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**Mysteries of the Tyringham Shakers Unmasked: A New
Examination of People, Facts, and Figures**

By

Stephen Paterwic

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, or Shakers, remain the longest-lived communal society in the United States. Ironically, however, as the number of actual Believers has continued to diminish, more and more people from "the world" have taken notice of them. Indeed, Shakerism is perhaps the only religion in existence where the number of adherents (seven in January, 2000) is vastly eclipsed by the thousands who have an interest in them.

Hundreds of books, articles and pamphlets have been produced which detail the material culture of Shakerism. This includes various aspects of the decorative arts, as well as furniture, herbs, seeds, cooking and music. In stark contrast, very little in depth work has been done on individual Shakers or Shaker communities. This latter omission is particularly serious because it has caused much of Shaker studies to occur out of context. Especially lacking is almost any attempt to put together the history of the smaller Shaker societies.

The tiniest and most unique of the lesser Shaker communities was Tyringham, Massachusetts.¹ At its numerical peak in 1830, it barely and briefly had one hundred members, one third of whom were indentured children.² Most other Shaker societies by comparison had over two

¹ Tyringham was also called the City of Love, a spiritual name given it in the 1840's.

² Data from the federal census of 1830.

hundred members and the largest communities had over five hundred members with single family units larger than Tyringham.³ Isolated as it was in the steep and shadowy hills of the southern Berkshires, Tyringham was also the least visited by outsiders. In contrast, at nearby Hancock, Massachusetts, and New Lebanon, New York, hundreds of people from “the world” called on the Believers. At these places on Sundays, visitors attended worship with the Shakers to see them “go forth in the dance.” During the week, scores of customers traded with them. Seemingly forgotten Tyringham lived out its daily community life, mostly hidden from view and rarely visited even by Shakers.⁴ In addition, when hard times came to the community, little was done by Shaker leadership to bolster the society. As a result, Tyringham became the first Shaker community to dissolve due to lack of membership. At that time, April, 1875, no one could have foreseen that Tyringham’s closure would be the precursor of a trend that would continue to the present. Today only the community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, remains of the once-flourishing nineteen Shaker societies.

Since Tyringham was small and isolated, and closed first, there has always been an aspect of mystery about it. Though Shakers lived at Tyringham, from the time of the first conversions in 1782 until the spring of 1875, the departure of twenty-three members in 1858 seems to be the most well-known event. Many “know all about it,” while not being able to tell a single other fact about Tyringham Shaker history. Furthermore, as some Shaker scholars have pointed out, not one Shaker manuscript speaks of the departures. Deborah Burns, for example, in the *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and, Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* states that the Shakers at places like nearby New Lebanon record all

³ The Shaker society at New Lebanon, NY, for example had 609 members in 1864. The Church Family and the Second Family groups in this society had over one hundred and fifty members each.

⁴ The Central Ministry of the Shakers, which resided at New Lebanon, NY visited Tyringham on August 13, 1857. This was the first time since before 1830. Reference from *A Journal or Register of passing events, continued from former Volumes, kept by Rufus Bishop (1850-1859)*, New York Public Library. Of course, Tyringham did receive a number of visits a year from the ministry of the Shaker bishopric to which it belonged. This ministry officially resided at Hancock, MA. The Shaker society at Enfield, Connecticut, was also in this bishopric.

kinds of insignificant details and comment on everything happening in the world, but fail to mention the departure of twenty-three members from a Shaker community.⁵ The Believers failure to mention this event at Tyringham has helped mythologize the event into some fantastic speculations that continue to this day. Common lore has it that Shaker records were destroyed or altered to delete references to the departures, and that the exodus involved young adults who left to get married or were involved in a sexual scandal of some sort. One local historian has even said that the Shakers were forbidden to discuss the matter with non-Shakers. Of course, none of these speculations is based upon a single Shaker source, yet these myths have become deep seated in the field of Shaker studies. The purpose of this article is to fully discuss the departures of 1858 and for the first time discover the true nature of the incident. In addition, by placing this event in the context of Shaker history, valuable additional insights can be gained about Tyringham Shaker history as well as Shakerism as a whole.

Upon analysis the myths that have grown up around the departures of 1858, are not consistent with what we know of how the Shakers had evolved from a closed and strict society in the 1790's to a more relaxed and open one by the 1850's. In the early years of Shakerism, the elders would have had the power to meddle with people writing diaries and journals. By 1858, this power had evaporated , and the ministry and elders were far too busy trying to shore up a rapidly deteriorating Shakerism than to bother with what members were privately writing at home. This can be seen clearly in the 1860 revision of the Millennial Laws governing Shaker conduct. The new rules show an almost complete reversal of the strict and constricting laws of 1845.⁶ Furthermore, on a practical level, so many people kept records, how could the elders have made sure that what was written was only what was acceptable to them? Also, if all journals were collected and examined for offending passages, how come this itself has never been noted?

⁵ Burns, 143-144.

⁶ Actually the repressive laws of 1845 had never gained a wide acceptance and there is ample evidence that they were ignored by most Shakers as soon as they were published; yet it is the 1845 laws that those studying the Shakers love to quote because they support the popular Shaker stereotype.

These thoughts lead to a further one. If no Shaker journal records the departures of twenty-three people in 1858, how do we know it ever happened at all since all references are “after the fact”? The best known of these is John Scott’s *Tyringham: Old and New*, published in 1905.⁷ Another is Sister Elizabeth Thornber’s account of the departures in the *Berkshire Gleaner* in 1906.⁸ If these accounts, written down almost fifty years after the troubles of 1858, were the earliest and only accounts, then it would be tempting to dismiss them as embellishments. Yet an account of the departures can be found in a little known work, *The Book of Berkshire*, published in 1886. This is the earliest known reference to what happened. At that time, the Shakers had been gone from Tyringham just eleven years and the author, Clark W. Bryan, was visiting the property. He tells a cursory history of the Shakers in Tyringham and casually mentions that in 1858 twenty-three “ran away at one time.”⁹ The wording of this reference gives the first clue as to the nature of those who left and their circumstances.

The words “ran away” are very significant because they are most normally used to describe children who left a Shaker community without permission. Older members are generally described as having “apostatized,” “seceded” or simply having “left” or “went away.”¹⁰ Since no available Shaker journals provide population statistics for Tyringham, federal and state census reports must be used to get an idea of the people involved. If it is accepted that the departures occurred in 1858, then this event was halfway between the 1855 Massachusetts state census and the 1860 federal census. A careful look at who was in the community in 1855 according to the state census and who was there in

⁷ Scott, 20-25.

⁸ *Berkshire Gleaner*, July 18, 1906. Sister Elizabeth Thornber (1837-1920) was the last Tyringham Shaker. She died at Hancock Shaker Village.

⁹ Bryan, 181-183.

¹⁰ The ultimate fate of the 1,068 people who joined the Church family at New Lebanon, NY between 1787 and 1879 is chronicled in manuscript #1078 at the Winterthur Library, Edward Deming Andrews Collection, “Names and ages of those who have been gathered into the church...” The term “ran away” is used only three times: twice for youths and once for a young woman twenty-four years of age. The most popular term for those who did not stay was “left.”

1860 for the federal one shows a clear indication of who left the society and why this was never written down by the Shakers.

According to the state enumeration taken September 22, 1855, there were 77 Shakers in the Tyringham society. The 1860 federal census lists 55 Shakers or 22 fewer. These numbers in themselves are remarkable because they show a decline of almost exactly the same number (23) said to have run away. This easy manipulation of numbers cannot be used, however, because between 1855 and 1860, six Shakers died at Tyringham and a few new people joined. Clearly the normal fluctuations that occur in a living community cannot be ignored in favor of fitting data to a known number. A specific look at the names of those who were there in 1855 and who remained in 1860 will yield more accurate information.

Before this can be done, a word must be said about how the Shaker society at Tyringham was organized. Following the typical pattern, the largest group of Shakers there was organized into the Church Family. It was here that the Meeting House was located.¹¹ Tyringham as a society was so small, however, that this family was the only one fully organized into full gospel order.¹² The North (also called Second) Family was much smaller and did not even have a single dwelling house for members, an aspect that is unique in itself. The North Family also functioned as a gathering or novitiate family, the place where new adult converts went as well as some of the indentured children. Yet throughout its history, this family also had many members who had grown up there and never lived at the Church Family. In light of these characteristics, Shaker order had not evolved into distinct units at Tyringham beyond the gathering of the Church Family.

¹¹ The present day Shakers spell meeting house with capital letters out of respect and reverence.

¹² The term full gospel order means that a full complement of elders, trustees, and deacons was in place and that the family had its own specific covenant which legally protected members and the Shaker society as a whole. Ideally, there were two elders and two eldresses and two sets of trustees, men and women being equally represented. Deacons and deaconesses were appointed as needed to run the kitchen, the housekeeping, the garden, the farm, etc. At Tyringham, no such complete set existed at the North or Second Family and that family used the covenant of the Church Family.

While the arrangements at North Family may have been fluid, the membership for the years between 1855 and 1860 remain quite stable and virtually all of the members of the North Family who were there in 1855 were still there in 1860. The sole exceptions were four boys. Two of them, Henry and Edward Babcock, both age 6, in 1855 had come to the community when their mother Sarah Ann Babcock joined in 1853.¹³ She left the society in May, 1855, but her sons were still in the community that September for the state census. It is doubtful that they stayed long after that time because there are not individual indentures for them, and this would have been a legal necessity if their mother no longer lived with there in the community. Therefore it is not probable that they were a part of the defection in 1858. The other two boys, James and Delana Jones, ages eight and fourteen in 1855, may have been brothers but neither is listed as living there in 1860. This may be a mistake on the part of the census taker since Delana Jones was still in the community in 1862. He signed a probationary covenant at the Church Family that year.¹⁴

Therefore, except for James Jones, all members of the North can be accounted for. Thus our questions about who left in 1858 must be found by looking at the Church Family membership. Externally this makes sense because the Church declined from fifty-five members in 1855 to just thirty-four members in 1860, while the North Family had twenty-two members in 1855 and almost the exact same, twenty-one members in 1860.

Matching the names at the Church in 1855 and in 1860 show that the departures occurred almost completely from the youngest portion of the family. Of those there in 1855, ten females ranging in age from nine to twenty, and ten males, ranging in age from ten to twenty-one, are missing in 1860. To these twenty can be added John Morey, a minor indentured to the Church Family in 1857 by his mother Betsey of Lee.¹⁵ In the agreement John was indentured for as long as he wished to remain, but he is not there in 1860. One other unaccounted for name, Thomas

¹³ Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The Church and the North Families consolidated at the Church Family in December, 1861.

¹⁵ Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18

Fair, can be added to those missing from the Church. In the 1855 census he is listed as being eight years old. Actually this age may be an error because in 1857, a man named Thomas Fair signed a probationary covenant to be a Shaker.¹⁶ In order to do this he would have had to be at least twenty-one years old. In addition, records show that a man named Thomas Fair indentured his three daughters to the Shakers in 1853. The manner in which the account is written seems to indicate that he had just three daughters and no other children.¹⁷ If this is true perhaps Thomas Fair was thirty-eight or forty-eight instead of eight as the census says. In any event, he was not there in 1860 nor was his daughter Margaret. His other two girls, Emily and Mary Jane, both died as Shakers.¹⁸

To recapitulate, if we subtract the members from the Church who were there in 1855 from those there in 1860, we have twenty-two unaccounted for names. It would be perfect to have found twenty-three, but other young people or adults may have joined between 1855 and 1860 and their names not recorded in the surviving manuscripts or is simply lost. Whether all the names can be given is not what is essential. What is important is to know that the mass defection of 1858, if it occurred as oral tradition states, all on a single day, perhaps in January, involved members of the community who were between the ages of nine and twenty-one, the average age being just a little above fourteen. This argues strongly against the idea that the departures had to do with something sexual, a conclusion that has been a favorite subsequent myth. In addition, none of those who left at that time are later recorded as having married one another. Since the earliest source available says that they “ran away,” this may be literally what they did, and this use fits with similar descriptions in other Shaker journals. In some of these other cases the children were tracked down and forced to return. These invariably left eventually when they could. Most of the runaways, however, were either never caught or simply allowed to go back to their relatives or friends.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Diary of Wealthy Storer*, February 15, 1853.

¹⁸ In fact, Emily Fair, the last Tyringham Shaker to sign the covenant, survived the closing of the society and died in the Shaker society at Enfield, Connecticut.

In the case of the youths who left Tyringham in 1858, many were from Connecticut. In fact at least one girl and three boys had been indentured to the Shakers on the same day, May 11, 1853 by the selectmen of the town of Norwalk.¹⁹ Another girl had been indentured that same year by the selectmen of Bridgeport. Six others, three named Payne and three named Collins were siblings as were the Joneses. Thus well over half the youth who left were related by birth or previous circumstance. The Collins girls were from Tyringham and the Paynes, who were born in Connecticut, may have been indentured from the poorhouse of Norwalk or Bridgeport as well. One other child, Samuel Day, age 15 in 1858, was also born in Connecticut and was one of a number of siblings indentured by their father in 1849.

In the case of all these children, by running away, they broke their indentures. The agreements stated that the Shakers would be responsible for the males until they were twenty-one and the females until they were eighteen. These age stipulations, however, were higher than previous ones a decade earlier. Indentures from the 1840's with the selectmen from towns in Connecticut had used fourteen as the age of majority. The older indentures did not stipulate an age and simply stated that the agreement held "as long as they [the children] agree to live there" or for "as long as they wish to remain."²⁰

Since fourteen was the legal school leaving age in Massachusetts at the time, it is not inconceivable that a large group of children, most without any parents to begin with, decided to strike out on their own. Perhaps the Shakers hoping to have young people stay longer, had adjusted the indentures to an older age. Young people in the community, however, no doubt knew that previous agreements had bound children to a younger age. With children making up well over half of the society by 1855, it would have been relatively easy for a vocal group of youths to plan a massive runaway scheme, especially if adult leadership was weak.

In general the particular leadership in Shaker communities has not received much attention of historians. Tyringham, being the smallest of the societies and the one with the fewest extant manuscripts, seems allusive at best in this regard. A surprising amount of information, however, can be pieced together from what does survive.

¹⁹ Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18.

²⁰ Ibid.

At Tyringham, the leadership of the 1840's and 1850's reflected the tensions of a community in flux. As late as the 1840's, the majority of positions were held by the children of the first converts. At the North Family, for example, Leonard Allen and Eleazer Stanley served as first and second elders. At the Church, Molly Herrick was first eldress while Daniel Fay was first elder. The change from the second generation to the third generation of leadership occurred during the era of spirit manifestations (1837-1850) known as "the time of Mother's Work."²¹ Throughout this period hundreds of spirits visited the Shaker communities and left messages, songs, and gifts. Before these heavenly visits ceased, many of the instruments who received the manifestations were in positions of power.

In May, 1844, Albert Battle and Calvin Parker took over as elders of the Church. Albert Battle had been brought up from childhood in the society. Calvin Parker, ten years older than Battle, had come into the society as a young man of twenty-three in 1822. He had been a leading male instrument at Tyringham and was a steady and constant presence in the community. He served willingly where needed, most notably as caretaker of the boys. At the North Family, an attempt to introduce younger leadership was made in 1850 when Alvin Davis, age twenty-six, became second elder. Davis had been brought up since childhood in the community but left the next year. The Ministry decided to make a clean sweep at the Second Family and at that time appointed Calvin Parker to be first and Richard Van Deusen, age twenty-two, to be second. By all accounts, Van Deusen was a very capable leader. In time, he became an expert in a wide variety of economic matters. To fill the place left vacant by Parker, the Ministry chose twenty-five year old Michael McCue. An orphan, McCue had been brought up by the Shakers under the care of Calvin Parker. Thus it was that Tyringham by 1851 had four young male leaders, all of whom would remain faithful Shakers until their deaths. This strength of leadership on the male side becomes even more impressive when it is considered that the young Storer brothers, Addison and Hastings would also remain faithful till death. With a number of the older men such as Freeman Stanley and Robert Wilcox, still active, and

²¹ This is the popular title used today by both the Shakers and those who study them. Previous non-Shaker historians have called the period the Era of Manifestations.

middle-aged Daniel Hulet and Willard Johnson serving capably, Tyringham had a very enviable core of faithful men.

On the female side, the same pattern can be seen, but ultimately the events did not turn out as optimistically as for the men. Desire Holt, born in 1804, became the first woman at the Church not belonging to the first or second generation to fill a position of power when she was chosen to be second eldress around 1840. Holt had been an instrument during the Manifestations, a caretaker of the girls, and schoolteacher. In 1848, she was chosen as a trustee and her place taken by Eliza Chapin, age twenty-six and also an instrument during the Manifestations. At this time, however, a series of incidents highlighted the problems of retaining sufficient numbers of capable adults to make a viable society.

Ever since the beginning, young and middle-aged people had left from all of the Shaker communities, east and west. By the 1840's, however, this constant trickle of departures was causing a tremendous strain because insufficient numbers of adults were taking their places and few of the children were electing to remain. What must have been depressing for Shaker leaders was that often those leaving had been in the community for decades and were needed. The most symbolic of these departures at Tyringham was that of Jeremiah Hawkins, age fifty, and Hannah Canon, age forty-nine. They left in 1849 and caused no end of trouble for the Shakers when without permission they occupied a building near the South House on Shaker property. It was not long after they were forcibly evicted with the attendant publicity and trial, that Desire Holt, aged fifty, also left. Hawkins had been second elder of the Church from 1820 until 1827. He then served as a trustee. Canon had been an expert weaver. Holt had held positions as eldress and trustee. No doubt she was being prepared for higher office, perhaps in the eldership or Ministry leadership. In response to the departure of Desire Holt, Wealthy Storer, gave up her position in the Ministry and returned to Tyringham. By 1857, Storer was first eldress and Julia Johnson, age thirty-one, was second.

By the time of the great departure of 1858, Albert Battle had been elder for fourteen years and had been assisted by Michael McCue for seven years. On the female side, Wealthy Storer was first. A veteran of Ministry status, Storer had three siblings and her mother residing in the Church Family. Julia Johnson, had grown up at the Second Family. The events surrounding the premature death of her sister Almira Johnson during the era of the Manifestations provided part of the folklore of that

time and was used didactically by leaders when instructing the young. Much therefore, must have been expected of both Michael McCue and Julia Johnson. Both were close in age and had been caretakers of the young. In their positions as seconds in the eldership, it was their duty to mentor and otherwise guide young adult Shakers and those teenagers over fourteen. Since both had also been brought up since childhood in the community, it was natural for them to be given this all-important task.

It is not possible for us to know exactly the true nature of the friendship that developed between Michael McCue and Julia Johnson. If Johnson's statements, made thirty-six years later in 1893 are correct, then they fell in love. Unlike the many at Hancock and Enfield who left during the decade of the 1850's, McCue and Johnson, however, "did not have the courage to flee the faith."²² Of course, while their affair was going on, their restless charges, who made up over half of the community, could not have helped but be affected. This is perhaps why so many of the young people left in 1858. They were old enough to leave, had been given good training in a trade by the Shakers, were not bound by family ties to the community and had imperfect role models in the faith who were not setting an example of contented Shakers.

Neither the Ministry nor the other elders could have remained unaware of the situation after so many young people left. That year, Michael McCue was removed to the Second Family and Calvin Parker, who had been first elder of the Church, came back to the Church as second.²³ No doubt it was hoped that Parker, who had been a caretaker of the boys would be able to salvage what was left. Julia Johnson remained at the Church as second sister but she must have still had some contact with Michael McCue because in 1860 she was sent to the Shaker community at Hancock as a "love cure."²⁴

The loss of twenty-three young adults and teenagers may seem like a tremendous loss and it was, quantitatively. In perspective, however, youth left Shaker communities all the time. The loss of some of the young people at Tyringham was not much of a loss qualitatively.

²² Myers, *Tyringham: A Hinterland Settlement*, 88.

²³ Burns, 208.

²⁴ Myers, 88.

Indeed, when seen in the context of Tyringham Shaker history, it was merely an adjustment of a very unbalanced situation that had existed for decades, namely the large scale addition of children in lieu of a sufficient number of adult converts.

At Tyringham, the fifty-three Shakers in 1800, in spite of thirty-three deaths in the community, had become 101 by 1830.²⁵ A closer examination, however, shows a change in the composition of the community. Of the 101 members in 1830, 32 were under twenty years old. This was a four-fold increase of youth from 1820. Though overall Shaker membership as a whole peaked at about 4200 in the early 1840's, a good deal of this was an ever increasing number of children. As conversion of whole families lagged during the 1820's and 1830's, a solution sought by the elders was to increase the number of children with the confident hope that they would remain Shakers when they reached adulthood. In this way, the influx of children, in greater numbers than ever before, masked the decline in adult conversions for at least twenty years. Most of these children did not come with their parents into the faith. Instead single parents indentured their children and many others came from the poorhouse and other asylums. A very high percentage of these young people eventually left. Since permanent adult converts were also few, the eventual numerical decline of the Shakers when it became obvious after the Civil War seemed rapid. This was true for all Shaker communities, but especially true for Tyringham, for that society had taken in more children percentage wise than any other.

This trend of adding children to compensate for the lack of adult converts can be seen clearly by examining who signed the Tyringham Church covenant when it was revised a final time in 1832. That year on Christmas day, only 58 adults signed.²⁶ If it is assumed that approximately one hundred people lived in the community, the remaining 42 members must have been children or recent adult converts ineligible to sign. In 1816 when the previous covenant had been renewed, 60 had signed it out of a community of about 70.²⁷ During the

²⁵ Data from federal census records.

²⁶ "The Covenant or Constitution of the Church at Tyringham," Western Reserve Historical Society, I-B-65.

²⁷ "Covenant of the Church at Tyringham," January 15, 1816, Library of Congress # 22.

1830's, thirteen Shakers died, adult converts were few and some members left. By 1840, only 76 are listed in the census. Of these, 24 or 32% were younger than twenty-one.

After Albert Battle became the first elder in 1844, an explosive growth in the number of children continued so that by 1846, ninety-seven people lived there, an increase of almost 28% in just six years.²⁸ By 1850, numbers had dropped slightly to 91, but children had become an alarmingly high proportion, almost exactly 50% of the whole. The percentage of children peaked in 1855 when they accounted for 52% of the entire community. Exactly half the males and females at the North Family were under twenty-one. Surprisingly, however, the largest percentage was made up of females at the Church Family. In most Shaker societies, the Church Family women were the "bedrock" of the community. This group was generally the largest single unit of adults in a particular society and provided leadership, workers, and stability. At Tyringham in 1855, a startling 63% of the females in the Church Family were under twenty-one years of age.²⁹ No other Shaker community at the time or since has had such a high proportion of children.

Why did Tyringham have so many children? The permanent conversion of adults from 1820 onward had not kept pace with the death of the founders and first generation. The leadership of Tyringham, as at most other Shaker societies, was made up of those who themselves had grown up among Believers. Albert Justus Battle, the illegitimate son of a local farmer, served as first elder of the Church from 1844 until its dissolution in 1875. His counterparts were Molly Herrick, the daughter of one of the original converts, and Wealthy Storer and her sister Harriet. Almost all of the Herricks had remained faithful Shakers as did all but one of the large Storer family who had joined in 1826. For these leaders it was logical to assume that children growing up in similar circumstances would likewise make good Shakers when they matured. Although some adult converts did join and remain, the numbers were few. Because Tyringham was so remote, it is not difficult to see why

²⁸ The Winterthur Library, The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, # 1065.

²⁹ Data taken from the 1855 Massachusetts state census.

more adults did not find their way to the Shaker community and the town of Tyringham itself had been declining steadily in population since 1800.

The consequent instability and flux, caused by the death of old members, the arrival of hordes of children, the departure of these children after a few years, and the replacement of these children by others, can be documented by surviving indentures and similar manuscripts. After 1850, however, the federal and state census enumerations augment the history by listing individual names. In every important way, critically examining census records shows that the eventual extinction of Shaker life at Tyringham was already determined by the 1850's, and it is in this context that the much talked about but so little documented defection of 1858 can be discussed for what it was. What happened that year was merely part of a pattern that had been going on for a couple of decades.

During the first five years of the 1850's, thirty-eight people ranging in age from eleven to fifty-nine left.³⁰ Though the losses occurred at various times, they were serious because of their relative enormity both quantitatively and qualitatively. In all, almost forty percent of the community left within five years. This included four young adult men and the one time second eldress and trustee of the Church, Desire Holt. At the same time, nine Shakers died. It is not to be wondered then that the leaders at Tyringham again flooded the community with indentured children from single parents and workhouses. In just five years, from death and departures, fifty percent of the community had gone. The first five years of the 1850's witnessed a much larger number of departures and some of these, such as Desire Holt and Alvin Davis were adults who had proven that they had many talents to share with the community. That is why an account of the departures of 1858 did not find itself into journals from other communities. What had happened during the previous years of the decade had been far more serious than the large departure of youth in 1858. Every Shaker society could fill its records with comments about the departures of the young. One final word that may be said on the subjects of 1858 is that we cannot be sure that the journals of the three societies in the bishopric, Hancock, Tyringham and Enfield did not in fact mention the departures. As anyone who has tried

³⁰ Information from comparing the census of 1850 and that of 1855 and using well-known histories of defections, such as the cases of Jeremiah Hawkins, Hannah Canon, and Desire Holt.

to do research on the Second bishopric knows, there is a real scarcity of material to be found, especially journals. Perhaps some manuscripts that have been in private hands for most of this century will come to light and reveal information that is not known now. Until this happens, only extant records can be used.

By 1860, the number of children at Tyringham finally began to decline to manageable proportions. From the high point of forty in 1855, those under twenty-one numbered just seventeen in 1860. More importantly, a little over half of the community was between twenty-one years of age and sixty, a high percentage for Shaker communities of the time. All aspects considered, Tyringham was in a very stable position in terms of population age distribution. The unbalanced community caused by so many children had been taken care of by the departures of 1858. In addition, leadership had been strengthened by the appointment of more faithful leaders. Still, the numbers were small: just fifty-five between two families. In almost all other Shaker communities this number would not have been even half of one family.

The obvious solution to conserve assets was a consolidation of the two families into one. As noted previously, the two families had always shared a covenant. Elders and trustees had often been interchanged as well. Since both Michael McCue and Richard Van Deusen were trustees, and both led the Second Family from 1858, plans may have already been made in the 1850's to have the families join forces. Who knows but that the departures of 1858 weren't actually welcomed by the leadership as a means of allowing the merger to happen?

In any event, the two families were consolidated in December, 1861. An inventory taken at the time shows a very prosperous society. When debts which totaled \$3,878.01 were subtracted from assets which totaled \$10,680.18 the positive balance was \$6,802.17. Not including agricultural products and livestock, another \$4,210 worth of garden seeds, herbs, brooms, measures, tubs and pails was on hand. Thus fifty-five Shakers owned free and clear almost two thousand acres of land, had assets totaling \$11,000 and owned outright a score of good solid buildings.³¹ At this very time the Shaker communities at Sabbathday Lake, ME, and Shirley, MA, were struggling to overcome

³¹ "Brief inventory of the personal property of the Shaker unity after the union of the two families, December, 1861." Winterthur Library, Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection, # 1159.

staggering debts due to mismanagement. As the Civil War devastated the communities in Ohio and Kentucky and large debts surfaced at Mount Lebanon, New York; and Enfield, New Hampshire, the Tyringham society must have seemed like a wonderfully well-run and prosperous, though tiny, society.

Richard Van Deusen stayed on at the Second Family to manage affairs there and sell the property after the membership was removed to the Church Family. In March 1867, it was sold to John Canon, the brother of former Shaker Hannah Canon Hawkins. The price was \$12,000. When this was accomplished, Van Deusen joined the Shaker society at Enfield, Connecticut.

Van Deusen's move to Enfield signaled plans that were already in the works: the eventual sale of Tyringham and its merger with Hancock and Enfield. By 1865, the membership at Tyringham was only forty. Though most of these would remain faithful Shakers, this was so small a number that both the Lebanon Ministry and the Second Bishopric Ministry were anxious to dispose of the property. Both the money realized by the sale as well as the members could be used to strengthen the other communities. A Ministry journal kept by Elder Giles Avery of Mount Lebanon mentions that "the propriety of breaking up Tyringham" was one of five items on the agenda at Hancock on November 11, 1869, during a meeting of the ministries.³² That next August, in a very rare move, the Lebanon Ministry visited Tyringham and toured the property with Elder Thomas Damon of the Second Bishopric Ministry and Elder Albert Battle. The purpose was "to see their pasture lands and wood lands, and make up our minds relative to the question of selling out the place." On November 15, 1870, it was "resolved to break up the Tyringham Society, moving them to Enfield Connecticut probably."³³

The decision to close Tyringham may have been made officially in November, 1870, but the members of the community were aware of it much earlier. This can be seen in the few children adopted into the society during the late 1860's. By July, 1870, when the federal census was taken, there were just three children under twenty-one, one boy and two girls, and one of these, girls had been there previous to 1865. Adult members totaled twenty-seven, one more actually than in 1865. A solid

³² "A Register of Incidents and Events... kept by Giles B. Avery," [1859-1874].

³³ *Ibid.*

group of Believers both men and women still occupied the Church Family and the majority would remain faithful.

Another plain bit of evidence that their days at Tyringham were numbered was the construction of a very large Church Family dwelling at Enfield, Connecticut. Elder George Wilcox of the Church there was not one to be outdone by the building efforts at other Shaker families. For example, Elder Omar Pease of Enfield's North Family had built a tremendously large Sister's Shop and made substantial improvements on the buildings and grounds of this relatively small family. Elder George, ever the one to scheme to be in the lead, made plans for a palatial brick structure to be the principal dwelling of the Church Family. Yet by 1870, the Church Family did not really need a large new building. Of course, however, if the Shakers from Tyringham were to move to Enfield, then it would be necessary. During the early 1870's this building was started and completed at the very time that the Tyringham society was ready to dissolve. Since the Shakers at Enfield were frequently visited by Believers from Tyringham, no one living in those two communities could not have known of the real purpose for the new dwelling house at Enfield.

For the Shakers remaining at Tyringham, the 1870's must have been a very tense time. They knew that soon they would have to leave their home and some had lived there for over fifty years. In addition, a series of untimely deaths further weakened the community. Between 1870 and 1874, five members died. Among these were Michael McCue, age 49, in 1873 and Hastings Storer, age 51, in 1874. In addition, Betsey Johnson, age 38, went into the Second Bishopric Ministry in October, 1873. In the meantime, as final plans were made for the breaking up of the society, members had to face the decision to go to the Enfield, Connecticut, society, the Hancock, Massachusetts, society or to the world.

Those who opted to go to the world were Christina Bailey, 43; Mary Mills, 26; and Laura Davis, 30. They left between late February and early April, 1874.³⁴ Two chose to go to Hancock: Eliza Chapin, 53, and Elizabeth Thornber, 28. The remaining twelve went to Enfield: Calvin Parker, 76; Addison Storer, 59; Aaron Manchester, 67; Albert Battle, 66; Edwin Davis, 53; Eunice Storer, 91; Anna Seaton, 74; Electa Parker 74; Emily Fair, 35; Harriet Storer, 58; Rebecca Harris, 65; and Mary Adams, 38. Except for one, Mary Adams, who left Enfield almost immediately, the rest of the these remained faithful and collectively contributed

³⁴ Western Reserve Historical Society, II-A-13.

decades of service to their new homes. The last of the Tyringham Shakers, Elizabeth Thornber, died at Hancock in 1920.

The focus of this study has been to place the most intriguing and heretofore most mysterious aspect of Tyringham Shaker history, the departures of 1858, into the fuller Shaker context. By doing this it can be seen that the events at Tyringham were a microcosm of a trend that was devastating Shakerdom as a whole: the lack of suitable, permanent adult converts. Attempts to deal with the decline in all the Shaker communities involved adopting large numbers of children. At Tyringham, this practice became so common that the little society was overwhelmed. Whatever defects in leadership that may have existed caused the situation to perhaps get out of hand.

In any event, a large number of children and teenagers “ran away” on the same day. Since Tyringham journal manuscripts for the period do not apparently survive and since Tyringham was always so small and so little visited, these departures have been magnified into an event wherein Shaker myths have been developed. These involve the depiction of a rigid and secretive Shaker ministry brutally suppressing all references to the wild sexual excesses said to have gone on in that shadowy, hidden place. The truth is that a large group of youth, not attached to the Shaker society by parental or religious ties, decided for whatever the reason to seek life outside the community. They were legally free to do so and they did. Their departure actually restored a balance to the society, but the number of Shakers was so small that when the adults aged and died, few remained to continue the work at that place. Adding children to the rolls had helped to mask the decline, but it only delayed the inevitable. Without the addition of so many children, perhaps the Shakers would have been forced to examine their community more critically with better solutions arrived at for its continuance. As events played themselves out, the departures of so many youth in 1858 has become so mythologized that this itself has also helped prevent a clear examination of the facts and how Tyringham fit into the wider and by that time severely stressed structure of Shaker communal society.

It is hoped that this detailed study which has for the first time examined and explained the departures of 1858 will serve as a guide that will encourage others to tackle obstacles that presently obscure a careful examination of Shaker life in other societies. When this is achieved, other issues of Shaker history can be explored and a deeper

understanding gained of the forces shaping America's oldest and most successful intentional community.

A list of all those who were members of the Shaker society at Tyringham, Massachusetts, according to the Massachusetts State Census of September 22, 1855, but who are not there for the U.S. federal census, July 18, 1860.

Name	Age in January, 1858*
1. Emily Avery	20
2. Margaret Fair	14
3. Emma J. Collins	14
4. Mary Payne	13
5. Elizabeth McKensie	13
6. Hannah Barnes	13
7. Reney Collins	11
8. Mary Thompson	10
9. Lucy Collins	9
10. George Banks	21
11. George McKensie	19
12. Richard Crolly	17
13. Marshall Hayzen	16
14. W. Sherman Hendrick	16
15. G. Benjamin Hendrick	14
16. Samuel Day	14
17. Charles Payne	12
18. Orrin Mills	12
19. Robert Payne	10
20. James Jones (North Family)	10
21. Thomas Fair	10?
22. Delana Jones (North Family)	16
23. Henry Babcock	8
24. Edward Babcock	8

Average age of females: 13.4

Average age of males, not counting T. Fair, D. Jones or the Babcocks:
14.6

Average age of the whole, not counting T. Fair, D. Jones or the
Babcocks: 14.02

None of the above had been in the community for the 1850 census except Samuel Day, who was indentured March 19, 1849.³⁵

*Ages derived from using the 1855 census and adding until January, 1858.

³⁵ Western Reserve Historical Society I-A-18.