

Document Two:

Sabbathday Lake, Maine, Shakers' Letter to the General Court of Massachusetts, January 2, 1818

To the Honorable the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Respected friends

We the brethren of the Church and Society of believers in New Gloucester Commonly Called Shakers, have heard that certain people in & about Alfred have Sent a petition desiring you to alter the Laws of the Land, in Such wise as that all Conveyance of real & personal estate to any family or to individuals of our faith, Shall become null & void at the death of the grantor. Although it is not our way to intermeddle with the public affairs, but to Submit quietly to all Laws enacted for the whole body of the people whatever they may be: yet regarding this proposed measure as a blow aimed at us in particular, we are constrained to remonstrate against it

We have been accustomed to Consider it as the Law of the Land that any citizen may lawfully bestow his welth to pious & charitable uses. On this basis we believe rests the general Statute respecting donation to Such uses, making certain officers of Churches corporation to take by gift: and in virtue of the Same right to give, we Suppose Sundry other Corporation are empowered to receive estates. Such as the trustees of ministerial funds, Bible & Tract Societies, Hospitals, Missionary Societies, & others; all having in view the free & charitable administration of good to the bodies or Souls of men.

We cannot think you ~~will~~ would pass any general Law which Should limit donations to Such Societies as these to the life of the donor. If therefore any law is enacted, it must be a particular one, levelled Specially at our Communion. But before you can be persuaded to pass any Such law, we think you will first be persuaded that we deserve it; either for Some radical fault in our faith pernicious to the State at large, or for Some equally dangerous corruption in our practices.

Respecting our faith we do not think it expedient with a relation of all the errors unjustly laid to our Charge= there are Some calumnies which we Shall never stoop to answer. We believe the Holy Scriptures to be a true record of the revelation from God to man = and we hope for Salvation through the lord Jesus Christ, and in no other way- Our particular views of the scriptures are contained in the writings of our brethren & are published to the world at large; and we desire that no peculiarity of faith may be Charged upon us but what is there expressed. We think that we can better

declare our belief then others can for us.

Touching our outward demeanor, it becomes us to Say but little. Our actions Speak for themselves. But we ought to observe that we do not urge or press any man to unite with us. We would not willingly receive any one to our Communion who is not fully persuaded in his own mind: We do not require any man to Convey all his property to us: nor do we receive any till his lawful debts are paid & Such provision made for his family as is just and proper. On this last point we are Scrupulous to have every just cause of complaint removed. If we Spend our Substance in vitious living, instead of works of piety and and charity, ~~if we are~~ if we are destitute of industry, Sobriety, frugality, temperance or integrity, let our enemies witness against us. Whose [?] have we taken- whom have we corrupted or defrauded or whose garments have we received for a pledge?

But if we are both corrupt in principle & immoral in practice; granting our enemies all they falsely allege against us: we still would Suggest that no act of legislation can be necessary. If this work or this counsel be of men, it will come to naught. We do not read that any pernicious Sect has ever existed in the Christian world any longer then it was thought proper to persecute it professors.

Let it not be said that in this last asylum, this only hope of the friends of true liberty in the earth, the Secular arm was lifted against any temple for the worship of Jehovah.

But should it be Still objected that we ought not to possess lands in common, we answer, let our titles be examined in the Courts of Justice, for the remedy Seems to be amply with them. We do not Suppose that they will hold as valid any donation or Conveyance obtained by fraud, or intended to carry into effect any immoral or unlawful purpose.

Wherefore, we respectfully request that you would not grant the prayer of that petition

Jan. 2. 1818

Joseph Briggs
Joshua Merrill
John Holmes
James Holmes
Calvin Holmes
William Merrill
Robert Willson
Oliver Holmes
Barnabus Briggs
Ephraim Briggs

James Merrill
Richard Thurlo

We the Subscribers are acquainted with most of the persons whose names are Signed to the within memorial, and Consider them as men of good character, to whose Statement we Should not hesitate to give credit

David Nelson
Daniel Howard
Joshua Abbe
Wm Bradbury Jr
Isaac Parsons
Joseph E. Foxcroft
Simon [?]

Jany 15th

Committed to the Comte on the petition to which this remonstrance refers

House or Representatives Jan 15. 1818
Read & commd to the Commee on Pet. of S. Sanborn & others.
Sent up for concurrence
Timothy Begelow Speaker
In Senate Jan 20 1818
Read and concurred
John Phillips Presidt

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