

Hidden in Plain Sight: The Shaker Origins of American Nursing and the Birth of the Pharmaceutical Industry

About the Book

Drawing on previously unpublished Shaker diaries, journals, and advice books, *Hidden in Plain Sight* reveals a largely unrecognized foundation of American nursing and healthcare along with broader traditions of human caring. Long before Florence Nightingale's influence reached the United States, Shaker communities had already developed a sophisticated culture of care grounded in spiritual practice, ecological knowledge including sickroom management, cultural diplomacy, and botanical medicine. Through a lens of cultural care architecture, this work reexamines the formation of early American professional nursing while tracing how the Shaker nurses' herbal traditions contributed to the emergence of the modern pharmaceutical industry. Both historically rigorous and deeply relevant, this book brings forward a powerful and necessary correction to the origin story of American nursing.

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, *Hidden in Plain Sight* invites readers to reconsider the roots of American healthcare and the traditions that continue to shape it. Framed by the voices of the Shakers themselves, which open and close the book, this work offers not only a reexamination of nursing and pharmaceutical history, but an encounter with a living tradition of care. It draws readers into a world where practice, spirit, and daily life were inseparable—and where they may discover, along the way, a meaningful offering to carry forward into their own lives.

About the Author

Martha Mathews Libster is a nurse scholar, historian, and founder of the Choreosophy Institute at Golden Apple Healing Arts. With more than four decades of experience in nursing, education, and historical research, her work explores the cultural, spiritual, and botanical foundations of care. She is the author of numerous books on integrative nursing, herbal medicine, and the history of American healthcare, including the award-winning *Herbal Diplomats*. Through her scholarship and teaching, she brings forward overlooked traditions and voices that continue to shape the future of healthcare.