



From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands: A Survey of the Industries

M. Stephen Miller

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Shaker communities grew and thrived during a period of tremendous social and cultural changes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. While the Shakers have traditionally been seen as standing apart from these developments, more recent scholarship has emphasized the degree to which the Shakers were actively engaged with the world and times. One of the most vital areas of intersection was the economic realm, where the Shakers produced and marketed a wide variety of products.

From Shaker Lands and Shaker Hands documents the surprising breadth and depth of the industries pursued by the Shaker communities, from the well-known Shaker chairs to seeds, herbal medicines, textiles, and foodstuffs. While much has been written about Shaker philosophy and its manifestation in their material culture, scant attention has been paid to the vibrant economic life needed to support their communal way of life. As this collection shows, each community engaged in a broad range of commercial activities, astutely marketing not only the products of their farms and craft shops, but also establishing a level of quality widely associated with the word “Shaker.”

This lavishly illustrated, full-color book documents the products, their sophisticated packaging, and the marketing strategies employed by the Shakers over a span of two hundred years. In addition to essays written by Miller, Gerard C. Wertkin, Director Emeritus of the American Folk Art Museum, and historian Stephen Paterwic—placing the Shakers and their commercial activity in appropriate cultural and historical context—the book includes a unique statement of belief from the remaining Believers at Sabbathday Lake, Maine.

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