

COMMUNISTIC SOCIETIES

GENERAL STATEMENT

Under this head are included in 1926 two bodies, similar in general type but not affiliated in any way. The Shakers were the first to establish a communistic settlement in the United States, their first group emigrating in 1774 and establishing a small settlement at Watervliet, N. Y., in 1776. Their numbers increased, and the society has historic interest from the fact that most of these settlements have been maintained for more than a century.

In addition to the Shakers and the Amana Society, there are other bodies, such as the Seventh Day Baptists (German, 1728) and the Hutterian (Mennonite) Brethren, which are communistic in their general character, but are presented with the Brethren (Dunkers) and the Mennonite bodies, as being more closely affiliated with them. A number of similar bodies were presented in the report for 1890, but in 1906 they had either disbanded or refused to answer inquiries.

The only two bodies included in 1926 under this head, therefore, as distinctively religious communal organizations, with the principal statistics as reported in 1926, 1916, and 1906, are listed below.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR COMMUNISTIC SOCIETIES, 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
1926								
Total for the group	13	1,577	11	\$77,500	3	\$600	3	47
Amana Society.....	7	1,385	7	50,000				
United Society of Believers (Shakers).....	6	192	4	27,500	3	600	3	47
1916								
Total for the group	19	1,901	14	37,050	3	750	6	96
Amana Society.....	7	1,534	7	16,300				
United Society of Believers (Shakers).....	12	367	7	20,750	3	750	6	96
1906								
Total for the group	22	2,272	10	31,190			5	103
Amana Society.....	7	1,756	7	14,090				
United Society of Believers (Shakers).....	15	516	3	17,100			5	103

UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS (SHAKERS)

STATISTICS

Summary for the United States, with urban-rural classification.—A general summary of the statistics for the United Society of Believers (Shakers) for the year 1926 is presented in Table 1, which shows also the distribution of these figures between urban and rural territory.

The membership of the United Society of Believers (Shakers) includes both the probationary and covenant members.

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, 1926: UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS (SHAKERS)

ITEM	Total	In urban territory ¹	In rural territory ¹	PER CENT OF TOTAL ²	
				Urban	Rural
Churches (local organizations)	6	1	5		
Members	192	21	171	10.9	89.1
Average per church.....	32	21	34		
Membership by sex:					
Male.....	26	2	24		
Female.....	166	19	147	11.4	88.6
Males per 100 females.....	15.7	(³)	16.3		
Membership by age:					
Under 13 years.....	15		15		
13 years and over.....	177	21	156	11.9	88.1
Per cent under 13 years ²	7.8		8.8		
Church edifices:					
Number.....	5		5		
Value—Churches reporting.....	4		4		
Amount reported.....	\$27,500		\$27,500		100.0
Average per church.....	\$6,875		\$6,875		
Parsonages:					
Value—Churches reporting.....	3		3		
Amount reported.....	\$9,000		\$9,000		100.0
Expenditures during year:					
Churches reporting.....	3		3		
Amount reported.....	\$600		\$600		100.0
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$100		\$100		100.0
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$500		\$500		100.0
Average expenditure per church.....	\$200		\$200		
Sunday schools:					
Churches reporting.....	3		3		
Officers and teachers.....	8		8		
Scholars.....	47		47		

¹ Urban territory includes all cities and other incorporated places which had 2,500 inhabitants or more in 1920, the date of the last Federal census; rural territory comprises the remainder of the country.

² Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

³ Ratio not shown, the number of females being less than 100.

The data given for 1926 represent 6 active organizations of the United Society of Believers (Shakers), with 192 members. The classification of membership by sex and by age was reported by all of the 6 churches, including, however, only 3 which reported any members under 13 years of age; of the 4 societies reporting church property, none reported any debt on such property.

Comparative data, 1890-1926.—Table 2 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926, 1916, 1906, and 1890,

TABLE 2.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1890 TO 1926: UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS (SHAKERS)

ITEM	1926	1916	1906	1890
Churches (local organizations)	6	12	15	15
Increase ¹ over preceding census:				
Number.....	-6	-3		
Per cent ²				
Members	192	367	516	1,728
Increase ¹ over preceding census:				
Number.....	-175	-149	-1,212	
Per cent.....	-47.7	-28.9	-70.1	
Average membership per church.....	32	31	34	115
Church edifices:				
Number.....	5	8	3	16
Value—Churches reporting.....	4	7	3	
Amount reported.....	\$27,500	\$20,750	\$17,100	\$36,800
Average per church.....	\$6,875	\$2,964	\$5,700	
Debt—Churches reporting.....			1	
Amount reported.....			\$80	
Parsonages:				
Value—Churches reporting.....	3	1	3	
Amount reported.....	\$9,000	\$2,000	\$7,500	
Expenditures during year:				
Churches reporting.....	3	3		
Amount reported.....	\$600	\$750		
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$100	\$265		
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$500	\$485		
Average expenditure per church.....	\$200	\$250		
Sunday schools:				
Churches reporting.....	3	6	5	
Officers and teachers.....	8	11	17	
Scholars.....	47	96	103	

¹ A minus sign (-) denotes decrease.² Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

State tables.—Tables 3 and 4 present the statistics for the United Society of Believers (Shakers) by States. Table 3 gives for each State the number and membership of the churches classified according to their location in urban or rural territory and the total membership classified by sex. Table 4 gives for the State of Massachusetts, and for all other States in combination, the number and membership of the churches for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926, together with the membership for 1926 classified as under 13 years of age and 13 years of age and over.

TABLE 3.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES IN URBAN AND RURAL TERRITORY, AND TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, BY STATES, 1926: UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS (SHAKERS)

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Males per 100 females ⁽¹⁾
United States	6	1	5	192	21	171	26	166	15.7
New England:									
Maine.....	2		2	69		69	7	62	
New Hampshire.....	1		1	53		53	3	50	
Massachusetts.....	1	1		21	21		2	19	
Middle Atlantic:									
New York.....	2		2	49		49	14	35	

¹ Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

TABLE 4.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, 1906 TO 1926, AND MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926, BY STATES: UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS (SHAKERS)

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches in either 1926, 1916, or 1906]

STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926		
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906	Under 13 years	13 years and over	Per cent under 13
United States.....	6	12	15	192	367	516	15	177	7.8
Massachusetts.....	1	2	3	21	56	53		21	
Other States.....	5	10	12	171	311	463	15	156	8.8

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION¹

HISTORY

The movement of which this society was the outcome originated in England about the middle of the eighteenth century, when Jane Wardley, of Bolton, began to exhort her Quaker neighbors to pure and right living. In their meetings a spiritual power was experienced, so strong that their bodies were exercised in various ways, and they were called in derision "Shaking Quakers." Her husband, James Wardley, was her first convert, and among the number who joined them were John Lee, a blacksmith of Manchester, and his wife and daughter. The daughter, Ann Lee, who later became their leader, after being greatly concerned for many years over human depravity, came to the conviction that the root of evil in the world was the uncontrolled, undirected use of the sexual relation, and that the way to purity of life lay in abstinence and control of passion. The plain preaching and fervent exercises of her company became so offensive that a severe persecution broke out, and several times she narrowly escaped death. While imprisoned in Manchester in 1770 she received a further vision, and later taught that the Christ Spirit which had anointed and inspired Jesus now rested upon and spoke through her; that it was necessary that Christ should come a second time, through a woman, to complete the perfect way of salvation; and that the Holy or Mother Spirit was manifested through a woman, as the Father Spirit had been manifested through Jesus.

Persecution ceased, but the new doctrines, accepted by the little company, were not widely adopted, and, after two years of quiet, Ann Lee, with eight followers, conceived the idea of emigrating to America. The little party landed at New York on August 6, 1774. Only one of the number, John Hocknell, had means, and he paid the fare of the party and afterwards purchased a tract of land in the woods of Niskeyuna, or Watervliet, N. Y., where, in 1776, they built their first rude log cabin and made preparation for the increase in numbers which Mother Ann, as she was known, firmly believed would follow.

In 1780 Joseph Meacham, pastor of the Baptist Church in New Lebanon, with others, went to visit the newcomers and soon after became a convert. As a result of a religious revival which took place during the preceding winter, and which had been characterized by many striking prophecies of the immediate second appearing of Christ, converts were made, and during a missionary tour of two years many hundreds were added to the membership.

¹ This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Walter Shepherd, trustee, United Society of Believers (Shakers), and approved by him in its present form.

After the death of Mother Ann in 1784 and of her immediate successor, Father James Whittaker, in 1787, Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, of Pittsfield, became the leaders of the large body of believers scattered through New York and New England and organized them into communistic societies. The period of greatest missionary activity, after 1792, was from 1805 to 1835, during which time societies were planted in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and the Eastern States, and the membership came to number fully 5,000.

From the beginning Ann Lee and her followers were practical believers in the intercourse of spirits within and without the body, anticipating thus by many years the advent of modern spiritualism. The period from 1837 to 1848 is known as the time of "Spirit Manifestation," or "Mother Ann's Second Coming," and during this time remarkable spirit phenomena are said to have been observed in all of the societies.

Since 1860 there has been a steady decline in numbers, though this is not a surprise, as it was foretold by prophets among the believers. Aside from various collateral causes, the members recognize departures from principles and laxity in spiritual energy among themselves as operating forces in the reduction which they deplore; and, while seeking to rectify their mistakes, believers are assured that the principles at the foundation of their system are true and essential to the evolution of the spiritual manhood of the race, and that a new revival of true Shaker living is certain to come in due time. They are not greatly concerned whether the revival is to find expression in a resuscitation of the existing communities, or whether it shall build for itself new forms, better adapted to the needs of the new day.

DOCTRINE

It is claimed that Shakerism is "a kind of Christian socialism, whose basis is the spiritual family, founded on the type of the natural family." The duality of the Deity is recognized, man having been made in the image of God. Hence, father and mother are coequal, and the spiritual parents, at the head of the order and of each family, are equal in power and authority, and this equality of the sexes extends through the entire membership and all departments of life. Of the principles that are the foundation of Shakerism, the ones most emphasized are "virgin purity, peace or nonresistance, brotherhood, and community of goods." These beliefs enjoin on the followers a life of innocence, strict temperance, and celibacy, where love and justice shall prevail; the abstaining from war and bloodshed, from all acts of violence toward their fellow men, from all the party contentions and politics of the world, and from all pursuits of pride and worldly ambition.

The foundation of their doctrine is holiness—"Without which no man shall see the Lord." To these people holiness signifies consecration or the setting apart from a common to a sacred use. They, therefore, dedicate their persons, services, and property to social and sacred uses. They accept as an example for this conduct the first gospel church, holding that they are to establish and support as a privilege one consecrated and united interest, by the voluntary choice of each member.

As an outgrowth of these principles, and held as ideals to be attained by the individual and society, are the resultant beliefs and practices; equality of the sexes, previously mentioned; equality of labor—all working for each and each for all; and equality of property, with no rich and no poor; in fact, industrial freedom.

In their ideas of the Bible the earlier believers approached very closely to the views promulgated in recent years by what is commonly known as the higher criticism. Mother Ann was also among the first in the modern world to teach and practice the equality of woman with man and was a pioneer in the woman's rights movement. They believe, too, that all life and activity animated by

Christian love is worship, and that God is the Almighty Creator, the Fountain of all good, life, light, truth, and love; the one eternal Father-Mother.

The conditions of membership are the desire to lead a pure life, freedom from debt, and freedom from marital bonds, and the form of admission is the confession of sin before the elder or eldress of the family. The society at the present time has two classes of membership, probationary and covenant. Probationary members are those accepted on trial and are subject to withdrawal or rejection. Covenant members are the fully consecrated and permanent members. The successful candidate for membership in this society, in any degree, must comprehend the faith and principles of the society and must freely and voluntarily agree to abide by such faith and principles.

ORGANIZATION

The organizations include the family or local society, consisting of one or more families, and a central ministry, or bishopric, presiding over all subordinate bishoprics and societies.

In the days of the largest membership there was at the head of the order a ministry or bishopric, consisting of two brethren and two sisters. An equal number formed a lower ministry at the head of each group of societies; and the same number of elders stood at the head of each family. Subordinate orders of trustees, deacons, and caretakers had oversight of all business and industrial matters, while the ministry and elders were set apart for spiritual labor and ministrations. With the decline in membership the quota of leaders has been reduced, and the ministry and elders have been obliged to exercise an oversight of temporal affairs. The central ministry appoints its own members. Subordinate ministries are appointed by the central ministry, with the approval of the older members. Elders and trustees in societies are appointed by the presiding ministry of the society, with the approval of the central ministry and of older members, and the deacons and deaconesses in families are appointed by the elders of the family, with the approval of the presiding ministry. There is no special ordination or setting apart, merely the announcement of the appointment.

In worship the exercises employed by the Shakers are said to be derived from the inspiration of the Spirit. Elder, or Father, Joseph Meacham affirmed that he was shown in vision the various exercises, saw the hosts of heaven worshipping in these movements, and he taught them to the people. Modern experts in physical culture have in some cases studied out scientifically the very movements which marked the early Shaker worship. Of these the only one that forms a part of the present-day worship is the march, accompanied by motions of the hands. Shakers have been noted for their inspirational singing, the wordless songs practiced for years giving place to hymns and anthems of peculiar but impressive character.

WORK

In their earlier days Shakers maintained schools. At present there are no distinctively Shaker schools, but many orphaned children are taken into the societies, where they are given a common school education and taught a trade. Charitable work of wide extent has been done in all societies in caring for the poor, and also in the case of transient members a great but silent work has been accomplished in rescuing, equipping, and inspiring with faith, hope, and energy the discouraged and unfortunate, thereby raising numbers of men and women from the ranks of paupers to self-respecting and useful citizens.

Believers are interested in the various benevolent activities and reform movements, including the movement for international disarmament, antivivisection, and animal-rescue work.

The publications of the Shakers are of wide scope in subject matter and include a history of the order and tracts bearing on doctrinal and spiritualistic themes.