

# Shaker Jesse Patchen's Account Book

by E. RICHARD MCKINSTRY



Eldress Emma Neale (seated)  
and Sister Sadie Neale.

Shaker men: left to right, the first  
two are unidentified, Rufus  
Crossman, Calvin Reed, Ferdinand  
Gainebin, and Daniel Sizer.

Winterthur has one of the finest libraries anywhere on the Shaker religious sect. Largely donated by the Andrews family—Edward Deming and Faith Andrews were pioneer Shaker scholars and collectors beginning in the 1920s—the collection holds thousands of printed items, manuscripts, and photographs by and about the Shakers. Even so, it has no manuscripts chronicling the activities of the first Shakers before they established their initial village in the late 1770s.

Together with seven adherents, Ann Lee, the first Shaker leader, left for America from her home in Manchester, England, in 1774 to escape religious persecution. They arrived in New York and disappeared from sight, only emerging again later in the decade when they reconstituted themselves as a community at Niskeyuna, near Albany, New York. Although they resided in New York City before then, worked, lodged, and assuredly bought goods from city shopkeepers, no original records have surfaced detailing their early years in the United States. As well, manuscripts documenting the earliest of Shakers native to America are scarce.





View of large Shaker buildings with a brother standing in front, from "Views of North Family Shakers at Mt. Lebanon, New York," by J. E. West., No. 25 of the series, First and Second Houses.

April 27<sup>th</sup> 1779 Joseph Meacham Crdt  
 for tobacco 12 pound - 0-8-0  
 for two Bushel of oats - 0-4-0  
 to two Bushel of oats - 0-5-0  
 to three hundred of hay X 0-6-0  
 Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> 1785 Tot 1785 1-2-0  
 Joseph Meacham Crdt - 2-10-6


David Crdt to three Bushel of wheat - 0-15-0  
 Darrow to three Bushel of Corn - 0-10-0  
 to half Bushel of wheat - 0-3-0  
 to one pair of shoes - 1-8-0  
 1-18-0  
 October 27<sup>th</sup> 1780  
 then Received with David Darrow  
 and sent home one Pound Eight shillings  
 David Darrow  
 Crdt to one Bushel of potatoes - 0-2-0  
 to seven Pound and three quarters  
 Sugar - 0-3-9  
 to one Bushel of oats - 0-2-0  
 to 9 Pound of flour - 0-5-10  
 10 14 14 Pound Sugar - 1-2-7

David Darrow's signature (on page 81) and Joseph Meacham's signature (on page 50), in Jessie Patchen's account book.

Jesse Patchen's account book from the 1770s helps fill the gap. Patchen, a tailor who worked in New Lebanon, New York, where there was a Shaker community beginning in 1787, had about eighty customers, and from all indications was successful at what he did. His 117-page account book is typical of its kind in that it notes the names of his customers, what he made or mended for them, the cost of the work, and how payments were made.

Names of Shakers who lived at the New Lebanon Shaker community are sprinkled throughout Patchen's account book. Two of the most important are David Darrow, a

leader of Shaker expansion into the western states, and Joseph Meacham, who is credited with the principal role of establishing the rules and regulations governing Shaker life. Both men signed Patchen's manuscript book, acknowledging their satisfaction with his work and the settlement of their accounts.

As a collector, my hope is that somewhere there is a handwritten manuscript containing the names of Ann Lee and the earliest of her followers; they undoubtedly existed at one time. Jessie Patchen's may not portray Lee and her English band, but it nevertheless compellingly brings to life a number of the earliest American-born Shakers. 

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With the exception of the two photographs of the Patchen manuscripts, all of the photographs depict the New Lebanon, New York, Shaker community and the people who lived there. The Shaker photos are undated, but probably were taken in the late 1800s. All Shaker photographs courtesy, Winterthur Library, The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection. The Patchen manuscript pages are courtesy, Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.