

The South Family of the Hancock Shakers, circa 1818–1849

Stephen J. Paterwic



E. M. Woodford, Map of the town of Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Mass., (Philadelphia, Richard Clark, 1855). Detail showing the Hancock Shaker families.

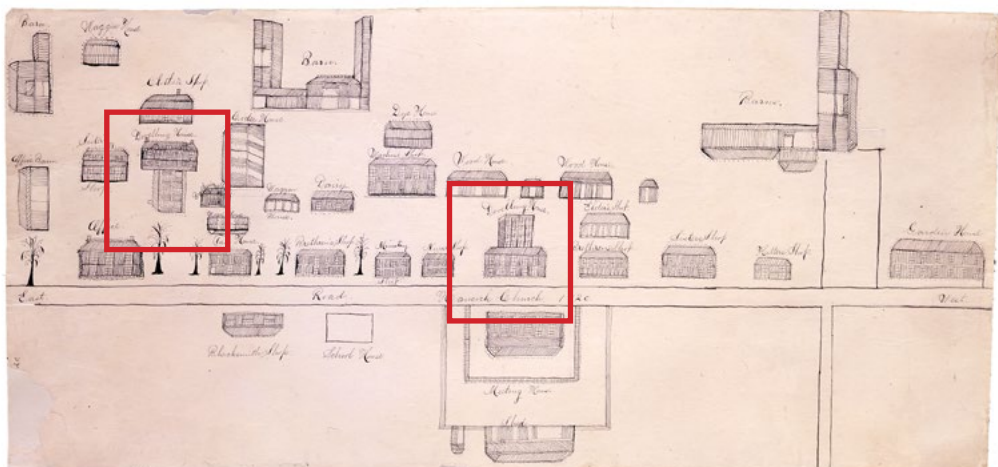
Note the former South Family buildings listed under Joseph Patten.

Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.

Editor's Note: On July 17, 2021, Hancock Shaker Village will open the site of the former South Family to visitors for the first time in the museum's history. Historian of Shakerism Stephen J. Paterwic, a member of the museum's Collections Committee, was asked to research this little-studied Shaker family. The results of his efforts will be used by Hancock Shaker Village staff to interpret the site, they are published in full below.

Confusion about the Founding Date of the South Family and Why

On page twenty of *Hancock Shaker Village, A Guidebook and History*, first published in 1976, the South Family correctly appears as part of the Novitiate or Gathering Order, but the founding date is given as 1800. This is not accurate, and the reason for this, no doubt, is an attempt to make



The Church Family of the Hancock, Massachusetts, Shaker community, 1820.

Note the dwelling of the two Church Order families.

Collection of Hancock Shaker Village

later

Shaker history match a reference from the journal of Daniel Goodrich which states that Hancock had five families in 1803. It is known when the Church, West, Second, and East families were founded (HSV library typescript item, H 234 ts.), and since the North was not started until 1819, the South was assumed to be in existence as one of the five, though no documentation has ever been at hand. Even in this typescript item, however, next to the South Family the year 1801 appears with a question mark. Hancock did have five families in 1803, but the Church was divided into two branches or Orders. This was a common practice in many Shaker villages. For example, Watervliet had two Orders of the Church until 1859 and New Lebanon had three Orders of the Church until 1811 and then two until 1896. These Orders were united in one joint interest and had one set of Trustees but were considered separate families and had their own elders and eldersses. On page fifteen of the *Guide Book* there is an 1820 drawing of the Church Family and the two dwellings, housing the members of each Order, are clearly visible. One, the First Order, is directly opposite the meetinghouse. The other is to the east. In addition, the two Orders of the Church at Hancock are indicated by the 1829 list of members found in the Western Reserve Historical Society (III B-42). The Church Family is divided into two groups labeled First and Second Orders. By 1830, the Church at Hancock had combined these two Orders into one, and they lived in the new brick dwelling. That is why there were one hundred of them. So, Daniel Goodrich's five families in 1803 were: First Order of the

Church and Second Order of the Church (later collectively called simply the Church Family), John Deming's Family (later just Second Family), John Tallcott's Family (later West Family) and Caleb Eddy's Family (later East Family).

<u>Young Believers Order</u>			
Males		Females	
Wm. Warden	18	Anna Warden	27
Nathan Holland	18	Matilda Holland	31
Samuel Asper	22	Sophia Asper	21
Isaac Richey	21	Isaac Richey	22
Abdel Asper	9	Lucy Holland	11
William Asper	5	Polly Holland	1
John Holland	7	Harriet Richey	1
John Holland	6		
Robert Richey	4	No.	7
Isaac Asper	3		
Harlow Richey	2		
Nathan Holland Jr.	3		
No.	12	Male No.	12

Whole Number of Males in the Society	112
Do of Females	111
Do of Males & Females	223

Hancock. A.D. 1819.

South Union Jasper Valley
Dec. 26. 5 20. 9. 1822.

A census of Hancock's Young Believer's Order, 1819.

III:A-17, Collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society.

Creation of Hancock's Gathering Order

John Deming's Family, John Tallcott's Family, and Caleb Eddy's Family were known as the Order of Families or Family Order as opposed to the First and Second Orders of the Church. This organizational pattern served the community well for only a few years, however, because it lacked a means for interested adults to become Shakers. When Father Joseph Meacham of New Lebanon put his system of full Gospel Order in place, new members were not an issue since from 1785 until just before 1800, the Shakers had stopped actively seeking converts and concentrated on organizing the ones they already had. To correct this shortcoming, the Gathering or Novitiate Order was founded. It was first created at New Lebanon in 1799, then at Watervliet in 1807, at Hancock in 1808, etc. until all the communities had at least one Gathering Family. At Hancock

Caleb Eddy's Family was chosen for this purpose and from 1808 until 1818 seven new buildings were constructed to transform the place, people transferred, and Christopher Patten made the presiding elder. From this point, references to Caleb Eddy Family became references to Christopher Patten's Family or to the Young Believers Order. Later the name became East Family. In spite of the anticipation of the arrival of new converts, however, numbers were small at first. The 1810 census under Christopher Patten enumerates just nineteen people, nine males and ten females. Clearly at that time there was no great need for a branch to house overflow applicants. Remember this was before the Shakers started their disastrous policy of taking in large numbers of children without at least one believing parent. Thus, population figures of the time are not inflated by hordes of pre-adults, almost all of whom would leave when they could.

It is almost impossible to imagine what the Shaker landscape looked like in those early years, and the post-Civil War images help us to forget that the properties and buildings of the earliest converts were once very much in evidence. Some structures had been repurposed, especially if they fell within the boundaries of an existing Shaker family. Those on the fringes, however, remained and they became great places to house whole families that sought admission. No doubt, the buildings of what later became the South Family, were from an old pre-Shaker homestead. At times some of the children from inquiring families would be sent to live at other Shaker families, but the parents and other adults and some of the children would reside there as an out family as they gathered their faith. The ultimate goal was their integration into the other families as useful and life-long members.

Creation of the South Family and Its Earliest Members

One characteristic of the Hancock Bishopric was that its three communities did things in tandem. One reason for this was the consistently high caliber of leadership actively engaged in affairs in the three Shaker villages under its care. For example, with so many people seeking admission to the South Family, Enfield's Gathering Order, it was necessary to create a branch in 1818. The former homestead of the stalwart Terry family became Enfield's West Family. For years it had been an out family housing the natural families of converts. The same situation was happening at Hancock. By 1818, three families with seventeen members sought admission. In the meantime, the existing Gathering Order at Christopher Patten's had almost doubled its population in ten years and had no room for that many additional people. To solve the problem, the Hancock Ministry directed that a homestead be selected as another Young Believer's Order in either 1817 or 1818. In fact,

this family was so new that in 1819 when the Shakers conducted a census, they called the group simply Young Believer's Order. When directional names replaced the previous system, this small band of Believers was called the South Family.

The creation of a branch of the Gathering Order at this time, and not in the undocumented year 1800, is also supported by federal census enumerations. In 1810, there are but two Shaker groups in Pittsfield, Christopher Patten's Family (East Family) and John Patten's Family (Second Family). In 1820, three Shaker groups are enumerated. There is an entry for Isaac Rickey near the enumerations in Pittsfield for Christopher Patten (East Family) and John Patten (Second Family). Isaac Rickey's group had 14 males and 10 females, including a female slave aged 14-25. The previous September, Rickey's name appeared on the Shaker census with the names of his wife and three children. They lived at the Young Believers Order (South Family), not Christopher Patten's Family.

The federal census enumerations before 1850, did not list individuals by name, just age. Though we do not have names for the 1820 census, the Shaker census the previous year gives us the names, and these fit exactly into the age categories. The only difference is that by 1820 there are five more members! Such was the rapid growth of Shakerism in those years. In addition to the five Richeys, the Leverett Augur family numbered five and the Nathan Holland family numbered seven.

During the 1820s, the Wollison and Smith families joined. In the Shaker census of 1829 the Augur, Wollison and Smith families composed thirteen of the twenty-three members of the South Family. Leverett Augur and Catharine Williams were the leaders. In spite of what has been written to the contrary, it is almost certain that the family never had its own elders. If the pattern set at New Lebanon and at Enfield, Connecticut held true for Hancock, families dependent on the principal Gathering Order Family, only had "First Brother" and "First Sister" designations for those in charge. A later Shaker manuscript confirms that the family had one set of leaders and that the family was connected to the East Family. This family would also not have had its own set of trustees. Temporal matters would have been handled by the East Family. That is why whatever foundation stones may be evident at the South Family site, these would not be for an Office, and the survey map is correct not to indicate an Office, which would have been by the road. In addition, as noted, the dwelling was probably part of a pre-Shaker homestead. The Talcott, Osborne, or Goodrich families are possibilities. Since there may never have been more than twenty-five members, a repurposed homestead with an ell added would have sufficed, and a new dwelling may never have been built. The census of 1840 states

that nine members were engaged in agriculture. This would have been eight out of the ten men who were twenty-years old or older. That is why the foundations may not indicate a Brethren's Shop. This family was agricultural, as Gathering Orders tended to be, given the transience and skills of most converts. If there were a shop, as the survey shows, it would have been for the Sisters.

Why There Is No Information about the South Family

No manuscripts of any sort seem to have survived from the South Family. This is not surprising because none have survived from the East Family. When Eldress Catherine Allen of Mount Lebanon and Wallace Cathcart of the Western Reserve were collecting materials to preserve, basically starting in 1910, Hancock was not on the verge of closing and had young members. There would have been no pressing need or desire to ship manuscript records off to Ohio. This is tragic because as the society declined, Frances Hall (1876–1957) had the opportunity to supervise what remained when buildings were cleared out. Apparently, she saw no value in sharing Shaker history with outsiders. Secretive and autocratic, records were either burned or thrown away. In addition, among the unfortunate “limits” of Eldress Fannie Estabrook (1870–1960) may have been a total lack of awareness of the importance of keeping paper items. That is why there are so few Hancock manuscripts to be found anywhere in spite of the community's continuance until 1960.

The South Family at a Glance

Demographically, the South Family was always small, and curiously seems to have had more males than females for most of its history:

Year	Total	Males	Females
1819	19	12	07
1820	24	14	10
1829	23	13	10
1830	19	12	07
1840	18	10	08
1846	13	06	07
1848	14	07	07
1849	11	05	06

Information sourced from: U.S. Census enumerations, III:A-17, and III:B-42, Western Reserve Historical Society.

Two Deaths

1. Leverett Augur, son of Ruel and Roxanna Augur, July 9, 1837–March 6, 1838, died of the croup.
2. William Blakeslee Augur, son of Ruel and Roxanna Augur, December 11, 1823–September 11, 1844

Two Births

1. William Augustus Danes, January 24, 1849
2. Leverett Erastus Danes, January 24, 1849

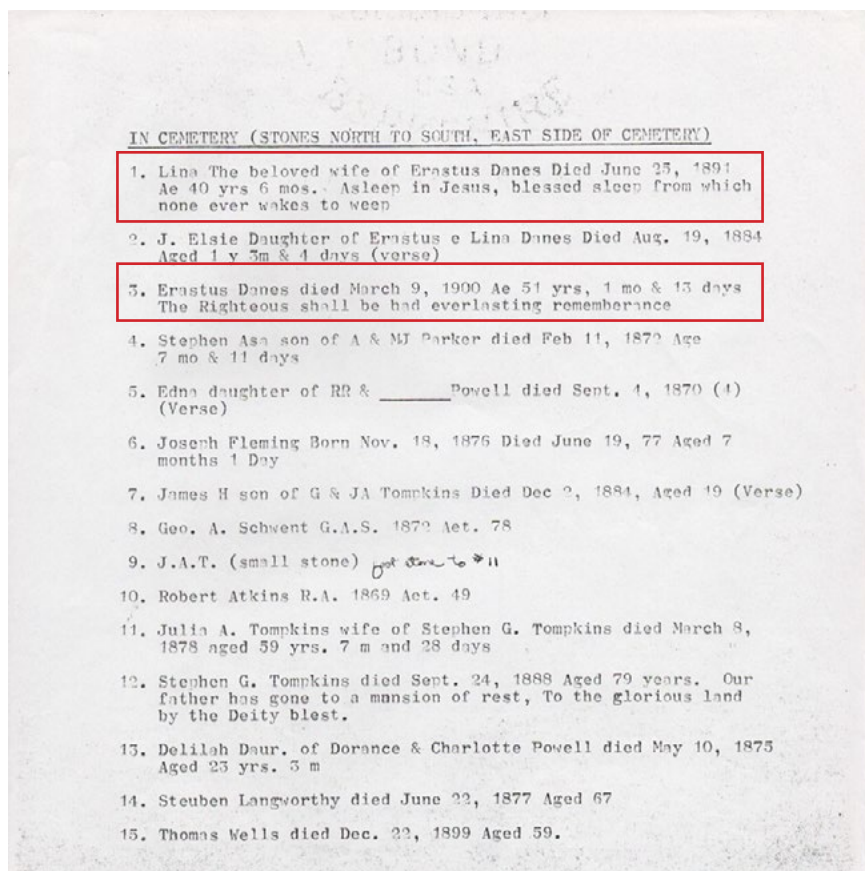
Their mother Eliza Danes (1813–1884) had run away from her husband on Long Island, New York, and joined the Shakers at the South Family. William Augustus and Leverett are names from members of the Augur family. Erastus was the name of a boy who once lived at Hancock named Erastus Smith, but he left the Shakers and eventually married a woman whose first name was Christina, not Eliza. Though no connection can be made with Eliza, the Smith family and the Auger may have been related and which leads to the strong possibility that Eliza Danes or her unnamed husband were related to Shakers or former Shakers from these families. Also the Augur family had twins (Mary Ann and Ann Marie), this is a possible genetic connection with Eliza. In 1884 while she was living at the East Family, Eliza committed suicide by cutting her throat. Her son Leverett left the community before 1870 and married and had four children. He worked for the Shakers, and when he died in 1900, though not a member, he was buried in the Shaker Cemetery at Hancock. His brother William Augustus also left the Shakers in the late 1860s.

Closure

The closure of the South Family was probably planned for some time. As members died, left or were sent to live at the other families, not enough new families or individuals were joining to make the operation of two Gathering Orders feasible. In 1848, three people were transferred out of the family, William Auger, almost 34, Ruel Auger, 52, and Elenor Jackson, about 38. William went to live at the Office at the Church Family, Ruel to the East Family where he too may have held an important position, and Elenor to the Second Family. William was the son of Leverett and Ruel was Leverett's much younger brother. Elenor may actually be Helena Jackson who is enumerated as black, age forty, at the Second Family in 1850. Recall that the census of 1820 enumerated a young black slave living in the family.

The South Family was dissolved on March 28, 1849. By that time Eliza Danes and her sons William Augustus and Leverett Erastus were

living at the East Family. That day, the remaining members were sent to live at other Shaker families.



*A list of non-Shakers buried in the Hancock Shaker cemetery.
Collection of Hancock Shaker Village.*

Last Residents of the South Family and Where They Went on March 28, 1849

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Leverett Augur | Second Family |
| 2. Roxanna Augur | North Family |
| 3. Janet Augur | Office at Church Family |
| 4. Ann Marie Auger | East Family |
| 5. Franklin Augur | Second Family |
| 6. Benjamin Franklin Wright | Second Family |
| 7. Maria Evans | East Family |
| 8. Elizabeth Smith | West Family |

SHAKER BROOM,

No. 4,

ISAAC AUGUR, Agent,

West Pittsfield, Mass.

SHAKER BROOM,

NO. 5,

ISAAC AUGUR, Agent,

West Pittsfield, Mass.

SHAKER BROOM,

No. 6,

ISAAC AUGUR, Agent,

West Pittsfield, Mass.

SHAKER BROOM,

No. 9,

ISAAC AUGUR, Agent,

West Pittsfield, Mass.

SHAKER BROOM,

No. 10.

ISAAC AUGUR, Agent,

West Pittsfield, Mass.

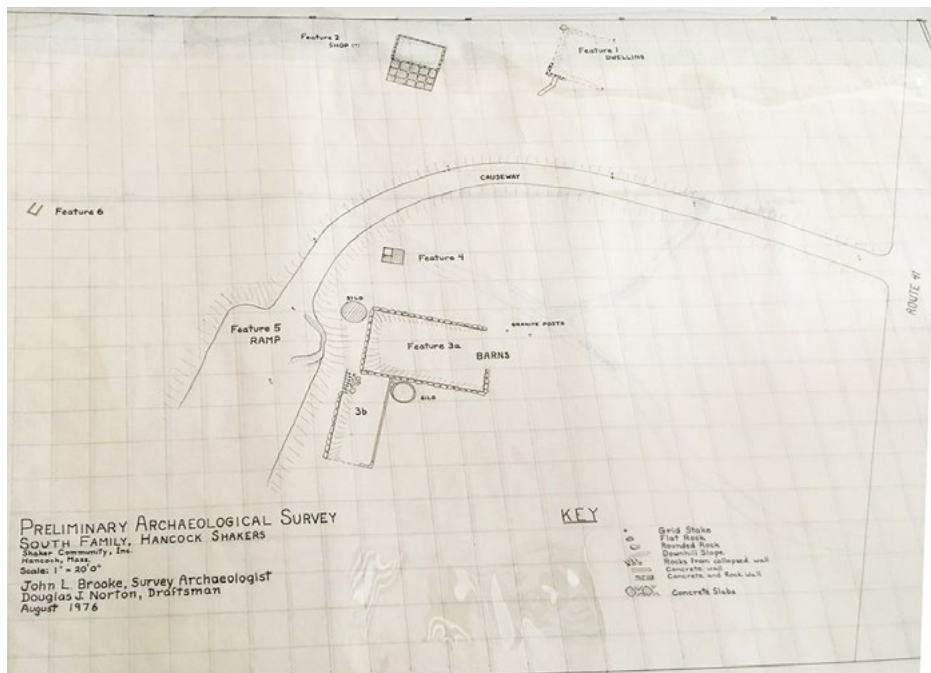
*Broom labels bearing the name of Trustee Isaac Augur,
who lived for a time at the South Family.
Collection of Hancock Shaker Village.*

List of Known South Family Shakers and Their Possible Tenure There

1. Augur, Ann Marie 1837–March 28, 1849, then to East Family
2. Augur, Elizabeth L. 1837-8–1840's, then to Church Family
3. Augur, Elizabeth Sophia 1837–1840s, then to the Second Family
4. Augur, Franklin possibly 1837–March 28, 1849, then to the Second Family.
5. Augur, George Henry 1837–abt. 1848 when he left or he could actually be Franklin Augur
6. Augur, Isaac 1818– November 5, 1846, then to the Office at the Church Family
7. Augur, Janet “Jennett” 1826–March 28, 1849, then to the Office at the Church Family
8. Augur, John Peter 1837–March 14, 1839, then to the Church Family, New Lebanon
9. Augur, Leverett 1818–March 28, 1849, then to the Second Family
10. Augur, Leverett 1837–his death March 6, 1838
11. Augur, Mary Ann twin sister of Ann Marie 1837–mid-1840s, then to the West Family
12. Augur, Ralph Hoadley 1818–mid-1820's, then to the Second Order of the Church by 1829. He was called “Odely,” a name in Hancock's Index Nominem, but really the same person as Ralph.
13. Augur, Roxanne 1837–March 28, 1849, then to the East Family
14. Augur, Ruel 1837 October 31, 1848, then to the East Family
15. Auger, Sophia Hoadley (wife of Leverett) 1818– abt. 1840, then to the Church Family
16. Augur, William Augustus 1818–April 4, 1848, then to the Office at the Church Family
17. Augur, William Blakeslee 1837–his death September 11, 1844.
18. Byram, George 1820s–early 1830s, then to the Second Family
19. Collins, Amos 1820s–early 1840s, then to the Church Family
20. Cook, Pitman 1820s–early 1830s, then to the Second Family
21. Danes, Eliza 1848-49, then to the East Family
22. Danes, Leverett Erastus 1848-9, then to the East Family
23. Danes, William Augustus 1848-9, then to the East Family
24. Evans, Maria 1820s–March 28, 1849, then to the East Family
25. Holland, Arnold 1818–1820s, then to the Church Family
26. Holland, John 1818–perhaps taken away by Matilda Holland his mother on October 12, 1831
27. Holland, Lucy 1818–October 12 1831?
28. Holland, Matilda 1818–early 1820s, then to the Church Family

29. Holland, Nathan 1818–October 12, 1831?
30. Holland, Nathan 1818–early 1820s, then to the Church
31. Holland, Polly 1818–October 12, 1831?
32. Jackson, Elenor 1820s–October 28, 1848, then to the Second Family
33. Rickey, Anna 1818–early 1820s, then to the Church Family
34. Rickey, Harriet 1818–1820s, then to the Church Family
35. Rickey, Horton 1818–1820s, then to the Church Family
36. Rickey, Isaac 1818–early 1820s, then to the Church Family
37. Rickey, Robert 1818–1820s, then to the Church Family
38. Smith, Augustus 1820s–July 1, 1831, then to the Second Family
39. Smith, Robert 1820s–likely left from there in the 1830s
40. Smith, Sarah 1820s–1840s, then to the East Family
41. Smith, Sarah Ann 1820s–July 31, 1831, then to the Second Family
42. Warden, Diana 1818–1820's, then left from the South Family
43. Warden, Wait 1818–1820s, then left from the South Family
44. Whipple, Benjamin 1820s–abt. 1840, then to the East Family
45. Williams, Catherine 1820s–abt. 1840, then to the East Family
46. Wollison, David 1828–mid 1830s, then to the Church Family
47. Wollison, George 1828–mid-1830s, then to the Church Family
48. Wollison, George W. 1828–left from the South abt. 1840
49. Wollison, Maria 1828–mid-1830s, then to the East Family
50. Wollison, Mary Ann 1828–by 1845 she lived at the East Family
51. Wollison, Reuben 1828–early 1840s, then to the Church
52. Wollison, Samuel Lightfoot 1828–abt. 1840, then to the Church
53. Wrightsburg, Catherine 1820s–left abt. 1840 from the South Family
54. _____, Michael 1843–? a convert of Irish descent who lived at the South Family. He is mentioned by David Lamson in Peter Hoehnle, *A Bruised Idealist: David Lamson, Hopedale, and the Shakers*, (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 210), 63.

Information sourced from: Index of Names at Hancock Shaker Village.



Preliminary Archaeological Survey of the South Family, Hancock Shakers, August 1976.
Image courtesy of the Hancock Shaker Village.