The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, commonly known as “Shakers,” established White Water in 1824, one of 19 communal villages founded by the Shakers in the United States between 1787 and 1827. White Water was the last of four major Ohio Shaker villages and is now the only substantially intact Ohio Shaker village. Nowhere else in Ohio is there such a significant collection of original Shaker buildings, 22 in all. The buildings represent the lives of those sincere, peaceful, hard-working people who believed that every labor was an act of religious expression and should be done to perfection.

What happened to the Village?

A fire in 1907 that destroyed the largest dwelling and the death of a much-beloved Elder in 1910 contributed to the demise of White Water Shaker Village.

The parent ministry at Canterbury, New Hampshire, sold White Water to private owners, prompting the last two Shakers to depart from Harrison in 1916.

The school was razed for farming about 1937. The Center west bank barn was struck by lightning and burned about 1970 and the South granary burned about 2000. The North Family bank barn was neglected until it collapsed in the late 1990s.

Following the Shakers’ occupancy of the land, the farms provided livelihood to several local families. From 1989 to 1991, the Hamilton County Park District acquired 733 acres of Shaker land and the historic Shaker structures.

The Shakers of White Water Village are commemorated by a large granite memorial placed in the center of the White Water Village Cemetery by the Canterbury Ministry. The marker honors all the Shakers who lived and died at White Water. The Crosby Township Trustees now maintain the historic Shaker cemetery.

White Water Shaker Village, an important part of America’s cultural and religious history, is owned by the Hamilton County Park District.

For further information contact the
Friends of White Water Shaker Village, Inc.
Richard Spence, President, 513-772-7974
James Innis, Vice President, 513-738-8764

P.O. Box 62714; Cincinnati, Ohio 45262
www.whitewatershakervillage.org

What happened to the Shakers?

Following the Civil War, White Water’s population waned as strict Shaker religious practices lost their appeal in favor of the liberal ways of the "world." Manufactured products outsold Shaker handmade goods. The market for their packaged garden seeds declined, so this commerce was ended but they continued to raise sweet corn to dry and market by the barrel as far away as Baltimore, Maryland. Basic farm labor had to be hired from the "outside" neighborhood as White Water’s population aged and dwindled.

Where is White Water Shaker Village?

The Village is located 22 miles northwest of downtown Cincinnati in Miami Whitewater Forest on Oxford Road near Harrison, Ohio.
Why did Shakers settle at White Water?

The nucleus of the White Water settlement began in 1822 when Believers from Union Village, a Shaker community near Lebanon, Ohio, came to share their religion with a group of settlers assembling at the Mt. Tabor Methodist Church in Butler County, Ohio. With these new converts, they formed a communal settlement in Hamilton County’s Crosby Township on land with rich soil and abundant timber along the flowing stream of the Dry Fork of the Whitewater River. Early converts donated their properties, thus enlarging White Water’s holdings. When illness struck the Shakers of Darby Plains, Ohio, in the early 1820s, they also moved to White Water.

What was life like at White Water?

Motivated by religious fervor, the Shakers built their first permanent brick structure in 1827 – the Meeting House – the only brick Shaker Meeting House still standing in America. Workshops, barns, corn cribs, milk houses, smokehouses, a mill, and several dwellings were soon built to meet the Village’s growing needs. The Trustees’ Office, built in 1855, hosted travelers and businessmen who came to visit or conduct commerce with the Shakers.

As a communal society, all White Water property was owned in common and members participated in labors for the good of all. Celibacy is a principle of Shaker belief, requiring the Shakers to depend on converts to maintain their numbers.

The Shakers included both men and women in their leadership with elders and eldresses, deacons and deaconesses as well as trustees who dealt with the “World’s People.”

White Water’s population peaked at nearly 200 members in the mid-1840s. Over the lifetime of the Village, more than 600 individuals considered it home.

Broom corn was the first commercial crop planted at White Water, from which the brethren assembled and sold thousands of brooms. The Shakers thrived with sales of garden seeds, fruit products, wheat, sorghum, and livestock. The Shakers also raised silkworms and used the silk to weave their scarves, bonnets, and handkerchiefs and were locally known for raising fish in two Shaker-made ponds and for selling turkey eggs. Other crops and products included Indian corn, oats, wool, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, wine, butter, rye, peas and beans, flax and flax seed, honey, and forest products.