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1

Shaker Education

Hosea Stout's father, Joseph, was a third-generation Quaker whose grandfather, Peter Stout, was so devout that he was known simply as "Peter the Quaker."¹ Joseph's parents, Samuel and Rachel, also were firmly entrenched in the religion, but one day after his twenty-second birthday, on July 18, 1795, Joseph was disowned by the Quakers for his activity in fighting Creek and Cherokee Indians with an east Tennessee militia.² He soon returned to his native North Carolina to live with his aunt, Pleasant Smith, and while there he fell in love with his first cousin, Pleasant's eighteen-year-old daughter Anna. As the relationship progressed, the mother was placed in a quandary because she, as a Quaker, could not sanction or even attend the wedding of her daughter to a non-Quaker, and Joseph, having been disowned, was no longer a member of the faith.

Under the circumstances, Joseph and Anna decided to elope, marrying on November 3, 1798.³ As a consequence, Anna also was disowned by the religion. Following their elopement, Joseph and Anna returned and were received by her mother, but the relationship was strained. Disowned by their religion, no longer welcome at home and undoubtedly poor, the young couple looked westward, across the Blue Ridge Mountains to east Tennessee.

Returning to his former environs was an obvious move for Joseph, since at least six of his siblings resided there.⁴ Moreover, Tennessee was granted statehood on June 1, 1796, as the threat of Indian warfare steadily disappeared and the number of free inhabitants exceeded sixty thousand, the minimum population that was considered essential to becoming a state.⁵ By 1798 various cessations of Indian land had been negotiated, resulting in large tracts of fresh and often fertile land becoming available for settlement. Between 1790 and 1800, Tennessee's growth rate exceeded that of the nation, as each successive Indian treaty opened up a new frontier. During that period the population in the state tripled,

from 35,691 to 105,602, as emigrants from the Atlantic states sought to take advantage of the cheap land, fertile soil, and milder climate that Tennessee offered.⁶ Yet its rapid population growth scarcely compared with that of the neighboring state of Kentucky, which was growing three times faster than Tennessee as settlers streamed through the Cumberland Gap into the region known as the Bluegrass.

Much of the land in Kentucky was similar to Tennessee, dominated by great deciduous forests dotted with majestic evergreens. Along the rivers in Kentucky there were great stands of canebrake—the only bamboo native to the United States—sometimes two to three miles wide and one hundred miles long, but the region that generated the most superlatives was the famed Bluegrass. Though it is actually green, when seen from a distance in the spring, its bluish-purple grass buds can, in large fields, give it a rich blue tinge.

Early pioneers found bluegrass growing on Kentucky's rich limestone soil, and traders began asking for the seed of the "blue grass from Kentucky." Felix Walker, who later became a US Congressman from North Carolina, wrote in 1775 of "the pleasing and rapturous appearance of the plains of Kentucky . . . covered with clover in full bloom, the woods abounding with wild game—turkeys so numerous that it might be said they appeared but one flock."⁷ In 1802, when French botanist Francois-Andre Michaux made a scientific expedition through the region, its population already was as great as seven of the original states of the union, though Kentucky didn't gain statehood—as a commonwealth—until June 1, 1792.⁸ Indeed, so many settled in the young state from other regions that Michaux noted, "perhaps there cannot be found ten individuals twenty-five years of age, who were born there."⁹

While in Tennessee, Joseph and Anna had five children—Rebecca, Sarah, Samuel (who died at a very young age), and twins Mary and Margaret.¹⁰ A few months after the birth of the twins, Joseph and Anna Stout joined the migration through the Cumberland Gap to Kentucky, settling in Madison County, where they had a daughter, Anna, and a son, Daniel, who like his brother Samuel died when he was very young.¹¹ They then moved to neighboring Mercer County, in the heart of the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky about five miles from the Shaker village of Pleasant Hill, where on September 18, 1810, their son Hosea was born.

Though widely considered to be an American institution, Shakerism actually began in England in 1747 as the outcome of a Quaker revival. Ann Lee (whose name was shortened from Lees when she settled in America) was an illiterate blacksmith's daughter from the slums of Manchester who at the age of twenty-two joined an obscure group of dissident Quakers. Members of the group were very animated in their religious expressions; a British newspaper reporter who attended a service in 1758—the year

Ann Lee joined the group—was so taken by the group's vigorous physical gyrations that he derisively called them "Shaking Quakers," from which the name Shakers derived.

Though Ann Lee married and had four children, each child died in infancy and her marriage to a heavy-handed, crude blacksmith was very unhappy. She walked the floors at night in an agony of remorse and became convinced that her miserable station in life was due to divine judgments on her sexual desires. She began to proclaim that "cohabitation of the sexes" was a cardinal sin and espoused a belief in celibacy.¹²

Mother Ann, as she became known after she assumed leadership of the sect, immigrated to America in 1774, settling in New York. Despite some defections after her death in 1784, the Society of Believers, as they called themselves, gained momentum and thrived in upstate New York and New England. Seeking to expand westward, on New Year's Day 1805 three strangely dressed Shaker men set out on a journey from Mt. Lebanon, New York, to southern Ohio and Kentucky.

The missionaries encountered their first success in Warren County, Ohio. Later that year, three farmers in Mercer County, Kentucky were converted; one of them, Elisha Thomas, subsequently donated 140 acres to the Believers near a creek known as Shawnee Run, a land replete with fertile soil, abundant fresh water, virgin timber, stone, and clay. Over the next several years another four thousand acres of some of the finest land in Mercer County were donated, on a rolling plateau high above the deeply slashed gorge of the palisades along the Kentucky River, providing the location for the village of Pleasant Hill.¹³

At the very moment the Pleasant Hill community began to succeed, Kentucky became deeply involved in the War of 1812.¹⁴ Kentuckians jumped into the conflict with great zeal but with little appreciation of the financial strain that the war would place upon the commonwealth.¹⁵ The war initially spurred economic prosperity in Kentucky, but by 1814, as the war began to wind down, financial difficulties threatened many with ruin. So it was with Joseph Stout, who about a year after the birth of their daughter Cynthia "had bad luck, from sickness and other misfortunes, which quite discouraged him; and induced him to put his children out."¹⁶

The Shaker practice of celibacy precluded growth through procreation; therefore they could expand their numbers only through conversion or adoption. Though the recruitment of orphans did not commence until 1833, the Shakers at Pleasant Hill were very willing to take in children when the opportunity presented itself.¹⁷ Having been disowned by their former Quaker religion, Joseph and Anna were not alarmed when their oldest daughter, sixteen-year-old Rebecca, joined the Shaker community in 1814, evidently of her own free will; of the other children (Sarah, Margaret, Mary, Hosea, and Cynthia) Hosea later recorded, "The

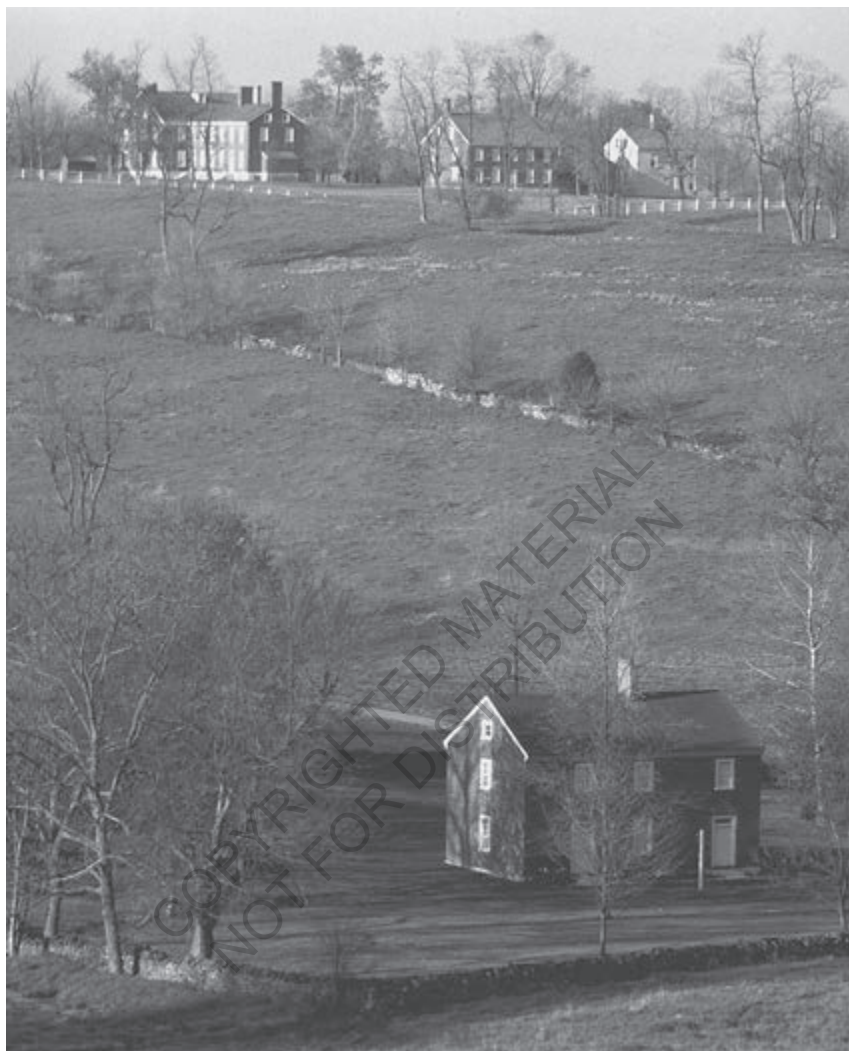


Figure 1.1. Pleasant Hill Community. Photo courtesy of Pleasant Hill Shaker Village.

Shakers, finding he was inclined to let them go, came and influenced him to let them have them, to go to school, accordingly all his children were taken by them.”¹⁸

Children entering Pleasant Hill were divided immediately by sexes, so Hosea was separated from his sisters and placed with a family of boys of his own age in one of the four communal “families.” Contact with his

sisters would have been minimal, since boys attended morning and evening devotional services, went to school and worked only with other boys and while eating sat in silence at tables separate from girls. Indeed, when Cynthia, the youngest of Hosea's sisters, died in 1815 at the age of three after a year at Pleasant Hill, Hosea saw "the funeral concourse of people marching to her burial" but evidently did not take part.¹⁹

From the start, children new to Pleasant Hill were drilled in the principles of Society discipline. Each day began very early—four o'clock in the summer and five in the winter—and every activity during the day was planned with precision. This was a shock to Hosea, who later wrote, "I had been, previous to this, allowed to run almost at large, to go where I pleased and make as much noise as I saw proper, which was not allowable with those who were disciplined and brought under the rigor of their rules."²⁰

Paramount in Society discipline was the confession of sins, the opportunities for which were plentiful. Children were "not allowed to fight and quarrel nor have any disputation among themselves. In playing they were not allowed to make much noise, nor go only on certain prescribed premises." Transgression of any rule was a sin that had to be confessed. Not long after his arrival at Pleasant Hill, certainly before his fifth birthday, Hosea was summoned to the house of John Shain, the superintendent of the large class of boys to which Hosea belonged. Shain asked him if it was time for the confession of his sins, to which an embarrassed Hosea answered that he did not know. The child's reluctance was overcome when Shain changed the interrogative into a command, and Hosea confessed for the first time in what became a nightly ritual:

From this time I had, as also all the rest of the boys, to confess our sins every night, so strict were we taught to confess the truth and tell all that we had done, that was wrong, that I have known sometimes to get up out of their beds and confess things which they had forgotten: not daring to let it go till the next night for fear they might die and the "Bad man" would get them. We would scroupulously tell all we had said or done through the day that was not according to the rules laid down, though it might cause us to get a severe reprimand and sometimes a moderate flogging.²¹

The subjects of discipline and punishment were prevalent in Stout's writings of his experiences at Pleasant Hill. The usual methods of punishment, he wrote, were whipping, being kept indoors during play time, and, worst of all, being placed "under the floor in a little dark hole dug

out for the purpose of putting roots &c in to keep them from the frost." The "little dark hole" was a root cellar, but it was terrifying by any name, especially with other scare tactics thrown in:

While there, if this did not humble us enough, they would frighten us with horrid stories about the "Bad man" coming and catching us. I have been almost scared out of my wits while in this dark and dreary place and would make any kind of a promise they would demand to be liberated and so would almost all the rest.²²

Despite the punishments and threats that he had to endure, Hosea had nothing but praise for Shaker approach to discipline as he reflected three decades later upon his years at Pleasant Hill. "The rules were necessary to keep a large company of boys in proper subordination," he pronounced and also stated, "I consider the regulations good and well adapted to keep a large number of boys in subjection." More importantly, and perhaps contemplating his own early family life, he wrote:

I have often thought if fathers and those who have the charge of families would adopt some of their rules and mode of discipline, it would be a great improvement to their peace and social happiness. Thus having good order and quietude instead of a continual scene of disobedience, bickering, strife, quarrelling, contradicting each other, bad language, backbiting and the like, and an eternal routine of ill manners, bad conduct &c. the example allways set by the parents or guardian.²³

High standards were set in all facets of daily life at Pleasant Hill. As Hosea grew older he was placed with a larger class of boys whose ages ranged from about eight to sixteen. In addition to play and school, where he learned to spell and read "tolerably well," each day included work, specifically braiding straw for hats. "It was astonishing to see the work we done," he wrote. Though kept busy, it was never to excess: "The times for our lessons, our brading and our play, was judiciously arraigned, not kept at either long enough to weary us." The children were also taught good manners, repeatedly using phrases such as "If you would be so kind," "I thank you kindly" and "You are kindly welcome."²⁴

Notably missing in the Shaker community, however, was the promotion of children's love for their parents; in fact, quite the opposite was

true. Hosea's mother made occasional visits to Pleasant Hill, bringing with her not only an infant son, Allen Joseph,²⁵ but also apples and small gifts for her children. On one occasion she asked Hosea to go outdoors with her for a private moment where she encouraged him "to be a good boy," but the loving request presented him with a dilemma:

I reluctantly went out with her and was in a hurry to go in again, least the other boys might think I loved her, for we were taught to spurn the idea of paternal affection. I did not yet realize the kind hand of maternal affection that was want to administer to me but deprived of the privelege only in this clandestine way.²⁶

Teaching children *not* to love their parents might seem radical, but the caretakers were obligated to make the children "future and dedicated Shakers," and it was in the best interest of the Society to keep them from returning to their family. Nevertheless, when Hosea's eighteen-year-old sister Sarah desired to return home in 1817, she was not prevented from doing so. It was an entirely different matter, however, when it came to Hosea.

A few months shy of his fourth birthday when he entered Pleasant Hill, Hosea grew to consider the Shaker community, not his father's house, to be his home. And thus on August 21, 1818, when he heard from other boys that "Old Jo. Stout" (as he and his friends called his father) was coming to visit, Hosea, sensing his father's intentions, ran and hid, only to be returned by Anthony Dunlavy, who had charge of Hosea's group of boys.²⁷

Joseph Stout requested to be allowed to take his son home for one week, saying that Hosea's mother was very anxious to see him. Dunlavy, however, concluded that Stout was disingenuous in his appeal and would not consent. Following a prolonged conversation with Dunlavy, Stout tried to persuade his son to go but to no avail.

That was enough for Joseph Stout, who decided to take matters into his own hands—quite literally—by picking up Hosea, setting him on his shoulders and walking off. "I screamed and cried as loud as I could," Hosea later wrote, "and tried to get away but, in vain." Many were aroused by the noise: the Sisters, the most earnest and vociferous of whom were Hosea's own sisters, echoed his cries while the men, who easily could have stopped him, offered no resistance, "it being contrary to their faith."²⁸

Joseph Stout lingered to mollify his daughters by vowing that he would return Hosea to the Shaker community the following Sabbath, but they remained unconvinced and at length Joseph picked up his son and

walked away. Hosea was terrified, for the Shakers at Pleasant Hill taught children in their charge that the “worldlings” had nothing to eat and that running away would lead to starvation. He therefore took notice of the surroundings as he traveled with his father through the countryside, harboring the plan of escaping at the first chance, but his hopes were crushed as they entered a deep forest:

At length we passed through a low bottom of sugar maple where the dark gloom which overshadowed me, caused such a lonesome and solitary feeling as I viewed this dark, cool, damp, wildering maze, as I sat on his shoulder and the cobwebs drawing over my face that I gave up the last and my lingering ferlorn hope of escape for I was affraid to pass alone through this trackless, and dismal forest.²⁹

Joseph reassured his son that he would have plenty to eat, but Hosea trusted more in the Shakers than in his father. Joseph also promised that Hosea would be returned to Pleasant Hill the next Sunday, but the pledge failed to calm the child, who was “almost in despair and began to weep and wail” due to his unhappy fate, fully convinced that he wouldn’t live that long anyway.³⁰

Notes

1. Teague, *Cane Creek: Mother of Meetings*, 36.
2. Disownment in Quaker society is the involuntary termination of membership in a meeting (congregation) due to acts that are contrary to established discipline. Reasons for disownment have changed over time, often reflecting contemporary societal mores. <http://trilogy.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/resources/glossary.php>
3. Stout, *The Autobiography of Hosea Stout*, 1.
4. Ibid., 2. According to Quaker records, Joseph’s siblings Mary, Rachel, David, Jacob, and Isaac were members of Lost Creek Monthly Meeting in Jefferson County, Tennessee.
5. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 149.
6. *Tennessee Blue Book*, 370.
7. Ranck, *Boonesborough, Its Founding, Pioneer Struggles, Indian Experiences, Transylvania Days and Revolutionary Annals*, appendix G.
8. Other commonwealths are Massachusetts, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.
9. Michaux, *Travels to the Westward of the Allegany Mountains*, 70.
10. Stout, *Autobiography*, 2. According to Hosea Stout family records at www.familysearch.org, the dates of birth were: Rebecca, May 20, 1798; Sarah, October 29, 1799; Samuel, 1802; twins Margaret and Mary, November 23, 1804.
11. Ibid. Anna was born December 22, 1806; Daniel was born in about 1808.

12. Houchens, "Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky," 264.
13. Ibid., 269.
14. Ibid., 12.
15. Hammack, *Kentucky and the Second American Revolution: The War of 1812*, 27–28.
16. Stout, *Autobiography*, 2. Cynthia was born April 12, 1812.
17. Ibid., 62–63.
18. Ibid. The children taken, excluding Rebecca who already was with the Shakers at Pleasant Hill, were Sarah, Margaret, Mary, Hosea, and Cynthia. Hosea's two brothers, Samuel and Daniel, had died previously.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 3. In his autobiography, Stout frequently used the term "bad man," obviously alluding to the "devil," as well as the term "bad place," which Stout identified as "hell."
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 5–6.
24. Ibid.
25. Allen Joseph Stout (who Hosea sometimes called Joseph Allen) was born December 5, 1815, in Danville, Kentucky. The first time Hosea saw his brother was on one of his mother's visits to Pleasant Hill.
26. Stout, *Autobiography*, 6.
27. Anthony Dunlavy III, born in Virginia in 1772, was one of four children of Anthony Dunlavy II and Hannah White to join the Shakers; of the other three siblings (Daniel, Rebecca, and John), his brother John wrote "*The Manifesto or a Declaration of the Doctrine and Practice of the Church of Christ*," a very important and lengthy statement of Shaker beliefs.
28. Stout, *Autobiography*, 6. Of Hosea's five sisters, Rebecca and twins Margaret and Mary were still at Pleasant Hill; Cynthia died in 1815 and Sarah returned to her parents in 1817.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 7.