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# Historical Dictionary Of The Shakers (Historical Dictionaries Of Religions, Philosophies, And Movements Series)



## Synopsis

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, commonly known as the Shakers, followed Mother Ann Lee to the United States in 1774 when life in England became difficult. In the United States, they established several colonies whose governing principals included celibacy and agrarian communal living. Even at its peak, however, Shakerism claimed only about 4,500 members. Today, except for one active community in Sabbathday, Maine, the great Shaker villages are diminished, but the Shakers left an enduring impact on the religion and culture of the United States. The Historical Dictionary of the Shakers relates the history of this fascinating group through a chronology, an introductory essay, a bibliography, and over two hundred cross-referenced dictionary entries on Shaker communities, industries, individual families, and important people. Every definition, biography, and point of history was submitted to the Shakers at Sabbathday Lake for their review before it was included for publication. As such, the voice of the contemporary Shakers is found in the dictionary, and they have given it their unequivocal endorsement.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Long-time Shaker scholar Steve Paterwic has compiled an invaluable volume, packed with valuable information, based on decades of painstaking and exacting research in Shaker primary source manuscripts. The latest title in a long-running series of "Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements," edited by Jon Woronoff, this volume significantly expands upon,

corrects, and updates an earlier contribution to the same series. A substantial introductory essay provides the most careful and balanced summary overview of Shaker history, expansion, organization, and practice to be found in a recent publication. Appendices include a range of information, from a historical chronology of the Gospel Ministry to a current Covenant, contemporary iteration of the longstanding Millennial Laws (reflecting modern deletions so as to allow the reader to better understand the historical progression of this vital document), and summary accounts of contemporary Shaker daily life and worship. Paterwic's Bibliography alone is worth the price of the book. Instead of a single listing, Paterwic creates helpful bibliographic categories and includes an essay that skillfully contextualizes the various subfields of Shaker literature, providing an excellent overview of both the rich diversity of Shaker studies and of the directions in which Shaker studies has yet to evolve fully. But the centerpiece of this book is the "Dictionary" itself. Paterwic has compiled over 250 pages of alphabetized entries, and these cover a truly impressive range of people, places, concepts, and events reflecting well over two centuries of the Shaker experience. The majority consists of compact yet substantial essays, and the thorough cross-referencing allows the reader to flow seamlessly through the volume, developing a more thorough understanding of virtually any aspect of Shakerism. Overall, no reader can possibly go wrong with this fine volume. The Shaker "buff" will be greatly enlightened and stimulated for even a higher appreciation of things Shaker. The serious Shaker scholar will find a ready reference aid for tracking down facts and concepts that would otherwise be obscured in the vast and widely dispersed primary sources. And all readers will be touched by Paterwic's tender introduction, in which he reminds readers of the continued relevance of the Shaker message and the capacity of any person to be touched spiritually by this remarkable American tradition.

I have been engaged in the business of buying, selling, bibliographically describing and otherwise digressing on works by and about the American Shakers for nearly 35 years. I have a very large reference collection about the Shakers. I have a modest reference collection about the Shakers that can be deemed 'solid', 'useful', and reliable. And I have a small reference collection that I consider to be "of great value". I number this fine work among this latter group. If you are interested in the Shakers and desire informative, correct and 'solid' information about them, then this is where you want to go.

At last here is a book which is an excellent reference and research tool for anyone wishing to have factual information about the United Society of Shakers (The United Society of Believers in Christ's

Second Appearing). Stephen J. Paterwic has been a presenter and speaker at Shaker seminars and forums for many years, beginning his research in the mid 1970's. He is highly respected as a Shaker Scholar, with a reputation for exacting and honest work. This dictionary represents his research into the Shaker Society from both an historical and contemporary perspective. It is not written for anyone with only a casual interest in the Shakers, although they would find it filled with useful information, but for the scholar and student seeking correct facts and information on all the Shaker Societies and their members. It truly is a dictionary of information, where one may find the answers to many questions. I enthusiastically recommend this book to students of Shakerism in all its forms. Elaine L. Disch Past President, The Friends of the Shakers

The Historical Dictionary of the Shakers is an extremely valuable reference for several reasons: It states the truth about a variety of subjects germane to The United Society (called Shakers), it states them clearly and succinctly, and it presents them in an easy-to-find format. Author Stephen Paterwic does not shy away from controversy--but deals with it in a direct, dispassionate, and honest manner. Not everyone will like this book--certainly not those who would like to perpetuate such myths/lies as "the Shaker covenant was/is closed" and the like. I believe that time will prove that untruths and half truths must ultimately be subjected to the clear light of day. This is the true value of The Historical Dictionary of the Shakers and I celebrate its appearance; among those of us who strive, each in his own way, to bring forth the truth about the Shakers--past and present--this is great news. M. Stephen Miller, author of "From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands."

Steve Paterwic's historical dictionary is the single most useful reference book on the Shakers. I keep it within reach and consult it constantly. I have also read from cover to cover (not my usual practice for a dictionary). This book's accuracy, thoroughness, and cross-references make it an essential tool for newcomers to the field as well as experienced senior scholars. Previous reviews enumerate the more important strong points about this fine scholar's Historical Dictionary of the Shakers, but I will add three more. First, the cross-references (in bold type) make it much more useful than a standard dictionary. This book is also an index, which makes it especially valuable for scholars new to the field. Second, the typeface is large enough for aging eyes to read - an important consideration in making the material accessible in this era of shrinking fonts. Third, I am pleased to see that it is now also available in paperback at a more affordable price.

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