



Ann Lee

February 29, 1736 - September 8, 1784

Died: Watervliet (Niskayuna), New York

Interment: Watervliet Shaker Cemetery, Colonie, New York

Ann Lee died at the Shaker settlement in Watervliet - then Niskayuna, on the flats northwest of Albany - on September 8, 1784. She was forty-eight. Born in Manchester, England, on February 29, 1736, a blacksmith's daughter who worked in cotton mills and a cookshop, she joined the Wardley Society of dissenting Quakers whose worship shook the body. She married Abraham Standerin, lost four children in infancy, and came to believe that celibacy and confession were not ornaments but the terms of a life.

In 1774 she sailed with a handful of followers and landed in New York as the colonies slid toward war. They bought land at Niskayuna. Neighbors called them Shaking Quakers and worse. She preached that God was Mother as well as Father, that women and men stood in the same spiritual office, and that a community could hold property in common if it held its appetites in check. Imprisoned at Albany and Poughkeepsie during the Revolution on rumors of British sympathy, she walked out and kept traveling the New England towns that would later raise Shaker villages from Maine to Kentucky. The dance, the gift of song, and the furniture the world later collected were disciplines before they were style.

She never learned to write a polished English page. Followers took down the sayings. Mother Ann was a title, not a courtesy. Manchester was the mill. Niskayuna was the American founding. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing outlived her by more than a century of villages, seed catalogs, and a shrinking remnant that still keeps the name.

She is buried in the Watervliet Shaker Cemetery in present-day Colonie, New York. The meetinghouse that remembers her is a museum now. The argument she made about work, sex, and equality is not.

Services

Died at Watervliet (Niskayuna), New York, on September 8, 1784. Interment at the Watervliet Shaker Cemetery, Colonie, New York. Born in Manchester, England; founder of the American Shaker communities.

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