

The Value of Women's Work

Why was work segregated by sex in Shaker communities? We celebrate the Shakers' belief in the spiritual equality of men and women; Shaker founder Mother Ann Lee herself was revered as the female counterpart to Christ. Yet, to an outside observer, there is an uncomfortable perception that Shakers were confined to traditional gender roles, with men performing agricultural labor and carpentry, while women held primary responsibility for tasks such as cooking and laundry.

One explanation for this apparent disparity is a moral one: Shakers maintained physical division between men and women to reduce carnal temptation. While celibacy and gender segregation represented a rejection of the sin of carnality, it also arguably functioned as a rejection of inequality. Marriage among the Shakers was understood to be built upon the subjugation of a wife to her husband¹.

When Shaker communities were functioning well, the work performed by sisters and brethren was remarkably complementary. Scholar Glendyne Wergland notes, "the brethren's most lucrative businesses were built on a foundation of women's labor."² At Watervliet, the lucrative seed industry was the economic powerhouse of the community. Journal entries describe brethren from both Watervliet and Mount Lebanon setting out in wagons to sell their wares as far West as Auburn, Geneva, and even Buffalo.³ Yet, this industry depended equally on women's labor. Picking, drying, sorting, and packaging seeds was all work performed by sisters.

Similarly, for basket-making, men split wood and turned handles, while women wove the reeds into a finished product to sell to "The World." Sisters used special looms to weave fabric tape, which they then wove into colorful chair seats on chairs crafted by Shaker brethren. Between March 5th and March 10th in 1865, Sister Lydia



Harvesting Beans at Watervliet, 20th c.

at Watervliet painted three coats of varnish on 2 dozen chairs. The following week she wove seats on nine chair frames.⁴

When tension arose between sisters and brethren, Shaker women exercised power through their work in ways that were not always visible to outsider observers. These women implemented what could effectively be called collective bargaining, even to the extent of boycotting their work if they believed that brethren were not contributing their fair share.

Why do the contributions of these women remain less visible? One reason may be that most outside observers who published historic accounts of the Shakers were men, and women and children are often absent from these narratives.⁵ Even contemporary scholars may not recognize parity among the Shakers by elevating men's work with the title of "industry" while women's work is seldom awarded the same stature.

As Shaker communities diminished and aged, certain responsibilities and divisions of labor became more fluid. Sister Lillian Barlow of Mount Lebanon manufactured chairs in the 1920s-1940s, keeping the famous industry going alone for the last several years of the community. At the end of the day, all work was a form of worship for the Shakers, and the need to keep their communities going led Shakers to relax restrictions and embrace

THE WATERVLiet SHAKER JOURNAL

Edited by

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Published by the

SHAKER HERITAGE SOCIETY

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

In schools each year, February brings Black History Month, and March its counterpart, Women's History month. For those of you who hate "History Months", I empathize. Why can we only celebrate and study these subjects for one month a year? Why do we adhere to the false idea that "women's history" and "black history" are separate and apart from "History"?



All the same, I'll use the excuse of History Months to make a point: Shaker history is Women's History. Shaker history is Black History. The story of the Shakers is one piece of the larger history of the ongoing struggle for equality that remains startlingly relevant today.

The pages of Shaker journals are populated by innumerable powerful women. There are the exceptional stories of prominent leaders like Ann Lee, Lucy Wright, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Anna Case. Many more women only earned a handful of footnotes in their lives, but still shaped the history of their communities through their industriousness, ingenuity, and friendships.

While the strictures of a Shaker lifestyle today may seem stuffy, bordering on oppressive to a modern audience, many Shaker women found true freedom within these communities; accepted as equals on their merits, rather than their identity. Indeed, there were probably many women who made the decision to join the Shakers out of practicality, as much as piety. Today, we celebrate Shaker women as co-equal leaders from an era when women were expected to be subservient and were guaranteed few rights or protections under the law. We might consider whether these Shaker leaders were unusually gifted, or whether they were exceptional in part because, unlike most women, they were afforded the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

How many more leaders are there among us, who are passed over or put down in a society that remains deeply unequal? While the Shakers of Watervliet are long-gone, their history, beliefs and values still hold important lessons for us all. As historians, teachers, and preservationists, I believe we have important contributions to make through both dialogue and action.

In 2020, let's recognize the lasting impact and relevance of the Shaker project of equality, and work together to build bridges of understanding.

Johanna Batman



Sisters Mary Dahm and Eva Larkin

economic opportunity wherever it led. In the final years of most Shaker communities, piece-work for factories and “fancy-goods” such as sewing baskets and needle

eries emerged as essential sources of income. In the end, it was “women’s work” that provided sustenance for the final generations of Shakers in New York.

1) Campbell, D’Ann. (1978) *Women’s life in utopia: the Shaker experiment in equality reappraised*. *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), pp. 23-38

2) Wergland, Glendyne R. (2011). *Sisters in the faith: Shaker women and equality of the sexes*. University of Massachusetts Press, pg. 166

3) Sept 9, 1819. Letter from Morril Baker to the Brethren of the Mount Lebanon Office. Reel 26, I V-A-84 Western Reserve Microfilm

4) *Watervliet Journals of Phebe Ann Buckingham*

5) Wergland, Glendyne. (2011) *ibid*

Volunteer Spotlight: Ann Sayers

For our Volunteer Coordinator Miriam Cantor-Stone, one of the best aspects of her job is getting to know our volunteers. She recently sat down with volunteer Ann Sayers to talk about her experiences:

The folks who choose to spend their time at SHS are endlessly fascinating. No one randomly picks a site like ours for their volunteer work. The people who give us their time and energy choose us because of their fascination with the Shakers, educational work, or the desire to connect with local history. In Ann Sayers’ case, she attended one of our Summer Craft Fairs in 1988, and quickly became intrigued by our site.

After buying a copy of *Shaker Days Remembered* by Martha Hulings and getting it signed by the author, she decided she needed to learn more about the Shakers and get involved in the Society. Next, she volunteered for one of our Learning Fairs, a program for local students to visit SHS as part of their curriculum to study local communities in New York state. Ann described the experience of hearing a Shaker song for the first time as particularly meaningful.

About ten years into her time both donning Shaker dress for Learning Fairs and occasionally helping in the Museum Shop, somebody handed her an article about a “Shaker marriage,” and she was instantly hooked. For those who know Ann, you may already know about her book, *“Their Name is Wicks...” : One Family’s Journey*



Through Shaker History. The book took her six years of research and several months of writing to finish, and she gives the process credit for giving her further appreciation of the Shakers. The experience of writing the book made her want to not only remember and respect the memories of the Shakers, but encouraged her to apply their principles to her own life. If she signs a copy of her book for you, she’ll inscribe it with the line, “Peace and simplicity: good guidelines for life.” For anyone considering volunteering at SHS, Ann would tell you this is a “convivial and convenient” place to pick. She would encourage people to think not just about the personal benefits of volunteering, but the reality of keeping this museum going for the sake of the Shakers’ history.

Interested in volunteering? Contact Miriam Cantor-Stone at volunteer@shakerheritage.org or 518-456-7890 x0

Upcoming Programs

TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE!

Ann Lee Pond Nature Preserve was once a swampy area fed by 5 streams—that is, until 1812 when the Shakers dredged the south end of the Church Family property and dammed the pond for the construction of a new mill. The mill played an important role in the industry and economy of the Shakers, who also collected a variety of plants and berries in the area. Today, Ann Lee Pond is the largest watershed in the Town of Colonie.

Among the guided walks at Ann Lee Pond this season, the June 3rd tour is co-sponsored by SHS and the Capital Region Native Plant Society. Tours take place rain or shine, and sensible shoes and bug repellent are recommended!

Ephemeral Spring Wildflowers – hosted by the Capital Region Native Plant Society, Wednesday, April 22, 5:30pm Spring ephemeral wildflowers are native, perennial woodland plants that sprout early, quickly bloom and seed before the canopy trees overhead leaf out. Once the forest floor is deep in shade, the leaves wither away leaving just the roots, rhizomes and bulbs underground.

Walk at Ann Lee Pond sponsored by the Capital District Friday Field Group, Friday, May 22, 5:30 pm Join a mix of amateur and professional plant lovers devoted to the natural history and identification of plants principally using Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. The Field group has many walks scheduled throughout the Capital District this year.

Late Spring Wildflowers at Ann Lee Pond, Wednesday, June 3, 5:30 pm sponsored by SHS and the Capital Region Native Plant Society. We will wander in search of late spring wildflowers, all the while enjoying the views of the various habitats throughout the preserve. We hope to find several species of Blue-eyed Grasses, Bunchberry, Large Blue Flag, Smaller Forget-me-not, Swamp Candles, Virginia Waterleaf, and Whorled Loosestrife in bloom.

Foraging for Wild Edibles: Highbush Blueberry, sponsored by the Capital Region Native Plant Society Wednesday, July 29, 5:30 pm After locating this targeted species, the group will briefly discuss a few

identification tips, its edibility, and some sample recipes. Feel free to bring a bag or other collection container to carry home your wild edible victuals! This outing is the second of six walks that will focus on Foraging for Wild Edibles.

More information on these and other outings can be found at www.meetup.com/Capital-Region-Native-Plant-Society. A wonderfully thorough and informative guide to the Wildflowers at Ann Lee Pond can be found on the *Curious By Nature* blog.

OTHER TOURS:

Members Only: West Family Site Tour, Tuesday, April 21, 5:30pm This special tour for SHS and Historic Albany Foundation members will explore the Dwelling House at the Shaker West Family. The building retains unique, intact features such as a worship space and built-in storage. This tour will require walking up and down several flights of stairs. Space is limited, and preregistration is required. Tickets are available by calling 518-456-7890, ext 3 or emailing educator@shakerheritag.org. Thank you to Rosetti Properties for opening the site for this members tour!

Investigation with Empire State Paranormal Society, Thursday, May 8, 7 pm Members of the Empire State Paranormal Society will guide small groups of visitors through several historic structures on the Shaker Heritage Site in the search for evidence of ghostly activity and spirits.

*Please note that this is not an historic "Ghost Tour", but a Paranormal Investigation (think Ghost Hunters). Preregistration required. Tickets available March 23 on Facebook or through Eventbrite. All proceeds benefit the Shaker Site; thank you to Empire State Paranormal Society for their generous support!

Watervliet Shaker Garden Tour & Seed Industry History, Wednesday, June 10, 5:30 pm The SHS Herb Garden and Church Family site will be featured for an Historic Albany Foundation "Walkabout Wednesday" tour. The Shaker Heritage Society Herb Garden contains over 150 varieties of herbs, each labeled with historic culinary and medicinal uses. An introduction to the garden will be accompanied by a discussion of the Shakers' seed industry which began at Watervliet in the 1790s. Bring a picnic to enjoy afterwards!

WORKSHOPS

Shaker Heritage Society Workshops celebrate the craftsmanship and creativity that was integral to the Shaker way of life. All workshop fees include the cost of materials. Participants should bring a lunch for a break during classes longer than 3 hours. You can download a registration form on our website or register via Eventbrite. Contact Lorraine Weiss with any questions at educator@shakerheritage.org or 518-456-7890, x 3.

Training Workshop for National Kids Basket Day Saturday, March 14, 10:00 am – 1:30 pm, No fee

Shaker Heritage Society is working with basket-maker Sandy Salada to host a free basket workshop that will be offered to kids on Saturday June 27th. Volunteers are needed to help teach participants how to make the basket. Anyone who has woven baskets and has the knowledge, skill and comfort working with a small group (4-10) of children and adults and who can volunteer for June event can take this free practice session.

Provender Basket Workshop

**Saturday, April 4, 10:00 am to 3:30 pm
\$55 (\$50 SHS Members)**

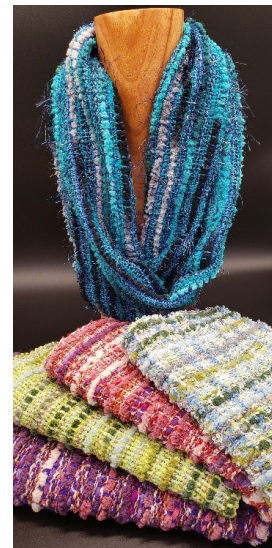
You will be ready to harvest herbs and cut flowers with this traditional, semi-flat Provender Basket. Woven in brown and natural reed with an inserted oak handle, the basket measures approximately 18 x 10 x 11" high, including the handle. The workshop will be taught by Sandy Salada. No experience is necessary.

Cowl/Scarf Weaving Workshop, \$75 (\$65 SHS Members)

Classes will be held from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from April 1-16, and Saturday, April 4.

Throughout most of the 162-year history of the Watervliet Shakers, Sisters produced a variety of textile-related products, some for the community's use and some for sale to The World. (And, by "produced" we mean thousands of yards of linen and wool yarn, chair tape, and woven fabric made each year.) Workshops taught by Lori Carter-Secreti will introduce beginners to weaving on a floor loom. Experienced weavers will be able to explore weaving with unusual fiber mixes. At the end of the 4-hour class, you will have produced a scarf or cowl and learned about finishing and washing techniques. The workshop fee includes materials.

Looms will be prepared with mixed colors in beautiful spring/summer colors. Students will choose yarn for weaving, learn to wind the shuttle, and weave fabric to make a scarf or cowl. There will be an optional, bonus workshop day on Tuesday, April 21, which will cover topics such as design and setting up a loom. For students who wish to produce a scarf in a second color palette, a second workshop is discounted: \$45 Members, \$55 Non-members.



Introduction to Needle Felted Painting

**Saturday, May 2, 1:00 – 4:00 pm
\$55 (\$50 SHS Members)**

Artist Christine O'Connor will lead participants through the process of transforming colored sheep wool fibers into a representation of a landscape or scene. Students should bring a picture with them or photograph favorite views of the Shaker site before class. These images will then be used as inspiration for a felted painting. The class will include information on how to display the finished piece. No painting or drawing experience is required; the class is suitable for those 12 and older.

Shaker Summer Craft Fair

New Dates!

Saturday June 13 & Sunday June 14 10am-4pm

Admission at the gate*: \$5 Adults, free admission for children 12 and under, veterans and active military, and EBT cardholders.

The Shaker Summer Craft Fair returns with new dates for 2020! Explore the booths of over 50 crafters and artisans on the historic grounds of the Church Family Shaker Site. Jewelry, apparel, ceramics, health and wellness products, gourmet foods, spirits, and more. Enjoy live music, pony rides, sheep shearing, food trucks, and a family activity station for all ages. Site tours will be offered both days.

***Admission dollars support education and preservation efforts at Shaker Heritage Society.**

Facilities Updates

New Outdoor Exhibits

Thanks to the skill and generosity of the Northeastern Woodworkers Association, (NWA) we look forward to the debut of our new outdoor exhibit signs this spring. In all, ten new signs will be installed across the Church Family site featuring an introduction to the history of the Shakers and the Watervliet community, and detailed information on the surviving buildings and visible features.



Special thanks to the NWA, Shaker Heritage staff, and volunteers who invested many weeks of work in the development and design of these signs, and to the Hudson River Valley Greenway for their funding support for this project.

Insulation in the Attic

If you have ever visited the Meeting House in winter, you are probably well acquainted with the chilly Meeting Hall and impressive icicles that adorn our eaves this time of year. As a first step to address these issues, we are working with architects from Lacey Thaler Reilly Wilson (LTRW) on plans to insulate the Meeting House attic in 2020.

Insulating historic buildings can be difficult. Trapped moisture in new insulation can lead to cracks, plaster failure, mold, and worse. LTRW is helping us develop a design that will avoid these issues, while reducing heat loss through the attic and improving our energy efficiency. We look forward to sharing updates with you in the coming months! Thank you to the Hunsdorfer Foundation for their generous support of this project.

Zelus 3D Scans

Shaker Heritage was approached last year by Ryan Percy of Zelus about a possible donation of their digital

scanning services.

Specializing in construction



projects, Zelus uses photography and Lidar technology to create visual walk-throughs and detailed 3D renderings of buildings. A full scan of the Shaker Heritage Barn has been completed and will be a valuable resource for future preservation projects. Additionally, 360 photos will offer visitors and guests interested in renting the barn an opportunity to do a digital walk-through from their living rooms.

We are grateful to Ryan and Zelus for their generous donation of time and energy, and through their ongoing staff training at the Shaker site, we hope this will be just the beginning of a great partnership!

Museum Shop Highlight

Among the treasures in our Museum Shop, we carry a variety of Shaker sweet herbs and medicinal teas prepared at Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village. Herbs have been cultivated at the Maine site since 1799, and are still dried in a facility built in 1845. These products carry on the Shaker tradition of high quality herbal goods.



Shaker Heritage Society is grateful to receive support from the New York State Council on the Arts Architecture + Design Program



Council on the Arts

A New Home for Archaeology Collections

Following recommendations from Spicer Art Conservation, we reached out in December, 2019 to the New York State Museum to offer a donation of several small collections of archaeology materials in our care. These items included fragments of pottery, clay pipe bowls, bottles, and other cultural material, mostly from the 19th and 20th century. While relevant to scholars of Shaker history, archaeology has never been the primary focus of our collections, and we are working to reorganize and consolidate our collections to make them the best-possible resource for staff and visitors.

Five boxes of material from a 2006 survey of the Church Family Site, and eleven boxes of material from a 2013 excavation at the West Family Site now have a new home in NYSM's extensive research and teaching collection. We hope that these materials will be a useful resource for historians and anthropologists for many years to come.



Collections Storage Improvements

Last fall, Shaker Heritage was awarded an NEH grant to conduct an environmental survey of our collection storage. As a first step in our project to improve the care and preservation of our 700+ object collections and archives, we spent the first week of January moving the large objects out of the third-floor storage room and protecting the shelves with dust covers to allow Neat Plaster to repair water damage from the early 2000's. While the room remains a work-in-progress, you can already see the difference in these before-and-after photos!

Thank you to John and Betty Nickles for their generous support of this project.

Left: Collections Room Before,

Below: After Repairs



Shaker Heritage Rentals

Did you know that you can rent the 1916 Shaker Heritage Barn and 1848 Meeting House for your event? Whether you're planning a wedding, a performance, or a charitable fundraiser, we offer a beautiful, rustic, authentic space for your celebration.

Visit shakerheritagebarn.org or email us at rentals@shakerheritage.org for more information or to set up a tour!



Recently Seen at the Shaker Site...

New York State Museum Great Places and Spaces

On Saturday January 11th, Shaker Heritage joined staff and volunteers from dozens of local cultural sites at the New York State Museum's annual Great Places and Spaces event. Thanks to our volunteers Geli Trzepacz, Cara Cashman, and Beth Dorn for chatting with visitors and teaching visitors to weave on our tabletop loom and other fun hands-on activities for the whole family!

Mother Ann's Birthday

Thank you to all who joined us for our open-house in honor of Mother Ann's Birthday on February 29th! Mother Ann would have turned 284, or a mere 71, depending on how you count it...



Special thanks to our guests from the Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, KY: Vice President of Public Programming, Billy Rankin; Program Manager Jacob A. Glover, PhD, and Assistant Program Manager Maggie

McAdams. They enjoyed a tour of the Church Family grounds and visits to the West and South Family sites with SHS education coordinator Lorraine Weiss, and presented a wonderful talk and discussion about the challenges and opportunities staff and volunteers at Pleasant Hill have embraced in recent years, including a complete overhaul of their education programs. Pleasant Hill made the decision to move away from costumed interpretation in favor of varied seasonal programs that highlight Shaker history, but also help visitors understand that history through the lens of their own lives and experiences. The site has been rewarded with tripled attendance in the past 8 years! The Pleasant Hill grounds and staff are inspiring for all of us who love Shaker history and wish to share it with the public!

Shaker Shorts on Facebook

Have you seen our new Friday morning videos on Facebook? Do you have an idea or a story about our site that you'd like to share? Message us on Facebook

or write to Johanna directly at director@shakerheritage.org to contribute your ideas, knowledge, and experiences to this series!

International Women's Day

March 8, 12-3 Ppm

RSVP (Retired & Senior Volunteer Program) and the Colonie Seniors Center are hosting an International Women's Day Celebration on Sunday, March 8th from 12-3 PM. We invite you to stop by the Beltrone Living Center located at 6 Winners Cir, Albany, NY 12205.



Picnic Group at South Family

Shaker Cider Release

March 10 - 22

Stop by the Nine Pin Cider Tasting Room to sample a special, limited edition Shaker Cider made with apples from the Shaker Site orchard! The cider will be available for purchase in the Tasting Room until March 22nd. Nine Pin Cider is located at 929 Broadway Albany, NY 12207. Visit them on Facebook or at ninepincider.com for more information.



Winter Shakers

Winter Shakers was the nickname given to those who showed up at the Shakers' gate when the weather turned cold, participated in the community for a few months, and then took off at the approach of spring. For us, the name applies to those who come by during the dark and cold days for a bit of relief from cabin fever. While we are officially closed to the public for the winter, staff keep very busy working on programs and new projects (and a few old ones!). Special thanks to Diane Duggan, Jim Maczek, Ann Sayers, and Judy Tarullo for their help this season!

Mother Ann Lee Birthday Appeal

Mother Ann Lee made history. On the occasion of her 284th birthday, your birthday gift will help us launch our 2020 season of innovative exhibits and programs, a thriving Museum Shop and a garden that promises color and reflects the vibrancy of our Shaker Heritage. Thank you for your support.

Visit shakerheritage.org and click "Donate" at the bottom of the homepage, or fill out this form and mail to:
25 Meeting House Rd, Albany NY 12211

Enclosed is my check for \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 or \$ _____

Please charge \$ _____ on my Mastercard Visa

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Year of the Garden!

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Shaker Herb Garden. Ground was broken for the garden in the fall of 1989 by Jack Faddegon with the help of a pair of Belgian draft horses. After a "rock pulling" session that removed rubble from the Sisters' Workshop, demolished in the late 1920s, the new garden was planted in the spring of 1990.

Stay tuned for information on upcoming celebrations and commemorations later this year!

The sign here reads: "Future Shaker Herb Garden on the site of the Shaker Sisters Workshop".





**25 Meeting House Road
Albany, NY 12211**

Mother Ann's Birthday Cake

1 cup sweet butter, room temp	1 tablespoon baking powder
2 teaspoons pure vanilla	1 cup milk
1½ cups sugar	12 egg whites
3½ cups cake flour	½ cup sugar
	1 teaspoon salt

Cream the butter until it is fluffy and light. Add the flavoring and cream again. Cream in the sugar a little at a time. Sift flour and baking powder together, twice. Divide flour mixture into four parts and milk into three parts. Add flour to creamed mixture, alternately with milk, starting with flour and ending with flour; four parts flour with three parts milk. Beat well after each addition.

Beat egg whites until foamy, add salt and beat until soft peaks are formed. Gradually add remaining sugar, beating constantly, until a stiff, moist peaked meringue is formed. Pour the batter over the meringue and fold gently to



*Photo: Isabela-Kronemberger
on unsplash*

combine. Do not beat at this stage.

Pour into three 8" or 9" greased and floured layer cake pans and bake in a preheated, 350°F oven for 25 minutes. Remove from pans after 5 minutes of cooling and continue cooling until cold. Fill between layers with peach jelly, and cover with any delicate icing or frosting.