

BACKGROUND SHEETS **for the Teacher and Accompanying Adults**

KEYS WORDS **to understanding the Shakers**

- **Believers** – What the Shakers call themselves, people who accept and live by the principles of the celibate, religious, communal society of the American Shakers. Their motto is “Hands to work, and Hearts to God.”
- **Brother / Sister** - Male and female Shakers
- **Children in a celibate society** – Children often entered the society with their families who joined. The Shakers also took in many other children who had lost a parent, raising them to age 16, at which time they could choose to stay or leave. Shaker families treasured their children.
- **Communal** – Shared in common. In the Shakers’ communal society, all property and personal holdings are given to the common good, and individuals agree to abide by the society’s rules or orders, and work for the shared good.
- **Deacon / Deaconess** - Men and women, at least two of each sex, who conduct the household affairs, daily schedules, and work rotations of the Family.
- **Elder/Eldress** – Men and women appointed to be spiritual leaders at every level of the Shaker society – Family Elders, Bishopric Ministry Elders, Lead Ministry Elders. Men and women shared leadership responsibility, and they were chosen by their Elders, not elected.
- **Family** - The smallest unit of Shaker society, made up of 30 – 100 men, women and children, living in community. A Shaker “family” would have farm and woodlands, a dwelling where they lived, and various work shops, barns, and other outbuildings. Each Shaker family was largely independent of other “families.” Our museum occupies the buildings and land of Hancock’s “Church” family. In the 19th century, five other nearby Hancock “families” had their own buildings and industries, coming together only for Sunday worship at the Church Family Meeting House.
- **Ministry** – Two Elders and two Eldresses appointed for life to be in charge of several communities. The Hancock Bishopric included Tyringham, MA, and Enfield, CT. The Lead Ministry in New Lebanon was over all the Bishoprics.
- **World’s people** – Anyone not a Shaker. World’s people are generally welcome only in the Trustees Office and Store and in Sunday worship services in the Meeting House. The Shakers desire a life set apart from the World.
- **Utopia** – Shakers attempt to live in “union” with each other and God, seeking perfection in a communal “heaven on earth.” The Shakers pre-dated and have outlasted the wave of Utopian societies that swept through America in the mid-1800s. Under founder Ann Lee and her immediate successors, the Shakers developed a sustainable utopian model based on:
 - Spiritual life** (religion); **Community life** (family); **Governance** (leadership);
Education (training for the Shaker life); and **Economy** (work).
- **Trustees** – The men and women entrusted with the economic affairs of a Shaker Family. Their work includes product development and sales, investments, and all dealings with “the World.” They live apart from the rest of the community.

KEYS to Understanding the Buildings

Built to support Spiritual life, Community life, Governance, Education, and Economy

Shaker buildings on this site span the period from the 1780s to the 20th century. Only 21 Shaker buildings now stand where once there were 40. Fire was the community's greatest enemy, followed by deterioration in the waning years. Today restoration is ongoing. Despite the missing buildings, the Village exhibits an order and layout that is the hallmark of Shaker communities.

The hand-hewn, post-and-beam barns and shops were built to last for generations. Materials on the outside of buildings run from clapboards to shakes to planks to stone to stucco to brick. Over 350,000 finely made bricks were used in the Dwelling, but somewhat more surprising is the choice of brick for a privy, a poultry house and a steam-heated automobile garage.

In the early years, white was used on religious buildings, and red and yellow/yellow ochre on work buildings, reflected in today's paint colors. Historic paint analysis is on-going, and shades or colors may be changed when a building is repainted.

- **Barns** (#15, 16, 12) – Shaker barns were the heart of the agricultural work that sustained the Shaker communities. The barns stabled cows, horses, sheep, and other animals, and were used for farm equipment storage and the grains and seeds grown in the well-tilled fields.
- **Other Animal facilities** (#11, 14) – Two poultry houses stand on the site.
- **Other Farm Buildings** – (#5, 18, 19) Other outbuildings and sheds are for firewood, carriages, cars, and machinery. The Ice House (18) is a well insulated, ice and cold food storage facility.
- **Dwelling** (#6) – This large house was specially built for the Church Family with wide halls, built-in cabinets, and rooms for cooking, dining, “retiring” (sleeping), and meetings. A Shaker dwelling was not normally open to people from the world. It was a place set apart for the people who called it “home.” There is a Shaker song, “My Sweet Shaker Home.”
- **Garden Tool Shed** (#3) was a screened summer porch for the early 20th century Shakers.
- **Meeting House** (#30) – The center of worship in a Shaker Community is located on the main road. Sunday worship was open to “World’s people” and was a major factor in attracting new converts. Shaker worship included singing and dancing called “laboring”. Upper floors contain bedrooms for the early Bishopric Ministry.
- **Privies** (#10, 22 and 26) **and Ministry Wash House** (9) – Before indoor plumbing, personal needs were attended to in outbuildings like these, winter and summer.
- **Schoolhouse** (#26) – Education of the children in Shaker care occurred in schoolhouses like this. A Sister taught the girls 4 months in the summer, and a Brother, the boys during the winter months. Shaker children also learned by working alongside the Sisters and Brothers.
- **Shops** (#4, 7, 8, 17, 20 and 29) – In a Shaker community, everyone put their hands to work. In their workshops, called “shops,” the Family attended to laundry and other community needs, and made goods and food products for their own consumption and for sale to the World.
- **Trustees Office and Store** (#21) – World’s people were welcome at this center of commerce and business. In it the Trustees maintained their sales routes, business dealings, and a small store with Shaker goods and souvenirs.

KEY INFORMATION about Shaker Farming for School and Youth groups

The Shakers farmed this site for more than 150 years. Providing food for themselves and their livestock was a major issue for them, as for any family. What they grew went into their kitchens, barns, and shops. Our museum farm reflects what the Shakers grew in order to provide farm-to-table sustenance year-round.

The Shaker philosophy of all activity being a form of worship led to efficiency and productivity, as well as inventiveness, such as the flat broom. The Hancock Shakers produced flat brooms by the thousands, and the itinerant Shaker salesmen successfully marketed them to the “World’s people.”

The evolution of farming included the successful seed industry and technological advances. It also reflected social norms, such as the strict separation of men’s and women’s work on the farm, the adoption of new farm machinery, and the decline from near self-sufficiency to having to hire farm workers in the early 20th century.

A Note about Hancock Shaker Village Farm Animal Practices

The Village is dedicated to keeping our livestock healthy and safe for your education and enjoyment. We observe strict animal health practices and procedures. Our Farm Manager works closely with our veterinarian and others to maintain healthy livestock in our region. The following sanitizing practices help us ensure the health and safety of your group and the livestock. Please be sure your group follows these practices.

- **Before and after** you pet or hold any of the livestock, please **sanitize your hands**. There are hand-sanitizing stations located throughout the Round Stone Barn and the Dairy Ell.
- **Bio mats** containing a mild solution of vinegar and water may be at the Visitor Center’s entrance and exit doorways and gates to and from the Historic Area. This organic, natural solution is safe for people, shoes, clothing, and livestock, but effectively eliminates germs. **Please walk normally over the bio mats**, taking care that the sole of each shoe makes full contact with the mat at least once.

Animals

Animals on the Shaker farm were raised for work, food, and useful products. Shakers kept chickens (for eggs), pigs, sheep (wool), cows (milk), oxen, and horses. Our animals are the heritage breeds raised here by the Shakers. You will find our animals in the ell of the Round Store Barn, in the barnyard, and out in the fields. One of our farmers may have an animal out for you to see up-close.

Crops

Hay was an essential crop for feeding animals over the winter, along with grains such as oats and winter wheat. Some crops, like broom corn, were used in products. Food plants included numerous root vegetables, which stored well, and beans, corn, cabbages, greens, tomatoes and many other vegetables in the well-maintained kitchen garden. Drying, canning and making jelly were important ways to preserve perishable foods. Our heirloom vegetable gardens showcase many varieties grown organically and harvested for use in cooking demonstrations and area restaurants.

Herbs

Herb gardens were originally kept more for medicinal than culinary purposes. The Hancock Shakers grew acres of sage for sale. The Shakers attained a reputation for quality. Patent medicines and dried herbs were important Shaker commercial ventures. Spend a few minutes looking at the many herbs Shakers grew and learn about their uses. Our gardeners will be glad to talk with you.

Orchards

Orchards were important as far back as colonial days. Growing and pressing apples for fresh or “hard” cider was essential to health in times when potable water was not always available and fresh fruit only briefly in season. Apples were preserved in cold cellars, as well as by drying. Our demonstration orchard contains many antique varieties of apples, and is a pleasant place to walk.