

Shaker Reed Stem Tobacco Pipes

By James L. Murphy*

ABSTRACT

Plain earthenware reed stem tobacco pipes manufactured by the Shaker religious communities at New Lebanon and Watervliet, New York, are described. The pipes are known to have been manufactured from at least 1809 to 1853, although the term "Shaker" has been variously applied to later, non-Shaker earthenware and stoneware products.

ALTHOUGH the term "Akron Shaker" is in common parlance among historic archeologists, no one seems to have been curious enough to investigate the derivation of the term. Heite (1972: 211) avers that "Stoneware pipes were called 'shakers,' and the earthenware pipes (*sic*) were called 'hamburgs.'" He also illustrates (1972: 212) a Pamplin "Wigwam Shaker," or "Pamplin Hexagonal Stemmed Milled Chesterfield" as subsequently described by Sudbury (1975), noting that "This form is nearly always found as a shaker, although it was manufactured in both pastes." Hamilton and Hamilton (1972) illustrate a 1941 Pamplin catalogue which also makes this distinction. The pamphlet illustrates a "'Powow' Smooth Shaker," a "'Wigwam Shaker," an "'Akron' Shaker," and an "'Ole Virginny' Shaker," noting that they are "available in both Shaker (stone) and Hamburg (Clay)."

As discussed below, it is believed that this distinction is a comparatively recent one that did not always hold and that is somewhat confusing because of the fact that Shaker-made pipes were originally of earthenware ("Hamburgs") rather than stoneware ("Shakers").

Initial inquiries at the Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio, brought the response that the Shakers never manufactured

tobacco pipes because smoking was forbidden within the sect (pers. comm. 1973). It was not considered likely that the Shakers would manufacture and sell pipes, thus promoting the habit that they had interdicted among themselves. Several years later, I happened upon an illustration (Guillard 1971: 186) of a reed stem pipe labeled "Shakers, Pleasant Hill, Ky." The pipe was found in the East family residence erected in 1817. The director of the Shaker Museum at Pleasant Hill, however, informed me that there had never been a pottery associated with the Pleasant Hill settlement and that there was no suitable clay in the vicinity. Eventually, I discovered Edward D. Andrews' *The Community Industries of the Shakers*, which contains virtually all that we currently know regarding Shaker reed stem tobacco pipes. The pertinent material from Andrews (1933: 166-67) is quoted below:

At the East family in New Lebanon [New York] there were natural deposits of red clay which were early utilized for making bricks, and this section of the community became commonly known as "the brickyard." It may have been due to the ready supply of such clay that the Shakers became engaged in the manufacture of pipe bowls and stems . . . soon after the beginning of the last century. Smoking was a common habit, even among the Believers themselves in these early days, and there was no moral or hygienic reason why the manufacture of pipes should not have been carried on. The Millennial Laws, revised in 1845, contain many specifications covering the careful use of pipes to prevent fires, and it was not until after the Civil War that smoking was definitely repudiated as an obnoxious habit.

The bowls were made of both red and white clay. The wooden stems were ordinarily made in two lengths, 10 and 15 inches. The first record appears in 1809 . . . , when "some pipes" were sold

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for \$1.62. In 1810 such items appear as "2½ doz. pipes . . . \$1.40," "30 doz. pipes . . . \$18.73," and "80 doz. pipes . . . \$40.00." In 1814 pipe "boals" were sold in quantity for a penny apiece, and the stems for three cents each. Pipes were being sold by the Church as late as 1853; in a gardener's diary . . . under date of November 23, 1843, is the entry: "B. M. after pipe stem timber below the sap woods." It is probable, however, that the Watervliet colony was the chief source of supply at this later period. By 1835 pipe bowls were being purchased in large orders from Frederick Wicker, the Watervliet trustee, and although the stems may have been and probably were still made at New Lebanon, the center of the industry had shifted to the other settlement. Wicker received \$8 a thousand for both red and white bowls.

Little more information has come to light regarding the Shaker earthenware pipes. Robert F. W. Meader, Director of the Shaker Museum at Old Chatham, New York, informs me (pers. comm. 1976) that "bricks, ceramic water pipes, and probably ointment pots" were also made at the New Lebanon center. According to him, some pipe molds exist in the nearby Hancock Shaker Village museum. The actual kiln site has not been located. Meader writes, "I have seen the potter's field at the Brickyard, and the foundations of some sort of brick building, but the kilns, while they were obviously in the area somewhere, I have never come upon."

Two Shaker pipes have kindly been loaned to me by Meader. These are illustrated in Fig. 1a,b. The pipe with a prominent rib around the stem end and below the bowl lip is very lightly glazed and an orange-cream in color. In general form it is similar to some "ringed bowl" types from the Peterson Co. plant at Point Pleasant, Ohio (Murphy 1977), but none of the Point Pleasant styles have such a prominent rounded rib placed *below* the bowl lip. A remarkably similar pipe has been recovered

from the Mogadore, Ohio, dump and is distinguishable in form only by virtue of slightly smaller dimensions, a stem rib less sharply set off from the stem, and a narrower, less pronounced rib below the bowl lip. The Mogadore specimen is of unglazed stoneware.

The other Shaker specimen lent to me is characterized by a comparatively long stem with an expanding end and a plain bowl without a rib around the lip. This specimen is of predominantly white clay with streaks of red clay intermixed. There does not appear to have been a deliberate effort to produce a marbled effect. Very similar forms occur at Point Pleasant, Ohio, but the stem is marked by a distinct, albeit rounded, rib rather than simply an expanded stem. Paste and dimensions of the Point Pleasant type (Fig. 1c) also differ.

Measurements for the 2 Shaker pipes loaned by Meader are given in Table 1 (in mm).

In addition, correspondence with the New York State Museum revealed that 2 specimens of red clay Shaker pipes are still extant in their collections (pers. comm., Ruthanne Brod 1976). These could not be borrowed for study, and it cannot be determined whether they are the same pipes illustrated by Andrews (1933: 167), but Brod has furnished a polaroid snapshot of the pipes, along with the following measurements: "The bowls measure 15/16" in outside diameter and 3/4" inside diameter. Height of the bowls is 1½" and overall length of one is 16-1/8" and 15½" for the other." Brod's measurements of "overall length," be it noted, apparently include the detachable willow stems. A purchased photograph of these 2 pipes is presented in Fig. 2. These pipes are characterized by a double ridge at the end of the stem and a double

Table 1

	Maximum Length	Height	Bowl Diameter	Bowl Thickness at Lip	Stem Diameter	Bore Diameter
Ring bowl	41.5	39.0	28.0-28.3	2.6 4.2 (ring)	15.3	8.1
Plain bowl	55.0	37.0	24.1-27.0	2.6	16.6	8.0

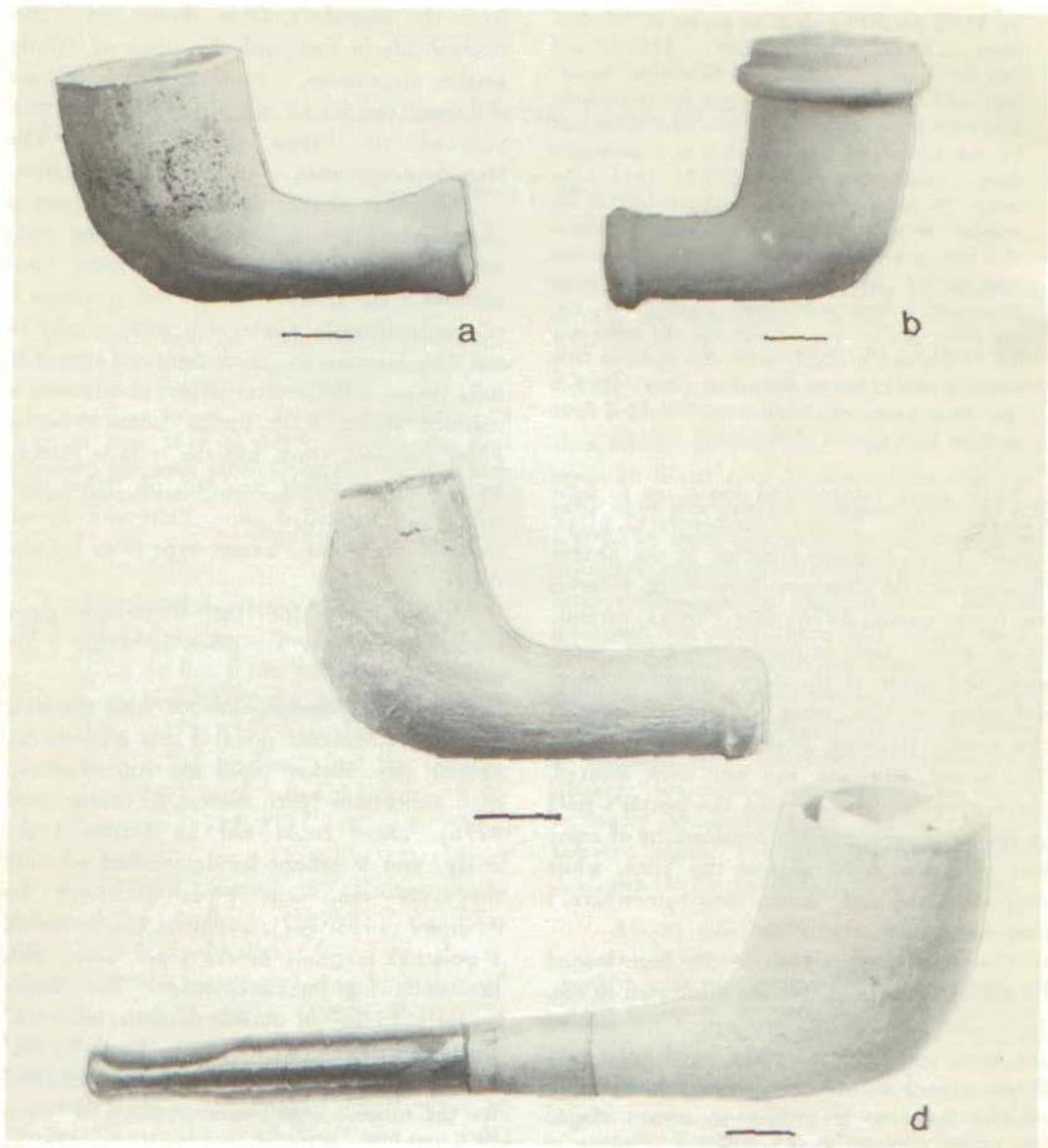


Fig. 1. a,b, Shaker pipes manufactured at the New Lebanon and Watervliet colonies, Collection of Robert F. W. Meader; c, *Similar pipe style produced at the Peterson pipe plant, Point Pleasant, Ohio, ca. 1850-1890*; d, "Akron Shaker" pipe, probably manufactured by the H. A. Ayres Co., Akron, Ohio, ca. 1870-1880. Summit County Historical Society collection. Linear scale equals 1 inch.

ridge or ridge and bordering (below) groove around the bowl lip. *Similar forms are available from Point Pleasant, Ohio, but differ by having a relatively shorter stem and a distinct pair of ribs around the bowl.*

The similarity of the New York and Ohio forms suggests that there might be a direct connection between the Shaker industry and the introduction of pipe making to Ohio.

However, I have been unable to trace early Ohio pipe manufacturers such as the Merrills, Fentons, Lakins, and Kirkpatricks to the Shaker communities of eastern New York. Along this line, it may be well to quote Meader again (pers. comm. 1976):

There was little variation in size or design, and these which I am sending to you are typical. Also, they differ little if at all from commercial

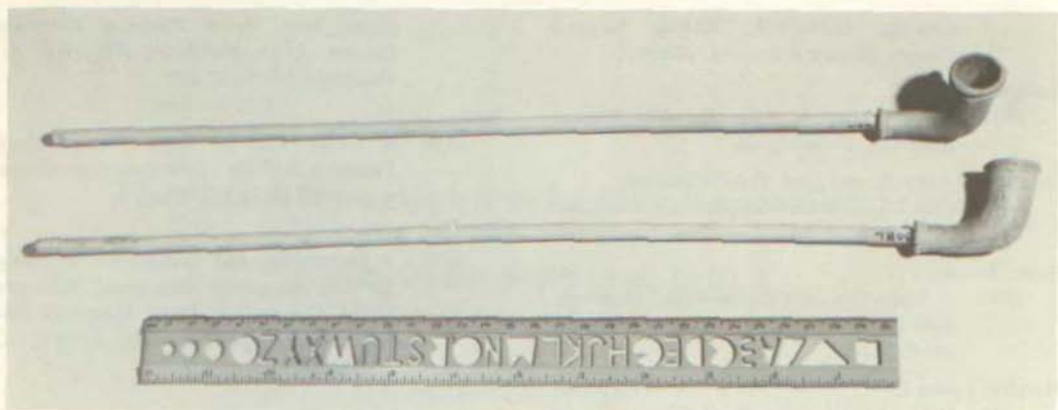


Fig. 2. Two Shaker manufactured pipes. New York State Museum and Science Service.

models—I daresay because their pipe molds were commercially bought and produced for pipe manufacturers all over. In Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, my home town, there was the Taber Pipe Factory; its products and molds were, for many models, apparently identical to these. However, these that I am sending are Shaker-made.

Unfortunately, no additional information about the Taber Company has been obtainable from either Meader or sources in Wolfeboro. The Taber pottery is not listed in Norton's (1939) checklist of New England potteries, nor are any pipes available for direct comparison with the Shaker products. It is unlikely, however, that such pipes, should they turn up on archeological sites or in museum collections, could not be distinguished by close examination.

Since pipe manufacturing began in Akron (Middlebury), Ohio, about the time that the Shakers ended production, it is possible that the Akron manufacturers adopted the term "Shaker" for advertising purposes. This would explain the term "Akron Shaker." The earliest known use of that term in the Akron area is an entry for "H. E. Merrill" in the 1866 Akron city directory. An 1876 letterhead (Blair 1965: 30) for H. J. Ayres and Co. of Akron provides the earliest known illustration of an "Akron Shaker" pipe. Advertising "wood, clay and enamel smoking pipes; also, all styles of Shaker Pipes," the letterhead displays a plain, obtuse angle pipe with a somewhat elongated stem and metal ferrule. A pipe in the collection of the Summit County Historical Society, believed to be a product of

the Ayres company, is illustrated in Figure 1d. It is made of gray, unglazed stoneware. Since earthenware pipes do not seem to have been commonly made in the Akron area, the term "Akron Shaker" may thus have become synonymous with stoneware pipes, especially at Pamplin, Virginia, after that factory was purchased by the Akron Smoking Pipe Co., September 2, 1879 (pers. comm., William A. Thompson, Jr. 1977). The Pamplin company marketed both stoneware and earthenware pipes.

In any case the original Shaker-made pipes appear to have been limited to a small number of relatively plain, unornamented forms that are readily identifiable on the basis of paste, measurements, and styles. Moreover, although they have not yet been reported from archeological sites, their manufacture seems to have been limited to a 50-year span, from ca. 1800 to 1850, so that their discovery on an archeological site might prove to be of significance in dating the site. In view of the confusion surrounding the origin of the term "Shaker pipe," care should be taken in applying it to specific pipe samples.

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