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## The Greatest Mystery of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked

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## The Greatest Mystery of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked

### Cover Page Footnote

"The Greatest Mystery of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked" made its debut on Wednesday, July 14, 1999, at the Shaker Seminar in Pittsfield under the title, "The Mysteries of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked: A New Examination of People, Facts, and Figures," and was later presented at a talk at the Tyringham Town Hall on October 4, 2003. A revised version was published in *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2003). On October 9, 2008, Paterwic gave a presentation at the Lee Historical Society titled, "In the Shadow of Lee—The Tyringham Shakers," which combined parts of "The Greatest Mystery" with additional information on Tyringham. This year he completely updated and rewrote his account for ACSQ.

# **The Greatest Mystery of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked**

*By Stephen J. Paterwic*

People in Tyringham and its environs have always viewed the Shakers of their town with curiosity. During the 1840s, for instance, stories abounded about the goings on at Mount Horeb during Shaker outdoor worship. One tale has it that Satan was cornered and cast into the ground digging deeper and deeper with clam shells attached to his hands.<sup>1</sup> Such images stood in stark contrast to the rows of neat buildings of the society, their well-run farms and mills, and the dignified appearance of individual Shakers as they interacted with the town's people.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Brother Freeman Stanley and Brother Michael McCue as trustees and peddlers were actively involved with local business interests. Yet in spite of this, there always has been a desire to really know what went on in that society located on a steep, shadowy hill above the town.

Of all the mysteries that have captured the imagination over the years, the greatest one has been that at one point in the middle years of the nineteenth century scores of young people fled the community during the depths of winter to marry or be free of the oppressive rules. Thoughts of young lovers escaping through the snow to begin a new life away from those that would break the natural spirit of the young are popular myths connected with the Shakers and feed a romanticism that many find pleasant to contemplate. Of course such flights of fancy do not often match the reality of the situation, and at Tyringham that is also the case.

The tiniest and most unique of the lesser Shaker communities was the one located in Tyringham, Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> At its numerical peak in 1840, it barely and briefly had slightly over one hundred members, more than 40 percent of whom were indentured children.<sup>4</sup> Most other Shaker societies by comparison had well over two hundred members, while the largest communities had over five hundred members with single family units larger than the entire Tyringham society.<sup>5</sup> Isolated as it was in the southern Berkshires, the Tyringham community was also the least visited

by outsiders. At nearby Hancock, Massachusetts, and New Lebanon, New York, hundreds of people called on the Shakers during the peak tourist season. At these places, visitors attended the public worship services to see Believers “go forth in the dance.” During the week, scores of customers traded with them. Seemingly forgotten Tyringham lived out its daily community life mostly hidden from view and rarely visited even by other Shakers.<sup>6</sup> In addition, when new members were needed in the community, little or nothing was done by Shaker leadership to bolster the society.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the number of Believers became so low at Tyringham that it was dissolved in April 1875. At that time, no one could have foreseen that this was the precursor of a trend that would continue to the present. Today only the society at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, remains of the once-flourishing Shaker communities.

Because Tyringham was small and isolated, and closed first, this has added to the mystery. Though Shakers lived at Tyringham from 1780 until 1875, the most well-known event of its history is the departure of twenty-three members in 1858. Indeed many claim to “know all about it,” while not being able to tell another single fact about Tyringham Shaker history. Furthermore, as some Shaker scholars have pointed out, not one Shaker manuscript speaks of the departures. Deborah Burns, for example, in *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* states that the Shakers recorded all kinds of insignificant details and commented on everything happening, but failed to mention twenty-three members leaving a Shaker community.<sup>8</sup> This silence on the part of the Shakers has helped to mythologize the event. Common lore has it that Shaker records were destroyed or altered to delete references to the departures, and that the exodus involved young adults who left to get married or were involved in a sexual scandal. One local historian has even said that the Shakers were forbidden to discuss the matter with non-Shakers. There is no documentation for such speculations, yet these myths have persisted. The purpose of this article is to fully discuss the departures of 1858 and for the first time discover the true nature of the incident. In addition, by placing this event in its proper context, other valuable insights can be gained about Tyringham Shaker history as well about Shakerism as a whole.

It is, of course, more interesting to conjure up romantic trysts among the young Shakers because the society has always been an object of speculation and curiosity. The reality is more mundane, however, and fully consistent with what we know was occurring all over Shakerdom during

the time. Shakerism had evolved from being a closed and strict society in the 1790s to a more relaxed and open one by the 1850s. In the early years, elders would have had the power to meddle with the few Believers writing diaries and journals. By 1858, this power had evaporated, and the Ministry and elders were far too busy trying to shore up a rapidly deteriorating Shakerdom than to bother with what members were privately writing at home. This can clearly be seen by looking at the transformation of the laws that governed the Shakers. The 1860 version of the Millennial Laws shows an almost complete reversal of the strict and constricting laws of 1845.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, there is a practical consideration because, officially or unofficially, many Shakers kept records by the mid-nineteenth century. How could the leaders have been able to make sure that what was written was only what was deemed acceptable? Also, if all journals and diaries were collected and examined for offending passages, how is it that this policy itself has never been noted? Finally, there is the whole question of apostates. Adults left the Shakers all of the time, and a few wrote adverse accounts of their experiences. A sexual scandal involving twenty-three people in one community would have been excellent fodder for apostate literature, yet there is no mention of anything of the sort in this genre.

These thoughts lead to a further one. If no Shaker journal records the departure of twenty-three people in 1858, how do we know it ever happened at all as all of the references are non-Shaker and “after the fact”? The best known of these is John Scott’s *Tyringham: Old and New*, published in 1905.<sup>10</sup> Another is Sister Elizabeth Thornber’s account in the *Berkshire Gleaner* in 1906.<sup>11</sup> If these were the earliest and only records of the departures, it would be tempting to dismiss them as embellishments since they date almost fifty years later. Yet an account of the departures can be found in *The Book of Berkshire*, published in 1886. This is the earliest known reference to what happened, even though it is almost thirty years after the event. By then, the Shakers had been gone from Tyringham eleven years, and the author, Clark W. Bryan, was visiting the property. He gives a cursory history of the Shakers and casually mentions that in 1858, twenty-three “ran away at one time.”<sup>12</sup>

The wording of this reference, combined with the absence of contemporary documentation of the event, give us sufficient clues to get to the truth. What if the reason that it was never recorded was that it was nothing unusual and not worth noting? In turn, how could this be unless it were a common occurrence? Looking at the various Shaker societies

in the 1850s, it is clear that in terms of demographics all of them had excessive numbers of children. This logically leads to the conclusion that the departures at Tyringham may have been from the Children's Order.<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, of all the Shaker communities, Tyringham was the most extreme in the number of pre-adults it had. In the long run, adopting children without at least one Believer parent, proved to be a very poor policy as almost every child in this category left when they came of age.<sup>14</sup> Thus if the twenty-three who "ran away" from Tyringham were children, why would this have been noticed by other societies who had hundreds of children coming and going all the time?

Another point is Bryan's use of the words "ran away." We cannot know if this use was intentional on his part as he was not a Shaker, but for Believers "ran away" would have been commonly used to refer to children who left without permission. All children received by the society were legally indentured. These documents clearly stipulated the time period a child was to remain. Running away was the most common way a child broke his/her indenture. Older members who left are generally described as having "apostatized," "seceded" or simply "left" or "went away."<sup>15</sup> Of course, Bryan's "ran away" could also imply adults who left because they could not live the Shaker life. To determine whether it was adults or children, it is necessary to examine federal and state census records.

If it is accepted that the departures occurred in 1858, then the event was halfway between the 1855 Massachusetts census and the 1860 federal census. A careful look at who was enumerated in the community in 1855 and who was there in 1860 indicates it was children who left the society, and this is likely why there was no record of a response on the part of the Shakers.

According to the state enumeration taken September 22, 1855, there were seventy-seven Shakers at Tyringham. The federal census of 1860 lists fifty-five, or twenty-two fewer. These numbers in themselves are remarkable because they show a decline of almost exactly the same number (twenty-three) said to have run away. This easy manipulation of data to prove a point cannot be allowed, however, no matter how tempting. Between 1855 and 1860, six Shakers died and people were still joining and leaving the society. Clearly, the normal fluctuations that occur in a living community cannot be ignored.

Before continuing, it may be useful to discuss how the society at Tyringham was organized. Following the typical pattern, the largest group

of Shakers was organized into the First Family of the Church, simply referred to as the Church Family. It was here that the meeting house was located. Tyringham was so small, however, that surviving evidence suggests that the Church Family was the only group of Shakers there to be fully organized into gospel order.<sup>16</sup> For a brief time a North Family may have existed as a fledgling “gathering” or novitiate family, but the name is also used interchangeably with the nearby Second Family of the Church, also simply called the Second Family. Although the Second Family had elders and trustees, it did not have its own covenant, and members used the Church Family covenant. The North/Second Family was much smaller than the Church Family and it was dominated for much of its history by the large Allen family who had been the pre-Shaker owners. This other group also functioned as a gathering or novitiate family—the place where adult converts went as well as some of the indentured children. Yet the presence of so many members from the various branches of the Allen clan reveals that unlike at other Shaker locales, Shaker order had not evolved into distinct units at Tyringham beyond the organization of the Church Family. Had Tyringham been larger, the units of Shakers outside of the Church Family would have been clearly delineated. This situation also adds to the mystery and vagueness of Shaker life in that community.

While the arrangements at the North/Second Family may have been fluid, the membership for the years between 1855 and 1860 remained quite stable, and virtually all of those who were there in 1855 were also there in 1860. The sole exceptions were four boys. Two of them, Henry and Edward Babcock, both age six in 1855, had come to the community when their mother, Sarah Ann Babcock, joined in 1853.<sup>17</sup> She left the society in May 1855, but her sons were still there in September for the state census. It is doubtful that they stayed much longer, however, because there are no individual indentures for them, and this would have been a legal necessity if their mother no longer lived in the community. In addition, it was the usual custom for children to follow their parents out of a Shaker community. Therefore, it is unlikely that they were part of the defection in 1858. The other two boys, James and Delana Jones, ages eight and fourteen in 1855, may have been brothers and their names are not listed in the 1860 federal census. That Delana Jones was part of the mass exodus is doubtful since he returned to the community in 1862 and signed a probationary covenant at the Church Family that year.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, except for James Jones, all members of the North/Second

Family can be accounted for. Identifying who left must, therefore, come from looking at the Church Family. This makes sense because although the North/Second Family lost only one member overall between the enumerations of 1855 and 1860, the Church Family declined from fifty-five members to thirty-four members. Furthermore, in 1906, Elizabeth Thornber, who lived in the Church Family, recalled thinking about whether to join the others who left.<sup>19</sup>

Matching the names of those who were at the Church Family in 1855 with those who were there in 1860 shows the decline was almost completely from the youngest portion of the family. Of those there in 1855, nine females ranging in age from nine to twenty, and ten males, ranging in age from ten to twenty-one and one adult man are missing in 1860. To these twenty may be added John Morey, a minor of unknown age who was indentured to the Church Family in 1857 by his mother Betsey Morey of Lee. In the agreement John was indentured for as long as he wished to remain.<sup>20</sup> The adult man was Thomas Fair who had indentured his three daughters to the Shakers in 1853.<sup>21</sup> He signed a probationary covenant to be a Shaker at the Church Family in 1857.<sup>22</sup> By 1860 Thomas Fair, his son Thomas, and his daughter Margaret are absent. His other two daughters, Emily and Mary Jane, both died as Shakers.<sup>23</sup>

To recapitulate, if we subtract the members of the Church who were living at Tyringham in 1855 from those there in 1860, there are twenty-one unaccounted-for names. This is two shy of the number mentioned as departing in 1858. The discrepancy is certainly due to the fact that other young people may have joined. Very few manuscripts survive from Tyringham and no journals from the Church Family for the years in question. Whether all the names can be listed is not what is essential. What is important is that the mass defection of 1858, if it occurred as oral tradition states, all on a single day, perhaps in January, involved members of the community who were between the ages of 9 and 21, the average age being 13.9 years old. This argues strongly against the popular idea that the departures had to do with something sexual. In addition, none of those who left at that time are later known to have married one another. Since the earliest reference available to the event says that they “ran away,” this may be literally what they did, and this use of the term fits with similar descriptions in other Shaker journals.<sup>24</sup>

One can only speculate as to the reasons why the children left in such a large group. What we know for certain is that many were either from



Connecticut or were related by blood. For example, at least one girl and three boys had been indentured to the Shakers by the selectmen of the town of Norwalk, Connecticut, on the same day—May 11, 1853.<sup>25</sup> Another girl had been indentured by the selectmen of Bridgeport that same year. It is very likely that not all Tyringham indentures have survived so those that exist may indicate that many more of the children had their pre-Shaker origins in Connecticut along Shaker trade routes. Furthermore, six others, three named Payne and three named Collins were siblings. Although the Collins children were from the town of Tyringham, the Paynes were from Connecticut. One other child, Samuel Day, age fifteen in 1858, was also born in Connecticut, but he was not from the poorhouse. He and his siblings had been indentured by their father in 1849.<sup>26</sup> Also he is the only one not there in 1860 who was also there in 1850.

The indentures of the children who left stated that the Shakers would be responsible for the males until they were twenty-one and the females until they were eighteen. These age stipulations, however, were higher than those a decade earlier. Indentures from the 1840s with selectmen from towns in Connecticut had used fourteen as the age of majority. The oldest Tyringham indentures did not even stipulate an age and simply stated that the agreement held “as long as they [the children] agree to live there” or for “as long as they wish to remain.”<sup>27</sup>

Since fourteen was the legal school-leaving age in Massachusetts at the time, it is not inconceivable that a large group of children, none with parents in Tyringham, would decide to strike out on their own. Perhaps the Shakers had adjusted the indentures to an older age, hoping to make children stay longer. Young people in the community could not have been unaware, however, that previous agreements had bound children to an earlier age or no particular age at all. With children making up well over half of the community in 1855, it would have been easy for a vocal group of youths to plan a massive runaway scheme, especially if adult leadership was weak.<sup>28</sup>

In general the leadership of individual Shaker communities has not received too much attention. Tyringham, being the smallest of the societies and the one with the fewest extant manuscripts, may seem elusive at best in this regard. Yet a surprising amount of information can be pieced together from what does survive.

Tyringham leadership of the 1840s and 1850s reflected the tensions of a community in great flux. As late as the 1840s, the majority of positions

were held by the children of the first converts. At the North/Second Family, for example, Leonard Allen and Eleazer Stanley served as first and second elders. At the Church, Molly Herrick was the first eldress and Daniel Fay the first elder. The change from the second generation to the third generation of leadership occurred during the Era of Manifestations (1837-1855) known as “the time of Mother’s Work.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout this period hundreds of spirits visited the Shakers communities, leaving messages, songs, and gifts. Before these heavenly visits ceased, many of the instruments who received the manifestations were in positions of power.

In May 1844, Albert Battles and Calvin Parker took over as elders of the Church. Albert Battles had been brought up from childhood in the society. Calvin Parker, ten years older, had come into the society as a young man in 1822. Parker was the leading male instrument at Tyringham and was a steady, constant presence in the community. He served willingly where needed, most notably as the caretaker of the boys. At the North/Second Family, an attempt to introduce younger leadership was made in 1850 when Alvin Davis, age twenty-six, became second elder. Like Battles, Davis had been a Shaker since he was a small child. Unlike Battles, however, Davis left the Shakers in 1851. The Hancock Ministry decided to make a clean sweep at the North/Second Family and appointed Calvin Parker to be first elder and Richard Van Deusen, age twenty-two, to be second elder. By all accounts, Van Deusen was a very capable leader. In time he became acquainted with a wide variety of economic matters. To fill the place left vacant by Parker, the Ministry chose twenty-five-year-old Michael McCue. An orphan, McCue had been brought up by Calvin Parker. Thus in 1851 Tyringham had four young male leaders, all of whom would remain faithful Shakers. This great strength of leadership on the male side becomes even more impressive considering that the young Storer brothers, Addison and Hastings, would also remain faithful until death. With a number of stalwart, older men such as Freeman Stanley and Robert Wilcox still active, and middle-aged Daniel Hulet and Willard Johnson serving capably, Tyringham had a very enviable core of strong men for such a small society.

On the female side, the same pattern may be seen, but ultimately the outcome was less favorable than for the men. For example, Desire Holt, born in 1804, became the first woman in the Church not belonging to the first or second generation to fill a position of power when she was chosen to be second eldress in 1840. Holt had been a caretaker of the girls, a

schoolteacher, and an instrument. In 1848, she was chosen as a trustee and her place taken by Eliza Chapin, age twenty-six, also an instrument during the Era of Manifestations. At this time, however, a series of incidents highlighted the problems of retaining sufficient numbers of adults to make a viable society. As the following paragraphs will show, Tyringham suffered the loss of a number of women holding significant positions including Desire Holt, Hannah Canon, and Julia Johnson. Their places had to be filled by reassigning other sisters who could hardly be spared from the jobs they already held.

Ever since the beginning, young and middle-aged members had left Shaker communities, both East and West. By the 1840s this constant trickle of departures was causing a tremendous strain because insufficient numbers of adults were taking their place and few of the children were electing to remain. What must have been very depressing for Shaker leaders was that often those leaving had been in the community for decades and were urgently needed to help run and manage the society. The most symbolic of these departures was that of Jeremiah Hawkins, age fifty, and Hannah Canon, age forty-nine. They left in 1849 to get married and caused no end of trouble for the Shakers when without permission they occupied a building near the South House on the Shaker property. A good deal of publicity and a public trial highlighted the event before the couple was forcibly evicted. Not long after this, Desire Holt, age fifty, also left. Hawkins had been second elder of the Church from 1820-1827. He then served as a trustee. Canon was an expert weaver. Holt had held positions of trust and care. No doubt she was being groomed to become a member of the Hancock Ministry. In response to the departure of Desire Holt, Wealthy Storer gave up her position in the Ministry and returned to Tyringham. By 1857, Storer was first eldress and Julia Johnson, age thirty-one, was second.

By the time of the great departure of 1858, Albert Battles had been elder for fourteen years and had been assisted by Michael McCue for seven years. On the female side, Wealthy Storer was first. A veteran of the Hancock Ministry, Storer had three siblings and her mother residing in the Church Family. Julia Johnson had grown up in the North/Second Family. Her sister Almira Johnson had died prematurely during the 1840s but was not forgotten. Almira's love of Shakerism and her patient endurance and comments during her prolonged and painful death were recorded and used didactically by leaders when instructing the young of the time.

Much, therefore, must have been expected from Julia Johnson, Michael McCue, and others of that generation. In their positions as seconds in the elders' lot, it was McCue's and Johnson's duty to mentor and otherwise supervise young adult Shakers and those teenagers over fourteen. Both of these leaders were close in age and had served previously as caretakers of children. Everything seemed ideal.

It is not possible for us to know exactly the true nature of the friendship that developed between Michael McCue and Julia Johnson. If Johnson's statements made thirty-six years later in 1893 are correct, then they fell in love. In contrast to the many who left during the decade of the 1850s, McCue and Johnson, "did not have the courage to flee the faith."<sup>30</sup> Of course, while their affair, if they had one, was going on, their restless charges, who made up over half of the community, could not have helped but be affected. This is perhaps another good reason why so many young people left in 1858. Many were old enough to leave; they had been given good training in a trade by the Shakers; they were not bound by family ties to the community; and they had imperfect role models who may have not been setting an example of contented Shakers or watching over them as closely as they should have.

Neither the Hancock Ministry nor the other elders could have remained unaware of the McCue/Johnson situation after so many young people left. That year, Michael McCue was removed to the Second Family and Calvin Parker, who had been first elder of the Church, came back to the Church as second.<sup>31</sup> No doubt it was hoped that Parker, who had been a successful caretaker of the boys in the past, would be able to salvage what was left. Julia Johnson remained as second eldress of the Church, but she must have tried to have some contact with McCue because in 1860 she was sent to live at Hancock as a "love cure."<sup>32</sup>

The departure of twenty-three young people may seem like a tremendous loss, but it was purely quantitative. Youth left the Shaker communities all the time. Indeed when seen in the larger Shaker context, it was merely an adjustment of a very unbalanced situation that had existed far too long, namely, the large-scale addition of children in proportion to the number of adult converts.

At Tyringham, the fifty-three Shakers in 1800, in spite of thirty-three deaths in the community, grew to 101 by 1830.<sup>33</sup> A closer look, however, shows a dramatic change in the composition of the community. Of the 101 members in 1830, thirty-two were less than twenty years old. This was a

four-fold increase of youth since 1820. Though overall Shaker membership peaked at slightly less than 4500 in the early 1840s, a significant portion of the total was an ever-increasing number of children taken in without their parents. Rather than aggressively pursue adult converts, leaders were happy to fill up the society with children. They were confident that these children would remain Shakers when they grew up. After the Civil War, however, when the remaining adults started to die and the young continued to leave, the number of Shakers declined rapidly. This was true for all Shaker societies, but especially true for Tyringham since that community had taken in a greater percentage of children than any other.

In addition to looking at census numbers, the changing demographic trend at Tyringham may be seen by looking at the signers of the Shaker covenants. The Church covenant was revised a final time in 1832. That year, on Christmas, fifty-eight people signed.<sup>34</sup> If it is assumed that approximately one hundred people lived there, the remaining forty-two must have been either children or recent adult converts who would have been ineligible to sign. In 1816 when the previous covenant had been renewed, sixty people signed it out of a community of approximately seventy.<sup>35</sup> In the space of sixteen years, the percentage of pre-adults had grown from less than 15 percent to over 40 percent of the society. If these numbers reflect children who had come in with at least one parent, then the numbers would not be as discouraging since the retention rate in that category of youth was far greater.

It would seem that with pre-adults making up over 40 percent of the community during the 1830s and 1840s, these numbers could not go higher if a viable community was to remain. Yet after Albert Battles became the first elder in 1844, there was an explosive growth in the number of children so that by the time of the census of 1850, overall numbers had dropped to ninety-one members but almost half were children. Finally, the percentage peaked at 52 percent of the society by the time of the state census of 1855. Exactly half of males as well as females at the North/Second Family were under twenty-one years of age. Surprisingly, however, the largest percentage of youth was among the females of the Church. In every Shaker society, the Church Family females were the “bedrock” of the community. This group was the largest single unit of adults and they provided leadership, workers, and stability. Not so at Tyringham. In 1855, 63 percent of the females in the Church were less than twenty-one years old! No other Shaker society at the time or since has had such a high

percentage of youth. This was the situation when the departure of 1858 occurred. With the people in charge of these pre-adults distracted by their own personal love lives or struggles, is it any great surprise that there were mass defections?

Why did Tyringham ever become so extreme in its demographics? The location was remote and the population of the towns surrounding the community had been declining since 1800.<sup>36</sup> Few adult converts were to be had and a reliance on children seemed the answer. After all, so many of the leaders had been brought up by the Shakers that it was logical to think that children growing up in similar circumstances would also join and remain in the society for life. The result was not what was hoped for; it was actually quite the opposite. There was constant instability caused by the continuous arrival of hordes of children and their departure after they had been painstakingly raised and given a trade and skills that could have helped the community survive. In every way, the eventual extinction of Shaker life at Tyringham was already assured by the 1850s, years before the 1858 departures. In fact, it was just a small part of a much larger pattern.

During the first five years of the 1850s, thirty-eight people ranging in age from eleven to fifty-nine years of age left.<sup>37</sup> These were serious losses because of their enormity, quantitatively and qualitatively. In all, almost 40 percent of the community left during a five-year period. Among these were four young adult men and the second eldress and trustee of the Church Family Desire Holt. During these years, nine Shakers died. It is not to be wondered, given their history, that the leaders allowed the community to be flooded with more indentured children from poorhouses and children from single parents who needed a place that would provide for their offspring. Between death and departure, 50 percent of the Tyringham Shaker colony had vanished. By the time twenty-three youth leave in 1858, the community had already been through far worse, and none of those who left were important or long-term members. As noted earlier, only one had been there in 1850.

At other Shaker communities, the young were also leaving, so what happened at Tyringham may not have seemed important enough to mention in journals. Every Shaker place could have filled many pages lamenting the departure of the young. It should be noted, however, that just because we have not found references to the departure of 1858, this does not mean it was not written about somewhere. As anyone who has

attempted to do research on the Hancock bishopric can attest, there is a real scarcity of material to be found, especially family journals that were kept by the elders, most often the second elders. Perhaps some manuscripts that have been in private hands will come to light and reveal information that is not known now. Until this happens, only extant records can be used. Even if Tyringham journals of the period are found, it would have been Michael McCue's task to keep the Church Family record. The departure of so many young people under his and Julia Johnson's care would have been a great embarrassment, not to mention the personal struggles of the pair. Would the official record really show this even if we had it to read?

As we have seen, the unbalanced community of 1855 was stabilized by the departures of 1858. According to the federal census of 1860 there were fifty-five in the society and just seventeen were under twenty-one years of age. This was much more in line with the percentages of youth in other Shaker communities. Still, however, the numbers were small. In December 1861, all of the Shakers at Tyringham were merged into the Church Family. The temporal assets were impressive and there were many capable leaders, especially among the men. Had a few Shakers been sent to live there from other societies, Tyringham may have been able to survive far longer than it did. Shaker leaders did not help them in this way, however, and on November 15, 1870, the Ministry of Mount Lebanon in consultation with the Hancock Ministry decided to close the society.<sup>38</sup>

The focus of this study has been to place the most intriguing and heretofore most mysterious aspect of Tyringham Shaker history, the departures of 1858, into a fuller Shaker context. By doing this it can be seen that the events at Tyringham were actually a microcosm of a trend that was devastating Shakerdom as a whole: the lack of suitable, permanent adult converts. Adopting large numbers of children was the major strategy all of the communities used to fill up their ranks. At Tyringham, this policy overwhelmed the little society. Whatever defects in leadership may have existed caused the situation to get out of hand. Tyringham may have been physically isolated, but it fully reflected events that were common elsewhere and its closure in 1875 was an ominous portent of things to come for the remaining societies.

## **Appendix**

A list of all those who were members of the Church Family of Shakers at Tyringham, Massachusetts, according to the Massachusetts State Census of [September 22] 1855, but who were not there for the U.S. Federal Census of [July 18] 1860. This does not include Shakers who died during the period.

Name	Estimated age in January 1858*
1. Emily Avery	20
2. Margaret Fair	14
3. Emma J. Collins	14
4. Mary Payne	13
5. Elizabeth McKensie	13
6. Reney Collins	11
7. Mary Thompson	10
8. Lucy Collins	9
9. George Banks	21
10. George McKensie	19
11. Richard Crolley	17
12. Marshall Hayzen	16
13. W. Sherman Hendrick	16
14. G. Benjamin Hendrick	14
15. Samuel Day	14
16. Charles Payne	12
17. Orrin Mills	12
18. Robert Payne	10
19. Thomas Fair	10

Average age: 13.9

Average age of females: 13

Average age of males: 14.6

Two males who joined at the Church Family in 1857 and may have also been among those who left:

20. Thomas Fair	35-40?
21. John Morey	a minor in 1857 when he was indentured



Four males who were living at the North/Second Family in 1855 but were not there in 1860:

22. James Jones	10	
23. Delana Jones	16	
24. Henry Babcock	8	Neither of these Babcocks was likely to have remained in the society after their
25. Edward Babcock	8	mother left in 1855

\*Ages for January 1858 are estimated based on the ages given in the 1855 census.

## Notes

1. Eloise Myers, *Tyringham: A Hinterland Settlement* (Pittsfield, Mass.: Berkshire Publishing Company, 1963), 83.
2. Various Shakers served the town in offices ranging from keeper of the pound to highway surveyor. For example, in 1840 Albert J. Battle was on the school committee, representing public school district #15, the Shaker school. The interaction between individual Shakers and townspeople is well documented in the records of the town meetings. These are available in the original copies in the Tyringham town hall and on microfilm at the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield.
3. The Shaker society at Tyringham was also called the City of Love, a spiritual name given to it during the 1840s.
4. Data from the U.S. Federal Census of 1840. An explanation of the problematic nature of the data on the Shakers found in this census is given in the footnote on p. 80.
5. The Shaker society at New Lebanon, N.Y., for example, had 609 members in 1864. The Church Family (both Orders) and the Second Family each had over 150 members.
6. The Ministry of New Lebanon (later called the Central Ministry) consisted of the elders and eldresses who had general supervision of all Shakers. When they visited Tyringham on August 13, 1857, this was the first time they had been there since before 1830. Reference from *A Journal or Register of passing events, continued from former Volumes, kept by Rufus Bishop (1850-1859)*, New York Public Library. Of course Tyringham did receive a number of visits each year from the Hancock Ministry, the leaders of the Shaker bishopric to which it belonged. The Shaker society at Enfield, Connecticut, was also a part of this bishopric and there were frequent visits among the Hancock, Tyringham, and Enfield Shakers. Shakers from other places, however, almost never went to Tyringham when they took special trips to see other Shaker societies.
7. Places like the Shaker society at Harvard would have closed decades earlier if stalwart and capable Shakers had not been sent there, starting in the early 1880s. Watervliet, New York, and Enfield, Connecticut, in particular, also received much-needed members from New Lebanon.
8. Burns, 143-44.

9. Actually the repressive laws of 1845 had never gained a wide acceptance and there is ample evidence that they were ignored by most Shakers as soon as they were published; yet it is the 1845 laws that those studying the Shakers love to quote because they support the popular Shaker stereotype.
10. John Scott, *Tyringham: Old and New*, Old Home Week Souvenir, August 7-13, 1905, ([Pittsfield: Sun Print. Co., 1905]), 20-25.
11. *Berkshire Gleaner*, July 18, 1906. Sister Elizabeth Thornber (1837-1920) was the last Tyringham Shaker. She “remembers the sadness of that day and how she weighed in her mind the question of going or staying, deciding to never break her Shaker faith.” Thornber was twenty-one years old when Tyringham closed.
12. Clark W. Bryan, *The Book of Berkshire, Describing and Illustrating its Hills and Homes* (Great Barrington, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan & Co.), 1886, 181-83.
13. The Children’s Order refers to the systematic way the Shaker organized the housing and education of the large numbers of children placed in their care. This was particularly true of children obtained from poor houses, orphan asylums, or relatives who did not intend to join the Shakers but wanted to leave unwanted children for the Shakers to raise. By the 1820s most communities concentrated these children at the Church Family (Center Family in Ohio and Kentucky). The children were segregated by sex and lived and worked (when not in school) in a building called a shop. Here they were supervised by a young brother or sister who acted as a caretaker. When a child reached the age of fourteen, he or she moved into the dwelling where the older Shakers lived and came under the care of the second elder or eldress. Though the Children’s Order was at the Church Family, other families also had smaller numbers of children. This was especially true of the gathering families where young children stayed in close proximity to their parents who had joined.
14. Many examples can be given that prove the point but perhaps the best is to use a well-know Shaker as an example. In over 225 years of the Sabbathday Lake Shakers, Delmer C. Wilson (1873-1961) was the only boy adopted by the Church Family without parents who stayed his entire life as a Shaker.
15. The ultimate fate of the 1,068 people who joined the Church Family at New Lebanon, New York, between 1787 and 1879 is chronicled in manuscript #1078 at The Winterthur Library, Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, “Names and ages of those who have been gathered into the church ...” The term ‘ran away’ is used just three times: twice for youths and once for a young woman twenty-four years of age. The most popular term for those who did not stay was “left.”
16. The term “gospel order” means that a full complement of elders, trustees, and deacons was in place, and that the family had its own specific covenant which legally protected members and the society as a whole. Ideally, there were two pairs of spiritual leaders called elders and eldresses and two sets of temporal leaders called trustees (office deacons and deaconesses). Family deacons and deaconesses were also appointed as needed to run the kitchen, housekeeping, garden, farm, etc.
17. Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18.
18. *Ibid.* The Church and North/Second Families consolidated at the Church Family in December 1861.
19. *Berkshire Gleaner*, July 18, 1906.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Diary of Wealthy Storey*, February 15, 1853. The Winterthur Library, Edward Deming

Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection.

22. Western Reserve Historical Society, I-A-18.
23. Emily Fair is the last Tyringham Shaker to have signed the Church Family Covenant. She survived the closing of the society and died in the Shaker society at Enfield, Connecticut.
24. Sometimes an attempt was made to track down the missing children and they were forced to return after they were caught. These would invariably leave when they came of age. Some runaways were never caught or simply not pursued and allowed to go back to relatives or friends.
25. Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Although it is not known at this time, Thomas Fair could have played a critical role in this. As an adult who had been married and lived most of this life outside of the Shakers, he would have been in a position to lead a group of children back to Connecticut. He may have taken one of his daughters, Margaret, when he left. His other daughters did remain Shakers, but neither lived a long life.
29. This is the popular title used today by both the Shakers and those who study them. Previous non-Shaker historians have called the period the "Era of Manifestations."
30. Eloise Myers, *Tyringham: A Hinterland Settlement*, (Pittsfield, Mass.: Eagle Publishing Co, 1963), 88.
31. Burns, 208.
32. Myers, 88.
33. Data from the federal census records.
34. "The Covenant or Constitution of the Church at Tyringham," Western Reserve Historical Society, I-B-65.
35. "Covenant of the Church at Tyringham," January 15, 1816, Library of Congress Shaker Collection #22.
36. The town of Tyringham had 1,712 residents in 1800. By 1840 it was 1,477. These figures are from the federal census records.
37. Information derived from comparing the censuses of 1850 and 1855, and using the well-known histories of defections such as the cases of Jeremiah Hawkins, Hannah Canon, and Desire Holt.
38. "A Register of Incidents and Events ... kept by Giles B. Avery, 1859 Oct 20-1874 Dec. 21." New York Public Library Shaker Manuscript Collection, item #4.