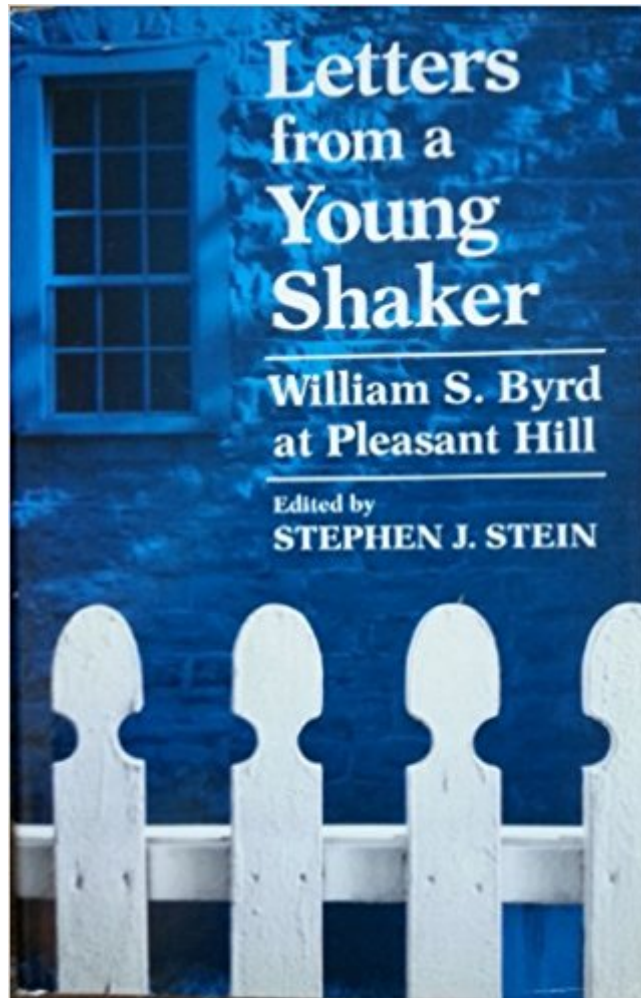




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Letters From A Young Shaker: William S. Byrd At Pleasant Hill



Synopsis

In the early nineteenth century, a young man belonging to the prominent Byrd family of Virginia, the grandson of William Byrd III, took up residence in the Shaker community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Over the next two years, 1826–1828, he wrote a series of letters to his father, a federal judge in Ohio, describing his experiences and his impressions of the United Society of Believers, as the Shakers were formally called. Eventually, William S. Byrd became a convert to the society and an advocate of its beliefs and practices. His letters cut short by his father's death offer today's reader an intimate view of communal life among the Shakers at a time of considerable turmoil in their village. In the correspondence of William S. Byrd, the Shaker experience is expressed in human terms and becomes a living faith. The letters also record the trials associated with conversion to a religion that was socially unacceptable to many Americans of the time. Some of their more poignant passages describe young Byrd's attempt to reconcile the tensions created by his membership in two families—the one of blood and the one of faith. Letters from a Young Shaker provides an unusually instructive commentary on life in a Shaker community, on the questions agitating the community, and on the appeal of Shakerism to Americans in the early nineteenth century. In addition to the letters, the book contains other documents bearing on William Byrd's relationship with the settlement at Pleasant Hill and an introduction placing him in the social and religious context of the period. This book will appeal to historian of American society and to anyone interested in the Shaker way of life. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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"The nineteen letters from this unmarried man in his early twenties to his sympathetic father are articulate and poignant descriptions of a convert's short life in a Kentucky Shaker colony. Most of these letters deal with personal adjustments to the Spartan lifestyle, with glimpses into the problems and mores of the colony." *Church History* "A fascinating addition to any bookshelf of Kentucky history. Now that Pleasant Hill has been restored, it can add much insight and pleasure to a visit there." *Ashland Independent* "Stephen J. Stein, a professor of religious studies at Indiana University, supplies a helpful introduction, notes and appendixes that reveal a harrowing family context of suicide, poor health and early death." *New York Times* "Stein attempts to capture this young man's thoughts and to 'speculate about the possible role [he] might have played in the future intellectual leadership' of the Shakers." *Southern Historian* "Provides insights on daily life and conflict within Shakerism, and helps the modern reader understand something of the appeal the movement had to seekers." *American Studies* --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Stephen J. Stein is chancellor's professor, emeritus, of religious studies at Indiana University. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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