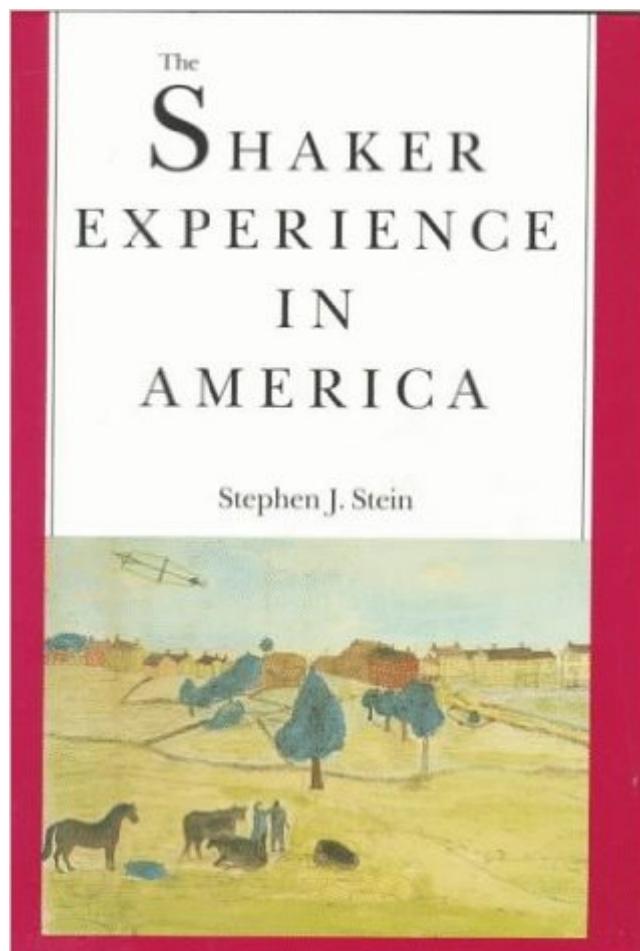


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The Shaker Experience In America: A History Of The United Society Of Believers



Synopsis

The Shakers, once a radical religious sect whose members were despised and harassed by their fellow Americans, have in recent years become celebrated--and sentimentalized--for their communal way of life, the simplicity of their worship, their belief in celibacy, pacifism, and equality of the sexes, and not least their superb furniture and handicrafts. This monumental book is the first general history of the Shakers from their origins in eighteenth-century England to the present day. Drawing on written and oral testimony by Shakers over the past two centuries, Stephen J. Stein offers a full and often revisionist account of the movement: their charismatic leaders, the early years in revolutionary New York and New England, the expansion into the West, the maturation and growth of the sect before the Civil War, the decline in their fortunes after the war, the painful adjustments to society Shakers had to make during the first half of the twentieth century, the renaissance of interest after 1950, and the "forbidden topic" within contemporary Shakerism--the conflict between the two remaining villages at Canterbury, New Hampshire, and Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Stein provides many new interpretations of the Shaker experience. He reassesses the role of founder Ann Lee, emphasizes the impact of the western Shaker settlements on the course of the society's history, and describes the variety of cultural enterprises that have obscured the religious and historical dimensions of the Shakers. Throughout Stein places the Shaker experience within the wider context of American life and shows how the movement has evolved to deal with changing times. Shattering the romantic myth that has been perpetuated about the quaint and peaceful Shakers, Stein portrays a group that is factious, practical, and fully human.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ann Lee said "Do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live, and as you would if you knew you must die tomorrow." That sentiment carries much of the flavor of the American Shaker sect and acts as a guiding principle for understanding their history. And that history is important, particularly if you want to understand the US during the nineteenth century. These highly successful communities managed to contribute to the fabric of a nation while living out their ideals of celibacy, simplicity of life, separation from the world, and community of goods. Industrialization and the US Civil War caused the circumstances that led to their inevitable decline, as the new country became more interested in class struggle than utopian visions. Extremely interesting reading.

Having visited the Shaker Hancock site during 1997, I became interested in the Shaker experience. Found this publication to be well researched and written so that it kept ones interest and provided material that took the reader inside the whole concept and idea that they believed in. Would recomend this book to anyone with an open mind and who enjoys different subjects and views.

Hang onto your bonnets...this book purports to be the true, un-romanticized history of the Shakers, which it is. It includes all the struggles, the in-fighting amongst the Shakers and between the various communities, the split between religious ideals and worldly dealing, their long and painful downfall in the hands of trust funds and lawyers, and includes the good, the bad, and the ugly. You won't find lyrical descriptions of their peaceful daily lives, beautiful craftsmanship or joyful personal worship. If you want that, go watch Ken Burns' documentary. I must say that this nitty-gritty, warts-and-all story is just as one-sided as a glamorous photo book of oval boxes, architecture and rhapsodic poetry about Shaker purity. We need to experience both sides, not one or the other.

I had purchased the book as was taking part in a Road Scholar trip to Pleasant Hill in Kentucky, a restored Shaker Village. The book is extremely well documented but found I sometimes did read through great amounts of detail. But it is well worth reading to discover the more complicated history of the group which goes beyond furniture and songs.

This book describes the Shaker life, but it did so in a way that seemed dry to me. I tried to read it for a college level course, but honestly did not make it all the way through. That is saying something, coming from a person who reads every book she starts from cover to cover, especially if it is an

assignment!

This book is for anyone who wants to understand "the shaker experience in America". I have to admit, it is a bit dry and text book like but this book is factual and dispells many myths that people have about the shakers. A must for anyone interested in this religion , in addition to visiting a Shaker site or museum collection

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