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SHAKER DWELLINGS

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- Shakerism was founded by Ann Lee. She and ten followers came to the US from England in 1774.

- Under Lee, Shakerism encouraged individual religious expression, argued that the Christ spirit dwelled within each person, emphasized the spoken word, anticipated the imminent millennium, preached equality of the sexes, and professed celibacy as a way for its members to be more like Christ. There was no formal meeting/worshipping place.

- The next leader Whitaker required that all members should give their personal possessions to the church, and also began building Shaker meetinghouses which formalized worship

- Next leader Meacham advocated communal societies, established first official Shaker communal society where members shared property and duties in New Lebanon. 105 members left their homes and settled on farms donated by Shaker converts (gospel order). By 1794 there were 11 Shaker villages

-New Lebanon village was divided into 3 families: first, second and third, who were not meant to interact—the most committed were not to be tainted by less fervent members. The first family were most committed to Shakerism, the second were the elderly, and the third were young ones or novices.

- Each family had a set of elders and eldresses (spiritual leaders), trustees (handled affairs of the world), and deacons and deaconesses (temporal leaders)

- Trustees and deacons lived separately from the main body of members so they could perform their duties without bringing into the community worldly influences that would corrupt

- The division of the community into large families with individual leaders facilitated the dissemination and enforcement of Shaker rules

- Families also served to replace the natural families of the converts, living together as a spiritual and temporal family more potent than those of the world

- A ministry of elders/eldresses oversaw a bishopric of three or four adjacent communities

- By 1826 the shakers had established 19 permanent communities

- 1821 Millennial Laws standardized the appearance of dwellings and the appearance of the villages themselves- architectural orthodoxy could better reinforce religious and social rules of behavior (architectural code basically)

-The also codified rules and schedules for cleaning- neatness and order were intended to set the Shaker community apart from worldly towns

- Shaker buildings were set close together to facilitate communication among members, enhance work efficiency and allow the elders to better supervise the community

- Shaker buildings were highly specialized to their use

- Later, they constructed separate workshops for the sisters, brothers, and the ministry

- Unlike monasteries, Shaker villages were not developed according to a cohesive program, they didn’t use modules or grid systems to locate their buildings

- Structures were situated along the main street that ran through each family’s community of buildings, creating a linear arrangement of the most important buildings (meetinghouse, dwelling houses, and workshops) with secondary rows for supporting ones

- Sites were chosen to promote interaction and trade with outsiders

- Physical and spiritual center of the entire village was the meetinghouse, and the social center center of each family was the main dwelling house. Dwelling houses are the largest buildings, and stand out as symbols of family unity and conformity. Each one has a bell on top that rings to announce rising, eating, worshiping, and bed times.

- They established a communal system that could be replicated in different places

- by manipulating the sense of personal space and areas of movement, Shaker leaders created an environment that represent the dual spheres of heaven and earth—for example, space separating men and women supported the spiritual need for celibacy (separate sleeping quarters, also separate entrances and stairways in meetinghouses)

- Pegs and nails embedded in the floors dictated the steps of dances

- Houses accommodated from 30-100 people, although ideal size was 50

- Interior elements were duplicated to separate the sexes and insure they would only meet each other at organized meetings, for meals, and for worship

- Strict schedules resembled early factory schedules

- “hands to work, hearts to God” mother Ann

- Shakers lived in large communal houses because the foundation and stability of the community relied on the subordination of the individual to the group, and a large group required patience and cooperation. Also it was more economical, and made chores easier to perform

- Children lived in their own order, apart from other members with one guardian, in order to easier indoctrinate them into the shaker way of life

- Privacy was unknown- large dwellings allowed better surveillance

- Elders wished to keep all members on the road to perfection, but they also wanted to maximize efficiency in producing goods. This was implemented largely through regulatory standardization of space arrangements propagated by the central ministry

- Rooms of family elders and deacons were located near entrances and other busy areas to facilitate surveillance

- Many houses were constructed of stone which had the sense of permanence and authority

- Interior windows are used for surveillance

- HABS plans of New Lebanon North Family’s main dwelling record a typical layout

- Basement is for food storage and preparation

- Usually the dining room is on the same level as the kitchen to make serving meals efficient, although sometimes the dining room was located directly about the kitchen to isolate the noise of food prep underground, and move meals up via dumbwaiter

- First floor was most active area, with common rooms, separate entrances for men and women, with corresponding staircases.

- The buildings are divided into 3 sections: brothers, sisters, and center space for the deacons and elders

- Upper levels contain retiring rooms, divided as above

- Division of sexes was to remind about celibacy rule, but the goal was not to have as much distance that characterized monasteries

- Hallways, doorways, and walls restrict circulation between various rooms

- The architecture segmented space according to the codes of behavior and movement of the Millennial Laws

- Retiring rooms held 4-8 people (designed so roommates can work in teams and keep an eye on each other), deacon rooms had 2.

- Shakers were frequently directed by deacons to change rooms, a method intended to prevent residents from forming deep personal relationships and to keep apart natural family members

- People lived with others with similar jobs, so as to be productive and efficient

- Built in furniture was common in order to save space and was another method of controlling behavior and asserting order within dwelling houses. Both communal and more private spaces had built-ins

- Each large house had an attic filled with built-in cabinets or shelves to store goods from the new converts. The items were catalogued with a numerical/letter system

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Julie Nicoletta, “The Architecture of Control: Shaker Dwelling Houses and the Reform Movement in Early Nineteenth-Century America”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (September 2003): 352-387.