

Combination of harmony and contradiction

An expert talks about Shaker craftsmanship

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Their lives were a combination of exquisite harmony and jarring contradictions.

Among themselves they were the United Society of Believers in the Second Coming of Christ. To outsiders and detractors, they were the Shakers.

Eventually they assumed the name which began in derision and stamped the chairs they made with their gold Shaker trademark.

Their story and a study of their furniture will be part of the Farmington Community Center's fall programs.

Mary Catherine Taylor of Birmingham, an expert in the study of Shaker society, will talk about their craftsmanship which makes their simple furniture the object of chic collections.

In their heyday, the Shakers were an island of industrialization in an unindustrialized world.

Once the Industrial Revolution broke, the Shakers' simple lifestyle was

soon outstripped. Persons who joined the sect because it offered a better life than the outside world became less inclined toward the group.

The Shakers advocated confession of sins, community property, pacifism and celibacy.

"MANY SHAKER scholars wouldn't admit it but celibacy was the reason they lost so many members," said Ms. Taylor.

The Shakers were convinced they were living in the Bible's Second Millennium. Their task was to build heaven on earth. And they went about their assignment with a flair for the practical which is reflected in their products.

"For the Shakers, work was a form of worship. They used to say, 'Hands to work, hearts to God.'"

That philosophy fostered a practical attitude toward their work. Their economy was on a firm base. The Shakers traded with the outside and contributed some practical advances in household tasks.

They invented the clothespin and the flat broom. The circular saw came from the Shakers. They invented and patented a washing machine which was used in New York hotels.

The Shakers' simple straight-backed chairs featured tilters on the back legs to protect the carpets when the seats were pushed back.

Most of the time, the inventions weren't patented. Shakers preferred instead to share their ideas.

Shaker craftsmen took ideas from their outside experience and shaped it to their new beliefs. Furniture makers took the fanciwork from their designs and turned out philosophically correct simple shapes.

"THOSE FUNCTIONAL designs made it into the Marshall-Fields catalog where they were snapped up as an inexpensive way to furnish a summer cottage. Modern hunters of Shaker furniture can find some of the chairs and tables in cottages in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Each of the Shaker communities managed to incorporate its own variations into the furniture.

Easter communities put tilters in chairs. The Western communities of Kentucky and Ohio dared to be fancier than the orthodox east.

"They were miles away from the central ministry. That's (the west) where dancing and singing were picked up by the Shakers," said Ms. Taylor.

Women were equal partners in the Shaker community. They operated their own businesses and held offices. Shaker communities were sometimes integrated with blacks and Indians.

Their practical approach to life and business exhibited itself in an almost compulsive record keeping.

In spite of a belief in practicality, the Shakers also believed in spiritualism.

Meetings were visited by persons from the afterlife. And those visits were recorded as if the persons had been flesh and blood companions to the worshippers.

LATTER DAY STUDENTS of the group express difficulty discerning between a spirit visitor and a live one.

Shakers would have spiritual experiences any time of the day. A Shaker would be wrapped up in a visitation during his work day, and when the spirit left he carried on with his task.

"The Shakers didn't see any contradiction between their lives and spiritualism. They could reconcile the two," Ms. Taylor said.

Their everyday lives were ruled by the Millennial Laws which regulated the

'In their heyday, the Shakers were an island of industrialization in an unindustrialized world.'

physical layout of the village and the colors of its buildings. If

Shaker homes were supplied with furniture according to the laws. Each home had one bed, one stand, one rocker. Decorations were considered superfluous.

Each home had vents over the doors to circulate the air.

The simplicity of their homes underlined the belief that the Second Coming of Christ would take the form of individual realization. Each person would receive his own message from God.

While Calvinists were saying that only a few would be saved, Shakers' founder Ann Lee was preaching that all would be allowed into heaven.

SISTER LEE WAS a young girl in England when she joined the Shaking Quakers. In 1774, she came with eight followers to America hoping to escape religious persecution.

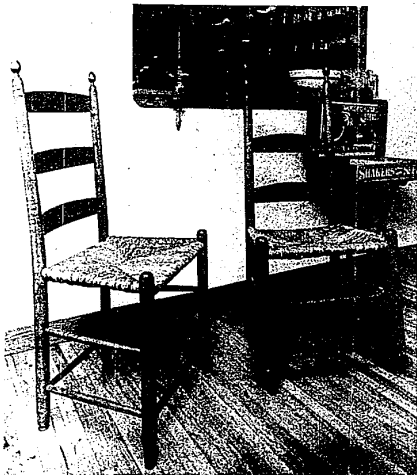
They founded 19 communities. Of these villages only nine Shaker members carry on the tradition today.

The oldest is in her 80's and the youngest is a 50-year-old.

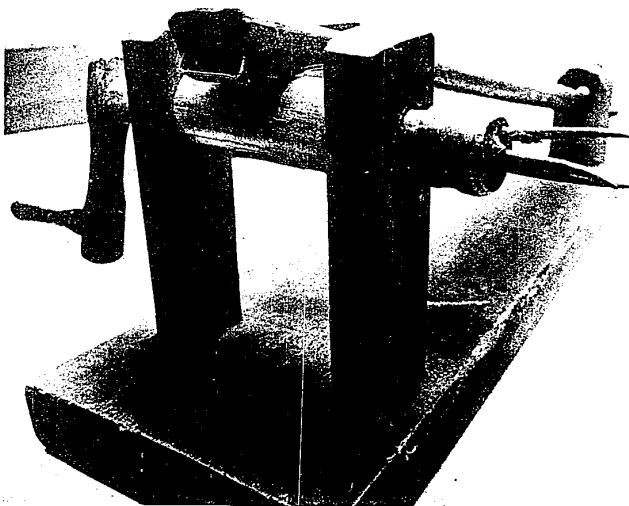
As the sect dwindles, scholars are reminded of one of Sister Lee's prophecies.

"She said when there would be only five Shakers left, there would be a renewal of interest in the life," said Ms. Taylor.

"And it looks as if there is."



This display features some common Shaker furniture. On the left, a side chair with tilters, a Shaker invention, stands next to a rocker — both from the mid-19th century. On the counter is a late 19th century yarn winder. The seed box is a reproduction by artisan Steven Kistler. (Staff photos by Randy Bors)



Believe it or not, this is a Shaker apple peeler, from the early 19th century, Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Yuriko sharpens tennis and English at North



By MARY GNIEWEK

Two of the reasons Yuriko Kamikura wanted to study in the United States for a year were to master English and tennis.

At North Farmington High, she is accomplishing both goals this year.

The 17-year-old from Matsudo, Japan, near Tokyo, still speaks English with a bit of hesitation, a little shyness. But on the tennis court, there is no trace of self doubt.

She is the number one singles player in girls' tennis on North's team. To date, she has lost just one match.

"Kamikura should be one of the top two players in our state regional tournament," said North coach Norm Stanisewski last week.

Miss Kamikura arrived in Farmington Hills in August as part of the Youth for Understanding foreign exchange student program.

Her courses at North won't transfer credits. When she returns to Kyoritsu High School next year, an hour subway ride from her home, she will still have to complete a year and a half of studies.

But that doesn't bother her. For now, she says she is accomplishing personal goals.

"Most important is to master English. In Japan, we must take English from junior high.

"I want to know about culture, to make friends here."

AT HER private school in Japan, there was no school team to join.

"On my own, I join tournaments, but there was no school tennis team to join.

"I play tennis five or six years. When I was little, I wanted to go to the U.S. Here, tennis is very popular."

Her favorite player is Chris Evert.

"She's great because she always concentrates in matches. She doesn't get mad."

Would Yuriko Kamikura like to become a professional tennis player?

"No, just for enjoyment I will continue to play. I'd like to teach, be a coach."

"I'd like to come back here. I want to study English more, play tennis here. If I can, I'd like to go to college here," she said.

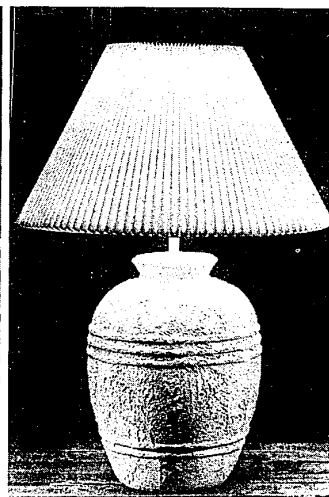
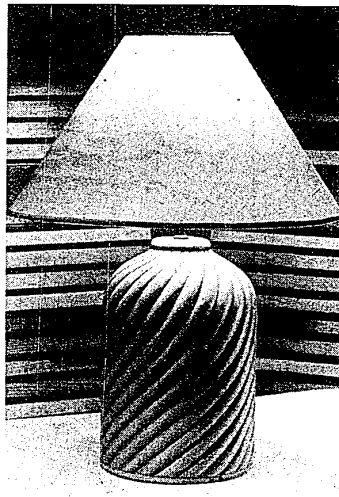
She likes her host family, Mr. and Mrs. Alex Drobish of Farmington Hills. She's looking forward to a winter break in Florida with them.

But sometimes she misses her own family — her father, an accountant, her mother, and a 12-year-old sister in Japan.

Yuriko finds there are several common bonds between the U.S. and Japan.

"It is much the same. In Japan, I listen to soft rock music, I watch baseball on tv, and I play tennis."

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-B. Braley