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“Home Notes”

Communal Societies Collection: New Acquisitions

Noyes, John, ed. *The Witness*. Ithaca, N.Y. Vol. 1, no. 1-v.2, no. 24 (Aug. 20, 1837-Jan. 18, 1843). Vol. 1, no. 4-v.2, no. 24 published in Putney, Vt. Erratically issued, generally once or twice each month but with a lengthy hiatus between Sept. 23, 1837 and Nov. 21, 1838.

John Humphrey Noyes is best known as the leader and patriarch of the Oneida Society, which in turn is best remembered for the sexual practices of its members, called by Noyes and others a “communism of love.” Noyes commenced his religious career in Connecticut in 1834, joining with other perfectionists seeking salvation from sin. That year, at age twenty-two, he made his first convert—the dark-haired and beautiful Abigail Merwin, who was eight years older than Noyes.

Noyes’ first serial works were published in New Haven, Connecticut between 1835 and 1836, first as *The Perfectionist* and later as *The New Covenant Record*. During this period, Noyes was privately in love with Abigail Merwin, which in time grew to become an obsession. To his grief and shock, she defected from the faith, left Connecticut and disappeared from Noyes’ life.

By 1837, Noyes learned that Merwin was in Ithaca, New York, and had married an old acquaintance, Merit Platt. Noyes left at once for Ithaca, travelling the entire distance by foot, “for the purpose ... of starting the paper [*The Witness*] and the Kingdom of God in the center of New York State, and ... of pursuing and confronting Abigail Merwin, who had deserted her post as my helper.” (*Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes*, p. 356.)

Under the sting of Abigail’s marriage, Noyes wrote a letter to a close friend which declared that the Kingdom of God could have no jealousy, and God would break down the wall of monogamous marriage. “I call a

certain woman my wife. She is yours, she is Christ's, and in him she is the bride of all saints. She is now in the hands of a stranger, and according to my promise to her I rejoice. My claim upon her cuts directly across the marriage covenant of this world, and God knows the end." (*John Humphrey Noyes, the Putney Community*, p. 3.)

The letter was published without Noyes' knowledge by Theophilus R. Gates in his quasi-perfectionist paper *The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War* and came to be known as "The Battle Axe Letter." In the following weeks, Noyes issued the first number of his third serial publication, calling it *The Witness*, and contracting to have it printed in Ithaca.

The two volumes of *The Witness* span the initial six years of Noyes' efforts to establish a more radical approach to what would come to be known as "perfectionism." The first three numbers were published at Ithaca during August and September of 1837. Following Abigail's departure from Ithaca, Noyes no longer had a reason to remain there, and moved to Putney, Vermont to join a small group of faithful disciples. After a fourteen month gap, *The Witness* resumed publication (November 21, 1838) at Putney. The series ended January 18, 1843, the date of the last issue of volume two. A new serial *The Perfectionist* took its place shortly after.

Hamilton College Library is pleased to have acquired a complete run of this important serial publication.

Clubb, Henry S., ed. *The Illustrated Vegetarian Almanac for 1855*. New York: Fowler and Wells, 1855. 48 pp, illustrated.

This work was published at the request of the American Vegetarian Society in anticipation of a large cooperative settlement in 'Bloody Kansas' (as it was known during the 1850s) organized by "The Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Company."

The society's president was educator and reformer William Andrus Alcott; the text contains a biography of him and other noted vegetarians including Michelangelo and Newton. Editor Henry S. Clubb, an English reformer who came to the U.S. in 1853, was the main force behind the Kansas colony. He intended to establish a joint stock company and locate in a "county" of twenty square miles or more. Its residents would be committed to "promoting freedom in Kansas" and a meatless diet.

By 1856, the colony had attracted over eighty (mostly English) immigrants to the banks of the Neosho River, including John Milton Hadley, an Indiana Quaker. An article in *The Kansas Historical Society Quarterly* (which published Hadley's papers) noted that he "expressed great

E. H. Chapman

The Illustrated

VEGETARIAN ALMANAC
FOR
1855.

EDITED BY HENRY S. CLUBB.

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WITH NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.

NEW YORK:

FOWLERS AND WELLS, PUBLISHERS

No. 308 BROADWAY.

ROCHESTER:
DARROW BROTHERS. }

1855.

CINCINNATI:
PITMAN & PROSSER. }

Price, Super Edition, 12½ Cts.; Plain, 6½ Cts.

optimism about the successful colonization of Kansas, both as a free state and as a haven for vegetarians.”

Unfortunately for Hadley, he found he could not sustain health without meat, and he withdrew sometime after 1855. The colony ended in financial ruin in 1856 or shortly thereafter.

It is an exceptionally rare imprint and, according to Clubb, published to a “small subscription.” The copy acquired by Hamilton College Library retains its decorative wrappers, is quite well-preserved and, according to OCLC WorldCat, is one of only two known survivals. The other copy is held by the Rochester (N.Y.) Museum and Science Center.

[Photograph Album] [Personal Album of Sister Blanche Gardner of the Shaker society at Canterbury, New Hampshire] Approximately 145 snapshots, photographs and postcards mounted in two commercial photograph albums, most of which have holographic titles on stickers affixed below the view. Numerous dated images from 1915 and 1916, as well as other internal evidence suggest that the album was assembled during the mid-1910s through the 1920s. An ownership signature is found on the inside front pastedown.

This wonderful collection of black and white photographic images offers a rare view of life in a Shaker community before, during and after the First World War. Although Shakerism was then in decline—its members reduced in numbers and of increasing average age—this album records that life at Canterbury was still vibrant, effervescent and joyful.

While most of the images depict life at Canterbury during the early twentieth century, there are snapshots and photographs of Alfred and Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and Union Village, Ohio. Numerous Canterbury sisters were dispatched to the last bastion of Shakerism in Ohio during the 1910s to help care for the remaining western Shakers, and to prepare for that society’s closure.

The photographs illustrate active pipeline construction and new machinery being installed at Canterbury. There are candid views of sisters sorting apples, children at play, and even one of Brother Irving Greenwood at the wheel of “The Atlas.” Another photograph of an automobile is captioned “Reo – Our First Auto 1907.” There are pictures of young and old alike at what appears to have been a day-long pageant and parade at the village, along with a single picture of what must have been a beloved household cat with the extraordinary name of “Sir Thomas Edison Jr.”



*Pantomime
The Blue and The Gray
Lena Esther Evelyn Frieda Eunice*



*Lena Cook Representing the
Dorothy Cloak*

Blanche Gardner (1873-1945) was brought to the Shakers as a child of eight years. She signed the covenant at twenty-one in 1894. She was appointed a trustee of the Canterbury society in 1939. Sister Blanche served as a bookkeeper, helped in cloak-making, and was actively involved in all aspects of producing and selling Shaker wares.

Photos are from the Walter Brumm Collection, donated to Hamilton College in 2004.

Shaker Concert At Washingtonian Hall ... Thursday Eve'ng, June 10th... [Boston, Mass.?: n.p., 1847?]. Broadside, illustrated. 7¼" x 20¾".

This remarkable playbill is one example of ephemeral imprints promoting theatre performances by former Shakers, quite popular during the 1840s. This example is likely a unique survival. It advertises a program of Shaker song, dance, and other performances by four members of the Chase family, who had seceded from the Canterbury, New Hampshire Shaker society. Washingtonian Hall, a popular meeting-hall and theatre, was located on Bromfield Street in Boston.

The “star of the show” was “Miss L. A. Chase ... the Miraculous Shaker Tetotum” who was able to perform “astounding Shaker gyrations [in] Real Shaker Costume” and supposedly was capable of whirling “round from 1500 to 2000 times.” She was probably the Lydia Chase, recorded as a Shaker sister, who was born in 1821, entered the Canterbury society in 1829, and apostatized in 1844. A different, dated playbill that features the Chase family advertises an 1848 performance. As our playbill calls for a show on “Thursday ... June 10th” it is almost certain to have been June 10, 1847 — but a slight possibility exists for the next possible year of 1852.

This playbill is not in Richmond (*Shaker Literature*) nor OCLC, though other Chase family playbills are known, including an undated one (Richmond 1282), one from Ogdensburgh, N.Y. probably dated 1848 (Richmond 728) and another from Boston dated 1846 (not in Richmond, but with an entry in OCLC). Richmond also notices another playbill with performers from the Palmer family — apostates from the New Gloucester, Maine society who were performing in Ohio in 1848 (Richmond 729). While it is certain many other similar playbills were printed, only a handful have survived.

The two woodcut illustrations (see front cover) are among the earliest visual depictions of Shaker costume. The smaller cut depicting a sister and

brother holding hands is described by Richmond. The larger cut of the sister, obviously done by the same artist, is apparently not included in other playbills.

[Eads, Harvey L., comp.] *The Constitution or Covenant of the United Society of Believers Called Shakers in the United States of America* ... Louisville, Ky.: John P. Morton & Co., 1883. [1], 33, [1], [52] pp. including record blanks for signatures. Original three-quarter black calf with boards. Unused (i.e. no signatures or manuscript notes were added to the record blanks).

This is an important work and one of few printed examples of the Shaker church covenant. This is the earliest of the Shaker membership covenants issued by the United Society. Eldress M. Catherine Allen of the Mount Lebanon society wrote that “this is the Covenant written by Elder Harvey L. Eads in 1883, at a time when numerous thoughtful leaders and members were agitating for some revision of the one adopted in 1830.”

Eads embraced a more orthodox Shaker theology than did his brethren at Mount Lebanon and elsewhere—he was often at odds with Elder Frederick Evans, “and the battles of wit and wisdom in argument between the two were many and fierce,” according to Shaker historians Leila Taylor and Anna White. Eads’ covenant, while used at the Kentucky societies at South Union and Pleasant Hill, was rejected by the eastern leaders as excessively “restrictive.”

Eads’ 1883 *Constitution or Covenant* is one of the scarcest of late nineteenth century publications of western Shaker societies. Richmond (*Shaker Literature*, no. 475). OCLC WorldCat locates only three other copies worldwide (one with a manuscript note: “Prepared by H. L. Eads and rejected by the ministry”).

Hyren, Frederic. *Principles and Rules for the Establishment of the Millennial Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, called the Church of the Holy Spirit*. Cleveland: Ben Franklin Office, 1858. i-iv, [1]-16, [1] pp. Printed wraps.

“The Millennial Church of the Lord Jesus Christ” was arguably one of the most bizarre and amazing American communal enterprises ever conceived. It was eventually to have included upwards of one-third of mankind, in a network of communities modeled somewhat after the Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists.

Hyren, born in 1812 in Finland, received his initial “supernatural” revelations from God while wandering from country to country in Europe. He arrived in America in 1846, full of zeal and prepared to commence gathering converts and preparing the way for his “Millennial Church.” Hyren’s revelations called for the abolition of marriage, considerable fasting, and the practice of a radical system of “free love” that would make Noyes blush.

Hyren found few takers, but at least one “weak-minded” though attractive young female convert considered him divinely inspired. In 1870, the two spent days in prayer and fasting in the woods of Wilmington, Massachusetts. According to local authorities, the religious retreat was interrupted by Hyren’s repeated “ravishing” of his newfound convert. As a result, the authorities committed both of them to nearby insane asylums.

The work is actually two titles contained within printed wrappers. The larger *Principles and Rules for the Establishment of the Millennial Church* is preceded by a four-page work, tipped and glued in (now loosened), titled *Sketch of Autobiography of Frederic Hyren*. It is the first of three works by Hyren. (His last was published in 1871 under the title *Frederic Hyren in the Insane Asylum*).

Principles and Rules for the Establishment of the Millennial Church is not recorded in Richmond (*Shaker Literature*) but certainly deserves inclusion given its fascinating, though critical, assessment of Shakerism. OCLC WorldCat locates nine copies under two entries.