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Cover Page Footnote

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By M. Stephen Miller

Throughout their long history in America—more than two hundred thirty-five years to date—the Shakers have meticulously recorded many of the *facts* of their communal lives in countless journals, ledgers, account books, and similar documents. Yet, with the exception of occasional diaries and random letters of a personal nature, sisters and brethren generally left few written accounts of their private *feelings*. Even rarer are examples of communication between siblings who spent their lives separately, within and outside a Shaker community.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to purchase a group of letters from bookseller Scott De Wolfe, most of which were written by Caroline Tate, one of the last members of the Enfield, Connecticut, community—and "First in the Enfield Ministry" at the time of its closing in 1917. Several others were from a few of her close relatives, both Shakers and former Shakers. All twenty-four letters were addressed to Caroline's biological sister, Martha Emily, one of a pair of twins (the other being Lucy A.). Neither twin ever became a Shaker. The final two were written to Martha's daughter, Averill.

The twins' mother, Hannah Richmond, immigrated to the United States from England with her mother, Hannah Teasdale (or Teasdel) Richmond in April 1852.[1] By May 4, the younger Hannah, her mother, and three siblings were living at the Enfield, Connecticut, Shaker community. In 1854 Hannah left Enfield and two years later married a Scotsman, James Tate, in New York City. They had five children together: Joseph, Caroline, William, Lucy, and Martha. (See the genealogy at the end of this essay.) Early in 1861, Hannah returned to Enfield with her first three children, all of whom were born in New York City. James became a naturalized citizen in Hartford, Connecticut, in October 1856. In August 1862 he enlisted

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in the Union Army and was taken prisoner in North Carolina two years later. After ten months he was paroled but apparently never returned to his family in Connecticut.

The twins, Lucy and Martha, were actually born at the South Family of the Enfield Shaker community in August 1861, so Hannah must already have been pregnant when she returned there. The girls spent their first five years in the community before Hannah withdrew a second (and final) time by 1866, taking the twins with her and placing them in foster care in southern New Jersey. When Hannah left with the twins, Joseph, Caroline, and William remained with the Shakers. Joseph left in 1878 when he was twenty-one. William was reported to have left in 1870, when he would have been only ten years old, and no more has been reliably learned about him. Caroline, by contrast, remained a stalwart Believer until her death in 1937. As far as can be ascertained, Hannah never returned to the community, even for a visit. In fact she moved back to England and, perhaps believing her first husband to have been killed in the Civil War, married one Edward Hughes there in 1866 and had two more children with him.

Lucy never married and little is revealed about her life in these letters, other than regular references to her as "poor Lucy" and "sickly Lucy." She seems to have had an unspecified health problem from a young age. Every available census record lists her as either a "servant" or "domestic servant," and always at a different location although always in southern New Jersey. Martha's life, however, took a very different course. Ultimately, this set of correspondence came to rest with Martha's grandson, and soon before his demise was sold to an antiques dealer in New Jersey, who then offered them for sale on eBay in July 2010.

My intent here is to use selections from these letters to display the human and emotional interplay primarily between birth sisters: Caroline, a lifelong Believer who was left with the Shakers at the age of two and never left communal life, and Martha, a thoroughly secular and worldly woman who was only known to have visited Enfield twice after the age of five. Several other letters were sent to Martha from blood relations at Enfield; these further amplify Shaker and non-Shaker interactions within a larger biological family. When Enfield closed in 1917, Eldress Caroline relocated to the Shaker community at Watervliet, New York, where she died in the faith twenty years later. The slightly younger Martha, on the other hand, married and had three children but passed away six years before Caroline. Martha lived her entire life in southern New Jersey, as did

her children.[2]

The earliest letter in this group was written in May 1877 to Martha from her uncle Thomas Richmond, her mother's older brother and an on-again, off-again Shaker at Enfield. When this was written, however, he was living in the community. In this letter we learn that he had visited both Martha, at the home of her foster parents, Charles Carslake and his wife, in Columbus, New Jersey; and Lucy, at the home of her foster parents, Thomas and Lydia Kester, in Hanover, New Jersey. The two towns are near each other and not far from Philadelphia. The twins were sixteen years old at that time. He invites them to visit Enfield that summer and makes reference to no fewer than twelve of their blood relations then living at Enfield—"8 cousins, 2 aunts & 2 uncles." This is an indication of the numerical prominence of a few family groups like the Richmonds and the Copleys, who joined the community in the mid-1800s. Thomas also writes of "your mother [and] … Maggie (Margaret) & Sammy (Samuel)." We learn here that Hannah Tate's five children now have two step-siblings. Samuel Hughes was born in England in 1866, and Margaret in 1869.

In the next letter, written five years later and dated 1882, Martha's uncle Joseph Richmond—Thomas's natural brother—who had left the community four years earlier, writes from the town of Elliott, Illinois, where he had settled and served as a pharmacist. Joseph's wife has recently died and he thanks Martha here for her expressions of sympathy. "Fortunately she knew you all by reputation but never the pleasure no more of seeing you." We also learn that Martha's foster mother, the "first" Mrs. Carslake, has also recently died: "They are the guardian angels and the world is always better for such dear ones living in it." (Martha's foster father, Charles, remarried shortly thereafter.) Martha is now twenty-one. Finally, we learn here that Martha has recently visited her Shaker relatives at Enfield. It would be nearly thirty years before she did so again!

Martha's aunt Elizabeth Copley, another stalwart Shaker—and the sister of Hannah—writing two months later, confirms this visit: "It is near the close of the year [that] I have had you to visit me…which I shall always remember with pleasure." Her aunt continues with a gentle remonstrance to Martha who, not being in the faith, she hopes "the good Angels are ever with you to keep and guide you from evil so that you can have a home in our Fathers house when you leave this vain trenchant earth. Poor Child you have a great manny [*sic*] trouble before you that you know nothing about." (This sort of "guilt trip" will continue and soon intensify.)

Caroline Tate

The reverse of this sheet contains a letter of the same date in 1852, written by Emily Copley, Martha's first cousin at Enfield.[3] Here, in unambiguous terms, Martha is urged to consider joining with the Shakers for her own salvation. "My Dear Martha[,] I wish I could gather you, to come and live with me again. I think you would never have reason to regret it." The term "gather" is for Shakers synonymous with conversion. Although Martha's inability or reluctance to revisit the community becomes a constant source of dismay in Caroline's letters beginning the following year, the subject of actual conversion is never broached again quite so directly.

Another letter, again written on the same date in 1852, comes from another first cousin, Sophia Copley. This is worth quoting from at some length, for it is both poignant and judgmental.

> Several years ago I knew a little girl named Martha who lived, and if I mistake not was born at, our South Family, and had a twin Sister named Lucy. They lived and grew to be fine young girls and reached the age of 5 years when by some misfortune I can call it—nothing else—their poor mother chose to roam once again in the broad road and seek her fortune there, taking those dear little innocent lambs out of the fold, to share with her the joy or sorrow that awaited them in the outside world. I then loved those dear children with all the fervor of youth uncontaminated by worldly selfish loves, and would have rejoiced could they have shared our clean Shaker home where they could grow in innocence before God—and when their understanding became enlarged sufficiently they could consecrate their time, talents, and strength to the giver of all good…. I learn that those little girls who have grown into intelligent young women came to our home on a visit last summer when the writer was absent.

This last sentence seems to indicate that Lucy accompanied Martha on this visit.

Beginning about then, in February 1883, and ending just months before her death in 1937, almost all the remaining letters were written to Martha by her sister Caroline. The first seventeen address her as "My own Dear Sister" or "Martie." Martha's upcoming marriage to William Henry Killey is the focus of all of the letters written at this time. The ambivalent

feelings of Caroline and other Shaker members of their extended biological family about this union are clearly expressed here and this makes them particularly interesting. It seems worthwhile to quote again at length from the first of these, dated February 6, 1883:

> A week ago last Sunday the North Family folks attended meeting with us [at the Church Family, the location of the community's central meeting house] and after meeting Aunt Libby [Elizabeth Richmond Copley] came into my room and said she could not help but think of her poor little Martha when she heard any one speak of entering a married life, and the dear old soul could not refrain from tears while speaking of you.

Caroline goes on to say: "My Dear little Sister of late there has been a little pamphlet printed containing the gospel experience of Mother Ann Lee whom you may have heard spoken of while here and I send you one thinking may be [*sic*] in your leisure moments you would be pleased to read it and thereby become more acquainted with Shaker faith and doctrine and should you feel to embrace it the invitation will be ever strong." This is now only two months before Martha's wedding! The "little pamphlet" that is referred to was Henry Blinn's *The Life and Gospel Experience of Mother Ann Lee.* Published at Canterbury, New Hampshire, it went through several editions, beginning in 1882 or 1883. Caroline's statement that Martha "may have heard spoken of" may be another instance of Caroline's sarcasm. After all, Mother Ann Lee was the founder of the faith! Again and again the relatives' letters carry strong undertones of "guilt trips" side-by-side with expressions of deep affection.

Finally, in one more attempt to gain her sister's attention, Caroline ends this letter with: "I would so love to see you for a few moments at least; you know one can talk so much faster and better than they can write … but I suppose we must make the best of it now as 'what can't be cured must be endured.'" In light of her sister's attitude, it does not seem unreasonable that Martha, after reading these unequivocal reservations about her marriage plans, would have reservations of her own about visiting ever again her sister and other relatives at the Enfield community. In fact, this return trip took another twenty-nine years!

Writing several weeks later in 1883, and addressing her missive to "My Darling Cousin," Martha's first cousin Averill Ann—another daughter of

Elizabeth Richmond Copley, who like her sisters Sarah Emily and Sophia became life-long Believers—says:

> Well to tell you the truth (which is oftentimes stranger than fiction) I have real lazy fits sometimes about writing and am just now emerging from the deepest part of one of those sad flights. Can you sympathize with me? I believe you can a little for I think the disease taints the whole family, more or less.

Is this a veiled reference to clinical depression or simply an excuse for her not writing? I believe it could well be the former. In any event, once she seemed to feel that with this shared confidence she had Martha's ear, she continues:

> I learned from Mother's [Elizabeth's] letter that the day was fixed for you to leave the [foster] home which has sheltered you so long (and in good part happily) and launch yourself. I should have been delighted had your choice brought you to me and us [the Shaker community] because I should have thought your path would have been smoother and your young life sacrificed to a higher and nobler aim, but I loved your trustful prayerful spirit when you was here & I have full confidence to look to your Heavenly Father for guidance. We all wish you joy in your new life but as it is so much different from one we have chose we hardly know what to say to make you the most happy and contented.

Ten days before Martha's marriage Caroline writes: "Oh Dear Sister, were it in my power to send you heavenly graces to deck and brighten your young life, for dear one they certainly would cause the cares of life you know so little about to grow lighter." This seems more than a little condescending, considering that Caroline is only two years older and has lived within the Shaker community from the age of two, while Martha has been in the "world" nearly her whole life. Caroline follows this with a biblical reference, one that she seems to feel justifies her own Shaker life.

> Think my Darling for just one moment what a solemn step you are about to take and please read the 7th Chapter of Corinthians, especially the 34th verse. I have often read it and contemplated

> deeply upon it and have come to the conclusion that it was the better way for me to care for the things of God…. I feel that inward peace and satisfaction that the world can neither give nor take away. And I trust that when this short life is ended I shall feel unfettered joy that I have thus lived." She ends this letter with: "Now Dear Sister I must bring to a close my religious ideas & beg to be excused for encroaching perhaps upon your private affairs. But believe, it is true love that has prompted me to express myself thus.

Verses 33 and 34 in Corinthians 7 read: "But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband." Thus Paul's message served as clear justification for Shaker celibacy.

Martha's marriage to William Henry Killey took place on April 12, 1883, at the Columbus, New Jersey, Baptist Church. They had three children together: Averill Copley (1884), Ernest Alphonso (1886), and Verna Sophia (1888). Of them, only Averill never married. She devoted her life to teaching in public schools. Ernest became an accountant and Verna a homemaker.

A fifteen-year gap in surviving letters follows Martha's marriage. In the intervening time Eldress Caroline's sense of sarcasm seems to have sharpened. Her letter of February 1, 1898, opens with these words: "What can be the matter that I do not hear one word from either of my sisters. I am sure I wrote last but it has been so long I begun to think that you have passed on and I had not been made aware of it. Well if you are still alive do write and let me know how you are and what you are about. Distance does not hinder me in thinking of and loving my sisters. Dear little Lucy: I often wonder if she is the same little feeble thing or if she is growing strong as the years increase." It is interesting to note that this sickly twin outlived her healthy twin sister by almost six years! Caroline then talks about common relatives who were current or past Shakers at Enfield. "I had thought that you would try to come while Aunt Libbie [Elizabeth Copley] was living but of course she cannot live all ways.… Eldress Sophia very miserable, in fact real sick; has not had her dress on but once in three months." Elizabeth died thirteen months later. Eldress Sophia Copley, who was Elizabeth's

Martha Tate Killey

daughter, was the twins' first cousin. She passed away only ten weeks after this was written.

Finally, Caroline talks a bit about a very controversial figure in Enfield's late history, and another child of Elizabeth Richmond Copley—John W. R. Copley. He and another Shaker sister, Clarissa Kezia Copley—already six months pregnant with his child—left the community in 1866 to marry.[4] As author Debra Burns writes in *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union*, "When Trustee Richard Van Deusen died in 1893, John [W. R.] returned to the community to act as agent for the North Family [directing farm operations]. The extraordinary idea of hiring Copley, a married man, was probably conceived by his influential relatives among the Shakers.… Many members of the larger Shaker community were scandalized by the hiring of a married man and particularly by the hiring of Copley, who had scandalously left Enfield with Kezia Lyman twenty-seven years earlier." Steve Paterwic adds: "They also gave him funds to build a house just on the edge of Shaker property…. [That] infuriated Elder George Wilcox of the Church Family and displeased the Central Ministry." In early 1897, Elder George "kicked John and his family out of the house…. [but] they settled with him monetarily."[5]

While Enfield was undergoing a period of great turmoil, of which the above was but one sign, Caroline managed to visit her sisters—presumably in the Allentown, New Jersey, area where Martha had settled and Lucy was then working. She writes in October 1898: "My Dear Sisters, I was quite pleased to receive a letter from you but was also pleased as you can imagine, having visited you. It has increased my interest greatly. I'm glad that Lucy has found a good home and is well pleased with it. Also that she is situated near you as you can cheer and comfort each other…. [Aunt Elizabeth Copley] sent so much love to you and said she always regretted that she ever let you go." This is another reference to the fact that Hannah's biological family did not keep the twins at Enfield when their mother took them away and put them into foster care. "Too late now to mourn. Could you not run up this fall & see her and us. A year from now you wont miss the money. I should not think it possible for her to stand it through the winter." Elizabeth Copley indeed died four months later.

In 1890, Caroline was appointed second in Enfield's Ministry and eight years later, as first. Soon after she mentions for the first time her niece Averill, Martha and William's daughter, who was now sixteen. "Averill is getting to be such a big girl. I should think you might run away for a

few days [and visit me!] and let her run the housekeeping; it will make a woman of her to trust her. Now is the time for me to get a good visit out of you before the rush of company. Don't you think me good at planning." This visit by both Martha and Averill finally took place in the summer of 1911, twenty-nine years after Martha's only other visit there.

Once again there is a break in the chain of letters between 1900 and 1918. By then Caroline was fifty-nine and Martha fifty-seven. Also by this time Caroline had been living with the Watervliet, New York, Shakers for about a year. Here she tells Martha, "I had expected to go to Springfield Mass. this month, but on account of Canning will have to postpone the trip. A friend had agreed to drive me down to the old home: to get a view of it once more. Then may be I won't ever care to go again; if it has changed so much." The "old home," of course, was Enfield—sold to a farmer for raising shade tobacco—and the canning she refers to is among the last of the industries at Watervliet—canning beets, tomatoes, and butter beans. Clearly Caroline was not above performing manual, and even menial, labor at her new home.

On a more upbeat note, referring to the war in Europe, Caroline writes, "On Tuesday Eve, of this week, ten of us are going to the Minstrel Show. The next Eve ten more will go. The proceeds are to go for the War Chest. It is advertised as some thing unusually good. You see we do not feel so bad about giving, when there is a little pleasure to anticipate. We have certainly tried to do our bit in many ways and give when 'it hurts.' It is a large Shaker family, [but] with not much [money], only when they earn it." Caroline recounts briefly here how the Watervliet community has helped in the war effort through contributions.[6] This may seem a bit of an anomaly for a group dedicated to pacifism; in any event, the armistice was, at this time, less than a month away. She ends the letter with: "I wish you lived as near by as Newburgh [New York]; then I'm sure you would come over and see me. But it is no use in wishing, or begging you to come. Now, it would only be a waste of time and strength to write it, ha. Now be sure and let me hear if any thing new is on the docket, with you and yours. Bushels of love to every body from your Affectionate Sister, Caroline."

The last two letters under consideration were written to Martha's daughter, Averill, in March 1937. Martha has been dead now for six years. This is the year that Caroline too will die and there is a definite sense of sadness and perhaps even foreboding present in both letters. Caroline is confined now to a nursing home, believed to be near Watervliet. The first

letter begins: "My Very Dear Averill, It is Saturday PM and has snowed all day, giving me the Blues—I go with medicines enough to take, to keep me busy. The Doctor says walk, and with the medicines it will bring down the swellings, but I think I'm getting worse…. [They] don't even go down in the night. O dear I'm so tired of it all. Can hardly bend my knees. Have been taking Med every hour all day, and what has it amounted to? Just nothing; only to make me feel ugly. How does that strike you?"

Five days later she adds, "The nurse that has taken special care of me has been most attentive, but all that is being done does not take the swelling down from my legs or body. So here I sit, or go limping around. The Doctor tries to keep me hopeful, but I think it is hard work." She concludes with, "Now Dearest I think my brains are scraped clean of anything sensible, and some things not sensible. Your letters are always so interesting that I must write a little to insure another from you; how is that for selfishness?"[7]

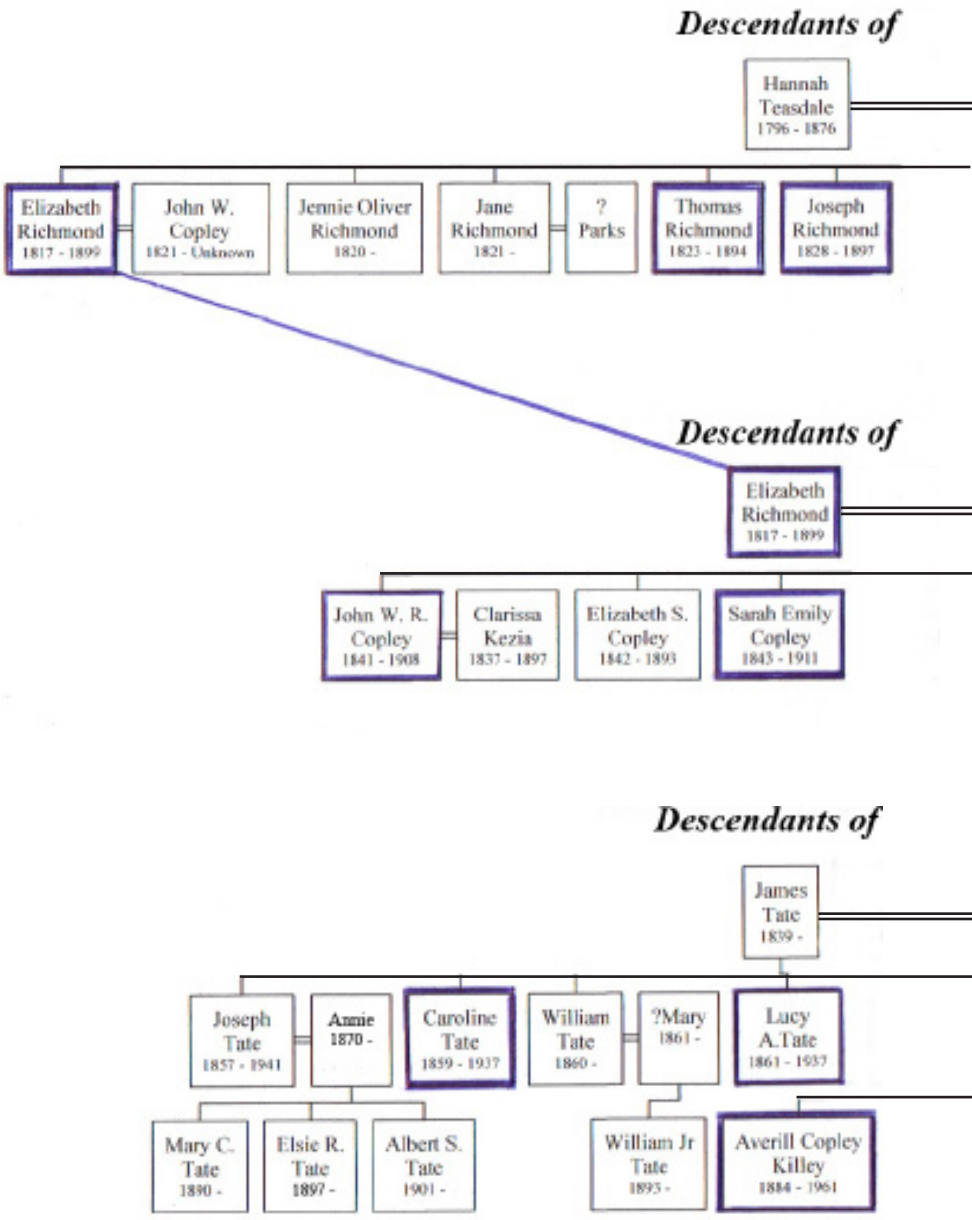
The final letter at hand was written on March 31, 1937, six weeks before her death on or about May 10. "My dear Averill, Well Easter has been and gone and I had so hoped to have a surprise Party Easter [i.e., a visit] when you was having a vacation, but the time's fast going and no Averill has appeared." Clearly, Caroline has not lost her sarcasm. "There are days that have passed by when I have tho't you never would see me again. One can never tell, may be there is nothing so good for me to look for." She continues the letter on the following day: "Thursday morn, 'Lovely and Sunny bright.' 'Aprils Fools day.' No fooling for me. Haven't heard any thing of that said around here." She closes with "I am all befudled [*sic*] in my Brain, so will have to brake [*sic*] off and fill this little space with Love, Loads and loads of it to you and all. May you pardon my foolishness for this time from your loving Auntie."

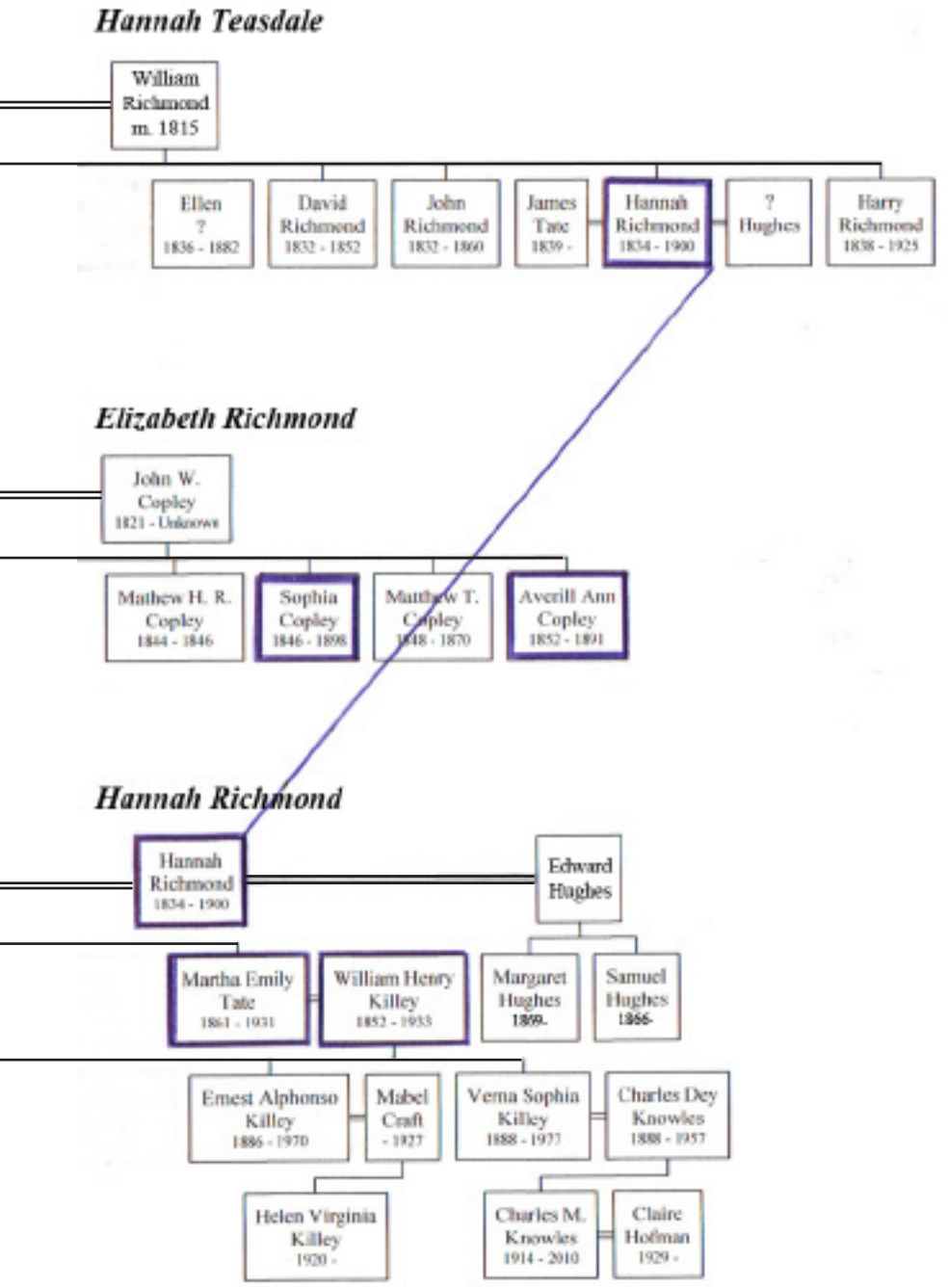
And the rest was silence.

Author's note: In an article in the July 2012 issue of the *American Communal Societies Quarterly* titled "The Richmond Family and the Shakers," Stephen J. Paterwic wrote an insightful essay about this important "biological" family unit. This present essay follows one branch of that family. I am grateful to Steve for his initial review of my transliteration of these letters and for his critical commentary. I also want to acknowledge Deborah Burns; her *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union* (University Press of New England, 1993) is an important study of the Enfield, Connecticut, community. I wish to thank Magda Gabor-Hotchkiss for many helpful comments, Amy Lynn Silverman for her scrupulous copy editing , and Barbara Gunvaldsen's genealogic expertise. Finally, I am most grateful to Mrs. Claire Hofman Knowles for encouraging my work in sharing these letters and photographs of her late husband's beloved ancestors.

Notes

1. See "The Richmond Family and the Shakers," Stephen J. Paterwic, *American Communal Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (July 2012): 143-61 for a comprehensive examination of the larger Richmond family.
2. Martha's grandson, Charles Malcolm Knowles, was the final repository of this correspondence. He sold it to an antiques dealer in New Jersey shortly before his own death in April 2010.
3. For an extended look at the Copley Family, see M. Stephen Miller, "The Copley-Lyman Shaker Family of Enfield, Connecticut: An Annotated Genealogy," *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 2007): 51-72.
4. Ibid.
5. Personal communication.
6. Caroline's nephew, Ernest Alphonso Killey, served with the American forces in Europe.
7. Magda Gabor-Hotchkiss points out that these references to her health problems late in life are "as much self-irony and sarcasm toward herself as the sarcasm in her previous letters to Martha." I agree.


Descendants of
Hannah Teasdale 1796 - 1876
Elizabeth Richmond 1817 - 1899
John W. Copley 1821 - Unknown
Jennie Oliver Richmond 1820 -
Jane Richmond 1821 -
? Parks
Thomas Richmond 1823 - 1894
Joseph Richmond 1828 - 1897
Descendants of
Elizabeth Richmond 1817 - 1899
John W. R. Copley 1841 - 1908
Clarissa Kezia 1837 - 1897
Elizabeth S. Copley 1842 - 1893
Sarah Emily Copley 1843 - 1911
Descendants of
James Tate 1839 -
Joseph Tate 1857 - 1941
Annie 1870 -
Caroline Tate 1859 - 1937
William Tate 1860 -
?Mary 1861 -
Lucy A.Tate 1861 - 1937
Mary C. Tate 1890 -
Elsie R. Tate 1897 -
Albert S. Tate 1901 -
William Jr Tate 1893 -
Averill Copley Killey 1884 - 1961


Hannah Teasdale
William Richmond m. 1815
Ellen ? 1836 - 1882
David Richmond 1832 - 1852
John Richmond 1832 - 1860
James Tate 1839 -
Hannah Richmond 1834 - 1900
? Hughes
Harry Richmond 1838 - 1925
Elizabeth Richmond
John W. Copley 1821 - Unknown
Mathew H. R. Copley 1844 - 1846
Sophia Copley 1846 - 1898
Matthew T. Copley 1848 - 1870
Averill Ann Copley 1852 - 1891
Hannah Richmond
Hannah Richmond 1834 - 1900
Edward Hughes
Martha Emily Tate 1861 - 1931
William Henry Killey 1852 - 1933
Margaret Hughes 1859-
Samuel Hughes 1856-
Ernest Alphonso Killey 1886 - 1970
Mabel Craft - 1927
Verna Sophia Killey 1888 - 1977
Charles Dey Knowles 1888 - 1957
Helen Virginia Killey 1920 -
Charles M. Knowles 1914 - 2010
Claire Hofman 1929 -