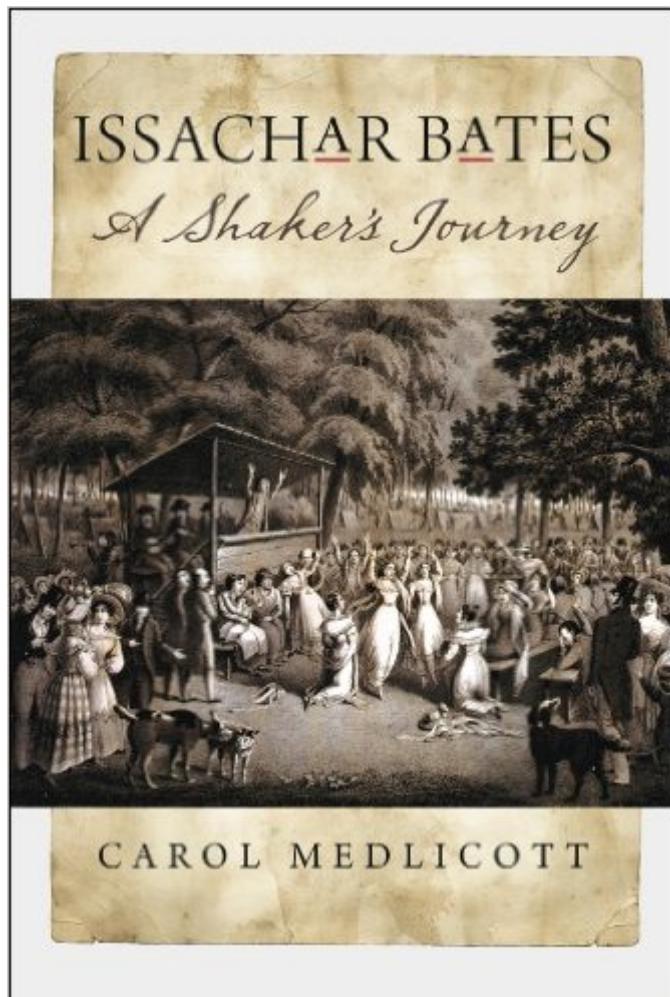


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Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey



Synopsis

Issachar Bates (1758–1837) was a Revolutionary War veteran in rural upstate New York who, at the age of forty-three, abruptly turned from his family life to become a celibate Shaker. He immediately became instrumental in Shakerism's westward expansion, and his personal charisma, persuasive preaching, and musical talent helped stimulate the movement's growth. Bates drew converts in abundance, profoundly changing the character of Shakerism by increasing its geographic reach. He also helped shape the Shakers' unique theology and hymnody through his many influential texts and songs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Up until now, Shaker Studies has really been about dealing with the Shakers of New York and New England. A few brave souls have tried to tackle the immense body of journals and manuscripts that remain from the Shaker West, but most of these efforts are so limited and fail to place the western communities in the context of Shakerdom as a whole. In her book, geographer/historian, Carol Medlicott has succeeded in penetrating the wall of western Shaker studies. Ironically she does this by writing about Issachar Bates who started out as an eastern Shaker. Indeed, his early life has very little to distinguish him from thousands of other men from New England who served in the Revolution and then became subsistence farmers with large families to support. Of course the big difference is that Issachar Bates, in the prime of life, became a Shaker. He was one of the three men sent to Ohio in 1805 to open the testimony in the West. His work spanned three decades, and

when he was recalled to the East in 1835, Shaker villages were firmly established in Ohio and Kentucky. Medlicott provides us with his story based on his autobiography, but her comments open up the western field like no other previous historian has. Through his triumphs and trials, extremely important insights emerge that can be used to examine Shaker history with fresh perspective. For example, anyone wishing to know why the Shaker Church covenant was revised again around 1830 will find the answers in her skillful treatment of the legal implications following the death of Father David Darrow and the closing of the Busro, Indiana, society.

How a hard-drinking ex-soldier became a Shaker preacher is an intriguing story, and Carol Medlicott has done it justice. This meticulously-researched biography has something for everyone, whether interested in the American Revolution, westward migration, frontier travel, nineteenth-century music, evangelical religion, or Shaker history. In researching this biography, Medlicott drew on hundreds of pages of Shaker manuscripts. Her lively writing, engaging style, and thorough research serve as a model for historical biography. Medlicott's expertise as a geographer gives breadth to her examination of Bates' life on the move. She deftly uses extracts from his writings to show the impressionable youth, the unvarnished Revolutionary soldier, the peripatetic religious seeker, and the pioneer in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, fighting his way through swamps, facing mobs, robbers, and Indians. The story moves as briskly as Bates strode across the landscape for thousands of miles. The chapter about the American Revolution is a riveting narrative that marches right along. Bates served as a fifer whose music directed troops, acting as a guard for prisoners of war, and getting caught behind enemy lines as battle degenerated into chaos. Subsequent chapters cover the wanderings of a man who could not stay settled for long. Chapter 3 hints at the problems of the ex-soldier seeking to reinvent himself in a postwar world. In this chapter, Medlicott did an amazing job of genealogical research to track the Bates family's chain migration from eastern Massachusetts to Hartford, New York, using the web of siblings, cousins, and in-laws.

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