

Alpha and Omega: The 1804 Shaker Church of Christ Missionary Letter and Richard McNemar's 1838 Draft of an Answer

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Shaker Richard McNemar functioned as a “minuteman” for the Shaker cause west of the Appalachians. From the moment of his conversion in 1805, McNemar turned his time and talents fully to the promotion and defense of Shakerism. Following a series of unfortunate developments in the 1830s—the eroding infiltration of Swedenborgianism, defalcation of Union Village trustees, and incompetent leadership in the Ohio Shaker Ministry—McNemar was faced with the sad reality of the state of the western Shaker communities. Freegift Wells, dispatched from Watervliet, New York, to Union Village, Ohio, in 1836 on a mission to establish order and stability in the west, instead found himself dealing with the additional problem of recalcitrant and decidedly unhumble veteran Believers. McNemar, unable to step away from the responsibilities piled on his back during thirty years of dedicated service to his faith, soon found himself marginalized and under threat in the very community founded from his Turtle Creek Church congregation on his own land. It was a disorienting and terrifying time for many, especially when combined with the eruption of spiritual communications attendant to the New Era, then dawning among the Shakers.¹

During this turbulent time, in a moment of self-reflection, McNemar took up his pen to answer the original letter carried by Shaker missionaries from New Lebanon, New York, in 1805. The letter, written in December 1804, was signed by elders from New Lebanon's North Family and trustees from the First Order of the Church Family (of which more below). The letter (hereafter: Church of Christ) begins: “The Church of Christ sendeth unto a people in Kentucky and the adjoining states.” Carried by Benjamin Seth Youngs, Issachar Bates, and John Meacham—the first three Shaker missionaries to the west—the letter was read to hearers, both eager and trepidatious, on the long road to Turtle Creek.

McNemar's “Draft of an Answer to the foregoing letter from the church,” (hereafter: Draft) written thirty-three years later, provides his candid assessment of the successes, and failures, of the western Shaker

converts in managing their own affairs. The Draft is slyly framed as an apologetic defense for the management of the western communities, specifically Union Village, in the face of the multiple failures precipitating Wells's arrival. McNemar writes from a place of detached elevation, as a participant, but also somehow above the fray and privileged to know the real situations of the western communities, to which he was repeatedly dispatched as a problem solver. However, the Draft evidences McNemar's unwillingness to step down from his privileged position willingly and with grace.

The single text of the Draft known to this researcher was located in the jumbled manuscript numbered 301 in the Shaker Collection of Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Perhaps McNemar's most important extant journal, although it is more of a commonplace book, it covers the crucial years 1837 through 1839, which saw his tragic downfall. Unhelpfully, the Library of Congress finding aid does not identify the volume as having been written by McNemar. Instead, it is listed generically as "Church records, including lists of members, descriptions of the buildings, correspondence agreements, circa 1815–1839, no. 1 [John Patterson MacLean?]." (Hereafter: Church Records) There is not even a mention of Union Village in the description. Frankly, this manuscript almost escaped my attention during the ten years plus that I spent researching my biography *Richard McNemar: Frontier Heretic and Shaker Apostle*, which would have been catastrophic for the final project.

Church Records comprises a random assortment of content, all in McNemar's hand. It is formed of separate quires, or gatherings, bound together, presumably by McNemar himself. The front cover bears the label "No. 1" in ink, as well as a note, attached much later and addressed to Shaker collector and historian John Patterson MacLean. Written by the Shaker who passed this precious manuscript along to MacLean—and by extension to posterity—it reads: "Esteemed Friend—Finding contents of this old record preserved in better shape in our own beautifully kept early journals thought this might be of more value to Library than to us—but have no one near me with whom to counsel. If you think I am making a mistake please [have same?] returned with such other matter of which you may so decide." The Shaker donor's casual assessment of the manuscript's contents does not stand up to scrutiny, at least in comparison with extant Union Village journals. In fact, much of the content contained in Church Records would never have been copied into later collections of

Shaker records, as it comprises McNemar's personal correspondence and documents he clearly marked as confidential. Additionally, the fact that the Shaker donor makes no mention of McNemar in their covering note indicates that they did not carefully peruse the volume before deciding to give it to MacLean. Shaker researchers are indeed fortunate for this oversight, as the manuscript is the sole source for information pertaining to many unseemly events at Union Village in the late 1830s.

The front pastedown of Church Records bears a list of the birthdays of Shaker leaders, McNemar among them. From there the volume is paginated continuously, beginning at 19 and ending at 105. There are an additional thirty-four pages of manuscript content, as well as a full page of text on the rear pastedown of the volume. However, the internal discontinuity of dates and lack of a general order makes Church Records very similar to the four other surviving McNemar diaries at the LoC. Indeed, there was so much incredible content about McNemar's last years in Church Records, that I couldn't possibly address it all in my biography. Accordingly, the highly intriguing Draft receives only a passing mention in the book, as a full discussion of the text would have digressed too much amidst the swirl of events that eventually subsumed McNemar. Also, a proper discussion of the Draft requires examining the original letter carried by the missionaries, dated in December 1804. I will now survey both texts and situate McNemar's response, penned thirty-three years later, in the context of events at Union Village in 1838.

Church of Christ: The 1804 Letter and Its Context

Three manuscript versions of this letter are held in the Shaker Collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) and one additional example is held in the Andrews Shaker Collection at the Winterthur Library.² There may be other extant copies, but no more have come to my attention. Intriguingly, the manuscript versions vary significantly in two details when compared with the published versions of this text issued by McNemar's press in the early 1830s.

Documentary evidence for the motivations behind the Shakers' decision to undertake a mission to the revivalists in Kentucky and Ohio has in large part remained elusive. New Lebanon journals for that year are rich with details of minutiae concerning business and travel, but very little in the way of daily events or big picture strategy on the part of the Ministry. In her biography of Issachar Bates, one of the three missionaries

sent to the west in 1805, Carol Medlicott cites reportage of the revival in the *Albany Gazette*, a newspaper the Shakers may have read. Medlicott also quotes Bates's autobiography, written in the early 1830s, which provides some of the only reminiscences of the zeitgeist at New Lebanon in 1804. Reflecting on his awareness of the Kentucky Revival, Bates wrote:

I wondered why the Church did not send messengers with the gospel to them poor souls, for I pitied them in my heart. But I concluded that the Church knew better about them than I did. But in the latter part of December 1804 I was sent for to go to Lebanon. Soon after I arrived Elder Ebenezer invited me into his room. We sat and talked a while about common matters. At length he asked me how I felt towards them precious souls that God was at work with in the west. I told him I had wondered why they had not been visited before this time ... Said he, "I want to know your faith supposing the lot should fall on you to go. For one, are you man enough to leave your family once and for all, and all your friends in these parts and for the sake of them poor souls that God is preparing for salvation?" I answered thus: "My faith is in the gift of God that is in the Church and that faith I will obey come life or death." "Well," said he, "that will do, for the Church have appointed Elder John Meacham, Benjamin S. Youngs, and Issachar Bates to start for that country the first day of January 1805."³

The Ebenezer mentioned by Bates was Ebenezer Cooley. As elder of New Lebanon's Gathering Order, or North Family, was a key factor in the conversion of many to Shakerism. Cooley was born in Greenwich, Massachusetts (now submerged in the Quabbin Reservoir), on March 14, 1737. A pewterer by trade, he knew Mother Ann Lee personally and gave two accounts of her in the collection of *Testimonies* published in 1816, which comprised reminiscences of her life, character, and revelations.⁴ In fact, Cooley claimed to have had a prophetic vision of Mother Ann, prior to discovering and meeting her.

Ebenezer Cooley, before he found the Church, saw in vision, a woman whose appearance was very glorious, and her face shone as bright as the sun. In the beginning of the year 1781, he visited

the Church at Watervliet; and when he saw Mother, he knew her to be the same woman whom he had seen in vision. She spoke to him and said, "I have seen you before, in vision. You must go forth and preach the gospel. You ought to have been prepared before this time."

These words of Mother greatly strengthened his faith. After Ebenezer had confessed his sins, and been taught what to do to be saved, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and became a powerful preacher of the gospel; and was instrumental, in the gift of God, of converting many souls to the faith, and of instructing and building them up in the way of God.⁵

Cooley was a missionary to New Hampshire and Maine in the 1780s. He gained notoriety there for his role in the conversion of Loyalist Zadock Wright, who faced ruin and exile, only to meet Mother Ann in jail, who promised Wright that God would deliver him. After the war, Wright's debts were miraculously settled. Shortly thereafter, Cooley and another Shaker missionary arrived at his doorstep, prompting his conversion.⁶ Cooley was listed among those gathered at New Lebanon in 1787 and fulfilled the mission of preaching Mother Ann's gospel to the end of his days.

Cooley's other testimony is often cited as one of the more important in clarifying Mother Ann Lee's theological assertions relative to the man Jesus Christ, as opposed to the Christ Spirit.

At Harvard, in the presence of Ebenezer Cooley and others, Mother spoke many things relating to her own experience; she said, "When I first gained the victory over a carnal nature, I was brought into great clearness of sight. I saw the Lord Jesus, and met with him, as a lover, and walked with him, side by side."⁷

In late 1799, the Shakers created their first Gathering Order at New Lebanon. Ebenezer Cooley was appointed elder assisted by John Meacham, Phillip Bartlett, Elizabeth Chauncey, and Lydia Matthewson, Sr. Their task was "to instruct enquirers and to hear their openings, and to receive into union such as honestly desired to be saved from sin, and were willing to forsake the course of the world, and to accept salvation by way of the cross." On March 8, 1800 Cooley and his lot of elders moved into the house built by Amos Hammond. That homestead became known

as the North Family.⁸ In 1801, as Medlicott notes, Issachar Bates met with Cooley during his conversion to Shakerism. It is natural, then, that Cooley was one of the signatories of the letter the missionaries carried west.

Three of the manuscript versions of Church of Christ are dated December 26, 1804—two at WRHS and the example at Winterthur (Figures 1 and 2). The Winterthur example appears to date from 1804, based on the handwriting, paper, and single folio sheet which contains the text on recto and verso. A transcription of that text appears as a document following this article. Additionally, I have used it as the basis for my brief analysis of the contents of the missionary letter, thus framing McNemar's reply. The dated WRHS examples are noted as "copies." One is a bifolium containing the text on leaf one recto and verso, and leaf two recto. The verso of leaf two contains a docketed title for the letter. Additionally, the date has been added in a different hand at the top of leaf one recto. The second dated example at WHRS is clearly a labeled "A True Copy" executed as a small pamphlet of thirteen pages. The third WRHS copy is undated, but appears to date from 1804, like the Winterthur example described above. It is a bifolium with the text contained on leaf one recto and verso and leaf two recto, with a blank space left at the end for the specific date. Strangely, when Richard McNemar eventually printed the Church of Christ the letter is given a date of December 31. As of this time, I know of no extant manuscript copy bearing that date.

The signatories of the letter also vary between the manuscript and printed versions. In the three WRHS manuscripts they appear in a column, from top to bottom:

Ebenezer Cooley
Stephen Markham
David Meacham
Amos Hammond

The Winterthur version sets pairs of names side by side, thus:

David Meacham	Ebenezer Coolly
Amos Hammond	Stephen Markham

The Church of Christ sendeth unto a People in Kentucky and the
Adjoining States &c. we have heard of a work of God among you which
works in Powers Operations of his Power, for which we feel thankful -
as we have an ardent Desire that God would carry on his own work
according to his Purposes - we know that God's work as it respects the
Salvation and Redemption of Souls, to be a Strange work, which he hath
Promised to Bring to Pass in the Later days; we also know that the Servants
of God have been under Sackcloth and Darkness since the falling away of
the apostolick order, which Jesus Christ, Ministry continued about
four hundred years; since that time antichrist hath had Power to reign
even in Christ's Stead, and hath set up the Abomination that Maketh
Dyotake spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, (which is antichristian
forms of Religion) whom Christ according to the Scriptures was to
Destroy in his second Coming by the Spirit of his Mouth and the
Brightness of his appearing - But not to tarry upon these things
we will come to matters in the Present Day, that is the time being
nearly finished, that antichrist should Reign (which is according to
the Scriptures) and the time fully Come for Christ to make his
second appearance, God out of his Everlasting Goodness and Mercy to
his Creatures in the fulfilment of his Promises, raised himself up
witnesses and gave unto them all those gifts of the Holy Ghost that were
given to the apostles in the day of Christ's first appearance, the Light
and Power and gifts of the Holy Ghost were so great Especially in the
First Pillow, Attended with the word of Prophecy in so great
and marvellous a manner that Every heart was touched and every
Rein of them that heard was broken, the Loss of man, and the way
and work of Salvation by Christ in the Present witnesses, appearing so
unspeakably great, that although we had been a People greatly wrong
led upon by the Spirit of God and were Looking for the Coming of Christ
yet the light manifested in the witnesses shewed us that we were
unspeakably short of Salvation, and had never Travelled one Step in
The work of Regeneration towards the new Birth, for it shewed us
that it was impossible for them that Live in the works of natural
generation Copulating in the works of the flesh, to travel in the
great work of Regeneration and ^{the} new Birth, and as those witnesses
had Received the Revelation of Christ in this new and Lost
Dispensation of the Display of the grace of God to a Lost world, they
taught and opened unto us the way of God which is a way out of all
Sin in the manner following, Firstly to Believe in the Manifestation
of Christ and in the Messengers he had sent, Secondly, to Confess
and forsake all our Sins, Thirdly to take up our Cross against the
Flesh the world and all evil, which we by Receiving and
Obeying from the heart have Received the Gift of God which
hath Separated us from the Curse of this world and all Sin in
our

Fig. 1. "The Church of Christ," 1804 (recto). Courtesy, the Winterthur Library:
The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection.
Photograph by Douglas L. Winiarski.

Letter

Our knowledge, for twenty years past and upwards, we therefore
as servants of Christ and children of the Resurrection, Testify to all
people that Christ hath made his second appearance here upon Earth
and the poor lost children of men knoweth it not, we know that
their is many among the wise and prudent of this generation who
are looking for the coming of Christ in this latter day who online
ly, ever look the work of God, as the Ancient Jews did in the
Days of Christ's, first appearance, for Christ has come and it is
seen from their eyes, and we marvel not at it, For Christ said I thank
the father Lord of heaven and Earth that thou hast hid these things
from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes
But as the work of God that hath wrought mightily in us to
purify us from the pollution of sin, has been progressive from steps
to steps, as we were able to bare from one degree to another,
we cannot tonight Particular in this Letter, we hope and trust
that you will be so far informed as will become necessary for
your salvation, we put union with the work of God we have had is
among you, and have a desire to Communicate something to you that
will be for your good, the light of God in the Gospel has taught us the
straight and narrow way that leadeth to life, and not only so But
has given us to see the Devices of Satan, that from ages past down to
this day, when God has given his holy Spirit to enlighten and convict
the children of men of sin, Satan would work also to lead them into
Erroneous Practices and in by and Forbidden Paths of Bribes to Dishonour
and Disparage the work of God even in them that God had enlightened
and called to be his witnesses - we have had a great desire that
some of you might have visited us Before now, as we have
been waiting for some time to know the mind of God in Relation
to you, we now out of Duty to God and our fellow Creatures, have sent
three of our Brethren unto you, (viz) John Meacham, Issacher
Bates and Benjamin Young, whom we trust will be able to
Declare these things more Particular, and open the way of Eternal life
unto you, which is out of all sin, a way that the Vultures Eye never saw
the Lions, whelps never trod, the four Lion never tasted By it
Receive them therefore as messengers of Christ and friends to your salvation
Written in the Church at New Lebanon in the Town of Canaan
County of Columbia and State of Newyork - Dated this 26 day of
December in the year of our Lord, 1804 -

We in Behalf of the Church have here unto subscribed our names

David Meacham Ebenezer Cooley
Amos Hammond Stephen Markham

Fig. 2. "The Church of Christ," 1804 (verso). Courtesy, the Winterthur Library:
The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection.
Photograph by Douglas L. Winiarski.

Who were these other men and why were they made party to this theological epistle? Stephen Markham was born in 1765 at Enfield, Connecticut. He was gathered in at New Lebanon in 1788 and served as North Family elder from 1804 to 1807. He may have been the junior elder under Cooley at the time the letter was drafted, or on the cusp of assuming the role of first elder, a question that will hopefully be resolved by further research. Markham was known as a good singer. Rather sternly, in 1820 he spoke in meeting about not buying raisins and liquor when riding out.⁹

David Meacham and Amos Hammond were respectively the first and associate trustees of New Lebanon's First Order of the Church. David Meacham Sr. was born in 1743 in Enfield, Connecticut. He was a brother of Father Joseph Meacham, and was admitted at New Lebanon in 1788, served as first trustee from 1794 to 1808, and as a family deacon from 1815 on. Like Cooley, he supplied eyewitness accounts of Mother Ann for the 1816 *Testimonies*.¹⁰

Amos Hammond Sr. (1737–1816) and his wife Rhoda relocated to New Lebanon from Scituate, Rhode Island, in 1780. They were gathered into the Church at New Lebanon in 1789. The farmstead where they lived eventually became the site of the North Family. Hammond signed the covenant in 1800 and served the Church as an associate office trustee from 1800 to 1807. Rhoda Hammond filled a similar practical and logistical role as the deaconess of the Church in 1804.

Intriguingly and inexplicably, Stephen Markham's name is absent from McNemar's later printing of the Church of Christ. Summarily, the Church of Christ letter manuscripts bear the signatures of two Shaker elders and trustees, while McNemar's printed version bears that of only one elder and two trustees; the dated manuscript versions of the letter are dated December 26, 1804, while McNemar's printed version is dated December 31, 1804. Now that the context of the Church of Christ letter has been established, we will turn to an examination of the text of the letter itself.

The title reads: "The Church of Christ Sendeth unto a People in Kentucky & the Adjacent States &c." The name used to identify the organization is important—simply "The Church of Christ."¹¹ This is the name used by the Church to identify themselves on the deed to the land on which the meetinghouse was built, executed on May 3, 1786 (Figure 3). Indeed, as late as 1818, John Dunlavy used it in the title to his *Manifesto, or A Declaration of the Doctrines and Practice of the Church of Christ* (Figure 4).



Fig. 3. "Church of Christ" given as the official name of the religious sect commonly known as Shakers on the deed to the land of George Darrow and David Darrow for the location of the Shaker Meetinghouse, May 3, 1786. Communal Societies Collection, Hamilton College.

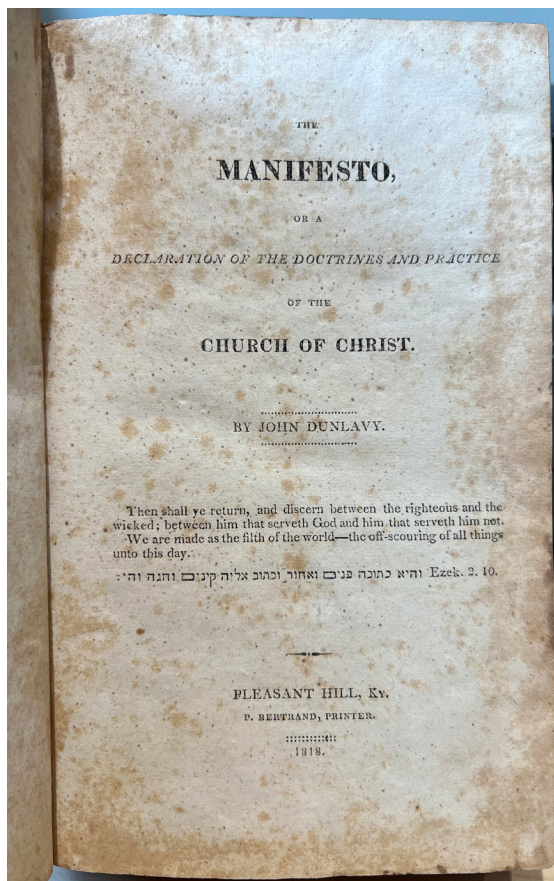


Fig. 4. *John Dunlavy, Manifesto, or A Declaration of the Doctrines and Practice of the Church of Christ (Pleasant Hill, Ky. P. Bertrand, Printer, 1818), title page.*
Communal Societies Collection, Hamilton College.

The letter begins with a description of the “divers operations of [God’s] power,” calling “God’s work as it respects the salvation and redemption of souls” a “strange work, which he hath promised to bring to pass in the lat[t]er days.” The Church of Christ asserted that the true Apostolic Order had fallen away after four hundred years and Anti-Christ had reigned since then. Benjamin Seth Youngs would specifically cite the year 457 in his *Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing*, as the beginning of the reign of the Antichrist.¹²

However, the letter bore the good news that since Antichrist’s reign was “nearly finished,” the time had “fully come for Christ to make his second appearance.” In fact, God had “raised up to himself witnesses and gave unto them the all those gifts of the Holy Gost that ware given to the apostles, in the day of Christs first appearance.” These witnesses were the English Shakers who had brought their gifts to the American colonies, arriving on August 6, 1774, and opening their gospel on April 19, 1780, the “Dark Day,” on which the sun was occulted by drifting smoke from Canadian wildfires. Up to that time, the letter asserted, the inhabitants of the New York/Massachusetts border were spiritually lost, “unspeakable short of salvation, and had never traveled one step in the regeneration towards the new birth.” The Shakers soon taught them “that it was impossible for them who lived in the works of natural generation, copulating [copulating] in the works of the flesh, to travil in the great work of regeneration and the new birth.”

The Shakers opened unto them “the way of God which is a way out of all sin,” comprising three simple tenets.

- “Firstly to beleive in the manifestation of Christ and in the messengers he had sent,
- Secondly. To confess and forsake all our sins,
- Thurdly to take up our cross against the flesh the world and all eavil”

By following these teachings, the converts of the early 1780s “received the gift of God which has separated us from the course of this world & all sin in our knowledge, for 20 years past.”

The Church of Christ letter now made a direct appeal to the revivalists, claiming that Christ had made “his second appearance here upon earth and the poor lost children of men knoweth it not.” However, the work of Christ had enabled the converts to “to purify [themselves] from the nature of sin,” in a progressive manner, at a pace that they were able to bear. The letter commended its bearers—Youngs, Meacham, and Bates—to its hearers as men who could “open the way of eternal life unto you, which is a way out of all sin.” Towards the letter’s close it contains a gentle challenge: “We hope and trust, you will be so far informed as will be necessary to your salvation.”¹³

How was the Church of Christ Letter Used and Received?

The three Shaker missionaries bearing the Church of Christ letter to the revivalists in Kentucky departed New Lebanon, New York, at 3:00 a.m. on January 1, 1805—a moment that has assumed legendary status among the Shakers, as well as historians of the sect. However, as Douglas Winiarski has detailed, despite finding themselves in a number of religiously heightened settings during their journey, the missionaries initially refrained from reading the letter. Indeed, it was not read for the first time until they reached Matthew Houston’s congregation at Paint Lick, Kentucky, on March 7, 1805—more than two months into the journey.¹⁴

As Benjamin Seth Youngs recorded in his diary, the missionaries told Houston about “the letter we had from the Church—it appeared surely his mind that it should be read at the meeting house if it was our feelings.” Later, at the meetinghouse, “[John] opened the way for the letter which B read to the people, which soon opened a way into their feelings & before the people were dismissed—there were apparently very few who were not more or less wrought upon & many of them in tears.”¹⁵ In a letter to New Lebanon Youngs provided an additional description of this meeting: “On Thursday 7th, a collection of about 150 people were made at the meeting house, to whom we spoke, & read the letter from the Church—At first the people appeared very hard; but before meeting was dismissed they felt very solemn, & many were in tears.”¹⁶ The evidently powerful effect of the message from New Lebanon must have heartened the missionaries, validating the tribulation of their winter journey.

The next day, March 8, they read the letter at the house of Methodist preacher John Manners. After dinner, “a desire was strongly manifested that the letter from the church might be read to the family which was

complied with—8 or 10 people were present who heard with listening ears.”¹⁷ The letter was subsequently read on March 14 at Barton Stone’s house. Stone had been a Presbyterian minister but separated himself from the Presbyterian Church as a vocal member of the Springfield Presbytery, along with future Shakers Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy. Although the hearers at Stone’s house were already revivalists and had broken “off from tradition,” Youngs was dismayed that “upon hearing the cross presented to view it sound[ed] as if they immediately were for finding weapons & would almost openly reject their own testimony.”¹⁸

Crucially, on Sunday, March 24, the letter was read by Youngs after preaching at the Turtle Creek meetinghouse—Richard McNemar’s congregation—as the climax to a long and powerful meeting. In Youngs’s diary he recorded that “the people through the whole were seriously impressed & many felt very solemn with tears. The number was 200 or 250 & a few of them were exercised with the jerks violently.”¹⁹ The letter was also read at subsequent meetings at the home of the Montfort family and Dr. Calvin Morrell.

The Church of Christ letter served as a powerful tool. As we have seen, it was usually read at the end of meetings, after the Shakers had preached, as a recapitulation of the tenets delivered orally. Given under the authority of a distant Church leadership, it distilled and clarified Shaker beliefs, and ultimately served as an invitation—and challenge—for hearers to take the next step in their salvation journey.

McNemar did not directly mention or discuss the Church of Christ letter in his *Kentucky Revival* (1807), the first history of the revival and an apologia for Shakerism and history of its beginnings in the west. The text of the Church of Christ letter seems to have lain dormant for the next twenty-five years. Upon acquiring his printing press in 1831, one of the earliest projects undertaken by McNemar was a small pamphlet entitled *A Review of the Most Important Events Relating to the Rise and Progress of the United Society of Believers in the West; with Sundry other Documents Connected with the History of the Society. Collected from Various Journals by E. Wright* (Union Village, Ohio: 1831). He chose to include the text of the 1804 letter as part of his chronological presentation. This exceptionally rare pamphlet survives in ten collections.²⁰ McNemar also printed a standalone version of the Church of Christ letter that survives in only seven collections.²¹ As noted above, in McNemar’s version the date of the letter is given as December 31, 1804, and the name of Stephen Markham is omitted. Based

on the surviving manuscript examples, it does not appear that McNemar used any of them as his source text. However, the text of the 1804 letter was copied into an important manuscript from the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky: “The Origin and Progress of the Society at Pleasant Hill.” Notably, this copy of the text gives the date of December 31 and omits the name of Stephen Markham. It also lacks the phrase “erronious practices” in the second to last paragraph, like McNemar’s version. (See documents following this article). So, it is possible that it served as McNemar’s exemplar for his printed version.²²

Reflecting on the letter in his *Review*, McNemar wrote, “Did the people generally understand this letter? How were they affected? What were their general impressions concerning those strangers from their appearance? and how did the matter go on? The letter passed without any comment or cavil. Few understood it, and the singular appearance of the strangers more immediately interested their feelings.” McNemar’s glib retrospective assessment of the letter’s impact is at odds with the accounts given in Youngs’s diary. Indeed, the fact that McNemar chose to specifically respond to it during a time of mounting crisis for him in 1838 belies his characterization of its importance. It is to McNemar’s Draft that we will now turn.

The events leading to the dismal state of affairs that enveloped the western Shaker communities by 1838 began with the death of Father David Darrow in 1825. The downward spiral then coursed through a variety of factors and causes, including:

- lack of a clear leadership succession
- internal strife ginned up by men such as Abijah Alley and Aquila Bolton
- external forces like Owenism and Swedenborgianism and factions formed as a result, leading to the removal of eastern transplants and longtime leaders like Mother Lucy Smith at Pleasant Hill
- three successive defalcations by trustees at Union Village, Ohio

- the ultimate removal of Darrow's successor, Solomon King, as well as his female counterpart Rachel Johnson, from the eldership of the western Ministry
- and, by 1836, the recall of all three original missionaries—Meacham, Bates, and Youngs, to the east

The story is extremely complex. Readers seeking more information should consult Medlicott's *Issachar Bates*, my own *Richard McNemar*, and Sandra Soule's work on Aquila Bolton.²³ The net effect of all of these tribulations served as evidence of the western communities' incompetence in the eyes of the eastern leadership, necessitating an intervention that proved disastrous for McNemar.

Richard McNemar's: Draft of an Answer

At an unknown date in 1838, Richard McNemar took up his pen and wrote the "Draft of an Answer to the foregoing letter from the church." Although it is undated, an internal reference states that it has been "33 years" since the Shaker missionaries' arrival in the west. The letter is addressed, anachronistically, to "the Church of Christ at New Lebanon State of New York." Likewise, the senders are named anachronistically as "the Society or People originally called Newlights or Christians, residing in the township of Turtle creek, county of Warren and state of Ohio." The Draft begins on a conciliatory note, offering thanks to the eastern Shakers for "your many acts of kindness and generosity towards us as a needy and dependent people."

McNemar credits the original selfless spirit of the missionaries, who acted not in "proselyting party views" (i.e., sectarian) or out of "self interest," but out of "a sense of duty to God," for the success of the missionary enterprise. Youngs, Meacham, and Bates had implanted "in us those deep-rooted principles of self denial and devotedness to God." Indeed, McNemar noted that the revivalists would have accepted "nothing but a measure of the same faith and practical experience" in convincing them to take a step that "aimed such a deadly bow at all our earthly prospects of honor wealth and pleasure." In McNemar's opinion, the missionaries had addressed the revivalists with respect and approached them as equals, acknowledging them as "moral agents, called to be workers together with God and to receive individually or as a society."

Draft of an Answer to the foregoing letter from the church.
To the Church of Christ at New Lebanon, State of New York.
The Society or People originally called Newlights or Christians, residing in the
Township of Smiths creek, county of Warren and state of Ohio. sendeth Greeting.
Dear Beloved and highly esteemed Gospel Friends.
 It is with heart full gratitude that we take this opportunity of acknow-
 ledging your many acts of kindness and generosity towards us as a needy and
 dependent people; and of tendering to you our unfeigned thanks for the same. And it
 is with pleasure that we recognize the moving cause of all your benevolent behaviour
 attention to us, from first to last: That it was no proselyting a party views, so prevalent
 in those days, nor any motives of self interest whatever, that attracted your attention
 but (as you express it) "A sense of duty to God, and for the increase and promotion
 of his work among the children of men; and for the purpose of establishing in us
 those deep-rooted principles of self denial and devotedness to God, of which you
 had long been the happy subjects. And we further recognize and acknowledge
 have induced us to accept of those your benevolent overtures which aimed such
 clearly show at all our earthly interests."

Fig. 5. Richard McNemar, "Draft of an Answer" ca. 1838.
 Item 301, Shaker Collection, Manuscript Divisions,
 Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

McNemar admits that, although the revivalists saw sects "as under the power of Antichrist and without the power of God," they saw these things "darkly," i.e., without full understanding. Despite their aversion to sects, stemming from the Springfield Presbytery's rejection of sects and creeds, the revivalists at Turtle Creek accepted the "sacred truths" presented by the Shaker missionaries in "this great and last day."

McNemar cited the missionaries' "repeated reference to the sacred scriptures in confirmation of your testimony," as important in forming the "primary union" between them and the revivalists. As many of the leading western revivalists had been well educated in scriptural interpretation during their training as Presbyterian ministers, its effective use by the missionaries resonated. But of more importance to their success, the missionaries were "not resting merely on the letter," but acting as God's "living witnesses ... endowed ... with the light power and gifts of the Holy Ghost." The Shakers experience in the work of salvation complemented the revivalists' knowledge that "the work of God is progressive from step to step as we are able to bear, from one degree to another." They accepted the Shakers' assertion that salvation from the *nature* of sin—not sin itself—was

“attainable from the experience of hundreds for upwards of 20 years.” This seems to mean that each individual Believer, subject like all human beings to the original sin of fallen Adam and Eve, have now been given the *capacity* to start anew—henceforth free from the indwelling *nature* of sin, but responsible for bearing the cross and remaining without sin through their own daily consecrated labor of heart, head, and hands. The revivalists gladly acceded to this radical proposal, and gave the missionaries the “right hand of fellowship.”

Having reviewed and contextualized the reasons for the success of the Shaker mission in 1805, the second half of McNemar’s Draft summarizes the ensuing three decades. Acknowledging that the eastern Shakers had lived without sin for twenty years prior to their coming west, he asks rhetorically, “What report may you just expect from us after the long experience & special privileges of 33 years, confessedly held in gospel union and spiritual relation?” In his preferred lawyerly style, McNemar examines whether—thirty-three years after their conversion—the westerners had lived up to the foundational example provided by the east.

In the context of the troubled times, following the defalcation of trustee Nathan Sharp, the dispatch of eastern deacons to audit the finances of Union Village, the removal of Elder King and Eldress Johnson, and the installation of Elder Freegift Wells to bring Union Village into order, McNemar questioned the westerner’s adherence to the foundational principles delineated by the 1804 Church of Christ letter, asking: “Do you think ... that we ... should now be able as a joint community to affirm and testify to all people that christ the power of God and the wisdom of God ... is in us and among us, and the lost children of men know it not?” Regretfully, he posited that there were disaffected members at Union Village “waiting for a retraction of your said original testimony,” seeking instead a “modification” that would justify membership on their terms. In McNemar’s opinion, the work of 1805 still stood, despite the efforts of “innovaters”—Owenites, Swedenborgians, and those seeking to democratize the society—and the resultant internal tumult.

McNemar recalled that the missionaries said the work of salvation would be “progressive.” Pointedly, he now asked, “Have you ever entertained a thought that the work among us would prove to be a degressive work & that you might possibly at some future period have to send hunters to hunt us up, as Saul was sent to hunt his fathers asses[?]”²⁴ In a frank admission of the western failure, he acknowledged that the westerners may not be

worthy of further effort, writing, “Should it ever be the case that we should become so degraded and lost, we would not wonder [if you] cease caring for the stray beasts and call home your weary hunters.”

McNemar circled back to his encomium of the missionaries’ attitude in embracing the revivalists, rather than condescending to them. In recognition of the western revivalists’ confidence that they were already on the only sure path to salvation, McNemar averred, “We could not possibly have been persuaded to set out in search of a better country than we possessed.” Again, the calm wisdom of the Shaker missionaries prevailed. McNemar remembered that “the first thing on your part was to acknowledge us where we were: and like the wise men of the East open your treasures and (as you express it) communicate to us something that would be for our good.” Punctuating the foregoing sentiment was McNemar’s admission: “It might be said, that we believed in you because you first believed in us.”

McNemar posited that both parties were independently prepared by God to receive each other. He cited a prophecy attributed to Mother Ann Lee that stated, “There is a great level country in the southwest, in which God will raise up a great people, who will be his people.”²⁵ Accordingly, McNemar observed, “Having from prophesies going before long expected a people to arise in the far west, prepared to meet the Lord at his coming, and on the other hand the coming of the Lord being so generally and confidently expected as the result of the then present work our faith was mutual and reciprocal.” Additionally, McNemar recalled, “The humble first messengers very frankly owned that they did not stand in the zenith of perfection—That others mightier than they would succeed their preparatory mission, and that they themselves were but in a state of infancy and expected to advance into further degrees of purity until they were made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” This was an important example of humility, much appreciated by those in the west.

On July 29, 1805, David Darrow, Daniel Mosely, and Solomon King arrived at Turtle Creek. These men were “confessed of a higher order.” Their appearance four months and seven days after Youngs, Meacham, and Bates, demonstrated the hierarchical nature of Shakerism and the progressive way in which its tenets would be unveiled to the westerners.²⁶ The new arrivals were “prepared & commissioned to superintend the work & conduct it on to a higher degree of perfection ... not come to rival or supplant the first: As the first had not attempted to supplant of

[or?] disannul the gifts that preceded them”—namely, men like McNemar, Dunlavy, Houston, and Worley. This was a chain of validation that grew into a chain of union for western converts gathered under David Darrow and Ruth Farrington at Union Village, John Meacham and Lucy Smith at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, and Benjamin Seth Youngs and Molly Goodrich at South Union, Kentucky. McNemar finished this happy reminiscence, writing, “And thus the work was harmoniously conducted on to the happy result of establishing The Chh of Christ (originally so called) in this place.”

Betraying a lack of self-awareness as to his present vulnerability, McNemar asserted that this spiritual hierarchy, which he had bolstered throughout the faltering western communities, could not “possibly fail otherwise than thro a fail in the leadship ... & those set in front for examples thro unfaithfulness lack of wisdom or other fatal cause cease to be objects of faith or worthy to be followed as guides to heaven.” Indeed, this was exactly how the eastern leadership and Freegift Wells viewed McNemar by this time, as someone whose ego left him unable to know his place in the hierarchy—someone who would not willingly step down from the high place where they had installed him and accept the humble station of a rank-and-file member.

Turning to Union Village, McNemar posited that it was “not the person but the order that is the primary object of faith.” But his defense is weak, because the cult of personality surrounding Father David Darrow was fully revealed in the wake of his passing, an event from which Union Village never fully recovered. Indeed, Darrow’s death drove the first western convert Malcham Worley insane, turning him into a reclusive hermit who became one more casualty of the purges at Union Village during the New Era. In defiance of the wisdom of the eastern Ministry, and his present lead in Freegift Wells, McNemar defended elders King and Johnson, pleading three years after their recall that they had “fully & satisfactorily filled that lot and office and we might say with an increase of experience and wisdom if not of power & authority.” McNemar asked the rhetorical question, from the eastern Ministry’s point of view, “What use we have made of those several gifts, which from time to time you have so generously sent us?” In reply, he assures them that “all who have been sent as messengers ministers or helps have been received by this body of people, at the time being unhesitatingly as being sent of God.” This rings as a preemptive defense of his non-cooperation with Freegift Wells, which was being reported to the east, as McNemar undoubtedly knew.

Aware that Union Village and its leadership had been judged as flawed and incompetent, McNemar assumes a defensive and pleading tone in petitioning the eastern Ministry not to wrest control of the community from western hands, writing, “Independent of the foundation laid we look for no increase. As for a renewal of those several gifts talents and offices, we have never expected nor do we believe that you are able to furnish it. Therefore we do not ask you for parents ministers, Elders, Trustees mechanics and exemplary members, superior to our honorable founders to lay a better foundation than they have laid.” Naively, he states that those at Union Village “simply wait for you to approve the building as far as has advanced and bid us God speed in going on with the work, strengthening the things that remain repairing damages, & building up each other in our most holy faith.” This is a desperate, and highly disorderly, attempt on McNemar’s part to shore up his own position at Union Village.

Realizing that his own candid and gossipy letters, which revealed many years of chaotic conditions plaguing western communities, may have exacerbated concerns in the east, McNemar attempted, rather too late, to defuse their impact, writing: “If we have trespassed the good rules of the church in disquieting you with disorderly reports ... we must beg your charity and forgiveness, for we are not ignovent of the general rule that every society ... ought to bear their own burdens and settle their own difficulties and if help become necessary that it be sought in union with the lead.” McNemar was transgressing this very sentiment as he wrote these very words.

In closing, McNemar abased himself and his peers at Union Village, writing: “As far as disorder and consequent calamity have prevailed we acquit you from all blame and take shame & confusion to ourselves that we have made so little progress in the down coming work of the gospel, in cultivating love, respect & confidence toward each other, and have so little of that real simplicity that can own & subject to the gift of God.” The letter practically ends in a surrender, which is perhaps the place where McNemar should have started:

If we have not entirely forfeited your confidence & exhausted your patience and you feel to continue ... with ... further helps as you shall deem necessary, we most freely renew our obligation to receive & appreciate any ... such gift as you may afford us, until as you express it God shall raise up among ourselves faithful souls &c.

What was the reaction to the Draft of an Answer?

Unfortunately, barring further information, this cannot be known. I have discovered no evidence that the letter was ever sent. In fact, the text only exists in the privacy of McNemar's journal, which would have been confiscated by Freegift Wells when McNemar was forced to turn over all his personal papers, an event that likely happened shortly after he wrote the Draft of a Reply. If, however, McNemar had attempted to send this letter, it would likely have been intercepted by Wells. At Union Village, the walls were closing in around men like McNemar and Worley, who could not step down from their high places and into the low valley of humility that they had embraced in 1805 and preached, at least nominally, ever since. The full tragedy of McNemar's excommunication and downfall, as well as the banishment of his friend Malcham Worley, is recounted in *Richard McNemar: Frontier Heretic and Shaker Apostle*. The Draft, written a year prior to those events, is powerful evidence of McNemar's continued faith in Shakerism and his eastern Shaker mentors, but his failure to follow their lead.

Notes

1. Readers wishing to explore this tumultuous time in western Shaker history are directed to Christian Goodwillie, *Richard McNemar: Shaker Heretic and Frontier Apostle* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023); as well as Carol Medlicott, *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2013).
2. The copies at the Western Reserve Historical Society are located consecutively by date in New Lebanon Correspondence, IV:A-31. I thank Doug Winiarski for bringing the Winterthur copy, ASC 1038 (SA 1225.1) of the 1804 missionary letter to my attention.
3. Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, 70.
4. Peter H. VanDemark, ed., *The Journals of New Lebanon Shaker Elder Rufus Bishop*, vol. 2 (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2018), 419.
5. [Calvin Green and Seth Youngs Wells], eds., *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee* (Hancock, Mass.: Printed by J. Tallcott & J. Deming, Junrs., 1816), 26-27.
6. [Green and Wells], *Testimonies*, 34-36.
7. [Green and Wells], *Testimonies*, 208.
8. "Records Kept by Order of the Church," 1780-1855, 16-7, item 7 "A Collection of Shaker Manuscripts," NN. I thank Steve Paterwic for this reference.
9. VanDemark, ed., *The Journals of ... Rufus Bishop*, vol. 2, 470.
10. VanDemark, ed., *The Journals of ... Rufus Bishop*, vol. 2, 474.
11. The text I have used for this analysis is the one appearing in ASC 1038 (SA 1225.1).
12. [Benjamin Seth Youngs], *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (Lebanon, State of Ohio: From the Press of John M'CLean, 1808), 519.
13. All quotes from Church of Christ are from ASC 1038 (SA 1225.1).
14. Douglas Leo Winiarski, "Shakers and Jerkers: Letters from the Long Walk, Part 2," *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 90 (2018), 92.
15. Benjamin Seth Youngs, Diary, 1805, ASC 859, DeWint-M.
16. Benjamin Seth Youngs, Issachar Bates, and John Meacham to "Beloved Elders and brethren" at New Lebanon, New York, April 29, 1805, IV:A-66, OCLWHi. I thank Doug Winiarski for bringing this reference to my attention.
17. Youngs, Diary.
18. Youngs, Diary.
19. Youngs, Diary.
20. For holdings of the Review, see entry 5339 in Randall L. Ericson, comp., with Christian Goodwillie et al., *The Shakers: A Bibliography*, vol. 1B (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2023), 140.

21. For holdings of the Church of Christ see entry 2029 in Ericson, comp., *The Shakers: A Bibliography*, vol. 1A, 258.
22. “The Origin and Progress of the Society at Pleasant Hill, 1805–1817,” Harrodsburg Historical Society, KY. I wish to thank Marc Rhorer for bringing this version of the letter to my attention.
23. Sandra A. Soule, *Independency of the Mind: Aquila Massie Bolton, Poetry, Shakerism, and Controversy* (Clinton, NY: Richard W. Couper Press, 2010).
24. McNemar is here referencing: 1 Samuel 9.
25. [Green and Wells], *Testimonies*, 221. Mother Ann’s prophecy was given at Watervliet, New York, in the “presence of David Slosson and many others.”
26. Youngs, Diary.