



Three days ago, as we were finishing the apple harvest, the big bell at the chapel started ringing and we all paused for several moments remembering two very important and very different events.

August 6th 1774 — “The Glorious 6th”, commemorating the coming of the Shakers (“The United Society of Believers”) to what was to become the United States. The dynamic leader, Mother Ann Lee, was following a dream. Then came over two centuries of one of the most remarkable and productive spiritual communities in our nation's history. They often had the courage to stand against popular opinion and as a result suffered great persecutions. But they were also often a light in the darkness of those times surrounding the

great catastrophes of our history, particularly the Civil War. Shakers endorsed and lived the equality of gender and race. So it would have been natural for them to join with the abolitionists in support of the war. But from the beginning the Shakers were also ardent pacifists. As Mother Ann strongly put it:

You will never kill the devil with a sword.

During the Civil War a Draft Law was enacted. The Shakers had 19 communities and perhaps as many as 6,000 members. Elder Frederick Evans of the leading Shaker community at New Lebanon, New York, went to Washington and pleaded with Abraham Lincoln to exempt Shaker men from the draft. He succeeded and Shakers became among the first to be granted conscientious objector status in United States.

In my lifetime we have drawn the sword to kill many devils. In the short run we generally seem to be successful. But as the years went by I have become increasingly respectful of Mother Ann's pronouncement.

August 6th 1945 — A United States B-29 bomber, named "Enola Gay" after the pilot's mother, dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The city was partly selected because it had been untouched by World War II. 60,000 buildings were destroyed. 70,000 people, mostly civilians, died immediately. 70,000 more died within 5 years from radiation. The bomb was named "Little Boy." Three days later another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

There are Americans who feel strongly that the bomb was necessary to prevent large casualties to our Armed Forces unless the Japanese surrendered. However, I doubt there are many who would argue with the proposition that it was during this time, including events such as the firebombing of Dresden (February 13, 1945), that civilian populations became legitimate “collateral damage” and war was no longer one army fighting against another.

In the winter I wear a cap, knitted by a poet friend, in memory of 14 year-old Khalid. He was one of 9 Afghan boys killed by US soldiers in helicopters in the winter of 2011. The boys were gathering firewood. The weather was bitter cold. Khalid was in the 6th grade and the sole support of his family of 13 sisters and 2 mothers. The official explanation was, “There appears to have been an error in the handoff between identifying the location of the insurgents and the attack helicopters.”

One of a growing number of “errors” as the years roll by. People get killed. I am less sure the devils ever do. I understand there are those who see it differently.

The chapel bell rings again. Back to the apples.

Brother Toby