

# Hamilton College Library

## “Home Notes”

### Communal Societies Collection: New Acquisitions

***Extract from an Unpublished Manuscript on Shaker History (by an Eye Witness.) Giving an Accurate Description of Their Songs, Dances, Marches, Visions, Visits to the Spirit Land, &c. Boston: Printed and Published by E. K. Allen, 1850. 48 p. 19 cm.***

This rare pamphlet was written by someone who was intimately acquainted with the Shakers during the “era of spirit manifestations” and, as bibliographer Mary Richmond opines, was likely a seceder from one of the communities. Internal evidence indicates that the author was a woman and very likely a former member of the South Family at the Harvard, Massachusetts society as early as 1839. She vividly recounts her experiences at highly emotional Shaker worship meetings where the brethren and sisters interacted with visitors from the “spirit world.” The work, while generally critical, is for the most part accurate and reliable. Her harshest criticism addresses the severe treatment of Shaker children by their superiors. She urges readers to refrain from sending children to the Shakers and recommends sending them to the almshouse instead. This pamphlet is a very early first-hand published account of the Shakers written by a woman. The Hamilton College Library copy includes the original printed wraps, with the cover title “Shaker History.” Despite the likelihood that the author was a former member of a Shaker community, Richmond includes the work in Volume II of her bibliography (*Shaker Literature*, no. 2103). OCLC WorldCat locates only seven copies worldwide.

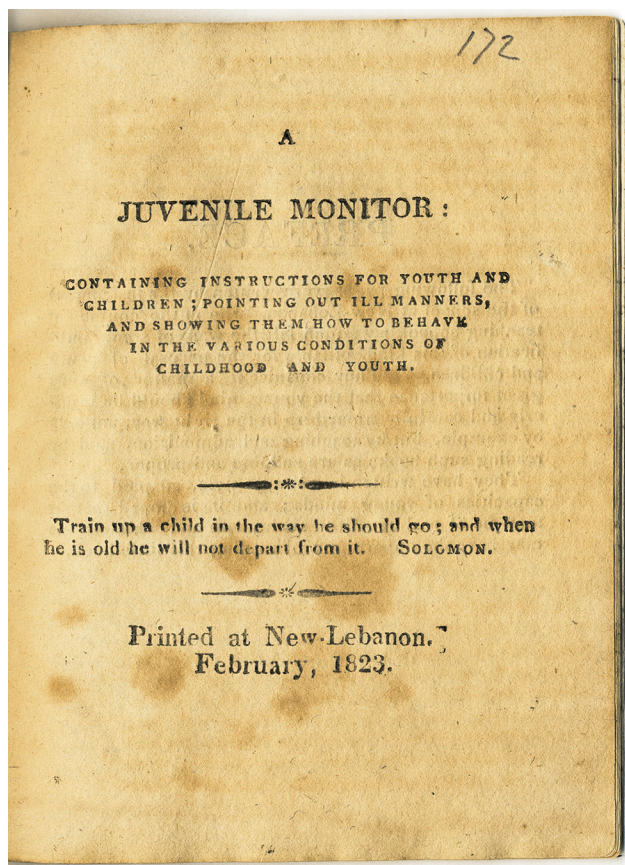
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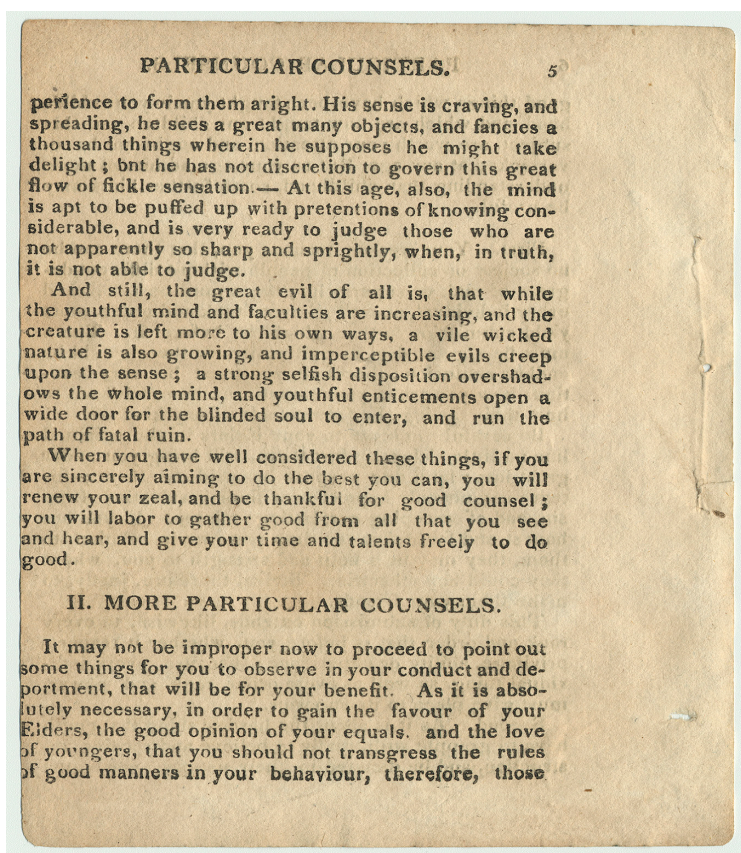
***A Juvenile Monitor. Containing Instructions for Youth and Children; Pointing Out Ill Manners, and Showing Them How to Behave in the Various Conditions of Childhood and Youth. Printed at New-Lebanon [N.Y.]: [n.p.], 1823. 20 p. 13 cm.***

The first two published works intended for Shaker children were both published at New Lebanon, New York in February 1823. *A Juvenile Monitor* was “written by the instructors of the school at New Lebanon, who in the course of teaching school have often felt the want of some publication of this kind for the ... youth and children.” The compilers were Garrett K. Lawrence, Isaac N. Youngs and Rufus Bishop — three exceptionally gifted and talented young believers. It is likely that all three had a hand in the other work published for Shaker youth, *A Short Treatise: Containing Observations on the Duty of Believers ... Addressed to Youth*, which has been attributed to Lawrence





and Youngs. The Hamilton College Library copy of *A Juvenile Monitor* is preserved within its original dust-blue plain wraps. Careful inspection of the wraps led to the discovery of a heretofore unknown Shaker imprint. Pasted on the inside of the wraps, as reinforcement, are two discarded pages (p. 5-6) of what at first were thought to be leaves from *A Short Treatise*. After making a comparison between the pasted-in leaves with an intact copy of *A Short Treatise* in the collection of The Shaker Library at Sabbathday Lake, we discovered that the leaves are from a different (probably earlier) edition of the same work. We appreciate the help of SDL Librarian Lennie Brooks who kindly shared information and prepared typescripts of *A Short Treatise*. Richmond (*Shaker Literature*, no. 848) locates eight library holdings of *A Juvenile Monitor*, while OCLC WorldCat locates ten.



A page from an unrecorded edition of *A Short Treatise* which was pasted into the inside of the cover of Hamilton College's copy of *A Juvenile Monitor*.

**[Manuscript letter]. *Copy of a Letter dated New Lebanon March 30<sup>th</sup> 1839* [A letter from the Ministry at New Lebanon, New York to the New Hampshire Ministry, with a second letter dated April 10, 1839 from the “Ministry at Canterbury” to the Elders at Enfield, New Hampshire]. 7 p. plus cover. 25.5 cm.**

This letter from the Ministry at New Lebanon is six pages in length. It includes considerable information on Shaker efforts to influence the New York legislature on matters relating to communal ownership of property and the right to maintain community trusts. There is also news from Watervliet, including accounts of persecution there, compounded by an outbreak of lung fever—“very distressing, hardly well ones enough to take care of the sick.” There are interesting accounts of visitors to the Shakers, invited there to attend meetings, examine Shaker property, talk to the Believers and be well served and fed. This hospitality was probably part of a campaign to improve their chances of securing favorable legislation. The meetings for worship were powerfully blessed with supernatural gifts. In one account, a visiting physician witnessed a young Shaker girl speaking in many different languages. He confronted her, demanding to know if she was schooled in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, and was thunderstruck to learn that she was not. The Shaker meetings were “almost constantly attended by great numbers of the Ancients, such as the Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles ... the number of inspired messengers are on the increase.”

The second letter, from the New Hampshire Ministry, is a single page, with the verso utilized for entering the Enfield, New Hampshire address. It also bears a manuscript stampless cover; “Shaker Village NH April 10, 1839” is the written postmark. Brief and chatty, it closes with a note to Sister Heziah Gage of Enfield, who is asked to find Elder Joseph’s “red pocket book” which he accidentally left at Enfield. “You will find it in his gray coat pocket. The coat is in the meeting house in the back room hanging up.”

Copy of a letter dated "New Lebanon March 30<sup>th</sup> 1839."  
Beloved and Esteemed Ministry.

Your very kind and edifying letter of January 28<sup>th</sup> came safe to hands the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, and the absent dear friends, we felt as though we had drawn a valuable prize, for we felt thankful to hear once more from our dear companions in the gospel and from all our good brethren and sisters in New Hampshire and the State of Maine; and no doubt but you have been looking day after day, and week after week for some returns for that good letter. Well we will confess that we are very and ashamed that we have disappointed you so much and so often, and after we tell you the why and the wherefore, we hope you will be so charitable as to forgive us.

The first paragraph of the letter from the Ministry at New Lebanon to the New Hampshire Ministry, March 30, 1839.