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Peter Ayers, Defender of the Faith

By Galen Beale

And as she turned and looked at an apple tree in full bloom, she exclaimed: — How beautiful this tree looks now! But some of the apples will soon fall off; some will hold on longer; some will hold on till they are half grown and will then fall off; and some will get ripe. So it is with souls that set out in the way of God. Many set out very fair and soon fall away; some will go further, and then fall off, some will go still further and then fall; and some will go through.¹

New England was a hotbed of discontent in the second half of the eighteenth century. Both civil and religious events stirred its citizenry to action. Europeans wished to govern this new, resource-rich country, causing continual fighting, and new religions were springing up in reaction to the times. The French and Indian War had aligned the British with the colonists, but that alliance soon dissolved as the British tried to extract from its colonists the cost of protecting them. In 1776 America believed itself to be independent and its citizens were willing to fight for this cause. The idea of freedom was intoxicating as New Englanders sought to practice their religion and to live as they chose.

Shaker leader Mother Ann Lee and a small band of followers came to America during this time also seeking religious freedom. While they continued to find angry mobs arrayed against their unusual beliefs, they were able to collect new converts and gain tentative acceptance in the New World. The stories of these early Believers are heroic and give a glimpse into how the sect was established. By the time Mother Ann died in 1784 her new religion had set down roots in American soil.

The job of organizing Mother Ann's scattered converts was left to her followers. Expanding from their first settlement in Watervliet, New York, the Shakers soon created another village in New Lebanon. Now, with two villages brought into Gospel Order, the Believers felt it was time to spread out further in New England to gather their other converts. The new leadership of the faith carefully picked the missionaries who would travel

New England to settle new communities. They had learned through hard experience that to establish a new religion was not a peaceful endeavor. Mother Ann and her band had been badly abused in her American travels by mobs that were frightened by her message, and the next wave of missionaries anticipated similar encounters.

The stories of Believers who fought for the freedom of their country and then dedicated the remainder of their lives to a faith based on communalism, celibacy and pacifism are inspiring. One of these stories is told by Elder Henry Blinn in his epic two-volume history of the Canterbury Shakers. While there had been earlier efforts to chronicle the New Hampshire Shakers' history, Blinn was particularly well suited for the job. A man of many talents, he was keenly interested in writing and publishing, and Canterbury became the center of the Shakers' printing industry under his leadership. For many years, that community published the Shakers' newspaper in which Blinn told his stories. Blinn's histories reflected his pride and admiration for the men and women who came before him that were instrumental in founding his beloved community; they are a carefully organized and personal history of the village.

Upon being appointed to the Ministry, Blinn began considering creating a village history. He would have understood that there was an accepted format for such a project: one had to be an engaging writer, but also show discretion in the choice of topics for such a manuscript. Blinn's journals were basically for internal use but Blinn was worldly enough to believe others might also read them, and he did not want anything to reflect badly on his band of Believers. He carefully chose the men and women he highlighted in his manuscript and created a detailed, dramatic and colorful story of his village from 1764 to 1879. Blinn was seventy-one years old when he finished these journals and they are based on a large collection of materials he had in his possession — his interviews with Believers as well as his recollections of forty years living in the community. Many other Shaker villages composed such an authorized narrative of their history that would become the foundation of their Shaker stories. Stephen Stein, in his *Shaker Experience in America*,² pointed out that these official narratives have the characteristic marks of a sacred story or myth and Blinn's journals were no exception.

In his history, Blinn highlighted one of the larger personalities from the founding generation — an unusual early Believer named Peter Ayers. Ayers' story was so compelling that even today the village tour guides

talk about his life. Ayers was one of many early Believers who had been fortunate enough to meet Mother Ann several times, and this gave him great authority. Blinn's journals took particular notice of the Believers who knew Mother Ann, and his stories of Ayers embedded him forever in the Canterbury Shaker village story. This larger-than-life man was also highlighted by Isaac Hill in his publication *Farmer's Monthly Visitor*. Together, these references to Ayers show how the Shakers' sacred stories were edited, enhanced and confirmed.

Blinn had arrived at Canterbury as a teenager in 1838 and knew Peter Ayers for almost twenty years; however, it was not until 1854 that Blinn, then thirty years old and a member of the Ministry, interviewed the ninety-four-year-old Ayers. No doubt he took notes during this interview but it was twenty-eight years later that he finally wrote about Ayers' life. After years of considering the qualities of this man, Blinn determined that Ayers was one of the early Canterbury Shaker heroes and a man whose story would inspire generations to come. The dramatic stories of Mother Ann and her followers found in Blinn's journals take place at a time when New England was in political and religious turmoil. Blinn illustrates the Shakers' courage and determination in the face of persecution by angry mobs. Ayers, who was present at some of these events, was portrayed as strong, brave and righteous, and his experience as a Revolutionary War soldier defined him as a protector of the faith. To Blinn, Ayers was the kind of strong-willed man that was needed to establish a new settlement in Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Peter Ayers and Mother Ann

Peter Ayers was born in the fall of 1760 in Voluntown, Connecticut. He grew up during the period preceding the Revolutionary War, and as he entered his teenage years, one of the many dramatic moments of this war took place, the Boston Tea Party, which stirred the soul of every New England patriot. Ayers' family moved to the Albany area of New York in 1775. The next year Mother Ann arrived in New York with her followers, seeking a safe place to practice her new religion, and gathered her converts in Watervliet, not far from the Ayers' home.

At fourteen Ayers joined a group of volunteers to fight against the British. Revolutionary War records indicate he joined a Connecticut militia regiment. The June after he moved to New York, Ayers fought at Bunker Hill.³ Because he had entered the war as a volunteer, he was able to return

home periodically to help support his family. Two years later, in the fall of 1777, Ayers fought in the second Battle of Saratoga.⁴ His early military experiences would create a personality that was tenacious, determined, and a lover of a good fight that would be reflected throughout his lifetime. According to Blinn:

[Ayers] was of German descent and a man of remarkable physical endurance. Loving liberty more than he loved life, he entered the Army as a volunteer and had the pleasure of witnessing the surrender of General Burgoyne at Bemis Heights, October 16, 1777.⁵

Near Ayers' home, Mother Ann was establishing her Shaker Gospel in the midst of the war, but she was not the only force advocating for a different kind of life. The Revolutionary War affected all New Englanders and the growth of religious revivals throughout the country offered an alternative to these war-worn New Englanders. When he returned to New York from the war, Ayers, too, was attracted to these new ideas. He knew that he did not want to become a professional soldier, nor did he want to return home to the family farm. He may have investigated one of the nearby revivals centered along the Massachusetts and New York borders called the New Light Stir, which focused on the imminent Millennium.⁶ Ayers' search was intermittent. He was a popular young man and people were attracted to his determination and his willingness to fight for what he believed in. At the same time, he was committed to having fun: he loved to dance and often attended parties. "Invitations brought Peter into all the dancing parties near his home, and whether it was a cotillion, a jig or a breakdown, he was always on the floor."⁷ But once Ayers settled on his course, he found other ways to use his talents: "At a later date, he threw aside all his carnal weapons and accepted a place in the ranks of the peacemakers. Peter would sing and dance for the Lord, day or night, and if need be fight for his religious teachers with as good grace as he would pray for them."⁸

In the spring of 1780 Mother Ann opened the Shaker Gospel. This new religion and its charismatic leader attracted many curious Americans and Ayers was no exception. He describes his first encounter with the Shakers:

At one time I was engaged in the hauling of lumber to Albany. My wagon was formed by only one long board, one end of which was

attached to the forward axle tree, and the other end of the board to the rear one. On my return home. I overtook six sisters who had been on a visit to Niskayuna, now Watervliet. They belonged in Hancock, a distance of 30 miles. By invitation, they accepted a ride on my carriage for some 10 miles, which brought us to the residence of my parents. My mother accommodated them for the night, and soon after breakfast they left for their own homes. We now learned that these sisters had only a few days previous, traveled from Hancock to Watervliet on foot.⁹

Curious and skeptical, Peter Ayers went to meet Mother Ann in May 1780:

In the month of May 1780, I'd heard of Mother Ann and the Elders, who then resided at Niskayuna and came to the conclusion to visit them. Previous to this, I had convictions in my mind respecting my lost condition, and had been blessed with spiritual manifestations in which were represented [in] those whom we call the people of God the exact likeness of this vision, I afterward found to be in Mother Ann and her followers.¹⁰

Ayers was a careful man, and he did not want to be misled by a charismatic leader. He described how he took preparations to ward off any trickery by Mother Ann and her followers:¹¹

At the same time of my first visit to this religious order I thought I would take expressed pains in regard to myself and not be deceived by anyone. My visit was largely one of curiosity, as I supposed the people to be more or less deluded. In order to be doubly guarded, I concluded to take some food with me that I need not be obliged to accept an invitation to eat at their table.

I was kindly received and conversed freely with several of the Shakers upon matters of common interest, till the first half of the day had nearly passed away. Being at this time in conversation with Elder John Hocknell he extended an invitation for me to dine with them, when Mother Ann immediately remarked, "We will let our brother, Peter take the food which he has brought with him, as he prefers to do that rather than to dine with us."

How Mother knew my mind I was unable to tell, as I was very careful of my words in regard to the course I had chosen to follow. They then invited me to remain with them over the Sabbath, and

Elder John Hocknell spoke very kindly and seriously: "Young man, you should confess your sins to God and live a new life."¹²

After his first meeting with Mother Ann, Ayers followed her progress carefully. He would have known that she was imprisoned in Albany in July 1780 only to be released on December 31 of that year.¹³ Despite being persecuted, Mother Ann continued her outreach journeys into New England. Leaving Watervliet in May 1781 she traveled to nearby New England states until maltreatment by angry mobs caused her to return to Watervliet in the fall of 1783. Ayers visited her three more times and was at Mother Ann's Harvard, Massachusetts, home known as the Square House.

Mother Ann had seen the Square House in Harvard in a vision while in England, and with the help of some thirty other Shaker brothers and sisters was able to purchase the house from Shadrach Ireland and use it as her headquarters. Peter Ayers was among those who contributed to the purchase of this house. His name was linked with John Spires and together they contributed \$31.11, the third highest donation.¹⁴ It is clear that Ayers had by then begun to commit himself to the faith, but it would be another seven or eight years until he joined the Shakers.

After this visit with Mother Ann in 1780, Ayers went home to his family for a while, but in 1781 he returned to fight at Yorktown, the final big land battle of the Revolutionary War.¹⁵ In October, now twenty-one years old, he returned once again to his family farm and continued his search for a new life. Ayers visited Mother Ann again and his description is recorded by Blinn:

Subsequently, I visited Mother Ann and the Elders three times before I fully concluded to abide by their counsels. I became persuaded that they were the people of God, and I accepted their testimony to take up my cross against a sinful life.... Soon after I made a confession of my life to Elder John Hocknell and also to Father William Lee.¹⁶

Once he had converted to Shakerism, Ayers rose almost to the status of saint in Henry Blinn's manuscripts. Blinn compared Ayers' conversion with that of the apostle Simon Peter:

While another disciple might be in spiritual retirement, Peter was defending the life of his beloved teacher from the insults of the crowd. A corresponding instance occurred in the life of our good brother Peter Ayers. Peter was about 18 years of age when he

accepted the testimony of Jesus Christ, as preached by Ann Lee.¹⁷ He was full of the life of the world. Every bone and muscle from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet was perfectly sound.

Describing Ayers' transition from Revolutionary War soldier to a soldier of Christ, Blinn continues:

Soon after he'd been converted, but before he had done much to establish the Brethren in the peaceable fruits of righteousness, he was subjected to the ridicule and mockery of an idle, reckless class, who laughed at the idea that Peter Ayers should have religion. Peter endured the insults like a martyr and suffered much personal abuse with Christian patience. One night after saying his prayers and retiring to enjoy the slumbers of a peaceful conscience, he was awakened by three young men who were calling him, Shaker! Shaker! Then they dared him to come out of the house.

Peter was not in the least disturbed by this salutation, but when they began to slander his gospel teacher, Ann Lee, and denounced her as a bad woman, he could bear it no longer. Jumping from his bed, and without dressing, he was soon on a wide chase and did not return to the house until he had thoroughly pounded his tormentors, and left them to mourn their bruises, while he returned to enjoy a night of quiet rest.

Peter in his old age, would laugh over this example of zealous, muscular Christianity and say it was all the self-denial he had attained up to that date.

He was a diligent reader of the Bible and of Believers publications. He was never at a loss for an appropriate quotation. "After I laid aside my carnal weapons," he said, "I put on the whole armor of Christ, and commenced warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil."¹⁸

Ayers told Blinn of another visit he had with Ann Lee in Stephentown, New York, in August 1783:

Once, I saw Mother Ann and the elders at Stephentown and attended worship with them. Several persons stood by the door, as spectators, and Mother, invited them to come in and take part in the service. I was at meeting in Hancock, Massachusetts at the House of Stephen Fitch and a mob gathered around the house while Father William Lee was speaking. Several of the brethren

went out among the mob, but Elder John Hocknell advised us to return to the house.

Mother Ann spoke kindly to these persecutors; but they were very unreasonable in their replies and in their false accusations. It was of but little consequence to this reckless mob, what were the words or actions if they could only find some pretext whereby to accuse Mother Ann and her followers.

They asked Father William what he had to say, "I am clear of your charges before God and his angels." Mother Ann, Father William, and Hannah Kendall, were, however, arrested and tried and fined \$6.25 each. Such is the injustice of a hypocritical and sectarian jury."¹⁹

Peter Ayers and Job Bishop

Once Ayers had settled on a life with the Shakers, he looked for ways to be useful. After Mother Ann died in 1784, it was another three years before the New Lebanon Church was gathered. During this time Ayers took up missionary work and waited to join the New Lebanon community. Ayers was now twenty-seven and he had been a faithful Believer for six years. He donated his accumulated wealth to the New Lebanon community when it opened on May 10, 1787. His property consisted of:

One horse, one wagon, a lot of tackling, two cows, 1 two year old heifer, 27 sheep, 25 pounds of wool, one chaise, 60 pounds of flax, 130 pounds of tobacco, One axe, one saddle, one sleigh, one pad-lock, one pound worth of port, 14 bushels of potatoes, one bed and bedding, 65 bushels of wheat, 16 bushels of rye, 4 bushels of corn, two sickles, 4 turkeys, 11 hens, one pair of plow irons, 2 chains, four dollars worth of fur and 16 dollars in money.²⁰

Subsequently, Ayers joined Job Bishop on his missionary journeys for the Society. Their job was to visit the already converted men and women and encourage the faithful. Job Bishop had recently returned from the deathbed of Mother Ann and Ayers may have accompanied him there.²¹ Ayers was a vigorous Believer and well suited for this work — he was a man who could think on his feet and, according to Blinn, he could quote a Bible verse for any occasion. The Shaker leadership quickly recognized that Ayers would be useful in many ways, and with his strength and willingness to defend his beliefs, he had the additional value of being able to protect Job

Bishop and his companions from angry non-Believers. Ayers and Bishop traveled extensively for three years, frequently joined by other Believers, as they visited the emerging communities in Maine and New Hampshire.

Job Bishop was also a legendary figure in Blinn's journals. As an itinerant minister sent from New Lebanon, he visited the two New Hampshire communities several times between 1782 and 1792. Once they were established, Bishop became the lead minister for both communities for the next forty years.

Ayers and Bishop had much in common: they were the same age, had lived in the same area, had both fought in the Revolutionary War, and were both committed Believers. They both ended up living at Canterbury, exerting their leadership in different ways, but both effectively. Just as he had done with Peter Ayers, Henry Blinn interviewed Job Bishop near the end of his life and retold the story of his conversion.

Bringing Canterbury into Gospel Order—1792

By 1792, the New Lebanon Ministry was well along in its efforts to gather the scattered Shaker converts into permanent communal settlements. Job Bishop's and Peter Ayers' skill and experience, gained as itinerate evangelists, were now focused on bringing the New Hampshire communities into Gospel Order.²² Bishop and Ayers were now both thirty-eight years old, and this would be their last assignment. Ayers bade his aging mother goodbye before his February departure for Canterbury.²³ Moses Johnson was also at New Lebanon and was chosen to accompany Bishop to oversee the building of a meeting house at Canterbury. Benjamin Sanborn, John Fuller, Jonathan Lougee, Daniel Fletcher, and John Winkley,²⁴ who were residents of Canterbury but were visiting New Lebanon, accompanied Bishop, Ayers, and Johnson on their journey. With the exception of Winkley and Johnson, all of these men would spend the remainder of their days at the Canterbury Shaker community. This missionary journey and their work to establish the New Hampshire communities bound these men together for the rest of their lives.²⁵

Sanborn, Fuller, Lougee and Fletcher were skilled farmers and gardeners—necessary skills to help establish a new community; the four men worked for the benefit of the Second Family for many years.²⁶ Lougee, born in Exeter, New Hampshire, had visited Mother Ann in Watervliet, New York, at which time Mother Ann reproved him for not coming to visit the Believers oftener. "Your people, said she, in New Hampshire are

wealthy but covetous. You ought to hate your covetousness and forsake it, and be joyful and cheerful and take up your crosses and serve God.”²⁷ Lougee followed her advice and returned to Canterbury where he became an elder of the Second Family and worked in the garden for most of his life.²⁸

Job Bishop set about his task and the Church Family was quickly established. Three years after these missionaries came to Canterbury, Blinn records there were forty-four brethren and forty-five sisters in the Church Family.²⁹ According to Blinn, Bishop was aided in his work by his charismatic personality:

In his ministrations, Father Job always spoke in the spirit of loving-kindness. He manifested at all times a great degree of patience and was constant in his exhortations for everyone to accept the beautiful cross of Christ. Even the little children shared largely in his parental care and looked upon him with reverence and respect. They sensibly felt through him an inspiration of holiness, to which in more mature years they affectionately bore witness....

Abundantly gifted in the manifestations of spirit power, he was a firm believer that the pure in heart only could see God, that those who really hunger and thirst after righteousness are the ones that are filled with the treasures of Christ’s kingdom.³⁰

Ayers at Canterbury

Henry Blinn was surprised that Peter Ayers was able to succeed as a Shaker because Ayer’s early life experiences were so different from those of Blinn: at fourteen years of age, Blinn had joined the Canterbury Shakers, while Ayers, at the same age, had joined the army to fight in the Revolutionary War.

It was surprising to many that Peter could make such a radical change. Among the light hearted, he was the lightest hearted. At feasts and parties he was always at home and could dance till nearly all had left the floor. As a boxer, we would be obligated to go far to find his equal, and even after he embraced the faith, it was not safe to offer him or his gospel friends an insult.³¹

Henry Blinn described Peter Ayers as “quite short, thickset, having a large head and dark eyes. His complexion was fair and his hair straight.”

What Blinn liked best about Ayers was that “he was a diligent reader of the Bible and of Believer’s publications.”³²

Once Peter Ayers arrived at Canterbury, he set about establishing his trade of hat-making. He had learned this trade at New Lebanon where he made both wool and fur hats. Early Believers’ hats were black, but by 1803 Blinn records that “the fur hats will now be light drab, although cheap hats can be made of white and black wool, so mixed as to make an ordinary gray.”³³ Three years after his arrival in Canterbury, the community had built a shop for Ayers, known as the Brethren’s South Shop. Blinn recorded that in July 29, 1795, “a 26’ x 30’ building was raised for the Brethren to make hats and hand cards. It was three stories high. Peter took over the first floor and on the second floor were the coopers and on the top floor the card makers and tailors shared the space.”³⁴ There was a demand for hats Society-wide and in June 1799, the Alfred, Maine, Shakers brought Ayers “Raccoon and Mush-quash furs ... to be made for the Church at Alfred”³⁵ as well as enough beaver pelts to make Elder John Barnes a beaver hat.³⁶ A setback to the trade occurred in 1800 when a large fire broke out in the



One of many stone piles at the East Farm built by Peter Ayers.
(Photo by Mark Stevens)

hatters' shop, but fortunately it was extinguished. By 1826 Canterbury's North Family took up the hatter's trade as well, no doubt taught by Peter Ayers. The North Family moved the old West Family's dwelling house into their family and began using the building for the manufacture of hats as well as for an infirmary.

Ayers settled into Canterbury and signed the community's first covenant in 1796, but he also continued to travel around the Shaker communities on various errands. At home, when he was not making hats, he found time to improve his education and by 1848 "he was qualified as an eminent schoolmaster of the flock."³⁷

Although the Canterbury community had been established with a generous donation of land from a Believer, as the community began to grow the leadership could see a far-reaching problem. It was evident to the early Believers that the Canterbury farm would never be productive enough because of its poor soils, and they would have to find other means to support their community.³⁸ The leadership of the community decided to construct a mill system of seven ponds that would support a variety of woodworking and textile mills. These mills would be large enough to service the surrounding community as well, and thus create an income for the village. The stony land could be used to pasture the sheep and dairy cows.

The mill system was completed just as the sheep boom hit New Hampshire. The Shakers had raised sheep from almost the beginning of the community and by 1804 Canterbury had built its first sheep barn. By 1820 sheep were an important part of most New Hampshire farms. The sheep boom in New Hampshire was short-lived, lasting only from 1820-1840, but significant. Former commissioner of agriculture for New Hampshire, Steve Taylor, states that "sheep were responsible for the only period of real agricultural prosperity in New England history, and the legacy of that time endures today in the form of the thousands of miles of stone walls that crisscross the countryside." By 1836 there were almost a million sheep in New Hampshire.³⁹ Both the Second and the Church Families maintained large herds of sheep.

The last factory within Canterbury's new mill system was a carding mill, and Peter Ayers was instrumental in its establishment. By 1808 Ayers was back in New Lebanon examining the carding machines manufactured there. By 1811 the Canterbury Shakers began the construction of the carding mill and Ayers returned to New Lebanon to purchase some new

machinery. He and Josiah Edgerly returned home with a set of carding machines which would be used in the mill for the next forty years. The mill was put into operation in 1812 and Blinn reported that “quite an extensive business was soon obtained in the carding of rolls, not only for the several families in the Society, but also for those who lived within a circle of several miles.”⁴⁰ Establishing such an extensive mill system required the Canterbury Shakers to search for more water power. Over the years Ayers was involved in the acquisition of more land and water rights to power the Shakers’ growing system.⁴¹

Several of Peter Ayers’ friends appear in Blinn’s records. Josiah Edgerly and Micajah Tucker were two New Hampshire men he met when he arrived at Canterbury. Edgerly was typical of Ayers’ friends at Canterbury. While he was ten years older than Ayers, he too had fought in the Revolutionary War. He had been an officer in the army and lost one eye while in the service. In 1793 Edgerly was appointed a trustee. When Isaac Hill visited the village in 1840 he found a peaceful Josiah Edgerly who was then age ninety: “He had been one of the hard workers of that community who have enjoyed the union of sound health and peace of mind—all those earthly blessing which temperance, diligence, benevolence and strict integrity bring in their train.”⁴²

At times there were more than two trustees for the Church Family, and Ayers often seemed to assume that authority. Both Ayers and Edgerly had continued to work on the extensive mill system. They had purchased the carding machines at New Lebanon and, in 1817, Ayers’ name is found on a deed with Josiah Edgerly purchasing water power rights from the Ingalls to power the mill sawing the Shakers’ firewood. While the money for this transaction was given by the Church Family deacons, Winkley and Israel Sanborn, the deed itself is signed by Ayers and Edgerly.⁴³

Micajah Tucker—“*a fearless battle axer against the lives of evil doers*”⁴⁴

In addition to the friends Peter Ayers made on his journey from New Lebanon, he also made friends with Canterbury Believers. Jonathan Lougee and John Fuller probably introduced Ayers to Micajah Tucker. Ayers’ attentiveness to Tucker was apparent when Lougee and Fuller brought Tucker to Enfield, New Hampshire, for medical treatment, where he had to stay for several months. Lougee and Fuller were in attendance as much as they could, and Ayers also visited Tucker during this time.

Tucker, like Edgerly, was older than Ayers, and at the founding of Canterbury he had been chosen as a deacon. His story is similar to that of the other early Believers: his early missionary work was with Zadock Wright, an early Enfield Believer, and on April 22, 1796, they were at New Lebanon together. Tucker finally settled down in Canterbury in 1806 at age forty-two and was an elder for the next twenty-eight years. Tucker was a joiner and carpenter by trade, but he is perhaps best known for the half-mile of stone walking paths he laid out throughout the Canterbury community. After his retirement as an elder, Tucker moved into Peter Ayers' shop where he lived until his death. Ayers had moved out to live in a small house near the sheep barn.⁴⁵

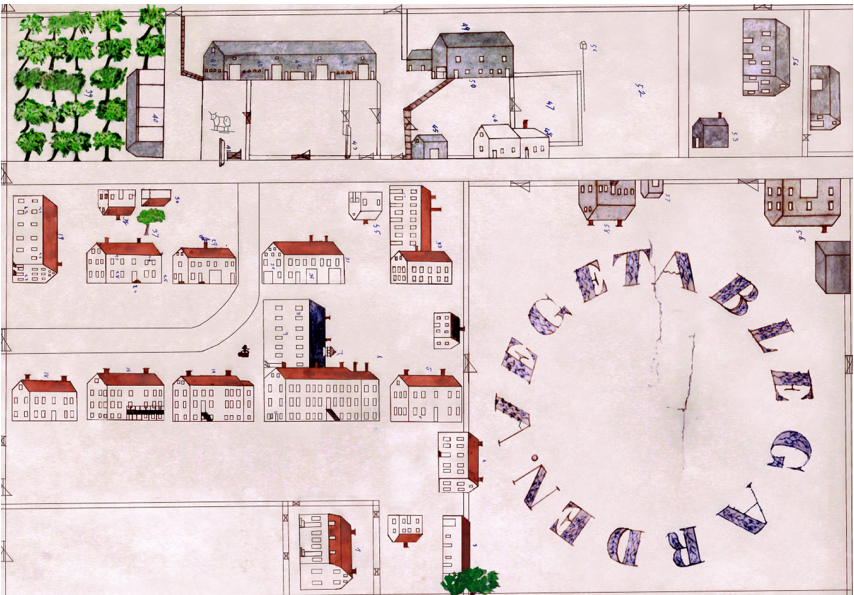
1818 Purchase of the East Farm

By 1818 with the Canterbury Shakers' mill system up and running, Peter Ayers turned to other pursuits. He was now sixty-one. The Church Family had recently purchased a 130-acre tract of land a mile northeast of the village known as the East Farm, and Ayers took over this farm which had both a house and barn already built. To reach the farm, it was necessary to follow the mill road along the pond system. Because of the East Farm's proximity to the mills as well as to the Church's sugar camp, Ayers had frequent visitors.

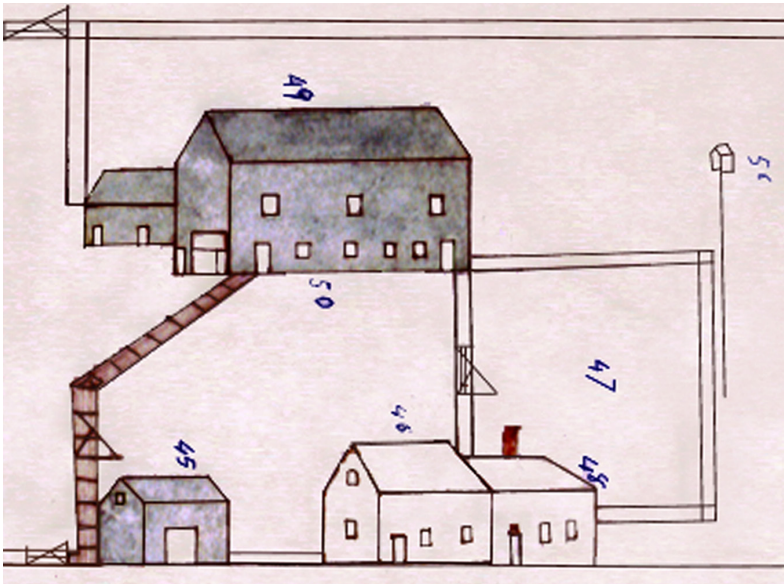
Ayers lived at the East Farm and worked with his pair of oxen for many years. As time went on the Shakers began to call it "Peter's Farm." So extraordinary was his work on this farm that many visitors of the day commented on it. In clearing the stony land, he and his oxen created large towers of huge stones on the homestead. Ayers' first task was to create an apple orchard of one thousand trees on this new property. Later he tackled the rest of the East Farm land and created new pastures for his sheep and cattle by rebuilding stone walls. He arranged these pastures so that he would walk through them when he came and went from the Church Family.

Once Ayers' orchard started bearing fruit, many of the young Believers from the village came down to harvest the apples. Nicholas Briggs writes of his joy in being old enough to go to the East Farm:

I blossomed into a "Youth Boy". This was a most welcome change. It made me eligible to all services and gathering of the brethren and taking my meals with them at the first sitting. I was surely



Henry Blinn's 1848 map of Canterbury Village. Peter Ayers' home is top center.
(Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village)



Detail of Blinn's 1848 map. House no. 48 is labeled "Peter Ayers house."
(Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village)

beginning to be a man. I was assigned to a man whom I liked very much, and what was fully as nice, who liked me, and who apparently did all he could to make me happy.

My first job with him was picking apples at the East Farm orchard. This was by far our largest orchard. It was the product of the indefatigable labor of Peter Ayers who at 96 years of age still worked on it when I went there to live.

He redeemed it from a rocky pasture, and the immense heaps of stones made by him in clearing the land betokened marvelous energy. This orchard yielded this year one thousand bushels of fruit for the cellar, quite as much more of sauce apples and a large amount for cider. A large company of both sexes was occupied a full week in this orchard. The young men picked the apples and the sisters sorted them into number one and number two for storage, and sauce apples to be cut and dried.

The apples were laid very carefully in baskets and conveyed home in spring wagons, and are carefully transferred to bins in the cellars. No apple was number one that had dropped from the tree or had received the least bruise. Dinner was served in the old barn, across the floor of which was a long rude table. We knelt before and after eating as at home, but there was no restraint in conversation. Few young sisters and no girls were there. In those present the Elders gave careful attention to their selection to remove all possible danger of undue familiarity between the young people.⁴⁶

In addition to living on the East Farm, Ayers also retained a residence near the sheep barn. Ayers lived on the East Farm while he was working it, but he could live and stable his oxen at either place.

“The Great Hunter and Mighty Man for Work”

In 1840 Isaac Hill visited Canterbury to write a full portrait of the community which he published in the *Farmer's Monthly Visitor*. Peter Ayers was one of his subjects. Isaac Hill was an old friend of the Canterbury and Enfield Shakers and his relationship with them went back to 1827. Born in 1789, Hill was not suited for outdoor work and he began a career as a printer. He purchased the *American Patriot* in 1809 which later became known as the *New Hampshire Patriot*, and finally today's *Concord Monitor*, a

daily newspaper. In 1823 he ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate and in 1836 became the governor of New Hampshire. Henry Blinn recorded that in 1830 Hill borrowed \$6,700 from the Shakers, perhaps needing the money for his political aspirations. Hill had been a long-time director of the Merrimack Agriculture Society and took a keen interest in the Shakers' agricultural practices which he frequently reported in his paper.⁴⁷

The morning of the second day introduced us to a most extraordinary man in the name of Peter Ayer, in the 80th year of his age, who had been 60 years a Shaker. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. He came at our request with his staff to lead us to an exhibition of his farm. It was a mile from the road, and contained a hundred acres, being a purchase made by the first family some 20 years ago, and upon it had been a house and barn, the last of which is still standing in the midst of a beautiful apple orchard of several acres containing more than 1000 bearing trees. The face of this hundred acres was hard and full of rocks, as was originally nearly every rod of the several thousand acres owned by the three Canterbury families. The orchard itself seemed to be but a mass of rocks. At this place, solitary and alone, except one stout, fateful yoke of oxen, as his assistants, Peter Ayer had worked among the rocks two entire seasons, taking up the old and crooked stone walls and laying over new walls in a direct line, digging out and piling up immense masses of stone in piles the size of a common haystack. The foundation stones dug out and laid into the walls by the veteran alone would weigh, judging by the eye, many of them 2 tons each; how one man, with the assistance even of the most docile beasts, could ever have moved them into place seem to us a wonder; of the immense piles of stone gathered from this ground it was a matter of astonishment that any man could raise them high above his head. Here was the work of a lone man in removing rocks upon an isolated spot of ground for two summers, which will remain as a monument of his Herculean labor during the life of the present generation. Besides doing this labor, Peter took upon himself the task of attending the large flock of cattle and sheep which range in the pasture surrounding the orchard; the farm itself is called Peter's farm, and will probably as long go by that name as the rocky piles shall remain in their places. Peter Ayer has been a mighty hunter in his day; he has

pursued, waylaid or overtaken many a bear and fox, traveling on his snowshoes often 30 and 40 miles a day. He is not yet so old as to give over the chase—a trained bloodhound is yet with him when he goes to the field, sending out the game and bringing to his master the intelligence. Peter has his own fitted-up room in an outer building, where he feeds and caresses his dog and cat. He has this year domesticated and tamed a young ground squirrel or woodchuck, which came at his call and fondled around him like a tamed kitten. It is said of Peter, that they have never known the second person who in early spring would save the lives and rear up so many young lambs as he, watching them and attending all their wants both by night and by day. Deacon Winkley says that notwithstanding all the amusements of Peter, he knows not the man living in the world, who has performed so much hard labor and accomplished with his own hands so much as he. Health and contentment are still prominently marked upon his countenance: at the age of 80 years he will out travel the majority of mankind at 40. At work in the field Peter proved to us he has not been alone—he had daily and hourly commune with his God; for there is no Scripture he could not quote in defense of his belief; and the only objection that could be raised to that belief was the idea which he firmly maintained that the omission of all outward sinful acts constituted the perfect man of this life.”⁴⁸

The Church Family at Canterbury in 1841 comprised 132 Believers—76 sisters and 56 brethren. Textile production was a major industry. That year 1600 yards of cloth were woven and the sisters were making flannel drawers, shirts and hose. The farm made 2100 pounds of butter and 3105 pounds of cheese. Henry Blinn, in 1841, was seventeen years old. Isaac Hill’s description of Canterbury and its occupants must have colored Blinn’s perceptions for years to come. Hill was an impressive man at fifty-one and he was at the peak of his career when he wrote his article for the *Farmer’s Monthly Visitor*. Forty-one years later when Blinn wrote in the *Shaker Manifesto*, he would closely echo Hill’s description of Peter Ayers.⁴⁹

Mother's Work

By the 1840s, Peter Ayers was in his eighties and had very few surviving friends; of the original eight travelers from New Lebanon, only Ayers and Lougee were still living. Isaac Hill had taken his snapshot of the Canterbury Shakers just before a series of significant religious upheavals swept through all the Shaker villages, a phenomenon later known as Mother's Work, or the Era of Manifestations. The movement had begun in 1837 in New Lebanon and by 1843 was firmly implanted at Canterbury. The Shakers' meetings changed dramatically to a form of spontaneous worship, with Believers twirling in ecstatic dance, having visions and falling to the floor in trances while receiving messages from the spirit land. Each community laid out an outdoor worship area, known as Pleasant Grove in Canterbury, and held non-public worship services there.⁵⁰

The movement served to reinvigorate the Believers' faith through the outpouring of spiritual messages thought to be sent from Mother Ann, General LaFayette and other notables, and during the meetings many Believers assumed the persona of an Indian or Negro. Mother's Work had its desired effect, but not everyone wished to join in. The pressure to conform isolated those who refused to participate. Ayers was such a Believer. The consequences of Ayers' stubborn refusals appear in the recorded minutes of the November 1848 session of the New Hampshire Legislature. At this session, Franklin Monroe and 409 others presented a petition praying for the passage of laws that would deprive persons of their property if they chose to join the Shakers. These petitions were referred to the Judiciary Committee and the two New Hampshire communities were summoned to a hearing in December that same year. David Parker and Caleb Dyer, trustees of Canterbury and Enfield, were subpoenaed to bring "their books published and unpublished, their covenants, their agreements, their records: all, everything touching the Society be it good or evil." The hearings lasted six days and the Shakers hired Franklin Pierce to defend them.⁵¹

The petitioners expressed concerns about the Shakers' abuse of children and the elderly and the adequacy of the community's medical treatment. The ensuing testimonies clearly reflect two different perceptions of the Shakers. The Shakers were able to call in their defense many prominent doctors who supported the Society's medical practices. The hiring of Pierce, a prominent lawyer, increased their credibility, and they included several upright citizens of Concord as witnesses, including Isaac Hill. The

petitioners were able to present several compelling examples of apparent mishandling of situations and of undue punishment. But in the end, the Shakers defended themselves well and there were no consequences, only an embarrassing airing of the Shakers' dirty laundry.⁵²

Peter Ayers' name came up several times as one who was the object of scorn, derision and abuse during Shaker meetings. The Ayers story was told by the many apostates who testified. Ayers himself did not testify. No doubt the apostates might have been angry and interested in retaliating against the Shakers, but their rational and well-spoken testimonies were convincing. Their testimonies revealed aspects of Shaker life that disillusioned many and may have led to their departure.

The recounting of Ayers' mistreatment focused on his non-conformity with Mother's Work. Indeed, Ayers did present a problem for the Shakers: during meetings he frequently expressed his displeasure with the excesses of Mother's Work. James Partridge, who had left the community after ten years, testified to what he saw in 1844 or 1845:

I have seen frequent instances of abuse among them.... [I] have seen an old man, Peter Ayer, eighty or ninety years old, pitched and tumbled about the room. He was gagged by stuffing a handkerchief in his mouth. This was done because he was going to speak his mind.... Old Mr. Ayers, who was gagged, has been considered one of the founders of the Society. Latterly, since he refused to believe in inspiration, they have made him live in a house alone; he is a hard laboring man.⁵³

This account is corroborated by John Whitcher, an eloquent defender of the Society. Isaac Hill described Whitcher, a schoolteacher and a preacher, as "a man of no common attainments; he was born and educated upon this ground; and there are few men in the state who could better indite an essay or speak upon any subject than this man."⁵⁴

I know Peter Ayer; I was present at a religious meeting where something was done to him. There was a personating of Indians there, by several individuals—James Otis, Russell Tallant, John Maloon, Dr. Tripure and others. Since then Otis, Maloon, James Partridge, Tallant and Dr. Tripure have left the Society. Violent hands were laid upon this old man, Ayer; Otis was the first, several others followed. Peter Ayer remarked that he did not fellowship the proceedings, and expressed opposition; he was requested to

sit down and did so, and afterwards repeated his expressions that he did not like their proceedings; he was afterwards compelled to keep silence by violence. Otis put his hand over his mouth, and finally a handkerchief, I think—won't be certain who put the handkerchief in his mouth; they held him so till they finally let him go. Afterwards Otis or someone else seized him and pushed his head back against the plastering; I am much mistaken if Otis was not the man who did it. The Ministry were then absent, and were sent for; the excitement afterwards subsided.

Cross examined: The exhibition was a personification of Indians, and the females joined in the exercises. There are many of the men and women now in good standing there, who took part in these exercises. James Johnson, the leading elder was present, and did not object to the proceedings. I will not pretend to state distinctly that it was James M. Otis who pushed the old man's head back against the plastering, or that it was he that put the handkerchief over his mouth... I have joined these exercises myself sometimes. I did not doubt that there was a supernatural power in these representations of Indian and Negro character, but I felt doubtful about its beneficial results. I did, and do now believe that these exhibitions of Indian and Negro character were the result of supernatural power.⁵⁵

Another apostate, Samuel Garland, who had spent twenty years with the Canterbury Shakers, reported, "Old Peter Ayers used to be called a heretic; he was turned out of the Society by himself. We were ordered to abstain from speaking to him, or having any intercourse with him."⁵⁶

The year after this hearing, Isaac Hill returned to Canterbury for more interviews. Hill found Ayers, now eighty-nine years old, to be the ultimate example of Shaker self-denial, still working with his oxen building stone walls around the village. He found Ayers much the same as in his previous visit, noting that "neither the firmness of his limbs nor the fire of his eyes has as yet abated."⁵⁷

By the 1850s Mother's Work had subsided and the excesses of this period had faded. By mid-decade, Ayers once again moved out of his residence in order to help someone else, just as he had done earlier with Micajah Tucker. The sisters turned Ayers' home into a hospital for the insane and called it the "Square House." Perhaps it was Ayers' suggestion

as he reflected back on his early experiences with Mother Ann at her Square House in Harvard.⁵⁸

The Old Hunter

In 1854, Henry Blinn joined the Ministry and at thirty years old, he began to compile the information on the Old Believers that he would use years later. When Blinn formally interviewed Peter Ayers that year, Ayers was still a vigorous man, even though a few years previously he had stopped joining the brothers to mow the summer hay. He continued to tend the East Farm and he and his oxen worked at extending the stone walls around the village. Three years later he died.

Years after Ayers' death Blinn composed his stories about this Shaker hero. In Blinn's journals and *Manifesto* articles were all the stories Peter Ayers recounted to him, and every place Ayers lived was chronicled as well.⁵⁹ Blinn portrayed Ayers in an 1882 article as he last remembered him—an old Shaker still carrying his Revolutionary rifle, still determined, and still a warrior:

By many he will be better remembered as the "old hunter." With his two hounds and his trusty, old flint gun, he would follow the trail of the foxes and raccoons from morning till night, through the deep snow, without either food or rest. His outfit, however, was never wholly complete unless he was equipped with a pair of ponderous snowshoes. Should fortune so favor as to award either a fox or a raccoon, he would feel compensated for all the hardship of the day. One year, Peter had a record of 23 foxes 12 raccoons and more than a score of crows. For every fox and crow that he killed, he obtained a bounty from the selectmen of the town, by the presentation of the right ear of the one and the head of the other.⁶⁰

At the time of Ayers' death in 1857, the Church Family was near the peak of its prosperity, consisting of ninety-three sisters and fifty-four brethren. Agriculture was still the prominent source of income, particularly the dairy which produced 2930 pounds of butter and 3250 pounds of cheese that year. The Church Family sheared 450 pounds of wool and put away the necessary 500 cords of wood for the winter. Many of the 300 bushels of winter apples laid up would have come from Ayers' farm. The sarsaparilla syrup business was booming and the manufacture of brooms

And This Covenant Shall be a Sufficient Witness
for us, before all Men and in all Causes in relation
To the profession Order and Use of the joint interest
of the Church.

In Testimony Whereof We have both Brethren
and Sisters hereunto Subscribed our Names
This Twelfth Day of October, in the year of our
Lord one thousand Eight hundred and one

Benjamin Whitcher	Mary Hatch
Ezekiel Stevens	Sarah Winkley
Ladock Wright	Molly Chase
Josiah Edgely	Molly Cotton
Nathaniel Sleeper	Molly Sanborn
Benjamin Warren	Dolly Loege
Francis Winkley	Abigail Wiggins
Micajah Tucker	Lucy Williams
Nathan Loege	Sarah Parker
Peter Ayers	Sabitha Williams
John Woodley	Stephizab Williams
James Daniels	Molly Drake
Elijah Browne	Sarah Wright
William Fletcher	Lysie Wright
John Fuller	Nella Tibbets
James Fletcher	Sarah Gowan
Samson Merrill	Anney Beck

Peter Ayers' signature on Canterbury's first covenant.
(Photo by Mark Stevens. Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village)

was in full swing.⁶¹ The Canterbury Shakers had many more good years ahead of them.

Peter Ayers had set a heroic example of a committed Believer for the Shakers coming after him. He had become a legend in his own lifetime, and at his death his obituary appeared in both Isaac Hill's paper, the *New Hampshire Patriot*, and the *New York Times*, where he was remembered as both a Revolutionary patriot and one of the original Shakers.⁶²

Notes

1. Laura Endicott Sears, compiler, *Gleanings from Old Shaker Journals* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1916), 30.
2. Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 8-9.
3. Henry C. Blinn, "Scripture Text," *Shaker Manifesto* 23, no. 10 (October 1883): 229-31. Note: In later years Ayers found two other men at Canterbury Shaker village who fought at Bunker Hill—John Wadley and Henry Clough.
4. Revolutionary War records available on the internet indicate Ayers joined the Connecticut Volunteers on May 29, 1777, serving under Hyde for eight months until discharged in January 1, 1778 ("Regiments, Connecticut Line, 1777-1781," Ancestry.com). Ayers is listed as a private under Col. Samuel McClellan ("Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution"). Ayers signed a petition regarding military wages ("Petition for Wages and Allowance for Military Service to be Adjusted to an Adequate Reward, 1775-1783," Ancestry.com).
5. Henry C. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," *Shaker Manifesto* 22, no. 9 (September 1882): 200-2; and 22, no. 10 (October 1882): 219-20.
6. Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 11.
7. Blinn, "Scripture Text," 230.
8. Blinn, "Scripture Text," 230.
9. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," October 1882.
10. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," September 1882.
11. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," September 1882.
12. Henry C. Blinn, *The Life and Gospel Experience of Mother Ann Lee* (East Canterbury, N.H., 1901), 61-63.
13. Seth Y. Wells and Calvin Green, eds., *Testimonies Concerning the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with her. Through whom the Work of Eternal Life was opened this day of Christ's Second Appearing, Collected from Living Witnesses, in Union with the Church*, 2nd ed., (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons & Co., Printers, 1888), 11.
14. Eunice Bathrick, "Erection of the Square House, No. 2," *The Manifesto* 27, no. 6 (June 1897): 86.
15. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," October 1882. The battle of Yorktown lasted from September to October 1781.

16. Ibid.
17. Blinn, "Scripture Text." Blinn in "Peter Ayers" indicated that Ayers was twenty-one years old when he converted.
18. Ibid.
19. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," September 1882.
20. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," October 1882, 219.
21. Wells and Green, *Testimonies*, 184.
22. Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 43-45.
23. Henry Clay Blinn, [Church Record], 1784-1879," ms. #764, c. 1895, Collection of Canterbury Shaker Village, Inc. [hereafter CSV], p. 151. Blinn finished compiling his Church Journal in 1895. He worked on this manuscript in sections over the years as there are text references covering the period 1892-1895. During the time he was finishing his journals, Blinn was also publishing the Shakers' Society-wide periodical, and many of his stories of Peter Ayers are found in the *Shaker Manifesto* and the *Manifesto*. They were not repeated in his journals.
24. John Whitcher, "A Brief History or Record of the Commencement & Progress of the United Society of Believers, at Canterbury, Vol. 1, 1782-1871," ms #21, CSV, February, 15, 1792.
25. Four of the group, Peter Ayers, Job Bishop, Jonathan Lougee and John Fuller had been in the Revolutionary War and had met Mother Ann (Henry Clay Blinn, "Historical Record of the Society of Believers in Canterbury, N.H. 1792-1848," ms. #763 c. 1892, CSV, p. 313). John Winkley, a clockmaker, left the community in 1795 (#763, p. 54). Canterbury's meeting house was the sixth Johnson would oversee. He left Canterbury May 16, 1793 to build Enfield, New Hampshire's meeting house. Johnson later retired to the Second Family at Enfield, New Hampshire. His two sons, Joseph and James remained at Canterbury carrying on the woodworking trade.
26. Blinn, ms. #763, p. 26. Blinn finished compiling his "Historical Record" in 1892. Probably working from earlier versions of his own personal journals as well as his collection of original materials, Blinn spent at least two years finishing the work as there are references in the text to 1891 and 1892.
27. Blinn, #764, p. 137. John Fuller also traveled as a gifted singer (Blinn, #763 p. 272).
28. Blinn, #763, p. 126-27. Lougee lived by Mother Ann's advice throughout his life and at seventy-nine is described by Isaac Hill: "The present year he had undertaken to cultivate one of the most rough, forbidding spots on the whole premises, a gravelly and rock know from which materials had been dug to assist in the forming the dams. He had succeeded admirable, as the spot had already yielded a superabundance of cucumbers." Lougee was also growing on the same plot melons, corn and potatoes. "By the side and at no great distance from the old gentleman's cultivated spot was a smaller plat which he had taught one of the orphans boys half a dozen years old to lay out, plant and cultivate" (Isaac Hill, "The Shakers," *Farmer's Monthly Visitor* 2 (August 31, 1840): 116).
With the able assistance of these early brothers and others, the Second Family with its forty-four members was formally established in 1800 under the leadership of Chase Wiggins, who had held this group of Believers together since 1796. The Family flourished and in 1836 their 458 acres were used to graze 136 sheep and 21 cows. Under good financial management, the Second Family also reported having \$100,000 at interest. Four years later when Isaac Hill recorded his snapshot of Canterbury

- Shaker village there was a one-hundred-foot barn, a dairy of twenty cows and fine gardens on both sides of the road.
29. Blinn, #763, p. 58 ; Blinn, #764, p. 50; Blinn, #763, p. 58; Blinn, #763, p. 273.
 30. Blinn, *Life and Gospel Experience*, 58.
 31. Blinn, #764, p. 151.
 32. Blinn, "Peter Ayers," October 1883.
 33. Blinn, #763, p. 132-133.
 34. Blinn, #763, p. 52.
 35. Blinn, #763, p. 71.
 36. Blinn, #763, p. 62; #763, p. 71.
 37. Blinn, #763, p. 67; Isaac Hill, "A Chapter on the Shakers," *Farmer's Monthly Visitor* 11 (1849): 113-18.
 38. Whitcher, #21, p. 39.
 39. "Membership Records, Enfield, NH 1792-1877," ms #156, CSV; Blinn, #763, p. 79; Steve Taylor, "The Great New Hampshire Sheep Boom," talk given at the Salisbury, New Hampshire, Library, May 6, 2011; C. Benton and S. F. Barry, comps., *Statistical View of the Number of Sheep in the Several Towns and Counties in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York Pennsylvania and Ohio, 1836*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Folson, Wells and Thurston, 1837). The Shakers' sheep herd grew to five hundred sheep in 1869. In 1849, the Church Family had one hundred sixty sheep while the Second Family had sixty-three.
 40. Blinn, #763, p. 157.
 41. I am grateful to Mark Stevens for sharing his photographs and deed research on the Canterbury Shakers. Peter Ayers' name is found on a deed to purchase water rights from East Pond in 1817 and the following year the Shakers bought the whole 130-acre property which would become known as The East Farm, or Peter's Farm.
 42. Blinn, #763, p. 313; Hill, "The Shakers," p. 115. Ederly was also a builder and in April 1815 he was sent to the Harvard community to help their Church Family frame a shop.
 43. Deed Box #5, CSV Archives. Additionally, in 1816 Ayers accompanied Israel Sanborn to Probate Court where Sanborn was to be reappointed as guardian of Cornelius Fuller who had been placed in the Society. Zadock Wright, Josiah Ederly, Nathaniel Sleeper and Benjamin Warren were trustees during the same period. Blinn, #763.
 44. Blinn, #764, p. 79.
 45. Whitcher, #21, p. 105; Blinn, #763, p. 169.
 46. Nicholas Briggs, "Forty Years a Shaker," *Granite Monthly* 52, no. 12 (December 1920): 29-30. Briggs' description is for 1855.
 47. Isaac Hill advertised the Canterbury Shakers' Slippery Elm Powder in 1827 in the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, February 11, 1828; Theodore E. Johnson, "Canterbury in 1840, A Distinguished Contemporaries View," *Shaker Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1864): 43; *The Biography of Isaac Hill* (Concord, N.H.: John F. Brown, 1835).
 48. Hill, "The Shakers," 116.
 49. Blinn, #763, p. 303; Blinn, #763, p. 314; Blinn, "Peter Ayers," October 1882.
 50. Winfred Ross, "Reviving the Spirit," *Early American Life*, December 2004.
 51. Blinn, #764, p. 55.
 52. This experience was difficult for the Shakers, as Blinn reported in #764, p. 54: "It was

a great relief to the Believers when they learned that the passage of the Bill had been defeated in the Senate, as they had already passed through an ordeal which was no less than the spirit of the inquisition. Persons might have been found in that body of lawmakers who would have voted to drive every Believer from the state or burn them as heretics, as this was publicly expressed.”

53. *Report of the Examination of the Shakers of Canterbury and Enfield before the New Hampshire Legislature at the November Session, 1848* (Concord, N.H., Ervin B. Tripp, 1849).
54. Hill, “A Chapter on the Shakers,” 56.
55. *Report of the Examination of the Shakers*, 57-58. James Otis came from Portsmouth and was in his early thirties during this time. He joined the Society at age thirteen and left when he was twenty-six. For years he was the principal gardener of the First Family as well as a trustee and then an elder for two years.
56. *Report of the Examination of the Shakers*, 29.
57. Hill, “A Chapter on the Shakers,” 56.
58. Whitcher, #21, p. 241
59. Thanks to Robert Emlen for pointing out Peter Ayers’ house [#48] on Henry Blinn’s 1848 map of the village (CSV). Blinn followed Ayer’s living spaces until they were no more. Ayers’ final house stood until 1867 when it was sold to Elijah Knowles and hauled away to a place beyond the saw mill to be used as a dwelling house. Elijah worked for the Shakers in the mills, making Shaker washing machines. The building burned to the ground in 1920.
60. Blinn “Peter Ayers,” October 1882. This 1882 description is similar to Isaac Hill’s in his 1840 article, “The Shakers.”
61. Blinn #764, p. 131; Whitcher, #21.
62. *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, September 30, 1857; *New York Times*, September 18, 1857.