

New Lebanon's Gifts to the Western New York Shakers

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One of the three major tenets of Shakerism is community. While Shakers did have intense loyalty to the particular family unit where they lived, they knew that they were part of a much larger network of families and societies. Indeed the Ministry and the elders commonly transferred members when conditions called for it. Shakerism is so diminished today that it is often forgotten that until the middle years of the twentieth century, it was common practice for Shakers to move from one Shaker family to another or to other societies.¹ This fluidity of membership helped Shaker leaders manage various families within a bishopric.²

In 1787, when Father Joseph Meacham became the head of the Shakers, New Lebanon, New York became the “center of union.” Although Union Village, Ohio, for a very brief time was larger, New Lebanon dominated Shaker demographics until shortly after 1900.³ From the earliest years, hundreds of Shakers from New Lebanon were sent out to distant communities, first as missionaries, later as leaders to build up new societies. In time, as Shaker fortunes declined, fervent members were sent to bolster societies that were fading or having troubles. Finally, the Ministry and trustees from New Lebanon helped to close communities. This pattern repeated itself all over Shakerdom until the New Lebanon society itself was dissolved in October 1947. For their entire history the Shakers of western New York certainly benefited from this type of close parental leadership by New Lebanon.

Until the 1830s, Shakerism was a growing religion. After the opening in the West in 1805, new communities were established every few years, and by 1825 there were eighteen major societies. In the previous decade Shaker missionaries had gathered large numbers of converts from “openings” that occasionally presented themselves.⁴ Shaker leadership assumed that the religion would continue to expand. Interested converts would either join existing communities or, more rarely, form new societies such as at North Union and White Water, Ohio. Subsequently, however, only one other site—Sodus, New York—actually became a fully gathered community, and as a result was the final society to be founded in the era of

Shaker expansion.⁵ Before the decade was out, in 1827, the Shaker society at West Union (Busro), Indiana, was consolidated with other communities in the west. For almost fifty years, Shakerdom would be centered around eighteen long-established societies, Sodus-Groveland being the youngest. A small family eventually formed in Philadelphia, but until 1875 when the society at Tyringham, Massachusetts closed, all efforts were directed towards keeping Shakerism alive in the eighteen communities.

Because western New York is relatively close to Ohio, it is not surprising that the first missionary activity in the area came from the Shakers at North Union. This was only natural since the history of western New York Shakerism is very closely entwined with the Pelham family.

In 1815, Abijah Pelham and his family of Lyons, Wayne County, New York moved to Ohio and soon joined the Shakers at Union Village. In 1820 or 1821, Abijah returned to Wayne County to settle business matters.⁶ His son Joseph was living in Galen, New York, and Abijah made this place his home for two months. After he returned to Union Village, he sent his son “The Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing”—an early codification of Shaker theology. Joseph expressed great interest in this work, though he made no move to leave his small farm or wife Susan. Late in December, 1824, however, his younger brother Richard, a Shaker missionary from North Union, stopped by his home. Richard Pelham is all but forgotten today, but he was one of the most important missionaries the Shakers ever had. He is credited with the founding of three Shaker communities formed during the 1820s: North Union and White Water, Ohio; and Sodus-Groveland, New York. While in Wayne County, “he preached in schoolhouses, and private dwellings—wherever they would appoint a place.”⁷ His efforts were very successful and a number of local citizens, including his brother Joseph, united with the Shakers. Richard returned to North Union in February 1825, and Joseph went with him. Other Wayne County residents who accompanied them to North Union were Malachi Sanford and his wife Elsey. A few days later, Moesy Spencer and his wife Elizabeth also went to North Union. Joseph Pelham continued on to Union Village where his experiences convinced him that he had found the true path of salvation.⁸ Instead of moving to Ohio, however, he and his little band wanted to found a Shaker society in western New York. No doubt they thought that help would come from the Ministry at North Union, aided by the Ministry of Union Village.

Little did he realize, however, that during the late winter and early

spring of 1825 Joseph Pelham was experiencing Union Village at the zenith of its prosperity. Under Father David Darrow's wise leadership, the society had grown to over 600 souls in eleven Shaker families. Numerically it had eclipsed New Lebanon, which had between 500 and 525 Shakers in 1825.⁹ Father David died on June 27, 1825, and very soon after, for various reasons, including a series of ineffective leaders, the premier Shaker community in the west began to decline steadily.¹⁰ Though the society still had many years of prosperity ahead, no leadership team was ever able to reverse the decline, which leveled off but nonetheless continued until the society was sold in 1912. Preoccupied with its own troubles at home and in the bishopric, the Union Village Ministry was not able to help Joseph Pelham in his efforts to found a new Shaker village in western New York. The Ministry of North Union, perhaps, did not feel able to take on this task alone at a place so distant. For whatever the reason, Elder Matthew Houston of North Union urged Joseph Pelham to ask the North Family at New Lebanon for help. This prompted him, after returning home to Galen in late April 1825, to write to the Ministry at New Lebanon.¹¹ Henceforth, the influence of the Ohio Shakers on the development of western New York Shakerism was replaced by the overwhelming power of New Lebanon.

By the 1820s the Gathering Order of New Lebanon had expanded from its home base at the North Family into the adjacent town of Canaan. The Upper and Lower Canaan families were extensions of this novitiate order. In response to Joseph's letter seeking help in gathering a new society in western New York, Elder Peter Pease, first elder of the North Family, and James Farnham, first brother of the Lower Canaan Family, visited Joseph at his home in Galen. The fact that Elder Peter actually visited Joseph Pelham in person shows just how seriously the leaders at New Lebanon took his request. Elder Peter had been sent to Ohio in 1806 as a missionary right after the Shaker testimony was opened there. He remained in Ohio until 1820. After returning to New Lebanon he became a trustee and later an elder of the North Family. His experience as a missionary and his ability as a trustee made him a wise choice to assess the viability of opening a new community. Born in 1773, James Farnham had been a child when the Gospel was first opened at New Lebanon, and he had been leader of the Lower Family since its inception.¹²

New Lebanon's willingness to take Joseph Pelham's request seriously was in part due to the fact that his brother was Richard Pelham. In addition, there were a number of converts in Wayne County willing to join the Shakers.

Elders Peter and James returned to New Lebanon and took Susan Pelham with them. After six weeks she returned to Galen with Calvin Green, Jeremiah Talcott, Betsey Hastings and Molly Williams, a very talented and important group of Shakers. This was the beginning of Calvin Green's long association with Sodus-Groveland. Though rarely acknowledged today, Calvin Green was a major Shaker theologian and historian. Though never married, his parents were Thankful Barce, who joined the Shakers before he was born, and Joseph Green who was first elder of the Second Order of the Church from 1803 until he left in 1814. Calvin always considered himself special in that he had been born in 1780—the year that the Shaker testimony was first opened in the United States—and that he had always been a Shaker.¹³ At the time he first visited Sodus he was second elder of the North Family. Jeremiah Talcott had been the leader of the Upper Family Canaan since 1815.¹⁴ Elizabeth Hastings was first eldress at the North Family, a position she held until sent to Union Village in 1835 to help stabilize the leadership there.¹⁵ Molly Williams, who lived most of her life at the Second Family in New Lebanon, was a part of the large Williams family whose members filled many roles of leadership.

This team from New Lebanon eventually returned home, but so great was the fervor that even with no Shaker leaders nearby, men and women from western New York continued to join the Shakers. For example, in the fall of 1825, Augustine Leonard of Brutus, New York went to Watervliet and united. That October Daniel Dryer and his wife Hannah visited New Lebanon and joined. This showed the pressing need for the New Lebanon Shakers either to gather all of the new converts into Watervliet and New Lebanon as they had done a few years earlier in Savoy, or make a firm effort to start a brand new community.¹⁶

On January 18, 1826, a letter asking for help was received at New Lebanon. So strong was the plea from the new converts near Sodus Bay that Elder Jeremiah Talcott petitioned the Ministry to allow him to go back and try to gather them into a permanent village. Proctor Sampson, whose duties at the North Family included peddling and other temporal concerns, volunteered to help find them a suitable piece of land. In late January they arrived in Wayne County. Local Shakers directed them to the Nicholas farm, which was for sale because of problems in the Nicholas family. To the Shakers, the availability of this land at just \$10 per acre was another example of the “overruling hand of Providence.”¹⁷ This property, at first thought to contain 1296¾ acres, was in Sodus and Huron, New York.¹⁸ The

new converts felt confident that they had the means to purchase it. They figured that by selling their individual farms they could come up with half of the money. Proctor Sampson said he would advance \$1,000 from the North Family. Elder Jeremiah did not think they had the means, but gave in to their pressuring assurances.¹⁹ On February 23, they bought the land, and for the first time, the western New York Shakers had a home. They took possession of this land on March 1, 1826, Mother Ann's birthday. Two hundred acres of this land were already being farmed and the property had a grist mill, two dwellings, two barns, two stables and other framed buildings.²⁰ The purchase price was \$12,600. With interest this became \$13,886.45 – far too high a price for the local Shakers to fund by themselves. Once again, it was the power of the Shaker tenet of united interest which came through. According to one account, only \$2,631.20 was raised by subscription, most of the remaining balance being paid for by Canterbury and Enfield, New Hampshire; Shirley and Harvard, Massachusetts; and Hancock, Massachusetts.²¹ Another journal states that the local Shakers were able to raise almost \$7,000 and the remaining balance was paid for by the older Shaker communities. Until the money was paid back, the deed for the property was held by the trustees of the Church Family of New Lebanon. In November 1826, the trustees of Harvard and Canterbury went to Sodus to pay a share of the debt. While there, they informed the elders of the new society that the loan would be interest free. Calvin Green saw this as “a practical evidence of that beneficent love that Believers have, one for another.”²²

Though New Lebanon paid relatively little toward the purchase of Sodus, they had a firm hand in its development. Before returning to New Lebanon in March, Talcott and Sampson assisted where they could in setting up the new community. These activities included preaching and visiting the still mostly scattered Believers. The society could not really be settled and drawn into gospel order, however, until permanent leaders were appointed. Accordingly the New Lebanon Ministry appointed a set of Ministry elders for Groveland: Jeremiah Talcott, John Lockwood, Polly Lawrence, and Lucy Brown. These leaders asked Calvin Green to go with them, and he reluctantly agreed. On May 8, 1826, they began the trip from New Lebanon and arrived at Sodus on May 13. Calvin Green opened the testimony by starting Public Meeting every Sunday. Roby Bennett of New Lebanon became deaconess. The presence of these New Lebanon Shaker leaders and their helpers had a tremendous impact on the scattered Believers

around Sodus. They enthusiastically participated in worship, and scores of men and women with their families joined the community. To make sure that the Shakers would not have legal difficulties, Calvin Green wrote a covenant, which was signed by everyone as they joined, and also signed by those already living there who were of age. In June, the New Lebanon Ministry sent Tiny Seaton and Elvira Wells, two sisters from Watervliet, to have the care of the little girls. That same month, Calvin Green and Proctor Sampson returned to New Lebanon. They had done all they could to help the infant colony.

It seemed that nothing would dampen the hearts of these Believers as they flocked to Sodus, yet tragedy dealt a tremendous blow when Eldress Polly Lawrence died suddenly on August 2, 1826. She had been first eldress less than five months, and her saintly character had been an inspiration. Born and brought up in New Lebanon, she attended the town's common school. Polly's entrance into the Shakers had made a very big impression on her teacher, Esther Bennet. Esther eventually married Miles Doolittle and they had a large family, including a daughter named Mary Antoinette Doolittle. Hearing her mother speak of Polly Lawrence was one of the factors that drew fourteen-year-old Antoinette Doolittle into the Shakers in 1824. She later became first eldress of the North Family and filled the position for decades until her death in 1886. Such was the influence of Polly Lawrence, who was just a teenager herself when she joined the Shakers. A song that she received, "The Rolling Deep," is one of the oldest Shaker songs still sung. Her words still have the power to inspire.

In September 1826, Eldress Polly was replaced by Eunice Esther Bennett from Watervliet, and she stayed as first eldress until her decease in 1848. In fact, not counting Polly Lawrence, the first Ministry at Sodus was long serving. For example, Jeremiah Talcott and John Lockwood did not return to New Lebanon until 1842 and 1851 respectively. Lucy Brown was second sister until 1844, when she moved to the Second Order at Watervliet. Thus this Ministry was still in place when Sodus was sold in 1836 and the society moved to Groveland. This continuity of leadership was a big strength for this community so far from the other Shaker colonies; it was also useful in steering Groveland through the turbulent years of the Era of Mother's Work.

Perhaps it was the tragedy of Polly Lawrence's death which prompted the New Lebanon Ministry to send a young brother named James Martin

from Watervliet to Sodus to be a physician. He was the tenth and final person sent in 1826. All told, from March 1, when the society was formed, until the end of the year, seventy-two people had joined, including the ten from New Lebanon and Watervliet. Two had died and twelve had left. When the deed of property was executed to the New Lebanon trustees on December 30, 1826, the first phase of New Lebanon's involvement was finished.²³

Until the community began moving to Groveland in 1837, the years after 1826 were prosperous and the community grew steadily. In 1831, the number of Shakers surpassed one hundred for the first time. That December the community numbered 106. A Gathering Order called the East Family was opened in November 1831. Tina Seaton, who had come from Watervliet in 1826, was appointed first eldress.

The sale of Sodus and the subsequent move to Groveland are not germane to the topic of this study; however, a few relevant comments can be made. On December 31, 1836, the community at Sodus numbered 148.²⁴ This number was never surpassed; after this, the society went into a steady population decline. The momentum that had existed at Sodus was never regained at Groveland, despite the fact that the same leaders were at Groveland as had been at Sodus, and, in fact, the land at Groveland was better.

What caused the change in fortune at Groveland? As mentioned previously, Sodus was the last of the Shaker communities formed during the era of Shaker expansion. Forces had been building for many years that would deal a death blow to Shaker communities, and Groveland would prove to be no exception.

Since 1824, against the advice of Mother Lucy Wright and Elder Calvin Green, the Shakers began adopting large numbers of children without their parents. It was hoped that these children would become Shakers when they came of age. As chances for missionary work slackened and the number of adult converts diminished, a heavy reliance was placed on these children for future membership. Time would show, however, that almost no boys who joined the Shakers without at least one parent stayed into adulthood. The percentage of girls who stayed was higher but not sufficient to replace those older Shakers sisters who died. Of course, when the large-scale adoption of children began, no one could have foreseen the negative impact it would have on the communities. Children had to have schooling and caretakers, and be integrated into the occupational aspects

of the societies. By the 1830s the first wave of the children brought into the Shakers during the 1820s started departing in large numbers. The young men left to make their own way in the world, equipped with the trades the Shakers had taught them, and leaving the Shakers to start over with more young people. Eventually the boys would end up, along with hired help, doing the bulk of the farm work.

A look at the numbers at Sodus in 1836 shows a very unbalanced community. That year the Church Family had 105 members. Of the fifty-three men, just twenty-four, or only 45%, were over twenty-one years of age. Of the fifty-two women, exactly half were over twenty-one years of age. In the Gathering Order, we have figures just for the women. Seven of the thirteen females were over twenty-one years of age.²⁵ If we assume that the number of men in the Gathering Order was the same or slightly greater than at the Church family, we can conservatively use the same numbers for both the men and women of the Gathering Order. This means that well over half of the population of Sodus was younger than twenty-one years of age.²⁶ What is equally incredible, however, and what saved Groveland from closing much earlier than it did, was that Sodus had virtually no older members among the adults. The oldest woman was just fifty-seven years old and the oldest man was just sixty-three. In the subsequent decades, the community aged and most of the young people left, but the society was able to survive for much longer than it would have had Groveland had more elderly members in 1836.

The Groveland community quietly continued on, only gradually losing members and facing relatively minor problems until the 1850s, when New Lebanon had to step in again and take an active role in managing affairs. The Ministry of New Lebanon did not have supervision of Groveland any more than it did of any other Shaker society outside of its bishopric. The Ministry and elders of Groveland occasionally visited New Lebanon to make reports. In turn, the New Lebanon Ministry visited Groveland on trips out to Ohio and Kentucky. Most of these trips were made from Watervliet. It is noted by the Ministry on May 2, 1843 that Groveland was 290 miles from Watervliet and the trip took thirty-six hours.²⁷

Ministerial journals of New Lebanon make hardly any comment on events at Groveland during the decades of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. For the most part Groveland was on its own. In fact, so independent had the community become that the New Lebanon Ministry in 1851 recalled John Lockwood from the Ministry there to take charge of the East Family

at New Lebanon.²⁸ A letter from Lucius Southwick of Groveland states that on January 18, 1852, there were fifty males and seventy females at Groveland.²⁹ This figure was an increase of eight from the federal census of 1850. That year there were forty-nine males and sixty-three females. Of the total, forty-five percent were youth.

As the 1850s progressed, however, two factors would cause New Lebanon to take a closer interest in Groveland. First, as in all Shaker communities, the thirty-year-old policy of filling the ranks with children who came in without parents was taking its toll. The societies were top heavy with older members and loaded with an ever-changing group of children. The pool of young and middle-aged adults able to assume positions of leadership and work at money-making occupations had greatly diminished. This caused crisis after crisis everywhere in Shakerdom. From east to west, the Ministry at New Lebanon was called in time after time to help. Second, on September 29, 1852, fifty-five-year old Daniel Boler, who had been first elder of the First Order of the Church at New Lebanon, was appointed to the New Lebanon Ministry to fill the place left vacant by the unexpected death of Rufus Bishop. He held this position as second elder until October 13, 1859 when he became first in the New Lebanon Ministry. In theory, he was the most powerful man in Shakerism. Every Shaker was under his direct and indirect supervision. In addition, he did not resign from the Ministry until May 8, 1892. This means that he served in the New Lebanon Ministry longer than anyone else, almost forty years! These were crucial years, and perhaps if certain steps had been taken, the subsequent course of Shaker history could have been modified. A careful look at Ministerial activities shows that Elder Daniel, in spite of the great need, seems to have played a very minor role in leadership. It was his assistant Giles Avery who seems to have been the one to carry out most of the duties. Elder Daniel was a basket maker and helped the sisters in this occupation. Journal references describe his actions in this regard while, at the same time, Elder Giles was engaged in trying to replace leaders, encourage the young to stay, deal with financial scandals, and think of new trades to take the place of those lost by competition, lack of manpower, or the shift of trade routes west.³⁰ Elder Daniel's role in the Ministry was well-articulated and he should have taken the lead. This does not mean, however, that he did not remain a beloved figure. His apparent inaction and the fact that there are no pictures of him, despite his serving as first elder in the Ministry for forty years, makes him a real enigma. Where

he did exercise leadership was in his great love for Groveland. That this community should thrive became a major concern for him. From the time he came into the Ministry until his resignation, he did everything he could to save Groveland.

An examination of Ministerial journals shows that by the mid-1850s there was an increase in visits from the Groveland Ministry to New Lebanon. The major reasons for this had to do with the construction of the new dwelling house, which began in 1858. There was much disagreement over the planned building. As early as 1856, Elder Amos Stewart, first in the New Lebanon Ministry, went to Groveland to help Elder Emmory Brooks, who had taken Elder John Lockwood's place in the Ministry. The first recorded solo visit of Elder Daniel Boler was on September 13, 1857. Elder Daniel supervised changes in the elders order, but Elder Amos Stewart still took the lead in matters pertaining to Groveland. The big change came in October, 1858 when Elder Daniel became first in the New Lebanon Ministry.³¹ He was assisted by Elder Richard Bushnell from New Lebanon's North Family. Due to a nervous disposition, however, Elder Richard never actually worked as a member of the Ministry and resigned a year later. Thus from October 1858, until October 1859, Elder Daniel served alone and had to take an active interest in Ministerial affairs.

In November 1858, Elder Emmory of Groveland came to New Lebanon to disclose the terrible spiritual state of the community. What had started out with concerns about progress in the building and community dissatisfaction soon revealed other serious problems. Elder Amos Stewart, while no longer in the Ministry, was asked to help out with the new dwelling at Groveland, but it was Elder Daniel who handled everything else. His greatest accomplishment during this time was to dissolve the Ministry at Groveland on September 13, 1859. Groveland then became part of the New Lebanon bishopric. The Ministry of New Lebanon assumed direct supervision of the two Shaker families there as they had of four Shaker families at Watervliet and the seven at New Lebanon.³² In a journal, Elder Daniel comments about the dissolution of the Groveland Ministry. He states that they "thought it wise to do so considering their weak condition and lack of suitable members to fill place of care."³³ The elders at Groveland lost no time in seeking help from New Lebanon. On January 11, 1860, Eldress Lydia Dole of Groveland wrote to the Ministry seeking assistance in dealing with the troubled social and spiritual conditions there. The next month brought another letter begging for help. In March, and six months

later in September, the Ministry went to Groveland. While there, the elders of both Groveland families told “their stories of poverty and sorrow.”³⁴

At first, the Ministry was cautious in its response. That winter Elisha Blakeman of the First Order of the Church at New Lebanon was sent to Groveland to teach school.³⁵ After he returned on March 30, 1861, he reported to the Ministry that conditions at Groveland had not improved. The very next day, the Ministry and the elders at New Lebanon had a council meeting to see what might be done to help Groveland. Unlike in 1826, there were no longer enough people to fill all the vacancies at New Lebanon, let alone send capable leaders elsewhere. Moreover, that same week, requests for help had come from Hancock, Canterbury, and New Gloucester. The revival of Groveland was a ministerial priority, however, and it was decided “to send them some valuable assistance.”³⁶ Once Elder Daniel had taken an interest in Groveland, nothing would deter him from helping them. The Ministry asked Peter Long, second elder of the First Order of the Church, to go. He agreed, but requested Chauncy Sears, Jr., also of the First Order, to accompany him. On May 18, 1861, Elder Peter became head of the East (Church) Family and Chauncy Sears was placed as an assistant to Joseph Pelham at the West Family. Once established, Elder Peter lost no time in trying to get Groveland back on firm spiritual and temporal foundations. That July he asked that Elder Joseph Pelham be removed. Elder Daniel went to Groveland immediately and released Elder Joseph from office. At Elder Joseph’s request, he was moved to Watervliet.³⁷ Later they replaced Mary Ann Stone as eldress of the West Family and forced Orange Truare to leave. To strengthen the Gathering Order, Calvin Green of the First Order of New Lebanon was asked to take Elder Joseph’s place as first in the West Family.

The last time Calvin Green had been in western New York was in 1826, thirty-five years before, when he helped organize the new society at Sodus. By this time, he was almost eighty-one years old. The West family was very small yet it had a debt of \$6,000. None of these factors mattered to Elder Calvin, who was anxious to go. The Ministry had given him its blessing, and he intended to do what he could. Elder Calvin offered an insightful glimpse of what conditions at Groveland were like in 1861. He wrote, “The Society was in a low, weak state, both spiritually and temporally, but Elder Peter had made some improvement and infused some life into them; full as much as could be expected in so short a time. They were greatly in debt and otherwise much embarrassed. Their Leaders unfortunately

had got darkened off from the true Gospel ground of blessing, increase and spiritual protection.” He went on to say, “”The young had mostly lost their protection and fell to the world. They had undertaken to build an extreme great house and had got up the outside by spending a large sum of money they had on hand; it seemed as though it could not be finished without running more in debt. It was undertaken in union, but there had arisen much dissatisfaction and contentious feeling against it and it was difficult to reconcile them.”³⁸ In reality, the new dwelling was much larger than both families at Groveland put together would need. Completing it would require expensive outside help, and one of the things that Elder Calvin deplored was the need for hired help. It had been the custom at the West Family to spend \$8.00 a day on hired laborers and provide them with overnight accommodations. Elder Calvin made every effort to hire as few outsiders as possible, and when it was necessary, hired near neighbors so they could go home at night.

With Elder Calvin at the West Family and Elder Peter at the East Family, fortunes at Groveland improved. By the end of the year, Elder Peter was able to give the Ministry a favorable report. Since Groveland had no population centers closer than thirty miles, and the Civil War had depopulated the area, when a public meeting was held, the attendance from the world varied greatly from week to week. Sometimes just one person would be there, while at other times there would be hundreds. In spite of these factors, by 1863, under Elder Calvin’s guidance, the West Family had eighteen males, only three of whom were children. The whole society had increased by at least one-tenth in two years, yet the elders still struggled against a tradition at Groveland that had permitted spiritualism to be combined with Shakerism. As long as Elder Calvin was at Groveland this tendency was kept somewhat in check, but after he returned to New Lebanon to live in 1863, his efforts were undone, and the population started to decline again.³⁹

Ever vigilant in matters pertaining to Groveland, in June 1864, the Ministry sent Henry Cantrell, Jr. of the First Order of the Church of New Lebanon to take Elder Calvin’s place at the Gathering Order. Elder Daniel then helped the Groveland Shakers buy a fifty-acre farm in Mount Morris to raise broom corn. He wrote asking Elder George Wilcox of Enfield, Connecticut to lend them \$4,000. Elder George offered \$2,000 and the land was bought.⁴⁰ Another way the Ministry tried to help Groveland was to send them potential members. For example, Henry Augustus Stone, who

had been brought up in the First Order of the Church at New Lebanon left in 1866, when he was twenty-seven years old. He came back a year later, and was sent to live at Groveland. In 1870, John Lockwood, who had lived at Sodus and then at Groveland from 1826 until 1851, returned to spend his final days there. When he moved to Groveland for the last time, he was seventy-nine years old. He lived there until his death in 1878.

As helpful as these efforts were, they did not have long term effects. By 1871, Groveland was in a crisis again. That winter the news was so disturbing that the Ministry traveled to Groveland in early March. It seems that all the good work that Elder Peter and Elder Calvin had tried to do was being undone by a core of Shakers who did not intend to follow gospel principles. When the Ministry arrived, they were unprepared for the news that both the leaders as well as some members of the West Family were leaving the Shakers. At meeting that Sabbath there was “much tribulation... in consequence of false Brethren and Sisters.”⁴¹ Those leaving from the West Family, including Chauncy Sears, Jr., first elder; Augustus Stone, second elder; Polly Ann Smith, first eldress; Hannah Greening, second eldress; members Olive Swingle and her three grown daughters, and Harriet Warren.⁴² That left only three covenanted Shakers in the West Family. Sisters Eleanor DeGraw and Caroline Austin from the Church Family Office also left.⁴³ Elder Giles Avery and Eldress Polly Reed of the Ministry took charge of the West Family until Elder Daniel Boler and Eldress Eliza Ann Taylor could obtain help from New Lebanon. Once again, the society at New Lebanon was called to part with some of its best members in order to sustain Groveland. Calvin Reed, James Goodwin, Abigail Crosman and Louisa Young from the Church Family and Elizaette Sutton and Sarah Cutler from the North Family were sent to live at Groveland’s West Family. Calvin Reed was to be elder and Abigail Crosman eldress. They arrived on March 28, 1871. In May, Henry Cantrell, who had been in Groveland since 1864—five years at the West Family and two years at the East Family—returned to the Church at New Lebanon.

Under the new regime, the West Family gradually built itself up to twenty members by October 1872, but the entire society had just sixty members in all. In March 1873, Groveland was characterized as having “a beautiful spiritual gift.”⁴⁴ Conditions were settling down enough for Elder Calvin Reed to return to the Second Order of the Church at New Lebanon. James Goodwin took his place as elder and deacon. Had Groveland been

in need, however, the Ministry of New Lebanon could not have done much to help. Trying to deal with theological controversy, financial scandals, the great fires of February 1875, and rebuilding were taking much of the Ministry's time. Meanwhile children, young adults and the middle-aged were leaving all the societies. When the Ministry stopped off at Groveland in August 1876 they found the West Family had seventeen members, but it needed an elder and an eldress.

The federal census for Groveland in 1880 enumerates forty-one Shakers in all—eighteen males and twenty-three females. Of these only three were in the West Family. Two of these were Elder James Goodwin and Eldress Abigail Crosman who had been sent to Groveland during the crisis of 1871. Clearly the West Family was on borrowed time, and not surprisingly, it closed in 1883.

The New Lebanon Ministry founded Sodus in the 1820s and sustained Groveland by sending them capable members in 1861 and 1871. The final role the Ministry was to play was to close Groveland and find its surviving members a suitable home. As the 1880s progressed it became clear that Groveland was struggling under a tremendous financial burden. For example, in 1888 its assets totaled \$4,330 and its obligations, \$15,000. By January 1892, assets were down to just \$1,274.14 while obligations had risen to \$15,500.⁴⁵ Clearly this trend could not continue much longer, yet as long as Elder Daniel Boler was in the Ministry it was unlikely that Groveland would close.

On May 8, 1892, Elder Daniel resigned his place in the Ministry due to old age and infirmity. The way was now open for the Ministry to take direct steps to close the society at Groveland. In the past this would have fallen to one of the men in the Ministry. When Elder Daniel resigned, however, there were not sufficient men to replace him, and Elder Joseph Holden, who had taken Giles Avery's place as second, moved up to the first place. Since he served alone, there were already tremendous burdens on him, and he decided to move to Hancock so that he could benefit from the shrewd financial advice of Ira Lawson, the best trustee the Shakers ever had. This left just the Ministry sisters still at New Lebanon. As first eldress, many tasks fell to Harriett Bullard. In a series of letters and, no doubt, visits, Eldress Harriett proposed that the Groveland society be dissolved and that its 1800-acre property be either sold or rented. The entire community of thirty-four would move to a beautiful farm with nice buildings in good repair—the North Family at Watervliet. This family had

only a few members and the elder, Nathaniel Frye, was dying. If nothing was done, the North Family would have to close. If the Groveland Shakers came to this place, the remaining Shakers there would remove to other Watervliet families and let the Groveland Shakers have the whole property to themselves.⁴⁶

Elder Nathaniel Frye died on May 26, 1892. Faced with insurmountable debts, living hundreds of miles from the nearest Shaker village, and with no prospects of receiving help either financially or otherwise, the Groveland Shakers decided to make the move. Accordingly, they moved to the North Family at Watervliet, starting in October and finishing by late December 1892. After sixty-six years, western New York had no more Shakers. The attention of New Lebanon then turned to other matters as Shakerism continued to collapse.

Notes

1. The last Shaker to move from one community to another was Eldress Gertrude Soule who moved to Canterbury from Sabbathday Lake on September 15, 1971.
2. A bishopric usually consisted of one, two or three communities under a local Ministry. Until 1859 there were ten Shaker bishoprics: **New Lebanon** (including Watervliet), **Hancock** (including Tyringham and Enfield), **Harvard** (including Shirley), **Canterbury** (including Enfield, New Hampshire), **Alfred** (including Sabbathday Lake), **Groveland**, **North Union**, **Union Village** (including Watervliet and White Water, Ohio), **Pleasant Hill** and **South Union**.
3. In the winter of 1904 New Lebanon had eighty-six Shakers while Canterbury had one hundred. These numbers are found in letters from Ernest F. McGregor to various Shaker leaders. The originals of these letters are at Hancock Shaker Village Library.
4. For example, the society at Enfield, Connecticut gained many stalwart members from a revival that occurred in Foster, Rhode Island. New Lebanon helped fill its ranks with families from Wilmington, Vermont, and Savoy and Cheshire, Massachusetts. In 1828, large numbers of men, women and children, the vast majority of whom stayed faithful, were added to the various families at New Lebanon after the short-lived Owenite community at Valley Forge dissolved.
5. A community was founded in Florida in 1896, but it attracted very few converts. During the time of its existence it never had more than a dozen members, most of whom were from other well-established Shaker villages. It closed in 1924. The society founded in Georgia in 1898 was very short lived and closed in 1902.
6. "A Record of Events Kept by Eunice Esther Bennett." NYPL MK15304 Box 1.
7. "A Record of Events Kept by Eunice Esther Bennett."
8. "Brief Narrative of the Religious Experience of Joseph Pelham, 1863." WRHS VI:B-2-4
9. Population estimated using the federal census of 1820 which lists 490 Shakers and the 1830 census which lists 559 Shakers. In addition, in Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells, *A Summary View of the Millennial Church*, Albany: C. Van Benthuyssen, 1848, 76,

- the number of Shakers at New Lebanon in 1823 is given between 500 and 600. This enumeration offers only approximate numbers.
10. Solomon King and Rachel Johnson, first in the Ministry of Union Village, did not prove to be strong leaders. Challenges from the society in Watervliet, Ohio, ongoing problems with location at West Union, Indiana, and deep discontent at Union Village itself, were overwhelming difficulties they had to handle.
 11. "A Record of Events Kept by Eunice Esther Bennett."
 12. The Lower Canaan Family actually started in 1814 near the Carding Mill in New Lebanon, owned by the Second Family. In 1816 it was organized by James Farnham and Phebe Smith. In 1823, this group moved to Canaan and became the Lower Family.
 13. "Biographic Memoir of the Life and Experience of Calvin Green, 1861." Library of Congress #78.
 14. When Jeremiah Talcott took charge of the family it was still located by the Grist Mill in New Lebanon and known as the West Family. In 1821, this family moved to Canaan and became the Upper Family.
 15. Solomon King and Rachel Johnson were ordered back to New Lebanon, and Eldress Elizabeth Hastings was sent from the North Family at New Lebanon to Union Village to take Eldress Rachel's place. By 1836 the population of Union Village had fallen to 330, just a little more than half of the 634 it had in 1819.
 16. Savoy, Massachusetts, had seemed like a very promising place for a new society. Two years of drought in 1820 and 1821, however, and a change in the Ministry of New Lebanon, caused this place to be abandoned and its members moved to Watervliet and New Lebanon.
 17. "Biographic Memoir of the Life and Experiences of Calvin Green."
 18. It eventually was surveyed and found to contain 1,331 and 53/100 acres (Wisbey, *The Sodus Shaker Community*, 7).
 19. "Biographic Memoir of the Life and Experiences of Calvin Green."
 20. "A Record of Events Kept by Eunice Esther Bennett."
 21. "Record of the purchase of 1,300 acres of land in Sodus from R.C. Nicholas." WRHS II 8-8c.
 22. "Biographic Memoir of Calvin Green."
 23. "A Record of the commencement and progress of Believers at Sodus- and Portbay..." WRHS V B-22.
 24. "A Record of the commencement and progress of Believers at Sodus- and Portbay..."
 25. "Names, Number and age of Believers at Sodus and Huron, May 1, 1836." WRHS III A-5.
 26. These figures do not add up to 148 for two reasons. First, the enumeration used here was taken in May, not in December when there were 148 in the community. Second, a number of those committed to Shakerism did not actually live at Sodus. That May, eleven people are listed as "them that live out." This number could have been larger as the year progressed. People may have been reluctant to join a community that was about to move. These people could also have been in the first stages of investigating the possibility of joining and felt more comfortable living in their homes.
 27. "A Daily Journal of Passing Events; begun May the 19th, 1839, at Watervliet [N.Y.]; by Rufus Bishop, in the 65th year of his age." Journal, 1839 May 19-Jan. 1, 1850. NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, Item #2.

28. This was a very unstable Shaker family, which needed the help of a strong elder. Elder John Lockwood must have had the reputation of being a troubleshooter as subsequent events in his life reveal. Elder John had replaced Elder Jeremiah Talcott in the Groveland Ministry on June 8, 1844. Elder John's replacement was Emmory C. Brooks.
29. "To Beloved Br. Isaac [Newton Youngs] from Lucius Southwick [of Groveland], January 18, 1852." WRHS IV A-18
30. Ironically, while eleven years younger, Elder Giles died two years before Elder Daniel. By this time (1890) the Shakers were in a free-fall from which they could not recover.
31. Elder Amos Stewart, although first in the New Lebanon Ministry, willingly resigned this position to become the first elder at the Second Family of New Lebanon. It was thought that this would be temporary, but he stayed in that position until his death in 1884.
32. The South Family at New Lebanon was not fully organized into an independent Shaker family until the 1860s, when it became the eighth and last family to be created at New Lebanon.
33. "A Journal or Register of Passing Events, continued from former volumes, kept by Rufus Bishop. 1850 Jan. 2-1859 Oct 1." NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, Item #3.
34. "A Journal or Register of Passing Events, continued from former volumes, kept by Rufus Bishop. 1850 Jan. 2-1859 Oct 1."
35. Elisha Blakeman was born in 1819 and joined the Sodus Shakers with his father in 1830. In 1834 they went to live at New Lebanon. His father returned to Sodus and then to Groveland. Elisha remained at New Lebanon until November 1860 when he was sent to Groveland for the winter. While at New Lebanon he had been a furniture maker and caretaker of the boys.
36. NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, Item #3.
37. Watervliet needed a good speaker to preach at Public Meeting, and Joseph Pelham filled this role admirably until his death.
38. "Mission to Groveland: my experience and labor there," in volume 3 of "Biographic Memoir of Calvin Green."
39. "Biographic Memoir of Calvin Green."
40. "A Register of Incidents and Events... kept by Giles B. Avery. 1859 Oct. 20-1874 Dec. 2." NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, item #4.
41. "A Register of Incidents and Events... kept by Giles B. Avery. 1859 Oct. 20-1874 Dec. 2."
42. Chauncy Sears and Polly Ann Smith married after they left the Shakers. He was thirty-eight, she was forty-five.
43. Kramer, Fran. *Simply Shaker: Groveland and the New York Communities*. Rochester: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1991, 35.
44. NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, Item #4.
45. "Inventory and Stock for Sonyea" in the *Inventory of Farms 1884-1892*, 38 and 47. Shaker Library, United Society of Shakers, Sabbathday Lake, Maine.
46. "Harriet Bullard to the Elders at Watervliet, February 29, 1892," NYPL Shaker Manuscript Collection, Item #89. Also "Harriet Bullard to the Elders at Watervliet, March 20, 1892." WRHS IV: A-83.