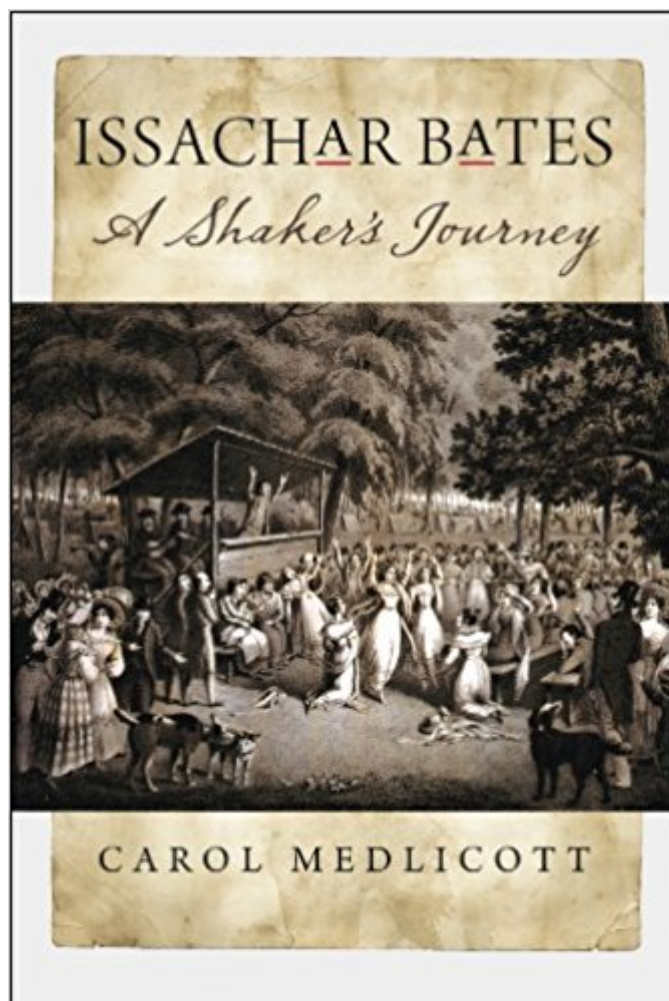


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# Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey



## Synopsis

Winner of the Communal Studies Association book award (2014) 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 "western" 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

"The text is accessible to any student or scholar interested in the Early Republic, daily life of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and Shakerism. Nova Religio "This biography is so rich and multi-dimensional that it becomes far more than simply a contribution to Shaker studies. In particular, it should have special appeal to anyone interested in pioneer life on the midwestern frontier, the dynamics of religious revivalism during the Second Great Awakening, and the development of religious music during the early nineteenth century. Indiana Magazine of History

"Carol Medlicott's choice to allow Bates to speak for himself through his

autobiography, poetry, and music gives her fine biography a wonderful sense of immediacy. (Andrew Cayton, Miami University, Ohio) “How a rough-talking, hard-drinking ex-soldier became a Shaker preacher is an intriguing story, and Carol Medlicott has done it justice. Her biography of Issachar Bates will add immeasurably to our understanding of Issachar Bates’s life and times, and his significance to western Shakerism. (Glendyne Wergland, author of *Sisters in the Faith: Shaker Women and Equality of the Sexes*) “Medlicott masterfully exploits the historical and religious sources that shed light on Bates’s diverse roles in western Shakerism. Her narrative breaks new ground and attains the highest level of biography. (Stephen J. Stein, Chancellor’s Professor, emeritus, Indiana University, Bloomington) “Medlicott paints a rich landscape of early American life, through which Bates moves in a bold and sometimes picaresque fashion. Bates is nexus for an adventure that combines the American Revolution, frontier struggle, music, poetry, religious revival, and celibacy. (Christian Goodwillie, director/curator of special collections, Hamilton College)

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. Moreover, the growing discontent among the young is not treated as a peripheral topic but is discussed in light of the stress caused by

misconceptions about the very nature of the covenant and the inability of leaders to cope. Many books about the Shakers make up tales about their life to make the believers seem peculiar. Any careful reading of Shaker manuscripts reveals that such a practice is not necessary. Their actual stories are compelling enough and do not need to be fictionalized to hold our interest or tantalize us. Medicott's treatment of Issachar Bates, the right man at the right time, will hold the reader's attention far more constructively than Shaker mythology ever can. Stephen Paterwic

Issachar Bates, one of three missionaries sent out from New York to "the west," was an important figure in establishing the Shaker version of Christianity in Kentucky and the midwest. An academic scholar, Medicott shows Bates to be not only a zealous convert but also a man of very human limits. A gifted singer, preacher, and poet, Bates was successful in spreading the Shaker message and making converts, but largely a failure as an administrator. Perhaps because of his many gifts, he also inspired jealousy among other western Shaker leaders. In the end, he is shown to have had a rather large ego himself and suffered emotionally when stripped of his authority and sent back east. Medicott's book also contains the best descriptions of the founding of the Watervliet (Ohio) and West Union (Indiana) communities that I have read. I recommend *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey* to anyone with an interest in the Shakers, especially any who harbor a utopian image of the sect.

I grew up not far from a Shaker village and was one of those people who wondered what they were all about. Carol Medicott's *Issachar Bates: a Shaker's Journey*, puts a face to this mysterious religion and brought it into much better focus. Her biography follows the life of Issachar Bates, from his youth in New England and service as a fifer in the American Revolution, to his sudden conversion in 1801 to the Shaker faith, and ensuing role as an influential Shaker preacher. A man with a sense of humor, Bates was a lively preacher, and a gifted poet and musician. He was also conflicted, and Medicott steers her readers straight into his life-long battle as a husband and father of nine who left his family to respond to a greater calling. Bates is seen not only as a zealous preacher, but also, a human who made difficult sacrifices. By the end of *Issachar Bates*, readers will have a clear sense and new appreciation of Shakerism in the early 1800s. Medicott's use of original illustrations and many primary sources lend this biography a superior authenticity.

Historian Carol Medicott's well-researched and reader-friendly narrative tells the life story of a

multi-talented veteran of the American Revolution, driven by his new-found Shaker faith to leave his large family and "harvest souls" on the sparsely-settled western frontier. His natural gifts as a musician, composer, poet and dancer uniquely equipped him for this mission, and his eloquence was successful in converting hundreds of settlers to embrace Shaker teachings of pacifism, celibacy and gender and racial equality, concepts even more difficult to find acceptance in his day than they are today. The communities he helped establish were models of efficiency, diligence and tranquility. This biography is highly recommended to any reader with a general interest in early American history and cultural development on the frontier.

Author Carol Medicott brings this fascinating Shaker leader to life; his story jumps off the page and I honestly couldn't put the book down. Issachar Bates was a Revolutionary War soldier, earthy, coarse and the father of many children. How did he become a celibate, hymn writing, Shaker leader? The author vividly writes about Bates' conversion, his leadership and his harrowing journey as he helped build Shaker communities in the West. It's hard to believe that we haven't already met Issachar Bates in history books; author Carol Medicott combines impeccable scholarship with a wonderful, creative voice!

Ms. Medicott describes the journey of Mr. Bates in a readable, interesting way. He was a Shaker missionary, with a passion for starting new Shaker settlements. I truly enjoyed this book.

If you ever wanted to know what it was like to be a Shaker man, this is the book for you! Watch "Ken Burns" documentary and then read this! It is written so well and flows so well. Great read!

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