

Shaker Seminar 2010

The Shaker Seminar for 2010 convened at Hancock Shaker Village in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the museum's founding. The speakers at the seminar prepared the following abstracts of talks.

World Monuments Fund Panel Discussion

A panel composed of Rob Emlen, Stephen Stein, Julie Nicoletta, and Don Pitzer discussed the feasibility of turning the Route 20 corridor running from the site of Mount Lebanon Shaker Village in New York through the site of Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts into a World Heritage Site.

Domestic Broils and Shaker Toils: Mary & Joseph Dyer, the Shakers, and the Public Dispute that Riveted Readers, Prompted a Mob, and Made Everyone Think about Marriage

Speaker: Elizabeth DeWolfe

When Mary Dyer fled from the Enfield, N.H., Shakers in 1813, publishing her “sufferings” offered the best hope of gaining the public support necessary to retrieve her Shaker-held children, as well as gaining the financial support necessary for survival. But her husband Joseph, well satisfied with Shaker life and backed by Shaker leaders, responded in kind, publishing his own version of the Dyers’ domestic disharmony. The Dyers’ dueling accounts of the breakup of their marriage set against the backdrop of the celibate Shakers riveted readers across New England and beyond. In Mary’s telling, the deceptions of a cruel husband, backed by an unyielding Shaker hierarchy, destroyed what had once been a happy, productive family. Joseph’s narrative counters these claims by alleging that Mary abused her children, neglected her husband, and engaged in extramarital affairs. The publications of abandoned wives and their husbands-turned-Shakers invited readers into two previously private domains: the domestic space of the marriage and the sacred space of the secluded Shaker village. In this presentation, based on the new book *Domestic Broils: Shakers, Antebellum Marriage, and the Narratives of Mary and Joseph Dyer*, we examine the He-said/She-said debate that pitted an aggrieved mother against an adamant father.

A close examination of their printed texts reveals the cultural and legal expectations for women and men in the first decades of the nineteenth century. But as much as the Dyers' dispute focused on marriage, the texts also reveal how those social expectations were supported, or challenged, by Shaker life. Escaping to or escaping from Shakerism, both Mary and Joseph offered to a court of public opinion their most personal experiences. With the paired publications of husband and wife, these texts challenged readers to debate what was worse for society, a bad marriage, or no marriage at all?

Hancock Shaker Village: Not the "First" of Mother's Children, Not the "Least" of Mother's Children, But Almost the Last of Mother's Children

Speaker: Steve Paterwic

Hancock by the mere fact of its longevity makes an interesting topic. "Not the First of Mother's Children, Not the Least ..." begins with the settlement of the town of Hancock and places Hancock Shaker Village in the context of the larger scheme of Shakerdom in terms of power and demographics. A very general history of the early years of settlement ends with the role Hancock played in the Era of Manifestations. As Shakerism declined, the inevitable changes that took place at Hancock are depicted in relation to demographics. Various vignettes are given about the personalities who lived at Hancock during the final years and what the Hancock Shakers may mean to us today.

The Bishops and the Crosmans

Speaker: Peter VanDemark

Peter VanDemark shares his research from the past year into his family connections to the Shakers.

HSV Green Tour: Yesterday & Today

Speaker: Todd Burdick

This walking tour of HSV reveals a new way to look at the old Village, exploring how the Shaker past can help inform the present and the future, focusing on sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, architectural design & construction, smart growth town planning, and more. This tour focuses on HSV's historic to modern green and environmentally friendly features. Included are a demonstration of the 1858 waterpower turbine

in the Laundry & Machine Shop and a discussion of how it relates to hydropower initiatives today. Also included is an investigation of the historic passive solar features of Shaker buildings, and a tour of HSV's new solar photovoltaic array (which generates 89.9 kilowatts, supplies 66% of the Village's electrical energy needs today, and is expected to reduce CO2 emissions by 3.7 million pounds over the life span of the system). This tour will also include a visit to Steve Grasselli-The Studio at the Tannery.

Witchcraft and the Shakers

Speaker: Wilson Ferguson

Ferguson examines accusations of witchcraft against the early Shakers in the context of New England life at the time. He discusses specifically what Shaker practices may have triggered such accusations from the local population. Ferguson then brings the narrative forward into the Shaker Era of Manifestations (the late 1830s and 1840s) and compares some of the spiritual activities of that period with the events that transpired in Salem in 1692.

Black Shaker Minstrels and the Comic Performance of Shaker Worship

Speaker: Rob Emlen

See Emlen's article in this issue.

Making a Graduate Program at Hancock Shaker Village

Speaker: Steven Bedford

The creation of a graduate program at HSV is a good example of developing a program from initial vision to implementation, from high-minded ideas to buying chairs. This talk discusses the rationale leading up to the decision to make a school at HSV and the issues involved in creating a new school at the village. It then chronicles the tortuous (not torturous) process of developing curriculum, finding faculty, developing degree-granting capabilities and negotiating the UMass Bureaucracy, recruiting, and, finally, making a space in the Village for the program.

Mount Lebanon Waterworks

Speaker: Alan Grosse

During the summer of 2009, a small group of landscape architects and

engineers gathered at Mt. Lebanon's North family to perform research on the waterworks and topography of that site. Under the direction of the NPS and HALS, the team spent the months of June and July documenting and sometimes excavating mill sites, reservoirs and underground stone waterways to learn about how the Shakers used water in their day-to-day lives. They diverted streams and created reservoirs using gravity to their advantage, and many of their nineteenth-century engineering feats are still utilized by engineers today. This study resulted in a greater understanding of hidden aspects of the North Family site, as well as a digital reproduction of the extant site on Google Earth.

Shaker Owned Books in the Hancock Shaker Village Library

Speaker: Magda Gabor-Hotchkiss (Presented by Lesley Herzberg)

This presentation intends to illustrate salient findings of research by Magda Gabor-Hotchkiss, HSV Volunteer Librarian, on the collections of Shaker-owned books in the Hancock Shaker Village Library. This research yielded insights into the processes of how the Shakers bought, collected, printed, published, protected (re-bound, re-covered), identified, and used books for educating their students and themselves. The books were collected mainly from two Societies (Hancock, Massachusetts and Mount Lebanon, New York), and covered many fields of knowledge, including spirituality, fictional literature, and natural philosophy; they were used for both self-fulfillment and as gifts between Shakers and their communities. This research has made it possible to prepare Guide Volume V in a color-illustrated series devoted to the Hancock Shaker Village Library collections.

"Dear Friend and Bother:" Ernest F. McGregor and the Shakers

Speaker: Christian Goodwillie

Goodwillie's talk examines Yale student Ernest F. McGregor's visits and correspondence with the Shakers, East and West, during 1904 and 1905. McGregor made a pioneering effort to gather statistics on the Shaker communities using a pre-printed questionnaire. McGregor's research was carried out for his senior thesis at Yale. His letters with Shaker elders reveal differences between the communities and Believers in the East and West, and also a fair amount of humor. His statistics provide a snapshot of the Shaker societies at the very precipice of when many would begin to close.

“Partake a Little Morsel”: Seeking A Shaker Top 40

Speaker: Carol Medlicott

It is well known that Shaker songs and hymns number in the thousands. Each Shaker village generated music, and songs and hymns were freely circulated across the Shaker world. Until the 1870s, Shaker music was recorded primarily in manuscript, and a vast number of individual Shakers compiled their own hymnals. Individual hymnals typically consisted of a mixture of songs and hymns, many from the compilers own home village, many from other villages, many attributed to individual Shakers, many with no attribution at all. Each Shaker manuscript hymnal is truly a unique product, a product of the compilers own individual choices and experiences. Despite all that diversity, and despite the thousands of hymns and songs available to the Shakers, reviewing manuscript hymnals spanning a period from the 1830s to the 1870s reveals a group of hymns of particularly persistent popularity. Most contemporary analyses of Shaker music tends to survey the representative genres of Shaker music or to focus on analysis of single significant hymnals. No study has attempted to probe the question of what hymns, among the vast repertoire, were particularly popular and significant to the Shakers themselves during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Considering that question can help us to contextualize the social and spiritual climate of Shaker villages at a critical point when many villages reached their apex and began a long period of dramatic transformation and ultimate decline.

Mother against Mother

Speaker: Ilyon Woo

Eunice Chapman, mother of three missing children, and Lucy Wright, mother to the people alleged to have hidden them, had more in common than might be guessed: both were gifted, assertive, spiritually-minded women who defied the conventions of their times to achieve unusual levels of power and public visibility. Both also overcame tremendous personal obstacles and, using their femininity in the most effective ways possible, radically redefined what it meant to be a mother during the turbulent early years of the nineteenth century. It is thus a bitter irony that these two women, who might have shared a common perspective, became entrenched on opposite sides of a crisis over custody, one in which motherhood, marriage, and even democracy itself were said to be under

siege. This was a scandal that riveted all of New York State and beyond, drawing attention from such luminaries as Thomas Jefferson and Martin Van Buren. “Mother against Mother” explores this sensational conflict from the point of view of these two formidable mother figures, examining their differing perspectives towards motherhood, as well the perfectionist people whom one mother led, and the other mother vowed to tear down.

“Today, today is my own time”: Lessons Learned about the Shakers from College Field Trips to Hancock Shaker Village

Speaker: Susan Eisenhandler

The opening words of a Shaker hymn, quoted in the title, evoke an important lesson learned from a dozen yearly field trips to Hancock Shaker Village—that is, mindful attention and systematic observation in the present create a foundation for the enduring appreciation of a people, a place, and a heritage. These words also sound a bit like an anthem of independence that demarcates generational standing—something that may resonate fully with college students and something that underscores the challenge of instilling the past into the present lives of younger adults. Field trips are a sliver of full engagement in one’s own time, created, somewhat paradoxically, by steeping students and teachers alike into an historical moment or setting if only for a day. Thus, firsthand experience with elements of the past functions as a turning point in the acquisition of knowledge that will shape the future.

In this presentation, I describe how the life story and heritage of the Hancock Shakers unfolds for college students. Insights, ideas, and some of our experiences are shared to highlight what we have learned from a day’s visit. The spirit and values preserved and maintained in the material culture of Hancock inevitably raise a question for each of us that is almost always posed by students: what does this mean for my own time?

All Souls Are Created Equal: African Americans and the Watervliet Shaker Community
Speaker: Starlyn D’Angelo

Starlyn D’Angelo will provide an overview of the history of African Americans at the Watervliet Shaker community. From the earliest years, African Americans were present in this community yet we know very little about them. More research is needed to complete an accurate picture of their role in the Shaker community.

In an attempt to uncover this hidden history, Shaker Heritage Society worked with student interns and volunteers to complete research on the topic. In the process, several surprisingly specific references to the Watervliet Shakers sheltering fugitive slaves were identified. Watervliet also was the stage for a fascinating early nineteenth-century legal battle between the Shakers and an African American family that accused the Shakers of stealing their slaves. Later in their history, Eldress Paulina Bates authorized establishment of the sister community in Philadelphia that was led by Rebecca Jackson, a black visionary Shaker. These topics are explored in an attempt to create a greater level of understanding of the role of African Americans in the Watervliet Shaker community and the ways that their white peers regarded them.

Identifying Index of American Design Photographs, 1935-36

Speaker: Lesley Herzberg

When the U.S. government sought to create jobs for its unemployed artists after the Great Depression, they created the Federal Art Project. Artists were sent all over the country to paint, photograph and sculpt. One of these artists was photographer Noel Vincentini, who was assigned to document the Shakers at Mt. Lebanon, Hancock, and a select group of other sites. His photographs depict stark, black and white views of disintegrating buildings, aging sisters, and objects in aesthetic settings. The group of almost two hundred images has never before been exhibited in their entirety. In preparation for an exhibition at HSV in 2012, I am sharing my research with seminar participants, in hopes that they can assist me as I work to identify some unknown locations featured in these amazing photographs.