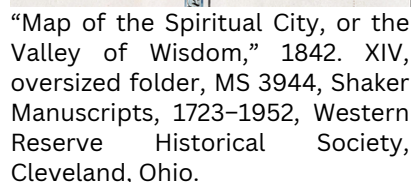


America's First Shaker Settlement

Vol 46 No 2

by Douglas L. Winiarski

Had I stood at this spot on May 1, 1842, I would have witnessed one of the strangest incidents in the history of American Christianity. Six surveyors were working in a field. Four handled



walked in a northwesterly direction, measuring the ground with their invisible rope while the surveyors followed with their chains. If I possessed the gift of spiritual sight, I might have perceived their destination on the horizon more than a mile away: a soaring battlement at the corner of an immense walled city. In the place of the butternut sapling, I would have gaped at an enormous spiritual tree towering hundreds of feet over my head. The two men

the compass and chains; the other two were behaving oddly. They gestured with their hands in the air as if they were uncoiling and stretching a length of rope. Starting from the butternut sapling, which had been recently planted in the field, the two men

continued, page 8

The Watervliet Shaker Journal

Edited by
Johanna Batman, Theresa Frey-
Alexander & Anna Starrington

Published by the
Shaker Heritage Society

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Director's Note

Today, the bustling agricultural village Ann Lee founded is now a peaceful park dotted with a handful of buildings. Yet the landscape still holds solitary markers of her presence. Grassy lawns leveled by Shaker hands, the creek they straightened, and ancient oak trees growing around their millpond remain silent witnesses to her and the lives of the first Shakers who settled here in 1776.



Johanna Batman with
Shaker broom.

Soon, the scenery at Watervliet will shift from blue days and lush fall color to moody grey and the sharp elbows of naked tree limbs. As the leaves fall and Halloween and Dia de los Muertos approach, we enter a liminal space between life and apparent death.

The Shakers of course weren't limited to Halloween for communion with the spirit world. During the religious revival known as the Era of Manifestations, Shaker brethren and sisters perceived an ethereal spiritual landscape covering their villages. Holy "fountains" were revealed to Believers by the spirits of angels and ancestors. Gathered at these sites, the Shakers briefly returned to worshipping under the open skies as under Ann Lee's leadership. Through careful research, Shaker scholar Doug Winiarski has recorded and mapped these spiritual landscapes. This October, he will offer a unique tour through the historic district, helping us to reconnect the ground beneath our feet with lives lived hundreds of years ago.

For decades, the work of cultivating and protecting this historic landscape has been largely accomplished by volunteers. But this year marked a major transition. Our longtime volunteer Bob Reilly rehomed his poultry and Kerry cows, and our lead gardener Becky Langer is stepping back from the role. Happily, Bob still serves as an advisor, and Becky is still enjoying some quality time in the garden. But we are faced with the question of how to fill the very big shoes they have entrusted to us.

On September 24th we are hosting a Gala event to honor Becky and Bob's service (50+ years between them!) and lay the foundations for strong stewardship of the site that mirrors their selfless dedication. Winter months are the best time for dreaming and planning. We are embracing the belief that this site has another 250 years ahead, and we're ready to begin planning that future now.

News & Events

Shaker Barn Relaunch



After a lull this summer, work has resumed at the barn and we look forward to installation of restrooms in the

former horse stalls by year-end. This investment in the barn as a facility rental venue will realize a goal set by SHS trustees nearly 30 years ago. (Really!)

While construction continues, we entered into a new partnership this season with Navona Catering to relaunch our facility rental program. Owners Kim Baker and Mike Niccoli bring over 20 years of experience managing events for the Century House in Latham; at their own Restaurant Navona on New Scotland Avenue in Albany; and most recently as a mobile catering business. They're now looking to put down roots again, and the Watervliet Shaker Village seems a natural fit. With their vision emphasizing a holistic approach to hospitality and food service inspired by education, sustainable farming, and community engagement, we're excited to work with them to grow together.

Even while planning their move into the Barn, the Navona team took an interest in the Ann Lee Powerhouse that stands across the drive along Heritage Lane. In partnership with Navona, SHS has secured a Pre-Construction Grant from the Preservation League of New York State to undertake a Building Condition Report for the c. 1929 structure. In addition to assessing the conditions and critical priorities for building stabilization, the report will also help to assess the feasibility of converting the building into a bakery and culinary classroom space. The Preserve New York Arts + Culture grant program is a regrant partnership between the New York

State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the Preservation League of New York State, made possible by NYSCA with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. The Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area provides additional funding to support projects in the Hudson Valley Greenway.

NEH Grant Restored

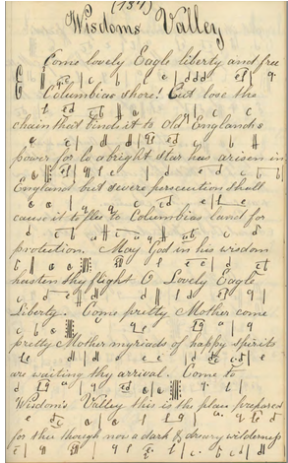


We are thrilled to share that after a May court ruling invalidating the 2025 cancellation of NEH grants, SHS recieved

reimbursement totaling \$83,500 this August. Last year, we lost a grant intended to insulate the Meeting House attic and diverted unrestricted funding from the barn bathroom project to honor our contract and complete the work.

The restored funds will offset costs for other important projects at the barn such as recently completed repairs to the slate roof, and installation of a new fire safety system this fall. With these unanticipated expenses covered, we are a step closer to undertaking critical repairs to the Meeting House entryway in 2027 with matching grant support from the New York State Council on the Arts.

We are deeply grateful for the outpouring of support from both our community and our elected representatives in the wake of the 2025 cancellation. Our special thanks to Assemblymember Phil Steck who helped us to secure a state grant this year to offset the loss and allow our barn bathroom project to proceed. Strong community advocacy and financial support has buoyed us through a challenging time.

News & Events, *continued*More Love! 250th Celebrations

Wisdom's Valley (Come
Lovely Eagle Liberty)
Watervliet, 1841

On May 23rd we kicked off our celebration of the 250th anniversary of the arrival of Ann Lee to our site with an incredible concert that was arranged and directed by American composer Kevin Siegfried. Siegfried and a group of ten performers traveled from Boston to Wisdom's Valley to fill the Meeting House with the angelic sounds of Shaker hymns. The event was called *Songs of Love*

and *Freedom: The Music of Mother Ann Lee*, and featured two songs that are attributed to the woman herself, as well as songs written by other Shakers during her lifetime, and songs written about Ann Lee long after her death. Early in the program, audience members joined the chorus in a sing-along of Richard McNemar and Joel Turner's 1813 hymn entitled *Mother (At Manchester, in England)*. This was a particularly special part of the concert as the hymn tells the story of Ann Lee's arrival here in 1776; the very event we had gathered to celebrate. The audience joined in with the words, "Near Albany they settled." The intersection of the place, the lively acoustics, the hymns written here, the monumental anniversary, the voices, the energy of the room where hundreds of Shakers worshiped over the course of several decades – it all came together in the most powerful way. There was hardly a dry eye in the house. After the concert, attendees enjoyed a cocktail hour with Shaker-inspired bites, and then a delicious Shaker-inspired communal dinner, which was joined virtually by Brother Arnold Hadd of the Sabbathday Lake community, who shared his

thoughts about the legacy of Ann Lee and the Shakers; bridging the Shaker's origins with their present. We were honored to have him join us.



Kim Tateo during her August 15 performance of *What Blooms in Moonlight?* Photo by Nicole Romanelli

The next event that honored the incredible legacy of Ann Lee at our site was a collaboration with local Capital-Region based artist Kim Tateo. The parallels between Tateo's practice as an artist and the practices of Ann Lee and first Shakers who lived here are remarkable. Like Shaker worship, Tateo's piece, *What Blooms in Moonlight?*, begins in quiet meditation. When she feels

moved, the artist begins to paint and sing. The result is an intuitive physical release of her inner world. Guided by love, *What Blooms in Moonlight?* explores and exposes the beauty that can emerge from darkness - as Ann Lee and the Shaker experiment emerged from the darkness of wartime. After the meditative painting performance, the audience became part of the piece, by joining together for an ecstatic dance, in the Great Hall that was built for dancing, over 150 years ago. Tateo's piece was of course visually and auditorily captivating; but the deeper magic of the piece, and of Tateo as an artist, is her capacity for bringing people together in community. Like Mother Ann, Tateo made each person feel seen and welcomed. The Meetinghouse was full of people who had never met – representing a wide range of ages and abilities – and by the end of the evening everyone felt connected by having shared the experience and contributing to making something together.

News & Events, *continued*



Visit [Shakerheritage.org](https://shakerheritage.org) to register for upcoming events or contact community@shakerheritage.com

Kintsugi Workshop

SHS Members \$75 / General \$80

September 18 @ 6pm



Discover the Japanese art of Kintsugi, in this hands-on workshop. Break a bowl and repair it with gold! Celebrate the beauty in imperfection. Join SHS and hvkintsugi for our

last Kintsugi workshop of 2026, led by local art therapist Tara DeLuca. All materials included!

Botanical Art with Colored Pencils -Tansy

SHS Members \$25 / General \$30

September 19 @ 10am



Explore the history and art of Botanical Drawing while creating your own Tansy, a perennial with golden button flowers and fern-like leaves. Learn about the Shakers' use of Tansy as an insect repellent and natural medicine. In this 2½-hour class, you'll learn

techniques for creating dimension and realistic forms using neutral tones and colored pencils. Beginner friendly!

Quiet Hour in the Herb Garden

FREE

September 22 @ 6pm

Slow down and reconnect with nature during a peaceful Silent Hour in the Shaker Heritage Society Herb Garden, surrounded by more than 150 healing plants. Bring a blanket and rest, journal, read, sketch, meditate, or simply daydream.

Fall Gala: Seeding the Future

September 24 @ 6pm

General \$150



Join Shaker Heritage Society for an evening celebrating 250 years of stewardship, preservation, and community! *The Fall Gala: Seeding the Future* brings together

supporters, community leaders, and friends for cocktails, dinner, and a special program honoring longtime volunteers Rebecca Langer and Bob Reilly. Proceeds support the preservation and future stewardship of SHS's historic site, farm, and gardens. For more information, please visit our website home.shakerheritage.org/fall-gala-seeding-the-future/

Dot Mandala Bookmark Workshop

September 26 @ 10am

SHS Members \$30 / General \$35

Create a beautiful, functional piece of art in this beginner-friendly workshop! Learn simple painting techniques and hand-paint your own wooden bookmark – perfect for saving your spot in your next read or giving as a gift. All materials included.

News & Events, *continued*

Moonbow #12

September 26 @ 7pm
Suggested Donation \$10



Join us for this concert in the historic Meeting House, featuring two unique artists.

Jenifer Gelineau is a Feeding Tube Records artist, music educator, and mother. Violin is her

primary instrument, and she often includes viola, vocals, music box compositions, wood, and electronics to layer rhythmic textures into dreamlike soundscapes.

Becca Pasley is an acoustic bassist whose spectral explorations emerge from free improvisation, noise, and ambient music. Their solo project is called Southern Cistern, an homage to Deep Listening.

Mother Ann Lee: Morning Star of the Shakers - Dance Performance

October 3 @ 6:30 & October 3 @ 1:30
Students \$5 / Seniors \$10 / General \$25



Continue celebrating the 250th anniversary of Mother Ann Lee's arrival to our site with *Mother Ann Lee: Morning Star of the Shakers*, performed by eba's Maude Baum and Company Dance

and Company Dance Theatre. Through storytelling, music, and dance, the performance explores Ann Lee's life and suffering, blending traditional Shaker song and dance with contemporary choreography. Originally

performed at Shaker Heritage Society's historic Meeting House over 20 years ago, this moving piece returns to honor her legacy.

2026 Shaker Holiday Market

October 13 - December 18
Closed Mondays



Celebrate the holiday season at our traditional Holiday Fair, featuring regional artisans offering handmade pottery, jewelry, fiber

arts, artisan foods, and more! Browse unique gifts for your loved ones while supporting local businesses. The fair runs October 13–December 18, Tuesdays–Sundays from 10 AM–4 PM (closed Mondays), inside our historic 1848 Meeting House. Admission is free; donations are welcome!

Holiday Market Preview

October 13 @ 4pm - 7pm
Suggested Donation - \$5



Join SHS for the Grand Opening of our annual Holiday Market and help kick off the holiday season! Shop a curated selection of unique artisans and vendors, enjoy live music, seasonal wine and ciders, and delicious snacks and treats. Meet and chat

with participating artisans and vendors while finding one-of-a-kind gifts. Admission is donation based!

News & Events, *continued*

Needle Felted Pumpkin Workshop

October 17 @ 10am - 1pm

SHS Members \$60 / General \$65



Perfect for the season! Create your own pumpkin friend in this fun, three-hour needle felting workshop. Learn how to shape and sculpt wool felt into a pumpkin, then add dimension with a stem, leaves, and other details. You'll also learn how to blend colors and

create a painted effect using wool roving and a felting needle to bring your pumpkin to life!

Felted Seascapes: Paint with Wool

November 7 @ 10am - 1pm

SHS Members \$65 / General \$70



Escape the cold with a cozy wool seascape! In this beginner-friendly workshop, learn how to layer, blend, shape, and needle-felt wool fibers to create a 5" x 7" unframed seascape

featuring sky, water, shoreline, and beautiful texture. No drawing, painting, or needle-felting experience is required. All tools and materials are included, and you'll leave with a finished piece and the skills to continue creating with wool at home.

Woven Ornament Workshop

November 14 @ 10am - 1pm

SHS Members \$50 / General \$55

Create three festive woven ornaments in this



fun, beginner-friendly workshop with local basket weaver Sandy Salada! You'll make an eight-pointed snowflake, puffy

heart, and reindeer using dyed reed. No prior experience is needed. Add a handmade touch to your holiday decor! Suitable for ages 14 and up.

Needle Felted Spherical Ornament Workshop

December 5 @ 10am - 1pm

SHS Members \$60 / General \$65



Get crafty this holiday season and create your own unique wool ornament! In this three-hour needle felting workshop with local artist Mallory Zondag, you'll learn how to cover a foam form with wool roving, sculpt dimensional details, and blend colors

to create a beautiful painted effect. Take home a one-of-a-kind handmade ornament perfect for your home or holiday tree!

Save the Date

11/21: Dot Mandala Wine Glass



Visit [Shakerheritage.org](https://shakerheritage.org) to register for upcoming events or contact community@shakerheritage.com

Taking the Measure of Revelation, *continued*

leading the surveying team held a long golden cord, and an angel in white raiment led the way. I would have been surrounded by magnificent temples, mansions, apartment buildings, gardens, and fountains and surrounded by pillars of light. From out of the darkness beyond the fortified walls came the spirits of the world's people by the thousands, seeking salvation in the Spiritual City of Wisdom's Valley. (2)

The surveyors were Shakers, members of United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, one of the most successful Protestant communal sects of the nineteenth century. The Albany airport was built on land that had formerly been part of Watervliet Shaker Village, the oldest settlement established by the society. During the extravagant period in Shaker history known as the New Era, Mother's Work, or, more commonly, the Era of Manifestations (1837–1850s), the butternut sapling from which the surveyors began their peculiar work marked “The Centre,” a fenced enclosure surrounding the magnificent spiritual Tree of Mercy and Forbearance and a shimmering pool of spiritual water issuing from a fountain. For a brief period during the 1840s, it was the holiest place in all of Shakerdom.

...

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing is the longest-lived new religious movement in the United States. Shakerism grew out of the visions of an obscure English mill worker named Ann Lee. Following a series of difficult pregnancies and visionary experiences, Lee identified human sexuality as the original sin of Adam and Eve. Salvation, she taught, was possible only by taking up the cross

—a euphemism for celibacy and the renunciation of all fleshly lusts. During the 1770s, Lee emigrated with a handful of followers to Niskayuna, a frontier settlement in what would become the town of Watervliet, New York. Her call to a life of sinless perfection received enthusiastic support from hundreds of zealous evangelical seekers in Upstate New York and New England. In time, Believers, as they called themselves, came to view her as Mother Ann, the second coming of the spirit of Christ in female form, the figure who completed the work of salvation initiated by Jesus of Nazareth. (7) During the half century following Lee's death in 1784, Shaker leaders succeeded in institutionalizing her teachings. Believers gathered into large, celibate families—groups of fifty to one hundred brethren and sisters who rejected marriage and agreed to live and work together under strict moral codes that regulated relations between the sexes. They developed religious practices profoundly out of step with those of their evangelical Protestant neighbors, including kneeling at prayer, confessing sins orally, and disciplining their bodies through elaborately choreographed dancing rituals known as laboring. At the movement's peak around 1820, perhaps 5,000 Believers were living in nearly two dozen prosperous communal villages scattered from Maine to Kentucky. Co-equal teams of Shaker elders and eldresses governed both the temporal and spiritual affairs of each community. Today, more than 250 years since Lee's arrival, two Believers, aided by a host of passionate seekers, collectors, researchers, and volunteers, keep Shaker traditions alive at Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village in southern

Taking the Measure of Revelation, *continued*

Maine. (8) Located a few miles north of Albany, New York, Watervliet Shaker Village was home to roughly three hundred Believers gathered into four families: the Church Family, which was subdivided into the First and Second Orders; the Second or West Family; and the South Family, a gathering order for new converts. In addition to four large communal dwelling houses, over seventy-five buildings ranging from outhouses and barns to impressive stone and brick workshops and mills dotted the landscape. Each Watervliet family worked their own land. Collectively, the society owned over 2,300 acres of fields, pastures, gardens, and orchards. The World's people who often visited the settlement—especially when the state legislature was in session—may have recoiled at the Believers' seemingly ludicrous and blasphemous dancing worship practices, but there was no denying that Watervliet was a prosperous and healthy farming community or that its members enjoyed an enviable standard of living. (9)

...

Although the Shakers experienced sporadic outbursts of visionary activity throughout its first six decades, the United Society entered a period of unprecedented spiritualistic activity beginning in 1837. The "New Era" of "Mother's work" at Watervliet, where a group of young women began to experience somatic fits, fell into trances, and received visions from Ann Lee. As news of the Watervliet visions spread through Shaker epistolary networks, gifted instruments emerged in each community and began communicating with a host of other-than-human figures, including God the Father and Holy Mother Wisdom, the female aspect of the Shakers' dual godhead; Jesus and Mother Ann;

angels, biblical prophets, and Christian martyrs; departed Shaker elders and eldresses; spiritual celebrities ranging from John Calvin to George Washington; and hosts of unconverted departed spirits from all over the world. The spirits regularly took possession of the instruments' bodies and spoke through them. Shaker scribes recorded thousands of communications from the Spirit World, including letters, rolls, scrolls, and two massive books, Philemon Stewart's so-called "Shaker Bible," *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book* (1843) and Paulina Bates's *A Divine Book of Holy and Eternal Wisdom* (1849). The Believers produced hundreds of new gift songs and scores of elegant spirit drawings during the Era of Manifestations. They devised new rituals. And the spirits doled out an astonishing array of spiritual presents, from fruits and precious gems to weapons, musical instruments, and strange mechanical devices. It was one of the largest and best documented outbreaks of "Supernatural Exercises" in American history. (12)

Nearly five years into the Era of Manifestations, on February 17, 1842, a Watervliet instrument named Moriah Gillett received an urgent communication from Jesus. The savior exhorted the sleeping "children of Zion" to awaken and prepare for a day of reckoning and purification. Believers, he warned, would need to cleanse their community of filth and impurity. To help them in their labors, Jesus then opened a "Fountain of pure and Holy Water" with which the instruments could wash the village walkways and dooryards. The elaborate spiritual structure, which soon came to be known as the Savior's Fountain, occupied the center of the courtyard formed by the Watervliet

Taking the Measure of Revelation, *continued*

meetinghouse, the impressive three-story Stone Sister's Shop, and the Church Family dwelling later known as the Bell House (fig. 1).

...

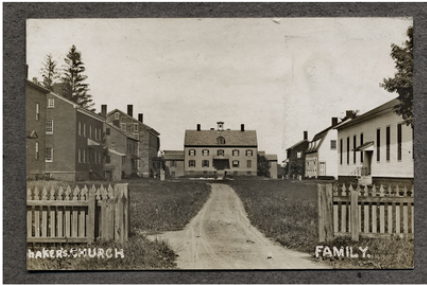


Figure 1. "Shaker's. Church Family." Postcard, early twentieth century. Shakers Collection, Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y.

As it turned out, the Savior's Fountain in the Church Family courtyard was only one of several spiritual fountains that had opened up across the

village. Each Shaker family had been blessed with one their own. In June 1842, the spirit of William Lee, a leading English convert and Mother Ann's brother, led visionists from the Second Order of the Church Family to a fountain in front of their dwelling house. As with the Savior's Fountain, "Father William's Fountain" was an elaborate structure. Five feet square, it was constructed of "holy Pearl" and surrounded by pillars of light twenty feet tall. A spiritual winepress equipped with cups made from a substance resembling glass stood nearby. The Second, or West Family, too, located a fountain near their dwelling. This one was named for Joseph Meacham, Mother Ann's successor who led the Shaker movement during the 1790s. So, too, did the South Family instruments, who also identified two additional sites located among the glacial drumlins that lay half a mile west of their settlement: a Holy Vineyard of spiritual grapes and a place they named the Holy Mount. (17) While other Shaker communities pooled their labor resources to construct individual feast grounds and erect



Figure 2. "Mountain Meeting," from David R. Lamson, *Two Years' Experience among the Shakers. . . A Condensed View of Shakerism As It Is*, 1848. Shakers Collection, Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y.

marble fountain stones, the families at Watervliet set to work building multiple outdoor worship sites across their village. Initially, they planted spruce saplings to mark the

location of the fountains. Over the next several years, teams of brethren and sisters mowed and graded the grounds surrounding their fountains, then enclosed them with fences neatly primed and painted white. The South Family constructed a wagon road to the top of the Holy Vineyard. By midsummer 1842, all four of Watervliet families had begun worshipping at their newly consecrated fountain sites—dancing, bathing, feasting, drinking, and receiving gifts and messages from the spirit world. (18)

It was only the beginning.

Taking the Measure of Revelation, *continued*

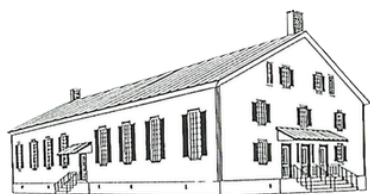
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At Shaker Heritage Society, our work has always been about keeping the spirit of the Shakers alive and preserving our history. History shows us where we've been, how we've progressed, how we can help to shape the future. Your contribution to Shaker 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 send this form to: Shaker Heritage Society, 25 Meeting House Rd, Albany NY 12211.