

Hamilton College Library

“Home Notes”

Communal Societies Collection: New Acquisitions



[Stereoview] *Group of Shakers.* [Group of seventeen Sisters and Brothers from the Mount Lebanon North Family of Shakers in front of the 1818 North Family dwelling house]. Photographer: Irving of Troy, New York. Photograph taken 1871. 8.3 x 17.5 cm.

Commercial photographers began publishing photographs of many Shaker villages during the last third of the nineteenth century. Some were issued as cabinet cards, while others—like this example—were stereographic photographs which, when viewed with a stereoscopic viewer, appeared as three dimensional images. HCL recently acquired a number of stereoviews of eastern Shaker communities. This image is particularly impressive because of its exceptionally fine contrast, resolution and quality.

The photograph was taken at the Mount Lebanon community. It seems certain that the structure is a North Family dwelling as all seventeen Shakers appearing in the photograph were members of that family. Was

it the so-called “second North Family dwelling” (which is still standing) or the older 1818 dwelling which was razed in 1973?

Careful inspection of the photograph, and comparison with other period images of North Family buildings, led to the discovery of a “smoking gun”—a small architectural feature to the right of the sister standing farthest right in the photograph. This offers proof that the group is standing in front of the north (sisters’) entrance to the 1818 North Family dwelling.

By making comparisons with photographs in the collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society, it can be determined that the photograph was taken during 1871. A similar image exists depicting the same fifteen sisters “bonnets and all,” probably taken the same day.

All seventeen individuals in the photograph have been identified. Several identifications, while very likely correct, are not absolutely certain, and these are noted with a question mark.

Standing or seated behind the fence, left to right: Eldress Mary Antoinette Doolittle (1810-1886), Elizabeth Moore (?) (ca. 1848-left 1876), Emma Sellick (?) (1846-left 1873), Eldress Anna White (1831-1910), Elvah Collins (?) (1853-left 1883), Margaret Pattison (?) (1833-1873), Louisa Sherman (1851-left 1879), Melissa Soule (?) (1846-1876), Martha Burger (?) (1853-1926), and Daniel Offord (1843-1911).

Standing or seated in front of the fence, left to right: Minnie Catherine Allen (1851-1922), Martha Anderson (1844-1897), Ann Offord (1842-1926), Margaret Cleaveland (1848- left 1883), Charlotte Byrdsall (?) (1848-left 1919), Richard Bushnell (1791-1873), and Rhoda Offord (?) (1840-1873).

In 1871 the North Family had sixty-one members, twenty-six males and thirty-five females. Of the females, there were just four under 18 years of age. These are not pictured. This means that in addition to Eldresses Antoinette Doolittle and Anna White, the thirteen other sisters in the photo make up the entire group of younger women in the North Family.

Kellogg, Ebenezer. *The Millennial [!] Kingdom of Peace: or a New System of Ecclesiastical Government, by The Holy Ghost and Saints: ... Where, Note, The Holy Ghost makes all Laws Invisibly! as when “the Spirit made it seem good to decree,” ... or, As Taught Herein, That, Invisibly, all Laws may be made by God’s Spirit, if made visibly by Saints ! but cannot be done by Nations ! for, God, our Saviour. promises, when he comes*

again, “to be glorified In his Saints,” not Nations ! ... This Work Maintains Also, That Such a Work Began in A. D. 1816 ! and is to end in A. D. 1866... [by] A Layman – Miraculously assisted! [n. p., but probably Middletown, Connecticut]: Published by the author. 1824. 120 p.

This is an extremely rare imprint by a remarkable visionary who received “miraculous assistance” from angels in outlining God’s plan for the elect—a new communal order which would be followed by the dawn of the Millennium in 1866.

Ebenezer Kellogg, who lived in the small northwestern Connecticut community of New Hartford, received divine inspiration through “angelic aid,” telling him that this “millennial work began in 1816” and would end fifty years later in 1866 when the “saints are [to?] rule for a thousand years.” The appearance of northern lights in early 1816, followed by near famine in the aftermath of the snows and frosts of the following summer (the legendary “year without a summer”) were signs, according to Kellogg, that such a powerful work had actually begun.

Kellogg’s first message from God occurred the previous year when he “held a conference with a free black woman on the subject of slavery.” The next morning, he went to her bedroom while she slept, and he saw “a supernatural light, like the burning bush.” More phenomena followed—burning lights, shooting stars and inspired messages that revealed the evolving “Millenniel Kingdom of Peace.”

Kellogg recounts over seventy instances where angels, in the form of shooting stars, confirmed his growing theological understanding of the new world order, and imparted to him the structure and arrangement of “property in common,” which was to be a feature of the fifty-year period preceding the Millennium in 1866. Kellogg would often pray over a particular tenet or revelation, then ask the Lord to send a sign—ideally a shooting star. Then he would cast his eye to a point on the horizon, and—time and again, without fail—a shooting star would appear within seconds, which he saw as a message from God, confirming its truth. One such example:

On the evening after I delivered the first chapter to the printer, I stepped out of Mr. Henshaw’s door, perhaps 9 o’clock at night and kneeled down and prayed that a star might shoot while on my knees, direct before my eyes, if God approved of that part of my manuscript ... when behold! While on my knees one shot! O! Glory...

It is not known whether Ebenezer Kellogg gathered many to the "Kingdom," but internal evidence suggests that some neighbors did become believers. What is known is that his inspired work must have had a small press run, for few copies survive. OCLC WorldCat locates only three other print examples worldwide, a single photocopy in Illinois, and no microform holdings anywhere.

