

## Selections from the Miller Collection

*By M. Stephen Miller*

[Editors note: We asked Steve Miller to identify some personal favorites from his collection and relate the story of their acquisition or significance.]

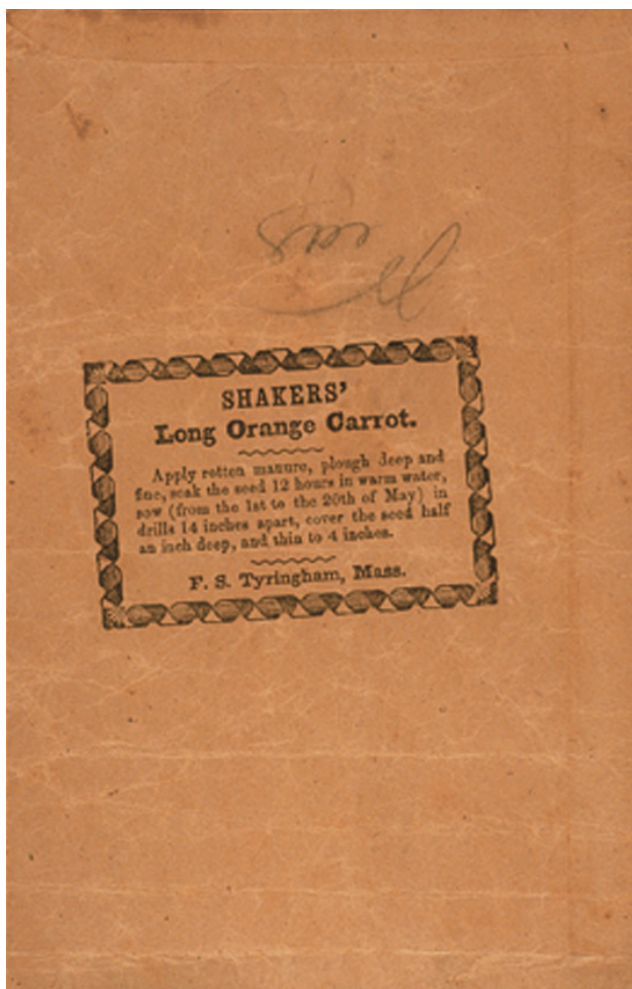
### 1. Box and bottle from New Lebanon

This bottle of *Ext[ract] Indian Hemp*, with its original cardboard cylinder package, showed up on eBay in 2005. I immediately recognized its importance—the only known extract bottle with container—and a *huge* bid was placed. It ultimately sold for almost thirteen hundred dollars and I was ecstatic to end up with it! In the Shaker's 1837 medicinal catalog, it says: "The extract is excellent in dyspepsia." This was a very general term usually applied to indigestion in the nineteenth century. The bottle held four ounces of a concentrate of this plant.



## 2. Tyringham seed envelope

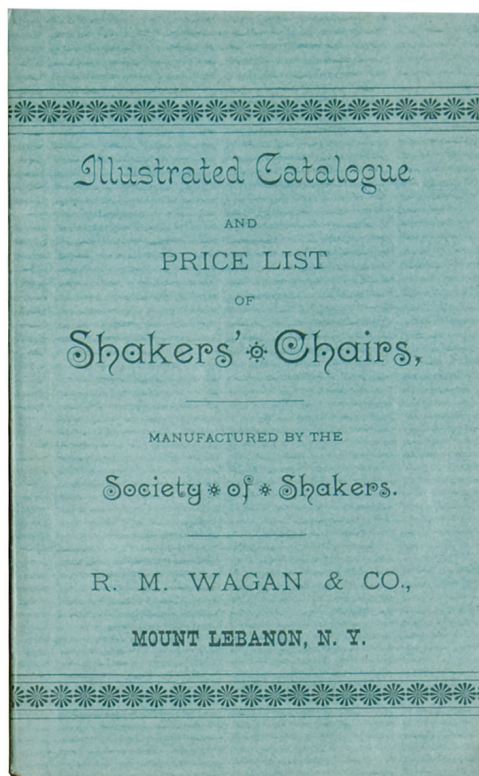
I came across this item in a private collection in Ohio quite a while ago and acquired it through a trade—a common means of building my collection in the early days. I had no idea how important this piece would turn out to be. Although the seed industry at the small Shaker village of Tyringham existed from at least 1826 into at least the 1850s, and reputedly was the major source of income there, this is so far the *only* seed envelope known to have survived from Tyringham! The initials on it stand for Trustee Freeman Stanley who died in 1862.



### 3. Chair catalog

Every year, between 1874 and 1880, the Shakers issued one or more catalogs promoting their chairs and stools. These all had similar formats except for those from the Centennial Year of 1876; these were larger and included advertising from non-Shaker sources. By 1874 the industry was very well organized and sizes were standardized with chairs numbered from “0” (the smallest) to “7” (the largest).

Almost every year, beginning in 1882, an auctioneer from eastern Massachusetts named Willis Henry has held a sale limited to Shaker objects. While ephemera has been a minor part of these auctions, a piece appears occasionally and sometimes it is a real treasure. This chair catalog came from one of these early auctions. It is in exceptional condition and therefore was of great interest to me. It is one of nineteen different chair catalogs—nearly all in similar condition—that are now part of the Hamilton College collection.



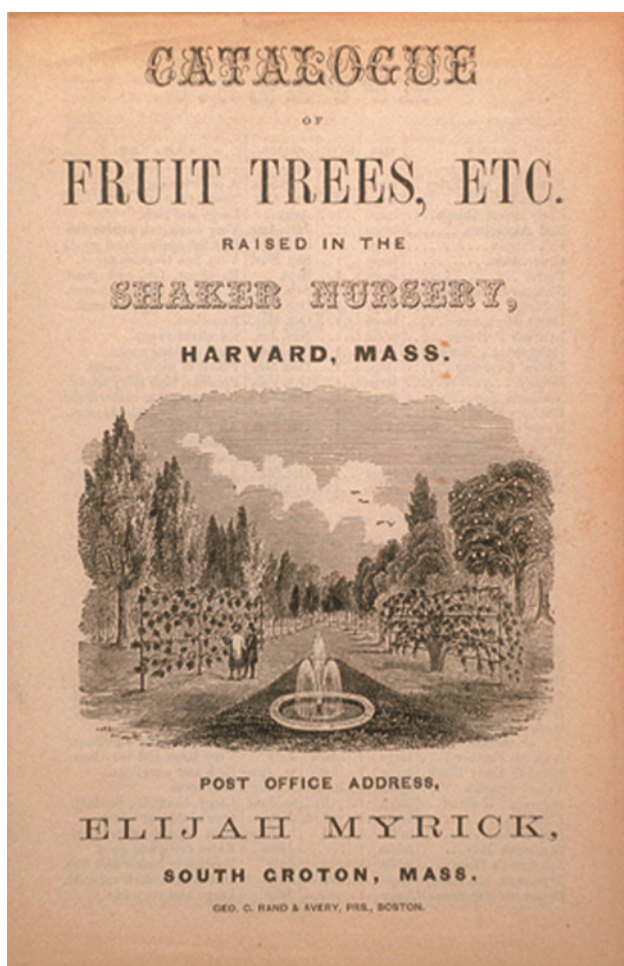
#### 4. Apple sauce firkin

Of all the Shakers' industries dealing with food products none was more widespread than the apple industry. I believe that *every one* of the eighteen long-lasting communities had apple orchards and put up the apples in various forms for profit. The most common form was applesauce. As with all the wooden firkins used by the eastern Shaker communities, this one was made by a commercial outfit and bought by Canterbury ca. 1885. I found it at a small antiques shop in a very small village in the Shenandoah Mountains of Virginia. It was as much a surprise to find it as it was a delight. Two similar examples are now part of the Hamilton College collection: one from Enfield, N.H., and the other from Enfield, Conn.



## 5. Fruit trees pamphlet

This very rare pamphlet, possibly a unique surviving example, was bought from a dealer in eastern Massachusetts. Although the standard bibliography of Shaker literature lists two similar examples, this one has some interesting variations. Harvard was the only Shaker community to put up tree stock for sale and it did so beginning in 1837. This catalog dates from 1849-1862. These three examples are the only ones known to advertise these products. Most of the trees offered were for apple (21) and cherry (16) trees, but five varieties of grapes, four of currents, and three of blackberries were also available.

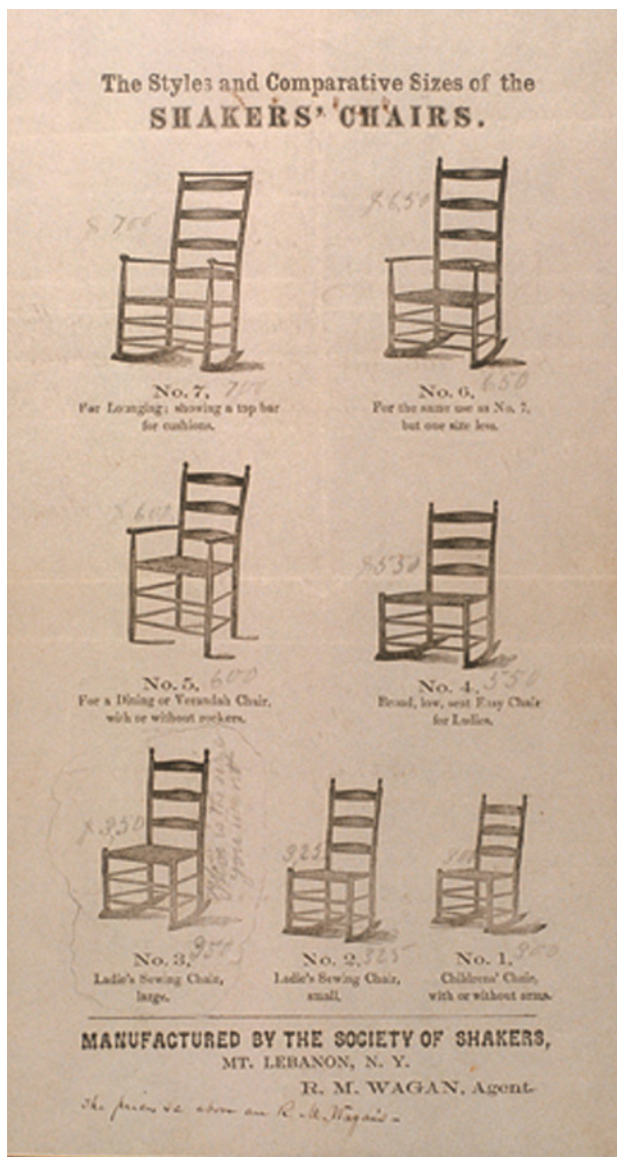




## 6. Early chair broadside

Once each year the Ephemera Society holds a fair for which ephemera dealers tend to save their best material; it is a prestigious event with high quality dealers. About fifteen years ago I got wind of a dealer who was going

to offer a "unique" chair broadside for sale. The day of the sale there was a March blizzard and rather than risk my life, I asked dealer and friend Scott De Wolfe to buy this piece for me—no matter what the price! He did so, and it turned out not only to be unique, but it is the earliest broadside to advertise the soon-to-be famous chair industry. I don't remember what it cost me but I was very happy to pay it. When something of this magnitude comes along, price should not be a primary consideration. This sort of thing happens only rarely for a serious collector, snow or no snow!



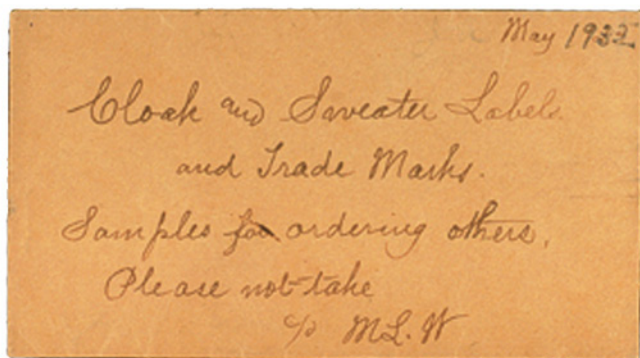
## 7. Display card for Tisane Americaine des Shakers

In 1992, my friend Bill Helfand—the leading collector *in the world* of prints related to the history of medicine—asked me to write an article about the manufacture of the “Shaker Extract of Roots” for a French journal. I was happy to oblige. After all, acknowledging my interest in Shaker ephemera, the previous year he *gave* me this display card from his own collection. My article, translated by another friend into French, appeared in the *Revue D'Histoire de la Pharmacie* the following year. The manufacturer of this product, for which the Shakers provided at least initially the raw materials, was named Oscar Fanyau. German occupiers killed him during World War I for his role as a partisan. This bright, colorful poster, probably from ca. 1910, with a string at the top for suspending it, belies Fanyau's sad demise.



## 8. Textile labels from Canterbury

The two woven silk labels on the top were used in cloaks, the bottom uncut strip in sweaters. They were set aside as samples by Eldress Mary L. Wilson (1858-1939). The date on the envelope is meaningful, for the manufacture of sweaters at Canterbury had already ceased in 1923, while cloaks were made until 1942. I like the “human” touch on the envelope: “Samples for ordering others. Please do not take.” All too often the Shakers are viewed unrealistically as too much apart from the rest of us. In so many everyday ways, they were not and are not. This group of labels came from a long-time collector in New Jersey, mediated by a long-time friend and an extremely important factor in my collecting life, Scott De Wolfe.





## 9. Sash Balance broadside and envelope

This broadside showed up at a small auction outside of Pittsburgh, Pa., in the mid-1990s. I don't think that there was any competition for it as I only paid a few hundred dollars. Relatively few broadsides have survived from the Shaker West where there was very little in the way of craft traditions. Their communities were supported mainly by agriculture. This piece advertises a device invented by a sometime brother, Sanford J. Russell, who lived with the Shakers in Ohio and Kentucky. He received a U.S. patent for this invention that eliminated counterweights on the sides by means of a cord and clamping device in the front. Although the device was apparently a com-

plete failure, it illustrates (literally and figuratively) the never-ending quest by Believers to improve, through modification and invention, everything they found useful.

# SHAKER SASH BALANCE.


**Supercedes Weights & Boxes.**

IS A PERFECT BALANCE AT ALL POINTS.

*Is Simple, Neat, Cheap, Durable and Ornamental.*

IS NOISELESS, AND OBEYS THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH—CAN BE ATTACHED TO ANY WINDOW WITH TWO SASH IN A FEW MOMENTS TIME.

**SAMPLES COMPLETE BY MAIL FOR \$1 50.**



Samples may be returned and money refunded if not satisfactory. We continue to make this liberal offer, without ever having one returned to us. In ordering, cash must accompany the order, or satisfactory reference be given. We cannot ship C. O. D. to unknown parties without twenty per cent. accompanies the order, and the bill is for every \$10. Without this assurance, in shipping to irresponsible parties we are liable to have our goods returned and charges to pay both ways.

In resulting please observe that your postoffice address, as well as your name, is plainly written, and, where convenient, obtain postoffice orders on Bowling Green or drafts on New York. If you send by express, prepay charges.

It needs no further comments to show that agents can make money rapidly with the "SHAKER SASH BALANCE," as there are so many buildings that have been put up without any balance, on account of cost, and the cheapness and simplicity of this makes them come within the reach of all, so that there is hardly any respectable house but what will take them. A glazier and screw-driver is all that is needed to put them on with.

**Address**                      **W. J. McGOWN, Manager,**  
South Union, Logan Co., Ky.

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We give herewith a few unselected evidences of its merits:

WINDING, TENN., May 31, 1875.  
J. J. McGown: The Shaker Sash Balance you sent me by mail arrived in my good order, and I have just appeared your letter by last mail but I wished to thoroughly test it, which I have done, and I find that it far exceeds my expectations. I shall abandon the idea of box weights, and will use your balance in preference to all others, I think that I am well a great saver of time in this market. Enclosed you will find check for \$10, for which you can send me the worth in your balance.

S. B. FRANKS, General Merchandise.

HENRY, MISS., May 30, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: Dear Sir—I am a contractor and builder, and have kept posted on the different devices for hanging windows for twenty-five years, and this is the best thing I have come into the knowledge of, and certainly, and only wants to be known to be generally adopted. The ease of rigging and the ease of working to give an opening top and bottom, which should be in all windows, cannot but do it all being to see them.

F. M. SPRINGER, Carpenter.

LAFAYETTE, TENN., May 5, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.


CHICKASAW, ARK., Aug. 6, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.

HEBER, N. Y., Sept. 11, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.


FERRIS, N. Y., Sept. 11, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.

ATLANTA, GA., Oct. 11, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.

ATLANTA, GA., Oct. 11, 1875.  
W. J. McGown: I have received the sample Shaker Balance, and at once, where I saw close it to a bare wall in which it is a grand BOON & WELL, Manchester, Indiana, Missouri.



**W. J. McGOWN,**  
SHAKER SASH BALANCE  
THE  
MANUFACTURER AND DEALER  
South Union, Ky.



Handwritten notes and signatures over the small portrait.

## 10. Maine Mower broadside

The Shakers at Sabbathday Lake were particularly innovative when it came to manufacturing woodenwares and machinery. The Maine Mower, a harvesting machine and not at all similar to our concept of a lawn mower, was invented and patented by a Brother Hewlett Chandler in 1865. This large broadside, 41½ x 26 cm., carries two endorsements from that year. It was found in a barn in Maine and came to me through a long-time member of the Ephemera Society. Although this example bears some resemblance to one listed Mary Richmond in her *Bibliography of Shaker Literature*, it appears

to be a unique surviving copy. I *love* finding ephemera such as this because I remain convinced that there is much more "unknown" material out in the world just waiting to be found.

# GET THE BEST MOWER!

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## THE SHAKER'S MAINE MOWER

Combines advantages which no other Mower possesses, particularly in the shipping in and out of gear, and suspending the cutter-bar in such a manner that it will not be liable to break when in motion.

For Ease of Draft, Durability, Perfection,  
AND  
BEAUTY OF EXECUTION,

it has never been surpassed, if equalled. New improvements having just been made to this mower, render it more desirable than ever, and all who wish to purchase can make no mistake in adopting this machine.

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RECOMMENDATIONS.

Having used one of the "Shaker Maine Mowers" during the past season, I find it superior, in every respect, to any other we have used. We have three other kinds. The Shaker Mower runs lighter and does the best work. I cut twenty-four acres of grass in as many hours, in the course of three days, averaging over a ton of hay to the acre, without injury to the machine, although portions of the ground were very rough, uneven and stony, saving, in my opinion, nearly or quite, half the power required to run our other machines, which is quite an important item during the hot weather.

ANDREW J. THOMPSON.

SHAKER VILLAGE, N. H., January 10th, 1865.

DAVID PARKER.

After, April 30th, 1865.

DAVID ALLEN.

The above statement of facts I endorse, and recommend this machine to all who wish to purchase.

The Shaker Maine Mower that I used last hay season cut the grass as well as any machine I ever saw, and is a great favorite of the horses. I can recommend it to any farmer that is in want of a Mower.

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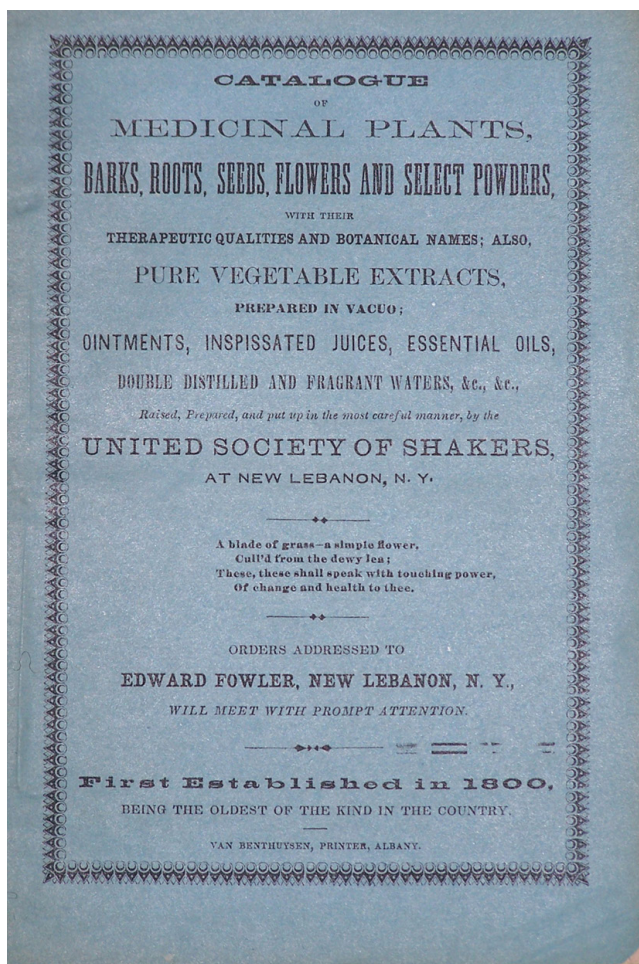
Patented, manufactured and sold by the United Society of Shakers, West Gloucester, Maine, Charles Vining, Trustee, by whom all orders will be promptly filled.

A sample machine may be seen at Emery & Waterhouse's, Portland, Me., also at Ward, Humphrey & Co.'s Store, Concord, N. H.

Tucker, Printer, 71 Exchange Street, Portland.

## 11. Catalogue of Medicinal Plants

Over the approximately thirty-five years that I have been collecting, items have come my way from many, many directions. This catalog, for example, was a product of a “mail auction” conducted by the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan in 1995. The library decided to de-accession duplicate materials for the benefit of their acquisition funds; the protocol for doing this now is that it must be offered by means of a public forum—generally, auction—and all gains must be used solely for new acquisitions. This pamphlet was purchased from that sale. The sealed bid that I placed was for \$900.00 and the selling price was \$772.00. This is not among the very rare medicinal pamphlets issued by New Lebanon in the early 1850s—this one is dated 1851 and Richmond’s *Bibliography of Shaker Literature* lists eight locations of at least one copy—but its condition is exceptional. It is difficult to believe that it is now more than one hundred fifty years old! Condition has always been a major factor for me; therefore, I have always been willing to pay a premium for it.





## 12. Apple sauce label

There is an unusual story behind my acquisition of this very colorful label. It was part of the William Lassiter Collection that sold at Sotheby's in November 1981. I bid very high but was outbid nonetheless. Since there were a number of identical labels in the lot I tried for four years to track down the successful bidder, hoping to be able to obtain a copy by trade or purchase. I finally found out that the actual bidder was a very high-level book dealer rather than a Shaker collector. By happenstance, upon this gentleman's death, I learned that he had purchased the lot on behalf of a client who turned out to be one of the wealthiest individuals in America! This person had a private botanical library and wanted some examples of Shaker plant/food ephemera, *no matter the cost*. Upon further work on my part, I found the address of this person and (rather boldly) wrote, telling of my interest in acquiring *two* of these labels for a display that I had planned. I offered to send several examples of ephemera from my collection that I had duplicates of. To my astonishment, about three weeks later I received two of these in the mail, with no note and no request for a *quid pro quo*! Nevertheless, I almost immediately packaged up the promised material and mailed it off to the person. I never received an acknowledgment. The label was printed for the Mount Lebanon Shakers by the Hinds Ketcham Company of New York and Cincinnati, sometime between 1880 and 1890. The process is multi-color letterpress.



13. Oval boxes broadside

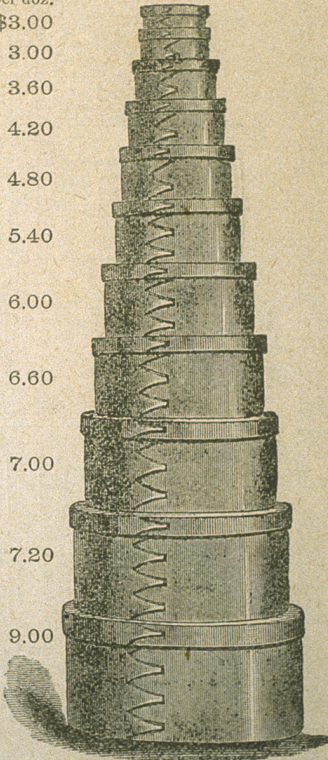
The Shakers at Mount Lebanon started making oval boxes with “finger” or “swallowtail” joints very early on, perhaps as early as 1800. Ultimately, many thousands were made and sold. What we learn from this rare broadside—actually a bi-fold, the other three sides advertising chairs—is that they were intended to be sold in nests *wholesale*, by the *dozen*. Thus, the price for a dozen of the largest size ca. 1870 was \$9.00 (or \$134.00 today). At

auction these days, a single unpainted 15” long oval box in good condition will cost more than \$2,000!

This broadside (or, more properly, broadsheet) came to me with the Pearson Collection in 1988. I have no idea where Ray Pearson found it; the *Bibliography of Shaker Literature* lists Syracuse University as the only other source. Ray was very friendly with William Lassiter, then curator at the New York State Museum in Albany, and I know that some materials freely passed between them at a time when these exchanges were not subject to the same standards that exist today.

**Fancy Oval Covered Wooden Boxes.**

	Price per doz.
No. 11,	\$3.00
" 10,	3.00
" 9,	3.60
" 8,	4.20
" 7,	4.80
" 6,	5.40
" 5,	6.00
" 4,	6.60
" 3,	7.00
" 2,	7.20
" 1,	9.00



ONE FULL NEST, - - - \$5.00