

Motive, Means, and Opportunity: Ayer Shutterbugs Shoot the Shakers

Ned Quist

At the 2019 Enfield Shaker Forum, I spoke about three Shaker Mills: the Harvard Bennett's Brook Mill, The Mount Lebanon North Family Mill, and the Sabbathday Lake Great Mill of 1856. The one with which I have since become most interested is the Bennett's Brook Shaker Mill in Ayer, Mass.—the closest geographically to me in Rhode Island. While conducting the research on that mill, Harvard Shaker scholar Roben Campbell suggested that there might be something of interest in the Ayer Library, so in the Fall of 2019, I went there.¹



Fig. 1. Photographer unknown, Ayer Library, ca. 1906, postcard.

In the Nutting Historical Room I found a stack of photo albums and over two thousand glass negatives. These included views of Ayer, Harvard, Groton, Shirley, and the surrounding area, taken by a group of amateur photographers between the late 1880s and about 1920.

Only a small number were of the Shakers, but among these were several that I believed to be unknown or at least little known. Together with the Shaker photographs at the Trustees of Reservations Archives and Research Center in Sharon, and at the Harvard Historical Society, these Ayer Library holdings add considerably to a remarkable body of late nineteenth and early twentieth century photos of the Shaker Society at Harvard.

Amateur photographers in Ayer and Harvard and more like them throughout the country were taking advantage of the new gelatin dry-plate technology and the hand-held camera to photograph their neighborhoods. The 1880s through 1920 saw a blossoming of amateur photography in America. In 1888, the Boston Camera Club started documenting the fast disappearing colonial and early nineteenth-century structures of Boston, which is very much what these amateur “shutterbugs” were doing in Ayer.²



Fig. 2. Ambrotype of Harvard, South Family looking northeast, ca. 1860.
Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

These amateur photos of the 1890s and early 1900s were by no means the earliest photos of this community, so I'll begin with a brief historical survey of photographic images of the Harvard community. This familiar ambrotype (fig. 2) taken ca. 1860 is believed to be among the earliest photos taken of any Shaker village.³ It shows the Harvard South Family buildings, many of which are no longer standing.

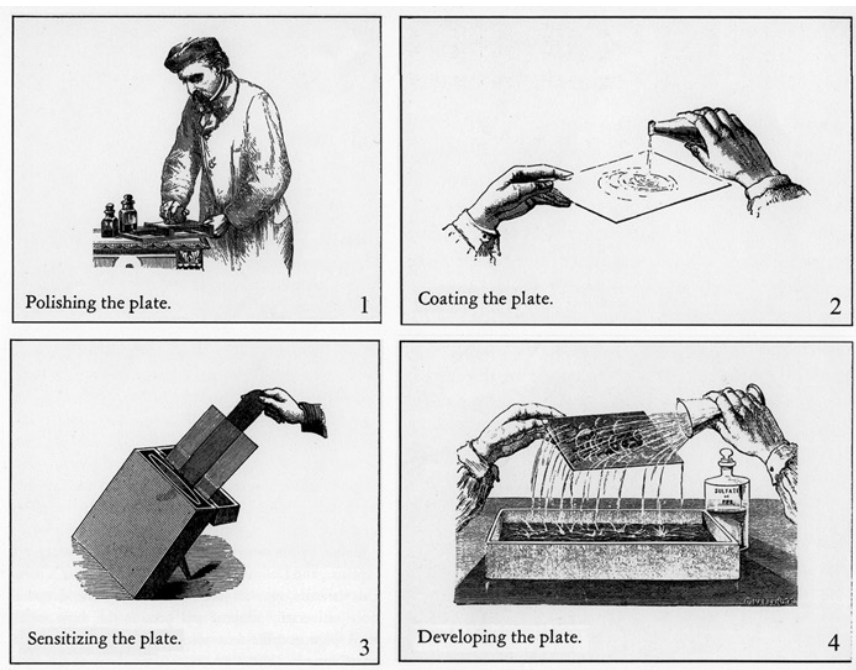


Fig. 3. Wet collodion process.

From 1851 until the 1880s, most photographers, including some amateurs, created their own photographic plates by the collodion process, of which the ambrotype was one example. Developing the photographic image with collodion photography required a complex and stressful process all of which had to be accomplished in a few minutes before the applied chemicals dried.⁴

This (fig. 4) is one of the earliest known photos of the Church Family buildings—a print from about 1866—note in this view that two of the four white buildings on the near side of the main road (Shaker

Road) have gambrel roofs. These roofs, appearing in several different views, help us date the images and trace the architectural changes in the village.



Fig. 4. Harvard, Church Family looking northeast, ca. 1866.
Courtesy of Winterthur Library and Museum.



Fig. 5. Stereoview, photographer unknown.
Harvard, Church Family, south of the Office 1871.
Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

The survival of a number of Harvard diaries and journals often helps us to date these early photos. For example, on August 23, 1871, Olive Chandler wrote in her Journal: “The family about one Oclk [o’clock] repair to the Office to have the Boston artist take [a] picture of the family group.... The artist returns to Boston [on the] eve train.”⁵

The above stereoview (fig. 5) is mostly likely an image of this very event and can therefore be dated as August 1871.

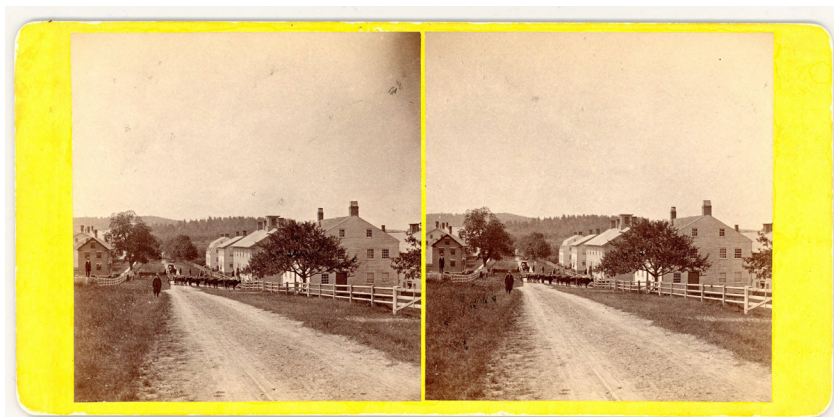


Fig. 6. Stereoview, photographer unknown. Harvard, Church Family, north view, Shaker Village, 1871.

Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

Note that in this view (fig. 6), taken from near the Square House and looking south (from the same 1871 photo shoot), the gambrel roof remains on only one of the four white buildings, the so-called Second House

A major development in photographic technology in the 1870s was the gelatin dry plate. As Sarah Greenough observes, the practice of professional photographers,, who made their living selling cabinet cards, cartes-de-visites, or stereographs of landscapes “was severely shaken during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Improvements in the gelatin dry plate process, the introduction of small hand-held cameras and the advent of a photo finishing industry during the 1880s changed photography from a messy and complicated process to one so simple, that even a child, could master its technique.”⁶

Fig. 7. Gelatin
dry plate envelope.
Courtesy of
Ayer Library.

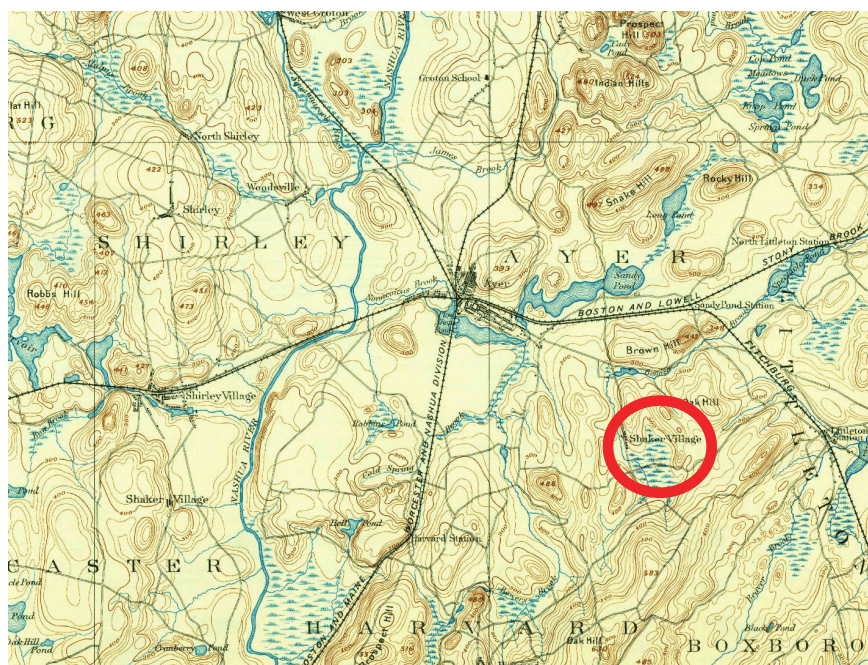


Fig. 8. USGS Groton, MA-NH Quadrangle, 1893 (detail).

To set the scene for the entry of our amateur photographers, here is the 1893 USGS Quadrant for Groton (fig. 8). Note the location of the Harvard Shakers relative to the town of Ayer in 1893.

The Suspects

Here, we enter the detective story. Samantha Benoit at the Ayer Library brought to my attention that these photographers knew one another, and in some cases took photographs together on photo outings. All were amateurs. All but one appear to have belonged to the same local Masonic Lodge, and there is evidence that they shared images and/or negatives, complicating the issue of who took which image. So here's the line-up:

William Wright (1852-1951)



Fig. 9. Photographer unknown. William Wright (detail).
Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Wright is perhaps the best known of my Ayer amateurs. Photos from his collection of prints in the Fruitlands Museum Collection at the Trustees Archives have appeared in several publications including Michael Volmar's *Harvard*, Edward Horgan's *The Shaker Holy Land*,

and Pearson and Neal's *The Shaker Image*.⁷ Other collections of his prints exist at the Ayer Library and of his glass lantern slides at the Groton Historical Society. Wright also used these lantern slides to give illustrated lectures on the history of Ayer.



Fig. 10. Advertisement Poster. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Inheritor of his father's undertaking business, Wright's obituary claims that he was "the most prominent undertaker" for almost fifty years in the Ayer area, and was also known as a furniture maker and for his hobby as a photographer and collector of photographic images. In its obituary, the *Fitchburg Sentinel* noted specifically: "Mr. Wright made a valuable collection of early scenes and people of Ayer."⁸

On at least one occasion Wright provided undertaking services to the Shakers, in 1894 embalming and preparing for burial the body of Lizzie Palmer, the Shakers' cook.

Shaker Sister Maria Foster writes in her journal of March 10, 1894: "Marcia and her girls prepare her [Lizzie Palmer] for burial. ... Wright and Son ... embalm her, and put her in the Casket."⁹

Charles Kennison (1864-1916)

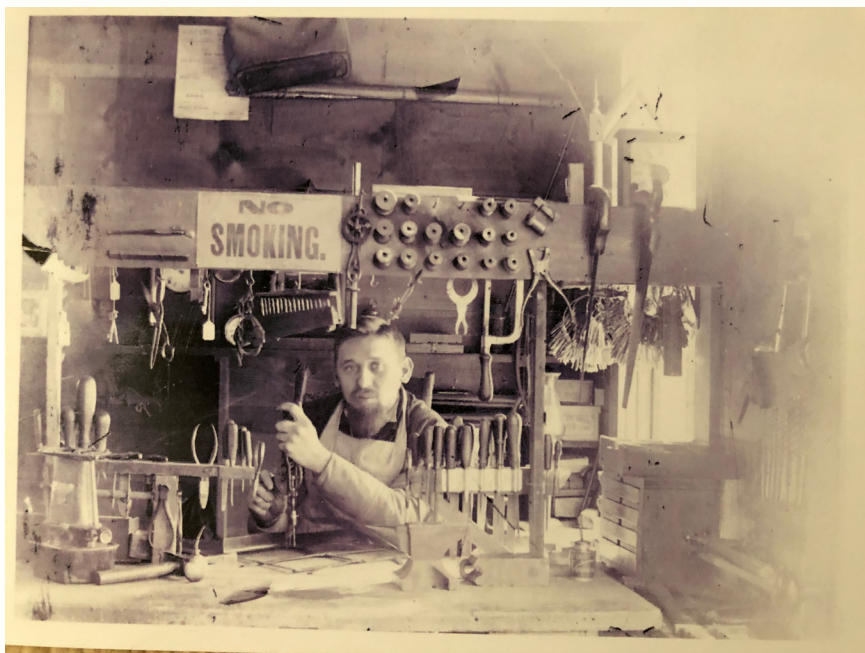


Fig. 11. Charles Kennison, photographer. Charles Kennison in his shop.
Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Charles Kennison came from a more humble background than the other amateur photographers. Born in Temple, Maine, Kennison and his family moved around several Massachusetts towns as his father was “associated with a portable saw mill.” From the age of twelve Kennison was confined to a wheel chair, the result of a spinal deformity. Never having attended either public or private schools, nor apprenticing to any trade, he was a self-taught mechanic—learning to fix clocks, bicycles, and other mechanical devices.¹⁰

At the age of thirteen he set up shop in a small annex to the family home in Ayer, and for forty years continued in this small shop right off the railroad tracks which still stands on East Main Street. Where he learned photography is unknown, but as the camera was in those days a purely mechanical device, it’s not difficult to speculate how he might have been asked to repair one, and became interested in learning how to use it.



Fig. 12. Photographer unknown. Charles Kennison on his buckboard, ca. 1907. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

In 1907 Kennison purchased a small automobile, which he referred to as his “buckboard.” On Sundays he motored around much of northeastern Massachusetts taking pictures.¹¹ His diary, on deposit at the Ayer Library, details many of these photographic outings. Before obtaining the buckboard, his photographic excursions relied largely on the generosity of his friends. With their larger automobiles came group outings and opportunities in all types of weather.

In the obituary appearing in *Turner’s Public Spirit*, it was noted: “He was an amateur photographer of more than ordinary ability.... He was a severe critic of his own efforts, and artistically and mechanically his work was far above average.”¹²

Kennison’s relationship with the Shakers was through his brother, John Lawrence Kennison. John, the publisher of the *Ayer News*, married Louise A. Preble, daughter of Sanford B. Preble. Sanford Preble, was a long-time employee of the Shakers who leased the Shaker mill on Bennett’s Brook in 1895.¹³



Fig. 13. Charles Kennison, self-portrait. Courtesy of the Ayer Library.

Which brings us back to where I started: In this photo (fig. 14), by Wright, we see three Preble brothers in front of that Shaker sawmill. Sanford Preble (the middle of the three) was both a Civil War veteran and an employee of the Shakers since 1877. Preble's daughter, Louise, grew up going to the Shaker school.

There are other amateurs I'll mention here, but as far as I know, only one of them took pictures in the Shaker Villages.



Fig. 14. William Wright, photographer. Shaker saw mill, Harvard, April 6, 1896. Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

Harrison E. Evans (1881-1959)



Fig. 15. Charles Kennison, photographer. H. E. E. [Harrison E. Evans] photographing W. W. [William Wright] in hollow of tree, July 5, 1914.

Courtesy of Ayer Library.

I've not yet found a portrait of Harrison E. Evans, but I do know he appears in this playful shot by Kennison (fig. 15), which features Evans taking a picture of William Wright. It's not much of an image, but I'm hoping something more useful may yet turn up.

In this shot by Evans (fig. 16, next page), we see Charles Kennison inside of a "dago hut" (a sort of hunting blind) near Pulpit Rock in Ayer. The notation in the title of "Exp. by Evans" suggests that either Evans took his own pictures, which were developed by someone else, or he was using Kennison's camera (suggested by Kennison's appearing in these shots). At the very least it supports the notion that they shared images. Evans was a local bookkeeper. He appears frequently in Kennison's diary as a fellow photographer and often as Kennison's transportation on photo expeditions. He also served as a pall bearer at Kennison's funeral.



Fig. 16. Exp[osure] by Evans. Dago hut near Pulpit Rock.
Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Charles Hassam (1879-1937)

Finally, among the Ayer photographers we have Charles Hassam, who, with his father, was a local purveyor of dairy products. This photo (fig. 17), likely by Kennison, was just recently brought to my attention and shows the Hassam's family dairy wagon which reads "Vermont Butter & Cheese" (Hassam's father was from Vermont). One of the two men standing around the wagon might be Charles, and based on age, I'm guessing he's the young man on the left with the bowler hat, but I don't know for sure.



Fig. 17. Charles Kennison, photographer. G. M. Hassens, November 17, 1901. Detail. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Also a photographer, Hassam, like Harrison Evans, was one of the Charles Kennison's drivers. According to Kennison's diary, they visited the Shakers together on at least one occasion.¹⁴ But Hassam was known to the Shakers on his own. In her journal, Shaker sister Annie L. Walker reports that "10-15-1903 I have a ride in an automobile, enjoy it very much, thru the kindness of Mr Hassam."¹⁵ I don't as yet have any evidence of Hassam having taken pictures of the Harvard Shakers, although, since Hassam accompanied Kennison on at least one trip to the Shakers, and he was known to them, I think it's entirely possible.



Fig. 18. Photographer unknown. Clara Endicott Sears.
Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

Clara Endicott Sears (1863-1960)

Our final suspect was a surprise to me. In January 2020, Jim Luedke, of the Boston Camera Club, and I met to go through the records of the club kept at the Boston Athenaeum, to see if any of my amateurs were members.¹⁶ I was trying to find out if the photographic documentation being done by these amateurs could be connected to the efforts of the Boston Camera Club in documenting the historic buildings of Boston. We were looking for Wright, Kennison, Evans, or Hassam. We found none of them as members; instead we found a prominent

member of both the Boston social scene and a person who built a mansion in Harvard and established the Fruitlands Museums, Miss Clara Endicott Sears. Although she was not a resident of Ayer, let's put her in the dock.

Clara Endicott Sears (1862–1960) has had a profound and possibly under-appreciated influence on Shaker Studies. She is often recognized as one of the earliest collectors of Shaker material culture.¹⁷ Among her many accomplishments, she was able to rescue one of the oldest surviving buildings in the Harvard Shaker Church Family the original Trustees' Office of 1794. She purchased it in 1920 from Fiske Warren and moved it to her property on Prospect Hill. In 1922 it became the Shaker Museum of her Fruitlands and Wayside Museums.

In 1916 Sears published a book about the Harvard Shakers: *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*.¹⁸ While not exactly a classic in the research field, it includes a summary history of the Shakers and the Harvard Society and includes a collection of excerpts from the many Shaker diaries and journals collected by her, and significantly, forty photos and illustrations.

Her skill as a photographer remains among the lesser known aspects of her multi-talented life. According to her biographer, Cynthia Barton, Sears gained her photographic interest from her father, Knyvet Sears, who studied photography in the Paris studio of Gustav Legray.¹⁹ She became accomplished enough in photography to win national prizes from the Photography Association of America for her landscape photography, in 1888, 1890, and in 1891.²⁰ Significantly, the winning of these prizes also suggests that she was proficient in the darkroom, as the rules for these prizes required that the photographer take, develop, and mount their own work.

These two photographs (figs. 19 & 20) found in the Sears Papers at the Trustees with captions in Sears's hand, were taken by Sears in the late 1880s, probably her most active period as a photographer. Although the subjects of the photos line up very nicely with Sears's later interest in New England traditional culture, they may relate more to places with which she was familiar. Pepperell is the next town north of Groton, where she summered at their Riverdale Farm estate until 1906. Likewise, Beverly is the next town north of Salem, where her mother's ancestral family, the Peabodys, family home is located and where she spent considerable time in her childhood.



Fig. 19. Clara Endicott Sears, photographer. Peperell 1888.
Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.



Fig. 20. Clara Endicott Sears, photographer. Beverly 1888.
Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

15. Print on Newsprint (engraving?). Building of North Shakers, recently called "Rural Home" (at Hadigans in Ayer)
16. Isaac Willard's House - The South Family location. Date ? Very interesting - locate.
- 8 x 10 Photos Black and White taken by Miss Sears
- 17.* Close view of Shaker Mill - 2 copies (Dadmun Co., Boston)
18. North view (about 100' away) of Shaker Mill (Dadmun Co.)
19. South-west view of Shaker Mill with gate in foreground. (Dadmun Co.)
- 20.* View of Maple-lined Avenue from Shaker Village to Holy Mount. (Dadmun Co.) 3 copies
21. View of Avenue (turn to Gravel pit) 2 copies
- 22.* Shaker Sisters leaving Meeting House (6 women) 3 copies 1 print (dated Dec. 3, 1916)
See also 5.
23. Another view of 21. 2 copies.
- 24.* Shakeress standing in clearing on Holy Mount. 5 copies.
- 25.* Shakeress placing stone on cairn. 3 copies. "Father William Lee and Father James Whittaker were cruelly beaten". Date Dec. 3, 1916. See also 11.
26. View of Marble slab. (See 24.) 1 Copy
27. View of Cemetery Gate (South Shaker Road) 1 copy
- 28.* View of Cemetery (pine at center) 5 copies
29. View of Cemetery (Pine at right) 4 copies
- 30.* Shaker School House (was next to square house) (Was this the one relocated and burned in 1960) 2 copies
- Published in Miss Sears "Gleanings from Shaker Journal"
31. View of Shaker School House and Square House. 1 copy
32. View of Square House looking South. 1 copy
33. View of Square House and School House looking North. (Note: Square house - Miss Sears - it had a hipped roof, that is why it was called the Square House?) 3 copies
34. View (looking South) of Herb House. 1 Copy

Fig. 21. "[Listing of] Photographs-Fruitlands Harvard," p. 2.
Courtesy of Harvard Historical Society.

The Evidence for Clara Sears

Seeing Clara Sears listed as a member of the Boston Camera Club, I had circumstantial evidence for her role as a photographer of the Shakers, but the first documentary evidence for Sears as a photographer of the Shakers came from a typed list of photos I found at the Harvard Historical Society in the papers of Bayard Underwood.²¹ It is a list of Shaker-related photos in the Fruitlands Museum Collection. Note the heading on the second page: "8 x 10 Photos Black and White taken by Miss Sears." I have reason to believe (after speaking with Underwood's daughter) that this list was made by (or for) Underwood himself. It had never occurred to me that Sears might have been the photographer of some of the photos in *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*. This list by itself is hardly conclusive, because I don't know on what basis Underwood is crediting Sears as the photographer. The only other evidence I have (also by Underwood) are assertions made in data sheets

accompanying the Historic American Buildings Survey photographs. I don't have any evidence that they knew one another, even though their time in Harvard did overlap by a year or so. Sears died in 1960; the Underwoods moved into the Harvard area in 1959. Coincidentally, Underwood's daughter reports that they may have lived in the former home of Ayer amateur photographer William A. Wright while waiting for their new house to be completed in Harvard.²²

Among the other names that appears on the Underwood list is the professional photographer Leon Dadmun (1861?–1943) who with his brother Frank had a photography business in West Somerville and Boston from the late 1880s until the early 1890s. We'll come back to him a bit later.

The Shaker Pictures

These are a few of the pictures of the Shakers, their village, and their environs taken by these amateurs and other photographers as yet unidentified.



Fig. 22. William Wright, photographer. Groton Junction, ca. 1855.
Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

William Wright not only took pictures of historic buildings, but also collected and preserved images of earlier photographs, ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, or collodion prints, by making photographs of the originals. This view (fig. 22, previous page) shows Groton Junction (which would become Ayer in 1871) in about 1855. The Shakers were regular and frequent visitors here. After the arrival of the Railroad, they visited Groton Junction to drop off and pick up passengers from the train station and to ship the products of their industries to Boston, New York and other locations via the railroad. Maria Foster's journal from the 1890s records frequent trips to Ayer, to pick up passengers from the train; to visit the doctor, dentist, shopping, or even to get one's portrait taken in a photography studio.²³



Fig. 23. Harvard, Church Family group, June 22, 1895.
 Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

This rather well-known group photo, taken in front of the Church Family's 'Trustees' Office in 1895 was probably taken by William Wright and so far is the only Wright photo of the Shakers themselves. It has been widely published.



Fig. 24. Photographer unknown. Last of the Harvard Shakers, ca. 1916.
 Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

This picture, published in *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*, *The Shaker Image*, and as a post card is well-known. According to the Underwood list, it was taken by “Miss Sears.” The Underwood list dates the image from Dec. 3, 1916. While it could have been taken in 1916, clearly the foliage on the trees suggests it was not December. What gives me pause about the attribution to Sears is the writing appearing in white in the upper right hand corner. Take note of the shape of the “r” in both Shakers and Harvard. We will see this handwriting again and discuss a bit how it got there later.

Shaker Pictures: Buildings: Both Extant and Vanished

The pictures taken by the Ayer amateurs of the Harvard Shaker buildings add considerably to our understanding of the “built environment” in the last years of the Shakers, in some cases by providing different angles of buildings known from other images, or in others providing the only clear evidence of the size, location, and potential use of the buildings since many are now gone.



Fig. 25. Charles Kennison, photographer. Rural Home, 1896.
Courtesy of the Ayer Library.



Fig. 26. East Family structures, ca. 1890.
Courtesy of the Trustees Archives and Research Center.

The “Rural Home,” (fig. 25, previous page) a new dwelling house for Harvard’s North family was built at considerable expense under the supervision of Augustus Grosvenor in 1853.

Unlike most images of this building, this 1896 photo by Charles Kennison shows what appears to be a carriage barn and shops or barns attached to the ell. Most images of this building do not show these attached outbuildings.



Fig. 27. Charles Kennison, photographer. John L., Louise and Lawrence Kennison in front of the Harvard, East Family dwelling, June 14, 1914.
Courtesy of the Ayer Library.

In his illustrated book, *Harvard*, Michael Volmar opines that this (fig. 26) is the only known photo of the East Family buildings.²⁴ Not anymore. Charles Kennison’s 1914 (fig. 27) photo of his brother John Kennison, John’s wife Louise, and their son Lawrence is taken in front of the same East Family building. Note the same vine growing up to the right front window.



Fig. 28. H. E. Evans, photographer. Bennett's Brook Mill, 1907.
Courtesy of the Ayer Library.

This 1907 photo, the only one of a Shaker subject by Harrison E. Evans, is one of the most evocative of the dozen or so known images of the Bennett's Brook mill. It captures the majesty of these slumping, decaying buildings that once housed so many industries vital to the Harvard Shakers. Despite its obvious deteriorated condition, the sawmill was still operating when this was taken. Note also that this is a panorama, made from two images. Just to the left of the building on the left is the spillway.



Fig. 29. Charles Kennison, photographer. Bennett's Brook Sawmill Sash and Carriage, 1915. Courtesy of the Ayer Library.

This 1915 photo by Kennison comes as close as we may ever get to an inside photo of the Shaker Mill on Bennett's Brook. It shows the carriage and sash of the sawmill. Until this picture emerged, it wasn't clear what sort of saw was being used at the mill. Alan Ganong, of the Ledyard Sawmill in Connecticut, notes two details which he had not seen on any other sash saw, the pins in the headblock and the fact that the saw blade teeth don't go to the end of the blade. Both of these same details also appear in a John Tarbell photo of the Enfield, New Hampshire, sawmill.²⁵ Ganong notes that the pins were used as leverage points for moving the log with a mill bar.²⁶



Fig. 30. Charles Kennison, photographer. Old South Home Harvard Shakers, Oct 15, 1903. Courtesy of Ayer Library.



Fig. 31. Photographer unknown. Detail of (front to back): Harvard South Family Office, Brethren's shop, and barn. Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

This 1903 image (fig. 30) by Kennison shows both the South Family dwelling (left) and a tantalizing piece of the long gone Brethren's Shop (right behind the carriage). The roof of this Brethren's Shop also appears in the 1860 Ambrotype (fig. 31)



Fig. 32. Charles Kennison, photographer. Old House, near Shaker mill, 1915. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

This was the photo (fig. 32) that triggered my interest in the amateur photographers of Ayer. Since the Shaker Mill was near the North Family, this Kennison September 1915 photo of a derelict building “near Shaker mill” got me wondering if this could be another North Family building.

The solution comes from comparing several images. This is the North Family Trustees' Office as it looks today (fig. 33).



Fig. 33. North Family Office, 2019. Photo by Author.

The next image was taken by Kennison in 1915 (fig. 34) and shows the original ell on the Trustees' Office and the corner of another building.



Fig. 34. Charles Kennison: Turn of the Road Near Shaker Mill, 1915.
Courtesy of Ayer Library.

In an earlier photo (fig. 35) from the Harvard Historical Society—it's easy to see that the light-colored building on the right was the same as the mysterious “Old House, by Shaker Mill.” Kennison's photo must have been taken after the HHS photo in which far fewer windows are missing. This image was taken just across northbound Shaker Road from where it takes a ninety degree turn to the left. The building is clearly Shaker but its exact function is not yet clear. The dearth of Shaker records for the Harvard North Family leaves this mystery as yet unsolved.

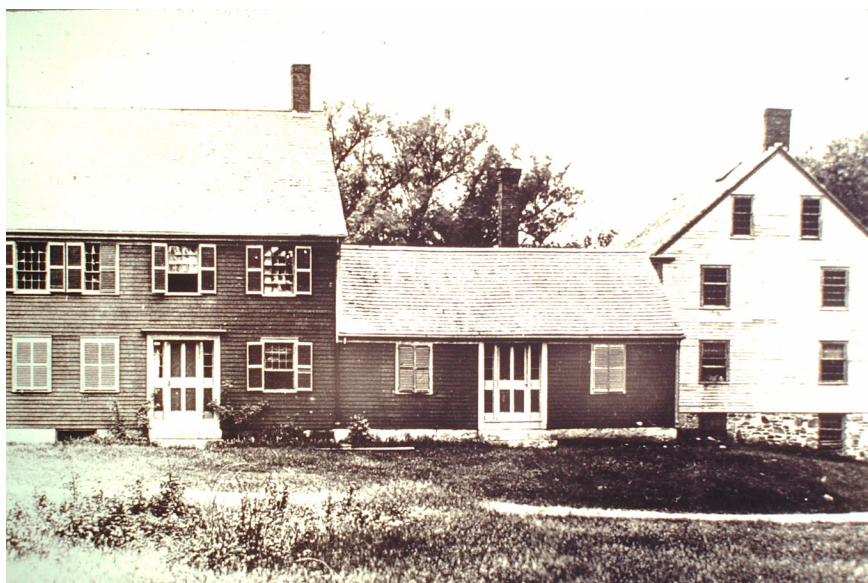


Fig. 35. Photographer unknown. No. Family Dwelling Patrick Hooley.
Courtesy of Harvard Historical Society.

The Photos Taken by the “White Hand”

The following two pictures I included not because they are by any of the amateurs under discussion here, although they might be, but because of the writing on each, which to my eye seems to be the same hand. There are about a dozen photos of the Harvard Shaker Village with this “white hand” writing. The Underwood list attributed the barn photo to Clara Endicott Sears. As you look at these, note the slant of the letters, the lower case “Rs” which resemble “Ys” and the “D” at the end of Harvard, which appears to have a tail pointing off to the left. A clue to another suspect who may have taken these is actually found on the typed list from the Underwood papers. Numbers 17-19 on the list give the credit: Dadmun Co., Boston. Looking for other photos on the internet by Dadmun there appear to be a number of other Dadmun Co. photos at Boston College, many of which also have legends in “white” but in a different hand.²⁷ At the moment, I don’t have any evidence as to who the “white hand” photographer is.



Fig. 36. Photographer unknown. Bennett’s Brook Mill ca. 1916. Courtesy of The Trustees Archives and Research Center.



Fig. 37. Photographer unknown. South Family Stone Barn, ca. 1916.
Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.



Fig. 38. Charles Kennison, photographer. Shaker Village Harvard from North, 1903. Courtesy of Ayer Library.



Fig. 39. Photographer unknown. Shaker Village. Post card.

Artist and journalist Benson Lossing admired the “one broad street” he found in New Lebanon, which was as Rob Emlen notes “replicated in other Shaker communities.” Indeed, the north and south facing views of Harvard’s “one broad street” (Shaker Road in the Church Family) would become among the more popular views taken by many photographers of Harvard’s Village.²⁸ This is a Kennison view, almost identical to the postcard view (fig. 38).

This southerly view (fig. 39), by an unknown photographer, shows a common “one broad street” shot taken by a number of photographers. Note that by this time there are no longer any gambrel roofs of the west side of Shaker Road.



Fig. 40. Charles Kennison, photographer. School House “Mother Ann” and Tailor Shop, 1914. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

In this 1914 Kennison view facing north, we see Maple Lane turning off to the left and from rear to front the schoolhouse, the Square House, and the Tailor Shop.



Fig. 41. Photographer unknown. Square House Harvard Shakers.
Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

In this “white hand” photo of the Square House, the schoolhouse is missing, possibly already moved to South Shaker Road opposite the Cemetery.



Fig. 42. Photographer unknown. Harvard Church Family
looking southwest, ca. 1916.
Courtesy of Hamilton College Library, Special Collections.

This is another of the “white hand” photos—this one in late Spring looking across an apple orchard to (from the right), the schoolhouse,

Square House, Brethren's Shop, First House, etc. We can see the roofs of the South Family buildings in the distance—an opposite view from that of the 1860 ambrotype (fig. 2).

What I found compelling about these photos is that most were taken by the worldly neighbors of the Shakers—by undertakers, mechanics, bookkeepers, possibly a wealthy heiress, and some by professional photographers. Also intriguing, and not yet completely settled, is the relationships these photographers had with the last Harvard Shakers. Kennison had a family connection in his sister-in-law, Louise Preble Kennison. Wright, a prominent local undertaker, was known to the Shakers professionally. Evans only connection was his friendship with Kennison. Of the Shakers journals I've seen from this period, only Wright and Hassam make appearances. Sears, we know, visited the Shakers often and had them as guests at her Fruitlands Museum on at least one occasion.

Here, it's worth restating that the actual authorship of a great many of these photos, is murky. Wright not only took and developed his own photos, but he also borrowed images from both other amateurs as well as collected images of earlier photographs to use in his lantern slide lectures. Wright's meticulous recording of the images he borrowed from his friends is quite clear from the annotations he made on the collection of lantern slides at the Groton Historical Society. The annotations by Kennison on album pages in the Ayer Public Library "Exp[osure] by Evans" or "Ex[posure] by Hassam" also suggests that either Wright and/or Kennison may have developed photos for their friends, or shared their cameras while on photographic expeditions.

Both Kennison and Wright numbered their negatives (fig. 43). Wright used them consistently in identifying prints and lantern slides. Kennison's prints were similarly identified numerically as you can see from the penciled number in the upper left corner.

It's also not yet clear if Hassam or other amateurs took photos of the Harvard Shakers. The three collections I've examined so far appear to contain mainly the photos by Charles Kennison (Ayer Public Library) and William Wright (Ayer, Fruitlands Collection at Trustees, Groton Historical) with others sprinkled in. We may yet find collections of Hassam and others and even the "white hand" photographer.

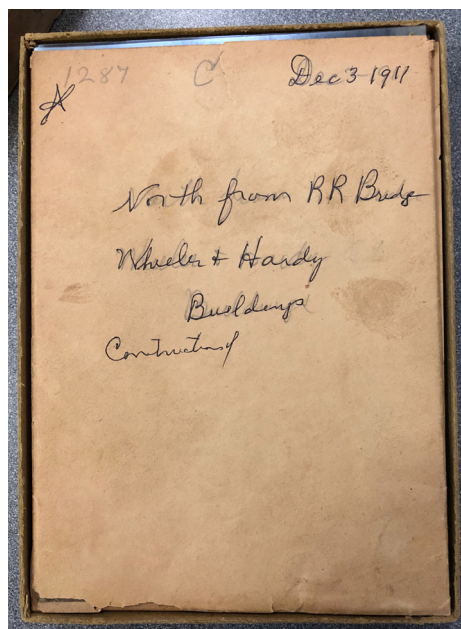


Fig. 43. Glass negative envelope. Courtesy of Ayer Library.

Did Clara Endicott Sears take photos of the Shakers, and if so, which ones? The evidence certainly suggests she could have. She had the motive: illustrations for her book *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals*. She had the means: she was an accomplished photographer with the financial means to have all the equipment and supplies she could ever want. And she had the opportunity: she was a frequent visitor to the Shaker Village in Harvard and evidently a welcome guest among the remaining Shaker sisters.²⁹

Other than the somewhat sketchy evidence of the typed Fruitlands list found in the Underwood papers, I can't point to a smoking gun—yet. Sears's diary from 1916, the year in which many of the “white hand” photos may have been taken, does not mention photography.³⁰

A number of the images we have from this period are labeled (on the negatives themselves) in a distinctive hand. If the Underwood list is correct, these may date from around 1916. Two of them were used by Sears in *Gleanings*. Some became postcards, and possibly were sold in the Fruitlands Museum gift shop.

The similarity of writing suggests that they were all taken (or at the very least labeled) by the same person. They may well have been taken by a professional photographer.

Among the plausible candidates for the “white hand” is Leon Dadmun. While none of the photos Underwood credits to Dadmun have the “white hand” labels, Dadmun photos, such as this urban scene, and others at Boston College also use this technique.³¹

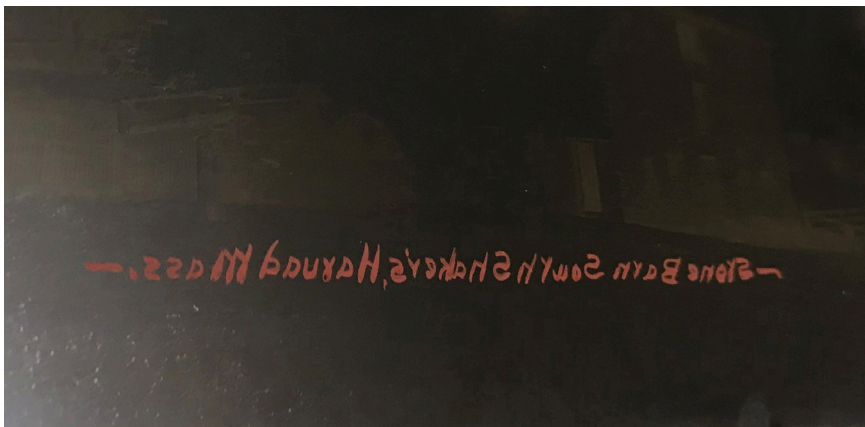


Fig. 44. Glass negative showing title written backward.
Courtesy of Christian Goodwillie.

The practice of labeling glass slides by writing backwards on the emulsion side was relatively common in this period, and in these slides you can see that in this case a red ink was used which when viewed from the glass side of the slide appears black; however, since this is a negative, when printed, it will appear white.³²



Fig. 45. Glass negative reversed showing writing, which appears as black.
 Courtesy of Christian Goodwillie.

Conclusions

Amateur photographers William A. Wright, Charles H. Kennison, and Harrison Evans were neighbors of the Shakers. Clara Endicott Sears, also a neighbor and friend to the Shakers, may or may not have been one of these photographers although she certainly had the means, motive, and opportunity. A professional photographer, Leon Dadmun, was also a summer resident of Harvard and, like Sears, a seasonal neighbor.

This 1890s to 1918 photographic legacy of the Harvard Community with its murky provenance still makes it possible for us to see the faces of some of the last Shakers and the built environment as the last Harvard Shakers saw it. In particular we get a glimpse of the physical condition of their community before its sale to Fiske Warren in 1918.

Many of the community's buildings were lost subsequent to the Shakers' sale to Warren, and without these photos there would be a number of buildings lost to us. After Warren's 1918 purchase of the property, a number of buildings were destroyed or moved. A fire claimed the Herb House, First House, and Sisters' Shop in 1919.³³

Another fire in 1937 claimed the second Great Barn. Several buildings were moved: The old Office (1794) was dismantled and reassembled at the Fruitlands Museum in 1920, The schoolhouse was moved to a site opposite the Shaker burial ground where in the 1960s it burned. The South family privy was moved to become part of the Hancock Shaker Village in 1990. The Rural Home was demolished in 1939.³⁴ What remained of the East family buildings was sold and demolished with the extension of Rte. 2 in 1950.³⁵ Despite local architect Bayard Underwood's efforts to save it, the South Family's Stone Barn roof collapsed and the barn fell into ruin in the 1970s. Also in the 1970s, the South Family Brick Shop was demolished.

By no means the only photos taken of the Harvard Shaker community in its final years, this body of photographic evidence holds a special place in that it was created through the eyes of the Shaker's neighbors with whom they had family, personal, or business connections.

When we consider that in the last thirty years of the Harvard Society's existence that there were only a few Shakers left to document the life of the community, and of those only two or three wrote down anything of substance, these photos supplement that meager written record with a visual narrative. That is especially true of the North Family for which we have virtually no written records. In all, they give an incomplete but valuable view of the Harvard Shaker Village and some of its inhabitants during its final years.

Notes

1. In addition to Roben Campbell whose generosity in sharing her immense knowledge of the Harvard Shaker Society continues to enrich my research, I would like to acknowledge the assistance and generosity of Alison Basset and Sarah Hayes of the Trustees Archives and Research Center, Samantha Benoit and Don Comeau of the Ayer Library, Judy Warner of the Harvard Historical Society. Rob Emlen, Jim Luedke, Christian Goodwillie, Ron Polito, and Marc Seigny.
2. Old Boston Photograph Collection [https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/sets/72157607471461913]. "Although the origin and early history of the collection remains a bit of a mystery, we believe that the prints represent the work of photographers affiliated with the Boston Camera Club (B.C.C.) and that the photographic project was done under the auspices of the B.C.C." See also Sarah Greenough "Of Charming Glens, Graceful Glades and Frowning Cliffs: The Economic Incentives, Social Inducements and Aesthetic Issues of American Pictorial Photography, 1880-1902" in *Photography in Nineteenth Century America*, edited by Martha A. Sandweiss (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 259-81.
3. Elmer R. Pearson and Julia Neal. *The Shaker Image*. Second and annotated ed. (Pittsfield, Mass: Hancock Shaker Village, 1994), 14, 191.
4. Grace Seiberling and Carolyn Bloore. *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 119-20. An excellent brief description of the collodion process and its relation to the ambrotype.
5. Olive Chandler, "Olive Chandler Diary," HVD 3125 MaShaTR.
6. Greenough, "Of Charming Glens," 259.
7. Michael Volmar, *Harvard*. (Images of America). (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2003); Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land* (Harvard, Mass.: Harvard Common Press, 1982); Pearson, *Shaker Image*.
8. "W. A. Wright, 79 Retired Dead in Ayer," *Fitchburg Sentinel* (Oct. 2, 1931), 29
9. Maria Foster, "Journal of Maria Foster," March 10, 1894, HVD 3133 MaShaTR,
10. "Deaths," *Turner's Public Spirit* (Ayer, Mass.), November 18, 1916, p. 5.
11. Charles Kennison [photocopy of] "Diary," Ayer Public Library [hereafter MaAy] July, 31, 1907.
12. "Deaths" *Turner's Public Spirit* (Ayer, Mass.), November 18, 1916, p. 5.
13. "Ayer: Deaths" *Turner's Public Spirit* (Ayer, Mass.), November 14, 1914, p. 5; Maria Foster, "Journal of Maria Foster," August 24, 1895. HVD 3133

MaShaTR.

14. Charles Kennison, "Diary," [MaAy] Oct. 22, 1905 (photocopy).
15. "Journal of Maria Foster," Oct. 15, 1903.
16. Boston Camera Club Records 1881-1971. Mss .L809 MBAAt.
17. Stephen Bowe and Peter Richmond, *Selling Shaker: The Commodification of Shaker Design in the Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 18-20; John T. Kirk, *The Shaker World: Art Life Belief* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 232; William D. Moore, *Shaker Fever: America's Twentieth-Century Fascination with a Communitarian Sect* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 17-18.
18. Clara Endicott Sears. *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916).
19. Cynthia H. Barton *History's Daughter: The Life of Clara Endicott Sears Founder of Fruitlands Museum* (Harvard, MA: Fruitlands Museum, 1988), 16.
20. "The Chicago Exhibition" *American Amateur Photographer* 1, no. 1 (July 1889): 59-60; "The Exhibit of Photographs at the Washington Convention," *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 21, no. 17 (Sept. 13, 1890): 524; "Association Prizes Awarded at Buffalo," *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 22, no. 14 (July 25, 1891): 437. [<https://archive.org> – accessed January 13, 2022]
21. Bayard Underwood Papers. Harvard Historical Society.
22. Ann Sroka. Phone conversation with the author, March 31, 2021.
23. Foster, "Journal of Maria Foster." For example, see entries for Feb. 14, 1894 (visit doctor), June 25, 1894 (pick up at station), Aug 22, 1894 (funeral), Feb. 1, 1895 (visit library), Feb. 1, 1896 (dentist), etc.
24. Volmar, *Harvard*, 50.
25. Pauline Carrington Bouve. "The Shaker Society an Experiment in Socialism" *New England Magazine* 42 (August 1910): 671.
26. Alan Ganong. Email to the author, October 5, 2021
27. See for example, Dadmun Company, "Chauncy St., corner of Essex Pl., Looking North, 2:35 PM" [<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth-oai:qn59vz70k>]
28. Robert P. Emlen, "Shaker Villages and the Landscape of Gospel Order." In *Shaker Design: Out of this World*, ed. Jean M. Burks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 7.
29. Barton, *History's Daughter*, 84-86. Barton quotes a substantial passage from the draft of a 1942 speech Sears gave to the National Society of New England Women, in which she recounts an event during which Eldress Josephine Jillson and Sr. Annie Bell Tuttle tell her, "We have trusted thee and we know thee to be our friend."
30. Clara Endicott Sears, "Handy Notebook (1915-1920)," Clara Endicott Sears Collection, Box 12, AR 360, MaShaTR

31. See for example <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth-oai:qn59sz839>.
32. My thanks to Christian Goodwillie at Hamilton College for making this examination and taking these photos.
33. "Fire Destroys Box Shop at Harvard," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 6, 1919; "Harvard: News Items: Fire," *Turner's Public Spirit* 52, no. 15 (December 13, 1919): 3.
34. "Building Being Razed," *Turner's Public Spirit* (Ayer, MA) (April 22, 1939): 5.
35. "Shaker Farmhouse Sold in Harvard," *Public Spirit*, April 20, 1950. "An original farmhouse and other farm buildings built by the Shaker Colony in Harvard on the Littleton Road and containing the original window panes and christian doors [sic], formerly the property of Grace DuFour, attracted a high bid of \$109 from Stanley Dennis of Dorchester.... These properties are to be removed for the construction of the Rte. 2 extension from Concord to Fitchburg."