Early Mormon and Shaker Visions of Sanctified Community

J. Spencer Fluhman
Polly Knight’s health was failing as she and her family trudged toward western Missouri. Having accepted Joseph Smith Jr. as God’s prophet on earth, the Knights left their Colesville, New York, farm and joined with other Mormon converts at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. Finding a brief respite there, they again set out, this time for the city of “Zion” that Joseph Smith said they would help build in Jackson County, Missouri. Worried that Polly was too ill to complete the trek, her family considered stopping in hopes she might recover. But “she would not consent to stop traveling,” recalled her son Newell: “Her only, or her greatest desire was to set her feet upon the land of Zion, and to have her body interred in that land.” Fearing the worst, Newell bought lumber for a coffin in case she expired en route. “But the Lord gave her the desire of her heart, and she lived to stand upon that land.”

Latter-day Saints, though, were not the only Christian sect in the early nation to treasure the notion of a fellowship with other believers in a life apart from the world. A generation earlier, converts had come together to live as one in the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing. New converts, calling themselves Believers but commonly known as Shakers, gathered into communities in Massachusetts, New York, and other parts of New England. As this society expanded, Shaker leaders and converts traveled from established communities in New England to newly formed frontier communities in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Despite poverty, persecution, and the difficulties of frontier settlement, many reacted as did David Rowley, a Vermont cabinetmaker who converted to Shakerism in 1810, who wrote “that I never have seen one movement since I set out in this blessed way but that I felt thankful for it; & can with confidence
recommend it to all souls who are sick of the vain world & are seeking.... a way of true life & imperishable love.”

Such was the attachment of many Latter-day Saints and Shakers to the idea of living in a holy community. Throughout the nineteenth century, conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or to the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing was virtually synonymous with “gathering.” Indeed, the search for a workable holy community serves as a unifying theme for the early history of both these movements. Historians have long noted similarities between the two

My interest in Shaker communities stems from my stint as a research fellow in the “Archive of Restoration Culture” project sponsored by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University. Under the direction of Richard L. Bushman (Gouverneur Morris Professor of History Emeritus, Columbia University), we fellows spent the summer of 1999 placing prominent LDS concepts in their early-American cultural context.

I was struck then, and now, by “gathering” as practiced by the early Saints and sought possible analogues in early American religious history. The Shakers were an obvious choice for comparison. Not only had earlier scholars noted similarities between the two movements but, as I sifted through early Shaker documents, I began to comprehend intersections not only between the groups’ communitarian impulses but in their prophetism, patterns of spirituality, and apocalyptic dispensationalism.

My interest in comparing Shaker and Mormon theology continued into my graduate studies in history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and resulted in this extended analysis. I find that my D&C students here at BYU enjoy comparing the early Shaker and Mormon communities and reading the groups’ lively descriptions of each other.

—J. Spencer Fluhman, Brigham Young University
groups; Stephen Marini has gone so far to say that the Latter-day Saints were among the Shakers’ “direct successors.”

Similarities notwithstanding, some nonhistorians might fail to associate the two movements, given the demographic trajectories each has followed since its respective founding. Mormonism experienced dynamic growth throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, partly the result of a vigorous proselytizing program and high birth rate. Over half of the Church’s members today live outside the United States, establishing Mormonism as a world religion. Shakers, too, experienced periods of explosive growth in their early history, but seasons of intense proselytizing were interspersed with spans of official suspension of evangelism. Moreover, the Shakers’ celibate life ensured a modest growth rate. Shakerism attracted adherents after the U.S. Civil War, but the number of followers has steadily dwindled since the mid-nineteenth century. A small handful of Believers now tend the remaining Shaker village in Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Historians are thus more likely to call attention to the longevity of the Shaker experience than its size. Indeed, more than two hundred years of Shaker communal life have earned the sect the renown of being history’s most successful communal society.

These dissimilar histories notwithstanding, early Shakers and Mormons offered similar responses to the rapid transformations of the early American republic. Christians had long been accustomed to the notion of coming “out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:10), but most did not see that ideal in literal terms as did early Mormons and Shakers. Most of their Christian contemporaries no doubt felt that they, too, had been “chosen” out of the world (John 15:19), but they probably would have insisted that their faith or piety was enough to separate them from the profane and ungodly; they could live and work among the unregenerate without being “of the world.” Mormons and Shakers, however, shared a conception of their communities as Zions—holy communities set apart wherein one might experience the true Christian church and pursue the right course to salvation.

Communitarianism offered practical advantages—a measure of physical protection, for example—for these persecuted, minority sects, but Mormons and Shakers saw their holy communities as more than pragmatic responses to outside circumstances. Indeed, the theologies of Joseph Smith (1805–1844) and Joseph Meacham (1742–1796), the respective founders of Mormon and Shaker communitarianism, shaped what might be termed a religious sociology for each sect. They infused their communities with tremendous theological significance, situating the communities in holy space and time and linking their characteristics with the fundamentals of Mormon and Shaker notions of salvation. And because these founders
defined their communities over and against American culture as they perceived it, these communities reflected their founders' dissatisfaction with various aspects of American life.

What follows is an elaboration of the meanings of religious community manifested in the theologies, organizations, and settlements led by Joseph Smith and Joseph Meacham. The two leaders dominated the theology of their movements in the early-nineteenth and late-eighteenth centuries, respectively, and their theologies in turn shaped their communities. Although each founder's vision of sanctified community was adjusted subsequently, the original frameworks persisted in modified form long into the history of each. Indeed, the historical procession of each movement across the years bears the imprint of these early visions. Mounting similar responses to shared concerns about their world, Mormons and Shakers nonetheless took very different paths across the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the differences between Smith's and Meacham's visions of religious community helped define the survival and expansion of each movement. Their approaches and concerns can be compared at four junctures: their attainment of leadership, their reasons for building Zion, the social and physical characteristics of their communities, and their conception of Zion in sacred history.

Zion's Prophets, Like unto Moses

Mormons and Shakers looked to Joseph Smith and Joseph Meacham as their respective prophet-leaders, but the two men came to that status in different ways. The process was somewhat uncomplicated in Smith's case: though it was not easy for Smith to achieve his reputation as a prophet, Latter-day Saints by definition believed in his prophetic powers. He shared administrative power in the church with close associates and shifted considerable responsibilities of governance to administrative councils as the church grew, but he dominated theological and administrative decisions throughout the church's first decade and a half. He presented many of his revelations as scripture; he related visions and visitations from heavenly beings; he asserted that God's authority had been restored to him by prophets of the past and was thus found in Mormonism alone. In short, Smith's declarations of prophetic gifts and divine manifestations were central to the Mormon message and to his acceptance as a leader among his people.

Joseph Meacham's ascendancy to preeminence was more complicated. He was not the founder of Shakerism but the third prophet to lead the sect. Meacham nonetheless came to be regarded as the father of
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Shaker communitarianism. Father Joseph, as he was known to the faithful, built upon the traditions and teachings of charismatic founders and put in place reforms that shaped Shaker experience for generations.

**History of the Shakers.** The sect was born in Manchester, England, in the 1750s when James and Jane Wardley separated themselves from their Quaker community, having determined that their co-religionists had drifted from their ecstatic spiritual roots. Called Shakers for their “uncommon mode of religious worship,” which included shaking and other bodily contortions during trance-like states, the Wardleys’ small flock regarded them as “prophet and prophetess.” This visionary preeminence within the group passed at some point to Ann Lee (or Lees). She and other Shakers lived in open antagonism to their Manchester neighbors. Court records document their frequent disturbance of local church meetings, in which they appear to have vocally condemned other Christians for their laxity and unrighteousness. Predictably, these confrontational tactics engendered hostility in non-Shakers, and authorities quickly tired of the nuisance.

By 1774, opposition in Manchester had become intense enough to convince Lee and a few other Shakers to emigrate to America. English pacifists could scarcely have picked a worse time to attempt a fresh start in the New World. Revolutionary Yankees viewed them with suspicion, and more than one transplanted Shaker spent a stint in jail during those first years. The English Shakers disappear from the documentary record until about 1777, when the tiny band purchased a small tract of land at Niskeyuna, near Albany, New York.

The religious excitement that attended an evangelical “New Light” stir during summer 1779 helped prompt the Shakers to promulgate their message actively. Evangelical revivals occurring in New York and Massachusetts heightened expectations of an imminent millennium, and tales of a “new and strange Religion” at Niskeyuna lured curious locals to visit the tiny Shaker enclave. The New Light Baptists at New Lebanon sent church elder Joseph Meacham and a few others from the congregation to investigate the sect. Shaker tradition has it that Lee foresaw Meacham’s coming and that she and the other Shakers answered his queries with such eloquence and power that “at length he was fully convinced that these strange people professed the spirit, kingdom, & work for which he had so earnestly prayed, & sought... and that indeed their testimony was the voice of the son of God.”

Prompted by their success with Meacham and the other New Light Baptists, Shakers decided in 1780 to open the gospel to their American neighbors. They established a system of hospitality and teaching, welcoming
visitors to Niskeyuna and inviting them to witness their worship and hear their doctrine.

Exactly what these early Shakers taught is not clear. Nor is it entirely apparent how the group lived or functioned. The paucity of sources for the earliest years is acute, made especially so by Ann Lee’s hostility to written creeds, histories, or testimonials. Lee’s own illiteracy no doubt contributed to these sentiments, which persisted in Shakerism after her death. As a result, the primary documentary sources for this early period are Shaker theological and historical works written some thirty years after Lee’s death and contemporary accounts by outsiders or defectors. Historians have grown increasingly wary about accepting the Shaker accounts uncritically, fearing that their hagiographic nature might reveal more about nineteenth-century Shakers than earlier ones. The outsider or defector accounts are often hostile and hence possibly inaccurate as well, if for different reasons.

Still, some general descriptions of the early period of Shaker history and doctrine are possible. Ann Lee, her brother William, and a close Manchester friend named James Whittaker comprised the leadership of the fledgling sect but functioned without clear responsibilities or roles—an arrangement Stephen Marini has characterized as “a kind of ensemble improvisation.” Ann Lee acted as the group’s charismatic visionary but was reportedly “a woman of few words.” Shaker historians touted her brother’s piety but admitted he was not “much gifted in public speaking.” James Whittaker, the more gifted orator, was the sect’s chief teacher of doctrine. Early Shakers referred to Ann Lee as “Mother” or “Mother of Zion,” understood that she was “Christ’s wife,” and considered her “holy,” even “omniscient.” Early Shakers taught that they comprised the only true church, a new dispensation of God’s saving work. They taught that Christ had come in the body of the Believers, that celibacy was critical to spiritual progress, and that they communed with departed spirits.

Lee and the English Shakers continued to teach the unconverted at Niskeyuna, holding meetings and worship services for converts who would travel there and return home after the meetings. This practice left converts in outlying areas who could enjoy fellowship and instruction only to the extent that they could find time and resources to travel to Niskeyuna. To bolster the converts and spread their gospel, the Lees and James Whittaker undertook a prolonged evangelical circuit during 1781–83. The missionary journey was successful, but shortly after the two years of constant travel, the Shakers lost two of their three leaders. William and Ann Lee died in 1784, leaving Whittaker alone to lead the group. Most Believers accepted Whittaker as the lone head of the movement, though a
When I first saw this title, I wondered: Besides recognizing that Mormons and Shakers both created communities based on hopes that the millennium was near, can we Mormons really compare our family-centered church to a sect that believed in lifelong celibacy? After reading this article, I have to say that the answer is yes. Author Spencer Fluhman carefully points out several striking similarities between the Shaker and Latter-day Saint attempts to establish Zion. Even more intriguing than the similarities, crucial doctrinal differences distinguish the two religions beyond the Shakers' well-known celibacy. For example, this article showed that although the millenarian zeal between the two religions was similarly charged, Latter-day Saint views of Zion called for consistent and intense missionary work, leading to sustained growth. This article taught me about the connection between Shakers and early Mormons beyond what we know from Doctrine and Covenants 49.

—Karen Todd, BYU Studies

few of the original English Shakers refused to acknowledge his leadership and left the group.23 Whittaker's own unexpected death in 1787 came as a bewildering shock to the Believers.

Father Joseph, Shakerism's “Apostle.” Early Shaker historian Calvin Green wrote in 1827 that, after Whittaker's death, “many of the Believers were . . . in doubt & fear, and some were quite weak, fearing that the gospel would come to an end.” Green blamed this fear on the Shakers' believing “more in the person of Father James [Whittaker] than in the revelation of God in him.” Believers looked to Joseph Meacham, his brother David, and fellow American convert Calvin Harlow as possible leaders. All had enjoyed close association with the English Shakers, were able speakers, and had been singled out by Ann Lee for special praise and affection. All three spoke at Whittaker's funeral; Green related that Meacham's address was especially moving—a sign, said Green in retrospect, that Meacham was God’s choice to head the sect.24

This omen was not as apparent to Shakers in 1787 as it was to Green years later. For months following the funeral, “the Lead appeared to rest jointly on these three Elders; and it was hardly known which of the three were first in the Lead.” Importantly for Meacham, he chose to remain at
New Lebanon while the other two candidates set out to visit Shakers in outlying locations to the east. In their absence, Meacham so sustained and impressed those Shakers at New Lebanon that all came to believe he was to lead. Green related that, after the return of the “other two Elders, they clearly saw that the anointing of the Lord was upon him [Meacham] . . . & came forward & acknowledged him as their Elder, and that he was chosen of God as the first in the lead, & that they could not keep the way of God without him; and this was now seen & felt by the spontaneous union of Believers.”

It may never be known exactly what enabled Meacham to assume the leadership of the United Society. Shakers who knew him described him as “a very able preacher,” and “though naturally of quite a bashful turn,” his “eloquence & understanding manner of speech” was such that Shakers thought “that few if any exceeded him.” For these or some other reason, Meacham assumed control of the sect and proved himself an able administrator, effective organizer, and moving preacher. He presented his decisions as “revelation,” and Shakers acknowledged him as God’s mouthpiece to the faithful. Esteemed as Shakerism’s “Apostle,” Meacham was able to pull the group’s theology and notions of community in a particular direction.

Reasons for Building Zion

Both Meacham and Smith claimed that God had revealed Zion’s structure and that they had simply followed his blueprints; as a result, neither offered extended explanations of his decisions regarding the communities. Even so, their decisions can be understood in several additional ways. One can regard, for instance, the historical development of each movement prior to major decisions about community organization to see if there existed internal or external conditions that made communitarian arrangements attractive or plausible. Alternately, understanding that Meacham and Smith identified their communities as standing apart from, and more holy than, the larger society leads one to assess the ways that their decisions constituted reactions to their received culture. Most helpful, though, is to compare the physical and social portraits of the communities themselves and, while juxtaposing both the founders’ statements about them and each leader’s theology generally, assess how holy community fit within each leader’s overall religious vision. This third avenue of inquiry provides the most insight into the founders’ aims, revealing that Meacham and Smith hoped their communities would facilitate the attainment of
theological goals. Despite broadly similar aims, though, Meacham and Smith nevertheless organized their communities very differently.

**Historical Considerations for Mormon and Shaker Communitarianism**

Joseph Meacham assumed control of Shakerism at a precarious point of the sect’s history, and the specific challenges Shakers faced at the time may have contributed to his ordering the community the way he did. Along with the successes of early Shaker proselytizing came almost constant opposition and persecution. Shakers had been jailed, denounced, threatened, and mobbed since their arrival in America; small, scattered groupings made Believers especially vulnerable to attack. Meacham was no doubt keenly aware of this problem—just weeks after Whittaker’s death, two Shakers were attacked on their way to a public meeting near Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Aside from the threat of persecution, Meacham may have worried about the time and resources it would take to continue the practice of visiting outlying areas to strengthen converts. Already stung by several exposés written by former members, Meacham and other Shakers may have been understandably concerned about dissension and defection. Stephen Stein speculates that communal organization increased economic stability through the sharing of resources and provided the group a much-needed sense of unity and shared purpose. All of these factors probably contributed to the attractiveness of communitarianism for Meacham.

Historical considerations are less helpful as explanations of Joseph Smith’s notions of religious community. Mormons, too, faced persecution almost immediately following the foundation of the Church. Smith and other converts faced harassment in New York, but on a scale much smaller than the opposition they would face in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Perhaps Smith’s first communitarian arrangements in Ohio were influenced by these New York troubles, but much of his foundational thought about Zion as a holy Mormon community was connected to the content of the Book of Mormon and early recorded revelations. Persecution no doubt helped refine and modify Smith’s conceptualization of Zion, but it seems unlikely that opposition was constitutive of his vision.

**Separation from the World**

Both Smith and Meacham clearly reacted to aspects of American culture by positing a more holy way practiced within their communities, and this posture undoubtedly contributed to the persecution they faced, but it is unlikely that they formed their communities with the sole purpose...
of registering a cultural protest. Even so, through their construction of holy communities Smith and Meacham articulated alternatives to what they regarded as profane aspects of American culture. For example, both Shaker and Mormon communities featured administrative structures that were authoritarian, contrary to the model of a “democratization” of American Christianity that Nathan Hatch alleges occurred during the period. Similarly, Mormons and Shakers practiced communal or cooperative economic systems—Shakers did away with private property, and Mormons owned property but donated their surpluses to the poor—each at odds with the surging market capitalism of the early republic. Atypical marriage and family arrangements—polygamy and celibacy—within both movements deviated from contemporary conventions of marriage and family life as well. Still, despite these clear differences from contemporary society, Smith and Meacham addressed the ungodliness of the outside world within the context of a broader religious vision primarily concerned with the salvation of their followers and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.

**Joseph Smith’s Intimations of Zion**

Early in the Mormon movement, Joseph Smith revealed the idea of Zion to the Latter-day Saints, and for the rest of his life he endeavored to realize those early visions. Calling the building up of Zion the “most important temporal object in view” of the early Latter-day Saints, Smith most often described his personal mission, and the aim of Mormonism generally, in terms of the “gathering” to Zion. 

Even before Smith published the Book of Mormon and formally organized the Church in 1830, his followers compiled, copied, and esteemed his revelations as extrabiblical scripture. Though Mormons were familiar with the word “Zion” from the Old and New Testaments, these new revelations introduced the word into a uniquely Mormon religious lexicon and established it as a key concept in Mormon theology. In 1829, a year before the publication of the Book of Mormon, one of the earliest usages of the terms appeared in a revelation admonishing the small band of Smith’s followers to “seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion” (D&C 6:6). The Book of Mormon is replete with references to Zion, often equating it with a literal New Jerusalem that would be established “in this [American] land” (3 Nephi 20:22; 21:4, 24). The most detailed reference appears in an ancient prophecy about the coming forth of the gospel:

> For it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that at that day whosoever will not repent and come unto my Beloved Son, them will I cut off from
among my people, O house of Israel... But if they will repent and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land [America] for their inheritance; And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem. And then shall the power of heaven come down among them: and I also will be in the midst. (3 Ne. 21:20–25)

The topic of Zion is also addressed in the Book of Moses, part of Joseph Smith’s revision of the Bible. The book expands on a brief biblical account of the antediluvian prophet Enoch, providing Latter-day Saints with a scriptural model for Zion. The Old Testament briefly describes Enoch: he “walked with God” during his “three hundred sixty and five years,” and “was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:20–24). The New Testament book of Hebrews elaborates on the Genesis account: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb. 11:5). Enoch’s final appearance in the biblical record relates his brief prophecy “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints” (Jude 1:14). In the Book of Moses, Enoch is given a divine commission to call the wicked to repentance and shown expansive visions concerning the last days. He gathers the righteous together and builds “a city that was called the City of Holiness, even ZION.” The account relates that the “Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.” So great was the holiness of the ancient city that “Zion, in process of time, was taken up into heaven” (Moses 7:19, 21). A conversation between God and Enoch near the end of the account connects Enoch’s holy city with Smith’s latter-day work:

And righteousness will I [God] send down out of heaven; and truth will I send forth out of the earth, to bear testimony of mine Only Begotten; his resurrection from the dead; yea, and also the resurrection of all men; and righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood, to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City, that my people may gird up their loins, and be looking forth for the time of my coming; for there shall be my tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a New Jerusalem. (Moses 7:62)
Emerging from these and Smith’s other teachings, Zion as a holy community had several meanings. First, Zion was often contrasted with “Babylon” to represent good and evil, the holy and the profane. Additionally, as was the case in the Enoch account, Zion was also a state of being and the name for God’s people collectively, “the pure in heart.” Finally, Zion and New Jerusalem were interchangeable names for a holy city to be built in America, reminiscent of one known by the same name in ancient times. Smith would draw on these multiple meanings to adapt the concept to changing circumstances and expanding vision.

**Joseph Meacham’s Bold Undertaking**

Unlike Smith, Joseph Meacham conceived of his holy communities in the context of previous leaders’ visions. In part, he systematized impulses that had been a part of Shakerism from the beginning. Shaker tradition has it that Ann Lee “frequently prophesied of the gathering [of] the Church in Gospel Order; but that it would not be her lot,” but these accounts are almost “surely apocryphal” because they include Lee’s prophesying that it would “be the lot of Joseph Meacham” to accomplish such restructuring. It seems unlikely that such uncertainty would have accompanied Whittaker’s death had the Shakers been accustomed to such prophecies about Meacham. Lee probably did seek greater consolidation of the Believers; clearly Whittaker did. Whittaker turned Shaker energies inward by closing the testimony of the Shaker gospel to the world, and he encouraged Believers to live together in groups where they could strengthen each other in the faith and share possessions. This sharing of resources made it possible for Whittaker to oversee the building of the first Shaker meetinghouse at New Lebanon in 1785. These previous initiatives notwithstanding, it was Meacham who developed and implemented full-blown Shaker communitarianism.

Shaker histories pinpoint 1787 as a crucial turning point in the sect’s history, the year Meacham “gathered” the “Church into gospel order.” Meacham established extensive administrative structures, provided Shaker communities with rules and codes of conduct, regularized Shaker worship, oversaw the construction of communal buildings, and reordered Shaker social life. Building on the inclinations of those leaders who
preceded him, Meacham erected the structures of Shaker communal life that persisted throughout the nineteenth century.39

A “Beautiful Outward Order”;
Zion’s Physical and Social Characteristics

The prophetic impulses of Meacham and Smith extended not only into the religious dimensions of community life, but also into the very social and physical details of their religious communities. For both Shakers and Mormons, there was virtually no separation between spiritual and temporal concerns in Zion.

Physical Characteristics of Shaker Communities. When Meacham assumed leadership of the Shakers, there were already several communities to which many Shakers had gathered. Meacham gathered the New Lebanon community “into order” first. Niskeyuna (later called Watervliet) functioned as the Shaker hub under Lee and Whittaker, but Meacham made New Lebanon Shakerism’s administrative center. Meacham himself had lived at New Lebanon, and the decision to establish it as the Shaker headquarters was made more likely by David Darrow’s donation of a large parcel of land, upon which Whittaker constructed the first meetinghouse. Meacham directed the building of structures, beginning with the “Great House” in 1788, designed to accommodate the large influx of Shakers to New Lebanon.40 To serve Meacham’s aims for communal living arrangements, the new buildings were large and could be used for multiple purposes. No effort was made to construct living quarters for individuals or nuclear families.41

Meacham believed that physical forms and organization bespoke an approximation of things divine, that “the united order & interest of Believers both spiritual & temporal was an emanation from this Eternal order, [and] therefore was consecrated & sacred.”42 The visual appearance of the community would serve as evidence that it was the earthly manifestation of the heavenly kingdom. Accordingly, Meacham instructed Believers that their gardens and crops should be planted in straight rows because “this will be preaching to the world for they admire the beautiful outward order of the people of God.”43 Meacham’s concern for the orderliness of the community bordered on obsession. Walls and fences were constructed with precise straightness. Shakers even built roofs in a uniform shape. Meacham felt that “God created distinct spheres for the distinct species of both the vegetable & animal creation,” and as a result forbade the mingling of different species of animals or the grafting of branches to trees of a different kind. “So particular was he in this respect,” reported Calvin...
Green, "that he would not even allow the eggs of one species of fowls to be set under another species, because it deranged their created order, & produced an unnatural anxiety & confusion which wronged the creature."

Meacham probably understood that the visual power of such geometric precision and segregated organization came in its stark contrast with the haphazard villages and farms of the New England backcountry.

**Physical Attributes of Mormon Zion.** Joseph Smith also had specific ideas about the shape of the city Zion, and he focused his energies on realizing the city throughout his life. He first brought the Saints together in Kirtland, Ohio, which served as the Mormon headquarters from 1831 to 1837, but his attention was constantly straying west. Almost contemporaneous with the establishment of Kirtland, Smith revealed that the city of Zion, the Mormon New Jerusalem, would be built in Jackson County, Missouri, near the village of Independence. Though unrealized, Smith’s plans for the city Zion have been regarded as the foundational vision for his holy communities. It served as the model for the later Mormon communities in northern Missouri, Illinois, and the Great Basin.

In 1833, Smith wrote to the fifteen hundred Saints in Missouri that their efforts to build up Zion should conform to the plans he enclosed. He envisioned two concentric zones that encircled a third at the center of the city. Barns, farmland, and industry were to be built outside the city proper, and individual families would live in lots located in the grid-like intermediate zone. At the center would stand the temple complex of twenty-four buildings that were to serve as houses of worship, ritual, education, and public life. The overlap of spiritual and educational space differentiates it from the Shaker model. Whereas early Shakers renounced worldly learning as antithetical to spiritual truth and refused to educate children or adults in their communes, Smith’s revelations instructed Latter-day Saints to “seek learning, even by study” and to glean wisdom from the world’s “best books.” And, unlike Joseph Meacham, who reportedly burned his valuable library when he converted to Shakerism, Joseph Smith saw to it that the Mormon “school of the prophets,” a seminary of sorts for missionaries and leaders, taught German and astronomy along with theology.

The location of a temple or temples at the center of Smith’s planned city is foundational for understanding his vision of Zion and its place in the world. Smith never oversaw the building of a single chapel or meetinghouse, but he oversaw the construction of temples in Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois, and dedicated sites for temples in Independence, Adam-ondi-Ahman, and Far West, Missouri. Smith would later teach that certain ordinances required sacred ritual space, more holy than a
meetinghouse. Through ordinances performed in the temples, Latter-day Saints entered into covenants that ushered them into God’s grace and gave them access to the blessings of Christ’s redeeming atonement. Salvation itself hinged on baptism and the higher ordinances administered in Mormon temples. A temple-centered community, directed by the Mormon priesthood that administered essential ordinances, thus reflected Smith’s ultimate theological hopes for his people; historian Richard Bushman is right to call the temple the “vortex” of Smith’s Mormon community.51

Social Dimensions of Mormon Zion. In like manner, the city of Zion functioned in Smith’s mind as the hub for the church itself. Though the Missouri city of Zion was not built in Smith’s day, other Mormon centers, especially Nauvoo and Salt Lake City, reflected his vision for a central place. He sought to establish a two-way motion around the Mormon nucleus, with missionaries going out from Zion, spreading the Mormon message across the world, and bringing back to the center the elect of God, and all else that was good or pure in the world that could enrich Zion.52 Smith envisioned a city, quite unlike the small Shaker villages, with large streets and hotels where he and the Saints would entertain the world.53 Zion would be a holy city apart from the world, but Smith intended that “all nations [would] flow unto it,” to be taught of the Lord’s ways and “walk in his paths” (Isaiah 2:2–3).

Social Organization of Shaker Communities. Meacham instituted an elaborate hierarchy to oversee the Shaker communities. He gathered a few prominent Shakers around him to constitute the “Ministry,” who lived at New Lebanon and governed the sect. “It is a truth which ought to be supported <as> a principle of Faith in the Church,” wrote Meacham, “especially by all that are called to office and oversight; that all true Church order and Law . . . is given by revelation and spiritual sensation, either in and by the Ministry, or by those that receive it by, and in relation to them.”54 The Ministry presided over lesser ranks of bishops, elders, and deacons who were to “see that the orders they give are according <to the principles> and the orders and counsels, which they have received.”55 Meacham instituted a parallel female line of authority, placing Lucy Wright over the female line. Meacham told her that she was “one whom I esteem my Equal in order & Lot according to thy sex / as it hath pleased
Meacham’s esteem for Wright was unfeigned; she was among his chief advisors, and he instructed that she replace him as the sect’s leader after his death. Meacham thus shifted Shaker authority from the person of the ecstatic leader to an office in the centrally located hierarchy. As Calvin Green explained it, the “Church [was] established as Mount Zion, & the believers were like the tribes of Israel round about, having received the Law from Zion, & the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

James Whittaker had instructed Believers that they were to conduct themselves in the meetinghouse with “reverence and Godly fear,” taking care that men and women entered separate doors and refrained from sitting together. Meacham elaborated on Whittaker’s instructions, initiating more comprehensive reforms in Shaker worship. Early Shaker worship was described as outlandish by most who recorded their observations. One report of their religious exercises related members “dancing in extravagant postures” and whirling with “inconceivable rapidity” before collapsing to the floor. Meacham discontinued these individualized ecstatic reveries, instituting instead a regimented performance of dances and chants. Believers were set in rows, separated by sex, and moved in unison to learned patterns (fig. 1). Calvin Green wrote that Meacham “had naturally no faculty in the dance” of the style promoted under Lee and Whittaker, “and for some time, after much struggle he could not gain a gift.” Perhaps his own difficulty with the earlier style prompted his worship reforms, but, in any case, he designed the new patterns and ensured that any innovations in outlying areas were approved by the ministry.

The social organization of the Shaker communities reflected Meacham’s ideal of an orderly gospel society. He invoked the Jewish temple as its organizing metaphor. Three concentric spheres, corresponding to the courts and interior of the ancient temple, organized the community. Those who of necessity had the greatest contact with the world, usually the least experienced and impious of the community, comprised the outer court. The second tier, made up of those intermediate Shakers neither inexperienced nor spiritually mature, dealt less directly with the outside, but nonetheless involved themselves heavily in temporal affairs. The inner circle of Believers included the most spiritually experienced. Meacham set this group almost entirely apart, circumscribing their contact with the world and other less-experienced Shakers as well.

Meacham dissolved biological families, making the care of children an assigned, rather than natural, obligation. Believers thus organized into these large “spiritual” families worked together, strengthened one another, and worshiped together. These gospel families lived regimented
FIG. 1. *Shakers Near Lebanon State of N. York, Their Mode of Worship, ca. 1830*, artist unknown. The Shaker dance style pictured above, first developed under the leadership of Joseph Meacham, was unlike the more individualized, spontaneous expressions that predominated under earlier Shaker leaders. The precision and regimentation of this later form of worship is emblematic of the highly structured religious life Meacham sought to create within Shaker communes.

lives. Meacham regulated nearly every aspect of community life. Men and women slept and ate apart in spacious structures that could accommodate large numbers. Shakers awoke together, followed a rigorous daily routine, and observed a multitude of oral and written laws. For instance, men and women could not pass each other on the stairs, for fear that inadvertent touching might invite temptation. No Believer was to play with cats and dogs, lest they "corrupt the animals by raising them out of their order."63 Shakers were not to give nicknames.64 Obedient Shakers closed gates, left nothing out of place, and refrained from walking noisily on the floor.65 Meacham "expressly taught" Shakers to "show our union in all our proceedings." “When walking together side by side,” Shakers were to “keep step, with the same foot, & when two were either walking or riding together, they should never suffer any person of the world, nor an animal of any kind to pass between them, it was a sign that such were not in that union, which the gospel requires.”66 With these “millennial laws,” as they were known, Meacham hoped to unify Shakers and provide a setting in which they could best live out the ideals of Shaker piety.
Meacham and other Shakers understood salvation in terms of “spiritual travel.” Shakers were to learn doctrines and principles of the true gospel, render obedience to the laws and ideals of Shaker life, and thereby progress gradually in understanding and piety towards sinless perfection. Meacham ordered his community to serve this process. Because Meacham, like Lee and Whittaker, understood celibacy to be paramount in this spiritual journey, many of his organizational measures and millennial laws were designed to decrease the likelihood of the intermingling of the sexes to avoid fleshly temptation at all cost. Moreover, regular contact between presiding officers and each Believer (of the same sex) provided an intimate setting for instruction, encouragement, reproof, and the confession of sins, which Meacham regarded as crucial for salvation and community order alike. Meacham’s concern for the salvation of his people is poignantly expressed in a letter to Lucy Wright, written just prior to his death in 1796. “I believe the Late & present troubles among the [young?] In the church is the Chief Cause of my Present Weakness & Sufferings,” he wrote. Because the “Principles of Gods grace to man in the Present day Were not Planted in them,” Meacham feared that “many may depart from The Faith.” Meacham’s final “hope & Expectation” was that his “Labours & Troubles” with the Believers would ensure that the “Great Number of the young will Keep their Faith.”

Both Meacham and Smith credited their communities with promoting unity and order. Each was confident that non-believers would recognize the distinctive holiness of their Zions and be inclined to join with the faithful. In this way, the two leaders each intended that their community embody their unique religious message. In directing their people to live and work apart from non-believers, Smith and Meacham both drew on images of “coming out of the world” and “gathering to Zion.” These images coexisted within each movement, but were not identical: the sanctified community was both a haven from a wicked world as well as a beacon to a wandering one. Where the first notion, that of leaving the world, involved rejection and removal, the second, of gathering, entailed engagement and accommodation. Both notions went hand in hand for Mormons and Shakers, and the various strategies employed to serve both ideals largely dictated the ability of each group to sustain itself and expand. In the end, Shakers were increasingly drawn to the first idea, while Mormons opted for emphasis on the second.

At first glance, it appears that Meacham gambled much on the attractiveness of his reforms. During the ten-year period of his leadership, he continued Whittaker’s practice and strictly forbade any Shaker proselytizing. Shakers before and after him were ardent evangelists, experiencing
periods of explosive growth, leaving historians to puzzle over Meacham’s
decision. Perhaps convinced that Shakerism needed internal bolstering,
or indeed supremely confident of the allure of his ordered, unified com­
munes, Meacham brought Shaker numerical growth to a halt in the short
term. Even more significantly, however, his model for the community in
some ways set the sect in a direction that would hem-in future expansion.

Meacham’s system provided that the farther one progressed in Shaker
spirituality, the farther one’s distance from non-believers. This strategy
placed the best teachers, preachers, and examples of Shaker piety (those
best able to represent Shaker ideals) away from positions of influence
with the unconverted. This model, along with Meacham’s restrictions on
proselytizing and promotion of celibacy, seems entirely incongruent with
Shaker rhetoric of the period predicting a vast flood of converts flocking
to the truth. Smith’s revelations also demarcated Mormons from a profane
outside world, but nonetheless more explicitly acknowledged a certain
engagement with it. The historical progression of each sect reflects this
differentiation between Meacham’s and Smith’s conceptualizations. Shak­
ers remained committed to a more radical separation from the outside
world throughout the nineteenth century, though they found it increas­
ingly difficult to maintain the distance. When forced to choose between
separatism and conversions, Mormons have historically opted for limited
accommodation with the outside to achieve those conversions.

A “Fullness of Times”: Zion in Sacred History

Joseph Smith and Joseph Meacham set their respective communities
within epochs of salvation history. Both connected their respective Zions
to a distant, purer past and a triumphant millennial future. Accordingly,
Mormons and Shakers believed they were participating in the work of the
“last days,” simultaneously a preparation for an apocalyptic millennium
and the culmination of God’s work throughout human history. Predict­
able, Smith’s and Meacham’s concepts of sacred time related to their
sanctified communities. Both movements were primitivist; in other words,
they looked back to the New Testament church as a model to be emulated.
Both were also broadly premillennialist, meaning that they felt an appear­
ance of Christ would inaugurate an apocalyptic change on earth and
usher in a thousand-year reign of peace. Yet each lived a variation on these
themes. Moreover, each adapted the connections between community
and sacred time as they progressed in the nineteenth century. They never
veered from their certainty that history had been providentially progressing
toward their Zions and that the millennium would uniquely reward their
efforts, but they had to reassess earlier notions of sacred time as their own history presented unexpected circumstances.  

**Millennialism and the Shaker Community.** Joseph Meacham published Shakerism's first tract in 1790, reversing earlier prohibitions against theological or historical writing. In it, he described four dispensations of God's work in human history. Abraham and the ancient patriarchs were granted the "first light of salvation . . . altho' they could not receive regeneration or the fulness of salvation from the fleshly or fallen nature in this life." The second dispensation of salvation was offered to Israel by the "hand of Moses," but the truth made manifest at that time was only a "shadow of good things to come." The third dispensation was "the gospel of CHRIST's first appearance, in the flesh . . . but . . . the measure of that dispensation" was still incomplete. "The mystery of God" was not finished, in Meacham's reckoning, as there "was another day prophesied of, called the second appearance of CHRIST, or final and last display of God's grace to a lost world." Before that last dispensation would come, however, there would be a general apostasy from true Christianity. Interpreting 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Meacham wrote that a "falling away began soon after the apostles, and gradually increased in the church, until about four hundred and fiftyseven years from CHRIST's birth (or thereabouts) at which time the power of the holy people, or church of CHRIST, was scattered or lost by reason of transgression: and anti-christ, or false religion, got to be established." Meacham testified that the Shaker gospel had inaugurated the culminating dispensation, and the visions, revelations, prophecies, and other spiritual gifts evident among the faithful revealed it as such. To conclude his brief summary of the dispensations of God's grace, Meacham entreated his readers to "believe the testimony of truth" and "obtain the mercy of GOD . . . before it be too late." 

Joseph Meacham thus believed that his communal order was not only "a resemblance of the kingdom of Christ in Heaven," but also a restoration of the apostolic church's purity. Shakers consistently contrasted the unity of the primitive church with the proliferation of sects and denominations in early America, concluding that the era's Protestant pluralism was evidence that "they have not the holy Ghost." Looking back at what was lost in the falling away since the time of Christ—the power of the Church having been destroyed by contention—Meacham saw in the Shaker gospel the millennial hope for humanity. The power, order, and government by succession thus restored, wandering souls needed to come out from a corrupt world and an apostate Christianity to be saved. 

If Meacham endowed Shaker communitarianism with a sacred past, Shakers in general were ambivalent about its role in the future. For Shakers,
Christ’s second appearance had already come in the body of believers (or in Ann Lee, according to later formulations), so there was no expectation of a coming kingdom. They were premillennialist in the sense that they felt Christ’s coming would initiate a new age, which they believed had been set in motion by their own movement, but passing years eroded the Shaker expectation of radical, apocalyptic transformation. Perhaps their ambivalence concerning evangelism is best understood in light of this waning belief that the millennial age had commenced. Early Shakerism was marked by urgency and the feeling that “God was moving now in the world.” There was even talk of constructing a large ship that would carry the converted from England and Europe to the American communes. This fervor faded as the nineteenth century wore on, perhaps partly due to the realization that their work had not ushered in the apocalyptic change they had earlier expected. Certainly, Shaker writing moved away from the earlier, dire warnings that the end was very near. Their rhetoric continued to insist that they would take the Shaker gospel to the world, but nineteenth-century Believers were more concerned with “gospel order” than they were with warning others of an apocalyptic end of time. With millennial expectations and evangelical zeal both gradually cooling as the nineteenth century progressed, Shakers, it seems, channeled their spiritual energies into disengaging from the world, fostering internal order and unity, and progressing in their spiritual journey among other believers while the world passed by in ignorance.

Mormon Millennialism. Joseph Smith, too, focused his movement on the imminence of Christ’s second coming, which provided the ideological energy for the proselytizing urgency characteristic of Mormonism throughout the nineteenth century. He connected his Zion to the past, but he went beyond comparing it to the New Testament church. And as events that Smith had not expected unfolded in early Mormon history, he, too, reevaluated the idea of Zion and emphasized the more expansive aspects of the concept.

Zion was so important to Smith’s millenarian timetable that he rarely spoke of Mormonism’s mission in terms other than gathering Israel and building Zion. As he taught it, this gathering and establishment of Zion were central components of a premillennial crescendo that would culminate in the destruction of the wicked at Christ’s second coming. The righteous, gathered safely in Zion, would occupy the earth during the thousand-year reign of peace. For early Mormons, then, the millennium itself hinged on the success of their ideal communities. “Unless Zion is built,” wrote an early Mormon bishop, “our hopes perish, our expectations fail, our
prospects are blasted, our salvation withers, and God will come and smite the whole earth with a curse." 84

As the city of Zion was to be Smith’s geographic vortex for the church, so it was also centralized in time within sacred history. Smith identified Zion’s Missouri location with the deepest of pasts, proclaiming that it had been the spot of the biblical Garden of Eden. Having revealed the description of Enoch’s city that had been taken to God without any of its inhabitants tasting death, Smith’s revelations also foretold that at the end of time Enoch’s heavenly city would meet the earthly Mormon Zion. 85 Moreover, Smith taught that the temple to be built in Zion would be the site of a pre-apocalyptic visitation of Christ, asserting it would be the temple to which the Lord would “suddenly” come. 86 The significance of the city of Zion was enhanced by the importance Smith attached to the site of a Mormon settlement he named Adam-ondi-Ahman, located north of the “center place” in Jackson County (D&C 57:3; 116:1). Like Zion, Adam-ondi-Ahman was sacralized in time, Smith having taught that it was the location of an ancient gathering where Adam, the “Ancient of Days,” pronounced blessings on his posterity and prophesied of things to befall the “latest generation” (D&C 107:56; 116:1). Additionally, Adam-ondi-Ahman was to be the site of a premillennial council to which Adam would return and present the authority over the earth to Christ before the priesthood of all ages assembled. 87 Sacred time and space thus merged in Smith’s revelations concerning the central holy city. The space was hallowed for Mormons by what had occurred there in the deep past and what would take place there in a triumphant millennial future.

Connections such as this between theology, time, and place are integral in the corpus of Joseph Smith’s teachings, in which promised lands are regularly connected with sacred vows and covenant peoples. For Smith, this latter-day gathering of scattered Israel was the culmination of the Abrahamic promises made in antiquity that provided the Holy Land as a gathering place for the Jews and America as a gathering place for other of Israel’s tribes. Gathering was thus not simply a concern of the “dispensation of the fulness of times”; rather, it was a part of God’s designs for his people throughout history. The purpose of gathering God’s people “in any age of the world” was to affect the building of a house “whereby he could reveal unto his people the ordinances . . . & teach the people the ways of salvation.” 88 Joseph Smith and the early Saints understood that “the building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age,” and they infused their communities with sacred meaning that stretched back to Eden and forward to Christ’s millennial reign. 89
Unfortunately for the Mormons, their neighbors did not see the Missouri frontier in the same light. Claims that Missouri land was holy ground reserved for the Saints intensified animosities posed by cultural, religious, economic, and political differences that culminated in the hostilities of 1833 and 1838. Mormons in Jackson County were removed by force in 1833. Dedicated to the idea of the Saints’ duty to build the holy city, Smith led over two hundred men to reclaim Mormon property in 1834. State authorities worked out a settlement to avert violence, and Mormons were forced to look for temporary refuge elsewhere, hoping the courts would return their Zion to them. The courts did not, and Mormons settled Daviess and Caldwell Counties in northern Missouri and were joined by their prophet in 1838 when the Ohio communities collapsed. Tensions again flared up, and a virtual civil war in 1838 sent the Saints fleeing to Illinois while their prophet spent the winter in the dungeon of the Liberty, Missouri, jail. His captivity provided a period of contemplation, and he emerged with a new-found vigor to establish yet another Mormon center, this time in Nauvoo, Illinois.

It was in Nauvoo that Zion took on its final conceptual framework during Smith’s life. Having been denied his Missouri Zion, Smith emphasized the expansive nature of the concept. His vision for Zion had always been expansive, even global. His 1833 plan for Zion contained the instructions that once the city reached its capacity of fifteen to twenty thousand people, other communities would be established “in the same way, and so fill up the world in the last days.” By 1844, Smith was teaching that all of North and South America constituted Zion. He and the Mormon leaders who followed him stressed that the “Lord called his people ZION” in ancient times “because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness,” not because of where they lived (Moses 7:18). Zion, in short, existed wherever one found true Saints. Utilizing meanings that had been subsumed in the concept of Zion from the outset, Smith shifted the primary meaning of the term from the name of the central Mormon city toward the notion of a promised land or state of mind. While the Latter-day Saints have never disregarded the importance of the Jackson County location, the term “Zion” has long since ceased to apply exclusively to that location.
A Meeting and Parting of American Zions

Brother Ashbel Kitchell, a Shaker of Union Village, Ohio, remembered that in "1829" (sic; it was 1830) a "new religion" came to northern Ohio, creating "a good deal of excitement among the people." Kitchell reported that he and the other Shakers granted the newcomers, including Oliver Cowdery, a forum to share their message. In Kitchell’s appraisal, the Mormons were "meek and mild, but as for light, or knowledge of the way of God, I considered them very ignorant of Christ or his work."93

The Mormons, however, were undeterred. After Shaker Leman Copley became convinced that the Mormons had the true Zion, he in turn convinced Joseph Smith that his former brethren might be similarly receptive to the Mormon message. Accordingly, Smith recorded a revelation and sent Copley, Sidney Rigdon, and Parley Pratt to deliver it to the Shakers at Union Village. Smith’s revelation, which Rigdon read to the assembled Shakers, related the voice of the Lord concerning the Shakers, conveying the message that "they desire to know the truth in part, but not all, for they are not right before me and must needs repent." Rigdon went on to read that "whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God," and, finally, "the Son of Man cometh not in the form of a woman" (D&C 49:2, 15, 22). As one might guess, the Shakers were unimpressed. Pratt’s recollection of the event is understandably succinct: "We fulfilled this mission [to the Shakers], as we were commanded, in a settlement of this strange people . . . but they utterly refused to hear or obey the gospel."94

For all their similarities, Mormonism and Shakerism forever parted ways after this brief meeting in northern Ohio. Whatever comparable responses they offered to the world around them, they could scarcely begin to comprehend one another. In the end, each esteemed the other as one of the many groups blinded to the true light revealed anew in the early American republic.

Yet, as this essay has explored, it is not difficult to understand why the former Shaker Copley and the Mormon prophet were hopeful about the meeting of the two Zions. Both movements shared premises about the importance of sanctified communities, even if that commonality did little to produce identical Zions. Meacham devised a Shaker community wherein the faithful could come out from the world and embark on a spiritual journey that would take them in degrees from corruption to
perfection, and he set the group on a course toward more pronounced separatism. It was Smith’s more grandiose set of plans and expectations, by contrast, that prompted his dispatching of the most gifted Mormon preachers to missionize in England and elsewhere beginning with apostle Heber C. Kimball’s 1837–38 mission to England and culminating in the eminently successful British mission of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles in 1839–41.\(^95\)

In retrospect, Smith’s curious strategy of sending his most talented and loyal followers away from the center of church affairs during a time of crisis appears to have succeeded brilliantly. The influx of thousands of European converts mitigated the effects of what might have been a devastating number of defections in Ohio and Missouri in 1837–38 and partially fortified the Church against similar problems in Nauvoo—to say nothing of the role played by European Saints in the trek to the Rockies and Zion-building in the West. It is the foreign mission that perhaps best delineates the difference in the Mormon and Shaker conception of holy community. While internal concerns prompted Meacham and later Shakers to turn inward and away from evangelism, Smith reinvigorated his Zion with an increasingly far-flung gathering of Saints. That both movements experienced remarkable success in the nineteenth century is a testament to the vision of the Mormon and Shaker prophets.

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4. By invoking demographical differences, I do not mean to imply that the number of adherents is the only measure of religious success. It would be a
mistake, in other words, to make failure the master-narrative of Shaker history. Even so, both movements early on expected mass conversions and toiled to that end. Scholars agree that among Shakerism’s pressing tasks since the Civil War has been the management of “decline.” Historian Stephen J. Stein takes on the complicated notion of religious decline in *The Shaker Experience in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 337–54.


6. Smith related that prominent figures from the Old and New Testaments bestowed upon him the authority to perform baptism and otherwise act in the name of God. He said that John the Baptist restored to him a lesser priesthood, which included the authority to baptize, and that Peter, James, and John restored to him a higher priesthood, which included the authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, perform marriages, and various other rites. Smith credited other prophetic figures with bestowals of various powers. On the reception of the lesser priesthood, see Doctrine and Covenants 13; on the higher priesthood, see Doctrine and Covenants 18, 20, and 27; for Old Testament figures and the bestowal of various powers, see Doctrine and Covenants 110; see also Doctrine and Covenants 20, 84, and 107 for Smith’s primary revelations on priesthood. For recent discussions of Smith’s conceptualizations of religious authority, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 143–79; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 74–78; Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988); D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 1–78; and Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995).

7. Virginia Gazette, November 9, 1769, 1. All quoted material retains original spelling and grammar unless otherwise noted.


14. The two most important early Shaker historical sources are Rufus Bishop and Seth Y. Wells, eds., *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with Her; Through Whom the Word of Eternal Life was Opened in This Day of Christ's Second Appearing; Collected from Living Witnesses* (Hancock, Mass.: J. Tallcott and J. Deming Jr., 1816); and Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells, *Summary View of the Millennial Church, or United Society of Believers, (Commonly Called Shakers). Comprising the Rise, Progress and Practical Order of the Society; Together with the General Principles of Their Faith and Testimony* (Albany: Packard and Van Benthuysen, 1823). Important early apostate accounts include Valentine Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*; Valentine Rathbun, *Some Brief Hints of a Religious Scheme, Taught and propagated by a Number of Europeans, living in a Place called Nisqueunia, in the State of New-York* (New York: n. p., 1783); Daniel Rathbun, *A Letter From Daniel Rathbun, from Richmond, in the County of Berkshire, to James Whittacor, Chief Elder of the Church, called Shakers* (Springfield, Mass.: Printing Office, 1785); Reuben Rathbun, *Reasons Offered for Leaving the Shakers* (Pittsfield, Mass.: Chester Smith, 1800); and Amos Taylor, *A Narrative of the Strange Principles, Conduct and Character of the People Known by the Name of Shakers* (Worcester, Mass.: Isaiah Thomas, 1782).


20. Benjamin West, *Scriptural Cautions against Embracing a Religious Scheme, Taught by a Number of Europeans, Who Came from England to America, in the Year 1776, and Stile Themselves the Church, &c. &c.* (Hartford, Conn.: Bavil Webster, 1783), 3–8, 10–11, 13; see also Taylor, *Narrative*; Rathbun, *Account of the Matter*, 4–8.


29. Eli Root to Edmond Crane and Thomas Fuller, August 9, 1787, Shaker Manuscripts, IV A-19, Shaker Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, microfilm copy at State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; Stein, Shaker Experience, 41.

30. Stein, Shaker Experience, 43.

31. Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). Hatch’s work has garnered wide acceptance, though some historians have questioned its usefulness. Christine L. Heyrman, for instance, has shown Hatch’s interpretation to be problematic with regard to the South. See Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998). Paul E. Johnson has cautioned that Christianity may indeed have been “democratized,” but in the historically specific sense of the word. Early-republic-era “democracy,” in other words, could foster broader participation and check some traditional means of power, but it could also buttress others, such as hierarchies of race and gender. See Paul E. Johnson, “Democracy, Patriarchy, and American Revivals, 1780–1850,” Journal of Social History 24, no. 4 (1991): 843–50.


34. History of the Church, 1:207.

35. Garrett, Spirit Possession, 222.

36. Johnson, “Biographical Account,” 27–29; see also Bishop and Wells, Testimonies, 219. In this regard, many Shaker accounts, including Green’s, are contradictory, relating both the prophecies and the uncertainty surrounding Meacham’s ascendancy.


41. Stein, Shaker Experience, 44.


43. Quoted in Garrett, Spirit Possession, 227.


46. Informing my discussion of the plan for the city of Zion are several important studies: Richard L. Bushman, Making Space for the Mormons; Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series Publications, no. 2 (Logan: Utah State

47. See Hamilton, Mormon Architecture, for an extended discussion of Mormon community planning.

48. A facsimile of the original plan and transcription of the Smith’s handwritten marginal notes (it also includes handwriting of Smith’s confidante Frederick G. Williams) is provided in Hamilton, Mormon Architecture, 15-18, plates 1 and 2, found after page 31. Hamilton also includes a facsimile of another plan for Zion, in which Smith made various minor alterations, which he found in the LDS Church archives in the late 1970s.

49. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118. It should be noted that later, in the nineteenth century, Shakers were heavily involved in their own educational efforts, establishing their own schools.


51. Bushman, Making Space, 4-7.

52. Bushman, Making Space, 5.

53. It is interesting to note that one of Smith’s revelations relates the divine decree that a hotel be built in Nauvoo, “a house for boarding, a house that strangers may come from afar to lodge therein ... that the weary traveler may find health and safety while he shall contemplate the word of the Lord” (D&C 124:23).

54. Rufus Bishop, ed., “A Collection of the Writings of Father Joseph Meacham, Respecting Church Order and Government; Evidently Intended for Way-marks, for All Who Were or Should Be Called in Spiritual or Temporal Care, in the Church,” Shaker Manuscripts, VII B-59, 1. Angle brackets <> indicate words that were added above the line.


62. Meacham, “A Short Information of my Order and Famylis,” Shaker Manuscripts, I A-8. On the reverse side of the first page of this manuscript, Shaker leader Alonzo Hollister wrote, “This was preserved in the Deacon’s room of the third Family, or Outer court. Afterwards, the Second Order of the Church. Taken from there by A.G.H. When the Family moved away in July 1896. If not written by
Father Joseph, I think it must have been dictated by him, & written by <him or> one of his Assistants in gathering the Church. A.G.H. Mch. 4[,] 1911.”


65. Some other early “Millennial Laws” are related in Thomas Brown, Account of the People Called Shakers: Their Faith, Doctrines, and Practice, Exemplified in the Life, Conversations, and Experience of the Author during the Time He Belonged to the Society. To Which is Affixed a History of Their Rise and Progress to the Present Day (Troy, N.Y.: Parker and Bliss, 1812); and William J. Haskett, Shakerism Unmasked, or the History of the Shakers (Pittsfield, Mass.: By the author, 1828).


68. Meacham to Wright.

69. Stephen Stein argues that the struggle to maintain cultural separation was the defining characteristic of Shakerism between the Civil War and the mid-twentieth century. See Stein, Shaker Experience, xvi–xvii.


72. Meacham, Concise Statement, 3.

73. Meacham, Concise Statement, 5–7; emphasis in original.

74. Meacham, Concise Statement, 7–10; emphasis in original.

75. Meacham, Concise Statement, 17.


78. Green and Wells, Summary View, 59.

79. Meacham may have first developed the standard Shaker description of a prophetic “mantle” passing from Lee to Whittaker to him. He could have further legitimated his authority by connecting himself both to the apostolic church and Lee herself. See Bishop and Wells, Testimonies, 519–20, 355–56; Bishop, “Collection of Writings,” 12–13; Green and Wells, Summary View, 59; and Johnson, “Biographical Account,” 27–29.

Neither of the two earliest Shaker theological documents, Meacham’s *Concise Statement* and “Candid Statement,” mention Ann Lee. Even more suggestive, when apostates attempt to expose Shakerism in the 1780s and 90s, they never mention her claiming to be Christ, only that she wielded inappropriate power within the group.

83. See Shipps, *Mormonism*, for a thoughtful analysis of early Mormonism’s relationship with sacred history and, especially, the Old and New Testaments.
85. There is no first-hand reference from Joseph Smith about Zion’s being the site of the garden of Eden, but evidence exists to connect the idea with him. At very least, several documents reveal how contemporaries internalized his logic of sacred time and space in their own conceptualizations. William W. Phelps, poet and editor of the *Evening and Morning Star* published in Independence, Missouri, consistently connected Zion and Eden in the *Star* and in his hymns (see *Hymns* [Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985], no. 48). Brigham Young maintained that “in Jackson County was the Garden of Eden. Joseph declared this, and I am as much bound to believe that as to believe that Joseph was a prophet of God.” See *Journal History of the Church*, March 15, 1857, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. See also Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854–86), 4:105, September 28, 1856. On Enoch’s city meeting with the New Jerusalem, see Moses 7:62–63.
86. *Doctrine and Covenants* 36:8; 133:2. The connection between the Jackson County temple and Christ’s appearance is also difficult to trace to Joseph Smith. Later leaders that knew him regularly associated the two. See Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 22:35, October 10, 1880.
90. From the city of Zion plat, transcribed in Hamilton, *Mormon Architecture*, 15–18, 34. The center place of Independence was to function not only as the location of the city of Zion, but as the central stake in the tent metaphor presented in the Old Testament (Isa. 54:2), much like the Mother Church in Shakerism.
Kitchell's journal reports that the year was 1829, but Kitchell was one year off on the date. Cowdery and other missionaries arrived in Ohio in 1830.
