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## **THE SHAKERS IN 1853**

### **Two Busy Summer Days At the Church Family by Henry Cumings**

The time is 1853. The season is haying time, July 18. All rise at the ringing of the bell at half past four. The clothes are neatly stripped from the beds and spread on the backs of chairs, the beds stirred up and left to air. Then the occupants of each room kneel together in a few moments of silent prayer; then all repair to their various places of employ or every day abode, which were known as shops, as farmers' shop, garden shop, broom shop, joiners' shop, etc. Various chores occupy the time till breakfast, some grind scythes, some care for the teams, and all the various things that need care. The sisters are in the kitchen, and doing the chamber work, and the milking and dairy work, etc.

The bell rings ten minutes before six and all repair to the waiting rooms in the stone dwelling house, and at 6 o'clock sharp are called to the dining room by the ringing of a hand bell. All file into the dining room, the brothers on one side, sisters on the other, and take their places at four long tables, which each seat twenty persons. The brethren occupy the north and the sisters the south end of the dining room, which is about 30x50 feet.

The tables are all set in squares of four, each square being furnished with all the kinds of food constituting the meal. Each person had a particular place and all quickly step into their own place; then all quietly knelt for a moment of silent prayer, the Elder taking the initiative. Then all quickly seated themselves and proceeded to eat. This was done in profound silence, no talking, or even whispering, allowed. The food was plain but excellent in quality: usually meat of some kind with potatoes, white and brown bread, apple sauce, or pickles, and perhaps doughnuts, with tea or coffee. Lettuce, asparagus, cucumbers, tomatoes, etc., in their season. About fifteen minutes were taken at a meal, all waiting until all were done, then all rising together and again kneeling in silent prayer.

Then all file out through two doors and proceed at once to the labor of the day. All take their scythes and proceed to the field already decided on by the head farmer, who is the boss in the hay field.

As no hired help were employed, it is the custom for all the help from all the trades to turn out for haying, and none are exempted, but two or three who were needed in the garden.

The field this day was to be a part of the great field - the 50-acre lot on the right hand side of the road. There was a gate opening from the road into this field, just where the road makes quite a curve to the eastward; and here we struck in.

Brother Simeon Childs leads as usual. He is a man about 50 years of age, sturdy and robust of build, though rather spare with not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones. He seems rather slow or moderate in his gait and movements, but he sets the stroke for the whole company and sets it for all day, and none of the youngsters are presumptuous enough to question his right, or ability to do so. Next to him follows the boss farmer, Geo. Slow, who is only slow in name, about 6 feet tall, broad shouldered, full chested, a blonde, ruddy complexion, auburn hair, a regular Tueton, jolly good

companion.

Next follow four brothers, Hosea, John, Seth and Williamson Bradford. There are also in the field four younger brothers, Rufus, David, Amos and Caleb, and also two cousins, Francis and Milton.

Next comes the Elder, Orville Dyer. Many will remember him, 6 feet 3 inches in height and a square built, well proportioned man, his every motion indicates the reserve force of his fine physique. Next him (sic) comes a small but wiry little man, Jasper Hart, about 5 feet 3, weighing only about 120 lbs. but every inch a man.

The last man I will introduce personally is Chase Allard, a man of powerful muscular build, about 5 feet 10 inches and weighing 185 lbs. He is the second Elder of the family and is said to be the strongest man in the society. After these come the younger and weaker men and boys, down to boys of 12 and 13 years old. When all have struck in there are thirty-five mowers. Besides there is the boys' company of about 15 boys with their caretaker, Sylvester Russell, who spread the hay evenly over the ground.

All do not keep in one squad, but gradually group into about three divisions, the front one of about twenty all swinging in unison and coming out square together at the corners, each one being just one stroke behind the one next in front of him.

The field taken consists of one-half of the great 50-acre field. It is an irregular parallelogram about 60 by 70 rods and is by actual measurement  $24 \frac{3}{4}$  acres. The grass is heavy on the whole of it, consisting of Timothy with some clover and Red Top and a little witch grass in places, but no daisy or other weeds.

When the first division reaches the starting point they are met by some of the good sisters with a light lunch of biscuit and butter and some nice cooling drink of gooseberry jelly. Then all strike in again.

By the time the rear division gets around to the starting point it is time to think of yesterday's cut, being the field of about 11 acres, between the buildings and the great field. About twelve of the younger and weaker hands are detailed to open the hay and get it ready for carting in the afternoon. Some of the other brethren, who are past mowing, etc., usually come out and help open the hay and help rake, etc., in the afternoon. Thus reduced the mowers swing around and a few minutes after 11 the last stroke is struck, and all repair to their shops to cool off and rest a bit for dinner.

At 11:30 the bell rings its first call and at 11:50 it rings again and all repair to the waiting room as in the morning. I shall not enter into the details of the dinner as it would be, mainly, the same as at breakfast.

After dinner the business is to take care of the hay of yesterday's cut and also to cock up that just mowed. At the time I am writing of, hay was cured much more than is generally the case now, requiring two good hay days.

Three teams are started to do the carting, three hands forming the crew of each team, one to pitch on, one to load, and one to rake after with a big drag rake which they used long before they were in the market. It also required several men to put up the hay for the teams to cart.

The rest of the help, men and boys, had the job of raking and cocking up grass just mown. This day two-horse rakes were started. The horse rake they used was one of their own invention and make, called the revolver, the men who operated it walking behind and dumping the hay in winnows by lifting up on the handles. A boy ten years old rode and guided the horse and two large boys followed with drag rakes to collect the

scatterings as the rake did not take the hay very clean; and it was the rule to do everything neatly and well.

One-horse rake was operated by John Bradford, who was its maker, the other by his cousin, Francis. Soon as the rakes were in operation the men and boys are scattered across the field, some cocking up the hay as the rakes gather it into winnows, and others raking up the leavings, trimming up the cocks, etc. Soon the field begins to look like a field covered with miniature tents.

In the meantime the carters are busy, but there is no great rush as only about eighteen loads are to be carted in this day. About 5 o'clock the last load goes to the barn and about the same time the hay is all raked up and cocked, and all proceed to their respective places. The bell rings at 5:30 and at 5:50 rings again and all go to supper, with the same routine as to breakfast and dinner.

After supper many of the young men and boys go to the lake for a bath and swim and all put on clean clothes. At 7:30 the bell rings again and all gather to the dwelling house (stone house). After waiting quietly for fifteen or twenty minutes, at the sound of a large hand bell all gather in the hall or meeting room, entering two and two, brethren by the west door, sisters by the east door. The Elders leading, all place themselves in ranks, the brethren in the northern half of the hall, sisters in the southern half; brethren and sisters facing each other, the front ranks being about six feet apart. Each one has his or her place and all quietly take their places. A hymn is sung, nearly all joining in it. Then the Elder quietly speaks of the labors of the day and how thankful all should feel for the blessing of God, that is so manifestly attending the worthy efforts of all to secure and store away the bountiful harvest. Then all kneel in silence; after a few moments one of the sisters strikes up the sweet refrain:

Sweet angels come nearer,  
O nearer, still nearer;  
Do list to our pleadings  
For strength from on high,  
This world's fleeting glories,  
Its riches, its honors  
The immortal spirit  
Can ne'er satisfy.

At the close of the song all rise, the meeting is dismissed, and all retire to their rooms and soon all are lost in the embrace of "nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."