

Using the *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations, and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee* to Recover Forgotten Shaker History: a Case in Point from Enfield, Connecticut

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The time between the opening of the Testimony in May 1780 and the gathering of New Lebanon in 1787 is the least documented period of Shaker history. We know that hundreds joined the Shakers in New England and New York, but many fell away after Mother Ann's death in 1784. In addition, from 1785 until 1799, there was an intentional cessation of Shaker missionary efforts. Though some did seek out the Shakers, energy was placed into consolidating and strengthening the converts they already had. Finally, as time passed, there was a lessening of fervor for the Gospel among some, and they withdrew. By the time the communities were organized into full Gospel Order in the 1790s, numbers had diminished and the names of those who joined for but "a season" during the 1780s seem to be unknowable unless recorded later by Shaker scribes. This need not necessarily be the case, however. Looking at the peripheral relatives of the first converts yields the names of a good number of people who may have been Shakers for a brief time only during the first decade of the Testimony. Another source that could help place this period in a more balanced perspective is the *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations, and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee*, first published in 1816. Intended by Mother Lucy Wright (1760–1821) for Shaker eyes only, it was almost three quarters of a century later that the work was publicly printed for a wider distribution. Taking the well-known stories and setting them aside, there remain scores of strands, that when investigated, reveal the Shaker world as Mother Ann and the First Parents knew it. Exploring these helps complete the Shaker historical narrative. When considering Enfield, Connecticut, for example, two such "strands" readily come to mind. When explored they show a history that has been effectively forgotten, but nonetheless can offer many important details of early Shaker history.

TESTIMONIES
OF THE
LIFE, CHARACTER, REVELATIONS AND DOCTRINES
OF
OUR EVER BLESSED MOTHER
ANN LEE,
AND THE ELDERS WITH HER;
THROUGH WHOM THE WORD OF ETERNAL LIFE
WAS OPENED IN THIS DAY OF
CHRIST'S SECOND APPEARING:
COLLECTED FROM LIVING WITNESSES,
BY ORDER OF THE MINISTRY,
IN UNION WITH THE CHURCH.

The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth,
A woman shall compass a man. JEREMIAH.

HANCOCK:

PRINTED BY J. TALLCOTT & J. DEMING, JUNRS.

—♦—
1816.

Fig. 1. Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, (*Hancock, [Mass]: Printed by Tallcott & J. Deming, Junrs., 1816.*)

Implications Associated with John Booth

The first concerns the Booth family of Enfield, Connecticut. There is nothing today that connects them to the Shakers, and today's Booth Road and Booth Street in Enfield are distant from where the Shakers lived. Indeed, Russel Haskell in 1867, when compiling the names of the early families that converted at Enfield, does not even mention the name Booth. That family, however, may have been among those who joined briefly and now are forgotten. A hint to this is found during an event which occurred during Mother Ann's third visit to Enfield as described in the *Testimonies*. By the time of this visit in October 1782, the level of distrust and outright hatred for the Shakers had grown to such a considerable degree that they were manifested by a mob which gathered outside the home of David Meacham, the place where Mother Ann was staying. During the highest point of intensity, Meacham was "knocked down and wounded." Then, "At this instant—John Booth, the Constable of the town, came up and commanded the peace, and threatened the mob with the severity of the law for their riotous behavior. But they rose against him, and swore that they would burn the house down before morning." This angered Booth so much that he came back to see the Shakers the following day to request a list of names of those who had led the mob. These men were later brought to court and fined.¹ This incident highlights the difficulty authorities had when attempting to control a mob. Such groups of angry citizens had been emboldened by almost twenty years of practice. Their power was discovered and developed in the 1760s when they rose up all over New England to oppose British taxation.

From our perspective, using only the information in the *Testimonies*, Constable John Booth (1728–1802) appears sympathetic to the Believers and the reader assumes that the reason for this is that Booth must have been a man of integrity who diligently carried out his sworn duty to protect citizens from unlawful violence. The account in the *Testimonies* is silent, moreover, about whether or not Booth had deeper motivations. Probing records of the town of Enfield's religious history, however, reveals that Booth belonged to a group called the Separates and would, as a religious dissenter, have had a natural affinity to the plight of the Shakers against intolerance.



Fig. 2. Membership list and covenant of the Strict Congregational Church, Enfield, Connecticut. From Francis Olcott Allen, *History of Enfield, Connecticut*.

Early Shaker History Not Just from a Baptist Perspective

There can be no doubt that the Shakers would never have established a community in Enfield, Connecticut, if it had not been for the presence of the Meacham family and the large-scale conversion of the Baptists there to the Gospel. Father Joseph Meacham, though born in Enfield, moved to New York during the 1760s. By the time the Shaker Testimony opened in 1780, he and his sisters Ruth Meacham King and Eunice Meacham Darrow lived in the New Lebanon section of the town of Canaan, New York.² Back home in Enfield, however, Father Joseph's brother David Meacham and their father, also named Joseph Meacham, were leaders of a large Baptist congregation located in the extreme northeast corner of the town and directly across the town line into part of Somers, Connecticut. This is the exact spot where the Shakers established their community. What has been forgotten, however, is the important role another group of religious dissenters played in the development of Shakerism in Enfield. As in so much of Shaker history, the role of the Meachams dominates and obscures other dynamics. Notable early Shaker leaders and many converts

at Enfield also came from the New Light Congregationalists, also known variously as the Strict Congregationalists, the Second Ecclesiastical Society in Enfield, the Separates, or the Separatists. They were, in fact, the very first religious community in the town to challenge the hegemony of the Standing Order of Congregationalism.

Indeed, decades before anyone in Enfield, Connecticut, had heard of Shakerism, hundreds of residents had been affected by the Great Awakening, which first came to New England in September 1740 when George Whitfield arrived from the Middle Colonies to Newport, Rhode Island. This famous itinerant preacher lost no time in evangelization: "In a whirlwind forty-five day tour of central places in Massachusetts and Connecticut, Whitfield delivered over 175 sermons to thousands of hearers."³ After listening to Whitfield and to the ministers who supported him, many church members found themselves preferring extemporaneous sermons and a more spontaneous form of worship. This "new" and enthusiastic aspects of worship, especially when delivered by itinerant preachers, had a lure that traditional Congregationalism could not match. Such "Old Light" Congregationalists listened to sermons delivered from notes and followed a proscribed worship service. Consequently, between 1742 and 1745 nineteen illegal separations from Congregationalism were made in Connecticut. By 1750 there were twenty-one more.⁴ Though dissent existed in Enfield, it did not coalesce until the 1750s when Joseph Meacham founded a Separate church of his own in 1753. Among the Separates, there was a drift toward Baptist ideas and Meacham became a Baptist in 1757.

Other Enfield Separates sought to exist without a Baptist affiliation but were not granted recognition as an independent group until 1770. Constable John Booth was a member of this group, though his name is absent from the covenant they drew up in 1762. The first meeting of those interested in such a covenant occurred on April 13, 1762, at the home of widow Abigail Markham (1712–1791), who would someday die a Shaker as would three of her sons, Joseph (1742–1817), Justus (1743–1825) and Jehiel (1746–1835) and most of their families.⁵ Indeed, when the covenant was signed on August 20, 1762, many of those who pledged themselves that day would either eventually convert to Shakerism or have descendants and/or relatives who would be Shakers. These include Daniel Wood, Timothy Pease Jr., Benjamin Pease, Elijah Terry, Ebenezer Allen Jr., Samuel Terry, Sarah Sabin, Mary Sabin, Jehiel Markham, Hezekiah

Pease, and James Pease.⁶ When Shaker history at Enfield is only seen from the Baptist perspective, the part played by these Enfield Separates in helping to open the way for the arrival of the Shakers is forgotten. Some of the Separates who became Shakers most likely followed the way taken by Joseph Meacham. They later became Baptists and then Shakers.

The Booth family had a strong presence right from the commencement of efforts of the Separates to organize. The first place they met to consider a covenant among themselves, as just noted, was at the home of widow Abigail Markham. Her maiden name was Booth, and she was the daughter of one of the town's most prominent citizens, Zachariah Booth (1666–1741). Constable John Booth's father John (1697–1778) and Abigail Booth Markham were brother and sister. The surname Booth appears among other signers of the Separatist 1762 Covenant: Joseph Booth, Phebe Booth, and Hannah Booth. Joseph (1710–1784), a sibling of John and Abigail, was the uncle of Constable John Booth. Phebe Booth (1737–1786) was Constable John's sister and Hannah Booth (1731–1803) was his wife. Also signing was Hannah Warner (b. 1740), Constable John's sister; Pelatiah Pease who was married to Constable John's aunt Jemima Booth (b. 1708); Abraham Pease who was married to Constable John's aunt Mary (b. 1699); Israel Pease who was married to Constable John's aunt Sarah (b. 1703); Nathan Pease, son of Israel and Sarah; John's sister Lydia (1729–1780) and her husband Thomas Parsons (1718–1811); Barzillia(h) Markham (b. 1740) nephew of Abigail Booth Markham, and Jehiel Markham, son of Abigail Booth Markham. In summary at least sixteen of the seventy-three signers of the covenant were direct relatives of Constable John Booth. That is almost one-fourth of the whole, and this does not include other peripheral relatives of his that were in the group. Clearly, tight familial ties as well as religious dissent were characteristic of the Separates as they would later be among the Shakers.

Though John Booth's name does not appear on the 1762 Separatist covenant, it may be found in the next important document, the 1769 petition for exemption from taxation. Under the Saybrook Platform of 1708, all tax-paying citizens were expected to contribute to the upkeep of the town's Congregationalist minister. This included not only his salary, but also providing such items as housing and firewood. In addition, the building and maintenance of a meeting house came from town taxes. So tight were the constraints that Connecticut's General Assembly, which met alternately in Hartford and New Haven, even had to approve the

construction of a new meetinghouse.⁷ This legislative body, however, did develop a process, though cumbersome and somewhat nebulous in its interpretation, that allowed religious dissenters to become exempt from the taxation that supported the Standing Order of Congregationalism. The Baptists under the leadership of Joseph Meacham Sr. were granted their first petition for exemption by the General Assembly in 1757.⁸ As long as the settled Congregational minister Peter Reynolds (1701–1768) was alive, however, the Separates in Enfield, though dissenters every bit as much as the Baptists, had been blocked from forming a new church within the town. It was only after the death of Peter Reynolds that the Separates were able to use their numerical strength to prevent the selection of a new minister until they had been granted autonomy.⁹ Though not explicitly documented in town records, the delay in the Separate's autonomy may have also been due to the war with France. After New Englanders received the news of renewed hostilities, "almost overnight, energies were channeled from revivals to defense. Divisions between Old Lights and New Lights that had threatened to split the churches now lost their edge as both sides contemplated the specter of a French invasion."¹⁰ As late as 1760, it was estimated by Congregationalist minister and future president of Yale Ezra Stiles (1727–1795) that 85 percent of New England's population was at least nominally Congregational.¹¹

Though the Enfield Separates were compelled by opposing Congregational members and the worrisome war to remain within the Standing Order longer than they would have liked, they did gain independence. On May 4, 1769, the male heads of household of the Separates presented a petition before the General Assembly and this was granted in 1770. Constable John Booth's name appears on this petition along with his father John Booth (1697–98), and Daniel Booth (1744–1811), his brother. Both Constable John and his brother Daniel appear active among the Separates until the mid-1770s. For example, on October 9, 1775, they were among the "Seators" chosen to organize the seating of the meetinghouse. This was supposed to be done by order of the age of male members with their wives seated with them. For some unknown reason, the first arrangement was put aside and John and Daniel and the other "Seators" were called upon to repeat their efforts on October 30, 1775.¹²

It is not certain that Constable Booth ever became a Shaker, but a tantalizing piece of evidence leads to the possible conclusion that he was a

Believer for a short time. Shaker death records note that before the Enfield society was gathered into Gospel Order, member Lucine (also spelled Lucene) Booth died at the age of seventeen in 1785.¹³ This would mean that she was born either in 1767 or 1768. Town records do not list her birth, but there is a sufficient gap to allow Lucine to have been born between the birth of Constable John's daughter Asenath on December 17, 1766, and his next child named John who was born on February 13, 1769.¹⁴ If Lucine was Constable John's daughter then his sympathy for the Shakers in 1782 might be explained by his or his family's interest in the religion. If Lucine is not his daughter then it seems impossible to determine her parentage from the surviving records. For example, Constable John and his brother Daniel were the only male siblings of the family to survive to adulthood. Lucine Booth could not be Daniel's daughter, however, since he did not marry until 1779.¹⁵ Joseph Booth who signed the 1762 covenant, as mentioned, was either Constable John's uncle or his cousin. Joseph Booth, Jr. had a number of children, but there is barely enough time for Lucine to be born between the birth of his daughter Annis in October 1766 and his daughter Lydia in August 1768. Using more peripheral Booth relatives is too speculative and serves no purpose. It is enough to open the possibility that Constable John Booth, his wife Hannah Phelps Booth (1731–1807) and their eight known children were Shakers briefly during the 1780s and daughter Lucine died before the family withdrew from the society.

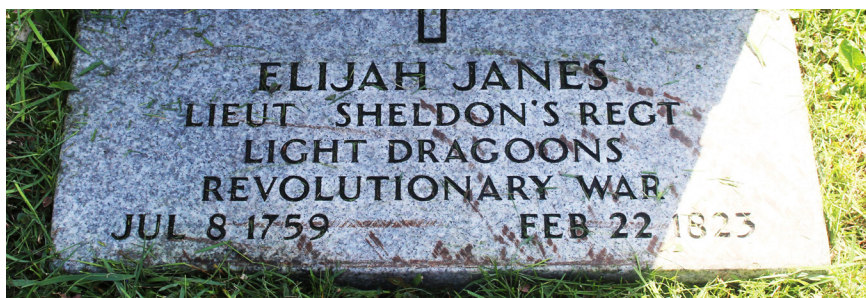
When the Shakers gathered into Gospel Order, they needed sufficient contiguous land holdings to make communal living feasible. While many and perhaps the large majority of Joseph and David Meacham's Baptist congregation became Shakers, not all of them did. Daniel Booth, Constable Booth's brother, may have become a Baptist, but not a Shaker, since there are a number of property transaction which place his land holdings next to those of Baptists who became Shakers. For example on January 28, 1794, Daniel Booth bought eleven acres of land from Aaron Emerson, a young Shaker at the newly gathered Church Family.¹⁶ This land was likely once owned by the late Joseph Emerson, Aaron's father. This land may not have been needed at the time by the Church Family since it was located too far away to be useful. It would have been more valuable to Booth who lived northward in Enfield, and directly on the border of Massachusetts. As a legal heir of Joseph Emerson, Aaron had the right to sell the property and dedicate the proceeds to the Shaker trustees. This land, however, soon found its way back to the Shakers.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, Daniel Booth moved to Ohio. In preparation for this, he sold his land to the Shakers. On October 20, 1802, Daniel Booth sold Benjamin Pease and Nathan Tiffany, Church Family trustees, six and a half acres of land.¹⁷ Less than a year and a half later, on February 13, 1804, he sold five and a half acres to Benjamin Pease and Daniel Wood.¹⁸ It is interesting that Daniel Wood's name appears as a grantee on the deed. He was the principal trustee at the North Family, which would have been very near Daniel Booth's homestead. Though the Church Family had an interest in the land, it is highly likely that all of the land once owned by Daniel Booth became part of the North Family's extensive holdings. The Shakers of this family were expanding their property northward into Massachusetts so purchasing the Booth land prevented outsiders from blocking this enlargement of their home farm. Preliminary to this, on December 3, 1800, Zachariah Booth, Constable John Booth's nephew, sold four acres of meadow land to North Family trustees Daniel Wood and Joseph Fairbank Sr.¹⁹

In summary, taking a name mentioned briefly in the *Testimonies*, and following up on it, yields a good deal of information about previously unknown Enfield Shakers who lived between 1780 when the Gospel opened and 1792 when the society was gathered into Gospel Order. In addition, this knowledge helps to place early Shaker property transactions in the proper perspective. So too does it help make sense of Shaker journal references to such families as the Booths, for it is common for early-nineteenth-century Shakers to refer to parcels of land on their farm as once owned by certain families. This is a use of the *Testimonies* that has hardly ever been done and consequently there is still so much more to learn about early Shakerism from this source.

Elijah Janes, Another Name to Consider

John Booth's encounter with the mob occurred during Mother Ann's third and final visit to Enfield, Connecticut. The second time Mother came to Enfield was seven months before, in early March 1782. At that time, David Meacham's house was besieged by a mob of two hundred hostile opponents of the Gospel. Father James Whittaker addressed the crowd and informed them that Mother Ann and her companions would leave willingly since they were not welcome. Leaving the Meacham homestead, they traveled west through the town to the ferry on the Connecticut River. During this passage, the Shakers felt themselves to be surrounded by angels,



Figs 3 and 4. *Elijah James's original and replacement grave markers from the cemetery in Lansingburgh, New York.* Photos by W. Hall and Tofftroy, finadagrave.com.

and they sang in union with the heavenly hosts. The persecutors looked on in “gloomy silence” until they reached the settled area of the town near the river. The crowd then taunted and threatened and the Shakers easily could have been harmed by the mob. As if by Divine Providence, “at this instant, a young American officer who was passing through the main street, observed the mob, and being attracted by curiosity, he rode up to them, and on inquiry, was informed that they were driving the Elect Lady and her followers out of town. Being well mounted and armed, and perceiving that the woman and her friends, though entire strangers to him, were very peaceable, and inoffensive,” and did not reply to the mob, “he took his station near Mother Ann’s carriage, and followed her to the ferry, with the determination, if possible, to prevent abuse.” Not intimidated by the persecutors, he led Mother into the boat and assured her that she was safe. More threats followed should Mother ever return, but by then she was ready to embark. “Being prevented from using any further violence, by the presence and determined resolution of the officer, the mob withdrew, and Mother Ann and her companions crossed the river in safety.” After landing, the Shakers “returned their grateful acknowledgements to the young man who had manifested such kindness to them, though strangers, and who had so generously interfered in their behalf.” The young man “went on his way” and the Shakers proceeded up to West Springfield.²⁰

The writers of the *Testimonies* provided a footnote which said that the young man’s name was Elijah Jones, who later became a merchant in Lansingburgh (now part of Troy), New York. Mother never forgot his kindness and considered their deliverance remarkable. With thankfulness she said “several times” that “God sent that young man there for my protection” and “the earth opened up her mouth, and swallowed up the flood.” The Shakers claim he was on business and was “providentially led through the town” just when Mother needed him.²¹

Elijah and Jones are common names for the time, but the footnote states that he was a lieutenant in Colonel Sheldon’s Regiment of Dragoons in the Revolutionary War.” This narrows the field of possibilities, and it may be said with certainty that his name really was Elijah Janes (1758–1823).²² The account in the *Testimonies* was written over thirty-five years after the fact, and over time his last name Janes was remembered as Jones. In addition, he lived in Brimfield, Massachusetts, a town with some connections to the Allen and Fay families who later became Shakers at Tyngsboro. Given the smallness of the population of that area, it is very possible

that Elijah Janes may not have been “entire strangers” to the Shakers as they claimed.²³ Indeed soon after Mother Ann and her companions left Enfield and escaped further violence from the mob through the kindness of Lieutenant Janes, they visited Believers in Belchertown, Massachusetts. This was where the Allen, Fay, and Stanley families were living right before they moved to Tyringham and became Shakers. No doubt some members of these families would have known who Elijah Janes was. Moreover, the father of Elijah Janes had a brother named Israel Janes (1734–1793) whose wife was Abigail Fay.

Elijah belonged to the Lebanon, Connecticut, branch of the Janes family. Another branch of the family was from Coventry, Connecticut, original home of the Tyringham Shaker Allen clan. Furthermore, Elijah Humphrey Janes (1744–1826) from the Coventry branch would have known of the Shakers since he lived in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, at the time of the opening of the Shaker Gospel in 1780. This Elijah Janes was a distant cousin of Lieutenant Elijah Janes, both sharing English-born William Janes (1610–1690) as a common ancestor.

When Janes encountered Mother Ann, he was a lieutenant and quartermaster in the Second Continental Light Dragoons under the command of Elisha Sheldon (1740–1805). He married in 1785 and later was a merchant and the president of the Lansingburgh Bank.²⁴ He died on February 22, 1823. The *Testimonies* was published in 1816, almost thirty-five years after Mother’s encounter with Lieutenant Elijah Janes. The fact that the Shakers still knew so much about him would imply that they remained in contact with him, perhaps through business dealings.

In summary, taking the names John Booth and Elijah Janes from the *Testimonies* and delving deeper into their particular histories reveals a pattern of familial relationships illuminating the earliest and seemingly most elusive, obscure days of Shakerism. “Mining” the *Testimonies* in this fashion not only provides solid information, but also opens up areas for further research. There is no reason why this could not also be done for all of the early Shaker communities.

Notes

1. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations, and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee* (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co.: 1888), 104.
2. New Lebanon did not become a separate town until 1818, before that it was a section of the town of Canaan, New York.
3. Harry S. Stout, *New England Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 190.
4. *Ibid.*, 208.
5. Francis Olcott Allen, ed., *The History of Enfield, Connecticut* (Lancaster, Pa.: Wickersham Press, 1900), 2:1549.
6. Allen, *History of Enfield*, 2:1550-52.
7. The Saybrook Platform had no legal force after 1784, but it did continue to influence Congregational Church polity.
8. William G. McGloughlin, *New England Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1:443.
9. Allen, *History of Enfield*, 2:1526.
10. Stout, *New England Soul*, 233.
11. Stout, *ibid.*, 260.
12. Allen, *History of Enfield*, 2:1555.
13. "United Society of Believers called Shakers: Records of the Church at Enfield; 1832-99," Canterbury Shaker Village Library, ECU MEM item 1992.7.1, 75.
14. Allen, *History of Enfield*, 2:1683.
15. "Daniel Booth," Eviston Family Tree, posted by Rosie Kohrman on Ancestry.com, Ancestry Family Trees, Provo, UT.
16. Town Clerk, Enfield, Connecticut, Book 6, 89.
17. *Ibid.*, Book 7, 541.
18. *Ibid.*, Book 7, 564.
19. *Ibid.*, Book 7, 481.
20. *Testimonies*, 82-83.
21. *Ibid.*
22. In my book, *Shakers of Enfield, Connecticut, 1780-1968*, 36, I incorrectly allude to him as Elijah Jones (1750?-1817?). This indicates the need for continuous research.
23. *Testimonies*, 82.
24. *10,000 Vital Records of Western New York, 1809-1850* for Elijah Janes, Ancestry.com