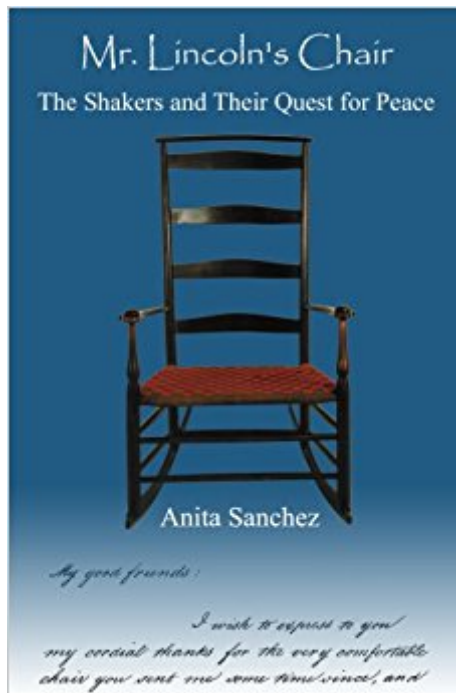




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# Mr. Lincoln's Chair: The Shakers And Their Quest For Peace



## Synopsis

Mr. Lincoln's Chair provides an interesting and engaging look at the Shakers, one of the most complex but largely ignored religious groups and one of the most unusual and successful Utopian communities in American history. The book tells the story of the Shakers from their tumultuous beginnings in the eighteenth century to the present day. It provides a broad overview of Shaker history, culture, religion, life, and work, and presents the Shakers against the backdrop of the Civil War, contrasting their peaceful and productive lives with the carnage of America's bloodiest battles. The book details the Shakers' struggle to obtain legal conscientious objector status, a quest that led them all the way to the White House and an audience with President Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln's Chair is for anyone interested in the Shakers, their unique way of life, and their world famous furniture and architecture. For Civil War buffs, or for anyone fascinated by the rich life of Abraham Lincoln, the book takes a look at Lincoln from a different point of view the Commander-in-Chief of America's bloodiest war seen through the eyes of America's first conscientious objectors. The book also includes brief up-to-date descriptions of all Shaker sites, listed state by state from Maine to Florida. It describes the museums and restored villages, archeological sites, and the all-but-forgotten sites at which few if any traces of the Shakers remain.

## Book Information

Paperback: 196 pages

Publisher: McDonald & Woodward Publishing Company (March 20, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0939923947

ISBN-13: 978-0939923946

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,960,097 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #54 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Shaker](#) #470 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Houseware & Dining > Furniture](#) #2959 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Religion, Politics & State](#)

## Customer Reviews

"In the Preface, author Anita Sanchez describes how her first personal encounter with the Shakers began 'with a lamp, hanging in the polished hallway of a Shaker Dwelling House.' From such a

simple beginning at Hancock Shaker Village 'on that sunny October afternoon' has come an intriguing and insightful new book on the humble yet nonetheless powerfully influential story of the Shakers. ...in the Epilogue, the author recognizes how most people today, when thinking of the Shakers, usually refer to the superbly designed, simple, and functional furniture, such as the chair they presented to Mr. Lincoln. Indeed, Shaker furniture and material culture offer a wonderful legacy for which the Shakers are rightfully renowned. However, the author quickly and correctly proceeds to the oft-missed next step, declaring: 'but the Shakers are about so much more than furniture.'

During the Civil War, perhaps the most violent and trying time in our nation's history, President Lincoln clearly recognized and appreciated the ideals of principled living hidden in plain sight within the Shakers' chairs. The author explores this dynamic in an exhaustingly researched and well-written work, with an in-depth yet easy to absorb manner. The message the Shakers offered to Lincoln and indeed to the World was particularly poignant in those turbulent times, and demonstrated how the integrity and idealism of an unassuming group of unique and unusual Americans could positively influence such World-altering people and events. This book also puts forth the intriguing proposition that perhaps someday the World might realize, as have the Shakers for more than two centuries, that equality can yet be about so much more than just the freeing of slaves, and pacifism can yet be about so much more than simply the absence of war." --Todd Burdick, Director of Education, Hancock Shaker Village

"The Civil War struck America's Shaker communities with all the violence of a hurricane. Through the dramatic story of two worlds in collision, author Anita Sanchez gives illuminating insights into the nature of each. As she unfolds the story of the Shakers' quest to spur President Abraham Lincoln to grant them conscientious objector status, the reader realizes how critically important to our nation is the legacy of a people who are too often dismissed as merely being the makers of nice chairs. Vivid and beautifully written, this book is a wonderful introduction to the history, faith, culture, and heritage of the Shakers, who have been interacting with and quietly influencing the mainstream culture of the United States for over 230 years while most Americans were unaware it was even happening." --Darryl Thompson, Shaker historian and historical interpreter

In August 1863 Henry C. Blinn, a Shaker in the Canterbury, N.H., community, received a notice of being 'legally drafted into the service of the United States for the period of Three years.' Author Anita Sanchez uses this message for the thread interweaving the history, beliefs and achievements of the Shakers. Since Edward Andrews' 1933 exhibition catalogue, 'The Community Industries of the Shaker,' America's most enduring and successful communal group has been the subject of many books. Most have focused on one part of the Shaker way of life such as furniture or music. Mr. Lincoln's Chair utilizes Lincoln's thank you [letter] for the gift of a

chair to lift up the Shakers quest for recognition as conscientious objectors. But the book is more an overview of the historic Shakers. It is a brief narrative that encompasses the total of the Shakers' experience. "Well foot-noted, Mr. Lincoln's Chair is an excellent introduction to the Shakers." - Charles R. Muller, author of 'The Shaker Way' and co-author of 'The Shaker Chair'

Anita Sanchez, in her newest work, 'Mr. Lincoln's Chair: The Shakers and Their Quest for Peace', has juxtaposed the history of the United Society of Believers (the Shakers) and one of the most traumatic events in American history, the Civil War. The basic premise of the book is to illustrate the pacifist nature of the Shakers through their efforts to convince President Abraham Lincoln to grant the sect conscientious-objector status during the Civil War. The Shakers, the longest-surviving utopian religious group in the United States, is often remembered simply for their architecture and their handmade objects that fill museums and antique shops. Sanchez uses one of the objects the Shakers are most famous for, chairs, to show a deeper historical meaning. When President Lincoln agreed to rescind draft notices of Shaker Brethren from military duty, the Shakers sent him a gift of gratitude: a Shaker chair specifically designed for the president. 'Mr. Lincoln's Chair: The Shakers and Their Quest for Peace' is a wonderful piece of historical literature for those who want to know more about the Shakers as well as for those who consider themselves Shaker aficionados. It also gives an interesting insight into Civil War history by connecting this religious group to the larger issue of Civil War objectors. - Wendy R. Benningfield, Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Winter 2009

It is a great book on Shakers and I would recommend it to anyone interested in the history of the Shakers.

Book is well written but I should have taken to heart an earlier buyer's review. The book is basically the history of the Shaker Movement which has been adequately documented many, many times.

Before picking up this book my only knowledge of the Shakers was as a style of chair or cupboard that you occasionally see mentioned in expensive furniture catalogues. I had a vague notion that they were somewhat similar to the Amish...("Aren't they like the people in that "Witness" film with Harrison Ford?....")What a revelation this book is. It gives a complete overview of the Shakers, setting out their history, their deeply held pacifist beliefs and their totally beguiling, ahead-of-its-time, anti-racist, anti-sexist, stance. Sanchez manages to weave masses of facts and details into her

book, while still keeping it light and easy to read. She takes one particular Shaker, Henry Blinn, and follows him throughout the book. Using the imaginative skills of a novelist to surmise what he must have been thinking and feeling and personalising the whole tale. It has the effect of bringing home to the reader that these were real people, with individual lives and personalities the same as our own. What a lovely book. The biography of a people, written by someone with a real feel, and obvious love, for the people involved.

Author Anita Sanchez's skills as both researcher and storyteller combine to craft an intriguing tale from three perspectives: that of a young nation at war; a religious organization at a crossroads; and a devoted man affected deeply by both. "Mr. Lincoln's Chair" is a respectful interpretation of the event that forges these three stories into one. By presenting the Shakers in the historical context of their times, and in particular, the Civil War, she links them to "the World" (as they called it) in a way that, by their own choice, they had never been connected before. By presenting the example of what happened to one Shaker man, the author allows the reader to relate to his religion and his time in a way that evokes concern for a people and an era that might otherwise seem distant and strange. Sanchez's insight to human nature and knowledge of the challenges faced by America, "The Believers" and individuals in the past allow her to write a story that is relevant to a modern reader and seems as current as the struggles our country and each of us face today.

This book provides an excellent, though brief, history of the Shakers - one which brings this group to life. The particular focus is on their interaction with President Lincoln, particularly with regard to conscientious objector status in the civil war. The sections on Lincoln are excellent and provide an up close glimpse into a world very foreign to modern Americans - a world in which ordinary people could gain access to the president. I think a great strength of the book is how the author brings the Shakers to life. The caricature of them known to most of us would make us wonder why anyone would join them. But in this book we see a life, both spiritual and practical, which could and did draw many converts. I found myself becoming rather attached to these people and sad reading the later chapters on the decline and closure of their communities.

I loved Mr. Lincoln's Chair! Author, Anita Sanchez, writes plainly but eloquently. This spare, honest style especially fits with the Shaker subject. It is as good a book for people who know nothing about the Shaker religion as for those who do. For Shaker aficionados, it takes disparate aspects of the religion and lifestyle and pulls them together cohesive unit. For Shaker novices, it is a good

overview, following Shakerism from its inception in England in the 1760s to its still-beating heart in the modern world. Using the "character" of Shaker, Henry Blinn, Sanchez immerses the reader in the day-to-day world of living in a Shaker community and in the horrors of the Civil War. So engrossed are we in the lives of the Shakers that we rejoice as the sect blooms and feel a sadness as their numbers drop and the villages begin to close. In short, this small book packs a powerful emotional punch while showing the kind of solid research you want from an historical analysis.

Mr. Lincoln's Chair: The Shakers and Their Quest for Peace is the fascinating true story of America's Shaker religious community, popularly known for their skill in crafting fine chairs, during and after the American Civil War. The Shakers strove to persuade President Abraham Lincoln to grant them conscientious objector status during an era drenched in American blood; and they grieved with the nation when an assassin's bullet ended Lincoln's life far too soon. A captivating, well-researched historical chronicle written to appeal to readers of all backgrounds, highly recommended.

As a Lincoln buff, I enjoyed this exceptionally well-researched and documented book on a little-known aspect of his personality--Lincoln's leniency and sympathy towards conscientious objectors. A revealing glimpse into Lincoln's White House and the Washington, D.C., of his day, with extensive quotes from his contemporaries.

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