

# Hamilton College Library

## “Home Notes”

### Communal Societies Collection: New Acquisitions

1. [McNemar, Richard?], compiler. *A Special Covenant of the First Family of the Church, Dated 3rd Month 8th 1815. [Watervliet, Ohio?, 183-?]. 1 sheet ([2] p.). 18½ cm.*

Shaker covenants typically set forth the rules and order of the communal family with the brethren and sisters binding themselves to each other, to their elders and to “the Church,” and sealing the covenant with their signatures. This “Special Covenant” is unusual, for it is not an instrument of Shaker communalism and was not signed. It is, instead, a spirited declaration of faith and rules of behavior for the male members of the Center Family at Union Village. The brethren state that “it is high time we should come to the light,” and go on to declare their “determination” to strengthen their faith and improve their conduct as community members. “We will not make a god of our bellies, nor make a beastly appetite ... we will not slug about and pretend that we are unwell, when we ought to be at work.” This broadsheet may have been printed by Richard McNemar who established a press at the Watervliet, Ohio community about 1830. The compiler lists the twenty-nine brothers who were at the Center Family “at that time,” which suggests a date of printing some time after 1815. Richmond (*Shaker Literature*, no. 960) attributes authorship to McNemar, but also lists it without an author (no. 1327). She furnishes evidence that it was printed not later than the 1830s, making this the earliest printed example of any type of Shaker covenant. Richmond records two other holdings and OCLC WorldCat adds three copies worldwide.

*A Special Covenant of the first family of the Church*  
*Dated 3rd Month 8th 1815.*

WE believe it is high time that we should come to the light, and declare our faith openly to each other, and maintain, aboveboard, what we conscientiously believe to be right, to the laying down of our lives.

I WE do believe, that, Father and Mother have the same spirit abiding in them, which was manifested in the first foundation pillars of the gospel, which is the only true touchstone to try all our spirits & all our ways. and only in union with their spirit and in obedience to their teaching, do we look for peace and salvation in time or eternity: Therefore, we are determined to labor for unity of spirit with them in all things, and take up our cross against that wicked nature that would lead us contrary to their counsel in any thing great or small.

It is our fixed determination to take up arms against the flesh, and war against the beast, in every shape & form that we can discover him; and for the future to avoid all unnecessary and improper intercourse with the sisters, and every thing that might have a tendency to ensnare our souls or stir up any partial or ungodly affection; and labor, in the fear of God, to build up among each other the precious gifts which, from time to time, we have been taught, particularly;

I We will not indulge ourselves in idle, vain, unprofitable or noisy conversation, or any thing of the kind, that would lead away the mind after that which is light and carnal; but we will improve our seasons of retirement in laboring for the gifts of God as we are taught.

II We will not slug about and pretend that we are unwell, when we ought to be at work, nor give way to any such spirit of idleness or carnal indulgence as would minister weakness and death to each other; but we will improve our time to the best advantage in doing good, and war against every contrary spirit & feeling as the open enemy of God and our souls.

III We will not make a god of our bellies, nor indulge a beastly appetite in any way that would clog our senses or unfit us for the exercise of any spiritual gift; nor give

**2. Evans, John. *Sequel to the Sketch of the Denominations of the Christian World: Being One Hundred Testimonies ... With an Appendix; Containing an Address on the Reign of the Messiah; An Idea of Christian Communion and Christian Discipline; and An Account of the Church Government of the Shakers, who neither Marry nor are Given in Marriage, but Profess to be as the Angels in Heaven.* 4th ed., with corrections and improvements. London: Sherwood, Neeley, and Jones, 1811.**

The fourth edition contains a seventeen-page extract from the second edition of *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing: Containing a General Statement of All Things Pertaining to the Faith and Practice of the Church of God in this Latter-day* (1810), pages 505-17. In his introduction to his *Sequel*, Evans says,

... the Shakers, an *American sect*, but the most singular of all the sects of Christendom. *Community of goods*, which they practice, is in these times, upon any large scale, impracticable. But their withdrawalment of *Creeds* and *Confessions of Faith*, in every age of the church the source of antichristian strife, is a curious experiment. Even the poor visionary Shaker has this golden vein of good sense running through the mass of his absurdities. Fanaticism is in general, blind, bigotted, and intrusive; but these people seem to have their eyes open, to behold the broad daylight of religious liberty. For to use their own expressions, "Our *only* confession of faith (if it may be so called) is to show our *Faith* by of WORKS, in doing justice and in loving mercy!" (p. 3-4)

Evans first published his *Sketch of the Denominations* in 1795, which went through numerous editions through the mid-nineteenth century, and was among the earliest publications to contain a description of the Shakers. It is not clear why he published *Sequel to the Sketch*. The first edition (London) was published in 1801 (one copy on OCLC WorldCat). There is no record of a surviving second edition, but a third London edition was published in 1806 (three copies on OCLC WorldCat). In 1811 a first American edition was published along with a fourth London edition (eight copies on OCLC WorldCat). A fifth edition was published in 1822 under the title, *The Golden Centenary, or, One Hundred Testimonies in behalf of Candour, Peace, and Unanimity ... designed as a Sequel to the Sketch of*



*the Denominations of the Christian World.* The fourth London edition (the edition held by HCL) appears to be the only one which contains the appendix with the extract from *The Testimony*. As such it appears to be the earliest recognition of this major Shaker work, and it is fascinating that it was published across the ocean in England.

