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THE SHAKER COMMUNITY IN FLORIDA

by RUSSELL H. ANDERSON

MANY RESIDENTS of Osceola County, Florida, recall a kindly though strange religious group, the Shakers, who once lived near present day St. Cloud-but the memory of these good people is fading. It should be recorded that beginning in 1894, Osceola County was the scene of one of the later efforts of an outstanding utopian movement in America-that of the Shaker religious group.

The Shakers-a short name taken by the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing-trace their beliefs to the early traditions of the church, and more particularly to a seventeenth-century group of French Protestants known as Camisards or Prophets. Protesting against the persecution of the Huguenots, they were driven from France to England by Louis XIV. They disappeared from view, but not before they had passed on their torch to a group of Quakers who were attracted by this somewhat similar faith. To the organization led by James and Jane Wardley, sometimes referred to as Shaking Quakers, came Ann Lee in 1758. Ann had an unhappy childhood and marriage and her experiences greatly influenced her religious beliefs. After a period of persecution she came to the conviction (she would have said that she had had a vision) that she should lead a band to America to develop a proper society in a land not encrusted with prejudice and intolerance.

Accordingly she led a group of eight persons to America in 1774 and left the English remnant to drop quietly from sight. Her group found it necessary to separate and work for two years in preparation for their united venture - a communal domestic establishment, at present-day Watervliet, New York.

What beliefs and principles led these people into this unusual experiment in a strange land? Mother Ann, as she was called, looked about and saw much trouble resulting from greed. The elimination of greed by communal ownership of all the property of the group was her first principle. Sex seemed to her to be the mainspring of many evils, and her second principle was to sublimate and overcome it by celibacy. The third was humility, the

practice of which was to avoid the damaging consequences of personal pride.

These fundamental ideas were overlain with a humanitarian point of view, a sincere pacifism based on the belief that every form of strife and violence was unchristian, profound respect for the dignity of man, a sense of the immediacy of God, and a passionate belief in the dignity of labor. They had no distinct body of theology—the essence of their theological thinking being a pietistic interpretation of the King James Version of the Bible—but much of their everyday religion was expressed in their often repeated maxim: “Hands to work and hearts to God.”

An English group, beginning their efforts along peculiar lines in 1776 as the colonists were drawing swords with England, they found an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. Persisting, in spite of persecution, they grew, and in time they had seventeen well-organized communities in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky; two smaller settlements were absorbed by the major Ohio communities, and near the close of the last century two communities were established in the deep South, at White Oak, Georgia, and near Ashton, Osceola County, Florida.

The overall organization was under the general direction of what was termed the “Ministry,” but there was a certain responsibility and independence for each of the units or communities, which commonly adopted a spiritual name such as “The Valley of Gods Pleasure,” “Valley of Wisdom,” or “Olive Branch,” as the Osceola community was styled. Land was owned in common and each person had his or her responsibility to work for the good of all. In varying degrees they kept to themselves to preserve and strengthen their spiritual convictions, but in all cases they maintained a pleasant but proper contact with what they termed “the world.” On a material plane they sought to be as nearly self-sufficient as practicable, and they produced goods for sale according to the talents of their members and the resources of their communities. All farmed, some produced garden seeds, some produced medicinal and culinary herbs, and many made furniture. The Osceola County group near Ashton relied chiefly on the production of pineapples, citrus fruits, vegetables, fish, and later, timber and cattle.

Work was a part of their religion, but the more customary forms of spiritual expression were the especial charge of selected

groups in the organization, although a simple intense piety was the charge of all. New members signed a novitiate covenant and after a time signed the full covenant of all those who had been "gathered," as they expressed it. They practiced their simple religion with a distinct lack of ostentation and a kindliness of spirit which endeared them to their neighbors, once they were understood. The Shakers, using a devoted corps of workers and a highly cooperative system of division of labor, were able, in the period before the Civil War, to hold their own in the rural and semi-industrialized situation of the day. With a steady, devoted group of workers, whose primary aim was spiritual not monetary, they prospered in both realms, reaching a high point somewhere near the close of the Civil War with a total membership of about six thousand adherents. Subsequently they declined until at present there are three communities with about forty members. It was in the declining days of the order that the Southern experiments were undertaken.

Whatever the immediate motivation, a small delegation came from the Watervliet Community near the Albany, New York, area in 1894 to establish a group in the salubrious southern climate. Benjamin Gates appears to have been the leader of this band which included Andrew Barrett and Charles Weed. This advance guard apparently found temporary quarters in or near the village of Narcoossee, Osceola County, Florida, a village which is about two miles from the property which the Shakers were soon to buy.¹ Brother Andrew Barrett wrote from Narcoossee on January 20, 1896, that he feared they were not building "a spiritual household as well as the temporal." The question of land speculation was apparently coming to the fore. He continued, "When I see the greed of money step in and engross our whole attention I begin to think we have forgotten the primary object of our *exit* into *Florida*. . . . To me this was not intended as merely a *speculative scheme* for a quiet and comfortable home with a chance to make a few dollars to still keep the thing a running. If God is in it I don't believe he wants any such Business."²

1. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, November 26, 1909; *National Tribune*, July 8, 1909; Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Florida, to Brother Alonzo [Hollister], May 31, November 1, 1909, Cathcart Shaker Collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Unless otherwise stated, all manuscripts cited are from this source.

2. Andrew [Barrett], Narcoossee, Florida, to Elder Joseph [Holder] Jan. 30, 1896.

Brother Andrew was troubled and welcomed the forthcoming visit of Elder Isaac Anstaat and hoped for a visit from Elder Joseph Holder. He wrote that a visit from the latter "seems an imperative duty as a releasement to the minds and feelings of us all. We are here as it were, knowing nothing of what is to be our fate."

He wrote that when Gates "left this time, Nancy [Dow] spoke to him about another sister coming down to help in the work. He replied: 'I guess we won't have any more come down here to support for you don't know yourself [whether] you will be here a month longer.' . . . Now if this is the object of our staying here merely for a home I question very much whether there is much of the movement and sooner or later it will be a huge Elephant on our hands to look after and eat its head off- and finally die of the dry rot as some of our other great possessions have and are doing."

Elder Isaac Anstaat did come (but not Holder) and on November 2, 1896, bought a tract of land from the Disston Land Company-perhaps the prospective land deal which had caused Brother Andrew such soul searching. For \$94,500, receipt of which was acknowledged, this company, which had secured an enormous acreage in Florida, sold to Anstaat (without any reference to the Shaker organization) a total of 7,046 35/100 acres in Osceola County, comprising fractional sections, 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, and 13, sections 4, 8, and 9, and 280 acres of section 17 in Tier 26S., Range 31E. This lay some twelve miles southeast of Kissimmee and included a number of lakes: Trout Lake, Lake Lizzie, Live Oak Lake, Sardine Lake and the upper portion of Alligator Lake. Later surveys to correct errors changed these exact locations to some extent.³

On this large tract was located the Shaker "Colony" - a common designation which befitted its seeming dependent status. They chose to live on section 8, near Live Oak Lake, where the Billy B. ranch is now located. The two large cottages which they built (one for the women and one for the men) were where Mr. Beck's house is now, on the south side of Route 192 just east of Ashton. Much of the area was either in lake or swamp, or was covered with heavy vegetation requiring extensive clear-

3. Osceola County Deed Record Book "O", 233-235.

ing. As a result of this circumstance and the small number of persons in the colony, only a small portion of the land was put in cultivation by the Shakers. The soil was good and the Shakers, here as elsewhere, were excellent farmers. The lakes were teeming with fish; and game, especially deer, turkey, and quail were common.⁴

Spiritual matters were of more importance to the Shakers than temporal possessions but the latter are easier to measure. Furthermore, since it was one of the cardinal Shaker principles to give their "hands to work and hearts to God," work for the sustenance of their way of life and beliefs was an integral part of their religion. During these early years Benjamin Gates, said to be the oldest member of all the Shaker communities, was the leader of what was referred to locally as the Narcoossee Colony. Later, when the Ashton station was built on the Sugar Belt Railroad, the location was commonly given as Ashton. Although his name does not appear in the transaction, Gates was in the colony at the time of the purchase of the Disston land. He left for a time soon after and he journeyed back and forth to the north frequently. The Kissimmee newspaper frequently spoke of his coming to town, referring to him as "the Shaker," or "the venerable Shaker," or "the Shaker of Narcoossee," or "prominent citizen of Narcoossee," but always with a favorable connotation.

The Shaker publication, *The Manifesto*, described the establishment in the following "selected" quotation, apparently from a non-Shaker:

In Runnymede Township, one mile from Ashton station on the Sugar Belt Railway, lies the splendid domain of the Shaker Colony known as Olive Branch. To call it a farm would belittle the place in a section where farms are so small as here, for it contains nearly seven thousand acres of which sixteen hundred are enclosed with a substantial fence and arrangements are about completed for fencing as much more.

. . . The writer recently inspected the place through an invitation from the business manager, Mr. Benjamin Gates and came away convinced it only needed the patient, intelligent industry manifested here to make farm life not only a delightful, but a remunerative occupation. In the grounds

4. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, April 21, 1899; interview with Will Tyson.

connected with the house and business office are orange, peach, apricot and persimmon trees with a large number of flowering plants. It seems to be the policy of this community to unite the beautiful with the practical; so you find here fruit trees, vines, shrubs and flowering bulbs all in one group relieving the lawn of that stiffness noticed in public parks. An irrigating plant supplies the five acres immediately adjoining the house. For field crops they are this season growing Irish and sweet potatoes, cane, velvet beans, cow peas, beggar weed, rice and pumpkins. All of them look well, the cane being remarkably good.

The design of the community has always been to make cattle growing the great industry, and for this the place is admirably fitted. It has numerous and abundant water for every pasture. Stockmen who have had cattle on this range claim it is one of the best in Florida. At present there are about nine hundred head of cattle in the portion enclosed. With the additional pasture to be enclosed this fall they can carry 2000 head.⁵

Andrew Barrett, a well-respected brother who was to become the head of the colony before he went to Union Village, Ohio, in 1902, was the right-hand man of Gates. Charles Weed, Nancy Dow, Elizabeth A. Sears, and Amanda Tiffany were in the group at or about the time of the land purchase. This small band, augmented from time to time, carried on both the spiritual and workaday affairs, but at no time did the resident population of the colony exceed a dozen and indeed we cannot document even that small number.

Honest work was a traditional feature of Shaker religion and the Olive Branch colony in Osceola County was no exception. During the early part of their operation, emphasis was placed on fruit culture with some commercial fishing. Later they turned somewhat more to cattle and timber. Of all their products the Shakers were most famous for their pineapples, which were at first the principal commercial crop. Within two years of their purchase of the Shaker tract, they attracted newspaper notice by attempting to propagate a crownless pineapple sport and in 1899 Gates was investigating a system to protect the growing of pineapples at the Shaker colony. As early as 1901 they were sending pineapple plants to Cuba and the local newspaper commented in 1898, "The Colony is putting out a new pinery covering about an

5. *The Manifesto*, XXVI (October, 1898), 153-154.

acre. The pines raised by these people are recognized as being the finest grown in this section which reputation has justly been earned." ⁶ By 1904 they were building a new pinery shed and in August, 1906, they were selling from 300 to 400 pineapples each week at Kissimmee, and they expected to have about a hundred pines a week until Christmas and a small production until March. These, which were of the smooth, Cayenne variety, were from a pinery of four-fifths of an acre which in that year grossed \$750. The local editor commented, "The Shakers have an established reputation of furnishing only the best of everything which they grow or manufacture and their pineapples are fully up to this standard."

This same high quality won for their pineapples a gold medal at the Jamestown Exposition in 1907. The cultivation of pineapples continued to be an important part of their crop until the end of their Osceola County enterprises. ⁷

After the first few years they began the cultivation of bananas. In 1908 they had a patch of 150 plants and were planning to build a protective fence ten feet high on the north and west sides. They were prepared to build fires of "rosin" to protect the plants if the necessity arose. The next year they cleared and fenced five acres of new land and set it to 1,500 banana plants. The freeze of the winter of 1909-1910 hindered this crop but in 1915 and 1924 this patch at the east end of Live Oak Lake was described as a twenty-acre banana plantation. ⁸

During the period of the Osceola County Shakers' greatest activity, from about 1904 to 1910, their letters and local newspaper accounts comment on the fruit and vegetables being raised -oranges, peaches, watermelons, strawberries, blackberries, mulberries, onions, potatoes, corn, and vegetables. ⁹ Much of this

6. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, November 25, 1898; October 13, December 22, 1899; April 29, 1904; May 28, October 18, 1908.

7. Andrew, Narcoossee, Florida, to Elder Joseph, Feb., 1900; July 14, 1901; Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Florida, to Brother Alonzo, May 30, 1904; August 12, 1906; April 1, November 1, 1909; *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, August 3, September 21, November 9, 1906; *National Tribune*, March 8, 1909.

8. Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Florida, to Brother Alonzo, August 9, November 22, December 18, 1908; April 1, May 9, 31, 1909; November 27, 1910; *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, Feb. 4, June 10, 1911; Osceola County Deed Record Book 39, 638; Bk. 56, 575; Ezra J. Stewart in *National Tribune*, July 8, 1909.

9. Ezra J. Stewart to Brother Alonzo, May 30, 1904; October 6, 1907; May 28, November 22, December 19, 27, 1908; May 31, November

produce was sold in Kissimmee, and in St. Cloud, where the Shakers maintained the most cordial relations with the veterans who had established this thriving community at the foot of East Tohopekaliga Lake. Stewart writes, "I go to St. Cloud once or twice a week with a load of provisions and yesterday had on, besides honey and syrup, cabbage, radishes, turnips, eggs, mulberries and banana plants all of which sell readily nowadays. The old soldier is very loyal to his friends and since we have helped them boom St. Cloud they buy freely whatever we have to offer."¹⁰

Living on and among a number of lakes, it was natural that the Shakers should turn to fishing. Elder Egbert Gillette handled the fishing about 1907-1909, while Stewart managed the other affairs. Sometimes alone, or with four hired men, he fished regularly and in one morning caught 2,800 pounds of fish. After supplying their own table they shipped fish from the local station at Ashton or from Kissimmee. On one occasion they caught a ten-foot alligator and sold its hide for \$18.75.¹¹

The summer of 1909 appears to have been the high point in the life of the Olive Branch Shaker Community in many ways. Stewart wrote in November 27, 1910, that he had been depressed for many weeks, adding, "I have been busy since arriving home as we have had a series of mishaps, and new means of making a living have been inaugurated. Between the freeze of last winter and the storm of recent days our fruit business was knocked sky high. [We are] now depending on cattle, lumber and wood business."

They had installed in 1904 a small sawmill with a capacity of from 2,000 to 4,000 feet per day, a great convenience in supplying the local demand for lumber. The next year, for a time, they were sawing about two days a week for a neighbor and continued to saw for themselves and the neighborhood. In addition they were interested to some extent in turpentine for a time.¹²

1, 1909; May 1, 1911; *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, June 8, 1906; June 10, 1910.

10. Ezra J. Stewart to Bro. Alonzo, May 9, 1909; *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, June 8, August 3, September 21, November 9, 1906.

11. Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Fla. to Bro. Alonzo, August 12, 1906; October 6, 1907; March 16, April 1, May 17, 28, 1908; Dr. Charles A. Graves, Estero, Fla., to Ezra J. Stewart, September 29, 1907.

12. Ezra J. Stewart to Bro. Alonzo, May 30, 1904; October 6, 1907; November 27, 1910; Elizabeth A. Sears, Ashton, Fla., to the minis-

Mention should be made of the relationship of the Shakers of Osceola County with another religious group, the Koreshan Unity, at Estero in Lee County, Florida. This organization had been founded there in 1894 by Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, who brought the nucleus of the group from his home in Chicago and who convinced his disciples that he was immortal. Like the Shakers, the Koreshans practiced celibacy and communal ownership of property and held a belief somewhat similar to the Shaker concept of a male-female godship, but here the resemblance ceased. The Koreshans professed a belief in reincarnation and seem to have attracted a strange lot of followers, many of whom held peculiar beliefs regarding the form of the world, life, etc. Because of a general agreement in some fields, each community was interested in the other and there was much visiting between them. At one time, in 1908, Ezra Stewart spoke of the Koreshan movement as a "racket" but the Shakers supplied information regarding their own beliefs and in 1909 Stewart wrote that "indications are that we may gather some of them" (i.e., receive them as members).

Interest among the Koreshans in Shakerism seemed to increase as dissension arose at Estero, yet only one of their adherents, Mary E. Daniels, joined the Shaker community. Generally the Shakers were sympathetic but cautious in regard to the Koreshans. For example, Edgar S. Peissert was furnished a copy of the Shaker novitiate covenant and given an invitation to visit. He indicated that he was in thorough accord with the covenant. Yet when he arrived he was found quite unacceptable. The point of view of the Shakers in such matters may be seen from the comment of Ezra J. Stewart who wrote in May, 1901, "As a result of an interview with the elders here . . . [it was thought best] that Edgar should depart [for Estero] next morning by train . . . as his views were found to be quite different from ours . . . He evidently hoped to set up a little kingdom here with himself as leader. [He] wears finger rings, and has much distaste for work, altho fairly strong and in good health".¹³

try, November 19, 1905; *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, April 29, 1904. Mr. Young Tindall of Kissimmee recalls that the Shakers used the "J.V." brand and one other.

13. Ezra J. Stewart to Bro. Alonzo, May 30, 1904; October 6, 1906; September 29, October 6, 1907; April 1, October 18, November 22, 1908; April 1, May 9, 20, 31, 1909; April 17, 1910, May 1, 1911; Dr. Charles A. Graves, Estero, Fla. to Ezra J. Stewart, September 29, 1907.

The Shakers, in Florida as elsewhere, did not become a cloistered group, forsaking all contacts with the "world" as they put it. While they maintained the special standards and procedures of discipline in their own establishment, they cooperated with their neighbors, occasionally hired laborers from the "world," and bought from and sold to outsiders. Perhaps the small size of the community in Osceola County made contacts with the outside greater than in many of the older and larger Shaker groups.

In 1908 Elder Ezra J. Stewart was hired by the county commissioners to go to Tampa and take charge of the county exhibit at the State Fair. The Shakers displayed pineapples and syrup while other farmers sent fruit, vegetables, and fish. While conscientiously looking after the exhibit, Stewart found opportunity to discuss religion and sociological questions with many persons and some of the contacts with the Koreshan Unity members arose from this trip. On one occasion he wrote that he expected to attend revival services at the Methodist Church.

One of Stewart's most interesting contacts at the State Fair was with Carrie Nation, whom he had the pleasure of escorting through many of the exhibits. He seems to have had a mixture of admiration for her courage and her principles - commenting, "She reminds me more of Mother Ann than any woman I have ever met," - and an amused kind of tolerance of some of her actions. She constantly admonished smokers-and in Tampa, the cigar center, she had a field day. He related that "while in the fair building I saw her assist in removing a cigar from a man's mouth, throw it on the ground, and stamp it to pieces. He said, 'Madam, that cigar cost me 15 cts.' She replied, 'Yes and it would have used up 15 cts. worth of your brain had you finished smoking it.'" She demanded that pictures of nude or near-nude women on display at the fair be removed and "visited saloons . . . and handed them out an idea or two."

To Stewart's invitation to visit the Shakers, whose beliefs he explained, she replied, "Can you get me an auditorium? I must have people to speak to." Stewart noted that Miss Nation did not "comprehend the use of celibacy" and thought it likely that there would be some discussion of it when she visited the Koreshans at Estero - a celibate group.

He commended her for her instruction on the sex question and commented that "she seems not to lack courage or strength

to attack and rebuke anyone if they happen to trespass in regard to cigars, etc. right in the street. [She] has the appearance of a dear old mother whose interest are for the wellfare [sic] of her children. One of her expressions is 'Arrest that thought!' ”¹⁴

Stewart reported that she “is down on [T.R.] Roosevelt. She says every nation is welcome at the White House but Carrie. She says he cries peace, peace, then war, war and is too much given to bear hunting.”

Even after his comments in regard to Carrie Nation, it is somewhat surprising to find him commending Bernarr Macfadden and sending to his colleague, Brother Alonzo, a copy of the magazine *Physical Culture* with the comment that it “is good reading. He teaches sex purity. That is cohabitation for offspring only. [He] is doing a great deal to instruct young men and women regarding sexual matters and how to conserve their forces instead of wasting them in secret vice, etc. He is now being prosecuted by Anthony Comstock for trying to open the eyes of the people in regard to sexual matters.”¹⁵

It is an ironic circumstance that the kindly Shakers, who eschewed the law and who had hitherto never been called to answer a criminal charge in Florida should have received their most widespread notice from the “mercy killing” of Sadie Marchant, who, in the last stages of tuberculosis, had asked for and received chloroform at the hand of Brother Egbert Gillette on August 22, 1911. A consideration of this case covers many facets of Shaker attitudes, customs, and beliefs and the regard in which the Shakers were held by the community.

The Sadie Marchant story begins with the tuberculosis sanatorium started at Narcoossee, between East Lake and Lake Hendon, by Dr. John A. Ennis and placed in use during the winter of 1904-05. The sponsorship was broadened into an association of which Sister Elizabeth A. Sears of the Shaker Community was vice-president and a conscientious supporter. Dr. Ennis attested that Sister Sears had been “a sister truly to many an invalid in our camp. She has never been absent from a meeting of the board; never failed to cheer us up in our darkest hour.”¹⁶

14. Ezra J. Stewart, Tampa, Fla. to Bro. Alonzo, February 9, 1908.

15. Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Fla. to Bro. Alonzo, November 1, 1909.

16. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, January 19, 1906; August 13, 1909. The organization was reported to be a legal branch of a national associa-

The notices regarding this home came to the attention of Sadie Marchant in Providence, Rhode Island. The doctors had declared her to be in an advanced stage of tuberculosis with only four months to live. She came to Narcoossee on January 23, 1905, and remained there for some months. When other patients returned to their northern homes Sadie remained, since she was penniless. At the urgent solicitation of Dr. Ennis, the Shakers, largely through the influence of Elder Egbert Gillette took her in although they knew her condition. She was given no duties to perform but did such work as she felt she could do.

Such food was prepared for her as was considered best for one in her condition and she was frequently carried on excursions on the lake and into the woods in the hope that the ravages of the disease might be stayed, the Shakers even going to the expense of buying a gentle pony for her to ride, and she was given the privileges of going when and where she pleased. The work of caring for Sadie Marchant fell mostly upon Sister Elizabeth A. Sears and Brother Egbert Gillette and many were the occasions when these two people neglected their duties on the farm to perform a kindness for their unfortunate sister. There was never a time during this more than six years that Sadie Marchant did not suffer from pain, which at times was so intense that she attempted suicide and on every occasion she was prevented from accomplishing her purpose and tenderly nursed until she was able to be up and around.¹⁷

Unfortunately the disease was not arrested and on August 20, 1911, the crisis came. In the last stages of her illness she suffered intensely and she asked Brother Gillette and Sister Sears to kill her to end her misery. At first Gillette gave her an opiate and then a ght dose of chloroform. She asked for a second and final application of chloroform, and while under its influence she died.

When this information reached the ears of the authorities, they investigated. Under the law they had no choice but to ar-

tion, The Tribune Sunshine Society of New York. It existed as a corporation from 1906 to August 1, 1909 when the institution was transferred to the State of Florida.

17. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, September 1, 1911. See also the issues of January 19, 1906 and August 13, 1909. The account given here was confirmed in a personal interview with Will Tyson who worked with the Shakers during this period and who managed their property later.

rest Gillette and Elizabeth A. Sears. The word was out and the debate began. New York, Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati and other papers carried the story. Were they justified in shortening her life in this way to ease her pain even in an admittedly hopeless case?

Local reaction was immediate and decisive. It is well expressed by the *Kissimmee Valley Gazette* in this way:

The Shakers . . . are well regarded as the personification of honesty, uprightness and peacefulness. They never take part in politics, never have use of the courts, treat all people with respect and reverence, and never commit a dishonest act or an infringement of the law. Therefore it is hard for our people to believe that anything but love could prompt these good people to take the life of one of their number. In all the years the Shakers have lived in this community this is the first time any of them have been called on to answer a criminal charge. They know nought but right, their religion teaches them to fear God and love their fellow men and they live up fully to their teaching. They tell the truth at all times and under all circumstances, let the result be what it will, and in this instance, we believe, they have lived up to their reputation. There is nothing but sympathy expressed on every hand for these unfortunate people even though they have committed one of the gravest offenses in the eyes of the law -that of taking the life of a fellow being.¹⁸

They have lived at peace with their neighbors and have never been before the courts of this country for an infraction of the law. They are honest, truthful and worship God and love all mankind. They never take part in politics and the latch-string always hangs on the outside to anyone in distress. They do not incur any debts but buy and sell on a cash basis and their word is as good as any gold. . . .¹⁹

We doubt if ever before a man was placed in jail and denied bond that the people of his community were as unanimous in their belief of his innocence of evil intent as they are in this case. The County Commissioners met in this city Monday and without exception expressed themselves as favoring the release of the brother on a nominal bond or even on his own word to appear for trial. . . . And that opinion is expressed on every hand . . . for there is not a jury in Florida that would convict him of a greater crime than technical manslaughter. . . . Would that Osceola County had ten thousand such people within its borders.²⁰

18. September 1, 1911.

19. September 29, 1911.

20. October 6, 1911.

The case came up for discussion before a conference of governors, and Governor Gilchrist of Florida expressed the opinion that the minds of the people were such that the accused would not be convicted, and added, "I doubt whether they will ever be indicted." Such was to be the case. Will Tyson now recalls that even when Gillette was nominally held in jail he was given the utmost freedom. The grand jury refused to indict either of the parties but the state's attorney insisted that both be held without bail. He was overruled and Gillette, who found many willing bondsmen left for the Shaker community on December 5, 1911. The judge refused to hold Sister Sears. In January, the chief witness for the state suggested that the charges be dismissed, which was subsequently done.²¹

It can scarcely be said that the Marchant case caused the abandonment of the Florida Shaker venture but there was certainly little energy put into it after that time, and in some two or three years it was to be closed. Will Tyson recalls that there never were more than "a dozen or so members at the most," and available records indicate that the number at any one time was much smaller. Their numbers were small indeed and the parent organization was declining. The Osceola County community and the White Oak colony in adjacent Georgia represent the last efforts of this religious group to extend its territorial limits - into what was thought to be a more propitious climate than that enjoyed by the older communities to the north.

In 1908 Stewart bewailed the fact that they were then receiving no applications for membership and that the colony consisted of four old members and "our proselyte, Sister Sadie." The following year there was a burst of interest and several came to Olive Branch with the apparent intention of joining the order, but in 1910 Stewart wrote that "we are getting to be a mere handful sustained by faith in great principles."²²

At the time of the trial the local newspaper reported that while they cultivated sugar cane, bananas, pineapples and citrus fruits "so far [they] have been unable to clear more than thirty or forty acres of land as their members have at all times been few, there being only four there at the present time."²³ Elder Ezra J.

21. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, December 8, 1911, January 12, 1912.

22. Ezra J. Stewart, Ashton, Fla., to Bro. Alonzo, May 9, 31, 1909; April 17, 1910.

23. *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, September 29, 1911.

Stewart, who was one of the mainstays of the community is a strange figure. He came to the Olive Branch Community in 1902 from the Mt. Lebanon group from whence he had published a religious article in the *Manifesto*, and was there until after the dissolution. Seemingly out of keeping with the Shaker concept, he wrote to his old friend Brother Alonzo Hollister at Mt. Lebanon in 1908, "As you know I have always entertained grand notions about living in a fine house but thus far circumstances and the devil have conspired to thwart all aspirations in that direction. Perhaps we poor folks will have an inning some of these fine days after all."²⁴ Although a member of a communal organization at the time, Stewart bought two lots in St. Cloud in 1910, and in 1915 and 1917 bought other lots in the Shaker Colony Subdivision. He had remained for a year or so after the formal dissolution, apparently in charge. He appears to have gone to Tampa by 1924, when as a resident of Hillsborough County he bought the east half of section 4 of the Shaker tract in Osceola County. From 1924 to 1931 he bought and sold property in Tampa, and owned and managed an apartment house there, seemingly until 1934.²⁵

In the absence of day-by-day accounts, such as are available for other Shaker communities, we must rely largely upon the official records in preparing an account of the break-up of the Osceola County venture. Section 4 of the Shaker tract was sold to Clifford W. Bruns and his brother-in-law, a Mr. Crouse from Indiana and platted as the "Shaker Colony Subdivision" in 1913. In 1914 Isaac Anstaat, in whose name the land was still held, deeded to Clifford W. Bruns and others. the larger part of the Shaker holdings, apparently for \$97,680, but on action of November 21, 1917, the mortgaged lands - 5,765.9 acres (the entire tract minus sections 4 and 8 and 20 acres of Section 9) were taken over by James A. Van Voast of Schenectady, New York, trustee for the Shakers, for \$85,000, apparently the outstanding indebtedness. By a series of clearing transactions from 1915 to 1924 the entire tract, except Section 4, was placed in the hands of Sister Emma J. Neale, as trustee. On April 15, 1924, a group of investors, including Mr. and Mrs. George M. Rickard and Dr.

24. *Ibid.*, November 22.

25. Deed Books, Hillsborough County, Fla.; *Tampa City Directories*, 1922-1936; recollection of Will Tyson.

Charles Ross of Alliance, Ohio, under the name of the "Shaker Land Company" bought the land which had been held by Van Voast. This Company, so Will Tyson recalls, sold land to the amount of \$150,000 but failed to secure a safe margin of down payment. When the land boom collapsed in the late 1920's the land again went back to the Shakers.

By 1924 the property still remaining in Shaker hands seems to have been largely in the care of Will Tyson, a non-Shaker who had worked for them for many years and who was selected to look after Section 8 for them. As late as August, 1933, Sister Emma J. Neale wrote to Tyson asking him to continue to look after their Florida property as he had been doing. She added, "I would sell the property now but see no good chance." Egbert Gillette, who had left the fold and married Mabel Marston after the dissolution of the colony and who was living nearby, joined Tyson in recommending certain improvements. The final land settlement seems indistinct but that is somewhat beside the point - the venture was over. Stewart was to go to Tampa. Egbert Gillette continued to live in the country. Will Tyson recalls that others joined one of the New York groups but the identity or even the existence of such persons is uncertain.

Perhaps the most suitable comment might be that which Eldress Emma King made to the writer on one occasion. She said in effect that the few remaining Shakers realized that in numbers they were a declining order, and were no longer capable of sustaining themselves by their current efforts, that they were firm in the belief that their spiritual principles and values were sound, and that they would again be recognized and cherished and become an influence in the world.

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26. Osceola County Deed Record Book, "O", 233-235; Bk. 39, 638; Bk. 47, 78-79; Bk. 56, 55-59, 636-637; Flat Book, No. 1, Plat of Shaker Colony Subdivision; personal interviews with Will Tyson and James Johnson.
 27. Sister Emma J. Neale, Mt. Lebanon, N. Y. to William P. Tyson, May 30, June 13, December 15, 1924; Bennie DaRoo, Mt. Lebanon, N. Y. to Tyson, April 9, 1931 - letters in the possession of Tyson, St. Cloud, Fla.