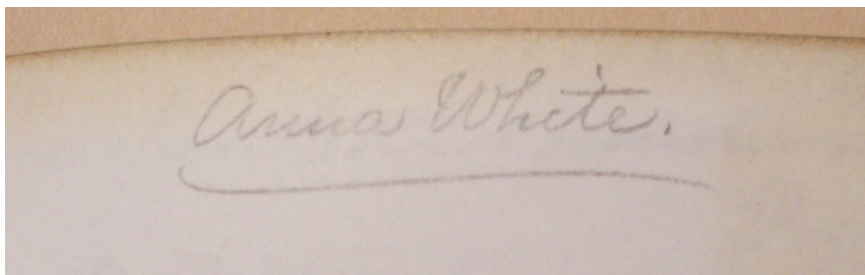


One Bound Volume, Two Shaker Sisters, and a Liberal Preacher

Sandra A. Soule

When Anna White wrote her name on the front endpaper, she decisively connected herself to an intriguing little leather volume and its contents. Measuring $6\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$ inches with lightly lined paper and green stained edges, it appears to be one of the many blank books made by the Shakers and used for a multitude of purposes. This small volume contains copies of correspondence. Since there is a substantial amount of surviving Shaker correspondence, which sometimes had been copied by community members, and Anna White was a Shaker eldress, none of that seemed out of the ordinary. However, upon closer examination certain aspects make this bound volume stand out and warrant further study.



Anna White's signature on the front endpaper of the bound volume.
Private Collection.

The identity of the correspondents is the first noteworthy feature. As indicated on the first page, it is “Correspondence Between Geo W Timlow — formerly, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in New Lebanon, now, a Minister in Salem, New Jersey, and Antoinette Doolittle.”¹ At the time the letters were written, Doolittle was the first eldress of the North Family in Mount Lebanon, New York. At first glance, this is a seemingly unlikely pairing of correspondents—a Shaker eldress corresponding with a worldly male preacher. How did a Shaker sister who had as a rule separated herself from male Believers and the world at large become party to this type of communication? And, even though Timlow had ministered in the nearby town of New Lebanon, he was still considered an unbeliever, since he did



Copies of letters filled this Shaker-made blank book.
Private Collection.

not espouse the tenets of Shakerism. Sixteen letters dating from September 4, 1877, to January 25, 1879, had been copied. Eldress Antoinette Doolittle had written seven letters to Reverend George W. Timlow, and nine of his letters to her filled out the volume. Why would they be corresponding with enough regularity to produce a cache of letters?

One also wonders about how the content of this volume compares to other examples of Shaker correspondence that had been copied in a bound book. The guides for Shaker manuscript collections in eleven institutions were examined in order to make this comparison.² Admittedly, this survey did not encompass all extant Shaker material, especially that housed in private collections; however, the findings are based on manuscripts catalogued in major, accessible Shaker collections. Although surveyed bound volumes of correspondence contain variations in the number and gender of correspondents as well as the type of letters compiled, none were exclusively dedicated to the communication between a Shaker sister and a worldly correspondent, or, for that matter, dedicated to letters between any Shaker and a nonbeliever. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that this little bound volume is a rare, if not unique, compilation.

(Correspondence
Between Geo W Timlow
formerly, Pastor of the Pres-
byterian Church in New
Lebanon, (now, a Minister
in Salem, New Jersey), and
Antoinette Doolittle
Salem, N.J. Sept^r 4th, 1877.

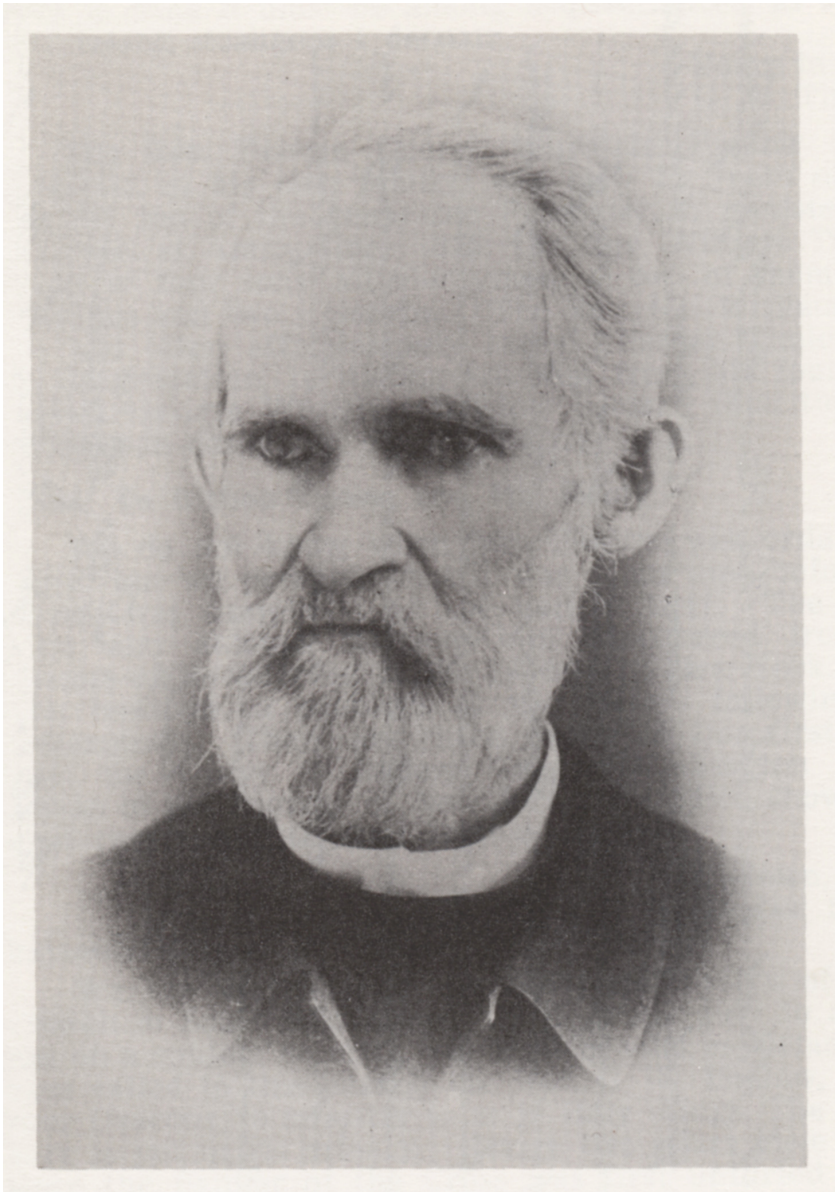
My Dear Friend
While your life
work makes as much demand
upon your time, as that of John
Evans does upon him, yet pos-
sibly you may not have as
much writing on hand as he;
and may in the charity of your
heart occasionally find time
to let a distant friend know

Antoinette Doolittle dedicated the use of this volume
to correspondence and penned the first page.
Private Collection.

Once again, more questions come to mind. Is this the full extent of the correspondence between Doolittle and Timlow? When were the letters copied and by whom? More importantly, why preserve this group of letters written over the course of seventeen months in this way? When trying to answer a growing list of questions by analyzing the contents of this volume, it became clear that the letters are products and evidence of change—an outgrowth of the reorientation of Shakerism. In many ways, this transformation precipitated and legitimized this exchange of letters. They offer a glimpse of the 1870s through the personal and professional concerns and opinions aired by both correspondents with a surprising degree of candor, trust, and sometimes banter that defies stereotypical images of stern religious figures. Timlow's and Doolittle's humanity shines through in the relevant stories and creative anecdotes that are used to illustrate points in their discussions. In addition to the freshness in their discourse, there is also depth with meaty, substantive issues surfacing. The back and forth flow of their conversation affords insights that cannot be gained from access to only one side of a dialogue. Before examining what this capsule of communication reveals, it is important to briefly review the backgrounds of the cast of characters associated with this volume and place them in 1877, the year the correspondence started. It is only fitting to start with Timlow, since he initiated contact with the Shakers.

George W. Timlow

To say that George Whitfield Timlow was fully engaged in the American religious scene when he started corresponding with Doolittle is an understatement. Religion in one way or another had figured prominently in his life from birth. Born in Amity, New York, on June 19, 1823, he was one of four sons fathered by Reverend William Timlow, pastor of the Amity Presbyterian Church. George and his three brothers followed their father into the ministry, with two of them remaining Presbyterians and the other two becoming Episcopalians. Before his formal religious training, George attended New York University where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1841. In 1843 while working on his Master of Arts degree, which he received from New York University in 1844, George became a "Candidate for Holy Orders" in the Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania. His name subsequently appears in the Diocese of New Jersey records, where he is identified as a deacon and missionary in Sussex County as well as being a teacher in the Sussex Church School.



Reverend George W. Timlow.

Photo courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York.

By 1845 he was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church after studying theology with the bishop of the New Jersey Diocese, Right Rev. George W. Doane. One gets the sense that George Timlow was on the move and quite focused during these years, especially as he is credited with founding and being the first rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Middletown, New York. He was in this position for seven years during which he married Caroline (Carrie) E. Wood in 1847, and their daughter, Ruth, was born in 1849. In 1851, George Timlow resigned as rector due to ill health; this is the first mention, though not the last of Timlow's health issues. His next assignment took him to the Church of the Epiphany in New York City, where it appears he served from 1852 until he went to New Lebanon, New York.³ During that time, the 1855 New York State Census records indicate that his wife and daughter were living in Ramapo, New York, with his wife's parents.⁴

The exact date that George Timlow moved to New Lebanon remains elusive; though we do know, by his own account, that in 1856 he first visited "the village on the 'Mount,'" home of the New Lebanon Shakers.⁵ He had left the Protestant Episcopal Church to take a position in a New Lebanon church that had been governed initially by the Congregational Church and then by the Presbyterian Church. However, provisions were made for members who wanted to remain attached to the Congregationalists, so both groups worshipped together and employed the same pastor.⁶ The next indication of Timlow reaching out to the Shakers appears in an entry in Anna White's diary. On Sunday, April 24, 1859, White wrote, "A singular coincidence occurred today that never has happened before." She goes on explain that about thirty Shakers had attended a meeting in the nearby Presbyterian meetinghouse in response to an invitation extended to North Family elder Frederick Evans by Timlow, "a liberal minded man" who had "some advanced views." White thought Timlow's sermon was "quite interesting" and noted that he "took his text from Christ's sermon on the Mt. 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.'"⁷ There is every reason to believe more Shaker visits followed, though tapped sources only document one more during Timlow's tenure.⁸

By the time of the 1860 federal census, the Timlow family was reunited, if not before, and Carrie's mother resided with them in New Lebanon. It is also on the 1860 census form that George Timlow's occupation as Presbyterian clergy is marked out and Congregational clergy entered.⁹ Timlow's affiliation is further confirmed with his name appearing in the Congregational Church's quarterly and association minutes.



*Elder Frederick W. Evans (1808-1893) was invited by
Timlow to the Presbyterian meetinghouse.*

Courtesy, The Winterthur Library:
The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection.

Undercurrents of seeking and unrest continued to flow in Timlow's pursuits, and in 1865 he took a position at the Elmira Free Academy (New York), which only lasted a year. This experience apparently prompted his return to the Protestant Episcopal Church, where it was announced in May 1867 at the annual convention in Boston that he was restored to the ministry after being deposed for connecting with another communion.¹⁰ Timlow was transferred to Massillon, Ohio, where he ministered until his assignment in 1871 as rector in St. John's Episcopal Church in Salem, New Jersey, his home when he corresponded with Antoinette Doolittle.



*Eldresses Antoinette Doolittle and Anna White,
North Family, Mount Lebanon, ca. 1874.*
Shaker Museum | Mount Lebanon, Old Chatham
and New Lebanon, New York

Antoinette Doolittle

Eldress Doolittle was just a few days short of turning sixty-seven in 1877, when she received the first letter from fifty-four-year-old George Timlow copied in this volume. At the age of fourteen in 1824, she had left her family in nearby New Lebanon and moved to the North Family, home to the Gathering or Novitiate Order that welcomed potential converts and provided a place to explore Shakerism. Mary Antoinette Doolittle signed the North Family covenant on October 28, 1831.¹¹ While most residents would move to other families in the community after committing to the faith, Doolittle remained in the North Family to prepare and guide prospective Believers. She shouldered increasing ministerial responsibilities starting in 1838 by serving as the second eldress for twelve years; in 1850 she became the first eldress, a position she had filled for twenty-seven years up to that point in time.

Doolittle witnessed numerous changes in the United Society of Believers as membership grew and then declined while leaders became more and more concerned about individual Believers' commitment to Shaker principles. From the late 1830s and into the 1850s, Doolittle had experienced events associated with the internal revival known as "Mother's Work," with its goal of revitalizing the faith of Believers. Concerns mounted into the 1860s as Shaker leaders, including Doolittle, confronted ongoing problems with Believers' spiritual growth, materialism, and morale, as the pull of the encroaching world strengthened. It was in this tense climate that conservative and progressive factions formed and debated about the best way to solve problems—survival of Shakerism was at stake. The first group wanted to rely on traditional theology and strict separation from the world while the second had liberal views and wanted to take Shakerism to the world. As the Society navigated this precarious phase, Doolittle aligned herself with the progressives led by Elder Frederick Evans, the first elder in the North Family Ministry where she served.

In the early 1870s, the Society launched a plan for spreading the Shaker message, which had two vital and interrelated components—active missionary work and the publication of a Society newspaper.¹² Not to diminish the spiritual import, but today some might equate this decision to embracing a new business plan for Shakerism. Doolittle worked tirelessly in both efforts to engage and inform the public. Going well beyond witnessing to inquiring visitors at the North Family, she traveled frequently and spoke to large public audiences in a variety of venues, often incorporating reform-

oriented topics. Doolittle's extraordinary contributions to the Society's monthly publication, *The Shaker*, stand as a testament to her commitment to informing Believers and the public alike. In 1871, the first year of its publication, she contributed five articles. Stepping in when the newspaper's first editor had to deal with the aftermath of a community fire, Doolittle took on the duties of joint editor with Elder Evans from 1873 to 1875. During that period the paper was renamed *The Shaker and Shakeress*, though its name would subsequently change several times. By the time Doolittle started corresponding with Timlow in September 1877, she had written fifty-four articles for the paper, many in her role as editress. When her last article was published in August 1884, a total of ninety-five articles had been attributed to her, with some being published as tracts or broadsides.¹³ Clippings of these articles can be found in a scrapbook assembled by Doolittle, which, in light of this study, may be viewed as another example of her propensity to collect and preserve specific material, thus creating a valued record.¹⁴

Unquestionably Antoinette Doolittle was wholeheartedly dedicated to the Society's initiatives for sharing Shakerism when George Timlow reached out to her. It is worth noting that correspondence between Believers and unbelievers routinely had been viewed circumspectly and regulated by communal rules. At the time these letters were exchanged, the "Rules and Orders For the Church of Christ's Second Appearing" that had been framed in 1860 were still in effect and would remain so until 1887. Correspondence other than that for business purposes was to be read and reviewed by the elders. In the section titled "Orders Concerning Books, Pamphlets and Writings in General," one order requires that "all letters received by any member, not sent in order to transact business, with the world, or with other Believers, should invariably be shown to the Elders, and this should be done, before being read to or by any other person." The next order in that section adds, "If any member should write a letter to send abroad, it should be shown to the Elders, before it is sealed, or sent away."¹⁵ As one who may have performed this task in the North Family, Antoinette Doolittle's judgment about appropriate content would be respected. Evidence specifically addressing the degree to which these rules were enforced at this time has not been found, but accommodation and flexibility in other areas, such as reading worldly publications, took place.¹⁶ Without a doubt, changes were in the works in the 1870s, and Doolittle's position of leadership afforded her opportunities to network

with Timlow, in person and in writing. Also due to Doolittle's standing, she had a well-established relationship with Anna White, who was drawn into the correspondence circle.

Anna White

It is not known when Anna White penciled her name inside this volume of letters, but we do know that she was serving as the North Family's second eldress in 1877 when the Timlow-Doolittle correspondence began. Anna's Shaker days had started in 1849 at the age of eighteen when she converted from Quakerism, in part due to the proselytizing efforts of her father, Robert White, a Shaker convert who frequented the North Family. From the time of her arrival at the North Family, Anna had looked to Doolittle as a spiritual leader, initially as the second eldress and then as first eldress. Anna became even closer to Doolittle in 1856 when Doolittle attended Anna's father's funeral with her in New Jersey. Another dimension was added to their relationship in 1865 when changes in the North Family's ministry were made, and Anna was appointed second eldress.¹⁷ Anna espoused the progressive views that held sway in the North Family and actively participated in the missionary movement. By all accounts, Anna worked well with Doolittle, and would serve as her second for the remainder of Doolittle's days. Reflecting on their relationship, Anna's memorialist would say that her "implicit obedience" to Doolittle "marked her thirty-seven years of dutiful affection" to the dear eldress.¹⁸

By sharing and lightening the burdens of the first eldress, Anna White often played a supporting role as needed and would do so in relation to the Timlow-Doolittle correspondence. In her distinguishable hand, White copied letters filling over half of the 201 small pages in this volume; Doolittle penned the other pages. By serving as a copyist, Anna assumed the joint duty of preserving the letters, which can be likened to her bearing other shared responsibilities with Doolittle, such as proofreading the Society's newspaper and recording expenses in the North Family sisters' "Record of Expenditures and Receipts."¹⁹ Since two active Shaker eldresses with demanding schedules devoted time to copying the correspondence, a case can be made that the volume was more than a personal keepsake.

When the decision was made to copy the letters cannot be determined, but there are some clues that indicate that the letters were not copied immediately after being written or received. After the first five letters were copied in the book, Doolittle started copying a letter out of chronological

order. The error was caught after she had filled two pages, and the remainder of that letter was copied in the back of the bound volume, in an attempt to maintain sequential order of the letters. Additionally, a section of one letter is copied twice in the volume, probably indicating that pages were shuffled when saved for copying later when time permitted. Possibly the incomplete table of contents, in Doolittle's hand, is also evidence of the project being put aside. The volume contains two more of Timlow's letters than Doolittle's, with the possibility that other letters were not selected for the small-size volume, since there is a noticeable gap in communication from March 31, 1878, to December 8, 1878. None of the original letters penned in the book have been found, so it is feasible that they were destroyed after being copied. Given its documentable history, it is fair to say that both Doolittle and White had a vested interest in this bound volume.

The Letters

When George Timlow initiated correspondence with Antoinette Doolittle on September 4, 1877, his first lines explained why he was writing to her instead of Elder Frederick Evans. Dealing with a potentially sensitive issue, he recognized that Doolittle's "life work makes as much demand on [her] time, as that of friend Evans"; however, he thought she might not have "as much writing on hand" as Evans. In the laying of this groundwork, Timlow recognized Doolittle's important role. He had just returned from a sojourn with the North Family in early August, therefore, he was probably aware of family dynamics and the extent to which Doolittle assumed additional responsibilities freeing up Evans to pursue his progressive mission. With "very pleasant memories" and "increased material for thought and reflection" from his recent visit, Timlow expressed his "old wish" that someone "would assume the task, and burden of writing" to him "with "some degree of regularity" about what was taking place at Mount Lebanon.²⁰ In her reply written on September 7, 1877, Doolittle took up the mantle, acknowledging the common ground that they shared:

It is interesting and gratifying to your Shaker friends to find here and there a living man or woman who dare to throw aside "Orthodox" creeds of the past—not irreligiously but conscientiously, that the light of present revelation which beams as brightly today, as in ages gone by, may shine upon their understandings to vivify and

give new impulse to the whole being. It is especially cheering to meet with persons like our friend G W Timlow, in the ranks of the clergy who not only honestly thinks, but possesses the moral courage to speak his thoughts, be they old or new, popular, or an infraction upon clerical laws & usages for the time being.²¹

Thus began their correspondence with content that can be divided into two broad, though interwoven, categories: personal information and religious subjects. Not surprisingly the highest percentage of their comments pertain to theological matters. Yet it is the personal details about their lives and experiences that provide insights about these two correspondents and furthers an understanding of how their relationship and discussions evolved. To establish this framework, some of the more personal comments will be explored first. Many of their own words best illustrate the tenor of their exchanges.

Recurrent themes about George Timlow's life emerge in his letters to Doolittle. From the time Timlow wrote his first to his last letter, health issues plagued him. From the start, he mentioned that he was "trying to put more youth into [his] old body, and rest an overtaxed, and jaded brain."²² That prompted Doolittle's counsel: "I believe I am a trifle your senior in age, if not in wisdom, I will take the liberty of giving you a little motherly advice. You live too fast; you think too fast for one who thinks so deeply, and has such a frail body."²³ (Of note is that Antoinette Doolittle was regarded as the spiritual mother of the sisters in her charge as first eldress of the North Family.) On another occasion, Doolittle perceptively remarked to Timlow, "Your vein of humor is a safety valve to the overtaxed brain."²⁴ At one point on February 16, 1878, Timlow confided, "I came home—not in tune like David's harp of solemn sound, but much like a snapped fiddle; and forthwith—figuratively—hung my harp on the willows; being in captivity in the land of the doctors....Carrie practically put in force the doctrines of woman's rights, and I shut up my eccleastical [*sic*] shop for sundry days."²⁵ Doolittle responded forthrightly: "I think you are improvident of your health."²⁶

Timlow's health problems and weariness were often tied to the demands on his time, professional and personal. Pressured to write articles and meet publication deadlines, in addition to penning "many private epistles to Bishops and others," Timlow spoke of "ventilating topics," which prompted his filling "about one hundred foolscap pages per week."²⁷

Participation in organized church congresses and meetings with other clergymen often rounded out his busy schedule. Even when exhausted, and on unexpected occasions, he devoted considerable amounts of time to people who wanted to discuss theological issues. Drawing upon recent events, Doolittle advised:

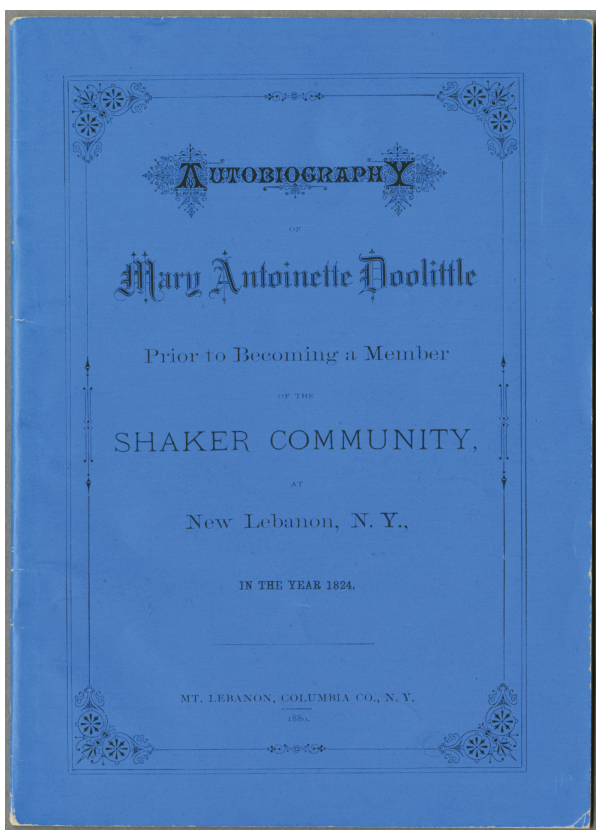
The next time you attempt to recuperate, turn your back, more or less upon inquisitive inquirers—be a little deaf and blind, and think more on the surface; let your rest, be rest to body and mind that your days may be long in the land in which your lot has been cast. We can better afford to lose Brigham [*sic*] Young—perhaps he has fulfilled his mission in his line—or part with M. Thiers, politician & statesman though he was, than any honest, laborer in the field of moral and spiritual reform.²⁸

Due to advancing his causes and defending his beliefs, Timlow explained, “I have not found time to take care of myself, any more than the soldiers in the heat of battle, stops to dress his small flesh wounds, or wash from his stained face the gathering soot and dust of the contested field.”²⁹

Furthermore, in 1877 Timlow worked two jobs—rector for St. John’s Episcopal Church and city superintendent for Salem Public Schools. In addition to meeting the needs of his congregation, he often had to deal with difficult parents. When telling Doolittle about complaining parents, a frustrated Timlow vented:

I have towards a thousand children under my care, the parents of whom are of as varied mental stripes as Jacob’s cattle; which are by tradition reported to have been of all the varied hues of the rainbow; besides having the additional tinting of ring-streaked, speckled, spotted and grizzled. The parents sometimes send bricks, and expect transmutation at once, into blocks of parian marble. Failing to realize their anticipations, they of course blame the teachers.³⁰

As an extension of his two jobs, Timlow devoted time to community service, helped the poor, met the needs of immigrants, and even volunteered to assist the police with local gang control. Without a doubt, Timlow was burning the candle at both ends.



Communal Societies Collection, Hamilton College

In the course of her correspondence with Timlow, Antoinette Doolittle opened the door to her personal life by delving into childhood memories. Of special note is that the contents of two of her letters, one written on November 15, 1877, and the other on January 21, 1878, form the core of her work, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Prior to Becoming a Member of the Shaker Community at New Lebanon, N.Y., in the Year 1824*, published in 1880. In her letters she does not mention any intention of publishing an autobiography, and in fact after a lengthy part of her narrative said, "Well, I have talked a long time concerning my progenitors, and my own individual history; and upon reflection, do not suppose it will be half as interesting to my friends, as to myself."³¹ Perhaps this statement reflects

the writer's modesty. Nonetheless, by 1880 other influences were brought to bear, possibly Timlow's. In the introductory comments of her book, Doolittle explained "I have frequently been urged by friends to give a simple narrative of my experience in early childhood, and youth, previous to entering the Shaker Society at New Lebanon."³² By copying and preserving her letters in a bound volume, she would have had a valuable resource at her fingertips for a writing project. It is not known if Doolittle penned these autobiographical details using essentially the same wording in other correspondence, or if it is unique to her exchange with Timlow. What we do know is that in some cases what Doolittle wrote in her letters appears almost word for word in her autobiography published two years later.

At this juncture it should be noted that a second version of Doolittle's autobiography was also published in 1880. Responding to suggestions "through the press, and by numerous correspondents," Doolittle added to her original text an account of her experiences once she became a Shaker, thereby expanding her work from twenty-seven to forty-eight pages.³³ By explaining Shaker beliefs and lifestyle, Doolittle's personal narrative would become an even more important tool for missionary work. In a history of the North Family Shakers in the *Biographical Review*, likely written by Anna White, Doolittle is credited with writing her forty-eight-page autobiography in three days, which may have been the time required to write the additional section.³⁴ Clues about the timeframe for publishing a second edition appear in the North Family sisters' "Record of Expenditures and Receipts," where it is noted on January 8, 1880, that \$25 of the sisters' funds was given to Elder Frederick Evans "towards Auto," and in August 1880, they spent \$53.50 on the "Second Edition of Auto."³⁵

When writing to Timlow, Doolittle drew from her past and admitted that as a child, she "felt a sort of reverence for sacred things," even though "the measured guarded sanctimonious phraseology of the stereotyped priesthood" never commanded her highest respect.³⁶ With this remark, she set the stage to describe her family's religious background as well as her own testimony about how she became a Shaker. Of her mother, Doolittle remembered:

My mother was a devout Baptist woman. I looked upon her as an angel in mortal form; and at times when I heard her voice in an adjoining room praying for children, I would stop my childish play

and listen to her soul breathings; and would watch her tearful eyes when she came into our presence and silently resolve not to do anything to grieve, or give her unnecessary pain.³⁷

Although Doolittle expressed singular love for her maternal grandmother, “a Presbyterian, of the puritanic [*sic*] type,” she chose to recount in her letter an amusing bit of family history that involved her grandfather, whom she never saw. She described her grandfather as “so tenacious of Sabbath keeping and of standing squarely on the old church platform, that he would not allow one of his children to wipe a slop from the floor Saturday night after sunset.” She further explained, “he was one of the strictest puritanic church goers,” who “felt that it was his duty to rear his children in the same school, and teach them to follow in his footsteps.” Likely feeling that Timlow would relate to this account, she continued:

Perhaps you are aware that no well organized family in those days could afford to be without an old fashioned Blue dye tub standing in the corner, anymore than a fashionable parlor in these days can afford to be without a piano. Well, he happened to have one boy who would not be religious. He hated to be confined to family prayer every morning against his will; and it occurred to him that the scent of the blue dye was as obnoxious to the olfactory organs of his father as long prayers were to him; and one morning when about midway of his father’s prayer the naughty boy seized the cat—lifted the cover from the dyetub, and gave it a dip. Of course, the prayer came to a speedy termination; and the boy was never again required to attend prayers against his will.³⁸

This family story definitely struck a chord with Timlow, raised as a preacher’s son, who responded:

Your illusion to dye-tub times, touches very tender periods of my own history. More than “forty times save one” have I stood on that family Altar a sacrifice or an atonement, for great irreverence & lack of attention, during the morning devotional reading, of chapters of absorbing interest, concerning the Hivites, the Gergasites, the Jebusites, the Hittites, and other pious ites, where of the chronicle makes due reverent mention. The reading closed,

I sometimes found that one tribe the Hit ites, still survived, & that they sought the pleasure of my personal acquaintance. Or, if they failed to appear, I did appear standing in penance on the dye-tub while the elect sat at meat. Once the weight of the “total depravity,” or general cussedness, was so sinfully heavy on the lid of the tub, that I broke through, making a catastrophe without a cat. Those times have changed, but they come trooping up in memory whenever I visit the place of my nativity, or, any one recounts a like experience. I was so hammered out then when a lad, that the rod has been apparently the pattern after which my body has grown, & under which it so very successfully groaned. Still I am better off than the man who declared that he was so lean that when he had a pain he could not tell whether it was colic or backache.³⁹

In a later letter, Timlow revisited the strong and painful impressions of his childhood when “the rod was not spared,” and on Saturdays “there came a double dose and a double jouncing to pickle down [his] ‘total depravity.’”⁴⁰

In another instance of family lore, Doolittle summoned memories of “Priest Churchill,” with whom Timlow was quite familiar, since he had filled the same New Lebanon pulpit that Silas Churchill did years earlier.⁴¹ As a way of transitioning to the topic of her Shaker conversion, Doolittle said of Churchill, “There came a period in my life, when I gave thanks that I was not his daughter nor the daughter of any sectarian priest or layman.” She described the “power working within” her, which would eventually lead her, the lone member of her family, to the Shakers, and the ensuing turmoil in her family as she made her final decision.⁴² This momentous occasion was well remembered by Doolittle, who acknowledged the ever-important anniversary of her commitment:

My mind was greatly exercised day and night, until I said “Father I will go and take the consequences.” And I am reminded that it is just fifty-three years today since I took that great and to me important step.

Priest Churchill went to my father and chided him for not compelling me to remain at home; said “if I had been a daughter of his, and he could not have restrained me in any other way, he would have headed me up in a hogshead.” I was glad and am still,

that I was not his daughter.⁴³

Following these comments about Silas Churchill, Timlow invoked his name in three subsequent letters, thereby firming up the common ground of New Lebanon history that he shared with Doolittle. Timlow asserted, “It would take a smart-sized miracle to make a Churchill believe in anything more or less, than the infallible John Calvin.”⁴⁴ To Timlow, Churchill epitomized Calvinists, or clergymen, who were not open to new truths, or even willing to reevaluate old beliefs—an assessment that no doubt Doolittle would readily support. Unable to travel to Lebanon as planned at the beginning of 1878, and calling into play the symbolism associated with the four horsemen of the apocalypse with death riding the fourth and pale horse followed by hell, Timlow declared:

I ought years ago to have considered the propriety of taking Deacon Churchill’s horse and theology.... A man on the ghost of a horse and with the Westminster Catechism in his saddle bags, ought to be able to go somewhere, and in an incredible space of time. I doubt however, if I should like that geographical somewhere, even after it was reached, having a mortal fear that there might be more sulfur in the atmosphere than would be agreeable to my lungs.⁴⁵

On another occasion when explaining that he “must get some more flesh on [his] bones” before visiting Mount Lebanon, Timlow wittily remarked, “If I only had one of Deacon Churchill’s horses to drive... people would think that the old picture in the catechism of ‘Death and the pale Horse’ had broken loose, and that I was on a rampage in the streets.”⁴⁶ By the time that Timlow called forth this Churchill-inspired imagery in 1878, he had known the Shakers for more than twenty years, going back to his early days as a minister in the town of New Lebanon.

Timlow had specifically requested that Doolittle let him “know of those who ‘pass up higher’; and also how thrive those who remain waiting for the brightness of ‘morning’ soon to be.”⁴⁷ When she replied on September 7, 1877, Doolittle informed Timlow about Brother Benjamin Morehouse who “had passed over the river,” and she included “some verses which were his own product, that he enjoyed singing, and hearing sung, till the last.”⁴⁸ That was the first in a number of poems exchanged by Doolittle and Timlow, with some being composed by North Family sisters including

Anna White, and others by Carrie Timlow, a poet in her own right.

The notice of the precarious condition of another Shaker appeared in Doolittle's January 21, 1878, letter, when she wrote, "Our loved & venerable Br. Edward Fowler is quite feeble, & at present confined to his room. We are apprehensive that the Boatman is nearing to convey his spirit to the green fields on the other side of the river."⁴⁹ Fowler, a prominent trustee who had handled the Shakers' business affairs for years, passed away on January 31, 1878. When Timlow expressed his regret for not being able to attend Fowler's funeral, Doolittle reassured him that he would have been pleased with the service with about one thousand people in attendance. As mentioned in Timlow's February 16, 1878, letter, he had spoken in 1861 at the funeral of Barnabas Hinckley, a Shaker brother and doctor; therefore, he would have been quite familiar with how Shaker funerals were conducted.

While Doolittle took her obligation seriously to relay news about what was happening inside the Shaker community, other topics would creep, and sometimes spill, into her letters. It was through the lens of Shaker principles that other subject matter was viewed. Timlow had made it his business to become familiar with the Shakers and their beliefs, so he had an enhanced appreciation of Doolittle's observations and positions on spiritual and temporal issues. When asked to give an account of the Shakers at a convocation of the Episcopal Church, Timlow reported that he had "advocated the propriety and need of every clergyman knowing of the doctrines of the people about him, & meeting them upon the ground of common courtesy, & with the dignity and consideration that belongs to an enlightened & Christianized humanity."⁵⁰ However, Timlow had actually gone much further than this in his relationship with the Shakers—he was in tune with them, though not necessarily always in agreement. That understanding allowed Timlow and Doolittle to freely introduce and openly discuss subjects that evince current, and often controversial, religious and social issues. Some of the topics that flowed between their pens include: the role of angels; the concept of hell; how to achieve peace; reforms for land, labor, and education; the impact of war; the meaning of "coming of the Lord"; and Henry Ward Beecher's "Wastes and Burdens of Society" lecture. Examples of other contemporary topics, who initiated them, and the subsequent responses, will be examined.

In the context of describing "a spiritual dearth in the land" with "cold and lifeless" churches that were "creed-bound," Doolittle introduced

the topic of Spiritualism, a popular movement of the day with diverse followers professing even more diverse beliefs in the power and purpose of spiritual activity.⁵¹ The Shakers' attempts to understand how spiritual manifestations taking place in the world compared to and fit in with what they experienced forms a significant and lengthy chapter in their history. The New Lebanon North Family was in the forefront of that quest, and Doolittle had played a prominent role from its onset in the mid-nineteenth century to the present.⁵² She looked to what some of these new ideas had accomplished on the contemporary religious scene in a state of transition:

Spiritualism has done a great work as an iconoclast to break in pieces many images, such as the doctrine of the Trinity—the Atonement through the blood of Jesus—the Resurrection of the physical body—a vengeful God—literal hell fire and brimstone &c.

Almost in the same breath that she recognized this important feat, she maintained, that “as a class of builders” those who had demolished these traditional beliefs “would erect temples and fill them with idols far more reprehensible than those they have sought to destroy.” Presently, she saw the need for “Saviors, whose practical lives will be a power before the people; who will show by precept and example that Christ lives in them.”⁵³ However, by acknowledging the work of Spiritualism, Doolittle introduced two subjects for consideration: the impact of spiritual manifestations, an all-important element of Shakerism and the bedrock of the Spiritualism movement; and doctrines under attack, which were part and parcel of orthodox beliefs. Both subjects would surface and elicit comments throughout the remainder of their correspondence. For example, later focusing on the concept of the Trinity, Doolittle theorized why some people still accepted this doctrine and in the process stated a Shaker principle:

It does not follow that they have been willfully blind, but have followed in the wake of the old ship their fathers sailed in, having on board the Nicene creed—the Trinity—and all other abnormal doctrines; then said, Hands off, don't touch the Trinity, it is very sacred, but cannot be understood by finite beings; if you undertake to find out its component parts, you surely will become infidels.... From the vast ocean of quickened & illumined thought, will be

evolved the true idea of the Godhead, which will be “like a great rock in a weary land,” upon which to plant the feet; then those who find that rock will work intelligently & to profit. When the sublime truth is fully revealed, that God is dual, Father and Mother, then, we shall understand the words of the inspired Apostle, who said, “The invisible things of God are clearly made known (revealed) by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head.”⁵⁴

In the same letter with her thoughts on the Trinity, Doolittle, who had witnessed the presence of spirits on numerous occasions, referred to “myriads of intelligences in spirit spheres,” and declared, “If we enjoy the society of good & truthful spirits, & hold close soul communion with them, we must be pure & just in our own lives—true to our neighbor—bless that we may be blest.”⁵⁵

When replying, Timlow picked up on both subjects, spiritual activity and orthodox beliefs, by referring to the copy of a newspaper article, which was titled, “What Dying People See,” that he had sent to Elder Evans. Timlow was so impressed with the “reflections” on this subject that he had the article republished and noted the excitement and interest it had generated:

The mind & heart of the present day are increasingly alive to the great facts of life & being & reaching out to more certainties natural & beautiful, involved in the connection between the Here & the Hereafter. They take less stock in graves, as a dressing room, where they are, according to the old creed, to make their toilet for a resurrection; and more than doubt if they are to wait for Gabriel and his trumpet toot before they enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God.⁵⁶

Timlow and Doolittle further demonstrated that they had a finger on the pulse of the contemporary religious scene by discussing commanding figures in the national spotlight. The first religious heavy hitter to surface in their letters was Reverend Joseph Cook, a name introduced by Timlow. Joseph Cook, an Orthodox Congregational minister, was one of the most popular lecturers in Boston, where he started delivering Monday afternoon lectures attended by thousands in the Tremont Temple in 1873. By 1877 those wildly popular, ongoing lectures were being published and

would eventually fill ten volumes. At this point in time, Cook was known for his outstanding oratory skills and his attempts to reconcile current scientific thought with religion, as he aggressively defended his faith.⁵⁷ At his first mention of Cook on October 1, 1877, Timlow noted that in the “Tribune,” he had called upon him “for authorities upon which he bases some of his late lectures, joining issue with him as him as to the accuracy of his statements.” Timlow knew that if he could get Cook’s attention and engage him in a public discussion, he would be “booked for a season.”⁵⁸ A month later, still reviewing Cook’s claims, and noticing that others had joined him in critically examining his lectures, Timlow offered this assessment of Cook:

He is trying to patch his old creed with new science—putting new cloth into an old garment, and of course the mending don’t hold, and the patch has a persistent disposition to be everlastingly dropping out. If Joseph Cook could only take good cloth, as he begins his tailoring, his thread & needle work would not be as now a task of disheartening repairs. He is a man of brilliant mind & learning, and is trying to make the image of clay & metal stick together, yet it takes all his time & both his hands to make the pesky old image stand up by holding on all the time, & even then, it is crumbling to pieces.⁵⁹

Joseph Cook’s popularity in Boston, which ranked number seven in the top ten largest cities in America in 1870, did not hamper the challenges by Timlow, a rector in the small town of Salem, as he publicly pursued truth and reform, often without regard for whose toes he stepped on. It was with concerns about potential fallout due to Timlow’s activism that Antoinette Doolittle entered the conversation about Cook in their correspondence.

Not waiting for Timlow’s reply to her previous letter, as was her custom, on November 24, 1877, Doolittle opened with emphatic words of warning about “approaching danger” and cautioned Timlow: “Look out for the Comstocks, and the whole army of Y.M.C.A., while you combat Cook’s ‘Scientifically Demonstrated.’ You may find yourself in a strait-jacket among lunatics in some asylum, or incarcerated in Ludlow St. jail or some other prison house.”⁶⁰

Although Doolittle did not mention the name of D. M. Bennett in her opening remarks, he was definitely the person she had in mind when

prompted to write this impassioned letter—he had been arrested in New York City on November 12, 1877. Doolittle was well acquainted with DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett, an outspoken freethinker and editor of his own publication, the *Truth Seeker*. He had formerly been a Shaker in the community where she resided. Even though Bennett had apostatized in 1846 in the company of his future wife, Sister Mary Wicks, the Shakers would support him throughout his crusade against Anthony Comstock. Doolittle did not want Timlow to suffer the same fate as Bennett in an unsettled climate where some felt that anything less than voicing traditional Christian principles might warrant the attention of Comstock.

Starting in the 1870s Anthony Comstock zealously assumed the role of moral arbiter, or vice hunter, with the goal of imposing Christian standards on all printed material in America. The Comstock era would be characterized by such excessive censorship that it would be branded as the American Inquisition. Reverend Joseph Cook would prove to be an apologist and cheerleader for Comstock. Two successful maneuvers in 1873 had facilitated Comstock's determination to root out what he considered obscenity, in all of its forms, including birth control information. First, as a member of the Young Men's Christian Association, Comstock worked to establish the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Secondly, with the support of Christian leaders and financial backing by the YMCA, Comstock lobbied for the passage of a federal law, known as the Comstock Law, part of which empowered him to scour the mail for obscene materials and prosecute offenders. Comstock was on task when he engineered the arrest of Bennett for mailing two "obscene" tracts—Bennett's *Open Letter to Jesus Christ* and Arthur B. Bradford's scientific article, *How Do Marsupials Propagate Their Kind*.⁶¹

Doolittle's letter of warning to Timlow developed into a polemic against Comstock. At one point she queried: "Who has empowered Comstock or the Y.M.C.A. to rule the consciences of E. H. Heyward, D. M. Bennett or A. B. Bradford?" With this question, it was clear that Doolittle was familiar with more than Bennett's plight. She was up to date on Comstock's latest exploits, including the targeting of publications by Ezra Heyward (*Cupid's Yokes*) and Bradford, "a man of moral worth," who she knew personally. Focusing on Bennett's tract, *An Open Letter to Jesus Christ*, Doolittle admitted:

Altho' we, individually would disapprove the spirit & animus of the letter penned by D. M. Bennett, and addressed to Jesus Christ,—

believing that logic is better and more effective than ridicule—yet under the American Government, a person has the right to address a letter to God, Christ, or to his Satanic majesty if he choose, without being amenable to the Y.M.C.A. thro’ Comstock or any other dignity. While he is arresting and trying an American citizen for blasphemy against one of the Gods would it not be well for him to be arrested and tried for blasphemy against the United States government?⁶²

Putting her finger on key issues and sizing up the consequent implications, Doolittle revealed her assessment of the YMCA:

I have looked with suspicion upon that peculiar institution ever since its commencement—have feared it was a child of dishonest parents—conceived in sin and brought forth with iniquitous designs and when it grew and waxed strong—in the name of God, and under the guise of Christian religion (?) it would seek to reunite Chh and State; and thus establish ecclesiastical rule, suppress free thought & speech, and kindle anew the fires of persecution. Have we not had religious wars enough yet? If the priesthood in their sanctimonious garb, could succeed in getting God & Christ into the American Constitution, Whose God and Christ would they place there? and which Sect would pilot the Ship of State provided they could manage to get on board & assume control? Catholic, or some of the numerous Protestant Sects? would there not soon be mutiny on board?⁶³

Doolittle was in the vanguard of progressive Shakers reacting to what was taking place on the world stage, when she expressed these sentiments to Timlow. By the end of 1877, Elder Frederick Evans was openly addressing these issues and entered into the fray by writing two letters to the editor of the *New York Tribune*. Alert to the Bennett saga with two more arrests instigated by Comstock, a well-publicized trial, a stint in Ludlow Street jail in lower Manhattan, and a protested transfer to the Albany Penitentiary, the Shakers publicly criticized the “Governmental Inquisition” and would eventually petition President Rutherford B. Hayes on Bennett’s behalf.⁶⁴ For now, Doolittle was waiting to hear Timlow’s reaction to her concerns.

Timlow replied to Doolittle’s letter of warning just a little over a week

after she had penned her urgent admonition. Trying to reassure Doolittle, Timlow put a positive spin on the matter writing, “If I do get in Ludlow St. jail, or into a jacket not made by a tailor, there will at least be some chance to rest from my present engagements.” As for the Comstock and Bennett affair, Timlow was “watching to see what it all meant, & what were the facts in the case.” And, even though Timlow was waiting for an unfolding of details, he felt confident to say, “I doubt if any change will be made in the ecclesiastical nomenclature of the United States Constitution.”⁶⁵

In light of the separation of church and state issue, Timlow observed, “The Roman Catholics are gradually winning the day in the matter of Bible reading in the Schools.”⁶⁶ With this remark, he spoke to a decades-long contentious issue in America, fueled by the influx of Catholic immigrants who challenged the anti-Catholic aspects of curriculum and the religious practices in public schools based on Protestant values. Catholicism had been the largest single denomination in America since 1850. Not able to reach an acceptable compromise, the Catholic Church developed parish-based Catholic schools; parochial education existed on a large scale after 1870.⁶⁷ “The tendency of public opinion,” Timlow concluded, “is to let Churches & Church Schools manage their affairs, and other institutions—Schools &c shape their own line of policy.” He believed that public schools were “not the place for anything sectarian,” and conscientiously implemented this policy in the schools he supervised.⁶⁸ What becomes noticeable from this point on is a recurring topic in Timlow’s letters—the Catholic Church.

Later in December 1877, Timlow mentioned that he had written an article “for The Catholic Standard of Phila. according to promise, being I believe the only Protestant who has the honor of such an invitation. But the Editor promised to publish whatever I might write; so at it I went.”⁶⁹ All was going well on that front at the beginning of 1878 when Timlow wrote, “I have been giving some help with my pen to the Editors of ‘The Roman Catholic Quarterly Review,’ & writing a few leaders for ‘The Catholic Standard.’ They wished me to review in full Joseph Cook’s books & lectures, but for that, time was wanting; & besides, since attention has been called to Cook’s blunders a multitude of Reviewers are after him with puncturing pens.” Of special note in the same letter is Timlow’s commentary on the contemporary religious scene and the Catholic Church:

An intimate examination of the state of the Religious world reveals some very singular features, not the least prominent of

which are 1st the decadence of the very “orthodox” theologies & 2nd the reactive & aggressive power of the Roman Church. Within 4 years, in the Romish Diocese of Baltimore two thousand, seven hundred and thirty Protestants were received into that body among whom was a large per cent of intelligence and culture. I see so much of the same order of things throughout the world, that the question has for years been forced upon my attention as I turn thoughtfully and with full examination to consider “the signs of the times.” The testimony which I have gathered up on this subject would cover the range of several volumes, and reveals a wide spread reaction from the whole scheme of Calvinism.⁷⁰

Noteworthy is that Timlow attributed an increase in the number of American Catholics to conversion rather than to a wave of new immigrants.

Ever mindful of the role and accomplishments of women, Doolittle replied and queried, “Is not the growth of Catholicism due in some measure to the missionary labors of the Sisterhood, who are continuous in their efforts in ministering to the sick, who watch & work to do good to suffering humanity, as far as it lies in their power? People in this generation are tired of a mere wordy Gospel; they want to see fruits.”⁷¹ Doolittle’s thoughts reflect an open-mindedness engendered by the Shakers’ current missionary efforts in the world rather than the Shakers’ history of taking exception to theology and ceremonies that were a mainstay of Roman Catholicism. Not willing to let this subject end here, and determined to reinforce his point, Timlow responded:

You are no doubt right in supposing that the “Sisters” in the Catholic Church are a great element of power. They are busy in all the walks of life, as educators, writers—in hospitals, lanes and avenues of wretchedness and sorrow, in short, everywhere. But there are also reasons of another kind that have led so many very able scholarly & good men and women of the present day into the Catholic faith. If you can put your hands upon such books as the *Life and Letters of Madam Swetchine* or *Judge Burnett’s* large book written after he became a Catholic, you will see what I mean. There are many books of the same kind, & they are interesting as showing the workings and conclusions of some very able, cultivated and spiritual minds.⁷²

In the same letter, when responding to Doolittle's previous comments about what Robert Ingersoll, known as the Great Agnostic, had said during a speech in Albany, Timlow took advantage of an opportunity to commend the Catholics. He opined that Ingersoll, "makes some very grave mistakes, & that a reaction follows such leaders, ultimately to the great advantage of the Catholic Church." Moreover, he maintained, "Rome gathers a large harvest from men who have professedly been Atheists & Deists, who find no anchorage in mere negations."⁷³ Doolittle did not address any of Timlow's comments about Catholics in her next letter; perhaps there are clues in her silence. However, she noted that his "perceptive powers are keen, & intuition pretty clear," before asking, "As you look thro' your mental and spiritual telescope—cast your eyes over Christendom—what do you see? Do your hopes brighten in regard to the future?"⁷⁴

Timlow's appreciation of what the Catholic Church had accomplished continued to be a viable topic for him through January 25, 1879, the date of the last letter copied in this volume. He advanced his observations about the success of Catholic schools, information that he asserted was based on Protestant sources, and enthusiastically stated, "As they are rapidly extending their ecclesiastical work in the world, I am glad that they are rousing up as never before to make the people intelligent, for then things will be apt to take a still more progressive shape in the long run." Following his public statements about "the increase of Catholicism in our country, & especially in the west," Timlow noted that a "religious census" had been taken. He reported that in Cincinnati 20,000 Protestants and 70,000 Catholics attended church; the value of the church property of all of the Protestants put together was three million dollars, about the same as the Catholics alone. He continued to declare, "the public will find out after a time that the Catholics are making a good deal of inroad in the American population."⁷⁵ While a writer for "Roman Catholic editors & publishers," he had "some contact with their bishops & leading theologians," and had noted "carefully what they are doing in all the world." Timlow avowed, "There is quite a percent of very liberal men among them, and the whole church is partaking more & more of the spirit of the age. I know this is not the popular idea, but the evidence comes up abundantly in current history, embodying their words & works."⁷⁶ Interestingly, in Anna White's first mention of Timlow in 1859, she described him as "a liberal minded man"; in the late 1870s this characterization still held true, as Timlow's liberal tendencies informed his correspondence with Doolittle.

Conclusion

What George W. Timlow and Antoinette Doolittle had in common overshadowed their differences and provided the impetus for them to correspond—they both spoke the language of reform in spiritual and temporal matters. Although they came from the different worlds of organized religion and Shakerism, each one stood out in, and to some degree challenged, the world that they came from. He was a rebel who had been excommunicated, and though restored to the Protestant Episcopal Church, he admitted from the start of their exchange that he had “no inconsiderable reputation as a ‘Heretic.’”⁷⁷ She was the first of the “new breed” of Shaker women, who played redefined roles within the United Society of Believers, and went beyond community borders with Shaker principles in hand to confront societal ills on the national stage.⁷⁸ Gone were the days when the correspondence of a Shaker eldress was mainly with her counterparts, and only occasionally with an elder.⁷⁹ As a Shaker sister who regularly corresponded with a worldly male, Doolittle had taken the early steps down a pathway in the 1870s, which became more familiar for Shaker sisters in the 1880s and well trodden by the 1890s.

The Timlow-Doolittle letters were highly valued and shared, and though not an unusual practice in the nineteenth century, especially among the Shakers, each correspondent informed the other about doing so. At one point, after noting the “pleasure and profit” he had gained from a letter, Timlow said “I have allowed the epistle to take wings; and it will probably come back with weather marks upon it like ‘Noah’s weary dove to the Ark.’” He likened Doolittle’s letter to being “a missionary” by “sending it on a circuit” among his parishioners and family.⁸⁰ Later, Timlow confided to Doolittle that although he had a large number of female correspondents, “there are but two or three whose lines interest Carrie, but your epistles are read by her several times.”⁸¹ Doolittle described one of Timlow’s letters as “the vehicle of so much valuable & interesting matter, that I gave freely to my brethren & sisters, and we all enjoyed it together.”⁸² “Your letters come to us full of hope, life and vigor,” Doolittle told Timlow.⁸³ This acknowledgement of hope may speak to why Doolittle continued corresponding with Timlow as well as why she shared and copied his missives. And, in the process one wonders if seeds of ecumenism were being nourished. Each correspondent had opened a window into their world as they confided personal thoughts and tackled controversial issues, some of which remain with us today. Shakers who

only knew Timlow through his letters wanted to meet him. For Timlow's part, he looked forward to interviews "with frank earnest people—where I feel the very atmosphere is home like; and where with whatever differences of opinion, the heart beats to the tongue and says 'These are my brethren and sisters.'"⁸⁴

Timlow remained in the constellation of the Shakers' friends, even as he gained more recognition in the world. New York University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in June 1879.⁸⁵ Doolittle knew this was in the offing. When telling her about fellow clergymen writing letters of support for this honor, Timlow said, "Possibly they think that a jug so very old ought certainly to have a new handle; or perhaps they think that I could float better with two new consonants hitched on to me as life preservers."⁸⁶ He continued to make coveted visits to the Shakers during the rest of his days; some would be referenced in his letters and others documented in Shaker journals. Entries in the garden journal maintained by the North Family brothers describe Timlow's visit in November 1883, when he stayed overnight with the family and shared stories about his experiences.⁸⁷

During that fall visit Timlow had a personal interview with Elder Giles B. Avery, a treasured opportunity that he acknowledged in a January 30, 1884, letter, the first of Timlow's eight surviving letters written to the elder over the next five years.⁸⁸ Avery was the second elder in the Mount Lebanon Ministry, which overlooked the spiritual welfare of all Shakerdom; he is credited with performing a staggering amount of work and assuming more responsibilities than the first elder.⁸⁹ Unfortunately none of Avery's letters to Timlow have been found, but Timlow's letters indicate that he had received a number of letters from the elder, as his bonds with the Shakers remained firm. An article titled "Prayer" by "Rev. George W. Timlow, D.D." appeared in the April 1884 issue of the *Manifesto*, with the note that Elder Giles B. Avery had contributed it.⁹⁰ As a call to action in the November 1884 *Manifesto*, Brother Alonzo G. Hollister referred to the exemplary experiences of "Our esteemed friend Timlow, who has reformed many unruly vagrants and put them in a fair way to becoming useful and respected members of society."⁹¹

No North Family letters to or from Timlow in the 1880s have been found, though they were likely written, since evidence points to their lasting relationship. When telling Elder Avery that he had been informed about changes in the Shaker community, Timlow mentioned the passing



Elder Giles B. Avery (1815-1890) corresponded with Timlow in the 1880s.
Communal Societies Collection, Hamilton College

of Antoinette Doolittle, which had occurred on December 31, 1886, as he reminisced about Doolittle and “some others” being “frequent & very faithful correspondents” for nearly a quarter of a century.⁹² Subsequently in an 1888 letter addressed to “Dear Friend & Sister,” who is not named, Timlow mentions his plans to send photographs to Anna White, Harriet Bullard, and Timothy Rayson, all current leaders who were among his earliest Shaker acquaintances; they had been at the North Family during Timlow’s New Lebanon days.⁹³

Still ministering and waging what he described as a forty-year campaign against questionable beliefs and practices, notably among religious leaders,

Timlow's last assignment on behalf of the Protestant Episcopal Church was in Warwick, New York, where he passed away on May 2, 1889, less than four months after his last letter to Elder Avery.⁹⁴ Of the cast of characters at the beginning of this story, only Anna White remained; she had succeeded Doolittle as the North Family's first eldress in 1887 and filled that position until her death on December 16, 1910. Perhaps as first eldress, White penciled her name in the front of the transcribed correspondence.⁹⁵

While much of the story about this little bound volume has come together with some questions answered, others remain. Even with the insights gained through the flow of the Timlow-Doolittle correspondence, we may never know the full extent of Doolittle's motives for copying these letters. In any case, she had gone one step beyond sharing to saving Timlow's letters in a book that could be easily circulated among the Shakers and retained as a community record. During the course of this research, this record was doubtlessly used for an unintended purpose. Clues about the author of an unattributed newspaper article surfaced in the process of becoming acquainted with the correspondents and analyzing their letters.

A strong case can be made that George W. Timlow wrote, "Mount Lebanon Shakers: A Sunday's Attendance upon their Religious Services," published in the *Pittsfield Sun* on July 13, 1881.⁹⁶ Timlow's decision to remain anonymous is not surprising considering that he had used changing nom de plumes for his work circulated through an extensive newspaper network as well as other channels. As he explained to Elder Avery, remaining incognito afforded him the opportunity to hear frank criticisms, especially from the clergy, of his work, which he would respond to as needed.⁹⁷ Maybe Timlow wanted to ensure that his observations would not be connected with his position as a former New Lebanon minister, who, in addition to changing his church affiliation, had ties with the Shakers. Whatever his reason for remaining anonymous, the style of writing, interests, and sentiments are in keeping with Timlow's, and reflect those found in his letters to Doolittle.

The newspaper article's subheading dates the period of the author's visit, July 6-13, 1881, which started and ended on a Wednesday. That the writer chose to focus on a Sunday service is in keeping with what would be expected of Timlow. We can place the Timlows in the Berkshire area in 1881 and know they had ties that continued to draw them to the region. Their daughter Ruth married William Parks on May 17, 1881, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, about twenty-six miles from the Mount

Lebanon Shaker Village.⁹⁸ In the North Family “Record of Expenditures and Receipts” in August 1881, the sisters recorded that they had received \$1 for a music book and tracts from Timlow, probably indicative of a recent visit with them.⁹⁹



*Timlow admired the Shakers’ “home on the mountain side” and wished
“to drop in upon the slopes of Lebanon.”*

Shaker Museum | Mount Lebanon, Old Chatham and New Lebanon, New York

Positive feelings about the Shakers abound in this commentary. It opens with setting a glorious stage by referring to the “Lebanon mountain” that the Shakers had made “to blossom as the rose—the whole hill-side where the settlement is located having become a veritable garden.”¹⁰⁰ Timlow’s appreciation of the Shakers’ “home on the mountain side” is similarly voiced in his letters.¹⁰¹ At one point he imagines the Shakers surrounded “by the inspirational scenes of mountain, hill & valley” and admits no “wonder that poetry blossoms on your home slopes.”¹⁰² The article writer’s notice of Elder Evans’s absence and the visitors’ disappointment is consistent with one sensitive to the public’s reaction as well as one acquainted with Evans; both could be said of Timlow. Additionally, topics discussed in the summary of the discourse by Brother Thomas Smith, who spoke to “advances in liberal thought,” would have

resonated with Timlow. Reminiscent of recurrent themes that Timlow and Doolittle had addressed, the author reports Smith's comments about "the current theology, the trinity, the resurrection of the body and the vicarious atonement," as well as his thoughts about the conditions of the poor and monopolies.¹⁰³

Yet, the most compelling evidence for attributing this newspaper article to Timlow is the observations about Doolittle who "made one of the leading addresses of the morning." It was noted, "Especially did she address the women of the visiting people, and assure them that any exercise which led them to ignore the frivolities of life would be of value." "The words of Antoinette Doolittle, uttered thoughtfully, and without cant," the author wrote, "were an appeal, full of earnestness and pathos, for all to enter upon a higher, more spiritual life."¹⁰⁴ Moreover, at the end of the article, Doolittle is placed center stage again with some details about her life and a reference to her recently published autobiography, from which the conclusion is quoted in its entirety. After all, Timlow may have been one of the first people to read Doolittle's autobiographical account, at least in part. Devoting this special attention to Doolittle and her work demonstrates an appreciation and respect reflective of the rapport the two correspondents had forged. By attributing this newspaper article to Timlow, we add to the rich legacy created by two Shaker sisters and a liberal preacher.

Notes

1. Correspondence Between Geo W Timlow ... and Antoinette Doolittle, 1, private collection. Henceforth cited as Correspondence.
2. Guides for Shaker manuscript collections in the following were surveyed: Berkshire Athenaeum, Fruitlands Museum, Hamilton College, Hancock Shaker Village, Library of Congress, New York Public Library (hereafter NN), New York State Museum, Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village (with the much appreciated help of Chuck Rand, librarian/archivist on June 6, 2016; hereafter MePosS), Shaker Museum | Mount Lebanon (hereafter NOCaS), Western Reserve Historical Society (hereafter OCIWHi), Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.
3. *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1889*, vol. 14 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 650.
4. Accessed the New York State Census, 1855, through Ancestry.com, by searching the record for Caroline E. Timlow [Caroline E. Wood].
5. Letter fragment, G. W. Timlow to Frederick W. Evans (?), n.d., NOCaS 6164a. The recipient cannot be confirmed, since only the last page survives. The letter ends with "Make as ever my fraternal regards to the family & all my Shaker friends. Yours as ever, G. W. Timlow." Shakers used the blank verso for math calculations. New Lebanon Shaker Village became known as Mount Lebanon, after a post office was established there in 1861.
6. Franklin Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York* (Philadelphia: Everts & Ensign, 1878), 311. Although in a different sanctuary, the present-day New Lebanon Congregational Church located at the corner of New York State routes 20 and 22 traces its history to the time when it was Presbyterian and Congregational simultaneously (accessed 10/28/16, <http://newlebanoncc.com/faqs/>).
7. Anna White Diary, April 24, 1859, NN 11. White names "George W. Talbott," in this entry, however, without a doubt it should be George W. Timlow, which is further confirmed by her reference to the Presbyterian meetinghouse in "Lebanon Flats," where Timlow ministered. I am indebted to Jerry Grant for sharing information about the location of "the flats" in New Lebanon (discussion with author, October 18, 2016). The excerpt from White's diary for April 24, 1859, in *A Memorial to Eldress Anna White and Elder Daniel Offord* (Mount Lebanon, N.Y.: North Family of Shakers, 1912), does not identify the minister, possibly because editor Leila S. Taylor knew the name in the diary was incorrect; also, Taylor refers to the meetinghouse in "the Valley," a more readily recognizable location, rather than "Lebanon Flats" (p. 34).
8. On July 29, 1863, "Elders and some brethren and sisters attend Meeting in the flats Meeting House." [North Family Elders' Journal], 10-DJ-010, MePosS.

9. Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Census Place: New Lebanon, Columbia, New York; roll: M653_737, 604, National Archive Microfilm Publication. Accessed on Ancestry.com under George Tmloe [sic].
10. *Journal of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Massachusetts* (Boston: E. P. Dutton & Company, Church Publishers, 1867), 33.
11. Covenant of the North Family or Central Institution of the Order of Young Believers in the United Society at New Lebanon, 24, NOcaS 13,258.
12. Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1986), 193-95. Stephen J. Stein, *Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 236, 258-62.
13. Articles were located using the search function for *The Shaker Manifesto* in Digital Collections, The Shaker Collection, Hamilton College Library. For tracts and broadsides, see Mary L. Richmond, comp., *Shaker Literature, a Bibliography* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1977), nos. 511-514. Henceforth cited as Richmond.
14. Mary Antoinette Doolittle (1810-1886), Scrapbook, OCIWhi XII: 10. Doolittle numbered and filled 91 pages with 114 articles listed in the table of contents, which includes several unattributed articles that Doolittle wrote and some duplicate clippings. She pasted the clippings in a blank book that had been first used by Anna White's father Robert to copy inspirational material in the 1840s. Starting at the opposite end of the book from Robert White's entries, Doolittle only pasted over and obscured one page of his writing. I am indebted to Christian Goodwillie for finding this source and for examining the original manuscript in order to determine how the blank book had been used, which was difficult to ascertain using microfilm.
15. Theodore E. Johnson, "Rules and Orders for the Church of Christ's Second Appearing," *Shaker Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1971): 155-56.
16. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 203-5.
17. Sandra A. Soule, *Seeking Robert White: Quaker, Shaker, Husband, Father* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2016), 237-55, 316-18.
18. Taylor, *Memorial to Eldress Anna White*, 47.
19. Taylor, *Memorial to Eldress Anna White*, 44. [Record of Expenditures and Receipts, North Family, Mount Lebanon, N.Y. from Feb. 1, 1866, through Mar. 1, 1897], private collection. Doolittle and White both made entries until 1885 (one year before Doolittle's passing), when White took over the full responsibility.
20. Correspondence, September 4, 1877, 1-2.
21. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 11-12.
22. Correspondence, September 4, 1877, 3.
23. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 16-17.

24. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 72.
25. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 151-52.
26. Correspondence, March 31, 1878, 174.
27. Correspondence, November 1, 1877, 59.
28. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 17-18. Mormon leader Brigham Young died on August 29, 1877. Marie Joseph Adolphe Thiers, former French president and historian, died on September 3, 1877.
29. Correspondence, October 1, 1877, 23-24.
30. Correspondence, October 1, 1877, 32.
31. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 82.
32. Antoinette Doolittle, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Prior to Becoming a Member of the Shaker Community at New Lebanon, N.Y., in the Year 1824* (Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., 1880), 5.
33. Antoinette Doolittle, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Containing a Brief History of Early Life Prior to Becoming a Member of the Shaker Community, also an Outline of Life & Experience Among the Shakers* (Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., 1880), 5.
34. *Biographical Review: This Volume Contains Biographical Sketches of the Leading Citizens of Columbia County, New York* (Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Company, 1894), 366.
35. [Record of Expenditures and Receipts, North Family], 94, 97. The North Family funded the publication of another sister's autobiography in 1880; the sisters spent \$30 in December to publish Sister Jane D. Knight's "Narrative" (p. 99).
36. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 73.
37. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 73-74. Corresponding published remarks will be noted as follows: Doolittle, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Prior to Becoming a Member*, 10-11.
38. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 75-77. Doolittle, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Prior to Becoming a Member*, 5-6.
39. Correspondence, December 3, 1877, 96-98.
40. Correspondence, January 10, 1878, 130.
41. Famed Shaker apostate Mary Dyer summoned the name, and services, of Silas Churchill in one of her attacks on the Shakers. See. Richmond no. 537.
42. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 78.
43. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 80-81. Doolittle, *Autobiography of Mary Antoinette Doolittle Prior to Becoming a Member*, 22-23.
44. Correspondence, December 3, 1877, 101.
45. Correspondence, January 10, 1878, 133-34.
46. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 162-63.
47. Correspondence, September 4, 1877, 2.
48. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 18. Benjamin Morehouse died on

August 16, 1877.

49. Correspondence, January 21, 1878, 148-49.
50. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 160.
51. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 14.
52. For one account of the North Family's quest, see Soule, *Seeking Robert White*, chap. 12.
53. Correspondence, September 7, 1877, 15-16.
54. Correspondence, October 10, 1877, 49-51.
55. Correspondence, October 10, 1877, 54.
56. Correspondence, November 1, 1877, 60-61.
57. Daniel P. Toomey and Thomas Charles Quinn, *Massachusetts of Today: A Memorial of the State Issued for the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago* (Mass.: Columbia Publishing Company, 1892), 113.
58. Correspondence, October 1, 1877, 26.
59. Correspondence, November 1, 1877, 63-64.
60. Correspondence, November 24, 1877, 87.
61. Roderick Bradford, *D. M. Bennett, The Truth Seeker* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006), 102-16, 156-57.
62. Correspondence, November 24, 1877, 89-91.
63. Correspondence, November 24, 1877, 87-89.
64. Bradford, *D. M. Bennett*, 119-21, 187-88, 192, 197-98. F. W. Evans, "Governmental Inquisition," *Shaker Manifesto* 9, no. 8 (August 1879): 181-82. Giles B. Avery, "Petition. A Letter to the President, Mt. Lebanon, N.Y., September 28, 1879," *Shaker Manifesto* 9, no. 12 (December 1879): 278-80.
65. Correspondence, December 3, 1877, 93, 98.
66. Correspondence, December 3, 1877, 98.
67. Richard Fossey, "Public Education and Catholic Schools in the 19th Century: A Historical Reflection," accessed November 2, 2016, <http://fosseyfaithbook.blogspot.com/2011/12/public-education-and-catholic-schools.html>. Joseph Moreau, "Rise of the (Catholic) American Nation: United States History and Parochial Schools, 1878-1925," *American Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 67-90.
68. Correspondence, December 3, 1877, 98-99.
69. Correspondence, December 27, 1877, 123.
70. Correspondence, January 10, 1878, 126-28.
71. Correspondence, January 21, 1878, 145.
72. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 158-59. Madame Swetchine (1782-1857), a Russian mystic, converted to Catholicism in 1815, was forced into exile, and moved to Paris, where she became famous for her salon; two multi-volume sets of her works were published posthumously in 1860 and 1861. Peter Hardeman Burnett (1807-1895) became a Catholic in 1846 and wrote a book (741 pages) in 1860 about his conversion, *The Path Which Led a*

Protestant Lawyer to the Catholic Church; he was the first governor of California as a state.

73. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 155.
74. Correspondence, March 31, 1878, 166-67.
75. Correspondence, January 25, 1879, 195-96.
76. Correspondence, January 25, 1879, 192-93.
77. Correspondence, September 4, 1877, 7.
78. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 262-63.
79. Rosemary Diane Gooden, "The Language of Devotion: Gospel Affection and Gospel Union in the Writings of Shaker Sisters," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987), 31-33.
80. Correspondence, October 1, 1877, 21-22.81; Correspondence, November 1, 1877, 58.
82. Correspondence, October 10, 1877, 47.
83. Correspondence, November 15, 1877, 69.
84. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 165.
85. "New-York University. Commencement Exercises – Awarding Prizes and Conferring Degrees," *New York Times*, June 20, 1879.
86. Correspondence, February 16, 1878, 164-65.
87. Garden Journal, 1879-1888, November 19 and 20, 1883, NOCaS 10349. Special thanks to Jerry Grant for sharing this reference.
88. Geo. W. Timlow to Elder G. B. Avery, January 30, 1884, OCIWHI IV: A-44. Nine letters written by Timlow are in this file.
89. Stephen J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 8-9.
90. George W. Timlow, "Prayer," *Manifesto* 14, no. 4 (April 1884): 91-93.
91. Alonzo G. Hollister, "Action Makes Light," *Manifesto* 14, no. 11 (November 1884): 251.
92. G. W. Timlow to Dear Friend & Bro. [Giles B. Avery], November 6, 1887, OCIWHI IV: A-44.
93. G. W. Timlow to Dear Sister & Friend, November 14, 1888, OCIWHI IV: A-44. Comments in Timlow's letters point to Corinne Bishop (1843-1929) in the Center Family as his likely correspondent.
94. G. W. Timlow to Dear Sister & Friend, November 14, 1888; G. W. Timlow to Dear Friend & Bro. [Avery], November 23, 1888; G. W. Timlow to Dear Friend & Bro. [Avery], January 22, 1889, OCIWHI IV: A-44.
95. Anna White's penciled signature of ownership also appears in the front of her father Robert White's personal copy of "A Journal of a Visit to the Western Societies by Prudence Morrell in 1847." Both volumes share the same oral history of being gifted by Sister Lucy Bowers (1860-1935), a former resident of the North Family in Mount Lebanon whose last days were spent with the South Family in Watervliet, New York, Shaker Village.

These manuscript volumes were among items that Bowers gave to Albany artist and friend to the Shakers, Alice Pauline Schafer (1899-1980), who bequeathed them to the Shaker Heritage Society; they were deaccessioned in 2001.

96. Glendyne R. Wergland, ed., *Visiting the Shakers 1850-1899* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2010), 311-13.
97. G. W. Timlow to Dear Friend & Bro. [Avery], June 5, [1884?]; W. Timlow to Dear Friend & Bro. [Avery], November 14, 1887, OCIWHI IV: A-44.
98. Accessed the record for William Henry Parks and Ruth Ella Timlon [*sic*] in *Massachusetts, Marriage Records, 1840-1915* through Ancestry.com.
99. [Record of Expenditures and Receipts, North Family], August 1881, 104.
100. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, 311.
101. Correspondence, September 4, 1877, 2.
102. Correspondence, November 1, 1877, 64.
103. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, 312-13.
104. Wergland, *Visiting the Shakers*, 312. Wergland observed that few visitor accounts mention that Shaker women gave one of the longer addresses (p. 311).