As with all aspects of Shaker life, the Shaker approach to medicine evolved through time in response to external trends and discoveries. Celibacy was an integral element of the Shaker faith from the very beginning, and strict separation of sexes was adopted soon after establishment of the Watervliet settlement. Thus, it may seem surprising that physical touch was actually a powerful tool of healing in the early days of the Watervliet community. Faith healing was the primary form of medicine adopted in the community and persisted well after the death of Ann Lee herself. Glendyne Wergland (2011) has described how Ann Lee used touch to establish “rapport” with potential converts. Some followers even described being overcome by an electric sensation they described as the “power of God” flowing through her touch, binding followers to the faith through a chaste, but powerful physical and spiritual communion. Furthermore, Ann Lee was purported to heal the sick through a laying on of hands (p. 18-19).

Herbal medicine was widely used at the time of the Shakers’ arrival in the 1770s, and the Shakers were soon gathering wild North American plants and cultivating imported European varieties to treat a variety of ailments in the community in the late 18th century. In 1800, the Mt. Lebanon community began to sell surplus herbal supplies to the World. Their business developed into the first herbal medicine industry in the US and is recognized as such by the American Pharmaceutical Association. What began in one community was often expanded to other Shaker centers, and the Watervliet Shakers had begun their own herbal products business by 1827.

For 30 years after the founding of the Watervliet settlement in 1776, medical doctors from “The World” were not permitted entry into Shaker communities at all. Considering the common “heroic” medicine that was popular among nascent American medical profession at the time--regular application of bleeding and toxic “cures” containing mercury and arsenic--it is perhaps no wonder that Shakers often preferred to adhere to faith healing and herbal remedies and trust to their own members to care for the sick. Shaker leaders relaxed this embargo slightly in the 19th century, but the requirements for separation and self-sufficiency continually restricted access to The World’s doctors. The Millennial Laws of 1821, published by Brother Freegift Wells shortly after Mother Lucy Wright’s death, codified this injunction and stated that

Continued, page 5
From the Director

I don’t believe I’ve ever welcomed spring with as much enthusiasm as I do this year. As we look hopefully towards the conclusion of this dark chapter of global history, I am optimistic that in 2021, vaccination will supplant infection as the historic “super-spreader” event of the year. I am fortunate to enjoy good health, and so I expect I will be among the last in New York State to receive my own dose. Until then, as I continue to avoid indoor gatherings, I will happily sink my hands into the still-chilly earth and embrace gardening as my tonic.

Trays of tomato, pepper, eggplant, and marigold seedlings are now growing under lights in my basement, while peas, spinach, and arugula germinate outside under teepees of netting to protect them from pesky rabbits and squirrels. At the Shaker Site, our faithful volunteer gardeners have returned to tending the 100+ plants of the herb and pollinator gardens, and the youth of Project Growth will plant tender new apple tree slips in the historic orchard across Heritage Lane.

As an agricultural society, Shaker lives were shaped around the rhythms of the passing seasons. This is reflected in observations recorded in the Watervliet Church Family Journals, kept by David Austin Buckingham:

1818
26 Mar Some robins and bluebirds come.
2 Apr The Hudson River ice is broken up.
12 Apr Swallows begin to come.
13 Apr "The bees begin to carry yellow legs and the frogs peep."
12 May Apple trees begin to bloom.

Whether you’re passionate about gardening, history, or both, this June we hope you’ll join Shaker Heritage and our partners again this year for Pollinator Week, June 21-27. Together we will explore the agricultural, domestic, and wild landscapes of the Capital Region, and learn what we can do to help support our local ecosystems in the face of a changing planet.

Johanna Batman

2021 Spring Appeal

Spring has sprung and brings with it a renewed sense of hope and excitement. With your help, Shaker Heritage made it through our most challenging year. In 2021, we already have more reasons than ever to celebrate the return of warm breezes and the first green shoots pushing up through the soil. Now, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, we are excited to announce yet another reason to celebrate: the $10,000 spring matching appeal is BACK!

Last time you met this match and more. Donors to the campaign raised a combined $22,000 to support Shaker Heritage. Can you help us beat this record? With your help, we are ready to welcome a new year and new future for Shaker Heritage and our Church Family Site. Thank you for your generous support, and we can’t wait to welcome you back!
Some might say he sang and danced his way to Shaker stardom; in other ways, Issachar Bates literally walked hundreds of miles and talked hundreds of people into embracing the Shaker Gospel. No matter which aspects of his character we examine, there can be no doubt that Brother Bates was one of the most colorful and charismatic leaders to emerge in the first decades of Shaker history. Issachar Bates was a key player in the establishment of the Western Shaker settlements, and he and members of his large family played central roles in solidifying the first Shaker communities.

What is perhaps most surprising about this lively, musical man, is that he did not even become a Believer until well into middle age. Bates led a pretty dramatic life as a young man: he was a drummer boy in the Revolutionary War, where he was present at the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Years later, when Bates was in his mid-70s, he wrote his autobiography and included vivid experiences as a teenager during the war. He was only twenty years old when, in 1778, he married Lovina Maynard. They settled for a while near family members in mid-western Massachusetts. Together, this couple went on to have eleven children, seven of whom survived to adulthood. Issachar Bates was soon drawn to the Baptists, especially after the “Dark Day” that occurred in May 1780. On this day the sky turned almost black, and many interpreted the weird day of twilight as a message from God, a warning of dire things to come.

Issachar Bates was one of many who encountered Mother Ann Lee during her missionary tour throughout Massachusetts in 1781-83. He witnessed Lee’s powerful preaching before an unruly crowd in Shirley, Massachusetts. However, he and his companion had departed the scene before the event turned violent and the mob attacked Mother Ann and her followers. It may be that events such as this led to the premature deaths of both Mother Ann and her brother, William Lee, in 1784 only a year after their return from proselytizing. Bates was impressed by Lee, but it was many years before he was once again drawn to the Shakers.

Always a restless man, Bates decided to move his growing young family to Maine, where he unfortunately suffered a major setback after engaging in risky land speculation. With his family on the verge of poverty, Bates decided to migrate yet again. In 1786 the family relocated to an area in the southern Adirondacks, in Washington County. Although he never succeeded in business or farming, (there is no evidence that he ever owned property), Bates did “settle down” in the area and his family grew over the course of the next couple of decades. It was here that his natural born musical gifts flourished. He became the choir director at the local Baptist Church.

In his late 30s Issachar experienced a personal transformation, when he “saw the light” and became consumed with guilt over his past transgressions. Bates began to roam the area as a “New Light” preacher, and it soon became clear that he had “the gift of gab;” his easy, gregarious nature appealed to all kinds of people. Around this time, Bates also published a collection of poems-hymns, and he continued to sing and preach. But his troubled soul was not soothed. It seems that he visited the Watervliet Shaker community in 1800, and early the next year he arrived at New Lebanon, where he surrendered himself with a full confession, and determined that he would become a committed Believer.

Bates seems to have had what we would now describe as a “mid-life crisis,” as he sought to reconcile his past mistakes and find a way forward. It is quite clear that his conversion was profound and he became a deeply devoted member of his adopted community. Initially shocked by her husband’s conversion, Lovina Bates eventually came around, and in March of 1803 she and

This article is by Ann C. Sayers, a long-time volunteer with the Shaker Heritage Society and the author of Their Name is Wicks, One Family’s Journey Through Shaker History.
seven of their children (others were by now young adults and out in the world) arrived at Watervliet where they soon settled in. Lovina and all of the younger children went on to become Covenanted Believers.

Issachar Bates almost immediately garnered attention as a natural-born and zealous preacher, whose physical attributes as a singer and dancer inspired people. Some felt his enthusiasm was excessive; Bates seems to have had a propensity for high drama, and there were those who criticized his emotional appeals. But his techniques worked, and in the early 1800s, when an extraordinary evangelical movement erupted in Kentucky, it made sense for the Shakers to seek new souls in the West. Although Bates had not been a Believer for very long, Mother Lucy Wright, the Lead Minister of all Shaker communities, recognized his gifts. She singled him out along with two much younger Brethren and sent them to venture west and explore the possibility of gaining new converts and creating new Shaker settlements.

The pairing of the then almost-47-year old Bates with two much younger Believers—Benjamin Seth Wells and John Meacham—seems to have been almost a stroke of genius (or perhaps, a gift from Mother Ann). In any event, the trio departed New Lebanon on a cold New Year’s Day of January, 1805, accompanied by one horse to carry their belongings. Over the course of several years, these three men walked literally thousands of miles, crisscrossing the mid-west, in order to bring the Shaker Gospel into the wilderness. These missionaries endured great physical hardships including threats from wild animals and unruly mobs. They preached, argued, cajoled and sang with people they met along the way. They were privileged to play a role in the American religious drama that became known as “the Second Great Awakening.” Most importantly, they helped found and develop early western settlements of the Shaker world. These included: Turtle Creek, later Union Village, OH; Shawnee Run, later Pleasant Hill, KY; Gaspar River, later South Union, KY; and Beaver Creek, later Watervliet, OH.

By any reckoning, the epic journey these men made in the early 1800s (some comparisons could be made to the Lewis and Clark expedition), was a huge undertaking, which produced remarkable results. For the ensuing three decades, Bates continued to travel back-and-forth to the new settlements, where he took on leadership positions, and helped guide the western communities. Meanwhile back East, members of his immediate family and extended family grew into devout, active, and long-lived Believers. Three of Issachar’s siblings joined the Watervliet community, not the least of whom was his younger brother, Theodore Bates, also a Revolutionary War veteran. Theodore is credited with inventing the flat broom, the production of which quickly became a major Shaker industry. All of the Bates left lasting legacies. Lovina, Bates’ wife, became a quiet and sensitive Sister, who died (probably of tuberculosis) at the age of 68 in August 1828. Following her wishes, soon after her death an inscribed copy of her Shaker hymnal “Millennial Praises” was passed on to a young Believer, Olive Wicks. Sadly, both Olive Wicks and the oldest Bates daughter Polly Bates passed away much too soon. These girls, like Lovina, suffered from tuberculosis, the “white plague” or consumption, which took off many young people—especially girls and women—among the Shakers.

A number of Issachar and Lovinia’s children became leaders. Before her death at age 35, Polly Bates had been an elder sister at the West Family. Among the other Bates children, “Little Issachar,” as Issachar Junior was sometimes called, became a respected Elder in the South Family. He lived to the advanced age of 86, and is mentioned often in the journals. Sarah Bates taught in Shaker schools, and was one of the most respected of all the teachers in the eastern communities, among which she often traveled and worked as a substitute or mentor for other educators. Betsey Bates became a leading member of the Central Ministry at Mt. Lebanon, and was held up as a great spiritual role model; there was an outpouring of grief upon her death at aged 70, in 1869.

Back to our hero...Elder Issachar continued to be unusually active, and enjoy good health well into old age. He remained at Watervliet, OH until 1835 when he was called to return to the community in New Lebanon, where he was busy mending fences and occupying himself with other physical tasks until the very end of his life. He maintained a correspondence with fellow Believers in the Shaker West, where there were constant challenges keeping those outposts thriving. Bates died on March 17, 1837, after a short illness. He had reached his 79th birthday on January 29th. Surely his was a life well lived.

Note that South Union Shaker Village and Pleasant Hill Shaker Village, both in Kentucky, are among the sites presenting online “armchair tours” with SHS this summer.
Health and Healing, continued

no Shaker was to seek outside medical treatment except in case of extreme illness or injury and then only with the blessing of their Elders.

It may have been an epidemic that led the Shakers to relent for the first time and permit outside practitioners through the gates. Throughout their history, Shakers were usually spared the worst ravages of infectious disease. This can be attributed to their careful selection of sites that provided fresh, clean running water in all communities, and their legendary cleanliness: one hundred years before the acceptance of germ theory. (“There is no dirt in heaven” is a saying attributed to Ann Lee). Diseases like cholera were transmitted through sewage and contaminated water. While common in cities, they were exceptionally rare in Shaker settlements. However, in 1812–1813, a number of “pestilences” ravaged New England. In the face of this disease, which may have been an outbreak of typhus, even Shaker communities were not spared. The Watervliet Church Family Journals, kept by Freegift Wells, note that between January 1 and February 28 in 1813, the New Lebanon community lost 20 Believers. It has been suggested that this frightening outbreak led the leadership at Mount Lebanon to soften their stance on outside medical intervention for the first time (Murray, 294).

While the Shakers eschewed interventions by The World’s doctors, Brethren and Sisters freely experimented with and adopted the latest trends in contemporary medicine within their communities. While rarely formally trained, Shaker physicians and nurses frequently enjoyed access to the latest medical research and discoveries, and Shaker libraries contained copies of the latest medical journals and treatises. In 1824, the Watervliet Church Family Journals note: “David Miller and Eliab Harbour of Lebanon went to NYC to see Dr. Charles Whitman, celebrated Scottish doctor. David got directions for a "vapor bath", made one at Wvlt and tried it on some of the brethren and sisters.”

Still, many of the “treatments” embraced by the Shakers today would be classified as “alternative medicine.” Thompsonian medicine, for example, was a popular regimen in the 1840’s. This theory of medicine rested on the idea of purging bad “humors” from the body through liberal application of emetics to induce vomiting, hot pepper enemas, and steaming to induce profuse sweating. Fad diets such as Grahamism, which emphasized whole grains and forbade meat and many other animal products were also eagerly embraced by many Shakers, particularly Brother Ephraim Prentiss of Watervliet.

Given the uneasy relationship Shaker communities had with the “professional” medicine of the outside world, it is somewhat ironic that the institutional Ann Lee Home is the most visible symbol of healthcare at the Shaker settlement today. To some, the old nursing home at the Church Family Site is an unattractive vernacular structure that looms uncomfortably over the remaining Shaker buildings. To others, it’s a complex of massive scale, full of fascinating corridors. No matter one’s opinion on the design, it’s a building with a fascinating history and surprising connections to the Shakers who settled the land on which it was built.

Albany County bought the Church Family property in 1925 and began plans for a new municipal nursing home. Prior to the opening of the Ann Lee Home in 1930, poor elderly residents of Albany, the “insane,” and orphaned children were all housed together in squalid conditions at the County Almshouse. While commonplace today, the concept of a municipally-operated nursing home was novel in the 1920s. The Ann Lee Home was one of several new facilities built in response to a 1927 ordinance passed by the city council to improve the living conditions of these vulnerable populations. The construction project brought intense changes to the property. Twenty Shaker buildings were demolished, reshaping the property to create a more open, park-like atmosphere that visitors recognize today when they visit the Shaker Heritage site.

For a decade prior to the construction of this “Ann Lee Home,” the buildings of the Church Family functioned as a Preventorium. “The Pre,” as it was often called, was a healing space for children and adults who had been exposed to but had not yet developed tuberculosis. In the 1920’s, the Trustees Office and Brethren’s workshop were fitted with grand, two-story screened porches for Pre residents to take in the fresh country air, and the Meeting House was retrofitted into a makeshift cinema for entertainment. Tuberculosis, (aka consumption), had its own persistent and harmful history among the Shakers. In fact, contrary to most other infectious diseases, the “White Plague” may actually have been more common in Shaker communities than the outside world, particularly among the Sisters who lived and worked in close
communion indoors (Murray 1994).

In 1929, Sister Lucy Bowers of the South Family notes many visits by children from the Pre in the South Family journals:

“13 April - Mary [Dahm] makes candy of various kinds almost every day and sells to the "Pre" boys who bring at least 5 different dogs with them.”

“22 July Frieda [Sipple] and Lucy [Bowers] go for a walk and are invited to see the children’s gardens at Pre.”

23 July Promise my four garden tools to the children at Pre; they come for them Sat. p.m.”

The Shaker sisters still living at the South Family property even enjoyed watching a film or two in their former Meeting House at the invitation of residents.

“One can draw a connecting line between the communalism of the Shakers and the "modern" healthcare afforded at the Preventorium and Ann Lee Home. These institutions were intended to alleviate suffering and reinforce a sense of community responsibility to care for the elderly and sick. One of the great social legacies of the Shakers was their commitment to equality, which encompassed equal access to education, work, food, shelter, and medical treatment for all members. Hundreds of years before the advent of welfare and social services in the United States, the Shakers were offering all the necessities of life to anyone who committed to their lifestyle. While the Ann Lee Home did not correct inequality in the outside world, its mission can perhaps be seen as a fitting tribute to the legacy of the Shakers.

Sources

Millennial Laws or Gospel Statutes and Ordinances adapted to the day of Christ's Second Appearing. Given and established in the Church for the Protection thereof by Father Joseph Meacham and Mother Lucy Wright, the presiding Ministry, and by their Successors the Ministry and Elders. Recorded at New Lebanon, Aug. 7th 1821. Revised and reestablished by the Ministry and Elders, Oct., 1845. Manuscript.

At Shaker Heritage Society, our work has always been about keeping the spirit of the Shakers alive and preserving our history. COVID19 has placed Shaker Heritage in a precarious position. Like Mother Ann, we will not be deterred. We have taken advantage of online tools and also reconfigured in-person events to address safety standards. We are grateful for the participation in our events, however, our revenue has decreased. So, we turn to you with a simple ask: please support the Shaker Heritage Society today. History shows us where we’ve been, how we’ve progressed, how we can help to shape the future. Your contribution to Shaker Heritage today will make sure we’re here tomorrow to keep the Shaker culture and site an integral part of the Capital Region’s history. SHS Members enjoy free or reduced admission to SHS programs and events; a 10% discount on regular gift shop merchandise and a 5% discount on facility rentals. Visit www.shakerheritage.org and click “Donate” at the bottom of the homepage, or fill out this form and mail to: Shaker Heritage Society, 25 Meeting House Rd, Albany NY 12211.

- Membership (Individual, $35 | Household, $50 | Supporting, $100 | Sustaining, $250 +)
- Donation

Name(s): ____________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________
City: ___________________ State: _______ Zip Code: ____________
Email: ____________________________________________

☐ Enclosed is my check for ☐ $35 ☐ $50 ☐ $100 ☐ $250 ☐ $500 ☐ or $__________
☐ Please charge $___________ on my Mastercard/Visa

Card Number ___________________________ Expiration date: ________________
Signature ____________________________________________

We are pleased to announce that our doors opened on March 30th. The Museum and Museum Shop hours are Tues. through Sat., from 10 am to 4:00 pm.

Our 2021 Summer Craft Fair will take place June 12 & 13 from 10 am to 4 pm. A number of new artisans are participating. There will be pony rides and farm animals on both days, artist demonstrations, live music, food and our beautiful historic grounds to stroll around. The application for interested artisans/crafters is at: https://form.jotform.com/210196500021135. Please contact Jackie at gift@shakerheritage.org with any questions.

Shop at SHS Online While the Museum is now open, you can still support SHS via our online store. Find the catalogue on our Facebook page or via the link on our website. Museum Shop manager Jackie Davis has eco-friendly, reusable, and regionally-sourced goods, in addition to traditional Shaker items. We offer pickup, delivery and mailing options.

Market Basket Workshop Saturday, May 29th 10:00 AM - 3:30PM
$45 Members  |  $50 General Public + $25 Materials Fee
No experience needed, Suitable for ages 14 and up.
The basket measures 8”x 12”x 5 ½” deep with a sturdy oak handle, big enough for the trip to the farmers market! The in-person workshop has been planned to allow for social distancing in the spacious Meeting Room, with 8 participants each at a separate table around the room. For more information, see the SHS website.
Program Updates

One of the very few silver linings of the pandemic has been the rise of online tools which allow us to gather those both near and far for conversations, celebrations, and learning opportunities. In February, SHS hosted Christian Goodwillie, Director and Curator of Special Collections at the Burke Library of Hamilton College who presented “Travels in Utopia: Twenty Years of Collecting & Conserving.” He highlighted just a few of the almost 500 “intentional” societies represented in the college’s Communal Societies Collection. Many items can be viewed online, including Shaker photos and ephemera.

The program was the first in a series of discussions that are planned with historians, collectors, and others who have contributed to the significant body of Shaker research. Future programs will feature Professor Jane Crosthwaite, historian Glendyne Wergland, collector and author Steve Miller, author Stephen Paterwic, South Union Shaker Village Director Tommy Hines, and curator Sharon Koomler, among others.

In honor of Mother Ann Lee’s 285th birthday at the end of February, Lorraine Weiss organized a “Virtual Birthday Gathering” with staff at other Shaker sites, including Mt. Lebanon, Enfield, CT, Canterbury, NH, Shirley, MA, South Union, OH, and Pleasant Hill, KY. We enjoyed meeting each other and discussing opportunities for collaboration. The first event was a Shaker Pie Day “bake off” on March 14th (3.14) coordinated by the Enfield, CT staff and held on Facebook Live. Weiss is coordinating a series of online “armchair tours” that will introduce staffs, volunteers, and the general public to a number of Shaker sites. The tours will offer a “big picture” view of Shaker communities and explore similarities and differences.

In March, SHS Education Coordinator Lorraine Weiss presented “In her Rightful Place: Women’s Roles in the Shaker Community.” Participants tuned in from Washington, D.C., Ohio, and points in between. Links to program videos will be on the SHS website.

Both online and in-person programs and events will be presented during Pollinator Week from June 21 to 27th. In fact, the week will likely serve as a “kick off” for related programming among the partners for the rest of the summer.

Stay tuned for future program dates which will be publicized on our website, Facebook page, and in e-newsletters.