

Collection Summary

ID Number: MSS 097

Title: Phil Webber Collection

Extent: 1 Box

Span Dates: 1980s – 1990s

Language: English

Geographic Location: Various

Abstract: The Phil Webber Collection consists of photographs about the Pleasant Hill Shaker Village, Aurora, Bethel, and Zoar communities from 1983 to 1996.

Historical Notes: This collection highlights some prominent communal groups across the United States:

The Bethel Colony was established in northeastern Missouri in 1844 by followers of Wilhelm Kiel. Many of its original members had previously been members of the Harmony Society. Bethel reached a population of some 650 by 1855 when some 150 of them, including Kiel, left in a wagon train to establish a satellite colony in the Pacific Northwest. After a brief stop at Willapa, Washington, the group founded the Aurora Colony in Oregon. More made the migration in later years, and by, 1867 the colony at Aurora was larger than Bethel, although both colonies continued under Kiel's leadership. The Aurora Colony became prosperous, with many buildings, an excellent hotel, and large church structure. A community band provided frequent entertainment. Kiel's death in 1877 left both communities leaderless, and they soon dissolved, Bethel in 1880 and Aurora in 1881, which communal property distributed to members in each case.

- **Sources:** Miller, Timothy. *The encyclopedic guide to American intentional communities*. 2nd ed. Clinton, New York: Richard W. Couper Press, 2015. pg. 31.

One of the several communities of immigrant German Pietists founded in the nineteenth century, Zoar was founded in 1817 in Tuscarawas County, Ohio. Under the leadership of Joseph Bäumeler (later Anglicized to Bimeler), the Zoar Separatists (so called because they, unlike some Pietists, insisted on leaving the German state church), numbering some 300, began to farm and erect buildings on their 5,500-acre tract of land. Two years after Zoar's founding the community members, struggling financially, decided to move to an economically communal system. By the 1830s the community was thriving. It survived Bimeler's death in 1853, although the communal spirit and passionate religious convictions of the members slowly began to wane. In 1898, the more than 200 remaining members decided to disband; some community property was sold at auction, while members were given the houses they occupied as well as cash and other property.

- **Sources:** Miller, Timothy. *The encyclopedic guide to American intentional communities*. 2nd ed. Clinton, New York: Richard W. Couper Press, 2015. pg. 493.

No other communal group in the United States has endured as long as the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, popular known as Shakers, and few have been better known. The Shakers were founded in England; the early members journeyed to colonial America in 1774 under the leadership of Ann Lee and began to develop structured communal life soon thereafter in a first colony at Niskeyuna (later called Watervliet), New York. Shakers lived sober and celibate lives that followed strict rules, including stringent separation of the sexes. For many years they suffered derision and active opposition from detractors—who accused the leaders of exploiting their rank and file members and ridiculed the Shakers for believing that Ann Lee represented Christ in the Second Coming—but eventually positive images displaced the negative ones. The Shakers became known for their vibrant worship services that featured dance-like rituals known as “laboring,” as well as for their fine agricultural products, their simple but elegant architecture and exquisite furniture, and their placement of women in leadership roles. The movement expanded throughout the early

nineteenth century, building about 20 villages scattered between Maine and Indiana, with a peak population of perhaps 5,000. Later in the century, however, the numbers began to decline, and the twentieth century saw sharp contraction in the movement. By the 1990's, only the Sabbathday Lake village, in Maine, remained, and in 2015 it was tenuously hanging onto existence with three members.

- **Sources:** Miller, Timothy. *The encyclopedic guide to American intentional communities*. 2nd ed. Clinton, New York: Richard W. Couper Press, 2015. pg. 399.

Selected Search Terms

Keywords: American History; Religious Groups

Related Materials: Buildings and Structures; Communal Studies; History; Photographs; Regional History; Related Materials -- 1951-2000; Religion and Spirituality; Special Collections

Administrative Information

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Contents	Date	Container	Location
Photographs [001-156]	1983-1996	Box 1	RL 3027