

From the Editor –

Dear *ACSQ* subscribers,

Wow, it's a warm late June day as I write this introduction to your July issue of the *ACSQ*. OK, no it's not, I'm lying. It's actually early November. It's been a crazy year and we got way behind. Too few hands on deck and new hands arriving that need training, and MANY classes to teach. So, here we are, sending you the July issue in November. Sorry. . . We're going to try to get back on track, honest!

This issue features Carol Medlicott's wonderful essay on the many cultural manifestations of the Tree of Life leading up to the iconic Shaker gift drawing painted by Hannah Cohoon, now in the collection of Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Medlicott's research has uncovered many cultural antecedents, both sacred and secular, from within and beyond the Shaker tradition. Additionally, she has procured many fine illustrations to bring the subject to life.

The second article is by another stalwart *ACSQ* contributor and Shaker researcher, Stephen J. Paterwic. In 2019 I discovered some interesting archival documents relating to the Maine Shakers in the Massachusetts Archives. I eagerly passed them on to Steve for his perusal. Thankfully, he agreed to digest their contents and produced this excellent article for us which fleshes out one of the first legal challenges to the Shaker covenant. The documents, as illuminated by Paterwic, also shed considerable light on relations between the Shakers and their non-Shaker neighbors.

OK, better start working on the next issue.

Have a great summer!

— Christian Goodwillie

Reconsidering the Shaker *Tree of Life*: Cultural Antecedents & Fresh Interpretations

Carol Medlicott



Fig. 1. Hannah Cohoon, “Tree of Life,” watercolor or tempera
and ink on paper, 1854.

Courtesy of Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

The Tree of Life is one of the most iconic images to come out of Shaker material culture. It was created in 1854 by a sixty-six-year-old sister named Hannah Cohoon, who lived in the Shaker community of Hancock in western Massachusetts. On a sheet of paper about 18 x 24 inches, Cohoon has carefully drawn and boldly painted an abstract depiction of a single tree (Figure 1). The exaggerated size and vivid vermillion and emerald hues of the tree’s fourteen fruits and sixty-seven leaves, contrasted against the slender sinuous lines of the trunk and branches, fill the visual field to produce a veritable gut-punch for the viewer. As the eye moves irresistibly over the image, imagining bilateral symmetry but finding none, the tree seems to wave and dance, to literally come to life on the page. A “tree of life,” indeed!

Because of its aesthetic power, Cohoon's *Tree of Life* has been reproduced countless times since its existence was revealed to non-Shakers in the 1930s.¹ It has served as a veritable "logo" for all things Shaker. It is the recognizable basis for the actual logo of one Shaker heritage site, Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill near Harrodsburg, Kentucky.² It is one of a multitude of images created during a period in Shaker history known variously today as the New Era, Era of Manifestations, or era of Mother's Work. This was an extraordinary phase of spiritual vitality that engulfed the entire Shaker world for at least two decades between 1837 and the end of the 1850s. Twentieth and twenty-first-century scholars have been challenged to explain this turn in Shaker spiritual life.³ But it is widely understood by scholars as a transitional interlude during which Shakers one or two generations removed from the founding period of Shakerism in America attempted to forge their own direct connections to Ann Lee and the other "Gospel parents," both integrating the spiritual values of their predecessors and building upon them. From the onset of this phase, exceptionally elaborate visionary episodes came to dominate Shaker worship, in which individuals would witness heavenly scenes and mingle with heavenly visitors. Shakers were enjoined by their leaders to record their visions in both narrative and graphic form, as prose, poetry, exhortations, songs, and drawings. An immense quantity of this material survives, including around two hundred documented gift drawings.⁴ Undoubtedly more were created but have since been lost or scattered.

The artistic representations generated during this period are exceptionally diverse, bound together mainly by their surreal qualities. They range from pictographs and childish sketches to meticulously executed compositions of lavish beauty. Many incorporate elements that resemble other forms of nineteenth-century American folk art, including samplers, album quilts, and Pennsylvania Dutch fraktur.⁵ Art scholars continue to debate their classification in American art history: whether they should be regarded as folk art or as an early form of modern art.⁶ As a body of work, they stand in puzzling contrast to the general simplicity—even to the point of austerity—of the Shakers' built environments and material culture. Moreover, they are difficult to reconcile with Shaker directives pertaining to the use of visual decorations in their interior spaces.⁷ Dominated by a singular abstract figure (the tree) Cohoon's *Tree of Life* is hardly typical of the gift drawings, many of which comprise vast assemblages of smaller elaborate objects and elements. But it is by far the most famous; as such it has come to represent this unusual period in Shaker history, as well as Shakerism more generally. Although as a Shaker image it is highly unusual, some scholars of American folk art see Cohoon's *Tree of Life* as typical of

Within the literature on the Shaker gift drawings, Cohoon's *Tree of Life* garners considerable attention. Of Hannah Cohoon herself, relatively little is known beyond the basics. Born Hannah Harrison in 1788, she grew up in a prosperous household where she evidently received a good education.⁸ Like most girls in the period, Cohoon's education would have included needlework such as sampler embroidery and decorative applique. The circumstances of her marriage are as mysterious as her motivations for becoming a Shaker. She came to Hancock in 1817 along with her two small children. By 1823 she had signed the Shaker covenant and was living in the Church Family, Hancock's highest spiritual order. Cohoon is known to have created at least four gift drawings between 1845 and 1856, when she was in her fifties and sixties.⁹ Four wordless dance tunes are also attributed to her, which appear to date to a much earlier period than her gift drawings.¹⁰ After the creation of her final known gift drawing in 1856, nothing further is known of her until January 1864, when her death was recorded at Hancock. She was nearly seventy-six years old.

Trees and/or the fruits of trees provide the theme for all four of Cohoon's gift drawings: *The Tree of Light or Blazing Tree* (1825), *The Tree of Life* (1854), *A Bower of Mulberry Trees* (1854), and *A Little Basket Full of Beautiful Apples* (1856).¹¹ Cohoon's *Tree of Light* and *Tree of Life* strongly resemble each other in their general shape and presentation. One early scholar of the gift drawings, Ruth Wolfe, speculates that Cohoon may in fact have created a series of tree images and these two are the only surviving ones.¹² Trees and plant material more broadly—branches, fruit, flowers, vines, leaves—are possibly the category of motif that is the most common across all the gift drawings. Depictions of trees, plants, and flowers were incorporated into many of the earliest inspired drawings—the “sacred rolls” and “sacred sheets” that date from the early 1840s. Most of the complex composite gift drawings—multiple figures in elaborate and often lavish arrays—were created between the mid-1840s and mid-1850s, and trees are a major motif.¹³ Other Shaker artists far more prolific than Cohoon also commonly depicted trees in their drawings, and in styles that are equally distinctive but entirely different from Cohoon's.¹⁴

The Shaker gift drawings in general, and *The Tree of Life* in particular, have been examined off and on over the past century by a range of scholars: scholars of American folk art, of American religious art, and of art history, along with scholars of Shaker material culture, theology, and spirituality. For the most part, this scholarship considers the symbolic, spiritual, and social implications of the gift drawings, but entirely within the context of the mid-nineteenth-century period in which they were created, and invariably with a focus on the individual Shaker creators (almost all

women). Perhaps the sheer power and complexity of the gift drawings, along with the degree to which they deviate from other forms of Shaker creative expression, have caused scholars to approach them as distinct subset of Shaker spiritual output. Similarly, the New Era in general has long been regarded in Shaker studies as a distinctive phase within Shaker history, a phase marked by a beginning and an end. That latter approach is changing somewhat, as scholars increasingly realize that another way to approach the New Era is to see it as part of a continuum, as a phase within a spiritual tradition that always centered upon visionary experience. Recent scholarship on Shakerism in the New Era is increasingly examining how the spiritual and visionary practices of the New Era were not in fact new to the Shakers; they simply became more prevalent after the late 1830s.¹⁵

By the same token, then, it follows that we should examine the inspired drawings as part of a continuum within Shaker culture. Drawing and painting were not part of the approved creative output for Shakers prior to the 1840s, but other forms of creative expression were encouraged, such as prose, poetry, and song. By examining hymn and poetry texts, letters, and published writings, we can trace how certain rich visual metaphors percolated through Shaker spiritual expression from much earlier periods. For *The Tree of Life*—and the symbolic use of trees, branches, vines, fruits, and flowers more generally—looking backwards from the period of the New Era reveals a strong continuum within Shaker culture of tree metaphors and related naturalistic forms such as vines and branches.¹⁶ This continuity unfolds over decades, going back to the lifetime of Ann Lee and even to the period prior to the Shakers' coming to America.¹⁷ Far from being a straightforward folk art expression of the well-known biblical image of a fruit-laden tree as depicted in the Book of Genesis, one of the two trees in the midst of the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life, as a concept, actually points to a much more complex set of spiritual, theological, and even political ideas held by the Shakers. In order to perceive the many layers of meaning in the Tree of Life image and appreciate the many forms that the metaphor takes—tree, branch, vine, arbor, and so on—it is useful to examine much earlier forms of theological and spiritual expression in the Shaker world. Also, because Shakers inhabited a broader world and were to at least some extent influenced by cultural ideas swirling around them in early America, it is necessary to consider how early American tree metaphors may have influenced Shaker expressions of the Tree of Life.

This paper will identify five different symbolic layers in the Tree of Life, tracing how each of these layers appears in various forms in Shaker cultural expression. Some of these strongly match the symbolic connotations that

were also present in mainstream early American religious culture, while others seem, if not unique to the Shakers, developed with greater potency within Shaker theological discourse. The first of these five layers is the Tree of Life as metaphor for a soul-restoring sacrament, which happens to be consistent with how the Tree of Life is framed in Genesis, along with its twin, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is the latter tree from which humankind ate and fell from grace. Correspondingly, the Tree of Life and its fruit represent an opportunity for restoration, for the healing of sin, and for returning to an Edenic state. Secondly, the Tree of Life can be a metaphor for the individual Shaker. Just as the tree bears fruits on its limbs, the individual Shaker is ideally supposed to exhibit the fruits of the spirit. Third, the Tree of Life is a metaphor for the Shaker church as an institution, and for the relationship between individual far-flung Shaker communities and the central community at New Lebanon, New York, where the Central Ministry was located. Fourth, the Tree of Life was a metaphor for the political identity of the Shaker world within the broader context American patriotic identity during the Early Republic. And finally, the Tree of Life is a Shaker metaphor for God, and specifically for the feminine aspect of God.

In considering the first connotation, the Tree of Life as a restorative and sacramental metaphor, it is quite easy to locate similar usages within early American religious poetry and hymnody, material which would have been widely known to many of the early Shaker converts circa 1800. One potent example is the popular hymn “The Appletree” attributed to New England composer Jeremiah Ingalls. Its text was published in several early New England text-only hymnals circa 1800, before Ingalls included it along with a tune in his highly influential *Christian Harmony* in 1805 (Figure 3). The text clearly outlines the fruit-bearing tree of life as a metaphor for Christ, and eating of the body of Christ restores the soul and brings salvation:

The tree of life my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always
green,
The trees of nature fruitless be, Compar'd with Christ the appletree
...
This fruit doth make my soul to thrive, It keeps my dying faith
alive,
Which makes my soul in haste to be, With Jesus Christ the
appletree.

The Appletree. 81

Lively.

The tree of life, my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always green; The tree of nature fruitless be, Compar'd with Christ the

Soft.

appletree. This beauty doth all things excel, By faith I know, but ne'er can tell, This beauty doth all things excel, By faith I know, but

L

82 The Appletree. Continued.

Loud.

ne'er can tell The glory which I now can see, In Jesus Christ the apple tree.

3 For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought;
I gain'd of all, but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the appletree.

4 I'm weary'd with my former toil,
Here I shall sit and rest a while;
Under the shadow I will be,
Of Jesus Christ the appletree.

5 With great delight I'll make my day,
Here's none shall fright my slumbering;
Among the fons of men I see,
There's none like Christ the Appletree.

6 I'll sit and eat this fruit divine,
It cheers my heart like spirit wine;
And now this fruit is foun to me,
That grows on Christ the appletree.

7 This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the appletree.

Fig. 3. "The Appletree," from *The Christian Harmony, or Songster's Companion*, Jeremiah Ingalls, 1805. Courtesy of Centennial Library, Cedarville University.

It is certain that at least some Shakers would have been aware of this hymn text, though we can only speculate just how influential its striking imagery would have been. There is compelling circumstantial evidence connecting Jeremiah Ingalls, the hymn's composer, to the Shakers. Ingalls was a prominent choirmaster in central Vermont from 1790 to 1810, during the time he was compiling *The Christian Harmony*, and he also was a tavernkeeper. Issachar Bates, who became a leading Shaker poet and composer, as well as preacher and missionary, lived close to the Vermont state line in the Lake George, New York, region between the early 1790s and his entry into the Shaker community of Watervliet in 1803. Bates was also a popular choirmaster in his local region, and his booklet of hymn texts, *New Songs on Different Subjects*, was published in 1800, the year before Bates embraced Shakerism. One of Bates's hymns from that collection—"The Harvest"—became known to Ingalls, who included it in his 1805 *Christian Harmony*. Bates was exceptionally mobile during this period of his life, and his effectiveness as a choirmaster and preacher caused him to be sent on visits to other churches. Indeed, his mobility continued during his

first years as a Shaker, and he was sent into Vermont as a Shaker missionary around 1803. It is probable that Bates and Ingalls were acquainted and that this was how Bates's hymn came to be included in Ingalls's collection. That is only the beginning of the circumstantial evidence, however, because the son of Jeremiah Ingalls, Jeremiah Ingalls, Jr., later joined the Shakers at North Union, Ohio. The reasons for his joining are not known, but he arrived as an adult with a young son, sometime in the 1820s. He remained until his death in 1858, serving as North Union's leading singer and one of its leading hymn writers. In short, it is impossible to ignore how Shaker adult converts would have brought their life experiences and connections into the Shaker life with them, and these experiences would have continued to influence their perspectives.¹⁸

The same metaphor of a tree and its fruit being eaten in a restorative sacramental act can be seen in a very early Shaker hymn in *Millennial Praises*, the first Shaker hymnal published, from the early 1810s. Its contents had been written and collected since around 1807. Among the many "tree of life" references in *Millennial Praises* are many alluding to the restorative qualities of the tree, its leaves, and its fruit. One hymn in particular, "The Tree of Life," is replete with Edenic and sacramental references:

On Zion's hill is clearly seen,
By souls who do not live unclean,
The tree of life forever green,
Of God the Father's planting...
Its roots are deep and firm and strong,
Its branches beautiful and long,
With verdant leaves forever young,
A spacious field it covers.
The hungry soul that's destitute,
Beneath its shadow may recruit;
For it abounds with precious fruit,
Much fairer than all others.

After describing the tree guarded by angels and generating a healing fountain of flowing water, the text concludes that all who seek the tree may "eat and live forever."¹⁹ Around three-fourths of the hymns in *Millennial Praises* were written by one Shaker poet and theologian, early Ohio convert Richard McNemar, so his own understanding of the symbolic significance of the Tree of Life would have readily found its way into Shaker doctrine through *Millennial Praises*, as seen not only in "The Tree of Life," but also in the many Tree of Life references found in other of the volume's

hymns, such as “Old Adam Disturbed,” “The Kingdom of Zion,” “The Foundation Pillars Revealed,” “The Word of Life,” and the book’s opening hymn, “The Testimony of Eternal Truth,” along with related allusions to the “true vine” found in “Spiritual Wine.”

The same sacramental connotation is seen in many other hymns written by early Shaker converts. One powerful example is “The Living Vine,” whose author is unknown but was being sung by 1808 and is believed to be the first instance of the vine image in Shaker spiritual texts.

The living vine we know is good
We judge it by its precious fruit
The true Believers only food
That will his weary Soul recruit.

Another example is found in the very popular “Christ’s Second Appearing,” attributed variously to Sally Eades and to her son Harvey Eades. Sally was pregnant with Harvey when she converted in 1807 at what became South Union, Kentucky. The hymn was characterized by western Shaker scribes as one of the “ancient” hymns of the Shaker West, and it was published in Richard McNemar’s 1832 hymnal, *A Selection of Hymns and Poems for the Use of Believers*. It also circulated widely across the Shaker world and was included in dozens of manuscript hymnals.²⁰

Here the tree of life is growing,
Here the hungry soul is fed,
Here the heavenly juice is flowing,
freely from the Fountainhead.

All of these references are consistent with ways in which Benjamin Seth Youngs explores the Tree of Life concept in his 1808 publication, *Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing*. This publication was the first attempt at a comprehensive expression of Shaker theology, and it was written in the West, a collaboration between Youngs (who was one of the original Shaker missionaries to the West) and several other Shaker leaders in the West. Youngs traces the Tree of Life metaphor and fruiting tree metaphors in general (such as olive trees) through the Old Testament and also the Book of Revelation. The visions of the prophets Ezekiel and John, respectively, found in Ezekiel 47:12 and Revelation 22:2, serve as the basis for the Shaker interpretation of the nourishing and restorative aspect of the Tree of Life. Because both scriptures note how the Tree of Life symmetrically flanks the

river of heaven, Youngs connects it directly to Shaker conceptions of the duality of Christ—of Jesus Christ and Ann Lee. Youngs’s writing seems to underscore the Tree of Life and consumption of its fruit playing a direct role in human redemption.²¹

A second form that the Tree of Life metaphor takes in Shaker culture is as a symbol for the individual Shaker. Youngs’s *Testimony* fully explores this with an extensive exploration of the scriptural passages in Proverbs, Matthew, and Luke about trees being known by their fruit and the impossibility of bad trees producing good fruit.²² At about the same time that Youngs was writing his *Testimony*, Richard McNemar expressed these same ideas poetically in an 1807 text titled “Sweet Apples” that tantalizingly anticipates Cohoon’s depictions of both the Tree of Life and of apples in her 1856 “Basket of Apples”:

The Good spirit is known by its fruit
An honest Believer you cannot confute
Say ye sinners did you ever see
Good apples growing upon a bad tree!
As sure as you’re born the crab and the thorn
Sweet apples have never produced.²³

Richard McNemar repeats this form of the Tree of Life metaphor specifically in reference to Shaker elder David Darrow. “Father” David Darrow was the beloved senior elder in the West, presiding over the entire western Shaker enterprise for nearly twenty years before his death in 1825. McNemar compares Father David to the Tree of Life in a hymn written for his funeral:

He was a cross-bearer, we all must agree;
his faithfulness none can dispute.
Yea, from the beginning, this flourishing tree
could always be known by its fruit.²⁴

But perhaps the best examples of this connotation of the Tree of Life metaphor—the tree as the human body—lie in the work of Issachar Bates. Bates was well known as a woodsman and an orchardist. He worked as a logger before his Shaker conversion, and he was instrumental in laying out nut and fruit orchards in the west, as well as in methods of grafting. Many of his writings suggest that he personally identified with trees. He composed and taught a dance for the song beginning, “I will not be like the stubborn oak, but I will be like the willow tree,” and during a bout of illness

in Ohio he declared his wish to be buried in a specific spot where an oak tree had once stood until he dug it out with his own hands.²⁵ One hymn by Bates deserves close examination for its visual reference to the Tree of Life. It was written by Bates sometime in the early 1810s through early 1820s during his period of eldership at Busro, Indiana, the westernmost of the Shaker settlements. The song circulated to several other Shaker villages, and it eerily prefigures Cohoon's *Tree of Life* drawing by painting a word picture of a human body hung with sinuous fruited limbs:

Now by my motion I will prove how much the work of God I love
For ev'ry tree what fruit it shows is 'round the limbs on which it
grows
So let my limbs with fruit be strong while lab'ring such a lively
song
Come all my active powers wise and make a living sacrifice.

Moreover, the Bates's song connects the Tree of Life metaphor to the Shaker dance. The tree's limbs are waving and supple, which exemplifies the bodies of the Shakers when they are worshipping. Quite often, a willow tree appears in Shaker texts as a metaphor for the body, such as in the 1850 text from a New Era gift song, "I will bow and be simple, I will bow and be free, I will bow and be humble, yea bow like a willow tree."²⁶ But Bates's text is even more evocative, because it depicts the Shaker in motion as a fully fruited tree, exactly like the Tree of Life.²⁷

The Tree of Life as a metaphor for the Shaker Church is a pervasive theme in correspondence exchanged among Shaker leaders across the Shaker world, particularly during the first third of the nineteenth century, when Shaker leaders still hoped for active expansion. It is also common in the poetic texts of hymns written and circulated by Shakers. Richard McNemar expressed the ideal for how individual Shakers were to be perceived as part of a spiritual tree: (T)he subjects of the new creation are as uniform as the leaves on an appletree: & whatever is opposed to that uniformity is of the old & will perish in time. I therefore rest satisfied that no essential difference ever will exist in the senior family, whether the members of it be located in the East or West, the North or South.²⁸

The ideal goal was for individual believers to be uniform in terms of their spiritual orientation and spiritual behavior, as well as in their obedience to their lead, despite the far flung distances between the various villages. And the individual Shaker villages were conceptualized as the branches of the tree of the Church. McNemar's doctrinal hymn "Responsive" reinforces this metaphor while it also explains the singular Shaker interpretation of

the nature of Christ, demonstrating to us the importance of the metaphor to McNemar and to his fellow Shaker theologians. The tree with its crown of branches and leaves reflected the structure of Shakerism from the leadership to the various “order and lot” and in turn on to the fruit and leaves on each branch. In turn, the tree reflects Christ.

Amen. Even so let it be.
There can be no room to dispute;
As branches of one living tree,
We’re now to be known by our fruit:
While each in our order and lot,
The gospel we simply obey,
In deed, and in word, and in thought,
The Savior we truly display.²⁹

One interesting poetic example, also by Richard McNemar, comes from a text he apparently aimed at a tense situation that occurred at Union Village in the late 1820s, when Shaker brother Abijah Alley was sowing discontent among young adults.

Do you believe, for certain, that after Mother’s day,
Her gospel was supported and did not fall away?
That it has been supported. there can be no dispute,
As all its lively branches, show clearly by their fruit.³⁰

In this text, one can see the Church depicted as a tree with fruitful branches, but with an awareness that the need might arise pruning out withered branches. Undoubtedly this was a nod to John 15:4-6, a scripture with tremendous symbolic importance to the Shakers because it so strongly resonates with the highest Shaker ideals of collective union and obedience, along with the dire consequences of deviation from those ideals:

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned. (New King James Bible)

Biologically, fruit-bearing vines are “lianas,” which like trees and shrubs

are also woody-stemmed long-lived perennial plants. Unlike trees and shrubs, their stems require external support. But their biological similarity helps explain how tree, vine, and bush/shrub metaphors are widely seen by biblical scholars as carrying similar symbolic significance, so that they should be approached with the same interpretive lens when encountered in scripture.³¹ Likewise, vines and trees functioned interchangeably as metaphors for Shaker writers and poets. In addition to the early hymn “The Living Vine” quoted above, in which the fruit of the vine is a sacramental food, vine and vineyard references are widespread in song material from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Both “My Vineyard” from 1850 and “I Am the True Vine” from 1856 fully reflect the symbolism from John 15: 5-6. A verse from “My Vineyard” reads:

When all the wither'd branches
Are sever'd from each vine
And thrust without my Vineyard
'Twill then in glory shine.³²

“I am the True Vine” is set to an especially lovely melody and attributed to Elder Joseph Brackett (also credited with “Simple Gifts). It has attracted the attention of Shaker music scholars and caused it to be adapted for performance and recording by modern singers.

I am the true vine which my Father hath set in his lovely
kingdom so fair,
Every branch found in me Which bringeth forth fruit He
purgeth it with care.
But the vine that is barren He will reject And from him he will
cast away
Withered branches he'll shake off And burn in the fire
That in me there be found no decay.³³

Manuscripts also show how Shakers drew meaning from trees as symbolic of their spiritual collective. One example is recorded by Henry DeWitt:

This was the 20 of May. Apple trees were all in the blow... I shall never forget as we were marching back, the upper side of the orchard, Garret K. (Lawrence) was invited to speak... and took his text upon the apple tree. Spake of the branches being nourished by the root; from the blossoms on the limbs down

to the root one must be nourished by the other according to its order: So it was in our spiritual travel, the lesser must be bless'd by the better. Speaking of pruning, he observed that it was known, fruit trees would not thrive well, if trimmed while the sap was not flowing, but that fruit trees ought to be trimmed while the sap was flowing, then the wound would heal over... when the gifts of God was flowing & souls were awake, it was the time for souls to be pruned and to have evil branches cut off.³⁴

Shaker manuscripts—journals, letters, poetry, and song texts—abound with cases of tree and vine metaphors being employed in reference to the believers and their relationship to one another. In addition to being consistent with scripture, a branching tree or vine serves as an ideal metaphor for the Shaker concept of “union.” Moreover, it was a highly convenient metaphor, since each and every Shaker community had direct experience with trees, especially with the care and management of fruit-bearing trees. Using tree and vine metaphors to reinforce collective union ensured that the message would not be lost. And union was the Shakers’ highest spiritual value, as evidenced by “United” being the first word in the formal name of the Shaker Church. Like branching, flowering, and fruited trees, Shakers were organically united across their many parts into one organic structure.

Yet another symbolic layer in the Shaker conception of the Tree of Life relates to the early socio-political identity of the Shakers within the early American national landscape. There is subtle but very clear evidence that the Shakers were influenced by another important tree metaphor from colonial America—the “Liberty Tree.” The term entered the American colonial vernacular in 1765. A 120-year-old spreading elm tree, planted in 1646 along the major road leading out of the Boston Common had long since become a site for public gatherings and the reading of proclamations. In 1765 the space under the canopy of this “Great Elm,” then a well-known landmark because of its stately dimensions and its spreading crown, became the center of political protests against the Stamp Act (Figure 4). Indignant colonists created an effigy of a British tax collector and hung it from the elm, and action memorialized in a poster hung with the effigy reading, “What greater joy did ever New England see, Than a Stampman hanging on a tree.” Anti-British sentiment grew, and a group of colonists attached a copper plate to the elm with “The Liberty Tree” engraved on it. Possibly the nameplate was made by Paul Revere, who was soon commissioned to engrave an obelisk to be placed under the



LIBERTY TREE, 1774,

CORNER OF ESSEX AND ORANGE STREETS.

The world should never forget the spot where once stood Liberty Tree, so famous in your annals.—*La Fayette in Boston.*

Fig. 4. *The Liberty Tree 1774, Corner of Essex and Orange Streets* (Boston: Published by Abel Bowen, 1825). Boston Athenaeum.



Fig. 5. *A View of the obelisk erected under the Liberty-tree in Boston on the rejoicings for the repeal of the Stamp Act 1766, Paul Revere, sculp.* (Boston: Paul Revere, 1766, restrike printed in 1839). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

tree commemorating the Stamp Act protests (Figure 5). Soon after, other towns all over the American colonies began designating their own “liberty trees,” large trees centrally located near town centers which could serve as convenient outdoor sites to gather for political purposes.³⁵

From early colonial times, pivotal historical events unfolded beneath landmark trees. Examples include William Penn’s “Treaty Elm” where negotiations with Native Americans were held and Connecticut’s “Charter Oak,” where the colonial charter was hidden for safekeeping. Such instances were complemented by a longstanding English folk tradition of organizing central village spaces around venerable trees or deliberately placed poles (such as those used as “maypoles” for seasonal rituals), for reasons that are still debated but tend to connect to pagan religions that spread from the ancient Near East northward into Europe in the pre-Christian era.³⁶ Inevitably, similar attitudes about the role of trees in public spaces entered colonial America, along with waves of English immigrants from various parts of the British Isles.³⁷

Soon after Boston’s Liberty Tree and other designated trees around the colonies continued to serve as staging spots for political speech, meetings, and public demonstrations. Towns that lacked a suitable tree erected liberty “poles” as an alternative. At Boston’s Liberty Tree, it was common for political pamphlets to be tacked to its trunk or hung from its branches by anti-British groups. In 1774, the Sons of Liberty brutally assaulted a British tax collector under the Liberty Tree, an event that was captured in a well-known engraving (Figure 6). The Great Elm’s nickname was reinforced when Thomas Paine, member of the Sons of Liberty, penned an anti-British poem which he titled “Liberty Tree” and revealed to the public by nailing it to the Great Elm’s trunk. The poem was printed as a broadside and reproduced throughout the colonies.³⁸ It was also set to music. The song “Liberty Tree,” with Paine’s text, became the most popular song of the Revolutionary period, and it endured as a beloved patriotic song for decades.³⁹ Its first half establishes the striking visual image of the goddess Liberty bringing a branch to plant in American soil:

In a chariot of light from the regions of day, The Goddess of
Liberty came,
Ten thousand celestials directed the way, And hither conducted
the Dame,
A fair budding branch from the gardens above, Where millions
with millions agree,
She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love, And the plant she
named Liberty Tree.

The celestial exotic struck deep in the ground, Like a native it
 flourished and bore,
 The fame of its fruit drew the nations around, To seek out this
 peaceable shore.
 Unmindful of names or distinctions they came, For freemen like
 brothers agree,
 With one spirit endued they one friendship pursued, And their
 temple was Liberty Tree.

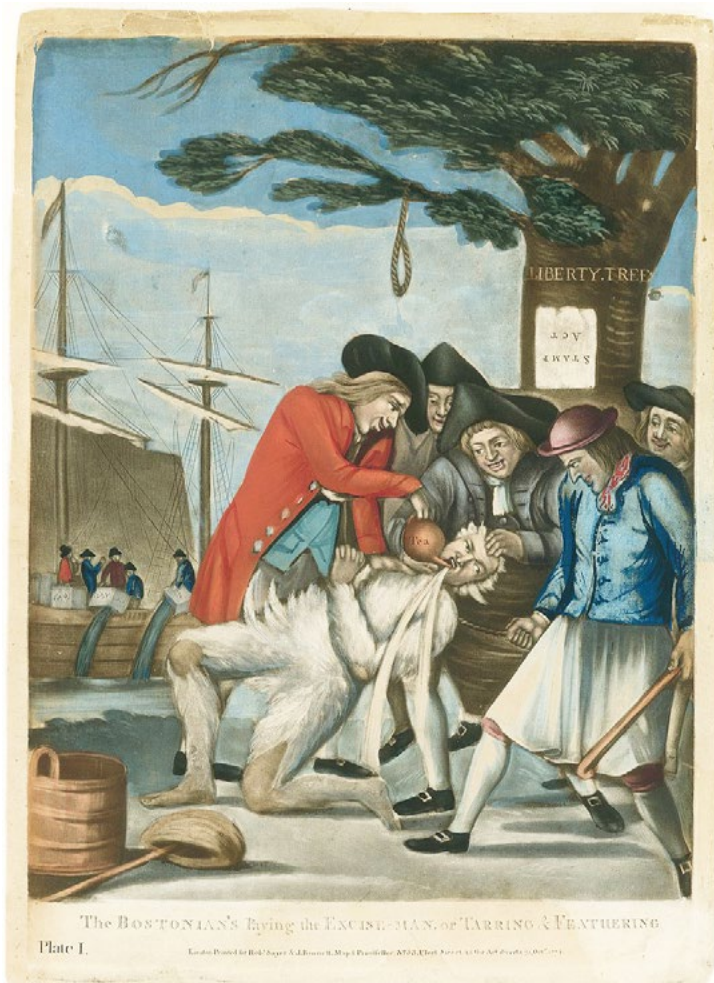


Fig. 6. *The Bostonian's Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring and Feathering*, attributed to Philip Dawe (London: Robert Sayer and J. Bennett, 1774).
 Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

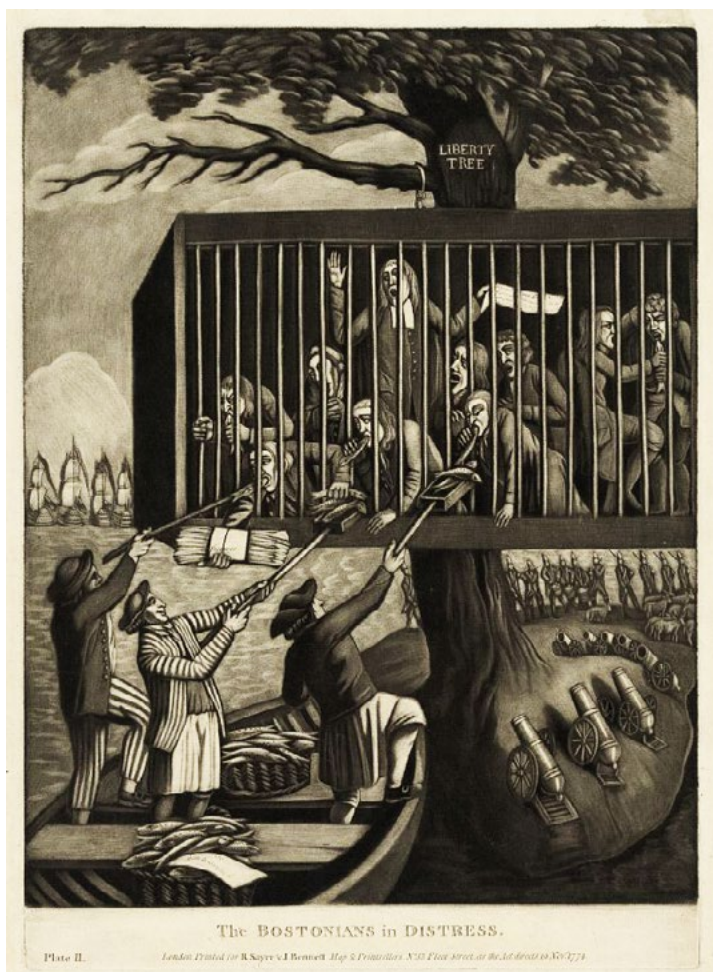


Fig. 7. *The Bostonians in Distress*, attributed to Philip Dawe
(London: Robert Sayer and J. Bennett, 1774).
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Certainly Paine's song "Liberty Tree" persisted longer than Boston's actual Liberty Tree. The city of Boston was occupied by the British early in the war. After briefly using the Liberty Tree to stage some public retribution against colonial patriots in Boston (Figure 7), the British chopped down the venerable elm, leaving only a stump. But that did not stop other American towns from continuing to honor their own Liberty Trees, many of which were elms, because elms were one of the dominant deciduous trees in the Middle Atlantic and New England regions during that period. In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, only six miles from the Shaker village of Hancock, a Great Elm stood at the town center and served the same function as a site for public gatherings and political demonstrations (Figure 8).



Fig. 8. “Central Part of Pittsfield, Mass.,” Drawn by J. W. Barber, Engraved by S. E. Brown, Boston. From John Warner Barber, *Massachusetts Historical Collections* (Worcester: Published by Dorr, Howland & Co., 1839).

Without a doubt, Thomas Paine’s “Liberty Tree” text was well known to the earlier generations of Shakers, anchored as Shakerism was within the sociopolitical culture of revolutionary America. Religious liberty, as well as freedom of conscience more broadly, were earnestly sought by the first Shakers who arrived as religious refugees in 1774. Shakerism’s strong endorsement of the fundamental rights defended by colonial patriots in the Revolutionary War is clearly exhibited in the early hymn “Rights of Conscience,” written by Issachar Bates, himself a war veteran.⁴⁰ Though the early Shakers embraced America’s potential, they also critiqued its shortcomings, such as what they regarded as excessive power wielded by faulty institutions. “Liberty is but a sound, if the conscience still is bound,” observes Bates’s hymn wryly.⁴¹ But the coming of the Shaker faith to America was part of God’s plan, according to early Shaker James Whittaker who testified that while still in England he “saw a vision of America, and I saw a large tree, and every leaf thereof shone with such brightness, as made it appear like a burning torch, representing the Church of Christ, which will yet be establish’d in this land.”⁴²

Paine’s “Liberty Tree” text, centered upon a female deity implanting an exotic new tree in American soil, must have resonated deeply with the Shakers, who may have seen it as further fulfillment of their unique claim to the ideological promises of America. As Jane Crosthwaite observes so eloquently, “America as seen through—or even, perhaps, as enabled by—

the Shaker vision was exceptional in her gifts of liberty and in her promise for a peaceful and just millennium.”⁴³ Given the prominence of a blazing American tree in the earliest visions of their “Gospel parents” (as the English Shakers and first American converts were commonly called), visions that even pre-dated Boston’s original Liberty Tree elm, the Shakers may have understood their envisioned tree as the righteous successor to America’s ill-fated Liberty Tree. As we have already seen, by the early 1800s, the Tree of Life was already well established in Shaker hymnody as a metaphor for the spiritual union of the Shaker world, represented hierarchically among the trunk, limbs, branches, and leaves of the tree. Probably sometime in the 1810s, a Shaker poet penned “Beautiful Branch,” a hymn text that deliberately echoes the “fair budding branch” of Paine’s Liberty Tree:

The celestial Dove from the field of communion,
Where millions & millions of angels agree
Has brought in her hand as a pledge of her union
A beautiful branch of this great Union Tree

This branch from the great Union Tree is now growing
And many are blest with an arbor of peace
Sweet rivers of union from Zion are flowing
And thousands have seen their eternal increase.⁴⁴

“Beautiful Branch” and “Liberty Tree” have very different metrical patterns. But it is quite obvious that the Shaker author of “Beautiful Branch” made deliberate choices of words and phrases to create a strong poetic gesture to Paine’s “Liberty Tree,” while free of outright caricature. The intent of the Shaker poet is plain: to present the Shaker collective as a new body politic, divinely ordained and bound together not by liberty, but by an even more elevated ideal: union. At this tree, people would gather in a new heaven on earth, reveling in the Millennium, and echoing the actual gathering of American patriots around the Liberty Tree. The “Beautiful Branch” hymn became exceptionally popular across the Shaker world. It likely originated with western Shaker Samuel Mclelland at the community of Busro in western Indiana Territory, but it was shared widely and reproduced in dozens of manuscripts, some of which use the title “Union Tree.”

Evidence of the colonial Liberty Tree’s influence on Shaker culture goes even further. Fresh examinations of Hannah Cohoon’s 1845 *Tree of Light* and her 1854 *Tree of Life* suggest a connection of the colonial Liberty Tree concept to both of those gift drawings. The trunk, structure, and



Fig. 9. “American elm tree on Old South Street, Northampton, Mass. (October 2019).” Creative Commons license.

crown shape of both these gift drawings by Cohoon are strongly suggestive of the general shape of an American Elm (Figure 9). Not many elms survive in America, unfortunately, because the Dutch elm disease has so thoroughly decimated the species since it invaded North American forests and urban treescapes alike in the early 1900s. But in Hannah Cohoon’s lifetime, the American elm was a major tree species in the local deciduous tree canopy of western Massachusetts. Cohoon would have known exactly what mature stately elms looked like; she would have seen them virtually every day of her life. The leaves on both Cohoon’s *Tree of Light* and *Tree of Life* match the unique shape and texture of elm leaves: the jagged toothed edges, the pointed oval, the way they attach to the twigs (Figure 10). It is not at all far-fetched to suggest that an American elm served as an inspiration to Hannah Cohoon. Moreover, Cohoon would have been familiar with Pittsfield’s designated “ancient elm” that served as the town’s own “liberty tree” during the Revolutionary period. Whether or not that specific tree was her inspiration, the connection between colonial liberty trees and the elm species was well established in the public understanding. Consequently, it is quite possible that Cohoon fully intended to establish a symbolic connection between her trees and the Liberty Tree.



Fig. 10. American elm leaves. Creative Commons license.

Our fresh look at the Shaker concept of the Tree of Life gains one final layer when we consider the ways in which the Shakers understood trees in scripture as metaphors for God and for Christ. Of course, references to trees are abundant throughout the Bible in multiple connotations—actual trees, envisioned trees, metaphorical trees. For early Shaker leaders, devoted scholars of the Bible, scriptural trees would have played a role in the formulation of their radical theology. One category of scriptural tree that strongly reinforces a male-female godhead but has mostly escaped the notice of Shaker scholars is the category of “Asherah” trees. The term “Asherah” appears some forty times in the Hebrew Bible, and it is generally taken as a reference to a sacred tree or wooden pole. Asherah were often paired alongside altars of Yahweh in early Hebrew practice. How to explain Asherah while still remaining true to orthodox interpretations of the Hebrew god as a singular male deity began to vex theologians in the late nineteenth century, as European archaeologists in the Near East uncovered overwhelming evidence that Asherah were actually goddess representations, often accompanied by symbolic trees, and that these seemed to be entirely normal among the ancient Hebrews, as opposed to some cultic pagan aberration. This “Asherah problem” has

generated an interesting literature across a full century, with many scholars hard-pressed to find explanations for the many Asherah references and abundant evidence, while still remaining consistent with dominant western understanding of Hebrew monotheism.⁴⁵ The formulation of Shaker theology of a dual-gendered godhead unfolded quite separately from any deliberations of the “Asherah problem” in formal theological circles, of course. But the many references to Asherah as sacred trees, gendered in the female in the original Hebrew which Shaker theologians both read and understood, would have presented a compelling justification for a female element of the godhead.

Often in scripture, symbolic trees are in pairs, which for the Shakers reinforced their understanding of the true nature of both God and of Christ as dual-gendered, as well as of the gender-divided order of Shaker life. For example, Ezekiel 47:12 speaks of “all kinds of trees” unfailing in their fruitfulness that flank the two sides of the river flowing out of the temple of God, and Benjamin Seth Youngs interprets this as signifying the rectitude of the Shaker practice of gender division.⁴⁶ In Zechariah 4:11-14, two envisioned olive trees are identified as God’s “two anointed ones,” which the Shakers understood as the male and female incarnations of Christ. Revelation 22:1-2 describes the two Trees of Life, one standing on each side of the River flowing from God’s throne. Again, the Shakers understood this pair of trees as symbols of the male and female aspects of Christ. The contribution of all three of these scriptures to Shaker doctrine can be seen in verses from the early doctrinal hymn “Testimony of Eternal Truth,” the opening hymn in *Millennial Praises*, the Shakers first printed hymnal. The same eighteen-verse hymn appears at the conclusion of Youngs’s lengthy volume, where it is identified as “an abridgement of the foregoing Testimony.”

The prophets saw in visions clear, by whom redemption would
appear
That ‘two anointed ones’ should stand before the God of all
the land.
Two olive trees suppli’d the bowl as life from Christ supplies
the soul,
And certain as the vision’s true, the male & female are the
TWO.

Ezekiel saw a river wide, with many trees on either side:
The tree of life appear’d to John, & truly there were more
than one

On either side the tree was seen, while living waters flow
between –
This tree of life on either side, he calls the Spirit and the
Bride.⁴⁷

Clearly all of these scriptures contain visually descriptive interpretations of fruitful trees. The strong role these images play in the formation of Shaker doctrine about the nature of God should help to inform our perspectives on the fruitful tree imagery that would emerge in Shaker spiritual texts and gift drawings alike. For example, the emphasis that the Shakers placed on the scripture from Zechariah, specifically, helps to explain the prevalence of another fruited tree—the olive tree—in Shaker imagery. Olive trees and olive branches appear as small motifs in gift drawings. And one exceptionally popular Shaker hymn dating at least as early as 1820, “Lovely Olive Tree,” emphasized the believer uniting with the olive tree, which symbolically signified both Christ and the Church, as well as being termed “the tree of life”:

More pure love I want to feel, More obedience and zeal,
More united we must be, To the lovely Olive Tree.
Every branch must fill its place Free from every thing that’s
base
Then the sap will freely flow And in union we will go
Now depart discord and strife, We have found the tree of life,
Heavenly love and purity Is the substance of the tree.⁴⁸

A vivid poetic description of the feminine aspect of God as the “tree of life” can be found in an 1823 hymn by Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, elder Joel Shields. Titled “Love the Only Object,” the hymn treats “Love” as the deity, playing upon the familiar “God is love” trope, as well as long-established Shaker theology of treating “God” and “Love” as interchangeable: “For God is a fountain of love, And Mother a branch of the same.”⁴⁹ Shields portrays God/Love as both a beautiful and richly appealing tree and as a gardener tending a surrounding group of cultivated trees:⁵⁰

With grace her fruitful boughs are spread, Her lovely fruits
appear
Her fields abound with living bread, Her welcome guest to
cheer
The fragrant trees that by her stand Like aloes sweet and fair
Are nourished by her lovely hand And pruned and dressed with
care.

No actions words or thoughts obscene No hatred war or strife
Shall in thy lovely courts be seen; Thou art the tree of Life
Come love sweet love possess me whole Come and possess my
heart
Make thy abode within my soul And never hence depart.

One place in scripture where the phrase “tree of life” appears unambiguously linked with the feminine aspect of God is in Proverbs, also known as the Book of Wisdom. It is well known among scholars of Shaker theology and spirituality that “wisdom” in Shaker writing always represents the female half of the dual-gendered godhead (Father God and Mother Wisdom). The Shaker interpretation was well supported by the fact that the word “wisdom” is consistently gendered as feminine in all the ancient languages of the Bible. In the book of Proverbs, it is quite clear that Wisdom not only holds female gender, but that Wisdom is also quite literally the Tree of Life. Proverbs 3:17-18 reads, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.” During the New Era, when Hannah Cohoon painted her *Tree of Life*, the vision-filled Shaker worship regularly featured appearances by the female half of the deity, a spiritual entity often referred to as “Holy Mother Wisdom.” One reasonable way that a Shaker would have interpreted Cohoon’s *Tree of Life*, then, would have been as a literal portrait of God. Such an interpretation would have been entirely reasonable, given the degree to which Shaker devotional writings had been infused with tree, branch, and fruit metaphors since the beginnings of Shakerism in America, as we have seen throughout this present examination.

Concluding Thoughts: “Whichever way our eyes we turn”

Because of the clear Shaker rejection of paintings and drawings in believers’ normal creative output and for decorative use, it has been most common to treat the New Era gift drawings as aberrations. However, such an approach fails to take into account how richly and intensely visual have been the accepted forms of Shaker creative output: writing, in all its forms, but particularly poem and song texts. Shaker spirituality has always elevated visionary experience, and Shaker verse was being used to lavishly describe believers’ visions decades before visions began to be set down in pictorial form by the creators of the gift drawings. “Whichever way our eyes we turn we view delightful towers, And in these pleasant groves discern the most delicious flowers” might well have described a New Era visionary experience and have been recorded meticulously as a colorful and detailed

drawing. But in fact, it comes from a hymn text written by the Richard McNemar's teenage son James sometime in the 1810s at Union Village, Ohio, and using words alone to paint a luxuriant garden landscape where "Wisdom's lovely ways" prevailed.⁵¹

The most impactful and aesthetically appealing images created during the New Era involved depictions of trees, and Hannah Cohoon's *Tree of Life* is by far the most iconic. However, because Shaker culture was infused with references to trees, branches, vines, fruits, and flowers long before such motifs began to be integrated into gift drawings, it is necessary to expand our search back to earlier phases of Shaker history in order to gain a more understanding of how these complex metaphors functioned within Shaker spiritual life.

Hannah Cohoon's *Tree of Life* seems to have been the artistic culmination of ideas that had been accumulating among the Shakers for many decades. Along the way, that tissue of ideas had been informed by colonial and revolutionary religious culture and the culture of the Early Republic. We have examined at least five different ways that trees functioned symbolically for the Shakers: as a restorative sacrament; as a metaphor for the individual believer's body; as a metaphor for the Shaker church and its hierarchical structure; as a metaphor for Shaker sociopolitical identity on the American landscape; and as an actual graphic representation of God, specifically of the feminine aspect of God. Given that the Shakers were well known iconoclasts who rejected the use of figural art, perhaps the boldest interpretation of the Tree of Life image is that it might have been perceived by the Shakers as a portrait of God, the ultimate Shaker icon.

In closing, seems fitting somehow to give the final word to another Shaker sister named Hannah, an African-American believer at South Union, Kentucky. Hannah Freehart entered Shaker life in 1807, a full decade before Cohoon, and she died in 1852 during the period that Cohoon was creating her iconic tree drawings.⁵² Evidence that the western Hannah was also inspired by trees has survived in the form of tiny fanciful drawings of fruited trees etched onto the underside of a small oval box owned by Hannah Freehart, along with her name and the date of 1827 (Figure 11). Why Hannah Freehart chose to inscribe her box with images of trees can never be known. But placing the embellishment on the underside of the lid ensured that it would remain for her eyes alone, or for those with whom she chose to share it. In that sense, the Hannah Freeheart's drawings are not unlike the gift drawings of the New Era, and it is entirely possible that Freeheart, like the New Era artists, held similarly complex understandings of the symbolic role of trees in Shaker spirituality.



Fig. 11. "H. Freehart, June 28, 1827," Collection at South Union Shaker Village. Image courtesy of Tommy Hines, Director, South Union Shaker Village.

Notes

1. Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews were the first non-Shakers to learn of the existence of the gift drawings. Sometime in the early 1930s, after at least ten years of cultivating friendships with Hancock Shaker sisters, the Andrewses were shown several gift drawings. Their account implies that the drawings had been largely forgotten by the Shakers at some point after their creation and possibly that many had been destroyed. See Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Fruits of the Shaker Tree of Life: Memoirs of Fifty Years of Collecting and Research* (Stockbridge: The Berkshire Traveller Press, 1975), 95-96.
2. Two other Shaker heritage sites, Canterbury Shaker Village and Shaker Museum of South Union, use logos based on Shaker gift drawings.
3. Other than the general discussions of Shaker spiritualism found in Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York: Dover, 1963) and Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), along with the analysis of its musical dimensions in Daniel W. Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual*, 2nd, corrected ed. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2000), most scholars have addressed primarily the visual art produced during the spiritualist period. In addition to Daniel W. Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song: A Study of Two*

Forms of Shaker Inspiration (Sabbathday Lake: The United Society of Shakers, 1983) and Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Visions of the Heavenly Sphere: A Study in Shaker Religious Art* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969), see Sally Promey, *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth Century Shakerism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); and France Morin, ed. *Heavenly Visions: Shaker Gift Drawings and Gift Songs* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2001).

4. In his book *Gift Drawing and Gift Song*, Patterson alludes to the 113 gift drawings documented by the Andrewses, along with a further seventy-nine that he includes as part of his "Checklist." See also Andrews and Andrews, *Visions of the Heavenly Sphere*.
5. See the discussions in Daniel Sellin, "Shaker Inspirational Drawings," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 57, no. 273 (Spring 1962): 93-99; and Sally L. Kitch, "As a Sign That All May Understand": Shaker Gift Drawings and Female Spiritual Power," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 1-28.
6. Sally M. Promey, "Celestial Visions: Shaker Images and Art Historical Method," *American Art* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 78-99.
7. Most scholars believe that none of the gift drawings were put on display during the period of their creation and may have been seen only by a limited number of people other than the creator. Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song*, suggests perhaps a few dozen only. Patterson coined the term "gift drawing," and he asserts that because they purport to be simply visual records of spiritual "gifts," they were not intended as artistic expression, but visual documentation. Whether to apply the term "art" to this body of material is debated by some, as the Shakers had no established tradition of art and artists, though the community included many individuals who employed great artistic skill in the execution of these drawings.
8. Cohoon's better than average education can be inferred from the fine penmanship of the drawings' inscriptions, as well as their narrative composition.
9. For a short but thorough biographical essay, see Ruth Wolfe, "Hannah Cohoon," in *American Folk Painters of Three Centuries*, Jean Lipman and Tom Armstrong, editors (New York: Hudson Hills Press, Inc., 1980), 58-65. A biographical essay drawn from Wolfe, along with an earlier publication by June Sprigg, is found in Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song*, 47-50. See also Jane Crosthwaite, "The Spirit Drawings of Hannah Cohoon: Window on the Shakers and Their Folk Art," *Communal Societies* 7 (1987): 1-15.
10. Wolfe, "Hannah Cohoon," 65, includes an image of a page from a Shaker songbook containing several dance tunes, including one of the tunes attributed to Cohoon, and Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song*, 49, identifies the source of this and of Cohoon's other tunes as a specific Shaker music manuscript in the Library of Congress collection.
11. See Checklist of Cohoon's work in Patterson, *Gift Drawing and Gift Song*, 50.
12. See Wolfe, "Hannah Cohoon," 62. Wolfe also suggests that a very unusual tree design created in 1844 by Shaker Elder Joseph Wicker, also at Hancock,

may have influenced Cohoon's style.

13. See the chronology in Andrews and Andrews, *Visions of the Heavenly Sphere*, 110. Promey briefly addresses trees as metaphors in gift drawings, *Spiritual Spectacles*, 79-81. In one intriguing and useful observation, Crosthwaite observes that an influential work on fruit trees as a spiritual metaphor, *The Spiritual Use of an Orchard*, by seventeenth century English arborist Ralph Austen, had just been reprinted as a new edition in 1847, around the time that trees became more prevalent in Shaker gift drawings. However, there is no direct evidence that the Shakers were aware of this text. See Crosthwaite, "Hannah Cohoon," 9n20.
14. In particular, the distinctive tree styles found in gift drawings attributed to Sarah Bates and Polly Collins have been noted, and both styles contrast sharply with that of Cohoon.
15. This is the approach taken by Ann Kirschner, "At the Gate of Heaven: Early Shaker Dreams and Visions," in Morin, *Heavenly Visions*, 169-78.
16. Carol Medlicott, *Partake a Little Morsel: Popular Shaker Hymns of the Nineteenth Century* (Clinton: Richard W. Couper Press, 2011), 9 and 68-72, begins to address nature metaphors expressed in early Shaker hymnody.
17. Diane Sasson, *The Shaker Spiritual Narrative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 28-32, examines how the first Shakers envisioned the Tree of Life, but primarily during the period of life of Ann Lee and James Whittaker only. A few scholars have grappled with the general question of how the Shakers confronted the natural world, such as the exceptionally erudite but broad treatment by Carl Benton Straub, *An Honorable Harvest: Shakers and the Natural World* (New Gloucester: United Society of Shakers), 2009.
18. On Jeremiah Ingalls, see Thomas B. Malone, "Jeremiah Ingalls and Shape-Note Connexion," from *Singing Ingalls* 2010, <http://www.singingalls.org/>. On Issachar Bates as an aspiring hymn writer in the 1790s, see Carol Medlicott, *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2013), 54-57. On Jeremiah Ingalls, Jr., see Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 258-59; and Peter Van Demark, editor, *Elder Rufus Bishop's Journals, Volume I: 1815-1839* (Clinton: Richard W. Couper Press, 2018), 210-11, 211n53.
19. See *Millennial Praises* (Hancock: Printed by Joseph Tallcott, Jr., 1813), 131-33. See also Christian Goodwillie and Jane Crosthwaite, *Millennial Praises: A Shaker Hymnal* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).
20. See Carol Medlicott and Christian Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar, Music, and the Western Shaker Communities* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2013), 306; and Medlicott (2009), 46-47.
21. Benjamin Seth Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (Lebanon: Press of John Mc'Lean, 1808), 395, 455, 525-29.
22. Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, 171-74, 207.
23. The full text of "Sweet Apples" can be found in Medlicott and Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar*, 312.

24. The full text of this memorial hymn to David Darrow can be found in Medlicott and Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar*, 177.
25. Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, discusses Bates's long and complex relationship to trees, plants, and gardening. See for example 48 for his conversion while working as a logger, 126 and 160 for his work as an orchardist, 249 for his stated desire to have his body replace the great oak tree at Watervliet, Ohio, and 266 for his teaching of the "Stubborn Oak" song and dance. Whether Bates actually wrote the song is unclear, but he may have. See also Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 208-9.
26. Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 339-40, attributes "Willow Tree" to Mary Hazard of New Lebanon.
27. See Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, xx, for analysis of this song.
28. Richard McNemar to Seth Wells, 23 March 1824, OClWHI IV:A-70.
29. See "Responsive" and the analysis of it in Medlicott and Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar*, 125-26.
30. See "A Dialogue, Little-faith and Go-ahead," and the analysis of it in Medlicott and Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar*, 236.
31. William R. Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and in the Ancient Near East* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018). For instance, the oaks that shaded the tent of Abraham in Genesis 18 offer similar symbolic meaning as the vine that grew to shade and comfort Jonah in Jonah 4, and the New Testament reference to the Father as "the vinedresser" is a deliberate echo back to Adam having been enjoined by God to tend and keep the trees of the Garden of Eden.
32. From "My Vineyard" recorded by D. A. Buckingham and quoted in Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 411-12.
33. "I Am the True Vine," quoted in Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 412-14. "I Am the True Vine" was adapted by singer/songwriter Chris Moore and included on his album *Kindling Stone* (2008) as a harmonized duet.
34. From Journal of Henry DeWitt of New Lebanon, OClWHI V B 97, quoted in Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 411. The date of this passage could not be located, but it would be sometime before 1835, as the very popular Shaker speaker and singer Garrett Lawrence died in 1835.
35. A scholarly analysis of the Liberty Tree concept in colonial America is found in Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Liberty Tree: A Genealogy," *The New England Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1952): 435-58. For a full treatment of how liberty and freedom were manifested in American visual culture, see David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
36. The literature on the role of trees in Anglo-Saxon folklore and English landscape tradition is considerable. For a recent and concise contribution, see Della Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore, and Landscape* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2010).
37. For a specific examination of how English landscape ideals were transferred to New England village design, see Jonathan Wood, "'Build, therefore, your

- own world': The New England Village as Settlement Ideal," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, no. 1 (1991): 32-50.
38. The rise of Liberty Trees as public protest locations is explored in Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), especially 265-95.
 39. See Joel Cohen, "Program Notes," *Liberty Tree: Early American Music 1776-1881*, by Boston Camerata (Erato CD, 1997).
 40. For a thorough exploration of Shaker perspectives on American patriotism, see Jane F. Crosthwaite, "'The mighty hand of overruling providence': The Shaker Claim to America," *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (April 2012), 93-111.
 41. The full fifteen verses of "Rights of Conscience" are included in Patterson, *Shaker Spiritual*, 165-67.
 42. This account of James Whittaker's vision is quoted or paraphrased in many Shaker sources, as well as in numerous secondary sources, including Sasson, *Shaker Spiritual Narrative*, 29-30, and Crosthwaite, "Hannah Cohoon," 14.
 43. Crosthwaite, "The mighty hand of overruling providence," 105.
 44. The full text of "Beautiful Branch," along with analysis of it as one of the Shakers' more popular hymn texts and an example of nature imagery, as well as analysis of the significance of the tune used by the Shakers, is found in Medlicott, *Partake a Little Morsel*, 68-69.
 45. On the "Asherah problem" see Judith Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005); and Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel, and the Old Testament* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Recently the topic of Asherah has generated many popular treatments from a range of perspectives, including feminist, New Age, and evangelical.
 46. See Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, 514, 525.
 47. Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*. The text of "Testimony of Eternal Truth" is tipped in at the end of Youngs's *Testimony* on unnumbered pages, along with an Errata page.
 48. See the discussion of "Lovely Olive Tree" in Medlicott, *Partake a Little Morsel*, 72.
 49. From "The Season of Loves," in *Millennial Praises*. See Goodwillie and Crosthwaite, *Millennial Praises*.
 50. From "Love the Only Object" in "A Hymnbook, Containing a Collection of Ancient Hymns... Compil'd and Recorded by Paulina Bryant, Executed at Pleasant Hill Beginning June 1854," DLC-MSS, Item 361, 148-49.
 51. See Medlicott and Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar*, 141, for the full text, tune, and analysis of "Gospel Fare" by young James McNemar.
 52. I am grateful to Tommy Hines of Shaker Museum of South Union for sharing information on Hannah Freehart, along with images of Freehart's box, which was re-discovered in the 1990s in private hands.