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# Common labor, common lives: the social construction of work in four communal societies, 1774-1932

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**Common labor, common lives:**

**The social construction of work in four communal societies, 1774-1932**

by

Peter Andrew Hoehnle

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Agricultural History and Rural Studies

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Ames, Iowa  
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**Major Professor**

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**For the Major Program**

Dedication:

For my grandfather, Arthur Selzer and my parents, Charles and Barbara Hoehnle, in  
appreciation of their love, support and patience.

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## ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century thousands of Americans flocked to communal societies for economic, social, political and religious reasons. This study examines the ways in which four of the most prominent societies dealt with the issue of labor. The four communities examined are the Amana Society of Iowa, the Oneida Community of Vermont and New York, the Shakers and the Icarian Community of Illinois, Iowa and California.

This study describes the ways in which each society organized its labor, the religious and cultural significance each attached to labor, and the role that a productive economy, oriented toward external markets, played in sustaining each community. This comparative analysis pays particular attention to the labor roles of women, children and the elderly in each society, as well as the contributions of the hired workers that each society, ultimately, employed.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Communal societies have been a part of the cultural fabric of the United States since the colonial era, their activities forming interesting aberrations to the general spread of America individualism. At least two hundred and sixty such organizations existed before 1965, although most flourished for relatively brief periods, particularly during the height of communal thinking from 1820 - 1850. Those groups that survived for more than a decade were the exception to the general rule, and typically did so because of a unifying religious belief. Few completely secular societies lasted for more than a year or two, nearly all ending in acrimony and distrust. As the noted Shaker scholar Edward Deming Andrews expressed it, “The ideas of plain people, touched by inspiration, found expression, over and over again, in utopian undertakings which in the aggregate do much to illuminate the temper of the young country.” Although sometimes given to extremes, the very practical and ordered life that developed within these communities stands in contrast not only to the fantastic utopian literature of the time, but to the general nature of society in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The four societies covered by this study – the Amana Society, the Shakers, and the Oneida and Icarian communities -- are among the best known, and longest-lived of American communal societies. Indeed, if any such groups can lay claim to having “household” recognition, the Shakers can, and Oneida and Amana, through the silverware and home appliance companies that grew out of their original communal situation, remain recognizable as brand names, if not for their utopian ideals, then at least for the quality of their products.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Demming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover, 1963), xiii; Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 3.



Of these Societies, only Oneida can lay claim to being an entirely American creation. Immigrant groups founded both Amana and Icaria. These groups arrived with preconceived beliefs and ideas that they adapted to their American environment. Although both communities dealt with their English speaking neighbors and sold goods and services to the outside world, they retained their individuality in language, dress, and belief, disassociating themselves from outsiders as much as possible. The Shakers are an amalgamation of an original religious system formulated in Great Britain and brought to the United States. Despite this, the form that Shakerism took in the United States was an entirely new and American creation.

Both Oneida and the Shakers benefited from the waves of religious enthusiasm and utopianism that swept the American landscape in the 1810s- 1840s, forces that left Amana and Icaria largely unaffected. Despite their differing religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds, all four groups, however, do manifest what seems to be a central human desire, the need to find security in a changing world through religious and social association with other people. Once each body of people had agreed to live within a communal structure, they adopted remarkably similar means of dealing with labor.

The common view of such societies is that their members rejected the world and all its attributes, living simple austere lives, free from internal dysfunction, intellectual thought and, most importantly, technology. In the popular mind, members of the Shakers or of the Amana Society, for example, are often associated with the technology-shunning Old Order Amish. In actuality, none of these groups failed to appreciate the benefits of modern technology; indeed, technological innovations may be attributed to the members of each group. Each society saw technology as a positive influence, a means to simplify and improve

life, to lessen the burdens of labor and to improve the quality of life. They merely rejected the abuses to which technology and the burgeoning industrial revolution were put by the outside world. When machinery could lessen the burden on the individual, the members of these Societies saw no reason why factory workers in Europe and the eastern United States should live in misery. By divorcing themselves from the world outside, these societies hoped to draw the best technological, social and religious attributes from the society they rejected in order to formulate their own Heaven on earth and, perhaps, serve as examples for the rest of the world to emulate.

For the members of these four societies, work was an expression of either ideological or religious faith. For the Shakers, whose motto was “hands to work and hearts to God,” labor was the one “sacrament” adhered to by a sect that otherwise avoided sacraments. At Oneida, improved systems of labor proved the perfection of the system of life propounded by their founder, while Icaria was intended to be a worker’s paradise, a joyful human factory where the evils of the industrial revolution would all be kept at bay. Only at Amana was the concept of work less fully integrated into the religious faith of its members. At Amana work was simply the practical expedient by which the society supported itself. By working, members were able to maintain the Society, which they believed had been ordained by God. Thus, in a circuitous way, work became their duty to God; by working they maintained His ordained community.

The fruits of these differing labor ideologies were mixed. Today, the products of Shaker hands have assumed almost mythic proportions, as Shaker chairs and boxes are sold for unheard of prices, while cheap reproductions of Shaker goods proliferate in discount stores. Indeed, the identification with the products of their hands has so obscured the

meaning and message of Shakerism in the popular mind that an outspoken twentieth century member of the sect was led to complain, “I almost expect to be remembered as a chair or a table.” During the nineteenth century, the products of the Amana Society and the Oneida Community were both nationally known for their high quality and workmanship, reputations that successfully transferred to, and have been maintained by, their successor for-profit companies. Icaria, on the other hand, never more than an agricultural commune, did not produce manufactured goods, and is little known today, save by scholars of French socialism and by its determined descendants who refuse to let the vision of Etienne Cabet die.<sup>2</sup>

In the public mind these communities have been reinterpreted. No longer communal, no longer secretive, they no longer pose a threat to American culture or mores. They have become quaint, old-fashioned symbols of an American agrarian past, safe places for family vacations and outings. The purpose of this study is not to understand why this mythologizing took place, nor is it meant to paint these societies in a dim light or to suggest that they are unworthy of public interest. Rather, its intent is to examine the labor and work ethics of these communities in a more complete manner than has been done previously, to indicate the complexity of the communal labor economy, and to suggest new ways of examining and appreciating these communities for what they were. What these communities most assuredly were not were the agrarian utopias that popular imagination has created. Imperfect though they were, however, these communities presented a clear alternative to the horrendous working and living conditions faced by many Americans in the nineteenth century. They represented safe havens for those marginalized socially, economically and spiritually. For

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), xiii. The individual quoted was Mildred Barker of the Sabbathday Lake, Maine community.

those individuals who managed to remain successful productive members of a particular community, they likely were “heavens on earth.”

In sum, this is the story of how four very different groups of Americans dealt with the issues of labor, religious revival and social organization in the nineteenth century. Although they were never large in numbers, each of these communities is remembered today, if not for influencing the world beyond its boundaries, then for creating a unique environment in contrast to the prevailing industrial and agrarian world of nineteenth century America. Today, the Shaker community of North Union is a prosperous Cleveland suburb, Icaria is little more than an Iowa cornfield, the Oneida Community Mansion House is a museum and Amana has become a tourist destination catering more to German culture than utopian ideals. The record of these communities, however, survives and, indeed, endures. While we, today, might find the ideas and practices of these communities strange or unusual, and while we may not have made the same choices that the thousands who flocked to utopian communities made, the same basic needs for freedom, security and happiness motivate us today, just as they did the nineteenth century idealists who chose to live and labor communally.

The individuals who made up the membership of each of these societies, unlike the protagonists in utopian novels of the period, were real human beings who came, in most cases, from the outside world. As outsiders, these people had developed certain world views in regard to gender roles, working practices and religious and social life. The people who formed the Amana Society were little different from thousands of other German immigrants, the North Union Shakers were Ohio farmers before they were Shakers, and the idealists of the Icarian and Oneida Communities were urban craftspeople, housewives and farmers before embarking on their utopian voyages. Unlike their contemporaries, however, these

individuals chose to reject their old life, or at least aspects of it, for life in a community. How radically they changed their lives, and their views, is partly the subject of the present work.

For comparative purposes, then, it is necessary to describe the world that these communitarians left behind, as well as the changing outside world that surrounded their communities. That world, in the case of these four groups, is rural nineteenth century America, for although the Inspirationists and Icarians had European antecedents, it is more instructive to compare their experience with those of other European immigrants than it is with their contemporaries who did not come to the United States.

American rural life during the nineteenth century was in virtually a continuous state of flux, as changes in agricultural marketing and technology vastly altered the traditional landscape of the American farm and rural community. While the farmer of 1800 might own a few dozen acres and maintain a subsistence farm with a few hand tools, his descendants occupied large market-oriented farms utilizing technological advances in such areas as transportation and farm equipment, that their forebears never imagined. During this period, agriculture shifted from subsistence farming to market production and regional specialization. Roads, then canals and, finally, railroads, knit the landscape together and reduced distances and isolation. Rural communities developed as supply and marketing centers connecting rural families with the outside world. Finally, the relentless press of European settlement shifted the balance of population further westward, squeezing the backcountry farther and farther west, leaving behind stable agricultural communities in its wake. Although some of the members of these Societies were originally urbanites, the vast majority were farmers before becoming communitarians, a status that they shared with a large portion of the population of the time.

The period of the Early Republic in the United States, the era when all four of these Societies had their origins and, in some cases, their periods of greatest strength, was a time of pressing optimism and experimentation. The children and grandchildren of the Revolutionary generation were busy attempting to develop a cultural fabric from many disparate threads as well as to define what it meant to be an American or a participant in a democratic society. Adding to the ferment of the times was the rapid increase of technological improvements such as the steam boat and railroad, coupled with advances in communication such as the steam powered printing press and telegraph, which made for a wider dissemination of news, opinion and thought than had been possible before. It was an age of tremendous optimism, but also of tremendous upheaval and dislocation. Through it all ran the electric vitality of the young nation as it struggled to define its place in the world.

Americans of this period, outsiders noted, worked hard and found value in the work that they performed. Indeed, as sociologist Robin Williams has noted, observers have historically agreed that “America is the land of haste and bustle, of strenuous competition...” As French commentator Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1835, labor was presented to the American mind “as the necessary, natural and honest condition of human existence.” In a society where aristocratic advantage did not exist, Tocqueville insisted that Americans did not view labor as dishonorable but, rather, held it in high esteem. Every member of American society worked, had worked, or was the child of parents who had worked. “In America,” de Tocqueville noted, “no one is degraded because he works, for everyone about him works also...” Americans, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur noted, were “animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.” This drive to work, as Williams notes, grew from a variety of sources, including the fluid social

structure of the young nation, the endless opportunity presented by the resources of the land, the religious tradition which imbued the young nation's consciousness and the frontier experience.<sup>3</sup>

Early observers were quick to note the influence of social mobility and freedom of economic activity as galvanizing features in the American work ethic. In the new nation the individual who willingly shouldered the responsibilities of labor could hope to advance within a society that prided itself on its equality of opportunity and social mobility. The pioneer with his ax could carve a prosperous farm from the backcountry, while a young clerk might one day control a trading empire. As Crèvecoeur exalted, "they receive ample rewards for their labours; these accumulated rewards procure them lands; those lands confer on them the title of freemen, and to that title every benefit is affixed which men can possibly require." "The American," Crèvecoeur asserted, "ought therefore to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest; can it want a stronger allurement?"<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the democratic principles that underlay American society and government, work formed the bedrock of the American faith; it was, in a real sense, the American religion, a core value. John Harmon McElroy suggests that three beliefs related to work developed during the colonial era from a need for survival in the backcountry, and eventually formed a key basis for American society. McElroy articulates these beliefs as "Everyone

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<sup>3</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II. trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), 152 – 153; J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 67; Robin M. Williams, *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), 422.

<sup>4</sup> Crèvecoeur, *Letters From An American Farmer*, 69, 70.

Must Work, People Must Benefit From Their Work,” and, as de Tocqueville observed, “Manual Work is Respectable.” McElroy suggests that the respectability of manual labor derived from the fact that, during settlement, it was a prerequisite both for survival and for advancement. Simply stated, if an individual failed to work he or she would fail to advance, let alone survive, in the American wilderness.<sup>5</sup>

The new land was both a country in which a poor man could hope to rise, as well as, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, a “Land of Labour.” A poor worker in the United States could hope to acquire material prosperity and to climb the social and economic ladder, something impossible in the rigid class society of Europe. The ability to climb the ladder of society through labor imparted honesty and a dignity to that activity not found in Europe, where society viewed labor as the duty of those who, by reason of birth were meant to labor in order to support the upper classes of which they could never be a part. Thus, Americans, from an early day, placed an economic value on labor as a means of personal advancement. Even the New England Puritans who felt called upon to work in order to fulfill the will of God, felt that the reward for pleasing the Almighty would be the accumulation of material rewards.<sup>6</sup>

This religious view of labor was a particularly old one. When God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis, the author notes that they were condemned to work by the sweat of their brow: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life...By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food...” As a result, work was often associated with a curse on humanity,

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<sup>5</sup> John Harmon McElroy, *American Beliefs: What Keeps a Big Country and a Diverse People United* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in McElroy, *American Beliefs*, 49



placed there as a result of the fall of Adam. For many writers, mankind had descended from an idyll to a cursed existence of work, suffering and death. Saint Paul attached a slightly different religiosity to labor in his injunction in Thessalonians that “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” Various religious writers voiced the opinion that not only was labor fulfilling a contract with God, but that idleness invited temptation as expressed by Tabanus Maurus in c. 842 who prayed that “May the servant of God never be found idle! For the devil has greater difficulty in finding a spot for temptation in the man whom he finds employed in some good work, than in him whom he encounters idle and practicing no good.” Americans of the new republic would have been more familiar with the well-known verses by Isaac Watts:

How doth the little busy Bee  
Improve each shining Hour,  
And gather Honey all the day  
From every opening Flower! ....

In works of Labour or of Skill  
I could be busy too:  
For *Satan* find some Mischief still  
For idle hands to do.<sup>7</sup>

The English Puritans found work to fit the sentiments expressed by Watts. Work was not satisfying in and of itself, but rather, “because society functioned more smoothly when everyone had a lawful calling” and because, as Watts asserted, idleness exposed the individual to potential vice and to temptation. For the Puritans, the main advantage of work “was that it kept people out of mischief and enabled them to provide for themselves.”

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3: 17 – 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:10. All Biblical quotations from *The NIV Study Bible New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers), 1985; Rabanus Maurus, Abbot of Fulda, *De Ecclesiastica Disciplina*, Trans. By Siegfried Wenzel, 1967, quoted in Keith Thomas, ed., *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999), 99 – 100; Isaac Watts, 1715, quoted in the Thomas, ed., *Oxford Book of Work*, 104.

Puritans thus imbued “secular occupational activity...with religious sanction...in which successful works became a sign of grace.”<sup>8</sup>

Other writers found in work a divine calling. In fulfilling the call of God to be active they felt that workers could also find spiritual fulfillment or satisfaction. As Thomas Carlyle commented, “All true Work is sacred; in all true Work, were it but true hand-labour, there is something of divineness.” Carlyle believed that even in the “meanest sort” of labor a person’s whole soul was “composed into a kind of real harmony” when an individual had “the blessed glow of Labour in him” a “purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up.” “Labour,” Carlyle mused, “has its summit in Heaven.” Nathaniel Hawthorne reflected these views in his thinly veiled fictional account of life in the Brook Farm community, *The Blithedale Romance*: “we had pleased ourselves with delectable visions of the spiritualization of labor. It was to be our form of prayer, and ceremonial of worship. Each stroke of the hoe was to uncover some aromatic root of wisdom, heretofore hidden from the sun. Pausing in the field, to let the wind exhale the moisture from our foreheads, we were to look upward, and catch glimpses into the far-off soul of truth.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Americans viewed labor within the framework of their capitalist ideology, as an expression of individual opportunity and of the individual’s ability to advance within a democratic society, and as fulfilling a religious calling, and each factor reinforced the others in a tight web of “self-interest, social recognition, and ethical and religious precepts.”<sup>10</sup>

The cultural beliefs that drove Americans to work, the hope of owning property, earning a wage, or of fulfilling a divine calling, unleashed “a focused human energy” upon

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, ed., *The Oxford Book of Work*, xviii; Williams, *American Society*, 423.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, quoted in Thomas, ed., *The Oxford Book of Work*, 113; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65 – 66.

the American landscape which, in the span of three hundred years transformed a collection of scattered subsistence settlements into one of the wealthiest, largest, and most powerful nations on earth. As McElroy notes, “work, not ancestry or class membership” became the basis for individual personal identity. The centrality of work in American culture, even today, is reflected in the query Americans often pose to strangers, “what do you do?”<sup>11</sup>

As the nineteenth century sped forward, propelled on steam and pulled by the gears of a thousand factories, physical labor assumed increasingly negative connotations, even in the “Land of Labor” of the United States. Factory laborers now found themselves disassociated by the products of their labor, forced to become cogs within vast economic machines. No longer the hand craftsman or the free holding farmer of the past, the new industrial worker was tied to the belching smoke of a gritty urban industrial monster. As time passed, American mobility assumed the proportions of a national myth rather than an attainable reality. The gritty exposés of labor conditions in the late nineteenth century by writers such as Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell no longer sang the praises of labor as did de Tocqueville seventy years before.

American farmers of this period were increasingly drawn into market agriculture, as railroads made possible a departure from the subsistence farming of earlier years. Despite the benefits to be gained from market agriculture, the dangers were just as great. Farmers and their families were now tied to commercial crops, as well as the vagaries of markets, banks and railroads in ways that their forbearers had never imagined.

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, *American Society*, 423.

<sup>11</sup> McElroy, *American Beliefs*, 51 - 52.

It was into this age of changing ideas about work and its place in American life that the four communal societies examined here entered. Although differing in their ideologies, all four societies rejected the central American dogma that the reward for work was in economic or social advancement. Instead of material gain, these four communities focused on the moral and religious implications of labor as fulfilling their obligation to God and in helping to advance their own idea of God's kingdom on earth.

## CHAPTER 2. THE AMANA SOCIETY, 1843 – 1932.

Nestled in the wooded valley of the Iowa River in east central Iowa, the seven villages that comprise the Amana Colonies retain ample evidence of the work of the sturdy German Pietists who settled and constructed the villages a century and a half ago. Refugees from religious persecution in the German states of the early nineteenth century, the founders, builders and workers of Amana were the descendants of an eighteenth century religious movement first known as the Community of True Inspiration (*Wahre Inspirations Gemeinde*). The Amana Society, unlike many communitarian groups, was characterized by “pious pragmatism” rather than grand utopian ideology, creating an organized, if stolid, world that functioned, without any serious disruptions for over ninety years until its members voted to modify their lifestyle in the face of increasing social and economic challenges. Unlike the Shakers and the Oneida Community, the members of the Amana Society did not believe that they were living in a “Heaven on Earth,” rather, they believed that their goal was to lead a pious life in anticipation of an “otherworldly heaven” and so they lived and worked accordingly. Through their sober labor, the quiet Inspirationists of Amana on their 26,000 acres of Iowa land created and maintained “the largest...[and] most systematically developed communitarian site” in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

From their inception as a religious sect in 1714 until their final dissolution as a communal society in 1932, the Inspirationists characterized themselves as a community “called out from the world.” They believed that they held a covenant with God, who, through the exegesis of divine inspiration had brought them together into a community of Christian

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<sup>12</sup> Delores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 225, 229, 231.

believers. In order to ensure the continuation of this covenant, members believed, and were taught, that they needed to be sober, pious and industrious workers. By working, they demonstrated not only respect to the Lord, but also contributed to the support of the community that, they believed, He had ordained. Work, then, became for the Inspirationists of Amana much more than simply fulfilling a Germanic work ethic, but an article of faith. For the Inspirationists, toiling in the field, at the craft bench, or in the kitchen meant not only that one was contributing to the temporal well-being of oneself and one's community, but to spiritual well being as well. Inspirationists equated work with faith, and those who failed to work, community leaders suggested, failed to demonstrate proper devotion. Amana, and its predecessor organizations in Germany and New York State, represents a prime example of labor organization within a successful communal society as well as a unique mixture of work and faith that transcended the ordinary workday experience.

The origins of the Amana Society can be found in the Pietistic movement of the early eighteenth century. Dissatisfied with the dogmatism and formality of the established church, Pietists, under the leadership of individuals such as Auguste Francke (1663 – 1727), sought to reinvigorate religious experience and service through a return to simpler forms. For some Pietists such a return mean eschewing most of the trappings of the established church including a church hierarchy, a formal liturgy, regular sacraments and ostentatious church ornamentation. Instead, such forms were replaced by simple gatherings featuring *a cappella* singing, unadorned places of worship, and ecstatic, extemporaneous worship.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The author adapted portions of the general history sections of this chapter for his short book, *The Amana People: The History of a Religious Community* (Iowa City: Penfield Books, 2003). The most detailed work on the history of the Amana Society are the multiple volumes of the *Inspirations Historie*, a community chronicle and history written by Gottlieb Scheuner, Georg Heinemann, Peter Stuck and August Koch, and covering the years 1714 – 1939. To date, only the years 1714 – 1856 have been translated into English. Bertha M. H.

In the early 1700s a former Lutheran clergyman, Eberhard Ludwig Gruber and a saddler, Johann Friedrich Rock, both of Himbach in present-day Germany, began to engage in frequent discussions of scripture and Pietist thought. In 1714 a group of mystical Pietists known as the “*Inspirirte*” or “the inspired ones” came to their attention. Although they initially rejected the Inspired’s claim that they possessed the gift of divine inspiration, Gruber invited representatives of the group to a meeting in his home on 16 November 1714. The Community of True Inspiration traces its foundation to this meeting, after which both Gruber and Rock became active supporters of the sect.

Gruber, in particular, assumed leadership of the sect, while Rock became one of the sect’s *Werkzeuge* or inspired instruments. After 1720, Rock remained the group’s only *Werkzeug* and, as such, made visitational journeys to Inspirationist congregations scattered across the German states. Following Gruber’s death, Rock assumed leadership of the sect, and continued in this capacity until his death in 1749, after which his scribe, Paul Nagel, trained as an attorney, became the group’s leader. Nagel continued to visit the scattered Inspirationist congregations and maintained a degree of activity within the sect despite the fact that it no longer possessed an inspired leader. Following Nagel’s death in 1779, however, the group entered a period of decline that did not end until 1817, at a point when virtually all of the sect’s original leaders and mainstays had died. In that year Michael Krausert, a journeyman tailor from Strassburg, proclaimed that he was an inspired *Werkzeug* and presented himself to the Inspirationist communities.

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Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration* (Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1908) remains the standard published work on the community, although Jonathan Gary Andelson, “Communalism and Change in the Amana Society, 1855 – 1932.” (Ph.D diss., University of Michigan, 1974) is the best scholarly treatment.

Krausert's appearance led to dissension within the dying movement, as some leaders and congregations refused to accept him as a true *Werkzeug*. Krausert, however, gained supporters, and instigated a revival. In 1818 friends, who felt that her strange visions and inner promptings resembled those of an Inspirationist *Werkzeug*, directed Barbara Heinemann, an illiterate serving maid from Alsace, to the sect. Krausert accepted Heinemann at once, and she began to speak in Inspiration alongside her mentor.

In 1819, Christian Metz, a young carpenter who had been born and reared within the Inspirationist community, also began to speak in Inspiration. Conflict soon erupted between the three leaders that ultimately ended, in 1819, with the leading elders of the sect ordering Krausert to leave. At roughly the same time Metz ceased to speak in inspiration and Heinemann remained the only *Werkzeug*. In 1823 Heinemann, tired of the demands placed upon her by the unique position that she held within the community, and also anxious to establish a normal life for herself, married Georg Landmann, a schoolteacher. The Inspirationists who held the celibate state to be the most pleasing to God viewed Heinemann's marriage as a spiritual fall. Accordingly, Heinemann ceased to deliver testimonies, and Christian Metz, who remained the group's charismatic leader for the next fifty years and who had once again begun to speak in Inspiration that winter, took her position. Metz, like John Humphrey Noyes, Etienne Cabet and Ann Lee was a tremendously charismatic figure but, unlike Noyes and Cabet, one with a deep sense of personal humility. Although, as one scholar notes, he "played the role of a wise but authoritarian father, one



who knew what was best for his flock,” Metz was never afraid to delegate authority to others or to ignore the counsel of trusted advisors.<sup>14</sup>

Like the *Werkzeuge* who came before him, Metz undertook visitational journeys to the various Inspirationist communities. In the early 1830s he expanded his usual visits to include Inspirationist communities in Switzerland, which had been largely ignored for several decades. Here Metz led a revival. During the 1820s and 1830s civil authorities began to revoke the privileges granted the various Inspirationist communities, and to question their rights to educate their own children and refuse military service. In 1826 Metz located an abandoned convent in the liberal province of Hesse Darmstadt that he rented as a refuge for his followers. Members of some of the persecuted congregations gathered at the convent, Marienborn, and began to form a semblance of community life there. At the same time, Metz’ testimonies began to suggest that “the time will come, and it is not far distant, when I [the Lord] will remove My luminaries [the Inspirationists] from there and put them in a different place. Eventually, I will gather all those who follow and remain true to Me. I will assemble them into.... one flock.”<sup>15</sup>

Over the next seven years, Metz and his associates leased additional properties as sanctuaries, including the Herrnhaag in 1828, Arnsburg (renamed, by them, “Armenburg”) in 1832 and Engelthal, also an abandoned convent, in 1834. Between 300 and 400 of the Inspirationist faithful ultimately congregated at these leased properties. Moving to the estates represented a significant action on the part of the faithful, as it required uprooting themselves from not only their homes but, in some cases, their country, and forgoing a private family

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<sup>14</sup> Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations Histoire, vol. III 1817 - 1850*, trans. Janet W. Zuber (Amana, Iowa: Amana Church Society, 1987), 53 – 54.

home as they moved into large common buildings with other Inspirationists. The Inspirationists leased each estate when it became evident to the sect's leaders that local authorities were forcing a particular congregation from its home region. Thus, the residents of most of the estate properties came from the same communities and likely recreated a sense of their old life on the estates. Since the estates, with the exception of Herrnhag, had all been used by Catholic religious orders, the means for sustaining a large community through agriculture and industry was already in place. Inspirationists cultivated the large fields surrounding the estates, and Inspirationist craftsmen began to produce the items needed for everyday life and to sell for added income.<sup>16</sup>

The Inspirationists established a form of communal living while housed on the estates. Although individuals continued to maintain their own money and property, certain aspects of their existence became communal. For example, the Inspirationists tilled the fields communally, for the good of the whole community. Likewise, at Herrnhag and Armenburg, wealthier members of the Society established woolen factories in order to provide much needed employment and income for the sect. Organizers did not establish these mills as a commercial or moneymaking enterprise. Metz simply asked wealthier members of the Society, including some with previous experience in textile production, to put up the capital and knowledge to create these factories. The community paid rents for the estates from its common fund, while it divided its income among the members, "according to their ability and time spent at work." Finally, the community ate its meals and held its church services on the estates in large common rooms. Thus, by the late 1830s the Inspirationists who lived on

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<sup>16</sup>Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 38; Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie*, vol. III, 59.

the estates, as opposed to their co-religionists who remained in their own homes, set the stage for an expansion of communal living by the group in the next decade.<sup>17</sup>

Not only did the Inspirationists become used to living and working together during this time, but they came to submit to the authority of the *Werkzeug* and other elders in secular matters as well as in spiritual. At the same time, Metz and the elders worked to unify the separate estate congregations through regular visits and by holding conferences in which the elders of the three communities assembled in order to discuss matters of common interest.

In 1842, suffering from a long drought, increased rents on the estate properties and continued persecution, Metz delivered a testimony directing the community to seek a home in the New World. Within a few months of his testimony, Metz, together with three associates had boarded the ship *New York* and set sail on the Atlantic. After a stormy voyage the committee arrived in New York, and, after fruitless searches elsewhere, finally purchased a 5,000-acre tract on Buffalo Creek Indian Reservation just outside the city of Buffalo, New York. Wilhelm Noe described the new tract in a letter to the community in Germany, laying particular emphasis on its economic potential. The new tract, Noe wrote, had “fertile soil, good climate, water power, [was] not far from a big city, located on a canal and the railroad, not far inland and in the best and most populous state.” Unfortunately, the Ogden Land Company that sold Metz the land did not yet possess clear title to the property, and it would be four years before such a title could be produced. In the meantime, the Inspirationist faithful began the process of immigrating to the new home.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Scheuner, *Inspirations Historie*, vol. III, 81; Barthinius L Wick. “Christian Communism in the Mississippi Valley: The Amana Society, or Community of True Inspiration,” *Midland Monthly* 6 (October 1896), 338.

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Noe to “Brothers and Fellow Members,” 22 December 1842, trans. Peter Stuck, collection of the author.

Before his followers arrived, Metz and Wilhelm Noe crafted a “preliminary constitution” which may have reflected organizational discussions held in Germany. Under the terms of the agreement, each member of the Society was to surrender his/her property to a common fund for a period of three years. The leaders then, were to pay the passage for poorer members of the sect, secure land, and otherwise fund the development of the new settlement using the fund. During the period, interest would accrue on the funds deposited by the members, and the Society would provide them with food and shelter. After the three years had passed, the communal phase would end and property would be divided proportionally among the members by the leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Precisely why Metz chose to institute communal living at this point deserves some exploration. Perhaps his need for a large amount of money with which to purchase the contiguous tract of land led him to institute a common fund. The desire to assure that all members, regardless of their wealth would be able to make the immigration was also likely a factor. Metz also would have been aware that such a system would not be viewed as a significant departure from the arrangement previously held on the German estates, and so would prove acceptable to his followers. Some have suggested that Metz’ visit to the Zoar Communal Society in eastern Ohio the spring following his arrival in New York may have cemented his thinking on the issue of communalism. Metz’ comments of that encounter, however, suggest that, if anything, the visit may have well dampened his enthusiasm for communal property as he found Zoar generally lacking in spiritual and temporal enthusiasm. Finally, Metz may well have had in mind the statement in the biblical book of Acts that the

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<sup>19</sup> Charles F. Noe, “A Brief History of the Amana Society,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 2 (April 1904), 176; Francis Alan DuVal, “Christian Metz: German-American Religious Leader and Pioneer” (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1948), 119.

first Christian church had held all things in common. Since in many of the other practices he instituted Metz attempted to follow the teachings of Jakob Boehme and follow the first church, he may well have viewed communalism as a way of doing so.

Metz named the new settlement, "Ebenezer," a biblical term meaning "hitherto the Lord has helped us." Within a short time, the community created three small villages on its New York land and acquired a large tract of Canadian land when its owner converted to the faith. By 1852 the community had created three additional villages in New York State and two small outposts in Canada. Calling itself the "Ebenezer Society" the community prospered. By 1846, a large woolen mill was in operation at the village of Middle Ebenezer, while tanneries, flour and saw mills operated in the other villages. As the community became established in its new home, Metz realized the need to formalize and extend his communal arrangement indefinitely. Community leaders drafted a new permanent constitution up which the members signed and, in 1846, the New York State Assembly formally incorporated the community as the "Village of Ebenezer."

The Ebenezer villages were essentially farm communities, in most cases separated from each other by only a few miles of cultivated fields and forests. Each village was a self-sustaining unit, with wagon, blacksmith, harness maker, cobblers, tinsmiths and other businesses. Middle Ebenezer, the location of the Society's woolen and calico mills, remained the industrial center of the community. All of the manufacturing carried out by the Society, from tanning hides, grist milling and the production of woolen textiles, was agriculturally based. Men staffed virtually all of the Society's shops and factories, the one exception being the woolen mill where records indicate half a dozen women worked by 1855.

Individuals who visited the Ebenezer community, and who committed their observations to paper, universally praised the Inspirationists for their industry and for the tremendous advances they had made in such a short period of settlement. The anonymous author of the first published description of the community, which appeared in *The Harbinger*, the official organ of the socialistic Brook Farm community, proclaimed that the young Ebenezer settlement spoke, “well for the superior efficiency of *combined effort over isolated and individual effort*. A gentleman who accompanied me.... Observed that they had made more improvements in less than two years than were made in our most flourishing villages when first settled, in five or six.” Other, less biased observers reported on the “astonishing improvements they have made in so short a time,” including constructing the villages, clearing several thousand acres of land, planting 25,000 fruit trees, constructing miles of fences and cultivating acres of gardens and fields, while at the same time managing a woolen mill ten times the average size for such a business.<sup>20</sup>

To the outside observer, work within the communities was organized in, what they perceived as the most efficient manner possible, with each member of the Society providing their fullest efforts towards the tasks allotted them by their superiors in the communal hierarchy. That the observers viewed the community through a series of filters, however, is readily apparent. To begin with, visitors to the Ebenezer settlement, such as the author of the *Harbinger* article and a visiting delegation from a nearby Shaker community, generally made such visits because they were supportive of communal activities such as those represented by the new community. Ebenezer, in contrast to the Fourierist Phalanxes then in vogue among

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<sup>20</sup>“German Settlement,” *The Harbinger*, 25 October 1845, 320; H. A. P., “German Ebenezer Settlement,” *The Cultivator*, 8 (August 1847), 248.

American reformers, offered an example of a successful communal experience. By the time that visitors first wrote about Ebenezer in 1845, the Society had already lasted longer than the average Phalanx, and showed no signs of imminent demise. Additionally, the vast number of improvements made to the Ebenezer holdings in such a short period of time seemed to indicate that a communal organization of labor was not only possible, but also highly profitable. Finally, with one exception, none of the observers appears to have spoken German, rendering them unable to communicate with the rank and file Inspirationists who knew no English. Thus, accounts of Ebenezer tended to be superficial, displaying, for example, an almost complete ignorance of the religious basis of the community. From what these observers noted of Ebenezer, it was an efficient community of hardy German peasants, who exemplified virtues of thrift and industry.

By 1854, the Ebenezer villages had reached a state of settlement and organization beyond that of most rural communities of the time. Bound together by religion and their unique economic system, the Inspirationists were also in daily contact with one another, whether working side by side in the fields or in the kitchen houses and such contact undoubtedly strengthened the growing bonds of community. And yet, for the apparent strength of the Society, both external and internal problems threatened its long-term survival. Internally, some divisions between members of the community were apparent. Although major controversies, such as an 1846 debate on whether or not the community should observe total celibacy, during a member challenged Metz in a church service, had passed without serious harm, other problems had proven to be more persistent and insidious. In what would prove the bane of the Inspirationists entire communal experience, members of the Society quickly realized that they had no incentive to work particularly hard. Not only did

communal activity lessen the demands on the individual worker, but the fact that the deficiencies in one worker's efforts would be compensated for by the strengths of another also prevailed. By 1854 the Society already employed hired hands to perform certain tasks on the farms and in the mills of the Society. Like the problems involving individual effort, these hired hands or *Tagloehner*, remained in evidence until the reorganization of the Society in 1932.<sup>21</sup>

Society records indicate a growing concern by Metz and other leaders with a developing sense of "materialism" and an indifference to spiritual teachings by members of the Society in the early 1850s. Such a "falling away" from core principles was likely fueled by the fact that the nearby city of Buffalo possessed a large and vibrant German immigrant community with which Society members had limited contact, and whose lifestyle they likely envied.<sup>22</sup>

Externally, attacks from competing business interests and hostile neighbors buffeted Society leaders. In the spring of 1854, for example, complaints that the Society failed to meet its fair share of the tax burden led to a formal investigation of the group by a committee of the New York General Assembly. At the same time, a dispute involving a dam a few miles downstream from the villages threatened to pull the community into a lawsuit. The dam, originally constructed in 1828 by the Buffalo Hydraulic Association, diverted water from Buffalo Creek into a canal which, in turn, powered several tanneries and other industries in the city of Buffalo. Over time the canal had silted in, largely due to the practice of its bordering industries using it for waste disposal, leading the Association to raise the level of

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<sup>21</sup> For the celibacy controversy see Jonathan Andelson, "The Gift to Be Single: Celibacy and Religious Enthusiasm in the Community of True Inspiration," *Communal Societies* 5 (1985): 1 – 32.

<sup>22</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 57.



their dam on Buffalo creek. This action, however, caused water to back up in the creek bed and flood some of the Inspirationists' low-lying fields. Worse yet, the higher water level often made it impossible for the turbines of the Middle Ebenezer mills to function. Concerned at Inspirationist complaints about the dam, the Hydraulic Association filed a formal court injunction, (later overturned) against the Society. On the same day that the injunction was filed, Christian Metz delivered an *Einsprache* (written, as opposed to spoken) testimony directing the Society to seek a new home in the west.<sup>23</sup>

Within days of Metz' testimony, the Inspirationists organized a scouting party, consisting of Metz, Carl Mayer (the Society's business manager), Carl Winzenried and Ferdinand Weber. The committee traveled to the new territory of Kansas, but failed to locate or purchase a suitable tract. Plagued with illness, and perhaps unsettled by the growing controversy over slavery in the territory, the committee returned to Ebenezer. A second committee, this time with only two members, traveled to Iowa. This committee, on its first day of exploration, located a tract of land only twenty miles from the then state capitol of Iowa City. In June of 1855 a third committee, headed by Carl Winzenried, returned to Iowa and began to purchase what would eventually amount to 26,000 acres of land in the heavily wooded valley of the Iowa River.

The new site, unlike Ebenezer, was relatively isolated from the "outside world." Additionally, the river and a large creek promised suitable waterpower, while the large stand of timber, clay and stone outcroppings provided easily available building materials. Settlement at Amana began with the arrival of a hand picked contingent of thirty-three

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<sup>23</sup> Gottlieb Scheuner, "Inspirations Historie, 1851 – 1856," trans. Virginia L. Lewis, unpublished manuscript, Amana Heritage Society, Amana, Iowa, 10 - 11.

settlers from Ebenezer. This advance party began the process of clearing land and constructing houses and barns at what became the village of Amana. In the following year, more settlers arrived from Ebenezer, and a new settlement, West Amana, began on the northwestern corner of the Society's land holdings.

In almost every year after 1855 the Society began a new village, spreading the communities across the Society's estate, roughly an hour apart by ox cart. Each village was surrounded by its own farm district, averaging roughly 2,000 acres. As in Ebenezer, the Inspirationists farmed their new Iowa holdings in the open field manner they had known in Germany, in which farm workers inhabited a village and worked the land surrounding it, but no one lived on an independent farmstead. The Inspirationists funded their Iowa purchases through the sale of their Ebenezer holdings, although the Panic of 1857 temporarily halted land sales, and forced the community to borrow large sums of money from Buffalo banks. On 30 December 1864 the final contingent of settlers arrived at Amana from Ebenezer, formally ending the latter's existence as a communal society. By the time the final contingent arrived, the Amana villages had a total population of 1,228 members.<sup>24</sup>

The 1860s were years of growth and development at Amana, as workers struggled not only to plant crops, but also to build homes, barns, shops and factories. Society officials laid out each village so that the *Saal*, or meetinghouse, was centrally located for convenience sake, with shops and barns located at the edge of town. Ever conscious of fire, the Inspirationists initially constructed both of their woolen mills, at Main and Middle Amana, some distance away from the rest of the village, although, in the case of Main Amana, a street of homes ultimately connected village and factory. The most significant construction

activity involved completion of a seven-mile long millrace in order to divert water from the Iowa River for use at the Society's various mills and factories. Initially, Society leaders speculated that Price Creek, the stream that bordered the village of Amana, would provide sufficient power for the mills. Quickly realizing their error in judgment, Society leaders authorized the construction of the canal in 1865. Christian Metz, Carl Winzenried and Friedrich Heinemann platted portions of the canal, although the engineering aspects of it were likely the work of A. Louis Moulin, an aged and blind Inspirationist who had been formally trained as an architect in the old country. The millrace required four years for construction, during which the elders assigned each village a quota of members to help with the effort. The completed canal powered both of the Society's woolen mills, the Amana calico mill, machine shops at both Main and Middle Amana, a starch factory at Middle Amana and the huge flour mills at Main Amana.

On 24 July 1867, Christian Metz, the beloved charismatic leader of the community, died at the age of seventy-two. Metz' mantle as *Werkzeug* fell upon Barbara Heinemann Landmann, who continued to spiritually guide the community until her death, at the age of eighty-eight, in 1883. Landmann's status as a woman, combined with what appears to have been an abrasive personality, limited her actual leadership role within the community. During the years following Metz' final decline in health in the early 1860s the temporal and spiritual leadership of the community largely seems to have been guided by Carl Winzenried, the official president of the Society.

Within each Amana village, various shops provided goods and services, not only to village residents, but also to non-members of the Society who lived in the immediate vicinity.

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<sup>24</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 73 -74.

Amana blacksmiths, for example, shod not only Amana horses, but often those of farmers in the surrounding area who paid a fee for the service that the blacksmith, and any other craftsmen performing a similar task, surrendered to the community treasury. The village stores, similarly, catered not only to the Amana residents who made their purchases there based on the line of support money or credit granted to them each by the Society, but also to outside visitors. From the very beginning, the Amana villages, although more isolated than their Ebenezer predecessors, were inextricably bound to the outside world. The Society depended upon the income derived from such small services as shoeing the horse of an outsider, to selling its blankets, calico prints, molasses, starch and other products to outsiders across the country. Additionally, farmers present in Amana to sell wool or have wool carded at the Amana woolen mill, traveling salesmen, and the simply curious stayed in the hotels erected by the Society in the villages of Main Amana, Upper and Lower South Amana and Homestead.

As transportation evolved from horse and buggy to train and, ultimately, automobile, more and more outsiders reached Amana and exerted a subtle influence on the minds of its residents by exposing them to such simple things as fashionable clothing, automobiles and instrumental music. Those residents, such as the depot agents, store and hotel clerks and doctors who had frequent dealings with outsiders came to have a more cosmopolitan view of the world than their more blue collar co-religionists in the Society managed craft shops.

All Amana villages had certain craft shops in common with one another. These particular shops were usually in some way necessary to the management of the village farm, and included blacksmiths, carpenters, wagon makers, wheelwrights and saw mills. Other enterprises connected with the communal kitchens, such as dairies, broom and basket

makers, bakeries, butchers and coopers, were also present in each town. Each village had its own general store. Beyond these enterprises others, such as tinsmiths and harness makers and the book bindery and print shop, were headquartered in particular villages but provided their services to other communities as well. Aside from Main and Middle Amana, none of the villages had factories and were, as a result, much smaller and more agriculturally-oriented than these two centers of the Amana population. With the exception of these two villages, the primary male occupation in each community was farm worker. Not only did managers assign more men to work on the farm than in the craft shops, but most craft laborers spent at least part, if not most, of the year helping in the fields as needed.<sup>25</sup>

In common among virtually all of the Amana crafts and factories was the fact that they were male domains. The patriarchal nature of the community, reflecting to a degree the outside world at the time, did not allow women a large role in community life. For most Inspirationist women, life revolved around the kitchen house (to which the village elders assigned them to work), their homes and church. Still, the communal nature of Amana meant that Amana women, in contrast to their sisters in the outside world, rarely worked alone, and rarely worked as hard as rural females who lived beyond the community.

Teachers, elders and parents instilled the need to work in the Inspirationist's mind from very early childhood onward, a circumstance best illustrated by describing the life of an average communal participant in the Amana enterprise. When an Amana woman became pregnant, she generally continued to work at her assigned duties in the kitchen house until shortly before giving birth. From the birth of her baby until the child was around three years

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Moershel and Dennis Zuber list twenty-three different types of businesses that were in operation during the communal period in their short study of the Amana communal period. They also note which

of age, the mother customarily stayed at home. Unless another child had been born in the intervening three years, meaning that their mother could stay home longer, the average Amana child went to *Kinderschule* at the age of three. *Kinderschule* was essentially a day care located in a small building set in a quiet part of each village. Each *Kinderschule* was staffed by women, usually older, who watched their little charges as they played in the oversize sandbox, on the swings, looked at picture books, or napped, and fed them snacks and meals at the appropriate times. Most mothers came for their children at noon, took them home, and then returned them to the *Kinderschule* for the afternoon while they worked in the gardens.<sup>26</sup>

At the age of five, each Amana child entered school. In Middle and Main Amana, the largest villages, students met in sections, with one teacher for the youngest children, another for the upper elementary and a third for the older pupils. In the other villages, however, all the students had a single teacher in a one-room school environment similar to that of most rural Iowa communities at the time. Teachers instructed children in basic grammar, arithmetic, history and geography.<sup>27</sup>

The Amana schools were always public, which, in the nineteenth century, meant that they conformed to the basic requirements mandated by the state and that their teachers were all certified. Beyond this basic instruction, however, the Amana schools were quite different

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businesses were in operation in which village. Henry G. Moershel and Dennis Zuber, "Time Touches Amana," unpublished paper, Amana Heritage Society.

<sup>26</sup> In 1982 the Amana Heritage Society conducted an extensive oral history project with local residents concerning their memories of the communal era. The terms of gift for these interviews provide that the interview subject not be identified by name, but only by interview number. I have adhered to this criteria, and will cite interviews by number. Other interviews, conducted outside of this project, do not carry this stipulation and are identified by name. Oral History #45, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, Amana Heritage Society.

<sup>27</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 82; Peter Stuck, interview with Jonathan Andelson, 9 December 1972, Notes collection of the author.

than those attended by most Iowa children. Generally, the schools followed the pattern of the German *Volksschule*, which interspersed periods of play with manual training and formal instruction. The school day at Amana started at 8 a.m. and included a two-hour section of standard instruction. This was followed by a period known as *Arbeit Schule* or “work school,” during which female knitting instructors taught younger children, both boys and girls, how to knit and older children worked outside helping to pick up apples in the orchards, picking grapes in the village vineyards, or tending garden plots. The most senior students apprenticed at a craft or in the kitchens. In West Amana, where the teacher was also the village apiarist, older boys helped him in the apiary. Formal instruction resumed in the afternoon, interspersed with playtime and other activities. School lasted until 5 p.m. and concluded with a short prayer meeting in the classroom.<sup>28</sup>

School in Amana was held year round, six days a week. During periods of harvest or whenever a kitchen house needed extra help, an adult appeared at the schoolhouse to ask the teacher to let them borrow some of the older children for these tasks. Besides simply helping with work as needed, the school children were involved in certain jobs. In the spring, school children planted onion sets in the huge common onion fields in each village, and, in the fall, it was often the older school children who harvested these onions. During the summer

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<sup>28</sup> Although one resident, when interviewed, noted that, “I don’t want to brag, but they say my Uncle Adam was the best knitter they had in school. He’d beat any girl,” there is little evidence to suggest that Amana men continued to knit following their school years. As a result, knitting was still a gender specific activity in Amana, taught to boys only as a means of keeping them occupied while young. Peter Stuck, interview with Jon Andelson, 9 December 1972, notes collection of the author. Oral History Interviews, #3, #15, #18, # 32, #44, #64, #75, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

months, and especially at threshing time, adults often pulled young Amana boys out of school by adults to help as needed, just as their rural counterparts were.<sup>29</sup>

Teachers expected Amana school children to clean the schoolhouse, and also to maintain the yard outside, which, in some villages, included a vegetable garden. Finally, while knitting provided a simple way to keep the small children busy for a few hours each day, the knitted stockings, gloves and wristlets produced by the children were used by their families and, in some instances, even sold by the Society for a profit. One outsider observer viewed the labor activities of Amana children with derision commenting that, "one will never see the little tots playing" but rather piecing quilts, working in the garden or knitting.<sup>30</sup>

From the age of five, when they first began to knit, Amana school children learned never to be idle, and to always contribute to the welfare of the Society. In school they learned to be obedient, not only to their teacher, but to the elders and other leaders. Finally, the practice of allowing older children to apprentice at trades during the afternoon hours demonstrates that the Amana educational system placed more emphasis on practical training than on intellectual instruction. The Amana curriculum, as a whole, taught the children the basic skills that they would need in order to be, as one young man wrote in his eighth grade graduation essay, "faithful member[s] of the Community and to do what [they were] bidden." The emphasis on constant, useful activity extended beyond school hours to the home where

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<sup>29</sup>Oral History Interviews, #20 and # 75, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Henrietta Moershel Ruff, *Seasons to Remember: Recollections of an Amana Childhood (Deep River, Iowa: Brennan Printing, 1996)*, 38.

Oral History # 20, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Viola Gardner Brown. "An Arcadia in America: Practicing the Gospel of Work, the Amana Society Had Actually Realized the Dream of the Political Theorist," *The Home Magazine*, 1906, in Joan Liffing-Zug Bourret, ed., *Life In Amana, 1867 – 1935: Reporters' Views of the Communal Way* (Iowa City, Iowa: Penfield Press, 1998), 93.

Brown's comments about Amana children working are decidedly negative, and also had harsh words concerning the women of the society who, she wrote, "have an expression of infantile innocence, and in many cases a strange apathetic look" (Brown, "An Arcadia in America," 93).



one older resident recalled “there was a lot of emphasis put on doing useful things after school” as children helped with household chores or helped their parents in craft shops, kitchen houses and on the farms.<sup>31</sup>

During their final years of school, the Community encouraged older Amana children to apprentice at a particular job. For girls this meant spending a few afternoon hours in the kitchen house, while for boys it meant a few hours each day helping with farm work, or perhaps assisting a father or older male relative at a particular craft.

At the age of fourteen Amana children formally graduated from school, at which point the local *Bruderrath* (governing council of elders) assigned each individual to a particular job. Although many young men followed the trade of their father, this was not a hard rule, and often a young man might find himself assigned to learn a different trade because the basket weaver or shoemaker was getting older and was having difficulty fulfilling his duties. In villages elders usually assigned boys to work on the farm after finishing school, and only later were assigned to particular duties.

Raised to be obedient, Amana young people accepted their job assignments and went to work. The authority of the church elders was not to be questioned, but to be obeyed. While Amana residents frequently recalled being dissatisfied with work assignments, few openly challenged the elder’s decision. The elders likely took care in placing individuals in suitable jobs, perhaps with the conviction that an unhappy worker would be an unproductive worker. An early observer of the community noted that, “[t]he tastes and preference of each boy and the opinions of his parents are, of course, consulted” in the job assignment process. A few

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<sup>31</sup> Shambaugh, *Amana The Community of True Inspiration*, 216; Oral History #29, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS. For a contrasting account concerning the work experiences of Iowa farm children

Amana men recalled appealing to the elders when they found a job assignment distasteful. In the majority of cases, such appeals were successful, again suggesting that the elders attempted, in so far as it was possible, to match the worker to the job. Despite adjustments that the elders were willing to make, enough dissatisfaction with job assignments prevailed in the early 1890s that the Board of Trustees was compelled to issue as statement that, "Our members must all do their part. The brethren and youths are not to be so choosy and, instead, be willing to take hold and help wherever needed. No work should be too lowly, for work is never shameful, but honorable. The good of the community should take precedence over one's own comfort."<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, the one assignment that led young men to appeal for a change was one of the most prestigious in the community, that of school teacher. Of the five teachers interviewed in later years about their experiences, all but one suggested that they had not sought, and did not wish to accept, the position. Perhaps teaching was less desirable to them because it entailed instructing small children, and was preceded by an extended period of study at high school and college in the outside world. In most cases, the elders managed to convince the young man involved to accept the teaching duty if, for no other reason, than as a chance to continue his education.<sup>33</sup>

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during the same period see Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "Helping Ma and Helping Pa: Iowa's Turn-of-the-Century Farm Children," *Annals of Iowa* 59 (Spring 2000): 115 – 140.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Shaw, "Life in the Amana Colony," *Palimpsest* 52 (April 1971), 174 (A reprint of an article originally written in 1887); Oral Histories #11, #12, #18, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Jonathan Andelson, interview with Peter Stuck, 18 June 1971; Amana Society Trustee Minutes, 12 March 1894, trans. by Henry J. Ruff.

<sup>33</sup> Oral Histories #19; #25, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Peter Stuck interview by Jonathan Andelson, 18 September 1972. An exception to this trend was Rudolph Blechschmidt of East Amana, who, ironically, was assigned to the horse barn when he finished school. Blechschmidt wanted to be a teacher like his father and bargained with the *Brudderath* that he would finish high school in only two years, if they would agree to let him continue his education. Blechschmidt's proposition was accepted, and he embarked on a

Once assigned to a particular duty, a man worked in that capacity as long as he was physically able. While retirement, as it is known today, did not exist in communal Amana, older individuals continued to perform at least simple tasks until they died, or were physically unable to continue. Certain jobs, such as carpet and basket weaving for men, and preparing vegetables on a lapboard for cooking for women, were primarily the domain of the elderly. Oral tradition suggests that by the time an individual was in his or her late forties he or she had a reduced workload.<sup>34</sup>

The Amana workday, for a man, lasted from 7:00 A. M. until 6:00 P.M., during the summer, and both began and ended a half hour later during the winter months. An hour-long dinner break over the noon hour, together with two shorter “lunch” breaks in the forenoon and afternoon, served to break up the monotony of the workday. All members strictly observed the Sabbath each Sunday. Kitchen workers and farm laborers who needed to tend to livestock performed minimal duties on Sundays, but no one else did. The observance of Sunday even entered into Amana folklore: one-woman recalled elderly aunts telling her, “If you do something on Sunday, [there will be] a day in the week where you can’t work. That’s what they always said. And I got to the point where sometimes I believed it.”<sup>35</sup>

The primary occupation in each Amana village was agriculture. Not only did a larger percentage of the male residents in each village work as farm laborers, but many other community industries, such as blacksmithing, harness making and wagon production, were inextricably tied to the farm production. The roughly 26,000 acre Amana estate was divided

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thirty-year career as a teacher and, after the reorganization, as a school official. (Oral History #80, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS)

<sup>34</sup> Andleson, “Communalism and Change,” 83; Oral Histories #3, #10, #29, #30, 32, #45, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

into seven farm districts, each with a village near its center and each under the direction of a single farm manager appointed by that village's local *Bruderrath*. The manager was responsible for directing the activities of the farm workers, including as many as several dozen hired hands. In most cases, each division of the farm, such as the dairy, calf and horse barns, had its own "boss" whose authority was subject to that of the manager. These assistant bosses met, often on a daily basis, to discuss the particular labor needs of the farm on a given day. The farm manager was also responsible for maintaining records on crop production and expenses. The seven village farm managers met on a monthly basis in order to share information and to coordinate the Society's farming activity. Aside from the local *Bruderrath* (of which he might also be a member), the village farm manager was the most powerful individual in his respective village in secular matters.<sup>36</sup>

Beneath the farm manager and the assistant managers and the normal farm workers was the floating pool of agricultural labor known, in Amana parlance, as the *Handarbeiter* (the hand workers). Technically, the *Handarbeiter* were not regularly a part of the farm workforce but, rather, were called upon for assistance during harvest, cutting wood, in animal slaughter and harvesting ice in the winter. The hired hands in each village were part of the *Handarbeiter* pool. The farm foremen issued "tickets" to each of the *Handarbeiter* designating them to a particular duty for that day. The *Handarbeiter*, together with the many of the Amana factory workers, constituted a vast, unskilled labor force with a constantly declining degree of commitment to work. Many hands made for light work, and also allowed some individuals to slack off and let other carry the major burden. Individual craft workers,

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<sup>35</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 83; Oral History # 30, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

as often the only practitioner of their trade in the village, by contrast, were too visible in the community to fall into a similar state of lethargy. If the cobbler failed to produce shoes, the elders would have noted the situation immediately, whereas, a farm hand who failed to give the full measure of his labor would be overlooked, since the efforts of other laborers, and, increasingly hired hands, filled the void.<sup>37</sup>

Farm labor in Amana was distinguished by its scope, but not necessarily in its methods. The original leaders of the Society divided the Amana estate into seven, roughly equal, farm departments. The Amana farms held a significant advantage over smaller private farm operations in Iowa at the time because the Society's capital resources allowed them to purchase tractors and other modern machinery at an earlier date than independent farmers. Finally, the seven farms complemented each other. Should West Amana, for example, have a bad wheat crop, a superior crop in another village would likely cover the deficiency. While each village had its own dairy, beef cattle and crop production, different villages specialized in different types of production. The East Amana farm, for example, was hilly and unsuited for heavy cultivation. As a result, East Amana became home to most of the 3,000 sheep raised by the Society in order to supply its two woolen mills.<sup>38</sup>

Farm labor, largely unskilled, could be performed by virtually any able-bodied member of the Society. As a result, farm managers frequently called upon craft workers to assist at particularly strenuous times of the agriculture year, such as harvest. Additionally, Amana youths, as young as twelve, helped deliver water to men in the field, led the horses

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<sup>36</sup> Oral History # 93, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Andelson, "Communalism and Change" 87 – 88.

<sup>37</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change" 88; Charles Nordhoff, *The Communist Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (Reprint, New York: Hillary House Publishers, Ltd., 1961), 34.

<sup>38</sup> Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 168.

that pulled loads of hay into the mows of the giant livestock barns and leveled off the grain in wagons during threshing. This type of labor was a standard experience for Iowa boys at the time. Indeed, the memories of men who worked on the Amana farms are in many respects, indistinguishable from the recollections of other rural Iowans of the same period.<sup>39</sup>

Next to the farms, the woolen and calico mills were the largest employers within the Amana Society. These two industries provided a significant income for the Society, which used such income to purchase raw materials and goods that it could not produce itself. The Society's textile industry dated back to the German estates, particularly to Armenburg, where a consortium of Inspirationist elders chartered a woolen factory in 1840, primarily to provide employment for their co-religionists. The Inspirationists transported the industry, together with some of its equipment, to the United States, where they established a woolen mill at Middle Ebenezer. In 1852 they expanded their production, and built a second mill at a site between Middle and Upper Ebenezer that became known as the village of New Ebenezer. The industry again moved with the Inspirationists when they came to Iowa; they built a new factory building at Main Amana in 1859. The community constructed a second factory, at Middle Amana, in the early 1860s.<sup>40</sup>

Together, the two mills employed approximately 125 people. Most of the Amana factory workers were male, although women worked on a limited basis to weave together broken threads and inspect cloth, unlike most textile mills of the time where women commonly operated the power looms. Children under the age of fourteen, a common component of textile mills in the nineteenth century, were also absent from the Amana

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<sup>39</sup> Oral Histories #74, #44, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Ruff *Seasons to Remember*, 39.

factories. The average mill worker was likely transferred to the mills in his late teens, after spending time working in the barns. During peak harvest seasons, managers often delegated mill workers to help with farm activities as needed. Likewise, some farm employees worked in the mill during peak production in the factory.<sup>41</sup>

The Amana woolen mills represented a full scale, integrated operation in which raw fleece wool, produced by the Society's own flocks, but always supplemented by purchases, was washed, carded, dyed, spun and woven into flannels. Working conditions within the mills were noticeably different than in comparable facilities in the outside world. Visitors noted vases of flowers, stools for workers to sit upon, break areas and a general unhurried atmosphere. Unlike workers in the outside world, mill workers at Amana had no need to be driven in their actions. Although they received bonus credits at the village store for overtime, woolen mill workers received the same allotments of clothing and the same food and housing facilities as their counterparts in farm work. These benefits came no matter what a person's output, suggesting that there was little incentive to work particularly hard. Indeed, observers such as Henry Wallace in 1914 frequently commented on the relaxed nature of the mills. Wallace noted that, "the mill hands were not hurting themselves by too much work, but looked placid and contented. There was a coffee pot in the center of the room, and one man took time off to pour himself a cup. Everyone was working, but there was not the vigorous bustle noticeable in most American factories."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Amana textile industry see Peter Hoehnle, "Machine in the Garden: The Woolen Textile Industry of the Amana Society, 1785 – 1942," *Annals of Iowa* 61 (Winter 2002): 24 – 67.

<sup>41</sup> Bertha M. H. Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic and Industrial Phases of the Amana Society or the Community of True Inspiration," in *Ninth Annual Report of the Iowa Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1899 – 1900* (Des Moines: B. Murphy, 1901), 505; Oral History #39, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

<sup>42</sup> Henry A. Wallace, "Visiting the Amana Society," *Wallaces' Farmer*, 25 December 1914, 1683.

In an 1884 letter to his brother-in-law, Middle Amana weaver, Ludwig Huebner, described his work day:

Early, 6:30 a.m. we go to eat in the kitchens.... then I go to my job.... At 11:30 a.m. we go to eat again, and we have at home a 15-minute worship, after which we do whatever small tasks need doing, until 12:30 p.m., when we go back to school and work. At 3 p.m. we have a break, at which time we have a beer, the same as at the mid-morning break, except now because of the [Iowa] temperance law we have coffee instead. Evenings, at 6:15, the workday ends. At 7 p.m. we go to eat. At 8 p.m. there is a half hour prayer service.”<sup>43</sup>

Huebner’s description of a work day punctuated by coffee breaks and church services, both characterizes conditions within the Amana mills and suggests how they were different than factories in the outside world. The average work day, as described by Bertha Shambaugh in 1908, lasted nine and a half hours. This contrasts with the up to twelve-hour days spent in factories in the outside world. In Amana, work hours could continue until later in the evening because, by 1900, electricity lit the factories.<sup>44</sup>

The impact of the woolen mills on the Amana labor pool extended beyond the confines of the factories themselves. Several smaller businesses were directly associated with the mills, and were critical to their successful operation. Among these businesses were the millwright shops in both Middle and Main Amana that produced replacement parts for mill machinery, and the shepherds who tended the Society’s enormous herds of sheep.

Additionally, the crew of men who operated the dredge boat on the millrace was clearly tied

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<sup>43</sup> Ludwig Huebner to Ludwig Herrmann, Autumn 1884, trans. Catharine Guerra, folder 38, Genealogy Collection, Amana Heritage Society. The use of beer at both morning and afternoon breaks at this period is confirmed by an article in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, which noted that the practice had been terminated, as Huebner noted, because of the Iowa temperance laws. *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 12 August 1891.

<sup>44</sup> Shambaugh. *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 179. Shambaugh noted that the hours were typically “the usual Amana hours of from 7:00 to 11:00 A.M. and from 12:30 to 6:00 p.m.” An undated placard preserved in the collection of the Amana heritage Society lists winter woolen mills hours as from 7 – 11 a.m. to 12:30 – 6p.m., except on Saturday when afternoon hours were 12:30 – 4 p.m. Amana Society, “Winter



to mill production. In Homestead a crew of men maintained the large brick Wholesale Department where the Society stored and packaged woolen goods before shipment on the Rock Island railroad. Teamsters from Middle and Main Amana made daily deliveries of woolen goods to the Wholesale Department. Finally, as many as ten salesmen at a time were on the road selling Society products, literally from Maine to California. Although the Society hired outsiders to represent their goods, Society members also served in the cadre of sales personnel. Individuals who served in this capacity were usually store workers when they were not on the road, and often were prominent figures within the Society; several of the salesmen, for example, served on the Board of Trustees. Their exposure to the outside world gave these individuals an elite status within the community, as did the fact that they and their families generally received an additional clothing allowance because of their perceived need to dress well in order to represent the Society abroad.

By 1885, the calico works ranked fourth among the Society businesses, in terms of its annual revenue. The workforce at the calico mills had a high percentage of hired laborers. In 1900, for example, when anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five men worked in the mills at any given time, as many of twelve were hired hands. The high preponderance of hired men in the calico mill reflects the less than pleasant working conditions there.<sup>45</sup>

The flouring mills at Amana and West Amana employed approximately sixteen men in 1900, approximately a third of whom were outsiders, including a teamster who hauled the finished goods to the depot for shipping. The Society marketed flour over a wide territory,

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Periode Arbeits Stunden in den Wollen Fabriken," folder 8, box 1, Amana Society Woolen Mill Collection, Amana Heritage Society.

<sup>45</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 95. The only study of the Amana calico industry is Darlene Fratzke, "The History of the Amana Textile Printing Mill: A Preliminary Study," unpublished paper, collection of the Amana Heritage Society.

and the enormous mills were landmarks in the two villages in which they were located. Unfortunately, in 1923 the flour mill at Main Amana would be destroyed in a dust explosion, followed by a tremendous fire that also destroyed a significant portion of the woolen mill, located across the canal. The Society never rebuilt the mill at Main Amana, and the financial loss, both in its destruction and in cessation of production, was severe.<sup>46</sup>

Other larger businesses operated under Society control: saw mills, a soap factory, calico print mill, tannery, gristmills and general stores. A selection of labels for Amana soap, sorghum and starch indicates that the Society marketed these products to a wider market, although records of these sales are lacking. The Society also manufactured and sold pharmaceuticals; Conrad Schadt, the Main Amana pharmacist, became the first person to manufacture the digestive aid pepsin west of Chicago. While the Society intended that the various craft shops primarily supply the needs of the community, the existence of small commercial industries such as these as well as the injunctions of community leaders that, “each business is so be so conducted that....some profit is produced from outside the community,” suggest that a more entrepreneurial attitude directed Communal affairs.<sup>47</sup>

Each village, with the exception of tiny East Amana, had its own general store, staffed by a manager and a few assistants. Most of the stores catered to area farmers and to community visitors. The High Amana store, in particular, became well known in eastern Iowa for stocking a wide range of products, from electric generators, radios, tires and bicycles. For the most part, Amana store managers, at least by the twentieth century, were

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<sup>46</sup> Shambaugh, “Some of the Economic and Industrial,” 507.

<sup>47</sup> Advertising materials and labels for these items are found in the Amana Society Print Shop Scrapbooks, a fascinating seven volume collection of printed matter produced by the Society between the late 1870s and early 1930s. The seven volumes are kept in the archives of the Amana Heritage Society. William Rufus Perkins and

clearly entrepreneurs, often selling farm implements, furniture, buggies, groceries, hardware and clothing. Precisely why store workers should have been so driven in comparison to other Society workers is a curious anomaly for they received similar allotments for clothing and food, as did their fellow members in more labor-intensive positions. The remark of one observer that the storekeepers did not care if a customer bought anything or not because, “[I]t is nothing to him. He gets nothing out of it, anyway,” seems to have been untrue.<sup>48</sup>

While most Amana men worked on the farms or mills of the Society, a smaller number ran the unusually diverse series of smaller craft shops maintained by the Society, largely to meet its own needs. These small shops included those, such as blacksmith, harness maker, wheelwright and saddler that were directly tied to the farm department and others such as millwrights and the Society’s wholesale warehouse department directly tied to the woolen mills. Other shops, including the butcher, tinsmith and baker largely existed as support for the Society’s communal kitchens. Additional shops, such as the tailors, locksmiths, coopers, watchmaker, carpenters, broom makers, basket makers were businesses whose products met the more diverse needs of the Society. While most of these businesses were typical of rural communities at the time, others were not. Such trades as carpet weaver, lampshade and umbrella repairman seemed to have existed more to save the Society the expense of buying certain articles.

Craftsmen observed the usual Amana work hours. Craft shops in most of the villages were located along a single side street, away from the center of the town, reflecting the layout

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Barthinius L. Wick, *History of the Amana Society or Community of True Inspiration* (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1891), 61; Ebenezer Society Trustee Minutes, 13 September 1848, trans. Henry J. Ruff.

<sup>48</sup> Oral History # 4, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Alex Miller, “Picturesque Iowa – The Amana Society,” *Ottumwa Courier*, 15 February 1902, n.p. Miller’s account is easily one of the most

of the traditional German *Doerfer*. In most cases the craftsman either had living quarters in the same structure as his shop, or lived nearby. During harvest time, or at haymaking time in the summer, craftsmen might be called upon to assist in the fields. In the case of the Middle Amana bookbindery, for example, the three youngest members of its staff only bound books during the winter months, working in the fields the rest of the year.

While most of their work was done for the Society, most of the craft shops sold or repaired items for neighboring farmers or other outsiders who required their services. Because of this small external trade, most craft shops managed to realize small profits each year. Between the years 1885 and 1891, for example, only the East Amana tailor and the blacksmith in Main Amana failed to make a small profit each year. Such profits were always small, however, reflecting, again, the communal nature of most of the craft shops work. Andelson reports the following 1885 profits for a selection of Amana craft shops: “East wagon maker \$171, East shoemaker \$2, East carpenter \$71, Amana tailor \$133, Amana tin shop \$504, Amana wagon maker \$55.”<sup>49</sup>

An unusual aspect of the work culture in Amana, and one almost entirely associated with male workers, was the proliferation of humorous poetry that workers wrote about their experiences. The approximately half dozen communal era poems that deal with work now in the Amana Heritage Society Archives include poems dealing with threshing, building fences on the farm, working in a kitchen house and an epic poem about the employees of the Amana Woolen Mill that allots at least a line to describing each worker. All of this verse is humorous, composed by the poets to amuse coworkers, or, as in the case of a poem written

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negative ever written of Amana. At times his negativity becomes almost humorous, as when he professes objectivity in not wanting “to pass judgment upon these queer people.”

by young men assigned to night watch duty, to pass the time during mundane tasks. One poem, describing the habits of a Middle Amana Woolen Mill worker, however, vents the author's apparent disgust at this individual's laziness, describing him sitting at the mill and smoking a cigar "because there is no work to do," then going home to drink.<sup>50</sup>

Every young girl in Amana knew, unlike her male counterpart, what her assigned duty would be, since all Amana women supplied the workforce in the over fifty communal kitchens spread between the seven villages. Women, particularly those who worked in the kitchens in the period after World War I, remarked in later years that they wanted to do other jobs, such as school teaching, but were denied a chance to pursue these goals by the elders. Other women remember their time in the kitchen houses fondly, and often as the best or happiest period in their lives. Dissatisfaction with work assignments seems to have been less prevalent with women than among men. Perhaps young women were largely reconciled to the idea of working in the kitchens by the time they were fourteen. As one former kitchen worker stated, "we [were] sort of used to having that place in society that we had here. We didn't question it, let's put it that way." For most Amana women, assignment to the kitchen meant, at the least, a few years of indoor labor cooking and clearing, with the prospect of time off to raise children and moving on to lighter work such as gardening and vegetable preparation. A few women might expect to one day be assigned to the woolen mills, which employed around eight women in 1900, or to care for children in the *Kinderschule*. A select number of young women, daughters of the village store keepers, worked as clerks in the

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<sup>49</sup> Andelson, "Communalism and Change," 99. It is curious to note that the East Amana wagon shop managed to realize a profit three times as large as the shop in Main Amana.

<sup>50</sup> Only one surviving poem, written about a kitchen house, deals with female working conditions. These work poems are found in the Songs and Poetry Collection, Amana Heritage Society Archives. The poem about the Middle Amana Woolen Mill worker is titled *Wollfabrick*. The line quoted here was translated by the author.

general stores. The Society's constitution permitted single women over the age of thirty to vote in Society elections from the very beginning of the communal system, but like other women, church practice barred them from serving as elders or officers. The highest status a woman could aspire to in communal Amana was as a kitchen boss. Older Amana residents, however, have pointed to particular women to whom the elders in their villages went to for advice, particularly on issues dealing with the kitchens. Being assigned to a kitchen was an obvious rite of passage for young Amana women, a sign that they were now adults, and many Amana girls looked forward with excited anticipation to the time when they could enter the kitchen force.<sup>51</sup>

Each kitchen was run by a kitchen boss, assigned to that duty by the village elders. Most kitchen bosses were in early middle age when they received this assignment, although instances of a boss as young as twenty-five are recorded. Most kitchen bosses were the mothers of children already in school or in the workforce, or were lifelong celibates. Many bosses were the wives of church elders, which may have influenced their appointment, and in a number of situations, daughters assumed management of their mother's kitchen when she was unable to continue in that capacity. Evidence suggests that, because of the great responsibility involved, the elders allowed prospective kitchen bosses to decide whether or not they would accept their appointment. Despite the honor, residents recall that the elders literally had to beg particular women to assume the duty, because "[y]ou was better off just living in [a regular]... house and you don't have to worry so much." The kitchen boss and her family, if she had one, lived in a standard Amana house with an attached two-room

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<sup>51</sup>Oral Histories, # 20, # 29, #72, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic and Industrial," 505; Richard Seifert, interview with Jonathan Andelson, c. 10 August 1972.

kitchen wing extending from the back and forming an L. Because of their proximity to the kitchen, the husbands and children of kitchen bosses often found they had extra duties.<sup>52</sup>

Following graduation, the local *Bruderrath* assigned each young woman to a particular kitchen, depending mainly on which kitchens needed helpers. Thus, a young Amana woman might find herself working on the other side of the village, and not necessarily in the kitchen where her mother or other female relatives worked. The youngest members of the kitchen staff did the heavier indoor labor, including cleaning, washing dishes, setting tables and cooking. Usually three workers rotated between the various duties, performing each for a week at a time. The kitchen boss and her assistant, the *Vize Baas*, were also in the kitchen helping to oversee the young workers, and, presumably, teaching them how to cook. As time passed, a young woman would be moved from cooking duties to being a *Ruest Schwester* (literally a “paring sister,” someone who pared or peeled fruits and vegetables prior to cooking) or a garden worker.

Each kitchen had a two to three acre garden, usually located on the edge of town, and tended by three women, one of whom was the garden boss. In some cases a young male farm worker or one of the hired hands assisted in the gardens. Each garden grew the vegetables needed by their kitchen, beyond onions and potatoes usually grown in common fields for each village. A small garden house sheltered the tools used by the garden staff, and also provided a place for them to eat their meals. The garden boss decided, in consultation with her kitchen boss, what needed to be planted, and otherwise directed her workers. A good-natured rivalry existed between the various kitchen gardens, as each sought to produce the

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<sup>52</sup> The Middle Amana village elders appointed Marie Steinmueller as a kitchen boss when she was only in her 20s. Elsie Ruedy Ackermann, interview with Barbara Hoehnle, 8 November 1985, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection; Oral Histories # 32, # 41, #80, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

earliest radishes, or the most onions or other vegetables. One long-time Middle Amana garden boss was known to literally spy on other gardens and then plant more onion sets in order to have the title of “onion queen” in Middle Amana. Such competition ran counter to the general principles of a communal society, but the effort that it engendered also ensured that production was always sufficient to meet the needs of the kitchens.<sup>53</sup>

Amana women viewed both gardening or serving as a *Ruest Schwester* as ideal jobs, primarily because they had more limited hours than those observed by the workers within the kitchen houses themselves. A garden worker, for example, did not work on weekends, and a *Ruest Schwester* might only work for two or three hours each day before going home. Additionally, garden work was seasonal, and garden workers often spent their winters at home without any kitchen duties. Older women either worked as *Ruest Schwestern* or simply did not come in to the kitchen house at all. In Amana, there were more than enough hands to handle the necessary tasks, and so work was divided to such a degree that the workload of the average Amana woman, while still strenuous, did not reach the level of their counterparts in the outside world.<sup>54</sup>

The routine in the kitchens varied little from year to year, or from week to week, leading one former worker to comment, “I think what bothered me . . . was not like the work in the kitchen, but the sameness. You knew exactly on Monday what you going to do all week. We even knew the menu, usually.” For this woman, and others like her, the deviations from the regular schedule brought by the changing seasons, at least, added a touch of variety to their otherwise monotonous labor. The work year for the average kitchen worker

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<sup>53</sup> Oral History #9, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

<sup>54</sup> Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 156 - 157. Oral History #15, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.



was closely tied to the changing seasons. From a practical stand point, the changing seasons brought changes in menus as different vegetables passed in and out of season; it also, however, led to periods of levity and change in routine for the kitchen staff. Fondly remembered by many Amana kitchen workers were the annual potato and onion harvests, events that brought together not only the workers from all the village kitchens, but other community members as well.<sup>55</sup>

Sitting in shaded areas near their kitchens, the women talked and told stories as they topped and sorted the onions. Some onions were saved for seed or sold by the Society as onion sets, while larger onions were stored by the kitchen houses for later use. The sociability of the onion preparation not only made the work seem to go faster, but also in many ways served the same function of a quilting party among rural women in the outside world. On the last day of the onion harvest the kitchens often prepared ice cream for the workers. In some kitchens, the bosses distributed handkerchiefs or other items as gifts to mark the end of the harvest.<sup>56</sup>

Other seasonal activities that deviated from normal kitchen practice included the annual “thresher trip” in the fall, when wagon (and later car) loads of young Amana kitchen workers traveled to Marengo, Williamsburg or other neighboring communities for the day. Each young woman received a small sum of money to spend on her day in “the outside world,” which usually included eating ice cream. At other times of the year, kitchen workers went on picnics, decorated their dining halls with fall leaves and asparagus ferns, and held simple parties for their friends.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Oral History #8, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

<sup>56</sup> Oral History #2, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

<sup>57</sup> Oral Histories #20, #32, #33, #55, #83, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

Whether or not a kitchen worker had a pleasant experience at her appointed tasks depended upon her particular kitchen boss. Some bosses were known for being particularly strict and unyielding, and some were known to freely criticize the efforts of their younger workers, particularly when it came to cooking. The fact that the local *Bruderraths* were known to replace some kitchen bosses, yet allow others to manage their kitchen until they were quite elderly, suggests that some bosses might have been removed because they simply were unable to manage the kitchen effectively, or at least promote or maintain a pleasant working environment.

Kitchen work, at least as remembered by Amana women through the lens of memory, was mostly a pleasant experience, a time of shared camaraderie and fun, interspersed with hard work. One Amana woman, assigned to clerk in the store after she graduated from the eighth grade remarked in later years, “I wanted to be in the kitchen with the other girls, but I had to go over to the store.... I didn’t want it; I wanted to be where the other kids were.” The bonds formed within the kitchen house were important to Amana women and endured long after communal life ended. As historian, Linda Schelbitzki Pickle notes, these bonds clearly were important strengthening the communal bonds the held the community together while, at the same time, making women’s experiences within the colony more pleasurable. The kitchen houses served as meeting places where, until late in community history, neighbors gathered to share their meals. Virtually every special occasion in Amana, including weddings, meals tied to special church services, was tied in a very direct way to the kitchen

house, reinforcing the bonds of community developed between the women who worked there.<sup>58</sup>

When not working in the kitchen, Amana women fulfilled some of the duties normally proscribed for women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women cleaned and maintained their homes, and cultivated small gardens in order to supplement their families' kitchen house diet. Women were also responsible for childcare, particularly in infancy, and for sewing their own, as well as their children's clothes.<sup>59</sup>

Curiously, outside observers had mixed feelings about the organization of women's labor at Amana. Their comments range from praise for making the lives of women easier, to outright scorn for depriving women of the opportunity to cook in their own homes. In 1908 Bertha Shambaugh remarked that, "the woman of Amana knows nothing of the cares of the average housemother of the world, who is expected to fulfill the combined duties of housemaid and nurse, hostess and church worker." Shambaugh praised what she viewed as the fair apportionment of women's labor, and the fact that the community permitted mothers of young children to stay at home and did not require them to perform any communal work at all. On the other end of the spectrum, Viola Brown, writing only two years before Shambaugh, remarked, "the old women are withered and ugly, perhaps from the life of hard work, with no relaxation or diversion of any kind." Unlike Shambaugh, a reformer and early feminist, Brown accepted traditional female roles and decried their absence at Amana. Brown curiously suggested that the Amana people, whom most observers criticized for not working

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<sup>58</sup> Oral History # 72, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 156; Delores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 242.

<sup>59</sup> Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic and Industrial," 508.

as hard as they should, were, in truth, overworked to such an extent that it prematurely aged female members.<sup>60</sup>

In the final assessment of women's work roles within the Amana Society it must be acknowledged that the experiences of women within the Society were better, in many ways, than those of their counterparts in the outside world, particularly the experiences of other rural women. Like men, Amana women received a guarantee of food and shelter as well as the companionship of working with others. Many hands really did make for light work, leaving Amana women time to pursue needle work, flower gardening and religious studies for which they might not otherwise have had time. Amana women, as Linda Pickle notes, did not face "the economic near-necessity of marrying" nor did they face the problems of maintaining children in the event of that their husband died. In the kitchen houses hired men often performed heavier duties, such as hauling water and fuel that women on a typical Iowa farm would have been required to do. Finally, Amana women could rise to positions of prominence within the management structure of the kitchens, although such advance was open to a comparatively limited number of women.<sup>61</sup>

Elderly members of the Society remained active as far as their physical faculties allowed. Because of the continuous infusion of new workers in the kitchens and on the farms, Amana men and women were able to curtail their physical activity fairly early in life. As one current resident noted, "my mother said when you were forty, at least the men felt that they should retire and let young people take over." At fifty, community standards freed women from regular kitchen work, although virtually all of them continued to help prepare

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<sup>60</sup> Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 156; Brown, "An Arcadia in America," 93

vegetables or work in the garden as long as they were able. “Retirement” in communal Amana did not mean, however, that a person ceased to work at all, nor was a member obligated to retire at any given time. Some men continued to work in their craft shops until they died. Those workers who were unable to continue with a full day’s work built furniture, did odd jobs around their homes, and continued to help on the farm and in the factories during periods of greater activity or helped with the kitchen gardens. In some cases, community leaders reassigned men from more physically demanding jobs to lighter duties such as making baskets, weaving carpets, or making brooms. Older women, however, seem to have retained at least a small role at the kitchen houses until they were physically unable to do so. Referred to as a “cradle to grave job,” kitchen workers simply transferred to less strenuous duties as they grew older. Homebound women still produced hand work and sewing and cared for their grandchildren. Elderly residents sat in the back rows during church services as a mark of distinction, and were generally part of the *Erste Versammlung*, the church division representing the oldest and most pious members of the community.<sup>62</sup>

The final group of Amana workers were the *Tagloehner* (day laborers). Different segments of the community viewed these men, and a few women, differently. To the elders and *Bruderrath*, the *Tagloehner* appear to have always been seen as both a bad influence on the members of the community, and a serious drain on their resources. One Amana “field superintendent” commented in 1908 that “[g]ood apples never yet made rotten apples

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<sup>61</sup> Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 151. This assessment of women’s roles draws heavily on Dr. Pickle’s insights. Pickle’s book is among the very few scholarly treatments that have bothered to explore the under appreciated oral history collections of the Amana Heritage Society.

<sup>62</sup> Clifford and Caroline Trimpold, personal conversation with the author, 18 August 2003, notes, collection of the author. Emilie Hoppe, “Life Is But a Pilgrimage,” *Communities* 89 (Winter 1995), 52 – 53; Oral Histories #10, #29, #32, #45, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Louise DuVal Interview with Kachina Dunn, 7 June 1995, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, Amana Heritage Society.

sound.... and we'd be better off without the hands." The *Tagloehner* were a necessary evil in the eyes of the *Bruderrath*, who always strictly regulated the *Tagloehner*'s wages and employment, and assigned living quarters on the edge of each village to them, often by the barns or factories, but never close to the homes of the members. The minutes of the *Bruderrath*, from as early as 1853, contain frequent injunctions to reduce the number of hired workers. The number of hired hands within the Society appears to have fluctuated over time, but sources as early as 1888 suggests that the number had already reached two hundred. Scholars have long pointed to the large number of hired hands at the time of the reorganization of the Society in 1932 as evidence of a slackened work activity on the part of members. The first official mention of hired workers, made in the Trustee Minutes of the Ebenezer Society in December 1846, however, suggests that they were a part of the Society from almost its inception and that this problem was not a twentieth century development.<sup>63</sup>

The *Tagloehner* remain shadowy figures in the Amana historical record. Their existence can be documented through census records, and the occasional reference in the minutes of the *Bruderrath*, but little about their lives as paid labor in a German speaking communal society seems to have survived. The number of *Tagloehner*, as variously reported in secondary accounts of the Society ranges from an estimated 175 – 200 hired hands in 1900 to over 300 by the early 1930s. The vast majority of the *Tagloehner* who served in the Amana communities were German speaking. The prevalence of German names in the records, together with German birthplaces in the census, suggests that most were immigrants.

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<sup>63</sup> Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True Inspiration*, 169. Evidence suggests that the "good apples" may well have been the hired workers themselves, and not the members of the Society as the superintendent implied. Minutes of the Ebenezer Society Board of Trustees, 29 December 1846, 11 January 1853; Minutes of the Amana Society Board of Trustees, 2 March 1876, 6 September 1887; 5 September 1893; Shaw, "Life in the Amana Colony," 165.

Naturally, working in a community in which many people knew no other language, fluency in German was a necessity.<sup>64</sup>

Virtually all of the *Tagloehner* were men, although a few young women, particularly in later years, worked in select communal kitchens and, more frequently, at one of the Society's four hotels, where the elders preferred to have non-members work in order to limit members' contact with outside guests. Unlike other hired help, the women who helped in the kitchens and hotels appear to have been from the vicinity, many of them from the large Czech farming community east of the village of East Amana.<sup>65</sup>

Most of the *Tagloehner* were unmarried, although a few family units did live in Main Amana, where members of the families worked together in the woolen mill that employed approximately eighteen non-members in 1900. The children of such families attended the Amana schools alongside Society children. Generally, the *Tagloehner* performed heavy manual labor, frequently the jobs that Society members themselves eschewed. Few *Tagloehner* were skilled workers, although several tended looms in the mills, and served in such trades as blacksmith or shoemaker.<sup>66</sup>

*Tagloehner* lived in small houses located on the edge of the village, simple one-story buildings, containing possibly four sleeping rooms. The rooms were sparsely furnished, often containing only a chair, table and bed. These were rooms men with few personal possessions

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<sup>64</sup> Bertha H. Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic and Industrial," 104.

<sup>65</sup> Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic and Industrial," 509; Oral History # 83, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS. Elizabeth Oehl Wetjen, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001, notes collection of the author.

<sup>66</sup> Shambaugh, "Some of the Economic," 505; Elizabeth Oehl Wetjen, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001, notes, collection of the author; Lina Roth Unglenk, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001, notes, collection of the author. One Amana resident suggests that virtually all of the weavers at the woolen mill were hired hands by the 1920s, while another woman remarked that she remembered there being more hired hands at the Main Amana mill than on the farms. Oral History #79, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

used for sleeping. In each village a particular woman had the duty of cleaning the bed linen and doing the laundry for the *Tagloehner*. At specified times during the year, crews of kitchen workers descended on the hired hand houses to scrub them and to apply linseed oil to their floors. During the winter, Amana women sewed quilts for use by the *Tagloehner*, using a plain blue sheet and a simpler than usual sewing pattern. The *Tagloehner* took their meals at the one of the kitchen houses, where they ate at a table separate from the members. In the village of Main Amana all the hired agricultural workers ate at one kitchen, while the hired woolen mill employees ate at the kitchen managed by the woolen mill superintendent's wife. This separation may reflect an attempt at segregation by the elders. The Amana Society consistently paid its hired hands less than the average wage for such labor elsewhere in Iowa. At least one observer suggested that the willingness of hired hands to work for less at Amana was due to the fact that, "[t]hey do not work so hard in the colony and live better." Others sources suggested the idea that the good food, wine, housing and kind treatment were factors in the retention of hired labor, also noted that Amana workers while paid less, were able to save more money than their counterparts in the world. A more negative account of the Society, contained in an editorial questioning the Society's loyalty during World War I, suggested that the hired hands in the Amana villages were kept at "starvation wages." The editorial also alleged that the hired hand's regular consumption of alcohol eventually incapacitated them, at which point, the Society deposited them in the Iowa County Home: over 75 percent of whose residents were former Amana hired hands, the author alleged. When a *Tagloehner* died, the villagers arranged for his burial in a portion of the village cemetery set aside for the purpose.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Oehl Wetjen, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001.



The degree to which *Tagloehner* were involved with community life, beyond supplying their labor, is difficult to determine. Some hired men attended Inspirationist religious services, joined the Society, and sometimes married Amana women. In a few cases, Amana women who married hired hands left the Society with their new husbands. A few younger members of the community became friends with the hired hands and played cards, drank or participated in group singing with them. To the members themselves, *Tagloehner* were symbols of the outside world. Because many of the *Tagloehner* were part-time hobos who rode the rails south in the winter, they were often outcasts from normal society, even more colorful than the outsiders who normally visited the villages. In a few instances, *Tagloehner* became accepted as virtually members of a particular family. Still, unlike the average farm household, in which hired hands were sometimes treated as members of the family, the *Tagloehner* of Amana, seem to have remained strangers within the community. They lived apart from the members of the Society, took their meals at separate tables, and rarely took part in such community-wide activities such as religious services. Despite sharing an ethnic background with the Inspirationists, the *Tagloehner* likely did not share the same religious or cultural viewpoints. In contrast to their Amana counterparts, *Tagloehner* earned an income, and might wear stylish clothes, mustaches or even drive automobiles. They played instrumental music, and were able to travel to neighboring communities for dances, fairs and other social events. Finally, the *Tagloehner*, unlike many Amana people, had at one time in their lives lived in the outside world and, as a result, had knowledge and experience

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Oral History # 6, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Richard Seifert, interview with Jonathan Andelson, c. 10 August 1972; Yambura, 94 – 95; Lina Roth Unglenk, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001. “Is Amana Society in Great Danger?: Much Interest Manifested Here in Action Commenced.” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 8 February 1905. Shambaugh, *Amana: The Community of True*

beyond that of the average Inspirationist. In short, the *Tagloehner* represented the outside world to the Amana people, and, from the perspective of church elders, their supposed worldliness represented a threat to the social order of the community.<sup>68</sup>

The presence of so many hired hands naturally suggests that Society members did not overexert themselves. Indeed, a comment made by many observers of communal Amana was that “the members do not work hard.” This remark was first made by Charles Nordhoff in 1875, who was told by a Society foreman that “three hired hands would do as much as five or six of the members,” and echoed by Richard T. Ely in 1902. Ely noted, however, that while the members did not work hard, “laziness does not appear to afford trouble at Amana.” In the woolen mills, Ely observed, “the aim seems to be to render work as easy as possible with the maintenance of efficiency.” The fact that over 360 hired hands needed to be employed to fulfill the labor needs of a community of barely 900 adults, is evidence enough of the lackadaisical nature of Amana labor. Amana workers simply had no reason to exert any greater effort. Local tradition holds that individuals feigned illnesses rather than work, that some men performed “unnecessary jobs” in order to avoid field labor and that some women produced large families taking advantage, critics alleged, of the Community practice of giving nursing mothers three years away from kitchen duties. One resident, recalling his home community at it was in the 1920s remarked, “There were people...that just didn’t want

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*Inspiration*, 170. This view is also supported by Perkins and Wick, *History of the Amana Society*, 71; “Put the Colony Out,” *Marengo Sentinel*, 26 March 1918.

<sup>68</sup> Louise Schuerer Blechschmidt personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001, notes, collection of the author; Elizabeth Oehl Wetjen, personal conversation with the author, 2 December 2001.

The author’s great-grandfather, Jacob Hoehnle, was a hired hand who married an Amana woman and later joined the Society. Michael Hofer, a former member of the Hutterite Community in South Dakota, also married an Amana woman, as did Albert Kaiser. Such cases seem to have been relatively rare, however. None of these men ever attained a particular degree of prominence in the community, although they appear to have been well respected by the Amana residents who still remember them. For Hofer’s experience see Peter Hoehnle, “Michael Hofer: A Communitarian in Two Worlds,” *Communal Societies* 22 (2002): 83 – 86.

to work and they just did as little as possible. Now, the others had to carry the burden. I think that was generally true in all towns, some of them a little more.” With the exception of woolen workers, Amana workers received no incentives to over exert themselves, and the *Bruderrath* was unable to do little other than admonish them. Finally, the schedule of frequent meals, breaks and church services, meant that even conscientious Amana workers suffered a loss in productivity. Although Amana workers may not have achieved the height of productivity, outsiders always praised the products of Amana craft shops and factories for their quality. Charles Nordhoff observed, in 1875, that “it [is] generally true that the member of communistic societies take life easy.” The heavy division of labor, the ease with which the lesser efforts of one individual could be compensate for by the over exertion of a more enthusiastic worker or hired hand, simply presented an opportunity for community members to work slowly and carefully, eschewing the patterns of industry and efficiency that workers in the outside world required in order to survive.<sup>69</sup>

Those individuals who found themselves unhappy with communal life were free to leave the colony, and many did. The majority of these apostates were young men, although a few young women also departed, often in the company of a marriage partner or a relative. While apostates often found what they were seeking in the outside world, others returned to the Society after brief absences. Apostates who stayed outside the Colony would have quickly discovered the freedom that they sought also came with the loss of the security that communal living entailed. In assessing the experiences of apostate Marie Geiger, who left the Society and settled on a farm near South Amana, Linda Pickle concludes that “[c]ertainly

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<sup>69</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 40; Ely, 185 – 186; Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 155; Oral Histories # 20; #27, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS; Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 229.

Marie Burgy Geiger had a harder life as an isolated frontier wife than she would have had integrated into the Amana community.”<sup>70</sup>

By the 1920s increasing economic pressure on the Society forced its leaders to reevaluate its future. In 1918, while the Society was still riding the crest of wartime production profits, its attorney recommended an amendment to the constitution that would provide for the dissolution of the communal organization. That such dissolution was necessary became apparent to many leaders during the 1920s, as both the textile industry and agriculture entered a period of depression following the removal of wartime price supports in 1919. By 1932, the Society’s total debt would reach almost \$500,000. At the same time other problems, such as the \$60,000 annually paid to hired workers, waste and corruption within the Society and an on-going youth rebellion steadily eroded the Society’s economic strength. An growing number of outside visitors came on the new highways that crossed Society land, offering examples of life outside the colony that tempted members such as the woman who later recalled of these visitors that, “they were dressed the way I would have liked to dress. They had all the things that I would have liked to have had.” Additionally, the Society had been without a charismatic leader since the death of Barbara Heinemann Landmann in 1883 and, while the elders had been successful in managing the Society since that time, they had failed to make significant alterations to the communal system established under the guidance of the *Werkzeuge*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 158.

<sup>71</sup> William F. Moershel, “Statement of Liquefiable Assets and Liabilities,” 4 April 1931, author’s collection. A recent study of the Society’s business records demonstrates clearly that the Society was headed for bankruptcy. Gary Carman, “The Amana Colonies’ Change from Communalism to Capitalism in 1932,” *Social Science Journal* 24 (1987): 57 – 67. Oral History #29, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

In 1928, Peter Stuck, writing the official chronicle of the community, mused that the economic and social problems within the community had reached a crisis stage commenting that, “we cannot hide from the facts, and if this degeneracy continues without some remedy it will lead to the same fate as has befallen many communistic communities, which was the complete dissolution or reorganization upon another basis.” Stuck believed that the only hope for the community was a “painstaking renewal.”<sup>72</sup>

By 1928 the *Bruderrath* secretly began to discuss possible courses of action, and, evidently instructed their unofficial clerk, Peter Stuck, to write to Oneida Community Limited, the New York company created by the reorganization of the former Oneida communal society, for advice regarding reorganization. Stuck wrote as a private individual, without reference to the *Bruderrath*. John H. Noyes, a son and namesake of Oneida founder, John Humphrey Noyes, exchanged several letters with Stuck, who asked to borrow materials dealing with the 1881 Oneida reorganization. Nothing immediate came of the exchange, however.<sup>73</sup>

By the fall of 1930, Stuck, together with community doctors Charles Noe, Henry Moershel, pharmacist F. William Miller and store clerk William Ehrle began to meet and to agitate for a resolution of the Society’s problems by the *Bruderrath*. In March of 1931 the

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Stuck, “Inspirations Historie, 1927,” unpublished manuscript, Amana Heritage Society, trans. Ivan Reihmann, 6. Stuck may have simply written to Oneida on his own volition, although the fact that the *Bruderrath* discussed reorganization at this time suggests that he may have been directed to do so on behalf of the Board.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Stuck to Oneida Community Limited, 16 March 1928; J. H. Noyes to Peter Stuck, 19 March 1928; Peter Stuck to J. H. Noyes, 22 March 1928; J. H. Noyes to Peter Stuck, 24 March 1928, photocopies of correspondence in the Oneida Community Collection, Syracuse University, collection of the author.

*Bruderrath* responded by appointing a committee of four men to address the members in each village and to explain the organization's precarious financial state.<sup>74</sup>

Following these meetings, in April 1931, Society members elected a committee to plan for the Society's future. Almost from the start, the Committee of Forty-Seven as it became known began to plan for a complete reorganization of the Amana Society. In June they sent a formal letter and questionnaire to each adult member of the Society asking them whether they would be willing to return to a life of self-denial, or whether they would prefer reorganization. The attached letter made it abundantly clear that many of the accoutrements that had become an established part of Amana life would have to be abandoned if the Society were to survive. The membership voted 74 percent in favor of pursuing reorganization, with virtually all of the opposition coming from the village of Middle Amana.<sup>75</sup>

After months of committee work, the Committee produced a reorganization plan which would create a joint stock business corporation, to be known as the Amana Society, which would essentially take over the business aspects of the Society while a separate organization, the Amana Church Society, would oversee religious affairs. The plan provided for distribution of voting shares to adult members, which would entitle them to vote in Society elections and to receive medical and burial benefits from the new corporation. Additionally, prior distributive shares would be given by the Society to each new member

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<sup>74</sup> Minutes, Amana Society Board of Trustees, 16 March 1931, Amana Society Archives, Amana, Iowa. The members of this committee included Peter Zimmermann, manager of the Main Amana Woolen Mill, member of the Board of Trustees and a church elder; Gustav Miller, that manager of the West Amana Store; Adolph Heinemann, a bookkeeper and traveling salesman for the Society and Dr. Noe. Zimmermann and Miller later were both presidents of the Amana Society, and all four men eventually served on the Board of Trustees.

<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Rettig, *Amana Today: A History of the Amana Society from 1932 to the Present* (South Amana, Iowa: Privately Printed, 1975), 123. For a detailed study of the Amana reorganization see Peter Hoehnle, "The Great Change: The Reorganization of the Amana Society, 1931 – 1933," (M.A. Thesis, Iowa State University, 1998) and Peter Hoehnle, "Community in Transition: Amana's Great Change, 1931 – 1933." *Annals of Iowa* 60 (Winter 2001): 1 – 34.

based on their years of service under the old system. An elderly member of the Society, for example, would receive stock shares, representing his or her lifetime of service, which were redeemable for cash or credit at the Society main office. The new plan also provided for the orderly appraisal of Society property and guaranteed members the right to purchase their homes. The members overwhelmingly approved the plan by 96 percent when it was submitted for a vote on 1 February 1932.<sup>76</sup>

During the weeks that followed the plan's approval, the Society began a period of transition. In March and April appraisers descended on the villages, and surveyors laid out lot lines where none had been before. The appraisers, including a team under the direction of Anson Marston of Iowa State College, reviewed the equipment and inventory of each of the Society's 162 shops, not including the Society's woolen mills, four hotels, grain elevators and farm departments. Each kitchen boss assisted with the appraisal of the items in her kitchen, down to the smallest utensils.<sup>77</sup>

The first significant shift in Society habits brought by the impending reorganization was when the communal kitchens served their last meal on the night of 11 April 1932. A West Amana woman recalled happily preparing the last meal when she noticed that an older co-worker had begun to cry; soon all the other women present were in tears. Fifty years after the reorganization, a communal-era South Amana resident still lamented the end of the kitchen houses: "I missed the kitchens and the girls I worked with. Sure, it was easier to cook

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<sup>76</sup> *Reorganization Plan*. Middle Amana, Iowa: Amana Society, 1932.

<sup>77</sup> One of Marston's assistants, Charles G. Parsons, used the Amana valuations as the basis of his master's thesis. Charles G. Parsons, "Valuation of the Industrial Property of the Amana Society," (M.S. thesis, Iowa State College, 1932).

for my husband and myself instead of [for] thirty people, but I missed the girls in the kitchen.”<sup>78</sup>

In the weeks following the closing of the kitchens, the Society held auctions and sales in each of the seven villages so that residents could bid on whatever utensils they felt they would need in order to set up housekeeping on their own. Most residents bought items for their sentimental value; few saw uses for the old lapboards, giant copper boilers and oversized frying pans.

In April the Society's new business manager, Arthur Barlow, a Cedar Rapids businessman, arrived to assume his duties. Barlow, assisted by a hastily assembled staff, began to institute double entry book keeping among the Society businesses. Barlow also issued letters to the managers of shops that the Society deemed unprofitable, and would therefore close as a result of the reorganization. The individuals who worked in those shops were told that they could purchase their equipment and continue their shop as a private business, or take a new job within the Society. The new organization guaranteed jobs to all of its members, which usually meant working in one of the factories or on the farm. For many craftspeople the change that their employment brought was minimal, since most had worked on the farms in the summer months anyway. Some craftsmen continued to operate their businesses as a sideline, while working on the farm or in one of the Society factories. Individuals such as Carl Hergert, the Middle Amana cobbler, and Phillip Griess, the West

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<sup>78</sup> Emilie Zuber Hoppe, *Seasons of Plenty: Amana Communal Cooking* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 219; Emilie Zuber Hoppe, "A Story Recalled," unpublished paper, Amana Heritage Society, 1981, 13, quoting Minnie Setzer, then of High Amana, who had worked in the communal kitchens for over thirty years before the reorganization.



Amana broom maker, continued for decades following the reorganization to ply their trades as sidelines.<sup>79</sup>

On 2 May 1932 the new Amana Society Corporation came into existence and, for the first time, Amana workers were put on a payroll. The reorganization plan called for a transition period, during which the Society and its members could adjust to the new order of affairs, and during which every worker, from the managers down to the farm hands, would receive a universal ten cents an hour wage. To compensate for the low wage, the Society sold groceries and other items in their stores at cost to members. The final death knell for the Amana Society came at 4:30 pm on 1 June 1932 when the Iowa County Clerk processed the deeds by which the old Amana Society transferred its holdings to the new corporation, and its churches and cemeteries to the Amana Church Society.<sup>80</sup>

Many Amana residents, when questioned about the Change on its fiftieth anniversary, described it in positive terms. “I don’t see how they could have lived any longer the way they did,” commented one resident, “[y]ou have to go forward, not backward, and this was a backward way of living.” Other residents recalled the anticipation of buying a car or of having their own kitchen. Indeed, so many Amana residents rushed to spend their meager resources on automobiles, that the situation forced Barlow to author an editorial in the *Bulletin* urging members to follow “a conservative course” in their purchases. Some women expressed relief at being freed from the authority of their kitchen boss and the regimentation of kitchen life. In a demonstration of her new freedom, one Amana woman served canned

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<sup>79</sup> Hergert, displaying true entrepreneurial drive, advertised his services in the *Amana Society Bulletin* with humorous puns and poems. He continued to mend shoes until the early 1950s. (For an example see *Amana Society Bulletin*, 8 September 1932). Griess, who was blind, made brooms until the 1960s and then assisted a local woman in establishing a broom business geared towards tourists.

<sup>80</sup> Iowa County Land Deed Records, Book 81/82, pp. 213 – 23, Iowa County Recorder’s Office, Marengo, Iowa.

pineapple at the first meal she prepared after the kitchens closed. The individuals who were alive at the time of the anniversary, however, were all fairly young in 1932 and, as a result, their memories reflected the attitude of the Society's youth. For older residents, the Change was greeted with trepidation. One older High Amana woman, upset that she could no longer continue peeling potatoes at her kitchen house, which had allowed her to socialize, commented, "I can not understand how those people who brought this [reorganization] on will be able to rest in their graves."<sup>81</sup>

The elderly woman who lamented the loss of her kitchen house job likely did not enter the post communal workforce. Many younger women did, however. Amana women found wage labor jobs following the reorganization, one assumes, in part because their income was needed at home, and also because they were simply used to working and wanted to preserve the camaraderie of their kitchen house experience. Many women found work in the woolen mills, and the Society employed other women to maintain some of the original kitchen gardens as small truck farming operations. Still other women participated in the Society's short-lived attempts at producing mittens and canned goods, known as "Department W," for sale.<sup>82</sup>

For men, the reorganization meant little change in their ordinary work habits. Most simply continued to work at whatever job they had done before the change, provided they were employed by one of the sixty businesses that survived Barlow's purge. One difference in their labor, however, and one that observers frequently commented upon in later years,

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<sup>81</sup> Oral History # 6, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS (translation by the author for the original German), # 20; *Amana Society Bulletin*, 2 June 1932.

<sup>82</sup> The Society continued to employ women to cultivate the "Corporation Gardens" until at least 1936. Bertha M. H. Shambaugh, "Amana – In Transition," *Palimpsest* 17 (May 1936), 155. For information concerning "Department W" see, *Amana Society Bulletin*, 14 July and 1 September 1932.

was how many men who had professed illness and an inability to work before the change suddenly “recovered” after it occurred. Residents attribute this shift to the realization that if they wanted their families to survive, they would need to work. These miraculous cures led the colonists to bestow the nickname “Dr. Barlow” on their new business manager.<sup>83</sup>

The reorganization was a deathblow to the Amana hired hands. As part of the reorganization process, the Society fired all of its over 300 hired hands. Outside observers and the Society’s own leaders acclaimed the action for the savings it meant in salaries. Furthermore, the jobs opened up by the removal of hired hands provided work opportunities for Society members, particularly craftsmen whose shops had been closed as a result of the reorganization. But ordinary members of the Society, particularly those who had come to know the hired hands as friends, were more ambivalent about this situation. In some cases, hired hands who had faithfully carried the burden of labor on the Amana farms for as long as forty years lost their jobs. Evidence suggests that the various village farm managers quietly rehired a few of these men, who likely would not have been able to find other work because of their age and because of the Great Depression.<sup>84</sup>

Amana young people, many of whom had been part of the Society workforce since the age of fourteen, jumped at the opportunity that the reorganization afforded them to attend high school. Suddenly, young Amana men and women, who had been “adults” under the old Amana Society, found themselves once again immersed in youth culture and irresponsibility.

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<sup>83</sup> Shambaugh, “Amana – In Transition,” 151; Oral History #59, typed transcript, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS. The belief that men who had falsely professed illness to avoid working before the reorganization was common among the subjects of the Amana Oral History Project in 1982. For examples of comments regarding this situation see, Oral Histories # 59, #61, 63, typed transcripts, Amana Oral History Collection, AHS.

<sup>84</sup> Caroline and Clifford Trumpold, “The Great Change,” unpublished paper, Amana Heritage Society, 13. Arthur W. Selzer, Personal Conversation with the author, 19 September 1998, notes, collection of the author.

Within a matter of months the Amana system of education, manual training and teenage work, already altered by education standards in the 1920s, crumbled.

During the 1930s the Amana Society managed to show a modest profit at the end of each year. The employment and stock structures created by the reorganization proved to be effective. A new community school system, formed in 1932, opened a high school in Middle Amana in 1934. Still, the Amana Society remained much as it had always been. Families added new improvements, including radios, siding, automobiles, running water and electricity to their homes, but the villages retained much of their communal era atmosphere. In reorganizing their Society, the Amana people, following the lead of the Oneida Community, successfully reorganized their community, retaining what they felt were its best aspects, while obliterating the distinctive features of communal ownership and labor that had characterized it for nearly a century.

A massive and largely unforeseen industrial expansion irrevocably altered the patterns of communal labor and community life in Amana. In 1934, George C. Foerstner, the son of the High Amana storekeeper, began to sell and install refrigeration coolers from a small shed located across the street from his father's store. In 1936, Foerstner and his single employee began to manufacture as well as to install these appliances under the name "Amana Electric Company." The Amana Society charged Foerstner with trademark infringement; the young man, who at the time needed added capital with which to expand his operation, then sold the company to the Amana Society for \$4,000 dollars, with the understanding that he would remain manager. Under Foerstner's continued management, and using Amana Society

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Selzer insists that most of the older hired hands on the Homestead Farm, where he worked, were retained after the reorganization.

capital, the business grew to enormous proportions. Sold by the Society in 1948, the company, now headquartered in Middle Amana, grew to become the sixth largest appliance manufacturer in the country. Amana Refrigeration came to employ 3,000 people, including many of the former Amana communal workers. Additional workers came from outside the community, many of them relocating to the former communal garden and field sites surrounding the villages of Main and Middle Amana. The ultra modern ranch style homes that these individuals, as well as younger community residents, built in these new developments altered the Amana landscape. In retrospect, the jobs offered by Amana Refrigeration kept many young natives within the community, while, at the same time, altering both their world view, and the future world view of that community.

A further change came to the Amana community in the 1960s with the growth and development of a large tourism industry. The Amana community had always been a popular destination for the curious, but improved roadways, the addition of an interstate highway only seven miles from the villages, the visibility given the name "Amana" through its connection with the appliance company, and effective marketing, brought thousands of visitors to the villages each year.

Although the majority of Amana residents who still remember the communal system do not long for its return, the success of that system in several fundamental areas must be acknowledged. Alone of the four communities studied here, the Amana Society never faced a serious internal revolt or schism. Although youth rebellion is often cited as a reason for the final reorganization, the complaints of its youth never seriously threatened the fabric of the Society, which ultimately succumbed to the poor economic climate of the early 1930s. For ninety years the smooth flowing, if imperfect, organization of the Amana Society provided

food, clothing and shelter for a population that averaged well over 1,500 persons, while at the same acquiring an enviable reputation for quality products in the outside business community. As Delores Hayden notes, the leaders of the Amana Society developed an efficient, if autocratic, communalism, what she refers to as “the best-planned communistic settlement of their era,” that could have been replicated with success elsewhere.<sup>85</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century the Amana Society was touted as the largest and most successful communal society in the United States. With seven unadorned villages spread over a 26,000-acre domain, the Society managed to keep most of the rest of the world at bay while practicing its unique religious and social beliefs. A century later, in the year 2000, the Amana Society still controlled a 26,000-acre domain, but its seven villages, now billed as “Iowa’s most popular tourist attraction,” were filled with gift shops and boutiques catering to the very human desires that its founders had abhorred in the outside world. In the end, what survives of the old Amana are the memories of its communal survivors, of which there are fewer each year, the physical environment that those communal workers created, and the fleeting visions of faith, work and hope expressed by its founders.

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<sup>85</sup> Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 253.

**CHAPTER 3. THE SHAKERS:  
LABORING IN “THE VALLEY OF GOD’S PLEASURE,”**

Labor is worship, toil is devotion  
Order is Heaven’s perpetual law,  
Toil is our lot, on the land, and the ocean,  
Man independent the world never saw.

Such is the genius of social relation  
Sloth is rebellion, and idleness crime,  
God is demanding throughout all creation  
Diligence, industry, right use of time.

- L. D. Grosvenor  
Harvard, Massachusetts,  
September 1867.<sup>86</sup>

Put your hands to work, and give your hearts to God.”  
- Ann Lee<sup>87</sup>

The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, most commonly known as “the Shakers,” is the longest surviving communal society in the history of the United States, and the only society examined in this work that retains a communal lifestyle. Today, a small Shaker community continues to function at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Because the music and design that came from this unique religious group has gained in popularity during the last several decades, the activities of this small group of believers, the last of “Mother Ann’s Children,” are the source of national interest and media attention. If, as some believe, the sect is nearing the end of its 250 year journey, that end will come under the glare of television cameras and millions of interested eyes. Fostered by sentimentality for an

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<sup>86</sup> This short hymn was copied by James Prescott of North Union in his private journal. He probably acquired it while on his eastern tour of Shaker communities in the Fall of 1860. James Sullivan Prescott, Journal, 1846 – 1874,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item 143, 1 November 1862.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Flo Morse, *The Shakers and the World’s People* (New York: Dodd, Meade & Company, 1980), 47.

American agrarian past, the public views the Shaker experience more as a way of life than as a religious community.

The attention devoted to this group, as in the case of the other communal groups, is completely out of proportion to its size. At its height, the Shaker movement may have had 4,000 members, scattered in eighteen communities from Maine to Kentucky, far smaller than virtually any mainstream religious movement in the United States at that time; yet, because of their radically different lifestyle, their influential architecture and furniture design - the "Shaker aesthetic" - they are admired and studied, analyzed and criticized in dozens of books, articles, documentary films and the popular media.<sup>88</sup>

From the nineteenth century, when such figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Charles Dickens visited and wrote about Shaker communities, the sect has been a topic of popular and intellectual interest. Friedrich Engels, Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, Jr., Henry George and Leo Tolstoy, who carried on a long correspondence with the Mount Lebanon community, are just a few of the figures who have expressed interest in Shaker theology and thought. No other American sect or communal society has produced such a distinctive material culture, style of music and craft work aesthetic as did the Shakers, and none has drawn as much public scorn, adulation and interest. The

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<sup>88</sup> The most accurate assessment of Shaker population is provided by William Sims Brainbridge, "Shaker Demographics 1840-1900: An Example of the Use of the U. S. Census Enumeration Schedules," *Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (1982): 352-365. Previous studies, and even some recent works, accepted the Shaker provided estimate of 6,000 members. This number was first noted by William Hepworth Dixon, *New America* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1867), 319 and was given widespread endorsement by Edward Demming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover, 1963), 224. Brainbridge concludes that the actual membership of the sect in 1860 was 3,489 (Brainbridge, "Shaker Demographics," 354).

Recent scholarship has also revised the population figures given for individual Shaker communities. North Union, for example, is listed in most works as having a peak population of 300, while community records fail to indicate a population beyond 150.



Shakers have become, undoubtedly, “the model utopia against which to judge all the others.”<sup>89</sup>

Unfortunately, as historian Stephen Stein has suggested, the fixation on the material culture of the Shakers has often obscured the reality of the Shaker experience. Many writers assume that the Shaker life was as perfect as the dimensions of its chairs, as clear and pure as the well swept floors of one of the many Shaker restorations. The records of this unique sect prove otherwise. The Shakers began as a despised and persecuted group of religious enthusiasts, and then evolved into a highly organized communitarian society. But even the well-oiled machinery of Shaker communalism was not perfect, and the Society suffered through the actions of dishonest or incompetent trustees, were occasionally misled by their own enthusiasm, and saw large numbers of their members depart, never to return.

Perpetuating the standard myth of the Shakers as having achieved their goals, allowing them to remain icons, is a disservice to the reality of Shaker life. The Shakers were not angels who happened to make furniture; they were real people who chose a particular way of addressing the world and of living their lives.<sup>90</sup>

In the midst of the popular interest in the Shakers, what Stein has termed “the World of Shaker,” a vital community of scholars has produced a number of serious studies of the group. Since 1930 the field of Shaker studies has been haunted by the work of Edward Demming Andrews who brought the largely forgotten Shakers to public attention and firmly established their image as a mystical sect, devoted to perfection in all things. In his mind they

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<sup>89</sup> Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1976), 65; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 17; Brainbridge, “Shaker Demographics,” 353.

were practical saints, and he created an historical myth to support this contention. In more recent years, Priscilla Brewer, Stephen Stein and others have pioneered new approaches to the study of the Shakers, shattering many conceptions.

Despite the trend towards a more diversified view of the Shaker experience, the majority of studies continue to focus on the eastern societies, particularly those in New York and Massachusetts. This focus is due to a number of factors, not the least of which is the longevity of the eastern societies as compared to those in the west, the eastern societies' greater size, and their greater public exposure to outsiders, travelers and journalists during their period of greatest strength. Because these societies lasted well into the twentieth century when the value of their records was becoming evident, a large manuscript record exists for these communities which is simply not present for the western settlements. Finally, the "dominating influence" of Andrews assured that for decades most Shaker studies focused on one of the eastern societies. Andrews' sweeping statement that, "Each of the Shaker villages was like the others, not only in organization of its religious and temporal affairs...and in the general nature of its agricultural, horticultural, and industrial art activities," appears to satisfy many Shaker scholars, who, to this day, ignore the western communities.<sup>91</sup>

Because the topic of Shaker work and labor patterns has been documented by Edward Andrews for the major eastern society at Mount Lebanon, New York, the present study seeks to offer a counterpoint, by comparing his conclusions with a study of North Union, Ohio.

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), xiv

<sup>91</sup> An additional reason for this focus is that Edward Demming Andrews lived in the New York and Massachusetts region, and was more inclined to work with the resources close at hand (Stephen Paterwic, "From Individual to Community: Becoming a Shaker at New Lebanon, 1780 – 1947," *Communal Societies* 11 (1991), 18.) Edward Demming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship Among the Shakers: Their Craftsmanship and Economic Order* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 26; John Murray and Metin

This study will take a broad view of the Shaker work experience, as elaborated in the many fine extant studies, while contributing to the expansion of Shaker studies through its focus on a western community. Contrary to the assertion of one of its modern chroniclers, North Union was not “a microcosm of all Shaker colonies,” for it would be impossible for a single community to embody all the characteristics of such a diverse series of eighteen separate communities. North Union, however, does provide an example of how Shaker philosophies of work played out within a single community during the sect’s period of greatest significance.<sup>92</sup>

Previous studies of North Union have relied heavily on a manuscript history prepared by James Prescott. John MacLean’s 1905 work, *The Shakers of Ohio*, includes an informative chapter on North Union. Caroline Piercy’s popularly written history, *The Valley of God’s Pleasure* has been the standard general history of the community for fifty years. Richard Klyver’s biography of James Prescott contains the best published account of North Union to date. The present work, inexplicably, seems to be the first to make use of the North Union materials housed at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.<sup>93</sup>

A close study of North Union, like close studies of other Shaker communities, points to the very real weaknesses and shortcomings of its members. Though they strove for

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Cosgel, “Regional Specialization in Communal Agriculture: The Shakers, 1850 - 1880,” *Communal Societies* 19 (1999), 73.

<sup>92</sup> Richard D. Klyver, *Brother James: The Life and Times of Shaker Elder James Prescott* (Shaker Heights, Ohio: The Shaker Historical Society, 1992), introduction, n.p.

<sup>93</sup> Ironically, although the largest collection of Shaker manuscripts in the world, located at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, is only a few miles from North Union, it contains only a small number of manuscripts from that community. This odd circumstance is due to John P. MacLean, who obtained significant materials from the surviving North Union Shakers and deposited them at the Library of Congress. All of the family journals, for example, are located there. Odder still is MacLean’s description of the Prescott manuscript as ending in 1870, which it does not, and referring to it as “simply a series of biographical successions,” which it most certainly is not (John Patterson MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio: Fugitive Papers Concerning the Shakers of*

perfection, and are portrayed as homespun saints in the popular mind, the Shakers fell disappointingly short. The buildings hailed as masterpieces of Shaker design were often assembled by hired hands; Shaker leaders absconded with funds, and many members, tired of the celibate lifestyle, left as couples for matrimony in the outside world. And yet, thousands joined the Shakers, lived happy and fulfilled lives, produced masterpieces of design, art and music and had an impact on the world surrounding them far exceeding their small numbers. In their communities the faithful lived and worked, “on the boundary between this world and the next.”<sup>94</sup>

The Shaker movement, like the Inspirationists of the Amana Society, had its origins in the charismatic utterance of the “French Prophets” who traveled around Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century. While, during a visit to the German university town of Halle, the prophets ignited the spark that led to the creation of the Community of True Inspiration. It was while they were in England that they fostered the development of what became known as the “Shaking Quakers.”<sup>95</sup>

A small society of the Shaking Quakers, located in the industrial town of Manchester, England, came under the leadership of James and Jane Wardley, former Quakers who had been influenced by the Camisards. It was to this small band that Ann Lee (also Lees) the

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*Ohio, With Unpublished Manuscripts* (Cleveland, Ohio: F. J. Heer Printing Company, 1907, reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1977), 176

<sup>94</sup> Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1986), 6.

<sup>95</sup>The common origins of the two groups, their similarity of beliefs, and the fact that both were at one time centered in New York State, led to an interesting period of interaction in the 1840s. For varying accounts of this interaction see Peter Hoehnle, “Communal Bonds: Contact Between the Amana Society and Other Communal Groups, 1843 – 1932,” *Communal Societies* 20 (2000): 59 – 80. For the common origins of the two sects see Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Garrett convincingly makes the case of the Camisard connection to the Shakers, a connection that Edward Demming Andrews acknowledged but downplayed. A reading of Andrews gives the false impression that the Shakers were a unique

daughter and wife of blacksmiths, came in 1758. Very little can be said about Ann Lee with certainty; historians are even unable to state with absolute certainty her date of birth, although she was baptized in the Manchester cathedral on 1 June 1742.<sup>96</sup>

Much of what is known about Ann Lee, and of her teachings, comes through the filter of carefully crafted Shaker oral traditions that were only recorded some thirty years after her death. These stories although often repeated and possibly true, have been dismissed by at least one scholar as “either completely untrue or considerably elaborated” What can be said of Lee with certainty is that she had a “charismatic bearing, a compelling inner force which made itself felt whenever she was among her followers. In some indefinable way, she was able to make them feel that they were in the presence of a Heavenly person.”<sup>97</sup>

Lee was a member of the Wardley group for several years before her charisma brought her to its leadership. Soon her loud public utterances and those of her followers, which never numbered more than thirty, brought her into direct conflict with established civil authorities. The Shakers often entered churches in which congregations were assembled for worship in order to loudly denounce the established church.<sup>98</sup>

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group who somehow developed their unique theology and craft and architectural aesthetic within a vacuum (Andrews, *The People Called*, xi).

<sup>96</sup>Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 4 does not fix a date for Lee’s involvement with the Wardleys. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that Lee was a principal in the Wardley group by 1772. Andrews, *The People*, 5; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 3. The implication of this date is that Lee was a newborn infant when she was baptized. Traditional sources place her birth much earlier. Brewer presents her probably birth date as 29 February 1736, what another scholar has termed an appropriately “mystical day that occurs only once every four years.” (Priscilla J. Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” in Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America’s Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 38; Christian Goodwillie and Joel Cohen, *Shaker Songs: A Celebration of Peace, Harmony, and Simplicity* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 2002), 42.

More recent scholarship suggests that Lee was known as “Ann Lees” during her life time, and that the shortened form, “Lee,” was only used to refer to her after her death (Robert P. Emlen, *Shaker Village Views* (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1987), 189, # 4.

<sup>97</sup>Clarke Garret, *Origins of the Shakers*, 150; William M. Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups: The Sociology of Unconventional Lifestyles* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 201.

<sup>98</sup>Andrews, *The People Called*, 7; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 23; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 5.

According to Shaker tradition, it was after four difficult pregnancies and the loss of all four of her infant children that Lee came to abhor sexual activity. While spending time in jail in 1770, Lee had a vision of Adam and Eve engaged in sex, which confirmed to her that this act was the transgression that had led God to expel them from the Garden of Eden, and led to the entry of sin in human affairs. Her main contribution to the Wardley group was this belief that all human depravity, war, crime and suffering, had its root in the carnal act of Adam and Eve and that, as a result, humanity had to abandon sexual activity in order to be redeemed. Lee's message had limited resonance in England and her little band faced continual persecution, so, in 1774, together with her husband and five other followers, Lee set sail for the United States, landing in New York.<sup>99</sup>

Within three years the tiny band had purchased a tract of land at Niskunyea or Watervliet, New York. The group included skilled weavers, blacksmiths and cobblers, all of whom plied their trades to provide income for the band, living in a state of informal communalism, "more out of necessity than religious conviction" In 1780, Lee and six others were imprisoned on suspicion of being British agents intent on promoting pacifism among the Americans. Ironically, the publicity surrounding her imprisonment only served to expose a wider audience to the message of what had "been a relatively isolated movement."<sup>100</sup>

Lee continued to attract more followers and made an important three year missionary trip to the New England states that ended in 1783. Opponents beat and whipped the Shaker

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<sup>99</sup> According to one account, one of Lee's daughters lived to the age of six and her last child died in October 1766. Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land: A Community Portrait* (Harvard, Mass.: The Harvard Common Press, 1982), 9; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 22; Andrews, *The People Called*, Glendyne E., "Lust, 'A Snare of Satan to Beguile the Soul': New Light on Shaker Celibacy," *Communal Societies* 15 (1995), 1.

leaders, and on several occasions, mobs dragged Lee from her bed to examine her body to determine if she was “a man, a woman, or a witch.” Her converts met in meetings in which they danced wildly, and made strange vocal noises so loudly that, according to one of their first critics, they could be heard two miles away.<sup>101</sup>

Tired, ill and depressed over the death of her brother, William, Lee died in 1784. With the death of their leader, whom some believed was immortal, many converts lost faith and left the sect. Illiterate, Lee left no writings and her teachings are preserved only through the recorded memories of her followers. That Lee was a powerful charismatic, there can be no doubt, and her central place in Shaker history is deserved. Lee, however, was not the founder of the sect, nor did she direct the formation of its communal system, nor was she the only charismatic or capable leader in the Society’s long history.<sup>102</sup>

James Whittaker first assumed Lee’s mantle, followed by Joseph Meacham, who organized the scattered believers into definable settlements, organized along communal lines. Meacham also initiated the dual nature of Shaker leadership, where each male leader had a female equivalent, by appointing Lucy Wright as his equal in the ministry. The Shakers remain one of the few religious sects to have consistently maintained female leadership.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 16, 34; Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” 40; John McKelvie Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints: A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 15.

<sup>101</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 17, 24.

<sup>102</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 50; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 38. As an example of a Shaker myth, Andrews points to the often reprinted story of how follower, James Whittaker, fed Ann Lee while she was in prison in Manchester by sticking a pipe stem through the keyhole of the door to her cell and pouring wine and milk through it. The problem with this story is that prisoners in the Manchester House of correction were not starved to death for Lee’s offense, breaking the Sabbath, and they were housed on the second floor of the building, making Whittaker’s act impossible (Andrews, *The People Called*, 11)

More recent scholars, most notably Stephen Stein, have simply ignored the Shaker traditions about Ann Lee which cannot be substantiated, and, instead, have produced sparse accounts of her work.

<sup>103</sup> Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 18.

In the decade after 1787, Meacham established the communal lifestyle and organization that has continued, unabated, among the Shakers for over two centuries. For Meacham, living a life with strict discipline was the way to attain spiritual salvation, and he worked to create a community both in which such discipline was possible, and which could easily be replicated wherever adherents settled. Without Meacham, Andrews correctly asserts, the church would probably not long have survived the death of its founder, or “merited more than a footnote” in American religious history.<sup>104</sup>

Meacham organized Shaker communities in areas where the Shaker message took hold, from New York to Maine, traveling between them “planning and exhorting.” By 1794, eleven Shaker villages, extending from New York to the frontier of Maine, formed. Communal living, Shakers reasoned, allowed them to lead lives of Christian virtue and charity. Additionally, in order to practice celibacy, they felt it was necessary to withdraw from the world, and withdrawal meant that to be successful they had to live communally.<sup>105</sup>

Following Meacham’s death in 1796, Wright assumed total control of the Shaker movement. Wright possessed both charismatic and administrative gifts and, according to more recent scholarship, “played a far more instrumental role in the evolution of Shakerism,” than did Meacham who is usually credited as “the primary architect of the Shaker communal order.” Wright, not Meacham or Ann Lee emerges from the reexamined record as “perhaps the most influential figure in all of Shaker history.”<sup>106</sup>

At Wright’s instigation three Shaker missionaries journeyed to Kentucky in early 1805 and there became involved in the Kentucky revival, gaining thousands of converts for

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<sup>104</sup> Julie Nicoletta, *The Architecture of the Shakers* (Woodstock, Vermont: The Countryman Press, 1995), 20; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 19; Andrews, *The People Called*, 54.

<sup>105</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 64; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 209.



the little sect and leading to the formation of Shaker settlements in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and as far west as Illinois. Shaker expansion was remarkably successful; by 1815 five new communities were in existence in the west, soon to be followed by two new communities on the Ohio frontier.

The early western Shakers faced persecution from neighbors who found their celibacy threatening to traditional ideas of family life, while their clannishness and secrecy raised suspicion. As one Ohio historian notes, “[n]othing was more likely to arouse the wrath of Ohio citizens than their fear that one group or another was making a fetish of its peculiarities or attempting to convert others.” Opponents directed physical violence, and even mob activity, at the communities. One commentator remarked of an Ohio Shaker missionary that he was a man “who goes about to seduce the people and ravish the women, accumulating property and making disturbance among those who before lived happily.”<sup>107</sup>

Western Shakerism was centered on and directed by the community of Union Village, Ohio. The subordination of the other western communities can be seen by their names: West Union, South Union and North Union, which indicate their geographical location in relation to the lead western ministry. The western communities were subject both to Union Village leadership and the leadership of the central ministry at New Lebanon, New York. By the 1830s the Shakers had reached a membership estimated at around 4,000, possibly their peak, living at eighteen different locations stretching from Maine to the short-lived community of West Union, Indiana.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 117.

<sup>107</sup> Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 29.

<sup>108</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 90; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 17.

It was during the years of western revival that Shaker theology took complete form. The key elements of Shakerism included an emphasis on confession of sins and repentance, a heavy dependence on revivalism, and veneration of Ann Lee, whom they felt had inaugurated the last phase of human history, the millennium. The belief that they were living in the Millennium guided the thinking of the Shaker community. They expected their communities to form the nucleus of God's kingdom on earth, and firmly believed that once most of the world had embraced Shakerism, fulfilling the divine plan, God's final judgment would occur. To this end, Shakers dedicated their property and their labor in order to further the fulfillment of God's plan. Shakers expected new converts to make complete confessions of their sins, and to continue to make confessions the rest of their lives. Revivalism among the Shakers was similar to the camp meetings held in the frontier areas where the movement gained its greatest strength: members shouted, turned on their feet until they fell to the ground, sang, trembled and, as their name implied, shook. Spirit possession, speaking in tongues, and visionary experiences were all a part of Shaker worship.<sup>109</sup>

As many as seventeen thousand individuals ultimately heeded the revivalist call of the Shakers and spent at least part of their lives in a Shaker community. While many joined the

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<sup>109</sup> Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, 22, 23, 25; Goodwillie and Cohen, *Shaker Songs*, 70. Ann Lee's position within the church was gradually reinterpreted by Shaker theologians such as Benjamin Seth Youngs. Lee's early followers evidently viewed her as "the elect lady," whose appearance on earth foretold the coming apocalypse, while, in Youngs' 1808 *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, she became the female incarnation of Christ (Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia*, 26 – 27)

Although Lee's position in Shaker theology ultimately shifted, to early Believers she differed from Jesus only in that he was the product of a virgin birth while Lee, born "of human flesh, [bore] the promise that that it is possible as a human being to transcend inherent sin and perfect oneself in the image of Christ."

By the end of the nineteenth century, Shaker views about Ann Lee had shifted and she was no longer viewed as a Christ figure. In a significant publication about Shaker Theology, "Life in the Christ Spirit," Theodore Johnson, an influential figure in twentieth century Shakerism could comment, "Mother Ann was not Christ, nor did she claim to be. She was simply the first of many Believers wholly imbued by his spirit, wholly consumed by His love." Theodore E. Johnson, "Life in the Christ Spirit," *The Shaker Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1968), 71.

sect because they believed in its religious principles, other motivations should not be overlooked. Unhappily married couples, in an age where divorce was unheard of, could join the Shakers and start new lives. In an age before welfare, widows, particularly those with young children, found financial and temporal security among the Shakers. As sociologist William Kephart suggests, other people many have joined simply because they were unsuited for a capitalistic world, and found a more secure life with the Shakers. The bonds of community, such as camaraderie, being among like-minded people and other social aspects of Shaker life were also appealing. On another level, Americans of a mystical bent were drawn to the community. The celibate life of the Shakers also provided individuals whose sexual nature was undeveloped, or who had “unsatisfactory or wounding” sexual experiences, or who were homosexuals in an unrelentingly heterosexual world, to find refuge. Finally, converts came who had simply concluded that Ann Lee was the female incarnation of Christ, and they wished to live in the community that she had started.<sup>110</sup>

Shakerism in the West was a frontier movement, adhered to by the rough men and women who willingly left homes in the East for the newly mapped lands of the western frontier. As individuals who were searching for economic opportunity, many were also searching for a more meaningful religious life as well, so it is not surprising that some of the largest and most successful revivals of the nineteenth century occurred in such obscure places as Cane Ridge in Kentucky.

The frontier life, and its world view, would inform much of the early development of what became the North Union community. Moses Cleaveland, and company, first surveyed northeastern Ohio, known as the Western Reserve, in 1796. The Reserve was an area of land

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<sup>110</sup> Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, 40; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 205 – 207.

given to the state of Connecticut by the United States Congress in recognition of its colonial land claims. Connecticut sold this grant to the Connecticut Land Company, which dispatched Cleveland's party and managed the sale of the surveyed land. Settlers arrived in the area, but not in the droves that Cleveland had hoped for; by 1803 his namesake village, at the point where the Cuyahoga River entered Lake Erie, had seventeen residents, a number that had only climbed to fifty-seven by 1810.<sup>111</sup>

Settlement of the surrounding backcountry near Cleveland was also slow, and mainly by New Englanders, who imparted a New England cast to this section, making it "another world altogether" when compared with typical Ohio settlement. The first successful attempt at settlement in the area that became North Union was by New Hampshire natives, Daniel and Margaret Warren, and the township surrounding their land was eventually named for them.<sup>112</sup>

In 1812 the extended Russell family, including son Ralph, arrived in Warren township and began clearing the land and establishing farms. In 1821, Ralph Russell spent the night at the home of James Darrow while on his way to visit relatives. During their encounter, Darrow, a recent Shaker convert, "opened the testimony quite fully" to his guest. Shortly after his visit with Darrow, Russell paid his first visit to Union Village Shakers in the fall of 1821, after which he returned home, a Shaker convert. Following his return, Russell had a mystical experience that he felt confirmed his conversion and which was later described by his associate Richard Pelham, "He had seen a strong clear ray of light proceed

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<sup>111</sup> Carolyn B. Piercy, *The Valley of God's Pleasure: A Saga of the North Union Shaker Community* (New York: Stratford House, 1951), 10, 20; Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People*, 30; Carol Poh Miller, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796 – 1990* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 9.

from Union Village in a perfectly straight horizontal line till it reached a spot near his dwelling...and there it rose up in a strong column & became a beautiful tree!”<sup>113</sup>

The elders at Union Village insisted that, rather than join their community, Russell should form a new settlement on his land near Cleveland. Since, as historian Suzanne Thurman notes, “[l]ocating Shaker villages close to established towns or cities was a guiding principle in the formative years of Shakerism,” the elders’ decision to encourage Russell to found a community near the lake port of Cleveland was probably motivated by other than religious factors. While religious devotion motivated many Shaker activities, economic considerations, such as access to markets where a new community could sell goods in order to support itself, were also factors.<sup>114</sup>

Called “North Union” because of its geographical position relative to Union Village, the community was the seventh, and final, western Shaker settlement. That spring Union Village elders, including the youthful Richard Pelham, who was called “that lad” by the locals, arrived at the Russell home to hold revival meetings, attracting a small group of converts, mainly drawn from the Russell family during their six week visit. The following year, the Shakers purchased a tract of land in Warren Township and consecrated it to their cause. Their property lay approximately seven miles south of Lake Erie and only eight miles east of Cleveland, which grew over to the ensuing fifty years to the point where the city ended half a mile from the Shaker property. The new site had a heavy stand of native poplar,

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<sup>112</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, “Ohio: Gateway to the Midwest” in *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* ed. by James H. Madison (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 209; Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People*, 29 – 30; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Pelham, “A Sketch of the Life and Religious Experience of Richard W. Pelham,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 281, 50 – 51, 53; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 116.

<sup>114</sup> Suzanne R. Thurman, “O Sisters Ain’t You Happy?” *Gender, Family and Community among the Harvard and Shirley Shakers, 1781 – 1918* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 3.

maple, chestnut and birch trees. This timber was virgin growth, and as late as the 1870s a visitor to the site noted the presence of trees over three feet in diameter and 140 feet tall.<sup>115</sup>

This process of community formation was not unusual for the Shakers. Typically, a group of converts congregated on the farm of a devoted convert who gave his property to the church. In some cases the owners of adjoining farms converted, immediately providing the Shakers with a large tract of contiguous land. In cases where the land gifted to the Society was not contiguous, the Shakers either sold it, or maintained it for other purposes. Those individuals without land contributed whatever possessions they could, ranging from livestock, to furniture, tools and food items. Unlike the Icarians and Amana Inspirationists, most Shaker communities seem to have selected land for its availability rather than for other qualities. If a fervent believer was willing to provide land, the community was willing to accept it, glad with any property for which it did not have to pay.<sup>116</sup>

Elders came from Union Village to organize the settlers into a Shaker community. This practice of sending experienced Shakers to teach a group of novices the Shaker way was typical in the early days of Shaker settlements. In the western communities established missionaries, such as Richard Pelham who worked at North Union, performed this service several times during their careers. At first the elders stayed for only short periods of time, up to three months, but in 1826 the Union Village ministry appointed a formal permanent ministry for the new settlement. Eventually, a cluster of seven cabins, including the original

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<sup>115</sup>Pelham, "A Sketch," 52, 57; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 112, 118; Henry Clay Blinn, "A Journey to Kentucky in the Year 1873," *The Shaker Quarterly* 6 (Winter 1966), 139 -140.

<sup>116</sup>Russell H. Anderson, "Agriculture Among the Shakers, Chiefly at Mount Lebanon," *Agricultural History* 24 (July 1950), 113; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, 53. The converts who formed the nucleus of the Pleasant Hill, Kentucky settlement, for example, also collected on the 140 acre farm of Elisha Thomas, an early convert, who subsequently turned the land over to the Shaker community, while the Harvard Shaker community formed on

Russell home, formed the Shaker community, the smoke from whose, “cat & clay chimneys in a cold frosty morning, assumed the appearance to a stranger afar off, of the native Wigwams [sic] of an Indian Village.”<sup>117</sup>

These new settlers, already pioneers of the Western Reserve, “were mostly if not altogether of the laboring class of People.” Many had been farmers, including the five Russell brothers who, together with their families, constituted thirty-eight people or two thirds of the total membership in the early years<sup>118</sup>

The early organization of North Union was followed by the signing of a formal covenant by all the members. This occurred on 6 September 1828 at which time the society owned 1,366 acres, mainly in Warrensville Township. Two years before this action, in 1826, the ministry at Union Village dispatched a new elder, Ashbel Kitchell, to take charge of the North Union Community, usurping the authority of Ralph Russell, the founder and organizer of the Community. While Russell possessed great religious enthusiasm, had donated his land for the colony, and was a hard worker, he lacked the business acumen and organizational ability needed to manage a growing Shaker settlement. Kitchell’s personality quickly eclipsed Russell, who eventually left the community.<sup>119</sup>

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land donated by Isaac Willard (Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Pleasant Hill, Kentucky: Pleasant Hill Press, 1983), 9; Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, 49).

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, “Agriculture Among the Shakers,” 114; James Sullivan Prescott, “Records of the Church at North Union containin the rise and progress of the Church,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 290, 11, 17. Inexplicably, Klymer felt that Prescott was comparing the houses to wigwams, and explains that unlike Wigwams “these cabins were stoutly built and extremely neat and clean.” completely missing the point of Prescott’s picturesque statement. (Klyver, *Brother James*, 14). The Shakers at Pleasant Hill also occupied cabins during the early period of their settlement (James C. Thomas and Samuel W. Thomas, *The Simple Spirit: A Pictorial Study of the Shaker Community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky* (Harrodsburg, Kentucky: Pleasant Hill Press, 1973), 11.

<sup>118</sup> Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 13; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 81

<sup>119</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 119, Klyver, *Brother James*, 19.

Under Kitchell, a corpulent man of commanding personality, the Society expanded and replaced its original log structures with substantial buildings constructed with the ample wood supply in the area. Frame construction remained the prevalent form at North Union where only industrial buildings and a school house were built of other materials. As the new North Union leadership wrote to its superiors, “we have a little company that have take[n] hold of the handles of Mother’s plow& feel at tho they would not look back untill [sic] they had drawn a furrow cleane [sic] through Bablon [sic], for which we are glad.”<sup>120</sup>

For the construction of its first major building, the Center Family dwelling in 1826, the community established a well worn pattern by turning to an outside mason, James Sullivan Prescott, to lay the stone foundation. A relatively well educated former school teacher, Baptist missionary among the Oneida Indians, and religious seeker, Prescott first came in contact with Shakers when, at age fifteen, he visited the public meeting at Shirley, Massachusetts, near his childhood home. Prescott was impressed with North Union during the two weeks it took to complete his work, and asked permission to stay in the community. Ultimately, Prescott joined the Society and became its single most important member, serving as an elder, school teacher, mason, carpenter and historian during the sixty-two years he was a Shaker.<sup>121</sup>

By 1826 the settlement had its own meeting house. The ministry lived in the meeting house and had little to do with the rank and file members of the community, prohibited from

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<sup>120</sup> Ashbel Kitchell and others to “Dearly Beloved Ministry,” 13 July 1826, Western Reserve Shaker Collection, Series V A-51.

<sup>121</sup> James Prescott to Watervliet Shakers, 25 December 1860, Western Reserve Shaker Collection, IV Correspondence, folder 51; Klyver, *Brother James*, 13 – 15.

In the past, writers have suggested that Prescott was the brother of William Hickling Prescott, the noted American historian. In fact, they were only fourth cousins. Ironically, Prescott taught at a mission school



doing so by the “Millennial Laws” that governed the Shaker world. Although some Shaker leaders abused their positions, particularly in the late nineteenth century, the majority, far from being despotic or criminal, earned the trust and admiration of their followers. While North Union had its share of problems, it never faced the disasters of mismanagement or poor investment that plagued many other Shaker communities. Despite the poor behavior of some Shaker leaders during the nineteenth century, historian Priscilla Brewer has concluded that most leaders acted with true humility and honesty and that “few became so arrogant that they became poor leaders.” In addition to managing the spiritual and temporal needs of the community, Shaker leaders also had to engage in manual labor, which the ministry did in a separate “ministry shop,” making their achievements, as William Kephart notes, “all the more impressive.”<sup>122</sup>

North Union and its ministry were responsible to the lead ministry located at Union Village, near Cincinnati. The Union Village elders, in turn, were subject to the rulings of the central ministry at Mount Lebanon, New York, composed of two men and two women who stood at the head of the Shaker movement. The Union Village ministry visited North Union annually, and occasionally the lead ministry from New Lebanon also visited the community, but not annually as they did the eastern societies. When not visiting North Union, Shaker leaders kept in contact with the affairs of the community through frequent correspondence.

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near the future site of the Oneida Community. Among his students was Ely S. Parker, later a Civil War general and head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Grant Administration (Klyver, *Brother James*, 9, 61)

<sup>122</sup> Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 22; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 59; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 132; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 215.

Visitation and the postal service created a web of communication between the widely scattered Shaker communities and resulted in a level of cohesion remarkable for the time.<sup>123</sup>

Below the central ministry, the Union Village bishopric and their own lead ministry, North Union was divided into three separate “families.” These families were located at the ends and in the center of North Union’s linear tract of land. The family located by the Society’s mills was appropriately called “the Mill Family;” the family located farthest east served as the “Gathering Order” (also referred to as the “East Family”) for new converts, while the family located in the center of the property was known as the “Center Family.” As in all Shaker communities, the residents who lived at the Center Family (in eastern communities called “the Church Family”) were the most spiritually advanced members of the community. The Mill Family had charge of the grist and saw mill operations as well as the linseed oil mill. This family lived in a large two and a half story frame building, surrounded by a dairy house, cow barn, stables, and chicken house.<sup>124</sup>

The three families were virtually autonomous. Each had its own farm, dwelling house and craft shops, and was governed by its own elder, eldress, deacon and deaconess -- in many cases occupying retiring rooms near entrances to the dwelling house the better to monitor the

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<sup>123</sup> The visits of the lead ministry were important events in the lives of the Ohio Shakers, preceded by days of cleaning and preparation. (“Family Journal, North Union, Ohio, [Believed to be Center Family’s Sister’s Journal] Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 242, 1 June 1852)

Once the ministry arrived, the Shakers held several meetings with them, during which the ministry instructed them in revised Shaker worship methods of dancing and singing, leading one North Union member to comment, “we found ourselves far in the rear as to a correct manner of taking step, & shuffling, marching & c.” The ministry on this visit shared stories of early Shaker leaders such as Mother Ann, Lucy Wright and Father James. The effect that such visits had in strengthening ties between eastern and western Shakerism, as well as with the historic past of the church cannot be overstated. (Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 124).

<sup>124</sup> Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 23, 72; Klyver, *Brother James*, 35. The three families were referred to by different names at different points in community history. “The Gathering Order” for example, was known as “the school family” when Isaac Youngs visited it in 1834. (Isaac Newton Youngs, “Br. Isaac Newton Youngs’ Journal. Tour with Br. Rufus Bishop, through the states of Ohio and Kentucky, in the Summer of 1834,” Ms. # 12,751, Shaker Library, Shaker Museum and Library, Old Chatham, New York, 19 June 1834).

activities of Believers. The Millennial Laws attempted to discourage extensive interaction between families as a means of protecting the more spiritually pure from contamination. Deacons and Deaconess had latitude in directing the financial affairs of their families. This latitude allowed the widely scattered communities the chance to adapt their production to meet local market demands. Families consisted of from thirty to a hundred members on average. At North Union, the center family, when at its peak population, reached one hundred (about two thirds of the total community population).<sup>125</sup>

Following the prescriptions of the Millennial laws, men occupied one side of the dwelling house, women the other, each member sharing their sparsely furnished “retiring rooms” with four to six other members. During the first decades of the North Union Society, members could expect the leadership to relocate them from room to room or from family to family as needed. Men and women also used separate stair cases as well as separate doors into public rooms and into the dwellings themselves. The ministry initiated “permissible degree of association” between the genders, known as “union meetings,” in 1793. At the four times weekly union meetings, Shaker brothers and sisters, each carefully paired with one another sat in two rows of chairs, five feet apart, and could “talk over the day’s events, sing, or read an approved publication aloud.”<sup>126</sup>

The Center Family was also the location for the community meeting house, the woolen mill, the cemetery and the trustees’ office. Trustee offices served as “portals to the world” in Shaker communities. Home to the trustees, who were in charge of the temporal affairs of the Society, the office also accommodated visitors who spent the night in the

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<sup>125</sup> Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 23, Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 134; Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann,” 43.

<sup>126</sup> Wergland, “Lust, ‘A Snare of Satan,” 2; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 21.

village and often contained a store and post office patronized by outsiders. Aside from the meeting house, which could be entered during public worship, the trustee office was the only building that visitors could officially enter in a Shaker community.<sup>127</sup>

With a few exceptions, North Union buildings were frame and stood on foundations of local sandstone. A visitor in the 1870s commented that “[m]ost of the buildings in North Union are painted some dark color, as dark slate, dark drab, dark yellow or dark green.” North Union was known for its flowers and other ornamental plantings, although such plantings were not condoned by the lead ministry. The Shakers maintained a virgin stand of trees, the “Hemlock Grove” as a place of recreational walks and picnics.<sup>128</sup>

For at least two decades, North Union was a Shaker village of great promise, which seemingly never fulfilled the hopes of the larger Shaker community. A sister, visiting in 1847, twenty-five years after settlement commenced, remarked, “It is, or will be a beautiful place after a little more improvement.” Although the community continued to build and

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<sup>127</sup> Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 81.

<sup>128</sup> Blinn, “A Journey to Kentucky,” 141; Klyver, *Brother James*, 104; James Sullivan Prescott, Centre Family Journal, 1869 – 1888, Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 287, 23 August 1860.

The Pleasant Hill Shakers maintained a similar “playground” on their land in Kentucky. Containing trees, “tanbark” paths and benches, this park also contained “a large ornamental pavilion.” Daniel Mac-Mir Hutton, *Old Shakertown and the Shakers* (13<sup>th</sup> ed. Harrodsburg, Kentucky: The Harrodsburg Herald Press, 1983), 59.

At Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, evergreens, shrubs and flowers were removed by community leaders in 1853. North Union’s plantings, however, escaped this fate. One Shaker sister in recalling the roses growing along the road that ran through her village, commented that “it was strongly impressed upon us that a rose was useful not ornamental.” Although they may have been decorative, the Shakers harvested these roses as a crop to produce rose water that the Society sold. F. J. Houghton remembered her/his great grandmother, Laura P. Houghton a member of the North Union society, who, she/he claimed “took care of the flower gardens around the center family” (F.J. Houghton to Mrs. Hermann J Nord, Secretary of the Shaker Historical Society, 19 September 1957).

<sup>128</sup> Thomas and Thomas, *Simple Spirit*, 31; Sister Marcia [Bullard], “Shaker Industries,” *Good Housekeeping*, July 1906, 37. Similarly, although the millennial laws specifically forbade dogs, the Center Family at North Union kept a large black dog during the last decade of the community (George Budinger, Interview, typed transcript, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio).

improve its property, a decade later a visitor would have been sure to note signs of decline and decay.<sup>129</sup>

In 1874 journalist Charles Nordhoff commented that the North Union Shakers were primarily former Methodists, Baptists or Adventists, and were mainly native born. He did find a few English, German and Swiss members in the community, and also noted that some members had been whale men, sailors and weavers but that, by and large as one would expect in rural Ohio, most had been farmers. Nordhoff's comments, however, do not represent the actual diversity of North Union membership.<sup>130</sup>

Although the majority of the North Union Shakers were from Protestant backgrounds, several notable exceptions were not. Occasionally, the North Union community raised Native American children; as late as 1873 three young Indian girls, "all good singers" according to one visitor, were in residence at the community.<sup>131</sup>

Like Shaker communities farther South, North Union had a small population of African Americans. Indeed, one of the first converts during the Kentucky Revival was a slave, Anna Middleton. Like other southern converts to Shakerism, Matthew Houston, a member of the North Union lead ministry, freed his slaves upon conversion. The first documented African American member of North Union, a former Virginia slave and blacksmith named Thomas Jones arrived in December 1823. The death of thirteen year old Emily Jefferson "an African" is noted in the North Union death register for 1843. Between 1846 and 1860 James Prescott noted the arrival of six black members of the Community, all

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<sup>129</sup> Prudence Morrell, "Prudence Morrell's Account of a Journey to the West in the Year 1847," ed. by Theodore E. Johnson, *The Shaker Quarterly*, 8 (Fall 1968), 91.

<sup>130</sup> Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States From Personal Visit and Observation* (Reprint, New York: Hillary House Publishers Ltd. 1961), 204.

but one, a young woman who did not remain long among the Shakers, were men, at least two of whom were escaped slaves.<sup>132</sup>

In their broad based membership, the Shaker communities differed from their foreign born communal counterparts such as the Amana Society, the Icarians and the Harmony and Zoar Communities. These groups, because of the language barrier, only admitted individuals who could speak their native tongue. The Shakers, by contrast, were able to admit any individual who professed belief in their doctrine and who had also adopted the English language, including Germans, Swedes, Poles and others. The 1880 census, for example, noted that 13.7 percent of all Shakers were foreign born, and North Union was no different. When German immigrant, George Ott, joined the community a German speaking member had to serve as his interpreter for the confession expected of all new members, and at least one Dane temporarily lived at North Union. A number of Shakers recorded in Prescott's 1850 census of the community came from the Isle of Man, many of them drawn from a nearby settlement of "Manxmen." North Union was also home to several Irish converts.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Blinn, "A Journey to Kentucky," 141. These were probably the three Indian girls brought to North Union from Detroit on 17 September 1870. Prescott, *Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888*, 17 September 1870.

<sup>132</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 75; Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Its Message* (Columbis, Ohio: Press of Fred J. Heer, 1904,, 125; Prescott, "Records of the Church," 11; Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 77; James Sullivan Prescott, "Death List of the United Society of Believers, North Union, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, 1827 - 1874," *The Shaker Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1962), 124. No other information concerning Emily Jefferson is available. Likewise, Thomas Jones' presence at North Union is poorly documented.

James S. Prescott, "[Private] Journal, 1846 – 1874," Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 143, 26 August 1846, 24 August 1848, 11 June 1849, 16 May 1859, 20 June 1859, 18 January 1860 for the arrival, and in one case, departure, of African American members. Two of these men were escaped slaves. Henry Johnson who had run away from a master in Kentucky seven years before his 1859 arrival at North Union, and Arthur Campbell from Maryland, who had escaped slavery two years before joining the Shakers in 1860.

<sup>133</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 211; Prescott, "[Private] Journal," 21 May 1846; Prescott, "Centere Family Journal, 1860 - 1888," 8 May 1879; Klyver, *Brother James*, 34; Youngs, "Br. Isaac Newton Youngs' Journal," 19 June 1834.

Former Jews, Catholics, other Protestants were welcome among the Shakers. In 1835 North Union accepted a German Jewish immigrant, Mority Sechler, for membership. Swiss immigrant, John Stark, joined the North Union community in 1836. Raised a Catholic, at one time Stark almost entered the priesthood. The presence of Catholics at North Union contradicts the statements of Shaker scholars who unequivocally state, “there is no record of any Roman Catholic having joined.”<sup>134</sup>

North Union also benefited from an influx of followers of William Miller that occurred in Shaker communities once Miller’s prediction of the imminent end of the world proved false. Prescott noted the visit of several Millerite families to North Union during the summer of 1846 and noted that Shakers visited some of these families at their homes in Cleveland. At least some of these “Adventist Friends” joined the community.<sup>135</sup>

In 1829, shortly after the organization of North Union, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints located at Kirtland, approximately fifteen miles from the Shaker settlement. Zealous Mormon elders visited the Shakers, who dismissed their message, although they accepted some religious books from their visitors. During the next few years

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<sup>134</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 223; Klyver, *Brother James*, 34; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 98, 99; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 215.

Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 160, was probably among the first to make the blanket statement of the Shakers that they, “get members from all religious denominations except the Roman Catholic.” Ironically, Nordhoff contradicted himself by reporting the presence of former Catholics at the Groveland, South Union and Union Village communities! Indeed, he remarked of Union Village, “I found, to my surprise, several Catholics, one of whom was originally a Spanish priest.” Evidently, his surprise was not great enough to cause him to revise his earlier statement, however. The presence of Catholics in a Shaker community is surprising, perhaps, considering the sect’s belief that “the Catholic Church was a totally corrupt hierarchy – ‘the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.’” (Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 199, 202, 207; Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints*, 20)

<sup>135</sup> In July of 1846 North Union was visited by Enoch Jacobs, a former Millerite and editor of the prominent paper, *The Midnight Cry*, who had recently joined the Shakers together with his family. (“The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 278, 18 July 1846; Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 10 May 1846; 24 May 1846, 19 June 1846 for material concerning Millerites. On 30 April 1847 Prescott recorded that Sarah Buttolph, and Adventist, had arrived at North Union with the intention of remaining. The Family Journal lists her death on 21 November 1857. )

the two settlements “kept up pleasant trading relations” until, in 1831 three Mormon elders paid a second visit to North Union. During this visit, the elders delivered a “divine message” presented by their leader, Joseph Smith. The message declared, among other things, that “whoso forebiddeth to marry, is not ordained of God” and “Verily, I say unto you, that the Son of Man cometh not in the form of a woman, neither of a man traveling on the earth.” Hearing both their central doctrine of celibacy and Ann Lee attacked, the Shakers were understandably unreceptive. Although neither Shaker nor Mormon literature indicates a second attempt at proselytizing by either group, North Union’s proximity to the former Mormon community of Kirtland, meant that it attracted a small number of former Mormons who chose to remain in Ohio rather than follow their leader, Joseph Smith, to Illinois. Some scholars believe that the North Union Shakers influenced Mormon leader, Joseph Smith, in constructing the Mormon community at Kirtland.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> The message the Mormons gave to the Shakers is quoted, in full, in *Doctrines and Covenants*, Section 49. Robert F. W. Meader, “The Shakers and the Mormons,” *The Shaker Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1962), 87 - 89.

Later, Kitchell spoke to a Mormon group “but few of them attended. They appeared to be struck with terror and fear lest some of them might get converted.” (Meader, “The Shakers and the Mormons,” 91)

In 1832 Matthew Houston wrote to Shaker leader, Seth Wells, about Jesse Guide? a former Hancock Shaker who had since joined the Mormons. Gudie’s wife, Minerva, had evidently left Kirtland to join the Shakers, and her husband had recently attempted to retrieve her. Guide, Houston claimed was “second to the Prophet or Seer Joseph Smith,” in the Mormon hierarchy. Houston was pleased that Guide has eventually departed because “he is certainly among the meanest of men,” and praised Minerva since she “cut off Old Jesse verry handsomely & he felt it in his gizzard.” Matthew [Houston] to Seth Wells, 10 August 1832, Western Reserve Shaker Collection, IV Correspondence, file 51. Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 10 May 1846; 24 May 1846, 19 June 1846 for material concerning Millerites. On 30 April 1847 Prescott recorded that Sarah Buttolph, and Adventist, had arrived at North Union with the intention of remaining. The Family Journal lists her death on 21 November 1857.

Although Meader asserts that the 1831 incident saw the end of missionary work between the Mormons and the Shakers, community records suggest otherwise. The visit of a Mormon elder mentioned in The North Union Family Journal, 15 May 1843, and a similar visit is recorded as late as December 1869 (Prescott, “Center Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 8 December 1869; Andrews, *The People Called*, 222.)

Similarly, James Prescott and another brother paid a visit to Kirtland in December of 1844 to visit “Some families amongst the Mormons and others who had previously professed Mormonism” although the purpose of this visit is not stated (“The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 17 December 1844).



Ashbell Kitchell oversaw the development of North Union until 1831, when the lead ministry at Union Village recalled him. During his administration the Society increased to 125 members, constructed a number of significant buildings, and began to develop the industries that would make it economically independent. By 1831, the Shakers were selling maple syrup and grinding the grain crops of their neighbors in their new (1829) grist mill. The orchards and dairy herds already under development would soon expand the marketable products of the Society.<sup>137</sup>

Kitchell was replaced as elder by Matthew Houston. Although he was personally popular with his charges, Houston was both elderly and ill and he served the community for less than a year. David Spinning, a strict vegetarian, replaced Houston, and served as head elder until 1840. He was accompanied by three new elders and eldresses representing a complete change in the personnel of the lead ministry. Under the new leaders, North Union expanded to include a “Gathering Family” for new members and, in 1837, a separate Mill Family at the site of its burgeoning grist and saw mill operation.<sup>138</sup>

Samuel Russell, the then thirty-three year old younger brother of Ralph Russell the founder of the North Union community, succeeded Spinning as leader of the community. Russell served as lead elder for over twenty years, during the period of North Union’s peak, economically, numerically, and spiritually, and also during the early years of its long decline. During Russell’s administration the Society began to produce silk and expanded its milling operations through construction of a landmark stone grist mill in 1843. Virtually every Shaker community had at least one landmark that they could point to with pride, such as the

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<sup>137</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 29 -30. Houston was a cousin Sam Houston shortly about to make his mark in Texas history.

round barn at Hancock, Massachusetts; for North Union, that landmark was the towering four story mill. North Union also expanded its dairy and horticultural operations, bee keeping, coopering and built a woolen mill in 1854.<sup>139</sup>

The Russell administration also covered the “Era of Manifestations,” or “Mother Ann’s Work” during which the already mystical Shakers experienced a decade-long period of religious revival in which members spoke in tongues, channeled the spirits of departed Shakers and luminaries such as Christopher Columbus, Napoleon, Alexander Pope, George Washington, Mohammed (who confessed the error of his teachings) and various Native Americans. At North Union, Jesus was said to have been in residence for three full months, during which the leadership barred members from leaving the premises, except for trustees on business.<sup>140</sup>

Manifestations at North Union began in 1838, when young people walking along one of its lakes, heard singing, “which seemed to be in the air above their heads.” The first appearance of this activity in a formal religious meeting occurred on 29 October 1843, some five years later, when several Indian spirits, including “Chiefs and Warriors Squaws of several different Tribes” made their presence known. This period also witnessed a flowering of Shaker music, as members “received” “gifts” of song from the spirit world, and North Union received several such anthems to include in this repertoire during this time.

Understandably, Shaker communities discontinued their public meetings during the Age of

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<sup>139</sup> Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 105; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 99.

<sup>140</sup> Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, 65; Edward Demming Andrews, *The Gift to Be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers* (J.J. Augustin, 1940, reprint, New York: Dover, 1962), 26 – 27; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 159. According to Andrews account, the Shakers believed that Washington had influenced thousands of spirits to convert to Shakerism. Andrews provides a lengthy list of the famous spirits who communicated to the Shakers (Andrews, *The Gift*, 26)

Manifestations. At North Union, public meetings were not held from September 1842 until September 1853, a period of eleven years.<sup>141</sup>

During this revival period, each Shaker community created a feast ground for special ceremonies, in the center of which they erected a symbolic fountain stone. These feast grounds each had special spiritual names and the Shaker leadership encouraged communities to choose new spiritual names for themselves, as well. North Union chose the spiritual name “The Valley of God’s Pleasure,” and its members met, secretly, at a feast ground known as “Jehovah’s Beautiful Square.” The use of the feast grounds declined rapidly following the end of “Mother Ann’s Work” and no record of meetings at the “Beautiful Square exists after 1852.<sup>142</sup>

Russell’s administration ended abruptly in 1858, with the elder’s sudden departure from the Shaker movement all together. Although the Russell period at North Union had been marked with prosperity, Russell was disorganized, and his departure might have been due to the Union Village ministry’s discovery of his disorganized financial records and a possible sexual scandal. It would take Richard Pelham of Union Village two years to untangle Russell’s accounts, by which time the former elder had gone to the world, but not

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<sup>141</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 140; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1840 – 1860,” 29 October 1843. Because of the Society’s relatively short existence, it did not leave behind the rich legacy of song found in the larger Shaker communities of the East, but such hymns as “Ode to Contentment,” “O the Simple Gifts of God” and “Gospel Truth,” were popular Shaker hymns that had their origin at North Union. (Klyver, *Brother James*, 137; Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 96.

<sup>142</sup> First used on 20 September 1846, the feast ground featured a smooth area of grass, planted with locust trees at each corner, with a large pine symbolizing the “tree of life.” In the center, as at the other Shaker communities, stood a specially engraved fountain stone, marked with religious inscriptions. Although Sunday meetings were open to the public, outsiders were never permitted to see the ceremonies conducted at the feast ground, to which the North Union Shakers marched in two columns, singing the hymn, “While We Are Marching,” specially composed by a member of their community in 1847. Following the Era of Manifestations, the holy groves fell gradually into disuse. After the abandonment of a Shaker community, its “fountain stone” was always buried or hidden. Except for the fountain stone at Groveland, New York, none of these unique monuments is known to exist intact. The North Union stone, or “boulder,” has never been located (Prescott,

without a fight. Apparently, Russell took the church covenant with him, and only returned it “after some sort of compromise” with the Shaker community.<sup>143</sup>

Following Russell’s departure, Pomeroy Root, a founding member of North Union assumed the lead eldership, but only held it until 1864, when an edict from the lead ministry at New Lebanon disbanded the North Union ministry and placed the community entirely under the jurisdiction of the Union Village elders, who now controlled all major decisions in the village. Root remained as presiding elder, with diminished authority.<sup>144</sup>

During the Civil War, the community escaped the serious repercussions faced by the other western Shaker communities, such as Pleasant Hill and South Union, Kentucky, both of

“[Private] Journal, 20 September 1846; Klyver, *Brother James*, 147 - 148; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 197; “Family [Sister’s?] Journal, North Union,” 24 August 1851.

<sup>143</sup> The exact reason for Russell’s departure is unclear. Curious entries in the Center Family Journal precede his departure, and only serve to cloud the issue. On 4 May 1858, for example, Daniel Baird was recorded as leaving for the east “to wait the expulsion of a *tyrant*,” a possible reference to Russell. On 19 August, the keeper of the journal could not hide his anger as he noted the departure of Russell, some three weeks after his cousin, Adaline had left: “Samuel Russell – gone *fishing*—after his filthy *cousin* Adeline! This brewing corruption – this accursed spiritual *incest* in high places – this *murder* of the *pure*...and the *good* has at length stalked out into open day light and gone to its own place Amen!”

Given Adaline’s recent departure, and the inference in this entry, it appears that Russell left in order to join his cousin, perhaps in marriage, although no record of him after his departure appears in North Union records. Perhaps Baird, well versed in financial matters, called Russell’s management into question and left. What is clear is that Russell’s departure engendered a great deal of anger on the part of the community he left behind. (“The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1860,” 4 May 1858, 26 July 1858, 19 August 1858)

Pelham remarked on the poor condition of the community upon his arrival. “I found the Society deeply involved in debt of some \$2400; and from some calamitous circumstances of a spiritual nature, in a general state of disorder, confusion & discouragement, temporally and spiritually.” (Pelham, “A Sketch of the Life,” 136)

Pelham, the missionary who led the revival that resulted in the founding of North Union in 1822, was an especially beloved figure and able administrator. By placing him at North Union in a time of crisis, the Elders demonstrated their talent for selecting appropriate leadership.

Russell’s departure served, in part, as the inspiration for the play “More Love, Brother” by Miriam Ann Cramer, which was produced in Cleveland in 1945. Cramer evidently examined journals from North Union in order to obtain material for the three act play, which also featured songs and dances. The play was heavily criticized in a sermon by Cleveland minister, John Schott, who characterized it as “a caricature of Shakerism.” I have so far been unable to read the script for this production. (Morse, *The Shakers and the World’s People*, 307.)

<sup>144</sup> For some reason this date is given as 1862 in other sources, probably as a result of John MacLean’s use of that date in his early history of the Society. The Center Family Journal, however, records the date as 3 July 1864. (MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 130; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 115; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 3 July 1864.)

which were overrun by the fighting armies. Two North Union men were drafted for military service, one served in a non combatant capacity, and the other was excused through the direct intervention of two Mount Lebanon elders who went to Washington to argue his case directly before President Lincoln. Like the Amana Society in Iowa, the Shakers of North Union contributed to benevolent causes during the war. They donated seven boxes of clothing to “the colored freedmen of the Mississippi Valley in the South,” valued at \$ 75.00 and also donated “provisions, manufactured articles, and Evergreens” to the “Cleveland great Sanitary Fair’ of Northern Ohio, valued at \$84.71.<sup>145</sup>

In 1848 the Shakers completed building a new meeting house at the Center Family. Modeled on a larger meeting house constructed by the Watervliet Shakers the year before, this structure was probably the only North Union building based on an eastern Shaker building, and it would be the last meeting house erected by a Shaker community. Men and women entered the main hall separately, and then listened as individuals spoke, before

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<sup>145</sup> Fortunately, in the case of Pleasant Hill, members of both armies respected the tiny religious community, but, unfortunately, while not destroying the settlements, the armies did commandeer horses, food stuffs and other supplies (Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 81)

One North Union draftee, George Ingalls, reported for service but was excused by the Secretary of War following the direct intervention of Benjamin Gates and Frederick Evans of Mount Lebanon, who traveled to Washington, D.C. where they met with government officials, including President Lincoln, in order to have Ingalls excused. Another brother, identified only as “John” paid the commutation fee of \$300 for exclusion from military service, returned to the community, while “Br. Samuel” left the community planning to enter hospital service, where he expected “he can do some good in ministering to the wants of the sick and wounded soldiers” (Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 201; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union,” 26 May 1864)

The payment of a commutation fee runs counter to the claim of John MacLean that the Society refused to pay such fees because “it was contrary to their principles. MacLean also claims that one member maimed himself in order to escape service, although this incident is absent from community journals. The community donated some lumber worth \$12.00 for a total donation of \$168.71. This represents the value of the donation made by the entire North Union community, Center Family Journal, 22 February 1864. I have not found record of other donations. By contrast, the Amana Society donated goods and money in excess of \$25,000 to various benevolent organizations. Even taking into account the fact that the Amana Society was more than ten times the size of North Union at this point, the Shaker contribution appears particularly small in comparison. North Union’s response to the Civil War, which is generally ignored in their journals, is disappointing (Maclean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 150).

singing some of the large repertoire of Shaker hymns, led by a lead singer, and engaging in the dances for which they were known.<sup>146</sup>

The unusual worship drew crowds of visitors, who sat in a specially constructed gallery. Commenting on a meeting in 1847, James Prescott noted that “the House was so crowded that we could do nothing; therefore we had to give it up and go out of doors and occupy the yard...It was supposed that there were 1500 or 2000 people present mostly from Cleveland...” Public meetings were, as this practice indicates, public affairs, with a sermon by a leading elder, a few songs and a restrained dance. Likely more typical of Shaker worship at North Union during this period was a closed meeting observed by Youngs in which a brother “leaped & shouted, clapping his hands, & the whole assembly seemed to join in one peal of shout. My hair almost stood up on end!”<sup>147</sup>

Despite not being exposed to the more extreme form of Shaker worship, many visitors, particularly in the early nineteenth century, described the Shakers as “harmless but crazy.” Ralph Waldo Emerson described the dancing he saw as “senseless jumping,” (others compared it to “kangaroos, dancing bears, and overgrown antelopes bounding around the room) while James Fennimore Cooper described Shaker singing as “a most villainous nasal cadency.” Alexis de Tocqueville, the famed French political theorist, remarked after

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<sup>146</sup> The Watervliet structure, which still stands, is 113 X 54 feet, while the North Union building, which shared roughly the same floor plan, was 100 X 50 feet. Nicoletta mentions that the North Union Shakers took the unusual step of having the sisters participate in the construction of this building in order to avoid having to hire help. She provides no documentation for this statement. I have been unable to find any basis for this statement in North Union records which, in addition to ignoring the possible labor of sisters on this building, do mention the presence of hired help (Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 47; Maclean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 127; Youngs, “Br. Isaac Newton Youngs’ Journal,” 15 June 1834. Br. Isaac mentioned visiting with “Jeremiah Ingalls, the principal singer” during his visit to North Union.

<sup>147</sup> Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 16 May 1847. It should be noted that the large crowd at this meeting was due to the fact that it was the first public service held by the North Union Shakers in several years. One assumes that Clevelanders were anxious to see the worship after this, to them, mysterious period of privacy. Isaac Newton Youngs, “Br. Isaac Newton Youngs’ Journal,” 20 June 1834, 15 June 1834.

attending worship at Watervliet, New York that “[w]e had with us...a young American Protestant, who said to us on leaving: ‘two more spectacles like that, and I become a Catholic.’”<sup>148</sup>

Among the notable observers of Shaker worship at North Union was future United States president James A. Garfield who attended a service in 1851. The only president to become an ordained minister, Garfield was not impressed by what he saw: “Attended meeting at the Shakers. A fellow pretended to have the power – fell on stove and knocked it over, etc. I sounded him and found him to be a villain.” Seemingly more impressed with North Union worship was the noted African-American abolitionist and women’s rights advocate Sojourner Truth who attended worship there on 28 September 1856. Truth, the Shakers recorded, stayed at the community in order to attend a singing meeting that evening.<sup>149</sup>

Visitors were common at North Union, not only at meetings, but to conduct business. While their interest in worship and in transacting business was welcome, one North Union member decried the presence of other outsiders, commenting, “there was scarcely a day but there were lots of men women & children a fishing, & carousing about, to the great annoyance of believers.”<sup>150</sup>

Although separated by hundreds of miles, the different Shaker communities were bound by ties of governance, economy and faith. North Union, part of the bishopric, was tightly bound to Union Village, Ohio, whose elders made frequent visits to the Community.

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<sup>148</sup> Sprigg, *Out of this*, 67. 68; George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>149</sup> James A. Garfield, *The Diary of James A. Garfield*, ed. Harry James Brown and Frederick D. Williams, vol 1, 1848 – 1871 (Michigan State University Press, 1967), 69; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal,” 28 September 1856.

<sup>150</sup> “North Union Family [Sisters’?] Journal,” 1 August 1851.

Together with the Shaker community at Groveland, New York, North Union formed a unique “Shaker bridge” between the eastern and western communities. Virtually every Shaker traveling between the two regions passed through these two communities, often spending several days to a week at each of them. For the Shakers, sheltered from the outside world, visiting North Union while traveling provided them with a momentary safe haven. As one traveler commented while staying at the village, “It seems more like living, to be here, with our gospel friends singing & dancing, then it did last Sabbath to be shut up on that old canal jail [boat], surrounded by Sodomites...” By mid-century the number of visitors was so high that feeding and housing them was placing a strain on community finances.<sup>151</sup>

Despite its reputation as a way station for traveling Shakers, North Union was relatively isolated, geographically, from other communities. Shaker settlements were often close, only a few miles separated Mount Lebanon and Hancock, and Harvard and Shirley were closer still. The three other Ohio communities, Watervliet, Whitewater and Union Village were within a thirty miles of each other, but North Union was hundreds of miles from the nearest Shaker settlement. For Richard Pelham, and other Union Village members, travel to this northern outpost required as much as “8 days of hard labor for man & beast to travel” in “those days of mud roads & cordray bridges.”<sup>152</sup>

Like other Shaker communities, North Union offered assistance to other Shaker settlements in need. When fire destroyed several of the cabins inhabited by the society in 1830 the Union Village and Watervliet Ohio communities sent \$140 in cash, as well as provisions and clothes. Assistance came not only in the form of materials and cash but in

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<sup>151</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 113; Hannah R. Agnew, “Journal of a Memorable Journey from White-Water, Ohio to New Lebanon, N. Y. Taken by Hannah R. Agnew when 16 years of age In the Year 1836,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, Item # 50. Klyver, *Brother James*, 33.



expertise as well. In 1855 and, again, in 1859, for example, Timothy Bonnel of Union Village spent six weeks at North Union to help set up an overshot waterwheel, leading the community chronicler to express thanks to Bonnel “for his labor of love.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Pelham, “A Sketch of the Life,” 59.

<sup>153</sup> Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 30, Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 90; The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 23 February 1855, 29 March 1859, 13 May 1859.

Occasionally, communities sent each other building supplies even when a disaster was not involved, as when the Enfield New Hampshire Shakers sent 30,000 shingles to the Harvard community to cover a barn, and Harvard and its sister community at Shirley, offered to send glass for the new meeting house at Mount Lebanon. Following a fire at Mount Lebanon, the Sabbathday Lake Shakers in Maine, despite their own poverty, sent fancy goods to the mother community so that “they would not be without merchandise to sell.” Shaker colonies also sent aid to non-members who were suffering. In 1847, for example, the Pleasant Hill Shakers sent 254 bushels of corn and ten bushels of beans to feed victims of the Irish potato famine (Horgan, *Shaker Holy Land*, 71; Gerald C. Wertkin, *The Four Seasons of Shaker Life: An Intimate Portrait of the Community at Sabbathday Lake* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986), 81; Hutton, *Old Shakertown and the Shakers*, 64)

**CHAPTER 4. WORK AS WORSHIP:  
THE NORTH UNION SHAKERS, 1822 – 1889.**

Beyond the religious and political life of their community, life for the North Union Shakers, as for their fellow rural Ohio neighbors, revolved around a continuous cycle of work that began in early childhood and continued until they were physically unable to contribute to the well being of their community. As one Shaker scholar suggests, “The rhythm of Shaker life was calm as work, worship, food, and sleep succeeded one another with predictable regularity.” In 1841, when the community had come close to its height in population, industry and settlement, North Union consisted of 132 Shakers, evenly divided between men and women, and including individuals from age two to sixty-eight. The average age of the membership at this date was thirty-one, the sign of a youthful, industrious and healthy community of committed members.<sup>154</sup>

Labor for Shakers, at least in the traditional view of the Society, “was a creative force indicative of personal consecration.” Their tasks were “consecrated” a sacrament, or form of worship to God. This view point was not unusual with only the Shakers. Indeed, it was the force that drove the labor of virtually all the religious communal societies. As at Oneida, where members believed that they were literally working for God himself, the Shakers believed that they were advancing the work of the Lord. By working, they were performing a type of worship, which is why Shaker practice expected that every member of the Shaker

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<sup>154</sup> Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1986), 65; “Age of Brethren in the year 1841,” “Age of the Sisters in the year 1841,” Shaker Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society, Reel 14, series 3, folder 9.

community, from the ministry on down, and with the exception of the infirm, to perform some form of manual labor each day.<sup>155</sup>

Since Jesus had been a carpenter, Paul a tent maker and Saint Peter a fisherman, the Shakers equated manual labor with increased spirituality, and as the natural avocation for a religious leader. Indeed, Shakers viewed manual labor as not only “good for the soul” but “especially useful in preventing Believers from getting above themselves.” The Shakers, Andrews noted, followed the same inspiration as the monastic dictum “*laborare est orare*, ‘to work is to worship.’”<sup>156</sup>

Shaker thought and practice integrated physical life with spiritual life; they were not opposites, but part and parcel of the whole cloth that composed Shaker life. A Shaker expressed the seamlessness between the spiritual and the temporal by stating that, “Heaven and Earth are threads of one loom.” Hepworth Dixon, writing of the New Lebanon community remarked that “every building, whatever may be its use, has something of the air of a chapel” and that the whole village “strikes you as a place where it is always Sunday.” It was perhaps significant, as one scholar has noted, that Shaker meeting houses looked very much like workshops, while Shaker barns often resembled cathedrals – both were places of worship. Additionally, the Shakers, like the Puritans whom they in many ways resembled,

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas D. Clark and F. Gerald Ham, *Pleasant Hill and Its Shakers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Harrodsburg, Kentucky: Pleasant Hill Press, 1983), 43; John McKelvie Whitworth, *God's Blueprints: A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 34;

<sup>156</sup> William M. Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups: The Sociology of Unconventional Lifestyles* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 209; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 61; Edward Demming Andrews, *The Community Industries of the Shakers* (Reprint, Charlestown, Mass: Emporium Publications, 1971), 30

saw their labor in another religious context, believing that a godly life would naturally produce economic success.<sup>157</sup>

The theological tradition of the Shakers, particularly the teachings of Mother Ann, supported their sanctification of labor. In a series of sayings the Shakers attributed to Lee, the leader expressed such sentiments as, “The devil tempts others, but an idle person tempts the devil,” “Do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live, and as you would if you knew you must die tomorrow” and the famous statement, often cited as the Shaker credo, “Put your hands to work, and give your hearts to God.” Whether these remembered statements were actually made by Lee, or were the product of a Shaker leadership utilizing her image to lend legitimacy to Shaker communalism, these statements make the direct connection between labor and fulfilling spiritual obligations toward God. The fact that so many of Lee’s attributed statements, which also include the dictum, “there is no dirt in

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<sup>157</sup> June Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands* (Hanover: The University Press of New England, 1975), 5, 12; William Hepworth Dixon, *New America*, 305; Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 22;

The very religious context of Shaker labor becomes obvious when examining the many Shaker religious songs that deal with labor. These songs are very pointedly not “work songs” as they were known in the outside world; songs meant “to ease or to give rhythm to the worker’s exertions.” Rather, they are songs about work, and about its religious significance. As Virginia Weis notes, “the purpose of these songs was explicitly religious. The object was never a spring housecleaning.” (Virginia Weis, “With Hands To Work and Hearts to God,” *The Shaker Quarterly* 9 (Summer 1969) 43)

I peaceably work at whatever I’m set,  
From no other motive but love  
To honor the gospel and keep out of debt  
And lay up a treasure above

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“Now’s the time to travel on  
Now’s the time to labor  
Now’s the time for everyone  
To be a good Believer.”

Heaven,” deal with labor indicates the importance placed upon it in Shaker theology and in Shaker practice.<sup>158</sup>

Producing products for sale allowed the Shakers to fulfill their spiritual obligation to perform work as worship while, at the same time, strengthen their temporal and material foundation, in order to further their spiritual mission in the future. As one scholar suggests, “self-sufficiency and financial success were only means to an end for the Shaker.” Financial success assured the maintenance of community life, and, therefore, of the Shaker’s ability to live, work, and worship together.<sup>159</sup>

Labor for the Shaker formed a continuous loop: the work was a form of worship, the financial gains achieved through work allowed them to worship as they sought fit, which meant, in part, being able to work on a religious, worshipful, level. Work was also a form of worship, a method for Shakers to put their ideals into practice in a meaningful way that also provided them with the satisfaction of contributing towards the survival of their community. Shakers rarely signed their work, meaning that the products of their hands were anonymous: a symbol of how each “put his ego second to the good of his community.”<sup>160</sup>

Additionally, for the Shakers, manual labor also allowed them the opportunity to release the tensions that following a celibate lifestyle imposed upon them. Their labor was their form of creation, analogous to the sex act as performed by outsiders to create children.

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(Rosemary D. Gooden, “A Preliminary Examination of the Shaker Attitude Toward Work, *Communal Societies* 7 (1987), 1; Edward Deming Andrews, *The Gift to Be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers* (J.J. Augustin, reprint, New York: Dover, 1962), 18.)

<sup>158</sup> Flo Morse, *The Shakers and the World’s People* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1980), 47.

<sup>159</sup> Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship Among the Shakers: Their Craftsmanship and Economic Order* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 41; Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands*, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands*, 11, 15.

Life in utopia could be monotonous and dull, and manual labor especially that which changed with the seasons, offered some respite from boredom.<sup>161</sup>

The Shakers frowned on idleness to such an extent that, as one scholar of the sect suggests, the “Shakers lived standing up.” As Virginia Weis noted in an insightful exploration of Shaker work, however, while the Shakers abhorred idleness, “we are not to assume that the ideal is one of feverish compulsive activity.” Although they worked hard, and well, most observers agreed with John MacLean who wrote of the North Union Shakers that “the general spirit was to move slowly.” He concluded that this was because “[t]here was not that incentive to energy, push and daring characteristic to the man of success.” North Union Shaker Joseph Stoll noted in old age that “The general idea was to move slowly and carefully and produce perfect workmanship.”<sup>162</sup>

Shakers took whatever opportunities they could to lighten their work. They viewed work as an obligation, but not as a punishment. Shakers should willingly work to support the development of God’s earthly kingdom, yet there was no reason why that labor had to be mindless drudgery or difficult. Indeed, the Shakers were pioneers in developing new technologies and methods of organization to improve their labor. Work was an obligation that a Believer should assume willingly and with joy; it was not a form of penance. As Shaker sister, Marguerite Frost wrote in 1962, “The care of one another and of the homes demanded that each one help in the service of all, with consecrated hearts and diligent hands, but yet not with a sense of drudgery.”

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<sup>161</sup> Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 60.

<sup>162</sup> Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 210; Weiss, “With Hands To Work,” 37-38, 42; John Patterson MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio: Fugitive Papers Concerning the Shakers of Ohio, With Unpublished Manuscripts* (Columbus: F. J. Heer Printing Co., 1907, Reprint, Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), 144; Georgiana Worthley, “The Last of the Shakers,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 June 1934.

Despite adopting appropriate technology, however, Shakers placed a strong emphasis on manual labor. While a washing machine or a water powered lathe might improve efficiency, mechanization could only be carried so far before it began to interfere with the main purposes of Shaker work and production. By replacing handwork with a factory system, which the popularity of their products would easily have supported, Shakers would have abandoned the central meaning of physical labor as an act of worship in their lives. Additionally, mechanization would have meant a loss of control over their products, and likely declining quality, thereby endangering the Shaker's closely guarded reputation for quality and their sales to the outside world. Thus, the Shaker refusal to mechanize was motivated by two disparate factors: religious devotion and business practices. By maintaining a hand work ethic, Gooden notes, the Shaker maintained a close connection with their product and craft, and, unlike workers in capitalist society, were not compelled "to do work which had little value—monetary or spiritual—for him personally." Shaker workers of both genders and at all levels of the Society were never alienated from their craft, from their faith, or ultimately from the way in which the two intertwined.<sup>163</sup>

Shaker families, in refusing large scale mechanization, were enlarged versions of the family economy that prevailed in rural America prior to industrialization. A typical family household included not only a nuclear family, but cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, hired labor or slaves. Members of the family assisted each other with farm chores, while women spun, sewed, raised children and produced goods for market. Most male farmers practiced a sideline craft, such as coopering, to bring added income to their household. The Shakers

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<sup>163</sup> Gooden, "Preliminary Examination," 5, 13. The point drawn from Gooden here is the emphasis on manual labor. Further conclusions are those of the author.

organized their own “family” economy much the same way, only on a larger scale. The Shaker dwelling, and its dooryard, remained a place of work and production where the necessities of life, together with products for the market, were produced. With few exceptions, there were no factories in Shaker communities; life was centered on the farm and related labor and remained pre-industrial. Edward Andrews, in his pioneering study of Shaker industry, noted that “they should be numbered among the first to develop farming, gardening and manufacturing from a household scale to one marked by many of the essential factors in combination and mass production”<sup>164</sup>

Ironically, while encouraging devotion to work, Shaker leaders may have led believers to shift their focus away from purely spiritual concerns, and replace their mystical Christianity with a secularized religion devoted to craft and production in the name of faith. Indeed, it becomes difficult to note the difference between Shaker devotion to their work as an expression of their faith, rather than as the subject of that faith. The tendency to devote too much attention to temporal affairs caused concern among Shaker leaders, and led some “to fear for the spirituality of the sect.”<sup>165</sup>

Shaker work was mostly segregated, with men and women even being provided with separate shops in which to perform their tasks. On the rare occasions where men and women worked together, both the millennial laws and the elders strictly enforced proper male and female contact. Describing an apple paring bee, one sister recalled the “particularly stern eldress” who was “chosen to patrol the ranks of the younger sisters, [so] that no tender

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<sup>164</sup> Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 33; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 11.

<sup>165</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 79.



glances might be exchanged across the chasm” of the room in which the men and women sat separately to do their work.<sup>166</sup>

As recalled by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Stoll, who belonged to the Shakers as children in the 1860s, the day began with the ringing of the rising bell at 4:30, at which point everyone knelt in prayer at the foot of their beds for a few minutes. After this prayer, the Shakers could converse, until they entered the dining room for their silent meals, where each sat at spaces marked with brass buttons marked with their initials. The sisters and brothers sat at separate tables, with the ministry at a third. Children only ate once the adults had finished. Shakers cleaned their plates and, after eating, cross their knife and fork on the plate. Following breakfast, the members engaged in their daily work or schooling. On Sunday, work was mainly suspended at North Union. The sisters typically prepared the food needed for meals on the Sabbath before hand “in such a way as to require very little work on Sunday to get the meals.”<sup>167</sup>

When considering the labor of North Union Shakers, it is instructive to consider the labor experiences of other rural Ohioans of the same period. Rural families did not see work as the opposite of leisure, but rather as, “life’s requirement for all creatures.” Like the animals and crops raised on their farms, rural Ohioans viewed their labor as part of a natural cycle, part of their God given duty as creatures on earth.<sup>168</sup>

As celibates, the Shakers did not produce children of their own, although some members joining the sect who had been married before brought children to the community.

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<sup>166</sup> Sister Marica [Bullard], “Shaker Industries,” *Good Housekeeping*, July 1906, 35.

<sup>167</sup> Edythe Tuner, “Articles by Joe Stoll,” Unpublished paper, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 4, 8; Worthley, “Last of the Shakers.”

<sup>168</sup> John Mack Farragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 47.

Like most Shaker communities, the North Union Shakers provided a safe and financially secure haven for widows with young children and, in at least one case, for a family of a woman who had divorced her husband for desertion. Mothers who came with very young children cared for them until they were eighteen months old, when caretakers placed them in the children's order. One nine year old boy who learned of the Shakers and who was "dissatisfied with [his] own home" came to the Shakers on his own, possibly as a runaway.<sup>169</sup>

Children sometimes came as a result of adoptions, as poor rural families brought their children to Shaker communities, like North Union, and "bound them" to the Shakers until they were of legal age. The North Union Shakers also accepted children from the poor house in Cleveland and, occasionally, Shaker peddlers brought children home with them from their travels. Until they reached their legal majority, the Shakers educated the children, indoctrinated them in their religious beliefs, and incorporated them in the normal workaday activities of the community.<sup>170</sup>

Shaker children received a standard education, focusing on reading, writing and arithmetic, using the "Lancasterian system" in which older children helped to teach younger pupils under the direction of the teacher. Beyond the standard educational program, instructors taught children "practical" subjects. As Edward Andrews succinctly stated, "The school prepared the pupil for life – the Shaker life."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> George Engle Budinger, interview, 23 November 1962, Typed transcript, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio; Worthley, "Last of the Shakers"; Interview with Joseph Stoll by Edythe Turner, n.d. typed notes, Shaker Historical Society.

<sup>170</sup> "Family [Sisters'?] Journal, North Union, Ohio," 1851 – 1884, Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 242, 26 March 1852.

Many of the eastern societies actually adopted children from orphanages, a practice that was popular with eastern benevolent organizations because they knew the Shakers would care for their young charges, and that the institutions would also be spared the expense of raising the children themselves.

<sup>171</sup> Carolyn B. Piercy, *The Valley of God's Pleasure: A Saga of the North Union Shakers* (New York: Stratford House, 1951), 187; Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover, 1963), 194.

The original school at North Union was in a converted log cabin. Isaac Youngs, who visited the school in 1834, commented on the primitive facilities including, “the grand log school house with a big dutch fire place, & a sort of ladder to go upstairs! Here we can occasionally take a peep out doors between the logs...” Later, the community converted portions of the Red Shop for school use, until 1858 when they constructed a brick school. Instructors taught Shaker boys separately from Shaker girls, and their education lasted a full two years longer. While girls formally became responsible members of the Society at fourteen, boys did not achieve this status until age sixteen. Boys attended school during the winter, when they were not needed on the farm, while girls attended during the summer. This rigid segregation of students and school time prevailed throughout the Shaker world.<sup>172</sup>

The Shakers abhorred intellectualism, and eschewed higher education. Indeed, with few exceptions, the Shakers seem to have never sent one of its members away for further education, in contrast to other communal societies such as Amana and Oneida. Thus, young people with intellectual curiosity may well have felt stifled among the Shakers and chosen to leave. This is not to suggest that Shaker education was not innovative or competent, however. Especially gifted teachers, such as James Prescott of North Union, incorporated nature and agricultural study into their lessons, and were notable for their skill as educators.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Isaac Newton Youngs, “Br. Isaac Newton Youngs’ Journal. Tour with Br. Rufus Bishop, through the states of Ohio and Kentucky, in the Summer of 1834,” Ms. # 12,751, Shaker Library, Shaker Museum and Library, Old Chatham, New York, 19 June 1834; Andrews, *The People Called*, 191; Deborah E. Burns, *Shaker Cities of Peace, Love, and Union: A History of the Hancock Bishopric* (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1993), 59.

<sup>173</sup> Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 223.

Most sources indicate that no members were sent away for further education, however, the Pleasant Hill community sent brothers Francis and William Pennebaker to Cincinnati in order to study dentistry and medicine (James C. Thomas and Samuel W. Thomas, *The Simple Spirit: A Pictorial Study of the Shaker Community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky* (Harrodsburg, Kentucky: Pleasant Hill Press, 1973), 71)

The Shakers expected children, like rural children everywhere, to work for the community as needed, although “no child was expected to perform tasks beyond his age or strength.” According to one source, instructors taught both boys and girls how to knit at the age of four, requiring them to do “so many needlefuls each day” according to their age. Boys learned productive crafts and skills, and helped in the garden and the broom making industry, and helped with such tasks as gathering butternuts in the fall. They were often apprenticed to older male Shakers who not only taught them a craft, but, significantly, taught by example the proper conduct and spiritual life for a Shaker male.<sup>174</sup>

Girls learned domestic arts, under the tutelage of particular sisters who “adopted” the girls as their personal projects. One woman, raised by the North Union Shakers, later recalled that “[w]e were taught great patience and skill in workmanship and though discipline was strict we were cared for with the greatest kindness.” She recalled the case of a young girl who “was prone to be very wasteful while paring potatoes.” In order to teach economy, the sisters had the girl string the peelings around her neck and wear them as a necklace for a day. Another woman recalled how, when a girl failed to sweep the steps completely, her supervisor placed the dirt from her second sweeping in a bag and hung it around her neck.<sup>175</sup>

Through their labor, adults taught Shaker children to appreciate Shaker values of work and diligence. These values found expression in proscriptive literature printed for Shaker children, such as *The Youth's Guide In Zion*, which proclaimed that “Idleness is the sure road to destruction and misery; and souls that walk therein, will fine an in-expressibly

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<sup>174</sup> Sister R. Mildred Barker, *Sabbathday Lake*, [21], Sister Marcia, “Shaker Industries,” 35; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 1 October 1851.

<sup>175</sup> Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 101; Georgiana Worthley, “The Last of the Shakers,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 June 1934.

great work to do, before they can enter the bright kingdom of peace and rest, in the world to come.” Whether by example, through readings or by gentle punishment, adults directed Shaker children towards a life of purposeful work.<sup>176</sup>

The school schedule adhered to by the Shakers, with boys attending in the winter and girls in the summer, meant that boys were free to help with the farm work. At other times of the year, however, boys could be found cutting broom corn, “a dreaded task,” according to one Shaker, because the dust caused skin irritation, or, as James Johnston found a group at Watervliet, New York in 1851 “busy packing up seeds and herbs.” Although Johnston described the boys he observed as “cheerful and content,” other jobs apparently did not elicit such a positive response from the youthful workers. Delmer Wilson, who came to the Sabbathday Lake, Maine Shaker community as a child, recorded such diverse tasks as planing boards, taping trees for maple sap, hauling ice, working on fences, planting potatoes, splitting wood and weeding sweet corn. In short, the work activities of Shaker children did not differ markedly from those of children in the outside world, although the emphasis and organization of their work did.<sup>177</sup>

Shaker children enjoyed normal rural pleasures such as swimming, hiking, picnics and other outdoor pursuits. Charles Pilot, who came to North Union with his parents in 1858, recalled swimming in the two mill ponds, skating and sledding. At North Union, and in the spirit of the Millennial Laws, adults never allowed boys and girls to play together. Unlike

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<sup>176</sup> *The Youth's Guide In Zion, and Holy Mother's Promises Given By Inspiration at New Lebanon, Ny, January 5, 1842* (Canterbury, New Hampshire, 1842, Reprint: Sabbathday Lake, Maine: The United Society, 1963).

<sup>177</sup> Sister Marcia, “Shaker Industries,” 35; James F. W. Johnston, *Notes on North America: Agricultural, Economical, and Social* vol. II (Edinburgh: William Blaskwood and Sons, MDCCCLI), 268-269. Delmer Wilson, “The Diary of a Maine Shaker Boy: Delmer Wilson – 1887” ed. Theodore E. Johnson, *The Shaker Quarterly*, 8 (Spring 1968): 3 – 22. Wilson (1873 – 1961) remained a Shaker his entire life, and at the time of

their rural counterparts, North Union children appear to have enjoyed good health and freedom from accidental death. Of the deaths under the age of twenty-one, four were of infants between one and two years of age, one was of a seven year old boy, and the rest were teenagers. Only one of these deaths was due to an occupational accident. In 1864, ten year old William Lewis had both feet badly cut by a mowing machine, requiring one to be amputated.<sup>178</sup>

Despite whatever benefits childhood in a Shaker community may have held, when they reached the age of twenty-one most young adults chose to leave the sect. This was especially true at North Union where an elder informed William Hinds in 1876 that “Since I came here forty-nine years ago... we have taken in young people enough, it seems to me, to make a continuous line of nearly half a mile; and there are few left.” In 1874, when the journalist Charles Nordhoff visited North Union, he was told by his hosts that “[l]ess than a quarter of the young people whom they bring up remain with them.”<sup>179</sup>

Young people who left the Shakers displayed courage as they opted to leave the familiar behind in exchange for a rather alien world. Mrs. Thomas Stanley, who left the community at age nineteen, recalled that “At first I found the outside world quite strange after the sheltered childhood which forbade such things as theaters, entertainments and social

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his death, was the only male Shaker in the United States. His diary covers the years 1887- 1961, although, apparently, only the partial first year has been published to date.

<sup>178</sup> Barker, *Sabbathday Lake*, [21]; Worthley, “Last of the Shakers”; Stoll, 8.

The seven year old was killed in a fall from the bank near the grist mill, a thirteen year old girl died of burns while taking a sulfur bath, a seventeen year old male was killed while hauling logs, and the rest died of consumption or other ailments. Only the logging death can be considered an occupational death. (James Sullivan Prescott, “Death List of the United Society of Believers, North Union, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, 1827 – 1888, *The Shaker Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1962); “Family [Sisters’?] Journal,” 9 July 1864.

<sup>179</sup> William Alfred Hinds, “The North Union Shakers,” *American Socialist*, 17 August 1876; Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (Reprint, New York: Hillary House Publishers, Ltd., 1961), 205. Nordhoff did not identify his informant, although his description indicates that it was James Prescott.

affairs. I was 23 when I saw my first circus and my, but it was a great thrill.” By the 1870s, Charles Nordhoff reported that Shaker communities “now almost always decline to take children,” because they invariably left upon reaching adulthood. At North Union, in particular, Nordhoff noted that the Society only accepted children if “their parents come with them.” By and large, as one scholar has observed bluntly, “children were one of the less successful Shaker ventures.”<sup>180</sup>

Historian, Priscilla Brewer has concluded that children who chose to remain in the community as adults generally did so because of the positive influence of particular older Shakers. Bonds formed during apprenticeships in craft shops, over kitchen stoves and in fields and gardens were very strong, and in this celibate sect, resembled the relationship between parent and child. In a sense, the work relationships that they formed with adults were an important consideration in a young adult’s decision to remain with the Shakers. When they came of age, adults incorporated children who opted to remain in the Shaker community into family life. Moved from the “children’s order” those young adults who chose to remain were assigned a retiring room, usually with a particular brother or sister whom the community expected to serve as their mentor and train them in the Shaker way.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Worthley, “Last of the Shakers;” Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 158, 204 – 205; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 221.

Despite increasing reticence towards accepting children, the Shaker continued to raise children well into the twentieth century. Indeed, the majority of the late twentieth century members of the Shaker community had been raised by the Shakers.

<sup>181</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 76. The influence of these bonds is readily apparent in examining the twentieth century Shakers. For decades, the movement was kept alive mainly by a small group of elderly sisters, virtually all of whom entered the community as children and many of whom spoke of the influence of a particular sister in their decision to remain. Indeed, it is possible to construct a virtual Shaker genealogy from particular Shakers who transferred their enthusiasm and devotion from one generation to another. (Gerald C. Wertkin, *The Four Seasons of Shaker Life: And Intimate Portrait of the Community at Sabbathday Lake* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986), 19; Julie Nicoletta, *The Architecture of the Shakers* (Woodstock, Vermont, The Countryman Printer, 1995), 70.

Shaker ideology expected that Shaker brothers, whether raised by the community or converts to the Shaker faith, to engage in some form of usual manual labor. Whether making furniture, running the Society mills or producing the broom handles and other goods that the Society sold. Many like James Prescott who was a mason, elder and teacher had several professions, although no one at North Union seems to have matched the thirteen different trades practiced by the resourceful Henry Clay Blinn of the Canterbury, New Hampshire community. At various times Blinn carded wool, taught school, farmed, served as night watchman, printed and bound books, worked as a dentist, tended the colony's bees, wrote history and, for a few years, edited *The Shaker*, the official organ of the United Society.<sup>182</sup>

Most North Union men worked on the farm, plying particular trades or crafts as needed. Like Shaker women, men rotated jobs, and a Shaker brother might wear a number of different hats during his working life. Because of its proximity to Cleveland, which after the completion of Ohio's canal network, and later of the railroads, became a significant regional shipping point, North Union was always able to find a ready market for the products of its brethren, whether crops or manufactured items such as cooper ware and brooms. Cleveland's growing urban population provided a convenient market for the products of North Union's fields, particularly of fruits, vegetables and dairy produce.

The North Union land was "slightly rolling" tableland overlooking Cleveland. Originally, the land was "very heavily timbered" with maple, beech, oak, birch, elm, walnut, and hemlock and basswood trees. The Shakers transformed their property by logging much of the timber and by building dams that formed two small lakes used as reservoirs for water power. Farming remained the principle industry of the North Union community -- as long as

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<sup>182</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 109.



it had enough male members to physically maintain its land -- as it did in most of the other Shaker communities, forming “the foundation of the Shaker economy.”<sup>183</sup>

Shakers seem to have viewed their work on the land as helping to bring a degraded earth back into Edenic perfection. As a contemporary observer noted, they “consider their labor on the soil as a part of their ritual, looking upon the earth as a strained and degraded sphere, which they have been called to redeem from corruption and restore to God.” This same observer stated unequivocally that, [t]he Granary is to a Shaker what the Temple was to a Jew.<sup>184</sup>

Like the Oneida Community, Shaker farms were not devoted exclusively to grain production. Many, including North Union produced maple sugar, dried sweet corn and processed jams, jellies and other preserves for sale. Additionally, most Shaker settlements participated in the famed Shaker seed industry, which had its beginnings at Watervliet in 1789 during the earliest days of the sect.

Shakers had a deserved reputation for adopting new farming technology as it became practical to their operations. Unlike many of their frontier counterparts, read agricultural books and journals, and raised the study of agriculture, in the words of Andrews, “into a kind of religious ritual.” Their relative wealth and size allowed them to purchase machinery that was too expensive for smaller neighboring farmers to own. Commentators cited the well tended Shaker farms as model agricultural establishments and these farms served as examples, closely watched by their neighbors. One nineteenth century source commented that when local farmers “want to buy new implements or machinery they usually call and see

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<sup>183</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 121; Andrews, *The People Called*, 116.

<sup>184</sup> Dixon, *New America*, 303, 304.

what the Shakers are using, and what they think will serve best for the purpose.” Neighbors informed still another that “the only localities in [New York]...in which farming is carried on systematically, on a large scale, are the settlements of the Shakers.”<sup>185</sup>

Nineteenth century visitors generally wrote admiringly about Shaker farms and, scholars assert, this praise was warranted. One English visitor, viewing the Mount Lebanon community in 1885 remarked, “it would be difficult to say too much in favor of Shaker agriculture generally. Even ensilage, the latest farming improvement, has been introduced; while for clean, careful and successful tillage, the Shakers can hold their own against Lincolnshire itself.” Harriet Martineau was even more effusive: “The earth does not show more flourishing fields, gardens, and orchards, than [the Shaker’s].”<sup>186</sup>

The model Shaker farms, however, were as much the product of the Society’s large financial resources and labor force as they were of their agricultural knowledge and practices. Shakers used these advantages to good effect, which likely fueled opposition from neighbors unable to compete. As a leading scholar of Shakerism has reported, too much has likely been made of the Shaker work ethic and “not enough of the real market advantages the society enjoyed.” The Shakers were, above all, practical farmers, and they adapted their agriculture to local conditions. Like their neighbors, Shakers came to focus on truck farming in the east, and grain production in the West. While some similarities in production exist between

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<sup>185</sup>Russell H. Anderson, “Agriculture Among the Shakers, Chiefly at Mount Lebanon,” *Agricultural History* 24 (July 1950), 114; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 38, 61; Johnston, *Notes on North America*, vol II, 264.

<sup>186</sup>John Murray and Metin M. Cosgel, “Regional Specialization in Communal Agriculture: The Shakers, 1850 - 1880,” *Communal Societies* 19 (1999), 74; Anderson, “Agriculture Among the Shakers,” 115; Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1976), 75.

eastern and western communities, the crops grown on the rocky fields of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, were far different than those produced in the red soil of South Union, Kentucky.<sup>187</sup>

Despite their agricultural production, however, the Shakers were never completely self-sufficient. Not only did they purchase manufactured goods they did not produce themselves, but they often purchased additional grain and livestock to supplement their own crops, particularly in years with bad yields. Recent research suggests that the Shakers paid close attention to market conditions, and this, combined with their attention to agricultural methods and breeding, suggests that the Shakers were in fact, even more savvy agriculturalists than earlier literature has suggested.<sup>188</sup>

Although the first settlers believed that the North Union tract, with its stands of enormous trees, would prove to be especially fertile, the opposite was true. A thin layer of top soil, only six to ten inches thick, lay beneath the intertwined roots of the giant hardwoods, with hard “clay pan” under it. After a few years of planting wheat on the land and dealing with the problems of erosion, the North Union farm deacon concluded that the farm was best suited for livestock production, including sheep and dairy cattle. North Union brethren learned to manage their soil by adding fertilizers, “top-dressing it, keeping water from standing on it, and also keeping the cattle off of their fields.” The community continued to plant corn, which became a staple of the Shaker diet, as well as flax which Shaker sisters processed into linen, while Shaker brothers crushed the seed for linseed oil and linseed cakes

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<sup>187</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 136; Murray and Cosgel, “Regional Specialization,” 73, 75.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Edward Andrews and other early Shaker scholars suggested that each Shaker community was much like any other, even down to its agriculture! (Andrews, *Community Industries*, 13)

<sup>188</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 135; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 65; Murray and Cosgel, “Regional Specialization,” 83.

which they used for cattle feed. Shaker farmers engaged in crop rotation and other progressive practices at North Union.<sup>189</sup>

Among the crops raised by the Shaker were enormous quantities of potatoes. The Mount Lebanon Shakers produced as much as 3,670 bushels of potatoes a year. Corn, wheat and barley were other Shaker crops. In season, the North Union Shakers tapped the maple trees on their property to produce maple syrup. This syrup was likely only for home consumption, although Shaker sisters at other communities were known to produce little cakes of maple sugar for sale. During the first half of the nineteenth century maple sugar was an important source of income for Ohio farm families, for whom it was not uncommon to produce from 1,000 to 1,500 pounds of sugar annually. With such a saturated market, it is not surprising that the North Union Shakers sought other sources of income.<sup>190</sup>

Like many other Shaker colonies North Union produced significant quantities of fruit. The community's location near Lake Erie, an area known for its orchards because the "moderating influence of the lake water" significantly reduced chances for damage from spring frosts. The village contained six apple orchards, each ten or more acres in size, a thirteen acre orchard contained cherry, peach, plum and pear trees. The Shakers also grew large quantities of strawberries, currents, huckleberries and grapes. The orchards were the special province of horticulturalist Elijah Russell, brother of community founder, Ralph Russell.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Richard D. Klyver, *Brother James: The Life and Times of Shaker Elder James Prescott* (Shaker Heights, Ohio: The Shaker Historical Society, 1992), 100 -101; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 122.

<sup>190</sup> Anderson, "Agriculture Among the Shakers," 118; Sister Marcia [Bullard], "Shaker Industries," 36; Robert Leslie Jones, *History of Ohio Agriculture to 1880* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1983), 243.

<sup>191</sup> Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977) 25; Jones, *History of Ohio Agriculture*, 220; Klyver, *Brother James*, 43-44.

The North Union community marketed much of this fruit in Cleveland in the form of applesauce, dried apples, jams and preserves. Not only did the Shakers at North Union, and elsewhere sell fresh fruit, but a considerable amount of their harvest went into preserves and applesauce, of which the Shirley, Massachusetts community sold as much as six tons annually. During the fall Shaker families gathered to peel and pare the apples as part of a “paring bee.” If the description of one sister is to be believed, these gatherings bore little resemblance to the rollicking “bees” used as social gatherings in the world outside the community. One eastern sister commented that the bees sounded

quite delightful, I dare say, but as a matter of fact [they were]... far from amusing. In the first place, we were all very tired after a hard day’s work, in the second, the brethren sat on one side of the washhouse, the sisters on the other, and general conversation was absolutely forbidden....The work went on until everyone was nearly asleep – for, remember, we all rose at 5 in the morning...<sup>192</sup>

In part because of its orchards, the North Union Shakers also maintained a large apiary, housed after 1854 in a thirty foot long brick and frame bee house. The Shakers kept their bees in the newly developed box hives, lining them up against the south wall of the bee house. The bees entered and exited through slots cut in the wall.<sup>193</sup>

The broom industry required the North Union community to raise large amounts of broom corn. By 1852, at least, they leased land on which to raise this crop. By 1858 North Union trustees were on the road buying broom corn, finding between eight and ten tons near

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Unfortunately, the crop records for North Union are incomplete. In their research through agricultural census records for 1850 – 1880, Murray and Cosgel found records of each of the Shaker societies in the agricultural census for each of the four censuses. The Ohio communities of Whitewater and Watervliet were each missed by the census on two occasions, but North Union was missed three times, leaving only records for 1880 when the community was in serious decline (Murray and Cosgel, “Regional Specialization,” 77)

<sup>192</sup>Klyver, *Brother James*, 43; Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land: A Community Portrait* (Harvard Mass: The Harvard Common Press, 1982), 100; Sister Marcia [Bullard], “Shaker Industries,” 35.

<sup>193</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 45.

Columbus that year. The popularity of Shaker brooms led other societies, including Mount Lebanon, to resort to buying raw materials outside, as well. By the 1860s, the Shakers went farther a field for their broom corn, purchasing some twelve tons of the material at Chicago in 1864, at cost of nearly \$3,400. The Union village Shakers, who were among the first to grow broom corn in Ohio, spawned a region of broom corn growers along the Scioto Valley. For years, these Shakers purchased broom handles from the North Union community to meet the demands of their thriving industry.<sup>194</sup>

North Union raised dairy cattle, sheep and beef cattle to supply its own needs and, increasingly, to produce marketable commodities, such as wool and milk. Livestock breeding formed an important component in the agricultural life of the Pleasant Hill community, which imported selected stock from Europe including Blakewell Sheep. Other Shaker communities, such as Mount Lebanon which imported Berkshire hogs, also shared their improved live stock with other Shaker settlements.<sup>195</sup>

The North Union livestock herds occupied large barns located at each of the family groupings. The Center Family used a unique “railroad” to transport feed between the barns, via six by three foot wide metal wheeled carts that rode on specially designed tracks. These carts carried cooked bran and mash to the cattle, feed to horses, and milk from the barns to

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<sup>194</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 13 May 1852, 1 January 1865; “The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 278, 10 May 1854, 3 January 1858. In 1859 they again bought four tons near Columbus (“Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 12 Sept. 1859. Andrews, *Community Industries*, 136; Jones, *History of Ohio Agriculture*, 246.

<sup>195</sup> Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 32.

the milk house. Riding the flat car that rode the tracks was a favorite pastime for Shaker children.<sup>196</sup>

Cattle production was especially profitable in the western Shaker communities, particularly during the 1850s, when cattle sales reached over \$10,000 in one year at South Union Kentucky. As early as 1854 North Union brethren drove livestock to Wisconsin for sale. The Shakers also sold some butchered meat to the public.<sup>197</sup>

Sheep and wool production were important parts of the North Union economy during the years leading up to the Civil War. Sheep were a particularly important agricultural product in Ohio which was the leading sheep producing state between 1840 and 1870, when the North Union farms were at their peak. By the 1860 “[a]most every farm in eastern Ohio had flocks of sheep” and the North Union Shakers were no exception. Sheep raising expanded with demand during the Civil War. The end of the war, however, meant the end of the boom, and left the state with an abundance of sheep. Merino sheep that had sold for twenty dollars at the height of the market were now sold to butchers for a dollar a head. Needless to say, the Ohio sheep industry was in decline during the last days of North Union. In the spring of 1851, North Union sheared a total of 325 sheep. The Shaker herd appears to have consisted of Blakewell sheep, twelve of which had been introduced to North Union in 1836 as a gift from the Pleasant Hill community.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> George Engle Budinger, interview, 23 November 1962, typed transcript, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio; Louise Budinger Eck, “Childhood Memories of Louise Budinger Eck, 12 May 1964,” typed transcript, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio.

<sup>197</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 139; “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 24 October 1854; “Family [Sisters’] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 24 October 1851.

<sup>198</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *The Sheep Industry in Ohio, 1807 – 1900*, *The Old Northwest* 7 (Fall 1981), 240, 243. The editor of the Zanesville *Signal* wryly commented, “We have sheep to the right of us, sheep to the left of us, sheep in front of us, sheep here, sheep there, sheep everywhere, we seem to meet sheep at every corner, think sheep, talk sheep, dream sheep. In fact, if ever there was a place that had a violent attack of sheep that place is

Unlike their neighbors, the Shakers seem to have always been conscious of the importance of breeding. As early as 1836 the North Union Shaker received a dozen Blakewell Sheep to improve the quality of their flock. Under the direction of Samuel Russell, the Shakers purchased Durham and Devonshire cattle, “of the most thoroughbred that could be obtained in either England or the United States.” The Shakers were equally careful about their horses, described as evenly matched in size, color and speed. In 1851 the community purchased a bull named “Sultan” “an extraordinary animal in appearance weighing about 2400 lbs.” in order to improve its stock.<sup>199</sup>

The North Union Shakers also raised cattle, both for dairy purposes and for meat. In adopting dairying, the Shakers were ideally situated as the Western Reserve was the center of the Ohio dairy industry. The region’s poor soil made it unsuited for crop agriculture, but its lush grass and experienced population of New England immigrants earned the area the sobriquet, “cheesedom.” Most dairies in the Western Reserve had between five and thirty cows, although larger operations could have as many as two or three hundred head of cattle. Before the development of refrigeration techniques for transporting milk, much of the Ohio dairy work focused on producing cheese and butter for sale. Unfortunately, Ohioans do not seem to have been particularly skilled at this type of production, and the cheese and butter that they sold in New York State and elsewhere had a bad reputation. Prior to the late

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Zanesville.” (Quoted in Hurt, “The Sheep Industry,” 245) “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 15 June 1851; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 100.

<sup>199</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 47. These sheep were driven from the east to North Union by Rufus Bryant of Pleasant Hill, who had been visiting the eastern communities. James Sullivan Prescott, “Records of the Church at North Union containing the rise and progress of the Church,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 290,” 43. MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 130; “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 - 1859,” 28 March 1851.



nineteenth century, dairying was not scientific, as the same cattle used for milk production were also raised for beef and farmers gave little thought to breed.<sup>200</sup>

The North Union Shakers had Durhams and Devonshires in their herds, many of which they sold for good prices to neighboring farmers. Even before refrigeration made the transport and sale of milk feasible, the North Union Shakers, because of their proximity to Cleveland, were able to meet its demands for fresh milk. The largest dairy herd, at the Gathering Family, furnished the milk for the daily milk delivery routes to the surrounding area and Cleveland.<sup>201</sup>

Hog production, like cattle production, was an important part of the agricultural program for western Shakers. As in their other livestock ventures, the Shakers were early proponents of selective breeding and the breeding program of the Union Village community proved to be particularly successful. By crossing their earlier “Shaker hog” with Berkshire in 1835, the Union Village farm produced the Poland China breed which became “the most important breed in Ohio” by the 1850s, and remained a staple of Midwestern farmers for decades. By the 1830s Union Village slaughtered 300 hogs a year, packing the meat themselves, or shipping dressed carcasses to Cincinnati. Although the New Lebanon ministry placed a ban on eating pork in 1841, western Shakers, including the North Union community, continued to raise hogs through the end of the nineteenth century, obeying the prohibition by not eating the pork themselves, but producing it for others to eat. At the same time, pork

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<sup>200</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, “Dairying in Nineteenth-Century Ohio,” *The Old Northwest* 5 (Winter 1979 – 1980), 388 – 389, 391 – 392, 395.

<sup>201</sup> John Murray and Metin M. Cosgel, “Market, Religion and Culture in Shaker Swine Production, 1788 - 1880,” *Agricultural History* 72 (Summer 1998), 557, 558, 570; Klyver, *Brother James*, 49.

production in the eastern settlements declined while western Shakers, like their neighbors, continued to keep large numbers of hogs as part of their farming operations.<sup>202</sup>

The North Union community also raised a quantity of beef cattle, mainly to meet their own needs. In late November and early December of 1857 the Shakers at the Center Family butchered a total of fourteen cattle, leading their chronicler, who evidently favored vegetarianism, to comment, “Alas! That these innocent creatures should be *murdered* that we may *live*.”<sup>203</sup>

Because of the large number of livestock raised at North Union, hay production was an important aspect of the summer harvest season; in 1862 the Center Family harvested 161 wagon loads of hay to fill its various barns. Depending on the weather, haying season lasted through most of the month of July. In the summer of 1852, a scant four years after the first such machine was used in Ohio. The North Union brethren spent the haying season, “proving a mowing machine” that they hoped to buy. The Society also raised a large quantity of turnips, around 500 bushels in 1864, primarily as winter feed for livestock.<sup>204</sup>

During the 1850s, the North Union sisters began to raise poultry. Although records of this production are scanty, it apparently represented a commercial addition to the poultry production used to supply community tables. A Center Family sister indicated the breath of the poultry operation in a journal in the spring of 1853, “We are doing up something at raising chickings this season, we have several choice varieties such as the Shangaes, Polanders, Jauas, Dorkies, Gold Spangeled [and etc.]....Also some white Turkins & Muscom

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<sup>202</sup> Budinger Transcript.

<sup>203</sup> “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 25 November, 1 December 1857.

<sup>204</sup> James Prescott, [Private] Journal, 1846 – 1874,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item #143,” August 1862; Anderson, “Agriculture Among the Shakers,” 117; Jones, *History of Ohio Agriculture*, 274; “Family

Ducks.” North Union sisters also likely milked the community cattle, although mention of this is not found in North Union records. Dairy work was common among farm women of the time, and sisters in other Shaker communities milked<sup>205</sup>

Shaker villages contained the craft shops such as blacksmiths, coopers, and tinsmiths common to most rural communities of the time. The men who worked at these trades not only maintained the equipment used in Shaker kitchens, homes and farms, but also did work for outsiders. In this respect the Shaker experience closely mirrored that of such groups as the Amana Society, whose craft shops served an extensive local rural community. By Christmas 1846, for example, the North Union blacksmith had shod “10 yoke of oxen for the world.”<sup>206</sup>

The popular image of the Shakers is of an agrarian people, but, as Gerald Ham notes, Shaker communities were “unremitting in their search for new markets,” and these new markets were typically found in light manufacturing and processing. The services and products of Shaker blacksmiths, tinsmiths and cobblers brought income to the Society from the outside as did the myriad assortment of other items produced by Shaker hands including, “baskets, brooms, and brushes; buckets, church, and tubs; carpet, cloth, and yarn; shoes and leather goods; hats, socks, mittens, “footens” and other items. In the eastern societies, particularly at Mount Lebanon, a chair industry emerged that endured into the early twentieth century. Indeed, the Shakers were involved in such varied production that an exasperated observer commented, they “manufacture brooms and measurers, pails and tubs, chairs and mops, mats and sieves, washing-machines and chimney caps, and I know not how many

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[Sisters?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884,” 16 July 1852; James Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” Shaker Collection, Library of Congress, item # 287, 29 November 1864.

<sup>205</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 7 May 1853; Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship Among the Shakers: Their Craftsmanship and Economic Order* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 114; Sister Marcia, “Shaker Industries,” 35; Faragher, *Women and Men*, 51.

other things. As Julie Nicoletta suggests, “[r]ather than the peaceful park-like places they now are, Shaker communities of the nineteenth century were noisy, active centers of production and commerce.”<sup>207</sup>

North Union’s manufacturing was limited, largely because of its size, but like most Shaker settlements, the community produced a variety of manufactured goods for its own use and for outside sale. Like their counterparts at Pleasant Hill and South Union Kentucky, for example, the North Union Shakers had a grist mill, saw mill, woolen mill and linseed mill. Because of their expanded resources, Shakers frequently built the earliest grist or saw mills in their respective areas. Three grist mills ultimately served the community.<sup>208</sup>

North Union was known for its production of cooper ware, woolens, yarns and brooms, all industries found to varying degrees in other Shaker communities. The industrial activity of North Union spread among its various mills, including the sawmill, the famous grist mill and a building known as the “woolen factory.” The sawmill was also the site of the cooperage and the linseed oil plant, in operation by 1834. Traditionally, the cakes of material left after the oil was extracted provided cattle feed. The woolen mill, built of stone and brick in 1854, at four stories and 24 X 50 feet despite its name, housed several different operations. On the top floor the Shakers installed a 160 spindle spinning jack, two power looms and a twister. The floor below housed carding machines, while the ground level contained an iron lathe and a wood lathe for turning the thousands of broom handles made by the Society each year. The basement level contained a buzz saw and a grinding wheel for sharpening tools.

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<sup>206</sup> Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 25 December 1846.

<sup>207</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 140; William A. Hinds, *American Communities* (Oneida, New York: Office of the American Socialist, 1878; reprint, New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 82; Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 119.

<sup>208</sup> Neal, *Kentucky Shakers*, 19. South Union did not have a linseed mill.

Prior to the construction of the woolen mill, the Shakers sent raw material to the Watervliet community in New York to be processed into clothe, a seemingly impractical move since woolen mills existed in Ohio. These shipments likely represented a Shaker desire to benefit each other whenever possible.<sup>209</sup>

Like their Shaker counterparts in Kentucky, North Union members managed a tannery on their property as early as 1834. Tanning hides required the use of ground bark, in ready supply from the nearby sawmill. During his 1834 visit, Isaac Youngs noted that the tannery used equipment powered by two horses that could grind nineteen bushels of bark on hour. Youngs' account also suggests that the Shakers tanned deer hides.<sup>210</sup>

The leading industry at North Union was the production of brooms which began in the early 1830s, when the Society converted some of the remaining log cabins into broom shops. Broom making was prevalent among the Shaker societies, and it appropriately reflected their obsession with cleanliness and order. The Shaker broom industry started at Watervliet in the early 1798, and it was there that, according to tradition, Shaker brother Theodore Bates developed the flat broom, a more efficient design than the bundles of broom corn or sticks used by farmers in the early republic.<sup>211</sup>

According to Andrews, the broom industry was probably the most widespread of all Shaker industries, present in not only in almost every community, but within almost every family in those communities, although it seems to have been most prominent in western communities. At Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, the Shakers converted a carpenter shop completely

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<sup>209</sup> Youngs, "Br. Isaac Newton Youngs' Journal," 19 June 1834; Klyver, *Brother James*, 85, 86; "North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859," 15 September 1852.

<sup>210</sup> Youngs, "Br. Isaac Newton Youngs' Journal," 19 June 1834. Unfortunately, Young's handwriting is difficult to read. He made have written 14 bushels.

<sup>211</sup> Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 97; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 130.

to the manufacture of brooms, and the members of the tiny Whitewater, Ohio community constructed a special building to house their broom production.<sup>212</sup>

The North Union Shakers grew broom corn in the fields surrounding the East Family, while the broom shop itself stood directly opposite the trustees' office; the Shakers also rented land on which to grow broom corn. North Union members specialized in producing broom handles, many of which they sent to Union Village to be made into brooms. In 1854 one order for "several thousand" broom handles had Shaker brothers "turning night and day." By the mid-1860s, North Union sisters were involved in broom production, as one Shaker journal writer noted, "the brethren prepare the corn & tie in the brush & the sisters finish off, label & c." Presumably "finishing off" meant sewing the broom, which meant that, although they had entered into the community's manufacturing industries, the sisters were still involved in the typically feminine occupation of sewing. Broom production at North Union came to an end by the mid-1880s.<sup>213</sup>

With the arrival of Joseph Worley, a Shaker from the Watervliet, Ohio community, North Union began the production of cooper ware, such as tubs, which became another leading industry. The wood for this cooper production came, in part, from a tract of Michigan woodland purchased by North Union in 1854.<sup>214</sup>

Originally, much of the dyeing, spinning and weaving was done by the Shaker sisters, but following the introduction of machinery with the construction of the new mill, the brethren largely took over textile production. The North Union mill operated into the 1870s producing gloves, mittens and stockings. Not all of the textiles were wool, however. A

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<sup>212</sup> Andrews, *Community Industries*, 139; Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 111.

<sup>213</sup> "Family [Sisters?]' Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884," 4 January 1854; 9 January 1865. Budinger comments that "There was no brooms made there while we were there." (Budinger Transcript).

unique product of the mill was raccoon fur gloves. The Shakers removed the fur from raccoon pelts, carded, spun and then used them to knit mittens and socks, with a silk thread knitted with the yarn for added strength.<sup>215</sup>

Among the items sold by North Union peddlers, and possibly manufactured at the community were wash boards and clothes pins and whiplashes. A long-standing tradition suggested that the clothes pin was the invention of the Shakers, and, specifically, of the North Union community. While North Union undoubtedly helped to popularize the device, such pins were known in the eighteenth century.<sup>216</sup>

A small and virtually unrecorded industry at North Union in the 1830s was the production of venetian blinds, commonly used during the nineteenth century in place of curtains. Production of these blinds centered in the “Red Shop,” and their production was noted by Isaac Newton Youngs during his 1834 visit during which he remarked that, “a great many green window curtains hang in one apartment, these they make for sale; they are made of wood splints & thread warp.”<sup>217</sup>

Like most Shaker communities, North Union produced quantities of garden seed which they sold through their network of peddlers. The seed industry originated in the early days of Shaker communalism; when production began at Watervliet in the early 1790s. The Shakers raised a variety of seeds, selling them in bulk, and at a later date, in paper packets; tradition credits Shakers as the first people to sell seed in packets. Shaker peddlers sold seeds, following established routes each fall and winter, sometimes leaving seeds for sale on

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<sup>214</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 31, 35; Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 113.

<sup>215</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 47. Budinger states that the woolen mill was not in operation during his residence at the community, roughly 1884 – 1889 (Budinger Transcript).

<sup>216</sup> Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 12 April 1858; “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 1 October 1851.

consignment with local merchants, creating some problems because virtually all of the Shaker societies raised seeds and, therefore, encroached on the territory of one another. By 1847 seed sales accounted for ten percent of the total income of the Hancock Shakers, although seed production began to fall after that date.<sup>218</sup>

The seed business at North Union seems to have begun in 1835 when “Br. Richard” (probably Richard Pelham) “wishing to have an extensive garden, on account of entering largely in to the Seed business,” fenced a five to six acres plot of land for a garden opposite the meeting house. Entries in the North Union Family Journal mention peddling trips on which seeds seem to have been the primary commodity to be sold. These trips were mainly in the early 1840s, and went to such places as Detroit, south to Wooster, Ohio, north to Sandusky and Milan and as far east as Pittsburgh. Mention of seed sales virtually disappears from the North Union record by the mid 1840s, however, suggesting that the seed business was of a very short duration at the community. Records indicate that North Union peddlers also sold fruit tree seedlings during their trips.<sup>219</sup>

In the rest of the Shaker world, seed sales began to decline precipitously by the 1850s. This decline can be attributed to the opening of the west which brought midwestern lands into seed production and the fact that Shakers were unwilling to engage in the type of misleading advertising that became a staple of the industry in the post Civil War era. Finally,

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<sup>217</sup> Youngs, “Br. Isaac Newton Youngs’ Journal,” 15 June 1834.

<sup>218</sup> Andrews, *Community Industries*, 70; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 136.

<sup>219</sup> Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 40; “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 5 November 1851. References to seed sales appear first on 29 September 1841. The last reference that I have noted is in the “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 25 October 1845.



the anachronistic Shaker seed peddler in his one-horse wagon was easily overtaken by companies that used mail order and the railroads to handle their sales.<sup>220</sup>

In the eastern societies the sale of processed and dried herbs, centered at Mount Lebanon, became an important industry by the 1830s, although less popular in the western societies than in the east. Herb production involved a considerable amount of hand labor, making it ideally suited to the Shakers who had a large free pool of labor from which to draw. Women and children assisted in harvesting, drying, pressing and packaging the herbs the society grew for culinary and medical purposes. The Shaker herb products eventually became so popular that the eastern societies were forced to turn to outside growers for materials.<sup>221</sup>

Beyond seeds and herbs, the North Union Shakers raised large gardens for their own use. A rare 1862 accounting of one of these North Union gardens provides a glimpse into the character of these plantings. That year the garden produced a total of 20 bushels of onions, 23 bushels of beets, 30 bushels of sweet potatoes, 400 head of cabbage, 7 barrels of peppers, “50 loads” of tomatoes, and undisclosed amounts of cucumbers, currants, squashes and “Berries a plenty.”<sup>222</sup>

The Shakers, in common with the majority of American communal groups, welcomed technology. Shakers are often depicted in the popular mind as “isolated and primitive people who eschewed the developing technology of their era,” embodying the goals of the “Arts and Crafts Movement” that arose in the late nineteenth century. In truth, the Shakers had such a

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<sup>220</sup> Burns, *Shaker Cities*, 152.

<sup>221</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 138; Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, 66. The current Shaker community of Sabbathday Lake Maine continues the Shaker herb industry, although the peddlers have been replaced by an on-line internet catalog.

<sup>222</sup> Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 1 November 1862.

mania for finding new and improved methods and devices to complete their work that they are traditionally credited with inventions that were later adopted by the outside world. While the Shakers believed in the value of manual labor, they rejected the idea that such labor had to be grinding drudgery; if a machine could improve production and, more importantly, the experience of the worker, it should be adopted. As Eldresses White and Taylor explained in 1904, Shakers see, “no virtue nor economy in hard labor when consecrated brain can work out an easier method.” These developments, significantly, were meant “to lessen drudgery rather than to increase productivity.” Shakers sought new methods constantly, and the letters and journals that members wrote home during visits to other communities, are filled with accounts of “the latest developments” in technology and practices in the communities they visited.<sup>223</sup>

The Shakers are often credited with mechanical inventions and innovations which, popular memory has it, they failed to patent. While they likely did develop the flat broom, screw propeller and were the first people to package seeds in paper packets, outsiders and the Shakers themselves, have innocently attributed to Shaker minds inventions that actually originated elsewhere. For example, while virtually every book on Shakerism credits them with the invention of the circular saw, this device was already known in Europe. What is remarkable, however, is that the Shakers did invent new and better machines and methods of performing tasks. Furthermore, while they may not have been the first to build particular

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<sup>223</sup> Helen Irvin, “The Machine in Utopia: Shaker Women and Technology” *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* 4 (1981), 313, 315; Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, Ohio: Press of F. J. Heer, 1904), 310.

devices as commonly thought, their development of these devices without any reference to previous examples of these machines is no less remarkable an accomplishment.<sup>224</sup>

Daniel Baird of North Union, the community's most notable peddler, was also a gifted inventor. Although Shakers rarely patented their inventions, Baird held several, including a rotary harrow, an improved brace and bit, "Babbit metal" (a combination of tin and pewter or lead used as a lubricant), and an automatic spring.<sup>225</sup>

North Union carpenters, particularly elders John Root and James Prescott, built large quantities of furniture for the various family dwellings, as well as fashioning the distinctive oval boxes which have become a virtual Shaker emblem in recent years. Unlike the larger community of Mount Lebanon, New York, where a chair factory existed, the North Union and other western Shakers did not produce furniture for sale, nor were the oval boxes, sold in "nests" of seven by other Shaker communities, a sale item of this community<sup>226</sup>

Although the North Union Shakers appear to have sold a great deal of their produce in Cleveland, at various times in their history they, like the Oneida Community, sent peddlers

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<sup>224</sup> Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land*, 99.

<sup>225</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 51; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 40; White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, 311; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 184 - 185.

Shortly after the North Union Shakers began to use machinery, Baird discovered a metal, believed to have been a combination of tin and pewter or lead, which was "excellent for gudgeons of the wheel to his turning lathe." Years later a man named Babbitt invented a similar formulation and sued Ward And Company of Detroit for infringing his patent. Baird was called to testify in the suit on behalf of Ward and Company, which won, largely because Baird testified that he his discovery predated Babbitt's. As a reward for his testimony, Baird received a railroad pass from the Ward Company, which he used to travel for pleasure, as well as to facilitate his travels as a peddler selling Shaker products (White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, 311; "Family [Sisters?]  
North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884," 30 September 1851).

One invention for which North Union has received credit in earlier sources is the clothes pin. Although the community manufactured these pins for sale, the device was known and used as early as the eighteenth century, and so could not have been a Shaker innovation (White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, 313).

North Union Shakers appear to have appreciated not only the technological advances that made work easier in their own community, but improvements in the world outside. In remarking about visitors from Union Village, one North Union journalist marveled at "the effects of progress," noting that "a few years ago we were separated from U. V. by 6 or 7 days tedious travel which can now be accomplished in a few hours." ("Family [Sisters?]  
Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884," 1 October 1853)

out into the world. Over the decades, a number of Shaker men undertook these peddling trips, usually in the fall and winter, carrying garden seeds, and the “shrewd, honest, sedate but kindly’ Shaker peddlers became a familiar part of nineteenth century rural culture. North Union peddlers sold seeds, fruit trees and brooms. Their territory included Michigan and Chicago by 1851. The Shakers do not appear to have used their peddlers as active missionaries, although the catalogue the North Union community printed to advertise its chair industry at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 did contain “a number of Shaker hymns.”<sup>227</sup>

Although the Shakers preached the equality of the sexes, this equality did not extend to labor practices. The Shakers believed that the sexes were “fundamentally equal,” but “differently endowed.” Thus, men and women were equal spiritually and creations of God, but they were endowed with different gifts and abilities. Historian, Lawrence Foster notes that, “the Shakers were almost wholly traditional” in their gendered segregation of labor. While Shaker women might have had a compatible role in community leadership and worship, practice segregated their labor from that of the Shaker brethren. So marked was the distinction between men and women that when James Prescott wrote biographical sketches of

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<sup>226</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 95 – 96; Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 36.

<sup>227</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 125; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 29 October 1851; Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, 151.

At North Union the peddling career of Daniel Baird is the most worthy of note. Called by a modern writer, North Union’s “super salesman” Baird traveled the back roads of Ohio and Michigan for decades with his wares on a packhorse, in the process earning the nickname “Uncle Daniel” among Ohio settlers. Baird continued to ply his trade until well into his declining years, in fact collapsing with his fatal illness just as he was beginning to set out on another business trip. (Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 144.)

prominent North Union Shakers he deliberately avoided profiling any of the sisters for fear that this would display a lack of propriety.<sup>228</sup>

The intricate Millennial Laws that governed the Shakers forbade any form of physical contact between members of the opposite sex; thus labor segregation, in addition to representing the traditional gender division of tasks, also helped to enforce the “moral code” of the sect. When Charles Nordhoff inquired of a Shaker leader in 1874 whether or not the Shakers would allow a woman to become a blacksmith, he was told they would not, “because this would bring men and women into relations which we do not think wise.” This segregation was in direct opposition to the strong emphasis placed upon mingling the labor of men and women in the Oneida Community. Separate shops for the activities of the brethren and for the sisters occupied Shaker villages. At North Union, however, this separation does not seem to have been absolute. Indeed, records indicate that both men and women did work in the Center Family’s woolen mill, although this structure was a male domain.<sup>229</sup>

The question which concerns recent scholars of Shaker women is whether or not the touted equality of Shaker communities really existed in practice. While the Shakers believed that everyone should be treated equally, this did not necessarily mean that they believed that everyone was equal. Sources are, at best, fragmentary for understanding whether or not the work of Shaker sisters was as valued as that of Shaker brethren.<sup>230</sup>

One point that is clear, however, is that the leadership role of sisters underwent a significant evolution during the nineteenth century. In contrast to Edward Andrews who

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<sup>228</sup> Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints*, 18; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community and the Mormons* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>229</sup> Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 211; Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 166.

<sup>230</sup> Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands*, 16.

blithely suggested that “women were coequal with men in all the privileges and responsibilities of leadership,” recent scholarship has suggested otherwise. Shaker sisters in temporal leadership were “deaconesses,” and unlike men who could serve as trustees with control over financial matters, women did not enter this role until 1880. Significantly, this move came at the North Union community, which replaced its original four male trustees with two female and two male successors. The Community justified its action in the official Shaker organ, *The Shaker Manifesto*, writing, “This might seem a new departure. But is it not in keeping with the leading principle of our church organization from the beginning, which have advocated equality of the sexes?” The shift at North Union, then in serious decline, was probably less an act of altruistic support of equality than a practical necessity, as the pool of available men for the post of trustee had significantly declined by that point. In subsequent decades the remaining Shaker communities followed North Union’s lead, and for most of the past century the Shaker church has been primarily under the temporal and spiritual leadership of women.<sup>231</sup>

Despite the segregation of labor by sex, the Shakers did not adopt the nineteenth century model of the “Cult of Domesticity,” or “Doctrine of Separate Spheres.” These two paradigms were largely middle class urban constructs of the early nineteenth century that reflected a shift away from the family household labor of the colonial period into a labor environment in which male and female roles were distinctly separate. Under this construct, men worked outside the home at productive, or wage earning labor. Women, in turn,

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<sup>231</sup> Quoted in Nickless, “Trustees, Deacons,” 16-17, 20 – 21. Curiously, this move did not receive extensive discussion in the North Union family journals.

The more recent history of the Shaker church has probably led scholars into the erroneous assumption that both men and women served as trustees from the beginning of the movement, a point of view expressed by June Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands*, 16.

performed tasks such as cleaning, cooking and raising children (although the Shaker segregation of the sexes did force an unusual condition on childrearing, in that male members of the community were responsible for raising all the boys within the community). Society considered women's work unskilled and, because they did not earn a wage, of lesser value than the work of men.

In rural areas environmental demands required the efforts of both genders for survival, blurring the distinction between male and female spheres of work, and this was the case among the Shaker communities. As Suzanne Thurman notes, many scholars point to the separation of Shaker labor by gender and suggest that the reality of Shaker gender equality was a strictly constructed model of the outside world at the time. Society devalued women's work because it was categorized as "menial, unskilled and unpaid." Thurman notes that these concepts "simply did not apply" to the Shakers, where no task was lowly, technology eased labor, and no one received a wage.<sup>232</sup>

Shaker women worked more in the milieu of rural families of the time, where men and women performed separate tasks towards a common goal of familial survival. Indeed, as historian John Mack Farragher notes, while rural men of the period needed to be jacks of all trades, "the sheer variety of tasks" performed by women "outdistanced men's." Because the Shakers viewed all physical labor as worthy, no work could be considered degrading or of lesser value than any other work. Thus, no matter what women did, the community honored their efforts. Furthermore, unlike the nineteenth century middle class woman whom Society expected to manage a house and care for children but not to produce commodities, Shaker

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<sup>232</sup> Suzanne R. Thurman, "O Sisters Ain't You Happy?:' *Gender, Family, and Community Among the Harvard and Shirley Shakers, 1781 – 1918* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 67, 71-72.

women were heavily involved in producing items for sale, an increasingly important component of the Shaker economy as time went on.<sup>233</sup>

The primary focus of a Shaker sister's working life was the dwelling house where she performed tasks in rotation ranging from laundry, to cooking and cleaning. As Edward and Faith Andrews note, "When one considers the size of the dwellings, the number of men, women, and children living the communal life, and the almost religious emphasis placed on order and cleanliness, it can be seen that household occupations represented no small undertaking." The Shaker obsession with cleanliness, legendary in the nineteenth century, was largely due to the daily cleaning given to every room in each dwelling house by the sisters.<sup>234</sup>

Like other rural Ohio women of their era, North Union women were more centrally involved in "providing subsistence" for the Shaker family than were men, through their production and preparation of food and clothing. Each of the three families at North Union had its own kitchen, equipped with large hearths and labor saving devices. Kitchens were generally "off-limits to other family members." In contrast to eastern Shakers, the western Believers, including those at North Union, built kitchens as part of ells attached to the rear of their dwelling house, giving their dwellings an unusual shape different than those in the east where basement kitchens predominated.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men*, 47, 53; Irvin, 314.

<sup>234</sup> Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, 111.

Charles Nordhoff, suggested that in their quest for cleanliness and order the Shakers "acted just as a parcel of old bachelors and old maids would, any where else, in these particulars – setting much store by personal comfort, neatness, and order; and no doubt thinking much of such minor morals" (Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 168).

<sup>235</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men*, 50; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 156; Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 61.



Women at North Union, as at other Shaker communities, took turns with household chores. Such rotation in labor was an important component in many other communal societies, and, as at the Shakers, provided women with a change every few weeks to relieve the monotony of tasks. Unlike Shaker men, whose work often took them outdoors, Shaker women spent most of their work day inside, and, visitors commented, “tended to look less healthy and happy than male Shakers;” Fredrika Bremer commented on the “corpse-like female figures, attired like shrouded corpses” that she encountered during a visit to Mount Lebanon in 1850. A measure of the decline of the North Union community is that in its final years women occasionally had to help with field work.<sup>236</sup>

Shaker kitchens, beyond their large scale cooking procedures, were unique for the diet they supplied. At various times Shakers in various communities followed different diets, such as that promoted by the reformer, Sylvester Graham in the 1840s. Many Shakers were vegetarians; very few of them consumed tobacco products. In 1874 Charles Nordhoff commented that the North Union Shakers “eat but little meat; use teas and coffee, but moderately, and ‘bear against tobacco,’ but permit its use in certain cases.”<sup>237</sup>

The products of the North Union kitchens constituted a portion of the goods sold by the community to add to its income. By the early 1850s the sisters of the community made large quantities of catsup for sale, packed tomatoes into tins, produced something called “pepper mangoes,” “picola” and barrels of horseradish. The sisters also picked fresh fruit, such as currants, for market sale and canned peaches. They dried and sold sweet corn in the fall, an industry that first appeared among the Shakers at New Lebanon in 1828. According

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<sup>236</sup> Worthley, “Last of the Shakers”; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 19; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, Trans. Mary Howitt, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853, reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 557; Budinger Transcript.

to Caroline Piercy, one of the first products sold by the North Union sisters were candles, which they “sold by the dozens.”<sup>238</sup>

As in other Shaker communities, the sisters also helped with the community seed and herb industries. During the late fall of 1852 for example, the sisters helped the brethren in digging “Poke root” to fulfill a contract the community had made to sell the material for five cents per pound. Sisters at Shaker communities where the herb and extract industry was prominent performed the major part of the labor involved in cutting, drying, and cleaning roots and producing ointments. The herb industry at North Union does not appear to have been large, likely because Union Village had a large herb and extract industry, thereby shutting North Union out of this market.<sup>239</sup>

During the 1850s the North Union sisters produced large quantities of bonnets for sale. Entries in the community journal indicate that by August 1856 the sisters had produced eighty-nine dozen bonnets that season. At the same time, the sisters produced seventy “Peafowl brushes” of which they made seventy one in 1856. Records indicate the manufacture of brushes as late as 1871, although the exact duration of this industry is unknown. In 1873, when Henry Clay Blinn of the Canterbury, New Hampshire community visited, he commented on coming “in sight of the peacocks. On reaching our room for the night we observe some 4 or 5 of these unmerciful screamers within a few feet of our

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<sup>237</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 205.

<sup>238</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 3 September 1852, 29 August 1853, 14 April 1856, 3 December 1856, 16 August 1859; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 82; Piercy, *The Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 126. I have not found any evidence to support Piercy’s contention.

<sup>239</sup> “Family [Sisters’] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 2 November 1852; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 103, 107; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 140.

windows.” Additionally, the North Union sisters, like their Shaker counterparts elsewhere, likely assisted in the community seed business.<sup>240</sup>

The celibate Shakers shared at least one problem with their counterparts in the complex marriage of the Oneida Community. Without marital partners, and following traditional gender roles, men had no one to mend, sew or wash their clothes. As at Oneida, men in Shaker communities each had a sister assigned to tend to these needs. Men reciprocated, within their gender defined roles, and were expected to do ‘needful favors for the sisters.’<sup>241</sup>

One significant difference between the work of North Union women and their rural Ohio counterparts was that Shaker women were freed from the responsibilities of child care. Although there were children in the North Union community, they were under the care of designated sisters and, in the case of boys, by designated brothers. Most women were free from the need to nurse and supervise children. They did not have to experience the attendant difficulties of childbirth, which most mid-nineteenth century rural women experienced at least five times. Infant deaths, birth accidents, miscarriages and stillbirths exacted “a terrible toll on the energies and spirit of women,” a toll that Shaker women did not have to pay.<sup>242</sup>

At North Union, women were involved in that community’s rather unusual silk industry. During the 1830s a silk craze gripped parts of the eastern United States including

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<sup>240</sup> “The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 30 August 1856, 27 December 1856; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 27 December 1856, ? 27 November 1871; Henry Clay Blinn, “A Journey to Kentucky in the Year 1873,” *The Shaker Quarterly* 6 (Winter 1966), 139.

<sup>241</sup> Andrews, *The People Called*, 123, 180.

“Each brother is assigned to a sister, who takes care of his clothing, mends when it is needed, looks after his washing, tells him when he requires a new garment, reproves him if he is not orderly, and keeps a general sisterly oversight over his habits and temporal needs.” At Oneida, these women were known as “mothers,” but no such term was used among the Shakers who reserved it, instead, as a mark of deference shown to their early female leaders. (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 140).

<sup>242</sup> Faragher, *Women and Men*, 58.

Ohio where, in 1830 a citizen of Marietta raised silk worms and began to manufacture sewing silk. Ohio speculators and farmers showed intense interest in silk production over the next seven years, although the boom eventually collapsed because it was “impossible to obtain laborers at a rate that would enable them to compete in the market with imported silk.”<sup>243</sup>

Ironically, the North Union Shakers began their silk production at the very end of the boom when in 1838 North Union began to raise silk worms, by setting out rows of mulberry trees with which to feed the silk worms. The trees and worms likely came from either Pleasant Hill or South Union, Kentucky, Shaker settlements where sericulture (silk production) was already established. Silk production at Pleasant Hill began in 1816, but was most prominent between 1825 - 1875 and was mainly devoted to producing sewing silk. In the beginning, North Union raised the silk worms, and then shipped their cocoons to the Kentucky settlements for processing.<sup>244</sup>

Silk culture, although not new to the United States, failed to expand because of the high amount of hand labor involved. Silk worms hatched in May and June, and then had to be tended and fed mulberry leaves from the rows of trees that the community had planted for this purpose. A designated sister cared for the worms, which totaled over eight thousand at North Union in 1853. Each cocoon had to be soaked in order to soften it so that the half mile of filament could be unwound. Between four to sixteen of these strands needed to be combined to form a workable thread which then had to be twisted and reeled, involving hours of hand labor. The Shakers, however, had a large pool of free labor, and were thus able to

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<sup>243</sup> Jones, *History of Ohio Agriculture*, 245.

<sup>244</sup> Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 30; Neal, *Kentucky Shakers*, 29.

exploit their communal advantage by entering this field. In 1844, two Shaker sisters from South Union visited their northern counterparts in order to teach them how to reel and spin silk.<sup>245</sup>

Silk production at North Union continued into the 1860s, until industrial competition, and the increasing age of the Shaker sisters, made its continuation impractical. The amount of silk produced was never large. In 1851 the sisters “reeled” two pounds and one ounce of silk. Until that time, North Union sisters wore silk scarves, while the brethren used the Society’s product for hat bands. The North Union sisters seem never to have woven silk material, sending what they produced to one of the Kentucky settlements for weaving.<sup>246</sup>

North Union sisters, again mirroring gender roles in the outside world, were involved in other forms of textile production at the village. During the winter months they spun flax. Until the construction of the woolen mill in 1854, the community regularly sent quantities of wool to the Watervliet, Ohio community to be processed. The sisters kept back some wool to produce “linsey & worsted” material. They dyed a considerable amount of material during the summer months, some of it for the stockings they sold. The sisters also did some commissioned weaving “for the world.” The North Union sisters wove carpet for community use, and towel material for sale.<sup>247</sup>

Beyond their commercial production, the North Union sisters also wove a variety of materials for the use of the community including, “lamp-wicks, dishtowels, dishcloths, diapers, dusters, crib sheets and blankets, cheesecloth, meal bags, rag carpets, druggist and

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<sup>245</sup> Family/ Sister, 16 May 1853, June 1853; Klyver, *Brother James*, 41 – 42.

<sup>246</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884,” 7 August 1851; Klyver, *Brother James*, 41 – 42. Other years silk production (from “Family [Sisters’?] Journal”): 4 Aug 1853 2 lb 9 \_ oz. 4 July 54 - 2 lb 4 oz. 2 August 1855 2 lb 3 oz. 2 lb 2 oz 8 August 1857.

Shaker flannel, tape of all widths, apron and field –smock material, bed spreads and...horse blankets...” Despite this production, Shakers were known to purchase quality goods from outside when they could be bought at a decent price. North Union was no exception, purchasing most of its cotton cloth either from another colony or from Cleveland.<sup>248</sup>

Because so much of their commercial production revolved around canning, drying fruit and processing silk and wool, the fall was an especially busy time for the sisters. In October 1853 a North Union sister wrote, “It is an uncommon busy time. Ministry Sisters at work in the Factory the rest of the Sisters engaged in spinning[,] reeling[,] twisting[,] dyeing[,] making[,] mending[,] gathering & drying apples...Cider making in the Factory &c &c &c.”<sup>249</sup>

Demographically, Shaker communities had many more female than male members. The number of male members began to decline significantly in the later nineteenth century, leading the communities to discontinue various industries and lease farm land. The income generated by Shaker sisters became increasingly critical. A large portion of this income came through the sale of “fancy goods,” such as pin cushions, work baskets, feather dusters, and items such as baskets and bonnets. Unlike the “fancy work” done as a past time by women in the outside world, Shaker products were generally practical and straightforward creations. While historians of material culture suggest that fancy work production in the Shaker communities began after the Civil War, North Union already practiced such production as early as 1851. That year a sister recorded that the sisters, “are doing considerable at making

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<sup>247</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884,” 1 January 1851, 26 July 1851, 5 September 1851, 20 October 1851, 1 January 1852, 21 January 1852.

<sup>248</sup> Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 142; “As Told by Mr. and Mrs. Stoll,” unpublished notes, collection of the Shaker Historical Library, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 6.

<sup>249</sup> “Family [Sisters’] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 22 [?] October 1853.

little palm leaf baskets for sale. Mercy has made a dozen cushioned boxes, 8 \_ doz pin balls & 10 emery cushion & some emery balls.” “Cushion boxes” were also a common commodity made by the sisters by early 1854.<sup>250</sup>

In normal years the sales of fancy goods and other items produced by sisters resulted in a small, but not inconsequential income. The importance of these sales became more evident in years of financial stress. Suzanne Thurman, in her study of two Massachusetts Shaker settlements, found that the sale of these products amounted to as much as 54 percent of the income of the Shirley settlement during a year when the seed sales that formed the foundation of that community’s income were low. Because their income was part of a communal account, Shaker women continued to have at least a small say in how it was used, in contrast to income producing women in the outside world who surrendered the rights to their funds to the discretion of their husbands.<sup>251</sup>

As with all aspects of Shaker life, inventions and new methods were constantly being developed and employed in order to ease labor. As Thurman notes, “[p]roductive labor, not drudgery, was their goal.” Shaker women benefited from early forms of washing machines, clothes pins, flat brooms, revolving ovens. The relative wealth of a Shaker community allowed it to purchase new devices far earlier than their rural counterparts, and the legendary Shaker inventiveness also bore fruit for women’s work. At North Union many devices eased the labor of the sisters including a new horse powered “washing mill” installed by the brethren in early 1853, of which one sister wrote, “we have used it several times, & like it very well; it is a great labor saving machine....” This machine consisted of a tub with a shaft

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<sup>250</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884,” 7 August 1851, 28 January 1854.

<sup>251</sup> Thurman, “*O Sister’s Ain’t You Happy?*,” 75, 76.

rising out of the center, to which a pole was attached. Usually, the teacher excused a boy from school to lead a horse attached to the pole for seven hours around the ten foot tub. By 1854 the sisters at the Center Family were using horse power to churn their butter. Other innovations used at North Union included a cream separator, a dough-kneading machine and a “miniature railway” that carried milk to the milk cellar.<sup>252</sup>

Shaker women believed their methods were superior to those used in the outside world, and they wrote poetry which decried “the lot of the factory woman.” In 1889 one Mount Lebanon sister wrote, “We have been busily engaged since last April in the making of shirts, but not like the poor factory girls, in their pent up rooms, deprived of pure, fresh air and the healthful sunlight, but in our beautiful, well-ventilated room, that is lighted by seven or eight large windows.”<sup>253</sup>

The North Union sisters were seemingly connected to the market place directly. Sisters traveled to Cleveland on a fairly regular basis “to trade.” One Shaker journalist noted that the sisters did weaving “for the world,” presumably commissioned work for an outside neighbor. Additionally, the North Union sisters were anxious to expand the scope of their production. In the fall of 1851 the community acquired a stocking loom. A sister at the time wrote, “we think that if it answers our expectations, it will be a profitable business, at least we hope so.” In 1854 the same journal recorded that a brother had recently built “a hennery,” and that they were “going in for raising poultry.”<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Thurman, *‘O Sisters’ Ain’t You Happy?’*, 71; Joseph Stoll, “Articles” collected by Miss Edythe Turner, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, Ohio. “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 4 March 1853, 10 April 1854. Mr. Stoll was born in 1857 and came to the Shakers around 1866. He died in 1935. Andrews and Andrews, *Work and Worship*, 159.

<sup>253</sup> Irvin, “The Machine in Utopia,” 317. The original source of the last quote is in a *Manifesto* of 1889.

<sup>254</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 - 1884,” 29 October 1851, 24 November 1851, 11 February 1852, 14 May 1852, 4 June 1852.



The work of Shaker sisters did not go unappreciated, as evidenced by an unusual journal entry made during North Union's heyday. At the end of 1856, the Center Family journalist summarized the work accomplished by the "sister's good works in the year," making a similar summary the following year. The journalist made no comparable summary of male labor. Among the many accomplishments of the sisters in 1856 the journalist noted that they had filled 632 cans of tomato sauce, dried 35.5 bushels of sweet corn, which the Society sold for \$284.00, and made three barrels of catsup. They also produced 70 "Pefowl brushes," 1000 yards of braid for bonnets, 1,000 yards of bonnet binding, 89 dozen Shaker bonnets, dyed 350 pounds of wool, "made untold numbers of garments and wove countless numbers of yards of cloth." "Besides all this," the journalist commented, "they washed ironed & mended large lots of clothes every week, made up about 100 beds every day & swept out over 50 rooms daily. They prepared in the best stile 530 meals each day and 193,000 meals in the year, besides innumerable little ods & ends & kind turns that no *man* can number." Then, in a rare display of Shaker boosting, the journalist concluded, "If any society East or West have got a set of sisters that can beat N. Union let them [be] introduced." This statement suggests that the men of North Union appreciated women's labor both for the income that it generated, and for its significance in helping the community function from day to day. Such a statement also is counter to the feelings of most rural men of the time who, although aware that the labor of their wives and daughters was necessary for

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Most sources do not credit sisters with outside contact, at least not with selling or buying. The sisters who made these trips were Abigail, Lydia, Sally C., Sarah. For the first half of the twentieth century a Sabbathday Lake sister, Eva Libby, made annual sales trips to various Oceanside hotels and resorts, probably the last vestige of the once number Shaker peddlers. Whether or not women performed this duty before Libby, or whether she was allowed to peddle simply because there were no men available, is unrecorded (Werkin, *The Four Seasons of Shaker Life*, 137).

family survival, took that labor for granted, or gave them only “minimal recognition” for their contributions.<sup>255</sup>

The women of North Union, like women in Shaker communities generally, were fortunate when compared to their counterparts in the rest of rural America. Working together with fellow believers, Shaker women were spared the loneliness and isolation faced by many rural women. Job rotation both freed them from having to perform all the myriad tasks performed by the average homemaker of the period and allowed them to experience variety in their working conditions. As Thurman notes, rotation and sharing of tasks was so typical of the Shaker way of life that scholars frequently overlook the effect it had in differentiating the experience of Shaker members from their more isolated outside counterparts, particularly women. Finally, as demonstrated by the North Union journals and sources in other communities, the community valued the efforts of Shaker women on a par with the efforts of Shaker men. The Shakers saw the work of each gender as necessary to the group’s survival, no matter what that work might have been or who performed it.<sup>256</sup>

Accounts of leisure activities are uncommon in the journals of the North Union community. This is not to suggest that leisure was unknown to the Shakers, but that it was not considered important enough to record. On Sundays they walked through the groves, picking pigeon berries and wintergreen leaves. During the long Ohio winters, they went sleigh riding, while fishing, seemingly a male only activity and excursions to the lake were popular the rest of the year. In August of 1865, two brethren took all of the Shaker children (divided between boys and girls) to the lake and to Cleveland, where “the girls were just in

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<sup>255</sup> “The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 31 December 1856; Faragher, *Women and Men*, 63 - 64.

<sup>256</sup> Thurman, ‘*O Sisters Ain’t You Happy?*’, 10, 72.

the right time to be admitted to see the Menagerie free...the boys were a little too late to be admitted.” In the fall, groups of North Union Shakers occasionally attended area fairs and the brethren also enjoyed special rides after a successful harvest. Finally, although it was intended as religious worship, dancing, shouting and singing during Shaker meeting was a form of entertainment, a release from the day to day life of the community.<sup>257</sup>

As in any rural community of the time, accidents afflicted Shaker members at work. The official journal of the Center Family records several minor accidents and mishaps that would not have been at all uncommon in any nineteenth century rural community, such as injuries suffered when a man fell from his horse, and an incident in which a brother lost two fingers to the community buzz saw.<sup>258</sup>

The paucity of accident reports in the Society records, however, suggests that they were uncommon. Following a mishap at the sawmill in which a brother had a foot and ankle crushed, the author of the family journal commented, “*Accidents* thicken! Yet folks will not learn to be careful.” Most of the fatal accidents at North Union occurred as the result of logging operations, as when a falling limb killed brother in 1854 or when another brother, John Hastings, died when the sleigh of logs he was hauling overturned on him. Seven

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<sup>257</sup> Stoll, “Articles,” 7; “Family [Sisters’] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 29 April 1852, 29 January 1853, 6 October 1859, 29 August 1865, and Center Family, 31 January 1867; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 - 1888,” 11 October 1867, 22 August 1868; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 225.

As in most Shaker communities, the intellectual life of North Union was seemingly lacking. In 1874 Charles Nordhoff, who commented generally that the Shakers “are not a reading people,” found that North Union had a small library and subscribed to two newspapers, the New York *Sun* and the New York *World*. (Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 163, 205).

<sup>258</sup> The North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 1 Feb 1854 and 26 May 1856)

The Society’s hired hands also suffered their share of accidents through the years. In 1865 a man employed at the sawmill lost his right hand to a saw. Another hired worker repairing a dam broke his leg. (Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 18 October 1865, 13 August 1866).

accidental deaths are recorded in the North Union death records, however, only the two previously mentioned were due to occupational injuries.<sup>259</sup>

When a member of the Shaker family died, the community interred their body in its cemetery following a brief ceremony, in neat chronological rows. The North Union cemetery was unique in the Shaker world. While Shakers generally buried their dead in chronological order of death, the North Union community buried men and women in separate sections.

Pieces of sandstone with a four inch smoothed section on top marked with the initials of the deceased marked graves at North Union.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>“North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 19 June 1856; “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 10 February 1854? 10 February 1859. Of the other accidents, two involved children and were not occupationally related, one man died from the effects of a fall, while an elderly woman died during the last year of the Society when the wagon she was riding in was wrecked. The exact nature of the final accident in the death records is not recorded. Nehemiah Devan died on 10 February 1854 when he was hit by a falling tree limb. John Hastings died on 10 February 1859 while hauling logs. Both victims were young men (Budinger Transcript; Prescott, “Death Register,” 127, 129.

<sup>260</sup> Barbara Rotundo, “Crossing the Dark River: Shaker Funerals and Cemeteries,” *Communal Societies* 7 (1987), 42; Blinn, “A Journey to Kentucky,” 140.

John MacLean, described the cemetery as being in “ruin, or dilapidation” by the time he visited it around 1900. (MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 147).

The health of the North Union Shakers was remarkably good. The general trend towards longevity and good health was noted among other communal groups and, as in the case of the Shakers, likely reflected the low level of stress many found in the communities, the good ventilation and country air, access to nursing and medical treatment and a solid diet. Modern analysis of mortality records suggests that the Shakers “did indeed live unusually long lives” free from many of the health concerns that plagued Americans generally during the nineteenth century. Indeed, Shaker life spans were at levels that other Americans did not experience until after 1950 (John E. Murray, A Demographic Analysis of Shaker Mortality Trends,” *Communal Societies* 13 (1993), 27)

Crowding in their family dwellings, however, did lead the Shakers to have a rate of death from consumption consistent with “the most severely affected areas in the United States.” Consumption was a leading cause of death at North Union; especially prevalent among sisters, who unlike the brethren, spent most of their workday indoors, thus, the disease, at least tangentially was a result of their working conditions (Murray, “A Demographic Analysis,” 23, 41)

An analysis of the death records of the North Union society produces some interesting conclusions about the relative health of the Shakers in that community. Precisely 137 Shakers died at North Union between 1827, when records begin, and 1889 when the Society dissolved. Seventy four or 54 percent of the deaths were of men, who lived an average of sixty years. The sixty-three women to die at North Union were, on average, only fifty at death, fully a decade younger than the men, and five years younger than the average age at death for the entire Society. As celibates, naturally, the Shakers did not have children, although several children were brought to the Society by their parents, or, as orphans, to be raised by the community. In sixty years two male and two female infants, all under age two, died. Additionally, Society records note the death of a seven year old boy and a two year old girl. Six young women and a single young man constitute the only other deaths of North Union Shakers below age twenty one. These statistics were derived from the North Union death register

A final group of North Union workers that became increasingly vital as the Society declined were its hired hands. Although often ignored in popular accounts of Shakerism, hired workers were an important and integral part of life in most Shaker communities, both as skilled workers and farm hands. As noted previously, the Society had a practice of hiring skilled masons and carpenters when engaging in building projects but, by 1874 when they were visited by Charles Nordhoff, they also employed nine hired men. On a purely percentage basis, however, North Union employed, proportionately, fewer hired workers than all but two Shaker communities.<sup>261</sup>

Shaker hired men were not, as popular perception would suggest, only a fixture of the sect's declining years. In fact hired men were present, albeit not in the numbers they attained later, from the earliest days of some communities. By 1874 Charles Nordhoff reported as many as one hired worker for every three Shakers in some communities. At North Union the Shakers frequently turned to the services of skilled craftsmen from the outside world when constructing buildings or repairing the dams on Doane's Creek. Indeed, one hired man, known as "Thomas," drowned while repairing the dam on the upper pond. James Prescott, as previously noted, came to North Union as a hired mason. Even the most significant building at North Union, the meeting house, was, in part, the product of non-believer's hands. At Sabbathday Lake, Maine, an outside firm designed and supervised construction of the community's 1884 central dwelling. In a similar vein, the Enfield, New Hampshire Shakers

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primarily kept by James Prescott. Ages at death were rounded to the nearest year. James S. Prescott. "Death List," 119-140. John MacLean, in his early work on North Union, but dealing with only partial death records, recorded similar statistics, noting that the average age was forty-nine (MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 145)

<sup>261</sup> Some scholars seem to deny the presence of hired men. June Sprigg, for example, notes that [b]y the twentieth century it became necessary to hire outside help for heavy work on the farms," suggesting that there had been no hired workers before, and that they were only a feature of the declining period of Shakerism (Sprigg, *By Shaker Hands*, 30; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 205,256).

hired the architect of the Vermont state capitol to design their famed stone dwelling house. As Julie Nicoletta suggests in her work on Shaker architecture, the presence of hired construction workers in Shaker communities was not at all unusual.<sup>262</sup>

By at least 1853, North Union Shakers employed “several hired hands for the season” to help with their farm work and, by 1854 most of the sheep shearing at North Union was done by “hired help mostly.” By the 1870s hired men at the Center Family occupied their own dwelling, located near the bee house.<sup>263</sup>

George Budinger, who lived at North Union in the 1880s, recalled that the “hoboes,” presumably including hired men, lived in the abandoned broom factory building. Two men, in particular, returned each fall to the community. In contrast to the impression usually given of such “Winter Shakers,” however, Budinger noted that they cut and stored wood and milked the cattle and “were honest and good men.”<sup>264</sup>

Accounts suggest that the Pleasant Hill Shakers regularly employed sixty hired workers during harvest seasons (Hutton, *Old Shakertown and the Shakers*, 27).

<sup>262</sup> Based on Nordhoff's figures, it is possible to note that the proportion of hired workers to members in some Shaker communities was significantly higher than at North Union. For example, the seventy-five hired workers reported by Watervliet, New York in 1874 was equal to 43 percent of its adult Shaker population, while Union Village reported a figure only slightly lower, 42 percent. Only Canterbury, New Hampshire (6 percent) and South Union, Kentucky (8 percent) reported lower ratios than North Union.

“North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 8 June 1850; Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 112, 161 asserts that “Only consecrated hands” worked on the meeting house, which is demonstrably untrue as evidenced by the family journals of the period. Several entries in the North Union Family Journal, however, counter this claim. On 25 January 1848 the journalist recorded that a Milo Davis “was hired to hew the timber for new meeting house” and on 25 Mai 1848 one Ephraim Gleason and “another hired man” began work on the stonework of the meeting house. Four months later on 17 September 1848 George Martin and Charles Loydd of Cleveland began to plaster the new meeting house. Clearly, none of these men were “consecrated labor.”

Barker, *Sabbathday Lake*, [6-7]; Nicoletta, *Architecture of the Shakers*, 30, 52.

<sup>263</sup> “Family [Sisters’?] Journal, North Union, Ohio, 1851 – 1884,” 14 May 1853, 20 May 1854; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 20 September 1879, 6 April 1880.

<sup>264</sup> Budinger Transcript. As early as 1875, the hired men of the Sabbathday Lake community occupied a specially built “boarding house” where they were supplied with meals of the office sisters, whose duty to deal with outsiders extended to this service as well. North Union records also suggest that only certain sisters were allowed by the community to prepare meals for the hired men, suggesting an attempt to segregate the workers from the rank and file Shakers (Wertkin, *The Four Seasons of Shaker Life*, 112).

Julie Nicoletta notes that many smaller Shaker communities, such as North Union, never had enough members to carry out all the needs of their respective communities. At Watervliet, Ohio, she notes, the tannery, wagon shop and mill were all run by hired men, housed in separate houses, from an early date. Although Shaker leaders were concerned about the impact of hired men on community members, they increasingly became a necessary evil as aging and declining Shaker populations needed to rely ever more heavily on them. Eventually, Nicoletta notes, “hired men provided most, if not all, of the labor at every Shaker village.” While hired men were a staple of these smaller communities, larger settlements, such as Watervliet, New York, actually employed more workers in proportion to their population than did the smaller communities such as North Union, Whitewater, Ohio and Groveland, New York.<sup>265</sup>

Like the hired men of the Amana Society and the Oneida Community, Shaker employees likely believed that their working conditions were superior to those of hired men on adjoining farms. Hepworth Dixon found at Mount Lebanon that “laborers come to [the Shakers] very freely, and remain as long as they are allowed to stay” Dixon further suggested that some laborers came to the Shakers both to work and to learn good farming techniques, “a clever young lad can hardly pass a season among these fields and farms without picking up good habits and useful hints.”<sup>266</sup>

Relations with Shaker hired men were not always good. In 1875 a disgruntled hired man set a fire that destroyed eight buildings at the Church family in New Lebanon, including the dwelling house. Although the Shakers expected hired men to follow certain rules, a

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<sup>265</sup> Nicoletta, *The Architecture of the Shakers*, 108; Figures derived from Data in Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 256.

<sup>266</sup> Dixon, *New America*, 313.

record of misbehavior grew. Hired men sometimes became drunk and disorderly, and sometimes harassed young sisters and stole from their Shaker employers. Such incidents, however, are mainly absent from North Union records.<sup>267</sup>

It was not unheard of for men employed by the Society to decide to join the Shakers. James Prescott, the leading figure in North Union history, originally came to the community as a hired mason. Jeremiah Ingalls, originally employed to do logging for the community, joined the Society in 1830, later followed by several members of his family. In 1835 Daniel Bennett, who had spent the winter working for the Society, joined it together with his family of five.<sup>268</sup>

Although the North Union Shakers were never the subject of mob action, like other Shaker communities, its neighbors sometimes viewed it derisively. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Shakers were the subject of dozens of pamphlets and tracts attacking their beliefs and way of life. By the late nineteenth century, however, opposition to the Shakers was on the wane. This decline was partly due to the fact that the sect no longer actively sought converts as it had in the past. Additionally, neighbors had become used to the Shaker presence, and they no longer felt threatened by what, in actuality, were small villages of aging celibates.

By the close of the nineteenth century the often hostile descriptions of Shakers left by visitors had been replaced, according to June Sprigg, by tolerance and even “expressions of respect.” The benign image of the Shakers as devout, honest and hard working individuals also helped to mitigate negative feelings. As early as 1839, one commentator reported that

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<sup>267</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 231, 297.

<sup>268</sup> Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 32; 39,



the Shakers had “become a proverb for industry, justice and benevolence” among New Englanders. Even Captain Basil Hall who commented derisively on the worship at New Lebanon conceded that “they appear to be a very orderly, industrious, and harmless set of persons. Outsiders also viewed the Shakers as “providing a place of refuge of inadequate and helpless individuals.” They were less likely to oppose a group that took in widows, orphans, and those unable to earn a living, both because it reflected the sect’s benevolent nature and because it meant that these individuals were not thrown upon the public for their support.<sup>269</sup>

Finally, by the end of the Civil War, Shaker communities had become enmeshed in their local economies. Farmers had their grain ground at the local Shaker mill, and knew they could obtain quality goods and services, as well as advice in a Shaker village. Shakers extended credit to their neighbors, Shaker schools served neighboring farm children, and the Shakers frequently maintained the local post office.<sup>270</sup>

Many members were unsatisfied with Shaker life and left North Union and other communities in large numbers. Among the largest number of apostates were young adults who had been brought to the communities as children. They did not choose to become Shakers, and those young people who had normal sexual desires or artistic or intellectual aspirations found the Shaker life lacking. The apostasy rates for children raised among the Shakers are astonishingly high. Of 678 children who lived at the Mount Lebanon Church Family between 1787 and 1900, only 121 (17.8 percent) spent their entire lives as Shakers;

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<sup>269</sup> June Sprigg, “Out of This World: The Shakers as a Nineteenth-Century Tourist Attraction,” *American Heritage* 31 (April/May 1980), 68; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 213; Andrews, *Community Industries*, 225; Captain Basil Hall, R.N., *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, MDCCCXXX), 111-112. For reasons of propriety, Hall refrained from saying more about “the innocent caperings of these honest Shakers.” Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints*, 81.

<sup>270</sup> Burns, *Shaker Cities*, 52 – 54.

the rest either left or were taken away by their relatives. Of the 197 children raised by this same family after 1860, only one converted to Shakerism.<sup>271</sup>

Adult apostates included individuals who lived among the Shakers for a short while before deciding against continuing their membership, and a group of short-term residents known as “winter Shakers.” The term “winter Shaker” refers to individuals who joined the Shakers in the fall in order to enjoy the physical benefits of food, clothing and shelter, before leaving in the spring. Not every individual that came to the Shakers merely for the physical benefits left in the spring; as Priscilla Brewer suggests, a “significant number of converts” adopted the Shaker way for other than spiritual reasons, and it would be wrong to assume that all of these individuals left after only a few months. Another scholar notes, perhaps “many Shakers were in truth ‘winter Shakers’ with ‘winters’ several years long.”<sup>272</sup>

Many individuals, looking at the neat and prosperous Shaker villages were likely more than willing to “pay lip service” if it meant physical security for themselves. North Union played host to a number of these individuals, including sailors who came to the village from Cleveland when cold weather halted the traffic on Lake Erie. In the spring they left the community. While their presence often drained community resources, as the Society aged, it welcomed the labor of these “Winter Shakers.”<sup>273</sup>

Many individuals left because they disagreed with Shaker policies or because of personal disagreements with individuals in their particular community. Some members, such as Samuel Russell at North Union, left after years of service, including holding office. Some

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<sup>271</sup> Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 223 – 224; Priscilla J. Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 48

<sup>272</sup> Brewer, “The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee,” 46; William Sims Bainbridge, “Shaker Demographics, 1840 – 1900: An Example of the Use of U.S. Census Enumeration Schedules,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (1982), 361.

members of the North Union settlement, as elsewhere in the Shaker world, appear to have left the community because they wished to be married. Such a fall from grace in the eyes of their fellow Shakers, was inexcusable, and often resulted in particularly harsh comments about their departure. On 14 May 1856 the Center Family journalist noted the departure of Washington Pike “for Babylon the emporium of lust!” A week later, the journalist was similarly unsparing when commenting on the departure of Sarah Ann Ringdon who left for “Babylon to hunt up W. Pike!” At Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, the departure of one man for romantic reasons generated a harsh, if somewhat humorous response from a community diarist: “Forty years old! With a shattered constitution and emaciated system! Humph! Cupid must be hard pressed to swallow such bait as that.”<sup>274</sup>

Despite the enmity born towards apostates, the Shakers seemingly welcomed them when they wished to return to the fold. William Hinds, who visited North Union in 1876, told the story of an apostate who, after leaving the community, had traveled extensively, joined a government surveying party, married, lived with the “Chippeways” and other Indian tribes, before returning to North Union after a twenty year absence.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Brewer, *Shaker Communities*, 88; Klyver, *Brother James*, 34.

<sup>274</sup> “North Union [Center] Family Journal, 1840 – 1859,” 14 April 1856 and 21 April 1856; Thomas and Thomas, *The Simple Spirit*, 46.

Some reports suggest that a “condemnatory knell was chanted” by Shakers whenever an apostasy was announced in a meeting:

“I’ll sense the awful situation,  
Of the souls that turn away,  
They lose all hope of their salvation,  
For them Believers cannot pray.”

(Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints*, 31).

<sup>275</sup> Hinds, “The North Union Shakers.” William Moore, who withdrew from the community on 9 August 1847 and was probably the same William Moore who later joined the Icarian settlement at Corning, Iowa. (Prescott, “[Private] Journal,” 9 August 1847)

Other temporary residents of North Union were young men who entered the colony during times of economy uncertainty, such as the Panic of 1837, when Elder David Spinning wrote to Elder Freegift Wells at Union Village, “they have found security but they do not wish to pay the price for peace.” During the crisis following the Panic of 1857, a Shaker at Shirley, Massachusetts commented, “We have many calling to our doors to get bread..... [a]nd many to get a home with us; perhaps some will finally be good Shakers. It is said to be very hard times.”<sup>276</sup>

The Shakers were known for tending to the needs of tramps and vagrants who chanced into their communities, and like the Amana Society, Shaker communities were probably known as soft touches among members of the “traveling fraternity.” At North Union, this charity extended up to the last days of the community. As late as the 1880s, according to George Budinger, tramps continued to take advantage of Shaker largesse: “They had hoboese come with a bundle on their back, and they would take them in, feed them. Then in the spring the hoboese would beat it out again.”<sup>277</sup>

North Union’s days of greatest prosperity and numerical strength were in the 1840s. By 1852, the North Union ministry writing to another Shaker community already noted that “[t]here has been but few gathered in...” By the time Charles Nordhoff visited North Union, in 1874, the community was in advanced decline.<sup>278</sup>

Like many Shaker communities, North Union began to relax some of its earlier rules and to adopt some of the styles of the outside world, a trend that was criticized to little avail by conservative leaders such as Hervey Eades, who felt that the Shakers should draw away

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<sup>276</sup> Quoted in Klyver, *Brother James*, 37; Horgan, *Shaker Cities*, 95.

<sup>277</sup> Budinger Transcript.

from the world. In other Shaker communities buildings acquired Victorian bric-a-brac, wall paper and heavy furniture, while organs made their appearance in some Shaker meeting rooms. North Union, where the Center Family placed an organ in its meeting room in 1881, was not immune to these changes. Henry Blinn, on his 1873 visit to the community noted that the interior woodwork at the East Family house was grained, “had drab pannels & pink trimmings” or had been “marbled.” Even the family meeting room was “painted in colors.” Concerned about Blinn’s reaction to this decoration, the sisters “attempted to make an apology, but it was needless.” At this family Blinn listened to a music box.<sup>279</sup>

Members of the sect began to take trips for other than business reasons, many visiting resorts for their health, or simply traveling for pleasure. In the last years of the community North Union even broke with standard Shaker practice, housing the family of divorcee Elizabeth Budinger and her children in a separate building, and allowing John and Maria Pilot, who had been married before their conversions, to share a house in their declining years.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> North Union Ministry to “Dearly Beloved Brother Isaac, 16 June 1852, Western Reserve Shaker Collection IV Correspondence, folder 51.

<sup>279</sup> Whitworth, *God’s Blueprints*, 60; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 7 January 1881; Blinn, “A Journey to Kentucky,” 141-142.

<sup>280</sup> In the late nineteenth century, as rules against such trips relaxed, many Shakers took what can be described as pleasure excursions, and North Union members were no exception. In September 1869 a group of twenty-five members of the North Union and Watervliet communities took a boat trip to Detroit (Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 20 Sept. 1869; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 204; Budinger Transcript; Eck Transcript).

During this period of decline, the Shakers as a whole initiated a missionary campaign in the hope of attracting new converts. Elder Frederick Evans of Mount Lebanon made two missionary trips to England, while Shakers from other communities lectured about their religious life to whomever cared to hear them. Missionary activity was also a part of life at North Union. Elder James Prescott made a short missionary visit among the Tuscarowa Indians of New York. Prescott also promoted Shaker belief through two conferences on spiritualism he helped to organize in Cleveland. The first conference, in 1871, was attended by elders from all the Shaker communities, as well as several hundred outsiders. The following year, Prescott made “desperate attempts to win new converts” through speeches at Farmington, Berlin Heights, and Kellogg, Ohio, all with no result (Klyver, *Brother James*, 61 – 62).

Slowly North Union slipped towards death. As early as 1870, rumors circulated in Cleveland that “an abandonment was contemplated,” although, at the time, the Community was still relatively strong. This strength however, eroded quickly as the decade progressed. By 1874, outsiders, such as Charles Nordhoff, observed signs of decay, commenting that “[t]he buildings of this society are not in as neat order as those of...others eastward.” That same year the Gathering Family disbanded and the East Family land was rented to outsiders.<sup>281</sup>

In 1875, the Community reported 102 members: 41 men, 44 women and 17 children. By 1879 the three families numbered sixty-seven in total, with twenty-five members at the East Family, twelve at the Mill Family and thirty at the Middle Family. These numbers represented a drop of thirty five members within a space of only four years, due to the possible departure of the seventeen children listed as present in 1875. Nationally, the average age of Shakers climbed during the later part of the nineteenth century. New converts failed to join the movement, and children continued to leave in droves. By the 1870s at North Union, and elsewhere, “fewer and fewer of the Shakers were in the most vigorous, most economically productive years” of their lives.<sup>282</sup>

Historian Stephen Stein has praised the “enterprising” nature of the Shakers at North Union who, when they could no longer tend their fields, rented their land out, including one of their ponds to an ice company, hired workers to continue their broom production and sold stone from their quarry. By this time the Society no longer manufactured cooper ware, and its woolen industry was mainly gone, although it still produced brooms, stocking yarn and

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<sup>281</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 130; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 205; Klyver, *Brother James*, 62.

<sup>282</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 130 - 131; Brainbridge, “Shaker Demographics,” 359.

lumber. Their chief income, however, now came from supplying Cleveland with milk and vegetables.<sup>283</sup>

While many of the male-driven industries ceased, or were performed by hired labor, North Union sisters continued to produce some of the goods for which the community had earned a reputation in earlier times. They still canned apple butter and preserves, made apple sauce and knit scarves, mittens and stockings for sale. They also continued to prepare medicinal herbs and produce various kinds of “fancy work” Like farm women in the outside world, whose activities kept their families going in hard economic times, the Shaker sisters sustained the community.<sup>284</sup>

By the 1880s the Shakers had to buy most of their grocery items from outside sources since they devoted their entire grain production for cattle feed. Such decline was not unusual among Shaker settlements at that time. As early as 1851, a Pleasant Hill Shaker wrote, “The older brethren are dying off rapidly, and the young ones are running off more rapidly.... We cannot prevent a spirit of discouragement from getting in among the people.”<sup>285</sup>

The recollections of George Budinger, who entered the community with his divorced mother and siblings in 1885, provide a poignant testament to the declining years of North Union. The young Budinger helped James Prescott tend his bees, and, alone, collected and boiled the sap to produce maple sugar for the Center Family. Budinger remembered the

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<sup>283</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 243; Prescott, “Records of the Church,” 129; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 205.

<sup>284</sup> Eck Transcript, 2; Klyver, *Brother James*, 65.

<sup>285</sup> Budinger Transcript; Thomas and Thomas, *Simple Spirit*, 43.

As the Society declined, North Union members began to reflect upon their past as “pioneers” of the Western Reserve. Members attended a meeting of “pioneers” in the town of Solon, seven miles from their village, while James Prescott, the perennial diarist and school teacher of the Community, began to work in earnest on a history of North Union, parts of which were published in a Cleveland newspaper in serial form in the 1870. Prescott’s sketches appeared in the Cleveland *Daily Herald* on 13, 21, 28 June and on 5, 11, 18 and 25

elderly Shaker men continuing to perform their tasks noting, “I never saw anybody looking around to see if they did it – I never saw anyone who neglected” cleaning their retiring rooms. He also reported that tramps routinely spent the winter feeding off of the North Union largess, while Clevelanders routinely stole items from Shaker buildings. “Everyone,” Budinger noted, “took advantage of the Shakers. Milk would be taken by the dairymen, and not paid for. Apples wouldn’t be paid for, fruit not paid.”<sup>286</sup>

By Budinger’s time, the Shakers no longer used the meeting house, described by the 1880s as “in a sad state of repair -- weather-beaten, broken windows, and yard overgrown with weeds.” Instead, they held all of their gatherings in the meeting room on the second floor of the Center Family. Too old to perform the wild dances of earlier days, the Shakers had abandoned religious dance in 1871, but continued to perform a modified form of their earlier rituals. As Budinger observed, “they would stand up, and move around and sing at the same time. They just walked up and down, women on one side, men on the other. They had their hands out, palms up. They were in no hurry, it was slow and dignified, no twirling around.”<sup>287</sup>

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July. (Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 30 August 1876; Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 175.)

<sup>286</sup> Budinger Transcript. Budinger’s sister, Louis Budinger Eck, also tape recorded her memories of North Union for the Shaker Historical Society. Only eight at the time North Union closed, Eck’s memories are less detailed than her older brother’s.

<sup>287</sup> Piercy, *Valley of God’s Pleasure*, 118; Budinger Transcript; Eck Transcript, 3. Eck recalls the dance in much the same way as her brother did. There seems to be some disagreement as to when regular dancing ended at the North Union community. Charles Pilot suggested that the date was much later, in 1880 (Worthley, “Last of the Shakers, 17 June 1934)

Other Shaker communities appear to have had less fidelity to the old worship forms as their numbers declined. By the 1880s outside Protestant ministers frequently led worship in the meeting house at Pleasant hill, whose members also freely attended worship services at neighboring churches, and this occurred fully thirty years before the community there ceased to exist (Klyver, *Brother James*, 68; Clark and Ham, *Pleasant Hill*, 89)

In the twentieth century the distinctive form of Shaker worship vanished from all the remaining communities, with the exception of Sabbathday Lake, Maine. By the 1970s, worship at the Canterbury, New



By July of 1885 the East Family ceased to exist, its members combining with the two remaining families at the village, while its farm was rented to outsiders. The Fourth of July celebration the following year was filled with dark portents for the surviving community. A gas balloon failed to rise during the celebration while the new proprietor of the famed Shaker mill, a Cleveland city council man, celebrated the holiday by dynamiting the structure so that he could sell the cut stone. James Prescott, writing in the Center Family Journal, commented that the “down fall” of the mill “was significant of the down-fall of original Shakerism in Ohio, and the inauguration [sic] of the second reign of antichrist.”<sup>288</sup>

By the time Prescott lay dying in his third floor Center Family room, the property of the Mill and East families had been rented out, leaving the Center family as the sole economic support of the Community. Eldress Clymenia Miner struggled to keep the community going emotionally and physically, aided in part by Budinger’s mother.<sup>289</sup>

By 1881 the Society was dependent on hired labor and on the purchases of food, medicine and fuel they were able to make in Cleveland. That year the Society, as whole, showed a deficit of \$732, with only the East Family showing a profit -- \$9.00. In 1885 a fire destroyed the saw mill which also housed the cooper shop. With surprising vitality, the Shakers hired outsiders to move a building from the Mill family on to the old foundation,

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Hampshire community, then home to the lead ministry, consisted of the elderly sisters viewing a popular Christian broadcast, “The Hour of Power” on television.

<sup>288</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 244; Martha Dale Boice, Dale Covington and Richard Spence, *Maps of the Shaker West* (Dayton, Ohio: Knot Garden Press, 1997), 92; Prescott, “Centere Family Journal, 1860 – 1888,” 5 July 1886.

The explosion was actually on 5 July, as the fourth fell on a Sunday that year.  
<sup>289</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 179; Eck Transcript. Louise Budinger Eck retained fond memories of Miner, commenting that “Clymena was a wonderful person – warm and understanding, and she had many friends both inside and outside the community.” (Eck, Transcript)

moved machinery from the Great Stone Mill and converted the structure into a grist mill which they leased the operation to an outsider.<sup>290</sup>

James Prescott died on 3 April 1888, mercifully preceding by a little over year the death of his beloved community. His death provided the Shaker leadership with the opportunity to close North Union. This decision, made while the community still had over thirty members, was likely influenced by the growth of Cleveland, then less than half a mile from the Shaker lands, and the threat that the city would annex North Union, placing the Society under a crushing tax burden. By this time the Shakers at North Union, and Shakers generally, were curiosities, quaint reminders of, in the public's eye, a dying fanatical sect. Leaders from Mount Lebanon arrived at North Union in May of 1889, to meet with the elderly members who, "spoke freely and to the point," before agreeing to close the community, which occurred that October.<sup>291</sup>

Following the decision to abandon North Union, the thirty-four remaining Shakers relocated to other Ohio communities, eight to Union Village and the majority, twenty-one, to Watervliet, where they lived, together, under the charge of Clymena Milner. Relocation was a difficult process for Shakers who had spent their entire productive lives building and maintaining their community. They left with little more than their clothing, leaving most of their tools, equipment and furnishings behind to be auctioned. Within weeks of moving to

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<sup>290</sup> Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 244; Klyver, *Brother James*, 69 – 70.

<sup>291</sup> MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 178; Stein, *Shaker Experience*, 245; Klyver, *Brother James*, 179 - 180; Piercy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 239.

Watervliet, eighty-two year old Malenda Russell died, followed by eight of the other surviving members within five years.<sup>292</sup>

The closure of North Union was stressful for Shakers in other small communities, many of whom could echo the concern of Shirley elder, John Whitely, who wrote another elder, "...am sorry to hear of the loss of Groveland and to hear that North Union must be broken up – The question very naturally arises—Which society next? I hope sincerely *not Shirley.*"<sup>293</sup>

In 1900 the remaining North Union Shakers relocated a second time to Union Village, Ohio, where they lived their last days mainly in the North Family under the care of their old Eldress, Clymena Milner, who accepted a promotion to second in the ministry only on the condition "that she should not leave her North Union people." Milner was the last surviving Shaker from the Valley of God's Pleasure when she died in 1916.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> "[T]hey just left things as they were and that was the way we found things" wrote a woman who visited and helped photograph the village soon after it closed. F. J. Houghton to Mrs. Herman J. Nord, secretary of the Shaker Historical Society, 19 Sept 1957, Nord Library, Shaker Historical Society.

George Budinger supports this statement that the Shakers left most of their things behind. Budinger's sister, Mrs. Eck who remained with the Shakers after the move to Watervliet, commented, "There was no need to move furniture and other things to Union Village and Watervliet as those families had enough for every one" (Eck Transcript, 6; Budinger Transcript, 139 – 140; Prescott, "Death Register," 139 – 140).

Klyver repeats the story of an elderly broom maker at North Union who told a young visitor (later, the source of this story) that "he'd almost rather die than leave North Union." According to the anecdote, the old man died shortly before the relocation. Unfortunately, the death records do not support this story, since the last male member of the Society to die at North Union died a year and a half before the relocation (Klyver, Brother James, 69; Prescott, "Death List," 138 -139.)

<sup>293</sup> Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land*, 128. Whitely might well have worried. In 1874 Shirley had only 36 adult members, far fewer than the eighty-five adults at North Union that same year. Still, Shirley managed to limp along for another twenty years before closing in 1908 (Population statistics from Nordhoff, *Communitic Societies*, 256)

<sup>294</sup> Milner's name is the last recorded in the record of deaths kept by the North Union community. Her death was number one hundred and fifty-nine. Milner was brought to the Shakers by her mother in 1839, and lived in the community her entire life, serving as an eldress after 1860 (MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 110 - 111, 133, 224)

North Union apostates lived into the 1930s, and George Budinger, who lived at North Union as a child in the 1880s and lived long enough to be interviewed about his experiences in the 1960s.

Eldress Milner befriended Ohio historian J.P. MacLean, providing him with north Union documents that he used in writing an important account of the community and which he later deposited, along with other materials, with the Library of Congress.

In its seventy-seven years, an estimated 407 people belonged to the North Union Community, of whom 137 had died there and thirty-four survived its closing. These numbers indicate that well over half of the total population left the community. The population of the community at its height was around 150. Although women outnumbered men in most Shaker communities, North Union demographics indicate that the community was almost equally divided between men and women through most of its history.<sup>295</sup>

The close of North Union was emblematic of the larger decline within the Shaker world. North Union's demise was followed, only three years later, by that of the Groveland, New York community. Over the next fifty years, other Shaker communities closed, their contents sold, and the buildings demolished, or converted by their new owners into homes, public facilities such as schools, nursing homes and prisons. In 1947 the Shaker community at Mount Lebanon, New York, home of the lead ministry disbanded, followed a few years later by the nearby Hancock, Massachusetts community. In 1992 the last Shaker sister at Canterbury, New Hampshire died, leaving the small community of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, as the last bastion of American Shakerism.

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<sup>295</sup> The population at any given time is difficult to determine. James Prescott's periodic census records are probably the most accurate indication, and they never rise above 150 members, although other published sources place North Union's population as high as 300. If the later figure is correct, then the North Union membership was slightly above the Shaker average of 285 members per community. Residents told William Hinds that the village had a population of 200 in 1840. Hinds visit occurred thirty six years after that date, and no credible contemporary evidence supports the claim that the population was ever that high. (Andrews, *The People Called*, 290 – 291; Hinds, "The North Union Shakers.")

Although early Shaker records indicate that gender distributions were fairly equal, this situation began to change, dramatically, after 1850. Hinds commented on the equal distribution of genders at North Union during his 1876 visit, remarking that [it] "is an unusual thing in Shaker Societies – the sisters generally being much in excess of the brothers – often outnumbering them two to one." Nordhoff reported forty-four women and forty one men at North Union in 1874. Statistically, women accounted for 57.7 percent of all Shakers by 1840 and that percentage had increased to 72.2 by 1900. In later years, the percentage of women increased until, for a period of time, there were no male Shakers at all (Hinds, "The North Union Shakers"; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 204; Bainbridge, 'Shaker Demographics,' 360)

The Union Village ministry sold the North Union property for \$316,000 in 1890, but not before heirs of the Russell family had sued the Shakers in order to recover what they deemed was their family property. On 22 April 1890, the day after a second auction, during which the furnishings of the Mill House were sold, a fire of unknown origin destroyed the nearby woodshed, spread to the dwelling and surrounding buildings and, within the space of two hours almost the entire Mill Family complex had been destroyed. The group of Cleveland bankers who purchased the property was thwarted in its attempt to develop it by the depression of 1893. The land stood idle, the farms grew up in weeds, and the wooden Shaker buildings became derelict relicts. By the spring of 1900 when John MacLean spent a day walking over the North Union site, those buildings that still remained were in a serious state of disrepair.<sup>296</sup>

A few years after MacLean's visit, a land company, led by brothers, O.P. and M. J. van Sweringen, purchased the site and developed as the community of Shaker Heights, demolishing the remaining buildings. Although Shaker Heights became one of the landmarks of American city planning and a wealthy suburb of Cleveland, the development almost completely obscured what little was left of North Union. In what is today an unconscionable act, the developers even relocated the graves in the Shaker cemetery in order to make room for construction.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Klyver, *Brother James*, 181 – 185; MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio*, 107; 189. Fortunately, historically minded individuals, including John MacLean, took numerous photographs of the Shaker buildings before their demolition.

<sup>297</sup> One seriously wonders how far the brick woolen mill and school house had deteriorated in fifteen years to merit their demolition. Today, buildings that are in far worse condition are restored, reflecting a dramatic shift in thinking on the issue of historic preservation and adaptive reuse. After their possessions were stolen, sold at auction or destroyed by fire, after every single structure they had built over a period of seventy years had been destroyed, the final indignity faced by these Shakers was that even their bones were not allowed to remain untouched. Indeed, the fate of the North Union site, in addition to being probably the most thorough eradication of a communal site in American history, stands as a hallmark of disrespect

Today, the only physical remains of the community are the two lakes it created on Doane's Creek, a few millstones, a sawmill foundation, and some cut stone that was salvaged to build the foundations of homes in Shaker Heights. Fortunately, a dedicated historical society, founded in 1947, has sought to preserve the Shaker record at this site, maintaining a museum and library, publishing various books and pamphlets and marking Shaker sites. The efforts of this group stand in sharp contrast to the wholesale destruction of the site by its original developers. On-going archaeological work has revealed some other features of this long abandoned community.<sup>298</sup>

The North Union community of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing lasted barely two generations, only sixty-seven years passed between Russell's

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This removal was not accomplished with the solemnity that Caroline Percy ascribes to it in her work. George Budinger commented in a 1962 interview that, "There are some of those bodies buried there yet where those houses are standing now. They only took the bodies out where they dug the basement. The few that they moved to the Warrensville cemetery don't make a handful." (Budinger Transcript)

A careful reading of Percy's more charitable comments about the relocation suggests that the relocated graves were not marked in their new location and that the exact location of the reburial was forgotten until, through the efforts of the Shaker Historical Society, it was identified and properly marked. One wonders how much Caroline Percy was grinding her teeth when she wrote uncritically of the Van Swearingen development. Surely, a sentimental and historically minded person such as herself did not really believe that the wholesale destruction of buildings and the removal of a cemetery that occupied only an acre or so was commendable on any level (Percy, *Valley of God's Pleasure*, 219).

Unlike more rural Shaker communities such as Pleasant Hill and Hancock, the North Union site was near the burgeoning city of Cleveland and prime real estate. Hancock was abandoned in the 1960s, when interest in preservation was beginning to develop in this country, and interested citizens, as well as Shakers themselves, were willing to expend the resources to preserve its material legacy. North Union, by contrast, was abandoned in the late nineteenth century, neglected for well over a decade, and then developed for its real estate value.

It is not my purpose to belittle Shaker Heights. Although the city planners showed little respect for the Shaker legacy, at the time in which the village was planned, few individuals would have thought to preserve decaying wooden buildings as historic monuments. Finally, the community that replaced North Union is at least notable as a triumph of city planning and management. Today, the community is known as the hometown of the actor and philanthropist, Paul Newman.

<sup>298</sup> Mary Jo Groppe to the author, 13 March 2003, collection of the author. Ms. Groppe, of the Shaker Historical Society, provided the assistance with obtaining copies of important primary sources in that organization's collection, as well as a description of the current status of the North Union site.

Mary Lou Conlin provides an interesting description of North Union sites in her short work on the community. At the time that Conlin wrote the only North Union building still standing was the bee house which, "until recently, was being used as a garage," and even that structure appears to have since been

conversion to the relocation of the last members. Born during the frontier days of the Western Reserve, by the time the settlement ceased to exist the tracks of the Cleveland street car system ended just a few miles from their meeting house. The end of the religious revivals meant no new converts for North Union and other societies, and the sect's belief in celibacy meant that no new members were born and so, without converts North Union gradually died of old age. Although the community experienced some internal difficulties, the carefully formulated pattern of Shaker discipline, reflected in work, worship and daily life, held true to the end. North Union, like the other Shaker communities that followed it into oblivion, did not die because of a failure in its vision, but rather because the world outside the community had changed to such an extent that people were no longer drawn towards mystical sects like the Shakers.

The age of the communal society was past by 1889, and while some groups, such as the Amana Society, would endure communally for a few more decades, the impetus to form and maintain such groups has eroded in the American culture at large. Not until the 1960s would Americans again be drawn to the communal lifestyle, and then on a scale and motivation largely different than the great religious communities of the nineteenth century.

**CHAPTER 5. HEAVENLY INDUSTRY  
AT THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY, 1838 – 1881.**<sup>299</sup>

We have built us a dome  
On our beautiful plantation,  
And we'll have one home,  
And one family relation.

We'll battle with the wiles  
Of the dark world of Mammon,  
And return with its spoils  
To the home of our dear ones

-- Oneida Community Hymn<sup>300</sup>

The Oneida Community remains one of the best known and most closely studied of all American communal societies; mention of it is virtually obligatory in surveys of American communal societies. Oneida's notoriety stems from a number of factors, not the least of which are the unique sexual and social arrangements that prevailed under the community's system of "complex marriage," the intriguing career of its founder, John Humphrey Noyes, and as the site of the only eugenics experiment carried out in the United States. Oneida was a distinctly American religion and society that sprang from the soil of Vermont and is, according to a leading communal scholar, central to an understanding of the long standing tradition of American utopianism. The complexities of the Oneida Community's social and religious beliefs have also proven an irresistible draw to sociologists, anthropologists and historians. The community's visibility, moreover, has only increased in the century since its reorganization through the commercial success of its successor company, Oneida Limited. Finally, the well-educated and articulate members who made up the Oneida Community left behind a significant body of letters, diaries, memoirs,

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<sup>299</sup> Taken from a letter to the *Oneida Circular*, 1 March 1855.

<sup>300</sup> From the text reprinted in Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 1851 – 1876 (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1970), xviii.



publications and other assorted records. Although a large body of material was, regrettably, destroyed by the leaders of the Oneida Corporation in the 1940s, enough material survives in order to paint an interesting picture of this fascinating community and its advanced methods of labor organization.<sup>301</sup>

Oneida was the direct product and property of its founder, John Humphrey Noyes, who was the very model of a charismatic leader. While each of the societies covered in this study were, at one time or another, under the sway of charismatic authority, none of them were so directly under the control of a single leader as was Oneida. Noyes' biography is the biography of the Oneida Community, which formed around his religious beliefs, structured upon his social views as informed by those religious beliefs, managed under his leadership, and ceased to exist, in part, because Noyes determined that the Community could no longer continue. Called "Father Noyes" by his followers, the leader of the Oneida Community maintained a distinctive relationship with his followers that transcended the charismatic appeal of other utopian leaders such as Christian Metz, Joseph Baumlér and Etienne Cabet.

In creating the Oneida community, Noyes and his followers were attempting to replicate the first Christian church through their careful reading of the writings of the Apostle

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<sup>301</sup> Tirzah Herrick Miller, *Desire & Duty at Oneida: Tirzah Miller's Intimate Memoir*, ed. Robert S. Fogarty (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3; Special Love, 3; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community and the Mormons* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991, 76).

The destruction of these materials, collected by George Wallingford Noyes, remains a sore spot with current descendents of the Community. Noyes had been at work on the third volume of his history of John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community and, indeed, had actually typed a manuscript containing large excerpts from the sources in his collection. Realizing what might happen to this material when he died, Noyes produced several copies of his manuscript, hiding them in a variety of places including a Toronto bank vault. All of the copies, except two held by his own family, were eventually tracked by the leadership of the Oneida Company, who felt that they contained material that would damage the reputation of their firm, and destroyed. These copies, now part of the Oneida Collection at the University of Syracuse, were fully opened to scholars in 1993 and edited and published by Lawrence Foster in 2001. (George Wallingford Noyes and Lawrence Foster, eds, *Free Love in Utopia: John Humphrey Noyes and the Origin of the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), xi, xii)

Paul. The Oneida Community was an evolving expression of its leader's understanding of the early church, its beliefs and practices. Oneida remained a remarkably fluid community able to abandon particular practices and adopt new ones for expediency's sake. While Noyes and his "family" may not have viewed their system as a perfected Utopian community, they believed that their way of life was nearly perfect, and ought to be emulated by others. As one member recalled in later years, "[i]t was never, in our minds, an experiment; we believed we were living under a system that the whole world would sooner or later adopt."<sup>302</sup>

The Oneida Community existed as a communal organization primarily because Noyes and his early followers intended to copy the communalism of the early Christian church, what Noyes termed "Bible Communism," and articulated in his theological work, *The Berean*. Unlike Etienne Cabet, who saw communism as the wave of the future and wished to create a model community whose economic and educational forms would sweep the world, the Oneidans wanted to create a community of model Christians whose peculiar message of Christian perfectionism would gain wide credence. Thus, at Oneida, work and labor were not organized along model lines, but in the ways in which Noyes and his lieutenants viewed them as the most efficient and enjoyable. Unlike other communal societies, Oneida was innately concerned with furthering the enjoyment that its members found in daily life, not only in their personal lives, but in work and worship as well. The Oneida system resulted in a body of contented workers with able leadership, strong community ties and a community with enormous economic prosperity. In the end, the workers of Oneida, whose leader never

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<sup>302</sup> Pierrepont B. Noyes, *My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 18.

articulated a broad communal economic model, were among the happiest and most productive of any in American communal societies.

John Humphrey Noyes was born on 11 September 1811 in Brattleboro, Vermont, the son of Polly Hayes and John Noyes, who was elected to the Vermont legislature on the day of his son's birth. Noyes' father was a successful merchant and politician, who later served a term in the United States Congress. His mother, of a more religious bent than her husband, was the sister of Rutherford Hayes, whose namesake son would be President of the United States. To state that "Noyes grew up in a family of higher than average intellectual and social attainments," is perhaps an understatement. In 1817, John Noyes decided to retire from public life and relocate his family to the smaller community of Putney, ten miles from Brattleboro, to a house they named "Locust Grove."<sup>303</sup>

The young Noyes was a bright and intelligent child, who quickly became the leader of his little group of playmates and for whom his parents planned a legal career. Noyes began the study of law after graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth. In 1831, while visiting his parents at Putney, Noyes was converted to Christianity at a revival, and immediately shifted his career plans towards the ministry. Noyes enrolled at Andover Theological Seminary, where he soon became involved with a group of other male students calling themselves "the Brethren;" all members hoped to become missionaries. Each week the Brethren met and engaged in what they called "mutual criticism," a self-improvement process in which each member submitted himself to an analysis of his traits by his comrades, and a system that Noyes would later instate at Oneida. At the same time, Noyes helped to

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<sup>303</sup>Robert Allerton Parker, *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 8; Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 78.

organize the New Haven Anti Slavery Society, demonstrating that his reformist outlook extended to fields beyond religion.<sup>304</sup>

In 1833, Noyes received his license to preach, and shortly thereafter became associated with the Free Church in New Haven. Noyes' theological leanings, influenced by the Free Church, began to embrace Perfectionism, the idea that a Christian does not sin once he or she is saved from sin through belief in Christ. Such a belief did not mean that a person is perfect, but that they have "purity of heart" through their faith. Noyes also determined that Christ's Second Coming had occurred in 70 A.D., at the time when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed; he also believed, however, that a second "resurrection judgment" was soon to come.<sup>305</sup>

Noyes' public declaration of the doctrine of Perfectionism led his religious superiors to revoke his preacher's license. Undaunted, Noyes continued his religious activities declaring, "I have taken away their license to sin...and they keep on sinning. So, though they have taken away my license to preach, I shall keep on preaching." Noyes traveled to New York City for a period of months during which he wandered the streets, preached to abandoned women, and drank, believing himself free from the religious legalism of his youth. Friends, concerned over Noyes' activities in New York and for his mental health, persuaded him to return to New Haven.<sup>306</sup>

After his New York experience, Noyes regained his composure and began to print *The Perfectionist*, a paper first published on 20 August 1834, to promote his religious doctrines. During this period Noyes failed in his attempt to woo Abigail Merwin, his first

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<sup>304</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 12, 19, 21

<sup>305</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 25; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 80 – 81.

<sup>306</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 29, 31 – 32.

convert, and then providentially it would seem, met Harriet Holton, the granddaughter and heir of a Vermont Lieutenant Governor and Congressman. Holton was not physically attractive, but her mind and wealth attracted Noyes' affections and he began to pursue her. He sporadically published a second paper, *The Witness*, at Ithaca, New York, and ran short of funds, until he received an unexpected eighty dollars in the mail from Holton with which he settled his affairs. Soon thereafter Noyes and Holton married, creating a union that Noyes described to his future wife as "a partnership which I will not call marriage." He then proceeded to explain his reasons for wanting to marry her, "rather like a cattle judge ticking off the good points of a prize Guernsey." Harriet was devoted to her husband, but was less a lover than disciple when she married him. Marriage to Harriet Holton provided Noyes with financial security (according to one interviewer, he made no secret of having married her for her money) and a stable home life to counteract the rumors about lewdness and promiscuity that had been circulating about him since his New York experience. The Noyes' married on 28 June 1838, the same day that Victoria was crowned Queen of England, an ironic marriage between the start of the sexually prudish Victorian age and a marriage that was anything but standard. In later years, Noyes dated the beginning of the Putney Community to his own marriage.<sup>307</sup>

Using his wife's money and position, Noyes built a house and built and outfitted a printing office, sending his fifteen year old brother, George, off on a crash apprenticeship to learn how to operate it. Throughout his life, printing a newspaper was Noyes' primary concern for, like Etienne Cabet, he was a master propagandist. Harriet Noyes, together with

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<sup>307</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 45, 59, 64, 89; George Wallingford Noyes, ed., *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (Oneida, New York, 1931), 17, 23; Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida*

her new husband's siblings, Harriet, Charlotte and George, set the type and helped print Noyes' new paper, *The Witness*. These individuals formed the nucleus of what became the Oneida community. At his urging, they spent the rest of their waking hours studying religious texts.<sup>308</sup>

Soon other individuals came under the influence of Noyes' publications and relocated to Putney in order to live near their spiritual leader. Chief among these new converts were George and Mary Cragin. Between 1842 and 1846 the growing Putney Community grew towards full communism. Noyes continued to publish his papers, but under different names; *The Witness* was succeeded by *The Perfectionist* in 1843 that ran until 1846 and was later replaced by *The Spiritual Magazine*. Noyes' father died in 1841 leaving Noyes, as the oldest sibling in charge of the family, most of whom belonged to the Putney Community, together with their substantial property.<sup>309</sup>

By March of 1843 the Putney Community consisted of twenty-eight adults and nine children, and owned both a store and a chapel located on the village square. Noyes wanted his followers to participate in a "Universal Manual Labor School," in which all would contribute to both the work and intellectual pursuits that would lead to the creation of a seminary for Perfectionists. The members awoke at 5 a.m. for a half hour of Bible study, and then spent the rest of the morning farming, printing or pursuing other jobs. In the afternoon they met for three hours in study and discussion. The Putney membership ate only one meal a

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*Community* (New York: The Penguin Press, 1993), 44; Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 273; William Hepworth Dixon, *New America* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1867), 407.

<sup>308</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 23; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 64.

<sup>309</sup> Noyes, sister, Mary, never joined the community, although both she and her husband, Larkin Meade, were friendly towards it and supplied it with assistance as needed. Mary Noyes Mead was the mother of Larkin Mead, a noted American sculptor, William R. Meade a noted American architect of the legendary firm of

day, but were free to eat cold meals from food stored in the pantry whenever they felt the need. Freed from kitchen responsibilities by cold meals, the women were able to devote their energies toward “spiritual pursuits,” spending three hours of the morning in this activity.<sup>310</sup>

The daily study sessions, in Noyes’ mind, were more useful than time spent at work. As he informed his faithful disciple, George Cragin, “If the growth of your faith, and the cultivation and improvement of your mind, require you to sit still, and do nothing at farming, half of the time, freely obey that instinct. I would much rather that our farming operations should be an entire failure, and our land run to waste, than to have you fail of a spiritual harvest. In later years, Noyes would come to advocate a six hour work day as “enough for any body.” The time spent in “mental culture” was time well spent in the eyes of the Putney Community, for it contributed to “the redemption and education of the inner man.” For Noyes, the entire reason for the Putney Community was not to create a communal society along the Shaker or Fourierist models, “but simply to publish the gospel and help one another in spiritual things.” Although Noyes authored, and the community adopted, at least three different guiding contracts, (each, “out of date the day after it was written,” according to his nephew) formal constitutions and structures were anathema to every community that came under his sway. Noyes, and his followers, were wary of being constrained by legalism, or formality, and always wanted to retain a fluid form of government and leadership, provided John Humphrey Noyes was that leader.<sup>311</sup>

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McKim, Mead and White and the wife of the American author William Dean Howells, adding to the already distinguished lineage of the Noyes family (Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 94)

<sup>310</sup> Victor Hawley, *Special Love -- Special Sex: An Oneida Community Diary*, ed. Robert S. Fogarty (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 6; George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 50, 54 – 55; Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 308.

<sup>311</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 3 September 1866; 23 March 1874; 12 November 1866; George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 55, 73.

Most of the Community's income came from the two farms owned by the Noyes family and from the store managed by John R. Miller, Noyes' capable brother-in-law, although as Noyes always suggested, the primary business of the community was the paper. As Noyes wrote for his paper, he also began to develop his own beliefs, expounding on them in a seventy-four-chapter book called *The Berean*, published in 1847. In the *Berean* Noyes advocated a return to the first Christian and that the second coming of Christ would be spiritual since, he reasoned, Christ had already returned in the physical sense at the time of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. The Putney Community, imbued with Noyes' ideals viewed itself as an army, marshaled together to herald the coming of kingdom of God, which they decreed had come, through a formal declaration on 1 June 1846.<sup>312</sup>

At this same time, largely because of Noyes' attraction to Mary Cragin, both the Noyes' and Cragins' began to live in a state of "complex marriage," a system that came to define the later Oneida Community, in which all four adults considered themselves married to each other. Noyes defended the system on the basis that there was no marriage in Heaven, and since his community was heralding the Kingdom of God on Earth, they modeled themselves along the lines of Heavenly life. A key aspect of complex marriage was the practice of male continence, in which the man withdrew before ejaculation during sexual activity, thus creating a highly effective form of birth control. After watching his wife suffer through four unsuccessful pregnancies, Noyes reasoned that "ordinary sexual behavior as practiced within the bonds of matrimony involved a tragic waste for both participants, and was responsible for a life-long reign of terror for many women." Male continence allowed a couple to engage in sexual activity, yet avoid the consequences that it might entail.

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<sup>312</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 55; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 121.



Additionally, Noyes began to engage in a series of faith healings which, combined with information on his Complex Marriage, led to an abundance of rumors in the village of Putney.<sup>313</sup>

In October of some year, warrants were issued for Noyes' arrest on charges of adultery, together with the Cragins. At the advice of Noyes brother in law, Larkin Meade, the Perfectionists who were not originally Putney residents, including Noyes, dispersed. The little group began to see themselves as "a little army, formed into a hollow square, a maneuver necessary for their infantry to meet the cavalry of Vermont respectability." Putney residents, infuriated at the Perfectionists, met in December of 1847 to pass a series of resolutions against the Perfectionists who had, "inculcated sentiments of a licentious tendency" in their community, resolving that "the moral interests of this community demand the immediate dissolution of said Association" as well as other demands. Perhaps frustrated at their efforts to eradicate the Perfectionists legally, one Putney man declared that, "if there is no law that will break them up, the people of Putney will make law for the occasion." Threats of mob violence never came to pass, however, and the situation in the little town eventually quieted to the point where citizens once again patronized the Perfectionist's store, although often under cover of darkness so as not to be embarrassed for doing so.<sup>314</sup>

In exasperation over the situation faced by his family and friends, Noyes' brother in law, Larkin Meade wrote, "When I become convinced that John's theological speculations end up in a community of persons, I shall think the sooner he is shut up in some kind of a

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<sup>313</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 178.

<sup>314</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 119, 136, 141; George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 323 - 324.

prison the better for all concerned.” In another letter, Meade commented that unless Noyes awoke to the dangers of his actions, “he will be transferred from his pleasant parlor to a less pleasant tenement in the City Prison.” When the Putney Community disbanded in the fall of 1847, it consisted of twenty-one adults and ten children, owned the store, the printing office, two homes and had twelve thousand dollars in the bank. As historian, Robert Fogarty notes, Putney was not a complete failure, since the Community allowed Noyes to lay theological and philosophical foundations for his later work, collect a group of devoted followers, and continue to expand his reach to outsiders by allowing him to publish his newspaper.<sup>315</sup>

Just prior to the trouble at Putney, Noyes had attended a series of meetings with New York State Perfectionists at which one group passed a resolution advocating the development of a “heavenly association.” Noyes encouraged the development of such an association believing that it would develop some sort of profitable industry and, thus, be able to support the press at Putney. The disastrous end of the Putney Community, however, would prove that rather than becoming a support, the New York perfectionists would actually provide a haven for the Putney community.<sup>316</sup>

The New York perfectionists, under the leadership of Jonathan Burt had begun to live communally at Burt’s farm, consisting of a forty-acre timber lot and saw mill near Oneida, New York. In February Noyes visited the new community, decided that all of his followers should congregate there, and gave Burt 500 dollars with which to fund operations. The date 1 February 1848 on which “the first practical steps were taken” by Noyes and Burt towards

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Miller wrote to Noyes, “Thursday night I received an anonymous letter through the post-office, saying that I would be tarred and feathered and ridden on a rail if I did not leave town immediately. But it was evidently done only to frighten.” (George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 349, 366 – 367.)

<sup>315</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 296, 343; Hawley, *Special Love*, 11 – 12.

forming the new community, was ever after regarded by members as their official “birthday.” Noyes’ arrival early in 1848 led many of his followers to move to central New York, leading an observer to comment, “The King-bee has lit, and the swarm is coming.” Within a short time three streams of perfectionists, including the Putney community, the New York group headed by Burt and Noyes’ disciples from Vermont, gathered at the new site, located at the geographical center of New York State and close to the Erie Canal, and began to build what came to be the Oneida Community.<sup>317</sup>

The men and women who gathered at Oneida in those first years were ordinary farmers and artisans, although a few intellectuals were sprinkled within the group. These were practical people, who knew how to plow a field, build houses and barns, make shoes, forge metal and run grist and saw mills. They included a mill wright, a cobbler, a carpenter, a joiner, a merchant, a blacksmith, a printer, a miller, a cabinet maker, and a variety of other crafts so that “few useless professions were represented.” They were a particularly young group of enthusiasts, with over eighty percent of the new members, including Noyes, under the age of forty. Like thousands of other Americans in the nineteenth century, these ordinary Americans were caught in the midst of the tremendous social and religious revival of the 1830s. Unlike most of their counterparts, who joined mainstream religious groups such as the Methodists at hundreds of revivals held throughout rural America, the people who came to Oneida came under the sway of John Humphrey Noyes and his particular brand of American Christianity.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 262 – 263.

<sup>317</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 19 February 1866; George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 389.

<sup>318</sup> Hawley, *Special Love*, 13 – 14; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 171.

The group's first order of business was to start construction of a building where they could all be housed during the coming winter. For Noyes, his band of followers constituted a family, and, as such, ought to occupy a common dwelling and ultimately engage in the common type of family based labor that characterized the rural Vermont of his youth. Everyone helped in the construction of the new home, called the Mansion House, with Noyes, himself, helping with the stone work, while the women of the community helped where they could, particularly with the interior lathing. Aside from the plaster work, the new structure was entirely the work of the community which proclaimed that "[t]his work was not drudgery, but a thrilling pastime – a real pleasure...[f]resh air, manual exercise, free and easy mingling of the sexes, and the consciousness of rendering a public service," all combined to render the labor pleasant.<sup>319</sup>

Life at Oneida, however, was anything but pleasant. The group was in dire financial straits and, for the first year, their sole income derived from operating Burt's saw mill, farming his land, and accepting the financial contributions of new members. Through it all the members "suffered privations cheerfully," infused with the charismatic power of their leader. During these difficult early years butter was a premium, and served only once or twice a week on days that were called 'good dinner days' by the members, with typical meals consisting of bread, milk, beans, potatoes and "milk gravy." In later years, members told "droll reminiscences" of the early days when "brown bread and applesauce, beans and milk-gravy were the staple, if not the only articles of diet."<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Hawley, *Special Love*, 17; William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities*, (Oneida: Office of the American Socialist; reprint, New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 119; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 172.

<sup>320</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 8; Hinds, *American Communities*, 119; Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 85 – 86.

While he seemed to thrive on promoting controversial ideas and although he had created a utopian community, John Humphrey Noyes hated confrontation, and willingly turned control of his community over to others. By 1849 the nucleus of the Oneida Community had constructed its Mansion House and begun to cultivate the surrounding land. At this point, Noyes, together with his inner circle of faithful adherents, left Oneida to live in a house at 41 Willow Place in Brooklyn, New York. Here, Noyes followed his one true avocation as a writer and publisher of newspapers. The Brooklyn venture was “one of seed time and preparation,” for it was at Brooklyn that the trap, bag and silk businesses of the Community began, even though, at the time, the “Brooklyn episode” was one of failure and financial drain.<sup>321</sup>

Brooklyn was one of several satellite communities started by Perfectionists during these years and connected to Oneida. They included colonies at Newark, New Jersey, Cambridge, Vermont and even, again, at Putney, where a small group of Perfectionists returned in 1851. The site of the community at Wallingford, Connecticut became the property of Oneida through the gift of converts Henry Allen and his wife in 1851, and was the most important and enduring of the branch communities. Wallingford was located at the foot on Mount Tom on the Quinnipiac River, “a rather respectable hill, with rather too large a name.” Wallingford was never very profitable, but became a way station for the mother colony at Oneida, a place where members would go “for rest and change,” away from the crowds and activity at Oneida. The two communities were essentially one, divided by a few hundred miles but otherwise linked financially, socially and politically and in daily contact. Wallingford, which usually housed 40 members, was primarily a farming settlement, but also

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<sup>321</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 22 January 1866.

engaged in some community industries. It was here that the Oneida bag and silverware business started and Wallingford members later produced chains for traps made in the mother colony and in the middle 1860s the Oneida printing operation relocated there. The community managed the farm at Wallingford, covering approximately 228 acres, much as the one at Oneida, generally growing small fruits such as strawberries. Wallingford members hired “pickers” from the nearby village of Wallingford, primarily Irish and consisting of women and children.<sup>322</sup>

During his absence from Oneida, Noyes left the leadership of the larger community in the hands of his capable brother in law, John R. Miller. Over the next five years Miller worked hard to place the Community on a firm financial basis and to handle legal challenges brought by its opponents. During its first years of its existence, the Oneida Community was always in dire financial straits; at one point in such desperate need of money that their leaders encouraged members of the community to sell their pocket watches to raise funds to support the community. Despite the hardships faced by the mother colony, Miller continued to pay the bills for his brother in law’s establishment in Brooklyn. Noyes was seemingly unfazed by his own fiscal irresponsibility, stating that the “first business [of the Community] was to see that God has a press.” Noyes seemed to care most about promoting his ideas through his newspaper and less about the community that he founded. If they resented Noyes indifference to the Community’s well-being, his followers seem to have remained silent,

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<sup>322</sup> Klaw, *Without Sin*, 79; Jessie Catherine Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring: Jessie Catherine Kinsley, Daughter of the Oneida Community*, ed. Jane Kinsley Rich and Nelson M. Blake (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 11; *Oneida Circular*, 21 March 1864, 4 June 1866; 11 January 1869; Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 66, 68.

In writing of these hired workers, a Wallingford member unintentionally betrayed a degree of bigotry by stating that the children of Irish immigrants that they employed, “have won our sympathies, and increased

even paying for Noyes' seven week trip to London to tour the World's Fair there in 1851, which Noyes justified by suggesting that since the fair "was to be a congress of all nations," he felt that "the Kingdom of God [Oneida] should be represented," too. Aside from its newspaper, Willow Place's ventures seemed to be always doomed. An attempt to be self supporting by manufacturing gold chain never took off; the sloop *Rebecca Ford* that the community purchased in order to make money by transporting limestone sank, drowning Mary Cragin. The other branch communities fared equally badly.<sup>323</sup>

At Oneida, itself, however, the community slowly began to prosper under Miller's capable leadership. By all accounts his brother-in-law's faithful disciple, Miller was also a talented businessman to whose skill the Oneida Community of the 1850s owed its survival. Miller belongs to the ubiquitous, but unheralded, cadre of talented business agents who managed the external affairs of a number of American communal societies, but whose activities writers and scholars of such organizations have ignored. It was John Miller, not John Humphrey Noyes, who managed Oneida for the first five years of existence, and it was Miller, not Noyes, who conceived of the diversified economy of agriculture, peddling, canning, and manufacture on which the fortune of the Oneida Community would ultimately be based. When Miller died, in 1854, "a weary martyr to the cause," Noyes rushed to fill the void left by his brother in law's death, at least until such time as he could find another such capable lieutenant.<sup>324</sup>

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our estimation of the capacities of the stock. They seem to be an improvement on their fathers and mothers...." (*Oneida Circular*, 16 July 1866, 140).

<sup>323</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 192, 194; Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 91.

<sup>324</sup> Lawrence Foster, in particular, emphasizes the role of John Miller in the Oneida Community in his introduction to George Wallingford Noyes's *Free Love in Utopia*.

Among the outstanding business managers whose influence mirrors that of Miller were Carl Mayer of the Ebenezer Society and Frederick Rapp of the Harmony Society. All three of these men shared close ties to

Noyes returned to Oneida, and almost immediately closed all of the branch communities, with the sole exception of Wallingford. Noyes also continued his brother in law's search for a single profitable industry on which to securely base the finances of the Community. He urged his followers to work at whatever tasks were needed for the support of the Community, charging that no task could be considered degrading if it helped maintain the Community. Noyes urged his followers to "make business a part of our religion," and members enthusiastically heeded their leader's call, working long hours, volunteering for Noyes' experiments with various industries and living such a Spartan life that, at one point, Noyes estimated that the cost of living at Oneida was only 84 cents a day per individual.<sup>325</sup>

Noyes was flexible and willing to try virtually any industry that had even the smallest chance of profitability. Initially, the community ran Burt's saw and grist mill, then grew broom corn and made and sold brooms. Next they tried to make willow baskets, but the venture failed. Attempts to make palm leaf hats, manufacture embroidered slippers for gentlemen, and later to sell plows and farm wagons, all proved unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. One of the more interesting failed ventures occurred in 1852 when a Mr. Ellis began to make "rustic" seats and tables as garden furniture, using rough cedar. Although the furniture sold and received a diploma as the state fair, the Community, too, abandoned this venture.<sup>326</sup>

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the charismatic leader of their respective organization: Rapp became the adopted son of Georg Rapp, Miller was Noyes' brother in law, and Mayer and Ebenezer leader Christian Metz, while not related, shared a close friendship reflected in their surviving letters. All three men were active in the formative years of their communities, and all three helped those communities weather significant legal and financial problems. Because these men shared the almost unlimited confidence of their leaders, they held virtually unlimited power as the official public face of their Societies while they were alive, and yet all three have been virtually buried under the shadows of the charismatic leaders they served. (Maren Lockwood Carden, *Oneida: Utopian Community To Modern Corporation* (2d ed., Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 39.)

<sup>325</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 14; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 203.

<sup>326</sup> Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 50 - 51.



The community had originally planned to support itself through both agriculture and horticulture on its acre estate. After a few unproductive years at farming, when community capital was rapidly depleting, Noyes came to see the need for a diversified industrial basis for his Community.

Because several community members had been peddlers before joining Oneida, Noyes suggested that members take up packs and peddle community goods to the outside world. Pairs of Community peddlers (typically an older man paired with a younger one) set out, selling pins, silk thread, combs, lace edging, collars, palm leaf hats, needles and other items made by the Community. Often, peddlers worked opposite sides of the same street, or separated for the day and met at night, but they always operated in pairs. Other community men traveled to neighboring villages with wagons of vegetables.<sup>327</sup>

The Community managed to add additional justification to their venture by suggesting that they were intent on undertaking, “religious peddling,” an attempt to improve a profession previously regarded as “a mean business – allied to horse-jockeying and kindred trades,” because of the propensity of peddlers to lie and cheat. In late 1863 the Community discontinued the peddling practice because, it claimed, it absented members for too much time and that other industries required “a concentration of our force.” In a more important sense, the growth of these other industries rendered the silk peddling, born at a financially difficult time, superfluous.<sup>328</sup>

The Community’s salvation came from a seemingly unusual source: the manufacture of animal traps. Sewell Newhouse, a well-known local hunter, wrestler and backwoodsman

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<sup>327</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 204; *Oneida Circular*, 26 July 1855 Robertson, *Oneida Community An Autobiography*, 220.

<sup>328</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 19 July 1855; 17 June 1858; 31 December 1863.

and also a talented blacksmith, had first become attached to the perfectionists in 1835 and joined the Oneida Community in 1850. In addition to his other skills, Newhouse was a talented blacksmith who had developed an improved animal trap before coming to Oneida. Newhouse had been at Oneida for four years before anyone thought that perhaps his trap business might be expanded to a community enterprise. The Community had already been making traps on a small scale for a few years, and had done well enough to lead John Miller to write to Noyes in 1852, "I think we shall make this a very profitable business," although it would be a few years before the Community entered the field with a full effort. Noyes, who always considered himself "a mechanic" at heart, took a special interest in trap making and learned how to make the devices himself.<sup>329</sup>

With Noyes' approval, Newhouse and his associates expanded the trap business, moving to a new building with new machinery, powered by water that assumed some of the handwork in their manufacture. By October of 1855 orders for the traps already had exceeded output. A single order for a thousand traps by the Hudson's Bay Company in April led Noyes to mobilize the entire labor force of the community to work at the trap shop in order to fill the order.<sup>330</sup>

Prior to Community involvement, Newhouse produced between 1,000 and 2,000 traps a year. By 1864, through the introduction of the Community labor force and labor saving equipment developed by Newhouse, Noyes and others, employed forty hired hands, annually used 300,000 pounds of iron and steel and produced six sizes of trap, from muskrat to bear. By 1865, despite fluctuations, the Community's trap production stood at 275,132 traps and

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<sup>329</sup> George W. Noyes, *Free Love in Utopia*, 199.

<sup>330</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 208; The Hudson's Bay Company remained a faithful client of Oneida, using their steel traps almost exclusively, for over seven decades (Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 14.)

net earnings were \$82,899.10, an increase of percent over the four years 1852 – 1856 combined. By 1869, the Community was able to report production of 337,437 traps and sales of \$ 114,841.20. On 1 November 1866 the Community inspected 5,000 traps, assembled 5,000 and shipped about the same number, a record amount, but indicative of the success the Community product enjoyed by that time.<sup>331</sup>

Trap orders continued to flow in to the Community, which never again experienced the severe financial strain that it had known in its first six years. While the original workers at the trap shop were men, their labor was augmented by the activities of women and children who assembled parts of the traps on a piecework basis and by the addition of hired hands, over sixty by 1864. As its workforce steadily increased, along with its wealth, the Community simply closed its eyes to the suffering of animals caught in its traps. And, in fact, justified it by noting that traps were “the pioneers of civilization,” subduing nature in order to render it fit for future development. Traps, after all, killed the mice who had been “very mischievous in our nurseries,” so they served a useful purpose in the advancement of the Community and Society.<sup>332</sup>

Because of fluctuations in the trap industry, Noyes argued for a new business. Since the Community had been selling silk products for years, Noyes decided that the manufacturing of silk products was a natural avenue. Accordingly, the Community dispatched its machinists to examine existing silk factories in order to learn the type of equipment needed. The Oneida machine shop then produced the necessary machinery, while a young man and two women apprenticed at an established silk factory to learn the trade.

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<sup>331</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 27 June 1864; 17 April 1865; 10 January 1870; 12 November 1866.

<sup>332</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 208, 213; *Oneida Circular*, 8 May 1856.

They returned to Oneida, the Community installed the machinery, and the industry began to produce silk on 30 July 1866. The silk industry appears to have employed relatively few Oneida members. Indeed, the first workers to join the two women who had studied at Conantville were “two or three” girls hired from the local community. Two years later, at the time the Community did its annual accounting, it had hired over fifty women and girls to work in the silk factory, compared to just seventeen Community women, four of whom were “superintendents.” Within the year, the number of hired workers had increased to seventy-six.<sup>333</sup>

In 1864 the Community began construction of a factory facility at “Willow Place,” (named for the “Brooklyn epoch”) a location approximately 1.3 miles from the Mansion House and on the turnpike leading from Utica to Syracuse. The factory building cost \$32,000, and housed both the silk and trap industries. A nearby residence housed the “Willow Place Family” consisting of thirty members employed in the shops.<sup>334</sup>

Relatively few reports of accidents appear in the pages of the *Oneida Circular*, and no accidental deaths are mentioned. This silence may reflect an attempt by the Community to avoid mention of potentially embarrassing incidents to its wider readership, the fact that their definition of accident was much less broad than our own, or that there simply were very few mishaps in the Community shops. In 1858 the *Circular* reported how the liking of an emery wheel burst and struck a young boy working in the trap shop, “producing something like a blood blister from the elbow to the ends of his fingers,” but, evidently, no major harm.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 3 December 1866, 10 December 1866; 31 December 1866; 11 January 1869.

<sup>334</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 212; *Oneida Circular*, 19 August 1867. The Willow Place facility later became the major factory of Oneida Community Limited, following the reorganization of the Society in 1880. Today (2002) it is still in use by the Oneida Company.

<sup>335</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 4 November 1858.

Other Community industries included rustic furniture and gold chains. In 1865 the Community attempted to manufacture agricultural implements, and for a time took over the works of Henry Wilson & Co. located a short distance from their trap factory. The new venture employed twelve men, but apparently did not last long. Oneida also supported the small industries and craftsmen necessary to keep their farm and community running, including a blacksmith, carpenters, wagon shop workers, dentist and a saw mill.<sup>336</sup>

Aside from their daily work and their religion, life for members of the Oneida Community revolved around Complex Marriage. For over thirty years, Oneidans engaged in a sort of on-going courtship, in which men and women sought each other's company for social and sexual reasons. Under this system, men wishing to have an "appointment" with a particular woman needed to make arrangements through an intermediary, allowing the woman a chance to refuse. Leaders encouraged younger men to associate with older women, ostensibly because, through Noyes' concept of "Ascending Fellowship," younger people should associate with older, more spiritually advanced individuals. This practice also had the double benefit of allowing them to master the technique of male continence on post menopausal women, as well as to involve older women in Complex Marriage. In writing of the system many years later, member Jessie Kinsley remained ambivalent: "Looking back upon it, I do not wholly understand it nor do I unreservedly approve of all of that experience. I see faults of a grave nature." Although the social implications of Complex Marriage have intrigued scholars for generations, to those who lived through it, and their descendants, it has often become the dark side of the happy utopian dream of their forbears.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 27 March 1865; 3 April 1865; 19 February 1866.

<sup>337</sup> Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 38.

Each night the Community gathered in the large hall of the Mansion House for the evening meeting, which took the place of formal religious services. The gatherings were “[p]artly social, partly intellectual, partly industrial, and partly religious in character.” The meeting room was filled with rocking chairs and small tables outfitted with lamps, at which the women did their sewing. These meetings featured a “news reporter” who read “quick snatches of news” gleaned from a selection of papers, and the regular “Wallingford journal” of events at the branch community, as well as correspondence received by the community, including letters from members who were then on the road. When he was present, Noyes sat at the end of a long table in front of the stage at one end of the room and, if he felt moved to do so, delivered one of his “home talks” during the last half hour of the meeting – a time reserved for religious expression.<sup>338</sup>

The method of government utilized by the Oneida community was “criticism,” a method in which a member volunteered to submit themselves to a session of critiquing by a group of ten to fifteen of their fellow members. The comments offered at a criticism could be both supportive and critical, but were meant in a constructive spirit. Still, criticism posed a trial for the individual whose character was dissected by his or her peers. One member, in old age recalled, “the mental chaos I would find myself in when, after a criticism, I would leave the friendly group of critics, which I myself had requested to convene, and go away by myself to take thought and cry a little.” This same individual, however, noted that she counted “all of my criticisms – except one –...as blessings.” After one harsh criticism a female member of the community told the man who had undergone examination, “Cheer up,” “Be happy – we all love you.” Charles Nordhoff, invited to observe a criticism during his brief

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<sup>338</sup> Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 66; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 33.

visit to Oneida in 1874, noted the discomfiture of the man being criticized as he “grew paler, and drops of perspiration began to stand on his forehead...”<sup>339</sup>

Criticism meant that reprobates within the community could easily be called to task and criticism also allowed members to air whatever bitterness they might harbor towards an individual, thus releasing tension within the community. By having the Community criticize the individual, Criticism also reinforced a collective identity through a collective set of standards, thus further tying the individual member into community life. When the peddlers returned from their forays to the outside, the Community subjected each to a “criticism” in order to cleanse them of any taint received during their time among outsiders. Criticism took on mystical meanings for the Oneida members, some of whom attributed having a criticism to being cured of a particular physical ailment. Criticism was central to life at Oneida, as one former member wrote, “Criticism was to the Community what ballast is to a ship. To the individuals it was as fire is to gold.” Community used this “fire” of criticism to remove spiritual impurities acquired by members through contact with outsiders.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup>Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia*, 85; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 29 – 30; Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1875; reprint, New York: Hillary House Publishers, Ltd., 1961), 292.

<sup>340</sup>Tara M. McCarthy, “The Medium of Grace: Mutual Criticism in the Oneida Community,” *Communal Societies*, 92, 95 – 96; Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 293, 295 - 298; Allan Estlake [Abel Easton], *The Oneida Community: A Record of an Attempt to Carry Out the Principles of Christian Unselfishness & Scientific Race-Improvement* (London: George Redway, 1900, reprint, New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1973), 58.

The Community was concerned with the moral temptations to which peddlers were exposed, noting that “It seems almost impossible for persons to enter the great sphere of covetousness, and handle its currency, without losing some of their simplicity of heart.” The peddlers underwent these “spiritual baths” before they were allowed to once again associate with their fellow members. (*Oneida Circular*, 28 October 1858; Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 15).

Noyes allowed himself to be criticized in the early days of the Community but later noted that “in his case criticism became a farce,” and he insisted since the brunt of criticism leveled against the Community be the outside world was directed at him he had his share. On at least one occasion, Noyes publicly criticized himself before an Oneida audience. He insisted since the brunt of criticism leveled against the Community be the outside world was directed at him he had his share. On at least one occasion, Noyes publicly criticized himself before an Oneida audience. After he had fled to Canada, however, Noyes privately asked a trusted lieutenant to

The Community chose new members carefully, and for the most part, once a person joined they remained for the rest of their lives, or at least until the Community reorganized, making the population of the Oneida Community one of the most stable among American communal societies. Of the 109 adults who joined the Oneida Community during its first two years all but twenty-five remained permanently. Every year between three to five adult members left the Community, although usually on good terms. A well-known exception to this rule was the apostasy of Charles Guiteu, a mentally unbalanced young man who sued the Community for wages and, fourteen years after his departure, assassinated President James A. Garfield.<sup>341</sup>

During its two final decades and period of greatest prosperity, life for Community members of all ages revolved around their labor, education, and religious life and leisure activities. Unlike other communal leaders, Noyes was opposed to asceticism, and his followers happily engaged in a wide variety of amusements and diversions, were encouraged by their leader to read widely also encouraged by him to work only when they felt the inclination to do so. During the late 1850s, the Community began its long standing love affair with drama, staging productions of Shakespearean plays as well as other dramas. In later years, members shared an almost fanatical devotion to croquet, even managing to play the game in winter. Despite the seeming lack of force in the structure of Oneida labor, members appear to have been faithful about performing their duties. Perhaps the threat of having their laziness highlighted during a session of mutual criticism served to chastise them.<sup>342</sup>

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criticize him (Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 218; Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 142; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 30, 51 – 52.)

<sup>341</sup> Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 87; Carden, 77; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 225.

<sup>342</sup> Harriet Worden, *Old Mansion House Memories: By One Brought Up In It* (Kenwood, New York, 1950), 61.



Every aspect of life at Oneida, at one time or another had its origins in the brain of John Humphrey Noyes. It was Noyes who introduced the concepts of Complex Marriage, Ascending Fellowship and the practice of Mutual Criticism. Noyes planned the evening meetings, and often led them by presenting a “home talk.” In many cases industries at Oneida came about because Noyes had the idea for them, and the way in which Oneidans worked at those industries also had its roots in Noyes’ fertile imagination. To John Humphrey Noyes, the rest of the world was enslaved by the “hireling system” of work and money. His goal was to create a society in which “heavenly industry,” devoted to advancing Christian love, was the norm.

The hired labor system of the outside world was anathema to Noyes and his followers, who believed it was little better than slavery. “The mass of mankind under the hireling system,” Noyes wrote, “are crushed down beneath the weight of drudging toil.” Those who worked under such “uninspired” conditions, Noyes argued, were building their own tombs, “[e]very stroke of their hands is laying a brick of their own tomb, vaulting themselves in.” He viewed the system of wage labor as one of the four links in the “chain of evils which holds humanity in ruin.” The first link was “a breach” between man and God. The second link was “a disruption of the sexes” which laid a “special curse on women,” while the third link was “the curse of oppressive labor” and the fourth and final link was “the reign of disease and death.” Noyes hoped, through the Oneida Community, to conquer all four. The religious life of the Community would serve to heal the breach with God; the

reordering of gender roles would alleviate the curse on women; while the reorganization of labor and loss of the wage system would heal the third link.<sup>343</sup>

Beyond establishing the forms of labor at Oneida, Noyes' central goal was to make labor attractive. In part, the Community accomplished this through the system of job rotation and the use of "bees," but the very character of work at Oneida tied it closely with the idea that the Community was fulfilling God's work. In his use of the term "attractive industry" and in his thinking, Noyes was directly influenced by the work of Charles Fourier, the French theorist whose ideas, reshaped by Albert Brisbane, gave birth to the Fourierists in America. Noyes acknowledged this influence, and even claimed that Oneida, born at the time of Fourierism's decline, was a successor to the earlier movement.<sup>344</sup>

Labor, in Noyes' thinking, became literally a sacrament, and what could be a greater stimulus than to work together for love of one's fellow man and for the love of God? "The stimulus which love gives, but which money cannot bestow, urges every one to exert himself to the utmost." Cooperative labor, Noyes suggested, elevated labor activity from self interest to that of a public concern; workers did not labor for themselves, but for their brothers and sisters in the faith, their community.<sup>345</sup>

Oneidans also firmly believed that they were working for Jesus, or at least helping, by their labor, to fund the development of His kingdom on earth. Noyes, while visiting the Willow Place Commune, spoke of this incentive when he noted that critics often attacked

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<sup>343</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 1 December 1859; 4 October 1869.

<sup>344</sup> One area in which Noyes draws heavily from Fourierism is in work, which Fourier had declared could be both a pleasure and could led one to self-realization. In Fourier's utopia, workers associated in small groups, and moved from task to task two hours, which seems to have inspired Oneida's practice of work rotation. The Oneidans, like Fourier, let workers chose their own jobs and work at them as long, or as hard as they wanted. Even the practice, at Oneida, of marching to the fields to the playing of fife and drum was borrowed from

Communism because “it does not give persons sufficient motive or incentive to be industrious.” People in a commune, not having to support their family, the critics reasoned, had no incentive to work. To the contrary, Noyes argued, although they did not work directly for their families, they worked for Christ, and there could be no greater incentive than to further the work of the Lord. “We are no longer oppressed by the fear of want, or excited by the love of gain; but in working for God, and with the assurance that every blow we strike with the hammer, and every stroke of the spade or shovel, tells in favor of his cause, our labor becomes to us a daily-increasing source of pleasure and profit.”<sup>346</sup>

Work at Oneida, in the hearts of the membership, was “a religious ordinance.” Those individuals bound to work for wages alone lived in a state just above slavery, in Noyes’ thinking, while those individuals who had higher spiritual goals would always find work “attractive” because they were working for higher purposes and more lasting goals. By exemplifying these goals, in the end, Noyes hoped that his community would become a beacon to the rest of the world, the proverbial city on a hill. A member, probably echoing his leader’s call, wrote about the industrial aspect of the community in the Circular: “Its complete and perfect development is destined to be the most obvious and out-spoken representation or expression proclaiming to the world the interior spiritual beauty and harmony which constitutes the kingdom of God upon earth. It is the ensign by which we shall exhibit to the world our nationality.”<sup>347</sup>

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Fourier (Carl J. Guarneni, “Reconstructing the Antebellum Communitarian Movement: Oneida and Fourierism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (1996), 480 - 481)

<sup>345</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 18 September 1856, 1 November 1869.

<sup>346</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 17 June 1867.

<sup>347</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 4 September 1855, 17 September 1857.

Like Etienne Cabet, John Humphrey Noyes believed in technology. As he proudly asserted, “I am a mechanic, and have always been so. . . .” An inventor, who developed new machinery to speed the Oneida trap shops and who invented a traveling bag that the community later sold, Noyes believed very firmly in the mechanical arts as the best means to support a community. He noted how the cooperative system in use at Oneida made it possible for its members to work with greater efficiency, as well as to have the capital to purchase new conveniences as they became available, particularly steam power. He continually derided the emphasis on agricultural held by other communal groups, particularly the Fourierists. Noyes clearly saw that the nineteenth century had fallen to the machinists, and not to the farmers. No Jeffersonian, Noyes did not mourn this state of affairs, rather, he embraced it, for he believed that machinery would be a boon not only to his own community of followers, but to the world at large.<sup>348</sup>

Humans, Oneidans reasoned, were not meant for heavy labor; rather, they were meant to “conquer nature by mind, intelligence, a good spirit and social unity.” Accordingly, the Community adopted new technologies, such as steam power and the telephone as soon as they became practical or available. The new technology that human intellect created would help to free humanity from its bondage to physical labor, while working in association would bring free humanity from its social bondage as well, and create the good state. The *Circular* noted evidence of this, suggesting in the 1850s that “[t]he new force which expresses present civilization, is seen in our World’s Fairs, and in such projects as the Trans-atlantic Telegraph and Pacific Rail Road.” Technology, the improvement of work, the editorialist felt, was supplanting war as the driving force of civilization. “McCormic’s [sic] Reaper will in the end

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<sup>348</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 1 January 1866, 1 November 1869.

eclipse Napoleon's Austerlitz," he proclaimed, and predicted that "Work and love will together ease the memory of wars and curses from the earth and make it bloom with undreamed of beauty for its King."<sup>349</sup>

Once sin had been conquered, the *Circular* declared, the same forces that organized armies and navies could be brought to bear on labor and "Industrial Armies,' instead of devastating ones [would] be organized for the subjugation of continents." Once the world had been brought into harmony through this productive use of human enthusiasm, it would mirror heaven, in the thinking of the editorialist. Nineteenth century conflicts, between nations and within nations, between the opposing forces of labor and capital, would disappear. "When all the laboring people form themselves into Communities they will be self-sustaining and independent of the capitalists, who will then be forced wither to join the societies or to roll up their sleeves and go to work." Communitarians as diverse as the members of Oneida, the Harmony Society and the Fourierists all strove for this ideal arrangement of society, believing that once this state was achieved wonderful, mystical things could happen on earth. Once humanity looked above instead of to the earth below, their ambitions and hopes might be realized..... The Community decried the conditions faced by workers in the outside world under the "hireling" system, and praised new legislation that shortened work days and otherwise improved conditions. The industrial revolution and ensuing prosperity, which ought to have been a blessing, was turning men into little more than machines and slaves, demoralizing them and robbing them of self-respect. All of these problems, the Oneidans felt, could be averted if "men become wise enough to combine, and manage their interests in favor of unity." When all people learned to live and work together, to value each other's

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<sup>349</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 10 May 1855, 3 January 1856; *American Socialist*, 26 September 1878.

contributions, and to devote themselves to the advancement of spiritual and social aims, a better state of affairs would follow.<sup>350</sup>

From their memoirs, and from the accounts they contributed to the weekly *Oneida Circular*, the propaganda organ that Noyes sent to a diverse group of adherents outside the Community, Oneidans displayed the reality of the work day life of their Community. From these accounts, it is possible to describe the part that a typical member played in the labor of the Community, from birth and childhood, to adulthood and, eventually into old age. We can also observe how Noyes' ideas effected the organization of labor within the Community, particularly the role of women in that work.

From 1849 to 1869 only forty-four children were born at Oneida. Of these, five births had been sanctioned by the Community, while another eight had been conceived before their parents joined, leaving only thirty-one "accidental" pregnancies -- a figure that the community pointed to with pride since it suggested the effectiveness of male continence. An additional number of children were brought to Oneida by their parents, for a total of 135 children in the Community before 1869. Because of the Community's poverty, it viewed producing children as hindering its work and endangering its survival and a pregnancy "was considered a serious detriment to the Society."<sup>351</sup>

The largest number of children within the community were those born during the stirpiculture experiment of the 1870s when Noyes, infused with the thinking of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, attempted the only eugenics experiment ever carried out in the United States. Under stirpiculture, individuals wishing to have children applied to a

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<sup>350</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 22 February 1855, 5 June 1865; *American Socialist*, 3 August 1876.

<sup>351</sup> Carden, *Oneida*, 51, 63; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 13.

governing board for permission to do so; the board then selected a mate, and allowed the couple to have a child. Because Noyes firmly believed that spirituality was a genetic trait, only those individuals of the proper spiritual understanding, such as himself, were permitted to have children under stirpiculture. Noyes himself fathered eleven of the fifty-eight children born during the years it was in effect.<sup>352</sup>

Regardless of the circumstances under which they were born, all Oneida children were raised by their mothers until they were weaned, usually at nine months, after which they were taken from them by the Community in order to avoid “exclusive attachment.” One mother ruefully confided in her diary after being asked by Noyes to wean her son, “I consented though it is one of the greatest sacrifices of my life. I have enjoyed nursing the sweet little fellow very much indeed. “While the mother of a child could visit her offspring, Oneida children slept apart from their parents, and spent their days under the care of selected community members in a separate children’s house until they reached the age of twelve. The Community officially viewed the separation of women and their children as beneficial, both because it prevented mothers from forming exclusive attachments with their children, and because it freed each woman to “fill her place in the various industries of the household.” Children were the property of the community after all, and were taught by their caregivers to view all adult members as their parents although they were aware of who their biological parents were. In the case of adult members, one former Oneida child wrote, “the feeling was

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<sup>352</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 10; Carden, *Oneida*, 63.

Noyes’ sexual appetite can be gauged, in part, from the fact that he fathered five children before forming the Oneida Community and ten more under the stirpiculture experiment. Evidence suggests that Noyes may have fathered at least one of the “accidental” children born between the 1850s and the start of stirpiculture. As an adult, Jessie Kinsley became convinced that Noyes was her father, an opinion shared by Theodore Noyes and, evidently, by Noyes himself, who took an especial interest in the young woman’s well-being (Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 143; Kinsely, *A Lasting Spring*, 43)

ingrained in them that they were mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles to all of us children.”<sup>353</sup>

In the Children’s House the children engaged in supervised play and, when they were old enough, educational activities. Oneida children received an education “similar to that of children of prosperous families in the outside world.” At the age of four or five children began attending a kindergarten taught by a female member of the Community in her room. Here they drew pictures, folded paper, drew, learned their alphabets, learned how to count by using an abacus, and learned basic geography. Later, children entered the second level of education taught in the Seminary Building, where they were taught reading, spelling and multiplication as well as typesetting – “A favorite with the boys” – ostensibly so that they could later assist with the Community publishing enterprises. From a very young age children were taught by their care givers to share toys and, growing up together, the children were raised, by the Community, as literally so many little brothers and sisters.<sup>354</sup>

Like other nineteenth century children, adult Oneidans gave children various simple tasks to perform at a young age. These tasks not only utilized their labor, but also created a bond whereby the children felt themselves contributing to the Community as a whole. Very young children were taught by adults to carry their dishes to the dish washing room, at the age when they were tall enough to lift them up to the table surrounding the washing vats. They swept floors and cleaned table knives and forks with brick dust. During the early days of the Community very young children spent an hour each day braiding palm-leaf hats,

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<sup>353</sup> Hinds, *American Communities*, 129 - 130; Tirzah Miller, *Desire and Duty at Oneida*, 102; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 15. Hinds says 9 months for weaning, elsewhere I have seen 6 and Kephart insists on 15 months. Tirzah Miller weaned her son at 5.5 months (Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 133; Tirzah, *Desire and Duty*, 102)



shelling beans, husking corn and, in later years, making boxes for the silk industry. Young boys brought kindling and wood from the woodshed, while all the children helped picking strawberries, packing shingles and pulling bean vines at the end of the season. The *Circular* described the little five year olds doing this task for an hour each morning in 1873 as “all cheerful, busy workers.” Children pared apples and potatoes and ran countless small errands for adults, while older girls assisted with babysitting, an important duty, particularly following the introduction of stirpiculture.<sup>355</sup>

After about 1873, older children spent an hour each day after lunch in the “chain room” in the Mansion House basement, making some of the fourteen-inch chains used on each Community trap. Each older boy had a “stent” of 100 chains to make, and had to remain at work until he had completed that number. Girls and younger boys untangled links for the chain makers. The Chain Room was primarily a children’s space, where the little workers sat on high stools around tables with one foot in a treadle, which operated a vise, and holding a “twister” in their right hands. “The operation consisted of seizing a malleable iron link, slipping it through the eye of a previous one, giving it a squeeze in the vise and evening the end by several quick snaps of its steel jaws.” The children were, in the words of one veteran of the chain room; “very competitive” until each had completed his “stent” taken off his work apron, washed his hands and gone outside to play. Supervisors inspected the children’s work and called back any child who had not completed his full “stent.” The *Circular* remarked that the boys were “often loath to stop at the end of the time allotted to them,”

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<sup>354</sup> Carden, *Oneida*, 64; Corinna Ackley Noyes, *The Days of My Youth* (Utica, New York: The Widtman Press, 1960), 52, 54.

<sup>355</sup> Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 62; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 19, 21 – 22, 37; *Oneida Circular*, 29 October 1857, 22 November 1869, 11 September 1871, 9 June 1873, 15 September 1873.

because “they enjoy the work as well as play,” a fact born out by Pierrepont Noyes’ adult recollections of his experience there.<sup>356</sup>

The chain room was always typically a stop on tours of the Mansion given to visitors, for whose approving comments the boys listened eagerly. Although the children worked with metal, including vises, accidents do not appear to have been part of the chain room experience. The children were productive, as evidenced by a report that between February and November 1878 they produced 182,111 trap chains, “besides three weeks’ work on halter-chains, of which no record was kept,” in addition to producing 4,000 boxes for use by the fruit department and picking small fruits during the summer.<sup>357</sup>

As with their adult counterparts, children often performed specific simple tasks, such as nailing packing cases together for the community canning department. Activities like this served to connect the children to the industry of the Community, and, by inference, to the community as a whole and, therefore, were a powerful socialization factor, as suggested by Pierrepont Noyes’ comment “We children though we were making all the chains used and considered ourselves important factors in the business.” Young Oneida Community children were taught by their caregivers to think of themselves as parts of a larger whole and not as individuals. By involving children in work the Community attempted to instill values in its youngest members so that they would “grow up industrious men and women.” Children were further made aware of the industries of the Community through their own curiosity as they

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<sup>356</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 27 January 1873; Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 101, 103. The *Circular* reported on the efforts of five year old Pierrepont and his associates, noting the production of each boy during their first work on the job. The future head of the Oneida Silverware Company made 128 chains that week, 31 more than the other two boys his age made respectively (*Oneida Circular*, 13 December 1871, 398)

<sup>357</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 103; *American Socialist*, 28 November 1878.

wandered from shop to shop watching Oneida craftsmen making shoes, clothing, tin ware, traps and cleaning laundry.<sup>358</sup>

The Oneida education, with its strong emphasis on manual training, mirrors the *Volksschule* of the Amana Society in which adults taught young children how to knit and older children tended the school gardens, helped with harvest and orchards and sometimes assisted in the Community kitchens or craft shops. In both cases, Community leaders viewed teaching children to labor as instilling in them a good work ethic, as well as helping them to view themselves as a part of the larger community while also keeping children busy during the day instead of underfoot.

Oneida boys, encouraged by the emphasis on the activity generated by the Community's most profitable industry, trapped otter, muskrats and even skunks, which they sold for money, "the first [real money] we had even possessed." Trapping was a common activity among rural boys of the time, but the financial rewards the Oneida children received ran counter to the communal nature of their community. The children seemingly went unpunished for this activity. It is unclear how the leaders of the Community viewed this "private income." Had such practices been frowned upon, it is unlikely that they would have been tolerated among impressionable young children. The money earned from trapping, while insignificant financially, opened children to a wider world of financial reward and gain beyond the walls of the Community.<sup>359</sup>

An interesting practice that grew up among young children during the 1870s was using the little tin disks produced in the process of making cans for the community, as

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<sup>358</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 92, 101, 119-123; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 20; *Oneida Circular*, 23 December 1872.

<sup>359</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 96.

money. Pierrepont Noyes recalled a “sudden rage for buying and selling with tins as legal tender.” Children sold services to each, such as each other’s turns on the common velocipede. One child, whose parents had given him liquorish, made and sold licorice water. The sudden discovery of several barrels of the little disks led to inflation, lessening the interest for the game among the children whose activity seemingly went unnoticed, or unpunished, by their communistic elders.<sup>360</sup>

As adults, Oneida children wrote fondly of their childhood years. While these memoirs, like most such efforts, are tinged with nostalgia, little that is contained in them, or alluded to in accounts of childcare at Oneida, at least after the hard early years of the Community, is unpleasant. Although the separation of parent and child that occurred when children were placed in the children’s house is abhorrent to modern sensibilities, it was, after all, the only way of life that these children knew. Oneida children received solid educations and good nutrition, were shown affection by literally, hundreds of adults, and lived with dozens of children their own age. The work that the Community assigned them to do, making chains, braiding hats and producing boxes for the silk products of the Community, was minimal compared to that expected of children in the outside world. While Oneida children might spend an hour making chains, their young counterparts in the outside world might spend several times that helping with heavy farm labor and other tasks.

Oneida children had a pleasant life, and their adult supervisors did not let them forget this fact. In 1871, one addressed the children reminding them that “in England there are thousands and thousands of children no older than you are that have to work for a living,” and reminding them to “appreciate the privileges [they] enjoy[ed] in not having to look out

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<sup>360</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 97.

for work or for a living.” The speaker was concerned that children were “in danger” of growing up without understanding, or appreciating, the differences between their upbringing and the outside world. The generation of children to whom he spoke that night, however, would only be teenagers when the Oneida Community reorganized, and would come to know all too well the need for earning a living.<sup>361</sup>

After completing school, around the age of twelve to fourteen, Oneida children entered the adult work force, although they still participated in the wide-ranging series of adult educational activities practiced by the Community. Adults at Oneida received work assignments that changed frequently, and there was a tendency in the community to encourage members to work at a variety of different trades in order to prevent exclusive attachments from forming, even between a worker and his craft. Despite these frequent changes, certain members remained with particular trades for extended periods of time. Harriet Worden, for example, began work in the Community printing office and remained there as a typesetter, writer and editor for the duration of her work life in the Community. Mr. Van Velzer, the community cobbler, was a specialist, and, in the memory of Pierrepoint Noyes was “one of the few men who never changed jobs.” Other individuals, such as Victor Hawley, seem to have moved between jobs with some frequency.<sup>362</sup>

Work activity at Oneida showed relatively little regimentation. In many cases, committees discussed what jobs needed to be done, and which individuals were qualified and available to perform them. The typical work day began at any point between five and seven thirty a.m. when individual members found their way to the Community dining room for

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<sup>361</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 16 January 1871.

<sup>362</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 14 November 1864, 22 November 1869; Pierrepoint Noyes, *My Father's House*, 120.

breakfast. After a short common Bible reading, members went to their assigned jobs where they would remain until three p.m. at which time dinner was served (the Oneida Community only ate two meals a day). During the day members often passed through “the court,” an entrance hall located between the main building and south wing of the Mansion House. The court contained a peg board, which members could use to indicate where they were to be found during the day, as well as a bulletin board that contained announcements of meetings, lost and found advertisements, and notices of upcoming work bees and other events. The court served as the nerve center of the Community. Following dinner, members attended adult classes in the sciences, language, religion or whatever else interested them, then convened for the nightly evening meeting. Most members retired by ten o’clock.<sup>363</sup>

Members worked six days a week, taking Sunday off from their regular labors. Observance of the Sabbath at Oneida appears to have been a practice the community adopted in order to not offend their hired workers and visitors, but did not reflect their own view that the obligation to observe it, “passed with the Jewish dispensation,” i.e. ended with the appearance of Christ.<sup>364</sup>

In the early days of the community, Sunday was a day of work on which, one trap shop worker reported, “the ring of our six anvils in the morning sounded like the cheerful call of church-bells.” By the 1860s, however, a member could write that “Sunday . . . is a day of books and pens, of music and meetings, and sometimes of . . . committees.” In contrast to society at large, Sunday was not a day for a special church service at Oneida. Indeed, the Community considered its nightly meetings to be its formal religious observance. In

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<sup>363</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 12; *Oneida Circular*, 17 March 1874; Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 118.

<sup>364</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 270

remarking on the construction of a new wing of the Mansion House, an Oneida member sarcastically noted that work ended on Sunday and “all is as silent as a church on week days,” suggesting that the religious observances of the world were confined to Sunday, whereas, at Oneida, they were week-long, for a people who regarded their work as worship, then, banging an anvil on a Sunday morning was akin to kneeling in prayer. The Community, however, did hold a religious meeting Sundays at 2 p.m., “for the benefit of outsiders” and since, “it did’nt [sic] amount to much,” they discontinued it.<sup>365</sup>

Oneidans shunned the “Sunday spirit” and while they may have taken time away from more strenuous labor in order to conform to the dictates of their hired workers and visitors, they did not abstain from other labor activity such as washing, holding meetings and various bees and singing school. Victor Hawley, a member of the Community in the 1870s, noted doing light labor such as writing letters, laying a carpet and recreation such as going for walks, working with his insect collection, dancing and reading, on Sundays. By 1873, the little boys in the trap shop also reported for work on Sunday. Sunday was also the day on which the community held its business meeting at which the foremen of the departments, as well as members having proposals to make, presented themselves before the business board, after which they reported at the evening meeting. Occasionally, the women held a business meeting dealing with “general order about [the] house,” but these were only called “as occasion demands.” The rest of the day included meetings of small classes and study groups.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 10 January 1856, 4 April 1864, 26 July 1869, 2 July 1863, 21 June 1869.

<sup>366</sup> Hawley, *Special Love*, 92, 114; *Oneida Circular*, 4 April 1864; 13 December 1875.

Generally, Oneida members did not work hard; indeed they seem to have exerted less effort than virtually any other major communal group, particularly when compared with the strenuous Shakers. As William Kephart has observed, the Oneida members were not particularly interested in creating an efficient working environment, rather they were much more interested in creating a “we spirit” within the community in which all lived and worked together as a family unit. Oneida members were not lazy; they worked when they had to, but always guarded themselves against “legalism” and regimentation in their work environment. Furthermore, as Harriet Skinner, Noyes’ sister observed of “they whose lives are joined to Christ. . . [n]othing can make them lazy,” because, unlike outsiders who worked only to gain the money that would allow them leisure time, community members were working to please God. Love of Christ, was the “motive power” behind Oneida labor. For Oneida members’ work was a sign of their consecration to God, to fail in their labor was to invite God’s displeasure.<sup>367</sup>

Rotation in work was common, and encouraged. In addition to lending their efforts to various bees as needed community members seem to have changed jobs on a fairly regular basis. “Variety in labor,” Noyes commented during an evening meeting, was key to maintaining interest in employment. During his adult life as a member of the Oneida Community Myron Kinsley worked as a blacksmith, cobbler, mechanic, cook, painter, nurse and farmer. Another member, who had been a lawyer before coming to Oneida, remarked, “[I]n the course of years I was cook, baker, farm-hand, shop-hand, laundry man, fruit-hand, book-keeper, stoker, pipe-fitter, lamp-cleaner, proof-reader, editor and it is hard to remember what I did not do.” An unidentified young man, raised in the Community, reported that by

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<sup>367</sup> Kephart, *Extraordinary Groups*, 119; *Oneida Circular*, 22 March 1855.



1869 he had divided his time working in the trap shop, the farm, the dairy and at jobs such as housecleaning and bookkeeping.<sup>368</sup>

Rotation in work assignments meant that members were unable to establish the kind of “exclusive attachments” to their labor that the community tried to prevent in its personal relationships. Additionally, rotation in labor enforced the community ideal that all work was equal and should be accorded equal respect and also furthered the idea, within the minds of individual members, that they were part of a larger whole. The lawyer, who started life at Oneida as a cook, remarked that “No form of industry was considered degrading.... On the contrary, it was a privilege to be allowed to help in any capacity in so noble a cause.” He even recalled joking with the former Episcopalian minister who was in charge of the community earth closets about the “incongruity of our early studies and training with such occupations,” but both regarded it as a “huge joke.” Finally, Oneida members found religious significance in their job rotations. Since Christ taught that all should “become as little children” and since children have “an aversion to routine,” then changing their work and routines made them retain a child like spirit. Since Noyes constantly argued against routine, rotation can be seen as a key element in reinvigorating the community. As a contributor to the *Circular* stated, “Appetite, or enthusiasm for work, is the main thing to secure efficiency.” By rotating jobs Oneidans hoped to maintain their appetite for labor.<sup>369</sup>

While they might have a specific trade, Oneida members were all expected to participate, as able, in the “bees” that the community regularly called in order to perform a task such as shelling peas, assembling traveling bags, hoeing the garden, making beds and

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<sup>368</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 13 May 1858, 22 November 1869; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 49; Estlake, *The Oneida Community*, 68.

every Sunday when a bee was held to fold the copies of the *Circular* and prepare them for shipping. In this way, the Oneida Community simply adopted a typical practice from the rural New England of its origins and adapted it for community use. Bees were voluntary, and usually lasted approximately an hour. In addition to bringing a large labor force to bear on a particular task, the bees also made that labor enjoyable for members. Not only did many hands make fast work of a task, but virtually every task became a game for the adult members of the Community. “We well remember the time when we all gathered under the butternut-tree at the call of fife and beat of drum with the enthusiasm and eagerness of little children, to attend a bee for planting or cutting corn.” At some bees a member would read to the workers from a popular novel or other literary work, including books by Cooper, Thackery, Dickens, Charlotte Bronte and Sir Walter Scott. At one bag bee Oneidans listened as a visitor to the community told of his adventures on a whaling ship.<sup>370</sup>

The simple act of sitting in a circle or across a table from their fellow members allowed Oneidans to talk, sing and otherwise socialize. Significantly, not only did men and women work side by side during these bees, but elderly and young members of the Community also mingled their labor. The “play spirit” was very important to the Oneida Community, not only in their leisure activities that were many and varied, but in their labor as well. This play spirit at work was evidenced not only in the bees but also when the community occasionally marched, en masse, to the fields to the sound of fife and drum.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Hawley, *Special Love*, 18; Eastlake, *The Oneida Community*, 68 -69, *Oneida Circular*, 8 February 1855, 1 February 1855.

<sup>370</sup> Worden, *Old Mansion House*, 78; *Oneida Circular*, 4 October 1855, 28 February 1856, 3 September 1857, 22 January 1866, 5 August 1867, 13 September 1875.

<sup>371</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 5 August 1867; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 5, 10.

Other bees, involving picking strawberries or hoeing were popular with members of all ages, including children, one of whom remembered thinking during one bee, “[o]utsiders never have such fun as our folks.” Leaders usually advertised a bee by a sign in the dining hall or on the bulletin board in the court, often in sideshow poster style as in the announcement, “Rally round the flag, boys, rally once again, rally in the cause of – PEACHES!” A community member enthusiastically described the effect of over 171 members at work canning peaches: “We have never seen anything so brilliant. It was perfectly electric. The condensation of magnetic life produced a general sparkle and flash of mirth throughout the bee.” Members enjoyed bees, whether picking berries or peas, sitting at tables in order to assemble traveling bags, or even raking the lawn in “merry companies.” Less popular were the thrice weekly gatherings held in season to put up horseradish, which Harriet Skinner noted were “pathetic Bees,” because of the odor and tears caused by the ground horseradish.<sup>372</sup>

The heart of the Oneida view of labor was contained in the bees. Here, men and women worked side by side. Here, to, the Community generally made an amusement out of unpleasant work. The goods made at bees, such as traveling bags, straw hats and processed fruit, were often items that the Community sold for its support, allowing each member to feel connected to that support. Finally, Oneidans viewed the bees as “industrial communion . . . as truly edifying and as attractive to the influx of Christ’s spirit as meetings for religious communion ever were.” With their belief in consecrated labor, Oneidans at bees were fulfilling their duty to God, communing with His spirit as well as in the fellowship of their

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<sup>372</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 123; Tirzah Miller, *Desire and Duty*, 14; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 37; Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 67 – 68.

fellow sisters and brothers in the religious community. Oneidans at a bee were Oneidans at worship.<sup>373</sup>

What is also clear from descriptions of bees and other work and worship at Oneida, is that the members of the Community literally viewed themselves as a sort of Christian army, bent on battling for their principles through the example of their work. Noyes, in particular, used military metaphors when referring to the Community. Upon arriving at Oneida in 1848 he referred to the earlier arrivals as “the first and only troops on the ground.” Military metaphors such as describing pea harvesters as a “storming party,” its short lived New York office as a “four years campaign” and to praise its women as having “proved themselves good soldiers...” or as “Community soldiers,” abounded in Oneida publications. During the Civil War, during which the Oneida men escaped the draft through an oversight of the enrolling officer, a member noted “We consider ourselves fellow conscripts with the new-made soldiers, but drawn to serve in a different field. Indeed, while most of them have been enjoying life in the usual way, we have been encamped for the last sixteen years, pioneering in a grand struggle against worst foes to the common welfare than the southern secesh.” In an editorial, “HJS” referred to “the front ranks of our industrial army.” A trap shop worker, writing in the 1850s, likened the clanging anvils to “the excitement and sublimity of battle,” and “[t]hank[ed] God for a place in the front rank of this work-battle.” Still later, the same correspondent noted that the silk peddlers “are getting ready to deploy for the spring campaign.” A reference to a bag bee likened its success to “the Napoleonic principle of

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<sup>373</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 22 February 1855.

throwing a very strong force on to the point of attack – a principle as useful in labor as in war.<sup>374</sup>

Rather than a burden, labor, in addition to being a sacred cause, was rendered almost an amusement at Oneida. Overarching all work within the community, was the belief that all work, undertaken for the good of the whole, was noble and worthwhile. No matter how lowly the occupation, it could be elevated by “the spirit in which it [was] pursued.” A person who “labors in true heavenly enthusiasm,” could make boot blacking or making traps “as noble employments as preaching or publishing.” “The meanest occupation through which shines a lofty purpose,” Community members argued, “becomes glorious.” Since the Community encouraged job rotation, most members at one time or another found themselves with lowly tasks to perform. James Herrick who had a very aristocratic appearance, was once asked by a visitor, “what office he held [?] ‘I am the rinser of dishes,’ James Herrick gravely replied.” By infusing these tasks with a sense of higher purpose, perhaps enjoying them as a part of a “bee,” or employing one of the many mechanical devices invented by community members to expedite labor, workers at Oneida had little time for discontentment.<sup>375</sup>

To work at Oneida was to fulfill a God-given purpose. Oneidans firmly believed that their society mirrored Heaven itself, and that the ways in which they worked reflected God’s purposes as well. Oneida members worked as a duty, both to themselves and to God. Correspondents to the *Circular* repeatedly suggested that the motivation for work at Oneida was unselfish; people did not work to become rich but instead they worked to further the

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<sup>374</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 390; *Oneida Circular*, 10 January 1856, 16 July 1857, 17 September 1857, 20 March 1862, 25 September 1862, 16 August 1863, 22 May 1865, 30 March 1868, 11 May 1868.

<sup>375</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 5 April 1855, 18 July 1864; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 297.

spiritual life of their fellow members and to fulfill their duty to God by following the principles of pure Christianity.<sup>376</sup>

Noyes and his followers seemed to have been obsessed with establishing the true motivation for their labor. In his home talks and editorials for the *Circular*, Noyes repeatedly pointed to what he termed the “hireling system” and the wages that workers received under it as little better than slavery. Workers beyond the Community, Noyes contended, worked with the thought of obtaining a “competency” that would free them for having to work later in life. Oneidans, he charged, had a higher purpose in that they worked for the Lord, “the sure paymaster,” alone, and the satisfaction that they received through Him. To work for wages was to abolish the brotherhood that should exist between a worker and his employer, to create an unnatural division between people, and to introduce a “mercenary element” into labor that destroyed, what Noyes viewed, as its divine purpose and make it instead into, “a mere human and selfish affair.” Instead of sinking to this level, the *Circular* countered, “We go for downright Communism, and every man’s right to labor as unto the Lord, and in brotherhood with all laborers in the Lord’s vineyard.”<sup>377</sup>

Drudgery in the Community, both in work and in other activities, was lessened to a degree, by the frequent entertainment activities in which the members engaged. At one point the game of croquet became so popular among community members, that they played it in the wintertime. The community was forever staging plays or musical entertainments, including a production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* during the final days of community life. The Oneida orchestra and band frequently played both for the community and in surrounding

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<sup>376</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 28 August 1865.

<sup>377</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 17 July 1856, 14 August 1856, 11 September 1871.

towns. Noyes participated in the orchestra, playing second violin. Oneida members tolerated Noyes' "distressing, off-key mutterings...with a smile..." When they were not working or playing, Oneida members of all ages participated in afternoon classes on a variety of subjects. Indeed, as one member noted in later life, belonging to the Community was "like entering college for life." Everyone was constantly, in a sense, at school. The journalist, Charles Nordhoff, during his 1874 visit, observed that "the standard of education among them is considerably above the average," and attributed this fact, in no small part, to the continuing education programs of the Community.<sup>378</sup>

One of the goals of Bible Communism, according to its proponents, was to deliver men from "the curse of hard work," while at the same time freeing women from "the curse of excessive propagation, and bringing about an entire amalgamation of the sexes in all useful industry." Male continence freed women from what Noyes and his followers believed was the curse of excessive childbirth and childrearing endured by nineteenth century women, while the unique social ideals of the community concerning gender roles served to facilitate greater involvement in Community industry by women. Women outside the Community, Oneidans felt, lived lives of unrelenting drudgery, their burdens not eased by machinery, and unenlivened by intellectual and social activity.<sup>379</sup>

Noyes believed that a "duality" existed in all forms of labor; that each task that humans performed had a male and a female component, "a bass and a treble" or "a light part," and that it was the duty of men to find what part of his work which "belongs to woman." Thus, while a man might be physically suited to pound iron at a forge, a woman

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<sup>378</sup> Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 25; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 9 – 10; Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 288.

<sup>379</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 24 April 1856, 19 March 1857, 2 April 1857, 25 September 1871.

was physically able to power the bellows to heat that forge. Noyes did not believe that women should engage in work that he felt they were physically unable to perform, but that the Community should try to find, in all of its labor activities, a place wherein women could contribute. Community members, like George Cragin, saw in the development of horse driven farm equipment, for example, an opportunity for women to broaden the scope of their agricultural work by freeing some tasks from heavy manual labor. By 1873, an “informal census” of the Community found a woman superintending the spooling department, five women working in the machine shop, one woman working as an elementary teacher, three women teaching classes in music, drawing and writing, and another woman as editor of the *Circular*. Additionally, three to four women served as compositors in the printing office. Women made paper boxes for the silk industry, while other women performed additional tasks in connection in this industry, and a team of women served as the bookkeepers for the Community.<sup>380</sup>

The limits that the Community placed on the role of women are suggested by their reaction to a letter, signed “D.D.” and printed in the *Circular* of 14 August 1865. In this letter, “D.D.” declared that “there is no sex in labor; ...there is no occupation which is not equally adapted to both sexes,” and that division in labor along sexual lines was due to education.” The *Circular* editorial commented on this piece in a more limited vein. Rather than suggesting full equality of labor, as “D.D.” argued, the editor commented, “When the

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<sup>380</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 30 March 1855, 1 February 1855, 24 April 1855, 14 August 1856, 25 July 1864, 10 February 1873.

As an aside in a letter, later published in the *Circular*, Noyes pointed to the example of Aquila and his wife Priscilla, both tent makers described in Acts 18:3 as individuals with whom the apostle Paul worked. “Observe,” Noyes wrote. . . . “that there was a wholesome mixing up of the sexes in that little industrial partnership which Paul joined.” For Noyes, there could be no higher endorsement of any principal than to find it accepted by Saint Paul (*Oneida Circular*, 16 September 1858, 133)



sexes shall come into the harmonic relation that God designed them for, the one as head and the other as helper, all questions of their respective spheres will disappear.” This statement shows the limits of the Community’s view regarding women’s labor: while they heartily believed women should enter fields, they should only do so as the “companion of man,” not as his equal, and should only perform those tasks the Community felt were suited to their feminine capabilities.<sup>381</sup>

By having men and women work side by side Noyes hoped to promote a sense of equality and fellowship between them, as well as increasing the sense of purpose that women felt in contributing to the Community. Women, the Community felt, were primarily meant to be the companions of men, and should therefore be associated with them in work as well as worship and social life. Women were not, however, merely producers of children and household drudges.<sup>382</sup>

Contributors to the *Circular* reported the ways in which women fit into traditionally male roles. At the trap shop, for example, males had found that there were adjustments and fine work that “women’s fingers are fitted to do” and were better suited to them than to “the more ponderous action of masculine hands. A male member who had helped women that day make hoes noted the “mechanical judgment and skill which some of them display,” and suggested that “[t]hey only need a chance for exercise, and they will become very efficient.” Male members of the Community charged that the appearance of women in the shop had positive results, not only in regards to their labor, but as a civilizing influence. Precisely why women were having this effect was not stated, only that “the presence of women made a

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<sup>381</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 14 August 1865.

<sup>382</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 24 April 1855.

change in the spirit of the whole thing.” The Community viewed the appearance of women in the shops not only as a “civilizing” influence, but also as a means of making the labor more attractive to both men and women by providing them with what they viewed as their God-given rights of companionship and association. In *Bible Communism*, the Community expressed these views: “Loving companionship in labor, and especially the mingling of the sexes, makes labor attractive.” In the current state of affairs, the argument suggests, men and women were separated in their daily work: women in the house and men in outside employment. The Oneida system brought them together, thus making labor attractive.<sup>383</sup>

The duality of labor, to an extent, went both ways. Not only did women assist in male occupations, but, to a limited degree, men assisted in female occupations, such as helping with the weekly Community washing and waiting on tables in the dining room. In the kitchen, men did such “heavy work” as carrying heavy dishes of food to the table, and moving large containers of provisions, such as potatoes. Not only did such activity serve to lessen the demands on the female membership and to reduce the time they spent in the standard household drudgery of the day, but it helped to promote understanding between the genders. As a member noted, “Let any man undertake the task of making up half a dozen [beds] from day to day in the depth of winter, and he will soon discover the necessity of wearing mittens, and be prepared to appreciate some of the drudgery that women undergo.” Furthermore, tasks such as ironing, cooking and so on, there were “heavy and light parts,”

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<sup>383</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 1 February 1855, 16 August 1855, 1 May 1856, 14 August 1856; *Bible Communism: A Compilation from the Annual Reports & Other Publications of the Oneida Association and Its Branches* (Brooklyn: Oneida Community, 1853, reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973), 61.

meaning activities for both men and women. Men were to be found in the Community kitchen, and they were partnered with women in doing laundry.<sup>384</sup>

The role of women, however, was not to overextend what Noyes viewed as their physical limitations. Thus, “a woman cannot saw and split wood – we never wish to see her raising the unwieldy ax,” but, on the other hand, women could help to stack the wood once this labor had been done by men. In order to address critics who might charge that placing women in industrial work of this nature might “sacrifice the delicacy which is supposed to be indispensable to the highest type of feminine culture,” the community charged that they were not conforming to the world’s dictates but to God’s. They charged that “Delicacy that is preserved at the sacrifice of health, usefulness and happiness, seems to be too costly.” Women, the author of this editorial charged, should be man’s companion and should share whatever sacrifices it took to install ‘heavenly industry’ on earth.<sup>385</sup>

An anonymous contributor to the *Circular* decried the inequality between the wages men and women received for work on the outside, arguing that women, working in the capacities for which they were best suited, rendered services of equal value to those of men in their occupations. Inequality in wages, the contributor argued, was seemingly created by men “for the sake of keeping [women] in a state of helpless dependence.” Other contributors argued that women in the outside should be allowed to participate in business, but in areas such as book keeping, clerking and “any interior business that does not require great physical strength.” In so doing, the contributor argued, women would cease to be regarded as nothing more than a “spoiled child, a slave to his passions, or the servant to follow his bidding.”

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<sup>384</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 25 January 1855, 22 February 1855, 15 January 1855, 6 January 1868, 13 January 1868.

<sup>385</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 1 February 1855.

Labor beyond prevalent gender roles would also improve women's mental and physical health, and make her "a more intelligent companion for man," as well as "elevate the character of business operations" through their influence (an argument later used by suffragists in regard to politics as a reason why women should be able to vote.) Neither men nor women, the correspondent argued, should "lay such burdens on the other, as to hinder the development of the faculties that God has given each to use to [H]is glory and for the good of their fellow beings." Occasionally, the *Circular* noted, with approbation, the advancement of outside women in such fields as education, but arguing that "the greatest triumphs for working women are still before them," which would come, the author implied, under socialism.<sup>386</sup>

The Oneida Community advocated an expanded role of women, and felt that the prevailing work and social roles assigned to them by the outside world not only kept them in a state of subservience, but hindered their mental and physical health and development and, more importantly, violated the duality in work that God had intended people to recognize and to follow. This duality, however, clearly recognized that while women should be involved fully as helpers to men, and become involved in spheres of business beyond their homes, they were always to remain secondary to men in authority. Their utopian goal was nicely summarized by the editor of the *Circular* who stated, "When the sexes shall come into the harmonic relation that God designed them for, the one as head and the other as helper, all questions of their respective spheres will disappear. We do not see why women should not be the companion of man in every situation."<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 3 July 1865, 10 July 1865; *American Socialist*, 23 May 1878.

<sup>387</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 14 August 1865.

Those women who wrote of their experiences in the *Circular* did so in glowing terms, as befitting contributions to what was essentially a propaganda organ. One woman wrote that “we are conscious that our lives are purer, our purposes nobler, our aspirations higher,” than in the lifestyle proscribed for women by the outside world where they would be subject to “the drains of forced maternity and to the corroding effects of the monotonous routine of household duties.” Indeed, this woman argued, “Community women have risen to a position where, in labor, in mind, and in heart, they have all and more than all that is claimed or can be claimed by the women who are so loudly asserting their rights.” Another female editorialist, pointing to the advantages of communal work, noted that, “you will not hear doleful complains of overwork, weary vigils with sick children, everything going at sixes and sevens in the house, all the winter’s clothing for the family to be made, and no help to be had, etc. etc.” A final correspondent, S. K. D. wrote that, “I find a great deal of pleasure in working at the trap-business, and appreciate the social advantages we have there, as well as take delight in the fact that we women are producing something.”<sup>388</sup>

In a sense, in believing they had advantages over most nineteenth century women, both editorialists were correct. Oneida women did have a greater diversity of career opportunities, they were freed from most of the duties of child care, they were not isolated, almost always sharing even mundane household tasks with other women, and their labor was, theoretically, infused with a sense of higher religious purpose and calling. Furthermore, as the editorialist asserted, women at Oneida were able to read and study, and, indeed, were encouraged in their intellectual development. From a nineteenth century standpoint, the

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<sup>388</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 14 February 1856, 7 November 1870; 9 January 1871.

women of Oneida were “liberated,” while, at the same time, maintaining a secondary status to men.

While the Community promoted the idea of equality between men and women in work, women still performed gender specific tasks. “Duality” in labor seems to have meant more how women could find their place in traditionally male work, “female – men” to appropriate an Oneida term, and not vice versa. In 1870 a report on the “Culinary Labor” of the Community noted that “[a]bout one fourth of this labor is performed by Community men,” male members seemed to have eschewed traditional female roles. There appears to have been some hesitancy on the part of Oneida men to assume traditional women’s roles. As “Mr. B” observed in a conversation on labor transcribed and printed in the *Circular*, “we are not yet entirely free from the old worldly notion that women’s work is not as valuable as mans’s’ For example, Oneida women worked in the kitchen and the community laundry, schoolroom and at housework. Oneida women, however, differed from their outside counterparts in also helping with farm labor, construction, and publishing. Similarly, women in Oneida were freed from the need to both cook and clean all day as their outside counterparts, leading one member to comment, years after she had joined the community with her husband, that in joining “I found emancipation from household drudgery and social slavery.”<sup>389</sup>

One of the gender specific duties assigned to women was the care of the clothing of anywhere from one to three men, since, under complex marriage, men did not have specific wives to perform this duty. Known as “mothers” to the men assigned to them, women did whatever mending the clothes of their assigned male charges needed, as well as knitting, at

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<sup>389</sup> *Bible Communism*, 62; *Oneida Circular*, 22 August 1870; Hinds, *American Communities*, 121; Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 15.

the little round tables with individual kerosene lamps spread about the assembly room during the nightly community meetings. Since a lot of time might be required to do their assigned mending, women naturally preferred to do this in the meeting room where, if they were not able to socialize, they could listen to presentations or to the reading of a novel by a community member. In addition to caring for the clothes of assigned males, Oneida women needed to make their own clothes, each receiving a sixty dollar annual allowance to buy clothing material and other incidentals. Oneida women continued to work well into their pregnancy which, in the case of Jessie Kinsley's mother, meant spending time "at the bench in the trap-mill, pounding out springs and flattening pans."<sup>390</sup>

In assessing the role of women at Oneida, scholar Marlyn Klee-Hartzel notes that the Society held to a "conventional, domestic system of women's labor that kept women focused on men and men's needs." Klee-Hartzel does suggest, however, that the Oneida Community clearly offered women advantages, including lighter work, and education and leisure opportunities that were not shared by women outside the community and which "most Oneida women" said they appreciated." William Dixon, who visited the Community in the late 1860s, made a similar assessment commenting that the Oneida system "gives a great deal of power to women," and that "[t]he ladies all seem busy, brisk, content...those to whom I have spoken...all say they are very happy in their lot." In conclusion, while the Community failed to live up to its own propaganda it did manage to foster an environment that was ultimately beneficial to women on some levels.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 24, 55- 56; *Oneida Circular*, 20 January 1868; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 13 – 14.

<sup>391</sup> Marlyn Klee-Hartzell, "The Oneida Community Family" *Communal Societies* 16 (1996), 21 – 22; Dixon, *New America*, 422.

The Community noted developments in the world outside that boded well for an expanded role for women in the workforce. In 1874, an Oneida member surveyed the last census to discover the various occupations performed by women, and noted that more than eighty were enumerated. None of these, however, included machinists, which led the Circular to again argue for the inclusion of women in this line of work, as they were within the Community.<sup>392</sup>

As at Amana, particular women who were skilled at nursing, with “sympathetic qualities and . . . knowledge of simple alleviations and remedies,” were called in to help during times of special need. Oneida women also assisted at midwives during childbirth. “A new member” writing of his experience in the Community found himself assigned “a combination of light duties” including the care of a man who had suffered a stroke. In describing his service, this individual commented on one of the salient features of communal life: that if an individual was injured, became too old to work or was incapacitated they did not need to worry that their family might become destitute as a result.<sup>393</sup>

The position of the elderly at Oneida was quite similar to the treatment of the elderly in the average rural family of the late nineteenth century. Those individuals still able to contribute in some way to the labor of the Community did so, while older members who were unable to contribute were lovingly cared for by younger members of the Community. Those physically able often performed work otherwise done by children, such as chain making, vegetable preparation, knitting and mending. Members believed that the elderly, through the ascending fellowship, could impart wisdom and spirituality to the young, and

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<sup>392</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 5 January 1874.

<sup>393</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 78 – 79; Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 32; *Oneida Circular*, 20 January 1868.



they remained part of Complex marriage and participated in community sports and activities as long as they were able. A member, writing in the *Oneida Circular*, remarked on one member, “Lady C.” who, although almost ninety years old and confined to her room, was overheard singing joyfully, evidence, the writer believed, “showing what Communism has done for the old....” When they became too old or incapacitated for work, the Community appointed someone, usually near their own age, to take care of them.<sup>394</sup>

Upon the death of a member, the Community buried their body in chronological order in a cemetery located near the Mansion House. Funerals were not dismal affairs but, rather, celebratory, as Oneidans believed it was wrong to mourn, in keeping with their belief in the resurrection through Christ. After one funeral, the *Circular* noted, “they had a pleasant time burying Florilla this morning. Everyone appeared cheerful and light-hearted; and the whole thing seemed...more like a picnic than a burial.”<sup>395</sup>

Although the Community initially professed that horticulture would be its chief pursuit, the incredible profitability of trap manufacture led them to depend on manufacturing for their income and, as a result, farming at Oneida was far less important to the overall fabric of labor in the community as compared to other communal societies. Noyes criticized these groups, and the Fourierists in particular, for their emphasis on agriculture, which he called “the hardest and longest of all roads to fortune,” and one which, when done by an association, would ultimately lead to conflict and dispute. “Almost any kind of factory would be better than a farm for a Community nursery,” Noyes wrote. The Oneida Community quickly discovered that while normal forms of crop and livestock agriculture might be

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<sup>394</sup>Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 36 – 37; *Oneida Circular*, 26 June 1862, 14 December 1874; Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 94.

<sup>395</sup>*Oneida Circular*, 21 March 1868.

unsuitable, as their leader believed, to community life, specialized fruit and vegetable growing and production was not, so the community made this type of production its “primary” form of agriculture, relegating field crops to “subordinate” status.<sup>396</sup>

For most of its history, Oneida grew strawberries and other fruits, with grain and livestock to supply their own needs on its 556 acres. Of their acreage, the Community devoted fifty acres to gardens and orchards, three acres each to grapes and to strawberries, 150 acres to meadow and the rest of the property to pastures and grain fields where they grew oats, barley and corn. The Community found that their “industrial army” allowed them to pick process and pack their fruit in an efficient way impossible to the average farmer who depended on the labor of his own family. In 1864 the produce of their fields included 1,000 bushels of apples, 100 bushels of plums and 200 bushels of pears as well as 30 bushels of cherries, 232 bushels of strawberries and 4,000 pounds of grapes. Both grape and strawberry production was down from the previous year, however, when the Community had harvested 400 bushels of strawberries and 7,000 pounds of grapes. These numbers, including the acreage of the Community, fluctuated over time, but the general focus of Oneida agriculture on fruit production remained a constant.<sup>397</sup>

Rather than have a farm, Oneida created a factory in the field, an integrated system of cultivation, harvest and processing that provided a significant income to the community but prevented them from falling into the agricultural traps that Noyes abhorred. The community realized that its workforce was key to making their form of agriculture profitable, and mused in the *Circular* that “to carry on fruit-growing successfully, Communism seems to be a

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<sup>396</sup> Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 48; *Oneida Circular*, 8 January 1857, 3 May 1869.

<sup>397</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 17 October 1864.

natural necessity,” and that “gardens need Communities to take care of them.” By allowing people to live efficiency and effectively on a small acreage, rather than the vast expanses favored by other communal enterprises or by their farming neighbors, Oneidans believed that they were once again proving the superiority of their organization.<sup>398</sup>

Among the most popular products marketed by the Oneida Community were traveling bags. This production started at Wallingford before moving, briefly, to the Brooklyn Community, but moved to Oneida when that outpost closed in 1854. Among the bags the Community manufactured was a “traveler’s lunch-bag” designed by John Humphrey Noyes himself, with special compartments for a compartment for clothes, as well as compartments for a lunch box, silverware and a flask of liquid. A few members cut the components for the bags, while the actual assembly, sewing and lining of the bags was done in “Bag-Bees” that usually involved from twenty to sixty community men, women and children. Because workers at bag bees, unlike the bees held to pick strawberries or weed the garden, sat the whole time the bees, “afford[ed] one of the finest opportunities for social interchange,” among members of the Community. By the end of the Civil War the demand for Oneida bags had increased to the point that the Community added hired help to aid in their production.<sup>399</sup>

In 1877 the Community began its final foray into manufacturing by producing its first silverware, at the Wallingford site. Making silverware was the suggestion of Charles Cragin (son of Mary) who died less than six months after the first spoon came from the Community machinery. Following the reorganization of the Community, in 1880, silverware gradually

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<sup>398</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 12 July 1855.

<sup>399</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 25 July 1864, 29 May 1865.

became the most important product of the new Oneida Corporation until, in 1925 it completely took over the production of the company, today known as Oneida Limited. Ironically, like the Amana Society, whose name is synonymous with kitchen appliances, the name Oneida is far more familiar as a brand name than as a communal society.<sup>400</sup>

Throughout its history, agricultural production remained important to the Oneida Community and its branches. The Wallingford Community's first industry was market gardening, once selling 950 bushels of strawberries in a single season, before entering its raspberry, blackberry and grape seasons. In 1877 the Community gardens produced a total of six acres of beans, eight acres of raspberries, 5,000 bushels of tomatoes and 5,224 bushels of sweet corn, all of it intended for the canning department. The Community also maintained a fifty head dairy herd and over forty five horses and colts; however their agricultural was primarily directed at producing canned material for commercial sale. Thus, even the community's agricultural pursuits ultimately assumed an industrial air.<sup>401</sup>

In its earliest years, the Oneida Community was unable to afford hiring labor from outside. With increasing prosperity, however, the Community began to hire workers from the surrounding area. Not only could Oneida afford to hire labor, but the increasing popularity of its products, particularly of their traps, made such labor a necessity. Community members resented the need to hire labor, charging that the early Spartan period when members all had to work hard, side by side, "were our happiest years."<sup>402</sup>

By 1866 the Community employed 154 hired workers who received a total of \$28,000 in wages in its various departments. The majority of these workers labored in the

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<sup>400</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 15; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 276.

<sup>401</sup> Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 67; Hinds, *American Communities*, 133.

<sup>402</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 16.

Community's factories, with sixty two in the trap factory, twenty-nine assisting with fruit preserving, fifteen in the silk factory, fourteen in the bag factory and twenty-two in agricultural work. At the same time, the Community estimated that it paid \$40,000 to its 230 hired workers. A year later, the Community reported that it paid \$56,532.39 for hired labor, although not specifying how many workers received these wages.<sup>403</sup>

Some of the labor performed by hired hands was seasonal and, as the Communities "Home Review for 1866" indicated, "not more than 100 were employed at any one time." By 1868 the Community's 230 hired workers received over \$40,000 in wages for their work in a single peak month. During this period the number of people that the community employed ranged "from one hundred to two hundred and fifty" hired workers "according to the necessities of our business." These workers mainly worked in Oneida factories although at least half a dozen worked in the Community Kitchen, and others helped at tasks around the Mansion House.<sup>404</sup>

During the early 1870s, press reports about Oneida noted the presence of hired laborers, and suggested that Community members served mainly as supervisors, leaving other tasks to hired hands. Typical of these statements was that of a correspondent to the *Yale Literary Magazine* who noted after a visit to Wallingford that, "[i]n reality the labor of the Community is more head-work than hand-work. The farm labor is performed principally by hired employees [sic] . . . [i]n the house and printing-office only, no outside help is employed." The article noted that two members superintended the work for twenty-seven

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<sup>403</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 21 January 1867, 17 February 1868, 10 January 1870,

<sup>404</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 21 January 1867; Tirzah Miller, *Desire and Duty*, 13; Hinds, *American Communities*, 122.

workers, all hired “village girls” in the silk factory there, while the nearby strawberry field was “covered with pickers,” all of whom, it implied, came “from the village.”<sup>405</sup>

These assessments horrified Community members, concerned lest outsiders reading them regard members as “lily fingered.” As a laboratory for Noyes’ ideas the Community could ill afford any negative statements in the press concerning its labor practices. The *Circular* responded with editorials that not only sought to justify the “hireling system” but also to argue that “the Community is a laboring institution,” and that “we never hope or desire that it should be otherwise.” Hiring outsiders was a practical need, they argued, since the demand for Community products was beyond the ability of the membership to produce on their own, and was only “entered upon reluctantly and cautiously.” Furthermore, this system was only temporary and, since the Community had to endure it, they were using it in an effort to improve the lives of the individuals they employed.<sup>406</sup>

The explanation that the growth of Community industry necessitated hiring outsiders is interesting when one reads the history of the silk factory, which started in 1866 with two Community women and “two or three [hired] girls.” Over the years, few Community women worked in the factory, while the number of hired girls increased. Thus, this industry was never the domain of Community workers, and was run, instead, with hired help. Furthermore, the Community never explained why, if it hired workers to staff its factories and shops in order to fulfill the large orders it received, community kitchens, field workers, laundries and even seamstresses were also staffed by outsiders. Community statements also do not explain how a relatively stable population suddenly found itself unable to meet its own household

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<sup>405</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 25 July 1870. A similar comment about the community was made in an *Albany Evening Times* article reprinted in the 4 August 1873 edition of the *Oneida Circular*.

<sup>406</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 6 January 1868; 25 July 1870, 19 June 1871.

needs, and at an early date: by the fall of 1863 the *Circular* reported that “a couple of young colored women from the vicinity” were assisting in the laundry. It could be that the small work hours that the Community had enjoyed since the days of Putney, really could not keep up with the demand for their products and they were unwilling to change. Or simply put, Oneida became wealthy enough to shift from being a community of workers to being a community of employers and superintendents.<sup>407</sup>

The shift toward hired labor also entailed a shift in emphasis away from the Community’s original religious origins to a more business oriented environment. This change was ruefully noted by Noyes’ own mother, Polly, in an interview late in life. In the interview, Mrs. Noyes commented on the shift in the Community away from the Bible and more towards science, noting that, “All I can do is to trust the faithfulness of the Lord, who will not leave us to go astray.” The shift away from the Bible that Mrs. Noyes feared was emblematic of the shift the Community was taking away from its origins. As prosperity replaced the socially bonding early hardships, so did hired hands take the place of the regular work bees.<sup>408</sup>

By 1877, a member writing of Oneida in comparison with other communal groups, was forced to admit that the bees he characterized as “occasions of gregarious industry” were now confined to “indoor labor” although a few outdoor bees, such as those for harvesting fruit, still endured. Noyes, himself, admitted to this shift in a “home talk” he gave at Wallingford in 1875. Noyes suggested that, “[i]nstead of gloating over the money profits we are making in our business, we should seek and find the value in the business itself; in the

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<sup>407</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 1 October 1863, 31 December 1866, 6 January 1868; Worden, *Old Mansion House Memories*, 28.

<sup>408</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 22 March 1865. She is referred to as “Lady N” born in 1780 and mother of nine.

pleasure of growth and education which we have as we are going along with it.” He then noted how the trap business had once been “a splendid school of education for the Community,” but that because trade had increased, “the necessity of the case seemed to drift us along into hiring” until now nearly all the work was in the hands of outsiders “and the object of education was forgotten and went out of sight – till all we value the business for now is because it brings us in money.” He urged the Community to “recover” itself by choosing the internal result of business for its focus. Furthermore, he foresaw that if money became the major object of Community work, and that children were taught that this was the goal, then “they will want to handle the money, and Communism will be broken up...” The Community, in a sense, became what John Humphrey Noyes feared.<sup>409</sup>

Philosophically, the Community was able to reconcile “the hireling system” with their ideals of equality of property and opportunity, by suggesting that they were, in effect helping their poorer neighbors. “Our benevolence assisted us somewhat in entering upon the practice of hiring labor...,” one community member wrote, “To give honorable employment, with remunerative compensation, seems to be doing good.” Community leaders proudly noted that some hired workers had been able to save enough money to buy their own houses and even small farms. Additionally, the Community established a special school for its hired workers so as to add mental improvement to financial advancement, paid them good wages, and otherwise treated them well. On at least one occasion, the Community provided workers and their families with an evening of entertainment, for which the “Mechanics” thanked them in a letter to the *Circular*. Held at both Wallingford and Oneida, the party coincided with the strawberry harvest. Members performed milking and other chores in order to free the hired

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<sup>409</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 13 December 1875; *American Socialist*, 13 September 1877.



hands, who enjoyed a concert by the Community band, and a second concert in the hall by the orchestra. In 1872 the workers in the shops received a two week “holiday vacation,” although it is not clear whether or not this was an annual occurrence, or merely an excuse to allow the Community to inventory their stock and fixtures.<sup>410</sup>

It was perhaps both out of desire to secure good public relations and a need to assuage their guilt at supporting the “hireling system” that community members often noted the satisfaction their workers enjoyed. When, in 1865 some seasonal workers had to be dismissed the *Circular* reported how “[a] number of women and girls dismissed; were very desirous of continuing in our service...” and literally begged to be kept on. In what amounts to a tongue in cheek justification, one member suggested that the Community hoped that the hireling system would follow slavery into extinction but, until that time, and until people understood that “there is a better way than to work for wages,” the Community would give them work while, at the same time, exposing them to the example of Communism and all its benefits.<sup>411</sup>

In a sense, Oneidans reconciled the inconsistency of hired labor with their ideals by making the hired hands a project of the Community, whereby they would directly contribute to the moral and physical advancement of their neighbors – a somewhat condescending attitude. Labor conditions in Oneida factories were superior to those in comparable nineteenth century establishments. Although they were required to put in long hours, workers received generous wages, those who lived nearby were transported to the factories free of charge, and others were housed in community owned homes. The Community even tried to

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<sup>410</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 27 June 1864, 4 July 1864, 6 January 1868, 23 December 1872; Hinds, *American Communities*, 122 – 123; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 263. Interestingly enough, this party is the only one for which mention was found in the *Oneida Circular*.

encourage young workers by awarding weekly prizes “to boys who worked hard and behaved well.” The Community also viewed the willingness of locals to work in Oneida factories as a sign of their acceptance and tolerance of the Community noting, “[t]hey are glad to work for us, and to have their children employed by us.” By the 1870s the fact that as many as two hundred area residents were employed by the Community helped to solidify its good relations with neighbors. Few would willingly attack a local institution that had such a positive role on the local economy, no matter how peculiar their religious or social beliefs. While Noyes may have violated his own principles regarding the hireling system, his beneficent role as employer, “built a well-nigh impregnable wall against the yapping attacks of moralizing critics.”<sup>412</sup>

Hired workers lived near the community, but were not included in its social or cultural life. Indeed, Noyes and the rest of the Oneida hierarchy specifically forbade association between members and hired workers beyond the needs of the workplace. For small children, like Pierrepont Noyes, the hired men were “strange people” who lived and worked “somewhere ‘beyond the hedge.’” Small children were expressly forbidden by adults to even speak to hired workers. Intuitive children, like Corinna Ackley, puzzled over why they were not allowed to associate with the apparently kind hired people. Commenting on one young man, she wrote, he “always looked as if he would like to stop and make friends, and yet there was some reason – never definitely explained to me, anyway – why it shouldn’t be done.” Most hired workers who worked in the trap shop lived in a village along the Seneca Turnpike known locally as “Turkey Street,” which contained approximately twenty-

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<sup>411</sup> *Oneida Circular*, 9 October 1865; 21 January 1867.

<sup>412</sup> Carden, 83; Hinds, *American Communities*, 124; Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 212.

four tenant houses by 1872. Turkey Street was not an area in which Community children were welcome. Not only were they not supposed to associate with outsiders, but the outsiders, or at least their children, took a dim view of them leading to name calling when community children wandered by.<sup>413</sup>

The Community's hired labor force, while generally taken from the local population, included several Irish people, as well as at least one African American woman who served as a cook in the kitchen at Wallingford, while a whole "kitchen corps of colored people," staffed the kitchen at Oneida by 1874. Several Indians, presumably members of the Oneida tribe also worked for the Community, which reported in 1866 that "old men and old women, young folks, children and even papooses," could be found in the all Indian group of people husking. In later years, the Community employed two outside women as seamstresses, who gained the attention and admiration of Community girls with their fashionable long hair and long dresses. Other women helped to sew parts for the bag making department. By 1870, as many as one hundred "worthy girls" came from the nearby villages of Oneida and Oneida Castle to work in the silk factory, and were driven home at night in Community wagons. These women from the surrounding area were young; twelve of the employees in 1867 were between ten and fifteen, so it is little surprise that their parents were concerned about the environment in which their daughters worked. In the fall of 1867 the Community claimed 131 hired workers, including 32 in the silk factory, 23 in the bag shop and 27 in the trap shop. In 1874 Charles Nordhoff reported that the community employed twenty – thirty five farm workers, in season, as well as two hundred and one other laborers: one hundred and

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<sup>413</sup> Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 22, 25, 115 - 116 ; Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 74; *Oneida Circular*, 27 May 1872.

three of whom were women, including seventy-five who worked in the silk factory. Of the men, sixty-seven were engaged in the trap shops, machine shop and foundry, with the others divided, as were the women, between the laundry, kitchen, cobbler and tailor shop.<sup>414</sup>

Aside from benefiting from economies of scale, community workers also benefited from labor saving equipment purchased, or developed by, the Community. A knitting machine, for example, aided the individuals who knit the community stockings, typically of the type known today as “tube socks.” New techniques and machines speeded work in the community trap shop and silk factory, while member, L. F. Dunn’s washing machine helped in the community laundry. Members also invented a string bean slicer, a type of lazy susan table for their dining room, a mechanical mop wringer and a mechanical potato peeler as well as new methods of bookkeeping.<sup>415</sup>

In his entire life John Humphrey Noyes never was gainfully employed, in the sense that he received a salary, as he noted in his letter proposing marriage to Harriet Holton, “I have no profession save that of a servant of God...” Publicly, Noyes suggested that leaders, particularly religious leaders, needed to follow the example of the apostle Paul who labored as a tent maker when he was not preaching. Noyes believed that Paul’s’ combination of manual and intellectual labor was “the very combination necessary to make the greatest men and the best leaders,” and he took pains to follow that prescription himself. Noyes resented the view outsiders held of him as “a professional person.” Rather than that, he asserted, “I am a mechanic, and always have been so,” in support of which he noted his early work with the

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<sup>414</sup> Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 43, 50; *Oneida Circular*, 27 August 1863, 8 October 1866, 8 April 1867, 13 May 1867, 26 December 1870 (quoting an article in the *New York Star*), 23 September 1872, 8 June 1874; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 263.

<sup>415</sup> Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 50; *Oneida Circular*, 8 May 1871; Carden, *Oneida*, 65; Klaw, *Without Sin*, 84.

gold chain industry at Brooklyn, the trap industry at Oneida, and comments that “ I have been a stone-layer, a brick-mason, a practical printer, a trap-maker, and a tinker. I say I have worked harder and more at those businesses than I ever did at preaching.” Noyes seemed genuinely proud of his humble occupations, identifying them with Jesus’ career as a carpenter. The Community, in turn, bragged that how at one point its leader was alternating, “between job-printing and farm work, and is now cutting cord-wood.” For a man who continually spoke of the honor and nobility of work to have stated otherwise would have been unusual.<sup>416</sup>

The Oneida leader apparently tried to set an example for his followers by participating in community wide labor such as the construction of the mansion house, making traps, and attending a strawberry bee during which he “work[ed] down a row of strawberries as vigorously as the others.” One member, commenting on the last bag bee reminisced about the early days of the Community when “J.H.N. was the life of the bees. He was always there, thimble and needle in hand, applying his Yankee ingenuity to the seams, pockets and locks.” In later years, when he had withdrawn from Community life, passerby would find Noyes sitting in an arm chair, eyes closed. One little girl who asked what Father Noyes was doing was told by an adult that he was “communing with St. Paul.”<sup>417</sup>

Whether or not his actual time at manual labor was akin to that of his fellow Perfectionists, it is clear that Noyes believed in, and at least gave the appearance of engaging in physical labor that his counterparts in the other societies in this study did not. While

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<sup>416</sup> George W. Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community*, 14; *Oneida Circular*, 16 September 1858, 1 January 1866; 19 June 1871.

<sup>417</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 261; Hinds, *American Communities*, 119; Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 123; Old Mansion House, 5; JHN and Putney, 389; *Oneida Circular*, 20 April 1868; Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 73.

Christian Metz was a master carpenter, after a certain point in his life all mention of his work disappears from the record, leading one to understand that he had totally given himself over to the problems of managing his community. Etienne Cabet, an intellectual like Noyes, preferred writing and administration to physical labor, and this may, in turn, have led his followers to resent him all the more.

From its very earliest days, the Oneida Community was an object of interest to visitors, both celebrated and otherwise. Over the years, Henry James, Sr. and Albert Brisbane, the leading proponent of Fourierism, the noted abolitionists, Grimke and Thomas Wentworth Higginson and thousands of ordinary citizens (over 45,000 between 1862 and 1867 alone) visited the various branches of the Oneida Community and spent an afternoon strolling the grounds of the Mansion House, often after disembarking from trains at the nearby depot.<sup>418</sup>

Realizing both the financial and public relations advantages to be gained from extending hospitality to these visitors, the Community went out of its way to serve their needs. Members received visitors “according to the etiquette of a family rather than that of a public institution” by not charging them and generally not accepting any compensation offered. Community members appear to have tolerated these visitors in good humor, often humorously reporting on some of the questions they had been asked in the *Circular*. Visitors often created more problems than they did benefits for the Community, leading one member to comment, “We cannot but hope that among all the impressions carried away from here by our visitors, there will be some that in future will help them to a better and happier life.”

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<sup>418</sup> Hawley, *Special Love*, 4; *Oneida Circular*, 10 October 1868. The *Oneida Circular* of 3 September 1857 mentions as “Miss G” who is a resident of Raritan Bay, New Jersey and who had once been a pioneer anti-slavery lecturer, this is undoubtedly Grimke.

Although on some days as many as fifteen hundred people overran the Community grounds but, for most occasions, the permanent greeter (for years Julia Ackley) stationed in a room at the front of the Mansion House was able to deal with visitors on her own. Many of these visitors received guided tours of the Mansion House and shops, although they were restricted from access to the private living spaces. A highlight of these tours was a visit to the “Chain Room” where visitors observed community children at work, leading some particularly outgoing children to exaggerate their efforts for the benefit of their audience. For a time, the *Circular* contained a regular column about visitors to the Community, and comments about particularly unusual or annoying questions were a staple of the *Circular* for years.

Additionally, the presence of distinguished guests, particularly those like the English author, Wilkie Collins, who spoke highly of the Community while visiting Wallingford, were duly celebrated in the community press.<sup>419</sup>

The visitors who came to Oneida for Sunday picnics saw the prosperous factories, well-tended fields and gardens and manicured lawns of a prosperous community. William Dixon, an English visitor in the late 1860s commented on the scene spread before the average visitor:

You see a fine house, a noble lawn, a green shrubbery, orchards shining with apple-trees, pear-trees, plum-trees, cherry-trees, prolific vineyards, excellent farms, busy workshops, grazing cattle, whizzing mills, and grinding saws, -- peace, order, beauty, and material wealth; and these are what the picnic visitors, who come in thousands to stare in wonder....always see..[the] mysteries of the Society are not explained to picnic parties.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 72; *Oneida Circular*, 25 June 1863, 17 March 1874; Hinds, *American Communities*, 120; Corinna Noyes, *Days of My Youth*, 60.

<sup>420</sup> Dixon, *New America*, 392.

The Community carefully constructed these visits to show itself to advantage, trying by this display of material prosperity which seemed to suggest the solid work ethic and religious values of the Community, that it was not the dangerous “free love” bed of licentious behavior portrayed by its critics.

John Humphrey Noyes serenely presided over this community of his faithful believers for over thirty years. Members of the Society in need of counsel sought him out in his room in the north tower of the Mansion House, later on in his room in the new wing, or in the upper sitting room, a place, an anonymous member noted, was “the source of the ever-flowing fountain of Community life, for here Mr. Noyes spends the greater part of his time.” Sometimes they came to him simply “for love.” After their consultation, they often remained with their leader for a game of dominoes or cards. Abel Easton probably voiced the opinion of many other members in declaring that he viewed Noyes as “THE MOST IMPORTANT AND CENTRAL” of Jesus’ messengers in the modern age. Most importantly, he was “Father Noyes,” a true patriarch in whose divine mission and guidance his followers had implicit trust – at least for a while. His son Pierrepont, recalling a period of anxiety concerning the future of the community in his childhood described watching his father leave the Mansion House on a walk: “Instantly, the sight of his broad back and vigorous stride reassured me. It was impossible! Father Noyes had firm hold on a stronger power than the hosts of wickedness. He would protect his people. My fear was gone.”<sup>421</sup>

Historians, examining the historical record of Oneida have been less charitable in their characterizations of its leader suggesting, in one instance, that, “Noyes emerges as a

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<sup>421</sup> Robertson, *Oneida Community: An Autobiography*, 85; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 35; Estlake, *The Oneida Community*, 5 (emphasis in original); Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father’s House*, 114.



manipulative and cruel leader who pitted members against one another, who used spies . . . to enforce order, and who was willing to reveal intimate confidences in order to inflict emotional pain." One Oneida member privately confided to her diary her own misgivings about Noyes: "Is he a crazy enthusiast, who is just experimenting on human beings? Does he still have a mesmeric power over me?" His own son, in later years, confessed to wondering as a young man, "Was my father just an insane fanatic, as his enemies asserted?" "What I tried to decide was whether religious fanaticism had led him astray or had he been, as Aunt Harriet said, "ahead of his time." I think I concluded, if I actually reached any conclusion, that it was a little of both."<sup>422</sup>

Problems started to arise both within and without the Community. Several reasons can be given for the demise of the Community. The first of these is that as John Humphrey Noyes grew older during the 1870s, his physical disabilities, particularly deafness, curtailed his ability to lead the Community, and he increasingly delegated authority to others. At the same time, Noyes made the unpopular move of attempting to establish his son, Theodore, as the new head of Oneida. In addition to not wanting the position, Theodore Noyes was an agnostic, a characteristic generally not found desirable in leaders of religious communities. At the same time, a faction within the Community led by one James Towner criticized the way complex marriage was being managed, while a group of theologians outside the Community began to launch yet another attack upon its morals.

Noyes' stirpiculture experiment introduced a host of complications to the Community. Finally, as at Amana and Icaria, the younger generation of Oneidans simply lacked the commitment to Community ideals held by their parents. Disagreements grew

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<sup>422</sup> Tirzah Miller, *Desire and Duty*, 29 – 30; 163; Pierrepont Noyes, *My Father's House*, 217, 294.

particularly tense and, as Jessie Kinsley would remember years later, “[t]here were scenes in the Evening Meetings. The disaffected began to sit in the gallery and from there hurl words upon the loyalists.”<sup>423</sup>

Tensions both within and without the Community led to the dramatic departure of John Humphrey Noyes from the Mansion House in 1879, a reality that his loyal followers awoke to on what was remembered as “that strange morning when it became known that Mr. Noyes had done away – no one knew where, but gone he was.” As he had in 1847 from Putney, Noyes was fleeing the possibility of arrest for immorality; which his lieutenants felt was likely, and from a situation he could not handle. As Noyes later wrote, “My greatest desire was to get out of it and to clear myself of all care [,] even knowledge of [the Community’s] external affairs.”<sup>424</sup>

Initially, the leader headed to Canada where he lived with a farm family for some months, before ultimately settling at Niagara Falls. During this period Noyes had time to evaluate his life’s work, often turning to his old “anodyne” (new word) of manual labor to relieve his anxiety. Day after day the sixty-seven year old Noyes, stripped to the waist, sawed logs on the Canadian farm on which he hid.<sup>425</sup>

Communicating with Oneida via messengers who managed to keep his whereabouts secret, Noyes conceived of a way to out maneuver the religious critics who were threatening the Community from without. On 26 August 1879 the members gathered in the great hall

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<sup>423</sup> Foster comments that most studies of the breakup adopt a “monocausal” view of the situation, and fail to view the event as the complex situation that it was. A notable exception to this trend is the work of Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876 – 1881* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1972); (Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 116 – 117 270; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 50)

<sup>424</sup> Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 51; Carden, *Oneida*, 102. Noyes’ chief biographer, Robert Parker, described Noyes’ flight and provided a comparison between Noyes and his first cousin, then president Rutherford B.

heard Noyes proposal read aloud that, “we give up the practice of Complex Marriage, not as renouncing belief in the principles and prospective finality of that institution, but in deference to the public sentiment which is evidently rising against it.” Tirzah Miller, Noyes’s niece, recorded that her uncle’s suggestion when read at the evening meeting, “was like the explosion of a bomb-shell.” The membership voted to follow their leader’s proposal and to end Complex marriage at 10 a.m. the following Thursday. According to historian, Robert Fogarty, the last forty-eight hours of complex marriage produced, “frenzied sexual activity,” although for members like Jessie Kinsley, the last hours of the unique experiment that had characterized the Oneida community were “solemn days” and a time for quite contemplation.<sup>426</sup>

With the end of complex marriage, the Community had really lost its cohesiveness and soon began to descend into disarray, rescued through the reorganization of the Community into a joint stock company. In addition to stock shares, 225 members over the age of 16 received allotments ranging from \$475 to over \$13,000. Noyes, himself, received less money than he had originally contributed at the Community’s founding. After it was all over Julia Ackley, who had been among the very first to arrive at Oneida Creek thirty five years before ruefully noted in her diary that “A good many have gone to work today that haven’t done but precious little for months and months.” She also noted a new experience: “bought the first spool of thread today that I have bought in the Community 33 years.”<sup>427</sup>

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Hayes: “the angles must have wept at the differing destinies of these two grandsons of old Rutherford Hayes – mediocrity in the White House, genius on its way to exile” (Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 283)

<sup>425</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 293.

<sup>426</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 284; Miller, *Desire and Duty*, 24, 178; Kinsley, *A Lasting Spring*, 53.

<sup>427</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 289; Robertson, *Oneida Community Profiles*, 64.

Community members each received stock in the new Oneida Community Limited Corporation, and many continued to live in the Mansion House. John Humphrey Noyes remained philosophical about the demise of his life's work, preferring, as was his wont, to put a positive spin on what most men would have found a crushing defeat. Writing of the Community, he said, "We made a raid into an unknown country, charted it, and returned without the loss of a man, woman or child." The exiled leader took up residence in a house the new company provided for him. Known as "the Stone Cottage," the house overlooked Niagara Falls, standing so near that the windows in Noyes' bedroom vibrated from the roar of the water. A nucleus of faithful members moved there to be near their leader who occasionally presented a home talk after the evening meal. Noyes died in 1886, and his body was returned to Oneida for burial. Like the graves of Christian Metz and Ann Lee, his is marked by a non descript marker in the Community cemetery now surrounded by a golf course owned by the Oneida Company.<sup>428</sup>

One hundred and twenty years after the Community reorganized, aspects of Oneida endure. The silverware company that eventually grew from the original community still thrives, and a small group of Oneida descendants continues to live in the Mansion House, which also plays host to large annual Thanksgiving dinners attended by other descendants and their families. Like the descendants of the Amana Society, Oneida descendants are bound by powerful influence of their forbearers, and the choices that they made in their religious and social life. The Perfectionist religion of Oneida lacked any outward forms, such as Sunday services. Noyes imbued the life and work of the Community with religion so that

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<sup>428</sup> Parker, *Yankee Saint*, 296. Noyes lays buried between Tirzah Miller, one of his favorite sexual partners, and his own wife, Harriet. Only a few feet away lay the remains of Mary Cragin, making for a very unusual "family plot."

the daily actions of the members were meant to be symbols of their worship. With the end of Communism, these actions lost their significance, and without a formal structure to maintain it, Perfectionism died. The generation of children born during the stirpiculture experiment became enmeshed in building the Oneida company and made “silverware their religion” in the words of one descendant. John Humphrey Noyes’ progressive spirit remains alive, even if his religious and social ideas have fallen by the wayside.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> This comment was made during a panel discussion of Oneida descendants in the Oneida Mansion House during the Communal Studies Association Conference, 27 September 2002.

**CHAPTER 6. SOLDIERS OF HUMANITY:  
WORK IN THE ICARIAN COMMUNITIES, 1848 – 1898.**

“They will be workers full of courage, intelligence, and learning, elite men, examined and tested who, as one man, afire with dedication and enthusiasm, will go out to win happiness for their posterity, their country, and all of humanity, even more than for themselves.”

-- Etienne Cabet, 1847<sup>430</sup>

In the utopian novel, *Voyage en Icarie*, the mythical land described by author Etienne Cabet is a worker’s paradise, a land of peace and plenty. Cabet attempted to translate his fictional land into an American reality, with the labor of his faithful adherents. For over fifty years, those who believed in Icaria struggled against persistent odds to realize their founder’s dream of utopia on earth by founding, then disbanding, then recreating seven separate Icarian communities in Texas, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa and California, until the Community died, literally, of old age. The sheer determination of the Icarians is not only a reflection of the power that a utopian dream can have over people, but of a deep-seated human need to find perfection, harmony and a change from ordinary life.

Icaria, like the Oneida Community, was the lengthened shadow of a charismatic founder, Etienne Cabet, a French attorney, politician, theorist and author. Cabet was born in Dijon, France on 1 January 1788, the fourth son of Claude Cabet, a prosperous cooper who supplied barrels to the thriving local Burgundian wine industry. Born the year before the French Revolution, virtually all of Cabet’s life was spent amidst under the vicissitudes and disruptions of revolution, war and social unrest. Cabet grew up during the turbulent years of

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<sup>430</sup> Quoted in Robert P Sutton, *Les Icariens: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 146.

revolutionary France and came of age under the nationalism of Napoleon, and both influenced his thinking in important ways.<sup>431</sup>

Cabet received an excellent education in Dijon, and briefly served as a teacher before studying medicine and then law. Becoming an attorney in 1810, Cabet gained early fame by defending General Antoine Vaux after the defeat of Napoleon in 1816. After relocating to Paris in 1820, Cabet, a born radical, associated with leading opponents to the restored French monarchy, including the Marquis de la Fayette and members of the *Charbonnerie*, a radical organization plotting the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy. Cabet supported the 1830 Revolution which toppled the repressive Charles X and replaced him with his cousin, Louis-Philippe, the so-called “citizen king,” who disappointed Cabet by shifting his political allegiance towards the right.<sup>432</sup>

During the brief period in which Cabet retained his enchantment with the new monarch, he accepted appointment as the Attorney General of Corsica as a reward for his efforts during the revolt of 1830. His ineffective performance in this capacity led to his quick dismissal after which Cabet entered elective politics when he was chosen Deputy of his home department of Cote d’Or. In office Cabet, who was, “totally inept as an orator and generally uncreative as a legislator,” remained in a perpetual state of opposition to the king.<sup>433</sup>

In 1833 Cabet began the publication of *Le Populaire*, a newspaper whose goal was to improve the welfare of the public and to aid them in an effort to recapture their natural rights.

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<sup>431</sup> Jacques C. Chicoineau, “Etienne Cabet and His World,” in *Humanistic Values of the Icarian Movement* ed. by Lillian M. Snyder (Corning, Iowa: The National Icarian Heritage Society, 1992), 7. The primary source for Cabet’s life is Jules Prudhommeaux, *Icarie et son Fondateur Etienne Cabet* (Paris: Publications de la Societe Nouvelle de Librairie, 1907); Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (Boni and Liveright, Inc., 1922, reprint: Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1959), 151.

<sup>432</sup> Vaux was one of many Bonapartists defended by the popular young attorney. Janet Fischer Palmer, “The Community At Work: The Promise of Icaria,” 26, 30; Sutton, *Les Icaris*, 6.

Cabet carefully crafted the paper's large type, simple language, short articles, attractive printing and marketing for its working class readership and the paper became very successful.<sup>434</sup>

In 1834 Cabet charged, in *Le Populaire* that the king oppressed the people and, the following week he wrote that he was a tyrant who would, "have Frenchmen shot, gunned down in the streets." Based on the French penal code of 1819 which made it felonious to print anything that was "an affront to the king [or incited] hatred and contempt of the government," Cabet was charged, tried, and sentenced to two years of imprisonment, a 4,400 Franc fine, and suspension of political rights (civil death) for four years. He selected a legal alternative to this severe judgment: five years of exile, which he spent in London.

Determined to use his exile period profitably, Cabet spent hours in the reading room of the British Museum and other London libraries, hard at work on what became a "historical indictment of the nineteenth century European industrial society," *Histoire Populaire de la Revolution Francaise de 1789 a 1830*, (Popular History of the French Revolution from 1789 to 1830).<sup>435</sup>

Infused with the revolutionary ideas that he had chronicled, Cabet decided to try his hand at writing an account of a utopian community, what would become his novel, *Le Voyage En Icarie*. Cabet's thinking at this time was influenced not only by French revolutionary ideals, but also by the writings of French sociologists, including Charles

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<sup>433</sup> Christopher H. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians, 1839 – 1851* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 31.

<sup>434</sup> Palmer, "The Community at Work," 45; Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 84.

<sup>435</sup> Sutton, *Les Icariens*, 13. The editorial was published in *Le Populaire* on 19 January 1834.

Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 41; Sutton, *Les Icariens*, 13, 17; Sutton, "Voyage To Icaria: A Message to the World" In *Humanistic Values of the Icarian Movement*, ed Lillian Snyder (Corning, Iowa: The National Icarian Heritage Society, 1992), 14.



Fourier and Count Henri de Saint Simon, and the Scottish reformer, Robert Owen, although he claimed to find flaws in the work of all three. Although a deist, Cabet utilized the philosophy of Jesus, the well known “Golden Rule,” as the basis for his ideas concerning the universal brotherhood of all humanity. A final source for inspiration for Cabet was the sixteenth century political philosopher and author, Sir Thomas More, whose own exploration of an ideal society, *Utopia*, Cabet discovered at the British Museum and which, he admitted, was not only his inspiration for exploring a communistic philosophy, but also the model for his novel.<sup>436</sup>

At the heart of Cabet’s work was Jean Jacques Rousseau’s belief, advanced in *Le Contract Social* (1762) that private property is the root of all societal problems. In Cabet’s ideal world, private property had been abolished and replaced with a secular adaptation of Christian morality, in which each individual both contributed toward, and shared in, the benefits of society to the best of their ability. The elaborate participatory Icarian government was likely drawn by Cabet from another equally well-known source, Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des Lois* (1748). Cabet’s use of these familiar and easily grasped themes is central to the wide and overwhelming appeal that his work had with the average French reader.<sup>437</sup>

The ponderous 600-page novel tells of the fictional journey of Lord William Carisdall from England to the fictional island country of Icaria, whose name appears to have been derived from a revolutionary song of Cabet’s childhood that proclaimed, “Ca Ira! Ca Ira! (It will succeed, it will succeed). The first section of the book describes Carisdall’s experiences

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<sup>436</sup>Sutton, *Les Icariens*, 16, 20; Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 45. Both Icaria and Utopia were portrayed as isolated island nations displaying equivalent states of political and social perfection.

<sup>437</sup> Reverend Sylvester A. Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie: A Study in the History of Social Thought* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1935), 64; Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 82, 88.

during his visit, the second part presents the history of the Icarian nation, and the final section is a summary of Icarian principles.<sup>438</sup>

During his visit Carisdall learned that despotic rulers had governed Icarian until a revolution in the 1780s led to a reorganization of the nation into a “democratic communism” under the leadership of the national hero and namesake, Icar. During a transition period Icar and other leaders divided the nation into a hundred provinces, each containing ten separate communes. Every province had its own governing council, while a two- thousand-member assembly, meeting in the centrally located capital city of Icara, governed the nation. The Assembly elected a president and fifteen assistants, who were subservient to its direction.<sup>439</sup>

Carisdall observed that the state controlled the means of production; each worker contributed to the best of their abilities and, in return, received whatever they needed from the state. Icaria was a worker’s paradise, under the guidance of a beneficent and completely participatory government. Icarian cities were models of perfection, in which blocks of houses were arranged around a gardened square, with wide streets that were both well lit and regularly cleaned by mechanical dirt and dust collectors. Stables, hospitals and slaughterhouses were placed on the edge of the cities, and factories and warehouses were located near the canals and railways.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 76.

Piotrowski’s explanation for the origin of the name is much more plausible than the suggestion that Cabet appropriated the name of Icarus the boy who, in Greek legend, flew to near the sun with wings of beeswax and feathers made by his father, and, as a result, fell to his death. It is much more likely that Cabet, who otherwise promoted the ideals of the French revolution, would have developed his title from a source connected with revolutionary ideals and infused with a positive message. Elsewhere the phrase “Car Ira” is translated, “It will be.” (Lillian Snyder. *The Search For Brotherhood, Peace & Justice: The Story of Icaria* (Deep River, Iowa: Brennan Printing, 1996), 19; Robert Sutton, “Voyage to Icaria: A Message to the World,” in Lillian M. Snyder ed. *Humanistic Values of the Icarian Movement* (Corning, Iowa: National Icarian Heritage Society, 1992), 18; Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 69.

<sup>439</sup> Sutton, “Voyage to Icaria,” 18 – 19.

<sup>440</sup> Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 70 - 71.

Children in Icaria received a basic education until, at the age of eighteen for men and seventeen for women; they chose a profession they wished to follow. They then received training in a field such as medicine, clock making, baking, millinery, printing or agriculture. There were no artisans in Icaria, only large, well organized and efficient workshops that specialized in manufacturing a particular article aided by the use of machinery. Indeed, Cabet noted, “these machines are multiplying so much that they are nearly all taking the place of, somebody told us, nearly 50,000 workers.” In the bakery specialized machines kneaded the dough, cut it, placed it in the ovens, which they also supplied with fuel, and then conveyed the completed bread to storage. Cabet displayed great faith in the advancement of machinery and the benefits that it would eventually bring to workers who, seemingly, only had to tend the machines that did, “all of the perilous, fatiguing, unhealthy, dirty and disgusting jobs,” for them.<sup>441</sup>

Because of the machinery Icarian workers had a comparatively short workday: they arrived at the workshop at 6 a.m., breakfasted at 9 a.m. and left work at 1:30 p.m. to eat with their families at the state owned restaurant in their neighborhood. No one returned to work after 2 p.m. but, instead, spent their time in leisure activities, filling, “the gardens, terraces, streets, promenades, popular assemblies, courtyards, theaters, and all of the other public places.” During work hours laborers each had a set job and functioned, “as a regiment,” since “so much order and discipline ruled them.” Workers observed an hour of silence at the start of the workday so that their foremen could offer them direction, but were able to speak the last two hours. Sometimes the whole happy workshop sang, “together as a choir.” In the

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<sup>441</sup> Etienne Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, trans. Robert Sutton (Macomb: Western Illionis University Press, 1985), 44, 66, 137, 142, 144.

women's millinery workshop Carisdall observed, "2,500 pretty mouths opened to sing a magnificent hymn."<sup>442</sup>

Icarian women worked at traditional female occupations such as the millinery work, dressmaking, florists, as linen weavers or in the laundry. Some women served as doctors, an unusual departure for Cabet, although, he suggested, a practical one since the female doctors could treat other women in such situations as childbirth more effectively than could men. Women also could serve as judges and as priestesses, although, as with female doctors, they served primarily to meet the needs of other women. Women were responsible for maintaining their homes, which they did in the mornings before beginning work at 8:30 or 9 a.m. depending on the season. Women's workshops also closed an hour before those of the men. Housework, Cabet suggested was "almost nothing," particularly because all of the family washing was done at a national laundry.<sup>443</sup>

The state excused nursing mothers, the ill, and women over the age of fifty and men over the age of sixty-five from work. "But," Cabet suggested, "the work is so agreeable that very few invoke retirement." Citizens esteemed all of the Icarian trades equally, and everyone happily performed their chosen labor for the good of the nation. When Carisdall asked if Icaria had any loafers, his guide retorted, "... loafers! We do not know of any . . . How could there be any of them when the work is so agreeable and when laziness and idleness are as infamous among us as robbery is elsewhere?"<sup>444</sup>

Cabet failed to consider how workers might ultimately become slaves to their mechanized world, or how machinery, in replacing traditional handwork, might disrupt long

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<sup>442</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 73, 82, 83, 146, 187.

<sup>443</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 82, 140, 156 – 157, 188; Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 98.

<sup>444</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 137, 139

standing, and beneficial, social and cultural practices. Furthermore, unlike his contemporary, Karl Marx, who pondered the threat of worker alienation, a psycho-social condition in which the “commoditization of labor and radical separation of worker from product” has an adverse impact upon laborers, Cabet described only the benefits of such a system. Cabet described workshops in which “each has his post, his job, and so to speak his rank,” in which all of the workers, together, formed “only one single and vast machine of which each wheel regularly fills its function.” The “skill that comes to each worker from always making the same thing really doubles the rapidity of work while combining it with perfection,” he suggested.<sup>445</sup>

In Cabet’s account, Icarian workers were cogs in a vast mechanized machine, which he saw as beneficial because it gave workers vast amounts of free time while the machinery freed them from workday drudgery. Cabet seemed unable, or unwilling, to suggest the negative effects that such a system would have on the psychology of the workers. He firmly believed, as he stated elsewhere in the novel that “Industry is today more powerful than ever in production but that it powerful enough to realize Equality of abundance and of happiness.” Thus, machines would not only lighten the drudgery of workers, but would allow them more free time and the ability to share in the abundance of quality manufactured goods, and would bring social equality. Icarians worked without pay, because their labor made “the good life” possible for themselves and their neighbors; it was their “public function,” their duty as citizens, to work. “The steam engine,” Cabet proclaimed, “will blow up the Aristocracy,” in France, as it had in Icaria, and will bring, “on a long line of [rail] cars, a thousand Reformers escorting Equality!”<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 52; Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 142, 187.

<sup>446</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 643, 647; Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 53.

After touring the urban workshops of Icaria, Carisdall traveled with his guide to the countryside. In this section of the novel, Cabet, “[b]y birth and education a city man,” revealed his limited understanding of the reality of rural life. During his exploration of Icarian agriculture Carisdall discovered that the dwelling of his farm hosts was “absolutely the same as city houses” if not slightly larger so as to accommodate the visits of neighbors. Ruralites in Icaria, Cabet suggested, “have nothing at all to envy from our brother in the cities.” Efficient railway connections and roads meant that ruralites could journey to the city at will, eliminating rural isolation and privation. Icarian farmers grew a large number of flowers, and developed superior irrigation systems in order to water the improved species of plants that they grew. Icarian fields lacked hedges and fences, which take up space, because there was no need to divide the fields since there was not private property. (Here, Cabet seems to forget that fences were traditionally in place to protect crops from wandering livestock.)<sup>447</sup>

Since the nation wanted all of its citizens to realize the importance of agriculture, Cabet wrote, all children participated in a sort of vocational agriculture instruction while in school. These farmers kept abreast of agricultural techniques and advancements through the pages of the *Journal d'agriculture*, and were so efficient that they were able to make astronomical observations from home observatories at night!<sup>448</sup>

As in the city, farm workers found their way eased by machinery, although Cabet failed to identify what these were, or what they did, this equipment almost reduced the role of the farmer “to that of an intelligent director and an enlightened manager.” Farmers only

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<sup>447</sup> Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 92; Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 200-201, 214 – 215.

<sup>448</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 206, 208; Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 51.

worked for “six or seven hours, like the townspeople.” On harvest days all of the neighbors, including obliging townspeople who arrived from the city, assisted, and the day was “always a day of pleasure and festivities.” Neighboring farmers also combined their efforts when repairing roads and other common improvements. In this description of agriculture, ironically, Cabet described the actual state of rural affairs at the time, not a utopian deal.<sup>449</sup>

Icarian farmers transported their products to the great national warehouses from which the nation distributed them according to need. The Republic directed which crops farmers should grow based on the need for particular staples and also on the condition and climate of each Icarian region. In addition to farms the Icarian countryside contained numerous rural industries, such as potteries, which used the products of the soil.<sup>450</sup>

Cabet returned to France with his manuscript, which he published in 1839 under the transparent ruse as a translation by “Francis Adams” from the original English account by Carisdall. The book was an instant success and publishing phenomenon, more of a testament to the popularity of its ideas than to its literary quality. By 1848 an English observer, visiting France reported that, “[Cabet’s novel] has already gone through five editions – there is not a shop or stall in Paris where copies are not in readiness for a constant influx of purchasers – hardly a drawing room table on which it is not to be seen.” *Voyage en Icarie* was eventually translated into English, German and Spanish.<sup>451</sup>

Following the publication of *Voyage En Icarie* Cabet’s life was consumed with his utopian vision. Over the course of the next several years the popularity of Cabet’s ideas spread, not only through his novel, but also through the constant stream of supporting

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<sup>449</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 210, 213, 217, 218.

<sup>450</sup> Cabet, *Travels in Icaria*, 222.

propaganda he supplied in the pages of his revived newspaper, *Le Populaire*, which achieved a press run of 4,500 copies by 1846, the largest of any popular paper of the day. A master propagandist, Cabet depended on his writings to gain adherents to what he called “Icarian Communism.” By 1845, Cabet’s leading biographer suggests, as many as 100,000 – 200,000 Icarian adherents lived in France, primarily in such centers as Lyon, Reims, Toulon, Toulouse and Nantes. Most of Cabet’s followers were urban artisans, including shoe and cabinetmakers, locksmiths and tailors, a fact that would later pose problems when these urbanites confronted the need to farm midwestern prairie lands in the United States.<sup>452</sup>

Artisans responded in large numbers to Cabet’s appeal, although the mechanized utopia that he proclaimed would end the need for their specialized skills. For the average worker, the prospect of a happy and “serene world” in which they could live in their own home with their families, not worry about the necessities of life, be assured that their children would be well-educated, have minimal work duties and be able to spend their extensive free time at parks or attending the theatre without any aspects of the dirty, oppressive world of mid-nineteenth century France, was irresistible. Finally, despite its advocacy of technological modernity, the traditional values of home, family and morality, firmly grounded in “an idealized artisan past,” and its use of Christian thought, appealed to workers caught between

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<sup>451</sup> Albert Shaw, *Icaria: A Chapter in the History of Communism* (New York: G. P. Putname, 1884), 18; Janice Clark Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” Ph.D. diss. University of Iowa, 1966, 409.

<sup>452</sup> Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 83; Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 108. Albert Shaw reported that there had been over 400,000 Icarian adherents. “Brief History of Icaria” (1880) states that the “Icarian school counted out hundred thousand adherents.” Fotion argues, without evidence, that these claims are too large, and that Cabet’s adherents were probably only in the “tens of thousands.” Shaw, *Icaria*, 19; Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” 416.



the grinding forces of the industrial revolution. Icaria represented a vision of industrial might turned towards the maintenance, rather than the destruction, of traditional values.<sup>453</sup>

During a period of economic recession and political repression at the hand of the enduring Bourbon monarchy, Cabet decided to announce an initiative: he would actually found “Icaria” in the United States, publicizing his decision in *Le Populaire* with the stirring call, “*Allons en Icarie.*” Leftists scorned the announcement, seeing it both an attempt on his part to gain power, and a possible threat to the unity of the opposition party. Other members of the “Icarian school” responded enthusiastically to Cabet’s call, and sent gifts of money, jewelry, seeds and clothing to his office to support the new venture.<sup>454</sup>

Cabet sought the advice of Robert Owen, the Welsh industrialist and founder of the unsuccessful New Harmony settlement in Indiana. Owen suggested that Cabet establish his community in the new state of Texas. Accordingly, Cabet contracted for land in the Red River Valley, approximately miles sixty north of the present day city of Dallas.<sup>455</sup>

On 3 February 1848 the Icarian advance guard sailed from Le Havre. Upon reaching the United States, the guard learned that Louis Philippe had been overthrown in France and replaced with a second republic. Despite this news, members of the guard decided to press on and travel to the site of Icaria. Upon arrival there they discovered that Cabet had only acquired rights to alternate sections of land, and the site was not located along the Red River, as promised in *Le Populaire*, but rather two hundred and fifty miles from it.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Johnson, *Utopian Communism*, 15, 48.

<sup>454</sup> Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 114 - 115; Ida Blum, *Nauvoo: An American Heritage* (Carthage, Illinois, 1969), 22. Cabet’s call appeared in the 9 May 1847 issue of *Le Populaire*.

<sup>455</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 22; Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 244, note #4.

<sup>456</sup> Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” 346

Malaria and heat dogged the colonists, whose disparaging letters home Cabet temporarily withheld from publication in *Le Populaire*. As one of their earliest chroniclers stated, the pioneers of the advance guard were “[s]trangers in a strange land, unable to speak English, ignorant of almost everything which a pioneer ought to know, their hardships were only exceeded by their fortitude and good cheer.” But their idealism was strained, as the harsh Texas sun, a general lack of farming knowledge, and malaria that took the lives of four colonists struck the advance guard. After only four months, the men began the long retreat to Shreveport, during which an additional four or five deaths occurred. Between 28 September and 18 December 1848 six successive groups of Icarians, totaling 389 people, their idealism uncorrupted by the Texas colonists’ experiences, landed in the United States.<sup>457</sup>

On 31 December 1848, the day before his birthday, Cabet landed in New York and then journeyed to New Orleans where he was reunited with his followers. During the next several months the disillusioned group lived in two large rented buildings in the city as they planned their next move. Many decided to leave the group, and Cabet refunded their admission fees, further depleting an already small communal treasury. Finally, scouts reported that the city of Nauvoo, located along the Mississippi River in Illinois, was in the process of being sold and vacated by the Mormons. Cabet and his 281 remaining followers boarded the steamboat *Marshall Ney* and headed up the Mississippi.<sup>458</sup>

When he came within site of Nauvoo Cabet first beheld the ruins of the Mormon temple, which had recently been burned by arsonists and whose ruins, “worked on [his] brains,” as a fitting site for his community. The temple’s sixty-foot high “blackened walls,”

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<sup>457</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 33, 36-37; Palmer, “The Community at Work,” 150. A fifth man was killed by lightning.

<sup>458</sup> Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 125; Blum, *Nauvoo*, 22.

according to a visiting journalist, “loom[ed] up like some old Egyptian ruin, above the river” and were visible for over ten miles. Cabet’s obsession led him to buy the ruins and surrounding city lots for a thousand dollars, rather than invest in farmland. Cabet planned to rebuild the temple in order to house the Icarian school, study and meeting halls and a refectory capable of seating a thousand people.<sup>459</sup>

Around the temple, Cabet ordered the construction of a series of wooden apartment buildings to house his followers. Built of native lumber, each two-story house contained four rooms on each level. Cabet assigned each family a single 16 by 20 foot room in which to live, “with one window and one door, two chairs a table, a bed and [a] looking glass.” The rooms, the Icarians told a visiting journalist, were “furnished with the most indispensable conveniences of life,” since “luxury... would be incompatible with the Icarian principles, whilst so much misery exists amongst the laboring classes in old societies.” Cabet, himself, occupied a house located east of the temple ruins.<sup>460</sup>

A severe windstorm on 27 May 1850 destroyed the north wall of the Nauvoo temple, weakening two of the remaining walls to the point where they would require demolition, radically altering Cabet’s plans. The storm also raised the creek on which the community washhouse was located so quickly and violently, that the fifteen women working there were only able to escape by climbing out of its windows. Resourcefully, the Icarians, as well as their Nauvoo neighbors, utilized the temple stone for construction purposes until, by the

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<sup>459</sup> Emile Vallett, *An Icarian Communist in Nauvoo: Commentary by Emile Vallet*, ed. H. Roger Grant (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Society, 1971), 20 - 22; “Nauvoo – Icaria” in *New York Tribune*, 2 July 1853 (reprinted in *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1988, 4) “Destruction of the Temple at Nauvoo on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1850 by a Storm,” in *New York Weekly Tribune*, 19 June 1850 reprinted in the *Center For Icarian Studies Newsletter*, 8 (Spring 1986), 4.

1860s, only the massive western wall of the temple remained standing: a classical ruin and memorial to the utopian visions of both the Mormons and the Icarians.<sup>461</sup>

After construction and initial settlement, Icaria began to function, for the first time, as a self-sustaining communal society. Although an isolated French speaking minority within Nauvoo, the group initially got along well with their neighbors, with the exception of the local Catholic priest whom, Cabet reported, denounced Icaria from his pulpit as “against the laws of the country and the ways of God.” A journalist who visited the colony in 1853, reported that his ferryboat man’s wife had remarked of the Icarians, “Catch me as to live as them folks do up there, all in a heap, and nothing to eat but bread soup! I had rather live on fish bones and dig for pebbles!” While locals may well have viewed the new arrivals with suspicion, pity or scorn, little outward hostility existed between them and the Icarians. The English-speaking residents of Nauvoo attended the various dramatic and other performances put on by the Icarians, even “though not understanding one word.” Journalistic accounts of the community also tended to be favorable, leading one scholar to comment that “the colonists were generally welcomed in the United States.”<sup>462</sup>

The majority of Icarians were artisans from French urban centers, such as Lyon. Few of them were experienced in agricultural labor and even fewer wanted to learn. Census records suggest a preponderance of urban occupations such as tailors and shoemakers among the Icarians. During the early, difficult times of the community, “fifteen to twenty” of these

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<sup>460</sup> Elizabeth Ann Rogers, “Housing and Family Life of the Icarian Colonies” (M.A. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1973), 43; Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 24; “Life in Icaria,” in *Chicago Press*, 23 June 1856 reprinted in *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1984, page 5.

<sup>461</sup> The collapse of the temple wall could be “heard three miles away in the country.” Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 22; “Destruction of the Temple at Nauvoo,” *New York Weekly Tribune*, 19 June 1850, *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring, 1986 page 5.

artisans produced shoes and clothing that the community sold in St. Louis in order to pay part of their expenses.<sup>463</sup>

Some accounts of the Nauvoo colony suggest that specialized workers happily engaged in unskilled manual labor in order to further the interests of Icaria, although others dissented at having to perform tasks for which they felt that they were unsuited. Cabet's work assignments were notoriously arbitrary. Although some of the colonists, such as professional musicians, had skills unsuited to a frontier setting, others were skilled at professions that were suitable, and yet were reassigned by Cabet. For example, Jules Maillon, a miller, was assigned to be a mason, and a skilled cooper was assigned to cut wood. These arbitrary reassignments did have the effect of forcing some colonists to learn additional skills, but they also generated dissatisfaction.<sup>464</sup>

The Community expected every person over the age of sixteen to work. Icarian workshops were scattered around the city of Nauvoo. The blast of a trumpet called workers to mealtime at the refectory on temple square, where they ate plain food around long pine tables.<sup>465</sup>

Each of the approximately ten workshops was under the direction of a "foreman, elected by the very shop or corps itself, sometimes unanimously, sometimes not." The foremen were responsible for reporting on the efforts of the laborers in their charge, and, former member Emile Vallet charges, sometimes used this power to disparage the efforts of

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<sup>462</sup> Palmer, "The Community At Work," 163; "Nauvoo-Icaria" in *New York Tribune*, 2 July 1853 reprinted in *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1988, 4; Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 31; Steve Wiegenstein, "American Journalistic Accounts of the Icarian Community." *Reflections of Icaria*, Spring, 2001, 5.

<sup>463</sup> Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 49; Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 20.

<sup>464</sup> Rulon N. Smithson. "Response to the First papers on the 'Contributions of Icarians' Theme." In *Contributions of Icarians to America* (Corning, Iowa: National Icarian Heritage Society, 1997), 5 -6.

<sup>465</sup> Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 25; "Nauvoo – Icaria" in *New York Tribune*, 2 July 1853.

individuals who had failed to support their bid for office. Some foremen were “quick tempered” and, Vallet suggests, “[w]ords were exchanged and the fist was sometimes used as a way of argumentation.” Work hours were from 5 a.m. until 6 p.m. with two hour-long breaks for meals. Icarian workers “exposed to the weather and performing hard labor,” including women, were allowed to drink whiskey. The Icarians who, while “temperate” were “not teetotalers,” derived part of their income from the operation of a distillery and, like members of the Amana Society, consumed liquor during the workday.<sup>466</sup>

The agricultural pursuits of the Colony were unprofitable, and it was unable to produce enough wheat to supply its own flour mill, or enough corn to supply the distillery. During the winter, gangs of twenty to thirty men chopped wood on Mississippi River islands across from Nauvoo. According to Emile Vallet, “as many as six men” worked a single cross cut saw: “two holding the handles and two others on each side pulling with a rope.” A six-man group ran a flatboat during the summer to float the wood to the saw mill. In many cases the men had to haul the cut wood from the interior of the islands to the shore on their backs, using specially designed baskets. By 1852, a total of thirty men worked at the wood cutting enterprise. Additional workers mined a ten-inch deep seam of coal twelve to fourteen feet below the surface of Nauvoo itself, while Icarian men attempted to supplement the meager community fare by hunting and fishing. Vallet, writing about the labor of the woodcutters, used them to suggest that the “Icarians did not show practicability in any of their work,” a marked contrast to the efficiency of the workers in the fictional Icaria.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>466</sup> Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 24, 27; Sutton, *Les Icariens*, 74.

<sup>467</sup> Vallet, *Les Icariens*, 25, 28; “Life In Icaria,” *Chicago Press*, 23 June 1856, reprinted in *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1984, 5; “The Icarian Colony at Nauvoo,” *Pittsburgh Post*, 12 November 1852.

Although Cabet spoke of “gender equality” in his writings, his actual concept of “equality” resulted in a standard separation of labor. Men worked in craft shops and on the community’s farm land, while women primarily worked as seamstresses, laundry workers and embroiders and, in a few cases, school teachers. Once each week, a covered wagon bearing the women assigned to laundry duty carried them to the Icarian washhouse, where they used flat stones as washboards. Women worked in pairs, received new work assignments usually every six months to a year (although some duties rotated on a biweekly basis), and typically labored for four to six hours each day.<sup>468</sup>

Since the community ate all of its meals together in the refectory, women were freed from the duties of cooking for their families, although some women assisted the Colony’s two male cooks. The small apartments, averaging one room per family, also reduced the amount of household care that needed to be expended by women. The women of Icaria, like women in Amana and many other communal groups, were freed from the isolation, and much of the household drudgery experienced by their rural counterparts in the same period.<sup>469</sup>

Despite the benefits that women received from the Icarian lifestyle, it is likely that many resented the limits put upon their occupational activities. Cabet’s system allowed women, as well as men, to choose an occupation when they reached the age of sixteen, although they had a reduced number of gender-specific tasks from which to choose. In this respect, Icaria was similar to the Amana Society in that women were limited in their career choices, but broader in that women had a broader selection of occupations. Additionally,

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<sup>468</sup> Blum, *Nauvoo*, 26. The washhouse was a so-called “grout building,” the walls of which were made up of lime powder, gravel and water. The building was inundated by the Mississippi, following construction of the Keokuk Hydroelectric Dam in 1913 (Blum, *Nauvoo*, 25; Snyder, *The Search For Brotherhood*, 60.)

after 1890 women at Amana did their own laundry and sewing, while at Icaria a specialized female workforce shared these tasks. As in Amana, however, nursing mothers were exempt from labor obligations and enjoyed the luxury of taking their meals at home, rather than at the refectory. Icarian women tended to have shorter work hours than their male counterparts, in order to free time for their household duties.<sup>470</sup>

According to Emile Vallet, the Icarians began to experience many labor problems that were endemic to communal groups within a few years of their settlement. “If they had performed their duty or not,” Vallet wrote, “[the members] expected to find their breakfast ready every morning...” Vallet cited another telling example of the breakdown of communal labor spirit at Nauvoo by relating the diminishing number of volunteers who assisted unloading the lumber laden flatboat on Sunday morning. The first time the leaders asked for volunteers to help, “fifty to sixty men offered their services,” finding the labor “merely play.” When the call was made on subsequent Sundays, “the most faithful” continued to volunteer but, Vallet noted, “some who did help the first time did not come again,” and “that some never came.” As fewer men volunteered the work became more difficult for each individual and fewer volunteered until one day a single man volunteered for the duty, which instead of horrifying the members, became a joke. Vallet further charged that production was never as high as it could have been and that even though the colony produced its own vegetables, whiskey, and tobacco and bought groceries at wholesale costs, the lack of productive capacity hampered the community. Again, the reality of Icaria stood in marked contrast to the

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<sup>469</sup> Snyder, *The Search For Brotherhood*, 61.

<sup>470</sup> Diane M. Garno, “Gendered Utopia: Women in the Icarian Experience, 1840 – 1898” (Ph.D. diss. Wayne State University, 1998), 611 – 612; Rogers, “Housing and Family Life,” 48.



efficient workshops of the fictional nation on which it was based, a land so industrious that one of its residents had exulted that they had no loafers!<sup>471</sup>

Issues of private property also came between members. Many women, in particular, possessed jewelry and clothing, against the rules of the Community, and others kept small flocks of chickens for themselves, maintained private flower gardens and were “suspected of cooking extras for themselves, at home.”<sup>472</sup>

In 1851 Cabet learned that he faced charges of fraud in France. Convinced Icaria could survive without his constant presence, he departed for France. After successfully defending himself in court, he remained in France for a time, before leaving and returning to Nauvoo on 23 July 1852.<sup>473</sup>

The community had not fared well during the fourteen month absence of its “Papa.” Severe storms had destroyed Icarian crops as well as stored lumber and the mill. Additionally, at least from Cabet’s perspective, the community had also deteriorated morally, since the colonists had “conducted themselves as school boys on a holiday,” during his absence. Cabet immediately initiated a series of reforms, adopted by the assembly, and he also initiated what he felt would be revitalization for his colony: relocation. Two weeks after his return from Europe, Cabet dispatched a committee of ten men to Iowa in order to purchase land for a new Icarian settlement. The men eventually located a tract of land in the newly organized southern Iowa county of Adams.<sup>474</sup>

On 19 July 1854 Cabet, the master propagandist, began publication of *Colonie Icarienne*, a publication that focused not only on events within the tiny colony, but also

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<sup>471</sup> Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 25, 29.

<sup>472</sup> Vallet, *An Icarian Communist*, 29

<sup>473</sup> Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 171.

commented on national and world events. Distributed by sales agents in the United States, London, and Paris, *Colonie Icarienne* reprinted Cabet's previous writings, as well as flattering letters that he had received.<sup>475</sup>

Cabet was the sole editorial voice of his paper and, indeed, the sole voice of his colony. Increasingly as his health began to fail (he suffered what may have been a slight stroke in December of 1854), Cabet became dictatorial. His relationship with his fellow Icarians had always been that of a father to his children, not as a brother or fellow member. He imposed his will upon his followers, completely abrogating the fraternity that he himself had advocated for his ideal society. He was incapable to reconciling his own views with the dissenting opinions of his disciples. His self-righteous egotism, inability to accept criticism, or even a joke, hindered his effective leadership.<sup>476</sup>

By 1854 the Icarians were able to feed, clothe and care for themselves, and the colony could well have been called a "success." Cabet's demands for increased power and control, however, soon lead to dissention amongst his "children." Eventually, younger members of the colony openly rebelled against Cabet, leading to ludicrous situations in which members of the opposing camps sat on separate sides of the colony dining hall. Actual fistfights broke out, watched with interest by non-Icarian neighbors who came to gape. The Icarian situation angered the citizens of Nauvoo, who briefly considered mob action against

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<sup>474</sup> Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 135; Garno, "Gendered Utopia," 578.

<sup>475</sup> Palmer, "The Community At Work," 187.

<sup>476</sup> Palmer, "The Community At Work," 202, 227; Fotion, "Cabet and Icarian Communism," 15. Fotion notes, "Cabet's egocentricity went badly with his mediocre talents and quite second-rate accomplishments. (Fotion, "Cabet and Icarian Communism," 18).

the colony. The unsettled situation within the city led Nauvoo mayor, R. W. McKinney to resign in frustration.<sup>477</sup>

In 1856 Cabet and his loyalists (who called themselves “Cabetists”) withdrew from the colony, and relocated to St. Louis. There, within days of arrival, Cabet died of a stroke but, as Lewis Mumford suggests, “as much perhaps from an outraged sense of dignity as from any physical disease.” The Icarians buried their leader, wearing his Icarian costume and with Masonic honors the next day. While Cabet had survived ridicule, persecution and even exile from France, the rejection of his authority by the Nauvoo community, leading to his practical exile from his own utopian world, seemed more than he could bear. Following the death of their leader, the Icarians rented buildings in which to live while they searched for a new home. During this period, the colony’s many urban artisans hired themselves out as workers in St. Louis carpentry, tailor, shoe, print and mechanical shops. Some members produced mattresses and women’s dresses for sale in the city.<sup>478</sup>

In 1858, the loyalists, their numbers decreased by departures to 150 members, agreed to buy an estate known as Cheltenham for \$25,000. The site, six miles west of Saint Louis, was close enough to the city that the artisans could continue to commute there to continue wage labor on behalf of the community. At the same time, thirty acres was too small to support agriculture, forcing the colony to buy supplies from outsiders. The site contained a sulfur spring, and had formerly been a small health resort. The Icarians derived an income

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<sup>477</sup> Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” 353; Palmer, “The Community At Work,” 214; Paul S. Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia: The Icarians of Adams County* (Corning, Iowa: Gauthier Publishing Company, 1992), 32.

<sup>478</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, 152; Blum, *Nauvoo*, 22, 25.

After learning of her husband’s simple burial, Madame Cabet asked the loyalists to rebury her husband in a lead coffin. In 1906 Cabet’s body was relocated to New St. Marcus Evangelical Cemetery, where his grave has become a place of pilgrimage for descendents of the Icarian community. Shaw, *Icaria*, 67; Dale Richard

from selling sulfur baths to outsiders, and, in a related venture, sold medical supplies to the public. They hoped to further augment their income by establishing a tavern, a general store and cultivating and selling flowers, although no evidence suggests that any of these commercial ventures actually got underway. In an attempt to further the cultural vision of Cabet, the colony instituted a series of Sunday afternoon programs featuring readings from Cabet's works, recitations by children and lectures. Known as the *Cours Icarien*, these cultural programs were probably the most significant accomplishment of the colony. In later years, the Iowa Icarian settlement adopted a similar program.<sup>479</sup>

In 1859, a contingent of forty-four Icarians left the colony due to a dispute over changes in the Icarian constitution. The dwindling Cheltenham band attempted to form "an industrial colony." With only thirty acres of land, the colony survived by producing articles for sale, and through the labor of members who continued to work for wages in the city as tailors, cobblers, coopers, earning a combined total of approximately \$140 a week for the community. Additionally, the bad water available at the Cheltenham site, despite the supposed health benefits of the sulfur springs there, caused widespread sickness. By 1858 records listed as many as 90 of the 140 recorded members of the community as incapacitated and, thus, unable to contribute their labor for the support of the colony. Finally, the loss of men to the Civil War, declining membership and an overwhelming debt forced the community to surrender. On 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1864 President Sauva turned the keys to the

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Larson. "Contributions of Edouard E. Martitz and His Descendants to the City of St. Louis, Missouri," in *Contributions of the Icarians to America* (Corning, Iowa: The National Icarian Heritage Society, 1997), 37.  
<sup>479</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 69; Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 38; Dale Larson, "Contributions of Edouard E. Maritz..." 38. "B" to Paris Home Office, 28 May 1858. This anonymous letter from Cheltenham was reprinted in the *Icarian Studies Newsletter*, 2 (December 1980), 6. For the history of the Cheltenham Colony see also Louise D. Rowe. "The Organization of Icaria/Cheltenham" in *Adaptation of the Icarians to America* ed by Robert P. Sutton (Corning, Iowa: National Icarian Heritage Society, 1993): 25 – 32.

Cheltenham community over to its creditor, whom he called, “a usurious jackal,” and the colony, which then only contained fifteen adult members, ceased to exist. Many of the former Icarians melted into mainstream society while a few others, including Sauva, journeyed north to join the Nauvoo Icarians at their new settlement at Corning, Iowa.<sup>480</sup>

Following the departure of the Cabetists, the Nauvoo community limped along for a few years. Problems, in part stemming from debts amassed during Cabet’s tenure, and the depletion of the workforce brought about by the departure of the Cabetists, continued to plague the community. During the period of fighting between the Icarian factions very little work had been done, leaving crops neglected and industrial contracts unfulfilled. In 1857, the Icarians found themselves in the midst of the worst economic depression in American history to that time. Additionally, the Icarian Paris Bureau, established by Cabet to direct fund raising to support the colony, only recognized the Cabetists as the legitimate heirs to the Icarian mantle and, consequently, refused to appropriate funds for the Nauvoo settlement.<sup>481</sup>

In January 1857 the Nauvoo colony resolved to relocate to the tract of land Cabet purchased in Iowa. A year later, in January 1858, the first train of Icarian wagons left Nauvoo, crossing the frozen Mississippi River. After a six-day trek they arrived at the site for the future Icarian settlement in Adams County.<sup>482</sup>

The Icarians who traveled to Iowa represented a small percentage of the Nauvoo colony that Cabet had left behind just a few years before. In the intervening three years, fully 75 percent of the members resigned from the colony. The 239 Nauvoo Icarians recorded in October 1856 had been reduced by 178 departures by 1860. Each departing member received

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<sup>480</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 39; *A Brief History*, 7. “B” Letter; Dale Larson, “Contributions of the Eduoard E. Maritz;” Piotrowski, *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 136.

<sup>481</sup> Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” 392.

\$20 from the community treasury, severely depleting its already strained finances. Some Icarians remained in Nauvoo, where their descendents continue to reside. The departures also meant that only 221 members remained to construct the new settlement. Men remained behind to settle the tangled affairs of the Nauvoo community, which ceased to exist in the fall of 1860.<sup>483</sup>

The Iowa colony was located on 3,054.95 acres of land in the Nodaway River valley, near the community of Corning, which had been surveyed only three years before the main body of Nauvoo Icarians arrived. Corning and Adams County, generally, while benefiting from the arrival of the railroad in 1869, remained a very rural, fairly isolated section of Iowa during the period of Icarian occupation. In 1900, shortly after the dissolution of the last Icarian settlement, Corning reported a population of 2,145 people out of a total countywide population of 13,601. Despite its rail connection, industry never developed in Corning, and the community remained dependent on agriculture and the business of its neighboring farmers. If Cabet was seeking isolation in locating his colony in Iowa, he had certainly chosen a good place.<sup>484</sup>

The “slim Icarian nucleus,” battered and perhaps slightly disillusioned, began the process of rebuilding their community on the Iowa prairies while, at the same time, retaining the strict regulation of labor and social activities instituted at Nauvoo. In 1860 they incorporated in Iowa as an “agricultural society,” which not only limited their activities to

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<sup>482</sup> Garno, “Gendered Utopia,” 700 - 701.

<sup>483</sup> Garno, “Gendered Utopia,” 702; Blum, *Nauvoo*, 24; Shaw, *Icaria*, 77; Sutton, *Les Icarimens*, 116. As late as the 1930s a woman who had lived in the colony as a child, still inhabited her parent’s apartment in one of the Icarian buildings.

<sup>484</sup> This total represents the acreage of the colony as of September 1855. The acreage was determined by a recent Adams County assessor from the official country records. Mabel E. Schweers, “Contributions of the

farming, but also limited them to owning only 5, 760 acres or less. This incorporation as an agricultural society would later prove to be the legal un-doing of the Iowa community.<sup>485</sup>

For the next several years, “life was anything but ideal and poetic at Icaria,” as its citizens endured circumstances that were, at the best, difficult. One of their chroniclers observed that “[t]he story of their privations and hardships in those days can not be written. It is a story which testifies to their high faith in the principle of communism, and to their personal courage and devotion.” Undaunted, the Icarians built small log cabins, each primarily occupied by a single family, in contrast to the apartment house arrangement prevalent at Nauvoo. A long row of cabins, located in the center of the tiny village, contained the laundry, bakery, dining hall, kitchen, pharmacy and community storage facility and the remains of the Nauvoo library.<sup>486</sup>

Alexis Marchand, the president for most of the early period of the Iowa colony, was a beneficent and permissive leader, whose style contrasted sharply with the “compulsive moralizing” of Cabet. Under Marchand, a “relaxed social atmosphere” prevailed in the colony, under which men could smoke; families could sell garden produce for personal profit, and wear jewelry and other personal possessions that Cabet had forbidden at Nauvoo.<sup>487</sup>

In 1876 a visiting member of the Oneida Community, William A. Hinds, was able to write a description of a more prosperous Icaria that included, “a dozen small white cottages

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Icarians to Agriculture in Iowa.” In *Contributions of the Icarians to America*, 48; A Brief History of Corning and Adams County, Iowa (Corning, Iowa: Corning Free Press Publishing Company, 1957), 84.

<sup>485</sup> Garno, “Gendered Utopia,” 706; Barthinius L. Wick. “The Icarian Community – Story of Etienne Cabet’s Experiment in Communism,” *Midland Monthly*, 3 (1895), 374.

<sup>486</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 81 - 82. Marie Marchand Ross, *Child of Icaria* (New York: City Printing Company, 1935, reprint, Corning, Iowa: Corning Friends of the Library, 1986), 7, 9.

<sup>487</sup> Fotion, “Cabet and Icarian Communism,” 394-395.

arranged on the sides of a parallelogram; a larger central building... a unitary bake-room and laundry near at hand; numerous log cabins.... forcible reminders of the early poverty and hardships of this people; a small dairy-house near the thatched stable to the south; barns for the horses and sheep to the north... [surrounded by a] domain of over two thousand acres of fertile land....<sup>488</sup>

In the center of the rebuilt colony stood the refectory, a large two story building whose basement was divided half into a storage space for root vegetables while the rest was the colony's kitchen, connected to the first floor dining room via a dumbwaiter system. The dining room featured walnut drop leaved tables that could seat between eight and ten members at a time, with the words "Equality," "Liberty" and "1776-1876" painted over its doorways. Ninety people could be accommodated in the dining room, which was connected to the second floor by a circular staircase. The second floor, initially an unfinished space used by the young male members of the community for recreational activities, such as billiards, later contained an apartment, the community library and space for the community tailor and sewing shops. A bell, hung on top of the refectory, called members in from the fields and shops for meals.<sup>489</sup>

Most of the new frame homes at Icaria were identical, small wooden cottages, twenty-two by fourteen feet and consisting to two rooms and an upstairs attic space. Simple furnishings, braided rugs and framed mottoes enhanced these tiny homes. In a concession to

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<sup>488</sup> William Alfred Hinds. *American Communities* (Reprint, New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 67 - 68.

<sup>489</sup> Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 145, 148, 151 - 153.

The original Icarian refectory was, like virtually every other building associated with the community. This demolition occurred in 1965, apparently before any documentary measurements or photographs were made of the structure (Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 153; Hinds, *American Communities*, 68.)



the shortage of skilled carpenters in the community, the Icarians hired outside masons and carpenters to build the refectory, the new houses and a cistern.<sup>490</sup>

The Civil War, which ended the Cheltenham Colony, actually saved the life of the Iowa group by providing the Icarians with a ready military market for their wool and food crops. The income brought by the war helped the colony pay off its debts, and actually begin to prosper. Additionally, the Colony's position, along a well-traveled early highway, meant it could participate in the lucrative trade of outfitting westward bound settlers. At least one such settler found the Icarian's, "liberality in dealing with travelers," in "strange contrast" to the "indolence...and apparently instinctive disposition to swindle emigrants, that are dominant traits in many of their American neighbors."<sup>491</sup>

Although never large, the Icarian community at Corning was fairly self-sufficient. Twice a year the Colony dispatched ox teams and wagons to Des Moines and St. Joseph Missouri, the nearest markets, for 280 pound barrels of brown sugar, dried fruit, salt, rice and other staples that they could not produce themselves. The colonists stored these foodstuffs in the basement of the refectory, where they supplemented the vegetables and meat produced by the colony itself. Beyond these annual purchases, the Icarians produced what they needed in order to maintain life in the Colony.<sup>492</sup>

As its charter stated, this colony of former urban artisans was primarily an agricultural community, raising livestock and grain on its acres. The northern range of the Icarian land consisted of rolling hills, and was ideal for livestock production, while the land

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<sup>490</sup> Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 36 – 37, 155.

<sup>491</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 57. Unfortunately, the original source for this traveler's account, which Gauthier located in a volume of early Adams County history, is unrecorded.

<sup>492</sup> Don Murphy, "He Lived in Icaria: Life in a Communistic Colony is No Bed of Roses, Even in the U.S." unpublished manuscript, ca. 1948, Icarian National Heritage Center, Corning, Iowa, 3.

in Mercer Township was level prairie well suited for crops. The Icarians were not skilled at crop agriculture; initially, they did not understand the fertilizing properties of the manure generated by their livestock herds, and dumped the collected waste material into the Nodaway River. The community subscribed to at least one agricultural journal and adopted such innovations as planting osage orange hedges for fencing. Through the years, they gradually improved and adopted new methods, such as storing grain in a silo, possibly the first constructed in Iowa. Following the completion of the harvest, the community assembled for an annual celebration known as the *La fete au Mais*.<sup>493</sup>

In the early days of the colony, when fencing was at a premium, the Icarian hogs roamed freely around the tiny settlement's muddy streets, rooting and making "a bad mess." The members drove the colony's seventy-five hogs along dusty roads to Des Moines, the nearest market. On one occasion, in the 1870s, the market at Des Moines was so low that the Icarian drovers brought the entire herd back to the settlement where they butchered the animals and sold the meat to area settlers and emigrants passing near the colony. By the spring of 1874, when the journalist Charles Nordhoff visited them, the community cultivated 1,936 acres, partially in timber, located along the river. The Icarians harvested wood and a good portion of their income came from its sale as cordwood to outsiders. Nordhoff reported that 350 acres were under cultivation at the time of his visit, and that the community, which

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<sup>493</sup> Mabel Schweers, "Contributions to Agriculture," 48 - 49. Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 64, 139; "Adams County - The Icarian Community" in *Iowa State Register*, 23 July 1868; Marie Marchand Ross, "When Grandma Was a Little Girl." 11. The silo, built of wooden staves, was definitely the first erected in Adams County, although its claim for state-wide preimence is unsubstantiated.

then had sixty-five members, maintained 120 head of cattle, 500 head of sheep, 250 hogs and thirty horses.<sup>494</sup>

Nordhoff's observations suggest that Icarian agriculture depended on livestock, as opposed to grain production. Each year, Nordhoff noted, the Icarians sold 2,500 pounds of wool, an undisclosed number of hogs and cattle and the products of its mills in order to provide community income. Even in 1874 when the membership of the Corning community had reached a peak, it employed two or three hired men to help with the farm labor. Thus, even with a relatively stable labor force, and a compact agricultural enterprise, the Icarians, like his counterparts at Amana, had to resort to outside labor. Perhaps, this suggests that Icarian workers, like this Amana counterparts, did not labor at full capacity.<sup>495</sup>

Icaria also maintained a few small craft shops, necessary for its survival, as well as a saw and gristmill on the nearby Nodaway River. The craft shops both represented the needs of an average small community of the time, as well as the artisan background of the Icarian membership. By 1874 the community had shops for wagon making, blacksmithing, carpentry and shoe production, an observer of the time noting that, "they make, as far as possible, all they use." The mills provided the colony with needed supplies, as well as income by grinding grain and sawing wood for area farmers and selling flour meal and bran for cash or for exchange.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 11, 47; *A Brief History of Corning*, 22; Don Murphy, "He Lived in Icaria," 3. Jules Gentry, the source for this story, recalled that the Icarians had been offered less than two cents a pound for their hogs, but sold ham and shoulders to settlers and emigrants at a dollar apiece. Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (Reprint, New York: Hillary House Publishers, Ltd., 1961), 336

<sup>495</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 337-338.

<sup>496</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 337; Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 112. Gauthier reprints an advertisement for "The Icarian Mills" from the *Adams County Gazette* for 16 August 1876.

Alexis Marchand, who was frequently the president of the community, once serving thirteen consecutive terms, fulfilled a variety of duties. According to his daughter, Marie Marchand Ross, her father referred to himself as “a *bouche trou*, a doer of odd jobs,” including baking, running the community pharmacy, making soap in addition to his administrative duties. In *Voyage en Icarie* Cabet had proudly noted that the equality of Icarians was demonstrated by the fact that the president of the assembly was a practicing brick mason. In Corning Icaria, however, the president worked less out of principle than because of the desperate need for every able-bodied adult to work. Other men pursued their crafts, but also did farm labor as needed. Like the Amana male labor force, the Icarian workers specialized in particular skills, but lent a hand in larger agricultural endeavors as needed.<sup>497</sup>

Women’s labor, at Corning, as well as at Nauvoo, followed standard gender divisions. Each woman was responsible for her own housework, which she did in addition to her community duties. Most women were involved with the laundry, sewing or cooking. Icarians dressed alike, in what amounted to a uniform consisting of blue cotton overalls for men and calico dresses for women. The calico for the dresses came from the Amana Society mills, and led to limited contact between the Icarians and that society. The Director of Clothing, annually elected by the Colony membership and usually a woman, carried the large bolts of cloth from house to house and measured off the yardage for each family as needed.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 52; Piotrowski. *Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie*, 90.

<sup>498</sup> Roy W. Swanson, “Iowa of the Early Seventies As Seen By A Swedish Traveler,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 27 (October 1929), 580; “Don Murphy, “He Lived in Icaria.” 3; Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 123. Gauthier cites the recollections of Julia Reynolds who lived in the Icarian colony after 1878.

The women did all the community laundry on the same day. This task was initially time consuming and primitive, involving a large tank containing clothes, with a canvas top covered with wood ashes. Two or three young women assigned to the task would spend most of a night pouring hot water through the ashes (thereby releasing the natural lye) and then draining the dirty wash water off. The next day, workers scrubbed the clothes, and then stacked in each family's basket for the women to take home and iron. Each family marked its clothing and linens, including stockings, towels and sheets, with their family number. Later, the Community acquired a new washing machine, consisting of three barrels with slats inside that turned, agitating the clothes. Hot water came from a nearby steam boiler, while a horse walking around a pole powered the whole machine. With the new machine, all the washing, "could be done in less than a day, and by fewer women." Animal power, in this case a dog walking on a treadmill, also churned the community butter.<sup>499</sup>

As at Nauvoo, women rotated their duties every week, and always worked in pairs. Despite the limited scope of their activities, the frequent rotation and the companionship provided by the Icarian system were likely appreciated by the women of the community. This practice provides an interesting contrast to the isolation and monotony faced by women on neighboring farms. Even in the days when washing was performed with wood ashes, and young women had to spend most of the night monitoring the tank, they managed to turn the duty "into a frolic." Frequently, young men of the community would keep them company, and they would crack nuts, pull taffy or pop corn.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 58 - 59; Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 123. Again, Gauthier cites the recollections of Julia Reynolds.

<sup>500</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 59

Younger members of the community treated elderly members, unable to work any more, with respect. Accounts of the community do not mention whether or not, as at Amana, elderly members simply worked at lighter tasks or were allowed to retire completely. Under the Icarian system individual members were expected to work until the age of fifty for women, and age sixty for men. Given Icaria's chronically low workforce, however, it is likely that elderly members worked in whatever capacity that they could until they were no longer able to do so. Marie Marchand Ross recalled one elderly woman, Catherine Utin, senile and crotchety, for whom the women of the community cared, bringing her three meals a day. Utin watched Ross as a child, and "knit stockings and socks for anyone who asked her."<sup>501</sup>

Children were active participants in the labor of the community from an early age. Icarian children grew up in a community composed mainly of older adults where they learned to do their share in maintaining the community. To a large extent, the labor of Icarian children mirrored that of their rural Iowa counterparts. Young children, too small for regular farm work, picked potato bugs in the multi-acre potato field, using a stick to knock them into tin cans that they carried for the purpose. Children also picked bugs off the community melon vines.<sup>502</sup>

In the spring, the head gardener of the community used the children to plant peas, beans and onion sets, and children picked wild strawberries, black berries, nuts and plums for community use in the nearby woods. In this respect, the Icarian children planting row after row of onions, exactly mirrored the use of children by the Amana Society for the same task.

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<sup>501</sup> Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 10, 28.

<sup>502</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 8, 26, 28.

Unlike the Amana schools, however, the Icarian school closed for the summer, freeing the children for long hours of play, and performing “little tasks” that adults assigned to them, such as carrying dinner to the men working at the colony mill.<sup>503</sup>

Older children worked with their parents, in gender segregated ways, as needed. As the number of able bodied men in the community declined, many community boys were pulled out of school in the spring to assist with farm chores. This meant they received “very little schooling” until the teacher made a formal complaint, with the result that the practice ceased. Older girls also helped with farm labor. In the early spring, three older girls typically served as shepherds while farm workers separated the ewes and lambs from the other sheep. This was relatively light and enjoyable work, during which the girls were able sit, visit, read or knit. Older children also had the evening duty of bringing the bakery bread to the refectory, once it had cooled. The children “made a real party” of this duty, with one child brushing the flour off each loaf, and another loading the loaves into the arms of the line of waiting children, who then carried them to the refectory where other children stored the loaves in a cupboard. Still other children, during summer vacation from school, watched younger children while their mothers were busy on washdays.<sup>504</sup>

Like their rural counterparts, Icarian parents expected their children to learn how to perform useful handicrafts from an early age. Marie Marchand, for example, learned how to braid straw for hats and, after she was eight, spent her winters knitting all of her family’s socks and stockings. Jules Gentry who, at age twenty would become the last Icarian Director of Agriculture also began his productive life early, by walking three-quarters of a mile daily

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<sup>503</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 33, 51, 127, Marie Marchand Ross, “When Grandma Was a Little Girl,” In *Reflections of Icaria 2* (Fall 1999), 11.

<sup>504</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaira*, 33, 54, 64, 67.

in order to milk the colony's ten milk cows in their distant barn. One winter he froze the side of his face during his daily trek.<sup>505</sup>

The precocious Marie Marchand serves as a unique example of a child's participation in community labor. Not only did Marchand perform the usual duties expected of a child, but she also voluntarily arranged and maintained the community's library. More significantly, in 1877 she helped a visitor, John W. Dye, start the community newspaper, the *La Revue Icarienne*. Following Dye's departure, she continued to print and edit the paper, albeit sporadically. Following the division into two Icarian communities, in 1878, it was the fourteen year old Marchand who printed the constitution of the New Icarian community.<sup>506</sup>

Curious observers who came to visit this western outpost of French utopian thought each viewed the tiny Icarian community differently. Few writers were charitable in descriptions, although most, like Charles Nordhoff who visited in the spring of 1874, and who initially described the settlement as "the least prosperous of all the communities that [he had] visited," still praised the members for their unceasing devotion to principle, and for their dogged determination to survive as a community in the face of, "penury and hardship." Hugo Nisbeth, a Swede who visited Icaria in the early 1870s, gave a dismal account of his visit, finding the residents unhappy and lethargic. He remarked upon leaving that, "It was as if a stone have been lifted from my heart when I at last [left Icaria]...when I got back to Corning and saw the people there busy, contented, and interested in their work, I vowed...[that] I would never become a member of the Icarian Community." A more charitable author, notably a Corning resident, commented that from a train the community presented "the

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<sup>505</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 35; Don Murphy, "He Lived in Icaria," 4.

<sup>506</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 37.



pleasing picture of Arcadian simplicity.” But most observers saw a hardscrabble, if devoted, community clustered in small houses in the middle of a large farm. Even with this view in mind, William Hinds, who visited the colony in 1876, still praised the members of the colony for being “apparently as full of courage and as enthusiastically devoted to Communism as they would have been had their pathway been strewn with roses instead of beset with thorns.”<sup>507</sup>

Tired of the monotony of life in the colony, and desirous of earning money and achieving the level of comfort that they saw in the lives of their non-Icarian neighbors, a small stream of colonists continued to leave Icaria in order to live in the outside world. Departing members received a small sum of money upon leaving, which in the case of J. B. Gerard and his wife, who lived in Icaria for fifteen years, was twenty dollars apiece. Gerard wrote poignantly of his departure noting that, “when we found ourselves.... on the mud road which led...to Corning, holding in my hand several pieces of silver, the ridiculously low salary for all the years of work and hardship, and immense despair seized us and we wept like children.”<sup>508</sup>

By 1876, the Icarian community had passed its years of hardship and its reported assets of \$60,000 exceeded the diminished \$4,000 debt. Trouble again came to the community, however, as younger members complained that their parents and other elders had lost sight of the Icarian goals. Years of “absorbing labor,” “privations” and “the effects of

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<sup>507</sup> Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 339; Roy Swanson, “Iowa in the Early Seventies As Seen By a Swedish Traveler,” 581; *A Brief History of Corning*, 89. The author was W. C. Chubb writing about the Corning area as he remembered it in 1890 for the 1 January 1898 edition of the *The Republican*; William A. Hinds, *American Communities*, (Oneida, New York: Office of the American Socialist, 1878; reprint New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 71.

age,” had dimmed Cabet’s vision, they argued, transforming Icaria into a “dreary farm cooperative.” The young party argued for admitting new members, engaging in industry and other revitalizations that the older members rejected.<sup>509</sup>

Bitter arguments between members of the two factions ensued, during which some of the progressives went on strike, and, instead of working for the Colony, hired themselves out as labor to area farmers. For over a year the two factions functioned separately on the colony site, eating their meals at different times, scheduling dances on different days, and hoarding provisions from each other. Years of fighting came to a head in a protracted nine-day court battle that ended, on 17 August 1878, with the Icarian community charter being declared forfeit on the technicality that the community had acceded its charter as an “agricultural society,” by running a saw and gristmill.<sup>510</sup>

After the trial, the court appointed officials to completely inventory the assets of the Colony, including land, farm machinery, tools and even pillowcases. As part of the division, both factions were granted dual use of the colony picnic grounds, asparagus, strawberry and rhubarb beds, and of the common cemetery.<sup>511</sup>

After the courts declared the old Icarian community dead, the two factions regrouped and reincorporated as communal enterprises. The young group was first to reincorporate and chose the name *Jeune Icarie* for their settlement that contained forty-seven members, including a number of children. The *Jeune Icarians* remained at the original colony site,

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<sup>508</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 60. Gerard and his wife purchased a farm in Adams County, and later became large land owners. Despite his despair, Gerard remained on good terms with his friends who remained with the Colony.

<sup>509</sup> *Brief History of Icaria*, 8; Robert Sutton, “Cabetian Orthodoxy Asserted: Past Practices and Voyage En Icarie,” in *Icaria-Speranza, 1880 – 1886* (Corning, Iowa: The National Icarian Heritage Society, 1995), 32.

<sup>510</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 72.

paying the older faction an additional \$1,500 to reimburse them for having to relocate to a new site a few miles away. At its beginning *Jeune Icarie* began to ambitiously follow some of the reforms that it had suggested for the old colony prior to the division. The new constitution abolished the office of president and four elected trustees instead, held the executive power.<sup>512</sup>

The *Jeune* Icarians opened shoe and blacksmith shops in Corning in an attempt to bring in added income and also began to manufacture brooms. The new industrial enterprises were an attempt to expand the ability of the colony to support the hoped for increase in membership. With only 850 acres of farmland, the colony was severely limited in the number of members it could sustain if it remained based completely on agriculture. They built a horse-powered circular saw, and cut wood for sale in Corning. They introduced new farming methods which the older Icarians, resistant to change, had refused to adopt, and all, according to one contemporary observer, “labored with a fine energy” to reduce the community debt. The community published a newspaper, *La Jeune Icarie*, which they circulated to interested socialists around the world. Emile Peron, the publisher also performed scientific experiments and connected his home to the school house shared by the two Icarian factions, via the first telephone line erected in the state of Iowa.<sup>513</sup>

The *Jeune Icarians* began to accept new applicants and the membership of the community grew steadily and quickly to seventy-five by late 1880 and was filled with new faces and “agreeable women, and plenty of vigorous infants.” Within a short time, however,

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<sup>511</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 85. Gauthier reproduces pages from the forty-one page inventory of Icarian holdings made at the time of the division.

<sup>512</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 113 (check)131; Robert V. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 63.

<sup>513</sup> *Brief history of Icaria*, 13; Shaw, *Icaria*, 132 - 133.

many of the new members left the Society, reducing the Colony to thirty members in 1881, and the Corning shops proved unprofitable and were closed, additionally the Icarians stated because, it was “unwise for some members to be individualistically detached from the great family.” Members of *Jeune Icarie* began to consider relocating the colony to a warmer climate, such as Texas, Florida or California where the members could engage in fruit growing, an enterprise they felt would require less time for labor and provide more leisure time for cultural and scholarly pursuits.<sup>514</sup>

In September 1881 they paid \$15,000 for 885 acres of ranch land near the town of Cloverdale, California. Within a month three families of Icarians and other individuals who had affiliated with the new enterprise, were on the site and had constructed a sawmill, while planning a formal merger with *Jeune Icarie*. Using hired labor, including at least six Chinese immigrants, the settlers prepared the site of their utopia. The new organization, called *Icaria Speranza*, legally began its existence in late 1883 with approximately fifty-five men, women and children.<sup>515</sup>

The new Society differed from previous Icarian incarnations, adopting some the principles of Saint Simonian socialism. At the end of each year the community would assess its profits and divide them into two parts: one part to remain community property, and the other to be divided among members, although the Community only credited these funds to the individual and would not pay them unless they withdrew. Additionally, the Community credited each member over age sixteen with “labor premiums” of from \$1.50 to a dollar or

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<sup>514</sup> Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 63 - 64; Shaw, *Icaria*, 133, 135.

<sup>515</sup> Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 58; Lorraine Stephens Berry. “A Granddaughter Reminisces on the Role the Dehay and Leroux Families Played in the Icaria-Speranza Utopian Colony,” In *Icaria Speranza: Final Utopian Experiment of the Icarians in America* (Corning, Iowa: National Icarian Heritage Society, 1995), 11; Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 68.

fifty cents depending on whether they had not missed a day of work, missed a single day, or had missed more. Members could own personal property such as furniture, household equipment, bedding and any gifts they received from outside the colony, provided these did not exceed fifty dollars in value. Instead of officers, as in previous Icarias, the new group instated five separate committees: works, home consumption, education, commerce and accounts. Two members of each committee were members of a Board of Administration that acted in necessary executive function. The General Assembly composed of all the members over the age of twenty-one made most of the community decisions, usually with a required three-fourths majority vote.<sup>516</sup>

Physically, the new settlement resembled its predecessors, with a single large refectory surrounded by small wooden houses, barns and outbuildings. Surrounding the settlement were acres of grape vines set out by the colonists as well as a hundred acres of wheat, a five-acre orchard and three hundred acres of pasture. Not only did the colony intend to produce wine, but, eventually prunes, and raise cattle.<sup>517</sup>

Despite its high goals, Icaria Speranza never became self-sufficient in its few years of existence. The colony never had enough skilled labor to fulfill its needs, once having to hire a butcher from San Francisco. Hiring additional labor served to draw more capital off of the colony's already strained resources, and new members did not join the colony because of the stringent requirement that all new members had to be fluent in French. In its entire existence, Icaria Speranza never admitted a single new member. Sometimes the colony rented shops in Cloverdale to market its produce, but without much success. Armand Dehay

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<sup>516</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 148; Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 69.

<sup>517</sup> Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 71 – 72.

operated a barbershop in Cloverdale that brought an additional \$75.00 a month to the community. Additionally, a chronic lack of money and a lingering debt proved an insurmountable obstacle. The colony's hope that its debts would be covered by the sale of its remaining Iowa land proved groundless, and also ignored the fact that the Iowa colony had debts of its own to pay, as well. Individuals who had donated to the colony brought suit and, on 3 August 1886 a court decree dissolved Icaria Speranza.<sup>518</sup>

Following the dissolution, the California Icarians mainly remained near the site of their former colony, while some remained among the vineyards together as a group of related families with no formal communal connection. In the end, Icaria Speranza was a victim of "poor-planning, over-exaggerated expectations and unorthodox departures from Icarian precepts..." Despondent, Armand Dehay wrote a friend, "My heart is broken that our commune is crushed like a house built on sand, I who in my enthusiasm had labored to perpetuate the work so nobly conceived by Cabet and his disciples forty years ago."<sup>519</sup>

With the death of Icaria Speranza the only remaining outpost of Cabet's dreams was the steadily dwindling colony of the Iowa conservatives, now called "New Icaria" and settled in a huddle of frame buildings on windswept Iowa prairies.

Alexis Marchand, the last remaining Icarian from the "advance guard" designed the layout of the settlement to be occupied by the conservatives on a rise near the original settlement. The new location had a "delightful" view of the surrounding rolling prairie and

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<sup>518</sup> Varena Anderson. "Land of Promise: The Icarian Experience in California," In *Icaria-Speranza*, 28; Robert Sutton, "Cabetian Orthodoxy Asserted: Past Practices and Voyage en Icarie in Icaria-Speranza" in *Icaria Speranza*, 35; Berry, A Granddaughter Reminisces," 13.

<sup>519</sup> Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, 75 – 77; Robert Sutton. "Cabetian Orthodoxy Asserted," 31. An interesting account of this community, containing some comments by one of its descendants as well as photographs, is found in Paul Kagan, *New World Utopias: A Photographic History of the Search for Community* (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1975).

scattered woodlands. Like the original Icarian colony, Marchand's plans located houses in a parallelogram surrounding a new fifteen by thirty foot refectory building, constructed by hired carpenters, in the center. Following the suggestion of a visitor, the Community painted its homes a variety of colors, instead of the plain white that had prevailed in the original community Marchand also planned landscaping, ordering that trees be planted to the north of the of the refectory and placing a large flag pole in the center of the colony from which an American flag flew. The conservatives moved eight of the houses from the original site on rollers, in order to move them the mile and a half to the new location. For this purpose they made a rare concession and hired an outside firm with experience in moving buildings.<sup>520</sup>

New Icaria carried Cabet's torch for almost twenty years after the split between the young and old factions in 1878. The settlement, however, was handicapped not only by its small initial numbers, but by the increasing age of its faithful adherents. Like the Harmony Society of Pennsylvania that eventually died because of old age and legal maneuvering, New Icaria simply faded away. The members remained committed to Cabet's vision, but were no longer in a position to achieve it. Instead, they continued to live communally, working to support themselves, and their fading vision. As in its predecessor communities, New Icaria organized labor into branches, each under an elected director including clothing and lodging (typically held by a woman), a director of industry who supervised building fences and the mills, and a director of agriculture. A single large garden supplied the needs of the

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<sup>520</sup> "The Voyage into Icaria: The Strange Book of a Frenchman and the Fault It Has Borne." In Elmira [N.Y.] Telegram 24 June 1888, Reprinted in the *Center for Icarian Studies Newsletter*, Spring 1983. Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 99; Rogers, "Housing and Family Life," 94, 169 – 170; Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 105.

Today (2003), the New Icarian refectory is, with the exception of the colony school, the only original Icarian building standing in Iowa. Currently, the Icarian Heritage Society is developing a park around the New Icarian Cemetery which, when completed, will include the schoolhouse, the restored refectory, and reconstructions of other community buildings.

community, which included thirty-four members in 1883, including eight over age sixty and twelve children under age thirteen.<sup>521</sup>

Although the community maintained shoe and tailor shops, its main income was derived from agriculture. Because of their declining ability to farm, the New Icarians began to seed some of their cropland into pasture. To augment their labor, the New Icarians continued to employ outside farm labor, primarily young men from the surrounding area who performed the heavy farm work that the aging Icarian men were unable to do. The community hired at least three young men in its last years, and all came from the Corning area. The men lived in a vacant house near the Marchland family residence, and the colony women, as at Amana, took care of their meals, laundry and housecleaning, when necessary. Hired for the summer, the men received eighteen dollars per month, plus their board.<sup>522</sup>

Its leaders did not discourage association with the hired men by the young people of the community, and fast friendships formed between Icarian youth and the newly arrived workers. The young people spent evenings singing together at the community organ and socializing. The hired men “kept the place very lively,” participating in study groups with the Icarian youth, sitting with them on the swing or singing songs together. One of the hired workers, Will Ross, although warned by his religious parents against the “heretics” at Icaria formed a strong friendship with Marie Marchand, which continued when he returned to work

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<sup>521</sup> *A Brief History of Corning*, 23; Shaw, *Icaria*, 115.

<sup>522</sup> Shaw, *Icaria*, 117; Mabel Schweers, “Contributions to Agriculture,” 50; Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 113, 120, 127. Ross mentions three hired men by name: Tom Ramsey and Will Ross, both of whom worked at least two summers, and August Humbert



in subsequent years and took French lessons from her father, and that resulted in their marriage in 1888.<sup>523</sup>

New Icaria retained the good relationship with the surrounding community that its predecessor colony had held. The Icarians introduced art, theatre and music as well lilacs, rhubarb and asparagus, among other things, to their English-speaking neighbors. Icarians, as a group, continued to journey into Corning to watch Independence Day celebrations, and young Icarians worked for neighboring farmers and homeowners. In the later years of the New Icarian community, the few young people from the colony joined outside youngsters for dances, held both on neighboring farms, and at the colony itself, with music supplied by a hired band. The children of neighboring farmers played baseball with the Icarian children on their diamond, located north of the refectory – an amusement that Cabet had not envisioned for his young communists. Young people even began to stay with outside friends for weekends without asking the customary permission of the assembly to do so. Evidently, the exposure to the world of money and fashion that this close relationship engendered had a detrimental effect on the few remaining young Icarians, who began to chafe under the restrictions of the colony, and to wonder why they could not share in aspects of nineteenth century life, such as advanced education.<sup>524</sup>

Young Icarians also began to resent not having possessions of their own, and not receiving wages for their labor, something of which young men, like Jules Gentry who worked alongside the paid hired workers of the colony, were acutely aware. As Gentry later

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<sup>523</sup> Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 120 - 121, 127 – 128, 131. For the later life and career of William and Marie Marchand Ross see Dale W. Ross, “Post-Icaria for Marie Marchand Ross and William Ross, Two Ardent Socialists” in *Assimilation of Icarians Into American Life*, ed. Lillian M. Snyder (Corning, Iowa: The National Icarian Heritage Society, 1994): 27 - 47 .

<sup>524</sup> *A Brief History of Corning*, 22 – 23; Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 122, 125; Gauthier, *Quest for Utopia*, 107, 188.

recalled, “[w]e wanted to be like our neighbors, instead of being suppressed all the time by the colony’s elders.” Because of their close association with outsiders, and the fact that they “went outside so much,” the young people began to adopt the style of dress of their outside friends, apparently without invoking the wrath of their elders, as they began to meld with the outside world.<sup>525</sup>

Finally, the day that its members feared came when, at the annual election of officers on 16 February 1895, no one expressed a willingness to serve as a colony officer. Although one elderly woman, Eugenie Gentry, sobbed bitterly at the outcome, the colony voted to disband. The process occupied three years during which E. F. Bettannier divided \$13,511.24 in colony assets among the twenty remaining members and heirs of members, some of whom returned to France, while others, including the young director of agriculture, Jules Gentry, remained in the Corning community for decades afterward. At 3 p.m. on 22 October 1898 Judge Horace M. Towner signed the decree formally dissolving the colony and, almost sixty years after the publication of his novel, the last physical remnant of Cabet’s dream passed from the scene.<sup>526</sup>

For two decades prior to the official end, astute outsiders had already been composing the epitaph of Icaria, perhaps none better than Barthinius L. Wick, who in 1895 wrote of the Icarians that “[a]lthough the world may not appreciate their labors; although their beautiful dream had not been realized; though their work has been fruitless and ephemeral; still the

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<sup>525</sup> *A Brief History of Corning*, 23; Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 124; Murphy, “He Lived in Icaria,” 4; Richard Osterholm, “Iowan Once Helped to Destroy a Red Colony,” *Omaha World Herald*, 26 March 1961. Osterholm’s article, structured around an interview with Jules Gentry, is almost as revealing of Cold War attitudes towards communism as it is of the Icarian way of life. Ross, *Child of Icaria*, 125.

<sup>526</sup> Gauthier, *Quest For Utopia*, 103. Judge Towner was at the start of a legal and political career that would later involve service in the United States Congress and as Governor of Puerto Rico from 1923 – 1929.

devotion, the self-denial, the sincerity of the members, who shrank from no privation, cannot help but awaken sympathy.”<sup>527</sup>

Icaria cannot be called a success, unless the willingness of a small group of people to endure decades of subsistence living, internal division and the hard work required of pioneer life can be called a success. For sheer endurance, the Icarians deserve praise but, ultimately, they failed to meet the goals revealed in the writings of their founder. It is unreasonable to suppose that any group could have fulfilled Cabet’s vision, so his true adherents deserve praise for making a valiant effort in that direction. Setting out with higher goals than any of the other societies studied here, however, the Icarians actually fell far shorter of these goals than did their less idealistic communitarian counterparts. The enormous economic success of the Shakers, the Oneida Community and of the Amana Society assured that their members lived a life that, compared to the cabins, mud roads and dissention that plagued Icaria, was closer to Cabet’s fabled brotherhood. The small size of Icaria meant that, unlike the other Societies, there was little benefit from economies of scale – Icarian men worked as often and as hard in their fields as their neighbors, while their children often failed to attend school because they were needed in the fields. The attempts at leisure activities – a few plays, a library, reading Cabet’s work, pale in comparison with the life of the typical member of the Oneida Community.

Beyond the economic comparison to the other three communities, Icaria must also be compared on an ideological level. While Oneida, the Shakers and the Amana Society were infused with strong religious feeling, Icaria was infused with the largely secular socialist ideas of Cabet. Members worked towards furthering the life of the community at Icaria,

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<sup>527</sup> Wick, “The Icarian Community,” 376.

while in the other three societies workers operated with assumption that they were furthering the kingdom of God on earth. Religion, it seems, proved to be a more powerful motivating factor, in the end, than secular ideology. If there is a lesson to be learned from Icaria it is that devotion to a particular cause often blinds its adherents to the very real failings of their system and, as could be said for the other societies as well, leads them to describe in glowing terms what to outsiders amounted to simple misery.

In 1922 Lewis Mumford wrote of Cabet's vision of Icaria that it "was a national state with all its pomp and dignity and splendor, and not a squalid collection of huts in the midst of a dreary prairie." While Icaria was never the "reconstructed Paris" or the "highly sophisticated and metropolitan" community that Cabet had envisioned, yet it was also not entirely the dismal failure that Mumford surmised. For fifty years several hundred individuals moved in and out of the Icarian community, satisfying, however briefly, their own utopian dreams, if not the dreams of Etienne Cabet.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, 152, 154.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION.

Utopian societies of the nineteenth century, by their existence, regardless of their ideology, offered their adherents an alternative to the prevailing social attitudes of their era, including labor and its organization. These alternatives took the forms of combined activity, shifting gender roles, and a generally more progressive attitude towards the labor and care of children and the elderly than evinced in the world outside. Even groups, such as the Amana Society, that followed traditional gender divisions and patterns of labor, still introduced innovations and variations on the experience of workers in the outside world. Each community served as a form of human machine, a closely connected group of individuals whose diverse activities within the community enmeshed like the gears of an engine. Every individual within these communities acted as a contributor towards the community's goals and basic survival. Workers outside of these communities, living under free market capitalism, worked towards fulfilling their own goals and the needs of their family or other dependents. Within a community, however, self-interest, while a factor, was never the guiding principle of the worker, whether or not they idealistically shared in their community's stated goals.

The role of children within communal societies is an area which has received very little attention to date. The movement towards the study of the history of childhood and family life that has been growing in other areas of social history has, just barely, begun to touch the study of communal societies. In recent years, however, notable studies of Shaker children and Amana children have been made, while the plethora of memoirs from Oneida Community children and Marie Marchand Ross' account of growing up in Icaria provide tempting sources for similar studies of those communities.

If any group of people can be said to have benefited from communal living, it is children. Growing up within the sheltered and generally financially secure confines of a communal society, children were well-nourished, typically received better than average medical care, and received a complete basic education. Unlike their rural and working class counterparts outside the communal world, they had a lower infant and child mortality rate. Additionally, communal children, particularly at Oneida, were the beneficiaries of a large network of “fictive kin.” In most communities, particularly Oneida and Amana, their elders encouraged children to look upon, and even refer to, non-related adults as “aunt” or “uncle.” Community members felt a responsibility for their youth in ways that people in the outside world who were not part of a “communal family” did not.

In terms of this study, the work and labor of communal children was no more strenuous than that of farm children in the world outside. Indeed, communal children, like their parents, worked less hard than children elsewhere. It would be difficult to compare the *Arbeitsstunde* of an Amana school child, lasting only a few hours each afternoon, to the routine of a farm child of a similar age. Finally, whereas farm youth frequently spent only short amounts of time in school, the children in these four societies attended until at least the age of twelve, and, with the exception of Icaria, were rarely absent from school for any reason other than sickness.

Another way in which children differed from their counterparts was in their sense of belonging to an organization. In all of the communities children knew that their labor and the products they produced benefited the community. Whereas a farm child was aware of his work helping his family, community children felt that their work served a broader purpose. Indoctrinated from a very young age, they came to see their work as helping to fulfill the

larger goals of such figures as Etienne Cabet, Christian Metz, Ann Lee and John Humphrey Noyes. At Icaria, children tended the Community garden; at Amana children tended the onion patches and knit stockings that the community sold; Oneida children helped harvest fruit and made parts for the trap industry, while Shaker children participated in the daily cleaning of Shaker dwellings and assisted on the farm or in the kitchen. Only at Icaria, where boys were kept from school to perform farm work, was this labor more than a few hours a day, unlike the strenuous hours required of farm children or working-class children in factories and mines.

When considering sex roles at Oneida, Icaria and among the Shakers, one must take care to see beyond their ideology. While the Amana Society may, in hindsight, be faulted for not providing a larger role for their female members, at least they were honest about the role women played in the community, and did not represent themselves as otherwise. If women in Amana led lives that were unequal and not particularly interesting, at least they enjoyed a higher standard of living than the women living in the final Icarian communities.

In truth, no Society provided full equality between the sexes. Women in all four communities performed the work considered appropriate to women's sphere in the nineteenth century. At Amana and Icaria women performed housework, cooking and laundry duties. At Oneida and among the Shakers, female members performed household tasks, but added a number of additional tasks all centered on producing goods for their community to sell. Only at Oneida, where women worked in the trap shop, did these roles extend beyond commonly accepted gender boundaries. To suggest that Shaker women making baskets, weaving bonnets, canning fruit and producing fancy work had an expanded labor role is ludicrous. Women at Amana and Icaria also canned, sewed and did fancy work, the only difference

being that the Shakers organized this work and did it for commercial sale, while women in the other communities simply did these things for personal use.

From a more radical perspective, all four communities, to varying degrees, could be faulted for not appreciably expanding the female role in their production. On the other hand, however, the question arises; do women need to perform the same jobs as men in order to be equal? Could, in fact, it be possible for women to assume equality in other ways, such as earning their own income and realistically contributing to the well-being of their community without pounding iron at a forge, running a saw mill or performing carpentry? From this more traditional perspective, then, women in communitarian societies became roughly equal to their male counterparts. In most cases the income from their production was smaller than that of the men, but they did produce an income, and the male membership often appreciated their labor for the serious contribution to communal welfare that it was.

Although the equality of men and women in these societies was likely never as great as their literature, or their latter day apologists would hope, the role of women in each community was at least different, and slightly better, than that of their counterparts in the outside world. At Amana unmarried women over the age of thirty could vote in Society elections, and women held prominent positions as kitchen bosses; women at Oneida participated in Community discussions, and voiced their opinions in the Community paper; Shaker women, at North Union, could serve in the ministry and as eldresses, and, later, as trustees; finally, women at Icaria could participate in Community elections in the last decades of their community's existence.

A characteristic which all four societies shared was the principle of rotation in labor. Although the rotation of women at Icaria, between the laundry and the kitchen, or at Amana



where women merely rotated related jobs in the kitchen house, was limited, both the Shakers, and especially, Oneida, provided women with a wide range of tasks to perform. Even when rotation was simply between mundane tasks that rural women of the time performed, the very fact that communal women could experience a change is significant. Disagreeable tasks needed to be pursued for only a short time before a woman could devote her energies to something more enjoyable. Additionally, women in all four communities seem to have had plenty of time for hand work and other forms of self-expression. While the more liberal religious attitude of Oneida allowed women to pursue a decidedly wider range of leisure activities, Amana women with their needlework, and Shaker women with the unending range of fancy work that they produced for commercial sale, also had outlets for creative energies.

All four societies provided forms of childcare that freed women from some of the duties, and restrictions, of motherhood. At Amana, children over the age of three attended the *Kinderschule* for a few hours every day; Oneida children entered the “Children’s House” at a very young age, while designated adult caretakers raised Shaker children. At Icaria, at least in the early days, the Community separated children from their mothers, although the community appears to have adopted a more traditional view of childrearing in later years. In all four societies cooking was a communal affair, done in a large kitchen, allowing women to work together. The freedom from childrearing and from having to cook for one’s own family, alone, in an isolated kitchen, cannot be overstated.

When considering the work of men in communal groups, the chief variation between their experiences and those of their outside counterparts is in the organization and attempts at efficiency promoted by communal life. Most societies benefited from an economy of scale: with several dozen men and expanded capital and other resources, it was simply easier for the

Shakers or the Inspirationists to buy new farm machinery try new techniques and, with collective innovation, develop new technology. Even tiny Icaria was progressive in its farming practices, building what may have been the first silo in the state of Iowa.

The role of the elderly in these societies is difficult to define. In all four groups older persons (despite Icarian hopes for an early retirement) worked as long as they were able. Performing small tasks allowed them to remain connected to the communal ethos, and imbued them with a sense of value. Beyond this larger commitment, and the fact that they tended, on average, to live longer, the lives of the communal elderly were not much different than their rural counterparts. The average older person on a family farm lived with other family members and was not isolated from the daily life and social atmosphere of the farm. They were not isolated or alone, as the elderly often are in today's society; there were no nursing homes, and when death came, the dying ended their earthly existence in their own homes, surrounded by family and friends.

The very social nature of work in communal societies should not be overlooked. In an age when their rural neighbors anxiously anticipated the next quilting bee, corn husking, or threshing day, the communitarians had these experiences every day. Each day was threshing day on a communal farm where dozens of men were ready to assist with the labor and where women were already working together to prepare a large meal in the kitchen. Each community benefited from the social camaraderie that developed between workers laboring side by side. Isolation, for better or for ill, was not a problem in a communal society.

Collective labor, such as the Oneida "bees" did provide a form of leisure although the members of each community also practiced more typical "leisure" pursuits. North Union Shakers went on picnics, took excursion to Lake Erie, and did handwork. Amana men made

furniture in their spare time, families went for long walks, women did handwork and children played games, just like children outside of the community. Icarians gathered at regular intervals for plays and for lectures and talks. Overall, community members seemed to have had more time for leisure activities and more activities from which to choose.

In a comparison that may seem uncharitable, communal workers shared important similarities with African American slavery in the South. Indeed, opponents of such groups often made this analogy. Valentin Rathbun, among the first apostates to vilify the Shaker movement, contended that the Shakers were driven by “hard hearted Pharaoh like masters, while their leaders live on the spoils of their disciples, and wallow in wealth and ease...” During World War I a local editorialist, critical of the Amana Society’s pacifism, suggested that, the “desire of the leaders seem[s] to be to keep the people as ignorant as possible, so that they could the more easily be kept in slavery.” It is significant to note, however, that unlike African American slaves, the workers in these communities worked of their own free will, could leave at any time, knew that both they and their work were respected and valued. Beyond these important differences, however, communal workers were subject to the work assignments of their foremen, in at least three of the societies – the exception being Icaria -- they could be told to move from one residence to another without any input of their own in the matter, and they were not paid for their labor.<sup>529</sup>

The communal worker, like the slave, (although, again, on a better scale) received food, clothing and shelter for his or her work, and nothing else. Because they did not need to pay a wage from their profits, groups like the Shakers could expand their production into

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<sup>529</sup> Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover, 1963), 46; “Put the Colony Out,” *Marengo Sentinel*, 26 March 1918.

fields, such as silk production, that would have been unprofitable otherwise. With a vast pool of skilled unpaid labor, it would have been difficult for any well-organized communal group to not have made a profit.

What is commendable, however, is that for the most part, communal leaders do not seem to have exploited their position of control; the leadership of none of these communities had a finer residence or lifestyle than the workers under them. Indeed, the Shakers made manual labor a necessary duty of its leaders, while individuals such as John Humphrey Noyes and Christian Metz took their turns at manual labor. Alone of the communal leaders covered in these pages, Etienne Cabet seemed to feel himself “more equal” than his compatriots,” who, however, realized this and expelled him from their community.

The work culture of the communitarian is also a topic of some interest. In most situations communal workers, by definition, worked alongside others. At Amana and among the Shakers women often spent years, if not decades, sharing kitchen duties with the same small group of sisters, while farm workers shared their workday with the same group of brethren. In many Shaker families, members with similar occupations generally even shared bedrooms, so that workday ties were further strengthened to the point where they assumed the level of familial bonds.

Machinery in communal societies did not run on golden hinges – work was no more physically demanding than outside the settlement, but it was often less driven, more relaxed and, indeed, pleasant. The shared camaraderie and labor experience of these communities closely mirrors the combined efforts of rural workers on threshing days and at quilting bees in the outside world. The difference between these two realms, however, is that it was always threshing day, and there was always a quilting bee in these communities.

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Although observers commented on the relaxed atmosphere of labor in these communities, this does not necessarily mean that there was a lack of commitment. While the farmer or farm wife in the outside world found a purpose in daily tasks for their survival, communitarians often found a higher purpose. The Shakers and Oneida people literally felt that they were working to further the kingdom of God on earth. The Amana Inspirationists believed that God had called their community out of Germany and, thus, by helping to maintain it they were fulfilling His will. Finally, through all their years of struggle, the Icarians must honestly have believed that they were helping to create an ideal community that others would emulate, through their labor.<sup>530</sup>

Even the clothing worn by the members of these communities suggested an emphasis on work and industry. While outsiders responded to the whims of fashion, adopting changes in design and favoring styles that suggested that their wealth precluded labor. The clothing worn by communitarians “did not respond to the tenet of conspicuous literature.” As Beverly Gordon notes, the clothing of communitarians was plain, “designed for practical, physical work, and eschewed any form of excess ornamentation that would preclude it.” The clothing worn by communitarians invariably represented a rejection of worldly fashion but, more importantly, of worldly emphasis on leisure, wealth and display. Instead, the practical, unfashionable garb of the communitarians indicated each group’s emphasis on, and celebration of, manual labor. Communal clothing conveyed a message that nineteenth century visitors to these communities could not have failed to note.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Beverly Gordon, “Fossilized Fashion: ‘Old Fashioned’ Dress as a Symbol of a Separate, Work-Oriented Identity.” *Dress* 13 (1987): 49 – 60.

<sup>531</sup> Gordon, “Fossilized Fashion,” 55.

Each of these societies employed hired labor, and most of them in proportionately large numbers. Oneida, in its later years, essentially ran on the sweat of hired workers who were supervised by community members. At Amana, the labor of hired hands supplemented the less than fulfilling work of the membership, while at both Icaria and North Union hired hands supplemented the labor of hard working, but increasingly elderly, members. In each community the presence of outsiders presented problems, particularly in their influence on the young people of each organization. In a few cases, most notably at Amana, hired hands ingratiated themselves with community members, formed friendships, and even married a member or joined the Society themselves. A cursory reading of the history of other communal societies, most notably that of the Harmony Society in Pennsylvania, suggests that the role of hired labor in supporting, and influencing, American communities is an area worthy of further study. Additionally, the subject of hired hands in the rural United States, generally, needs more scholarly attention.<sup>532</sup>

All four of the communities in this study were located in rural areas and, to varying degrees, participated in the agricultural economies of their respective regions. As Delores Hayden notes, however, communitarians typically held different attitudes towards their land than did their neighbors. Many backcountry farmers, she notes, viewed farm land as a commodity to be sold at the first opportunity to do so at a profit, so the farmer could move to greener pastures farther west. In the meantime, these agriculturalists “impoverished their land by cropping it constantly” to a lucrative staple. Communitarians, by contrast, were committed to remain on their land, and immediately adopted practices to increase the

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<sup>532</sup> The author’s great-great grandparents, Samuel and Christina Hoehnle, were among the over three hundred hired hands who maintained the Harmony Society at Economy, Pennsylvania, in the 1880s.

productivity, and to preserve the fertility, of their land for the future. As Hayden notes, groups like the Shakers and the Amana Society became well known for adopting the latest farm technology. The Shakers published farming and gardening guides, while the efforts of the Amana Society were discussed in farm journals, as were the practices of other communal groups.<sup>533</sup>

Despite their agrarian setting, each of these communities engaged in a level of industry unknown in similarly located settlements. While none of these communities was a mill town, as that term was used in the nineteenth century, neither were they rural backwaters, either. By 1900, the Amana woolen mills were the largest in the state of Iowa. The society sold these woolens, together with calico fabric, flour and other commodities across the United States. Oneida traps helped to dominate that industry for decades, while the other products of that community, while less well known, were also sold over a wide area. Although the North Union Shakers did not engage in large industry, their woolen mill and flour mill served the needs of farmers from a wide area, and their level of production of such items as brooms, clothe, foodstuffs and fancy work far exceeded similar production in other rural communities of the time.

By contrast to these groups, the principal products of the Icarian settlement for much of its history were the farm goods that it sold at market. Ironically, the community that was based on the writings of a reformer who envisioned a great urban utopia filled with factories, was the most rural and least industrialized of the four communities in this study. The Vermont and New York farmers who supported the Oneida Community, ironically, were

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<sup>533</sup> Delores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1976), 16, 18.

involved in a more urban and industrialized society than the urban craftsmen who formed the bulk of the intensely rural Icarian settlement!

While each of these communities was initially located in a rural environment, as Delores Hayden notes, “Even the most isolated communes created centers of community life which were far more urbane in character than the isolated homesteads which surrounded them.” Not only did each community foster social interaction, religious expression and, in the case of Oneida and Icaria artistic expression unknown in the surrounding countryside, but the organization of their industry placed them on a higher plane, economically, than their neighbors. Shaker and Amana mills served as significant processing centers for the grain of their neighbors, who also traveled as much as fifty miles to purchase supplies at the stores these societies ran.<sup>534</sup>

Despite the fact that they were internally “money less societies,” money and property seem to have been a primary concern of these communities. From the very start, each of the four settlements searched for commodities that it could produce and sell in order to support itself. For Amana these commodities were woolens, calicos, onions and flour; at Oneida preserves, traps, silk; at North Union brooms and cooper ware provided the main sources of income, while at Icaria, workers concentrated on farm production. None of these communities appears to have ever believed that it could be completely self-sufficient and isolated. From their first years of settlement, manufactured goods flowed from their shops and factories, and each community, with the exception of Icaria, maintained a miniature army of traveling salesmen and peddlers to hawk its wares at a distance. Although communal, each

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<sup>534</sup> Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 15.



society directed its economy towards the market beyond its borders. Each became, in a sense, a collective shop whose proceeds were used to support an internal communal family.

The touted and very real financial success of Amana, the Shaker communities and the Oneida Community suggest, ironically, that these communitarians may have been better capitalists than many business leaders in the non-communal world. The efforts of Carl Mayer and Carl Winzenried of the Ebenezer-Amana Society, John Miller of Oneida and Ashbell Kitchell of North Union in leading the financial affairs of their respective communities were as important as the leadership provided by the charismatic leaders whom they served. The communitarians do not appear to have been troubled by their seeming dependence on the larger world which they had all rejected in principle, suggesting that far from being idealistic dreamers, the leaders of successful communes were pragmatic idealists as well as astute businessmen.

Although hundreds of people ultimately chose to depart from membership in these four colonies, many people remained and found, if not happiness, at least comfort and satisfaction in communal life. For those individuals who felt called upon to lead the austere, ideologically bounded and work-drive lives demanded of communal living, the rewards were many. Communal life meant security: security not only in the knowledge that one would have a home, food, that one's children would be educated, that friends and family were always around, that health care was available and free, but that one was leading a life that fulfilled their deepest desires either to please God or their own ideals of how life should be lived. In an age when thousands of other people contentedly followed the status quo, those individuals who chose to abandon the conditions of western civilization dared to walk, they believed, where only angels dared to tread.

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