
America's Utopian Experiments

BRIAN J.L. BERRY

Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992; xviii, 273 p.; notes, bibliography, index; figures, tables; \$18.95 paperback.

American economic development has followed a cyclical pattern, periodically encountering times of crises. Brian Berry finds a close relationship between economic fluctuations and the formation of Utopian communities. Examining America's Utopian experiments from the Shakers to the communes of the 1960s, he explains periodic Utopian surges as reactions to the long wave crises in economic development. Whenever economic hardships have hit, he argues, declining prices and asset values have led people to seek Utopian alternatives to orthodox social and economic values.

The idea of a relationship between economic cycles and Utopian activities is not entirely new and has been hypothesized previously by, for example, Barkun ("Communal Societies as Cyclical Phenomena," *Communal Societies*, 1984, Vol. 4, pp. 35-48.). Berry utilizes his expertise in long-wave economic theory, displayed in his recent book *Long-Wave Rhythms in Economic Development and Political Behavior* (1991), to go beyond Barkun's argument and uses Kondratiev's theory in examining further complexities of long-wave triggers to communal activity. For example, he argues that in addition to intense periods of communal activity in the 1840s and 1890s, episodes of lesser magnitude have also been correlated with long-wave crises. Recognizing that such an explanation of Utopian activities might be objected to as being ultimately deterministic, Berry responds at the outset by saying, "so be it" (p. xv) and relies on the strength of his evidence for support.

Berry provides evidence from community formation at the aggregate level and from the histories of specific movements. At the aggregate level, he demonstrates graphically the relationship between the number of communities started in 5-year intervals between 1787 and 1919 and the growth rates of prices in the United States. The figures in the second chapter suggest the presence of a strong correlation, though a few questions remain about the strength and validity of the evidence presented. For example, beyond visual illustration through charts, no statistical analysis is provided that would support the significance of the suggested correlation. Similarly, beyond information about communities *started*, no evidence about the dissolution of communities or their population dynamics is provided that would reflect the totality of Utopian activities. Despite such questions, however, the evidence is powerful enough to suggest the presence of a correlation between economic waves and Utopian activities.

At the level of individual communities, Berry examines several Utopian movements in order to link their histories to the long wave theme. Communities examined include the Shakers, German Separatists (Rappites, Zoarites, Amana Colonies), Owenites, Mormons, Fourierists, Oneida, Transcendentalists, Icarians, Hutterites, Jewish agricultural settlements, Theosophists, Socialists, Single-tax communities, New Deal Communities, Catholic and Black American movements, countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Intentional Community Movement of the 1990s. The inclusion of the secular and socialist Utopias since World War I is thus one of the significant contributions of this book, as Berry expands the scope of Utopian movements beyond those included in conventional surveys. As an inevitable consequence of such a wide scope, however, he relies exclusively on secondary sources. Similarly, he provides no detailed evidence, such as from journals and testimonies of members, which would directly support his contention that Utopian activities of individuals and communities were indeed triggered by economic crises.

Berry's book is well-written and has something to offer to all readers, generalist and specialist alike. The general reader unfamiliar with the long-wave theory or the histories of specific communities will have no difficulty following the argument. The specialists will benefit from Berry's comprehensive theory of Utopian activities and gain a new perspective in understanding the role of larger economic and social events in the histories of specific communities.

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New Arcadias

Robert Owen and the Landscape of Utopia:
New Lanark and New Harmony

PATRICK EYRES, (EDITOR)

Leeds, England: New Arcadian Press, 1987 (issued as *New Arcadian Journal*, No. 25, Autumn 1987); 61p.; maps, drawings. Limited edition £8.00 (U.K.)/£11.00 (overseas).

Two Airedale Landscapes: St. Ives and Saltaire

HOWARD EAGLESTONE, PATRICK EYRES, ANDREW GRIFFITHS,
STUART RAWNSLEY, (EDITORS)

Leeds, England: New Arcadian Press, 1987/8 (issued as *New Arcadian Journal*, No.26, Winter 1987-88); 62p.; photographs, maps. Limited edition £8.00 (U.K.)/£11.00 (overseas).

The modern landscape is rich in evidence of communitarian experiments. By their very nature these little settlements, on the very margins of society, have more often than not been overwhelmed by later developments, but even in its distorted form the signs are there to see. Sometimes, remarkably, there has been little distortion of what was there originally, so that what remains is accessible not only to enthusiastic scholars but also to a wider public. It is to examples of the latter, where the physical legacy is plain to see, that two successive editions of the *New Arcadian Journal* are devoted.

Of the four examples chosen, two (New Lanark and New Harmony, the subject of the first of these two volumes) will be familiar to scholars of communitarianism. The third example, Saltaire (in Yorkshire, England), also enjoys an international reputation, though less as a radical experiment and more as a mid-nineteenth century 'model village' sponsored by the industrialist, Sir Titus Salt. It is straight out of the textbook of conservative industrial philanthropy, a tableau of neat workers' cottages, with various institutions for moral and religious improvement, a well-ordered park and, of course, close to hand, the imposing presence of Salt's woollen mill.

Less familiar might be the fourth example, St. Ives (also in Yorkshire and not to be confused with the Cornish artists' colony of the same name), planned as a picturesque landscape and working farm estate rather than a village. The rationale for its juxtaposition in the text alongside Saltaire is its pedigree as a 'pre-Raphaelite landscape',

reflecting conservative principles that were popularized by the nineteenth-century British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. Both Saltaire and St. Ives, the authors argue, were the product of a deep-rooted quest amongst Victorians to turn back the clock, creating in the place of industrial disorder, some of the natural and social qualities of a bygone age.

St. Ives apart (which is of greater interest to the landscape historian than to the scholar of communitarianism), one has to ask whether these two publications can bring to the specialist reader anything that is not already known about New Lanark, New Harmony and Saltaire. Certainly, what is of value in these works is not to be measured in terms of unearthing fresh archival material. Each is carefully referenced and makes good use of local history sources but more than that is not claimed. Nor should their value be assessed solely in terms of their interpretative insights; for each of the three communities (New Lanark and Saltaire especially) the context into which the experiments are put is clearly stated but not particularly new. These are not seminal works but (in relatively slim texts with little apparent in the way of fresh research) it is unlikely that they were intended to be.

Instead, what these publications best offer can be found in the style of the *New Arcadian Journal*, in the sense of landscape appreciation that emerges and in the focus on how each of these communities is currently being used and conserved.

The *New Arcadian Journal* is the product of a small press based in Leeds and specializing in local studies, especially of Yorkshire. Typographically, each edition is a work of art in itself, skilfully designed from the woodcut style cover page to the use of illustrations throughout; a bonus in the New Lanark and New Harmony edition is the use of delightful pen and ink drawings by Jack Sloan and others. So even if what is said is not especially novel, it is impossible to miss the care and affection for what is at issue.

It is also impossible to miss a concern for the architectural form and quality of landscapes in which each of the four developments is located. This concern is revealed in the artistic treatment of the subjects and in descriptions (historical as well as contemporary) of the British examples especially.

Finally, one must acknowledge that in each case there is a commentary on how these historic landscapes have been conserved and managed for public access. New Harmony comes in for particular criticism, where the author of this particular study, Edward L. Hawes, claims that the Owenite phase of the community's history is under-represented and that, overall, the visitor is overwhelmed with

details and left to reflect on the unevenness of the exhibits on the Rappites, the scientists and the decorative arts. But there is a sense of flippancy in this criticism that leaves the reader wary of the contribution as a whole, and with a verdict on the two publications of 'artistically presented but lacking in depth'.

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Zig-Zag and Swirl; Alfred W. Lawson's Quest for Greatness

LYELL D. HENRY JR.

Iowa City, IA: The University of Iowa Press, 1991; xix, 336p.; bibliographic notes, index; photographs; \$29.95 hardcover

Alfred W. Lawson: baseball star, sports magnate, aviation journalist; almost inventor of the airliner, the modern airline, the aircraft carrier, and the smokestack scrubber; Utopian novelist, economic theorist, communal founder, and cult leader. This interesting character, self-described "First Knowledgian", called by at least one close friend a "crackpot", founded a movement which is still in business, both as a church and a "university," and obviously had a significant influence on many followers who still revere him. While he has fallen into obscurity since his death in 1954, Lawson deserves a serious sympathetic biography, which is exactly what Lyell Henry has tried to do.

Henry apparently began this work before 1979, and apparently was doing well in gaining the confidence of the surviving Lawsonomists, until they objected to an article on Lawson's baseball career. Since there is little primary source material outside the possible holdings of the Lawsonomists, Henry has had to rely very heavily on the scant secondary sources and Lawson's own voluminous writings. As a result, while this book appears as a biography, it is as much an analysis and exegesis of the theories of Lawsonomy, which started as a type of physics/cosmology, developed into an economic system, and ended as a religion. Although the principles of suction and pressure, zig-zag and swirl, and equaeverypoise remain rather obscure to this reader, Henry does in fact go a long way to explaining what Lawson was getting at.

Unfortunately, Henry is much less successful in explaining Lawson's appeal—either to the hundreds of thousands of members of

the 1930s vintage Direct Credit Society, the members of the University of Lawsonomy in Des Moines, or to the current Lawsonomists. While he does compare Lawson to Father Coughlin, whose headquarters were for a time near Lawson's, Henry appears unaware of most studies of either utopianism or intentional communities—such writers as Robert Fogarty or Rosabeth Moss Kanter appear nowhere. Similarly, while Henry provides an interesting summary of Lawson's Utopian novel, *Born Again*, he does not place this in the context of other Utopian novels, or give much evidence of any knowledge of the field.

Some of this failure is understandable. After all, Henry was cut off from much of his information. However, although he claims to have made many visits to many libraries over the years of research, he does not even cite the oral history compiled by Steve McClure at Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne, Indiana) in 1984, which could have helped Henry's work considerably. Similarly, Henry appears to be unaware that Lawson's first aeronautical periodical, *Fly*, was in fact completely reprinted (not just volume one as he claims), and that *Aeronautics* is available in a number of libraries.

The failure to put Lawson in context also applies to the more modern period. In particular, the evolution of the Direct Credits for All movement into first a "university" (actually a form of Utopian colony) and then a "religion", parallels the direction of many modern cults. Certainly, Lawsonomy-as-religion with its insistence on reading nothing but Lawson's own writings, its isolation from the world, and its almost total reliance on a charismatic leader even after his mental state appears to have declined, cries out for some analysis based on what we have learned about modern communal societies and "cults."

Overall, then, this book succeeds on one level and fails on another. As an interesting, sympathetic account of the beliefs of a leader and a group who could certainly have been easily parodied, the book succeeds. As an account of an alternative philosophy and community, which retains adherents nearly forty years after the death of the leader and the dissolution of the major settlement, the work fails.

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Mother's First-Born Daughters:
Early Shaker Writings on Women and Religion

JEAN HUMEZ, (EDITOR)

Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993; fwd., intro., 320 p.; bibliography, index; \$39.95 hardcover, \$17.50 paper.

In this valuable anthology, Jean Humez has provided a remarkable collection of published and unpublished documents detailing the early history of the Shakers in the United States. The focus of her documents is, as the title proclaims, on the experience of Shaker women, and Humez has employed documents by both men and women on topics as diverse as the emerging collective memory of Mother Ann to the grueling experience of women missionaries in Ohio in order to demonstrate what she calls "the long-overshadowed agency" of the women who helped shape Shakerism (p. xxvii). Humez's collection depicts vividly the experience of the women who lived within and defined the innovative dual-gender ideology of their faith. The documents suggest, furthermore, the range of concerns of the first Shakers and, indeed, of the scholars who continue to revise and reinterpret our understanding of this enduring communal experiment. Jean Humez has collected manuscripts and published writings covering the period from the Shakers' first tentative appearance in New York State in 1774 to the growth of permanent and vibrant Shaker communities throughout New England and New York and on the frontier by the 1850s.

Humez divides her anthology into four sections. An informative introduction provides the reader with a sophisticated context in which to place the central role of religious experience in the lives of American women in general and the particular place of gender in Shaker beliefs and practices. Each of the following four sections commences with a prefatory essay, followed by the documents themselves. The first section considers Ann Lee through the memories of her followers. Many of the documents in this section have been drawn from published memories and testimonies of Shakers, and, taken together, they permit an intriguing glimpse at the construction and reconstruction of the young faith's collective history. The second section turns to the second great Shaker leader, Lucy Wright, who led the Shakers for almost thirty years, and whose leadership defined a period of contentious and rapid growth. In the third section, Humez has compiled a fascinating series of letters to and from Shaker women missionaries in Ohio and Kentucky. The labors of these

women in the isolation and discomfort of their western outposts provide riveting reading and shed valuable light on the missionary impulse and those who answered it. Finally, the fourth section of *Mother's First-Born Daughters* is devoted entirely to the phenomenon of Shaker spiritualism after 1837. These remarkable documents reveal the important role ecstatic religion played in providing Shaker women with an alternative vehicle for spiritual expression and theological innovation. The way in which spiritualism enabled shaker women to redefine their ties to the founder provides a thought-provoking foil to the initial construction of memories of Mother Ann presented in the first section of the anthology and, furthermore, offers a moving conclusion to this consideration of the changing roles of women within Shakerism.

Jean Humez's editing strategy seems deliberately non-intrusive. She saves her attention to current debates in the growing literature on Shaker history for the informative essays that preface each section of documents. Her collection will be of value to a range of audiences. In publishing these manuscript sources, many drawn from the excellent collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Humez has provided a useful starting point for those specialists interested in religious history and women's history. Humez's collection will be useful in upper level undergraduate courses, and the documents themselves will help students who have followed the current revisionist scholarship on Shakerism to consider some of the evidence firsthand and to remind themselves of the central role of women in Shakerism.

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Two Hundred Years of American Communes

YAACOV OVED

New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Press, 1988; pref., intro., 500 pp.; notes, appendix, index of names, index of communes.

There is no other book on the market quite like Yaacov Oved's, and it seems unlikely that others in the future will adopt Oved's original and ambitious plan. The book is divided into two parts, "The Historical Sequence" (365 pages) and "A Collective Profile in a Comparative Approach" (135 pages). Part I begins with an essay on the

characteristics that made America a "hotbed for communes in the modern world," followed by descriptions of "approximately 70" individual communes, arranged in sixteen chapters, some devoted to a single group (e.g., the Shakers, Oneida, New Odessa, Kaweah, the Hutterites) and others to several related groups (e.g., Religious Immigrant Communes, Communitarian Settlements and Socialist Parties in Washington State). The survey covers communities established between 1732 (Ephrata) and 1933 (Sunrise). Part II consists of seven comparative chapters on aspects of communal life (Ideological Principles; Social Activity and Management; Education, Culture, and Rituals; The Family and Women's Status in the Communes; Economic Assets and Liabilities; Dualistic Relationships with the Outside World; Dissolution of the Communes) and an Epilogue.

The combination of a case history approach with a comparative approach is one of the book's strengths. Most surveys of American communes have opted for the case history approach with a nod toward comparison at the end. It is refreshing (and useful) to have Oved's competent and often insightful comparisons, although the chapters differ in quality. The weakest is the one on ideology, which betrays a minimal grasp of the doctrines on which the religious communities, especially, were based. Oved's discussion of the family builds on earlier scholarship debating "the feasibility of a symbiosis between family and commune," and he offers several original insights on this question. His discussion of women's status did not have the benefit of important recent studies on that subject. His conclusion that "the status of women on communes was higher than the average in most American communities of that time" is not well-supported. The strongest comparative chapter is perhaps the one on the economic aspects of American communes.

Two-thirds of the book is given over to descriptions of various communal groups. Almost inevitably, the number of groups covered gave this section a cookbook quality, especially evident in Chapter 6, where Oved reviews over a dozen of the Fourierist communities before settling into longer descriptions of Brook Farm and the North American Phalanx. Still, the large number of communities surveyed meant that several not usually encountered were covered in some detail, for example La Reunion, New Odessa, and the Christian Commonwealth. While Oved's decision to omit from his survey groups formed after 1933 is understandable, it would have been interesting to know whether he sees systematic differences between the "historic" and "contemporary" groups, especially in light of the fact that Oved is an Israeli kibbutz member—something that he mentions but which plays no explicit part in his analysis. Also regrettable

in these chapters is the almost complete lack of voices from individual commune members. This, plus an emphasis on longevity as the criterion of success, give these chapters a rather detached quality.

A large number of factual errors detract from Oved's description of the community I know the best, the Amana Inspirationists. For example, on just the first page of his section on Amana he mistakenly sets the group's origins in the seventeenth century (rather than the eighteenth), says most of the members came from the peasant and lower-middle classes (in fact, almost none were peasants), cites Wuerttemberg as the group's principal center of activity (it was Hessen), wrongly claims that Barbara Heinemann, one of the group's leaders, was a factory worker, and misspells the names of two of the Hessian estates where members gathered before emigrating (these were Marienborn, not Marienburg, and Engelthal, not Engenthal). I mention these errors to alert readers to the possibility that other chapters contain similar shortcomings.

Problems of a technical nature detract further from the book's appeal. There are numerous typographical and proofreading errors, which are certainly as much the publisher's fault as the author's. The prose style, rarely lively, is occasionally awkward; Oved may have been ill-served in this by his translator (whom he thanks in the preface, but who is otherwise not acknowledged).

Two Hundred Years of American Communes is a useful addition to the comparative literature on American communitarianism, though it needs to be used cautiously.

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