Shaker Oval Boxes

Volume III

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History
Materials
Design

John Wilson

HOME SHOP BOOKS
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Cover Photos

These two photos, front and back, show quite different class scenes. They bookend experience and skill levels, age and experience, teaching and accomplishment. Both are scenes of shared delight that come from hands-on work making oval boxes.

On the front is a smiling class of accomplished adults with full stacks of boxes just made with John Wilson in his prime at bringing this traditional craft to a new generation. We are celebrating at Kelly Mehler's school in Berea, Kentucky, where this event took place.

The back cover shows Amy VanKolken with child's coordination using her hammer for the first-time clinching tacks under the trusting guidance of Ben Hamilton. This was actually at the very first oval box teaching event I did at the invitation of Diana VanKolken, editor of *The Shaker Messenger* in Holland, Michigan. Ben, a long-time friend of mine from classes at Lansing Community College, came to assist.

Credits

Front cover: Kelly Mehler, August 2006

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I WOULD NOT GIVE A FIG

for SIMPLICITY This side

of COMPLEXITY,

BUT SIMPLICITY the OTHER SIDE

of COMPLEXITY

IS WORTH A LIFE.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Contents

Foreword

This is the story of how I became an oval boxmaker.
There are three players: a gifted teacher,
an eager student, and a horse barn.

Sodus, New York, is a lovely small town about halfway between Syracuse and Rochester. In 1826, the Shakers founded a community on Sodus Bay. The community lasted until 1836 when the Shakers moved to Groveland, New York. The property eventually became Alasa Farms. The owners of Alasa Farms were respectful of their Shaker history and every two years had a weekend Shaker heritage festival. It was at Alasa Farms in 1994 that I met John Wilson.

I was a cabinetmaker at the world famous Stickley Furniture Company, located in Manlius, New York. Shaker style caught my eye and I fell in love with the boxes. I also wanted a craft I could turn into a home-based business. The boxes would be just the right product.

I don't recall how I heard about John's class at Alasa Farms on that hot summer weekend. However, the Shaker heritage festival was great! On the property there were Shaker antiques, Shaker crafts and lectures. For me, of course, the focus of the weekend was the oval box class, and John Wilson.

Since John brings the entire woodshop with him, the question was where to set up? The buildings at Alasa Farms were the Shaker dwelling, now the family residence, a garage, some outbuildings and the horse barn. It was a nice horse barn. It was in the stalls of that horse barn, that John set up his class workshop. During the day visitors went through the barn and saw the horses and goats and other residents that I have forgotten. But late in the day when the animals had been cleared out and the woodshop set up, what was left were John, his students, and the flies, many flies. Lots and lots and lots of flies.

The class was in John's usual format, one evening and the next day. I made my five boxes. I still have them. I do not show them to anyone. I could have done better! I look on that class as the first step, not the only step.

Since 1994 I have continued to learn. I have held in my hands hundreds of Shaker made boxes. In talking to museum curators and knowledgeable collectors I have learned to replicate the details they value, the details that make Shaker work so distinctive. As John says, some details fall within Shaker tradition and some fall outside Shaker tradition. As a craftsman, you choose.

I met John Wilson twenty-five years ago, and from that meeting I have built a good small business making oval boxes. My work is sold in most of the Shaker museum stores. By taking to heart some Shaker beliefs, I have established a good reputation for dependable quality. I do believe that work is worship, as do the Shakers. My skills and talents are a gift from God, they are not to be wasted by not doing my best work.

I have received far more than woodworking instruction from the oval box class. I learned a skill, yes, but from that beginning I have found my labor of love. I make a little money for my family, I work at home, and I have made the perfect life for me. Along with new skills, the thing I cherish is that for the last twenty-five years I can say that John Wilson is my friend.

Steve Grasselli
Syracuse, NY
January 2019

A treasure of an oval box to hold treasures is Steve Grasselli's No. 3 with two divided trays inside.

Preface

The cover photo is one of my favorites. The smiles of participants holding their newly completed boxes in an event hosted by Kelly Mehler's School in Berea, Kentucky, August 2006. I am so glad Kelly had us gather up our boxes for him to take this graduation photo. I feel the comradery and shared skills making me one among these folks crafting boxes.

There are many ways to look at boxmaking. Craftsmanship is one perspective; the hands-on skills of working wood into useful objects. While this is no doubt uppermost in the view of participants, there are other perspectives that this book seeks to foster. The obvious one is the view of craft legacy that makes us beneficiaries of those who have gone before. See this not just to seek historic authenticity, but to be part of a continuum of individuals who make oval boxes in the style first practiced by Shaker craftsmen – a stream bringing to us satisfying work and to which we add our experience to future box makers.

Another perspective is the belief of those original craftsmen that shaped their lives. The dedicated commitment of Shakers within a community which involved them totally cannot be anything short of a powerful influence upon their work. The essays presented here relay the virtues of simplicity, utility, and enduring quality that represent the foundation upon which their timeless designs rest.

To achieve a useful object with grace and efficiency is worth pursuing. Oval boxes are one such object, and perhaps more than any we practice is iconic of Shaker belief. Still useful today. Add one more dimension – universality. I know of no other project which every man, woman, and child, past, present, or future, here or anywhere, can identify and take to heart. And put to use.

One of the classics of Shaker Craft literature carries the thoughtful title *Religion in Wood: A Book of Shaker Furniture*. It was written by Edward and Faith Andrews, published by Indiana University Press in 1966. The title while thought provoking is not always understood. It is perhaps for the reason that some perspective readers would be put off or misled by the title that Dover Publications changed the title in the 1999 reprint to *Masterpieces of Shaker Furniture*. I am sure there are commercial reasons for such a change. However, it is the purpose of *Shaker Oval Boxes Volume III* to advance this perspective of Shaker belief, and understand that its expression in wood is a heritage we proudly follow.

KELLY MEHLER

Introduction

In a world where news of inhumanity bombards our sensibilities,
where grasping for things goes so far beyond our needs,
when time is squandered in busyness;
It is a pleasure and a privilege to pause for a look at handiwork,
to see beauty amidst utility, and
to know that craft traditions begun so long ago serve us today.

It was five years ago that I wrote this passage introducing the first volume of *Shaker Oval Boxes*. You are holding Volume III to complete the trilogy.

The oval box craft has seen a revival during my lifetime. When I began teaching woodworking in 1977, there was only Ejner Handberg's *Shop Drawings of Shaker Furniture and Woodenware* published five years before. Now there are many books, many classes, many craftsmen. And that is good. As the quote above says, "It is a pleasure and a privilege" to have been a part of this revival.

What of this trilogy? Each book has its purpose. Volume I, to quote the subtitle, is a "craftsman's guide to original, derivative and diverse forms of the oval box"; Volume II has "projects, plans and processes", while Volume III gives the "history, materials and design" of our craft. It is an anthology of my years of experience in this craft.

From the first glimpse in 1977 came a life of teaching boxmaking, and supplying the trade with tacks, bands and boards, forms and plans. I regard this experience as the laboratory for sound writing.

I wish you well.

I know of no other project like the oval box
which every man, woman, and child,
past, present, or future, here or anywhere,
Can identify and take to heart,
and put to use.

John Wilson

COURTESY OF THE UNITED SOCIETY OF SHAKERS, SABBATHDAY LAKE, MAINE

PART I

Shaker Belief: The Context of their Craft

Those things which attract both our interest and admiration are but byproducts of a particular way of looking at the world.

Theodore E. Johnson

1

Hands to Work and Hearts to God

The familiar phrase "Hands to Work and Hearts to God" was the admonition of Mother Ann Lee. Ted Johnson's writings express well the second dimension – hearts to God. While it may prove heavy going to get one's understanding around a sentence like "Through the universal acceptance of the principle of mutual sharing, the scattered cells already foreshadowed a theocratic communitarianism," it is worth the effort. Br. Ted speaks from experience from within the community at Sabbathday Lake as well as from academic observation as a Rhodes scholar. Here is an opportunity to expand one's understanding of the roots of the work of the shop. Profit was not paramount because the bills were paid today and for life by signing the covenant contract. Personal aggrandizement was understood to be vain glory and missing what was true about pride in good work. Simplicity and utility were not merely expedient, they were attributes of a holy life.

"Hands to Work and Hearts to God" by Theodore E. Johnson

Once, many years ago, at Niskeyuna, where the first Believers were called by God to serve Him in the wilderness, Mother Ann Lee admonished her followers: "… put your hands to work and give your hearts to God." In these words she gave us an insight not only into the essence of Shakerism itself, but also into those things, both spiritual and material, which would in succeeding generations grow from the movement.

From its very beginnings Shakerism has represented an attempt, on the whole successful, to reconcile meaningfully the human and the divine, the temporal and the eternal. All that the Shaker did was, in fact, done under the shadow of eternity. Every human action was looked upon as related to that great drama of salvation in which the God of History had given each man a part. The Shaker way must be looked upon as more than just an attempt on the part of individuals to establish a right relationship between themselves and God. It was, on a much deeper level of meaning, a wholly dedicated, or perhaps better, an inspired attempt to restore the primitive church. This renewal of apostolic Christianity as lived and taught by Shakers for over two hundred years grew from the life and ministry of Ann Lee, a remarkable English woman whose words have provided the title for this catalogue.

She was born in 1736 on Toad Lane, in the oldest quarter of the Lancashire borough of

Manchester, an area which was just beginning to feel the painful birth pangs of the industrial revolution. The daughter of a humble blacksmith, Ann received little, if any, formal education and early began to work with her hands to help to support her parents' not inconsiderable family. Possessed of a deep craving for spiritual perfection, she found that the formality, rationalism, and seeming coldness which in the eighteenth century tended to mark the Church of England, into which she had been born, could not satisfy her inner needs. In her twenty-third year she came under the influence of James and Jane Wardley, religious seekers who had at one time been associated with the Religious Society of Friends. It is this tenuous association which has perhaps more than any other factor perpetuated the long-lasting confusion of the terms Quaker and Shaker. The Wardleys' teachings seem to have been derived at least in part from those of George Fox, but more importantly from the French Prophets, the spiritual descendants of the Camisards whose ecstatic inspiration had led Louis XIV to suppress their religion in 1702. From Fox the little society evolved its belief in the necessity of waiting upon the Lord for the moving of His spirit; from the Prophets came the all-pervasive expectation of the imminent second coming of Christ. From this concern with the nearness of the parousia was to grow the one peculiarly Shaker contribution to Christian life and thought.

It is to Ann Lee that we owe the spiritual insight which was to lead that little group of Manchester seekers away from the narrowness of traditional beliefs in regard to the Second Coming to a fuller, richer interpretation, the broad implications of which are perhaps just now being fully grasped. To Ann, whom her associates in the Wardleys' little company had come to recognize as their spiritual "Mother," came the inner realization that Christ's Second Coming was not to be a dramatic one amid clouds of righteousness, nor one in glory on the Mount of Olives, but a quiet, unobtrusive one within the hearts and minds of individual men, women, and children. Mother Ann and her earliest followers realized, as Benjamin Seth Youngs, one of the earliest and most important Shaker theologians, was later to write, that "Christ in His Second Appearance had come in them." It is this central concept of the indwelling presence of Christ in an active ever-present way that lies at the heart not only of all Shaker teaching, but of the Shaker way of life as well.

Fulfillment of the life attitudes proceeding from the recognition of Christ's indwelling presence proved impossible to attain in England. It was as the result of a dream vision that Mother Ann decided, in 1774, to move with eight of her followers to the New World. The little band worked at a variety of occupations in New York

ANN CHWATSKY

Brother Theodore E. Johnson

until the spring of 1776, when they moved up the Hudson to establish themselves some eight miles northwest of Albany, at Niskeyuna. For four years the first Believers strengthened their own inner resources of spirit prior to the opening of their public testimony in 1780. That testimony was a startling one indeed for most of those still in the thrall of the Great Awakening and the millennial anticipation that had grown from it. When Mother Ann proclaimed to her hearers that "the second appearing of Christ is in His church," there were evidently very few who realized the full meaning of her words. All too many were ready to denounce her as "a female Christ" and her followers as deluded fanatics. Her detractors failed to grasp the deeply spiritual significance she intended. For the early Believers, Christ as an indwelling presence had come within them. He was operative in them as individuals and as a community which gathered together within the oneness of His mystical body.

Converts were slow to come, yet the number of followers grew gradually as Mother Ann and those who had come with her from England extended their missionary activity not only over upper New York state but over rural Massachusetts and Connecticut as well. During the four years of her active public ministry, Ann Lee called into being the embryonic Shaker communities at Niskeyuna (Watervliet) and New (or Mount) Lebanon, New York; Hancock, Harvard, and Shirley, Massachusetts; and Enfield, Connecticut. It was through the zealous activity of her earliest converts in eastern New York and western Massachusetts that Shaker belief was carried first into New Hampshire and later into Maine.

* * *

At the death of Mother Ann in 1784 the Shaker church was still a very loosely organized body. Through the universal acceptance of the principle of mutual sharing, the scattered cells already foreshadowed a theocratic communitarianism. It was under Father James Whittaker, the last of the English leaders and Mother Ann's successor, that the first formally organized community was, in the Shaker phrase, "gathered into gospel order" at New Lebanon, New York, in 1785. Not until his successor, Joseph Meacham of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, the first American leader of the church, was the Order given the essential outward form which has distinguished it ever since. It was during his administration that the societies at Alfred and New Gloucester were fully "gathered," in 1793. Despite the early Shaker activity at Gorham, it was not until 1804, under Lucy Wright, Father Joseph's successor as head of the church, that the first covenant was adopted there.

The relatively remote locations of the first Shaker villages was happenstance, arising simply from the rural isolation of those who first consecrated their lands to the society's use. In time, however, the isolation became more one of attitude than of place, as the Shakers' neighbors, through misunderstanding, tended to cut themselves off from the now growing communities. However it was not only geographical and social apartness which created the need for self-sufficiency among Shakers, but the realization of their special calling to build God's kingdom.

ANN CHWATSKY IN *THE FOUR SEASONS OF SHAKER LIFE*

The Sabbathday Lake Community in worship. Shakers were prolific in writing hymns, and these were often accompanied with gestures to include the whole self in song.

Truly they felt that they were in the wilderness preparing a highway for the ever-coming Lord. The Maine communities, as the others in New York and New England, attained to a high degree the art of being sufficient unto themselves. The early account books at both Alfred and New Gloucester show very little being purchased of "the world" other than salt, sugar, molasses, and metal to be worked.

It was the attempt at self-sufficiency during these early years which gave birth to the almost incredible diversification of industrial and agricultural activity that characterized nineteenth-century Shakerism. At New Gloucester, for example, we see at an early date the construction of lumber, flour, carding, and spinning mills, an extensive tannery, and cooper's shops. Both the herb and garden seed and seedling industries became major agricultural pursuits. In Shaker villages everywhere all of the necessities of daily life poured from the shops in such abundance that the surplus soon began to be sold to "the world." Feeling that their primary reason for being was a religious one, Shakers were always ready to seek and adopt devices which would save time or energy and allow them to devote themselves more fully to the things of the spirit. As elsewhere, necessity proved to be the mother of invention. The list of Shaker inventions is impressive, indeed. It includes the clothes pin, the circular saw, the flat broom, the washing machine, the metal pen, water-repellant cloth, Babbitt metal, and a host of other devices which during the nineteenth century made life in home or shop easier.

Craft activity within the several communities at first met only communal needs, as we have said. This early period, which we may call primitive, is marked by a desire to shun worldliness and ostentation in all material productions. Yet Shaker work from this period is often difficult to distinguish from that produced at the same time by the Shaker's neighbors. Thus, while Believers did seek to separate themselves from the taint of the world, economic necessity must have been an equally important incentive for simplicity and directness in design.

Primitive Shaker furniture may be characterized as substantial, perhaps even heavy, yet vigorous and eminently practical. It bears all the marks of the earth to which its creators' lives were so firmly attached. Maine pieces of the period are, as we might expect, most commonly made of pine and maple. Furniture is stained far more commonly than painted. An indigo-based blue, mustard yellow, and a variety of shades of red are the predominant colors. The recessing of drawers and cabinets into walls became even in the 1790s a mark of Shaker interiors. The pegboard, that eminently practical device for hanging all things from bonnets and broad-brimmed hats to chairs, also dates from this period. It is, of course, not a solely functional contrivance, but an architectural one as well, in that it helps to break the monotony of whitewashed walls. From this era, too, we may date the beginning of the mushroom-cap pull which was to remain a distinguishing feature of Shaker cabinet work long after it had become uncommon in the world. Within one generation it was to evolve from a disproportionately long-stemmed button cap to the more familiar low, broad cap of well-turned proportions.

Sometimes in its third decade in Maine, Shakerism here as elsewhere began in its material expressions to manifest certain almost indefinable changes. One begins to feel in the work of the 1820s a newness, a freshness, a vibrancy not present before. The change arises from no conscious effort on the part of the craftsman to intellectualize his work. It comes, rather, from his full acceptance and understanding of the way of life to which he had been called – a way of life which showed that man may develop his greatest potential only when he is able to stand filled with both humility and love before his Creator. It is in this era, which may be called classic, that we see coming into prominence the

two Shaker theological doctrines which more than any other were to have a profound effect upon the material expression of the movement. The central teaching of the indwelling spirit of Christ which embodied itself in the Shaker way of life had pressed toward a conceptual expression, a theological explanation. From this need of expression grew the two concepts which are the major Shaker theological emphases – unity and simplicity. It is surely no accident that the two Shaker accomplishments in the arts from this era which are best known to the world serve in a very real sense as types or examples of these principles. Sister Hannah Cahoon's inspirational drawing of the Tree of Life is as meaningful a guide to the doctrine of unity as Maine Elder Joseph Brackett's song "Simple Gifts" is to that of simplicity.

As a Shaker symbol we first encounter the tree in Father James Whittaker's splendid vision in England of the church in America. A generation later it is for Benjamin Seth Youngs, in *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, a preeminent symbol for the church. …

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Simplicity, the second of the fundamental theological concepts, was summed up for Shakers in Elder Joseph's injunction that we must "come down where we ought to be." It is through simplicity, which can only come from a proper understanding of self, that the Shaker attained the sense of being part of that holy fellowship which is the church united in Christ's body. It was through the achieving of this divine gift of simplicity that one might realize the basic Christian right and responsibility of self-fulfillment. Shakerism has ever valued human fulfillment and believed that man fulfilled himself by being nothing more nor less than himself.

The Shaker crafts of the classic era were the output of those who had come to terms with themselves, who had triumphed in that greatest of all confrontations – the confrontation with self. The Shaker craftsman had no need to seek an effect. In every facet of his daily life the idea of the attainment of effect for effect's sake was strongly rejected. To the Shaker each craft experience was an open and honest encounter between himself and the Creator of the materials with which he worked. To that confrontation he had to bring the same spirit of integrity which was the Creator's due in all of life's work. We feel immediately in the best Shaker work the harmony between the craftsman and the materials of his craft. The resultant grace and proportion eloquently bespeak the degree to which the artist attained the sacred oneness which was his unconscious goal.

In Maine, as in all parts of a Shakerdom now extended to western New York, Ohio, and Kentucky, the craftsmanship of the period from the 1820s until the era of Reconstruction represented a golden age in design. There is both lightness and delicacy, yet vigor, too. There is unwitting adherence to the ancient dictum, "Nothing too much." Practically speaking, we find the cabinetmaker increasingly interested in bringing out the natural beauty of wood. We find many fewer stained or painted pieces than in the primitive period. There are attempts, particularly in Maine, to enhance the attractiveness of the natural wood by contrasting it with brightly painted surfaces. Although pine and maple remain the chief woods, chestnut, birch, and a great variety of fruit woods come into common use.

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The Shaker craft tradition continued into our own century. Eldress Sarah Collins was making chairs at Mount Lebanon in the 1940s that were very little different from those made in that community nearly a century before. At Sabbathday Lake in Maine, Elder Delmer Wilson was producing, as late as the 1950s, oval boxes and carriers superior in lightness and delicacy to anything made during even the golden age of Shaker craftsmanship. Yet with the passing of Elder Delmer in 1961 the craft tradition, too, seems

to have passed, although the community itself remains actively loyal to the Shaker way.

In a day in which there is much interest in the material productions of Shaker hands, it is vitally important to remember that one cannot properly understand the objects themselves without first understanding the spirit that produced them. Those things which attract both our interest and admiration are but byproducts of a particular way of looking at the world. We must acknowledge that in the arts, as in all things, the Shakers were not more than they seemed, nor did they seek to be more than they truly were.

Theodore E. Johnson
Director, The Shaker Museum
Sabbathday Lake, Maine, January, 1969

"We read almost daily of our demise."

When I began traveling to teach oval box workshops in the early 1980s, it was always with surprise that participants learned that the Shaker life was still alive and well in a community in Maine. Shaker life, it seems, was relegated to an earlier moment in time, a movement in our social history out of reach to us who were discovering the meaning of the work of Mother Ann for ourselves.

I was fortunate to have visited the village on the shores of Sabbathday Lake (a local variant on an Indian name for that place) early in my own travels. The community was not remarkable for its building and grounds. There were a half dozen other village sites to command one's attention before Sabbathday Lake. What was different was the sense of community, for here was a gathering of folks living the life of being Shaker rather than a monument to a life now past. Other sites were museums of what that life had been, caretakers of a time past, trustees held to husbanding a slice of history.

Now, community is an intangible. It is the sense that exists amongst those who live a life together. It is not to be confused with the buildings that are occupied by those who make up the community. For this reason, it is something to be experienced firsthand rather than seen in a photograph or read in a text. It is harder to define than bricks and mortar and furniture, but once experienced it is just as real.

I came to Sabbathday Lake (SDL) in the summer of 1984. I came to learn and I came to offer what I had already learned. I had taught my first workshop on oval boxmaking the year before I visited there. Br. Delmer Wilson was the last of the Shaker boxmakers and, now twenty-five years after his death, I wanted to find out about this man and his work. It was also possible that what I did to teach groups of interested students how to make oval boxes could be of use to the program at the village.

I met Br. Ted Johnson in the formal Victorian style parlor of the main dwelling. A burly, engaging man dressed in a simple style reminiscent of clothes preferred by Amish I knew in the Midwest, Br. Ted was receptive to my suggestion for conducting a workshop on oval boxes the next summer. It seemed that they already were planning on offering a variety of hands-on events, and this would fit nicely into the new program.

Our meeting again the next summer of 1985 was to be the last for he died that next winter. For many years I came back to teach workshops, but I will always remember the two times we met. He made me feel special about being there. I was sorry to learn of his death, but only slowly did I learn of the dimension of the loss to the community at SDL and to Shakerism as a whole. Br. Ted as a former Rhodes scholar had a foot in both the world of scholarship that was interested in the various examples of communal living and in being a member himself of one of those communities. He saw this small village in the context of a large history, and he had the practical good sense to be able to do his job well.

J.W.

2

A Humble Servant

The following essay by Katy Mooney will provide insight into Br. Ted Johnson who was a bridge between Br. Delmer, who was a leader in the community when Br. Ted first came to Sabbathday Lake, and the Shaker world of today. The vitality of the presence of this one remaining community of believers owes much to the life of this man.

Katy Mooney was a recipient of the Br. Theodore Johnson Scholarship. A graduate of Gray/New Gloucester High School and member of the 2004 Shaker Studies Class, Katy attended St. Michael's College in Vermont. She presented this research paper at Friends Weekend, the fall of 2005.

"Humble Servant of the Lord: The Works of Brother Ted" by Katy Mooney

"We tend to look rather much on the Shaker past, forgetting that the Shaker past isn't really that important at all. It is always the Shaker present and the Shaker future that are the really important thing."

The humble and kind man who would affectionately be referred to as Brother Ted truly lived the words which he wrote in *Practical Daily Living: Reflections on Shaker Theology.* A common adjective an outsider might associate with Shakerism would be "old-fashioned." After extensive research on the life of Brother Ted, particularly his experience at the Sabbathday Lake Village, my eyes were opened to the hopefulness of the Shaker present and the Shaker future. Shakerism struggled through great change during the 1930s,'40s and '50s as villages were closing and the Shaker economies were somewhat unsteady. Brother Theodore Johnson was able to guide Shakerism back to its roots and reinstate a re-appreciation for heritage through his studies of early Shaker writing in combination with his natural leadership, teaching abilities and unsettling will to make positive changes to the Shaker community.

During the first half of the 20th century, there was a lack of innovation in remaining Shaker villages as they strongly lacked momentum. There was a feeling of monastic memory among many of the villages; the daily tasks of many Shakers had become ritualistic. Shakers were running through the motions and were beginning to lose sight of their true reasons for completing these tasks. They were no longer aggressively looking for ways to survive. With the arrival of Brother Ted at the Sabbathday Lake Village in the late 1950s, Shakers gained the momentum for change and survival that they had previously been lacking.

Brother Ted first began reading extensively

about the Shakers while working as a librarian. Growing up as a member of the Episcopal Church, he went on to study Benedictine and Jesuit leaders in college, particularly because he had always been drawn to religious communal life, but couldn't see a great deal of relevance to some forms of communal life in the Anglican church. This desire for community led him to the Hancock village where Shakers encouraged him to visit the Sabbathday Lake community because Sabbathday was "where the life was." By the late 1950s, Brother Ted was visiting the community every weekend. Eventually, he gained a room at the village and began living there (Oral History of Brother Ted).

Brother Ted's high interest in Shaker life and academic knowledge complemented the strong faith and discernment of another Shaker living at the village during this time, Sister Mildred Barker. Together, they helped the Shakers re-invent the Shakers. According to Shaker Arnold Hadd, "They worked well together because they had the same mind. Brother Ted was able to implement a lot of what Sister Mildred felt." Like Sister Mildred, Brother Ted was also able to discern what was good and necessary. He had studied Shakerism extensively and was always thirsting for more knowledge. He was drawn to Sabbathday particularly because he believed that there, "There was an excellent discernment of what is and was not essential." More essential than any other aspect of Shakerism is the religious devotion. Brother Ted refused to allow the work done at Sabbathday Village to be monastic. He reintroduced Morning Prayer and Wednesday night prayer to the village and introduced noontime prayer. In doing this, Brother Ted was "making people more accountable as individuals for their own personal growth, while also providing more of a structure," says Brother Arnold. The environment which Brother Ted created emphasized to an even greater extent than before the importance of the unification of work with worship.

In studying Shaker past, Brother Ted was able to implement change that would positively affect the Shaker future. During the twentieth century, many villages closed due to dwindling numbers. "There wasn't a sense within the greater Shaker church that Shakerism was going to survive beyond the people who were there," said Brother Arnold. Brother Ted didn't believe in this, he believed there was great hope in the future of Shakerism. He discerned ways for Shakerism to grow. One of the most monumental ways in which he did this was by opening up public meeting, which had ended in 1888. Brother Ted recognized that "if you are a person dedicating yourself to God, you have to let your light shine (Hadd)." To do this, he was convinced that the public should be participants, rather than the spectators that they were prior to 1888. Not only did he give the public something to witness, but gave the Shakers a voice to the world. He helped to establish the *Shaker Quarterly*, in which Shakers wrote articles about Mother Ann, the gospel, the children's order … not about the furniture that is so commonly associated with Shakerism. This publication was changing the world's perception of Shakerism, and helped them to recognize the Shakers for what they really were, not simply what they made. He also evangelized through his writings and public speaking. Though as an Elder, he arose in the community as one of their greatest leaders; he always remained humble in all of his work. Brother Arnold commented about his work, "When he went and delivered that talk at Hancock, 'Life in the Christ Spirit', that galvanized the essence of what he believed to be true in Shakerism. A lot of people think that is too bare-boned of a document, but that is essentially and absolutely boiled down Shaker Theology to the nth degree … It sums up what Shakerism stands for."

More than anything, Brother Ted was excited to share his faith and his knowledge of His savior with others. The 1960s and 70s were

a time of experimentation, which attracted many people to Shaker communities, though they did not necessarily believe in the religious aspects of the community. Brother Ted never turned anyone away and was always open to people visiting the community. He took time out of his busy schedule to answer people's questions and was in constant correspondence with those who were interested. Brother Arnold and Brother Wayne both believe that they would not be Shakers today if it weren't for Brother Ted. His influence is clearly much greater than he may have ever known.

Sister Frances Carr was a good friend of his during his lifetime. While all appreciated all that he did, she is most grateful for his friendship, and all that she learned from him. He helped her to grow in her spiritual life through the Bible study group that he instituted. In learning from Brother Ted, Sister Frances was able to appreciate the many versions of the Bible. Brother Ted "opened up the wonderful world" to her.

Brother Ted's spirituality had a ripple effect on the community in which he lived. He once said that the greatest thing about Shakerism was that, "Here all of your energies can be God-directed …. Here all energies can be expended in that fashion. No one thinks it's strange if morning, noon or night, one is engaged in spiritual reading or prayer or contemplation. In the world, it is not only peculiar, it is impossible." Brother Ted certainly let his spirituality be the center point of his life, and he shared his knowledge of the Shaker faith and his personal growth with others.

One of Brother Ted's strengths was his skill as a librarian. It was the dream of Sister Mildred and himself to regain possession of the old Shaker schoolhouse and transform it into a library. He began cataloguing many of the Shaker works that were stored away. Brother Arnold commented, "Brother Ted built that on faith. We didn't have any money except to get the building back." Tragically Brother Ted would never live to see the finished library. He died a month earlier. Even in death, Brother Ted was still influencing the community. The money that people sent the community in sympathy of his death is what founded the project and made the library what it is today (Hadd).

Brother Ted died in 1986, a year before I was born. Though I never knew him physically, the changes and re-appreciation for Shaker heritage he brought to the Sabbathday Lake Village is something I can recognize and appreciate. If it were not for Brother Ted, I would not be able to get a firsthand glimpse at Shaker life, which I have been able to experience through my participation in the Shaker Studies program which he founded. I would not be able to sit in the library and read an inspiring letter from Elder Otis Sawyer to a Shaker who was considering leaving or the deep theology of Brother Ted's "Life in Christ Spirit." Though I am not of Shaker faith, I have a great admiration, appreciation and respect for the way in which they live their lives: completely devoted to God. Reading the works of Brother Ted has been very enriching. It has inspired me in my faith journey as a Catholic. In reading about people who so humbly devote themselves to the will of God and who always prayerfully discerned his call, I am inspired to do the same. Perhaps I am just a living example that Brother Ted's work has not only instated a re-appreciation for heritage in the community, but given the public a greater appreciation for Shakerism as well.

Katy Mooney

3

Who are the Shakers?

This statement is by Br. Arnold Hadd at The Sabbathday Lake Community. It appeared in 2010 in From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands *by M. Stephen Miller.*

"Who Are the Shakers?" by Br. Arnold Hadd

The United Society of Believers, commonly called Shakers, has been best described as a Protestant monastic community. We are governed by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, our model and exemplar. We seek to imitate Him in all things.

We view God as pure spirit. Within that Spirit we believe there are attributes of both maleness and femaleness, and we refer to God as our Father-Mother (see Genesis I:27).

We believe that Jesus was neither the Christ nor the anointed of God from his birth, but rather became the Christ on the occasion of his baptism by John. For us the sign of the dove descending symbolizes the anointing spirit of God whose voice is heard to say, "Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." This view in no way affects our attitudes toward the virgin birth or any of the other miraculous occurrences surrounding Jesus' beginnings. For us, these are all signs of God's prior choice of Jesus as the recipient of the anointing spirit. In fact, for Believers, Jesus' life, ministry, teachings, and death is our holy rule.

We do not worship Mother Ann Lee. Mother was not Christ, nor did she claim to be. To Mother was given the inner realization that Christ's Second Coming was a quiet, almost unheralded one within individuals open to the anointing of His spirit. She remarked, "I converse with Christ, I feel Him present with me as sensibly as I feel my hands together. My soul is married to him in the spirit – he is my husband. It is not I that speaks, it is Christ who dwells in me." And she further states, "… the second appearing of Christ is in His Church."

Central to the teaching of the New Testament is love: the love of God for His creation and the love of mankind for God. This love is the cornerstone of Shakerism. It is a living force that must be rediscovered and acted upon each day. Perfect joy comes only with laying aside one's self in love. Day after day, in the sharing of the common life, the Shaker seeks to lose himself by giving joyfully and freely, expecting nothing in return. Such perfect love is manifested in Universal Brotherhood, equality of all people, and pacifism.

We are not the Church, but a part of the Church. To be a Shaker is a special calling (see Matthew I9:I2), meant only for those who "… wish to go the whole way. Go sell your pos-

sessions and give to the poor and then you will have riches in heaven and come follow me" (Matthew I9:2I). We are called to reveal Christ to the World, a place in which the will and purpose of God are largely forgotten. God calls in many ways, but all men and women, whatever their occupation, whatever their profession, are called to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

In this sacred oneness we seek to emulate Christ and his first Apostles in practicing the same Community of Goods where no one owns anything, but we all own everything. Those who give up material things for the sake of the Gospel are taught by that same Gospel that they may learn to live in joyous confidence that they will lack for nothing. The spirit of Christian poverty is more than the absence of wealth. Anyone who regards all that he has as a trust from God and uses it for His glory is living in the true spirit of Christian poverty.

Mother Ann gave us the motto, "Hands to work and hearts to God." To this end we are all employed in manual labor, each according to his/her ability. All contribute, young and old, with willing hands and hearts. This is not done for personal or monetary gain, but to support our community and to come to the aid of those others in need. In so doing we are able to fulfill the words of Christ, "… anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

We are called in this life of holiness and prayer to "give our hearts to God." As such all work has the potential of being worship in that it is not being done for ourselves, but for others and for the upbuilding of God's Kingdom here on earth.

Shakerism continues to have a message as valid today as when it was first expressed. It teaches above all else that God is Love and that our most solemn duty is to show forth that God – who is Love in the World. Shakerism teaches God's immanence through the common life shared in Christ's mystical body. It values human fulfillment highly and believes that we fulfill ourselves best by being nothing more nor less than ourselves. It believes that Christian love is a love beyond disillusionment, for we cannot be disillusioned with people being themselves. Surely God would not have it otherwise, for it is in being ourselves – our real selves – that we are most like Christ in His sacred oneness.

Br. Arnold Hadd
Sabbathday Lake Shaker Community
2010

8

Brother Delmer and the 1,083 Carriers

There is a striking photograph of oval carriers all stacked up in the middle of the shop floor on which is hung a sign "1083 Carriers." The extraordinary number of oval carriers in the well-worn surroundings of the wood shop makes a memorable subject. Many are familiar with this photo who have visited the museum and gift shop at the Shaker Village, Sabbathday Lake, Maine, where a large copy of this photo is a perennial best seller.

I, too, purchased and framed the 1083 carrier picture. This was before I knew the story behind it. As a woodworker and itinerant teacher of workshops in the making of Shaker oval boxes, I had a special interest in the subject. It was while staying a few days in the vil-

One of four photos Br. Delmer took on the April, 1923, day that the winter's output of carriers was moved out of the shop to be finished and lined by the Sisters. The square head planer behind Delmer was used for dimensioning bands and boards after being cut from the log starting New Year's Day of that year.

lage after conducting a box-making craft course that I read the following account:

> *In 1894 Amanda [Stickney] and Sirena [Douglas] lined up two Lebanon carriers which had been given to them and sent them to the Springs in August. It started quite a craze accordingly other carriers were prepared and sold. Finally, all spare oval boxes were picked up, some even had paint removed, and after I made bails for them…the carriers were lined and furnished (I should have also said varnished) and found a ready market at Poland Spring.*

So began a journal labeled "Carrier Notes" dated 1921 in which Br. Delmer Wilson (1873 – 1961, see sidebar on page 45) recounted his work in making carriers. It was at the Shaker Village at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, that a tradition of box and carrier making began with taking two carriers to show the summer visitors at the resort of Poland Spring just a few miles north of the village.

Since boxmaking was not a craft of the village at the time, they rounded up all the available boxes that could be adapted to meet the demand. These were refinished, fitted with a bail, and lined for use as sewing baskets, or, in terms of the day, work boxes.

> *Eldress Lizzie's [Noyes] next move was to buy all the oval boxes she could get in Mt. Lebanon, NY. There were four or five sizes with covers, but no bails, neither were they varnished. I put bails on all of these, and Eldress Lizzie varnished them as she has continued to do to date. The covers were discarded and all since have been sold without covers with a few exceptions.*
>
> *A while later Eldress Lizzie got Elder Henry Green of Alfred to make a lot (100 I think) and I put bails on them.*

For the next two years, boxes were purchased from Mt. Lebanon and Alfred communities for fitting out with bails, varnished and lined. Sixty-eight in all were made over that way

COURTESY OF THE UNITED SOCIETY OF SHAKERS, SABBATHDAY LAKE, MAINE

A young Br. Delmer Wilson making carriers for which the Sabbathday Lake Village was famous in the period 1896 to the 1940s. The maple bands are bent, the pine bottoms being fit, and the bale to be put on. The wood frame band saw is one Delmer made following a visit to a trade show in Portland, Maine.

in the first half of 1896. Then in July of that year, Br. Delmer recounts that he "made some round carriers, the first carriers I ever made."

Insight into the methods used to prepare the maple bands for oval carriers is detailed in recounting machines that were brought into the village's shop, or charges made when going outside for mill work. Cutting hard maple thin and wide (1/16" × 3" × 28" is a typical dimension) is an unusual task, and one that goes beyond the capacity of the ordinary carpenter's setup.

> *August 19, 1897: I sawed carrier sides at mill. August 21, I took 200 sides to Lewiston and got them planed at Hall's carpenter shop Canal St. at 50 cents per hour. Planer was not set right for such thin stock so did not do a perfect job. January 11, 1898, I drew a plan for a sanding machine to work like a planer to smooth carrier sides. February 9 sander completed and I used it for first time. It worked very well, but when I came to soak the sides to bend them the grain was raised fearfully. Later we found it an awful job to smooth around the fingers where the sand belt could not reach it. So, I decided a sander was not equal to a planer.*
>
> *December 20, 1898, when Elder Joseph Holden brought Washington Jones here to live, I was using the little panel planer Elder Wm. bought of Frank Winter for about $40.00. It worked very well, but as there was no pressure bars to hold board firmly, the knives would lift the thin stock and damage it. I found by dulling the knives a little it worked much better.*

From a modest beginning in 1896 when Br. Delmer made 30 carriers, he recorded the winters' output, increasing until 1908 when for the first time over 1000 were produced. Then the demand does not seem to have changed much, as only occasionally will it be recorded that in some year an additional 20 or 100 small covered boxes were produced, along with the open swing handle carriers. These carriers were made in four sizes, listed according to their cost. It is a testament to the price stability of the times that such a measure could be made. The sizes in 1910 prices were $3.00, $2.25, $1.75, $1.50.

As I read further in Br. Delmer's carrier notes, I came to the winter of 1922 – 23. Here the journal shifted from a summary recollection of events and figures to a daily log of people, work and production. The record kept pace with the work in the shop. As work was completed that season, Br. Delmer wrote with pride of the accomplishment of himself and his shop help, Harry Merrill, that year. It culminated in making a stack of 1083 carriers and taking pictures of it. Suddenly, I realized that the events I had been reading about were already known to me in the picture which for a year now had been in my home.

Let's take a look at the journal for that year, and the kinds of events it records. The journal itself was used only for notes on carrier production, so the first entry is December 26, 1922, and the last is April 17, 1923. It was seasonal work. Shop work balanced with warm weather pursuits. Carriers made then were finished in time for the summer resort trade. After the boxes left the shop, the sisters did the varnishing and lining out to complete the work boxes.

> *December 26, 1922 Began to sort carrier lumber. Dec 27 Elder Henry came over. Dec 29 Began to cut off lumber. Dec 28-29 Big storm 2 feet of snow. Dec 29 Stage came to office and returned home. Dec 30 Elder Wm. started to corner with Elder Henry and gave it up, snow deep and hard.*

So began the carrier work for the winter. Perhaps in the festivities of Christmas that year Br. Delmer had played Santa Claus as he had recorded for that same day in 1901 when he

received a sealskin cap. In any event, over the next weeks and months making carriers accompanied such chores as handling seed orders and cutting ice on Sabbathday pond.

The Weather: *"January 12 another N.E. storm, 5th storm one after the other. January 14 one more of the numerous snow storms – lost count. February 2 Ground Hog Day: Clear and Bright. I took picture of path near office under apple tree, huge blocks of snow and narrow path reminded me of the mountains. I printed sign of Crawford Notch and put it up and took a picture of it."*

Health: *"January 5 Mamie has been to Lewiston several times about her teeth. March 16 I took to my room this noon with a bad cold. March 26 work in shop once more after 10 days illness."*

Community Affairs: *"March 12 Town meeting Elder Wm. and I attend, appropriations still high $27,000 and about $8,000 for state and country." Throughout this year, Br. Delmer was organizing the extension of electricity to the village and surrounding area. "February 1 I called on the neighbors about electric lights. I have asked them to subscribe $5,000 per year for 5 years also pay $2,500 in advance toward hole digging and pole hauling and buy $500.00 worth of stock each. They seemed agreeable."*

Automobiles: *"January 6 Harry took mule and hauled out auto. February 27 Went to auto show. April 14 First auto went by."*

Business: *"December 30 Gave order for seeds of $13.98 to Cobb Seed Co. Oldham agt. of Auburn. February 22 Washington's Birthday, Prudence and Ada trade at Poland Spring: good sale. April 17 Girls took all carriers into house, I think I have worked about 76 days – Harry about the same – Isaac helped us 4 days = 80 days. If a mechanic was hired to do all of this work it would cost $5.00 per day, or $400.00 on average. Harry's time would amount to about 1/3 this amount or $133.00 or a total for the job of $533.00.*

Cherry bought about	*$10.00*
Hardware used	*2.60*
Sandpaper No. 1	*.50*
Sandpaper No. 2	*.50*
Total bought	*$13.60*
Home lumber 1½ cord	*18.00*
Home pine 500 ft @ 2½ cents	*12.50*
	$44.10
Gasoline and oil about	*14.00*
	$58.10
Labor brought forward	*533.00*
Total expense	*$591.10*

Or about $600.00. Each carrier cost on an average of 55 cents – 4 mills each (!)"

The Work of Making Carriers

Sawing at the mill went on from December 26 to January 18. First the sorting of lumber, followed by cutting bailing lumber, then pine for bottoms, and finally sawing the maple sides. The rest of January was taken up with planing the freshly cut maple sidebands and the pine bottom boards. In addition to smoothing the sides, they were put through the planer on a shooter board with a raised end to plane the lap end of the band.

The first week of February involved running the moulder for rounding the bails. Bands were cut to final size, holes for tacks pricked, and inspected. "I sorted carrier sides, found over 1795, also 100 thrown away and 100 culls = 2000 planed, also planed 500 for Elder Henry, 2,500 total, quite a job each planed 3 to 4 times."

Bending bails was done on forms looking something like a long loaf of bread with a slat on each side to catch the bail ends firmly. About 50 bails could dry on one form. Along with bending bails, the rims were sanded smooth, a job which has never been received with much enthusiasm. Br. Delmer notes that "Isaac is coming to help Harry in this." Finally, on March 16th these tasks were largely done.

The middle of March started the fitting of pine bottoms in the bands, or as Br. Delmer called it, cutting in the bottoms. These were then nailed in place using 1/2" iron brads. At the same time, the bails had to be drilled, and the ends trimmed. These were then attached to the carrier sides with brass rivets.

The first two weeks of April were taken up with finishing the attachment of bails, which were nearly done by the 12th, when "Harry dug the first parsnips." The bottoms were polished using the disc sander to level out the surface. "Harry finished bailing all carriers, he has done them all in very good shape. I counted up 1085."

The final day arrived. "April 16 I repaired up a few carriers and finished the whole lot at 9:20 a.m. Harry and I stacked them up in a huge oval pile 35 across and 30 high using all of the 4 sizes; pile was about 7' high. I took 4 views of them, I was in two views. April 17 Girls took all carriers into house – 1083."

The Catalog of Fancy Goods, Shaker Village, Sabbathday Lake, Cumberland County, Maine, published by trustee Lizzie M. Noyes in 1910, displayed a range of oval carriers with their sizes, prices and description. The four sizes were:

7 in. × 4 5/8 in., $1.50
8 in. × 5 1/4 in., $1.75
9 1/4 in. × 6 3/8 in., $2.25
11 in. × 7 5/8 in., $3.25

"The oval carriers are an old-style box coming into greater favor each year. The peculiar ern on the list. These are made of various kinds of selected hard wood, highly polished and varnished. Each carrier has a flat bail firmly riveted in the center so it will turn completely around, making it convenient to pack. These carriers being designed for work boxes are carefully satin lined, in shades to suit the individual, and fully furnished. An extra charge is made for carriers built of the dark woods as follows: 10¢, 15¢, 25¢, and 50¢ respectively."

Br. Delmer was making these four sizes of carriers in the winter of 1922-23. In his journal he revers to the sizes by the price at which they first sold. An entry for March 31: "Have cut in (bottoms into) all of 2.25 size also all of 1.75 or 714 – total of 2 sizes." On April 17: "Girls took all carriers into house – 1083 as follows:

3.00	2.25	1.75	1.50
D – 44	343	376	320

War prices still in effect are

4.50	3.00	2.25	2.00

Dark and light same price."

In addition to these open carriers, the 1910 catalog displayed a covered carrier 12 5/8 in. × 7 in. for $6.00. "This is a beautiful oval wood box made of carefully selected hard wood, such as apple tree, black cherry, mahogany and quartered oak. The cover being a leading attraction is carefully fitted and attached to the rim with brass screws, giving it a very finished and attractive appearance. The bottom is also made fast with screws in the same manner. The large bail is of a special model, carefully worked out by hand. This also turns in both directions. These large carriers are generally lined with a superior brocade satin and fully furnished. It is perhaps needless to say that this beautiful work box has received the most careful attention in its outward construction as well as in its inner completeness."

Br. Delmer's Maple Bands and Pine Boards in 1923

January 1st of 1923 and a new season of making carriers began at Sabbathday Lake Village.

Pine boards need drying before being made into carrier bottoms. Here rough sawn thin boards are being winter-dried near the stove in the Home Shop similar to what Br. Delmer did in 1923.

Br. Delmer kept an account book that ended in April with 1083 carriers photographed as they were ready for transport to the Sisters' shop for finishing. In June they would be sewing baskets for the fancy goods trade of the village.

What was needed were maple bands for bending stock and pine boards for bottoms, both available in the woods of central Maine. A simple statement that "we began cutting maple logs" and "standard pine for bottoms" begs for explanation as anyone who has sourced these materials on their own will appreciate. The challenge for manufacturing good band stock is how to cut thin maple strips that range in width up to 6 inches and 4 feet long, and how to dry pine boards and both of these in the winter months with the resources at hand in rural Maine.

Cutting maple logs on a mill to rough dimension of 1/8" to 1/4" thickness is not particularly difficult. The challenge is to plane these bands thin and smooth to thicknesses of 1/16" to 3/32". Try it and the wood loses its stiffness at these thin dimensions so that the planer knives will tear and shatter the wood. I remember well one of my first experiences doing this when on the last pass to final thin size I entered the board, and the helper had this puzzled look on his face. "Ok, where is the board?" It went out with all the chips!

So how did Br. Delmer use the thicknessing planer available in the shop in the village to do his maple band stock? The first thing we know was recorded by him in an interview with the Smithsonian oral history project in the 1950s. The blades of the planer were sharpened at a steeper angle to prevent tear out. This change in knife angle of attack is similar to what bench planes incorporate when in a smoothing plane the irons are set at 55° instead of the common jack plane angle of 45°. I believe he made this change in blade grinding on one half of the blade to allow for one side of the planer to work best on thicker stock, while the other side, which could not hog off as much wood, was suitable for thin band stock.

The other element in the success of band stock manufacture is deduced from the time and temperature when he did his work. First we know that logs were cut and band stock dimensioned all in the first weeks of January. The maple wood was planed wet. This is always more reliable in the planer. Wet stock is also ideal for trimming finger ends, hand planing feather laps, and bending – everything needed to complete the first stage of boxmaking. (Today we make use of abrasive thicknessers for much of our band stock final dimensioning and wet wood does not work well here.)

The second aspect of the month of January in Maine is the cold. Everything outdoors freezes. So what does this have to do with successful oval box band bending? Two things: planer reliability and mold elimination. I once had a load of wet boards to plane in winter. It was frozen wood and the shop hardly warmer. Eric and I loaded it through the machine and out to the trailer again as fast as it was dimensioned. The surface of hundreds of boards was near perfect, none of the usual spots of tear-out or surface chatter where grain direction was opposite to planing direction. The frozen and wet wood held together just as it would in Maine in January.

The stacked up bands were ready for box work, dimensioned and still wet as they were in the living tree. The trouble here is that maple also has sugar, and the white wood at moisture levels above 20 percent will bloom with mold whenever temperatures are above freezing. At cool temperatures you have a week or so to separate and dry the layers of wood. In summer, it is a matter of days or even hours before noticeable discoloration happens. Br. Delmer and his helper had a month and a half to do their work thanks to the Maine winter.

Pine boards are more forgiving than maple band stock. The thickness dimension needed for box work is 1/4" which can be passed through the planer successfully wet or dry, especially as softwood dimensions easier than hardwood. The challenge here is drying the wood prior to manufacturing the box. Unlike band stock that needs to be wet, bottoms need to be as dry as the interior of homes before fitting them into the oval band, or else shrinkage will happen later and spoil the tight fit.

Cold conditions are not conducive to drying boards. Br. Delmer records that the thin pine boards were stacked in the shop near the stove to dry, and that the sequence of shop work was to complete all the bending of sides and handles before beginning to fit bottoms into the carriers. This gave them six weeks before needing boards, enough time for pine, which would be 3/8" rough cut, to dry to needed level of about 8° moisture content. In our shop, drying of thin boards goes on eight months of the year in our solar drying kilns. In winter, the short days and cold ambient temperatures defeat the system, and we do what Br. Delmer did in the winter of 1923 – stack boards in the shop near to the stove.

J.W.
The Shaker Quarterly
1987-88

Charles Delmer Wilson (1873 – 1961)

Born July 8, 1873, at Topsham, Maine, he entered the community of Sabbathday Lake at the age of 8, January 7, 1882. He took care of the dairy herd at 14 and was in charge of orchard and farm.

He came to earn the title of "Dean of the Carrier Makers" following the beginning of the entry of that item into the fancy goods trade in 1894. From this time through the 1920s as many as 1,000 carriers of various sizes were made during the winter shop work. While fewer boxes were made, there are many fine examples of cherry, apple, and mahogany as well as the traditional maple and pine. A remarkable nesting set of nine thin oval boxes was made for an exhibit at a local Maine fair. The two largest of these were sold with the intention that more could be made. None were, however, and the remaining set of seven are in the museum collection of the village.

He was gifted and resourceful. On one occasion he returned to the village and built a large wooden saw modeled on one made of metal he had examined at a work site.

Br. Delmer was appointed Elder on May 14, 1931, to succeed Elder William Dumont. According to his preference, he continued to be called Brother. He died December 15, 1961.

Pricing Your Oval Boxes

There is no one answer to the question "How much should I charge for my boxes?"

Is this direct sale or wholesale?

Is it a local or from-shop sale, or mail order, or is it a show with booth fee and road expenses?

Is your box ordinary, or is it made for special use with distinctive wood?

Are you just getting started or well established?

Are you covering the materials costs of your hobby, or are you making a living from it?

On the following page are prices charged by five boxmakers: three of them individuals supplied by the Home Shop with materials, two of them businesses sourcing their own. Orleans Carpenters and Shaker Workshops are businesses located in eastern Massachusetts and both founded at the beginning of the revival in Shaker reproductions in the 1970s. Of the three craftsmen, I started in the early 1980s and tried direct local and craft show sales before moving on to being a supplier of wood and fasteners to the trade in my business, the Home Shop. Carl Huth and Tim Arnold have each found a profitable and rewarding nitch for their craft more recently: Carl at local and statewide shows in Ohio and Tim going national to major exhibitions with substantial entry fees up to $3,000 each.

All of these makers produce other sizes and specialty boxes besides the standard nesting set, such things as business card holders and letter carriers, jewelry boxes and quilters' specialties. Listed here are nesting box sizes No. 000 to No. 12 plus an example of fixed handle and swing handle carriers, and a serving tray. Perhaps the most prolific array is that of Shaker Workshops who show in their catalog a variety of twenty styles besides the No. 0 – No. 8 nesting boxes in unfinished, clear coat, and milk paint varieties. Footnotes give you background for each from which to judge relevance to your situation. In compiling this listing, I was struck by the similarity of pricing in the nest of No. 0 – No. 5 boxes, while larger sizes and specialty boxes varied. Prices are from a variety of sources and a spread of years. In spite of that they give a useful range from which to judge your work.

A. Shaker Oval Box Kit

Traditionally used to store tea, herbs and sewing sundries, these oval boxes typify Shaker design, graceful and functional with clean lines. This kit contains all the materials necessary to make a nesting set of three boxes in sizes #1 to #3 (approx. 2¾"×4¼" to 4⅝"×7¼") – specially prepared cherry side band material, quarter-cut stock for the box tops and bottoms, plus wooden pegs and copper tacks. Full-sized patterns allow easy construction of templates and bending forms, and thorough instructions provide clear guidance for shaping and bevelling the "swallowtail" fingers and bending the sides.

Boxes nested together

55K68.01 Shaker Oval Box Kit **$29.50**

Copper Tacks for Shaker Oval Boxes

Specially designed for clinching the fingers on shaker oval boxes, these copper tacks have a thin section to minimize splitting. Sold in 1 oz packages. Tack lengths, recommended box sizes, and approximate quantities are listed in the price lines.

	Tacks	Length	Box Size	Qty.	
B. 55K68.05	#1	5/16"	#0-#1	800	$3.95
C. 55K68.06	#1½	7/32"	#1-#3	600	$3.95
D. 55K68.07	#2	¼"	#4-#6	375	$3.95
E. 55K68.08	#2½	5/16"	#7-#12	200	$3.95

FROM THE JANUARY 2006 LEE VALLEY CATALOG

Comparison of Oval Box Prices from Professional Boxmakers

Box Size[1]	Oval Length[2]	John Wilson[3]	Carl Huth[4]	Tim Arnold[5]	Orleans Carpenters[6]	Shaker Workshops[7]
No. 000	2"	$40	$35	---	$33	---
No. 00	2 5/8"	$40	$32	$30	$33	---
No. 0	3 1/2"	$27	$31	$25	$33	$33.75
No. 1	4 5/8"	$31	$36	$30	$35	$35
No. 2	5 3/4"	$35	$41	$35	$40	$38.75
No. 3	7"	$40	$46	$40	$45	$42.50
No. 4	8 1/4"	$44	$51	$45	$55	$47.50
No. 5	9 1/2"	$54	$56	$55	$65	$52.50
No. 6	11"	$72	$61	$65	$85	$58.75
No. 7	12 1/2"	$125	$65	$75	$115	$68.75
No. 8	14 1/4"	$145	$70	$100	$150	$80
No. 9	16"	$175	$85	$150	$200	---
No. 10	17 3/4"	$200	$105	$200	$250	---
No. 11	19 3/4"	$225	$130	$350	$300	---
No. 12	21 3/4"	$250	$185	$500	$350	---
No. 4 or No. 5 Swing-handle Carrier		$50	$41	$65	$85	$55
No. 8 Fixed-handle Carrier		$90	$57	$85	$75	$43.75
No. 9 Serving Tray		---	$53	$85	$80	$41.25

[1]Size numberings No. 1 – No. 6 are those given by Ejner Handberg in 1973 in *Shop Drawings of Shaker Furniture and Woodenware*. Others are an extension of that series. There is no one exact standard, and Shakers numbered theirs in reverse with the largest No. 1!

[2]Ellipse length is to the inside of the box, the form on which it is bent. Again, there is no one set dimension. Generally, the ellipse is of a ratio of 1:1 1/2, front to back vs length. Sizes increase roughly 1" front-to-back per size. Some Shaker communities increased theirs on the even inch, being 3" – 4" – 5" – 6" while others used 3 1/2" – 4 1/2" – 5 1/2" – 6 1/2". Band width will increase 1/2" per size in the smaller boxes beginning with 1 1/2" wide for the No. 1 size. The number of fingers increases with band width being each 3/4" to 1" wide. In the larger size No. 8, the serving tray band is one finger wide, the carrier band two fingers wide, the nesting box four fingers wide, and tall sizes multiple fingers.

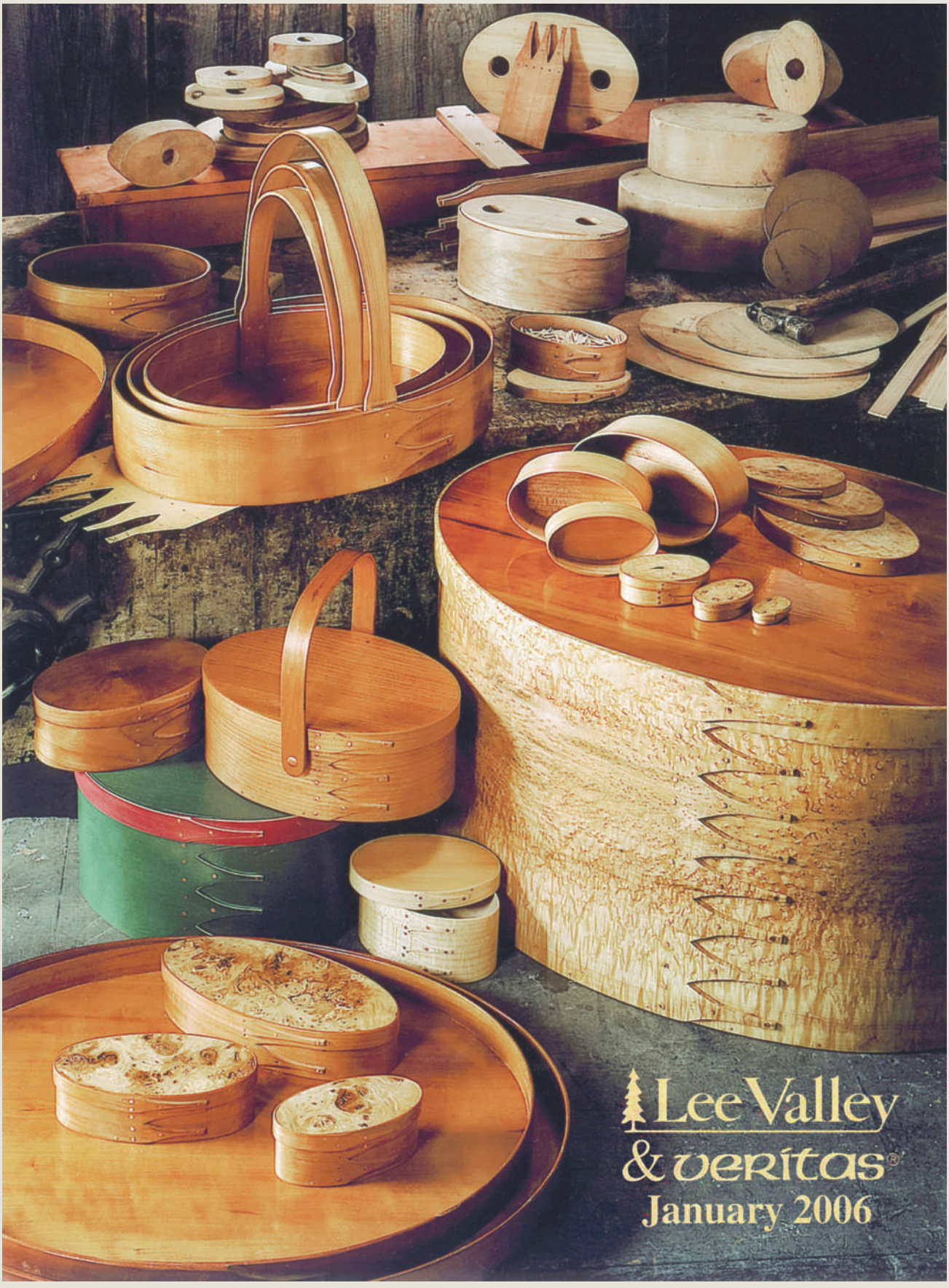
[3]John Wilson began teaching boxmaking in his woodworking classes and later added selling boxes both direct sales and at local craft shows, jokingly referring to doing so "to support my habit." This was in 1984 and 1985 for shows, and another ten years for direct sales. "I moved on to teaching classes, writing, and supplying the trade with copper tacks, supplies and forms. This list has an interesting origin. I found myself approached by gift store owners to sell to them at a wholesale discount, normally 40 – 50 percent off list. This was more than I was comfortable doing. So, I told them I could give 20 percent discount and they could charge retail at whatever they wanted. That made them uncomfortable. So, I came back the next day with a new list that was 20 percent higher for all boxes, and the following note: 'Prices quoted are list. Direct sales from the maker are at 20% discount.' That made everybody comfortable!"

[4]Carl Huth has been successful in selling at art shows in his home state of Ohio. Travel is reasonable and booth fees small. He focuses on four or five shows a year, some of which run for three weekends.

[5]Tim Arnold has made a business of boxmaking and is the most prolific of the Home Shop customers. He does very well by picking venues that draw interested customers, often specialized ones like for quilters where he may be the only woodworker showing. These are national shows involving extended travel, and fees are not cheap, averaging $1,600 per show. Shows may run four days. The results are in the volume of sales where he may sell 40 or 50 of one size rather than 4 or 5 at a local affair.

[6]Orleans Carpenters was founded by Dick Soule in the 1970s, out on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Dick was a big help to me getting started, and I helped out in his shop on occasion. He built a national sales business by mail. Sold to Paul Dixon in the 1990s, it was a major source of oval boxes until closing in 2014.

[7]Shaker Workshops has been a source for Shaker furniture and woodenware since the 1970s. The Shaker ladder-back chairs were a specialty being sold both complete as well as a kit. Their catalog is worth looking through if you can find one as it contains over 20 variations on the oval theme as well as the traditional nesting set unfinished, clear coated or painted.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