An Uncharted Union: The Shakers and the Amana Inspirationists

Peter Hoehnle

The Shakers and the Inspirationists of the Eben-Ezer and Amana Societies were unquestionably among the best known American communal societies of the nineteenth century. It was inevitable that these two pillars of American communalism would interact with each other. The belief systems of both groups share remarkable commonalities that, as some scholars have suggested, might be a result of sharing a common antecedent in the French Prophets of the early eighteenth century. This article traces the interactions between the two groups, a sporadic exchange that has reemerged in the present day.[1]

Middle Eben-Ezer, one of the four communal villages established by the Inspirationists in New York State, as it appeared around the time of their first contact with the Shakers. Hand colored lithograph by Joseph Prestele, Sr. (Amana Heritage Society)

Clarke Garret, in his 1987 study, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers*, describes the movement of the French Prophets that, many believe, resulted in both the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (the Shakers) and the Community of True Inspiration (the Amana Society). The French Prophets were a small group of inspired men and women, including hundreds of inspired children, which emerged in eastern France in 1688, a period when spiritual manifestations were common among Christians, Jews, and Muslims.[2]

Springing from among the two million French Protestants (*Huguenots*) denied religious freedom by Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Prophets urged rebellion. From 1702 until 1715, bands of Protestant "Camisards," under the direction of the Prophets, staged an unsuccessful revolt in the Cevennes and Lower Languedoc region of eastern France.

Exiled from their native France following their unsuccessful revolt, the Prophets settled in London, where their apocalyptic message attracted a wide following; Sir Isaac Newton was said to have been drawn to them.[3] Critics, including many leading religious lights of the era, attacked and mocked the Prophets from both pulpit and judicial bench. Most scholars, including Garrett, Edward Deming Andrews, and Stephen Stein, believe that some of the Prophets' followers traveled to Manchester, where they planted the seed for the Wardley Society that ultimately, under the leadership of Mother Ann Lee, became the Shakers.[4]

In 1711 the Prophets made a journey through northern Europe. In 1712 two Prophets, Elie Marion and Jean Allut, began a second two-year odyssey that took them through Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia-Moravia, and Italy, with a long visit at Halle in modern Germany, whose university was then the center of Pietistic thought. After the Prophets' departure, their Halle followers continued to meet for worship at services that were attended by three brothers, Johann Tobias Pott (1691–1759), Johann Heinrich Pott (1692–1777), and August Friedrich Pott (1695–1777), who may have become acquainted with the Prophets as early as July 1711 when the French visionaries visited Halberstadt, where the Potts then lived.[5] Soon, the Potts began to deliver testimonies of their own, and began to travel, spreading their inspired messages to whomever would listen, and being joined by two female instruments, Johanna Melchior (1690–1758) and Eva Catharine Wagner. In November 1714 they traveled to Himbach where Johann Tobias Pott and Johanna Melchior met two leading separatist figures, Eberhard Ludwig Gruber (1655–1728) and Johann Friedrich Rock (1678–1749), and together formed the Community of True Inspiration, which, a century and a half later, became the Amana Society of Iowa.

The common roots of the Shaker and Inspirationist movements, is a fact that, interestingly, neither group appears to have been aware of. This ignorance of common origins might be because although the Shakers have historically listed the Prophets among their forbearers, the Inspirationists of Amana have never done so.[6]

The emerging doctrines of the Inspirationists and the Shakers provide an interesting contrast. To begin, both sects were Christian and ardently pacifist. While the Shakers avoided sacraments, the Inspirationists observed communion (which they referred to as the *Liebesmahl*, the love feast) and,

like the Shakers, believed in spiritual baptism without the water ceremony observed in mainstream churches. While the Shakers believed in a male/female God and a dual restoration, the Inspirationists believed in a male creator and a single male redeemer (Jesus) whose return they believed lay in the future. Similarly, while the Shakers focused on the concept of a present-day millennium and a "heaven on earth," the Inspirationists believed the millennium lay in the future, and in an otherworldly heaven.[7] Indeed, the Inspirationists devoted scant attention to the millennial reign of Christ in their principle theological writings, a fact unusual among radical Pietist theologies.[8] The Inspirationists differed from most groups, including the Shakers, by not wishing to serve as a model for the rest of the world, but instead leading quiet lives centered on the acts of repentance and personal piety.[9]

Despite their differences, the sects, as befitting groups with a common origin, agreed on many points. Both groups, for example, promoted confession of sins. The Inspirationists held an annual *Unterredung* service during which members confessed their sins publicly, a feature that later Shaker visitors commented upon favorably. Both groups shared a conviction that they ought to restore Christianity to its state before "the fall of the church under Constantine." Most significantly, both sects, the children of the French Prophets, believed in modern-day inspiration that originated within the inspired instrument, and typically manifested in strong bodily motions, but there the similarities end.

For the Inspirationists, the belief in inspiration of certain select *Werkzeuge* or instruments by the Lord was a central tenet of belief. These instruments, of whom the community recognized at least ten in the eighteenth century, traveled Europe delivering testimonies of faith, and establishing over eighty-six small communities of believers in southern Germany, Switzerland, Alsace, and the Netherlands.[10] J. F. Rock, the sect's co-founder made over ninety-four missionary journeys in his thirty-five years as a *Werkzeug*, becoming, in the words of Karl Barth, "a seer and a prophet, to whose curious message half if not all of Germany listened."[11]

For the early Shakers, inspiration was embodied in the person of Ann Lee, who, after 1767, became the chief figure in the movement. Central to early Shaker belief was the idea that God inspired Lee and, in a later interpretation, that she was the female redeemer of humankind. During the formative period of Shakerism, trances and visions were common among Believers, but it was only in the 1830s, with the advent of the Shaker "Era of Manifestations," that inspiration came to hold a similar role among the Shakers as among the Inspirationists.

Inspiration among the Inspirationists falls into two major periods, separated by a period of sixty years (1749–1817) when no one within the community professed the gift. The most intense period of inspiration was the period immediately surrounding the group's founding, when no less than seventeen individuals possessed the gift, traveled Europe in pairs, and frequently delivered testimonies together.[12] After this early intense period of inspiration, Johann Friedrich Rock remained the only *Werkzeug* for a period of thirty years. When Rock died, the movement experienced a decline that lasted until *Werkzeug* Michael Krausert initiated a revival in 1817. Additional *Werkzeuge*, Barbara Heinemann and Christian Metz, soon joined Krausert. Following Krausert's expulsion from the movement and Heinemann's marriage and three-decade-long withdrawal from leadership, Christian Metz emerged as the spiritual and temporal leader of the community, under whose leadership the Inspirationists emigrated to the United States, established communal living at Eben-Ezer, New York, and, finally, at Amana, Iowa.

Shaker inspiration made its great appearance in 1837 in the Girls' Order at Watervliet, N.Y., soon spreading throughout the Shaker world. During the Era of Manifestations, hundreds of Shakers experienced trances, visions of the spirit world, and delivered messages and testimonies from divine personages. Hundreds of the famous Shaker songs, most of the Shaker "gift drawings," pages and pages of recorded testimonies, and new rules of order and worship date to this intense decade-long period of spiritual manifestations.[13]

While the Shakers had several dozen instruments, the Amana community held that only a select few individuals possessed the gift of "true" inspiration, and these individuals were followed by scribes who recorded their pronouncements. The Inspirationists differed from the French Prophets and other groups by claiming that there was both "true" and "false" inspiration. At least in the early period of the group's history, those claiming to be inspired were subjected to rigorous testing by the sect's leaders.[14]

Four of the early Inspirationist *Werkzeuge* (roughly a third) were women, whereas among the Shakers, many instruments were female.[15] One common trait among the instruments was their youth (most were in their early twenties), and the fact that their inspired period lasted for only a short time. The prophets of all three groups were from the lower, more marginalized, classes of society. Many of the French Prophets were rural peasants; a majority of the Inspirationist *Werkzeuge* were from artisan or peasant backgrounds, while similar conclusions can be made about the rural background of the Shaker mediums.[16] A significant difference,

however, is the fact that three Inspirationist *Werkzeuge* spoke for periods lasting several decades, much longer than any inspired figure among the Shakers.

Finally, while Shaker instruments such as Philemon Stewart gained authority within the Shaker community, they were still subject to the Ministry, whereas Inspirationist *Werkzeuge*, while closely monitored by community elders, became the undisputed spiritual, and in the case of Christian Metz temporal, leaders of the community.

It is instructive to compare the form of these inspirations. Peculiar to both groups of prophets were strange, often violent physical motions that were also characteristic of the French Prophets. The Inspirationists referred to these movements as *Bewegungen* and recorded that they could last for several hours before the inspired instrument spoke. These movements were elements of what Garrett has termed, "spiritual theater." J. F. Rock was known to shake his head violently from side to side, move his arms wildly, and issue "loud, unregulated and inarticulate sounds" before beginning to speak in a loud, slow voice delivering a testimony for fifteen to thirty minutes.[17] The experience was frightening or disturbing for many unwary onlookers. Virtually all extant accounts of Inspirationist *Werkzeuge* presenting testimonies note that the speaker closed his or her eyes, sometimes walking around the room while speaking in a loud, unnatural voice. A modern audience would likely equate these actions with the manifestations commonly reported in Pentecostal congregations.[18] As anthropologist Jonathan Andelson notes, the process of delivering a testimony "undoubtedly elicited responses in some people at deep, perhaps subconscious or even autonomic levels, the kind of response associated with profound belief."[19]

The Shakers often danced as part of their inspiration and, indeed, many new dances and songs came from the experience. While the *Werkzeuge* often composed hymns while inspired, dancing, which had no place within their religious or social tradition, never manifested itself. Inspirationist and Shaker instruments presented testimonies in both written and spoken form. As with the Inspirationists, scribes recorded oral Shaker testimonies. Inspirationist scribes compiled the written record of testimonies, which the sect published in volumes that circulated throughout their communities.[20]

Shaker inspiration was far less constrained and freer than that of the Amana Inspirationists. Testimonies presented among the Inspirationists were monitored to verify their authenticity. Such testimonies often took the form of short sermonettes, admonitions towards greater piety or spiritual awareness, or chastisements of individual or community transgressions. Although *Werkzeuge* frequently underwent the violent

bodily motions characteristic of the French Prophets, they did not engage in the less restrained sacred theater of the Shakers, who whirled, danced, lay prostrate on the floor, and presented each other with spiritual gifts of fruit and other items. Inspirationist testimonies fit within prescribed limits.[21] The far more fluid structure of Shaker theology has permitted reinterpretation, while the Inspirationists continue to adhere to the basic doctrine expounded by their founders with only minor alteration. Oddly, for a sect led by charismatic leaders, the Inspirationists have survived for three hundred years without a major schism or revolt, owing in part to the historic willingness of generations of leaders to adapt their practices, if not their theology, as time and situations warranted. Finally, neither the Inspirationists nor the Shakers seemed to have believed their instruments capable of the "miracles" ascribed to the French Prophets, who claimed the ability to heal the sick and, on one famous occasion, to raise the dead.[22]

While the movements and manifestations of Inspiration were similar between the two groups, the messages were often very different. Inspiration, according to the Inspirationists, came from God, either through his inspiring the *Werkzeug* in prayer or by issuing a direct word. For the Shakers, the source of Inspiration was very often a deceased person. While the dead were often former Shakers, messages came from such diverse sources as the prophet Mohammed, George Washington, and dozens of Native Americans. Additionally, the Shakers often spoke in *glossolalia* (tongues). In a very few instances, and all seemingly at funerals, Inspirationist *Werkzeuge* spoke on behalf of deceased members and, following the death of Metz, elders of the community reported that he had appeared in their dreams providing them with advice and direction.[23] Curiously, in all the seven thousand testimonies recorded at Amana, only one instance of *glossolalia* is recorded, and that was very early in the history of the sect.

Shaker and Inspirationist testimonies were different manifestations which had different motivations. For the Shakers, the words of Mother Ann and other members of the "first born" generation, spoken through the instruments, served to connect young Shakers with their spiritual past. For the Inspirationists, testimonies spoken by J. F. Rock in 1720 and Christian Metz a century later were similar in scope and content. Rather than connecting believers to a historical past, they focused on a spiritual continuum, addressing such standard issues as conversion and maintaining faith, and themes such as humility, and, more rarely, political, economic, and social issues.[24] In this way, they were more in the tradition of the French Prophets than were the Shakers. Indeed, Inspirationist leaders as late as 1883 were still experiencing the *Bewegungen,* heavy breathing, and other characteristics attributed to the Prophets a century and a half before.

Although believers held the inspired messages to be divine in origin, it is important to note that both the Shakers and the Inspirationists considered the Bible to be the primary basis of their religious discourse, the testimonies being subject to the final authority of scripture.

Curiously, while the form of inspiration among the Inspirationists remained the same for almost two hundred years, a key element of the message of the original French Prophets—that the world was about to enter the millennium—was absent. Although the early testimonies dealt with this theme, following the departure of *Werkzeuge* J. A. Gruber and J. C. Gleim from the sect, millennialism was no longer central.[25] Indeed, the later members of the sect did not identify as millennialists. The Shakers, however, were very much in the millenialist tradition; indeed, Shaker theology taught that the millennium had come in the person of its founder, Ann Lee. Thus, while the Inspirationists maintained the methods of the French Prophets, they chose to turn from millennialism while the Shakers, the Prophets' second born, made this a prominent feature.[26]

As Sally M. Promey notes in her study of Shaker gift drawings, *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth Century Shakerism*, Shaker inspirations were very visually oriented. Shaker mediums often described visions they had of the spirit world, and frequently presented spiritual gifts such as robes, boxes, etc., that only they, as visionists, could see. This visual tradition led some mediums to produce "spirit drawings," some very complex. Visions were not an important part of the Inspirationist experience. Although Metz and other community members attached significance to their dreams and attempted to divine their meaning. Metz recorded nearly two hundred dreams in his journals and letters, attaching "a certainty of intent approaching that of an inspired testimony" to them.[27] These dreams, however, do not bear similarity to the visions Shakers reported of heaven and the spirit world; rather, they dealt mainly with community concerns, Metz's own spiritual state, and the spiritual standing of his co-religionists. Surviving testimonies rarely refer to visions, and nothing on the scale of the Shaker spirit drawings is found in Amana. The Inspirationists did produce a few examples of *Sinn Bilder*, drawings that do fit into the Shaker spirit drawing genre, but which were not produced by *Werkzeuge*. There is no indication that these drawings were meant to represent a vision by the artist; rather, their simple depictions of crosses and other allegorical symbols served much the same purpose as the house blessings found in Inspirationist homes: to remind the viewer of religious concepts in a visual format. During his 1846 visit to the Inspirationists at Eben-Ezer, New York, Shaker Elisha Blakeman commented on a *Sinn Bild* that he saw there.[28]

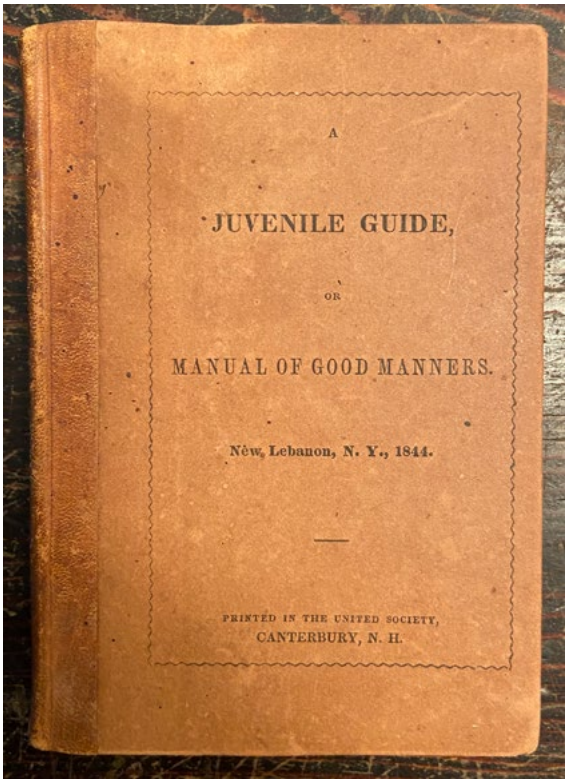
In conclusion, the Amana Inspirationists most closely adhered to the form of divine inspiration as practiced by the French Prophets. While the form of Inspirationist testimonies was similar, however, their content was less so. While the Prophets spoke frequently in apocalyptic terms and focused on the millennium, these themes, after the very early years of the Inspirationist movement, are largely absent from the testimonies. In contrast to the Inspirationists, the Shakers adopted the millennial focus of the French Prophets, although they placed far less emphasis on inspiration until the Era of Manifestations. The inspirations received at that time, however, were very dissimilar to those of the French Prophets for, instead of speaking with the voice of God, the Shakers spoke on behalf of their deceased early leaders. Shaker inspiration, in sum, was more closely related to the American spiritualist movement than to the French Prophets. Aside from the millennial focus, the one way in which the Shakers related to the French Prophets was in their highly ecstatic form of worship. Ironically, this is the one instance in which the sedate Inspirationists did not adhere to the French Prophetic model.

When discussing the relative influence of the French Prophets, they were but one of many religious strains that influenced the Shakers, while their preeminence as an influence on the Amana Inspirationists was far more pronounced. It seems a tenuous argument, at best, to suggest that the Shakers drew their concepts of inspiration from the Prophets but, rather, like more modern groups such as the Pentecostals, they formulated these beliefs based on their own interpretation of the Bible.

Inspiration played a powerful role in both communities. According to Shaker tradition, it was following a vision by Ann Lee that the English Shakers made the decision to immigrate to the New World in 1774. Similarly, testimonies delivered by Christian Metz encouraged the members to congregate on several rented estates in the religiously tolerant region of Hessen Darmstadt, then inspired over eight hundred members to migrate to New York State from 1843 to 1845, build the six villages of the Eben-Ezer Society, and establish a system of communal living that remained essentially unchanged for nearly ninety years.

Shortly after the Inspirationists arrived in New York they accidentally initiated contact with the Shakers. On Valentine's Day in 1846, a visitor from Eben-Ezer, Elder Charles L. Mayer, who served as the Society's general business agent, appeared at the Watervliet Shaker village. He had come to the village at the invitation of two Shakers that he had met while on business in nearby Albany.[29] The Shakers invited Mayer to remain at the village for three days, during which time he attended Shaker meeting and witnessed a Shaker inspiration "in an unknown tongue" by Sister E.

B. Harrison. Mayer explained his own community to the Shakers, who dutifully noted his comments in the "Church Journal," remarking that the faith of the Inspirationists "was very similar in many respects to the faith of Believers." The Shakers presented Mayer with a number of books, and the Inspirationist leader returned home.[30]


A

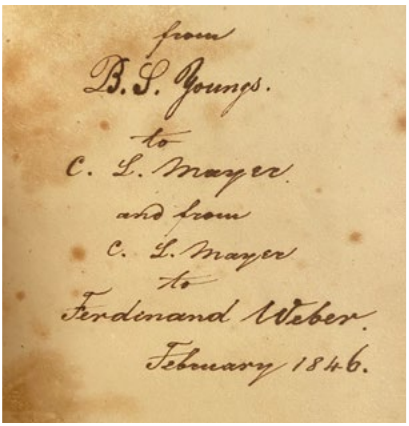
JUVENILE GUIDE,

OR

MANUAL OF GOOD MANNERS.

New, Lebanon, N. Y., 1844.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED SOCIETY,
CANTERBURY, N. H.


from
B. S. Youngs.
to
C. L. Mayer
and from
C. L. Mayer
to
Ferdinand Weber
February 1846.

Copy of the Shakers' Juvenile Guide *presented by B.S. Youngs to Inspirationist elder C. L. Mayer.* (Amana Church Society Archives)

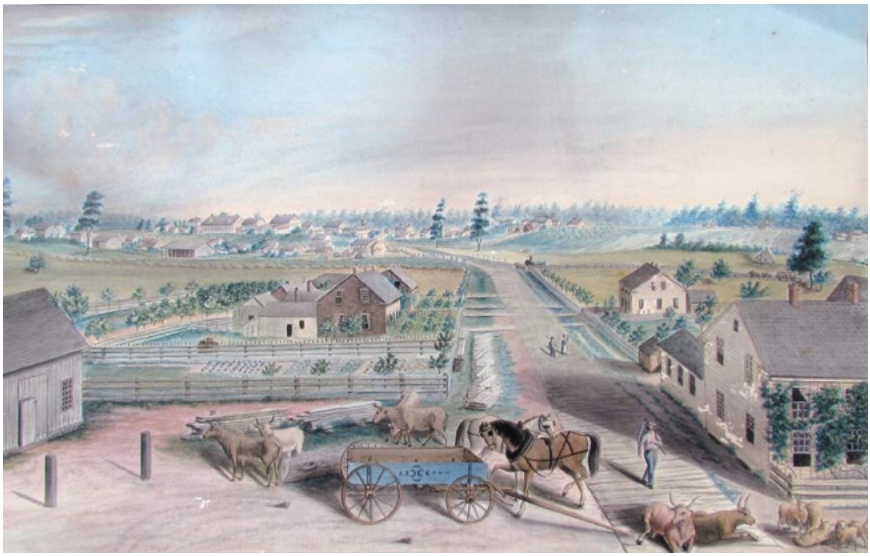
A few weeks later, on May 6, Mayer wrote to Watervliet reporting on his activities since his visit, expressing his thanks for the hospitality he received, and expressing the hope that, "if it please the Lord our only guide, [we would] cheerfully enter into a nearer acquaintance and connection between us."[31] Mayer's letter was read in Shaker meeting and generated favorable comment.[32]

In response to Mayer's queries about Shaker doctrine, Benjamin Seth Youngs began work on a lengthy forty-three-page explanation that he sent to Eben-Ezer in July. In his complicated explanation, Youngs addressed concerns conveyed by Mayer about the then prevalent Shaker understanding of Ann Lee as the female redeemer, a concept that Youngs, himself, had developed in his *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, the major Shaker theological work written some forty years previously. Youngs informed Mayer that

> we consider you to be led and guided by the same holy Spirit by which we are led & guided & and that therefore it is no part of our anxiety or concern to dictate to the Spirit what you or we should believe or what we should not believe. [later remarking] [i]t is, however, but an act of brotherly kindness & gospel affection we feel towards you, that we have been thus lengthy & particular in giving you so full an exposition of our faith & principles … Not that we expect that you are prepared to receive or adopt our faith & principles … but that you might have a correct understating of the Spiritual & Scriptural ground the Lord have given us to occupy.[33]

In other words, Youngs's treatise was an explanation of Shaker doctrine, not an attempt to convert Mayer or the Inspirationists. As he probably surmised, Youngs's explanation failed to calm Inspirationist feelings about the position of Ann Lee, a doctrine that scuttled any attempts Mayer and Youngs had for creating a "nearer acquaintance and connection" between the groups.

On August 12, 1846, Elijah Blakeman (1819–1900) and Peter Long (1816–1885), at the direction of the lead ministry and because of Mayer's contact with Watervliet, paid a visit to Eben-Ezer. Blakeman's charming account of their visit is one of the very few firsthand records of the community. Mayer acted as the interpreter for the Shaker visitors in conversations held between them and various Inspirationist elders. The



Hand colored lithograph of the village of Lower Eben-Ezer, circa 1850 by Joseph Prestele, Sr.
(Amana Heritage Society)

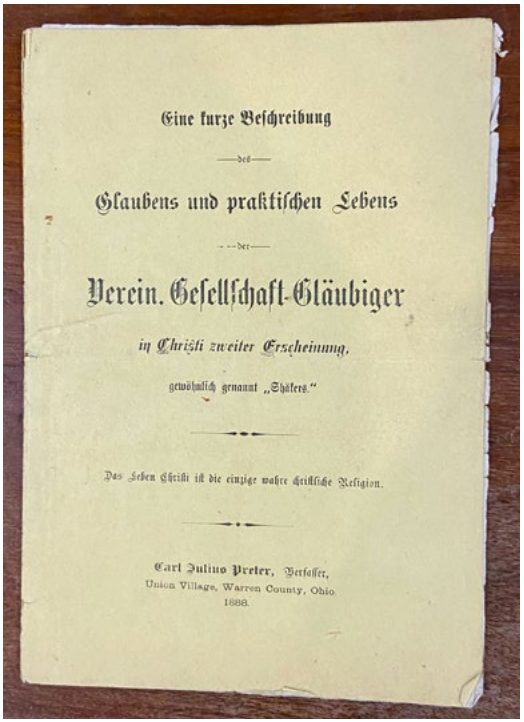
visitors were impressed when they learned of the Inspirationist *Unterredung* services, in which members publicly confessed their sins each year, a practice in keeping with the key Shaker tenet of confession. One subject that Blakeman did not mention discussing with the elders was Ann Lee. The Shakers received a tour of the village and were favorably impressed with what they saw during their day-long visit.[34]

This contact with the Shakers filtered down through the Eben-Ezer community, where ordinary rank and file members, much like the Shakers, entertained very positive reactions to one another. In fact, these reactions were far too positive for the comfort of some leaders, particularly Christian Metz, who had misgivings about Shaker doctrine, particularly what he viewed as the deification of Ann Lee. On November 8 and again on the 26th, Metz delivered testimonies dealing in part with the Shakers. While praising them for their enlightened religious views and lifestyle, the testimonies criticized the Shakers for daring to elevate Ann Lee to divine status. Strongly influenced by the German mystic, Jakob Boehme, the Inspirationists held that Jesus was androgynous, thus removing the need for a female redeemer as the Shakers contended. The Inspirationists, for the most part, held to "an orthodox Protestant Christology with no surprises."[35]

A third testimony, on December 9, again criticized the veneration of Ann Lee and criticized the Shaker commitment to total celibacy. Contact

with the Shakers had caused members of the Eben-Ezer Community to question whether they were in error for not observing total celibacy. Historically, the Inspirationists, and Metz's testimony, held that celibacy was a higher spiritual calling, but that marriage and procreation, while representing a lower spiritual state, were also pleasing to God and ought to be permitted. For the Inspirationists, celibacy also demonstrated an individual's ability towards self control, a virtue they and other Pietists held in high esteem and, indeed, a larger number of Inspirationists were celibate.[36]

Metz's testimony of November 26 contained a particularly harsh indictment of Shaker beliefs concerning Ann Lee, suggesting that only Christ was pure and could lead the redemption of humanity. The testimony charged that the Shakers had committed "an ungodly deification" by elevating Ann Lee to Christ-like status. The testimony then reaffirmed the standard triune deity and Christ's position as sole redeemer. Curiously, the testimonies referred to Lee as someone who had "reached a degree of enlightenment and brilliance, one who has gained perception through sacrifice," thereby not negating her teachings but only the way in which her later followers had come to view her. Similarly, while the testimony criticized Shaker belief, it also charged the Inspirationists to "love these


Eine kurze Beschreibung

des

Glaubens und praktischen Lebens

der

Verein. Gesellschaft-Gläubiger

in Christi zweiter Erscheinung,

gewöhnlich genannt „Shakers."

Das Leben Christi ist die einzige wahre christliche Religion.

Carl Julius Preter, Verfasser,
Union Village, Warren County, Ohio.
1888.

One of the publications that Charles Preter sent to Amana. (Amana Heritage Society)

people [the Shakers], for they are united in their intent toward self-denial and in their hatred of the way of the flesh."[37]

Mayer translated the testimonies and sent them to Watervliet, where the Shakers kept them. They now reside in the collections of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Unlike Mayer's earlier letter, however, these were ntot read by the elders to the Shaker meeting. Despite what now seemed like a breach between the groups, Peter Long paid a return visit to Eben-Ezer in February 1847 where Metz directed a supportive testimony about the importance of personal faith to the Shaker leader.[38]

The Shaker veneration of Ann Lee bothered the Inspirationists, not because of her gender, as one Shaker scholar innocently assumed, but because of the position that Lee held within nineteenth-century Shaker theology.[39] Although the Inspirationists respected their inspired leaders, neither they, nor the leaders themselves, suggested the *Werkzeuge* were anything more than passive instruments of God. Indeed, one of the organizational strengths of the community was its leader's effort to direct the loyalties of its faithful to the community itself, rather than to an individual leader. In this way, the community avoided a leadership crisis when figures such as Christian Metz died.[40]

For the Inspirationists the interaction between the two sects in 1846 and 1847 was significant for, because of it, they were forced to revisit and define their own beliefs about celibacy.[41] The impact of this interaction for the Shakers was far less important, however. Edward Andrews asserted that contact with the Inspirationists, another group experiencing modern revelation, "further reassured" the central ministry about the authenticity of the Era of Manifestations, which had come under considerable doubt and scrutiny by this time. In support of this contention, Andrews only cites Blakeman's account of the visit, which itself does little more than note the details of the visit and fails to supply additional evidence.[42] A cursory examination of Shaker journals and correspondence failed to locate more than a casual reference to the contact. In other words, the Inspirationists did not influence the Shakers.

In the 1850s two former Shakers, August Jacobi and Friedrich Maubach, joined the Inspirationists. Jacobi, who had lived at Watervliet from 1849 to 1851, was a German speaking Pole who claimed to be of noble birth. His later career (he eventually lived in seven different communal societies in as many years) suggests that he was a man in search of the community that would value him as a leader. The Watervliet Shakers, who barely noted his existence in their journals, did not meet his expectations, so he came to Eben-Ezer. Here, he ingratiated himself with the Inspirationists. By the spring of 1852, however, Jacobi had become dissatisfied with Eben-

Ezer and Eben-Ezer with him, and he was off to seek greener communal pastures somewhere else. As the Inspirationist chronicle notes, "It was not long before his falseness revealed itself, and thus there was no remaining in the Society for him."[43]

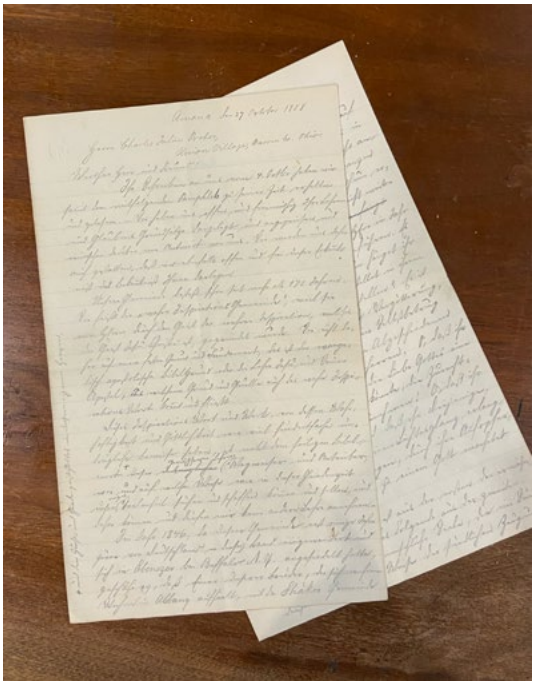
Less is known about Friedrich Maubach, a former soldier who claimed to have been a Shaker, although he his not listed in standard Shaker membership sources. Curiously, Maubach, a member of two pacifistic communal groups, left Eben-Ezer to fight in the Civil War. His military career included guard duty during the trial of the Lincoln assassination conspirators. Maubach subsequently returned to the Inspirationists and died at Middle Amana in 1886.[44]

Georg Volckmer, who joined the Eben-Ezer Society in the summer of 1853, told the Inspirationists that he had been with a Shaker community in Ohio for eight years. Volkmer was among the members of one of the first parties sent from Eben-Ezer to the new settlements at Amana, Iowa, where he arrived in the spring of 1856. Volckmer remained with the Society, living in the village of South Amana, until he left in June 1857. As with Maubach, searches of Shaker records fail to find any trace of Volckmer. [45]

Despite the presence of these three former Shakers in the community, or maybe because of it, the Inspirationists chose never to renew their ties with the United Society. Geographical isolation in Iowa, far away from the center of Shakerism, played a factor. There is no evidence that the Shakers used Amana-made products, or that the Inspirationists bought any Shaker products, although they did carry on a trade with other communal groups.[46]

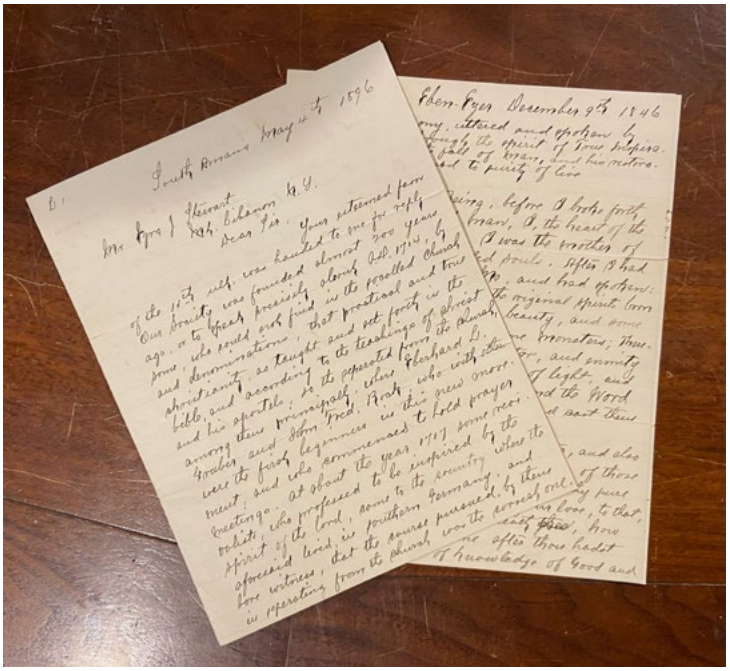
In 1888, Charles Preter of Union Village, broke the long silence with a lengthy letter and a packet of German-language Shaker materials that he sent to Amana. Preter's letter explained that he had learned of Amana through Charles Nordhoff's 1875 work, *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, and that the two groups seemed very similar. Gottlieb Scheuner, the chief elder of the Amana Society, replied to Preter.[47]

Scheuner took great pains in his letter to be polite, but the Inspirationist leader and historian, who was well-versed in the 1846 period of interaction about which Preter was completely unaware, reiterated the Inspirationist response of that era to his correspondent, providing lengthy quotes of the relevant testimonies, particularly concerning Ann Lee. Scheuner criticized Preter's insistence that Shakerism was the only true religion and all that ran counter to it was "anti-Christian." In this statement, Scheuner echoed the sentiments of Metz and other Inspirationist leaders of the past who felt that "theirs was the best, though not only, way to God."[48] Scheuner praised the Shakers for their commitment to celibacy and simplicity and closed



Draft response to Preter's letter by Inspirationist elder, Gottlieb Scheuner. (Amana Heritage Society)

(Below)
Draft response to Ezra T. Stewart's letter by Inspirationist elder, Georg Heinemann. (Amana Heritage Society)



with a friendly salutation.

Ezra T. Stewart, then of the Mount Lebanon Shaker community, wrote a letter of inquiry to the Amana Society in April 1896. Although Gottlieb Scheuner was still alive at this time, the duty of replying to the Stewart letter fell to Elder Georg Heinemann. Stewart had asked for information concerning the Society, and Heinemann provided a brief history. Next, the Amana elder tackled a specific questions posed by Stewart. This query, as restated by Heinemann in his reply was, "Have you an established virgin order, and if virgin purity is not a principal [i.e., principle] of you[r] Society [–] what are the principals [i.e., principles]?" Heinemann responded that the Society was not celibate, but that celibacy was preferable. He pointedly rebuked Stewart with the comment, "In conformity with the teachings of St. Paul and the bible [sic], marriages are allowed, and no detriment or obstacle to be a member of good standing."[49]

Heinemann concluded his response, as had Scheuner to Preter's letter, with a review of the 1846 encounters between the Inspirationists and the Shakers from Watervliet, the testimonies delivered by Christian Metz, and the decision by the Inspirationist elders not to pursue closer relations with the Shakers. Heinemann closed, "We were also in other manifestations at that time exhorted to love you, in which brotherly love rejoice and remains," and he enclosed a copy of the testimony spoken by Metz that the Inspirationists sent to Watervliet in 1846.[50]

Thus, except for a footnote, ends the story of the Inspirationists and the Shakers—two groups who stemmed from the same tree, eventually came to the same part of the world, and, briefly, had contact. This contact, however, was akin to two natural siblings, separated at birth, meeting, but never realizing that they had more in common than not. It is unfortunate that barriers of language and doctrine proved insurmountable

Curiously, aside from the Hutterites, the Shakers and the Amana Inspirationists are the only nineteenth-century communal groups with a twenty-first century following. Today, over three hundred people continue to belong to the Inspirationist church, now known as the Amana Church Society. While the current membership of the Shakers is much smaller, their influence is more pronounced. Thousands of Americans are aware of the Shaker tradition, and many have been influenced by Shaker spiritual thought in profound and meaningful ways. Thus, it appears that the legacy of the French Prophets will continue to be part of the American religious fabric for some time to come.

There is a postscript to this story. In 1998 I started a conversation with two Massachusetts visitors to the Museum in Amana where I worked. By a stroke of good fortune, the conversation turned to the Shakers. The two

visitors were Betty and Dan Grecoe, both friends of the Sabbathday Lake Shakers, and soon I was the recipient of a long letter from Br. Arnold Hadd, together with a packet of books. Since that time, during the writing of an article about the Amana-Shaker connection and, later, of my dissertation, Br. Arnold has been unfailingly generous with his help. Today, at the start of the twenty-first century, there are still Shakers and there are still Inspirationists and now they have once again established meaningful contact, but this time with a mutual understanding and appreciation for one another.[51]

Br. Arnold Hadd (left) and Peter Hoehnle at the Shaker Trustee's Office, Sabbathday Lake, Maine, July 2004. (Peter Hoehnle)

Notes

1. The common ties between the Shakers and the Inspirationists of the Amana Society have received limited scholarly attention in the past. Scholars have either focused on the common origins of the two groups with the French Prophets of early eighteenth-century London, or on the interesting contact between the Watervliet Shaker community and the Inspirationists of Eben-Ezer, New York. This paper will discuss all aspects of contact and commonality between the groups and will explore aspects of that interaction that have eluded previous scholars. For previous accounts of the connections between the Inspirationists and the Shakers see Peter Hoehnle, "Communal Bonds: Contact Between the Amana Society and Other Communal Groups, 1843–1932," *Communal Societies* 20 (2000): 59-80; Jonathan Gary Andelson, "The Gift to Be Single: Celibacy and Religious Enthusiasm In the Community of True Inspiration," *Communal Societies* 5 (1985):1-32; Karl J. R. Arndt, "An Early Shaker Visit to the German Community of True Inspiration," *Shaker Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1987): 10-18; (Summer 1987): 39-51; Daryl Chase, "The Early Shakers: An Experiment in Religious Communism," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1936, 195.
2. Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers: From the Old World to the New World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 10.
3. Newton was in contact with one Fatio de Duillier who became a fervent follower of the Prophets. According to one source, Dr. Lockier, Newton "might have had a hankering after the French prophets" himself. Yet another source suggests that "Sir Isaac himself had a strong inclination to go and hear these prophets, and was restrained from it, with difficulty, by some of his friends, who feared he might be infected by them, as Fatio had been." Newton's biographer, however, suggests that these stories are "not believable" because the direct inspiration expounded by the Prophets was, "antithetical … to Newton who held that the written prophecies were the objective revelations of God, which carried the key to their own interpretation, and that their interpretation must according be purged of the vagarities of private fancy." Richard S. Westfall, *Never At Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 654-55.
4. The principal source concerning the opposition to the French Prophets is Hillel Schwarz, *Knaves, Fools, Madmen, and that Subtle Effluvium: A Study of the Opposition to the French Prophets in England, 1706–1710.* Gainsville: University Presses of Florida, 1978. Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York: Dover, 1963), 5; Stephen Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 5; Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*, 141.
5. Hans-Christian Brandenburg, "Die drei Gebrueder Pott–Die ersten deutschen "Werkzeuge" der Inspirations-Bewegung Ein Beitrag zur Geschicte von Pietismus und Sepratismus." Heiner Faulenbach (Hrsg.) *Standfester Glaube*

zum 65 Geburtstag von Johann Friedrich Gerhard Goeters (Koln: Schriftenreihe des Vereins fur Rheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1991), 284. Frank M. Moore, "The Amana Society, 1867–1932: Accomodation of Old World Beliefs to a New World Frontier Setting," PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1988, 19, suggests that the Potts attended a Love Feast given by the Prophets at Halle. This interaction, while possible, is not supported by other sources.

6. Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*, 72-73. References to the French Prophets in Inspirationist accounts include [Eberhard Ludwig Gruber], *Historiche Umstaende zur Pruefung Gottes* (1715), 1. The 1857 edition of the Inspirationist *Catechism* notes that late seventeenth century prophets appeared up in France. At least three volumes of the collected testimonies of Allut, Marion, and others are in the Amana Church Archives. More recent studies, such as Grossmann, note the connection.
7. Gottlieb Scheuner to Charles Julius Preter, 19th Century Letters and Documents Collection, Folder 17, Amana Heritage Society, Amana, Iowa (translated by Jon M. Childers).
8. Moore, "The Amana Society," 83.
9. Ibid., 183.
10. Ibid., 22.
11. Walter Grossmann, "Gruber on the Discernment of True and False Inspiration," *Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 4 (1988): 363. Quoting from Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. jahrhundert* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1952), 96.
12. The other *Werkzeuge* for this period included Johann Heinrich, Johann Tobias, August Friedrich Pott, Johanna Melchoir, Eva Catharine Wagner, Ursula Mayer, Johann Adam Gruber, and Johann Carl Gleim.
13. Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986), 128.
14. Grossmann, "Gruber," 377.
15. While Inspirationist women did not serve as church elders, Eberhard Ludwig Gruber, the sect's cofounder, observed that the "Holy Spirit seizes the old, the young, man and woman, the learned and the uneducated," for the role of *Werkzeuge*. (Grossmann, "Gruber," 383).
16. Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 15.
17. Ulf-Michael Schnieder, "Holy Raptures, Religious Ecstacies, Pietist Sepratists: Johann Friedrich Rock and his 'Community of True Inspiration," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 13, 1999, translated by Janet W. Zuber.
18. Christine Ackermann Christen in her old age described Christian Metz as he presented a testimony: "The *Bezeugniss*, or revelation, could occur at any time, but most frequently in church. If it occurred during services he would close his eyes, stand up and begin speaking. Frequently, he walked about the room, with eyes closed, never feeling his way, and would go up and down the rows of benches addressing various members of the service, stopping before them and admonishing them. The revelations were spoken in a loud, clear voice, so that all the people in the assembly could understand him.

When finished, he would resume his original seat, open his eyes, and service would continue" (Christine Ackermann Christen, statement of January 5, 1947, summarized in DuVal, "Christian Metz: German American Religious Leader and Pioneer," PhD diss., State University of Iowa, 1948, 249).

19. Jonathan Gary Andelson, "Communalism and Change in the Amana Society," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1974, 134.
20. J. F. Rock delivered over nine hundred testimonies while Christian Metz, the most prolific of the *Werkzeuge*, delivered over 3,654 and dozens of hymns in forty-four years of activity. Bertha Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 82; Schneider, "Holy Raptures"; Schneider, the leading scholar on Rock, notes that the assiduously recorded testimonies represent a rare example of what are "literally recorded utterances from an era without microphones or tape recorders" that preserve the patterns of spoken German speech of the time.
21. Grossmann, "Gruber," 377; Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*, 70.
22. Clara Endicott Sears, *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916, 6.
23. Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 140; Moore, "The Amana Society," 135. See Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie, 1884–1891* (Amana: Amana Society, 1915), 25, for an example of Metz appearing in a dream. The only *Werkzeuge* to speak on behalf of a dead person was Barbara Heinemann Landmann (Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 141)
24. Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 144.
25. Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*, 72.
26. Moore, "The Amana Society," 83, notes that the Catechism only contains a brief statement concerning the millennial reign of Christ, simply quoting Revelation 20:4-6. Moore concludes that "[t]his brief statement indicates that millennial notions did not occupy a significant place in the theology of this community. An examination of much of their other writings nets the same finding." (Moore, "The Amana Society," 83).
27. Philip E. Webber, "The Dreams of Christian Metz, Amana's Charismatic Founding Leader," *Communal Societies* 22 (2002): 12.
28. Elisha D. Blakeman, "A brief account of the Society of Germans called the True Inspirationists residing seven miles South East of Buffalo," photocopy collection of Amana Heritage Society (n.d., Amana, Iowa), 3.
29. Daily Journal of the First Order [Watervliet, N.Y.] February 14, 1846, Western Reserve Historical Society, Reel 47. Elder Rufus Bishop referenced Mayer's visit in his journal, New York Public Library Microfilm Reel 1, ms. p. 261 [February 14, 1846]. This section of my paper is adapted from my earlier article, "Communal Bonds: Contact Between the Amana Society and Other Communal Groups, 1843–1932," *Communal Societies* 20 (2000): 59-80. I would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of librarian Gay Marks and Br. Arnold Hadd of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Community for their assistance with the research that informed that earlier study.

30. One of these books is still in the archives of the Amana Church Society, Middle Amana, Iowa. In 2004, the Church loaned this book to Hancock Shaker Village for a special exhibit. The account of Mayer's visit is found in "Church Meeting Journal," February 15, 1846, Western Reserve Historical Society Reel 48, #327.
31. Charles Mayer to "Beloved Brethren and Sisters," May 6, 1846. Western Reserve Historical Society.
32. Benjamin S. Youngs to "Charles L. Mayer and the True Inspirationists near Buffalo," July 30, 1846.
33. Youngs to Mayer, July 30, 1846.
34. Blakeman's account of the visit is in the collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Karl Arndt transcribed the original text for inclusion with his short article on the Inspirationists and the Shakers in the *Shaker Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1987). An account of the visit from the Inspirationist perspective is in Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie, 1817–1850*, trans. Janet W. Zuber (Amana, Iowa: Amana Church Society, 1987), 241.
35. Moore, "The Amana Society," 69.
36. Ibid., 68.
37. Christian Metz, "Testimony," November 26, 1846. Translated by Janet W. Zuber.
38. Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie, 1817-1850*, 245.
39. Nancy Marcotte, "Editor's Note," *Shaker Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 39. Marcotte was relying on Arndt's sloppy translation of Metz's testimony for her assumptions, still they reflect a complete and utter disregard for the issues addressed in those testimonies, as well as for the broader picture of Inspirationist history. Indeed, for sixteen years in the nineteenth century this sect that "showed little regard for women" was led by a female *Werkzeug*, Barbara Landmann, the only major nineteenth century communal group, aside from the Shakers, with that distinction. One is struck by Arndt's sexist comments relating to gender neutral language at the close of his article, which seem out of place in a journal devoted to the study of a sect practicing gender equality!
40. Moore, "The Amana Society," 109-10. This was particularly true of Christian Metz who, like Ann Lee, was respected for his humble demeanor, evident in a voluminous correspondence and in a frank diary published after his death.
41. Andelson, "The Gift to Be Single," is the standard treatment on this topic, as well as on Inspirationist celibacy.
42. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, 175, 326-27n237. Andrews seemed unaware that the Amana community and the Community of True Inspiration listed separately in his index were indeed the same organization. This oversight betrays a lack of familiarity on his part with wider communal history. More excusable was Andrews's failure to establish the French Prophet connection between the two groups, something overlooked by the scholarly community until Garrett's study.

43. Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie, 1817–1867* (Amana, Iowa: Amana Society, 1891), 469. John Humphrey Noyes reprinted Jacobi's own account of his stays among the Shakers, Inspirationists, and other communal groups in his *History of American Socialisms*. References to Jacobi's activities are found in the records of both the Watervliet, which records his presence from 1849 to July 1851, and Eben-Ezer Communities.
44. For Maubach's biography, see Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie, 1884–1891* (Amana Society: Amana, Iowa, 1918), 276-77. Several dozen letters written by Maubach to Inspirationist friends during the Civil War are preserved in the archives of the Amana Heritage Society.
45. https://amanafamilytree.net/getperson.php?personID=I2449&tree=Main_Tree, accessed October 19, 2021. Volckmer (also spelled Volkmer) appears in two of the manuscript sources on which the Amana Family Tree database is based.
46. To date, no former Inspirationists have been found among Shaker records. Given the diversity of Shaker records, and the constant in and out flow of members during the nineteenth century, this is not surprising. The Amana Society, by contrast, kept detailed records on every individual who joined the Society, including a separate record of members who departed after a short time and did not die as members of the Society. These records, fortunately, have survived and are in the process of being translated.
47. I had recently decided to revisit this topic, when I found myself one day in the Amana Church Archives building, which houses Gottlieb Scheuner's desk. I opened one drawer of the desk and there, lying on top, was the pamphlet from Preter, tied with string to a draft of Scheuner's reply! The letter from Preter, which I found ten years ago, was in a box of old letters kept by my great-grandfather.
48. Moore, "The Amana Society," 215.
49. Georg Heinemann to Ezra T. Stewart, May 4, 1896, Amana Heritage Society, Amana, Iowa.
50. Ibid.
51. Meeting the Grecoes is another example of serendipity at play in my research. Historical research often depends on the most unlikely discoveries and meetings happening.