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Book Review of "Neither Plain Nor Simple: New Perspectives on the Canterbury Shakers", by David R. Starbuck, 2004, University Press of New England, Lebanon, New Hampshire, 190 pages, 174 illustrations, \$29.95 (paper).

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record. Archaeological investigations are all too frequently hindered by Section 106 defined project areas, or by the limited capabilities of a university field school over a few seasons. Even when Revolutionary War sites are examined, it is rare to get a full look at diverse site features/areas. The Fort Montgomery study offers such comprehensiveness.

The recent publications of the New York State Museum underline their commitment to analyze and publish earlier research efforts. The Museum is to be commended for their overall efforts. The Fort Montgomery volume presents important information that otherwise would never have been known to our discipline. I strongly recommend the volume for military sites archaeologists and students of the Revolutionary War.

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NEITHER PLAIN NOR SIMPLE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE CANTERBURY SHAKERS, by **David R. Starbuck**, 2004, University Press of New England, Lebanon, New Hampshire, 190 pages, 174 illustrations, \$29.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Kim A. McBride

The volume is a summary of David Starbuck's twenty-five years of research at Canterbury Shaker Village, done with the aid of many students and colleagues, and several seasons of research at Hancock Shaker Village. Some of the material has been previously produced elsewhere, in magazine articles or special publications, as cited by Starbuck, but this volume is useful in pulling the various threads together and making them accessible in one location and to a wider audience.

The volume begins with a very personal introductory section, in which the author outlines the history of his involvement in archaeology at Canterbury (near Concord, New Hampshire) and Hancock Shaker Village (western Massachusetts). This chapter is brief, informally written, and fun to read. The tone set in this chapter extends throughout the volume, so that the reader not only learns what Starbuck learned through the years of research, but what surprised and delighted (or less often frustrated) him along the way.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the Shakers, and what Starbuck refers to as the traditional view of Shaker life, to which he offers this volume as somewhat of a challenge, or alternative view. He does a good job of presenting a brief history of the Shakers. For the benefit of readers of this review who are without such background, I will offer a brief summary.

Non-members gave the name Shakers to a group who entitled themselves the Society of United Believers in Christ's Second Appearing. The name Shakers arose because of the frenzied dancing which characterized the Society's early years. The Believers later accepted the name Shakers, especially as they became more concerned with establishing an identity for marketing their products. Shaker communities were founded upon principles that distinguished them from mainstream Christian communities of the 19th century. These principles included communal ownership of property; celibacy; a broad conception of worship that embraced everyday actions and especially labor; the public and private confession of sins; and a deity composed of a female Holy Mother Wisdom as a counterpart to a male Almighty God (Stein 1992). They organized their 19 villages into communal "families" containing from 30 to 90 persons, with the families grouped into broader orders. Most villages contained from three to seven key families, and from several hundred to up to 1,000 persons. A core component of Shaker theology was a rejection of materialism and an affirmation of the primacy of the Spirit. Following from this spiritualism was a receptiveness to individual religious interpretations and expressions, including those from dreams and visions, communications with deceased persons, and the expression of these communica-

tions in poems, songs, and handiwork such as samplers or spirit drawings. The only remaining operational Shaker village is Sabbath Day Lake, Maine.

The Shakers are fairly well known today since they became the most successful (if numbers tell the story) of a host of utopian societies in the 19th century. They also stand out because of the dancing at their worship services, which they invited visitors to view (often in hopes of converts), and also because of the popularity of their furniture and crafts among collectors. Starbuck notes that “the nature of scholarship over the course of the twentieth century sometimes makes it difficult to develop an objective understanding of the Shakers” (p. 15). He rightly notes the strong influence of the Shaker material culture collectors and enthusiasts, beginning with the Andrews, resulting in “a vast body of platonic imagery, nostalgia, and craft reproductions that have become the basis for modern interpretations of Shaker life.” He makes an insightful analogy between these misguided interpretations and “the efforts of early explorers and anthropologists to discover simpler cultures that had not yet been corrupted by the modern Western World” (p.14–15).

One of the most prominent Shaker scholars, Stephen Stein (1992) has suggested that the preoccupation with Shaker artifacts can partly be explained by an American tendency to like “things” rather than “ideas” and because there is less that is potentially offensive in the material culture of the Shakers, as compared to their religious ideology. Perhaps it is precisely because the Shakers can be associated with a distinctive material culture that they are of such interest today. This preoccupation, which sometimes serves to reduce the Shaker contribution to a matter of “style” or artistic leaning, is doubly ironic given the Shaker emphasis on spirituality over materialism, and their reinterpretation of things worldly as having a spiritual basis.

This over-emphasis on simplicity in Shaker interpretations is quite well established. For example, we see it even in the Shaker song, “Simple Gifts,” which has become somewhat of a “theme song” describing the Society. The melody of this song, certainly beautiful, was made famous by composer Aaron Copeland’s incorporation of it into his Appalachian Spring

composition. This song is only one of thousands written by the Shakers but likely the only Shaker song known to many persons today. And without an accompanying understanding of why it was so important for the Shakers to “Bend and to Bow” as a part of gaining “True simplicity” as stated in the song, we have lost an appreciation that Shaker “simplicity” was actually pretty complex. But I should return to *Neither Plain Nor Simple*.

Chapters 2–4 present the archaeology at three different types of Shaker sites. In Chapter 2, Starbuck summarizes his mapping and excavations of the extensive milling system at Canterbury. In Chapter 3 he discusses several dump sites. Chapter 4 presents information on blacksmith shops and smoking pipes.

The milling system discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrates the incredible labor power the Shakers could bring to a problem or need, and Starbuck’s enthusiasm and admiration for the ingenuity demonstrated at Canterbury is evident. Among their many accomplishments was the construction of a “long ditch” and series of connected ponds to control and redirect surface water—eventually to the extent that they could power a total of 19 mills (not all in operation at once) on land that lacked a creek or river. This chapter brings home not only the uniqueness of the Canterbury situation, and the Shaker’s solution, but also serves as a good reminder of how important milling was to all 19th-century communities, Shaker or otherwise. To have a community with any degree of self-sufficiency without milling must have seemed so impossible to the Canterbury residents that they accomplished what many outsiders likely saw as an impossible solution. Besides providing background on milling and information from the Shaker documentary record, Chapter 2 is a detailed technical documentation of the milling system, with many plan maps and cross sections or elevations that make the technology in use (likely widely known in the 19th century but not today!) more understandable to the novice.

In discussing the milling system Starbuck lets us know of the wide range of products the Shakers produced at different times, from grain products to raw and finished wood products, to cloth. In doing this he also highlights one of the many myths that surround modern conceptualizations of the Shakers—that they

were totally self-sufficient. In reading about the ups and downs of the milling we can see the Society struggling to define what was best to produce themselves, versus what was best to buy from the world. I have seen this same tension in the milling system, and other projects, at the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky Shaker village, where I have been fortunate to conduct archaeology since 1990.

Issues of material culture acquisition and use are continued in Chapters 3 and 4, where Starbuck presents information on a series of Shaker dump sites and blacksmithing sites, respectively. It is in these chapters that we see the bulk of material culture. In Chapter 3 Starbuck presents a summary of multiple field seasons excavating a series of dumpsites, from a range of time periods and settings. He documents a common pattern at Canterbury of the Shakers utilizing abandoned building foundations or cellars as handy places to put the trash. I have found this same pattern at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky sites, thought not to the same extent as at Canterbury. But then the Canterbury Shakers did not have the sinkholes common in central Kentucky, into which most 19th-century and a good proportion of 20th-century occupants, Shakers included, readily disposed of their unwanted items. I have also found a corresponding pattern at Pleasant Hill, of general yard spaces, outside of building ruins, having less than typical trash deposits. This fact, and a few vague references in the Shaker journals, suggests that special efforts were made to keep the yards clean.

Many of the Shaker villages have become museum sites, and Starbuck acknowledges the difficulties in presenting an accurate portrayal of their complex belief systems and lives. This point is not new to archaeologists, having been brought to our attention over twenty years ago by Mark Leone (1981) after a visit to the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky site. Starbuck suggests that archaeological research can make these interpretations more realistic. For example, he contrasts the brightly decorated china patterns excavated with the typical "simple" and often mostly white tableware portrayals found at some Shaker museums. Starbuck acknowledges the difficulties of assuming that material culture found in the Canterbury dumps was all purchased or used by the Shakers, since for much of the later 19th-century hired helpers,

especially men, also lived at the villages. I share Starbuck's hope that more dumps from the earlier years, when hired labor was not so common, will be found.

The interpretations of the material culture in this chapter could be expanded, and perhaps this will come with the future analysis of materials. Starbuck indicates on several occasions that analysis is still in progress, understandable given that much of the work has been accomplished via field schools and likely with limited funding. But even at the present level of analysis, the interpretations could be strengthened by delving a bit deeper into the Shaker material culture literature. For example, while Starbuck cites many of the standard early works on the Shakers, such as Stephen Stein's excellent (1992) historical synthesis, he does not make use of the recent masterful work by John Kirk (1997). This is especially disappointing since Kirk's work focuses on the material world of the Shakers, and how it intersected with their worldview, a topic of obvious interest to Starbuck. Kirk goes well beyond characterizations of the Shakers as plain or simple, and delineates principles of Shaker design (Ordered, Stretched, Fragile, Rugged, Improvised) that he traces through many areas, including furniture, craft production, building design, even to dances and worship services. Kirk also rejects a view of the Shakers as unchanging through time, and discusses the degree to which their material culture differed, or did not, from the surrounding non-Shaker material culture. I previously have been drawn to the importance of Order as an explanatory theme for the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky site, and have, like Starbuck, rejected any reliance on the principles of simplicity so commonly used in reference to them (McBride 1995).

Chapter 4 presents explorations at several blacksmith shops, and like Chapter 2 on the mill system, we get the sense of the importance of this industry to the Shakers, and good technical information on the structure of some blacksmithing sites. Starbuck's excavation at the Second Family shop leads him to suggest that stub stem clay smoking pipes were being manufactured there.

That the New Lebanon and Watervliet Shakers were making red and white clay smoking pipes as early as 1809 was docu-

mented by the early Shaker scholar Edward Andrews in 1933, but information on this industry has not been readily available to archaeologists. The earliest mention of the possibility of Shaker pipe production I have seen in the archaeological literature was by James Murphy in 1978. Murphy noted the manufacture of pipes in Ohio called "Shakers," but which were made by an Akron company. However, he hypothesized that these pipes were named Shakers because their form was similar to pipes that had been made by the Shakers in the first half of the 19th century. Starbuck's work at Canterbury further demonstrates how common this pipe production was at Shaker sites, and should make this information far more accessible to other scholars.

The pipes illustrated in *Neither Plain Nor Simple* are almost identical to those excavated at Pleasant Hill, where we have many plain fragments and two specimens with remnants of letters suggesting they were labeled "Pleasant Hill, Ky" (McBride 2005). While Starbuck has not found much documentary evidence on the commercial production of smoking pipes at Canterbury, Pleasant Hill records document them selling for a few cents each in the early-19th century. We have used these pipes, and this documentation, in exhibits at Pleasant Hill, and they always seem to fascinate visitors.

The discussion of the smoking pipes in Chapter 4 provides a good opportunity for Starbuck to discuss how the Shaker's views, and habits, changed over time. While temporal change is a common problem to deal with on any site, it is especially relevant when groups are presented in museum settings, subject to being "frozen" in time and into one unchanging belief system. For example, smoking was heavily practiced at Shaker villages in the early-19th century, but less so toward the mid-19th century. Views toward pork and alcohol changed also, topics Starbuck also discusses. In discussing these topics Starbuck makes use of the Millennial Laws of 1821 and 1845, in which the Shakers lay out some of their prescribed and prohibited activities. What a luxury to have such a written document against which to contrast actual practices, a point not lost on Starbuck.

In Chapter 5 Starbuck presents his "Final Thoughts" on research so far, but he makes

clear that he anticipates more research, with new surprises and understandings, in the future at Canterbury. Most of these final thoughts center around how the Shakers should be interpreted. Starbuck concludes that "to the degree that material culture mirrors behavior, the Canterbury dumps suggest that the Shakers had become almost indistinguishable from the outside world a full century ago" (p. 85). Maybe the Canterbury dumps look similar to non-Shaker dumps, but does this mean they behaved and believed the same? I doubt Starbuck really means this. Perhaps we have yet to find the ways to more fully extract the meaning of these Shaker material culture assemblages.

Neither Plain Nor Simple fits easily within the growing field of landscape archaeology, and in fact can be said to take an early role in such, since Starbuck's efforts began in the late 1970s. Part II presents the results of a detailed mapping project of over 600 acres at Canterbury. In this section of the book Starbuck demonstrates his attentiveness to the fine details of the local sites but places them within an overall landscape perspective. We learn that his research really began as a large-scale mapping project of the Canterbury built environment and not excavation of individual sites—that came later in his research program.

Much of the Part II material has been previously published by Starbuck, but with some updates in the current presentation. The work was undertaken with the aid of students but Starbuck eventually enlisted professional surveying assistance. The results are presented in 61 black and white maps. The maps are followed by a running log in which each cultural feature, archaeological site, or building, is numbered and described.

This is an unusually detailed body of data that will serve as a comparative research base for years to come, and one that many scholars will wish they had for other Shaker (or other) sites. This is especially valuable since we are rapidly losing 19th-century rural sites to the pressures of natural decay and land development. One gets the sense that Starbuck's motivation to undertake this detailed recording of the landscape owes something to his background in Industrial Archaeology, both from a technical expertise standpoint (some drawings are to HABS/HAER standards, for example),

and his obvious interest in the Shakers' manipulation of the landscape for the milling system.

One difference between Starbuck's work and recent landscape studies is that he gives relatively little attention to the Shaker's view of the landscape, or how their view of the world might have lead them to see the landscape differently than members of the mainstream culture. This topic may be rich for future research, given that the Shakers felt they were creating Heaven on Earth (which Starbuck recognizes and reports). Again I feel that the concept of Order could be quite useful.

The book is well written, often in an informal style, and sprinkled with anecdotes of twenty-five years of research, and interaction with both interesting colleagues, and of course, Shakers. A highlight of Starbuck's research is that he was able to do much of it in the presence of the last three Canterbury Shakers, and with their blessing and cooperation. He does a good job of introducing the reader to the remaining Canterbury Shakers, Sisters Eldresses Gertrude Soule and Bertha Lindsay, and Sister Ethel Hudson.

The presentation style of *Neither Plain Nor Simple* makes it easy for Starbuck to weave quotes and other primary source materials from the Shakers into his more typical presentation of archaeological findings. This is another strength of the volume, and Starbuck makes good use of the many letters and journals left by the Canterbury Shakers. Is it the unusual preservation of these records, or the way that the Shakers created them in great volume, that is more unusual or interesting? It is almost like the Shakers knew this "experiment" they were embarking on would be of interest to future researchers, and worthy of documentation. Regardless, hearing the Shakers' own words about their undertakings, alongside Starbuck's descriptions of his discoveries, makes the volume more interesting. This wealth of documentary material is an appealing aspect of research at most Shaker sites, and I have found it to my great benefit at the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, Shaker Village. Many Shaker sites have gone to great trouble to preserve the records of this society and make them available to scholars. Starbuck notes that most of the records that have sur-

vived are quite mundane, with more personal and interpretive journals having been purposely destroyed. While we mourn the loss of the more personal data, I often marvel at how fortunate archaeologists at Shaker sites are. How often on non-Shaker sites do you have family papers that tell you the location of out-buildings, their dimensions, and when and why they were built?

Technically the book is well produced, and very easy to read. The straightforward presentation style should make it accessible to many non-archaeologists as well. The large page format works very well since many of the illustrations and maps in Part II have much detail that needs to be legible. In general the many illustrations (113) plus the 61 maps in Part II, are clear and readable. The selection of historic photos is a great complement to the technical plan and profile drawings, in terms of giving the book more popular appeal. More consistent use of scales in the artifacts photographs would be useful, although Starbuck typically provides artifact dimensions in the captions. In several cases we see both line drawings and photographs of a select feature. While each conveys different information, in some cases needed, in other cases one medium could have been sacrificed to gain the chance to showcase something new.

In summary, this is an informative and enjoyable book that I would recommend to fellow archaeologists, Shaker enthusiasts, and the general public interested in history and preservation issues. Too rarely do archaeologists have a chance, or take the time, to look back at such a long stretch of work at one site, like Starbuck has done here. Starbuck tells us that he plans to continue this research, and to investigate new sites at Canterbury. I hope that future work will contain more detailed analysis of artifact patterning and comparisons to non-Shaker sites in the region, but that the author can retain the very down to earth presentation style and clarity seen here.

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