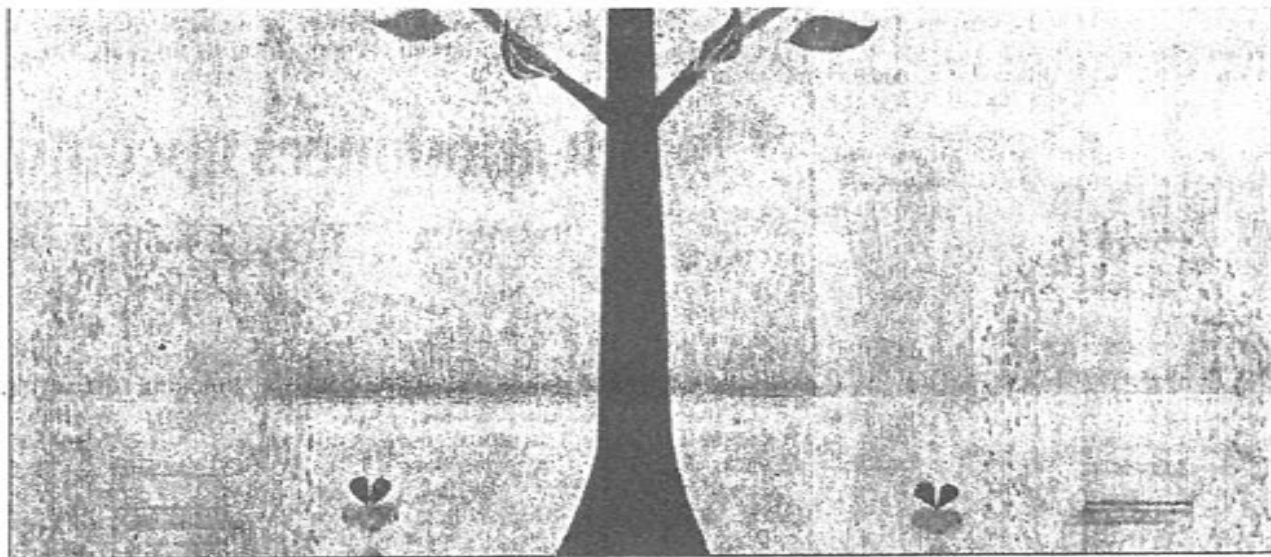




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# SIMPLE PLEASURES





Submitted photos

The Davenport Museum of Art exhibit includes this 'Tree of Life' watercolor, buckets, baskets and boxes.

## SHAKER ART ON DISPLAY AT Q-C MUSEUM

By Julie Jensen  
Correspondent

A world we can scarcely imagine is evoked by the Davenport Museum of Art's new exhibit, "Crafting Utopia, The Art of Shaker Women," on view through Nov. 26.

A celibate society cannot expect much of a future, but the past of the Shakers is something to marvel at, and the group left a legacy of fine furniture, straightforward architecture and beautiful music by putting "hands to work and hearts to God."

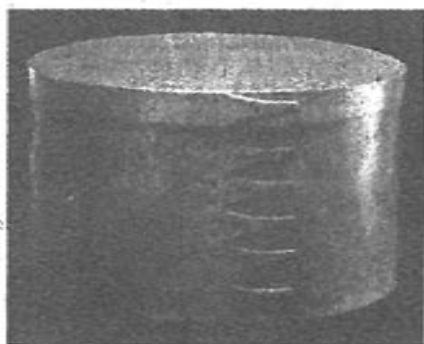
The 125 objects in this exhibit came from the Hancock, Mass., Shaker Village, one of the last to close. The village continues as a museum and a monument to the simplicity and integrity of the Shaker tradition and its continuing influence on American folk art and aesthetics.

This exhibit was organized especially for the Davenport Museum of Art, and when it closes here, it will be shown at the Louvre in Paris.

Who were the Shakers? The American church was founded in 1774 by a small group of followers from Manchester, England. In 1787, they founded a central independent communal colony at New Lebanon, N.Y., where they could live, work and worship without persecution. As more followers joined the faith, 19 communities were established in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana.

Why were they called Shakers? The name came from

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## Shaker

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their ecstatic group dancing in worship services.

Despite their celibacy, theirs was the most enduring religious experiment in American history. The Shaker religion reached its peak in the mid-1800s with about 6,000 members. They believed in pacifism, feminism, freedom from prejudice, and natural health and hygiene.

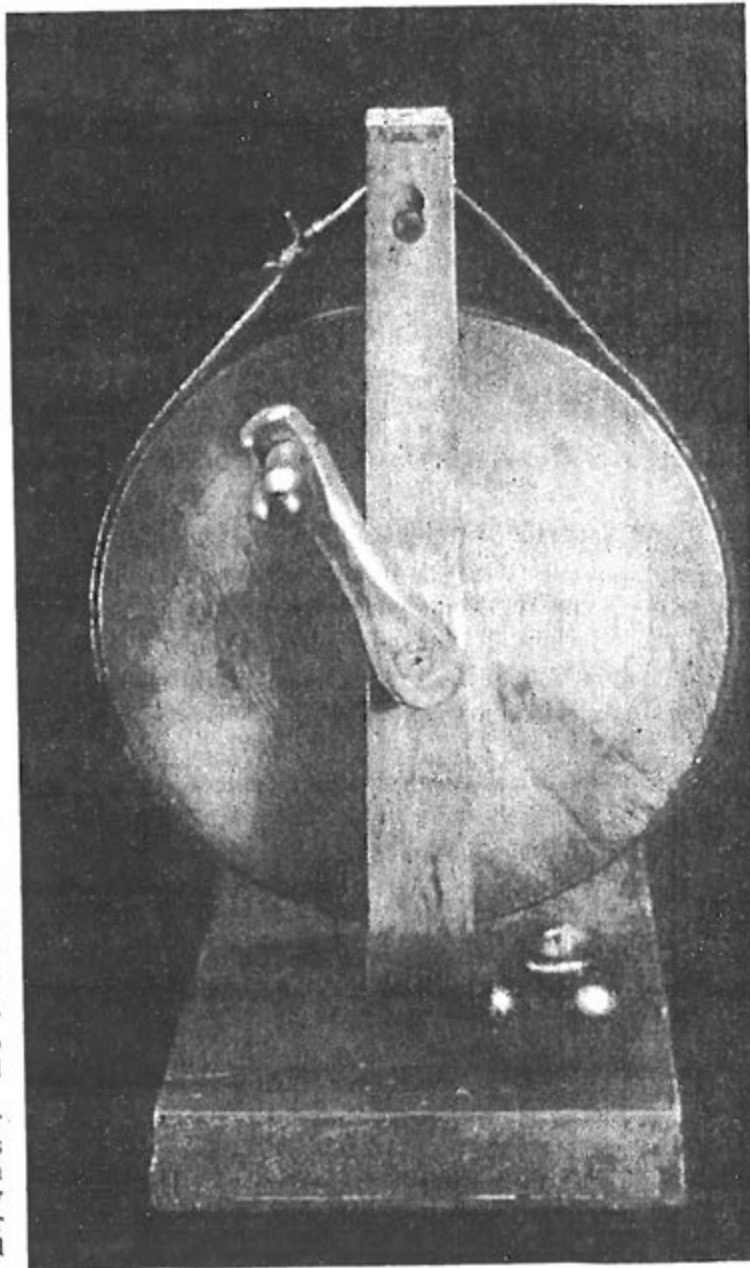
For more than 200 years, they insisted that their followers strive for simplicity and perfection in everything they did. Although men and women lived and worked separately as Brothers and Sisters, they shared equally all positions of spiritual and temporal authority.

Although Shakerism began to decline after the Civil War with industrialization and the westward movement, and communities began to close in the late 1800s, one Shaker community, the one at Sabbathday Lake, Maine, remains.

The Shakers' approach to life still is relevant, and the objects they made are distinguished by simplicity of form, harmonious relationship of parts, good workmanship, and utility with an appreciation for the natural beauty of materials. Shaker craftsmen were not allowed to sign their works, as that would be a display of personal pride.

Shaker furniture has never been more popular than it is now. Perhaps the forms evoke a purer lifestyle, or perhaps they are purely beautiful, but their simple lines and uncluttered surfaces have appealed to furniture buyers for generations.

The prices of Shaker antiques



One of the items in the Shaker exhibit is this apple peeler.

surfaces have appealed to furniture buyers for generations.

The prices of Shaker antiques are out of sight; historical reproductions are pricey; and mass-marketers have succeeded with their knockoffs. Most people can recognize a ladder-back rocker or a candle stand as a Shaker creation.

Why this beautiful simplicity? Because ornate forms were worldly, and Shakers had abandoned the world. However, they couldn't resist some symbols — a heart for love; lamps and candles for heavenly light; doves, birds and the falling feather for their daily speech.

The clock signified mortality, and trees symbolized the Tree of Life.

Shakers wanted to glorify God through all their labors — anything from peeling a potato or sweeping a floor to turning a chair leg.

By living mindfully in conscious emulation of Christ, they aspired to create a heaven on earth.

Several Shaker societies last-

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ed into our own time. The one at Canterbury, N.H., closed in 1992, and the one at Hancock, Mass., where these artifacts were made, closed in 1960. The first one to go was the society at West Union, Ind., which closed in 1827. The society in Pleasant Hill, Ky., which had some connections with the Bishop Hill Swedish settlement, closed in 1910.

An open house for the Shaker exhibit is planned for 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Friday. Michelle Robinson, curator of collections and exhibitions, will give a special tour of the exhibit. Reservations should be made by calling (319) 888-2045.

A family-day program from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 21 in the Wiese Auditorium at the museum will involve learning the history of traditional Shaker woodworking by watching Jeff and Marlys Sowers from Milo, Iowa, create a washtub with a

wooden dipper, demonstrating the art of coopering or making vessels from wooden staves. Admission to this event is free.

Shaker cuisine was good and plain, simple and excellent. You can try it at a Shaker luncheon from noon to 1 p.m. Nov. 1 in the Wiese Auditorium. Cost of the meal is \$10.

This will be a traditional Shaker soup luncheon with breads, pickles, cheeses, dessert and a quick lesson in Shaker table manners. Your check or money order is your reservation, required by Oct. 25 and sent to Shaker Luncheon, 1737 W. 12th St., Davenport, IA 52804.

Moline fiber artist Patti Hawkins will discuss the history of Shaker basket techniques and show how she incorporates them in her contemporary baskets from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Nov. 2 in the Wiese Auditorium. Admission is free.