embodied in jerking, barking, howling, or fainting. This characteristic New Light exuberance, accompanied by the eschewing of anything that was not plain and pious, paved the way for Shakerism’s advent. McNemar had also directed the rejection of traditional doctrinal positions, such as Calvinism.\footnote{Dawn Bakken, “Putting the Shakers ‘In Place’: Union Village, Ohio, 1805-1815” (Indiana University PhD diss., 1998), 68, 80.} This had prepared them to more easily adopt what the first Shaker missionaries offered, although McNemar himself proved a difficult, but eventual, convert. Whether or not Mount Tabor underwent a similar isolated revival process that led to similar language changes that prepared the way for the Shaker gospel is unclear; but considering the revival trends in the region at the
time, it seems likely that it resembled earlier revival patterns. Like the New Lights under McNemar’s leadership, the awakening at Mt. Tabor would have long-lasting consequences for the Agnew and McKee families.
Chapter Two: Nurturing the Little Seeds

In the spring of 1823 a woman arrived on foot at Union Village in Warren County, Ohio. She had ridden twelve miles on horseback with her husband to the town of Hamilton and walked alone the eighteen miles between Hamilton and Union Village. The woman was Miriam McKee Agnew, wife of Joseph Agnew. “She had been impressed for some time that Believers were the people of God,” recollected Richard Pelham, a Union Village brother. “Her husband had similar feelings, but was so much engaged with his spring’s work, he could not come.” Miriam stayed several days with the Believers, becoming, in Pelham’s words, “a hearty recipient of the faith.” When the Shakers took her back to Hamilton and left her to continue home on foot at her insistence, Miriam pressed them to visit and speak more on the faith to both her own family as well as their neighbors. Richard Pelham was chosen by the Union Village leaders to make the trip. After two days spent helping Joseph Agnew clear a field from stumps and brush, spending their breaks discussing the Shaker faith, Joseph informed Pelham and a companion, George Blackleach, “he was satisfied that the way was right, and wanted the privilege to confess his sins.” Although they were alone in a newly cleared field, Pelham sought a private place for confession, and Joseph “did…the work like an honest earnest soul.” Thus were made the first of many converts to the Shaker faith, and the roots of an eventual community were planted along the White Water River. The process of converting individuals in the White Water region exemplifies the process of building a new religious community from among previously established networks, as well as the ways in which Shaker leaders exerted influence in the absence of a strong, central, and charismatic leader like Ann Lee.

Although still in its own formative years, Union Village had already played a critical role in illuminating and defending Shaker doctrine and thus opening up the faith to greater exposure. During Miriam’s visit, the Believers were preparing to print a third edition of The Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing, which had been first printed at Union Village in 1808. In June, 3000 copies were undertaken and completed in the late fall. While the publications were intended to combat open attacks by former Believers who had apostatized or abandoned the faith when it lost personal appeal to them, there is a very real possibility that the Agnews might have come into contact with a Shaker book or pamphlet. The fact that both Brant and David Agnew were

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2. Ibid., 18.
subscribers to the lending library indicates the presence of printed material and a belief in the value of education and self-improvement through reading. The challenge was to cash in on the Agnews’ conviction of Shakerism’s merits and extend this belief system to encompass their neighbors and relatives.

**Gaining Converts**

As promised, Joseph Agnew did gather together a number of neighbors and relatives, and on a Sunday afternoon following Joseph’s own conversion Richard Pelham addressed a significant gathering. Pelham “opened the testimony as fully and plainly as I could in a discourse of about one hour,” but his message had little effect on the people. Pelham’s address was followed by a rebuttal from a local Episcopal minister (perhaps the minister of Mt. Tabor) whom Pelham judged to be a fairly well educated. Although the minister relied largely on Christian scriptures to combat the words of Pelham, he concluded his appeal to those gathered by encouraging them to return to their homes, “love your wives, and live with them and [never] mind what the Shakers say.” Following this, Pelham once again spoke to the people, openly rebutting every Scriptural example the clergyman had given, “show[ing] his sophisms, his unfair and illogical arguments, and especially false quotations, absurd applications, and garbling of the scripture.” When the minister tried to defend himself, Pelham commanded him to sit down, declaring, “I wont be interrupted; when I am through if you have any thing to say you may say it.” This heated exchange had far more effect on those gathered than Pelham’s initial testimony. Indeed, Pelham added wryly, “I think this poor man ought to [have] the credit of the success of the testimony.”

A number of conversions followed, including that of Brant Agnew.

The Episcopal clergyman’s exhortation for the gathered husbands to continue loving and living with their wives raises several questions regarding the perceived threat of Shaker celibacy to the social fabric of the local community. As we have seen, the family—or rather, extended kin groups—was the backbone of the region’s settlements and on a broader social spectrum, the family was the social cornerstone of the nation. Did the clergyman fear that dozens

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3 Pelham did not record actual figures for the gathering, only that “the gathering was so great that Joseph [Agnew’s] house would not contain half the people, & we therefore adjourned to the forrest [sic], where, with boards & logs sufficient seats were prepared for all to be seated. Pelham did exert his voice to such an extent during his open-air address that he ruptured a blood vessel in his lungs. See *A Short Sketch of the Life of David Spinning…A Sketch of the Life and Religious Experience of Richard W. Pelham…* Dayton Local History Room, Dayton Metro Library, 18-19.

4 *A Short Sketch*, 19.
of wives and children would be left to fend for themselves as their husbands, like David Spinning at Union Village, temporarily deserted their families and farms to go abroad preaching the Shaker gospel? Or did the idea of dissolving biological kin groupings represent a threat to a perceived national identity based on marriage, land ownership (or at least agricultural labor), which was often conflated with the democratic ideals of liberty and pursuit of happiness? Or perhaps the threat was felt directly by the clergyman, who saw his influence over the community waning in the face of Pelham’s testimony. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the direct impetus for the clergyman’s claims, clearly the Shaker gospel of celibacy represented a threat to the way of life that had developed around the organic roots of biological kinship in the area.

The clergyman’s worst fears were recognized in the conversion of the Agnew brothers (although in the long run neither man abandoned his family). But conversion was not enough to guarantee success of the newly planted Shaker gospel. The key to following this success was to hold on to and nurture the little seedlings planted by Pelham’s testimony. As Susan Love Brown suggests, the surge in utopian or communitarian groups during the early period of the United States republic was perhaps not coincidental, but a key indicator that “society was engaged in a cultural transition with which many people were having difficulty.” Indeed, Miriam Agnew had suffered a particularly agonizing year; she had given birth to her final child, William Wilshire, in 1822, but she had also lost a son, Chester, when he was less than a year old. The loss of her child may have moved Miriam to seek spiritual comfort in some new place, as the thought of celibacy may have offered comfort in the face of maternal loss, or the threat of facing one’s own mortality with every new pregnancy and childbirth experience. For the larger secular community, like the period of Shaker advent into America, the period of advent in the west coincided with the development of a new nation, fueled by the sentiment of the Enlightenment and the desire to reshape the individual and society. In major metropolitan spaces such as Philadelphia, the rise of a distinct middle class heralded new concepts about sexuality and social order, political rights and participation. While the Northwest region may have seen less metropolitan development, the post-Revolutionary period did introduce new tensions. Roads

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5 In “The Political Threat of a Female Christ,” Adam Jortner explores the threat Shakerism posed to “public order of masculine self-government.” The Shakers, Jortner argues, combated this perceived threat by styling themselves as “a loyal, apolitical, and feminine organization.” In *Early American Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 179-204.


7 *A History and Biographical Cyclopaedia of Butler County, Ohio.* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1882), 426.
were scarce, but print culture seeped into the area. Richard McNemar deplored the presence of deism among settlers in both Kentucky and Ohio that threatened true Christian belief. Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason* accompanied settlers going west, underpinning the threat to Christianity among a “giddy and thoughtless multitude.”

The outbreak of New Light revivals was a response to development and uncertainty; as during the first period of Shaker integration, the revivals in the west provided fertile ground for the Shaker message.

While the deepening solidification of kin networks reveals the attempt to create supportive structures amidst the upheaval, the rise of intentional community also signaled ways to cope with the realities of life in the region. Jonathan Andelson explores the development of intentional community, or sociogenesis of community, in his essay on “Coming Together and Breaking Apart.” Sociogenesis indicates a process wherein an individual or a group goes from unawareness, or disconnectedness, through a process that gradually enmeshes “mutual interests, concerns, and efforts.” Andelson identifies three ways that sociogenesis takes place: first, the development of bonds in common with a charismatic leader. Second, development from shared interests or ideologies. Thirdly, sociogenesis may result from “preexisting, noncommunitarian connections.” The development of kinship among the Agnews and McKees falls between the second and third stages, because while the families shared the bonds of intermarriage and local community, which indicates a shared interest, but these bonds developed from initial noncommunitarian connections defined by settlement patterns.

The process of sociogenesis for eastern and western Shakers was clearly different, according to Andelson’s definition. Eastern Believers’ commitments to one another were cemented by their co-commitment to the charismatic leadership of Ann Lee. Lee’s successors, Whitaker, Meacham and Wright, were challenged to maintain Believers’ commitment to the faith without Lee’s physical presence, leading to a period of apostasy. It was during this liminal period following Lee’s death that the troubles with former Believers (who chose to leave the community for any number of reasons) arose and committed Believers began publishing with fervor, including a collection of testimonies from the first converts to Shaker faith. Print culture was a

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10 Ibid., 136.
direct response to bolster the faithful and tie them more closely to the community, allying them against attacks from apostates and unbelievers alike. As Andelson notes, the presence of persecution fosters bonds, creating an intensified sociogenesis that more closely allied the Believers.\(^{11}\) Lee’s charismatic leadership, however, could not be replicated in the west, and so the missionaries had to rely on other methods to gain the loyalties of converts.

**Developing Intentional Community**

In order to build a new Shaker community, missionaries relied upon preexisting kinship ties among converts, as shown by the example of Union Village and White Water. At what became Union Village, initial converts had already formed bonds in separating from the Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Richard McNemar, and their New Light experiences further cemented their ties to one another. Shaker missionaries had only to exploit their desire for assurance of salvation and show a shared ideology in order to draw them into the fold. At White Water, the bonds of kinship had been in place since the early period of the century, further cemented by continued intermarriage in the wider community of Morgan Township. After these initial groups were converted and initiated into the faith, further proselytizing would rely upon shared ideologies in order to bring more converts into the fold. As I will discuss in chapter 5, this is precisely what happened with the Millerite influx during the 1840s. The use of preexisting networks also produced a situation wherein some might be pressured to join the majority in order to not loose their connections to kin. At White Water, it quickly became apparent that some converts were more committed than others, resulting in a schismatic situation that divided the intentional community and split the kinship bonds that had held extended family members together in the vicinity since the early nineteenth century.

In order to keep fragmentation at bay, good leaders had to be swiftly put into place. At Union Village, Lucy Wright sent a series of New Lebanon brothers and sisters to aid in developing an appropriate Shaker community. Dawn Bakken has shown that these “Old Believers” from eastern communities had difficulty adjusting to the rough western life, viewing their tenure in the west as a temporary rather than permanent condition. Their bonds to the west

\(^{11}\) Andelson, “Coming Together and Breaking Apart,” 139.
were soluble and according to Bakken, inhibited their ability—and desire—to integrate into the fledgling communities. But Union Village had direct, personal supervision and encouragement from eastern Believers, even if they brought their own traditions and understandings into a Shaker way of life. At White Water, however, there was no initial imposition of leadership. As with Darby Plains and presumably the other fledgling communities (none of which are mentioned specifically in the daily records of Union Village from this period), Union Village relied upon short visits made by brethren to White Water. Calvin Morrell and Samuel Sering of Union Village were making trips to Darby Plains in 1821, and White Water was added to their route beginning in 1823 when Samuel Sering and George Blackleach spent six days visiting among the new converts. In December, Calvin Morrell and six other Believers, including Matthew Houston, visited the region in order to “see the place.” Brant Agnew received them cordially into his home during their visit. In letters from Union Village to New Lebanon, the possibility of moving the Darby Plains Believers to White Water was already being considered.

As a settlement, Darby had proved difficult, owing to damp, low lying location that promoted illness (primarily malaria) among the members and threatened to undo the work there. The Darby settlement had its origins in an 1801 New Light movement had begun in Vermont under the leadership of Douglas Farnham (or Farnum). Farnum’s followers went west, settling

<table>
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<th>Zilpha Burnham</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Charlotte Simmons</td>
<td>Polly Burnham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susannah Farnham (window of Douglas)</td>
<td>Unknown number of children</td>
<td>Susan Champlain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louisa</td>
<td>Samuel Rice, Sr.</td>
<td>Polly Champlain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Easterbrooks</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>Sarepta Hinman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Easterbrooks</td>
<td>Ebenezer</td>
<td>James Wells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Dorcas Wells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Adaline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Mariah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Darby Plains Believers moved to White Water in 1823.

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along Darby Creek in what would become Union County. Nathan Burlingame was one of the young preachers present at Darby when a revival broke out in 1818, subsequently ending badly because the confession of sins amongst the members resulted in animosity. Two years later, Douglas Farnum and two other men visited Union Village, and Farnum was allowed to address the Believers gathered at meeting.15 Darby was built on the foundation of several families including Samuel Rice and his six children, James and Dorcas Wells and their daughter, Adaline, in addition to that of Farnum and Burlingame and others (see Table 2).

The Believers at Darby Plains along with the Agnews and McKees were not the only ones that Union Village found themselves busily nurturing. Elder Matthew Houston, writing to Seth Wells in 1823, declared that several other locations were requiring a great deal of attention. “We have four little locations in different parts of this state,” he informed Wells, “which do now & will continue to demand our close attention & earnest solicitude for some time yet.” The fact that Union Village was shepherding fledgling Shaker communities at White Water, North Union, Watervliet, West Union and two other locations near Eaton and Columbus (neither of which flourished) was not so burdensome as lacking “labourers in proportion to the labour—the burden [thereby being] lightened.”16 Having made converts, McNemar, Houston and the other leaders at Union Village, and even those leaders at a distance in New Lebanon, were faced with the challenge of sustaining these fledgling communities, along with fostering the growth of leaders in the faith that would serve to relieve Union Village of the burden of leading so many others when they themselves were still few.

15 August 5, August 9, and October 3 1820, Daily Records of Union Village, 1805-1896, WRHS V B 230.
16 Matthew Houston to Seth Y. Wells, 15 September 1823. WRHS IV A 70.
Chapter Three: “Sarah’s children have all left us”: The Establishment of Community and the Dissolution of Kinship

Their love cannot be mixed with that which leads to sin,
Nor is it solely fixed on self’s beloved kin.

- Richard McNemar

In 1830 Margaret Agnew Boggett wrote a letter to her daughter, Phebe, and her husband, William McKee, a cousin of Phebe’s sisters-in-law, Miriam and Josiah McKee. Margaret had not heard from her daughter in some time and the couple had apparently moved some distance from Morgan Township. "I am at a loss to know what information you want by your long silence,” Margaret wrote. The distance between them, both geographically and otherwise, clearly pained Margaret a great deal. “I have written heretofore on the subject of Salvation,” she reminded them without malice, “but fearing from your coldness that that does not suit your taste…[I] will give you a detail of your family connections.”

Phebe and William were not the only family to reject the faith. William’s aunt, Sarah Guest McKee, lived with Margaret and the rest of the White Water Believers, but Margaret made the crucial note in her letter, “Sarah’s children have all left us.” Margaret’s letter reveals the tensions between the Agnew and McKee families following the introduction of Shakerism in 1823. It is unclear whether Phebe and her husband initially embraced Shakerism and then rejected it, or whether they were opposed to Richard Pelham’s testimony from the beginning. Nevertheless, by the time Margaret was writing seven years later, Shakerism was obviously a major rift in the relationship between mother and daughter. The task of forming communities, which relied upon kin networks, also forced the community and family members to deal with the objections of their loved ones. As the process of forming community at White Water reveals, the idea that Believers’ love was not “solely fixed on self’s beloved kin” did not bear out in the reality of Shaker life. Indeed, it was complicated by existing ties to family.

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2 In a letter dated 1844, Joseph B. Agnew indicates he received a letter from his sister, Phebe, via Memphis, indicating that the couple probably moved to Tennessee sometime between 1830 and 1840. Joseph B. Agnew to William and Phebe Agnew, 29 July, 1844. FWWSV.
3 Margaret Boggett to William and Phebe McKee, 3 February, 1830. FWWSV.
4 At the end of the 1880 U. S. census enumeration for White Water, enumerator James H. Carter added the note, “Here ends the Enumeration of Shakers at White Water Village. They consider them selves as one family.”
Creating Community at White Water

Following Joseph Agnew and Brant Agnew’s conversions, very little seems to have changed for their families residing in Morgan Township. Brant continued to serve his three-year term as Justice of the Peace, witnessing as many land sales in 1822 as he had in previous years. Joseph was reelected overseer of collecting the poor tax in April of 1822. Their families also continued to grow. In 1823 Brant and Caty added a third son, Joseph, and the new little Joseph’s uncle also had a new boy born in 1822, William. They continued to live on their own farms adjacent to their relatives, including the McKee clan. On Sundays, they traveled to the hillside where Mt. Tabor was located, worshiping under the direction of visiting figures from Union Village. There must have been a palpable sense of excitement for some as they pushed aside the rough pews and began to learn the steps of the Shaker spiritual dances.5

The first major change to the White Water community (hardly yet a true Shaker community) came when Union Village elders decided to move Darby Plains Believers to the new site along the Dry Fork of the White Water River. Martin Simmons, a Darby brother, went to Crosby Township, Hamilton County, and purchased a 40-acre tract of land with $200 supplied by a fellow Darby Believer, Samuel Rice Sr. The land adjoined Morgan Township, Butler County, directly butting up against the quarter section of land owned by Joseph Boggett (see Figure 1).

The decision to dissolve Darby and move any willing Believers to White Water, while strategic on the part of a thinly stretched leadership at Union Village, added a new burden to the nascent White Water community, with new converts still living on their own properties, some housing Darby Believers while others lived in one cabin put up on the new 40 acre tract in Crosby Township. According to John Maclean, in 1825 when development of the land on the White Water was undertaken in earnest, a number of cabins were both moved from a previous site as well as constructed. Those cabins that were moved were probably located on the properties of either Joseph Boggett (because his farm in Morgan Township lay proximal to the land purchased in Crosby, Hamilton County) or one of the other Agnew farms.6 Undoubtedly this introduced an immediate strain on the Agnews and McKees, who had their own families to

5 This is purely speculative on my part; there is no direct evidence concerning this earliest period of Shakerism at White Water.
6 Maclean, Shakers of Ohio, 237. The measurements given by Maclean are “eighteen feet square with a lean-to in the rear.”
support, notwithstanding an influx of new—and sick—Believers from Darby. The oncoming winter of 1824 would test the new bonds of community.

When the spring elections were held in Morgan Township on April 7, 1823, Brant Agnew was elected to a third term as Justice of the Peace, a seat he had held since 1818. It was a contested election, with Brant’s fellow justice, William T. Jones, winning by one vote over his opponent, John Rickard. Despite having received “a very large portion of the votes given,” indicating his overall popularity with his neighbors in Morgan Township, Brant refused to accept the commission because of “religious scruples.”

Joseph, too, no longer served the township in his previous capacity as collector of the poor tax. The conversions of both brothers were strong enough, it seems, to cause them to abandon their longstanding and respected positions within the local government. In their last appearance in the township records, Brant was nominated in 1825 to oversee the poor, along with Nathan Burlingame; both sought to be excused from the position, Burlingame under the pretense that his election was a “misnomer,” and Brant under the agreement that Shaker poor “should not become chargeable to the township,” thereby placing the burden of provision for their own poor upon other White Water Believers.

In June of 1824, the ministry at Union Village wrote to New Lebanon, New York, reporting that it was a “general time of health with some exceptions among Believers in these regions, and of more than common prosperity with Believers at large in this state [Ohio], with a gradual increase of numbers.” White Water, in particular, was doing well as could be expected given the fact that the Darby Plains Believers had removed there the past winter. According to the Church Records from White Water for this period, Nathan Burlingame, Ebenezer Rice, Emma Burlingame and Susannah Farnham were the acting leaders at White Water; consequently, they were all Darby Plains Believers.

While the summer of 1824 may have been a fairly prosperous, or at least uneventful one, the winter brought decidedly negative results. The land purchased along the Dry Fork of the White Water in Hamilton County was difficult for the brethren to cultivate. The Believers from

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8 Ibid., 18.
9 Union Village to New Lebanon, 7 June 1824. WRHS IV A 70.
10 It is unclear what the difficulties actually were; the land on which Joseph Boggett lived is quite hilly, but the land surrounding White Water Village is relatively flat and is currently used for agricultural purposes. Samuel Hildreth’s *Pioneer History* identifies 1805, 1838, and 1845 as years of severe drought. See Hildreth, Samuel P. *Pioneer History: Being An Account of the First Examination of the Ohio Valley, and the Early Settlement of the Northwest
Darby Plains continued to be plagued by sickness and depended heavily on Union Village to supply their needs, along with those that Maclean calls “those previously on the ground”—the Agnews and McKees. According to a description by Calvin Morrell preserved in Maclean’s account, “Meat with them was scarce. Sugar they had little or none, and milk but seldom. Bread was greatly lacking, while tea and coffee were out of the question. It was Lent with them nearly all the year round.”¹¹ By the time the summer of 1825 arrived, serious divisions had arisen among the White Water Believers, requiring Union Village to intercede by sending new leadership to the community. Aside from the regular visits of Calvin Morrell and others from Union Village, Nathan Burlingame and his wife, Emma, along with Ebenezer Rice and Susannah Farnham, were functioning as the leaders.¹² Burlingame may himself have been part of the problem, as he possessed what some called a “proud high sense” and was filled with a “high chaffe vain spirit.”¹³ Calvin Morrell was appointed the new leader at White Water, along with two sisters from Union Village, Mary Beedle (or Bedle) and Phebe Sockwood. Also present from Union Village was William Davis, acting as deacon, and under his leadership the White Water Believers purchased 215 additional acres and established a School Family first on the Mull farm, and then on the farm of Joseph and Margaret Agnew Boggett, where the children of the adult Believers lived, supervised by older brethren and sisters.¹⁴ By breaking up biological families and reordering them along the lines of Shaker communities, White Water took its first steps towards becoming an “intentional community,” and as we will see in chapter four, the first steps towards fictive family were also initiated. This process would slowly reorient the focus and loyalties from one’s blood relatives to spiritual brothers and sisters, although the ties to biological family would never fully be abrogated.

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¹² The Daily Records of Union Village, 1805-1896 show four visits to White Water in 1824, but only one visit in 1825, and none in 1826, showing perhaps a growing autonomy.
¹³ Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 28 October 1829. WL, ASC-1052.
¹⁴ “A Church Record Relating in Consecutive Order the appointments to and Removals from Office of Ministry Elders Trustees & Deacons of the White Water from its Commencement in 1823,” 2, 96. WRHS V B 357.
Leadership in the Early Years

Calvin Morrell, once a doctor in Warren County, found the task of leading the little group at White Water particularly taxing. Writing after the end of Morrell’s tenure at White Water in 1831, Richard McNemar noted Morrell’s initial cheerful willingness to take charge of White Water, a duty that he performed with “patience, ability and skill.” By the end of his tenure, however, Morrell was not quite so cheerful. McNemar wrote that although “several members had been gathered thro’ Calvin’s special labors, and promised fair for a time, [they had been found] to be not so good as he expected, which had furnished a field of heavy labors from which we could not well be released.”\textsuperscript{15} Morrell had the difficult task of assimilating another influx of Believers sent by Union Village from the newly dissolved village at West Union, Indiana (whose history will be further discussed in chapter four), as well as supervising the building projects undertaken during 1827 and 1828. In February of 1827, White Water brethren, aided by a number of brethren from Union Village, set about constructing a large shelter in which to house the new arrivals. In October, carpenters and masons from Union Village began construction of a red brick meetinghouse with the characteristic Shaker double front entrance and separate

\textsuperscript{15} June 1831, Close of the White Water Records, LC Shaker Manuscripts, reel 27, item 347a.
staircases leading to divided upper apartments for elders and eldresses.16 The first floor featured a wide-open space meant to accommodate the vigorous Shaker worship and dancing. On October 30, 1828, Archibald Meacham, Calvin Morrell, Eunice Sering, Susanna Stout, and Joanna Wallace (all of Union Village) moved into the apartments on the second floor. Because more private rooms were usually reserved for a communities’ leadership, it can be assumed that these five were serving as the elders and eldresses of White Water.17 Already settled were the families from West Union, Indiana.

Despite internal strife that drained Calvin Morrell’s energies, improvements were made between 1828 and 1829 by adding both a sawmill and gristmill along the Dry Fork of the White Water. A large frame dwelling had also been put up to house the new additions to the body of Believers. More land was acquired, and the Believers fostered a modest garden seed and broom business, and wove mats in the winter. These endeavors, according to Maclean, allowed the purchase of meat for the community. In 1828, Brant and Joseph Agnew sold their farm in Morgan Township for $1,000 and moved onto lands held communally by White Water, further deepening their commitment to the faith.18

But while White Water was experiencing growth, the kinship bonds between the Agnews and McKees were becoming increasingly frayed. Nancy McKee noted in her 1842 testimony (recorded along with four other Shaker sisters) that her parents, James and Sarah Mathers McKee, had withdrawn from the community at White Water. With four children of their own and Sarah most likely pregnant with a fifth, it may have proved too great a burden to provide for themselves along with the nine sickly Darby families living on the unfruitful White Water lands.19 For some time after their departure between 1825 and 1830, James McKee’s cousin, William W. and Phebe Agnew McKee did not contact any family continuing at White Water (Phebe was the daughter of Margaret Boggett). William’s aunt, Sarah Guest McKee (presumably widowed yet again after her second marriage to William Wrench) and several McKee cousins were still at White Water, and practically all of Phebe’s family was still there as well. William

17 Indeed, the records of White Water, reconstructed at some point after a fire destroyed the original, assume the same. See “A Church Record,” 3. WRHS V B 357.
19 “A Declaration & Sentiment of Nancy Agnew a Visionist at White Water,” 22 October 1841, 1. LC Shaker Manuscripts, reel 6, item 251. Sarah’s potential pregnancy may also indicate the couple’s refusal to embrace celibacy.
and Phebe’s silence grieved Phebe’s mother, Margaret Agnew Boggett, who in an 1830 letter, would have chastised Phebe for her silence save for “parental affection [which] forbids.” William and Phebe settled around Memphis, Tennessee and never returned to Ohio.

David Agnew and his wife and children had also left White Water. Before 1830 David had sold his land in Morgan Township and moved to Cincinnati where he supported his family working as a day laborer. Perhaps the little family itself was split over the Shaker faith. Describing her mother, Phebe Agnew said that Josinah had “received a measure of faith,” and as Josinah lay upon her deathbed, she entreated her young daughter to return to her kin at White Water. This was not an easy task to fulfill, for “on account of prejudice” which Phebe received “through the ministration of those of my natural relation who were opposed,” she did not follow her mother’s instructions. Two years later, her father must have relented, allowing her to return to White Water. By 1835, David was also dead and all of his children had been returned to the care of kin at White Water, save their youngest child, James, who was sent to live with David’s deceased wife’s younger sister, Phebe McKee Hummel. Phebe Agnew’s experiences indicate the split over Shakerism occurring between the extended family, with some deeply opposed to the faith, while others, like Phebe’s mother, held at least a small measure of belief in the teachings of the Shakers. Time and family members’ deepening commitments or opposition to Shakerism would only further fragment the ties between them.

William and Phebe Agnew McKee may also have been split over Shakerism. In a letter to his sister in 1831, Joseph Agnew counseled Phebe to “live your own faith be in subjection to your husband live in peace and love.” God, Joseph added, “makes known his will to you then is your time to obey for he is merciful and holy and will give everyone a fair and equal chance.” Knowing that Phebe was not content “living after the course and practice of the world” prompted her brother to speak openly, adding that he had more assurance of his own salvation than ever before. In 1844, he wrote William and Phebe again, gently reminding them that if they were “sick of the world and of sin” the Shakers at White Water had the answer for their weariness. Neither William nor Phebe acted on Joseph’s assurances by returning to White Water.

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20 Margaret Boggett to William W. and Phebe McKee, 3 February 1830. FWWSV.
22 Joseph Agnew to William W. and Phebe McKee, 29 July 1844. FWWSV.
The most unusual family division, however, regarded Miriam McKee Agnew’s decision to leave both White Water and her husband, Joseph. She joined her son, Joseph Boggett, in Franklin, taking with her daughters Susan, Lucinda, Minerva, and the youngest son, William. Daughters Hannah Ann and Marietta remained at White Water with their father, Joseph. While there are no family letters detailing the reasons for Miriam’s decision, the practice of self-divorce was not unknown. The early newspapers published in Cincinnati and its vicinity detail numerous advertisements placed by husbands no longer willing to cover debts accrued by wives who had left them. Spousal conflict and divorce was most often a community concern, with “family, kin, and neighbors [exercising] practical control of marriage formation, preservation, and termination.” Although each state had its own laws regarding divorces, and these laws were relatively compatible with the state’s neighbors, by the mid-nineteenth century divorce might be accomplished simply through moving to another state—or “migratory divorce.” By 1850, Indiana was especially notorious for serving as a “divorce mill,” where a disgruntled spouse might take up a brief residence and then petition for separation from his or her spouse. 23

There are no extant records indicating that Joseph and Miriam obtained a divorce while Miriam still lived in Hamilton County. 24 A family split that resulted in one spouse moving, with over half their children to another state cannot have been without its tensions, perhaps exacerbated by Joseph and Brant’s sale of the family farm in 1828. Despite the fact that Miriam purportedly sought out the Shakers’ help in maintaining the fires of revival at Mount Tabor, the situation at White Water—or in her marriage—was, in the end, intolerable. After moving to Franklin, Indiana, Miriam remarried twice—once in 1839, and a second time in 1846. Both her second and third husbands died a few years after their marriages.

Brant and Caty Agnew also had their own marital tensions. In 1827, four years after Brant had been converted to the Shaker faith, Caty gave birth to a son, Oran Perry Agnew. His was the last birth entry in the Agnew family Bible that went into the possession of Brant and Caty’s elder son, Daniel. An Agnew descendant, Brett Nelson, pondered the appeal of Shakerism to both Brant and Caty and according to family letters, Caty was less persuaded by the Shaker faith than her husband. “Having been raised a devout Mennonite,” Nelson writes, “some of the

24 It is possible that such documents did exist; the Hamilton County Court house was destroyed by fire three times, resulting in the loss of innumerable documents.
Shaker doctrines—the dualism of Christ, celibacy, and communal life—may have started to lose their appeal as the times grew better and [Caty] grew older.”25 Her pregnancy—an obvious sign that, like James and Sarah Mathers McKee, neither she nor Brant had fully embraced the celibate facet of Shakerism—would no doubt have aroused the resentment of those in the community living in full accordance with the faith. By 1835, Brant and his family had withdrawn from White Water, moving to Illinois where he purchased a quarter section of land in Hancock County.26 In 1840 Brant wrote to his son, Joseph, directing him to ask his mother if she “would take it in to consideration agreeable to her faith and other combined circumstances and prepare to return with me [to Ohio].”27 But Caty would not relent, and both husband and wife died and were buried in Hancock County, Illinois.

Those Agnew and McKee family members who chose to remain at White Water must have been deeply saddened to see their fellow kin depart, whether harboring deep enmity towards the Shaker faith or merely because they sought a different path in life. By 1835, Joseph and Margaret Boggett and three adult children (Hannah Boggett, William and James Agnew) still lived at White Water, along with Sarah McKee. The Boggetts and Sarah McKee were now in their seventies and White Water was probably also functioning to support them as their adult children would have under normal circumstances. David Agnew’s children were listed, along with their cousin, Nancy McKee. Joseph Agnew had one child left with him, Marietta. Hannah Ann Agnew, then about fifteen years old, had been chosen to accompany a visiting sister, Joanna Wallace, on her return to New Lebanon, New York.

The decision to send Hannah Agnew to New Lebanon had not been easy. In much of the correspondence directed to eastern Shaker leaders, former eastern sisters and brethren expressed their desire to return hither as soon as possible. “I felt that I had received a great prize,” wrote Archibald Meacham to Rufus Bishop upon the reception of the latter’s letter in 1838. In another letter, Meacham expressed his longing to be among his eastern brethren once more: “It is now all most four years since I was with you,” he lamented.28 Other eastern brethren and sisters sent to

26 U. S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907; http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=blmlandpatents&h=602417&ti=0&indiv=try&gss=pt&ssrc=pt_t116488_32_p-66788324_g32768
27 Quoted in Brett A. Nelson, The Greening of West Branch, 98.
28 Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 15 March 1838; Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 27 May 1830. WRHS IV A 86.
the west expressed similar desires to return once more to their eastern homes. Thus, to be chosen to accompany an elder sister on her return to the east was a great honor. “We had about twelve young Sisters to select [Joanna’s companion] from, all of whom we asteamed highly for there [sic] good works sake,” the White Water elders wrote to the ministry at New Lebanon. Hannah Agnew received the honor of being chosen, and the elders called Joseph Agnew, along with Susannah Farnham (the eldress of Hannah’s family group) in to hear their decision:

We asked them if they had as great faith as Old Father Abraham had who offered up his only son. Joseph answered that he thought that we ought to have greater faith than Father Abraham for our day was greater. And that he had too Daughters & he was willing to offer them both if they was wanted.

Hannah Agnew seemed less enthusiastic than her father; when she was informed of the elders’ decision, “she sayed that she wold go if that was the gift,” but the surprise of the decision (and perhaps the finality of being sent so far away from her family) “seemed all most more then she was able to bare.” The elders did their best to comfort her, but the news that she would be leaving White Water was meet with “such weeping & lamentation [as] we do not know that we ever witnysed before, not even at a funeral.”

On the morning of her departure, Hannah wrote with a deep sense of sorrow that she left with a “deep and heavy sigh, and reluctantly take a long farewell to the beautiful home I loved so well. The home of my childhood.” Like those eastern brethren and sisters who found it difficult to adjust to life in the west and to be separated from beloved eastern Believers, so Hannah too faced the same sense of displacement and severance from real and fictive kin as she went to live among the eastern Believers.

Despite their commitment to the Shaker way of life, individuals did not easily relinquish connections to biological family. Margaret Boggett and her son, Joseph Agnew, maintained a

Table 3: Agnews and McKees remaining at White Water after 1835.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joseph Boggett (77)</th>
<th>Sarah McKee (72)</th>
<th>Phoebe Agnew (18)</th>
<th>Nancy McKee (25)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret (Peggy) Boggett (70)</td>
<td>Amanda Agnew (12)</td>
<td>Theodore Agnew (9)</td>
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<td>Hannah (29)</td>
<td>Joseph Agnew (49)</td>
<td>William Agnew (15)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>William (Allen) Agnew (20)</td>
<td>Marietta (18)</td>
<td>Samuel Agnew (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James A. Agnew (32)</td>
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29 Taken from Maclean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 245-246.
30 The Lot of Elders at White Water to Beloved Ministry, 28 April 1836. WRHS IV A 86.
sporadic correspondence with their daughter and sister, Phebe McKee. When their
granddaughter, Marietta Agnew, went to Union Village to live, Margaret Boggett and Sarah
McKee made trips to Warren County to see her.32 This was in direct contrast to the ideal set of
expounded on the virtues of the Shaker life, including a doctrine and behavior that was “honest,
just and true,” and Believers who were living their lives after the example of Christ, a “faithful
few.” They were united in love towards their fellow man as well as fellow Believers, and this
love transcended the connections between “self’s beloved kin.” Clearly, however, this was a
Shaker ideal that was more difficult to attain in reality. Hannah’s reluctance to leave behind both
biological and spiritual kin revealed deeply rooted relationships developing out of the fictive
familial and kin networks established according to the Shaker faith, as well as maintenance of
old bonds. The family groups at White Water had begun to function as a de facto family, with the
same emotional attachments. In the absence of Miriam Agnew, Susannah Farnham probably
filled the role of mother to Hannah and her sister Marietta, as would have their grandmothers,
Margaret Boggett and Sarah McKee.

This mixture of both fictive and biological connections would change between 1835 and
1840, when the last group of family converts would be admitted to the community. As White
Water entered its second decade of existence, it no longer relied on kin networks in order to gain
new converts, although kin relationships still existed among its members. Continuance relied
upon the community’s ability to more deeply establish the fictive bonds of spiritual family that
had already begun to take root in lieu of strong kinship connections. The process of establishing
intentional community required that the architecture of family be carefully constructed under the
guidance of strong central leadership.

32 Ellen F. Van Houten and Florence Cole, eds. Warren County, Ohio: Shakers, Union Village, 1805-1920 (Lebanon,
Ohio: Warren County Genealogical Society, 2003), 1:3.
Chapter Four: “To protect & save”: The Architecture of Family

In 1814, Archibald Meacham, the son of Shaker Elder Joseph Meacham of New Lebanon, New York, was sent to take over leadership at the faltering community of Believers in Busro, Indiana. Founded in Knox County in 1809, the core of what would become known as West Union was built around Shaker settlers who had been converted to the faith in Kentucky and Ohio before migrating to the western edge of the territory that attained statehood in 1816. Under the leadership of Issachar Bates, the community began to thrive, despite severe bouts with malaria (the community was located along Busseron Creek and the Wabash River). Serious disruptions occurred between 1812 and 1814 because of ongoing battles between Miami Indian tribes and the military forces of William Henry Harrison, necessitating the wholesale flight of the Believers to Union Village and Pleasant Hill. When they returned in 1814, it was under the leadership of Archibald Meacham.1

The situation Meacham found upon arriving at West Union did not portend success. Eldress Ruth Darrow (daughter of David Darrow, elder at Union Village and an eastern Shaker transplant) died within weeks of his arrival, to the shock of Believers both in the west and east. The same fever that ended Darrow’s life afflicted the other Shakers and Meacham reported to Union Village in late fall that “there was no more than 10 or 12 brethren in the society at that time fit for duty.”2 Under Meacham’s leadership West Union made slow progress at best. A second eldress died in 1823, and the meetinghouse remained unfinished (the village had been in existence sixteen years at that point). Writing to the Ministry at New Lebanon in 1825, Meacham pinpointed the central issue regarding West Union’s faltering progress:

> It is in relation to those who were Children when their Parents first took up their cross.… There is a number with us….that are of the younger class, and there is very little prospect of their making Believers.3

Despite the efforts of both Meacham and other leaders who attempted to keep the community afloat, West Union fell into such a decline that it was closed in 1827 and willing Believers

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2 Cheryl Bauer, ed., *Shakers of Indiana: A West Union Reader* (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2008), 34. A visitor in 1816 commented upon the marshy quality of the land surrounding West Union, a situation that “must suffuse the whole village with unwholesome exhalations” (see page 84).
3 Ibid., 68-69.
removed to other villages (see table 4 for West Union families who were transferred to White Water).

The abandonment of West Union was a serious blow to the Shakers. It represented not only the first failure in their drive to spread the Shaker message into new territory, but also the limitations of relying heavily on existing kinship networks, for as much as they sought new converts, they also relied heavily on the children of existing Believers. As the leaders of Union Village wrote to New Lebanon, “it was easier to convince people of sin and even to bring them to confession than ‘to protect & save them afterwards.’”

It also seemed difficult to convince children to maintain the faith that their parents embraced. The failure to keep the children of converts within the faith also plagued White Water. Following its establishment in the early 1820s, young Agnew and McKee children left Shakerism and sought land on which to establish themselves and start families.

But Ohio had been settled swiftly and there was little arable land left. For a child born in the early years of the century, they “faced an impossible task if he wished to find good land to buy when he was twenty-one.” Newer states like Indiana (now already 15 years old) and Illinois were preferable to saturated Ohio. Brant and Caty Agnew’s eldest son, John Myer, left home at 18 and went to Dayton, working as a day laborer. He later moved to Franklin, in Warren County, Ohio for a short time, and then worked the Ohio River as a flat-boatman. In 1836, he returned to Hamilton County and found work as a carpenter. His path had proved much more disjointed than that of his father, who by roughly the same age had already become involved in local land sales.

John Myers’ cousin, Joseph Boggett Agnew (son of Joseph and Miriam Agnew) also left home at

Table 4: Family Groups from West Union, Indiana, 1827.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hall, Ann</th>
<th>Sherman, Ezra Sr.</th>
<th>Stroud, Reece</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Rachel</td>
<td>Ezra, Jr.</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Mary Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Quoted in Guide to Agnew/McKee Lineage, 10. FWWSV.
an early age, settling in Franklin, Indiana where he also worked as a day laborer and later trained as a miller.\textsuperscript{7}

Would the children have left if their parents had maintained farmland, instead of donating it to the Shaker community? Evidence drawn from Morgan Township maps suggests that the children of the Agnews, especially Joseph and Miriam, might have remained in the vicinity had Joseph been able to subdivide his property, as did a fellow farmer, James Shields. Shields subdivided his land between children until each held only a small section of the original 160 acres. Shields example notwithstanding, the surrounding region had reached that critical point identified by Daniel Scott Smith, where oversaturation led to outmigration from the local community.\textsuperscript{8}

**Meacham and White Water**

With his first attempt at leadership thwarted by war, disease, and the failure to maintain the children of Believers among their ranks, Meacham was given the eldership of the fledgling community at White Water. As the son of Joseph Meacham, the first American convert chosen by Ann Lee to inherit her mantle of authority, and the primary figure associated with the establishment of communal villages and the codification of Shaker practice, Archibald Meacham had a powerful example to follow. His uncle, David Meacham, had been one of the first three missionaries into the Ohio River Valley; his older brother John was the first elder at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Meacham’s family history was the perfect example of what Steven Stein identifies as the Shaker reliance upon “traditional blood relationships” as leaders, especially in the west.\textsuperscript{9} Meacham’s task at White Water also represented the central concern of Shaker leaders both in the east and west: building and maintaining viable communities that retained members, including the children of first generation converts. In doing so, the Shakers chose to model


\textsuperscript{8} Daniel Scott Smith, “‘All in Some Degree Related to Each Other,’” 58.

\textsuperscript{9} Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 92. David Darrow, from New Lebanon, was sent west by Lucy Wright to take charge of the development of Union Village. Darrow’s daughter, Ruth, was a beloved eldress at West Union, whose death in 1814 came as a real blow to both West Union and the eastern villages. See Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 60, 64; also, “A Devastating Death,” in *Shakers of Indiana. A West Union Reader*, ed. Cheryl Bauer (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2008). Other family names which come up with regular frequency are Wells, Youngs, and Bishop. There was a Wells-Youngs influx in the east, among them Seth Y. Wells, Benjamin Seth Youngs, and Seth Youngs. The latter’s son, Isaac Youngs, left detailed accounts of his experiences as a Shaker. See Glendyne Wergland, *One Shaker Life. Isaac Newton Youngs, 1793-1865*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
themselves after the biological family unit, creating fictive kin relationships that served to bind the community to one another.

Building a family was essential to Shaker survival. In his exploration of liminality, anthropologist Morton Klass concerns himself with Victor Turner’s terms *liminality*, *communitas*, and *anti-structure*. Turner suggests that as an individual moves from one structure to another, they enter a *liminal* space—indeed, he suggests that a religious order is in itself a permanent liminal space: “What will happen to communitas when people live out their lives in liminality?” Klass asks. “Turner suggests that structure will emerge over time, at least the sort typically found in religious orders.” This view, of course, appreciates society and culture as a structuralist framework, but the very act of stepping into liminality suggests an individual’s agency in moving from structural state to state. Using Turner’s model, then, those converts from the “world” (a structure) moved into a liminal space before becoming fully members of a new structure—the Shaker community. Even the advent of Shakerism went through this process: originally made up of loosely federated individuals and family groups, each community slowly underwent the transformation into community as the members sold or donated their land and moved into communion with one another. Of course, as White Water shows, this was not a smooth transition, but a fragmented process that repelled as many as it attracted.

Moving past a liminal state was essential for the Shakers. They could not maintain a vibrant faith that incorporated celibacy and an emphasis on community if that community were fragmented by spatial separation. Proximity either reinforced or reduced the strength of Shaker faith. In addition to the challenge of maintaining adherence of the faithful, the strangeness of Shaker beliefs elicited strong public censure from outside the group. To strengthen the bonds between the Believers, it behooved the Shaker leaders to coalesce around a new social structure that would move the Believers away from liminality and into a new system.

The model that the Shakers chose to coalesce around was that of the family. Not the nuclear family that came to be emphasized as the nineteenth century progressed, but an extended network that not only encompassed each village with its multiple “family” groups, but also reached out to encompass the villages clustered in the east as well as those flung out across the west. Each village consisted of families designated by location, such as the North Family and

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Central Family at White Water. Villages had “gathering orders” where new converts were housed and instructed. Heading each family was a male/female partnership that acted much like parents: there were deacons and deaconesses, elders and eldresses, and trustees. “Shaker leaders instructed members to consider the elders and eldresses as their fathers and mothers, their compatriots as brothers and sisters,” writes architectural historian Julie Nicoletta. “They would live together as a spiritual and temporal family more potent than those of the world.”

Over the temporal networks was the spiritual parentage of Mother Ann Lee and Christ; over them, Holy Father (or Jehovah) and Mother Wisdom (also known as Holy Mother Wisdom).

Ann Lee’s own emphasis had been on family. She had sought out single young women during her period of ministry in upstate New York, perhaps targeting them deliberately because of her own dynamic relationship with her mother, and the loss of her children. In recounting their testimonies, Lee’s first female converts display a deep emotional attachment to Lee, identifying her as a spiritual mother, even while they de-emphasize their ties to sanguine family. Anne Mathewson wrote that she felt herself “a child blest [sic] with the best of mothers.” The imagery of family employed by Lee extended to her own role as leader. When challenged by a potential convert with the Apostle Paul’s commandment that women were to be silent in the church, Lee responded that as the natural order of generation required both a man and a woman (with the man as the head and the woman as the second), so the spiritual family required both a mother and father—and when the father was not present on earth, the “government belongs to the woman.” When the head was present, however, both the woman and children were to be subject “to her husband, who is the first.” Lee claimed her right to leadership only in the absence of Christ’s earthly presence.

The man Lee chose to replace herself before her death in 1784 further solidified the use of family structures. Joseph Meacham—the same convert who had challenged Lee’s authority to lead based on Paul’s injunction—took the spontaneous faith inspired by Lee and removed it from a state of liminality by creating a structured, codified movement that could better withstand the

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13 Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee... 14.
harsh storm of printed invectives lobbied by apostates and critics alike. Under Meacham’s successor, Lucy Wright, the communal guidelines were formally written down in a document called the *Millennial Laws*. Wright was concerned with deviations among members’ adherence to the central tenants of celibacy, confession and community; the promise of a revival prompted her to remind those under her guidance of the need for rightly ordered conduct. The document itself is divided into chapters, each of which addressed an aspect of Shaker life, conduct towards one another, and preparation for worship. Brothers and sisters were even instructed on how they were to go up and down stairs: rather than sliding the foot across the step, they were to lift their feet and putting them down square “so as not to wear out the carpets unnecessarily.” While many of the laws such as treading upon carpets seem extraordinarily idiosyncratic, their purpose was to preserve the homogeneity of the community. Most importantly, the rules of Chapter Three of the *Millennial Laws*, “Concerning intercourse between the sexes,” established interpersonal relationships among male and female Shakers, and this necessitated unique architectural accommodations so that the laws of celibacy could be enforced.

According to the laws, men and women were not allowed to be together alone, either in the street or within the shops and dwellings, excepting in situations where they had the specific permission of the Elders. The inability to interact with one another on an individual basis removed chances of knowing someone more intimately, thus prohibiting the possibility of certain brothers and sisters developing bonds between them. The equality of the brothers and sisters is never mentioned, but the main thrust was primarily towards keeping men and women separated from each other at all times. In order to maintain separation in the dwellings between brothers and sisters, the spaces themselves had to be gendered. The fifth law in chapter states that it was “contrary to order for the brethren and sisters to pass each other on the stairs.” By creating gendered spaces, the Shakers worked to remove potential situations wherein a brother or sister might be tempted through the presence of a member of the opposite sex.

But rules were not only intended for keeping men and women separate from one another. According to architectural historian Julie Nicoletta, “the Shakers had a strong sense of order”

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which was manifested in their physical environment. As with eastern communities, who gathered together formally under the leadership of Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, White Water gradually moved from kinship into a state of shared community. Isaac Youngs depicted the ordered environment of White Water in 1834, when he and Rufus Bishop of New Lebanon toured the western communities, and Isaac drew maps of each village (see Figure 2). The map of White Water, dated 1835, shows the North Family in the Y of what are now Howard’s Creek Road and Race Lane at the Hamilton/Butler County line. The brick meeting house and dwelling house, along with four shops and supporting outbuildings are set perpendicular to Howard’s Creek Road. Behind the buildings (all set at right angles to one another), are two equal pastures labeled “Garden” and “Deer Park”, constrained by lines probably indicating fencing. Across from the meeting and dwelling houses are another garden and orchard, along with a brewery on the Dry Fork of the White Water and two mills on either side (White Water had grain and saw mills). South on Oxford Road is the South Family, consisting of one large dwelling house flanked by a barn and shops, with a kitchen behind. Each of the family buildings are situated so that the main buildings face the central road, but because of the right angles at which the supporting buildings are set, there is also an internal street of sorts. The proximity of the buildings characteristic of all Shaker villages “[facilitated] communication among members and [enhanced] work efficiency.” According to Nicoletta, the proximity of the buildings had less to do with specific designs than the “practical concerns” raised by the communities’ vision.

The maintenance of order within Shaker communities required a delicate balance between power and family. As outlined in the two previous chapters, the advent and establishment of Shakerism in the west required the presence of kin networks, yet dependencies on one’s blood kin was eschewed in favor of building a spiritual family. The emphasis on

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18 Ibid., 357.
Figure 3: 1834 Map of White Water Shaker Village. Isaac N. Youngs, *Sketches of the various Societies of Believers*. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington DC.
spiritual family did not mean that they could overlook the natural temptations of human flesh, including sexual desire. In her analysis of Shaker dwellings as a form of communal control, architectural historian Julie Nicoletta unsuccessfully tries to link the Shakers to a broader movement towards greater social reform in the early- and mid-nineteenth century, which included the advent of the penitentiary and insane asylum. Although Nicoletta herself acknowledges that there is “little evidence of direct links between the Shakers and contemporary reformers,” she is correct in assuming similarities, although these may not be directly based on Shaker awareness of worldly reform movements. While older scholarship has treated the Shakers as a social phenomenon, Nicoletta endeavors to treat them as integrated rather than isolated from the broader culture. In seeking to emphasize similarities, she overextends her evidence in trying to directly link Shaker communal control to that of emerging penitentiary or insane asylums. While she is correct in illustrating the analogous concept of British political Jeremy Bentham’s plan for the Panopticon with that of windows installed so that Shaker elders and elders might observe the Believers at worship in the meetinghouses, there is probably less of a correspondence between Bentham’s Panoptical and Shaker windows than the simple fact that the Shakers stood on tremulous ground in the early nineteenth century, seeking both to strengthen their communities as well as rebuff the harsh criticism of apostates and outsiders. Nevertheless, Nicoletta correctly emphasizes a “shared…intellectual heritage” in the same way that the Shakers were influenced by and borrowed from Protestant religious language as it sought to gain a foothold in the hinterland of upstate New York.19

This view of Shakerism as a strong, hierarchical movement that governed its adherents through a specific and prescribed set of rules meant to exert control over every aspect of life creates an essentialist structuralist argument about the nature of Shakerism. The prevalent mode of addressing the Shakers has been to emphasize a person’s (or persons’) choice in joining the Shakers, after which the scholarship is most concerned with establishing the structural framework of Shakerism and the rules handed down to its adherents, such as celibacy, confession, and the numerous regulations listed in the Millennial Laws. The penchant for order (both physical as well as spiritual) and the conscious effort by the Shakers to project an image of “simplicity, perfection, social isolation, and religiosity” creates a religious and cultural framework that seems to be uniformly rigid from east to west.

The Development of Community and Family

When he arrived at White Water in 1827 with a handful of families from West Union, Meacham inherited the eldership from Calvin Morrell. Still smarting from the failure at West Union, Meacham’s only serious rival for leadership was a convert named Nathan Burlingame. Young, and apparently quite charismatic, Burlingame had been one of Union Villages’ first converts at Darby Plains in Union County. When the Darby Plains New Lights became Shaker converts, Burlingame’s preaching gift was recognized by those at Union Village, who actively sought to cultivate it by both inviting him for personal instruction at Union Village, as well as sending him to visit one of the eastern villages at Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Burlingame was the first to respond to Union Village’s directive for the Darby Believers to sell their land and join with the new Believers in Morgan Township. In addition to serving as the preacher, he also dabbled in “doctoring,” perhaps prompted by the ongoing battle with malaria among the Darby transplants. When White Water was formalized and the first parcel of 40 acres purchased for its village, Nathan, his wife Emma, and two other Darby Believers, Samuel Rice and Susannah Farnham (wife of Douglas, since deceased), served as its first elders and eldresses. Neither Burlingame nor his wife remained long in leadership; Emma died not long after and by 1825, Calvin Morrell had replaced Nathan.

Burlingame might have faded into the annals of White Water’s history if not for running afoul of White Water’s new elder, Archibald Meacham, whose connections to powerful eastern leaders would prove useful in Meacham’s ousting of Burlingame. In June of 1829, Burlingame wrote to a Shaker brother he had met on his stay in the east, communicating his desire to be once more among the Believers in that place. “I feel to communicate my remembrance of the good preveleges I enjoyed when with you,” he wrote, “…every recollection a glow of warmth springeth up within me, my mind is in a moment present with you, my next thoughts are shall I ever see you again in the body[?]” Burlingame concluded, “I know not.” Alluding to some deep connections that had been formed between himself and another Believer (identified only by the initials G. W.), Burlingame acknowledged the receipt of a silver pen, along with G.W.’s “love love love.” So dearly did Burlingame treasure the pen that he wrote the letter with it.

20 J. P. Maclean, Shakers of Ohio, 234.
21 Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 28 October 1829. WL ASC-1052.
22 A Church Record... of the White Water, 1. WRSH V B 357.
23 Nathan Burlingame to Nathaniel Deming, 3 June 1829. WL ASC 1050.
Four months later, White Water’s head elder, Archibald Meacham, wrote to the same leaders at [Pittsfield/Enfield?], painting a dark contrast between the nostalgic, respectful letter sent by Burlingame in June, and Meacham’s descriptions of the former’s serious faults. “I thought it was my duty to give you some information of his State & Standing,” wrote Meacham, for a long time before he left us I never had any particular acquaintance with him till in about two years past, since my acquaintance with him I have found him far from an honest faithful believer But a proud high sense Man very full of a light chaffy vain Spirit, both in his public preaching & in his common deportment and a real corrupter of female virtue.

Meacham and others labored with Burlingame in vain to get him to “take up a faithful Cross against the flesh” but Burlingame would not acquiesce. Meacham thus decided it was best to let Burlingame expose himself to the other Believers at White Water, which he did in short order, according to Meacham’s letter. Even the elders at Union Village, who had so early on recognized the young man’s talent, were unable to get him to repent. At last acting upon the nostalgia indicated in his letter, Burlingame chose to go back east, a decision that neither Union Village nor Meacham discouraged. “I think you will now [know] better what measures to take for his Salvation & protection,” Meacham told them.24

With Burlingame conveniently out of the way, Meacham could focus on bringing White Water into alignment with Shaker models of community and family. In a record pertaining to Morrell’s final “releasement” from White Water in June 1831, those Believers who had “promised fair for a time [but were found] to be not so good as…expected” were brought up short by Meacham’s “increase of order.”25 His next task was to organize the disordered little society, a task that was finally completed in 1830 with the help of Richard McNemar. A part of the reorganization included the signing of a covenant, which defined the boundaries of leadership and individual obligation to the community.26

The covenant was revised in 1830 to broaden its coverage of issues such as leadership and the roles of elders, deacons and trustees, the surrender of personal property, and the rights of those Believers to reclaim surrendered property if they chose to leave the faith.27 Prior to 1830,

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24 Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 28 October 1829. WL ASC 1050.
26 Richard McNemar to Seth Y. Wells, 25 March 1830. WRHS IV A 71. Apparently no covenant had been written and signed by White Water Believers prior to 1830, although it was customary to do so. See Maclean, Shakers of Ohio, 242-243.
27 The 1830 covenant was undertaken to bring older covenantal agreements up to date. In a brief history of the covenant given at the outset of the North Union, Ohio copy from 1830, amendments and additions were made in
covenants had been simpler, although addressing the same issues. At Enfield, Connecticut, for instance, the 1827 covenant contained only seven short articles, ranging from the individual Believer’s commitment to obey the elders and “conform and subject ourselves to the order, rules and regulations of the Family,” to the responsibility of deacons and trustees to keep accurate records of all who signed the covenant, as well as all other community records and financial transactions. The leadership at New Lebanon approved each covenant.

At White Water, however, the process of signing the new 1830 covenant proved challenging. Reporting on the progress of updating the covenants in all of the western communities, elders at Union Village informed the New Lebanon Ministry that Richard McNemar had gone to White Water “for the purpose of preparing a Covenant suitable for the people their [sic]—as the present young and unorganized state of the people…will not we think admit of a Covenant in any respect in the same form of the one that came from the east.”

What, specifically, would the Believers at White Water have objected to? The second section of the new covenant acknowledged the “primary authority” of New Lebanon, a position of authority threatened by the realities of geographic separation. Early leaders in the east recognized the difficulty of exerting control over far-flung communities and actively halted missionary efforts. Stein identifies “some of the spirit of independence in the distant villages, branded by the leadership as a lack of union and order, was probably the natural and necessary product of their relative isolation.” The difficulties of control may have also guided what Stein calls “self-perpetuating” leadership, such as drawing almost exclusively on biological relatives or trusted Believers from the east. Some of these “old believers that came from the east” believed that the ways of the eastern Shakers were incompatible with those in the west because of

light of the trials the Church has passed through. “Hence,” the covenant stated, “some further amendments are found necessary to make the written covenant more complete in its provisions, and better calculated in its for a general covenant, applicable to all the branches of the Society, where the gospel order is established.” Furthermore, the covenant would serve to “protect the church [and] its members in their religious and consecrated rights [and] privileges, and to give all concerned a more clear and explicit view of its nature and principles.”

North Union Covenant, 10. LC Shaker Manuscripts, reel 20, container 22, item 266.

28 1827 Covenant of the South Family, Enfield, Connecticut. LC Shaker Manuscripts, reel 20, container 22, item 264. The 1827 Enfield covenant also stressed the equality of all Believers as members of a family. Article 4 emphasized that “all and every individual of, or belonging to the Family, shall enjoy equal rights and privileges, in the use of all things pertaining to the Family.” In return, each Believer was to exercise their gifts and talents to improve their Family. The covenant also stressed that each member had to voluntarily “acquiesce” to the guidelines set forth in the covenant; none were to be coerced. This guaranteed the continuation of a peaceful family order wherein each member saw him or herself as a voluntary, yet important contributor.

29 Union Village to Beloved Ministry, 20 February 1830. WRHS IV A 71.

differences in “situation and circumstance.” Archibald Meacham did not agree, stating, “The work of God can never prosper in the West no further than the very same spirit is cultivated in the West that is in the east.”

Meacham may well have been referring to the struggle at White Water surrounding the new covenant, as he wrote those observations in May of 1830, shortly after the original report from Union Village to New Lebanon. Because the records at White Water are incomplete, the reconstructed Church Record gives no indication as to why reaching a consensus on the covenant was so difficult. The only surviving covenant dates from 1912 when an old copy from Watervliet was reused after the original at White Water was burned. Perhaps the families resented the leadership choices culled from outside White Water’s ranks. Since section 4 of the 1830 covenant granted the authority to fill a leadership vacancy only to those still in authority, members would have little say in who was chosen, whether from within or without White Water’s membership. In reality, few of White Water’s early elders, deacons and trustees were drawn from the original family groups. Instead, older Believers from Union Village were sent to take charge of the community, such as Daniel Sering, Edith Sering, Calvin Morrell and several others in the early years, and Archibald Meacham later. Even those leaders from White Water had their roots in earlier communities at Darby Plains or West Union. In 1842, Hannah Boggett was the first original member from White Water to be chosen for leadership, filling the empty position once held by Eldress Eunice Sering.

Meacham would remain White Water’s head elder until 1842, when he was released to return to New Lebanon. Under his leadership, major improvements were undertaken at White Water. A fire destroyed the buildings belonging to the School Family located on the former

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31 Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, 27 May 1830. WRHS IV A 86.
32 In 1907 White Water suffered a particularly devastating fire at the Center Family that destroyed a large dwelling, killing three beloved sisters who had been at White Water since the 1840s and 50s. Elder Charles Sturr, who was sleeping in the dwelling when the fire occurred, raced to save the community’s documents but could not get the safe combination correct (he had lost an arm years earlier). Microfilmed deeds at the Western Reserve Historical Society are so badly burned that many are only partially legible, and some entirely so. See copy of the Harrison News in White Water, Ohio, Village of the Shakers, 1824-1916, ed. Marjorie Byrnsie Burress (Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc, 2003), 63.
33 A Church Record… 4. WRHS V B 357. It is possible that Hannah’s half-brother, Joseph Agnew, had been chosen as an elder earlier than Hannah, but even the White Water records are admittedly inconclusive. Joseph Agnew did begin serving as an elder sometime in the 1840s. Other White Water members chosen for leadership, but who had joined earlier communities, included Louisa Farnham (Douglas Farnham’s daughter), and Ebenezer Rice, both from Darby Plains.
34 A Church Record… 4. WRHS V B 357. The date of 1842 is contested by a letter from Meacham at White Water dated 19 June, 1843. WRHS IV A 86.
Boggett farm, but by the end of 1830 the School family had been moved to the site of what would become known as the Center Family. In 1835 a large brick dwelling was built next to the meetinghouse, with sleeping quarters on the first and second floors, a dining hall in the basement and storage in the attic.

Although under Meacham’s leadership White Water had been molded into a Shaker community, the work was not without consequences. As the solidification of Shaker family took place, the connections between the Agnew and McKee families continued to fray. Like the children of the West Union Believers, so too the children of the Agnews and McKees, as well as some parental units, began to pull away from Shakerism, either unconvinced or directly opposed to the faith, or drawn west by new opportunities. This transition marked the beginning of what Steven J. Stein calls “the Middle Period” of Shaker history. By the late 1830s and 1840s, the ranks of those Believers in the east who had known Mother Ann personally were growing thin; Lucy Wright, the woman specifically chosen by Lee to be the “female lead” alongside Joseph Meacham, had died in 1821, thus dissolving one of the only truly distinct, strong leadership roles following that of Lee. Although New Lebanon retained leadership rights, Stein emphasizes the difficulty it had in maintaining control over the far-flung network of villages.

The period of intense spiritual manifestations among the Shakers in the late 1830s and continued on into the 1850s is a hallmark not only of a refreshing wind that blew threw the churches, but also of the instability as the movement aged and grew further away from it’s historical roots. The “routinization of charisma” begun under James Whitaker, Joseph Meacham, and Lucy Wright, only grew more distinct and methodical under the generation of leaders who followed in their steps. The failure and dissolution of West Union exemplifies the struggle of the core Shaker leadership to manage its periphery establishments. A constant exchange of epistolary and physical visits were used to resolve the tensions present among the body of Believers, but the sense of “wholesale apostasy”—especially among the young—seemed acute. The decision to abandon “the largest and most significant” settlement in the west signaled a major defeat to Shaker dreams of greater geographical expansion. From 1827 onward, the pattern was a slow retreat against the encroachment of a dwindling membership, fragmentation of kinship, and the tug of new opportunities further west, along with industrialization and urban life.

35 A Church Record… 96-97. WRHS V B 357.
37 Ibid., 121-125.
in growing cities.\textsuperscript{38} At White Water, there would be one final influx of kin groups in the 1840s that would simultaneously refresh its thinning ranks as well as herald its own slow decline.

\textsuperscript{38} Stein, \textit{The Shaker Experience in America}, 126.
Chapter Five: The Promise of the Yellow Dwelling House

Henry Bear was discouraged, yet remained hopeful. In 1843 he had come across a little book by one William Miller, who predicted Christ’s return that same year.¹ “Miller’s manner of reasoning: his explanations of the prophecies, and the starting point he gave to them, appeared to me so correct that they caused convictions to grow up in my mind,” Bear recollected in an undated pamphlet called Henry B. Bear’s Advent Experience. Bear began to prepare for Christ’s return quickly dispensing of his liquor business in Hempfield, Pennsylvania. Labeling themselves “Millerites”, Henry and his wife Julia Ann warned their relatives of the imminent millennium. The Bears disposed of their worldly possessions, and on the eve of September 10, 1843, joined other Millerites in awaiting the return of the Lord.

But Christ did not return on the appointed day. The Bears’ faith was shaken, but not destroyed. The Millerite followers set a new date—October 22, 1843. That, too, proved a failure. Wrote Bear of the experience, “We looked in vain—we were disappointed. The scoffers had their day, and we had to bear it in humiliation.” Shortly after this second disappointment, Bear and his wife moved to Dayton and then to Cincinnati, looking for good business prospects. Keeping their millennialist hopes quiet, the two finally settled in Union County, Indiana in June of 1845, making trips to see other Millerites in Cincinnati. It was there, during one particular gathering, that Bear first made the acquaintance of three Shaker elders from White Water: Philip Antis, Joseph Agnew, and Ezra Sherman. Bear was intrigued by the discussion of Shakerism, but ultimately felt mistrustful of the message these three men delivered, “thinking they might be deceivers.” Despite his mistrust Bear visited White Water, where he engaged in a long conversation with Agnew about the role of confession of sins. As he had done with William Miller’s prophecies, Bear interrogated the Shaker way of life in comparison to the Bible, focusing on the Shaker’s love for one another. After sitting through a Shaker meeting, Bear went to sleep later that night but awoke, “the following scriptures [coming] into my mind, ‘By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another.’” Bear continued:

The principle of a united consecration convinced me of their superior love, for while the Shakers lived in common in their houses, the Adventists were living, some in fine houses, and others in poor rented hovels. Some could, and would, ride in fine carriages while

others had to walk. In view of these facts I had concluded that the manifest love of the Shakers condemned that of the Adventists.

What Bear saw was the Believers’ embrace of equality, despite socio-economic background or prior experience. Aside from the leadership hierarchies of elders, trustees and deacons, the tiny body of Believers at White Water ate, worked, and slept without regard to personal wealth. The decision to surrender all goods to the broader community meant that all could benefit from the wealth that one individual brought with them. This represented a marked difference between the Shakers and other groups, such as New Harmony, Indiana, where the Welsh immigrant Robert Owen’s utopian experiment ultimately failed because of continued inequalities among its members. Bear, who had already committed himself to voluntary poverty in preparation for Christ’s return, would also have seen the Believers’ way of life as a viable one, since he would be able to rely on their pooled resources, rather than beginning his life anew.

After this realization, Bear struggled on a little while longer before confessing his sins to Elder Joseph Agnew. At the time of his confession, Bear asserted that the idea of becoming a Shaker was not tied to his confession, but as soon as it was made, Bear felt transformed. He saw his Millerite experiences as “the circuitious [sic] road” that had led him to the kingdom of God. Bear was further blessed by his wife’s unquestioning acceptance of his decision. “This is too good news,” Julia Ann told him upon arriving at White Water and hearing of his conversion. “I expected we would have much more trouble and tribulation before we would find a resting place.”

Henry and Julia Ann Bear, along with other Adventists who converted to Shakerism in the mid-1840s, represented the last large kin group to come into White Water. While other Millerites chose to remain faithful to William Miller’s message, ultimately becoming the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Bears chose a different way. The Adventist influx also occurred at a critical junction in White Water’s history. In 1837, a series of spiritualist activities had swept through the Shaker villages, beginning in the east, invigorating the Believers with new and fresh promises from Mother Ann and departed Shaker leaders. The Millerite conversions to Shakerism came towards the end of the spiritualist period, but coincided temporarily with the promises of

2 Brian J. L. Berry, *America's Utopian Experiments* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 60-61. Interestingly, Owen eschewed the family as the central unit of society, instead believing that “community should supersede the family” (62). Although Owenites held many of the same beliefs as Shakers, including shared property and a focus on equality, the movement held no religious beliefs, instead espousing an early secular socialism that ultimately failed.

the spiritualist revivals, lifting the hearts of those at White Water who had grown discouraged by dwindling numbers.

**Spiritualism at White Water**

The Federal Census enumeration of 1840 counted thirty-five male members at White Water, almost half under the age of twenty. There were forty-four women, seventeen of whom were younger than twenty, and twelve between the ages of twenty and thirty. In total, the village had seventy-nine members the day the census enumerator came to White Water. But as Archibald Meacham noted in a letter toward the end of the previous decade, a number of younger Believers had come to White Water, individuals “of the wandering class of mankind.” Concerned about the commitment of these young Shakers, he observed, “It is very uncertain whether they will get hold so as to continue.”

In an 1849 letter to Elder Freegift Wells of Union Village, Joseph Agnew related that the community had decided to build a new dwelling house to be painted a light yellow. The neighbors called this folly. The construction boss, John Shroyer (who also lived on a nearby farm), told the workmen building the dwelling that White Water “never would find Shakers enough to fill it.” Indeed, Agnew noted that the community’s ranks were dangerously thin, although the spiritualist work of the past ten years or so had promised to bring more followers. “There was several lodging” at White Water during that time, Agnew acknowledged, but “when they were brot’ up to the line [they] would not stand the fire.” Spiritual messages relayed through “instruments,” or mediums, promised that if only the White Water Believers would “purge ourselves…he [God] would send us people that would bear the Cross.” The new yellow dwelling stood as testament to the White Water Believers’ faith that God would, indeed, make good on the promises He had sent through the mouths of His instruments.

In the late 1830s, a series of spiritual manifestations took place among the eastern Shaker communities. Those brethren and sisters, called “instruments,” who experienced these manifestations claimed to have visions of angels and other prominent departed Shaker figures. They were also taken on heavenly journeys. The individuals experiencing these phenomena then returned, bearing spiritual messages for the Believers on earth. As Stephen J. Stein notes, manifestations and other spiritual phenomena were not unusual among the Shakers:

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4 Archibald Meacham to Beloved Ministry, no date. WRHS IV A 86.
5 Joseph B. Agnew to Freegift Wells, 2 May 1849. WRHS IV A 86.
The fundamental concept of the gift had never disappeared from the Shakers religious consciousness. At every village there were recurrent expressions of experiential spirituality in visions, dreams, voices, leadings, prophecies, healings, miracles, and the like.\(^6\)

The spiritual exercises that were so vigorously renewed in the 1830s were not, then, a new experience, but in the words of Stein, were a “resurgence of religious beliefs and practices already present among the Believers.”\(^7\)

The network of ongoing epistolary correspondence between east and west rapidly spread the promise of visitation and messages from beloved Shaker leaders. News of what was occurring in the east reached White Water in 1838 when Elder Freegift Wells of Union Village stopped at White Water while returning home from visiting the Pleasant Hill and South Union communities in Kentucky. During an evening meeting with the White Water Believers, Wells read aloud an account of what was happening among the eastern Believers. Writing to Rufus Bishop at New Lebanon, Archibald Meacham reported, “You may depend our souls were filled with feasting and thankfulness to God to hear of such extraordinary divine manifestations… It really did our souls good, hoping that we many yet be blessed with the like precious gifts.”\(^8\)

What is commonly referred to as the “Era of Manifestations”, or “Mother’s Work” produced prodigious amounts of written material recording dreams, visions, and messages from the afterlife. In the east, primarily at the New Lebanon, New York and Hancock, Massachusetts, communities, instruments channeling divine messages drew elaborate “gift drawings” that conveyed spiritual messages. These rich and intricate records resemble one-dimensional primitive art and have a Surrealist quality to them.\(^9\) Believers reported engaging in spiritual exercises manifested in physical spaces, such as the “Sweeping Gift,” received by Hancock village in 1843. This entailed a march through the village buildings wherein all of the spaces were ritualistically cleansed with “gospel fire” from holy angels and “Mother Ann’s six messengers.” Beginning in their respective workshops and outbuildings (which were strictly segregated according to Millennial Laws) the brothers and sisters sang and felt “the quickening

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\(^7\) Ibid., 165. The Era of Manifestations was not without its abuses. Richard McNemar and Freegift Wells both used instruments to lobby attacks at one another in a power struggle over the leadership of Union Village; see Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America*, 187-188. During a visit to White Water in 1839, Freegift Wells noted, “The visionists did well except [illegible initials] who delivered no messages at all” (Journal of Freegift Wells, entry for June 30, 1839, WRHS V B 241).

\(^8\) Archibald Meacham to Rufus Bishop, 15 March 1838. WRHS IV A 86.

power of shaking.”

Marching from building to building, Elders and Eldresses sprinkled them with holy fire from a bowl given by an angel. The Believers repeated commands exhorting them to “be thorough and make [their] dwellings clean,” as they marched through from top to bottom and up through the kitchens and cellars. When they had cleansed every part of their village, the Believers gathered in the meetinghouse where they were further exhorted by the Elders to “be more tidy and cleanly in deed and truth.” The connection between the physical and the spiritual made it clear that their physical space was an essential part of spiritual practice.

At White Water, however, the Era of Manifestations proved more modest, judging from the paucity of revelations compared to other villages. There was a series of messages conveyed through “instruments” and recorded for the community, including the lengthy “Record of Messages & communications at White Water O [,] 1841.” If there were gift drawings, none are extant. At almost two hundred pages in length, a “Record of Messages” included letters from Mother Ann Lee to both Elder Archibald Meacham and Eldress Eunice Sering, as well as messages from Eldress Ruth Darrow, a beloved figure from West Union, Indiana, and James Whittaker and Lucy Wright, the leaders who had inherited power directly from Ann Lee. Archibald Meacham also received a message from his biological father, Joseph Meacham. The messages drew on the language of spiritual family, referring to the Believers at White Water as “Mother’s children,” or the “little children”.

One of the richest sources from the manifestations at White Water is the tiny leather-bound notebook containing the personal testimonies of the six young women who served as visionists, including cousins Nancy McKee and Phebe Agnew (Agnew was noted as one of the principle visionists). Each testimony begins with the instrument’s life outside of White Water,

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11 Most spiritual visions were given through a single instrument, sometimes identified by name and sometimes left anonymous. Whether the Hancock Sweeping Gift was received by one instrument and transmitted to the rest of the Believers who followed his or her bidding is not indicated. The vision is written as if all were participants in the vision of receiving the bowls of fire from which the dwellings and outbuildings were sprinkled clean; Mother Ann also gave each believer a broom and commanded them to “Sweep the floors clean” (Humez, 249). Whether a physical broom was actually present, or was merely a symbolic reference to what Mother Ann wanted them to do in a spiritual sense, is unclear.
12 It is probably impossible to count the number of revelations; at Western Reserve Historical Society alone I combed through hundreds of pages of revelations, most of which are long, rambling explications on Shaker messages from departed leaders.
13 “Record of Messages & communications at White Water O 1841.” WRHS IV A 86, item 283.
14 “The declaration and testimony of Nancy McKee, a Visionist at White-water,” 1842, 47. LC Shaker Manuscripts, Box 21, reel 18, item 251.
as well as their conversion experience that brought them into the community, exchanging biological family for spiritual family. For Nancy McKee, her parents’ choice to remove themselves from the community grieved her; at fourteen, despite her parents’ kindness towards her, McKee chose to return to White Water, testifying that her decision to become a Shaker had never once caused her regret. In closing, McKee referred to being content among her “lovely gospel relations” and her gratefulness for the “tender mercy and loving kindness of [her] heavenly Parents.”\textsuperscript{15} Phebe Agnew’s story was much the same as her cousin Nancy’s, except that the death of her mother, Josinah McKee Agnew, was the point at which Phebe felt drawn back towards the Shakers. Her testimony alludes to the tensions between her Shaker and non-Shaker relatives, the later of whom prevented her return to White Water until she, too, was about fourteen years of age. “I …resolved to obey the counsel of my departed Mother,” Phebe recalled, and “seek home & friends, among the believers.”\textsuperscript{16}

The visionists’ testimonial record closes with two messages from Mother Ann Lee conveyed to the Believers at White Water through an unidentified instrument (presumably one of the six young women who had written their testimonies). The first is a general letter to all of the members, to whom Lee refers to as “her Sons & Daughters.” The language draws on strong maternal authority, calling for the submission of the Believers as obedient children. “Now my children,” the letter opens, “bow your spirits low, & receive my council, love, strength & protection, for I am your Mother.”\textsuperscript{17} The message conveyed both the promise of reward as well as stern judgment should the Believers’ fail in the task that Lee laid out for them. Unfaithfulness would result in the loss of their “birthright.” Lee also commanded the Believers to live in “strict obedience” to the earthly authorities that she, Lee, had placed over them.\textsuperscript{18}

In a period when the membership at White Water was low and the empty yellow dwelling house stood as a reminder of a promise that remained unfulfilled, these messages reinforced the hierarchical family structure of the Shakers, emphasizing obedience to those in leadership. The stern warnings were not enough, however, to hold many of the Believers permanently to the community. Before 1845 Phebe Agnew had abandoned both biological and spiritual kin at White

\textsuperscript{15} “The Declaration of Nancy McKee,” 3-5.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 27-29.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 39-41.
Water, choosing instead to marry. Of the five visionists who gave testimony in the slight volume, only Nancy McKee ended her life at White Water.

Kinship and the Era of Manifestations

As the events of the Era of Manifestations worked to cement the bonds of spiritual family and emphasize submission and obedience to authority, biological family ties continued to be integral to several of White Water’s members. As the diminishing number of Believers strained White Water, so too were strained the tenuous connections between the extended Agnew and McKee families. In 184- Joseph Agnew was standing as head elder, accountable not only for White Water’s progress (a struggle he detailed in the letter to Freegift Wells), but Joseph was also responsible for his non-Shaker kin. This was especially evident in the situation with William Agnew, Joseph’s nephew and son of his deceased brother, David.

David Agnew’s wife Josinah had died in 1830, leaving him with five young children. Four of the children, including Phebe Agnew, went to live among their relatives at White Water. The youngest child, James, was sent to live with his mother’s aunt, Phoebe McKee, and her husband Jacob Hummer. David had moved the family to Cincinnati before 1830, working as a day laborer; he himself died in 1835.19 Sons William and Samuel continued to live near White Water, although their sisters, Phebe and Amanda, remained among the Believers. A younger brother, Theodore, went with Archibald Meacham when he returned home to Albany, New York, sometime before 1844. By 1850, neither Phebe nor Amanda was listed among the Believers. In 1845 Phebe married Alexander Mann in Hamilton County.20

Phebe’s brother William married Jane Butler, the daughter of Rachel Butler, a Believer at White Water. Described in an 1859 letter from his uncle, Joseph, to his cousin, Joseph Boggett Agnew, Joseph Agnew indicated that William had written from his current location in Shelbyville, Indiana, “beging [sic] for help which I am not able to give [.] Besides,” Joseph added, “I have done more already for him than any other man has done for him since he was born.” After supporting his family as a day laborer, William had taken a lease near Shelbyville, moving there with just enough money to support him while he tried to establish himself there. An unfortunate illness bankrupted him. William’s family, Joseph added, “had consumed almost

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20 Joseph Agnew to William W. and Phoebe (Agnew) McKee, 29 July 1844; Phebe Agnew to Alexander Mann, 30 September 1845 (Hamilton County Marriage Index 1817-1845, vol. 14), 153.
everything and was really in a lamentable and pityable [sic] condition.” The White Water Believers sent food, clothing, wood and some money to help the little family through their troubles, but William continued to beg for more, even sending his wife to ask the White Water Believers for more money, which they refused. William’s poverty may have prompted his mother-in-law, Rachel Butler, to take William’s daughter, Matilda, to live among the Watervliet Shakers in 1859. The little girl remained only a year; in 1860 her mother, Jane, came for her.²¹

Joseph clearly saw himself responsible for his nephew’s family’s welfare, although he was happy to turn this responsibility over to his son, Joseph Boggett Agnew. William and family relied heavily on their Shaker relatives, whose stability was obviously attractive enough to cause them to beg for pity, but not enough to actually draw them into the community as Believers. William and Jane Butler Agnew had seemingly little temerity in taking advantage of relatives living among the Shakers. Remark ing on David’s behavior to his son, Joseph Agnew concluded, “He still continues [begging] by letter for I believe he would be ashamed to come before my face after what I have done.” With a note of irony, Joseph added, “I will hand him over to you but I fear if you begin you will have to maintain the family.”²²

Brant and Caty Agnew had also taken their leave of White Water. Their departure, according to a story related by a descendent, Brett Nelson, was the “result of a combination of factors”:

Caty’s brother John, first of all, had moved to East Bend, Illinois, and had begun to farm and operate a river boat up and down the Mississippi River, hauling agricultural produce. Since 1832, the Agnews’ eldest son, John, had also been working on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers as a flat boatman. Brant Agnew may have seen the opportunity to join them on the river and further expand the new Shaker seed distribution business. Caty had been raised Mennonite, and her descendent Brett Nelson suggests, “Some of the Shaker doctrines—the dualism of Christ, celibacy, and communal life—may have started to lose their appeal.” In the 1840s Brant asked his son Joseph to inquire if his mother “would take it into consideration agreeable to her faith and other combined circumstances and prepare to return with me [to Ohio].”²³ While Caty returned to White Water to visit sometime around 1844, she would not go back to live permanently among the Believers.

²² Joseph B. Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 15 February 1859. FWWSV M03-07.
²³ Brett A. Nelson, The Greening of West Branch (Germantown, Maryland: B. A. Nelson, 1981), 96-98. In a letter from Joseph B. Agnew to William W. and Phebe (Agnew) McKee, 29 July 1844, Joseph indicated that Brant and
While William Agnew’s reliance upon his Shaker kin was a burden to both Joseph and the community that provided what Joseph could give his nephew, the kinship connections among the Agnew and McKee families were not all negative. Joseph Agnew maintained a vibrant epistolary relationship with his son Joseph Boggett, and through him, with members of the extended family, including his grandchildren. During the 1850s father and son carried out business agreements regarding cattle raised at both White Water and Union Village. Joseph regularly reported the health of his son’s Shaker family. In 1859, sisters Hannah Ann and Marietta Agnew visited White Water from New Lebanon, New York, and Union Village, respectively. Rooms were furnished at White Water’s Center Family where the two could receive visiting family in privacy. Those who came to see Hannah and Marietta (whom Joseph declared to be “both happy [,] Contented and perfectly satisfied” with their Shaker faith) included their sisters, Miriam and Lucinda, and Joseph’s former wife, Miriam McKee Agnew. If there was tension between the Shaker and non-Shaker Agnews, or between Joseph and Miriam, it was not revealed in either Joseph’s letter or a later one written by Hannah. Hannah was clearly touched by her visit with her family, expressing a deep sentiment towards her father in her parting letter. She spoke of herself in the third person, indicating that “‘the heart feels much & the lips speak not.’”

Clearly, the sentiment expressed in Richard McNemar’s poem wherein Shakers were no longer attached to “self’s beloved kin” was an ideal, rather than a reality. Joseph regularly closed his letters to his son by reiterating his deep love not only for Joseph Boggett, but also for all of the extended kin with whom his son still had contact. “My love and blessings to all,” he concluded in 1859. In 1860 he wrote plaintively, “I know it is very expensive to travel so that I cannot insist, but I should be very glad to see you all [.]” The distance separating him from his

Caty had lost two children while living in Illinois. FWWSV. Anthony and Nancy (Agnew) McKee, and also experienced their share of sorrow. A son (unnamed) committed suicide sometime in the 1850s, according to a letter from Joseph B. Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 15 February 1859. FWWSV.

Joseph Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 7 July, 1856. FWWSV M03-10.

Miriam McKee Agnew had remarried a third time in 1846 to Providence White, after the death of her second husband, Sylvester Saltmarsh, whom she had married in 1839. Data from Ancestry.com.

Hannah Ann Agnew to Most Worthy Parent, 8 July, 1856. FWWSV M03-09.

Joseph Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 11 October, 1859. FWWSV M03-06.

Joseph Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 11 October, 1860. FWWSV M03-03. By 1860, only Joseph, daughter Hannah Agnew at New Lebanon, N.Y., and his niece, Nancy McKee, remained faithful to the Shaker faith. His mother, Margaret, had died in 1859 and Marietta, the daughter living at Union Village, had left with a brother, Sanford Russell, to marry in 1861. See Joseph Agnew to Joseph Boggett Agnew, 15 February 1859. FWWSV; also,
children and grandchildren seems to have been a deep burden, despite his days being filled with the cares of White Water.

For all the fragmentation of the Agnews and McKees, the ingathering of Millerites drew in new and larger kin groups to replenish White Water’s dwellings. Stephen Ball, himself a Millerite convert, noted a number of the families who had come to White Water with him:

- George Rubush + wife with 8 children from near Indianapolis…
- John Hobart Wife + Family of 8 children.
- George King Wife + Family from Cincinnati.  

The influx of Adventists ushered in a new and joyous period at 1840s White Water. Building projects were put underway, including a brick sisters’ shop, a washhouse and a two-story dwelling. New supporting buildings, such as a cow barn and a new brick schoolhouse were also undertaken, both of which required the construction of a kiln to fire bricks made of local clay.  

While only a short time before John Shroyer had declared that the Shakers would not find Believers to fill up the new yellow dwelling being built at the North Family, Stephen Ball declared in his notebook,

> Our neighbors were somewhat astonished at what was going on around them. For it had looked to them before this time that the Society would soon pass away but this Change of things was une[x]pected butt nonetheless it came and it was a saying that what [h]as been may be seen again. The promise of God made to the Society—that the increase of this place and government should be from Everlasting…. For he that made these promises is able to fulfill them.

During a visit to the western communities in 1847, sisters Prudence Morrell and Eliza Sharp wrote of the “pretty fine times and joyful feelings” they found among the White Water Believers, who counted some sixty Adventists among their ranks. The Sabbath meeting was infused with energy—the “people were all alive [.,] they sung many beautiful songs, and labored in the works of God, until they were wet with sweat.” There were also manifestations of Mother Ann and

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29 Stephen Ball, Notebook 1846-1896, 14. Dayton Metro Library Local History Room, box 1, folder 1. In a journal kept jointly by Hiram Rude and Hannah Ann Agnew of their visit to the western communities, they noted that at White Water “we visit the Brothers and Sisters, and have a very good visit with them. Many of them being of the Advent Society, they would tell an escperience [sic] that I thought was worth listening to, George Rubush and, George King…and also Stephen Balls history, before and after he was a believer, was very interesting, and satisfactory, that the spirit of good was at work with him,” 46. WRHS V B 161.

30 Stephen Ball, Notebook, 1846-1896, 8-16; Beth Parker-Miller’s thesis details many of the other building projects, as well as the expansion from two to three family groups, new land purchases and a new sawmill; see Parker-Miller, *White Water Architecture: A Study of Extant Shaker-Related Buildings on White Water-Owned Land in Southwest Ohio*, MA thesis (Wright State University, 1988), 103-104.

31 Stephen Ball, Notebook 1846-1896, 9-11.
promises to be faithful to the “way of God & [appear] not to be [ashamed] of their blessed Mother, but rather gloried in her.” The love and faithfulness inspired the two visiting sisters so that they bestowed upon the White Water Believers “a great bundle of good gospel love.”

Henry Bear never abandoned the gospel love he found at White Water. He continued to faithfully serve and live at White Water, filling the role of Center Family elder from 1887 to 1905. Julia Bear, too, continued at White Water, meeting her death in a tragic fire that consumed a Center Family dwelling in 1907. Although no headstone in the White Water bears their names, presumably both were interred among their fellow Shakers. In the close of his advent testimony, Bear recalled the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote in Romans 8:24-25 of waiting with patience for that which was unseen. “In my former experience,” Bear wrote, “I had to act upon belief only, but now upon knowledge and in obedience to direct counsel from a visible lead.” For him, the yellow dwelling was a visible manifestation of what he had sought his entire life.

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32 Journal of Prudence Morrell and Eliza Sharp’s visit to the Western societies in 1847, 5 September 1847. WRHS V B 241. The exact meaning of what “good gospel love” meant is unclear, but was common parlance among Shakers.

33 Marjorie Byrnside Burress, ed. "White Water, Ohio: Village of the Shakers, 1824-1916" (Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc., 2003 ), 72-73. Shakers did not customarily put headstones on individual graves, but some graves at White Water do have headstones with names and dates; several emphasize the individual’s relationship to others, such as ‘mother.’
Conclusion

Although the yellow dwelling stood bright with promise, it actually represented a high point in White Water’s membership and in its general history. The biological kinship among its members continued to deteriorate as time went on, especially with the deaths of the Agnew family members who had remained at White Water (Joseph Agnew died in 1870, and his niece, Nancy McKee in the 1890s). The influx of Millerite kin groups, the Kings, Hobarts and Rubushes, were sustained slightly longer, although certainly not at the levels in which they had been admitted. In the Federal Census of 1860, only four King and Hobart family members remained; the entire Rubush family, including George Rubush, his wife Susan, and seven children, were still at White Water.¹ By 1870, however, only Susan and two daughters, Amanda and Martha, remained. Henry and Julia Ann Bear lived out their lives at White Water, Julia Ann dying in a fire that consumed a Center Family dwelling in 1907.²

The extant White Water records illustrate the permanency of the faith among the early White Water Shakers, especially those who converted with the support of biological family members. After 1850, the leaders (including elders, eldresses and trustees) included Hannah Boggett, mother and daughter Susannah and Louisa Farnham, Adaline Wells, Ebenezer Rice, Ezra Sherman, Joseph B. Agnew, sisters Polly and Susan Chapman, John and Lucy Easterbrooks, all of whom had come to White Water with their families. One of the final membership rosters in 1905 included among the leadership Henry Bear, Amanda Rubush, and Charles Sturr. All three had come before 1850, joining with family members (many of whom subsequently departed). Adaline Wells, whose parents had joined originally at Darby Plans, was still counted among the Believers.³ For that first generation, there seems to have been a particularly strong sense of faith in the Shaker way of life that declined in the years between 1850 and the community’s closure in 1916.

The differences in adherence among converts points to the difficulties in quantifying belief; what drives one convert to devote his or her life to a particular religious lifestyle, while

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¹ There were two Rubush sons, G. W. and William, and five daughters, Amanda, Percella, Martha, Elizabeth and Sarah.
² Marjorie Byrnside Burress, ed., White Water, Ohio, Village of the Shakers, 1824-1916. Its History and Its People, (Marjorie Byrnside Burress; reprinted by Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc., 2003), 63. Copy of an original article from Harrison News, which was a copy of an article originally appearing in Cincinnati Enquirer for Thursday, 20 June, 1907.
another convert may stay for a time and then gradually drift away? Why were the first generation converts more likely to devote their entire life to Shakerism while those who came in during the mid point in the community’s history used White Water as more of a temporary situation versus making a long term spiritual commitment? These differences also reveal the changing nature of the family outside of the religious community. Whereas the Shakers had been able to rely upon the stable presence of kinship networks in early Ohio, by the midcentury these networks were no longer a reliable source of converts. The broader community had reached the saturation point and the line of the frontier had moved further west, drawing the children of first generation Ohioans to the newly opened territories of Illinois, or even further west. As exemplified by the Millerite family groups, the Kings, Hobarts and Rubushes were nuclear families that had already left their extended kin behind. The changing nature of kinship and conversion among the Shakers becomes an indicative marker of broader social change in the family during the nineteenth century.

The nature of religion, too, was shifting during this period. Less emphasis was placed on grand conversion experiences, such as those fostered by the Kentucky spiritual awakenings and the subsequent spiritual awakenings in Ohio, including the spiritual manifestations among the Shakers in the 1830-1850 period. Rather, religious emphasis was placed on social engagement, including abolitionism and social reform movements, such as temperance. These changes moved the individual into engagement with the broader culture, as opposed to being knit into small, inclusive religious groups that defined themselves against the broader social context. But, for the Shakers, the period of manifestations had done just that—walled the communities off from outsiders as they sought to maintain privacy and control over the spiritual exercises. Stephen Stein emphasizes that although the manifestations promised new converts (and indeed, new converts were reaped at White Water), in general the closing-off of meetings from the general public resulted in the unintended consequences of failing to attract new converts. “These failures set the stage for a number of initiatives by the society designed to reach out to the non-Shaker world,” Stein states, “including the launching of a missionary program.” Thus, by 1850, even Shakerism was touched by the religious turn from the individual to social reform.4

What do these changes reveal? First, they demonstrate the reliance upon biological kinship among the Shakers, even as they professed to eschew blood relatives in favor of building

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an intentional community of spiritual family. While alluded to by scholars such as Stephen J. Stein and Glendyne Wergland, the explicit connections between family and community in Shakerism remain unexplored. A better understanding of the role kinship played in White Water and other Shaker communities will enrich our understanding of who was attracted to the Shaker way of life, and the multiple threads that wove the communities together. Was it easier to maintain communal bonds when biological bonds already bound the members to one another in a preexisting community? As the history of White Water suggests, kinship played a large part in the formation of community, although the strain of forming spiritual families, as well as natural drifting away from or opposition to Shakerism took its toll on families whose members cast their lot with the Shakers.

Secondly, the drifting away of family members, especially the young, illustrates the major weakness of the Shaker way of life. When he wrote of the difficulties facing West Union, Archibald Meacham spoke not of the challenge of attracting new members, but of convincing the children of the Believers to remain in the community. “Thus it has been with those who were children when they were gathered,” wrote Meacham in 1825. “As they grew up, they have been scattering away to the world, from time to time, until the greatest part of them are gone.” While emphasis has been placed on external forces gradually wearing away at the communities, such as the rapid industrialization of the nation in the mid-1800s and the pull of an urban environment, the seeds of disintegration are to be found internally, synonymous with the fragmentation of biological kinship. The Shaker practice of adopting orphans can be seen as an intentional effort to counteract the loss of the Believers’ own children, augmenting the spiritual kinship. For what is a family without children to carry on the name?

The yellow dwelling that the White Water Believers built in 1840, acting on the promise of communal rejuvenation, is gone. Like so many of the architectural remainders at White Water, the decay of time and ravages of both human and natural forces have taken their toll. Although there is an ongoing effort to restore what buildings remain, including the brick meetinghouse, the disappearance of the yellow dwelling represents the underlying fragility of the Shaker way of life. Simultaneously committed to a celibate way of life and continued reliance upon the relationships among families to maintain their tenacious hold on the land, the community of Believers at White Water maintained a unique way of life that survived for almost a century.

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5 Cheryl Bauer, ed., *Shakers of Indiana: A West Union Reader* (Little Miami Publishing Co, 2008), 68.
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**Secondary Sources**


Appendix: Agnew and McKee Family Groups

James McKee
Sarah Guest McKee *

William R. McKee
wife, Sarah Mills
  Jeanna
  James P.
  Solomon G.
  Jeremiah G.
  William M.
  Sarah
  Daniel A.
  Mariam
  Aaron
  Moses M.
  Antony Wayne
  Mary C.

James McKee III
wife, Sarah Mathers
  Nancy *
  Anthony Wayne
  Joseph R.
  John
  Thomas Jefferson
  Andrew Jackson
  Hannah
  Jacob

Miriam McKee
husband, Joseph Agnew
husband, Sylvester Saltmarsh (1839)
husband, Providence White (1846)

Phoebe McKee
husband, Jacob Hummer

Mary McKee

Anthony Wayne McKee
wife, Nancy Angew
  Mary A.
  Russell

* Shaker
David
Sylvester
George Riley
Phoebe
William
James
Brant
Martin
Jessee

Reily McKee

Russell McKee

Josinah McKee
  husband, David Agnew
William Agnew
Margaret Brant Agnew*

Brant Agnew*
wife, Catherine Ann (Caty) Myers
  John Myers
  Margaret Agnew
  Rebecca Agnew
  Daniel Agnew
  Joseph Boggett
  Oren Perry

Joseph Agnew*
wife, Miriam McKee
  Susan
  Lucinda A.
  Joseph Boggett
  Minerva
  Marietta*
  Hannah Ann*
  Chester
  William Wilshire

David B. Agnew
wife, Josinah McKee
  William
  Phebe*
  Samuel
  Amanda
  Theodore*
  James

Phoebe Agnew
husband, William W. McKee (nephew of James McKee III)
  James Wesley
  Margaret Boggett
  Mary Ann
  Nancy Catherine
  Mercy Melvinia
  Ruth
  Thomas Stacy
  Phoebe Ellen
  Amanda Isyphena
  William Bunyan

* Shaker
Daniel Agnew

Nancy Agnew
husband, Anthony Wayne McKee

William Allen Agnew*

James Agnew

Joseph Boggett*
Margaret Brant Agnew

Hannah Boggett*

* Shaker