

American Communal Societies Quarterly

Volume 4 | Number 4

Pages 191-217

October 2010

Black Shaker Minstrels and the Comic Performance of Shaker Worship

Robert P. Emlen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hamilton.edu/acsq>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

This work is made available by Hamilton College for educational and research purposes under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](#). For more information, visit <http://digitalcommons.hamilton.edu/about.html> or contact digitalcommons@hamilton.edu.

Black Shaker Minstrels and the Comic Performance of Shaker Worship *By Robert P. Emlen*

Among the many visual images of Shaker life published in the popular press of nineteenth-century America are several small wood engravings picturing two rows of dancing figures. (See fig. 1 and the detail on the front cover). Used in the 1850s to illustrate a popular ditty called “The Celebrated Black Shaker Song,” this scene in twenty-first-century America has become a curious artifact whose original meaning has been obscured with time. Today the use of dance and song in Shaker worship and the presence of African-American members in Shaker communities are well documented and widely studied, and with the benefit of historical perspective these “Black Shaker” engravings simply do not correlate with the actual practices of religious dance and racial integration in Shaker life. This scene of gangling men in goofy hats engaged in uncoordinated dance to the music of a seated fiddle player is entirely out of character with what we now know of Shaker worship in the nineteenth century.

The reason for this incongruity becomes apparent when these “Black Shaker” illustrations are examined in the wider context of the visual culture of popular amusements in nineteenth-century America: the figures pictured in these engravings are now recognized as neither black nor Shakers. They are in fact minstrel show actors in blackface makeup parodying Shaker worship as comic performance.

While they are viewed today as a peculiar artifact of a bygone era, minstrel shows enjoyed widespread popularity in nineteenth-century America. In the United States the stage performance of these shows grew out of a tradition of street entertainment that exaggerated African-American speech, dance, and song. In the 1840s minstrel show acts were formalized into theatrical presentations, and by the 1850s they grew to include racial impersonations of Asian and Native American characters as well, especially in the West.¹ However, in the Northeast, the stock and trade of these shows was the ridicule of African Americans. In the nineteenth century the comedy performed by the men and women in “negro” minstrel shows was commonly viewed as good-natured fun made at the expense of a people trying with mixed success to raise their station in life. By the mid-

PLANTATION MELODIES.

17



THE CELEBRATED
BLACK SHAKER SONG.

Composed by E. Horn, and sung by him upwards of 400
nights at Wood's Minstrel Hall, 444 Broadway.

I WENT down to Sally's house,
Sally wasn't home,
So I sat in de corner dar
An' play'd on de jaw-bone.

CHORUS.

Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Hic, chick, pick it up, and chuck it in de dock.
And a fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum.

Possum up a gum tree,
Cooney in de hollar,
Show me de colored man
Dat stole my dollar.
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy, &c.

NEW VERSION, BY E. HORN.

Oh, bless dat lubly yaller gal,
De white folks call Miss Dina,

Fig. 1. "The Celebrated Black Shaker Song." Wood engraving on paper, 1855.
(Collection of the John Hay Library, Brown University)

twentieth-century the overtones of anxiety and anger in the purveyors of this racist humor became increasingly apparent. In retrospect observers began to recognize the ridicule and denigration of minstrel show humor as a function of the ambivalence or apprehension many whites felt about the rise of people of color in a predominantly European-American society. Our understanding of this curious phenomenon continues to evolve: recent scholarship examining the widespread appeal of blackface performance suggests a “white fascination with blackness” in the dominant culture of white America. In this view minstrel shows served as an acceptable vehicle for transmitting vernacular culture to more formal arenas of society on both sides of the Atlantic.²

These latter-day analyses of minstrel show humor lay far in the future when, in 1843, three men calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels first began entertaining theater audiences with race-based skits.³ Part of the humor of blackface minstrel acts arose from the practice of using code words like Ethiopia or Plantation or Carolina to alert audiences to the theme of their performances. Audiences understood that if a group called itself the Virginia Minstrels, it would present blackface humor. While the familiar theme of every blackface minstrel performance was the comical ineptitude of African Americans, the programs of individual shows were chosen to exploit whatever novelty or current event was then capturing the public’s attention. For example, when a Tyrolean singing group toured concert halls in the United States, their Alpine songs were soon mimicked in blackface by minstrel performers who hoped to get a laugh by making an invidious comparison of the two cultures.⁴

The Shakers’ unconventional ways made them prime candidates for such parody. Their principled repudiation of marriage relations, of property ownership, and of the hostile use of force startled and even unsettled contemporary society. Nineteenth-century American literature abounds with examples of derisive and defensive humor pointed at Shaker life. Charles Dickens, for instance, famously and sarcastically wrote about the absence of feminine allure in the dour Shaker sister who denied his request to observe religious services at the community at New Lebanon, New York.⁵ Still, a comic performance linking blackface minstrels and Shaker worship might not have seemed so clever and to the point had the American public not become aware that African Americans were accepted on equal terms with whites in Shaker communities. This unusual arrangement was widely publicized by the appearance around 1830 of a

popular print that showed African Americans engaged in religious dance alongside European Americans at the Shaker community at New Lebanon. (See fig. 2).

The presence of black Shakers in these northern rural villages apparently did not cause much of a sensation among the Believers who quietly integrated their communities. Students of Shaker history know that at various times throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Shakers welcomed people of color, particularly at Watervliet, New York,⁶ and in Kentucky at Pleasant Hill and South Union.⁷ Racial integration in daily life was unusual in mid-nineteenth-century America, but as practiced in the self-contained world of Shaker villages it did not attract much public notice.

What surely did catch the public's eye was the arresting image of the two African-American men depicted in the popular prints of Shaker worship at New Lebanon. The novelty of men and women conducting



Fig. 2. "Shakers Near Lebanon State of N York: Their Mode of Worship."
Stipple line engraving, ca. 1830.
(Collection of Hamilton College Library)

religious exercises through inspired dance itself assured the popular success of this engraving. The additional public spectacle of a racially integrated community worshipping together in this remarkable manner guaranteed that the image would be even more widely disseminated: at least twenty versions inspired by the original scene are known to have been published in the thirty years after the first print appeared.⁸

In virtually every example of twenty different versions of the Shaker dance prints two men in the back row can be identified as African Americans.⁹ In the inexpensive engravings and lithographs produced as black-and-white illustrations for books and magazines these men were pictured with distinguishing physiognomy and hair. (See fig. 3). On the larger and more expensive colored prints produced in the 1830s and 1840s for framing and display, the faces and hands of these men were also tinted brown. Although the majority of these larger “framing” prints were made before the new technology of chromolithography became widespread, their



Fig. 3. “The Shakers at New Lebanon.” Wood engraving on paper. *Illustrated American News* 1 (July 26, 1851). (Collection of the Fleet Library of the Rhode Island School of Design)

BLACK SHAKERS!

As Originally Performed by E. Horn & Company.

PLANTATION JIG.....	Birch
COMIC BANJO TRIO.....	Horn, Wells & Briggs
BURLESQUE HORNPIPE.....	H. M. Williams

Part Third.

THE ORIGINAL DUTCH DRILL.....	by Capt. Wells & Lieut. Horn
GOOD BYE SALLY DEAR.....	Campbell
JULIUS CÆSAR GREEN.....	S. A. Wells
I'M OFF FOR CHARLESTON.....	E. Horn


Fig. 4a. Detail from “Chestnut Street Theater, For One Night Only.”
Broadside. Philadelphia, 1851.
(Collection of Don B. Wilmeth)

E. HORN!

HIS FIRST APPEARANCE

In this his Native City.

FOR FOURTEEN MONTHS.



The illustration shows a man in a tall top hat, a long dark coat over a white shirt and cravat, and breeches. He is carrying a large, dark suitcase with the words "BRUDER BONES" written on it. He is walking towards the right of the frame.

Fig. 4b. Detail from “Chestnut Street Theater, For One Night Only.”
Broadside. Philadelphia, 1851.
(Collection of Don B. Wilmeth)

publishers employed artists to hand-paint colors on individual engravings printed in black ink.¹⁰ In the Shaker dance prints these watercolor artists invariably rendered the African-American worshipers with dark skin. No one who encountered one of these ubiquitous prints missed the point that the peculiarity of Shaker worship was only compounded by the Believers' unconventional attitudes towards racial integration.

In nineteenth-century America performers in blackface minstrel shows did not need to know much about the tenets of Shaker life in order to add a "Black Shaker" skit to their repertoire. Their audiences may not have known or particularly cared about the use of inspired movement in Shaker worship. Superficial and unrealistic as it might be, a burlesque Shaker dance sufficient to amuse a theater audience could be orchestrated by someone who had never known Shaker life at first hand, merely by observing any one of the many versions of the Shaker dance print.

The first recorded instance of a comic rendition of a Shaker dance by blackface minstrels appears in the spring of 1850, when New York newspapers carried notices announcing that Pierce's Minstrels were presenting a "Black Shaker" burlesque at the Olympic Theater.¹¹ Those performances were popular enough soon to inspire imitators. By September of 1850 the competing company Fellow's Minstrels added a burlesque of Shaker dance to their performance of mock opera and mock military drill at New York's Olympic Theater.¹² The next spring Wells & Briggs' Ethiopian Serenaders, "late of Christy's and Fellows' Minstrels, New York," presented the minstrel Even Horn performing "Black Shakers!" at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia.¹³ (See figs. 4a and b). By the summer of 1851 the Ethiopian Serenaders had found an audience for this act in New England, where, on August 1, the Boston Museum advertised a performance of Even Horn's "Black Shakers."¹⁴ (See fig. 5).

On the playbills for these performances by the Ethiopian Serenaders, the promoters advertise that the "Black Shaker" act was "originally performed by E. Horn & Company." This assertion that Even Horn was the original author of this skit suggests that rival minstrel companies appropriated the "Black Shaker" act early on, to the extent that the Ethiopian Serenaders felt the need to defend their territory from the competition. Just how promptly rival performers adopted Horn's "Black Shaker" material can be seen in a playbill advertising an appearance by the Virginia Minstrels soon after the Ethiopian Serenaders' appearance in Boston.¹⁵ On September 16, presumably in 1851, the Virginia Minstrels

8th Season **Boston Museum.** No. 358.
Tremont Street, between Court and School Streets.

Museum open Day & Evening. Hall o' Statuary open till 8 P. M. Exhibition Room
opens at 7 1-2 o'clock. Performances commence at 8. Admission 25 Cts.
Seats Reserved for 50 Cts. Children under 12 years of age 12 1-2 Cts.

 **LAST NIGHT BUT ONE** 

**HORN, WELLS AND BRIGGS'
ETHIOPIAN
SERENADERS!**

**Benefit of
EVE HORN!
ALIAS
BRUDDER BONES!**

First Night of Horn's Travestie of

**DAMON AND PYTHIAS,
AND OTHER ENTIRELY NEW FEATURES.**

On Friday Evening, August 1st, 1851,

They will have the honor of introducing the following varied

PROGRAMME.—PART FIRST.

Grand Introductory Overture, (from La Dame Blanche)..... Full Band
Opening Chorus—The Postilion of Longemeau, (introducing the Boatman's Dance)..... Serenaders
Song—Jenny Lane, originally sung by..... Campbell
Song—Nelly Bly, originally sung by..... S. A. Wells
Tyrolean Solo—(displaying a compass and flexibility of voice hitherto unknown)... Christian Galsianno
Song—Camptown Races, (with Bone imitations of horse racing, &c.)..... Birch
Song—Ring, Ring the Banjo, written and composed expressly for this company, by
S. C. Foster, Esq., and sung only by..... Campbell
Chorus—Fenced round by grateful hearts, (from Gustavus)..... Serenaders
MASQUERADE WALTZ, { With Automaton and Street } **FULL BAND**
Organ imitation.

PART SECOND.

Violin Solo—(with Variations)..... J. B. Farrell
Tyrolean Burlesque..... Company
Banjo Solo..... T. F. Briggs

BLACK SHAKERS,

As originally performed by E. HORN & COMPANY.

PLANTATION JIG..... BIRCH
Banjo Trio..... Wells, Horn and Briggs

Fig. 5. Detail from "8th Season. Boston Museum." Broadside. Boston, 1851.
(Collection of the American Antiquarian Society)

advertised a performance in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, that would include, appearing between the “Plantation Dance” and the “Juba Dance,” a number called “the celebrated Shaker dance.” (See fig. 6).

THE
**VIRGINIA
MINSTRELS!**
Would respectfully inform the inhabitants of
that a
**VOCAL & INSTRUMENTAL
CONCERT,**
WILL BE GIVEN AT

On
A selection of the most popular Songs,
Dances, &c., &c., will be given on the
occasion, among which is the favorite
Plantation Dance.

The following performers will appear with their instruments:

Master JOHNSON,	Guitar,
“ PEELE,	Castanets,
“ WEST,	Tamborin,
“ WHITE,	Banjo,
“ WALLACE,	Violin,
“ JONES,	Triangle.

Among the pieces which they perform will be the celebrated

Shaker Dance,
JUBA DANCE, LUCY LONG.

Doors open at 6 1-2 o'clock; Performance to commence at 7 1-2.
Front seats reserved for the Ladies.

Price of admission 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents.

FRENCH & BORCE'S PRINT, LOS, MASS.

Fig. 6. “The Virginia Minstrels would respectfully inform the inhabitants ...”
Broadside. Lee, Massachusetts, ca. 1851.
(Collection of the Shaker Museum and Library.)

In addition to the extended engagements by better-known minstrel players in urban theaters, traveling companies of lesser renown performed comic renditions of Shaker dance in one-night appearances for small-town audiences. On a tour of the provinces by the Virginia Minstrels, the time, date and location of the “celebrated Shaker dance” performance were left unspecified on the printed playbill, and then penciled in as local circumstances developed. This adaptable form of advertising was well suited for traveling shows of short and uncertain duration held at different venues in the countryside.

Because their stage performance in Great Barrington was held only a few miles from the Shaker villages at New Lebanon and at Hancock, Massachusetts, it is possible that the Virginia Minstrels could have augmented their impression of Shaker dance with first-hand observation of the Shakers’ religious services. Visitors were generally welcome to attend Shaker meeting and to see for themselves the practice of religious exercises.

It was not necessary, however, for minstrel show performers to travel to these rural villages to see authentic Shaker dance. Since at least 1835 disaffected former Believers had appeared on the public stage performing the unconventional movements and songs they had learned while members of the Shaker Society. Newspaper notices advertising upcoming performances, playbills naming the performers and detailing the programs, and published reviews describing the performances all document the willingness of apostates to edify the public about the remarkable forms of Shaker worship. An 1835 playbill from the American Theater in New York, also called the Bowery Theater, advertises “the first appearance on any stage, of a Lebanon Shaker,” who, having been a “member of their community for 15 years, will exhibit the following peculiarities of the Society.” The printed announcement goes on to list the names of eight Shaker dances, marches, and steps that were to be performed.¹⁶

Appearances by former Shakers reprising the songs and dances of Shaker worship on the public stage increased in the 1840s. After the impresario P. T. Barnum saw six seceders from the community at Canterbury, New Hampshire, performing at the Apollo Rooms in New York on September 5, 1846, he signed them to appear at his American Museum for the remainder of the season. In his playbills he announced that the apostates would appear in authentic Shaker costume and perform “a great variety of singing, dancing, whirling, and shaking.”¹⁷

In contrast to blackface minstrels, who mimicked Shaker worship for laughs, former Believers who publicly recited the ritual movements and authentic music of Shaker worship promoted their performances as an edifying experience. For example, advertisements for minstrel shows promised the hilarity of “a comic sketch,”¹⁸ while the language advertising the performances of apostate Shakers stressed instead the “interesting, amusing, and instructive” qualities of what the promoters called “great moral entertainment.”¹⁹ A playbill for an 1848 appearance by a troupe of Shaker seceders assured potential theatergoers that “nothing in this performance can offend the taste of refinement or the eye of modesty.”²⁰

In *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography*, Mary Richmond hypothesizes that these touring Shaker apostates may have shared the stage with a company of blackface minstrels,²¹ who by this example would have been seen the comic possibilities in combining the spectacle of Shaker dance with the mimicry of African-American culture. However, the former Shakers’ pseudo-educational presentation of authentic Shaker performance would probably have appealed to a different sensibility than would buffoonery by minstrel mimics. A bill of entertainment actually combining these two different kinds of public presentations would have been an awkward fit. The only known joint performances of apostate Shakers and blackface minstrels on the same program did not come until the 1860s, and the show did not appear to be a great popular success.²²

Because the “Black Shaker” skits were created only after the apostate Shakers started performing in public, it is possible that the minstrels were inspired to lampoon the Shakers after seeing the seceders on stage. One confluence of “Black Shaker” and apostate Shaker performances is known to have occurred at the American Museum in New York, where P. T. Barnum presented the Ethiopian Minstrels and the apostate Shaking Quakers in alternate performances during the season of 1846-47.

The playbills of performances by apostate Shakers in the late 1840s list inspired singing as well as dancing. For example, in addition to eight dances and a display of “astounding Shaker gyrations,” the “Shaker Concert” held in Boston on June 10, 1847, included ten songs.²³ One of these was “in the unknown tongue, supposed by the spirits to have been learned by the inspiration of Heaven.”²⁴ In this way the casual public, at first familiar only with the visual depiction of Shaker dance in popular prints, could now also hear the sound of Shaker song in popular concerts. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that performances of blackface

minstrels included Shaker songs as well as Shaker dance in their repertoire.

In 1851 the minstrel performer Even Horn published his composition *Fi Hi Hi: The Black Shakers Song & Polka*. (See fig. 7). It was scored both as an arrangement for four male voices and as a dance tune which, like such contemporaneous favorites as the “Jenny Lind Polka,” could be performed without vocal accompaniment. Written in dialect, the narrative thread of the *Black Shakers Song* is simplistic, merely recording the singer’s lament that his Miss Dinah has left him and gone off to join the Shakers. The actual references to Shaker life in Horn’s *Black Shakers Song* are nominal. Dinah has gone to Lebanon. The words “Fi hi hi” introduce an intervening chorus of nonsense syllables, which might have been intended to mimic the solemn Shaker practice of singing songs in unknown tongues received through divine inspiration. Otherwise the narrative falls back on old reliable elements of minstrelsy song, starting with Miss Dinah, who is a stock character in the genre, but also including the tried-and-true minstrel references to hoeing corn and baking cake.

The humor in Horn’s *Fi Hi Hi* depends on the singer’s mistaking Lebanon for a state and the absurdity of his planning to end his grief not by hanging himself with a rope but by drowning himself with a rope, or, in an alternate version, his summarily ending his grief by finding another gal and marrying her tomorrow. There is no indication in these lyrics that Even Horn had any interest in or awareness of Shaker life or Shaker song. Very likely the gratuitous reference to the Shaker community at New Lebanon came only from the title on the print pictured in figure 2, for in both the print and in the song lyrics the community is misidentified as “Lebanon.” It is no wonder that when the early Shaker scholar Edward Deming Andrews encountered the sheet music for Horn’s *Black Shakers Song*, he included it only as an appendix to his 1940 study of Shaker music, *The Gift to be Simple*,²⁵ without investigating any relationship it might have had to authentic Shaker performance. Very likely he understood that while it appropriated their name, this curious artifact was irrelevant to the real Shakers.

Black Shakers Song must have been a popular success, because in 1854 a competing song with the same title but with different words was published in *Christy’s and White’s Ethiopian Melodies*.²⁶ The next year Even Horn responded to this upstart challenge to his song by publishing a new version of his original lyrics in Henry Wood’s anthology of minstrel songs, *Wood’s New Plantation Melodies*, again asserting his claim to the original with the



Fig. 7. *Fi Hi Hi: The Black Shakers Song & Polka.*
Engraving on sheet music cover. New York, 1851.
(Collection of the John Hay Library, Brown University)

statement: “Composed by E. Horn and sung by him upwards of 400 nights at Wood’s Minstrel Hall, 444 Broadway.”²⁷ Aggrandized with the title “The Celebrated Black Shaker Song,” Horn’s lyrics were accompanied by the illustration pictured in figure 1 of two opposing rows of dancers facing a seated man playing a fiddle. Signed by the artist “J. M. L. del[ineator],” the woodcut appeared over the title of the song (see figure 1) as well as on the front cover of Wood’s sixty-six page songbook. (See fig. 8).

The new version of Even Horn’s “Celebrated Black Shaker Song” was also published as a single-sheet broadside by the Philadelphia printer George Harris.²⁸ (See fig. 9). Although the illustration accompanying Harris’s broadside song sheet is similar to the illustration accompanying *Wood’s New Plantation Melodies*, on close inspection it appears that the woodcuts on the Philadelphia song sheet and the New York songbook are different engravings. They vary in small details: on the Philadelphia song sheet the artist’s initials have been omitted, the shadows behind the minstrel band have been rendered in straight lines instead of cross hatching, and the broad-brimmed hat on the fiddler seated at center is shown not cocked back on his head but with the brim parallel to the floor.

The distinction between the cocked brim in the New York version of the engraving and the level brim in the Philadelphia version of the engraving is important because it links the New York version with an oil painting made in Philadelphia at about the same time. (See fig. 10). Signed “C. Winter / Phila.,” presumably for Charles Winter (ca. 1822–1860s), an obscure portrait painter who lived in Philadelphia briefly in the 1850s,²⁹ the oil painting is something of a curiosity.

Nothing is known about the history of the painting before 1945, when the noted collector of American arts Maxim Karolik purchased it from the New York art dealer Victor Spark, who had given it the title “Minstrel Show.” In 1948 his wife Martha Codman Karolik bequeathed their American paintings to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which in 1951 exhibited and published a major catalogue of the collection.³⁰ “Minstrel Show” attracted further attention when it was illustrated and described in publicity accompanying the 1951 installation of the Karolik paintings at the MFA,³¹ and in a second catalogue of Karolik paintings in 1956.³² Because of the exposure it received when the Karolik collection of American paintings was first exhibited and published, in a few years “Minstrel Show” went from obscurity to become a familiar image in the world of American folk art.

The Karolik painting features seven figures in blackface, one playing a fiddle and the others separated into two lines, dancing. Everyone's mouth is open, presumably because they are shown singing. The minstrels stand on a fly-wing stage, which one recent observer has described as "complete with inset panels, overhead curtains, gold fringe, and illusionistic backdrop, indicat[ing] a performance in a professional theater."³³ If the artist did in fact picture an actual theater in Philadelphia where the painting was made, it was possibly the Chestnut Street Theater where the "Black Shaker" minstrel show was advertised in the playbill illustrated in figure 4.³⁴ Additionally, the accuracy with which the artist depicted such details as the theater equipment and the Pennsylvania Windsor side chairs suggests that this painting may have been made from personal observation. If so, the verisimilitude of this scene could reasonably be expected to extend also to the performance being pictured on stage.

If, like the architecture and furnishing of the theater, the portrayal of oddly dressed men prancing about with their arms held out in front of them is not some fanciful conjecture but is a literal representation of some actual event or performance, then what is going on in this picture? The minstrel performance in the Karolik painting "Minstrel Show" is so idiosyncratic that it was a while before anyone recognized it as a burlesque of Shaker worship. The musicologist Hans Nathan was the first twentieth-century writer to correctly identify the scene as representing a minstrel skit about the Shakers, probably because he was familiar with the wood engravings accompanying "The Celebrated Black Shaker Song," reproduced in figures 1, 8, and 9, and because he recognized their similarity to the Karolik painting, which only recently had been illustrated in print for the first time. It is clear from Nathan's description of this painting that he had read Andrews's *The Gift to be Simple* and understood enough about Shaker worship to be perplexed by the differences between authentic Shaker dance and the eccentric activity of the minstrels it pictured. In *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Negro Minstrelsy*, he described the painting as "an almost surrealist interpretation of a Shaker dance on the minstrel stage."³⁵

While it appears that Nathan recognized the relationship of the Karolik painting to the wood engravings for "The Celebrated Black Shaker Song," it does not appear that he recognized any of these scenes as mutant versions of the well-known 1830s Shaker dance print (see figure 2). The departures in these scenes from the Shaker worship depicted in the dance print are many. For example, the artist of the Karolik painting rendered

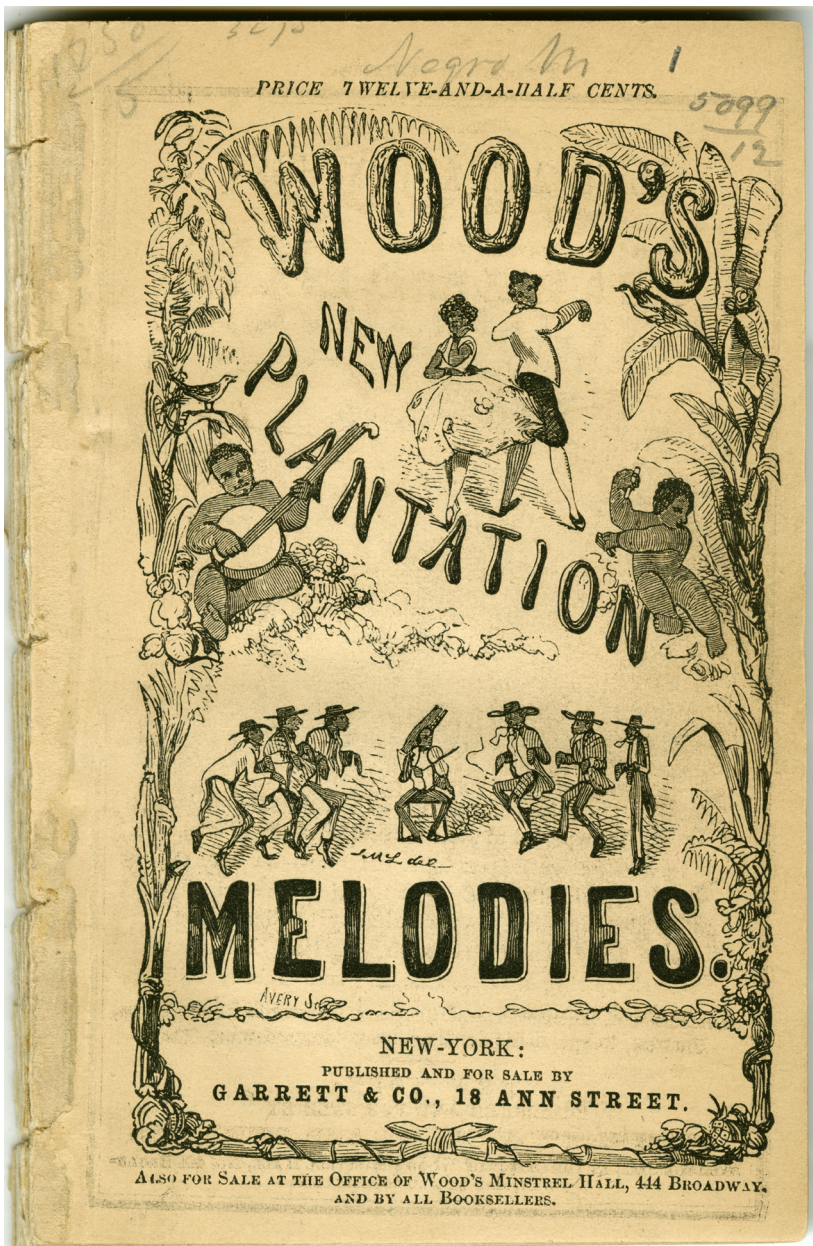
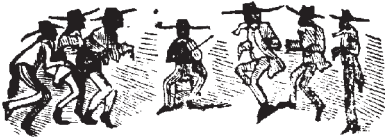


Fig. 8. *Wood's New Plantation Melodies*, cover. New York, 1855.
(Collection of the John Hay Library, Brown University)

W. S. & J. ROWLEY,
BOOKSELLERS & STATIONERS,
146 Baltimore St.—Wholesale Ag'ts for Balt.

THE CELEBRATED



BLACK SHAKER SONG.

I went down to Sally's house,
Sally wasn't home,
So I sat in the corner dar
An' played on de jaw bone.

CHORUS.

Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Hic, chick, pie it up and chuck it in de dock.
And a fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum.
Possum up a gum tree,
Cooney in de holler,
Show me de colored man
Dat stole my dollar.
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy, &c.

NEW VERSION, BY E. HORN.

Oh, bies dat lubly yaller gal,
De white folks call Miss Dina,
Come pity me, ye darkies all,
And show me whar to find her.

CHORUS.

She's gone away to Lebanon State,
To hoe de corn and bake de cake.
Maasa said she was too late,
Let her go to Lebanon State.
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
Fi, yi, yi, lap id diddy doodle dum,
But since she's gone and left me
My heart is filled with sorrow,
I'll find some other yaller gal,
And marry her to-morrow.
She's gone away to Lebanon State, &c.

114
Harris, Printer, S. E. Cor. 4th & Vine, Phila.

Fig. 9. "The Celebrated Black Shaker Song." Broadside, undated.
(Collection of the Library of Congress)



Fig. 10. C. Winter, American, 1820s-1860s? "Minstrel Show."
Oil painting on canvas.

(Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Martha C. Karolik for the
M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings. 48.493)

some of the dancers in enormous floppy hats. The man on the left in the painting is pictured in the kind of hat actually worn by Shaker brethren, although they did not wear them at indoor worship services, and none of the brethren in the dance print is wearing a hat. The dancers in the painting throw themselves around the stage with abandon, conspicuously out of step with one another, which was contrary to the Shakers' aspirations to conformity in appearance and behavior, and contrary to the uniformity of movements pictured in the dance print. Shaker practice included both men and women in the dance, which emphasized not only the equality of the sexes but the separation of the sexes, as can be seen in the dance prints. The absence of women in this painting, therefore, is yet another anomaly. Finally, the minstrel show fiddle would be out of place in Shaker worship, which in the nineteenth century was accompanied only by a vocal band.

Therefore no instrument player is pictured in the 1830s dance print.

So many elements of this scene contravene Shaker practice that the minstrel show painting would seem to have little to do with the Shakers in general, and the dance print in particular. What ultimately links this painting to the Shaker dance print, however, is the portrayal of the minstrels holding their hands out in front of them with their palms turned down, appearing, as several visitors observed, like dancing dogs.³⁶ This was a common gesture in early Shaker dance, said to represent “shaking off the sins of the world,”³⁷ and is pictured clearly with each of the worshipers in the dance print.

That practice changed in 1842, when the Shakers began worshipping with their palms turned up so that “the Angels would bestow upon them the gifts of God.”³⁸ A wood engraving published in 1851 in P. T. Barnum’s *Illustrated American News*³⁹ is the earliest published depiction of this new form of worship and was probably drawn from life.⁴⁰ (See fig. 3). The minstrel show, however, was behind the times. Even though the painting in the Karolik Collection was probably made between 1850 and 1855, it pictured the dancers with their palms facing down, no doubt because the choreography of the minstrel act was based on the Shaker dance print of the 1830s and not on current observation of actual Shaker worship.

The inconsistencies in the painting with actual Shaker worship are understandable when one realizes that the minstrel show act derives from the scene pictured in the 1830s dance print. The dancers are out of step because in this burlesque of Shaker dance, the characters are comically inept and unable to accomplish the movements in unison. That is the point of the joke while the other anomalies are just a function of minstrel performance. The fiddler accompanying the dance was a stock character in minstrel shows, not in Shaker worship. The absence of women in the dance can be explained by the fact that in the 1840s and 1850s minstrels were almost always played by white males.⁴¹ The actual conduct of Shaker worship was easily and even purposely misrepresented for comic effect. The Karolik painting appears to be an accurate depiction of intentional dysfunction played for laughs.

Although promoters advertised the persistent popularity of the “Black Shaker” skit, it was not the sort of presentation that drew audiences to repeat performances. The humor in this act was superficial and its appeal was short-lived. The public taste among the working class audience for sensational entertainment demanded novelty.

There is little evidence that comic renditions of Shaker worship were being performed in minstrel shows past the mid-1850s. The sport of parodying Shaker worship by men in blackface was losing its appeal. A playbill for a minstrel performance in London (see fig. 11) indicates that a “Burlesque Shaker Dance and Song” was being performed as late as 1859,⁴² but no more announcements for comic minstrel performances of Shaker worship are known after that date. The fickle public gaze had wandered. Constantly searching for fresh acts to catch the public’s fancy, blackface minstrels moved on to other popular topics.

ST. JAMES'S HALL,
PICCADILLY.

LAST WEEK BUT TWO.

THE ORIGINAL AND CELEBRATED

CHRISTY'S MINSTRELS

Consisting of Ten Performers and Singers.
SOLE PROPRIETOR AND MANAGER, MR. J. W. RAYNOR.

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

PROGRAMME.

PART I.

Overture—Medley	Christy's Minstrels.
Opening Chorus, "We come from the Hills"	Company.
"Toll the Bell,"	Mr. J. W. Raynor.
"Angelina Baker,"	Mr. W. P. Collins.
"Let me kiss him for his Mother,"	Mr. G. J. Wilsom.
"That's so,"	Mr. G. W. Moore.
"Beautiful Star"	Mr. W. Burton.
"Kiss Me Quick and Go, My Honey" —(by desire)	Mr. W. P. Collins.
New Song and Chorus "Nelly Gray" —(first time)	Mr. J. W. Raynor.
"Neapolitaine,"	Mr. Burton.
Tyrolean Solo (Exhibiting great volume of Voice)	Mr. T. Christian.
Sleigh Polka	Full Band

PART II.

WE'RE A BAND OF BROTHERS!

A Burlesque on the HUTCHINSON FAMILY, who visited England some
Ten Years since.

Lucy Long	Mr. W. P. Collins.
Ballad	Mr. G. J. Wilsom.
Irish Lilt	Messrs. Howard & Collins
Violin Solo	Mr. A. Nish.
Stump Oratory	Messrs. Burton & Collins.
American Jig	Mr. J. Howard.

BURLESQUE SHAKER DANCE AND SONG
BY THE COMPANY.

PART III.

Fourth Week of the Favourite Extravaganza Burlesque

BURLESQUE ITALIAN OPERA

ADAPTED AND ARRANGED BY MR. A. NISH.

On **FRIDAY EVENING** next, **JULY 15th, 1859.**
BENEFIT OF MR. A. NISH.

252

Fig. 11. “St. James’s Hall, Piccadilly.” Playbill. London, 1859.
(Reproduced from Harry Reynolds, *Minstrel Memories*, 252)



Fig. 12. George Christy & Henry Woods, *Mirth & Melody*. Miniature book, 1901. Cover. (Collection of Jerry Grant and Sharon Koomler)

The mid-century wood engraving depicting the “Black Shakers” minstrel act appeared one last time, in a retrospective publication. In 1901 George Christy & Henry Wood produced a miniature book⁴³ with tiny wood engravings of the different skits their minstrel company had performed over the years. (See fig. 12). Only one and one-half inches high, their novelty keepsake contained woodcut illustrations less than an inch in width. One engraving, entitled *Colored Shakers*, pictured seven prancing figures wearing floppy hats. (See fig. 13). This diminutive scene would be unrecognizable to anyone who



Fig. 13. George Christy & Henry Woods, *Mirth & Melody*. Miniature book, 1901. Wood engraving “Colored Shakers.” (Collection of Jerry Grant and Sharon Koomler)

could not remember the choreography it pictured of the “Black Shaker” skit fifty years earlier.

Although the “Black Shaker” skit never reappeared on the stage, minstrel show players did give Shaker performance one last try. After war broke out in 1861, theaters featured comic skits about raw recruits and exhibited Japanese Tommy, who, described as being twenty-nine inches tall, was too short to enlist in the army. When the Shakers petitioned President Lincoln to exempt them from military conscription on the basis of their religious beliefs, minstrels were quick to react. In 1862 Morris Brothers, Pell & Trowbridge’s minstrel players added a conscientious objector Shaker performance to their bill of comic banjo solos and *Fling de Ethiopie*. “The Exempt Shaking Quakers! From Lebanon, N.H., 10 in number, have been engaged, and will exhibit the peculiarities of their people,” promised the playbill.⁴⁴ (See fig. 14).

The announcement on this playbill gives the impression that this is not a humorous skit by impersonators in blackface, but a late survival of a public performance by actual Shaker apostates. A later playbill for this same act, which removed the erroneous reference to Lebanon, New Hampshire,⁴⁵ preserved the same descriptive language suggesting a presentation not about racial humor but about peculiar folk. In the aftermath of the Civil War the mockery of African Americans came to mean something else entirely, and it appears that the days of burlesquing Shaker worship in blackface had passed.

Thereafter comedic stage performance based on Shaker belief moved beyond the racial humor of minstrel shows. In 1883 Frank Bristow published the sheet music for his comic song *The Little Shaking Quakers*. The cover illustration for the score pictures eight European-American children performing a cloying song-and-dance number about a little Shaker brother asking for a kiss from his little Shaker sisters. (The response of the little Shaker sisters is “nay, nay, nay.”)⁴⁶ (See fig. 15). The Shakers are still fair game to be belittled for public amusement, but racial humor of the 1850s is nowhere to be found in this entertainment.

At the height of its popularity in the early 1850s, the minstrel performance of “Black Shaker” song and dance served the public as an anodyne in two ways. Like the entire program on the minstrel playbill, it reassured audiences that African Americans were genial bumbler and that their efforts to rise in American and British society were no threat to the established order. At the same time, it portrayed the believers in

MORRIS BROS. PELL & TROWBRIDGE'S
OPERA HOUSE
 Washington St. Boston.
 NEWLY OPPOSITE THE OLD SOUTH

MONDAY EVENING, NOV. 3d. '62.
 AND EVERY EVENING DURING THE WEEK.

Hundreds Turned Away Nightly!
 CROWDED FROM PIT TO DOME!

THE GREAT CHAMPION PRINCE

JAPANESE TOMMY!
 ONLY 29 INCHES HIGH!
 They've Grafted Him Into the Army!
 ISN'T IT A WONDER!

EXEMPT SHAKING QUAKERS!!
 Stocks Up and Stocks Down!
 ANOTHER "BIG THING!"

MRS. MCGOWAN'S REEL!
ION MORRIS IN A COMIC BANJO SOLO.
 JOHNNY PELL AND BILLY MORRIS IN THEIR ORIGINAL COMPOSITION
THE RAW RECRUITS.
 NIGHTINGALE POLKA!
DOUBLE CLOG HORNPIPE
 LOOK OUT FOR YOUR CARPET BAG!

PROGRAMME FOR THIS EVENING—PART I.

Nightingale Polka—with Flageolet and Piccolo Obligato. Messrs. Queen and Carroll
 Come, Come with Me—from Massanello. Company
 Tell It a Wonder. Billy Morris
 The Fatal Duel Between Mr. Nott and Mr. Shutt. Lon Morris
 They've Grafted Him into the Army. Billy Morris
 Annie Lada. F. Wilmshurst
 We are Marching Along. Lon Morris
 CUCKOO POLKA. By the ORCHESTRA

PART SECOND.

THE BURLESQUE PRIMA DONNA
 CHANGERS FOREVER.

COMIC BANJO SOLO!
 Written and performed by ION MORRIS

Fling de Ethiope, R. M. Carroll

THE EXEMPT SHAKING QUAKERS!
 FROM LUDANON, N. H., 10 IN NUMBER.
 Have been thought, and will excite the production of their people.

DOUBLE CLOG HORNPIPE. MESSRS. QUEEN AND CARROLL

STOCKS UP AND STOCKS DOWN
 MORRIS BROTHERS.

Mrs. McGowan's Reel, Messrs. Pell and Carroll

SIMON THE CELLARER. R. FREDERICKS

THE RAW RECRUITS!!
 Messrs. Pell, Morris Brothers and Japanese Tommy.

SELECTIONS. By the ORCHESTRA

PART THIRD.—The whole is made up of the best and most selected music, arranged with the tempo, &c.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR CARPET BAG!

THE FINEST ION MORRIS JACK QUINN BILLY MORRIS
 GUY GARDNER W. W. HODGKIN L. J. GARDNER F. WILKINSON
 THE LADY W. W. HODGKIN L. J. GARDNER F. WILKINSON
 WILKINSON J. C. TROWBRIDGE PERRY GARDNER R. M. CARROLL

We recommend **SKIPO**, the Intelligent Monkey, which will be produced with care and elegant manner, with music, properties and brilliant effects.

TICKETS 25 CENTS RESERVED SEATS 50 CENTS.
 Children under 10 years, 15 Cents.

DORCHESSTER ST. 54. TO DORCHESTER ST. 77 & 79. SEE SHOWMEN FROM 100 TILL 1 P. M.
 SEATING—LADIES FIRST—GENTLEMEN SECOND.

The Great Champion Prince

J. E. Parwell & Co., Massachusetts Steam Job Printers and Engravers, 27 Congress Street, Boston.

Fig. 14. "Morris Brothers Pell & Trowbridge's Opera House." Broadside. Boston, Mass.: L. R. Pike, 1862. (Collection of the American Antiquarian Society)



Fig. 15. "The Little Shaking Quakers." Lithograph on sheet music cover, 1883.
(Collection of the Lilly Library, University of Indiana)

pacifism, celibacy, and the communal ownership of property as ludicrous zealots whose worship consisted of risible cavorting and of babbling songs without words. By denigrating both groups in this way, minstrel show performers left their public secure in the knowledge that neither group presented a serious challenge to the familiar old ways.

The “Black Shaker” burlesque arose not out of any apparent animus toward the Shakers, but because when their occasional newsworthiness attracted the vulgar gaze, their unconventional behavior made them an easy target. There is no evidence that the Shakers made any public comment on these minstrel performances. If they were aware of them, they understood that these public amusements had nothing to do with the life the Believers had chosen to live.

Notes

1. Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 32-43.
2. W. T. Lhamon, ed., *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), vii. Lee, in *Orientalists*, describes the underlying purpose of these performances as demonstrating a presumed “polluting” effect of people of color in a white society.
3. W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 59. Lhamon cites the Virginia Minstrels’ skits as the earliest documented instance of a complete performance of blackface minstrelsy in the United States.
4. Hans Nathan *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 94.
5. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), 2:211-21.
6. For African-Americans Shakers at Watervliet, see Jean Humez, ed., *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Richard Williams, *Called and Chosen: The Story of Mother Rebecca Jackson and the Philadelphia Shakers* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981); and Geraldine Duclow, “The Shaker Family of Philadelphia” *The Shaker Messenger* 13, no. 3 (September 1991): 5-7. The African-American family living in Philadelphia was unusual in that it was not located in a traditional Shaker village.
7. Daniel Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 177.
8. Emlen, “The Shaker Dance Prints” *Imprint: Journal of the American Historical Print Collectors Society* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1992): 14-26. Since the publication of this article my census of these related images has increased from eighteen to twenty.
9. Jerry V. Grant, director of research at the Shaker Museum and Library, has identified one of these men as the Shaker brother Tower Smith.

10. See, for instance, two impressions of the same engraving, one hand colored and one uncolored, offered for sale by Skinner, Inc., as lot no. 597 on November 7, 2010. Skinner, Inc., *Sale 2524B* (Boston: Skinner, Inc., 2010), 138.
11. George O'Dell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929-1947), 5:549, 559. O'Dell finds notices for "Black Shaker" performances from May 10 through August 6.
12. O'Dell, *Annals of the New York Stage* 6:58.
13. "Chestnut Street Theater. For six nights only. Horn, Wells & Briggs' Ethiopian Serenaders ... Monday May 12, 1851." Philadelphia: S. A. Wells & T. F. Briggs, 1851. A copy of this playbill is in the collection of Don B. Wilmeth.
14. "8th Season. Boston Museum ... Horn, Wells, and Briggs' Ethiopian Serenaders!" Boston: Hooton's Press, 1851. A copy of this playbill is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.
15. In *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography* Mary Richmond records that the notations "The Town Hall," "Great Barrington" and "Tues. Eve Sept. 16" have been penciled in on the copy of this playbill in the collection of the Shaker Museum and Library (entry 2888). September 16 occurred on a Tuesday in 1851 at the height of popularity of the "Black Shaker" performances. That is almost certainly the year of the performance advertised in this undated playbill.
16. "American Theater, Bowery ... December 12, 1835." An example of this playbill is in the Harvard University Theater Collection.
17. An example of the "American Museum" playbill is in the collection of the New-York Historical Society. A similar playbill for a traveling performance by this troupe is illustrated in Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual* 402.
18. "Morris Brothers Pell & Trowbridge's Opera House" (Boston, Mass.: L. R. Pike, 1862). A copy of this playbill is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.
19. "Last Night! Great Moral Entertainment! By the celebrated and Far-famed Shaker Family from Canterbury, N.H." (Boston, 1848). A copy of this playbill is in the collection of the Williams College Library.
20. "Great Moral Curiosity! Shaker Concert!" (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: The American Peace Press, 1848.) An example of this playbill is in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society.
21. Mary Richmond, *Shaker Literature: A Bibliography* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1977) 2:131, entry 2888.
22. This show is documented in the playbill "Morris Brothers Pell & Trowbridge's Opera House" (Boston, Mass.: L. R. Pike, 1862), a copy of which is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society. It is reproduced in this article as figure 14.
23. "Shaker Concert at Washingtonian Hall" (Boston [?] [1847?]) An example of this playbill is in the collection of the Hamilton College Library and is illustrated in the *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (April 2008), cover.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Edward D. Andrews, *The Gift to be Simple* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1940), 159.
26. Charles White, "White's New Ethiopian Song Book" in George Christy and Charles White, *Christy's and White's Ethiopian Melodies* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Bros., 1854), 50.
27. Henry Wood, *Wood's New Plantation Melodies* (New York: Garrett and Company, 1855), 17-18. The author is indebted to Rosemary Cullen, senior scholarly resources

- librarian at the John Hay Library at Brown University, for bringing this engraving to his attention.
28. The author is indebted to Erica Hirschler, Croll senior curator of American Paintings, Art of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for bringing this broadside to his attention.
 29. Claudia Vess, catalogue entry for “Minstrel Show” in Guy McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), 28-29.
 30. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *The M. & M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815-1865* (Cambridge, Mass.: Published for Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [by] Harvard University Press, 1951), 520-21.
 31. *American Art News* 50 no. 6 (October 1951): 26-27.
 32. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: *American Paintings, 1815-1865* (Boston: The Museum, 1956), 107-8.
 33. McElroy, *Facing History* 27.
 34. The curatorial files in the Department of Paintings, Art of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, are full of correspondence about this painting. Particularly helpful was the museum’s correspondence with Mrs. Geraldine Duclos, former head of the Theater Collection at the Free Library of Philadelphia, Prof. W. T. Lhamon of Florida State University, and Prof. Daniel Patterson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
 35. Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 94-95.
 36. See, for instance, [A correspondent], “The Shakers,” *Penny Magazine*, November 18, 1837, 448.
 37. Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual*, 248.
 38. Patterson, *The Shaker Spiritual*, 387.
 39. “Shaker Worship,” *Illustrated American News*, 1 (July 26, 1851), 61.
 40. Charles Godfrey Leland, *Memoirs* (New York: Appleton & Co, 1893), 235-36. In this autobiography Leland describes visiting the New Lebanon Shakers and discussing with them an article he was preparing for the *Illustrated American News*.
 41. W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 72.
 42. Harry Reynolds, *Minstrel Memories* (London: A. Rivers, 1928), 252.
 43. George Christy and Wood, Henry, *Mirth & Melody: Illustrating the Entertainment given by Geo. Christy & Woods* (New York, 1901). The author is indebted to Jerry V. Grant, director of research at the Shaker Museum and Library, for bringing this publication to his attention.
 44. “Morris Brothers, Pell, & Trowbridge’s Opera House ... Boston ... November 3rd, ’62.” A playbill for this performance is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.
 45. “Morris Brothers, Pell, & Trowbridge’s Opera House ... Worcester ... June 23rd, 1863.” A playbill for this performance is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.
 46. Frank Bristow, *The Little Shaking Quakers. A Comic Chorus* (Cincinnati: George D. Newhall, 1883).