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Abijah Alley of Long Hollow: Preacher, Shaker Apostate, and Backwoods Prophet of the American South

Nancy Gray Schoonmaker and Christian Goodwillie

Abijah Alley had the gift of prophecy. He also wrote, painted, farmed, and traveled. Sources tell us his peregrinations took him to the Shaker community at Union Village, Ohio; later to Cincinnati and across the Ohio River to Covington, Kentucky; to visit the president in Washington; to Europe; to the Holy Land; to Texas. And that when he returned to his family's Appalachian property he constructed a replica of King Solomon's temple for his home.

A mercurial religious visionary, Alley blazed an irregular trail through the first half of nineteenth-century America. Despite his remarkable life he has thus far eluded biographers. This article attempts to bind together the disparate threads of his pilgrimage into a narrative telling of his spiritual journey.

Abijah Alley (1791–1866)¹

Who were the Alleys to whom Abijah was born in 1791 in southwestern Virginia? The first Alley to settle in colonial Virginia was Francis, the son of an Anglican vicar. By 1642 Francis Alley was living at Jamestown with his wife and children. Francis's descendants, fruitful multipliers, moved steadily westward seeking farms of their own. Abijah Alley's grandfather and siblings moved with their families from Henrico County to land along the Clinch River around 1776.²

Because the indigenous population was hostile, the Alleys settled near Fort Blackmore. Abijah's grandmother, Azby Christian Alley, watched helplessly from afar as her daughter Fanny and five grandchildren were killed and scalped by Indians near the fort in 1777. Polly Alley, another relative, was captured by Indians and taken to Canada.³

These Alleys were members of the Anglican Church, but there were no Anglican parishes in southwestern Virginia. There were no churches at all. Until congregations were formed, settlers had to read their Bibles and work out salvation for themselves with occasional visits by itinerant preachers.

One of these, Baptist preacher Squire Boone, wintered in this part of southwestern Virginia in 1773–1774. Baptist churches were the first in the area and Baptists remained the dominant denomination. Their Calvinist creed dictated that God had identified the elect, those He would save, before He even created the world. The Alleys were not Baptists, though. The *Minute Books* of the Stony Creek Baptist Church show that Thomas Alley, Abijah's father, was received by experience and baptized on April 24, 1802. Thomas is the only Alley in the church records. Almost from the start, Thomas Alley's relationship with church authorities was uneasy. By July 1804, he had twice run afoul of church discipline, and two months later was "excluded from membership with this church for denying the name of a Baptist and the final perseverance of the saints in grace."⁴ The Alleys were deeply religious, but on their own terms.

During Abijah's childhood, the religious awakenings spawned by the 1801 Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky swept in waves through the region. Evangelical religion as preached at revivals offered free grace, the *assurance* of salvation to those whose inner light guided them to conversion. Apparently, the Alleys accepted the evangelists' message of free grace.

Some time between 1804 and 1810, three things happened that altered the course of Abijah Alley's life: members of his family embraced free grace and salvation through the guidance of their inner light, his mother died, and he embarked on his life-long avocation of preaching. A descendent of one of Abijah's uncles claimed the Alley family had "more preachers than any race of people I know of." He recalled that one of those uncles was a Methodist preacher and another—along with Abijah's father Thomas—belonged to "the New Light Faith but later took the name of Christian."⁵ Abijah Alley marked out his own trail. As a young man, while his brothers married and farmed, he traveled to Union Village, Ohio, to become a Shaker.

Like many others who abandoned their homes and families to seek out the Shakers, Abijah Alley's evangelical conversion had left him hungering for a more deeply satisfying religious experience. The Shakers had sent missionaries into the region as soon as they heard about the revivals in Kentucky because their greatest successes in gaining converts in New England had been among those awakened by revivals but still seeking.

To join the Shakers was to enter "a divine order akin to the primitive church of Jerusalem."⁶ Shakers believed that Mother Ann Lee, founder of their sect, was the second coming of the Christ spirit in female form. Thus it was imperative to embrace their true faith because they were living in

the millennium. Mother Ann claimed religious authority on the basis of visions and revelations, and the Shakers continued to value such spiritual “gifts.”

Abijah Alley arrived at Union Village in 1817, became a Shaker in 1818, and departed April 1, 1829, a few days after his thirty-eighth birthday. Abijah’s younger sister Fannie, a widow at thirty-one, came to Union Village in 1827; she became a member in 1829 but left soon after. Catherine Alley, wife of Abijah’s older brother James, did not arrive until 1828, and in 1830 was the last of the Alleys to leave. The arrival of James and Catherine’s son Daniel was not recorded; he was a young man when he and Abijah left in 1829.⁷

Abijah Alley was one of many who left the Shakers, unable to reconcile interpreting scripture in their own light with the authoritarianism of Shaker leadership. Abijah was also struggling with celibacy. Strict separation of the sexes was enforced after it was revealed to Shaker founder Mother Ann Lee that Adam and Eve’s coitus was in fact the original sin. Some apostates claimed that the Shakers had assured them they would in time be content practicing continence, but it was not so. Alley’s schism created turmoil among the Shakers, who recorded that Alley demanded that the current elders step aside. Alley claimed leadership for himself (as had Mother Ann) on the basis of divine revelation and spiritual gifts.

Evangelical Christians and the Spirit(s)

Alley and his fellow evangelical Christians had received profound assurance of their faith through cathartic religious conversion and the experience of the Holy Spirit. Most evangelical Christians came from a long tradition of people who took their faith in Christ as Son of God and Redeemer of mankind seriously and wanted more than anything to worship God as He would have them. They yearned for the immediacy and purity of faith as experienced in the “primitive” church of Jesus Christ and the apostles. Their goal: finding favor in God’s eyes and securing a place in heaven. In the century after Gutenberg unleashed the printed word, Bibles began to appear everywhere. By the American Revolution, anyone who could read could study the sacred word of God that had once been closely guarded and meted out by the clergy. Historian Nathan Hatch dubbed it *The Democratization of American Christianity*. People had the right and responsibility to map for themselves God’s plan for their lives and salvation.⁸

Abijah Alley was a transitional figure, as were the Shakers, in the emergence of Christian Spiritualism. The distinctions between Christian Spiritualists and evangelical Christians can be murky, but chronology is helpful in clarifying the similarities and differences. Christian Spiritualists did not appear as a self-defined category until the early 1850s. They believed it was possible in the here and now for the faithful to receive visions and revelations from spirits of the dead. Some also believed that they were capable of the sort of miraculous feats performed by Christ and the Apostles, especially healing.⁹ Christian Spiritualists, for purposes of this discussion, were those who embraced communion with the departed as in some way part of God's plan and interpreted Scripture as supporting their views. A smattering of southern Catholics and Jews were also Spiritualists. Some were lifelong believers in communication with spirits and angels, some only briefly so, and some merely curious. That most truly believed they might communicate with spirits invites explanation.

By the early nineteenth century, everyone in the American South would have known of one or more groups positing the reality of contact with spirits and/or angels: animal magnetists, Shakers, Swedenborgians, practitioners of *voudon*, and relatives or servants who passed on folk beliefs or supernatural lore. Methodists probably knew that John Wesley had believed it still happened. Though they increasingly wished to distance themselves from it, ministers were well aware that many of the pioneers of evangelical religion had believed in the prophetic power of dreams and the activity of ministering spirits. Many early evangelicals were what Ronald Knox called "ultrasupernaturalists," people who shared "a cluster of beliefs and practice that place great stock in dreams, visions, supernatural impressions, miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, and gatherings at which people fall in a swoon and are left lying in a trance, sometimes for hours or days." Evangelical Christians in the first decades of the nineteenth century fell along a continuum that ran from acceptance of those precepts to a strict denial (reinforced by clergy) that such things have had divine approval since the close of the apostolic "Age of Miracles." Christine Leigh Heyrman has remarked on the "frequency with which ... spirits took corporeal shape and accosted southern whites. Some were spirits of the unquiet dead" while "[o]ther spectral presences remained more mysterious." These spirit visits were sometimes interpreted by evangelicals as divinely inspired, sometimes as manifestations of Satan's trickery.¹⁰ The evangelical conversion experience itself was the assurance

of salvation through a profound sense of the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit. As evangelical denominations in the South won more prosperous and educated converts, they tended to move away from demonstrative religious expression and distance themselves from the dreams, visions, and supernatural experiences that had been a part of early evangelicalism. Counter to this evangelical trend, Shakers from the late 1830s into the 1850s experienced an Era of Manifestations in which visions and communications from (and possession by) spirits were widespread and until 1842 were performed in meetings open to the public. Millenarian sects—most notably the Millerites who abandoned their worldly goods and assembled on a hilltop for the second coming that failed to take place in the 1840s, thrice—encouraged many rational people to consider religious outsider groups a pitiful laughingstock.¹¹ By the time Christian Spiritualists appeared, they like most mid-nineteenth-century Christians eschewed the more dramatic manifestations of religious ecstasy but did believe messages from those in heaven could help to guide them in their spiritual journey on earth. More orthodox evangelical ministers were vehement in their proscriptions against communing with the spirits of the dead.

What made some people so susceptible to the message of the Shakers, the Swedenborgians, and the many other millennial Christian sects that coalesced in the Early National Period? What attracted them to animal magnetism or magical promises with roots in Africa? What made them so inclined to accept as divinely inspired the many different keys to the Kingdom of Heaven these prophets held out to them, or to believe themselves prophets? Understanding that they were part of a predominantly Anglo-American culture emerging from a world where natural phenomena were interpreted as signs of God's favor or displeasure and the most popular books were the Bible and almanacs is the foundation of our answer to those questions.¹² Reconstructing what we can of the lost stories of spiritual seekers such as Abijah Alley helps us to map the cultural and spiritual streams that carried them along in their journeys of faith to belief in communication with the unseen world.

The Shakers

In England, the earliest Shakers were influenced by reports of the mystical powers of the French Prophets, the remnants of an uprising of pietistic Huguenots in the years after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, making Protestantism once again illegal in France. The French Prophets

migrated to London in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Claiming apostolic gifts, they attracted a good deal of both interest and opposition. Like many prophetic sects, they revealed that the end of the world was near. They reminded people of Quakers. A British clergyman's denunciation of the French Prophets printed in 1708 began with a sermon delivered thirty years earlier excoriating the Quakers and concluded with a section giving this account of the Prophets' religious exercises:

The Shakings of their Heads, Crawling on the Knees, Quakings and Tremblings; their Whistlings, Drummings, Trumpettings; their Thundrings, their Snuffling; Blowing as with a Horn; Panting, and Difficulty of Breathing; Sighing and Groaning; Hissing; Smiling; Laughing; Pointing with the Finger; Shaking the Hand; Striking; Threshing; as likewise their perpetual Hesitations; Childish Repetitions; unintelligible Stuff; gross Contradictions; manifold Lies; Conjectures turn'd into Predictions; their Howling in their Assemblies like a Dog, and being in all manner of Disorder.

These strange manifestations, the Prophets' vaunted power to cure illness and raise the dead, and their ragged, unworldly appearance fascinated many, but their following dissipated after the promised resurrection of a deceased member failed.¹³ The "religious exercises," however, had been seen before and would be seen again and again.

The French Prophets' influence on English popular religion continued. In 1739, they appeared among new Moravian and Methodist societies. Thirty years later, sixty years after the heyday of the French Prophets, a small sect in Manchester was dubbed Shaking Quakers by a newspaper noting the sect's "uncommon mode of religious worship." By the late 1760s Ann Lee, the daughter of a blacksmith, became the acknowledged leader of the sect. These Shaking Quakers provoked civil and religious authorities, disturbing the peace by preaching in public and disrupting Anglican worship services. Seeking a safer and more secluded religious life, Mother Ann and eight followers sailed for America, arriving in New York City on August 6, 1774. They settled by 1779 at Niskeyuna in Albany County, New York.¹⁴

How Ann Lee, an illiterate ideologue from Manchester, came to be thought of by Shakers as the Second Coming of Christ, without whose

intercession no man or woman could find salvation, may never be fully understood. The Shakers' first success in winning new members in America came after a 1779 New Light revival among Baptists and Presbyterians living on the New York-Massachusetts border. Converts who wanted something more than they had found at the revival sought out the Shakers, and some remained with them. By 1780 "Mother Ann" had assumed the stature of prophet within the Society; seekers and the curious were drawn to the Shaker settlement at Niskeyuna. One old Believer later reminisced that it was a time when "Signs and operations, prophecies, and visions and revelations of God greatly abounded."¹⁵ The word began to spread.

Mother Ann died at Niskeyuna on September 8, 1784. Under the direction of her successors the scattered pockets of converts in New England and New York were gathered into communal religious societies, confessing their sins to Shaker elders and eldresses, taking up the "cross" of celibacy, and sharing all property in common. Their social structure was modeled on the earliest Christian communities as described in Acts. Shakers believed they were living in a reestablished Church of Christ on earth in the Christian millennium. The church was officially called the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing.

Historian Stephen J. Stein, in his definitive recounting of the Shaker experience, pointed out that when the last of the three founders of the Believers in America died in 1787 "their religious ideas were unsystematized, their social relations unorganized, their worship unstructured, and their activities together rather informal." Stein suggested that Shaker doctrine was probably not what attracted early converts, but instead "certain symbolic acts that forged a strong sense of community within the society," such as sharing of food and lodging, a unique way of speaking, distinctive close-cropped hair that "set them apart from outsiders," and their camaraderie. Shared persecution for giving public testimony, Stein observed, contributed to their bonds of common striving and experience. Their performance of piety and the certainty of their faith bore powerful witness to seekers. Outsiders were also attracted to the "charismatic power and apostolic signs perceived to be in abundance among the Shaking Quakers." Shakers' ecstatic ritual activities were, reported a contemporary, "according to the dictates of the spirit that governs them," and they believed this to be a new "spiritual dispensation." These spirit-directed actions made no sense to outside observers, but "provided some converts with a sense of assurance."¹⁶ While not yet actively conversing with

spirits of the dead, their respect for visions and their embrace of direction by “the spirit” would predispose them to welcome such communications by the 1830s.

By 1800 eleven Shaker communities were established in New England and New York. Central religious authority for the sect was located at New Lebanon, New York.

The Kentucky Revival

Barton W. Stone, Presbyterian minister at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, had heard about some revival activity to the south in the Cumberland region; in 1801 he traveled to Logan County for a mass religious convocation. Stone was startled by the things he saw. People under conviction of their sinfulness fell in agony, writhing on the ground. When they experienced God’s grace and forgiveness—and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts—they leapt and shouted praises to the Lord. Inspired, Stone spread the word for over a month that he would be holding a protracted meeting at Cane Ridge in early August.

Thousands came. Eighteen Presbyterian ministers shared in the preaching, as did a handful of Methodists and one freethinking Baptist.¹⁷ The combined shouting of preachers, howling of sinners, and ecstatic praise of the saved was, one source said, “like the roar of Niagara.”¹⁸ And it was in this mass of overwrought humanity that a variety of “attendant exercises which came to distinguish particularly the Kentucky phase of the revival” appeared. These included falling, rolling, the “jerks,” singing, dancing, and laughing uncontrollably. What at first seemed miraculous gifts from God, according to revival historian John B. Boles, attracted a great deal of attention but were limited to a relative few and “only in some splinter groups that developed in Kentucky did they become ultimately respectable.”¹⁹ One of those groups was the Shakers.

The organized camp meeting revivals that were spawned by Cane Ridge spread throughout the Cumberland region and into southern Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee. They followed the Clinch River into Scott County, Virginia, home of young Abijah Alley and his large extended family. News of the revivals was transmitted in letters, newspapers, and travelers’ stories. By the end of 1804 all of America knew that whatever was happening in Kentucky, “when grace broke the chains of sin, the new born son or daughter, commenced to shout the anthem of redemption, and danced, turned, or shook with uncommon violence.”

From the Shakers' northeastern perspective, these converts in Kentucky were experiencing in the throes of religious ecstasy the same "twisting, turning, jumping, rolling, falling, stamping, and the gift of visions, they professed to have."²⁰ New England was not a fertile field for Shaker converts in 1804, but Kentucky held promise.

Shaker leaders pondered the reports from Kentucky, aware that their own greatest successes in saving souls had been among those newly awakened by revivals. The leaders dispatched three carefully chosen missionaries—John Meacham, Issachar Bates, and Benjamin Seth Youngs—to the "West" on January 1, 1805. By late March the trio had established themselves in southwestern Ohio, having traveled—largely on foot—through Virginia and into Kentucky by way of the Cumberland Gap. Over the course of the next few years the missionaries converted hundreds of people throughout the region, including prominent ministers who had left the Presbyterian Church and were especially prized as converts because their congregations often followed them into Shaker life. Chief among them was the schismatic Presbyterian minister, Richard McNemar. It was on his property that the Shaker community at Union Village, Ohio, was founded. Union Village paralleled New Lebanon in the East as the center of Shaker "union" in the West. In July 1805 the New Lebanon ministry sent David Darrow to live at Union Village and oversee the conversion and education of Shaker converts in the West. By 1810 the western Believers were establishing communal settlements on the model of those in the East, and Darrow was lovingly called "Father David" by his fellow Believers. Union Village was growing into a thriving settlement that eventually included eight communal families arranged in an ascending order of their spiritual and material commitment to Shaker tenets.

Gospel Order—and Disorder—at Union Village: Changing Circumstances, Solidifying Hierarchy

Between its founding in 1805 and Abijah Alley's arrival at Union Village in 1817, there were subtle but significant changes in the structure of Shaker life. The scattered settlements were bound together by the authority of the ministry at New Lebanon, New York, and by friendships and personal relationships within "a strong network" of Shaker leaders. As Shaker membership grew, local covenants were rewritten to clarify principles, particularly of communal property, but also to strengthen the control of the elders and to codify their visionary "gifts" regarding appropriate

Shaker dress and comportment.²¹

Shaker communities were extremely hierarchical, with parallel chains of male and female leaders supervising the religious and temporal aspects of life for Believers. Members were required to submit to the authority of their divinely-inspired “lead,” their deacons or deaconesses, elders or eldresses, and ultimately the ministry, who “labored” with those unwilling to yield in an effort to help them maintain their faith, thereby ensuring their salvation.

That Alley was, in the main, content in Shaker life is confirmed by the fact that three close family members came to Union Village and became Shakers while he was there, but new tensions were emerging within the ranks of Believers. Tension between the hierarchical structure and the democratic, evangelical imperative to examine the evidence and draw one’s own conclusions was probably exacerbated by the passing away of many first-generation converts who yielded unquestioning devotion to Mother Ann Lee and other early Shaker leaders. Celibacy as a condition for salvation continued to vex many, and the Shakers’ retention of children coming of age who had never known the founders was “very low.”²²

The death of Father David Darrow on June 27, 1825, deprived the western Shakers, particularly the families at Union Village, of the founding leader who had helped unify them, ministered to their spiritual needs, and presided over the growth of Shakerism in the West. Solomon King, another eastern transplant, was installed in his place. The position of Second Elder in the ministry, however, was left vacant until November 1829. This leadership vacuum created space for dissidents in the West to question authority and study new models for communal living. At the Pleasant Hill Shaker community in Kentucky, John Whitbey led an 1825 group demanding more democratic governance. They had been reading the “utopian proposals for a new moral order” of Scottish communitarian Robert Owen.²³

These factors, combined with the closure of the Shaker village at West Union, Indiana, in 1827, and the 1828 restructuring of the families at Union Village, created opportunities for disgruntled Union Village Believers to encourage, and participate in, rebellious words and deeds. These troublemakers set in motion a series of events that shook gospel union and order to the core at Union Village during 1828 and 1829.

Disturbing Dreams of Joining Giblets

A prominent ringleader in these disruptions was Abijah Alley. Alley had shown promise as a young Believer, and was appointed elder at the North Lot Family, a gathering order of the church, in either 1822 or 1823.²⁴ A gathering order was the first step into Shaker life, where new converts were housed and instructed. The North Lot was a branch of the East House Family, the location of Richard McNemar's pre-Shaker home, and originally formed as the main gathering order of the church. A milestone in each Shaker's life was the day he or she became a Believer, the first step in ascending the Shaker hierarchy. Eventually, the East House Family became a home for Shakers who were not quite advanced enough in the faith to be members of the Centre Family, but too advanced to be considered young Believers.²⁵ The North Lot gathering order, of which Alley was elder, was under the supervision of the more spiritually advanced East House Family. In 1825 Alley was removed as North Lot elder, his East House superior Elder David Spinning having concluded that Alley's "talents ... were not competent to lead so large a family as that at the North but might be profitable in a smaller family."²⁶ In 1826 Alley was appointed second elder in the West Lot Family, a cluster of buildings that housed one of the smallest families at Union Village.²⁷ The timing of his demotion would have afforded Alley cause to feel belittled at the same time he might have been aware that John Whitbey was spearheading demands for reforms at Pleasant Hill. It is also likely that in Alley's mind things had begun to go wrong for him when Elder Darrow died and was replaced by Elder Solomon King, but he appears to have held his peace and performed satisfactorily as second elder at West Lot.

On August 11, 1828, the elders initiated a major restructuring at Union Village, which Believers referred to as the "great move." They dissolved the South Family, created a new family at the West Branch, and removed the East House Family to the North Lot. Finally, they created an entirely new family at the old East House Family site. This new East Family was composed mainly of children, with a few older Believers placed in authority.²⁸ Abijah Alley was installed as first elder, with Samuel Parkhurst as his second in the eldership. These two men had been given a particularly sensitive responsibility in ministering to young and impressionable members of the community, many of whom were entering adolescence.²⁹ Alley was thirty-six years old at the time of his appointment. It was around this time that he began to have visions, and to share them

without reservation among those under his spiritual care.

It was fall of 1828, and from his new position of authority Abijah Alley's years of frustration, sexual and hierarchical, erupted in dreams and what Alley claimed were divine revelations. Most of what we know of Abijah Alley's life and beliefs is stitched together from fragmentary clues, but the Shaker records, detailed and extensive, let us hear snatches of his own voice. The extant records of his dreams and visions are some of the most explicitly sexual texts found in Shaker manuscript records. One such account, entitled "A Vision or imagination of Ab Ally which he told to some of the sisters," related this:

He was surrounded in his dream by a number of women (They seem to be church sisters) who got to picking & fingering about his posteriors as he supposed to execute the passions of nature but that he stood firm against all their excitements at length one of an enormous size (as big as a chimney and prodigiously swelled) approached him, & seemed to be intent on forcing him to violate his faith took him by the privates in the struggle to maintain his innocence he awoke ... the monstrous woman was Elderess Malinda [Watts] swelled with the blood of the saints, that she appeared a dark yellowish colour & in her aspect resembled a huge serpent.³⁰

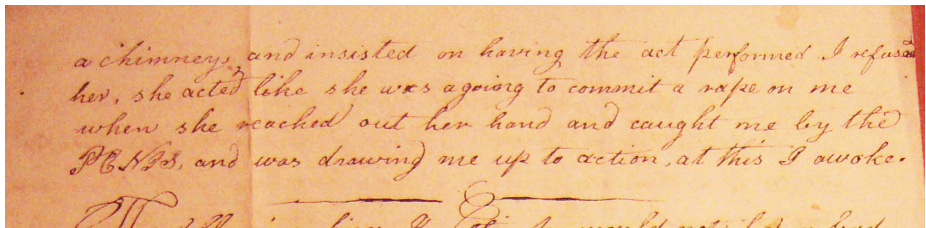
Malinda Watts had been eldress of the former East House, or young Believers' order, where Alley probably lived during his first years at Union Village. Unpacking the imagery is tempting, but there is much more to explore.

Brother Joseph Worley recorded another version of this dream—told in this instance to a young sister—with several substantial variations.

I [Abijah] thought I was in heaven (it must have been a turkey buzzard heaven) and their was an host of women met me at the threshold of the door, and began to solicit me to join giblets with them or have to do with them in such a manner as would pregnate them with a SPIRITUAL CHILD, but I refused them then there was one presented her self before me as big [as] a chimney, and insisted on having the act performed I refused her, she acted like she was a going to commit rape on me when she reached out her

hand and caught me by the PENIS, and was drawing me up to action, at this I awoke.³¹

Here Eldress Malinda is not named, but the desire for procreation to bring forth a spiritual child is attributed to the sisterhood in general. Imposing psychoanalysis on the past is a fool's errand, but this dream, and the notion that he was capable of fathering a spiritual child, belong entirely to Abijah Alley. His later justification for sharing these lewd dreams with his young Shaker family was that fellow Elder James Smith taught him that if he was "defiled by filthy dreams or other involuntary attacks of the flesh to release himself by pouring it out on the family in meeting."³² This was doubly damning in the eyes of the elders who eventually investigated Alley, since defending his actions as based on the teachings of an elder implied that his behavior was the sanctioned practice of the church. More to the point, Alley seemed not to have understood that his graphic revelations to a family of impressionable children and adolescents were inappropriate.



The end of Abijah's vision contains a rare instance of the word "penis" written in a Shaker manuscript.

Item 349c, Shaker Collection, Library of Congress.

The Trials Begin

Alley's disturbing behavior came to the attention of the ministry and other elders at Union Village in mid-November of 1828.³³ It was then they discovered that Alley was nursing a long list of grudges against the leadership. A trial was convened, and Alley enumerated his accusations against his fellow Believers. These charges included blasphemy, tyranny, assault and battery, injustice, cruelty, robbery, and murder—the murder victim in question being Alley's soul. Whether fact or a product of his new state of mind, Alley claimed that "prior to joining the society [he] had acquired the keys of the kingdom of heaven ... was cleaned & purified

from all lust—was perfectly dead to sin & alive to God conversed freely with angels, was commissioned by the Almighty to set up his kingdom on earth & had in his possession the foundation stone which he was instructed by an angel from heaven to lay among the Shakers as the ground work of the latter day temple.”³⁴ This is the first mention of his divinely mandated mission to rebuild King Solomon’s temple. Alley may have had this revelation before coming to the Shakers and kept it to himself for a decade. Or we might speculate that the notion had been planted, deep in his frustrated subconscious, as Alley processed the thwarting of his vision of his proper role in the Shaker hierarchy by “outsider” Elder Solomon King. Whatever the notion’s genesis, realizing it became a defining feature of his later life.

In retrospect, Alley explained he had been frustrated in his efforts first by John Woods, who Alley claimed abused him and filled him full of lust. The abuses continued under the leadership of East House Elder David Spinning and Eldress Malinda Watts, while Alley was elder of the North Lot gathering order. After Alley was found incompetent by Spinning and moved from the North Lot to the West Lot, Alley claimed Spinning and Watts continued their abuse of him, until they “cut his throat from ear to ear.” All of this maltreatment had greatly injured and diminished the apostolic powers that Alley claimed to have possessed when he joined the Shakers. The astonished Shaker leaders agreed to arbitrate Alley’s case on the condition that Alley would withdraw “the charge of murder exhibited against those persons as it lacked proof & forgiving all other offences on gospel principles.” Alley declared that he held nothing personally against any of the Shakers, but instead against “that spirit which had exercised all those reputed cruelties on him, & that he never would be satisfied or feel released till that spirit was put down.” The ministry decided to relieve Alley of authority at the West Lot and replace him with someone who had “faith in subjection to a lead.”³⁵

A subsequent trial documents Alley’s progress as the recipient of spiritual communications, giving divine mandate to his self-aggrandizement. He was at the time living in the same family as venerable Elder Matthew Houston, one of the original Presbyterian ministers converted by Shaker missionaries in 1805. Alley accused the “leading characters of the church as being the cause of dr[a]wing many innocent young people to the world & ruining their souls ... & that the foundation was corrupt.”³⁶ Alley claimed to have this information by revelation from God through “an angel ...

[and] in dreams & open visions”³⁷—a serious breach of spiritual hierarchy among the Shakers. Spiritual “gifts” were the province of the ministry.

In one of his visions Alley saw western Shaker founder Father David Darrow “in hell, not eternal hell, but bound under torment for his cruelty and oppression,” a vision that veered into heretical notions of universal salvation and one he recanted during his trial with Elder Houston. However, Alley asserted that “if Father David had been the means of souls perishing he would have to suffer for it until all such were raised again to life.” Alley maintained his competing claim for spiritual primacy, because “the power of salvation was not with the Church but committed to him, & that the whole order had to come down & acknowledge his gift.”³⁸ With these words the trial recessed and the Union Village ministry convened a panel of seven members to reason with Alley and attempt to dissuade him of his convictions.

Alley, however, held firm and was subsequently released from his eldership on November 27, 1828. The Shakers were charitable, allowing him to remain among them as a common member provided he cease to disseminate his incendiary visions and revelations. Alley agreed, but shortly thereafter was found to have returned to his preaching.³⁹

Richard McNemar, another of the early ministerial converts in Kentucky, believed the root cause of dissension among the young Believers in the West was disappointment in the ministry over their dissolution of the West Union, Indiana, community in 1826. McNemar accused disgruntled members coming to Union Village from West Union of sowing seeds of discord among the people, and encouraging them to rebel against their lead—the ministry and elders. McNemar viewed Alley as someone who was always seeking after popularity, and a person who sought to ingratiate himself with young members. “He laid himself open to the young people male & female to hear their secrets & their sentiments gathered their burdens on to him ... he opened in order those stirrings of nature that were excited by his freedoms among young females.” In fact, between September 2, 1828, and April 2, 1829, when Alley finally left the Shakers, twenty-four Believers between the ages of seventeen and thirty-four left Union Village. This was a staggering loss of young members for the community. Many of these apostates were the children of those who had been converted in 1805 and immediately thereafter. Among them were Archibald Houston and Patience Spinning, son and daughter respectively, of leading western Shakers. Most galling was the defection of McNemar’s son and namesake,

Richard McNemar, Jr. on October 27, 1828.⁴⁰

Alley found a kindred spirit in ex-Quaker and Swedenborgian Aquila Massie Bolton, who taught the evening school.⁴¹ Before long Alley and Bolton were holding meetings where open rebellion to the ministry was discussed. Inexplicably, in light of all the trouble he had caused, his removal from eldership in November, and his return to disseminating his Alley-centric doctrine, it appears that in December 1828 Alley was appointed to the eldership of the East House. This speaks to the disorganization of the leadership at Union Village, and also the probable lack of experienced men available to serve as elders. At the East House Alley met William Hewitt.⁴² Alley was not the only Shaker beset by disturbing dreams. McNemar recorded that Hewitt had been “grevously troubled in his sleep with some invisible demon who would load him with distress & force him to vent the most alarming cries & vociferations on such subjects as suited the invisible genius. Which strange impulse got so habitual that they followed him into his wakeful hours & held him almost continually in distress.”⁴³ Hewitt confided his visionary and spiritual torments to his elder—Abijah Alley—and according to McNemar the pair from then on “were mutually devoted to dreaming & construing & mounting figures & allegories to suit the times & in some way to bring about a revolution in which they would ... stand as first pillars & bring the whole order of the church on to ground that suited their fancy.”⁴⁴

McNemar and Matthew Houston questioned Hewitt on Monday, December 15, 1828, in an attempt to discern whose visions came first, Hewitt’s or Alley’s. Hewitt claimed that he had been the first to pass into the spiritual world and converse with Father David Darrow. According to Hewitt, and echoing Alley’s earlier dreams, Father David had been since his decease laboring unsuccessfully in the spirit world for the redemption of those who, through no fault of their own, had not been saved. Father David revealed to Hewitt that this was the reason for his spirit having been absent at Union Village. Hewitt further claimed that Father David had sent him to Union Village to open this work of salvation in the church, but that this calling had not been successful until Hewitt had opened the gift through Abijah Alley. Hewitt claimed, “After Abijah had received the gift the angels flocked around him & surrounded him & if he was rejected the consequence would be dreadful.”⁴⁵ McNemar and Houston confirmed for Hewitt that he was first in prophecy, and asked him to commit to writing much of what he had told them, probably attempting to trick him into

giving them written evidence of the pair's spiritual malfeasance. Instead of fulfilling this request he consulted with Abijah and delivered a statement to a Deacon that same afternoon, claiming,

This is the will of god and unto me concirning the church that all rule and athority shall be committed unto the son. that god may be all in all concirning gifts this is what I feel that Father Richard should free himself of all burden and all rule and authority and lay it on Elder Solimon as a son for the redemption of the fathers and Father Mathew Houston in like manner to laydown all rule and authority and to release himself from all burdens through Father Richard Mcnear to E Solman And Elder David in like manner through Father Mathew and so one through the hole order By honestly opening acording to the above metioned order strictly the fathers shall be redeemed from all blame or fault This is the gift of god to me other wise judgment without marcy Wiliam Hewitt

And if Elder Solimon finds himself unable to bare the in[i]quities of the fathers and the people let him aply to abijah Alley who holds the gift of a son

It was asked me whether or no the gift that is given to me and that of abijah's did not clash I can assure you they do not for I can venter to say that his corrisponds with what I have written farwell Wiliam Hewitt

there are other things which can be attended hereafter⁴⁶

First thing the next morning Alley came to McNemar's shop and engaged him in a two-hour conversation about the message conveyed by Hewitt, which was apparently in Alley's handwriting. Alley explained that he had taken it down verbatim as Hewitt spoke the words given by revelation, noting also that Samuel Parkhurst was present as a witness. Alley demanded that "the fathers were to come down to a level with the children & all rule & authority to cease for ever, to have no more preaching, but to let the spirit speak by the children that Elder Solomon must come down out of the meeting house & live in one of the families on a level with the fathers & their bear the iniquities of all." He declared that he had no faith in the present salvation offered by Shakerism and that Elder Solomon was a "soul murderer." McNemar rebutted Alley's egalitarian notions and stated that if he continued in this line "he would presently be raving thro

the streets & round the buildings like W[illia]m Scales [a noted apostate and anti-Shaker activist of the late eighteenth century].”⁴⁷

Liberty of Conscience

The next confrontation came on Friday, December 19, when elders assembled and examined Alley, Hewitt, and Parkhurst. McNemar called them the “three disciples” in his journal. Their beliefs centered around their assertion that Solomon King was a soul murderer. This act was carried out through the reawakening of lust within Abijah Alley—a lust he claimed to have laid to rest prior to becoming a Shaker. Alley’s new revelations had once again left him free from lust, but only through his complete liberty of conscience to do and say as he pleased without subjection to any authority among the Shakers. Alley claimed “that which was ordained to life [the spiritual rebirth of converting to Shakerism] I found to be unto death it deceived me & thereby slew me.” McNemar wrote, “This slaying the silly creature calls murder & charges it to John Woods and others that had the rule over him.”⁴⁸

On December 20 McNemar wrote to Alley and tried to appeal to any lingering sense of loyalty he might have to the Shaker Church, telling him, “I never till quite lately doubted your having a lot of heirship in the gospel.” However, it was now plain to McNemar that Alley was attempting to poison his fellow young Believers against the old Believers, and to “flat the whole order, & yourself take the whole government on your shoulders.”⁴⁹ As if to prove McNemar’s point, on the Sabbath, Sunday, December 21, William Hewitt revealed that he had, in fact, “hardened his conscience against all reproof from the elders because the effect of reproof was to make him feel unhappy.” Alley made an even more stunning claim that God had murdered Jesus Christ, was condemned for it, and therefore gave up all power of judgment to his son who bore God’s iniquity and redeemed God. Alley believed that his situation was parallel with the Shaker hierarchy and that the Shaker fathers (McNemar, Houston, King) had murdered him, and that he would now lead them to redemption. The Shakers would not achieve redemption until “all power was given [to Alley] & he was exalted as a prince & a savior.” The previous day Alley had upped the ante on the Shakers by traveling into nearby Lebanon, Ohio, and meeting with five apostates bent on causing difficulties for Union Village.⁵⁰

“The Work of God is a Levveling work”

At some point on Sunday, December 21, Samuel Parkhurst delivered two private letters to Richard McNemar. These letters justified Parkhurst's allegiance to Alley, and also expressed his disappointment in the leadership of McNemar and his cohorts. Parkhurst explained that a number of Believers at the East House (a family of which Alley was briefly elder) had received this new gift of salvation that had brought them back to “the Obedience of that Gospel taught by our first Parents.” Parkhurst wrote that the East House Believers had experienced great “freedom of soul,” but that their “Elder Brethren were offended & would not come in which seemed to us like a Dagger in our Bowels thrust in by the Dragon which is more & more mannifested as we find them [the Elders] using their exersions to crush the work & Distroy the Manchild as soon as he is Born This is the murderer we mean & not any of our Elder Brethren in the true spirit of the Gospel.” Parkhurst then demurred, using the Shakers' own theology to justify the actions of Alley and company in rejecting the authority of the elders:

But shall I presume to Teach my Elders nay I consider this quite unnessary for they have Taught us from the Beginning that the work of God is a Levveling work and that every knee shall bow to the God & Tongue Confess wherefore any Spirit that goes to Destroy this whether by word or Deed I can not acknowledge to be of God but is of that wicked one who Slew his Brother wherefore I can not Bow to nor worship him however high he may be exalted in the Temple of Church of God.⁵¹

In a second letter Parkhurst expanded on his egalitarian theme:

I do not dispise any man as such but to give Honour to whom Honour is due for by their Fruits ye shall know them but I desire to know no Man after the flesh or to have any Mans person in admiration because of advantage for I want no advantage or Rule or Authority or Power of Honour but that which comes from God only and this I shall have in walking humbly before him.⁵²

An uneasy week passed in Union Village before Abijah fulfilled the elders' request for a written statement of his charges against them. In a

long and rambling discourse, filled with religious allegory, Abijah presented himself as deluded and forsaken by the Shaker church. Evoking Christian martyrs, he asserted that in response to his charges of injustice the church had “set her great lions on me to tear me to pieces.” Alley rejoiced in his subsequent escape from the spiritual subjection of the church, and boasted, “I have shown both her & her priests their drunkenness, murder, & hardness & oppression.”⁵³ Alley compared himself to Balaam’s ass, stating that the Shakers had “rode me these fifteen years,” and that despite their cruelties and abuse he was now trying to open their eyes to their own madness—and to the new way of salvation he offered them. He charged that the elders had slain innocent souls and had become drunk with their blood.

That the conversations were so protracted requires explanation, and it is clear from McNemar’s journal that he believed it his duty to “labor” with these malcontents, to make every effort to turn them from error and thereby save their souls. That, not incidentally, would save the souls of the many in danger of being led astray—and out of a Shaker community struggling to retain young members—by the “three disciples.” McNemar’s eponymous son was already lost.

The Elders Extend an Olive Branch

Failing to persuade Alley to attend a face-to-face meeting, the elders responded in writing two days later. They acknowledged that Abijah Alley had been a promising young Believer, “though whimsical, self conceited, & stiff willed in your natural creation.” His disappointment in being removed as elder of the large family at the North Lot was recognized, but the elders charged him with misleading young Believers, “ready to catch at occasions of trial against their leads—fond of novelty, thirsting for knowledge, gaiety, pleasure & every forbidden freedom suited to the passions of a youthful mind.” The elders blamed circumstances, such as the lack of a first elder in the Union Village ministry subsequent to the death of Father David Darrow in 1825 and the influx of dissatisfied Believers from West Union, for the lack of oversight that allowed Alley to remain as elder at the North Lot Family for so long. This protracted disarray in leadership at Union Village accounted for the “strange & almost unaccountable dispensation” that placed Alley once again as elder at the East House. It was at that point, they charged, that Alley knew “now or never was your time to bring all your forces to bear on the church, to head a party, put down

the whole order & place your petty self at the helm of affairs.” The letter then repeated the multitude of offenses that Alley had offered the Church, including poisoning minds against the elders and meeting with apostates in Lebanon. Remarkably, it ended with an olive branch, a final offer to Alley that should he repent and recant, and cease his treasonous ministrations to the young, he could yet remain within the community. Additionally, he was required to attend public and family worship meetings, but as a silent observer only. He was not to participate until instructed to do so again by the elders. The letter closed, “If you comply with this reasonable request well & good, if not prepare for what follows.”⁵⁴

McNemar followed up with a personal letter, written in the legalistic style he favored in disputation. McNemar posed six questions to Alley, among which was, “Who taught you to spend so much of your time in smoking and chating with sisters?” He challenged Alley to prove his accusation that McNemar himself was personally culpable for the problems at Union Village, as Alley perceived them. Short of this, McNemar implored Alley to erase the seditious thoughts from his mind and learn the gifts of Father David Darrow that he had obviously either forgotten, or never learned in the first place. And so things stood as 1828 came to a close.⁵⁵

Alley’s “Relation to the Body”

The uneasy push and pull continued through the month of January, as the elders labored to save Abijah Alley and his followers, and he resisted admitting that his vision of a reformed Union Village with himself as its head would never be realized, that his life as a Shaker was at an end. The “leveling” demanded by the “three disciples” was not a plan for equality. Alley had asserted that Elder David Darrow had communicated to him from the spirit world that Alley was to be the “lead.”

During Saturday evening meeting on January 10, 1829, it was announced that Alley would not be allowed to unite in the worship as “it was generally known that he had separated himself and did not profess to hold and relation to the body.” At this declaration Abijah reacted physically, and “with a violent spring he reared & stomped with both feet,” an act McNemar said “put it out of all reasonable dispute where the dragon spirit had its seat.” Alley declared that he would worship God where he chose. Alley’s follower Samuel Parkhurst declared that if Alley could not unite in worship then neither would he. After the commotion subsided one hymn was sung and meeting was quickly dismissed.⁵⁶

The incident at meeting prompted the elders to draft a statement of the charges against Alley to be read the following afternoon at the Sabbath meeting. In their view the troubles following the dissolution of West Union, the restructuring of families at Union Village in August 1828, and the failure of Shaker leadership to address the concerns of young Believers, led Abijah to claim “special revelation & commission from God, and under this pretext to ingratiate himself into the confidence of a number of respectable characters even elders not excepted.” The elders told the assembled multitude that Alley said “that he saw [Father David] in hell &c. suffering for his tyrannical government over the people: and saying moreover that the evil of so many going off was chargeable to the lead, & that the foundation was corrupt.” The Believers were told that although Alley believed in spiritual resurrection through Christ and Mother Ann, he refused to recognize the gift of any subsequent Shaker leader, but rather, the pathway to salvation was reopened through him by the angels who ministered to him. Abijah believed himself to be the first-born son of Mother Ann, and he denied the authority of any extant Shaker government. He demanded that founding western Shaker converts and Elders Richard McNemar, Matthew Houston, and David Spinning renounce their authority and confess their iniquities to Elder Solomon King, who would then finally cede all spiritual authority to Abijah.⁵⁷

The members probably wondered why such behavior was tolerated for so long. The elders explained that they had labored with Alley in a spirit of charity and forbearance, in case he could be brought back into gospel union. However, they had concluded that since Alley himself maintained that he wanted to no connection with the church as it existed that they would “take him at his word to seal his own deliberate choice—& loose him and let him go.” Members were warned to steer clear of Alley, “lest by indulging either an undue sympathy for the man or a curiosity to hear his lectures you may lose your union bring yourselves into trouble & finally land in the same predicament.” Alley, who was present at the reading, interrupted and attempted to contradict certain statements, but was denied a chance to speak based on his own voluntary withdrawal from the society. The membership was invited to examine Alley’s writings for themselves if his behavior was not proof enough.⁵⁸

Would He Stay or Would He Go?

The next morning Alley was relieved of work duties and asked to state

in writing his objections to the previous day's statements by the elders. He refused and went to work in defiance of the Shaker leadership. On Tuesday, January 13, he informed the elders that he would appeal directly to the ministry at New Lebanon, New York, through a written memorial that Aquila Massie Bolton would prepare for him. Alley was told that this would have no effect, as the New Lebanon ministry would not countenance such a memorial from a non-member. McNemar went to the West Brick House that day and met with Bolton while Alley was present. Bolton sought their counsel as to whether or not he should write Alley's requested memorial. He was told to use his own faith & judgment. Bolton decided to write for Alley.⁵⁹

A "Disciple" Departs

The pressure was becoming too much for Alley's accomplice, William Hewitt. On Sunday, January 18, Hewitt came to McNemar's room without a prior appointment and informed McNemar that he could no longer remain at Union Village, or hold any union with Believers, and that he was leaving the next morning. Hewitt alluded to his continual physical and emotional problems, saying they had impaired his constitution and made him a burden to those around him. When McNemar offered one last chance to save his soul, Hewitt replied that "he had not much soul any how and that of but little value, that his principle object at present was to get off from those spirits which continually tormented him." McNemar asked Hewitt if he thought Alley would leave with him. Hewitt said no, that Alley would remain. Hewitt "bitterly regretted that he had staid so long & involved himself in such difficulties," retracted the negative things he had said about the Shaker leadership, and lamented the fact that he was viewed as insane by the general membership due to his afflictions and vociferations. He did not recant any of the visionary messages that had been delivered to Abijah Alley through him and maintained that he had only opened his mind to Alley as his elder and communicated what came through. McNemar had to accept Hewitt's justification, as it validated the Shaker hierarchy. McNemar and Hewitt conversed for two more hours, during which time they explored the characteristics and judgments of individual Shaker leaders at Union Village. Throughout this time McNemar read hymns in an effort to once more bring Hewitt's mind into union with the Shakers. Hewitt departed quietly the next morning at nine, having requested that McNemar publish his confession.⁶⁰

Hewitt reappeared briefly at Union Village ten years later, when on April 27, 1839, a journalist noted “To day, an insane man, named Wm Hewitt, went through the Village throwing stones through the windows and broke sash & glass considerably in the 2d Family dwelling house, & also in the meeting house. He was afterwards arrested & imprisoned, by an officer for trial.”⁶¹

McNemar arose early on Friday morning, January 23, and by candlelight wrote in his journal, once again recapitulating the actions of Alley, and the subsequent justification for his removal from the Shakers. It seems the Shakers’ tolerance for characters such as Alley had yet further limits, as McNemar allowed for a possible scenario whereby with the approval of the deacon in Alley’s family, Alley might stay and continue “the free exercise of his self created gifts & assumed authorities.” However, should the deacon eventually find this inconvenient, Alley could then be farmed out, with the Shakers paying for his boarding, washing, and lodging. Alley was moved to the South House of the community, and in his journal McNemar began referring to Alley as “Double Eyes,” a theme he would subsequently develop a length in a poetic rhetorical dialog between himself and Alley.⁶²

Alley Remains, Admonished Not to “cuddle about among the sisters”

On Friday, January 30, the community was addressed at evening meeting concerning Abijah Alley—who had yet to remove himself from Union Village. The Believers were told that Abijah should either settle his accounts at the Office and move on, place himself under the care of the physician if he was insane, or remain among them as a lay member, but that he could not continue to attempt to unite in worship as a member of the church unless he opened his mind again and recanted. The question was posed, “How can we minister to such a character who ... declares that there is no salvation in the body but that we are goats, dragons, & every base character that the scriptures can furnish.” For the moment Abijah was warned that it was “insufferable to have him withdraw from his own sex with whom he ought to keep his union & cuddle about among the sisters.”⁶³ This improper physical affection for the opposite sex remained a key aspect of Alley’s conflict with Shaker leaders, and fundamentally, Shaker life.

Saturday morning the church convened a committee of four brethren to once more examine Alley’s case. He demanded that two witnesses of his

own choice be present. His request was denied, as the matter at hand was to simply establish whether Alley acknowledged the authority of and of the present Shaker elders. Alley refused to answer and retreated from the village into nearby woods.⁶⁴

Alley Declares Faith in the Elders and Church

On the Sabbath, February 1, William Hewitt's confession was read in meeting. That night Alley confided to Elder Matthew Houston that he wanted to open his mind, which he did the next morning. He claimed to feel like an idiot, and asserted that young people had sought him out for his advice, and that by challenging the elders he was only trying to express the concerns of the young members, and mollify them to prevent apostasy. He maintained that his true faith ever lay with the elders and Church. In the afternoon he talked further to Houston and McNemar and confessed to them that although he had gained some control of his lust, "he did not pretend to be clear of the flesh—that he was nothing but a man nor never expected to be any thing more in this life." Alley shared more of his dreams and visions, and claimed he was induced to act by an "invisible agent" over which he had no control. As for the damage he had done to the church, Alley intimated that he did have the power to turn the people against the elders, but felt he had caused no evil effect among the membership. He revealed to McNemar and Houston that he had made inquiries of S.M. (Samuel C. Manning) about purchasing a piece of land where he could resettle himself and his followers, which included a number of sisters. However, he maintained that he would bear his cross against the flesh forever, even if he left the Shakers. Alley closed by stating that he expected he and his followers would eventually leave unless his plan for a more "republican" form of government was adopted. He averred that if a majority of elders and members asked him to go that he would. McNemar and Houston again asked Alley to respect the request not to unite in worship—which Alley refused, effectively ending the meeting.⁶⁵

A Hiatus

It is not clear what if anything happened between February 1 and March 20.

On March 20, Richard McNemar questioned Manning about Alley's plans and Manning declared that he had spoken to some apostates in Lebanon about Alley's preaching and that they considered him "crazy."

Manning himself stated he thought Alley “deranged” and that “he seemed to be greatly exercised in dreams & visions even surpassing Swedenburg.” Alley also shared with Manning his pretensions to being the third appearing of Christ.⁶⁶

On March 28, 1829, Richard McNemar penned a final, rhetorical indictment of Alley in his journal. Although addressed to Alley it is unclear if a copy was actually given to him. In it, McNemar gave Alley the benefit of the doubt about his professed good intentions for saving souls, but required him to admit he was “actuated by a false spirit.” McNemar bluntly asked him: “What moved you to reject the ministry the whole order of the church to denounce the whole order of Believers on earth to testify an entire falling away after the decease of first Mother, to traduce the church covenant as a yanky invention & trample any thing sacred underfoot to make way for a 3d appearing of Christ which was to be manifested in your own person? Did you apprehend at first when the grand object was the salvation of the young people that your motives would have carried you all this length, to reject the church as a beast, dragon, whore, every thing abominable, without the power of salvation or a spark of the spirit of God or of xt in it?” McNemar charged Alley with wishing to lure good Believers away, consorting with apostates, and announcing his heaven-granted authority to “revive the long lost spirit of Jesus and Mother Ann” in order to “humble the Elders & purge out of them that spirit which you say murdered your soul.” McNemar warned Alley that as long as evil remained in the church there was a gift to search it out, and compared the church to a lion, “mild to the faithful innocent Believer ... but a fierce lion to tear in pieces the rebellious.”⁶⁷

Surprisingly, McNemar’s words resonated with Alley. On March 30 he wrote a letter to McNemar conceding that his “zeal was not according to knowledge” and that he would give McNemar his “word & honor that from henceforth I will do my endeavors to reconcile myself to the present order & administration as an example to others who may have been turned aside thro my influence.” Alley begged a privilege to stay on the grounds of Union Village. The following day he penned another letter to the elders offering to make a public recantation of all the sentiments he had preached about the Shaker Church and elders being the dragon’s tail, or the end—devoid of salvation. It does not seem that the elders responded to Alley’s *mea culpas*, which ultimately elicited the response they probably desired. A final note from Alley acknowledged the fairness of the elders in their

dealings with Alley, and the righteousness of their judgment. Alley gave up all hope of reconciliation, or of another privilege at Union Village, closing his note by stating, “[I] know that I have no more place [on the] ground at present.”⁶⁸ In his journal recording these events McNemar appended the text of the hymn “The False Prophet” to mark the end of the Alley controversy.⁶⁹

April 2, 1829: Alley Departs

After an agonizing period of nearly five months during which the patient Shaker leadership had been severely tested, and their authority compromised in the eyes of many, Alley finally departed. On March 31 Alley walked to the trustees’ office and announced his intention to withdraw from the Shaker Society. He then visited the elders and told them of his decision, whereupon he was escorted back to the Office to make his final settlement. He ultimately left Union Village on April 2, 1829.⁷⁰ In meeting on Sunday, April 12, McNemar gave a sermon which attempted to put a period on the saga of Abijah Alley. He opened by comparing Alley to the Apostle Paul’s companion Demas, who apostatized, “having loved this present world.”⁷¹ McNemar then recounted the whole saga chronologically, beginning with the ministry’s first knowledge of the “strange notions which it was said he recd in dreams and visions,” beginning in November 1828. He told of how Alley regarded the Shaker Church as under the power of the dragon, and that the brethren and sisters of the East House must rise up and reclaim it in the name of the Christ Spirit. Despite Alley’s best efforts, the Shaker leadership ultimately prevailed, although the community was badly damaged by the ordeal.

The Next Chapter

Alley seems to have landed on his feet. By June the following ad was run in Cincinnati for a public lecture by Alley, opening a new phase of his career. As an enhancement to his ministry, Alley had begun painting.

NOTICE. Mr. Franks respectfully informs the citizens of Cincinnati, that Mr. A. ALLEY, lately from the Shaker Society Union, Ohio, will deliver a course of lectures at the Gallery of Paintings, corner of Main and Fifth streets, commencing this evening, at 8 o’clock. The object of these lectures is explained in the following notice.

TO THE PUBLIC.

In the year 1813, I became a member of the Union Village society, in Ohio, which I left in 1829, after becoming acquainted with its spirit and government. The agitation of my mind during the latter part of my stay in this society was extreme, during which time I had many extraordinary visions, some of which are yet mysteries to me, and others so forcibly obvious of truth, that I feel myself conscientiously bound to give them to the public, for the purpose of testing their truth or error. In the first place, I will endeavor to show the *existence of God according to the thing I see within the veil*. I will also exhibit images illustrative of what I have seen, leaving every person to form his own judgment of them, after some remarks of explanation and illustration. I will then endeavor to illustrate the character of the old Dragon, spoken of in the Revelation of St. John.

ABIJAH ALLEY

July 3d.⁷²

Following the Spirits South

Alley's stint lecturing in Cincinnati must have been brief. Unfortunately, the images he used to illustrate his lectures are not known to survive. He first appears in public records on the 1830 Campbell County, Kentucky census; his brothers James (whose wife Catherine and son Daniel had also been Union Village Shakers) and Peter also headed households there. The census shows Abijah as the head of a large household, but it is not known who shared his home; perhaps some were those he had led away from Union Village. Catherine and Daniel were apparently living with James and the children she had left behind. The fourth Alley Shaker apostate, Fannie, married there in 1830.⁷³

Covington and Cincinnati were connected by ferry service. In 1831 a Cincinnati newspaper claimed Abijah Alley as a resident of that city in its notice about the exhibit of a model of Alley's design for a bee house, based on utopian socialist Robert Owen's "system of communities in parallelograms," the same Robert Owen whose writings had influenced the 1825 Pleasant Hill dissidents led by John Whiteby.⁷⁴ Alley was reading more than his Bible, and Cincinnati offered him interesting new perspectives on religion.⁷⁵

It was probably Alley's father's death in 1834 that brought him home to Long Hollow, for although he was a younger son it was Abijah who was

executor of his estate. Turning sharply from Shaker communitarianism, Alley amassed substantial acreage on which he farmed, had three orchards, and grazed sizable herds of horses and cattle that provided a comfortable annual income for his large family. In his time he was the exemplar of the Founding Fathers' notion of a virtuous citizen of the Republic, beholden to no man for his livelihood. However, his spiritual yearnings were by no means sated, and he soon became locally renowned for much more than his impressive farm.

Rebuilding Solomon's Temple

Abijah Alley had expressed his interest in rebuilding Solomon's Temple, indeed his divine mandate to do so, while he was among the Shakers. For his home, Alley had a log residence built on the plan of the temple.⁷⁶ According to the Biblical account, the stones for Solomon's temple were prepared in the quarry, so there was "neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."⁷⁷ Accordingly, Alley's house was constructed of logs, "cut and hewn in the woods and notched and fitted there, so that when they were being put together there was 'no sound of hammer or any iron tool.'"⁷⁸

Solomon's temple was more than just another Bible story for many people, as it was for Abijah. It formed the core of Masonic ritual and symbolism, and a 1762 London book that revealed the secrets of the Masonic order enjoyed frequent reprinting on both sides of the Atlantic through the 1820s. These widely circulated explanations of the mystical significance of Solomon's temple supplemented the Biblical accounts. The Bible says that the temple built by Solomon—the first temple—was destroyed by the Babylonians. After the Babylonian captivity the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. This second temple was enlarged by Herod, and left in ruins by the Romans. Some have interpreted Biblical prophecy as requiring the building of a third temple to trigger the second coming of Christ. As a Shaker Alley had subscribed to a theological system built on the assertion that the Christ spirit had already come back to earth in the form of Mother Ann, but his apostasy and statements indicate he believed himself to be a true Christ spirit as well. Others followed him when he left the Shakers, and he eventually he had a band of followers living near his home. This is remarkably similar to what he had proposed to Samuel C. Manning, the landowner near Union Village, when he attempted to secure a premises there in 1830. Surrounded by his followers, Alley's rebuilding of

the temple in the mountains of Virginia was surely intended to welcome the end times.

Bringing the World Back to Long Hollow

Alley was financially secure and curious about the world outside Long Hollow. As the story goes, one day on the way to have his corn ground, it came to him that he wanted to see the president of the United States. He dropped off his corn and asked the miller to grind it and deliver it to his family with a message: He would return “by and by.” After two months, he did return, but soon took a notion to see every ruler of Europe and visit the Holy Land. The family heard nothing from him for almost three years; he reappeared one day and claimed to have seen every crowned head of Europe and spent a year in Palestine during which he collected seeds to replicate the flora of the Holy Land around his rustic Solomon’s temple. Alley was deeply attached to his home, but never lost his wanderlust and yen to know about life outside southwestern Virginia. The tales of people and places he brought back to Long Hollow and its environs must have seemed marvelous to his family and neighbors. According to another of his sons, Abijah in his old age “could say that he had personally known every president of the United States from Washington to Lincoln. He always went up to the capital to attend every inauguration of a new president, and they would recognize him when they saw him, and greet him as a friend. It was very easy for them to know him for he wore a very long, very white beard.”⁷⁹

Abijah Alley cultivated the appearance of a Biblical prophet. Just as Solomon’s temple was built on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount and surrounded by terraced gardens, Alley, using seeds he collected in the Holy Land, planted a terraced garden on the hillsides around his home with the “vines and olives, flowers and shrubs, whose seeds had ripened on the hills of Jerusalem.”⁸⁰ He also began painting scenes from Scripture on the interior walls. The *New York Times* reporter who visited what was left of the house in 1897 described the only image that remained, “representing the Garden of Eden before the Fall,” and opined that it showed “much natural talent” in its clarity, composition, and use of color.⁸¹

Abijah Alley wrote a book during these years. No copy of the book is known to survive, and information about its contents comes from an 1897 article in the *New York Times*. The text apparently detailed his weeks in heaven, his conversations with angels, explained his interpretation of

theology, and offered his prophecies. According to the *Times* article, his neighbors thought his predictions of secession, civil war, emancipation, and Union victory suggestive of an unsound mind, but all came to pass twenty years later. This in itself is hardly more than others foresaw; its importance is that it pinpoints Alley's book as written by the early 1840s. When his book was finished, Alley gave copies away. Because none has been located, only fragments of his belief system can be pieced together. The Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg was read and discussed widely by the 1830s, and it is likely that his stories inspired Alley's own conversations with angels. Fellow Union Village Shaker apostates Aquila Massie Bolton and Richard McNemar, Jr. (son of the elder who "labored" so long with Alley) both became prominent Swedenborgians, after studying his works while still among the Shakers. At the time Alley and his brothers were in Covington, there was at least one active follower of Swedenborg there: Pliny Bliss, who operated the horse ferry to Cincinnati where there was a congregation of Swedenborg's followers.⁸²

Swedenborg was a devout Christian, a believer in heaven and hell who cautioned that only a visionary such as he could or should have such communications, and that to attempt them was dangerous for most mortals.⁸³ Abijah Alley, chosen by God, would have been exempt from such peril. He believed that he too had visited heaven and conversed with angels. A close and careful reader of the Bible, Alley, like Swedenborg, formulated his own interpretation of its meaning and God's will. He was a preacher with a dedicated following who drew large congregations to hear him when he spoke. His life and the home he built are evidence of his intensive engagement with Scripture, and especially with prophecy. Beyond his rejection of creeds and sectarian religion, though, the written record of his life in Long Hollow says little more than that he believed in the brotherhood of mankind and apparently chose not to own slaves.⁸⁴

Texas: Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker

In 1840, Abijah Alley was earning his living as a farmer. His older brother James had moved with his wife Catherine and son Daniel, former Shakers, from Kentucky to Indiana and then to Texas. Thomas Alley, father of Abijah and James, had built a mill on the Clinch River by 1820. James found a likely Texas stream and built a similar mill by 1838, and Alley's Mills quickly became an East Texas trading center. Both James and Daniel were listed in the 1846 Republic of Texas poll lists.⁸⁵ It may have been to

visit them that the peripatetic Abijah made his way to Texas around 1848.

How Moseley Baker, a hero of the Texas struggle for independence from Mexico, came to have a copy of Abijah Alley's book remains a mystery. He might have obtained it on a visit to the East in 1846 or found it in Texas.⁸⁶ Baker had only recently found the Lord. He became a Methodist preacher, and by 1847 caused a schism in his fledgling Houston congregation when he and others became fascinated with the possibility of communication between this world and the next. Baker started what observers labeled the first Spiritualist newspaper in the South, the *Texas True Evangelist*, to disseminate the good news of spirit communion and animal magnetism. In this paper, he printed the observations of Abijah Alley.⁸⁷ This fragmentary story seemed destined to remain so because no trace of Alley's book remains, save two brief references to it in other publications.⁸⁸ Nor are there any known copies of Moseley Baker's *Texas True Evangelist*, and only a few secondary works mention it.

What is notable is that this early reference to Spiritualism, particularly in the South, has given scholars cause to reconsider the introduction of that word to describe spirit communication. It points to Baker having been familiar with the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, who displayed remarkable clairvoyant powers when mesmerized. In the early 1840s, heralded as the "Poughkeepsie Seer," Davis became a successful clairvoyant for paying customers and displayed a knack for diagnosing illnesses.⁸⁹ Davis's first book, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, appeared in late summer of 1847. The principles set forth in Davis's book urged a revolution in the way people understood this world and the next. According to the historian Robert W. Delp, "Within a short time the obscure Davis became the 'prophet' of a 'Harmonial' dispensation which he continued to propagate in books, articles, and public addresses." Davis had a theoretical structure in place when the Fox sisters—credited with starting the Spiritualist movement in 1848—started rapping, and his Harmonial philosophy "provided the foundation" for many believers in the Spiritualist movement as it began its rapid spread.⁹⁰ Moseley Baker of Houston and presumably Abijah Alley of Long Hollow as well were early adopters.

Alley's Final Years

The 1850 Scott County census lists his occupation as C. C. Clergyman, another enigmatic clue to Alley's religious views. This could be Christian Church, Church of Christ, or Christian Connexion.⁹¹ All three sought

to restore worship to the purity of the apostolic church founded by Jesus Christ. "C C Clergyman" might also refer to the religious sect Abijah Alley founded. Known as "the little band," it still had a few adherents in Scott County on the eve of World War II. Almost nothing is recorded of its activities, save that Abijah Alley was the main contributor to construction of a church in Long Hollow, and that he "frequently began his services several hours before dawn; and large congregations did attend these services."⁹²

By 1860, Alley was listed in the census not as a minister but a miller, having acquired a mill where he employed several of his sons.⁹³ He died in 1866, four days shy of his seventh-fifth birthday. Alley's journey through life was extraordinary. The breadth of his religious experience spanned the early evangelical awakenings in the South, the strict hierarchical communitarianism of the Shakers, and the entirely self-directed revelations that led him to publish his heavenly conversations with angels, reconstruct the temple, and travel to the Holy Land. Throughout his life Alley's charisma and religious fervor secured the attention and devotion of followers who recognized something of a prophet in him. Finally, Abijah Alley's visionary work planted seeds of the nascent Spiritualist movement in the American South. They grew and bore fruit, just as the seeds Alley retrieved from the Holy Land bloomed for a time around his temple in Long Holler.

A REMARKABLE VIRGINIAN

**Abijah Alley, Backwoods Preacher,
Prophet, Author, Artist, and
Globe Trotter.**

HE LIVED IN "LONG HOLLER"

**Erected a Building Modeled After His
Conception of What Solomon's
Temple Was Like—Part of
It Still Standing.**

*The New York Times published
this brief biographical account of
Alley on November 7, 1897. It is
one of the very few sources for his
life outside of Shaker manuscripts.*

Notes

1. Abijah Alley gave his date of birth as March 28, 1791, when he entered the Shaker community at Union Village, Ohio in 1817. Three other Alleys came to the community later, and all left between 1828 and 1830. For the information about the Alleys at Union Village, we are indebted to the late Katherine Lollar Rowland of Otterbein, Ohio.
2. "Alley & Christian Genealogy," <http://www.hullhome.com/Alley.gen.htm> (accessed August 26, 2009).
3. Robert M. Addington, *History of Scott County, Virginia* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Kingsport Press, 1932), 85, 93.
4. *Stony Creek Baptist Church Minute Books, 1801–1811*, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/va/scott/church/stonycrk.txt> (accessed August 14, 2009).
5. *Biography of Peter H. Alley* (written between 1895 and 1901), <http://www.angelfire.com/tn/thewilliamsons/ALLEY.html> (accessed October 6, 2009). The other New Light who later became a Christian was the biographer's grandfather, Peter Alley.
6. Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: The Search for the Perfect Society* (Toronto: General Publishing Company, 1953), 21.
7. For this information we are indebted to the late Katherine Lollar Rowland of Otterbein, Ohio. "A Church Record," Shaker Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society (hereafter OCIWHI), III:B-34, records Alley's arrival in 1817, but he later claimed he had lived among them since 1813 in "Notice," *The Sentinel, and Star in the West* (Cincinnati, Oh.) 1, no. 38 (June 26, 1830): 299. In light of the evidence that Alley's grasp of quantifiable fact had loosened during the late 1820s, the Shaker records are probably the more reliable source.
8. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).
9. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." John 14:12 (KJV).
10. John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1950), 2, 3, 11, 152; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: A. A. Knopf: 1997), 57–8.
11. Jonathan Butler, "From Millerism to Seventh-Day Adventism: 'Boundless

- Consolidation,”” *Church History* 55, no. 1 (March 1986): 55.
12. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989), 122; Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York: B. Franklin, 1977), x, 281.
 13. Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers: From the Old World to the New World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 58, 141, 15–19. Hardcover edition published in 1987 as *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers*, 141: “One of the French Prophets’ bases of operations had been Manchester, and it must have been through some nameless Prophets in the Lancashire region that the spark of divine possession was passed to the little body of seekers that came to be called Shakers.”
 14. Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 3, 8.
 15. Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 19.
 16. *Ibid.*, 38, 17–18.
 17. Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 208.
 18. John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787–1805* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 65.
 19. *Ibid.*, 68.
 20. *Ibid.*, 70, 120–21.
 21. Stein, *Shaker Experience in America*, 92, 93.
 22. *Ibid.*, 126.
 23. *Ibid.*, 128. John Whitbey moved on to Robert Owen’s New Harmony community in Indiana.
 24. “A Church Record,” 202.
 25. *Ibid.*, 104.
 26. Richard McNemar, “Diary, memoranda of events, and other writings,” [6]. Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Item 256, (hereafter DLC-MSS).
 27. “A Church Record,” 148–49.
 28. Abigail Clark, “Journal and other Writings,” Item 164c, Shaker Collection, DLC-MSS.
 29. “A Church Record,” 138.
 30. McNemar, “Diary,” [171].
 31. Folder containing papers of Abijah Alley, DLC-MSS, Item 349c.

32. McNemar, "Diary," [101-2].
33. Ibid, [114].
34. Ibid, [3].
35. Ibid, [3-8].
36. Ibid, [9].
37. Ibid, [10].
38. Ibid, [10].
39. Ibid, [117], [10]. Different sections of this source document refer to Alley being removed as elder of the North Lot, or of the East House. The identification of the various families at Union Village during this period, especially when the names of the families and their geographic locations are often confusingly substituted for one another in manuscript sources, makes it difficult to state with certainty which family Alley had been leading when he was removed, although it seems to have been the newly constituted East Family gathered in the wake of the "great move."
40. Names of those who left were taken from "Diary, Union Village, Ohio, 1826-1860," Item 167, Shaker Collection, DLC-MSS. They are as follows: 1828, September 2 Archabald Houston, Sept. 6 John Watts, Sept. 15 Solomon Smith, Sept. 25 Patience Spining, Dexter Ball, October 7 Martha Kimble, Oct. 9 Mildon Kitchell, Amos Holloway, Oct. 12 Luther Babbitt, Oct. 13 James Blue, Oct. 22 Rachel Baxter, Oct. 25 Thomas Millikin, Oct. 27 Samuel Anderson, Richard McNemar Jr. (from Brick House), Oct. 30 Irene Watts, November 3 Phebe Johnson, Nov. 18 Lovisa Milligen, Nov. 25 Samuel Smith, December 19 John Galloway; 1829, January 1 James Wallace, February 10 Jonathan Gandy, Feb. 11 Joseph Watt, March 26 Molly Sering, March 27 Margery Mackeen, April 2 "Abijah Alley abscon[d] ed this morning from the office."
41. For a thorough treatment of Bolton, see Sandra Soule, *Independency of the Mind: Aquila Massie Bolton, Poetry, Shakerism, and Controversy* (Clinton, N.Y.: Richard W. Couper Press, 2011).
42. Hewitt is found spelled in a variety of ways, including Huet, Hewet, ... For this paper it is standardized as Hewitt according to his own handwriting on his statement in Item 349c, Shaker Collection, DLC-MSS.
43. McNemar, "Diary," [16].
44. Ibid., [17].
45. Ibid., [17-18].
46. Folder containing papers of Abijah Alley, DLC-MSS, Item 349c. The date of this statement is ascertained from the transcription of it given in

- McNemar, "Diary," [19-20], and corroborated in McNemar, "Diary," [118], [202], [119].
47. McNemar, "Diary," [21]. For a fuller discussion of Scales's life and relations with the Shakers, as well as the text of his publication, see David D. Newell, "William Scales' 1789 'Mystery of the People Called Shakers,'" *American Communal Societies Quarterly* Preview issue (September 2006): 6-20.
48. McNemar, "Diary," [21-22].
49. Ibid., [119-20].
50. Ibid., [23-24].
51. Folder containing papers of Abijah Alley, DLC-MSS, Item 349c.
52. Ibid.
53. McNemar, "Diary," [24-29].
54. Ibid., [30-35].
55. Ibid., [91-93].
56. Ibid., [30-36].
57. Ibid., [37-47].
58. Ibid., [37-47].
59. Ibid., [48].
60. McNemar, "Diary," [53-66]. Pages [81-87] of McNemar's "Diary" appear to contain Hewitt's confession. The item is untitled, unsigned, and unattributed, but its content and placement in McNemar's Diary suggest that it is Hewitt's confession to McNemar.
61. "Daily Record of Events of the Church Family," Union Village, Ohio, OCIWHi, V:B-230.
62. McNemar, "Diary," [67-68].
63. Ibid., [87-90].
64. Ibid., [90, 94].
65. Ibid., [95-100]. "S.M." is identified as Samuel C. Manning on page [173-79].
66. Ibid., [123, 173-80].
67. Ibid., [109-12].
68. Ibid., [125-28], see also [134] for dragon's tail reference.
69. This hymn can be found in *Philos Harmoniae* [*pseud.* Richard McNemar], *A Selection of Hymns and Poems* (Watervliet, Oh.: 1833), [103].
70. McNemar, "Diary," [179].
71. Ibid., [113].
72. "Notice," [299].

73. "Campbell County Marriages 1826–1835," <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kycampbe/marriages1826.htm> (accessed 14 August, 2009).
74. "Beehives," *Western Tiller*, reprinted in *Genesee Farmer*, May 14, 1831. It is tempting to speculate that it might have been Abijah Alley to whom John Woods referred in this remembrance of the absurdity of some of the "gifts" Shakers claimed: "These gifts remind me of an event in Union Village. A young man had the charge of the Bees there. He had taken great care of them, but they did not prosper, nor afford much honey. While eldress Tinsey was sick, and was expected to die in a few days, one of the ministry, he said, told him, that as soon as he should hear of eldress Tinsey's death, he should go and knock with his knuckles on the bee gum, and say, Eldress Tinsey is dead. Then his bees would prosper." John Woods, *Shakerism Unmasked, or, A Narrative, Shewing the Entrance of the Shakers Into the Western Country, Their Stratagems and Devices, Discipline and Economy: Together with what May Seem Necessary to Exhibit the True State of that People* (Paris, Ky.: John Woods, 1826), reprinted as "Shakers, or Shaking Quakers," in Burton W. Carr, *Gleanings of Religion, or a Compilation Containing the Natural History of Man—a True Account of the Different Sects in the Religious World; Together with Much Useful and Instructive Information on Various Subjects* (Lexington, Ky.: Burton W. Carr, 1829), [263].
75. In the wake of his split with the Shakers and in the context of his openness to unorthodox social and religious influences, Abijah Alley would almost certainly have been drawn—particularly as clergymen were offered free admission—to the Infernal Regions exhibit at Cincinnati's Western Museum. Opened in 1828, it featured what to visitors was evocative lighting, sound effects, and mechanized figures, all separated from viewers by electrified iron bars. Creator Hiram Powers became a lifelong Swedenborgian, and his brother and roommate were both members of Cincinnati's Swedenborgian First New Jerusalem Society. As an inventor himself, as well as what historian David Abzug would call a "religious virtuoso," it is likely Alley would have sought out Powers. See David J. Voelker, "Cincinnati's Infernal Regions Exhibit and the Waning of Calvinist Authority," *American Nineteenth Century History* 9, no. 3 (September 2008): 219, 229, 231.
76. "A Remarkable Virginian," *New York Times*, November 7, 1897, 3. For the Biblical description of Solomon's temple that Abijah Alley would have used as his inspiration, see 1 Kings, chaps. 6–8.
77. 1 Kings 6:7.
78. "A Remarkable Virginian."

79. Ibid. Abijah Alley, born in 1791, probably could not have personally known all the presidents.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. "As early as 1815 the subject of a bridge across the Ohio was mooted by the enthusiasts and the want of a steam ferry boat commented upon. At this time and for some years later a Mr. Bliss conducted a horse ferry boat whose qualities of 'safety, comfort, dispatch and capacity for heavy burthen' commended themselves to the public." Charles Theodore Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1904), 1:504. Bliss appears on the 1820 and 1830 Campbell County census as a resident of Covington, and is listed as a Receiver in Covington in the *Journal of Proceedings of the Sixteenth General Convention of Receivers of the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem in the United States: Held at the Temple of the Second Society of the New Jerusalem in Philadelphia. June 5, 6, and 7, 1834–78* (Boston: Otis Clapp, 1834), 115.
83. Cyriel Odhner Singsted, *The Swedenborgian Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Record Press, 1952), 222. Swedenborg experienced the "danger of communication with the dead, of intercourse with a world of spirits packed with legions of demons, waiting to rush in upon him and destroy him body and soul. Swedenborg realized this danger. While he was asleep in his bed they plotted, he says, to strangle him. They surrounded him with nightmares and visions so horrible as nearly to destroy his reason. They inspired him with an almost uncontrollable desire to commit suicide. They tried to make him drink something that would deprive him of understanding. They inflicted excruciating pains upon various parts of his body, causing nausea, swooning, or fever. 'I doubt whether others could have endured it on account of the pain,' he says, 'but having become accustomed to it I at last bore it often without pain.' Once a spirit seemed to come up to him stealthily from behind and plunge a dagger into him. 'I felt as it were a stroke through the heart,' he says, 'and immediately another in the brain such as easily would have killed a man. But being protected by the Lord, I feared nothing.... Unless the Lord defended man every moment ... he would instantly perish, in consequence of the indescribably intense and mortal hatred which prevails in the world of spirits against the things of love and faith towards the Lord. [But] the devil can do no harm to those whom the Lord protects, as it has been granted me to know from much astonishing experience, so that at last I have no fear even of the worst of the infernal crew.'"

84. Abijah Alley had one male slave under age ten in 1840, and the slave does not appear on the 1850 or 1860 slave census for Scott County. His brother Thomas owned one slave in 1860, and she was listed as a fugitive from the state.
85. Marion Day Mullins, *Republic of Texas: Poll Lists for 1846* (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1974), 3.
86. There were four Alley brothers who came to Texas from Missouri and were involved with the Austin colony, but we cannot determine that there is any connection with the family of Abijah Alley. Alley's brother James was in East Texas by 1838, along with his wife Catherine and son Daniel who had been Shakers with Abijah; it is probable that they would have received a copy of Abijah's book. Their home at Alley's Mills was a center of commercial traffic in the Cass County area in the 1840s.
87. Rev. Homer S. Thrall, of the Texas Conference, *History of Methodism in Texas* (Houston: E. H. Cushing, Publisher, 1872), 95.
88. Because there is so little information about Abijah Alley and Moseley Baker and their publications, it is impossible to establish a reliable chronology of influences on Baker or the events between his visit to Kentucky in 1846 and his death in Houston of yellow fever on November 4, 1848. What is possible is to assess the clues available and construct the narrative that makes the most sense.
89. See Marc Demarest, "Apostolic Power and True Evangelism, 1840–1850," Chasing Down Emma (blog), August 30, 2015, <http://ehbritten.blogspot.com/2015/08/apostolic-power-and-true-evangelism.html/>, for the results of this discussion. It is a significant scholarly re-assessment of how and when the word Spiritualism acquired this particular connotation. For an example in a primary source, provided by Marc Demarest, see "Letter from the Queen City," *The National Era* (Washington, D.C.), February 17, 1848, 5, 27.
90. *Other Side of Salvation*, 21; *Modern American Spiritualism*, 61–62; *Other Side of Salvation*, 38; Robert W. Delp, "A Spiritualist in Connecticut: Andrew Jackson Davis, the Hartford Years, 1850–1854," *The New England Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (September 1980): 345. A summation of the Harmonial philosophy appeared in an early number of *The Spirit Messenger*, August 31, 1850, 29: "The Law of Harmony." Superior to all other laws established in creation, and existing as the legitimate result of their action, is the great law of Harmony. This law applies not only to the outward universe, but also to Deity himself, as it constitutes one of the essential and inherent principles of His nature. It is in fact the *end* attained by the innumerable parts of

creation—the *effect*, produced by the natural operation of the grand WHOLE. The final purpose of God being resolved into a unity, all things tend harmoniously towards one end Though occupying different spheres, and existing in different stages of development, the varied forms of nature have no conflicting aims, but combine to work out the great and beautiful result, intended by the Divine Mind. Each part in the mechanism of creation, bears a relation to all other parts; each is essential to form the whole, and each performs its appropriate office, while all unite, and act in unison and harmony, to accomplish the proposed design.

91. There were a number of evangelical sects that called themselves “the Christians” in the late eighteenth century. For a concise explanation of how the names Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Christian Connection, and Churches of Christ were applied, see David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 4-9. John Woods and the post-Cane Ridge schismatics adopted the name Christians by 1804.
92. Sutton, *Early Osbornes and Alleys*, 33-34.
93. “WPA Interview with Joseph H. Alley, Lebanon, Oregon, aged 100 years and 4 months.” Transcribed by Patricia Dunn. <http://lgsoregon.org/resources/wpa/alleyjos.htm> (accessed July 28, 2008).