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Western Kentucky University Manuscripts & Folklife Archives – Shaker Collections



This is a list of collections in the [Manuscripts & Folklife Archives](#) holdings of WKU's [Department of Library Special Collections](#) that relate primarily to the United Believers in the Second Coming of Christ, commonly known as the Shakers. Most of the collections relate to the Shaker society at South Union in Logan County, Kentucky, but materials relating to other societies are also included.

Clicking on a collection name will link you to [TopSCHOLAR®](#), WKU's online digital repository, where you can download a detailed finding aid for the collection and, in some cases, view material in the collection. You can also search TopSCHOLAR® for other collections that contain incidental material relating to the Shakers but are not listed on this page. To further broaden your search to include sources such as published material, photographs, broadsides, etc., search [KenCat](#), the [Kentucky Library Research Collections](#) catalog.

For further information, e-mail mssfa@wku.edu

Journals and Diaries – South Union

In accordance with their church constitution, Shaker deacons or trustees maintained record books documenting many aspects of life at South Union: weather, finances, agricultural and business operations, church meetings, ministerial appointments, member activity (admissions, work, accidents, illnesses, movements between houses, departures, deaths), and other matters of interest. Records were also maintained by the elders of various “families” or “orders,” groups of believers housed together according to their degree of progress toward full membership in the church. In addition, individual Shakers sometimes kept diaries or journals. Many of these records are typescripted and indexed. They provide valuable insight into the history, achievements and decline of the Shakers.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “A,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1804-1836.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “B,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1836-1864.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “C,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1865-1879.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “D,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1879-1917.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A diary, probably kept by Eldress Betsy Smith, detailing an 1854 trip from South Union to visit Shaker societies in New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

[Moore, Nancy Elam, 1807-1889](#)

Eldress Nancy Moore’s diary, kept from 1861-1863, chronicling the effects of the Civil War on the pacifist Shakers as both Union and Confederate forces passed through South Union. The journal was edited and published by Shaker historian [Julia Neal](#).

[Moore, Nancy Elam, 1807-1889](#)

Eldress Nancy Moore’s diary, kept from 1863-1864, chronicling the effects of the Civil War on the pacifist Shakers as both Union and Confederate forces passed through South Union. The journal was edited and published by Shaker historian [Julia Neal](#).

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A journal of the North and East families recording activities at South Union in 1865 and from 1888-1897.

[Moore, Nancy Elam, 1807-1889](#)

A journal kept by an unidentified female author recording activities at South Union for most of the year 1866.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

The record book of an unidentified author focusing on women’s work at South Union in 1866.

[Moore, Nancy Elam, 1807-1889](#)

A journal, probably kept by Lucy Shannon of South Union, recording daily activities at South Union from 1871-1872 and January 1890.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A journal kept by Elder John Rees Cooper and other Shakers documenting activities at South Union from 1872-1878.

[Coke, William Gaston, 1895-1977 – Collector](#)

A journal kept by James Carr (1836-1918) recording activities at South Union from 1890-1893.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

The journal of Jane Cowan (1829?-1909) recording activity of the Center family at South Union from 1900-1903. Additional entries by others date from 1919-1921.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Journals kept by Lucilla Booker of the Center family recording activities at South Union from 1907-1910 and 1913-1916.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A journal kept by James Carr (1836-1918) recording activities at South Union from 1909-1911.

Vital Statistics – South Union

South Union Shaker journals often included censuses of members, lists of the members of various “family” houses, and death records. Censuses provide names and ages, and in some cases place and date of birth. Some collections also include vital statistics from other Shaker societies.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “A,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1804-1836, includes a list of deaths from illness, especially in 1814, and an 1827 census of members.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “B,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1836-1864, includes 1854 and 1862 censuses of members.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “C,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1865-1879, includes censuses of members from 1867-1870, 1872-1873, 1875-1878, and a compiled list of members “who have lived and died at South Union” from its beginnings to January 1, 1879. The censuses often give comparative figures from the Shaker society at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Shaker Record “D,” a journal of activities at South Union from 1879-1917, includes censuses of members from 1879-1883 and 1885-1889.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

The South Union, Kentucky Shaker Necropolis compiles lists of deaths since 1810; the most recent deaths were recorded in 1918. The information includes name, place and date of birth, date of death, and age at death.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A graveyard book lists deaths at South Union from 1811-1881. Short biographies of prominent members are included.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

John Rees Cooper's journal lists the brethren of the North family at South Union, 1874.

[Coke, William Gaston, 1895-1977 – Collector](#)

The journal of James Carr includes a name-only census of South Union members in 1891.

Land and Buildings – South Union

[Bond Family Papers](#)

The papers of Oscar Bond include material relating to his ownership and sale of farmland formerly belonging to the South Union Shakers.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Various deeds and an 1860 agreement for the location of a depot for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at South Union.

[Youngs, Benjamin](#)

Youngs' 1818 letter to the New Lebanon ministry concerning the design of buildings at South Union.

[Cook, Matthew](#)

Floor plans of the Center Family house at South Union, and drawings of some of the architectural elements.

[Whitaker, Francis J., 1916-1994](#)

The papers of Shaker scholar Francis J. Whitaker (also known as Brother Thomas Whitaker of St. Maur's Priory) includes research and photographs of buildings at South Union.

Industry, trade and craftsmanship – South Union

[Shakers – South Union – Slaughtering of Animals](#)

A chronology of hog and cattle slaughtering at South Union, 1814-1891, compiled from various sources.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Contracts, leases and other documents relating to Shaker mills at South Union, 1810-1893.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

A ledger recording accounts of the fulling mill at South Union, 1814-1815.

[Shannon, Thomas J.](#)

A journal documenting Shannon's four-month trip from South Union to New Orleans, Louisiana, 1831-1832, to sell seeds and other Shaker goods.

[Macy, Jethro](#)

A diary recording Macy's work in carpentry and livestock at South Union from 1847-1848, and his musings on topics of personal interest.

[Neal, Mary Julia, 1905-1995 – Compiler](#)

Research notes of Shaker historian Julia Neal compiling entries in Shaker journals concerning trees and plants.

[Whitaker, Francis J., 1916-1994](#)

The papers of Shaker scholar Francis J. Whitaker (also known as Brother Thomas Whitaker of St. Maur's Priory) include research on crafts, inventions and furniture.

[Molesky, Constance H. and Gayle Wilson](#)

A 1970 WKU student project includes photographs and a discussion of Shaker furniture at South Union and Pleasant Hill, Kentucky.

[Winstead, Sara C.](#)

"The Shaker Chair," a 1976 paper written by Sara Winstead for a WKU folk studies class.

Legal Affairs – South Union

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Documents relating to various lawsuits involving the Shakers, ca. 1807-1835.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky – Legal Papers](#)

Records of a divorce suit brought by Sally Boles against her husband William after he joined the Shakers in 1808.

[Holman, Billy](#)

Records of an 1829 lawsuit against the Shakers include pleadings objecting to their unfavorable treatment by the public and the legislature. [Read more](#)

[Moore, Nancy Elam, 1807-1889](#)

Moore, an eldress at South Union, writes her brother James in 1837 regarding their father's estate, particularly land he owned in Warren County, Ohio. [Read more](#)

[McElroy, Clarence Underwood, 1849-1928](#)

Bowling Green lawyer Clarence McElroy's papers contain files on various legal matters involving the Shakers.

African Americans – South Union

[Cress, Mary Jane "Kit" \(Firth\), 1920-2010](#)

A list of African Americans residing at the South Union colony, with data on their years of residence, emancipation, departure and death, where available.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Contracts relating to the hire and emancipation of African Americans at South Union, 1817-1841.

[Slavery – Emancipation](#)

An 1819 agreement allowing a family of emancipated African Americans to reside at South Union.

[Whitaker, Francis J., 1916-1994](#)

Shaker scholar Francis Whitaker's papers include research on African Americans at South Union.

Research and Monographs

[Bennett, Mackie Smith](#)

"The Shakers and the Settlements in Kentucky," a 1935 paper by Mackie Smith Bennett.

[Blewett, Keith](#)

“A Collection of Shaker Folklore,” a 1970 paper written by Keith Blewett for a WKU folk studies class discussing Shaker beliefs, architecture, furniture, inventions, and lifestyle.

[Blohm, Amanda](#)

“Changes in the Economic Role of Women in Kentucky Shaker Communities,” a 1997 WKU honors program thesis.

[Coombs Family Collection](#)

Clippings, notes and a 1940 research paper by Elizabeth Coombs on the South Union Shakers.

[Moore, Mary Elizabeth \(Taylor\) Leiper, 1885-1973](#)

“The Story of the South Union Shakers,” a paper and associated materials prepared for a radio show.

[Neal, Mary Julia, 1905-1995](#)

The papers of Shaker scholar Julia Neal, author of *By Their Fruits: The Story of Shakerism in South Union, Kentucky* and editor of *The Journal of Eldress Nancy*, include speeches, articles, correspondence and photographs relating to the Shakers at South Union and elsewhere.

[Sanders, Nolan](#)

“South Union: Their Business and Life in the 1870s,” a 1979 WKU student paper.

[Weeks, Estella Terry, 1886-1969](#)

Weeks reports at length on her research during the 1940s into the Shaker communities at South Union and elsewhere.

[Whitaker, Francis J., 1916-1994](#)

The papers of Shaker scholar Francis J. Whitaker (also known as Brother Thomas Whitaker of St. Maur’s Priory) includes extensive research and writing on South Union and other societies, correspondence with other scholars, and photographs.

Oral Histories – South Union

[McNulty, Sara Jane](#)

Interviews conducted in 1989 with several Logan County residents about their memories of the South Union Shakers.

Drama – South Union

[Miller, Russell Hale, 1905-1968](#)

A play, “Shakertown Revisited,” by Western Kentucky University speech and English professor Russell Miller, first staged in 1962 at the annual Shaker Festival at Auburn, Kentucky.

Shaker Music

Ann Lee, the founder of Shakerism, made music, singing and dancing an integral part of a believer’s life. Bringing their folk singing traditions from New England, the Shaker missionaries also adopted the frontier revivalist practice of combining religious lyrics with popular “jig tunes.” The new forms of Shaker music made their way back east, where the first hymnals were published. Shakers also compiled their own manuscript hymnals.

[Coke, William Gaston, 1895-1977 – Collector](#)

Nine hymnals dating from 1827-ca. 1880, compiled by various Shakers at South Union: Betsy Smith, Mary Edwards, Chester C. Holman, Harvey L. Eads, Robert Johns, and some unidentified.

[Coombs Family Collection](#)

Bibliographer Estella T. Weeks discusses Shaker hymnals and other manuscript materials.

[Sears Family Papers](#)

Polly Ann Smith’s hymnal, compiled in 1848 at New Lebanon, New York.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Six hymnals and music books dating from 1844-1886, compiled by various Shakers at South Union: Nancy McNemar (possibly), a group of Center family sisters, Mary Edwards (possibly), Birdie and Virgie Breedlove, and Harvey L. Eads.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky – Hymns](#)

An undated manuscript hymn book and music instructional notes.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Words and music to Shaker hymns, 1886 and undated. One appears to originate at Mount Lebanon, New York.

[Shakers](#)

Words and music to a hymn that appears to originate with Eldress Antoinette of Mount Lebanon, New York.

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

Words and music to an undated hymn.

[Shakers](#)

A compilation of printed and manuscript hymns from various Shaker societies, and instructions for dances to accompany singing.

[Simmons, Mary Jean](#)

“Shaker Music as a Genre of Folk Music,” a 1980 paper written by Jean Simmons for a WKU folk studies class.

Shaker Memoirs

Issachar Bates

[Chambliss Collection](#)

The memoirs of Issachar Bates (1758-1837) include details of his travels on behalf of the Shakers.

John Rankin

[Shakers – South Union, Kentucky](#)

The autobiography of John Rankin (1757-1850), a Logan County, Kentucky Presbyterian minister who converted and became a Shaker leader.

Other Shaker Societies

[Kezar, Jovanna](#)

“Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village: The Shakers Today,” a 1971 paper by Jovanna Kezar detailing her visit to a Shaker community near Poland, Maine.

[Milligan, R. A., b. 1849](#)

The diary of R. A. Milligan focusing on farm work from 1879-1894 at the Shaker Society at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky.

[Morrell, Prudence, 1794-1855](#)

Prudence Morrell’s journal chronicling her 1847 travel from the Shaker community at New Lebanon, New York to eight others in New York, Ohio and Kentucky.

[Shaker Death Records](#)

A list of Shaker deaths at Hancock, Massachusetts, 1784-1818, and some at New Lebanon, New York.

[Shakers](#)

A list of members, 1837-1867, of two houses in the Shaker society at Union Village, Ohio.

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