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Cover Page Footnote
This essay was awarded the prize for the outstanding presentation at the Enfield Spring Forum in May 2010.
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By Roben Campbell

Shaker enthusiasts, townspeople, and general visitors alike appreciate the Harvard Shaker cemetery for the distinctive and delightful appearance of its cast metal markers. Behind that appearance is a richly textured history that few are aware of. The cemetery started out with individual headstones, mostly of slate, but at a certain point the headstones were converted to metal markers. How the cemetery was organized and then converted reflects the changing nature of the Harvard community and the problems facing all Shaker societies making the transition from the pre-Civil Wars years of increase and expansion to a new period of decrease and decline. The Harvard Shaker cemetery avoided the widespread twentieth-century practice of converting individual burial stones to a common stone monument, and became one of only a few Shaker cemeteries today with individual headstones intact.¹

The core of this paper is a systematic exploration of burying order in the Harvard Shaker cemetery. At issue is whether Shaker burial placement shows a pattern of social arrangements.² Supplementing this analysis are the history of the cast metal marker as a practical solution to the general need for restoration in Shaker cemeteries, the story of one sister’s determination to clean up and keep order in the Harvard cemetery, and an account of the disappearing Shaker cemeteries of the twentieth century.³ Together these elements provide the context for understanding how the Harvard Shaker cemetery became the unique and extraordinary place it is today.

A Description of the Cemetery

The Harvard Shaker cemetery lay midway between the Shaker-owned properties that became the Church, South, and East Families. The entrance is on South Shaker Road in the town of Harvard (see fig. 1). Today visitors naturally walk from the entrance to the western vantage point where

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the markers face them in ten relatively neat rows running north to south with the earliest burials at the northern end (see fig. 2). Fondly called the “lollipop cemetery” by local Harvard residents and others, the cemetery charms visitors with its unusual appearance. Surrounded by woodland, and home to hawks, wild turkeys, deer, coyotes, and mice alike, it has been used as a place for contemplation and solitude since Shaker times.

A year after the Harvard village came to Gospel Order in 1792, a plot of land, set aside for a burying ground, was leveled and enclosed by a stone wall. Burials began that year even though the graveyard was not completed until 1799,\(^4\) when a gate was placed at the entrance on South Shaker Road. The cemetery proper eventually saw 314 to 319 burials, the first of which was in 1792 and the last in 1929, eleven years after the village closed. The oldest headstone is that of founding mother Hannah Kendall, which was left intact during the conversion to cast metal markers in 1879 (see fig. 3). She also has a metal marker. Seventeen other slate markers also survive that were not replaced with metal tablets. The reason for this is not

![Fig. 1. Harvard Shaker cemetery at the entrance on South Shaker Road.](Collection of Pat Hatch)
known; one speculation is that tablets were produced, but they contained inscription errors and could not be used.

Several aspects of the cemetery are important to note. A promenade of extra width separates the first five rows from the second five rows, a feature that is not unusual for older American burial grounds. The Shaker cemetery at Watervliet has such a promenade, as does the town cemetery in Harvard. Each row in the Harvard Shaker cemetery progresses chronologically with the oldest burials at the north and the newest ones at the south close to the entrance. Nature, however, has imposed limits. A large boulder in front of a tree shortens the first two rows, and is visible on the extreme right of figure 1. A similar boulder shortens the last two rows on the western edge. And, too, nature has taken its toll. The tree on the left in figure 1, at the end of row 6, which existed in Shaker times, no longer stands. The discovery of this photo was critical to understanding the large number of missing tablets and general disarray at the entrance today. The date of the photo is close to 1940, which is the year the town of Harvard purchased the cemetery from the Shakers and assumed responsibility for its maintenance.

Fig. 2. The cemetery from the west at row 10, looking east, as it is today.

(Photograph by Roben Campbell)
Fig. 3. Mother Hannah’s grave marker of hand-hewn slate.
(Photograph by Roben Campbell)
Burial Patterns

My evaluation of burial patterns depended on reconstructing row lists as accurately as possible, based on the individual inscriptions on each marker, which consisted of name, age, and date of death. The cemetery itself was not a completely reliable source of information. Tablets have been knocked down by storms and destroyed by vandalism. Furthermore, the town’s maintenance crew has replaced fallen tablets incorrectly. Three sources of information about the cemetery exist today in addition to the cemetery itself. The most recent source consulted was the large plot map of the Harvard cemetery completed by Wendell Hess in conjunction with the “Harvard Shaker Cemetery Project” conducted by the Boston Area Shaker Study Group (BASSG). This diagram provided a convenient reference tool in spite of having many omissions due to missing tablets. Figure 4 shows this diagram in a spreadsheet format. Hess’s vantage point is the entrance on South Shaker Road rather than from the west—the direction in which the markers face. North is at the top, and the ten rows appear as columns extending from top to bottom. The positions in each row are marked on the left. Each colored cell represents a burial with a marker. Rows 1, 2, 9, and 10 are short because of the boulders, as mentioned above. Other blank cells represent missing markers. Note the thick gray line dividing the cemetery in half, which represents the promenade. The Hess diagram shows 264 burials.

Local historian Elvira Scorgie also compiled a row list around 1940. Her list, totaling 314 burials, identified fifty markers missing in the Hess diagram. Fortunately Scorgie put her list together before the tree in row 6 fell (see fig. 1). The Hess diagram in figure 4 clearly shows three markers incorrectly replaced at the end of row 6 where the tree once stood, and also shows a cluster of empty cells at the bottom of rows 4 and 5 representing some of the two dozen tablets that were destroyed when the tree fell. Figure 5 shows the Hess diagram supplemented with the Scorgie list.

The third source was a death list compiled by the Shakers themselves, consisting of 319 names of Shakers that died and the families they lived in. This list did not include cemetery row and position, but was invaluable as a cross-reference for typographical errors and inconsistencies in the other sources.

The unique social arrangements of the Shakers demanded that gender and family be among the areas examined as clues to burial placement patterns. Gender was easy to determine from each Believer’s given name.
Family association was noted in both the BASSG study and the Shaker death list. The Harvard Shakers were divided into three main families: the Church, the North or Second Family, and the South or Gathering Family, plus the East Family, which was affiliated with the South Family. Leadership was added to family and gender as a possible factor in burial placement because of the high number of recognizable names who were community leaders in the rows to the left of the promenade.

What proved to be key in identifying clear patterns of burial placement was realizing that the Harvard Shaker cemetery was an artifact that spanned many years, from 1792, the date of the first burial, to 1929, the date of the

![Fig. 4. The Hess diagram on a spreadsheet (green cells indicate a burial).](chart designed by David Fay)
last burial, and there were changes in burial patterns over these years. As a starting point I noted the time period when gender and family appeared to be the primary factors governing burial arrangements. Generally the middle years of the community provided the clearest burial patterns. Row 3 began and ended as an all-sister row in chronological sequence, with the first burial in 1819 and the last in 1866. When the next sister died in 1867, she was placed in the next space available in row 4, up to this time an all brother row, which also began in 1819. The year 1819 seemed a promising year to begin a middle period of highly consistent burial patterns, while the year 1867 seemed a possible year for the close of this period with a

Fig. 5. The cemetery layout supplemented by Scorgie’s list
(green cells indicate a burial).
(Chart designed by David Fay)
breakdown of order in the cemetery. Another factor, however, entered into choosing the parameters of the middle period. The ten rows of the cemetery have fewer than a dozen anomalies in sequential order of death date. Some of these anomalies fill in space between positions, mostly at the north end where the earliest burials are located. One in particular stands out, the burial placement of Elder Grove Blanchard at the top of row 7 at his death in 1880, in a prominent position above Daniel Tiffany and the founding parents, Mother Hannah and Father Eleazer and their successors, the most honored members of the community. Further, Elder Grove Blanchard’s biological father, Seth Blanchard, was buried adjacent to him at the top of row 6, also out of sequence in 1868. Elder Grove’s
position at the top of row 7 also reflects his stature in the community. Appointed to the ministry on his twenty-first birthday in November 1818, and serving for over fifty years, he was released for ill health on his birthday in November 1871. The most stable, productive, and prosperous years of the community were under his stewardship. By chance or circumstance the middle period ended with a shortage of space in the cemetery but also marked the end of the very long tenure of one of the most prominent leaders of the community.

Thus, three time periods emerged: an early period (1792-1818), during which a consistent pattern had not fully taken shape; a middle period (1819-1871), when patterns were most clear; and a late period (1872-

Fig. 7. Patterns of burial for leadership in the early period.
(Chart designed by David Fay)
1929), when previous patterns fell apart. Figure 6 shows the layout of the cemetery in each time period. The following nine charts examine patterns of leadership, family, and gender, in that order, within each of the three periods.

Figure 7 isolates the early period to show the burials of leaders and rank-and-file Shakers. Significantly, there are two separate locations, with leaders appearing in only one location on the left. The first two people to die in the village were buried at the head of rows 1 and 2 in 1792. The third death was young Daniel Tiffany buried at the top of row 7 in 1793. He had been sent from New Lebanon to help out the community. Although not a Harvard leader himself, he lived in the meetinghouse with the Harvard

![Burials by Family in Early Period](chart.png)

*Fig. 8. Patterns of burial by family in the early period.*

(Chart designed by David Fay)
ministry. The founding parents of the community, Eleazer Rand and Hannah Kendall, probably made the decision themselves to bury him in a different location from the first two Believers. Notably, four adjacent burial positions were set aside for the founding parents and their successors beneath Daniel Tiffany. Leadership appeared to be a determining factor in burial placement in this early period as all leaders in the community were buried in what became rows 7 and 8 on the left side of the promenade.

Figure 8 represents family membership in the early period within the two burying areas. Church Family members were buried on the left side in rows 7 and 8; and most North, South, and East Family members were buried together in the first two rows. By contrast, gender was not a factor

![Burials by Gender in Early Period](image)

*Fig. 9. Patterns of burial by gender in the early period. (Chart designed by David Fay)*
for burial placement in the early period (see fig. 9).

The early period was formative in nature, reflecting an emerging community. It lasted for just twenty-six years. A precedent was set to bury Believers in two separate locations, one location reserved for leadership and most of the Church Family, and the other for rank-and-file Shakers in the other families.

The next three charts cover the middle years from 1819 through 1871, a time span twice as long as the early period, and containing the majority of deaths for the village. Figure 10 shows the burial positions of those in leadership in the middle period and figure 11 shows burial positions by family. There are several conclusions we can draw by comparing these

![Chart of Burials by Leadership in Middle Period](chart.png)

Fig. 10. Patterns of burial by leadership in the middle period.
(Chart designed by David Fay)
two charts. Most leaders were buried on the left side of the cemetery, but some were buried on the right side. As all Church Family members were buried exclusively on the left side, we can conclude that during this period leadership was no longer drawn exclusively from the Church Family. In addition, most North, South, and East Family members are buried on the right. These two charts show that most members of these families who were buried on the left were leaders.

Figure 12 shows the burial positions of brethren and sisters during the middle period, also with extremely clear results. On both sides of the promenade brethren and sisters have separate rows. The brethren were buried in the two rows adjoining the promenade on either side, that is,
rows 4 and 5 on the right, and 6 and 7 on the left. The sisters were buried in the first three rows on the right, and the last three rows on the left.

During the middle period, family and gender supplanted leadership as determining factors, with clear burial patterns reflecting Shaker social organization. Family association was the first determinant of burial placement, with the Church Family to the left of the promenade, and the other families together on the right side. This two-fold distinction follows Steve Paterwic’s division of Shaker membership into two orders: the Church Order and the Order of Families.\(^\text{13}\) The Church Order of the village was laid to rest on the left side of the promenade, and the Order of Families on the right side. Within these two locations gender was as

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**Fig. 12.** Patterns of burial by gender in the middle period.
(Chart designed by David Fay)
important as family in determining burial position.

The charts for the last period, 1872 through 1929, reveal that the burial patterns established in the middle years fell apart. Figure 13 shows leaders and rank-and-file Shakers completely mixed on both sides of the promenade. Figure 14 shows patterns of family: the Church and other families are mixed together. Figure 15 shows that burial patterns by gender had also fallen apart. Also, rows 4 and 5 on the right side, and row 7 on the left side, which were previously brothers’ rows, are now dominated by sisters. There was simply no space for separate brother and sister rows. Also note how few brethren died. All previous patterns of burial vanished in the later period.

Fig. 13. Patterns of burial by leadership in the late period.
(Chart designed by David Fay)
This later period for the cemetery, beginning in 1872, reflected a period of general decline in the village. There were a dwindling number of Believers in Harvard. The North (or Second) Family was the first family to close, a sad event which was one of many clouds hanging over the village in the years surrounding the Civil War, but the details are beyond the scope of this paper. The East Family closed shortly thereafter, and the South Family in 1895, making family distinctions irrelevant.

The population was also aging, with few brethren. The 1870 Massachusetts census lists only two brethren in the Church Family between the ages of sixteen and sixty. With the 1890 death of Elijah Myrick, the last physically capable brother, burial management went to the hired hand

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**Fig. 14. Patterns of burial by family in the late period.**

(Chart designed by David Fay)
Bliss Goss. Any semblance of Shaker order in the graveyard was lost.

To sum up, the three periods of burials show that the Harvard Shaker cemetery had order, and a very Shaker order at that. The early formative years through 1818 present a picture of a fledgling community, indebted to the dedication and vitality of its founders and other leaders. The burial patterns suggest the importance of leadership and family, defined in Shaker terms. The middle years from 1819 through 1871 present clear patterns of burial placement reflecting the unique social arrangements of the Shakers, both by family and gender. The later years from 1872 onward give a picture of a community in stress as the patterns of burial placement began to fall apart.

Fig. 15. Patterns of burial by gender in the late period.
(Chart designed by David Fay)
The Cast Metal Marker: An Ingenious Low-Cost Solution to Graveyard Restoration

Graveyards in Shakerdom were crowded and falling apart by 1872, but the most pressing problems in the villages had to do with the living. The decline in membership, particularly among the brethren, put a strain on all areas of operation. The Shakers themselves were aware of this problem. Figure 16 compares the population of the eighteen main villages between 1823 and 1874.16 What is important to note is that all the villages were losing members. Not only that, they were losing brethren at a faster rate than sisters. Figure 17 shows the low proportion of brethren to sisters in

![Population by Village in 1823 and 1874](image)

Fig. 16. Shaker population in 1823 and 1874.
(Chart compiled and designed by David Fay)
1874, potentially devastating for economies based on agriculture. Note that Harvard and Shirley had the lowest proportion of brethren in the Society.

The Lebanon ministry was forced to address the issue of graveyards due to an incident that occurred in 1872. They were on their annual round of visits to satellite villages, and arrived in Enfield, Connecticut, in September of that year. Trustee Omar Pease gave the ministry a tour of the new laundry at the Second Family sisters’ shop, which was twice as large as the family needed, and also showed them polished Italian marble for grave stones recently purchased for $700 at the cost of $16 for each headstone. The ministry was appalled.
The Italian marble monuments were never erected. Giles Avery of the Mt. Lebanon ministry immediately started work on the “Circular Concerning Graves, Grave Yards and Monuments among Believers”\(^{21}\) to set the matter straight for all the villages. Excess was not to be condoned. The issues outlined in the circular reflected two schools of thought. On one hand were those who felt that bigger or fancier markers were acceptable for those who could afford them. But the Lebanon ministry thought such privilege leaned towards “aristocracy,” which went against Shaker principles of equality, simplicity, and modesty. Opposed to them were those who thought a headstone was unnecessary and that the human corpse could be buried like a “brute animal.”\(^{22}\) The ministry considered this too demoralizing for the living. The guidelines the ministry recommended were generally a restatement of common graveyard practice since the time Shaker communities came to Gospel Order: that all grave markers should be the same size; that the size should be modest with measurements specified, not greater than 18”H x 14”W; and that inscriptions should be limited to the name of the deceased, age, and date of death. In fact, common practice for some older cemeteries was occasionally less elaborate, a few using initials rather than names of the deceased, and one small cemetery in the Mt. Lebanon village having no inscriptions at all.\(^{23}\)

The “Circular” immediately generated a flurry of activity among the Mt. Lebanon brethren. By the summer of 1873 the efforts of Amos Stewart\(^{24}\) and George Wickersham had produced a sample cast iron marker at the cost of $1.50 each, quite a savings from the polished Italian marble in Enfield.\(^{25}\)

The cast metal marker turned out to be a low-cost and ingenious solution for restoring order in the deteriorating Shaker cemeteries in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The metal marker was sampled, and adopted by one of the multiple cemeteries at Mt. Lebanon.\(^{26}\) The village cemetery at Harvard underwent restoration with cast metal markers in 1879, and was the only village cemetery to do so. Fourteen of the main eighteen societies buried their dead in village cemeteries, that is, in one location from the year the community came to Gospel Order until the last Believer was buried, thereby preserving the integrity of the entire village. The village cemeteries at Watervliet and Tyringham were restored with marble, and a few family graveyards were also restored, but most Shaker cemeteries were left to suffer the further ravages of time.
The Harvard Cemetery: Metal Tablets Replace Stone Markers

The story surrounding the conversion outlined in a little-known journal of elderly Shaker sister Susan Channel deepens our appreciation of the cemetery at a very human level.27

The circumstances under which she began the journal underscore its unusual nature. Journal writing was usually taken up as an extension of leadership responsibilities, yet Susan Channel began her journal during the week she was released from her position as assistant in the Church Elders Order in September 1872, which also coincided with a visit from the Lebanon ministry.28 The first page of entries provides an outlet for her emotionally charged disappointment and wounded pride. She wrote, “I never shall forget this day, nor the feelings that swell my heart, well nigh to breaking, I am not prepared to meet all I hear.”29 Caroline King, who was also released at the same time, gave her the spiritual guidance she needed, with Susan Channel describing Eldress Caroline as “like a tender Mother (as she had always been).”30 The journal lapses in January 1873, its purpose served.

Six years later, on January 1, 1879, Sister Susan Channel re-started the journal with another purpose in mind. Her first entries include the condition of the cemetery; a fire had swept through it the year before, and the ground was still filled with debris. “What next?”31 she comments.

What she does not mention is that Caroline King, her companion, roommate, and mentor of the past forty years, had died at her side only weeks before she began writing.32 Eldress Caroline had served in both the ministry and Church Family Elder’s Order since 1822. Susan Channel again honored her as “Mother,” after Mother Ann Lee, the highest title a sister could have.33 Sister Susan did not want the final temporal resting place of “Mother” Caroline to be a messy place. She wrote in October that she, with Elijah Myrick and Mary Hill, had begun to place the new metal tablets, as she calls them, and that they finished on December 8th, two months later. Susan Channel’s mission was accomplished, and she herself died four months after its completion. Susan Channel and Caroline King lay side by side in death, as they had walked together through life in the Shaker way. Figure 18 shows Caroline King’s tablet.

Susan Channel’s initiative to clean up the cemetery in order to honor her mentor and companion became an act of preservation. Shaker cemetery policy shifted in the twentieth century from the standards set in 1872. As villages closed and were sold, the Shakers retained ownership of the village. 

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cemeteries,34 also inheriting their neglect and need for attention. The idea of a single monument provided a practical solution to the problems of upkeep and maintenance costs. The first community to erect a common monument was probably the Church Family at Sabbathday Lake in 1905,35 followed by Enfield in 1915.36 Twelve more cemeteries converted to single common monuments in the middle years of the twentieth century.37 Other cemeteries now in private ownership have disappeared or fallen to neglect beyond repair.38

The Harvard cemetery remains unique with its metal tablets. The markers are modest, have simple inscriptions, and are identical for all, reflecting standards that prevailed from the time the communities began. Further, the original patterns of burial placement underscore the core beliefs of the Shakers, the separation of the sexes and the redefinition of family as a spiritual and economic unit rather than a biological one. Equally important, the Harvard cemetery is an artifact that is not fixed in time, but naturally incorporates the changing nature of the village, the burial patterns revealing a short formative period, a longer period of

Fig. 18. Eldress Caroline King’s cast metal tablet.
(Photograph by Roben Campbell)
stability, and a period of decline. Even though fifteen Shaker cemeteries of the original twenty-five now have common single monuments, row lists or plot maps exist at three other sites: the Watervliet cemetery, which is still intact, the Church Family cemetery at Enfield, New Hampshire, and the Church Family of Sabbathday Lake. Perhaps the burial patterns of these cemeteries can be examined to determine whether the Harvard’s patterns were unique to one village, or were part of a general practice among Believers before the Civil War.

Notes

1. The other village cemeteries with individual markers, Watervliet and Tyringham, both replaced their headstones with marble ones. Unfortunately the headstones of Tyringham cemetery were laid flat and are no longer visible. See Thomas A. and Brenda Malloy, “The Disappearing Shaker Cemetery,” paper presented to the Cemeteries and Gravemarkers Section of the American Culture Association, Toronto, Canada, March 1990.


3. Thomas A. and Brenda Malloy, “The Disappearing Shaker Cemetery.”


5. Communication with Thomas A. Malloy, author of “The Disappearing Shaker Cemetery.”


7. The date is taken from a copy of a bill of sale belonging to Steve Paterwic.


11. In addition to the families into which Harvard was divided, the BASSG study and the Harvard death list also added the Square House as another dwelling designation.
The Square House served as a home for the elderly for all the Harvard families. Mother Hannah set a precedent by choosing to reside there rather than with other ministry leaders to be close to Mother Ann. The gift of living in the Square House seemingly was extended to “Mother’s First Born Children” and other elderly residents in the community. Square House residents were buried evenly on both sides of the promenade, suggesting their burial placement was determined by where they had lived in their active years. The last of “Mother’s First Born Children,” Sarah Kendall, died in 1852. The gift was closed, and the elderly were moved from the Square House to other dwellings on July 12, 1854, as noted in the “Deaconess Journal (1853-1867),” Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Massachusetts, FM31.2. Seventy-two Harvard Shakers of all families died at the Square House.

12. “Covenants &c, Ministries, Elders, Deacons and Deaconesses,” pp. 221-69, FM1.8, Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Massachusetts. Changes of leadership were also regularly mentioned in FM31.2, and two other manuscripts from the Fruitlands Shaker archive: “Sisters Journal, 1845-1852,” FM1.11, and “Journal of the domestic work of the sisters In the Church Family, 1867-1876,” FM2.1


14. The woes of the North Family extended back to 1854 when their new dwelling was built by their trustee Augustus Grosvenor, and put the North Family into heavy debt, which demoralized Believers.

15. The 1870 Massachusetts State Census, Harvard Shaker Village, from photocopied census information in the Fruitlands Museum archive. The two brethren were Elijah Myrick, age forty-seven, and William Davidson, age fifty-six.

16. “List of Deaths Made at Hancock,” followed by several additional death dates and writings of Alonzo G. Hollister, WRHS III.B.7. This document includes statistical counts for the number of Believers in the main villages in 1823 and 1874.

17. “List of Deaths Made at Hancock.”

18. “A Register of Incidents and Events ... Kept by Giles B. Avery,” New York Public Library, reel 1, #4. September 6, 1872. I am indebted to Stephen Paterwic for bringing this journal to my attention.


22. “Circular Concerning Graves, Grave Yards and Monuments among Believers.”

23. Malloy and Malloy, “The Disappearing Shaker Cemetery.”


25. “A Register of Incidents and Events,” July 11, 1873.


33. “A Journal kept by Alfred Collier,” September 5, 1872, “Eldress Caroline like a tender Mother (as she had always been)” and July 7, 1879, “no Mother Caroline to clasp my arms around.”
34. Communication with Stephen Paterwic.
35. Communication with Br. Arnold Hadd at Sabbathday Lake.
36. Communication with Stephen Paterwic.
37. Communication with Br. Arnold Hadd. Single monuments were erected under Elder Walter Shepherd of Mt. Lebanon: Shirley in 1927; one of the multiple family graveyards of Mt. Lebanon in 1932; White Water, Ohio (date not known); and possibly Union Village, Ohio. Single monuments were also erected under Eldress Emma King of Mt. Lebanon in the 1960s: Enfield, New Hampshire, and Lebanon South Family. Sabbathday Lake as the only remaining Shaker village has continued this tradition, erecting a single monument at the Sabbathday Lake North Family graveyard, at Alfred, Maine, and the two family graveyards at Hancock.
38. Malloy and Malloy, “The Disappearing Shaker Cemetery.”