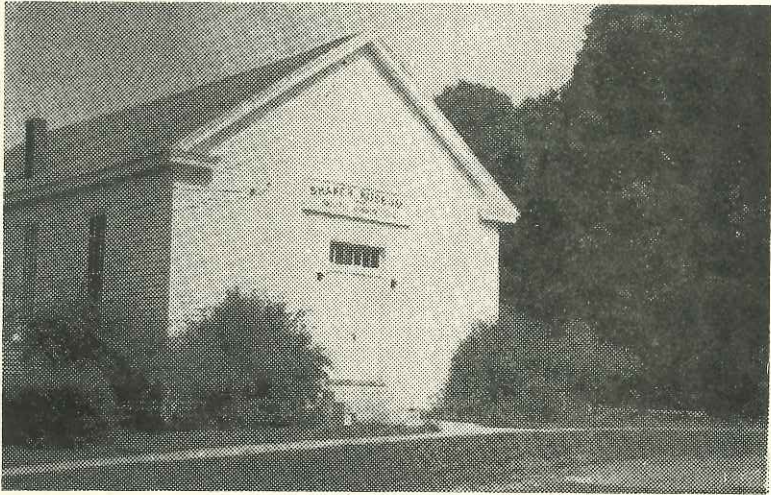


The Shakers

1807-1922



SHAKER MUSEUM—AUBURN, KENTUCKY

By REV. EDWARD COFFMAN

Russellville, Ky.

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The Shakers first came to Logan County on October 17, 1807 and the colony which was established by 1810 continued until 1922. Issachar Bates, Richard McNemar and Matthew Houston were the first three missionaries of the Shakers who came in 1807 to the Gasper River community in East Logan County and were entertained in the home of the pastor of the Gasper River Presbyterian Church. Soon the pastor and a large part of the congregation had gone over to the Shakers. (Julia Neal BY THEIR FRUITS p. 36.)

The term "Shakers" was a nickname for the communal society officially known as the UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS in Christ's Second Appearing. From the fact that their worship included a kind of dance, similar to folk-dancing, the name "SHAKER" was derived.

The SHAKERS, or United Society of Believers, had their origin in ENGLAND near the middle of the eighteenth century. James and Jane Wardley, former Quakers, were active in the movement which later centered around the person of ANN LEE, known as "MOTHER ANN," who was born in Manchester, England, in 1736. She apparently represented the second coming of Christ. In 1774 she came, with eight other leaders, to America and settled in upper NEW YORK State, at Watervliet, near Albany. The movement was based on the communal settlements in villages beginning in New York and later extending westward. Mother Ann died in 1784. (Standard Int. enc. vol. 16, p. 4456).

MANY CONVERTS

The Shakers first came to Kentucky on March 3,

1805, reaching PAINT LICK, in Garrard County. The fires of the Revival of 1800 were still burning and the Shakers made a number of converts in Central Kentucky, including many Presbyterians and "NEW LIGHTS."

On October 17, ¹⁸⁰⁷~~1807~~, Bates, McNemur and Houston arrived in the Gasper River Community, in Logan County, and lodged in the home of John Rankin, then pastor of the Gasper River Presbyterian Church. Many in the neighborhood, including John Rankin, became Shakers and soon some 2,500 acres of fine farm land was acquired and the village of Shakertown was begun about 1810. The meeting house and school were early buildings and an organizational meeting was held in September, 1811. January 31, 1822 was designated "WILL DAY" when property of the church members was made over to the Society. (Neal, op. cit. p. 45) In 1827 there were 349 people in the colony but there were only 212 in 1836. The number fluctuated from year to year. About ten or twelve substantial houses, most of them brick, housed the colony. The name SOUTH UNION was adopted since the mother colony in Ohio was known as UNION. There was also a village at Harrodsburg, in Mercer County, Kentucky.

There were three orders among the Shakers — the NOVITATES, or beginners, the Juniors and the Seniors. There was a further division into families. These included the CHURCH FAMILY, the NORTH FAMILY, the EAST FAMILY, and the SCHOOL FAMILY and the BLACK FAMILY. The latter group consisted of some 30 negroes. By 1812 the school family numbered 100 children and 18 adults. (Neal, op. cit. p. 39-45).

The cardinal beliefs and practices of the Shakers may be considered as four-fold, viz: 1st, Communal organization. The Shakers lived in comfortable and well governed villages which were owned by the entire community. All had a share in the ownership and expenses of all were paid. 2nd—Celibacy. Men and women lived apart. The houses were built with separate stairs, one used by the women and one by the men. They did not live as families. The children were separated, boys living in one group and the girls in the other. 3rd—Doctrines. Based upon the assumption that Christ had come a second time in the person of "MOTHER ANN" LEE, their remaining doctrines followed the general faith and exercises. Following their regular worship services, the Shakers had as a part of their ritual and creed a peculiar form of dance from which their nickname of "SHAKERS" came. With singers in the center of the room, chanting hymns, usually of a doleful nature, the men at one end and the women at the other would go through with a dance similar to folk dancing of later years.

17 VILLAGES

Beginning with the colony at NEW LEBANON, N. Y., the Shaker villages spread through six or seven states until there was a total of about seventeen. The Ohio village, near Dayton, was known as UNION and the Logan County colony became SOUTH UNION. The other Kentucky Village was PLEASANT HILL near Harrodsburg. The main houses at South Union were brick, well constructed and several stories high, of plain but imposing GEORGIAN ARCHITECTURE.

Although farming was the principal activity of the Logan County Shakers, they also engaged in fruitmaking,

Josie Bridges, mentally ill, was cared for by the Shakers and Elder Logan Johns, long prominent as leader in the colony took the train for New Lebanon, N. Y., immediately after the sale of the property. He died two years later in 1924.

2,000 ACRES OF LOGAN LAND

The Shakers' holdings were some 2,000 acres of the best land in Logan County. Mr. Oscar Bond of Louisville was the principal purchaser of the land and buildings.

In 1949 Shakertown buildings on the North side of the road and fifty acres of land were purchased by the BENEDICTINE FATHERS of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. On August 9, 1949, a company of MONKS and candidates for the sacred orders first occupied the Shaker buildings. A commodious new building has been erected and the older buildings now house the monastery which is known as ST. MAUR'S PRIORY. Thus a religious community continues through the years in the village begun by the SHAKERS or TRUE BELIEVERS a hundred and fifty years ago.

