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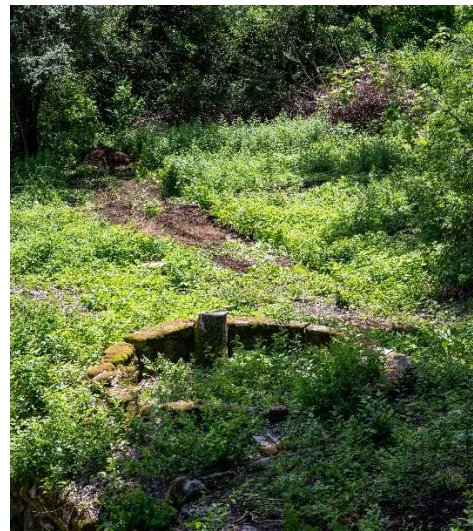
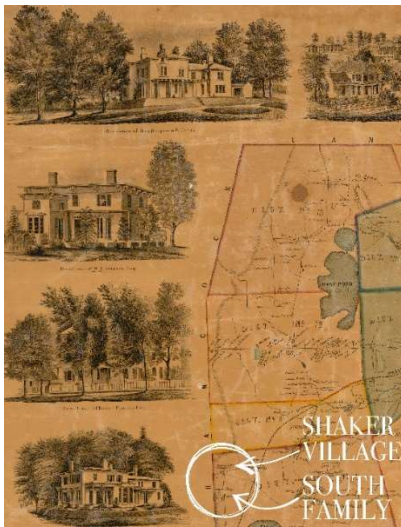
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**NEW TRAIL AND NEWLY REVEALED RUINS
AT ONE OF AMERICA'S LARGEST SHAKER SETTLEMENTS
OPENING JULY 17, 2021**



PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, June 17, 2021 – On July 17th, Hancock Shaker Village will open the South Family Trail, a new walking trail just south of its historic Village in the Berkshires. Deep in the woods, the new path will lead to the reveal of additional archaeological remains of Shaker building foundations that have not been seen by the public in the museum's 61 year history.

A National Historic Landmark since 1968, Hancock Shaker Village has been recognized as having one of the premier Shaker collections in the world, holding more than 22,000 artifacts including furniture, textiles, hymnals, and everyday goods. Despite the enormity of its archive, archaeologically speaking, the Village property is not fully discovered and some foundation structures have not yet been revealed. The new trail south of the historic Village will lead to the archaeological remains of four Shaker building foundations of the South Family. Interpretive signage will tell the history of the site, where from 1818-1849 "new believers" lived when they became Shakers. Continuing research involving the indigenous people who lived on this land before the Shakers will be shared through interpretive signs later this summer. Visitors will be able to walk this southern trail for a historically immersed exploration of Pittsfield Shaker traditions, history, and natural beauty.

For 176 years, the Hancock Shaker community was part of one of the most successful utopian communal societies in the United States. In 1774, Mother Ann Lee led eight Shaker converts from Manchester,

England, to America, seeking freedom to live, work, and worship. She visited Hancock in 1783. The Shaker community at Hancock began the same year, and officially “Gathered into Gospel Order” in 1790. This was the third of nineteen major Shaker villages established between 1783 and 1836 in New England, New York, Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana.

By 1830 the Hancock community had grown to a vibrant 300 members living on 3,000 acres. Early on, land for the community was acquired by neighboring farmers who had converted to the Shaker faith. Shaker communities formed smaller communal groups known as ‘families’ within the larger community for efficiency of work, worship, and administration. The senior family was called the Church Family, which comprises most of the historic Village today. The Church Family was surrounded by satellite families corresponding to points on the compass rose: the East Family; the South Family; the West Family, and North Family.

Archaeological remains of the North Family can be seen along the Shaker Trail north of route 20 today. Buildings from the East Family are now private residences on Route 20, while what remains from the West family are cellar holes that are visible but grown in. This July, foundations of the South Family will also be accessible to visitors. Anchored by two barns, the unearthed South Family foundations serve as reminders that the Hancock Shakers were primarily farmers. With the 1826 Round Stone Barn of the Church Family at the center of a thriving dairy industry, and with many acres of medicinal herbs, vegetables, fruits, and other crops, the Hancock Shakers enjoyed a simple, peaceful, and hard-working lifestyle, separated from the ways of the World. As the Shaker population declined in the 20th century, the property was sold in 1959, and the Village became a museum in 1960.

“Opening the South Family Trail is tremendously exciting to us,” said Jennifer Trainer Thompson, “Previously you had to bushwhack through a dense thicket of brambles and forest to get to it – our Farm and Facilities Director Bill Mangiardi pointed it out to me several years ago, and we had to view it in early spring, because by summer the way through the woods was impenetrable. If we had waited another few decades to do this work I’m sure the forest would have completely taken over the foundations. Visitors will be able to walk a new trail, learn something new about the Shakers, and experience their stone foundation work. Reached by a beautiful forest trail, it’s a new place to see, to contemplate, to learn from, and to explore.”

As part of the trail’s opening, Shaker scholar Stephen Paterwic will give a talk about the South Family at 1 pm on July 17.

South Family

The South Family was established at Hancock in 1818 to handle the overflow of new members from the East Family. The South Family was called the Young Believers’ Order, for it was where people could come and try out Shaker life before fully committing themselves and their property to the Church. By 1818, three families with seventeen members sought admission. By 1820, census records indicate that three Shaker groups had five more members. The census of 1840 states that 9 members were engaged in agriculture, which makes sense -- this family was agricultural, as Gathering Orders tended to be, given the transience and skills of most converts.

By 1849, the South Family was closed because there were too few new members – only 9 -- who were sent to live elsewhere in the Village. Not much is known about the South Family and its members, as no manuscripts of any sort seem to have survived from the South Family. When Eldress Catherine Allen of Mount Lebanon and Wallace Cathcart (a prominent bibliophile at the Western Reserve Historical

Society) were collecting materials to preserve the history of the Shakers starting in 1910, Hancock was not on the verge of closing and had young members, so there would have been no pressing need or desire to ship records off to Ohio. What Hancock manuscripts survive are in the library at Hancock Shaker Village, established after the community discontinued in 1959.

The closing of the South Family was probably planned for some time. Not enough new families were joining to make the operation of the South Family feasible. In 1848, three people were transferred to other parts of the Village - William Auger, Ruel Auger, and Elenor Jackson - and the South Family was dissolved in 1849. Augur is still a name known in this region. Dedicated since 1960 to bringing the Shaker story to life, Hancock Shaker Village is pleased to be opening this new trail on July 17, 2021.

"Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

July 17 South Family Trail Opening At A Glance

10am Members' reception and hike to the trail

11am South Family Trail opens to the public (Village hours are 11am-5pm)

1pm *The South Family of Shakers and Their Significance* by Stephen Paterwic in Leander Hall (free with museum admission)

Stephen Paterwic is the author of five books and scores of articles on the Shakers, and has given almost seventy-five talks on a wide range of Shaker topics. A native of Springfield, Massachusetts, he grew up just a few miles from the former Enfield, Connecticut, Shaker community where his paternal grandparents had a farm that was once an out-family of that society. A retired math teacher, he has studied the Shakers for his entire life, beginning as a teenager, and he is currently a trustee of the Shaker Library and Museum at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and a member of Hancock Shaker Village's Collections Committee. He considers his greatest blessing, however, the fact that for nearly fifty years he has had a close friendship with the remaining Shakers who live at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. "I am deeply grateful to be part of the glorious work of the Shaker Gospel and to support the Testimony as a vital force so needed by the world," said Stephen.

Hancock Shaker Village is located at 1843 West Housatonic Street in Pittsfield Mass. If you would like more information about the South Family Trail or Hancock Shaker Village, please contact Carolyn McDaniel at cmcdaniel@hancockshakervillage.org or visit HancockShakerVillage.org.

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The South Family Trail was made possible with principal support from the family of Ruth Mabel Daniels Wood, a long-time volunteer of the Village. Their support was made in her memory and to publicly acknowledge her love for the Shakers. Sustaining support was provided by Berkshire Gas and Avangrid with additional support from Magda Gabor-Hotchkiss.