Crafting utopia

Shaker exhibit opens at Davenport museum

By Alma Gaul

They were a deeply spiritual people who believed in equality of the sexes, communal ownership of property and glorification of God in everything they did.

They were called the Shakers, a religious offshoot of the Quakers who got their nickname from their practice of whirling, trembling or shaking during services.

They flourished in various communities between 1830 and 1850, then gradually declined, but left behind a legacy of simplicity and integrity that continues to influence American folk art and
You can see part of that legacy beginning Sunday, Oct. 1, when the Davenport Museum of Art presents a major exhibit of Shaker work called “Crafting Utopia, The Art of Shaker Women.”

Collected from the Hancock, Mass., Shaker village that dissolved in 1960, the exhibit features 125 artifacts such as fine furniture, tools and textiles that reflect the significant role of Shaker people in American social, religious, and economic life.

In conjunction with the display, the museum has organized 10 special programs highlighting music, food and crafts.

An opening reception will be 1-4 p.m., with music and a dance demonstration, guided tours of the exhibit and pie and cider. The exhibit continues through Nov. 26.

The museum chose this particular exhibit because it meets many criteria: it is of high quality (after the showing in Davenport, these objects will travel to The Louvre in Paris); it features a variety of objects; it has never been done in this area before and it

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ABOUT THE PHOTOS
MAIN: A sister’s cloak and bonnet are among the textiles that will be part of the Shaker exhibit.
TOP TO BOTTOM: An apple peeler was a useful Shaker tool. The skills used to make lidded baskets were shared by men and women. Wooden forms were used to help fashion baskets.

DAVENPORT MUSEUM OF ART
Music, food part of Shaker programs

The opening reception for the Shaker exhibit at the Davenport Museum of Art will be 1-4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1, in the main gallery.

Tours will be at 1:30, 2:15 and 3:30 p.m., with trained guides interpreting the objects and explaining the story behind them.

At the beginning of each tour, Stephen Burks and Laura Nealy Burks, both former members of South Union (Ky.) Shaker village, will present a short program featuring traditional Shaker songs and dances. Pie and cider will be served throughout the afternoon in the Leeo Auditorium. Free, donations appreciated.

Here are other attractions:

Educators Explore


- Lecture, Craft Demonstration
  7-8:30 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 2
  Wieser Auditorium
  Moline fiber artist Patti Hawkins will discuss the history of Shaker basket techniques and show how she incorporates them in her contemporary baskets. Free.

- Celebration of Shaker Music
  7-8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 5, St. John's United Methodist Church, 14th and Brady streets, Davenport
  This program will feature instrumental, vocal and spoken-word interpretations of Shaker teachings.

SHAKER Q&A

Who were the Shakers?
The American Shaker church was founded in 1774 by a small group of followers from Manchester, England. In 1783, the Shakers founded a central independent communal colony at New Lebanon, N.Y., where they could live, work and worship without persecution. As more followers joined this faith, 19 Shaker communities were established in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana.

Why were they called "Shakers"?
The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing was the official name of this group, but they are more commonly known as Shakers. They earned the name Shakers or "Shaking Quakers" because of their ecstatic group dancing.

Why is the Shaker style so popular?
Shaker furniture has never been more popular than today. Whether it's because Shaker forms evoke a purer lifestyle or because they are purely beautiful, their simple lines and uncluttered surfaces have appealed to furniture buyers for

Many songs, for example, refer to "Mother Ann," or Ann Lee, the enthusiastic, outspoken, charismatic and visionary Shaker leader who evangelized throughout New England. Songs also refer to humility to bending (as in bending before God, giving up everything to God), to willow trees and to water, he says.

In addition to music, there will be spoken-word interpretations of Shaker teachings that are readily available from reproductions of the meticulous journals they kept, Burks says.

Other Quad-Citians contributing to the programs:

- Patti Hawkins, a Moline fiber artist, will discuss the history of Shaker basket techniques and show how she incorporates them in her contemporary baskets.

- Professors Gary A. Mann and Myron Fogel, both of Augustana College, Rock Island, will present programs on Shaker beliefs and utopias. Fogel's talk will acknowledge the similarity between the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill, Ky., and Bishop Hill, Ill.

The exhibit was organized by International Arts and Artists.

THE ART OF THE SHAKER WOMEN:

Davenport couple admire group for its sacrifices

The couple admires their group for its sacrifices and devotion to the faith.

- Shaker furniture is known for its simplicity and functionality.

- The Shakers were known for their communal living and beliefs.

- The exhibit features music, food and other Shaker-related activities.

- The artists contributing to the programs include Patti Hawkins and Professors Mann and Fogel.