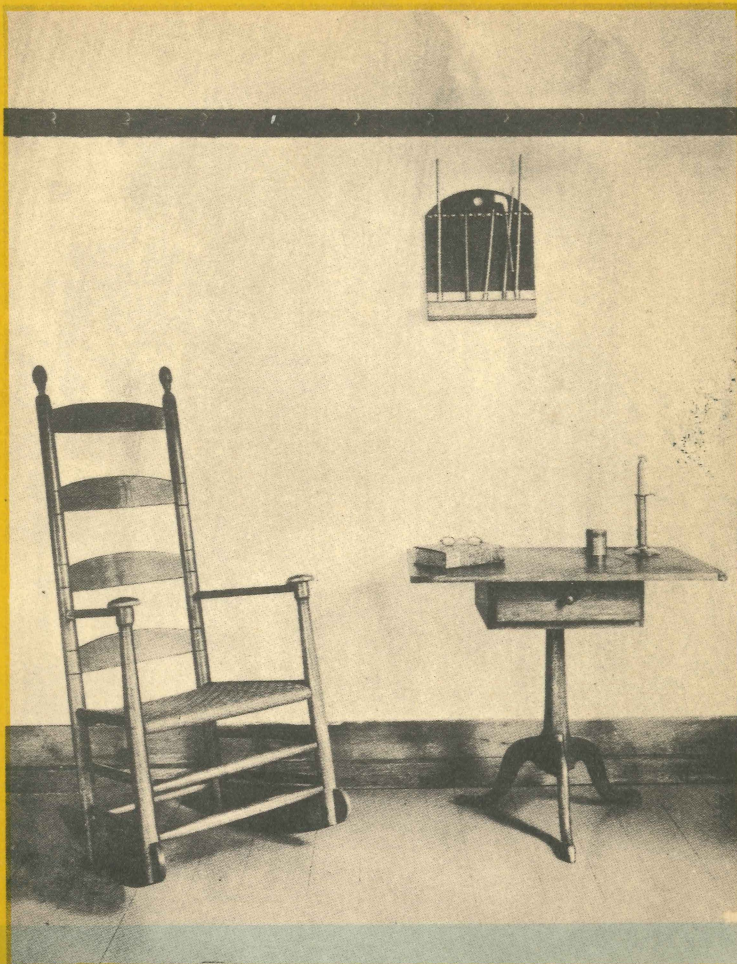


Shaker Furniture

The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect

By Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews



Photographs by William F. Winter



For Thomas Merton and his Trappist brethren -
in appreciation of a memorable day at the
Abbey of Gethsemani in November, 1961

With love,

Edward and Faith Andrews

CHOIR NOVITIATE
GETHSEMANI, KY.



SHAKER FURNITURE



THE CRAFTSMANSHIP
OF AN
AMERICAN COMMUNAL SECT



BY
EDWARD DEMING ANDREWS
AND
FAITH ANDREWS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM F. WINTER

1950

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PLATES

(Following page 66)

1. Ministry's dining room, with early trestle table and benches. *frontispiece*
2. Long communal dining table with benches.
3. Community dining table and early dining chairs.
4. Side chairs arranged for a "union meeting."
5. Long meeting-house benches.
6. Ironing-room, with table and chairs.
7. Ministry sisters' room. Stretcher-base table, rocking chairs and mirror.
8. Sisters' gathering or common room. Drop-leaf tables, chairs and stove.
9. Maine Shaker craftsmanship. Tables and chair.
10. Kitchen table and bench.
11. Shaker bake-room furnishings.
12. Early Shaker stands.
13. "Round stand," with side chairs.
14. Workstand, with brethren's rocker and pipe-rack.
15. Sewing stands and chairs.
16. "Round stand," with early rocking chairs and clock.
17. Four-legged sewing stand or table. Small built-in pine cupboard with drawers.
18. Chests and chairs for children.
19. Blanket- or storage chests.
20. Small case of drawers and drop-leaf table.
21. Wood-box and washstand.
22. High cupboard-chest and step-stool.
23. High pine case with base cupboard.
24. "Weave-chest" or sill cupboard, with accessories.
25. Cellar cupboard and bench.
26. Built-in drawers and cupboards.
27. Built-in cupboards and drawers in brethren's retiring-room.
28. Sideboard used by Canterbury ministry.
29. Long tailoring counter.
30. Tailoresses' shop. Counter, chairs and looking glass.
31. Sewing stands, with swivel-stools.
32. Large sewing desk.
33. Sewing cabinets or tables from Hancock.
34. Furniture unit in sisters' shop.
35. Corner of early Shaker schoolroom. Desk, bench and hanging rack.
36. High pine desk used by trustees.
37. Deaconess' desk.
38. Lap- or table-desk.
39. "Nurse-shop" or infirmary scene.
40. Bed and washstand.
41. Shaker tall-clock, with table and chair.
42. Shaker wall-clock and counter.
43. Oval boxes.
44. Pegs and pulls.
45. Chair buttons.
46. Ironing-room in washhouse of the Hancock church.
47. Cobbler's shop.
48. Carpenter's bench.

In such a flexible system, the carpenters, joiners or wood turners whose main employment was furniture-making, might at various periods be shifted to building construction, coopering, shingle-making, turning handles or even to work in the gardens, fields or mills. The patternmakers who formulated the designs for industrial devices and machines probably coöperated in their actual construction, enlisting the services of the mechanic, the blacksmith and the joiner. Such shifting from one occupation to another was usually an informal procedure supervised by the family deacons or trustees; but on rare occasions, if a member took too vain a pride in his work, permanent transference to another branch of industry was ordered by the elders or ministry. None were required, however, "to labor beyond their strength and ability." The ministry, elders and trustees joined the commonest members in the humblest labors. All were equal in spirit, and all contributed alike to the welfare of the order.

The system of rotation and change in occupation affected the quality of workmanship in several ways. Since no one, with the possible exception of the chair-maker, confined his attention to a single pursuit, it was easier to follow the established tradition of simple design than to experiment with more difficult forms. The more skilful joiners, in particular, were called upon to do such a multitude of jobs that the most direct and economical method of finishing a given piece of furniture was also the most practical one. Variety in industry, on the other hand, militated against stereotyped performance: the joiner did not make one case of drawers or bed after another, but approached each project freshly from some other calling. Production was always for use; work was incessant but seldom hurried. Emergencies rarely existed and he could choose his own time to finish the work at hand. The craftsman labored neither for master nor market demand, but for a community which he believed would be timeless. Pursuing the millennial ideal of mutual helpfulness, woodworkers also went from house to house, from family to family, and often from one society to another. They borrowed freely what was best in each community, and thus helped to preserve the highest standards of craftsmanship.

The joiners' shop was often open at five o'clock in the morning, or in the winter, a half hour later. Sundry chores were performed before the six or half-past six breakfast; fires were started in the small cast-iron



Jan. 27, 1954

FACE of CHRIST

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Holy Shroud of Turin

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PRAYER

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O Lord Jesus, Who by a singular prodigy didst leave for us upon Thy Holy Shroud the imprint of Thy Most Holy Body, so cruelly tortured and put to death for our salvation, together with the Image of Thy Most Holy Face, that wicked men by wounds and blows disfigured, grant us through the merits of Thy many sufferings, that by venerating on earth the Image of Thy Holy Face, upon which the very Angels long to gaze, we may be made worthy to contemplate It forever in heaven. Amen.

Imprimatur:

✠ FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN.

Photo by Enrie, 1931

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HOLY SHROUD GUILD, ESOPUS, N. Y.

stoves and "stuff" prepared for the day's work. After the morning meal, the "mechanics" repaired to their varied occupations. A request from the deacon or elder of the family, or from the deaconess or eldress, might require the construction of a case of drawers, a particular kind of counter, or a long table for use in a kitchen or herb-shop. If the stock were not on hand, the cabinetworker would often go to the sawmill himself. He planned the piece in his mind's eye, familiar with types already made for similar purposes: for rarely, it seems, was the design executed on paper beforehand. His labor was straightforward: fine tools and machine and foot-lathes were present; stains, oils, varnishes and paints were part of the shop's equipment. He might, however, be interrupted before the twelve o'clock dinner by demands from other shops and trades: a mechanic might be needed for repairs in the washhouse; an unexpected problem might await solution in the weave-shop; the seedsmen might be shorthanded in boxing seeds for immediate delivery; or an order for broom handles might claim priority. In such cases the cupboard, counter or table had to wait until the emergency was over. The wood turner took up his complex routine soon after the frugal noonday repast, and worked till the bell on the roof of the dwelling sounded the five-minute warning for supper at six o'clock. Often he returned afterwards to put the shop in order, to see that fires were extinguished, sometimes to work by the fading daylight or the gleam of candles.

Production was accelerated when a new dwelling, with its manifold requirements for fixed and movable furniture, was nearing completion. At such times the available skill of an entire family or society was needed to build the scores of cases, tables, cabinets, beds and other furnishings required. Only then did the wood-turning shops assume the appearance of a scale-production establishment. Repetition of motif prevailed: the plans for one retiring-room were like those for another. And there was division of labor: some worked with the mortising machine, turning lathe or planer, while others confined their attention to such operations as dovetailing, applying knobs to drawers and finishing. But never did the amount of labor on hand reduce the rules of simplicity to the point of crudeness, vitiate activity with carelessness, or obscure the vision of inspired and unblemished workmanship.

Shaker Furniture

The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect

By Edward Deming Andrews and
Faith Andrews

Photographs by William F. Winter

Here is the definitive work on a distinctive American furniture style, by two of the world's leading authorities on the Shakers. This book shows you design of an austere charm, coupled with strength, simplicity, and what we today call "functionalism." Whether you are a collector of antiques, an habitu  of auctions, a reconstructor of furniture, a student of American culture, a designer, or simply an admirer of fine design, you will be aided and pleased by the material in this volume.

Forty-eight superb photographic plates show such items as side chairs, long benches, rocking chairs, chests, cupboards, storage chests, children's furniture, sewing stands, carpenter's benches, a cobbler's cabinet and bench, oval boxes, and dining tables. These were photographed in rooms of actual Shaker dwellings and workshops in New Lebanon, New York, and Hancock, Massachusetts. Careful descriptions of each plate tell of use, arrangement, and variations. Exact measurements are given for each piece, to aid you in identification, reconstruction, or restoration. Appendices present discussions of the Shaker chair industry, the life and works of two clockmakers, and notes on construction, materials, and finishes, with formulas for stains, coloring, and lacquer.

To help you understand the origin and intent of Shaker design, the authors have provided an introduction which discusses the cultural background of Shaker craftsmanship, its character, methods of craftsmen, and Shaker houses and shops. Through extensive quotation of contemporary documents, and scholarly, but highly readable, commentary, you will become acquainted with the attitudes of this ascetic, communal sect. This introduction combines with the photographs themselves to produce a book which is an important contribution to American cultural history, and the history of ideas in America.

"Nowhere else is there such an authoritative account of the Shaker way of life," American Heritage. "Intensely interesting . . . a major contribution," Antiques Magazine. "A beautiful book," Arts Digest. "Every serious student of American design should want this well-written, beautifully observed . . . study," Design.

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