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"The Most Lamentable Tragedy": William Pennebaker and the 1871 Fracas at Pleasant Hill

By Aaron Genton

The following entry was recorded on January 7, 1871, in the Pleasant Hill East Family journal:

Tragedy! The most lamentable tragedy occurred to day at the West Family. A foolish feud that has been cherished for years between the Pennebaker & Spencer families culminated in a fracas in which Wm. Pennebaker inflicted a severe & dangerous wound on the left side of Henry Spencer's neck, with a saddler's tool called a half moon laying it open horizontally through the back of the ear, near 6 inches in length, & an inch & ½ or more in depth, which gaped open about the width of three fingers. Fortunately, however, neither the leader nor the jugular vein was severed, so that he did narrowly escape with his life. Tho William claimed that it was accidentally done in self defense.¹

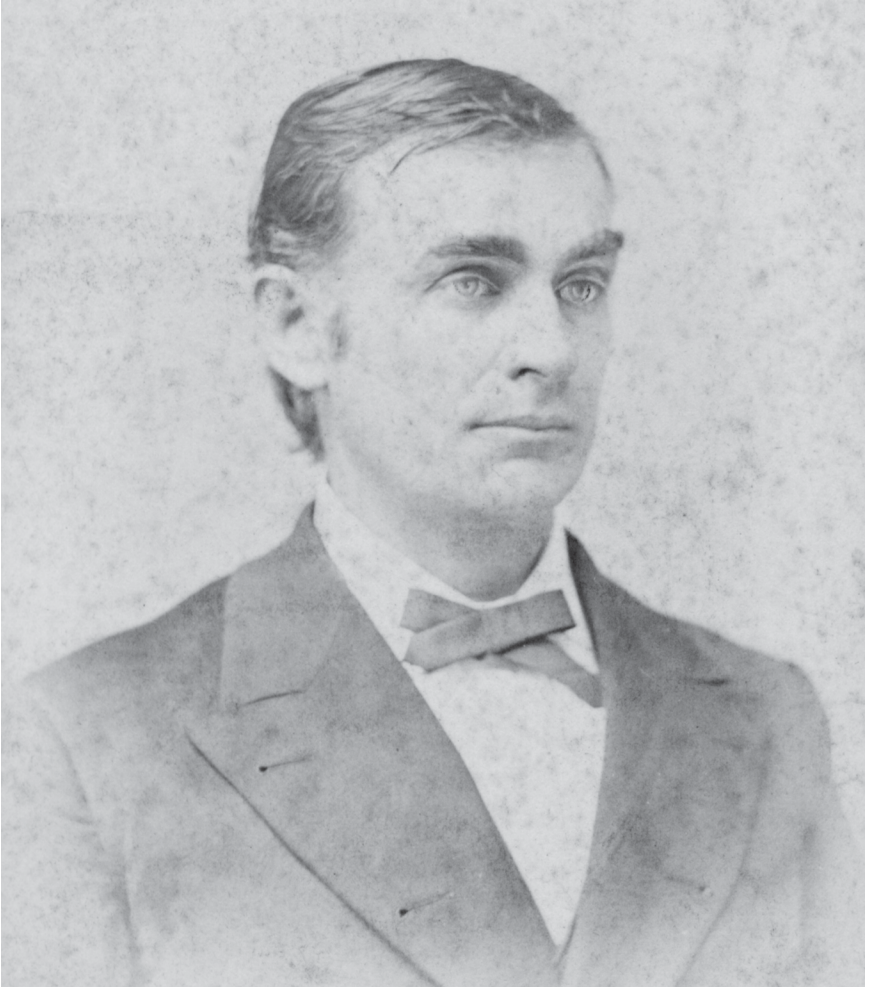
This very compelling entry opens up an interesting window into the world of the Pleasant Hill Shakers—a world filled with people trying to live for spiritual perfection, but also a world filled with very raw human emotions. This tension between spiritual desire and physical reality is likely embodied in the lives of many Shakers, but perhaps none more so than in the life of William Pennebaker. A man of good reputation, who showed great promise at Pleasant Hill, was also a man who at times engaged in questionable actions. The series of events surrounding this "most lamentable tragedy" exemplifies this paradox. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the episodes of this very unique event for the first time, while trying to understand how this incident fits into the life of this Pleasant Hill Shaker.²

William Pennebaker came to Pleasant Hill as an eight-year-old child, along with two older siblings, Francis and Sarah. At the time of their parents' sudden deaths they had a number of relatives living at Pleasant

Hill.³ In August 1849 they were brought from their old home in Bullitt County, Kentucky, by Brother John Shain, and arrived at their new home. They were integrated into community life in the ensuing years, contributing in a number of ways, but are not extremely prominent in the records. As they aged, they were given more responsibility. For the most part, William appears to have lived a normal life, at least early on. By his teenage years, he was farming, taking part in trading trips, transporting various items and people in and out of the community, looking for stolen horses, and pursuing runaway children. He also was involved in some light-hearted moments, taking various “pleasure trips” to local spots outside of the community, and on a particularly cold day, skating across a frozen pond. In October 1868, he signed the covenant, thereby announcing his intention to commit himself to the community at Pleasant Hill. In December 1870, records reveal the first of many references to William’s creative side as he and his brother Francis invented an inclined plane that would draw ice from the community’s frozen ponds. By 1871, he was functioning as a deacon. After two decades at Pleasant Hill, William Pennebaker appeared to be well on his way towards living a good Shaker life, and perhaps was beginning to carve out a nice niche for himself within the community.⁴

Henry Spencer and his seven brothers were brought to Pleasant Hill in 1859 by their mother, Ann. They also came from Bullitt County, Kentucky. The five oldest boys—Alonzo, John, Henry, Preston, and George—were placed at the West Family upon arrival, while Ann, with the youngest two, Charles and Hamilton, went to the West Lot dwelling, one of two Gathering Orders at Pleasant Hill. Six years later, the youngest two would join their brothers at the West Family. Little is revealed about this family while at Pleasant Hill, although one cryptic statement from 1865 revealed that Ann and Alonzo went to Bullitt County, and “her son may not return back with her and he may.” A couple of weeks later, William Pennebaker also traveled to Bullitt County and returned home with Ann and Alonzo Spencer, among others. This may have just been William performing his regular duties, as noted above, and nothing more. The Spencer boys remained in the community in the ensuing years, living at the West Family, as did William Pennebaker. In January 1871, William was twenty-nine years old, Alonzo was twenty, John was twenty, and Henry was eighteen.⁵

Historian Stephen J. Stein has identified the mid-nineteenth century as a time of great change among the Shakers. Beginning around 1860, Believers were “increasingly conforming to the ways of the world, having



William Pennebaker as a young man. (Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)

abandoned their radical sectarian past.” The Millennial Laws were modified to foster a spirit of accommodation and flexibility in daily life. An influx of new converts created an “increasingly diverse population” that brought their own ideas and experiences into the communities. Some of these were less than committed, leaving after a short time, which created instability within the communities. This all happened while the older generation of leaders began to pass on, giving the reins of leadership to a younger and sometimes more progressive group. The result was a “universal declension in the religious element” among the Believers.⁶

This also characterized the situation at Pleasant Hill in the years surrounding the fracas involving William Pennebaker. In December 1865, on the heels of the Civil War, the Pleasant Hill Ministry reported to the New Lebanon Ministry that “the blighting effects and demoralizing influence of the late unholy war are yet conspicuously visible on society’s surface, both in and out Zion,” and these effects most prominently attacked “the religious element at home.” A decade later, the outsider’s perspective matched this insider’s report. In 1876, the New Lebanon Ministry was appalled at the state of affairs they found at Pleasant Hill. They reported “a gift lacking, in every sense” among both brothers and sisters in the East Family, while at the West Family “insubordination & want to enterprise both temporal and Spiritual reigns supreme.”⁷

If these are true assessments of affairs at Pleasant Hill during these years, it is possible to see how such a climate could lead to an assault. And yet, tension and strife were not new phenomena in Shaker communities at this time. Nor was it the first or last time that physical violence erupted. Much has been written about the union and order that existed in Shaker communities, as well as the role that pacifism played in the lives of Believers. This, however, obscures the fact that real people with real emotions occupied the communities, and this could sometimes lead to less-than-noble behavior or actions that could be characterized as “out of union.”⁸ Certainly at a place like Pleasant Hill, and all Shaker communities, there were bound to be squabbles, or feuds, such as gave rise to this assault. This was almost inevitable in a place with people living and working in such close and constant proximity to one another. The 1871 “fracas,” however, became much bigger than a petty squabble.

There is no indication in the surviving records prior to this incident that William Pennebaker, Francis, or Sarah had a problem with the Spencer family, or vice versa. Yet, according to an entry in the East Family Journal

recorded at the time of the fracas, "a foolish feud" had been "cherished for years" between these two families.⁹ And this feud ultimately culminated in the fracas on that cold January day that left William Pennebaker beaten and bruised, Henry Spencer bleeding on the ground, neck gaping open, and the Pleasant Hill community with a problem on its hands greater than any they had experienced in years.

On January 12, five days after the violent episode, officers of the law came to Pleasant Hill and arrested William Pennebaker and the Spencers for a breach of the peace. Additionally, William Pennebaker was charged with assault with intent to kill. The following day, William Pennebaker and J. R. Bryant, one of the trustees, were able to obtain a change of venue for the trial—the trustees' office at Pleasant Hill. In addition, the proceedings would take place before a magistrate, but without a jury.¹⁰

Court was held at the Pleasant Hill trustees' office on January 17, only ten days after the event occurred. According to Pleasant Hill records, Magistrate Joseph Ewing came with four lawyers. Five Shakers were tried—William Pennebaker, Alonzo Spencer, John Spencer, Henry Spencer, and William Kidd. The majority of the proceedings took place at the trustees' office, although due to Henry Spencer's inability to leave his bed, the court sat in the brethren's sick room at the Centre Family during his portion of the trial.¹¹

Official records from this trial do not survive—at least not in state legal archives. Additionally, only two surviving Pleasant Hill manuscripts actually have any mention of these events, and due to the brief nature of these records, there are a lot of questions left unanswered about the circumstances surrounding the fight, which may have come out during the trial. As a result, details of the trial are hard to come by. But some details were reported in local newspapers. In an article entitled "The Difficulty at Shakertown," the *Kentucky People* attempted to clear up false reports by providing the following account as the correct one:

William Pennebaker is a Deacon and overseer of one of the families at Shakertown. Having directed some of the laborers to haul some manure to a certain place, the order was disobeyed. Pennebaker, while mending some harness, observed a boy driving the manure cart to the wrong place, and went down and attempted to take the reins from the boy. The boy resisted and, in the scuffle, the boy was thrown. At that moment, a Shaker, named Spencer, came up and was in the act of striking Pennebaker, when the latter turned

and struck him, cutting him badly back of the ear with the harness knife which he had been using. Then two other Spencers came up and attacked Pennebaker. Gibbons attempted to take the Spencers off, but was prevented by a man named Kidd. Pennebaker was severely beaten and kicked by the Spencers.¹²

William Pennebaker's initial defense, as recorded in the East Family Journal, was self-defense—and he maintained that defense during the trial, saying that when he struck Spencer “he forgot about the harness knife and did not intend to cut him.” The local reporter took his side, and reported that Pennebaker's “character as an up-right, truthful man, quiet and peaceable in his demeanor, removes any suspicion that he intended to do Spencer harm.”¹³

One of the most interesting statements from this report—what might be considered the “bombshell” of the trial—was the confession by one of the Spencers that “there was a conspiracy to whip Pennebaker.”¹⁴ Considering the Shaker assessment that there had been a long-standing feud between the families, it appears that they either planned to “whip” him on this day, or in the confusion of the manure cart misdirection, it was just convenient to do so at the time.

It appears that the magistrate sensed that William had done no wrong, based on the facts and possibly his character witness. After all the testimonies were heard, the Spencers and William Kidd were each fined \$20. William Pennebaker, it appears, paid no legal penalty. For the moment, at least, the issue was resolved.¹⁵

Interest in this event was almost certainly widespread, as it wasn't something that happened every day, especially in a Shaker community. As previously noted, one of the local papers, the *Kentucky People*, attempted to provide an accurate report of these events to the people of Mercer County. It was pointed out that “all the parties concerned are Shakers,” which points to the peculiarity of these events to people that were familiar with the Shakers. In addition, the *Kentucky People* report was picked up and printed verbatim in the February 4, 1871 issue of the *Cleveland Morning Herald*, and was prefaced with, “The following ... purports to be an authentic account of the recent difficulty among the Shakers.”¹⁶

The *Kentucky People* account implied that multiple published reports had circulated with less-than-accurate information. While it's not clear what exact information was being referenced, two other newspaper reports give a hint of the misinformation that was out there.

The *Kentucky Advocate*, published in nearby Danville, Kentucky, provided the following account: "Our Shaker friends usually follow the ways of peace, but some days ago, at Pleasant Hill, a Shakeress caused some trouble in the peaceful settlement which resulted in several of the brothers getting a few bruises and one of them a slight stab. Four of them were tried before Squire Ewing and fined twenty dollars each."¹⁷

Even more interesting, however, is that these events were reported as far away as Maine. The *Maine Farmer*, provided an intriguing, and quite different, summary of the events in Kentucky:

A free fight took place the other day among the Shakers of Pleasant Hill, or Shakertown, near Harrodsburg, Ky., in which fists and stones were freely used, and one of the pugnacious broadbrims was stabbed with a pocket knife by another of the fraternity. Such an occurrence would have seemed almost incredible had it been located in any other State than Kentucky. No arrests were made, as it was the first fight the Shakers had indulged in for several years.¹⁸

Meanwhile, back at Pleasant Hill, it is easy to imagine that this was the talk of every brother and sister in the community. Surely everyone knew about it. Because of this, there was one more step to take before the matter was closed. There was still the spiritual issue, as these men had engaged in a sinful act completely contrary to acceptable Shaker behavior. At 7:30 P.M., on January 19, the Church, along with the elders of the Gathering Order gathered at the meeting house, where "William Pennybaker came forward at the lower end of the alley & made a public acknowledgement of the grievous sin he had committed, & asked the forgiveness of the Meeting, which was cordially granted, & thus peace was restored for the present." The Spencers were excluded from the meeting and Francis Pennebaker, William's biological brother, did not attend. It is unclear why, and leads one to wonder how widespread the restoration of peace really was.¹⁹

In the ensuing days and months, a flurry of relocations related to the Spencers is perhaps illustrative of how uneasy life still was following these events. On January 21, Alonzo Spencer was moved from the West Family to the West Lot.²⁰ In March, John Spencer moved from the West Family to the Center Family and Alonzo absconded from the West Lot.²¹ In April, Charles and George Spencer moved from the West Family to the East Family, leaving the West Family devoid of any more Spencers.²²

In May, Henry left “for the pleasures of this wicked world” and four days later James, Charles, and George were taken away by their mother, leaving John as the only remaining Spencer at Pleasant Hill.²³ William Kidd also absconded in May, leaving William Pennebaker and John Spencer as the only remaining participants of the fracas at Pleasant Hill.²⁴ It may have appeared that the unsettled situation of the previous months had finally resolved itself and everyone could return to a pre-fracas way of life. However, beyond these movements, there was activity taking place that would leave the proverbial hatchet unburied for the months to come.

On May 24, 1871, Levi Ballance, who kept a series of journals at Pleasant Hill, recorded, “Today I attended Circuit court in Harrodsburg. It was on the same case that we had tried at our office the 17 of last January.”²⁵ There is no other mention of this, or the subsequent events, in any other Shaker records. But these actions led to an entirely new trial for William Pennebaker.

According to the Mercer County Circuit Court Order Book, on May 25, 1871 an indictment was entered against William Pennebaker and he was charged for malicious wounding by the grand jury. The entry reveals the following: “The Grand Jury of Mercer County in the name and by the authority of the Commonwealth of Kentucky accuse William Pennabaker of the crime of Malicious Wounding with the intent to kill, committed as follows, the said William Pennabaker did...willfully and maliciously cut, strike and wound Henry Spencer, with a Saddlers Knife, a deadly weapon, with the intent to kill him...Witnesses Levi Ballance, Wm Kidd, Alonzo Spencer, John Spencer.” A bench warrant was issued against Pennebaker and he was admitted to bail for \$300. William appeared, with his security J. M. Wilson, and was allowed to be free on bail, but had to make himself amenable to the orders and process of the court. He was to report back in November for his trial.²⁶

During the following months, the prosecution and defense worked on their respective cases by lining up witnesses and preparing their arguments. Subpoenas were issued for both Shakers and non-Shakers to appear on behalf of the plaintiff and defendant. It was almost certainly a tense summer at Pleasant Hill as they looked ahead to the trial. Whereas the January hearing was practically over before it had started, this time they experienced a waiting game of six months. While no surviving Shaker records have any mention of this trial, there are a number of questions that naturally arise in consideration of the dynamics it must have created in

the community. What was the prevailing sentiment within the community about William Pennebaker and the Spencers? Were some bitter that Pennebaker had been acquitted in January? Had some sided—and would they continue to side—with the Spencers? Were the witnesses coached by the Ministry in any way? Was there any inner turmoil between heart and head—between telling the truth or helping a Shaker brother? Would they perhaps be the one responsible for Pennebaker's conviction? Might they say something that would lead to a guilty verdict and one to five years in jail? Indeed, the atmosphere had to be tense at Pleasant Hill during these months. And on top of all of that, it can be assumed, Pennebaker continued to live his daily life at Pleasant Hill, interacting as he always had with the rest of the community, which would have been a very difficult thing to do.²⁷

Arguments in the *Commonwealth of Kentucky vs. William Pennybaker* were presented November 20-22, 1871. Unfortunately, there isn't a transcript, or even something comparable, that survives with the legal records. But from the documents that do exist, it is possible to determine some elements of each side's argument. As the charges indicate, the prosecution set out to prove that Pennebaker willfully and maliciously cut and wounded Henry Spencer with the intent to kill. Henry Spencer was presented as a good citizen who observed William Pennebaker in a threatening attitude with a deadly weapon, who was doing his duty to prevent the commission of a crime. If the jury believed that Spencer stepped in to act as a preserver of the peace, then he was entitled to the same protection as any other officer of the law, and Pennebaker was guilty. The prosecution also tried to say that Pennebaker had other means at his disposal to escape, regardless of how much he believed himself to be in real or apparent danger. The defense, on the other hand, had to create doubt that Pennebaker's actions were done intentionally, willfully, and maliciously, and not in necessary self-defense. They brought up the conspiracy to attack Pennebaker, how he acted in self-defense using means that at the time seemed necessary and proper, and that he accidentally and without malice cut Spencer in attempting to ward off the blows.²⁸

On Wednesday, 22 November, after the rest of the arguments were heard, members of the jury retired to their room, and returned shortly thereafter with the following verdict: "We of the Jury find the Defendant Wm Pennabaker not Guilty."²⁹ Years later, Pennebaker would say that this verdict was received with cheers from the entire courtroom.³⁰ Pennebaker

was subsequently released from custody and discharged, free to return home with his good reputation intact—yet now with a black mark on his record.

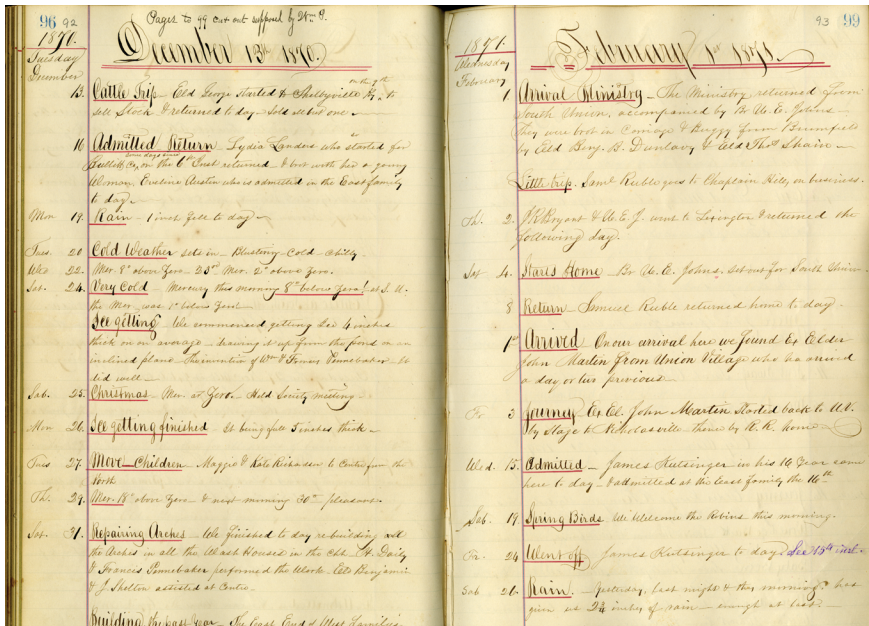
Upon his return to Pleasant Hill, William Pennebaker seems to have picked up right where he left off. However, it must have been a very strange situation to return home with all of these events in his past—perhaps constantly hanging over his head. It's not clear how William felt about this upon his return to society life after the trial. But his actions may provide a clue.³¹

At some unknown point, pages were removed from Pleasant Hill journals—pages that correspond to the dates of these events. The Ministerial Journal is missing pages 97-98 which contained a record of all of January 1871. The bottom of page 104 has been cut off, leaving a gap between the dates of May 20-27, the dates that Pennebaker was indicted by the Mercer County Grand Jury. Also missing are pages 111-12, creating a gap between October 19 and November 23, 1871, which leaves no record of his second trial by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. On the top of page 96 is a marginal, yet cryptic notation that says, "Pages to 99 cut out supposed by Wm P."³²

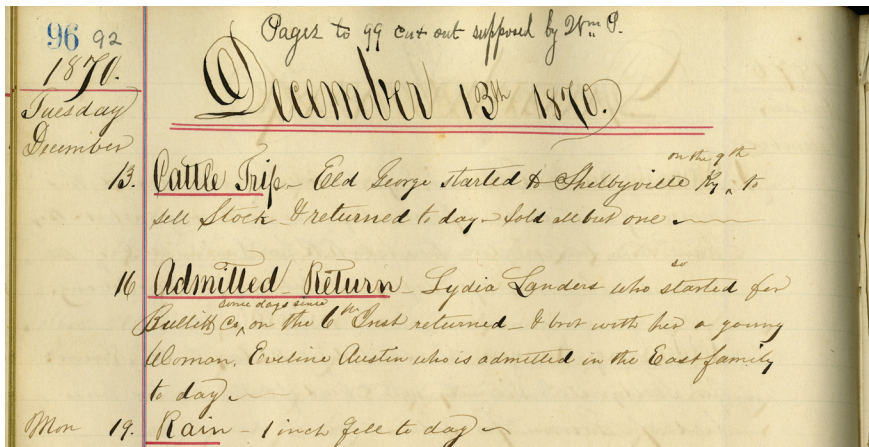
Also, in the journal kept by West Family member Levi Ballance, pages 144-45 are gone, which covered the events of January 1-18, 1871. This same volume records daily events in the community until October 31, 1871, and the next volume picks up on November 23, 1871. Ballance was dedicated to recording something on a daily basis, so it appears unlikely that he took most of November off from record-keeping. Instead, the page recording the events of November 1871 has likely been removed. While there is no notation connecting William Pennebaker to the removal of these pages, it is probably not a coincidence that the same pages for nearly the same dates are missing from both of these journals. If Pennebaker removed portions of one, he probably did so from the other as well.³³

What does this mean? If Pennebaker did this, the action indicates his willingness to purge this information from the community record, perhaps at a high cost. It certainly appears to be an editing job, rather than a removal of the pages for a legitimate purpose. If these pages were needed for the trial, Pennebaker could have requested them and surely they would have been provided. There would seem to be no reason for these pages to be removed without the knowledge of the scribe.

The fracas involving Pennebaker is not mentioned in any other



The Pleasant Hill ministerial journal, missing pages 97-98 which cover events of Jan. 1-18, 1871. (Pleasant Hill Shaker Records, volume 16. Courtesy of The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky.)



Detail of the top of page 96 of the Pleasant Hill ministerial journal, with annotation at the top indicating that it was assumed that Pennebaker removed the missing pages. (Pleasant Hill Shaker Records, volume 16. Courtesy of The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky.)

surviving records until nearly thirty years later, and this mention also sheds some light on how the fight affected Pennebaker. In the late nineteenth century, the Pleasant Hill Shakers were involved in a number of court cases related to their financial situation, and one case involved a familiar face who was a former Shaker. In *J. T. Spencer and G. M. Bonta vs. Society of Shakers at Pleasant Hill Kentucky*, John Spencer, now an ex-member of the community and a business associate of the Shakers, charged the Pleasant Hill trustees for failure to pay back a loan of money. The trustees claimed that they never signed the note and that it was fraudulent, and the case revolved around the resolution of this dispute. The court ultimately decided for the Shakers, but in making this determination, from September 1898 to May 1900, a large number of people were examined by the court. John Spencer, as a plaintiff, of course, is prominent in these proceedings. As a notable member of the community in these later years, William Pennebaker is also heavily involved and is questioned multiple times. As a common tactic, the character of both men is called into question in order to discredit any credibility they might have. During his questioning, Pennebaker provides very clear, lucid answers during the entire proceedings—except on one subject. At one point, the fracas of 1871 is brought up as a way to cast doubt on his character. When questioned concerning the incident, the change of Pennebaker's tone is unmistakable, as if he would rather talk about any subject other than that.

298. Dr. Pennebaker were you ever indicted by the Grand Jury of Mercer County?

A. Yes sir.

299. When?

A. 1872.

300. What for?

A. For defending myself from an attack of a lot of thieves in this place.

301. What was the charge of the indictment?

A. Assault, I think.

302. Wasn't it malicious cutting and wounding?

A. I don't remember just the form.

303. Wasn't it a penitentiary offense that you were charged with in the indictment?

A. Perhaps it was.

304. Don't you know?

- A. No sir.
305. You have been on unfriendly terms with Spencer ever since, haven't you?
- A. I have had nothing to do with him.
306. Haven't even spoken to him?
- A. No sir.
307. You were indicted for malicious cutting and wounding Spencer's brother a boy about 15 or 16 years old were you not?
- A. I think the indictment was for breech [sic] of the peace.
308. Please answer my question.
- A. I don't remember the wording of the indictment.
309. You were indicted for malicious wounding and cutting J. T. Spencer's brother a boy about 15 or 16 years old?
- A. I don't remember the particulars of the indictment.
310. Wasn't it proven on the trial that you did cut his brother a boy about 15 or 16 years old in the neck with a shoe knife?
- A. I don't remember what was proven.
311. You don't remember what any witness stated about you cutting him with a shoe knife?
- A. There was nothing denied about it.
312. I simply ask you if it wasn't proven on the trial that you cut his brother, a boy 15 or 16 years old in the neck with a shoe knife?
- A. I don't remember the admissions.
313. I don't ask you what was the admissions. I ask you if on the trial in the Mercer Circuit Court it was not proven that you cut Spencer's brother a boy 15 or 16 years old in the neck with a shoe knife?
- A. I don't remember the particulars of what was proven.
314. Didn't you admit on the trial that you did cut him in the neck with a shoe knife?
- A. I don't remember the admissions.

315. You were tried for cutting Spencer's brother?
A. I was tried for assault.
316. I ask you again if you were not tried for cutting Spencer's brother a boy 15 or 16 years old in the neck with a shoe knife and if it wasn't so proven?
A. I don't remember the particulars of what was stated at the time.
317. You don't remember how it was shown that you assaulted him?
A. I don't remember what it was. I don't remember the particulars of the proceedings of the court.
318. You don't remember whether you said on that trial that you cut him in the neck with a shoe knife a boy 15 or 16 years old.
A. I don't remember that I did.
319. Is it not a fact that you did cut Spencer's brother a boy 15 or 16 years old in the neck with a shoe knife?
A. I did.³⁴

Why would Pennebaker dodge the question so many times before finally affirmatively answering? He was, after all, acquitted of any wrongdoing twice—and yet he seems to dance around the issue. There are two possibilities. One possibility is that his lawyers told him to not talk about this issue if it came up. As a result, he avoids the topic as much as he truthfully can, until directly asked whether he cut Henry Spencer. Another possibility for his avoidance is because this was an event that he would rather not remember and not discuss—an event that he not only tried to remove the physical evidence of, but also tried to wipe from his own memory—an event that bothered him, because it wasn't consistent with who he believed he was or who he was trying to be. This would be consistent with the act of journal editing that he was supposedly involved in. While each possibility has merit, the actual motive is not immediately obvious.

This fracas, and subsequent events, capture an interesting side to the life of William Pennebaker—a man with a good character and reputation who became involved in an un-becoming controversy. This was a surprising turn of events based on everything that is revealed about him prior to the fracas. He showed great character and great promise—but he was

attacked, caused bodily injury to one of his attackers, and was taken to court for the wounding. He then appears to attempt to remove and avoid any mention of the incident. How can these two dynamics be accounted for?

Perhaps William Pennebaker realized he was a complex individual—a person with strong character, but with a troublesome side. He knew what he wanted to be, what he strove to be, and was successful at that. But problems arose, problems that weren't consistent with his character, yet problems that were driven by his very human nature. And none of these problems was more representative of this conflict than the "most lamentable tragedy" that occurred in January 1871. And so, he tried to hide it and tried to remove it from memory.

On that fateful January day, William Pennebaker was attacked by a number of other members of the community, and a fight ensued. When the dust settled, Pennebaker held a bloody knife in his hand while one of his attackers lay on the ground with a severe and dangerous neck wound. This set off a series of unique events at Pleasant Hill and served as an important moment in the life of William Pennebaker, a Shaker who might be fittingly called, just like this tragedy, "most lamentable." But that would be just half of his story, as he put his hands to work and for the rest of his life dedicated himself to the survival of the Shakers at Pleasant Hill.



William Pennebaker with a group of Shaker sisters. (Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)



William Pennebaker as a young man with three Shaker sisters. (Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)



William Pennebaker standing on the steps, with his brother Francis (far left), and a number of visitors. (Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)



William Pennebaker with two women.
(Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)



William Pennebaker. (Courtesy of Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill Collection)

Notes

1. "East Family Journal, 1856-1871," January 7, 1871, Pleasant Hill Collection.
2. Shaker scholars, in recent years, have shown a new interest in the individual lives of the people that once made up this group. See, for example, Glendyne Wergland, *One Shaker Life: Isaac Newton Youngs, 1793-1865* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006) and Carol Medlicott, *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2013). The result of examining them as individuals, rather than as a faceless whole, is a more layered and complex understanding of people who are often classified as "plain and simple," or as Stephen Stein described it, "warts and all." See his *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 430. William Pennebaker was indeed unique among his Pleasant Hill comrades, and his life story is deserving to be told in its entirety one day.
3. Their mother, Nancy Hatfield, had left Pleasant Hill in the 1830s, during a time of widespread apostasy in the community. She left behind a number of relatives, including members of the Shain family, who were some of the earliest members of Pleasant Hill. It is unknown if she arranged for the children to come to Pleasant Hill, but it is likely that her family ties were still strong enough to bring this about. Biological ties among Shakers, and the role that such connections played within and without Shaker communities, is a subject that, while noted by scholars, has yet to receive a focused treatment. See Marc A. Rhorer, "The Rise and Fall of Mother's Southwestern Branch: A Socio-Demographic Study of the Shaker Community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, 1805-1910" (M.A. Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1996), 8-10; Suzanne R. Thurman, "*O Sisters Ain't You Happy?*": Gender, Family, and Community among the Harvard and Shirley Shakers, 1781-1918 (Syracuse University Press, 2002), 7-8, 48-49; Patricia L. Goitein, "Strangers Along the Trail: Peoria's Shaker Apostates Enter the World," *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (January 2010): 3-19; Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, 177-201; and Stephen J. Paterwic, *Tyringham Shakers* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2013), 21.
4. For Pennebaker's arrival at Pleasant Hill, see "Family Journal Book A, January 1, 1843 – October 19, 1871, Kept by order of The Deaconesses of the East House," August 14, 1849 [Mss. BA S527 vol.4], The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky (hereafter, FHS). References to daily work, as well as recreation, can be found throughout Shaker journals; see, for example, "A Temporal Journal, September 17, 1853 – October 7, 1864," April 23, 1849 and May 12, 1860 [Mss. BA S527 vol.10], FHS; James L. Ballance, "A Journal, April 1, 1854 – March 31, 1860," September 3, 1855 and April 21, 1856 [Mss. BA S527 vol.11], FHS; Kitty Jane Ryan, "A Journal kept In the Centre Family, 1839-1860," January 6, 1860, Pleasant Hill Collection; James L. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events, April 1, 1860 – December 31, 1866,"

- October 1, 1864 [Mss. BA S527 vol.12], FHS; and James L. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events, January 1, 1867 – October 31, 1871," August 27, 1868 [Mss. BA S527 vol.13], FHS. For his covenant signing, see "Church Record Book A," October 6, 1868, Harrodsburg Historical Society, Harrodsburg, Kentucky (hereafter, HHS) and "East Family Journal," Pleasant Hill Collection. For the inclined plane, "A Ministerial Journal, October 24, 1868 – September 30, 1880," December 24, 1870 [Mss. BA S527 vol.16], FHS, and "East Family Journal," Pleasant Hill Collection. Although there is no record of his appointment as a deacon in Shaker records, he is referred to as such in several contemporary sources. See "The Difficulty at Shakertown," *Kentucky People*, January 21, 1871; "Deacon's Journal, June 16, 1851 – September 12, 1884," January 7, 1871 [Mss. BA S527 vol.9], FHS; and James L. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events, November 23, 1871 – July 31, 1880," February 16, 1872 [Mss. BA S527 vol.14], FHS, and "A Ministerial Journal," FHS, v. 16.
5. Ballance, *Journal*, November 30, 1859, FHS, v. 11; Ballance, "A Journal or record of events," June 24, 1865, October 24, 1865, and November 9, 1865, FHS, v. 12. Ages are based on a community census from "A Ministerial Journal," January 1869, FHS, v. 16.
 6. Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 200-222.
 7. Quotes from F. Gerald Ham, "Pleasant Hill: A Century of Kentucky Shakerism, 1805-1910" (M.A. Thesis, University of Kentucky, 1955): 230; and Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 250. This time of spiritual turmoil has been noted by various Pleasant Hill scholars, and noted as going hand-in-hand with the "decline" of the Pleasant Hill community. See Ham, "Pleasant Hill: A Century of Kentucky Shakerism," 230-74; Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers* (Pleasant Hill Press, 1968), 82-92; Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 78-94; and Rhorer, "The Rise and Fall of Mother's Southwestern Branch," 45-56.
 8. Failure to acknowledge this can lead to a romanticized or sentimentalized view of the Shakers, as Stephen Stein observes in *Shaker Experience in America*, 429-430. The strife and tension that was present in the communities was often found among the leadership, or by conflict between leaders and would-be leaders of the rank and file who could not get their way. See Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, 228-256; Marc Alan Rhorer, "Believers in Dixie: A Cultural Geography of the Kentucky Shakers" (PhD Dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, 2007), 61-73; Deborah E. Burns, *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 133-38, 182-84; Michael Volmer, "Insights Into Harvard Shaker History," *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 2013): 175-94; and Stephen J. Paterwic, "Voices That Heard and Accepted the Call of God," *American Communal Societies Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (January 2015): 19. Carolyn B.

Piercy claims that "Never in the history of Shakerism have any of its members resorted to physical force when threatened or molested even to death" in *The Valley of God's Pleasure: The Thrilling Saga of the North Union Shakers* (New York: Stratford House, 1951), 228. However, in *Sisters in the Faith: Shaker Women and Equality of the Sexes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 118-19, Glendyne R. Wergland relates how a number of Shaker sisters at the Canaan, N.Y. community forcibly threw a brother into the street when they became fed up with his harassment. Also, Mary Dyer claimed to be forcibly removed from an Enfield building by a number of Shakers, male and female. See Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, *Domestic Broils: Shakers, Antebellum Marriage, and the Narratives of Mary and Joseph Dyer* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 43. Incidents such as this one at Pleasant Hill and in other societies show that even sometimes strife and tension could turn more serious, to the point of violence, arson, or even murder. See Julia Neal, *By Their Fruits: The Story of Shakerism in South Union, Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 248-49; Cheryl Bauer and Rob Portman, *Wisdom's Paradise: The Forgotten Shakers of Union Village* (Wilmington, OH: Orange Frazer Press, 2004), 238-40; Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers*, 86. Even at Pleasant Hill the previous year, Elder Benjamin Dunlavy was attacked as he labored with one young man to correct his behavior. See "East Family Journal," November 29, 1870, Pleasant Hill Collection, and "A Ministerial Journal," FHS, v. 16. Many thanks to my colleagues on the Shaker Studies listserv for help understanding this context.

9. "East Family Journal," January 7, 1871, Pleasant Hill Collection.
10. *Ibid.*, January 10-14, 1871, Pleasant Hill Collection.
11. *Ibid.*, January 17, 1871. Little is revealed about William Kidd, outside of his involvement in this incident. He was nineteen years old at this time. He ran off from Pleasant Hill two years prior, returned at some point, participated in the fight, and left for good in the coming months. See "A Ministerial Journal," July 3, 1869 and May 8, 1871, FHS, v.16.
12. "The Difficulty at Shakertown," *Kentucky People*, January 21, 1871.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*; "Deacon's Journal," January 17, 1871, FHS, v. 9 and "East Family Journal," Pleasant Hill Collection.
16. "The Difficulty at Shakertown," *Kentucky People*, January 21, 1871; *Cleveland Morning Herald*, February 4, 1871.
17. *Kentucky Advocate*, January 27, 1871.
18. "Items of General News," *Maine Farmer* 39, no. 9 (February 4, 1871): 2.
19. "East Family Journal," January 19, 1871, Pleasant Hill Collection. It is possible that the Spencers were unrepentant in this situation, which would likely lead to their exclusion from this community meeting.

20. Ibid., January 21, 1871.
21. "A Ministerial Journal," March 7, 18, 1871, FHS, v.16.
22. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events," April 11, 1871, FHS, v.12.
23. Ibid., May 11, 15, 1871; "A Ministerial Journal," May 15, 1871, FHS, v.16.
Hamilton, the youngest of the seven brothers, had died of a fever in September 1870. See Ballance, "A Journal or record of events," Sept 30, 1870, FHS, v. 12.
24. "A Ministerial Journal," May 8, 1871, FHS, v. 16. John Spencer remained at Pleasant Hill until March 1887 when he left following charges of dishonest business practices. See Henry N. Daily, "A Journal, May 1, 1885 – May 15, 1889," October 7, 1886, March 13, 1887, and September 10, 1887 [Mss. BA S527 vol. 21], FHS. William Pennebaker remained until his death in 1922.
25. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events," May 24, 1871, FHS, v. 13.
26. Mercer County Circuit Court Order Book 42, p.239-40, Shelf G02/L1, Item No. 42, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky. The initial hearing of this case in January by Magistrate Ewing was just that—a preliminary hearing. As a magistrate, he only had jurisdiction over misdemeanor offenses, not felonies, as this was. A magistrate was able to hear the merits of a case, and decide whether it should be referred to the circuit court if the evidence was there. After hearing the testimony and examining the evidence, Ewing apparently didn't consider it worthy to pass along, and levied the fines based on misdemeanor offenses. This judgment, however, did not preclude the victims from taking it to the grand jury themselves if they weren't satisfied with the magistrate's decision, which is what appears to have happened. My thanks to Kurt X. Metzmeier of the University of Louisville Law Library for this very valuable insight.
27. *Commonwealth of Kentucky vs. William Pennebaker*, Mercer County Circuit Court Record C-203, Shelf G02/B6, Item No. 49, Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky. These questions are pure speculation; however, they are interesting to consider as we try to understand the details of daily life in a Shaker community. Julia Neal imaginatively does this in *By Their Fruits*, 57.
28. Mercer County Circuit Court Order Book 42, p. 471-472; *Commonwealth of Kentucky vs. William Pennebaker*, Mercer County Circuit Court Record C-203.
29. Ibid.
30. *J. T. Spencer and G. M. Bonta vs. Society of Shakers at Pleasant Hill Kentucky*, p.361. Copies of this material are available in the Earl Wallace research material, Box 6, Pleasant Hill Collection.
31. While this study mainly focuses on William Pennebaker, the same questions could be asked concerning John Spencer, who continued to live at Pleasant Hill, and Levi Ballance, who was one of the witnesses for Pennebaker's

indictment by the Mercer County Grand Jury, who also lived at the West Family Dwelling with Pennebaker. The implications of these events on the community are entirely unclear, but are perhaps possible for future areas of study.

32. "A Ministerial Journal," FHS, vol. 16. There are also later pages removed from this volume, p.129-130 and 167-168, which also contain statements indicating that William was the supposed culprit. These pages do not appear to correspond to the events of the fight, and the reason for removal remains unclear.
33. Ballance, "A Journal or record of events," FHS v.13 and v.14. This leaves the "East Family Journal," Pleasant Hill Collection and "Deacon's Journal," FHS, v. 9 as the only extant Shaker records that mention these events.
34. *J. T. Spencer and G. M. Bonta vs. Society of Shakers at Pleasant Hill Kentucky*, p. 349-51.