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HISTORY OF SHAKERTOWN IN MERCER COUNTY, KENTUCKY
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SHAKERTOWN IN MERCER COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Pleasant Hill-or Union Village-later named Shakertown in honor of the Shakers, who settled there over a hundred years ago, situated in Mercer County, three miles from High Bridge, seven miles from Harrodsburg, and the railroad, on an elevation that commands an outlook over the surrounding country. Shakertown is one of the most picturesque and interesting spots in Kentucky. The village has but one shady street and it seems in truth asleep, while in former days it fairly hummed with activity. The Shakertown of to-day is merely the reminder of former prosperous days.

The Shakers were established in England in 1647 and the Mount Lebanon Colony in New York was founded in 1774 by A. M. Lee, whose identity as the reincarnation of Christ is the vital religious tenet of the faith. Like the Pilgrims the Shakers sought a country where they could practice their beliefs free from interference. The name originated in the somewhat violent and irregular motions, leaping, shouting, etc., which were once a part of their worship, but which are so no longer, the motions of the Shakers being uniform and regular and without sensational features. Although originating in England, the sect is wholly American and presents in the several communities an interesting example of thrift, industry, and good morals. Ten years after establishing the Colony at Mount Lebanon, New York, Ann Lee died, but had firmly established the doctrine of Shakerism, and besides claiming to be the incarnation of Christ, later visions induced her to bring about the rule of separating the sexes. Married people were taken into the colonies, but upon entering were made to live as brother and sister.

Joseph Meacham, one of Ann Lee's successors gave the believers their effective organization. The greatest membership being 4,869 in seventeen

societies distributed over New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, Ohio, and Kentucky. The Membership is now considerably less than 1000; ~~and~~ both colonies in Kentucky being extinct.

The Kentucky Colony was planted at Pleasant Hill, Mercer County in 1805, and in 1814 the 116 members drew up their written compact. In spite of their practice of celibacy, the Colony grew by adoption until in 1870 it had about 500 members and owned 7,000 acres of the best land in Mercer County. The Colony decreased, members grew older and acreage was sold off year by year. Several years ago 1,500 acres were deeded to Mr. George Bohon, of Lexington, Kentucky who agreed to care for the remaining members during their lives, and of this 576 acres were afterward deeded by Mr. Bohon to Dr. W. F. Pennybaker, member of the Colony, the covenant of his deed containing similar provisions as to the care of the aged Shakers.

The Colony was governed by trustees elected by the members and approved by the Parent body at Mount Lebanon. Considerable dispute arose as to the disposal of the Colony at the death of Sister Mary Settles by the old members of the Colony, but Mrs. George Bohon came into possession of the estate, and maintains it as an Inn and Lodge.

When the Shakers built, they built for an eternity. The stone and brick houses are in a perfect state of preservation. Not a stone, a brick, or a spoke of a staircase, but what is so strongly set as when they were fashioned on the place a hundred years ago. All the houses had double staircases and double doors. The old "East House" was built in 1817, and the winding double staircase of the Castleman House built in 1839 is one of beauty. The interiors of these old houses are filled with wonderful hand made mahogany pieces and beautiful rugs. It has been said by a well known traveler, "To walk through these old houses is to break the tenth commandment at every step."

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