

A Sampling of Rare Shaker Broad­sides at Hamilton College Library

By Christian Goodwillie

The Communal Societies Collection of the Hamilton College Library possesses a large number of nineteenth century broadsides by and about the American Shakers. The earliest known Shaker imprints that could loosely be termed broadsheets were hymn texts printed ca. 1810. A letter dated October 17, 1810 sent from Watervliet, New York to New Lebanon, New York notes the enclosure of “two hymns corrected for the press.”¹ Copies of these printed texts are held in bound form at the Shaker Library, Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and at Williams College. Loose sheets from the same printings are held at Hamilton College and Hancock Shaker Village. Some of these sheets came to light in a rather exciting discovery made by a paper conservator working on a box owned by collector M. Stephen Miller. Dr. Miller’s conservator undertook the extraction of Shaker Lemon Syrup broadsides that had been used as lining in the box. Beneath the Lemon Syrup broadsides, loose examples of the hymn sheets were found.²

Most early Shaker broadsides (published prior to 1840) fall into four broad categories: 1) hymnody, 2) legislative memorials, 3) Shaker product catalogues or lists, and 4) incidental or ephemeral items. Some were intended for use as handbills, others were the nineteenth century equivalent of posters, while some were pasted onto seed boxes and similar containers, furnishing a description of the contents.

By mid-century, many of the Shaker communities had acquired printing presses. Mary Richmond’s authoritative bibliography *Shaker Literature* lists hundreds of Shaker broadsides. However, even she admits in her introduction to the section entitled “Catalogs, Broad­sides, Advertising Flyers, Etc.” that “Unquestionably, more of these ephemeral Shaker publications existed than are recorded here ... ”³

In the nearly thirty years that have passed since Richmond’s bibliography was published, hundreds of works, both primary and secondary, have been discovered that undoubtedly would have been included in her two volume work. A large number of these discoveries eluded Richmond simply on account of their scarcity. Some of these “not-in-Richmond” imprints shed new light on the Shakers, furnishing facts heretofore unknown.

The Hamilton College Library holds a large collection of imprints

unrecorded in Richmond's bibliography. Broad­sides account for some of the more interesting examples. The following selection of five rare Shaker broadsides from the Communal Societies Collection illustrates that the Shaker (and sometimes non-Shaker) printer set his type for many different purposes, both sacred and profane. All five examples are exceptionally rare (none are located by OCLC WorldCat) and only one of these broadsides was noticed by Mary Richmond. Most of these selections are likely unique survivals. All are from the nineteenth century, and one example (the only one known to Mary Richmond) furnishes a bit of wit and an element of mystery.

Public Notice. Pittsfield [Mass.], 1835. Broadside. 11½ x 8 cm. Printed on heavy card stock with a decorative border, signed by Daniel Goodrich, William Deming, Joseph Wicker.

In 1830, the Church Family Shakers at the Hancock, Massachusetts society erected a new brick dwelling house. It was, at the time, one of the largest buildings in Berkshire County. Elder William Deming, the designer of the dwelling, wrote proudly of the building in a letter to his colleague Benjamin Seth Youngs at South Union, Kentucky:

We began laying the foundation on the 15th of April 1830, with the materials as follows 2,326 feet of white hewn stone 30 cts [cents] per foot—this includes the underpinning, belting, Window caps and sils with the water table and door posts. In addition to this 565 feet of blue limestone that we sawed and cut ourselves for the basement story at the South end of the house—which forms the outside walls of the cook room. Also 330 feet of blue lime stone sawed six inches thick with the sawed edges out, this is placed under the underpinning. Now add 350 thousand bricks with these materials and stone for the cellar walls; we commenced our building and in ten (10) weeks from the placing of the first stone in the cellar, the house was neatly laid up and the roof put on. One week in the time we were hindered for want of some materials.—The work is all well done. There is none to excel it in this country. And the same can be said of the Joiner work—The stuff is very clear, scarcely a knot can be seen in all the work, except the floors and they are yellow pine and very good. There is 100 large doors including outside and closet doors; 240 Cupboard doors—369 Drawers—These are placed in the corners of the rooms and by the sides of the chimneys. The drawers are faced with butternut and handsomely stained.⁴

PUBLIC NOTICE.

HAVING, for several years, admitted people into our Dwelling-House, who called merely for the purpose of viewing it, we would inform the public generally, that for several reasons we are under the necessity of abandoning the practice. As the number of persons who call upon us, and "*wish to see the house,*" amounts to some hundreds in a season, the attendance, and additional labor in keeping the house clean, amount to a heavy tax upon our time, and subjects the residents to great inconvenience by destroying the retiredness of a private dwelling.

In adopting this course, we feel no disrespect to our fellow-citizens, and presume that no rational person will take offence because we are unwilling to convert a comfortable dwelling into a public promenade. Persons wishing to stop in this part of the Village, will please call at the TRUSTEES' OFFICE, where we shall endeavor to make them as comfortable as circumstances will admit, and those who desire it, freedom to walk over the premises.

DANIEL GOODRICH,
WILLIAM DEMING,
JOSEPH WICKER.

Pittsfield, June 18, 1835.

It was a remarkable building that excited public curiosity and interest. Many traveled to Hancock "merely for the purpose of viewing" the dwelling, as the broadside notes, "amount[ing] to some hundreds in a season."

The broadside is dated June 18, 1835, the date Hancock Shakers publicly announced that they could no longer tolerate the parade of "the world's people" through the dwelling halls and rooms. The Shakers were "unwilling to convert a comfortable dwelling into a public

promenade," and found the tourists to be "a heavy tax upon [their] time." Shaker dwellings were not customarily open to non-Believers; instead the Trustee's Office at each community served as the one acceptable facility for entertaining those who were not members of the United Society.

As this very small (4½" x 3¼") broadside was printed on a heavy cardstock, it suggests that it was probably posted outdoors for the public's benefit. Later visitors to Hancock's brick dwelling who *were* allowed inside included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Ford, and First Lady Grace Coolidge.

In 1978 a facsimile of this broadside was published by Hancock Shaker Village, Inc. As the museum does not hold a copy of the original 1835 imprint, they likely copied this example (then in private hands), although it is possible that another copy may exist somewhere.

Card. A Tribute of Thanks to our Neighbors. New Lebanon [N.Y.], 1852. Broadside. 17 x 13 cm. Signed by Jonathan Wood, Edward Fowler, Peter H. Long, in behalf of the Society.

(See front cover for illustration.)

The Shakers were no strangers to the horrible effects of fire. Throughout their history, almost every society suffered considerable loss from fires. Some were accidental, and some the work of Shaker and non-Shaker arsonists. In 1875, for example, the society at Mt. Lebanon, New York lost eight buildings, including the Church Family dwelling. Another devastating fire occurred at the Church Family of Alfred, Maine, in 1901. Notable post-Shaker losses to fire include the Great Stone Barn at New Lebanon, New York, the Cow Barn at Canterbury, New Hampshire, and the meetinghouse at Union Village, Ohio. There were occasions when fires were suppressed before much damage was done. This broadside celebrates one such event, and recounts a fascinating tale wherein notable heroics involved “the zealous efforts of those praiseworthy females.”

The broadside is dated May 10th, 1852, by which time the several families at New Lebanon had become rather wealthy. It appears that the Center Family owned several buildings in the Town of New Lebanon proper, probably near the Protestant Episcopal Church. The Shakers were fortunate in that their buildings caught fire when church services were underway.

This small card is a rare, if not unique, example of a printed statement of thanks, tendered by the Shakers to their non-Shaker neighbors. It is small, roughly 6½” x 5¼”. What is remarkable is that it was dated the day following the fire. Whether it was printed on May 10th or sometime shortly thereafter, it is an indication that New Lebanon still had an active press in 1852. Typographically it is very interesting in its use of many different fonts. Bold, script, capital, and plain types surrounded by a decorative border effectively communicate the thoughtful sentiments of the Shakers towards the people of New Lebanon.

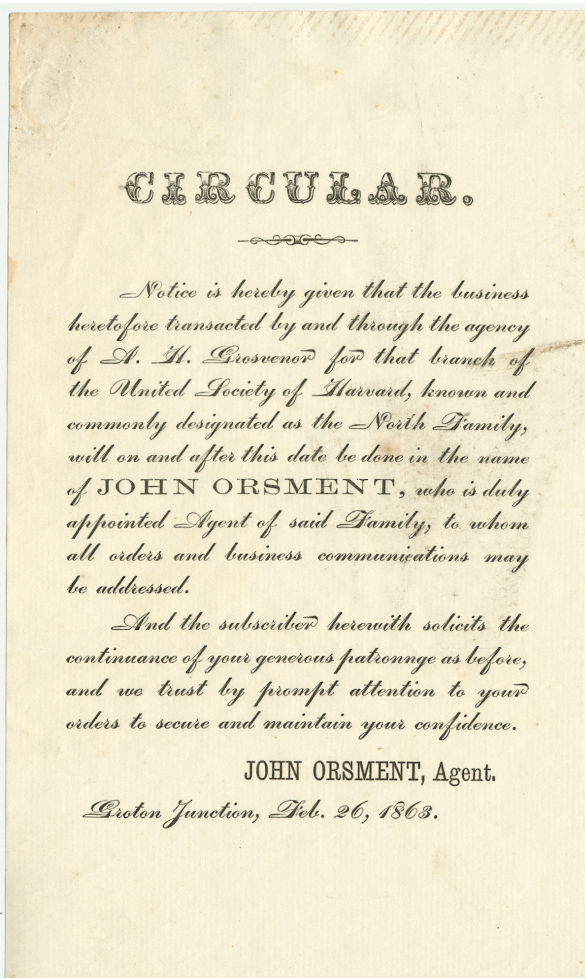
Circular. Groton Junction, 1863. Broadside. 20 x 12 cm. Signed by John Orsment.

On the surface, this broadside dated February 26, 1863 seems to report a simple and plain fact. It is a statement that Brother John Orsment was to replace Brother Augustus H. Grosvenor as “agent” (i.e. family deacon) for the North Family at the Harvard, Massachusetts society.

But there is more to the story. Grosvenor had served the North Family as an elder and as a deacon. While he might or might not have been an effective spiritual leader, his business abilities were clearly below par. Clara Endicott Sears, in her *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*, reports that Grosvenor was responsible for the financial disaster surrounding the construction of a residence at the North Family (which later became a hostelry called "The Rural Home"). The family found itself \$25,000 in debt, nearly insolvent, and with an unfinished dwelling.

Sears recounts that "one day the Shakers ceased to call him [i.e. Grosvenor] Elder, and he was forced to tend the swine as a rebuke, and desperate with humiliation his heart stopped beating and he fell dead." Indeed, Grosvenor died the year following the issue of our broadside. According to Sears, his heart was removed after death and found "rent in two" with a three inch cleft. "He was buried without his heart and the excised organ of the former elder was displayed in a pharmacy in nearby Ayer for some years thereafter."⁵

This is, perhaps, the only Shaker imprint specific to the Harvard North Family (although ephemera relating to the Rural Home survives, such as the trade card for the Harvard



Shakers' Spring Water). This notice is relatively diminutive, printed on plain white paper.

Programme, of Peices [sic] Sung by the Mount Lebanon Singing Class: At their Regular Singing Meeting on the Evening of Jan. 23rd, 1877, at the Meeting Room of Second Order. [Mount Lebanon, N.Y.?], 1877. Broadside. 20½ x 12½ cm.

This wonderful heretofore unrecorded broadside from the Mount Lebanon community is dated January 23, 1877. It affords a peek into the social life of the Shakers at the Second Order (Center Family) who were attending a "Singing Meeting" in the meeting room of the family dwelling.

The broadside shows that by this date, the Center Family had an organ in its meeting room. The hymnal that was utilized for the "programme"

PROGRAMME, OF <i>Peices Sung by the Mount Lebanon,</i> SINGING CLASS. <i>At their regular Singing Meeting on the</i> EVENING OF JAN. 23rd, 1877. <i>At the Meeting Room of Second Order.</i> PART I.			
1	Organ Voluntary.	- - - -	-
2	Hear Father hear our Prayer.	- - - -	Page 336. Chant.
3	We'll breathe the words of holy joy	- - - -	" 11. Chorus.
4	By cool Siloam's shady rill	- - - -	" 99. Chorus.
5	Nearer my God to thee	- - - -	" " "
6	Oh ! that I had wings	- - - -	" 294. Quartett.
7	What is in thy heart for God	- - - -	" 30. Chorus.
8	Love divine all love excelling	- - - -	" 182. " "
9	Who are these in bright array	- - - -	Solo & Chorus.
10	Jehovah's praise	- - - -	" 252. " "
PART II.			
1	Hail smiling morn	- - - -	Glee
2	When all thy mercies O my God	- - - -	" 117. Chorus
3	Almighty Lord before thy throne	- - - -	" 282. Motett.
4	Exulting angels in seraphic strains	- - - -	" 240. Anthem.
5	How cheering the thought that the spirits	- - - -	" 218. Chorus;
6	Oppression shall not always reign	- - - -	" 231. " "
7	When shall we meet again	- - - -	" 330. Duet & Cho.
8	Children of Zion what harp notes	- - - -	" 237. " "
9	Brother thou art gone before us	- - - -	" 226. Chorus.
10	The breaking waves dashed high	- - - -	" 146. Quartette.
11	O think of a home ever there	- - - -	Chorus.

was not a book of Shaker hymns, but an as yet unidentified commercial hymnal from "the world," and the selection of hymns included the ever-popular "Nearer my God to Thee." There is little evidence of the Shakers using worldly music before ca. 1870. After that date worldly hymns began to creep in alongside the plentiful body of songs still being written and printed by Shaker

composers.

Whether this small program (about 8" x 5") was printed at Mount Lebanon is not known. While not recorded in Richmond's bibliography of Shaker literature, a similar broadside is found in E. Richard McKinstry's catalogue of The Edward Deming Andrews Collection (entry 350). The example at Winterthur includes only eleven hymns. The author has seen similar, yet later, examples of this type of singing program from the South Family at Mount Lebanon and the Church Family at Canterbury, New Hampshire.

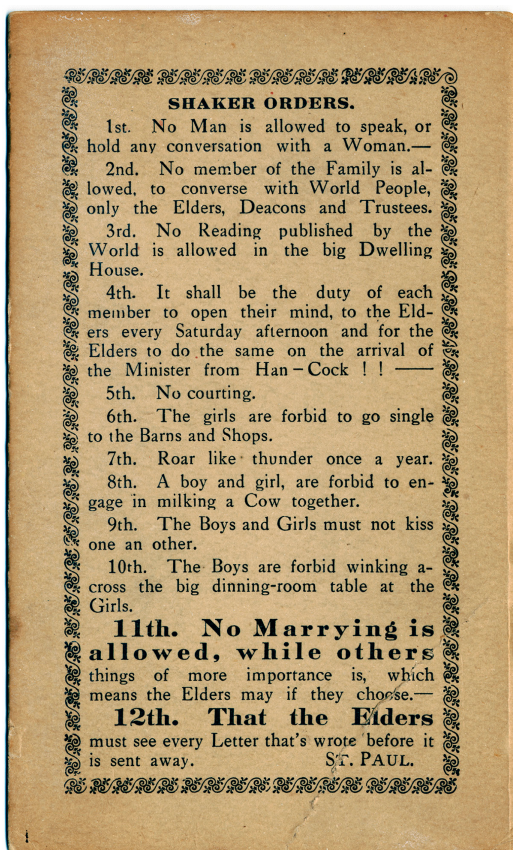
***Shaker Orders.* [N.p., n.d.]. Broadside card. 15½ x 9½ cm. Printed on heavy card stock with a decorative border.**

This unusual broadside is undated, and printed on cardstock, probably by a commercial printer. It is quite small, measuring only 6" x 6¾".

It was noticed by Mary Richmond and included in her bibliography of Shaker literature as entry 1296. She was aware of only one example at Hancock Shaker Village. Our example is the only other known copy of this imprint.

The style of printing and type of cardstock suggest that it was printed after 1860 but before 1900. It is obvious that the author of this work was familiar with the Shakers, their governance and standards of conduct.

It is tinged with parody, laced with humorous comments, and raises more questions than it answers. Why is it signed "St. Paul"? Why are there so many



unusual spellings and variations in typography? Indeed, all who have examined this peculiar document have remarked that it is at least baffling, if not bewildering. The fourth order, noting the arrival of the “Minister from Han – Cock ! !” suggests that the piece was possibly printed in the vicinity of Enfield, Connecticut, a part of the Hancock bishopric and subject to visitation from the Hancock Ministry. Tyringham, Massachusetts fits the same description, but given its closing in 1875 it is doubtful that that dwindling community was the subject of this printed jibe. Order number eleven scandalously suggests that the Elders could partake of sexual intercourse at their discretion. This particularly pointed jest goes further than any of the others on the card, but perhaps not as far as some of the more scandalous charges of early Shaker apostates.

This example was originally in the collection of former New York State Museum curator and Shaker collector William Lassiter.

Notes

1 Correspondence, Watervliet, New York, f. 77, Western Reserve Historical Society Shaker Collection IV:A-77.

2 Details of this interesting series of events can be found in M. Stephen Miller, “Storage Box Yields Shaker Broadside,” *Shaker Messenger* 9, no. 2 (1987): 10-11.

3 Mary L. Richmond, *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography*, vol. 1 (Hancock, Mass.: Shaker Community, Inc.: 1977), 25.

4 The letter is dated January 8th 1832. A photocopy of the original is in the Amy Bess and Lawrence K. Miller Library at Hancock Shaker Village. Call number Red Dot 9768.H2 D369 4541-2.

5 Clara Endicott Sears, *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), 275-76.