# BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHAKER COLONY AT SOUTH UNION, KENTUCKY

By Elizabeth Coombs
Cataloger, Kentucky Library
Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Bowling Green, Kentucky

The events leading to the founding of a Shaker colony in Logan County, at South Union, or Gasper River, as it was first called, go far into the past. The same is true of Pleasant Hill, the Shaker colony in Mercer County, on the Kentucky River.

Before giving a brief history of the Shaker colony at South Union, based on the Shaker documents in the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, a few facts should be presented about the origin of the Society of Shakers from which this colony grew. The story is given in detail in Charles Edson Robinson's *Concise History of the United Society of Believers Called Shakers*, published in 1893.

The origin of the Shakers, says Robinson, extends back to the revival of religion in France, which took place in the last part of the Seventeenth Century. It spread across the channel to England, where one offshoot continued to exist, without any great growth, under the name of the "French Prophets," until 1747. In that year James Wardley and his wife Jane Wardley, prominent Quakers, joined the sect. In Manchester, under their direction, strange manifestations took place. The members sang, shouted, walked the floor, trembled and shook. From these exercises they became known as "Shaking Quakers," which was soon shortened to "Shakers." They, however, called themselves "The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing," and referred to their fellow members as "Believers."

In this same city of Manchester, in 1736, was born Ann Lee, the daughter of a poor blacksmith, who was destined to fall under the Wardleys' religious influence, and, by means of it, was to become one of the world's remarkable women. Little more than a child, she worked at first in a cotton factory, later in a hat factory; finally, she became a cook. Then, while still very young, she was induced to marry, much against her will and conscience, however, a blacksmith by the name of Abraham Stanley.

Four children were born to them, all of whom died in infancy. Perhaps this caused her to turn to religion for consolation. At

any rate, in 1758, she united with the "Shaking Quakers," and for the next nine years this ignorant woman—who could not read nor write—experienced prophetic visions and received revelations which she in turn disclosed to the Society. These were of a decidedly revolutionary character.

Without entering into a discussion of Shaker theology, as revealed by Ann and adopted by her followers, it should be stated that the most important changes from conventional Christian beliefs were these:

1st. God's possession of both a masculine and feminine nature, and the recognition of the new leader as "the first spiritual parent in the female line," calling her Mother Ann. 2nd. The doctrine of celibacy for all. Marriage was renounced as self-indulgence and as contrary to the Scriptures. 3rd. Spiritual communication, spirit guidance, and obsession through trances, including contact with the other world.

In conservative England, these views and various activities of the Shakers in public matters finally lead to Ann's imprisonment in 1770. For fourteen days neither food nor water was taken to her by her keepers, nor was her cell door opened, in the hope and expectation of starving her to death. Starvation, however, was prevented by another Shaker, James Whitaker, who each night secretly fed her a small quantity of wine and milk by means of a pipe-stem put through the keyhole. On her release from prison, directed by a vision, she determined to seek freedom from further persecution by going to America. With her husband and seven other followers she landed at New York in 1774. There they endured many hardships. It was not until two years later that the original group, with the exception of Ann's husband, who had meanwhile deserted her and abandoned her faith, was re-united by settling at Watervliet, New York. In that sparsely settled district they managed to exist only by the most diligent toil, trying to prepare a place for the converts which they felt sure would eventually come to them.

Shortly after their arrival the American Revolution began. The English birth of the Shakers, their Quaker scruples against war, and, probably most of all, their strange behavior and religious convictions, which were looked upon with jealous suspicion by the neighboring clergy, resulted, in 1780, in the imprisonment of Ann and her elders, upon the charge of high treason.

Released after six months, they returned to Watervliet and found the membership there greatly enlarged. The increase, it is said, was brought about partially by public sympathy. Now at last the Shakers felt sufficiently secure to begin their missionary labors in earnest, and for the next three years they preached in Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as in New York State, but not without occasionally suffering injury and violence from mobs and riots. These years were exhausting for Mother Ann, both mentally and physically, and lead to her death in 1784, but happily not before she had realized the success of her venture.

For the next twenty years the Shakers made great progress, principally under the leadership of Joseph Meacham. He formerly had been a Baptist minister in Connecticut, and developed excellent administrative and executive ability as need arose. It was he who decided that a corporate as well as a spiritual body should be formed; he thus established communistic life in America for the first time. In this new life the women had equal privileges with the men, and received the same responsibilities, an unusual state of affairs for those days.

The following figures give some idea of the growth of membership in the United Society of Believers in the United States: In 1780 it was 9; in 1803 it was 1,632; in 1828 it was 2,632; in 1839 it was 5,000.[1]

The "Great Revival," which began in southern Kentucky in 1800, was a forerunner of the founding of the Shaker Colony of South Union. In Logan, and the neighboring counties, James McGready and John Rankin, both Presbyterian ministers, were chiefly responsible for its fast-spreading influence to other parts of the State.

John Rankin's Autobiography,[2] written in 1845, and copied in South Union's Shaker Record A, gives an unequaled account of the still inexplicable occurrence of this revival. The

[1] Charles Edson Robinson: *Concise History of the United Society of Believers Called Shakers* (East Canterbury, New Hampshire, 1893), page 57.

[2] The Autobiography of John Rankin, Senior, was written at South Union. The transcribed copy comprises the first pages in Shaker Record A. It carries this heading: "Auto-biography of John Rankin, Sen. written at South Union, Ky., 1845, & copied here Aug., 1870, by H. L. Eades," and is signed "John Rankin, Sen. now in the 88th year of my age." It begins with the emigration of his parents from Ireland in 1746 and ends with the year 1805, when he was 48. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1757 and died at South Union in 1850, aged 93. The transcribed copy covers 35 pages, 14 by 9 inches. The first 25 pages include an outline of the first forty years of his life, interspersed with much religious discussion. The last ten pages tell of his going to Tennessee and then coming, in 1798, to Gasper River in Kentucky; these last pages, extending down to 1806, include a graphic account of the Great Revival in Kentucky. So far as I have been able to learn, this Autobiography of John Rankin has never been published.

first camp-meeting was held at Gasper River Church in July, 1800, which instituted the camp-meeting as a form of worship in America. From unimpeachable sources we know of the strange conduct of the worshipers at this gathering and at the many other camp-meetings, also church meetings, that immediately followed.[3]

"Contortions of features, bodies, and limbs" caused alarm and confusion, reports John Rankin. "Heavy groans were heard and tremblings and shaking began to appear. Inquirers began to fall on all sides and their cries became piercing and incessant." Swiftly turning around, dancing, and open confession of sin followed.[4] Exercises called the jerks, the rolls, and the barks, also swoons and trances, became commonplace. Conversions by hundreds took place, and this in a section of country heretofore almost totally indifferent to religion.

Into Kentucky, so swayed by religious excitement and fervor, the Shakers decided to send missionaries. At New Lebanon, New York, in 1804, three messengers were chosen to convey the tidings of their gospel: John Meacham, Issacher Bates and Benjamin Seth Youngs. Written instructions and counsels were given to them, also a pastoral letter to the people of Kentucky and adjacent states.

Copies of these letters and other documents transcribed from the originals in 1870 by Harvey L. Eades are in the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, where they may be examined in detail. In later years Eades, an unusually gifted and good man, became the best-known of the South Union Shakers.

From this 1804 starting point, Eades transcribed all the journals and diaries pertaining to the founding and growth of the colony down to September, 1836, collected in one large volume of 640 pages, which he designated "Shaker Record A." This book contains an unrivaled account of Shaker life and an almost day-by-day history of South Union through about thirty-two years.

[3] *James McGready—Posthumous Works*, edited by James Smith, 2 Vols. (Louisville, 1831), Vol. 1, pages ix-xvi. Richard McNemar: *Kentucky Revival* (New York, 1846). Levi Purviance: *The Biography of Elder David Purviance* (Dayton, Ohio, 1848), pages 46–50 and 295–304. *Barton Warren Stone*—Biography written by himself with Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers (Cincinnati, 1847), pages 39–42. John Rankin: Autobiography (extending from 1757 to 1805) in South Union Shaker Record A, pages 32–38.

[4] John Rankin. Autobiography, in South Union Shaker Record A, pages 32–38.

Record A begins with the transcribed Autobiography of John Rankin; then follow the instructions given to the missionaries, and their pastoral, or ecumenical, letter. The constitution, or covenant, are given on the last pages. Between these two entries is the main record of the colony's life from 1804 to 1836. The first elder of South Union, Benjamin Seth Youngs, one of the original messengers, wrote most of this important chronicle, later transcribed. From Record A came the following facts down to September, 1836:

The three missionaries from New Lebanon, New York, set out on foot January 1, 1805, with a horse to carry their baggage. They traveled south through Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and Tennessee, and arrived in Garrard County, Kentucky, on March 3. From there they made trips into Ohio and parts of Kentucky. In the beginning their most important converts were Presbyterian ministers, many of whom were extremely well-educated men for the frontier; among them were Matthew Houston, Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy. But their efforts to preach the new religion were attended with many setbacks: frequently their preaching stands were burned, mobs gathered, the ears and tails of their horses were cut off, the windows were broken in houses they occupied.

It was not until 1807 that the southern part of Kentucky was reached by the Shakers. On September 22, 1807, Issacher Bates, Richard McNemar and Matthew Houston started from Ohio on their journey to "Kentucky and Cumberland in Tennessee."[5] They passed Elizabethtown, Bacon Creek, Green River, Mammoth Cave, Dripping Springs, and crossed Barren River in Warren County. They did not go through Bowling Green; it was not on the main road at that time. On October 17th they arrived at John Rankin's, at Gasper, in Logan County. This is the missionaries' first reference to the future South Union.[6]

[5] South Union Shaker Record A (640 pages), page 79

[6] There is more or less confusion concerning the name Gasper or Gasper River as applied to churches in Logan County. Maps and postal guides show a village in Logan County called Gasper, midway between South Union and Richelieu. Gasper of today, however, is in reality a neighborhood, not a village, which includes the Gasper or Gasper River Baptist Church. This church is some two miles distant from Richelieu.

The first Gasper church was Presbyterian. John Rankin's Autobiography, written in 1845, says on page 17: "In August 1799, a sacrament was appointed at Gasper River old meetinghouse, five miles below [the future] South Union." The five miles "below" is in reference to the flow of Gasper River.

His Autobiography further states on page 18: "In the meantime, the members of this Society (Gasper) were cordially engaged in building a meetinghouse for their future accommodation." The following statement appears on page 19: "The next

Within a month twenty-five persons had been converted to Shakerism. The missionaries then returned to Ohio, where a colony, Union Village, had already been established. However, by frequent visits and letters they kept in close touch with the little group at Gasper, which continued to grow through the years 1808 and 1809.

By the end of 1810 considerable land had been acquired, and in November a large building had been completed on the north side of the "Great Road," as Father Benjamin called it.

At this point, on page 142, the transcriber, Harvey L. Eades, inserts the following comment:

"It is worthy of remark that the title of Father and Mother is the highest conferred on any Believer. Mother Ann being the first, and then on those who came with her—and Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright. After these there seems to be an interregnum, until about the last of the Year 1812 or the first of the present year (1813), this title was conferred on David Darrow and Ruth Farrington. Since which time it is conferred on no others and the present Ministry of New Lebanon have decided not to accept it tho urged upon them from various quarters. This decision was made as early as the year 1808. So I learn. H. L. Eades."

Eades refers to Benjamin Seth Youngs as Father Benjamin consistently in the copying of Youngs' Journal, as a mark of personal respect and reverence. He is sometimes referred to also as "Little Benjamin" because of his small stature.

By the year 1811 communistic life had begun for the South Union colony.

In 1811 Gasper was first designated as South Union. That same year Benjamin Seth Youngs and Joseph Allen were appointed the first elders, and Molly Goodrich and Mary Pickett the first eldresses. They arrived at South Union on October 6th, and on the 8th met in worship with the people for the first time. A brick kiln was built in November, and brick-making started immediately. A school was opened for the children. The latter part of the year the first series of famous earthquakes were re-

large meeting was held . . . at Gasper River, at the New Meeting House one mile and a half below [the future] South Union in the month of July 1800." This new church, built for John Rankin, was apparently called both Gasper Meeting House and Gasper River Church. It was the second of the Presbyterian churches of that name in Logan County, and the place of the first camp-meeting held in America. This historic church later came into the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination. According to the *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (1888) by Benjamin W. McDonnold, page 121, the church was abandoned for a time, its members attending Pilot Knob Church. But after the Civil War its services were resumed, and it existed as a live organization as late as 1888. For many years now the congregation has been disbanded.

corded. On December 31st Father Benjamin wrote: "Two shocks last night—so quakes off the year 1811."[7]

The year 1812 brought many exciting events. The earthquakes continued in January, February, and July. "It seems as tho our little ball might be shaken to pieces quite easily," wrote Father Benjamin.[8] War was declared against Great Britain. The Legislature passed a law whereby divorce was allowable by one of a couple joining the Shakers, and the party then joining obtained all the property and children of the family. A saw-mill was put into operation and much building of every description took place. The first covenant was signed. In November the Shakers made their first trip to the coal-banks of Butler County, with teams to bring home the coal.

1813 was a most eventful year: in January 1,140 additional acres of land were purchased; a maple-sugar camp was erected; shingle making on a large scale commenced; a bridge was built over the creek, and a large number of peach trees planted along its banks; a grist mill was built, and work was pushed on the new brick building.

The War of 1812 was brought vividly to them by the encampment of 400 soldiers, by the Spring, in April. An attempt was made to draft the Shakers, but they were finally exempted because of their religious scruples. On May 1, 1813, the name Gasper was officially changed to South Union. That same month 500 drafted militia, under General Samuel Caldwell, camped overnight at the Spring.

Father Benjamin, in spite of the work accomplished, was discouraged at the end of the year. He was a small, frail man who never weighed over one hundred pounds; but in direct contrast his energy and determination were enormous. In October he wrote: "Low & distressing times in these days—Weak handed & many sick—Grain to buy & from 10 to 30 miles to Mill—Winter coming on—No shoes—no leather, no shoemakers if we had, no money wherewith to purchase—no Blacksmith, & the Society (14,000.) fourteen thousand dollars in debt!" Then follows this comment by the transcriber: "Well Pa: you have given us a picture! I was then about 6 years old, & felt nothing only a pinching in the stomach, with just half as much mush & milk at a time as I craved. H. L. Eades."[9]

[7] South Union Shaker Record A, page 161.
[8] *Ibid.*, page 164.
[9] *Ibid.*, page 143.

The records of 1814 should be of special interest to the medical profession, for in March, April, May, and June of that year occurred what Father Benjamin called the "cold plague," an epidemic probably similar to the "flu" of our day. Of the 300 persons in the society, including 145 children, almost 100 were affected by it, and thirteen died.

The next year, 1815, found the colony numbering 330, all apparently zealous and industrious. A fulling mill was put in operation in January. The Kentucky Library has one of the account books of this mill, also a broadside advertising its products. Some members obtained special permissions to work by moonlight on the fences and dooryards. Another brick building was finished; it was to be used for general and public meetings. The first cider was made. Following all this endeavor, another "cold plague" came in September. Fifty-six were ill, and required much care; all but the most necessary work was stopped; only two deaths occurred.

The year 1816 marks the start of the erection of a new meeting house. Stone was hauled for the foundation, trees felled for timber and 18,000 shingles made for the roof. Next in importance was the installation of millstones. The two pairs cost the Shakers $200.00 in labor and transportation, a large sum in those days. Five men spent a month at the quarry getting out the stone; it required three wagons, with thirteen horses, eleven full days to haul them home. By November the shoe-shop, wheelwright's shop, and blacksmith's shop were in operation and a shearing machine had been purchased. "With beautiful pleasant weather, general health and prosperity. So ends the year 1816."[10]

1817 began with the usual industry. A saw mill was put in operation; 14,000 fence rails were made in two weeks. In the spring gardens were planted; brickmaking began again, to supply bricks to finish the meeting house.

The year 1818 brought more progress in every direction. Not content with all the work done by day, evening school was instituted for all.

A year long to be remembered was 1819. Although there were 312 souls in the society, there was still a preponderance of children whose education and upbringing was a constant anxiety and worry. The Lancasterian method was used in the school at

[10] *Ibid.*, page 244.

this period. A spinning machine was bought, also a carding machine. The grounds were improved, and it was urged "that no more cattle, sheep, nor hogs be permitted to run in the streets from henceforth forever." Distinguished visitors are noted for the first time in South Union records. On June 17 President James Monroe and his suite, and General Andrew Jackson and his family dined there. On July 12 a large comet is reported. The new meeting house, or church, was finished on November 28, after two years' labor, and its dedication service was held with great rejoicing.

In January, 1820, Elder Issacher Bates, one of the three first messengers to the Western Country, visited South Union. In February is recorded the sight of a flight of the famous passenger pigeons, flying from north to south, "seemingly in clouds a mile in width as far as the eye could see."[11]

The 1820's marked a decade that probably showed the greatest enterprise and business development of the Shakers.

In 1821 the first seeds were marketed. This was the beginning of the sale of garden seed, later to be in demand over a large portion of the United States. 35,000 pounds of hemp was grown. The fourteen- or seventeen-year locusts came, "which made the welkin ring." The meeting house yard was sown in bluegrass, then, as now, greatly admired.

On April 1, 1822, the cellar excavation began for the great Centre House, which still stands today close beside what was then the "Great Road." A Durham bull was purchased; that marked the beginning of their fine stock breeding. A cotton gin was put in motion.

The year 1823 might well be called a year of "firsts." The first distillery was built, the first carriage was made, the first tavern, or office, as the Shakers often called it, was erected to accommodate the public, and the first stone laid in the Centre House foundation.

In 1824 the corner-stone of Centre House was laid, and the brickwork commenced. The first flatboat was built on Red River, near Clarksville, Tennessee, to float down the Mississippi to New Orleans to market their goods. This boat was 15 by 60 feet, and was loaded with 250 hogs, 100 sheep, 2 barrels of kraut, much garden seed and many small articles. This first trip netted $572.00. From this time forward, for many years, the

[11] South Union Shaker Record A, page 292.

New Orleans trips were an annual occurrence and a splendid source of cash income.

In 1825 Solomon P. Sharp's name appears from time to time as a visitor, and sometimes as a lawyer bringing suit against the Shakers. His assassination in Frankfort by Jereboam Beauchamp is noted in November.[12] The Shakers admired "Judge Brodnax, our just judge," who was serving this District as Circuit Judge.[13] This same year they bought a tract of 250 acres at $10.00 per acre, twice its estimated value, from General E. M. Covington, first sheriff of Warren County, to protect themselves from undesirable neighbors, whose settlement on the land there was referred to as "Rowdytown."

In 1826 the first postoffice was opened in a small log house. The postmaster was David Smith. A little humor appears this year. Father Benjamin writes, "Dunn Davis, having repeatedly visited the still with the overmuch within, left to-day. The last of Dunn. Dunn has done it!"[14] Again he writes in the record that a darky said, "Man may pint, but God will disappint!"[15] A new road was cut to the south with sixty of the brethren working on it, and in December the annual boat trip started down the river to New Orleans.

The January, 1827, entry commences with a complete roster of the names of the Shakers, 350 in all. This was the largest number ever at South Union. Four of the members made the journey to Mount Lebanon, New York, and were gone six months. Earthquakes occurred in July and August, but without causing much alarm. The cargo to New Orleans this year included straw hats, brooms, and whiskey, besides the usual variety of seeds.

The year 1828 was remembered by its floods, caused by forty days of rain. The Bowling Green Bridge over Barren River was rendered impassable, and the waters all about were higher than ever known before. In July the hay was harvested, without the use of whiskey. "The first harvest ever taken in this country without the help of whiskey."[16] Seven yoke of oxen hauled the huge stones for the sidewalk across the "Great Road" near Centre House. They were laid the same day.

[12] *Ibid.*, page 378.
[13] *Ibid.*, page 376.
[14] *Ibid.*, page 385.
[15] *Ibid.*, page 394.
[16] *Ibid.*, page 431.

The year 1829 was an important one in many ways. It was the 25th anniversary of the selection of the Shaker missionaries to the Western Country. Payments on lands were made continually. The money was realized from peddling trips made for the purpose of selling their manufactured articles in this and the adjoining states. The sale of seeds on a large scale, and the income from the annual New Orleans boat trip was very encouraging. The tavern was thriving. The number of travelers, by horseback and by stage-coach, who stopped there for refreshment had increased.

The making of straw hats and bonnets had, by 1829, become a major industry. Even the men platted straw at odd times, and great rivalry existed in turning in the greatest number of yards each month. Milton Robinson and Harvey L. Eades usually made the highest scores. Both were then twenty-two years old, and assisted Father Benjamin in keeping the journal. The first cookstove was installed in May. Henry Clay and John J. Crittenden took dinner and supper at the tavern. Each was presented with a fine hat.

One tradition has it that Shakers never engaged in lawsuits, but certainly these of the South Union society did from the earliest days. They, however, were not often obliged to defend themselves as in the following case:

"Henry Grider, a young lawyer, came with a letter from Eph Ewing stating that suit was to take place against the society for $1000, which a certain John Boon said he had paid U. E. Johns by mistake instead of $100. for building his boat, requesting us to pay and avoid the scandal of a suit. We treated Ewing's counsel with contempt. Stood suit and were acquitted and Boon paid the costs. John Breathitt and James T. Morehead did themselves great credit for the able manner in which they defended the society."[17] (Both lawyers later became governors of Kentucky.)

In December another calamity came. Some enemy poisoned the horses and chickens with strychnine. In all twelve horses died, causing a loss estimated at $1,200.00.

The next year, 1830, cheesemaking on a large scale was started. In one day, in August, forty cheeses weighing 1,500 pounds were made. Within six months the Sisters realized over $800.00 from the sale of cheese. A little printing press was bought this year

[17] South Union Shaker Record A, page 457.

to mark the seed bags. The Shakers found it necessary to hire four slaves for service during the coming year.

In March, 1831, strawberry vines were set out in the gardens for cultivation. Previously only wild strawberries, but these in great abundance, had been available. The seed business continued to expand. In one day 5,525 seed bags were pasted with labels. By October, 33,290 packets of seed had been prepared for sale down the river. Over $4,000.00 was cleared by the flatboat trip this year. (The Kentucky Library has a unique diary kept by T. J. Shannon; it gives much about this particular trip.) On December 15th the thermometer stood at 25 below zero, the coldest weather ever known at South Union.[18]

1832 shows another occupation for the Sisters: the raising of silk worms and the weaving of silk. Handkerchiefs and neckerchiefs were the main articles produced. The first state-wide cholera epidemic took place, and August 18 was set aside by Governor Metcalfe as a day of fasting and prayer.

1833 marked the final completion of the great Centre House. For a period of eleven years the Shakers had put upon it daily painstaking labor combined with great pride of workmanship. The trees had been felled, the timber cut by their own sawmill, the stone quarried and hauled, the shingles split, the bricks made in their own kilns, and all the plastering and cabinet work had been done with the greatest of care. In 1833 and for many years thereafter it was an outstanding building. It is still (in 1939) a beautiful house, well preserved.

The Shakers moved into Centre House on May 7th. "Bedsteads, new mostly, having been put in the rooms—the beds & clothing & bureaus, & drawer-chests, boxes, chairs etc. all found their appropriate places. . . . A large brass clock put in the lower Hall—A good wooden clock into the dining room—a good brass clock in the hall above, between the Elders Rooms etc."[19] Dinner was postponed until four o'clock, with seventy persons sitting at the table. The formal dedication took place after dinner.

The records of the year 1833 further show that in the summer cholera re-appeared. The tavern became still more prosperous. The Shakers agreed to keep eight stage-horses, to be changed there, at $500.00 per year. Numbers of falling stars, or meteors, were observed on November 12th and 13th.

[18] *Ibid.*, page 501.
[19] *Ibid.*, page 526.

By 1834 the membership, in spite of great prosperity, had dwindled to 213 persons. Many public meetings were held that year. One was attended by 400 spectators, 116 taking dinner, supper and breakfast at the tavern that day. Sam Houston of Tennessee attended one of the meetings.

In 1835 came a terrible outbreak of cholera. Many people died in near-by Bowling Green and in Russellville. Some tried to escape the plague by leaving the towns. A large number came to the Shakers, who at no time ever turned away anyone. Some of them became ill, requiring much nursing and care. Three of them died in the tavern.

In July, 1836, Father Benjamin went to the Shaker colony at Pleasant Hill, Mercer County, Kentucky, for the purpose of trying to combine the two societies, but he failed in his mission. This year H. L. Eades was appointed assistant, associate, and helper to Elder Benjamin Seth Youngs.[20] This was a great honor for Eades, then aged thirty-nine.

The membership of the colony was gradually diminishing. In September, what was known as the East Family, was wholly broken up, and the brethren and sisters scattered among the other families of this society. There were in 1836, in all, 210 souls.

On September 10, 1836, Elder Eades closes his transcription of Record A with these remarks: "Journal A is now completed . . . cannot say it is positively correct, but it is as nearly so as I have been able to get it from the numerous scraps of journals I could collect. I am thankful it is finished, as it gives a connected history of this place from its very beginning."

South Union never attained a very large membership. It varied from 175 to 300 in the more thriving years. The 1820's and 1830's were the time of its greatest development in numbers and wealth, in farming and erection of buildings—truly a remarkable accomplishment. Nearly 100 buildings of various kinds were then on the land. Six large houses were in the central group. They were known as the East House, the West House, the North House, the Centre House (the largest), the Tavern or Office, and the Church. In later years, after the building of the railroad, a hotel and store were constructed adjoining the depot at South Union, some distance from the colony.

During these early years the colony had been almost entirely self-sufficient. The Shakers provided nearly all their own food and clothing. They had their orchards and gardens. Sugar was

[20] South Union Shaker Record A, page 617.

secured from the maple trees; as much as 600 pounds was made in one camp. They operated a saw mill, a grist mill, a fulling mill, a cider mill, a tanyard, a distillery, a blacksmith's shop, a wheelwright's shop, a shoemaker's shop, a lime kiln, a brick kiln, and a cooperage shop. They wove cotton, linen and silk, also rag carpeting. They made dyes. They grew and preserved rare medicinal herbs, dried apples and peaches, made quantities of preserves. Many small articles were made for sale, such as straw hats and bonnets, brooms, measures, button boxes, rules, and gauging rods.

In the Kentucky Library is an original record for each of the next eight decades, giving more or less of the Shakers' work from the time of the closing of Record A down to 1916.

The 1840's are made very real by the general account book of the society kept by Eli McLean in his fine, clear penmanship. It extends from January, 1843, to April, 1844. It is noticeable how many more articles were purchased ready-made, instead of being made at home. $4,668.00 was spent in 1843 on purchases of all description. This was a large amount, taking into consideration the fact that all the necessities of life were already provided for.

The 1850's are preserved in a journal kept, probably, by Eldress Betsy Smith. She, with Sister Nancy E. Moore, Elder John Rankin and Brother Urban Johns made a visit to the older Shaker settlements in New York and New England in the summer of 1854.

The record of the 1860's is an unusually fine literary production, a diary written by Eldress Nancy E. Moore, describing the Civil War period in this locality from January, 1863, to September, 1864. At that time the Confederate troops had been almost entirely driven from the State. The Shakers were staunch Union people, but, in spite of this fact, they were, according to the diary, mercilessly imposed upon by the Federal army authorities. Forage masters took whatever they needed from them. More often than not payment was refused at the Quartermaster's headquarters in Bowling Green upon a technicality or some irregularity. Eldress Nancy says, "These bargains to accommodate the armies are very uncertain indeed to us. They seem to have quite a nack of drawing up their receipts in a way to get around making an honest payment."[21] In the end, after many

[21] Nancy E. Moore: Journal of South Union, Logan County, January 17, 1863, to September 4, 1864, page 6.

losses in stock and food, she was considerably more lenient in her views towards the Confederates, except in regard to slavery. Elder Eades, she wrote, had a hard time indeed trying to protect the society's property.

The entire countryside was overrun with guerrilla bands. Their misdeeds were credited to the Confederates, but actually these bands harassed all with equal impartiality. General John Hunt Morgan, Captain Thomas Henry Hines and Edgar Mitchell, it was rumored, directed their activities.

The Civil War days of near-by Bowling Green, Woodburn, Franklin, Auburn and Russellville, are constantly pictured in these pages by one of the shrewdest and most sensible of women. One almost feels personally acquainted with her after closing her graphic and exciting little diary, so neatly and exquisitely written.

As in other wars, an attempt was made to draft the Shakers for the army. In this case Elder Eades appealed directly to President Lincoln, and on December 30, 1863, this telegram was dispatched to the provost marshal at Bowling Green: "If there is any religious community within your district, whose conscientious scruples abjure war, or the payment of commutation fee, you will parole them indefinitely, still holding them subject to any demand from the authority here."[22]

In June, 1865, nineteen children were sent to South Union. They were orphans of refugee soldiers who had been living at the Children's Orphan Home in Clarksville, Tennessee, which the government decided to close. (I was unable to find any record as to how long they remained with the Shakers.)

By 1870, in spite of the troubles experienced during the war and the almost total suspension of business enterprise for several years, the colony had resumed its energetic and industrious ways.

A record from January, 1871, to June, 1872, is in the form of a diary, probably kept by Eldress Lucy Clark.[23] The now familiar names of Jefferson Shannon, Eldress Nancy Moore, Elder Eades, and many others continue to appear on its pages. We find the colony less serious. Trips were taken to the towns, to the country, and visits made in and out of the state to other Shaker communities. Even the Warren County Fair, at Bowling Green, was attended and its exhibits greatly admired. In spite of many

[22] Anna White and Leila S. Taylor: *Shakerism, Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, Ohio, 1904), pages 195–199.

[23] Journal of South Union, written by an Eldress, January 1, 1871, to June 18, 1872, page 95.

disillusionments the Shakers continued their policy of kindness to all who came to them, as these two entries show:

"The professed widow who came here from Louisville a short time since, left today with a man who came here and claimed her for his wife, but they took good care to slip away without the children."

"A male infant of African descent supposed to be three or four weeks old was left at the smoke house door . . . This branch of the strange vine will of course be some expense and trouble."

They all enjoyed "frolics" for picking blackberries, raspberries and cherries. At this time their preserves had attained great reputation, even in distant places. From New Orleans one merchant ordered one hundred cases; from Galveston, Texas, another ordered thirty cases. Within the month of May, 1872, they made 4,010 jars. In one day alone, 600 jars of strawberries were put up. This was the largest amount ever made in one day.[23] By the 18th of June, 4,472 jars had been prepared.

Both the hotel and store, built about one half mile from the colony proper, did excellent businesses, and were points of great attraction to the less industrious members, who were finally forbidden to visit them unless in the performance of duties assigned to them.

The Calvert Bank failure in Bowling Green caused the society the severe loss of $60,000.00. Suit was brought in the Court of Appeals in 1871 and the suit for its recovery was won in October of that year.

By the 1880's the decline of the colony is very apparent. A journal kept by one of the brethren, covers the period from 1880 to 1897. The members were becoming older and fewer in number, but they did their best to carry on the old traditions. The farming was done by means of hired help. The preserve house was still in operation, and even the Brothers assisted in picking and cutting the fruit, in order to help the Sisters, who still personally attended to the preserving, which had become the staple product for barter and trade in the surrounding towns. Bread was baked for sale also. This journal contains little of interest other than weather reports, agricultural results, and business accounts.

The next decade, 1888–1899, is represented by the journal of the North Family, also written by a man. By this time, outside

[23] Journal of South Union, written by an Eldress, January 1, 1871, to June 18, 1872, page 95.

of farming, preserving had become almost the only paying activity. In one inventory given here, eighty cases stored in the North Family cellar were valued at $560.00, and a respectable sum of money was listed in preserve accounts outstanding.

Four journals from 1907 to 1916 were kept in the new century; all were for Centre House.

The first extends from September 1, 1907, to December 31, 1908. It informs us that the Shakers could no longer personally look after their varied affairs. Mr. Claude Duncan managed the Shaker store; the hotel was leased to outsiders. In 1908 their land was leased for the drilling of oil and gas.

The journal for the years 1909 and 1910 was kept by an old and tremulous member, and only the most trivial happenings are entered.

Then follows the journal of June 1, 1909, to December 31, 1911. This record shows great deterioration. It is badly written, the words often misspelled, and the usual culture, as well as depth of feeling and sincerity for the Shaker religion, is missed. The great event was the installation of their first telephone in March, 1910. But on January 1, 1911, it was recorded that they have "quiet and peace and plenty, and are thankful for the same." Only seven sisters, six brethren, and one boy remained at Centre House.

The fourth and last journal extends from January, 1913, to August 30, 1916. It shows the few surviving members living under the roof of the huge Centre House. Paid help carried on all the work, even in the Sisters' once sacred kitchens. Flower gardens and pleasant visitors were a great joy to these old Shakers. A Victrola was bought in 1914, and the neighbors came in to listen with them; the name of the sister playing the Victrola is very often entered in the journal! An automobile was bought in 1915. The first ride is mentioned in October, and in pleasant weather the rides became frequent. This same year a Christmas tree was put up for the first time.

By 1916 the Shakers had arrived at times so modern that their lawyers, Mr. R. C. P. and Mr. T. W. Thomas, came from Bowling Green to make out the federal income tax return of the society. In August, 1916, bathrooms were installed in Centre House. They were complete even to hot water. The water was pumped from the well in the dooryard to the kitchen and then to the bathrooms. With the record of this act of progress

the journal ends. It is the last of our original records for South Union now in the Kentucky Library. At the foot of the last page is written: "Time flys fast now at this age of life, after eighty years have passed."

Slowly the little group diminished. Ten were alive in 1922, when it was decided to dispose of the property, now reduced from about 7,000 acres to 4,113 acres of fine farming land, with all the cattle, stock, farming implements and furnishings, the store and the hotel. The proceeds were to be divided among the surviving members of South Union and the parent society at New Lebanon, New York.

On September 26, 1922, the sale was held. One local newspaper account says 5,000 to 6,000 people attended it and that the average price of the land, divided into sixty farms, was about $56.00 per acre. At that rate at least $229,000.00 must have been realized from the land and buildings alone. Mr. Oscar S. Bond of Louisville—formerly of Elizabethtown—bought the largest acreage, including the central group of handsome, substantial buildings.

Mr. Bond has since done much toward preserving the large buildings; many of the smaller houses have been torn down. He has erected twelve large feeding barns. These and all the other houses are equipped with running water supplied from a lake he built, furnished by many ever-running springs. The farm now embraces 2,000 acres, and is one of the outstanding stock farms in Kentucky. It is called the Shaker Farm.

The great Centre House is to be turned into an inn. Its interior has been somewhat modernized, and all its woodwork and flooring have been refinished. The handsome cabinet-work of the paneled doors and cupboards has not been changed; the original slate roof, however, has been replaced by one of Spanish tile.

Three of the ten surviving Shakers decided to accept $10,000.00 each as their share of the money realized from the sale and to live in the nearby town of Auburn. Two of these married each other, contrary to their long-professed religious belief, and lived happily ever after. The other seven chose to end their days at the parent society at New Lebanon, New York.

Today only five dwindling Shaker colonies survive, all of them in the eastern part of the United States. The largest, with forty-odd members, is at Canterbury, New Hampshire. This year,

1939, for the first time in its long history of 147 years, this New Hampshire society asked relief from taxes because of its religious status.

The fate of South Union was similar to that of Pleasant Hill[24] and of most other Shaker communities. Practically all of its known records, as already stated, are carefully housed in the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, at Bowling Green.

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES ON SOUTH UNION, Logan County, in the Kentucky Collection, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1939:

Account book for the Fulling Mill at South Union, 1815.

Articles of Agreement entered into by the Shakers, South Union, 1858–1901 (incomplete).

Harvey L. Eades (1797–1892). Compiler, Shaker Record A. Copies of journals and diaries pertaining to South Union from 1804 to 1836. Transcribed by Eades from the originals in 1870.

Journal of a journey to New York State, 1854, made by Elder John Rankin, Brother Urban Johns, Eldress Betsy and Sister Nancy E. Moore, all of South Union.

Journal of North Family, South Union, including accounts, March 29, 1888, to March 4, 1897.

Journal of South Union, written by an Eldress, January 1, 1871, to June 18, 1872.

Journals of Centre House, South Union: 1. September 1, 1907, to December 31, 1908. 2. January 1, 1909, to December 31, 1910. 3. June 1, 1909, to December 31, 1911. 4. January 1, 1913, to August 30, 1916.

Eli McLean. Account book for South Union, kept by him, giving all items purchased by the Society, from January 21, 1843, to April 22, 1844.

Miscellaneous letters concerning business affairs of South Union, 1815–1840.

[24] In The Filson Club archives are a number of unpublished materials on Pleasant Hill, Mercer County. Included are sixteen sundry journals (pertaining to daily happenings of different Families), account books and the like, running from 1816 to 1895, with a number of years missing.

The Club also has "The Shakers of Kentucky, The Story of a Strange Sect," by Max Charleson, a typewritten manuscript of about 500 pages and about 75 photographs, divided into 29 chapters. Chapter 6 is devoted to Pleasant Hill and Chapter 7 to South Union. The work deals chiefly with Pleasant Hill and its various industrial activities. In addition to the seven-page chapter on South Union there are about twenty references to it. This manuscript was completed in 1931 and purchased by The Filson Club in 1933. This manuscript, however, has not yet been made available to the public.

Nancy E. Moore (1809–1889). Eldress. Journal of South Union, January 17, 1863, to September 4, 1864.

Necropolis of the Shakers, South Union, 1906. List of the names of the brethren and sisters, giving dates of birth and death, who have died in the Society since 1810. A few entries were added in 1910.

John Rankin, Sr. (1757–1850). Autobiography (1757–1805) written in 1845 at South Union, and transcribed, in 1870, in Shaker Record A. See footnote No. 2.

Thomas Jefferson Shannon (1801–1895). Journal of a journey from South Union to New Orleans, made on a flatboat in 1831.

PUBLISHED MATERIALS ON SOUTH UNION: In the Kentucky Collection are about thirty books and a number of newspaper and magazine articles bearing directly or indirectly on this subject.