

# Artists' Colonies as Communal Societies in the Arts and Crafts Era

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DURING THE TWO decades between 1890 and 1910 many artists in the United States and abroad banded together in colonies in which they could pursue their muses in the company of other artists. While artists' colonies—in the sense of locales with high concentrations of working artists and some sharing of studio and gallery space—are of ancient vintage (and have long been well represented by such American enclaves as Provincetown, Taos, and Old Lyme), the turn-of-the-century colonies, products of the then-popular arts and crafts movement, were a new breed: their diverse economic systems often involved some kind of sharing of money (ranging from owning land in common, to helping peers in need, to living off the charity of wealthy patrons), the artists usually lived and worked on community property rather than simply in a neighborhood, and the colonies embodied a sense of common purpose among the participating artists, a conviction—one that fueled the arts and crafts movement as a whole—that art could be a powerful instrument of social change.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the arts and crafts colonies to be considered here were not communes in the strictest sense of the term, but were examples of a genre of intentional community sometimes called the "cooperative colony."<sup>2</sup> They occupy a place within American communal history if

1. An excellent brief history of the major communal art colonies is Karal Ann Marling, "The Art Colonial Movement," the introduction to *Woodstock: An American Art Colony, 1902-1977* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1977), an unpaginated catalog.

2. Enclaves here called cooperative colonies—i.e., residential intentional communities that are less than fully economically developed—have been studied by several scholars, particularly in the mid-twentieth century. See, for example, Henrik F. Infield, "Cooperative Community: A Note on a Potential New Field of Sociological Research," *American Sociological Review* 7 (December 1942): 854-55; Hendrik F. Infield and Joseph B. Meier, eds., *Cooperative Group Living* (New York: Henry Koosis and Co., 1950).

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one accepts this relatively inclusive definition of a communal society: 1) it is a residential community, with participants living in a unitary dwelling or in adjacent buildings; 2) it involves some fair degree of economic sharing (such as holding land in common); and 3) it espouses a vision, a purpose that informs the lives of members and calls them to live in this distinctive fashion.

The arts and crafts colonies numbered a dozen or so and represented a spectrum of organizational patterns and levels of commitment to a communal ideal.<sup>3</sup> They were typically in rural areas or small towns, reflecting the "back to the land" sentiment that at about the same time was spawning other communities, including the Salvation Army farm colonies, some of the Jewish agricultural settlements, and various cooperative enclaves of one-acre microfarms.

Earlier intentional communities—Brook Farm was a notable example — had been havens for artists, but as a movement encompassing hundreds, if not thousands, of artists in several widely dispersed locations, the arts and crafts colonies represented a new twist on the venerable theme of intentional community and must be taken into account by those who seek to understand the phenomenon of intentional community in all its forms and manifestations. They also deserve attention because they were part and parcel of a subtle but important shift taking place in communal America at the turn of the century, a shift from large, visible communal establishments with strongly articulated (usually religious) ideologies and disciplined lifestyles and economic systems to a less rigid type of community, typically smaller in size than the earlier ventures were, in which common goals remained crucial but individuality was given greater value in the communal scheme of things. Given the decline of many of the large communes and communal movements of the nineteenth century (the Shakers, the Harmony Society, and Fourierism, for example), the arts and crafts communities may be seen as significant links between the glory days of the past and the great revival of the communal spirit that would mark the last third of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The model that beckoned the arts and crafts colonists was Euro-

3. The estimate of a dozen was made by David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 190.

4. Thousands of new intentional communities were founded in the United States after 1965, and dozens or hundreds of communities founded earlier survived into the last third of the century as well. In the mid-1990s thousands of communities continued to exist; the 1995 edition of the *Communities Directory* contained over 500 entries, and the database on which the *Directory* was based contained over 2,000 entries, the substantial majority representing active communities preferring not to be listed publicly. See *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (Langley, Wash.: Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1995).

pean; for the better part of a century colonies of artists had prospered there, most notably, perhaps, at Barbizon, the French village that first began to draw artists as early as the 1820s and which by midcentury had among its inhabitants such distinguished painters as Camille Corot, Jean Francois Millet, and Theodore Rousseau.<sup>5</sup> In the latter part of the century the model spread, particularly to England and the United States, its dispersion coinciding with the rise of the arts and crafts movement, which emerged in England in the late 1850s and 1860s under the inspiration of John Ruskin and William Morris—both of whom, not incidentally, were founders of arts-oriented communities in their homeland.

The impact of Ruskin and Morris must not be underestimated, but in the United States several domestic social and cultural currents contributed to the colony impulse as well. One was the popularity of culturally-oriented summer camps in latter-nineteenth-century America, where educated vacationers, disproportionate numbers of them fairly prosperous, pursued Chautauqua presentations, Bible studies, and a wide variety of aesthetic endeavors—lectures, performances, and workshops in visual arts, music, philosophy, and so forth—at any of hundreds of campgrounds. Another was the tide of social reform activity—populism, the social gospel, progressivism, and single tax agitation, not to mention more radical advocacy of socialism, anarchism, and free love—that surged in the latter years of the century and embodied the kind of idealism typically congenial to the founding of intentional communities. Yet another was the movement to establish garden cities, pleasant semirural towns not defiled by sooty factories. And still another was the work of feminist reformers, among them Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who were outlining new models of home life that would relieve women from exclusively domestic duties, models that meshed well with cooperative endeavors. In this milieu a good many artists, both prominent and obscure, were drawn to participate in reform-minded social experiments while enjoying the cultural richness of villages of artists and the patronage of prosperous visitors.

The arts and crafts movement, the heart and soul of the art colony movement, from its beginning had goals beyond the mere creation of works of art by individual artists. It sought to revolutionize the organization of workshops, eliminating the distinctions among designers, craftspersons, and managers, and, in the age of robber-baron

5. For a sketch of the history of Barbizon and other European artists' colonies, see Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life: Artist Colonies in Europe and America* (Oxford, U.K.: Phaidon Press, 1985).

capitalism, it subscribed to the labor theory of value.<sup>6</sup> Importantly for communal studies, the movement tried, notably through the creation of cooperatives patterned after medieval craft guilds, to engender a sense of cooperative endeavor and an atmosphere of equality among its artists.<sup>7</sup> It championed hand work, and although machines inevitably crept into many arts and crafts studios, the movement had a strong sense of making sure that they were servants, not masters, of the workers: "The Arts and Crafts [movement] is a soul-reaction from under the feet of corporations and the wheels of machines," declaimed Edward Pearson Pressey, the founder of the New Clairvaux art colony.<sup>8</sup>

### Roycroft

The earliest of the more or less communal art colonies was that of the Roycrofters at East Aurora, New York. Its founder and ubiquitous leader, Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915), made a small fortune early in life as a soap salesman. Then, looking for more satisfaction than the conventional business world offered, he turned to study and writing. In 1892, on a trip abroad to collect materials for a major writing project, he visited—possibly in the company of George Bernard Shaw—William Morris's Kelmscott arts and crafts colony at Merton Abbey, outside London, and deliberately imitated it in building his own community, which began to take shape the following year.<sup>9</sup> The earliest ventures focused on hand-printing and hand-illuminating elegant (some would say pseudo-elegant) books;<sup>10</sup> the publishing operation turned out to be a commercial success, due largely to Hubbard's tireless and corny but canny promotion of it. Indeed, the consummate salesman used his promotional genius to make all of the Roycroft product lines profit-

6. Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 156.

7. For a brief historical sketch of the rise of the arts and craft movement in England and the United States, see Mabel Tuke Priestman, "History of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America," *House Beautiful* 20 (October 1906): 15-16, (November 1906): 14-16.

8. Quoted by Eileen Boris, " 'Dreams of Brotherhood and Beauty': The Social Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *The Art that Is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 208.

9. The suggestion that Shaw may have introduced Hubbard to Morris is provided in Felix Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora* (New York: William H. Wise, 1926), 176.

10. Dard Hunter, who designed many of the books, was ambivalent about their artistry. He wrote in his autobiography: "Even though the books produced at the Roycroft Shop were bizarre and lacked taste and refinement, they were, nevertheless, a step in the right direction. These books were better made than most of the work done in this country at the time ...." See Dard Hunter, *My Life with Paper: An Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 43.

able—so much so that his detractors saw him as more a carnival barker than an artist or communitarian. While the ceaseless hoopla did have its distasteful side, it is useful to remember, as Leslie Greene Bowman has observed, that while Hubbard's gaudy promotion of Roycroft wares, including ideas, may have turned the campus into a "kind of arts and crafts amusement park," the promotion did in fact sell the products and kept the venture alive while the less commercially oriented colonies had shorter lifespans.<sup>11</sup> Years earlier Hubbard had written, "To refer to me as 'commercial' does not hurt my feelings. The World of Commerce is just as honorable as the World of Art and a trifle more necessary. Art exists on the surplus that Business Men accumulate."<sup>12</sup> In any event, for two decades Hubbard reigned as the P. T. Barnum of the arts and crafts movement.

About the time the books began to come off the presses, in 1895, Hubbard also founded *The Philistine*, a little magazine of aphorisms and miscellany. Its tone was mildly iconoclastic; Hubbard took frequent slaps at monogamy, for example (it later became known that he had had a lengthy affair, which led to a divorce from his first wife).<sup>13</sup> The magazine found an immediate niche and quickly developed a healthy circulation; seven years after its founding, riding Hubbard's own increasing renown, it reached the incredible number of 110,000.<sup>14</sup> As Eileen Boris, the perceptive historian of the arts and crafts movement, has observed, "While it appears juvenile and hackneyed today, the *Philistine* opened new worlds of art and thought to young people in small towns where parochialism and religiosity circumscribed their lives."<sup>15</sup>

Eventually a second magazine, *The Fra* (Hubbard frequently styled himself "Fra Elbertus"), appeared as well, and all the while the books continued to pour forth—largely Hubbard's works, some of which found a wide audience. The centerpiece of the books was a long series called *Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great*.

Curious visitors began to drop in at East Aurora. Eventually the

11. Leslie Greene Bowman, *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990), 41-42.

12. Quoted in Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, 201.

13. A typical epigram is: "To civilize mankind: Make marriage difficult and divorce easy;" quoted by Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, 491.

14. Freeman Champney, *Art and Glory: The Story of Elbert Hubbard* (New York: Crown, 1968), 92. Felix Shay remarks casually that one issue about 1914 had a press run of 225,000, but Shay's adulation of Hubbard is uncritical, and no dispassionate witness vouches for any figure in that range. See Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, 547.

15. Boris, *Art and Labor*, 147. The reference is to one of Ruskin's most popular works. See John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (New York: J. Wiley and Sons, 1880).

Roycrofters built the Roycroft Inn to house the inquirers, and in furnishing the hotel they hit upon what became a mainstay industry, Morris-style furniture. The hotel, in fact, became a showplace of Roycroft crafts, and it had the calculated whimsy so characteristic of Hubbard: the rooms, for example, were not numbered, but named for such persons as Aristotle, Charles Darwin, William Morris, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Walt Whitman, and Rosa Bonheur. Eventually the line of craft products included copperware, leather, stained glass, wrought iron, and other such things; the mail-order business even carried food specialties.

Although most of the Roycrofters built artifacts of standard pattern, several artists of excellent repute provided original designs and prototypes; Dard Hunter, who produced fine metalworks and later produced exquisite hand-made paper and other works, was probably the most prominent of them.<sup>16</sup> Roycroft also had a bank and a farm. By the turn of the century the whole enterprise was a thriving business.

Hubbard on a number of occasions claimed that the Roycrofters lived and worked in a true commune that included a common treasury, organized as a corporation for legal purposes but operating in the interest of its employees, who owned much of its stock.<sup>17</sup> The claim seemed to be fairly widely accepted at the time, and various socialists applauded the seeming progressivism of the Roycroft Shops.<sup>18</sup> Hubbard's biographer Freeman Champney calls the setup "quasi-communal," emphasizing the sense of free-wheeling camaraderie and the little fragments of classless democracy, such as the fact that the Roycroft workers and their paying hotel guests all ate together in one dining hall.<sup>19</sup> Champney concludes:

In the early years, Roycroft had much in common with the Utopian communities that had dotted the country earlier in the century. Not economically, since the property was Hubbard's. But Roycroft had common meals, meetings, sports, studies, and a library. Cash wages were small, but there wasn't much need or opportunity to spend money. The work was still work, but there was an effort to make it humanly satisfying. There was a real—if informal and basically paternalistic—feeling of shared values, adventure, responsibility.<sup>20</sup>

16. On Dard Hunter, see Dard Hunter II, *The Life Work of Dard Hunter* (Chillicothe, Ohio: Mountain Press, 1981).

17. See, for example, [Elbert Hubbard], *The Book of the Roycrofters* (East Aurora, N.Y.: Roycrofters, 1907); Elbert Hubbard, *The Roycroft Shop: A History* (East Aurora, N.Y.: Roycrofters, 1908), 6.

18. See, for example, W. D. P. Bliss, *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 586.

19. Champney, *Art and Glory*, 64.

20. Champney, *Art and Glory*, 80.

Certainly working conditions in the Roycroft shops were enlightened for the time. Roycroft in effect became one of the "welfare capitalist" industries of the turn-of-the-century era, resembling in some respects, for example, LeClaire, Illinois, the company town built by plumbing-fixture entrepreneur Nelson O. Nelson, where workers enjoyed such amenities as a library, a kindergarten, schools, community buildings, a cooperative store, and an easy payment plan for home ownership.<sup>21</sup> Workplaces at Roycroft were comfortable and well lighted; the workday was only eight hours long; workers tiring of one task could take up another. The Roycroft Creed began by affirming a "belief in working with the Head, Hand and Heart, and mixing enough Play with the Work so that every task is pleasurable and makes for Health and Happiness."<sup>22</sup> Hubbard's system was benevolent, and it worked in the marketplace. By 1906 the ranks of the Roycrofters exceeded 400.<sup>23</sup>

The Roycrofters' communitarian image was enhanced in a variety of ways. Hints of collective endeavor were scattered about the "campus"; for example, Hubbard nicknamed the Roycroft Inn the "Phalanstery."<sup>24</sup> Progressive causes and fads were often endorsed: a sign in the dining room recommended "Fletcherism," or slow chewing of food, which was believed by adherents to insure perfect health as well as to cause the eater to consume less.<sup>25</sup> The community presented itself as committed to left-of-center social causes, as evidenced by its inviting as visiting lecturers such progressive lights as Eugene V. Debs, Clarence Darrow, Booker T. Washington, and Margaret Sanger. Moreover, the Roycrofters periodically sponsored conferences on socialism and other progressive topics. An announcement for a Roycroft conference scheduled for June 1909 opened by intoning, "Socialism is coming. The question is in what form, when, and how?" On the other hand, the Roycrofters sponsored several conferences annually on a variety of topics (after 1903 they had a hotel to fill, after all), and they did not hesitate to use their appeal to socialists and other reformers to sell

21. On LeClaire, see by Kim McQuaid, "The Businessman as Reformer: Nelson O. Nelson and Late Nineteenth Century Social Movements in America," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 33, no. 4 (October 1974): 423-35, and "The Businessman as Social Innovator: Nelson O. Nelson as Promoter of Garden Cities and the Consumer Cooperative Movement," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 34, no. 4 (October 1975): 411-22.

22. Coy L. Ludwig, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in New York State, 1890s-1920s* (Hamilton, N.Y.: Gallery Association of New York State, 1983), 36.

23. The figure comes from Albert Land, *Elbert Hubbard and His Work* (Worcester, Mass.: Blanchard Press, 1901), as quoted by Boris, *Art and Labor*, 148.

24. Kirsten Hoving Keen, *American Art Pottery, 1875-1930* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1978), 55; Hunter, *My Life with Paper*, 31.

25. Ludwig, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in New York State*, 29.

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advertising for their periodicals.<sup>26</sup> Boris concludes that "More than any other self-proclaimed follower of Morris, Hubbard manipulated anties-establishment symbols to support the existing culture."<sup>27</sup>

Hubbard swore that he was egalitarian through and through. "All the money I make by my pen, all that I get from my lectures and books, goes to the fund of the Roycroft—the benefit goes to all."<sup>28</sup> "I want no better clothing, no better food, no more comforts and conveniences than my helpers and fellow-workers have.... The Roycroft Shop is for the Roycrofters, and each is limited only by his capacity to absorb."<sup>29</sup> But he has had a fair number of detractors who have argued that he, like some other charismatic leaders of intentional communities, was rather more equal than his fellows, that he was a skillful publicist, an opportunist, and a seeming bohemian who actually served the American ruling class well and skillfully.<sup>30</sup>

Hubbard associate Felix Shay tried to dismiss such criticisms by arguing that some Roycrofters refused to work and, when they were fired, "paraded their tales."<sup>31</sup> But disgruntled former employees were not the only ones carping at Hubbard. "By 1914," notes Frank Luther Mott sardonically, "the Fra was playing golf with John D. Rockefeller." In his last years, "Hubbard rode two horses—socialism and big business."<sup>32</sup> Certainly some shift in his outlook had occurred over time. In 1903 Hubbard had been able to write, "The Superior Class is a burden. No nation ever survived it long, none ever can." But by 1913 he seemingly had become what would now be called a neoconservative: "Trust-busting attorneys, intent on barratry, working under protection of an obsolete law, have wrought havoc and worked a dire wrong to the working people. The endeavor to destroy our Captains of Industry—

26. See an advertisement headed "Congress of Socialism," *The Fra* 3, no. 3 (June 1909): xxi. In the same issue of the magazine another full-page advertisement (p. xii) lists five summer conferences at Roycroft, including ones on New Thought and women's suffrage as well as the one on socialism, and advises "Wise Advertisers" that "Such Folks lend class to your following. Win them today and they are with you for all time."

27. Boris, *Art and Labor*, 146.

28. Quoted by Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, 328.

29. Hubbard, *The Roycroft Shop: A History*, 24.

30. For a critique of the supposed communitarianism of the Roycrofters, see Frederick Lewis Allen, "Elbert Hubbard," *Scribner's Magazine* 104 (September 1938): 12-14, 49-51. See also Robert L. Beisner, "'Commune' in East Aurora," *American Heritage* 22, no. 2 (February 1971): 72-77, 106-109.

31. Shay, *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, 122.

32. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1885-1905* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1957), 4: 644.

our creators of wealth—has been a blunder, vast and far-reaching in its malevolent effect."<sup>33</sup>

One of the more vitriolic attacks came, after Hubbard's death, from Upton Sinclair, who denounced Hubbard for having tried to sell large quantities of an antilabor motivational tract to John D. Rockefeller and thus help the arch-capitalist head off worker unrest.<sup>34</sup> Hubbard's most famous literary creation, by far, was "A Message to Garcia," a paean to devotion to duty that was purchased in bulk by many industrialists and distributed to their employees, eventually reaching a circulation in the millions.<sup>35</sup> The tract eulogized self-reliance and teamwork—virtues dear to socialists and cooperators that also meshed well with the interests of corporate managers. In any event, Hubbard adroitly promoted the profitable proliferation of the piece, and the whole thing raised, understandably, serious doubts about his status as a reformer among those devoted to social change.

But Hubbard's reputation as a progressive and communitarian had defenders as well. One sympathizer wrote in 1905 that because of "Garcia" Hubbard was condemned by progressives, but that conservatives also distrusted him "because he insists on work for the idle rich and work for the idle poor; because he does not stand pat on the present system and is trying to replace competition with co-operation; ... because he has identified himself with street gamins, monists, heretics, cowboys, mothers, lovers, babes and sages ...,"<sup>36</sup>

J. Wade Caruthers argues that the depiction of Hubbard as an apologist for big business seems to derive from posthumous publications of his selected works, pieces that do not constitute a balanced sample of his thought. The whole Hubbard corpus, Caruthers maintains, discloses a reformer who promoted socialist ideas and criticized orthodox religion, the wealthy who lived off the work of others, government oppression, imperialism, and child labor, among other things. Caruthers concludes that Hubbard was on the whole solidly

33. *Philistine* 10 (April 1903): 134, and 37 (October 1913): 133-34, quoted by Mott, *History of American Magazines*, 4:643-44.

34. Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check* (Pasadena, Calif.: author, 1931), 314-17. Sinclair's complaint was essentially a recapitulation of an anonymous popular-press article that had appeared years earlier; see "Elbert Hubbard's Price," *Harper's Weekly* 60 (30 January 1915): 112.

35. Elbert Hubbard, "A Message to Garcia." The piece was first published without a heading in *The Philistine* (March 1899). Fairly soon orders for that issue increased sharply, and then reprints of the essay alone proliferated. See the *National Union Catalog* for an extensive listing of the various listings of the "Message." For details about the proliferation of editions and the content of the essay, see Champney, *Art and Glory*, 86-92.

36. Charles A. Sandburg, "Subjugation of Elbert Hubbard," *To-Morrow* 1 (October 1905): 32.

progressive—indeed, was a dreamer who had tried to implement his vision of a better society.<sup>37</sup> One would have to overlook quite a few important Hubbard writings to conclude that the Fra's only agenda was the promotion of himself and corporate America.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the level of communitarianism the Roycrofters may have achieved, and whatever the level of purity of Fra Elbertus's thought, the enterprise was quite prosperous for many years, producing and successfully marketing elegant books, arts and crafts furniture, and other items. Moreover, Hubbard was, as Robert Koch has noted, "the first to promote Morris' ideas in this country" and therefore to be credited as a major precipitator of the flowering of the arts and crafts movement. Roycroft was undeniably a major force—perhaps *the* major force—in placing arts and crafts furniture, books, copperware, and the like in middle-class American homes; it also foreshadowed the success of other arts and crafts ventures, such as some of Gustav Stickley's work, which, as Koch observes, "could never have had such a widespread vogue had not Hubbard paved the way with the printed word."<sup>39</sup> He had at least a modicum of influence on later artists and architects as well. Wayne Andrews suggests that Hubbard influenced Frank Lloyd Wright in matters of style and self-promotion, if not architecture:

It is just possible that it was Hubbard who taught Wright there was no easier way of attracting attention than wearing one's hair long and sporting flowing ties. After all, the nation listened when the editor of *The Philistine* preached: "Wear thy hair long: it is a sign that thou art free." Wright may have listened more attentively than anyone else, for he and Hubbard were one in their admiration for the teachings of William Morris.

Possibly, too, the architect might never have dreamed of ending his days as a patriarch surrounded by young admirers if he had not been aware of what the founder of the Roycroft Press accomplished at East Aurora. The Taliesin Fellowship of future architects come to learn the secrets of the profession from the master has more than a little in common with the Roycrofters—in Spring Green as at East Aurora, young people are obliged to recognize that, as Hubbard put it, "all work is respectable, including the dirty work."<sup>40</sup>

37. J. Wade Caruthers, "Elbert Hubbard: A Case of Reinterpretation," *Connecticut Review* 1 (October 1967): 67-77.

38. To cite just one example, in a single book of essays Hubbard denounced anti-Catholic prejudice, praised unfettered liberty of thought, and provided a light Utopian fantasy, among other things. See Elbert Hubbard, *As It Seems to Me: Being Some Philistine Essays Concerning Several Things* (East Aurora, N.Y.: Roycroft Shop, 1898).

39. Robert Koch, "Elbert Hubbard's Roycrofters as Artist-Craftsmen," *Winterthur Portfolio* III (1967): 82.

40. Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition and Americans* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 248-49.

Hubbard also provided what were for his era excellent working conditions, including the freedom for workers to move from task to task to avoid industrial boredom.<sup>41</sup> Roycrofters had recreational and cultural activities unusual for businesses in their day—a baseball team, for example, and a Roycroft band. Boris argues that Roycroft combined "symbolic medievalism with communitarianism and benevolent capitalism," even though it was less a Utopian community than a laboratory for Hubbard's ideas.<sup>42</sup>

Roycroft served as something of a beacon to those who would combine art, community, social reform, and, to some extent, radical politics. It rapidly slipped into obscurity, however, following Hubbard's death. Hubbard, even inadvertently ever the master of the flamboyant gesture, and his wife Alice went down with the *Lusitania* in 1915.<sup>43</sup> Such commonality as there was at the Roycroft shops did not long outlast Hubbard, although the business survived under the management of his son Elbert Hubbard II until 1938. Thereafter several of the Roycroft campus buildings became public facilities, one of them the East Aurora town hall. In the 1980s a Roycroft renaissance arose along with a general renewal of interest in the arts and crafts movement; once again artists worked in East Aurora, and galleries flourished anew. The Roycroft Inn began a major renovation, and at this writing the artistic, if not the communal, spirit of the Roycrofters lives on.

## Rose Valley

The most fully communal and certainly the most democratic of the art colonies was Rose Valley, founded outside Philadelphia in 1901. Its participants represented the fusion of two groups, a radical circle of intellectuals and professionals that included the respected Quaker architect William Lightfoot Price and a bohemian scene whose most prominent figure was Horace Traubel. Price was an architect of some renown; among his better-known projects were several extravagant mansions—one of them, Woodmont, on the Main Line outside Philadel-

41. Even Hubbard's critics generally acknowledge his benevolence as an employer. See, for example, Leslie Greene Bowman, *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990), 39-41.

42. Boris, *Art and Labor*, 147-48.

43. A widely-told but probably apocryphal tale has it that after the torpedo hit the ship, Hubbard commented to his wife, "Think of it, Alice—tomorrow the headlines will say 'Elbert Hubbard killed on the Lusitania!' " See Lionel Lambourne, *Utopian Craftsmen: The Arts and Crafts Movement from the Cotswold to Chicago* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1980), 156-57.

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phia, later became the headquarters of Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement — and two grand hotels in Atlantic City. Price and Trauble had met in the 1890s, and Trauble had introduced Price to the radical thinking of William Morris, Henry George, and Walt Whitman.

Since then Price had become involved with, among other radicals, the Fels brothers, Samuel and Joseph, single-tax devotees and heirs to a considerable fortune who devoted much of their money to fighting the system that had provided it, and Edward Bok, the influential editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, who used his mass-circulation pulpit to promote such causes as sex education, pure food and drug laws, and wilderness preservation.<sup>44</sup> At the end of the century Price and his friends began to focus their efforts on colonization projects, which they saw as helping the arts and crafts struggle for a revival of craftsmanship in an industrial age. The first colony, founded in 1900 by Price, Frank Stephens, and Joseph Fels, was the single-tax enclave of Arden, Delaware, located just a few miles from their suburban Philadelphia base.

Once Arden was under way Price and his associates—this time his business partner Hawley McLanahan was the other principal participant—turned their attention to a pair of aged and empty mill buildings at Rose Valley that would house what they intended to be not only a workspace for artists but a community that, at its ambitious best, might become the nucleus of new social order they so fervently sought.<sup>45</sup> Half a century earlier Rose Valley had housed several houses and water-powered mills; its main industry had been the manufacture of snuff. The decline of snuff-taking in society had turned the mills and homes into a ghost town that to Price and McLanahan seemed made to order for a colony of the arts.<sup>46</sup>

Price purchased the site in April 1901, incorporated his organization in July, sold stock to participants for working capital, and set about developing crafts-related industries.<sup>47</sup> He moved his family to Rose Valley soon after acquiring the property and, as George Thomas has

44. Shi, *The Simple Life*, 183.

45. Eleanore Price Mather, "The Arts and Crafts Community," in *A History of Rose Valley*, eds. Peter Ham, Eleanore Price Mather, Judy Walton, and Patricia Ward (Delaware County, Pa.: Borough of Rose Valley, 1973), 11.

46. For information on the earlier period in Rose Valley and photographs of the ruins prior to their restoration, see Mabel Tuke Priestman, "Rose Valley, A Community of Disciples of Ruskin and Morris," *House and Garden* 10, no. 4 (October 1906): 159-65.

47. Stock worth \$25,000 was authorized, but much of it did not find buyers, leaving a lingering financial problem in the community. See William Ayres, "'A Poor Sort of Heaven; a Good Sort of Earth': A Chronology of the Arts and Crafts Community," in *A Poor Sort of Heaven, A Good Sort of Earth: The Rose Valley Arts and Crafts Experiment*, ed. William Ayres (Chadds Ford, Pa.: Brandywine River Museum, 1983), 18.

written, set to gathering about him "others committed to William Morris' notion of reintegrating creativity and work, so that the designer and the producer again were united."<sup>48</sup> Even the physical plant, with its red tile roofs, guest house, and small cottages with gardens, reflected the thinking of Morris, who held that "those who are to make beautiful things must live in a beautiful place."<sup>49</sup>

Common ownership and effort were central to the Rose Valley ideal. The eighty-acre central precinct plus some smaller parcels provided a total land area of a bit over 100 acres, all of which was held in common through the Rose Valley Association. Land and buildings would be rented to those who would live and work in them. Those who insisted on land ownership could buy their own tracts on the periphery of the community proper. In the commonly-held core would be created a place where, in the words of Price's biographer George E. Thomas, "the medieval unity of life, art, and work could be renewed."<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, in the last years of the nineteenth century a bohemian scene had begun to develop in Philadelphia with the emergence of a group of artists and intellectuals known as the "Pepper Pot Club" (for one of the favorite dishes at the restaurant where they most often gathered). The spirit of Walt Whitman, who lived just across the Delaware River in Camden, was the chief inspiration of the group; its central figure was the colorful Whitman disciple and cultural radical Horace Traubel, whose prominence was anchored by his editorship of *The Conservator*, a free-ranging Whitmanesque little magazine. Traubel was famed for his unconventional behavior and his enormous appetite as well as for his passion for social justice and beauty.<sup>51</sup>

His parents had been friends of Whitman's, and Traubel became, for several years beginning in 1888, Whitman's Boswell, eventually publishing several volumes of intimate records of Whitman's daily life from that period.<sup>52</sup> Traubel was, among many other things, a socialist whose instincts were revolutionary, but who seems to have found, as

48. George E. Thomas, "Rose Valley Architecture: Where Art Served Life," in Ayres, *A Poor Sort of Heaven*, 29.

49. Hawley McLanahan, quoted in David Karsner, *Horace Trouble: His Life and Work* (New York: Egmont Arens, 1919), 80.

50. George E. Thomas, "Thomas L. Price (1861-1916): Builder of Men and Buildings," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1975,305.

51. Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America* (New York: Dover, 1960; originally published in 1933), 156-57.

52. Traubel published three volumes before his death, but could not locate a publisher for the fourth, which he had completed, or for the others, which needed minor editing before publication. At this writing, six volumes in all have been published, with more forthcoming: Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden: Volume 1* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1906); *Volume 2* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1908); *Volume 3* (New

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did other socialists in America in that era (Eugene Debs among them), brighter prospects for success in small experiments than in converting the whole nation.

Traubel took an early interest in Price's community project and soon became deeply involved in it. After spending the summer of 1903 in Rose Valley, he established the Rose Valley Print Shop in Philadelphia, whence he published the community's magazine, *The Artsman*, beginning that fall. The magazine provided a chronicle of Rose Valley as well as excerpts from the works of Ruskin, Morris, and other guiding lights of the arts and crafts movement. Traubel joined Price and McLanahan as one of the leading spirits of Rose Valley, a community of working artists that would be stand as a revolutionary vanguard for the coming socialist society. Traubel wrote the manifesto in the first issue of *The Artsman*:

Rose Valley is a cross between economic revolution and the stock exchange.... Rose Valley is not altogether a dream or wholly an achievement. It is an experiment. It is also an act of faith.... Rose Valley pays a first tribute to labor. Labor is the social base.... The Rose Valley shops are temples. Here men pray in their work. Here men practice fellowship in their work. The shops have only one creed. That creed is good work. There is only one apostasy at Rose Valley. That apostasy is bad work.... Rose Valley has not withdrawn from the world. It is in the world \_\_\_ It is not an ideal. It is a step towards an ideal.<sup>53</sup>

As the vision unfolded, Rose Valley attracted increasing numbers of residents who together ran several arts-oriented cottage industries. Students and professors from nearby Swarthmore College also joined the experiment. Price operated his architectural practice at Rose Valley; a furniture shop opened in 1902, and soon there were also a ceramics shop and a book bindery. Ridley Creek, which had powered the old mills, again became a source of water power for workshops, as well as the community's water supply. The old bobbin mill was remodeled into a community center known as "Artsman's Hall," where theatrical productions were mounted regularly. The residents formally declared themselves the "Rose Valley Folk" and began to hold monthly meetings called "Folk Motes," patterned after the "motes" held in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*.<sup>54</sup>

Social life became lively and elaborate, with lectures, Shakespear-

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York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1914); *Volumes 4-6* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1959-1982).

53. Quoted in Karsner, *Horace Traubel*, 81-82.

54. Elizabeth Cumming and Wendy Kaplan, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 172. See also William Morris, *News From Nowhere* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891).

ean plays, and concerts.<sup>55</sup> Government was democratic, and the communalism blended individualism and mutual support well. Community members worked side by side on construction and remodeling projects, fulfilling the arts and crafts vision in which "architect became builder; builder was architect."<sup>56</sup> By the peak years of 1905 and 1906 Rose Valley's predominantly Quaker population probably exceeded fifty.<sup>57</sup> A visitor in that year wrote exuberantly of the colony,

Sometimes we find an oasis. Rose Valley is one of these. We feel that a spirit of artistic freedom pervades; here is a place where the vampire of commercialism cannot find entrance; here is a place where the craftsman may work for the love of his craft, and the artist for the love of art; here is a small but living monument to the life-work of John Ruskin and William Morris.<sup>58</sup>

Despite its convivial social life and idealism, Rose Valley was never without problems. At the beginning Price had had trouble finding the craftsman workers he sought: machines had already taken over such relevant industries as furniture manufacture, and traditional craft workers were in short supply. So rare had such American artisans become that Price had to look abroad for workers, who ended up coming to Rose Valley from France, Norway, and Belgium—and who were never really assimilated into the larger Rose Valley community.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the community never managed to find a secure financial footing and thus could not provide steady jobs for would-be resident artisans. Its fine furniture was far too expensive to attract any but wealthy customers, especially since much cheaper, if inferior, similar pieces were readily available from a variety of mass-market sources.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, retaining communally-minded artists and workers proved difficult. Many left, and few replaced them. By 1907 the shops were moribund, and the Rose Valley Association was finally dissolved in 1908. However, the end of collective work did not mean the end of common social activities. For years afterwards Rose Valley enjoyed a

55. For a detailed discussion of the social life of the community, see Ann Barton Brown, "Joy Is Not Joy That Is Not Shared"—Life in Rose Valley," in Ayres, *A Poor Sort of Heaven*, 81-93.

56. Thomas, "William L. Price," 312.

57. Estimates of Rose Valley's population have been as high as ca. 100 (see Priestman, "Rose Valley," 163), but a few over fifty seems closer to the actual count. See Daniel Richard Stoddard, "Horace Traubel: A Critical Biography," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1970,227.

58. Priestman, "Rose Valley," 165.

59. William Small wood Ayres, "A Poor Sort of Heaven; A Good Sort of Earth; The Rose Valley Arts and Crafts Experiment (1901-1910)," M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1982,11,51.

60. Ayres, "A Poor Sort of Heaven" (thesis), 39-40.

rich cultural life, much of it focused on the Folk Mote, the town meeting *cum* social club. The last formal remnant of the cooperative community was erased in 1910 when McLanahan and his father-in-law Charles T. Schoen, who had already taken over the site of the defunct furniture shop, bought the community shares of the Rose Valley Association and with that transaction took title to all the land and buildings except the Guild Hall. Eventually the erstwhile community became a prosperous residential neighborhood, many of its residents commuting to jobs in Philadelphia as they did from the other suburbs in the area. The Rose Valley Press, operated by Traubel in Philadelphia, continued to operate until his death in 1921, but for the rest of the community the experiment was over. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Rose Valley survived for only seven years, Traubel's biographer was downright lyrical in his assessment of the little arts community:

Traubel and his associates gave to the world something it was not ready to receive. Rose Valley was the premature child of its economic mother. It was not a step backward into industrial competition, but rather a leap forward into the social commune. Rose Valley was the social spirit incorporated into economic fact. It was the harbinger of the co-operative commonwealth heralding its message of freedom in the camp of industrial slavery. It was the expression of "hope that some men, released from the deadening influences of monotonous unthinking toil, may see such possibilities in life as will make them put their shoulders to the wheel and strive to lift society out of the rut of accustomed thought or habit."<sup>61</sup>

### New Clairvaux

Another colony that shared Rose Valley's aims and, roughly, its lifespan was New Clairvaux, founded in 1902 by Edward Pearson Pressey, a Unitarian minister and Christian socialist, in Montague, Massachusetts. Pressey, who deplored the migration to the cities that left behind good but unneeded homes and perennial food crops, saw craftwork as a means for reclaiming the countryside and for countering the ravages of urban industrial society.

In 1900 Pressey and his wife moved to the down-and-out village of Montague, where Pressey began preaching in an abandoned church. In 1902 he began to publish *Country Time and Tide*, which pushed the entire reform agenda, particularly rural self-sufficiency and salvation through the arts and crafts movement. New Clairvaux, named in honor of the cultural center led by St. Bernard in twelfth-century France, started in the same year as the magazine and became a fairly freewheeling cooperative of back-to-the-land artists. Components of

61. Karsner, *Horace Traubel*, 83.

the community were added one after the other: after the press was running the residents started a farm where they raised produce to eat; then they started a school, the New Clairvaux Plantation and Crafts School, which provided its male students with training in craftwork as well as more conventional academic subjects. All the while they were producing a variety of handicrafts for sale. The resident colony population reached a peak of twenty-nine.

Financial problems dogged New Clairvaux, however, as they did the other arts and crafts colonies of the same era, and the experiment was finally dissolved in 1908 or 1909. Pressey continued as a writer for several years thereafter to tackle the problem of repopulating and reinvigorating the countryside; in 1918 he moved for the last time, to Schenectady, New York, where he worked on the local newspaper and continued to promote his passion for country living and crafts.<sup>62</sup>

### Byrdcliffe

Byrdcliffe represented yet another model of the arts and crafts colony, one financially grounded in the patronage of a wealthy friend of art and founded with grand vision. Started outside Woodstock, New York, in 1902, it played a decisive role in turning Woodstock into the town of the arts it has been ever since. Byrdcliffe was a multifaceted enclave: a millionaire's personal estate, a summer art school, a handicraft factory, and a rural community.<sup>63</sup>

Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead, the English heir to a fortune created by felt mills in Yorkshire, had come under the influence of John Ruskin while a student at Oxford. Whitehead began to formulate his communal theories and plans in the early 1870s as an observer of Ruskin's attempt to establish, in England, a series of Utopian colonies collectively known as the "Guild of St. George." He seems to have made two or more attempts to start communities based on Ruskin's ideas in Europe, in Austria and Italy, although little is known of them other than that the second colony, near Florence, was a proving ground for the organizational patterns introduced at Byrdcliffe.<sup>64</sup> In the United States

62. Information on New Clairvaux is limited. Most secondary accounts are based on Pressey's papers in the archives at Harvard University, and on the community's periodical, *Country Time and Tide*. For brief accounts, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1981), 335; Boris, *Art and Labor*, 168-60; Max West, "The Revival of Handicrafts in America," *Lf. S. Bureau of Labor Bulletin* 9, no. 55 (November 1904): 1614-15.

63. Boris, *Art and Labor*, 166.

64. Karai Ann Marling, "The Byrdcliff Colony of the Arts and Crafts," in *Woodstock: An American Art Colony*, unpaginated.

he became involved in the burgeoning socialist movement and concluded that an arts and crafts colony could help further the social reform agenda as well as promote the arts, of which he was a longstanding patron. According to his original scheme, artists of means as well as wealthy patrons would give ten percent of their incomes to support their fellow colonists.<sup>65</sup>

Like other reformers of his time, he decried the increasing frenzy of life in the new industrial age: "The beauty and the joy of life seems too often to be lost through the haste to get somewhere too quickly ...; nature works slowly... and the ties which bind us to her larger soul are torn and weakened by our impotent restlessness and love of novelty."<sup>66</sup> Despite his privileged circumstances, he was also a lifelong advocate of manual labor in the arts and crafts spirit: "The pleasure of doing good work under healthy conditions, be it with a spade or with a sculptor's chisel,—the joy of a man in the work of his hands,—is not a mere passing satisfaction, but is an element in all sane life."<sup>67</sup>

In the late 1890s Whitehead met Hervey White, an up-and-coming novelist who was working at Hull House in Chicago, and White became Whitehead's agent-in-chief for colony development. In about 1899 Whitehead was offered a site for a colony, an idyllic clearing in the ancient forest near Alsea in western Oregon. With White's assistance he set to work on the project, overseeing the building of a large common building and rustic log cottages for the expected artist colonists. Infighting among various individuals involved in the preparations for the opening of the colony, however, ended the venture before it had actually got under way. Undaunted, Whitehead undertook to search the mountainous regions of the East for a new site. This time Whitehead and White were joined in the search by the talented painter Bolton Coit Brown, who, like White, would play a major role at Byrdcliffe and later in the larger Woodstock art scene.<sup>68</sup>

An anti-Semite, Whitehead initially excluded the Catskills from consideration since the area had a large Jewish summer population, but Brown found what seemed the perfect piece of land near the village of Woodstock, which fortuitously had no resident Jews. The town at the time was an unlikely place for artists and thinkers to gather; one early

65. William Claiborne, "A Utopian Art Colony in the Face of Reality," *Washington Post*, 16 March 1976, B-3.

66. Quoted in Anita M. Smith, *Woodstock: History and Hearsay* (Saugerties, N.Y.: Catskill Mountains Publishing Corp., 1959), 43.

67. Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead, "A Plea for Manual Work," *Handicraft*, June 1903, 72.

68. Brown, a sometime member of the Stanford University faculty, was also a skilled mountaineer. A peak in the Sierra Nevada has been named for him. See Clinton Adams, "We Knew That," *Sierra* (September/October 1992): 14.

denizen of Byrdcliffe wrote that the region was "apparently quite without intellectual resources," located in "this most illiterate county of the Empire State."<sup>69</sup> But the topography was stunning, and Brown purchased seven farms totalling over 1,200 acres for the colony, whose name would combine the middle names of Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead and his wife, Jane Byrd McCall Whitehead.

Brown began overseeing the construction of some twenty-nine colony buildings in 1902.<sup>70</sup> Fanciful names adorned the rude but durable structures: Lark's Nest, Yagdrisil, Camelot, Morning Glory, Fleur-de-llys, Carniola.<sup>71</sup> Whitehead was locally rumored to have spent \$500,000 to build the physical plant.<sup>72</sup> By mid-1903 he had issued a call for "any true craftsmen who are in sympathy with our ideas and who will help us to realize them" to come to his new haven for the creative; while denying that Byrdcliffe would be a "community," Whitehead projected that:

There are many ways in which cooperation is possible, and we shall use any of them which are convenient. To make and sell our products, to supply ourselves with some necessaries of life, we shall organize means in common. By combining in groups we can have many things which would be impossible as individuals. We can in time have a good library; we can have music played by first-rate musicians. ... We can arrange for the education of our children on some more rational lines than those of the public schools...<sup>73</sup>

A number of craftworkers moved in in 1903, along with a salon of free-spirited writers recruited by White. With the advent of summer came new arrivals, students at the Byrdcliffe Summer School of Art, an important part of Whitehead's concept (indeed, summer schools of art, which attracted a seemingly limitless clientele, became financial life-lines for any number of artists' colonies). In accordance with the benefactor's wishes, Byrdcliffe was a happy-go-lucky Bohemia, a benevolent dictatorship, and artists worked on the premises for many years.<sup>74</sup> As historian Alf Evers later wrote: "The young students of

69. Poultney Bigelow, "The Byrdcliffe Colony of Arts and Crafts," *American Homes and Gardens* 6, no. 10 (October 1909): 393,389.

70. The most complete account of the planning, building, and life of Byrdcliff appears to be Alf Evers, *Woodstock: History of an American Town* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1987), 398-449. This recounting of the story draws heavily from Evers's work.

71. Robert Edwards, "Byrdcliffe: Life by Design," in *The Byrdcliffe Arts and Crafts Colony: Life by Design* (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1984), 7.

72. Claiborne, "Utopian Art Colony," B-3.

73. Whitehead, "A Plea for Manual Work," 70-71.

74. Bolton Brown, Whitehead's close associate in the project, used the phrase "happy-go-lucky Bohemia" to describe Whitehead's ideal. Brown preferred a more disciplined structure for the colony. See Bolton Brown, "Early Days at Woodstock," *Woodstock*

painting, drawing and of woodworking, carving, weaving and metal-work felt the Byrdcliffe experiment as a forerunner of a future similar to the one they had read of in William Morris' *News From Nowhere*, in which pollution of air and water had ended, money had become a mere curiosity, and all shared in a life of creative fulfillment."<sup>75</sup>

Such optimism was easy in the pleasant life at the colony. One early resident recalled years later, "The birds sang as if the earth had just then been newly created. And the Byrdcliffers sang too, and danced and made love to each other, just like the birds. Later the summer came on—with wonderful warm summer nights, when fireflies danced over dew-laden meadows, and when we gathered in bands and climbed the Overlook, in search of adventure and romance."<sup>76</sup>

Certainly the gathering of great minds infused Byrdcliffe with vitality. Among those reported to have stayed there are Clarence Darrow, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, John Burroughs, John Dewey, Harry Hopkins, George Bellows, Will Durant, and Heywood Broun. One report has it that folksingers Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan lived there for a time, although long after the glory days had passed.<sup>77</sup>

The community's main industry did not fare well, however. The William Morris-style furniture that the colony shops turned out was going out of style in favor of Art Nouveau designs, and the handcrafted works could not be delivered at prices within reach of any but the wealthy. Leslie Greene Bowman reports that the community ultimately produced fewer than fifty pieces of furniture.<sup>78</sup> Many were huge items made of oak, and so heavy they could scarcely be transported to the local freight depot for shipment by rail to market. Thus they were consigned to White Pines, the Whitehead home at Byrdcliffe.

The Byrdcliffe Pottery did somewhat better with its wares, but it was hardly extensive enough to support a whole community of artists. There were also the inevitable personality clashes, early on one between Whitehead and his lieutenant Bolton Brown, which resulted in Brown's departure from the premises in 1903, and later various others. Brown, White, and other artists were disgusted with the rather British, class-conscious atmosphere of the place, one in which friends of the

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*Historical Society Publications* 13 (August/September 1937): 3-14. The phrase "benevolent despotism" was used to describe Byrdcliffe by Bigelow in "The Byrdcliffe Colony of Arts and Crafts," 393.

75. Evers, *Woodstock*, 422.

76. Carl Eric Lindin, "The Woodstock Landscape," in *Publications of the Woodstock Historical Society* 7 (July 1932): 18, quoted in Alf Evers, *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 622.

77. Claiborne, "Utopian Art Colony," B-3.

78. Bowman, *American Arts and Crafts*, 34.

Whiteheads visited frequently and dominated the colony to the detriment of the working artists.

While artists were given wide creative latitude, in nonartistic ways the founder's rule was heavy-handed; as one reporter put it, "Whitehead operated his commune almost as a czar."<sup>79</sup> One particularly nettlesome matter was Whitehead's practice of demanding that the residents of his fiefdom perform Morris dances three times a week. Even benevolent regimentation did not sit well with many free artistic spirits, and they sought less structured settings in which to pursue their work. Within a few years many of the resident artists had left the mountaintop community and headed for the burgeoning art community in town. As Karal Ann Marling wrote in 1977, "The intentional colonies, founded in a wave of social reform, articulated an elaborate program of goals to justify the existence of their retreat communities; by regulating the lives of their members to further those goals, they left little room for individual initiative and, consequently, for the chaotic results of organic communal growth."<sup>80</sup>

It is a testimony to some kind of spirit of Byrdcliffe, however, that most who left settled nearby, stimulating the center of the arts that Woodstock has been ever since—even though by about 1912 the town artists were condescendingly calling the pioneer colony "Boredstiff."<sup>81</sup> And in any event not all of the creative spirits departed; artists and writers were active there until the 1930s, and in some cases longer. Anita M. Smith reported in 1959 that one jewelrymaker and silversmith apparently still living and active at that time "remained through all the years in Byrdcliffe."<sup>82</sup> The Whiteheads themselves continued to do craft work, especially pottery, at least as late as 1926.<sup>83</sup>

After Whitehead's death in 1929 his widow Jane lived on at Byrdcliffe;<sup>84</sup> as she grew older management fell to her son Peter, who stalwartly maintained the core of the property as an arts and crafts center, although he had to sell much of the peripheral acreage to pay

79. Claiborne, "Utopian Art Colony," B-1, B-3.

80. Marling, introduction to *Woodstock: An American Art Colony*, unpaginated.

81. Several historical studies of Byrdcliffe note that other artists in town sometimes spoke derisively of the pioneer enclave and, occasionally, of artwork produced there. See, for example, Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life*, 170-71.

82. Smith, *Woodstock: History and Hearsay*, 43.

83. Jane Perkins Claney, "White Pines Pottery; the Continuing Arts and Crafts Experiment," in *Byrdcliffe Arts and Crafts Colony*, 17.

84. Jane Whitehead had resisted moving to Byrdcliffe permanently in its early days, apparently put off by her husband's womanizing, and stayed on at the couple's elegant former home in Santa Barbara. Eventually, though, they both lived at the colony in apparent harmony. See Edwards, "Byrdcliffe Life by Design," 8.

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taxes and maintenance. When Peter Whitehead died in 1976, title to most of the remaining property passed to the Woodstock Guild of Craftsmen. Most of Byrdcliffe's buildings still stand and some have been used intermittently for the creation of art in recent years. The Guild, trying to preserve the deteriorating buildings, was reportedly renting studios out at \$500 per season after Peter Whitehead's death.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps a communal settlement of artists will eventually emerge again there.

### The Maverick

The personality clashes between Whitehead and his lieutenants led to the creation nearby of another, more egalitarian colony known as the "Maverick." Hervey White resigned his Byrdcliffe position in 1904 after an altercation with Whitehead and, with help from a friend, purchased a 102-acre farm three miles away. The Maverick, with no wealthy patron, was an artists' colony, active mainly in the summer, in which the poverty was shared; White, the lord of the manor, lived in a tiny six-by-eight-foot cabin. From 1908 onward White began to build other simple cabins for use as studios and residences, and gradually a community of the arts took shape. While those who could afford it paid rent to live there, White, a lifelong socialist, provided free lodging to indigent young residents at what he sometimes called his "rural Hull House" and even bought groceries for them.<sup>86</sup>

The Maverick only later appealed to visual artists, but it quickly became popular among writers, musicians, and bohemian intellectuals. Among its residents and visitors were Clarence Darrow, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Thorstein Veblen. White established the Maverick Press by printing three of his own books in 1910; he had had trouble interesting commercial publishers in his work, which was well received critically but never had good sales. The following year he founded a new monthly literary magazine, *The Wild Hawk*. That periodical gave way after five years to a magazine of broader focus, *The Plowshare*, which featured reviews and art as well as literature and in time received a fair amount of acclaim in independent literary circles.<sup>87</sup>

85. Claiborne, "Utopian Art Colony," B-3.

86. The "rural Hull House" characterization is quoted by Evers, *Woodstock*, 454, from White's manuscript autobiography.

87. For the history of the Maverick press and further information on the writings of Hervey White, see "An Unrecorded Private Press," *The Book Collector's Packet 2* (June/July 1933): 21-25.

Other publications emerged from the press at the Maverick as well, providing the foundation for the literary tenor of the community.<sup>88</sup>

A growing wave of Bohemianism in America early in the century helped feed and support the Maverick. By the beginning of World War I many Greenwich Village artists and intellectuals found the rural colony to their taste. White kept building more of his simple little cabins to house them, and overhead mounted. In 1915 the proprietor, needing to pay some colony debts, especially a huge one occasioned by the drilling of a deep water well, concocted the idea of holding an annual chamber music festival. Many locals, farmers and townspeople as well as resident artists, pitched in to construct an outdoor theater in an abandoned bluestone quarry, and the Maverick Festival was born. The next year a concert hall was constructed, and the Maverick Concerts, an important part of the Woodstock cultural scene ever since, were initiated.<sup>89</sup>

The most fully communal phase of the life of the Maverick occurred late in White's life. In 1938 the aging proprietor of the colony turned his Maverick Press over to a younger crowd who published a literary and political sheet called *The Phoenix*. The editor and head of the group, James P. Cooney, believed that the world was falling apart and that the only hope of salvation lay in putting into practice the social theories of the late D. H. Lawrence, who had urged the development of a new culture based on American Indian traditions. A sense of the direction of this communal group can be grasped from Cooney's announcement in 1939 of their "complete renunciation of machines and mechanized modes of life; the unequivocal condemnation of Industrial forms of society" and their intent "to break away in small communities" and "return to the dignity and purity and religiousness of a mode of life rooted in agriculture and the handicrafts."<sup>90</sup>

Tales of bizarre behavior circulated in the town; Anita Smith has recounted two of them, "of one man who quite openly had two wives on an equal status; of another man who believed he could acquire a mate by bellowing like a bull in the night, and it was said he was successful!"<sup>91</sup> *The Phoenix*, in any event, was much admired for its editorial quality until it suspended publication in 1940 when the Cooneyites moved to Georgia to pursue the simple life in a more

88. Smith, *Woodstock: History and Hearsay*, 55-56.

89. Much of this information comes from Evers, *The Catskills*, 628-38 and *passim*, and from Evers, *Woodstock*, 450-59, 468-82.

90. Quoted by Evers, *The Catskills*, 655.

91. Smith, *Woodstock: History and Hearsay*, 66.

isolated location.<sup>92</sup> The Maverick kept to its original course, and at last report was still functioning in more or less the spirit in which it was founded.

### **Beaux Arts Village**

One of the last of the arts and crafts colonies to be founded was Beaux Arts Village, located across Lake Washington from Seattle. It arose somewhat spontaneously from a group of artists who worked commonly in a former University of Washington building and, in the spirit of the arts and crafts movement, decided to found a colony. Frank Calvert and Alfred T. Renfro, among others, played leading roles in the group, which came to be called the Beaux Arts Society. With \$16,500 of borrowed money they purchased an attractive fifty-acre site with a nice beach and heavy timber. They held as common land the beach and a central ten-acre enclave called "Atelier Square," which was designated as a site for studios for all kinds of arts; the square was laid out in the shape of the outline of the Society's emblem, an arts and crafts bungalow. The rest of the land was divided into 114 lots.

Renfro was the first builder and first resident, moving in in October 1909. By 1916 there were fifteen houses, and the Beaux Arts Society had seventy-eight members, each of whom owned village property. Although there was some common life (an annual picnic on the beach was held for years, for example), the studios were never built at Atelier Square, and that land was eventually subdivided into homesites. Many charming houses were built in a variety of architectural styles, and before long the village became entirely too expensive and too middle-class to provide a haven for starving artists. The bourgeois normalness of the place was confirmed by the scandal that erupted when a couple living in a rented house were discovered to be not only practitioners of yoga but unmarried; they were ousted. In relatively short order Beaux Arts Village became a pleasant suburb of Seattle, although it remains a neighborhood with interesting houses, large trees, and a communal beach.<sup>93</sup>

### **MacDowell and Yaddo**

Other arts-oriented communities of the era were farther removed from the arts and crafts movement, and often had only limited

92. For the Cooney colony, see Evers, *Woodstock*, 600-602.

93. The principal source on Beaux Arts Village is Norman J. Johnston, "A Far Western Arts and Crafts Village," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 35 (March 1976): 51-54. See also Walter L. Creese, *The Search for Environment: The Garden City: Before and After* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 138-39.

cooperative features. Nevertheless, they too embodied the collective spirit of the age, and they serve to illustrate further the ongoing broadening, in the early twentieth century, of the communal form from one mainly characterized by disciplined, centralized communities to one in which greater individual freedom and less fully communal economic arrangements became acceptable options. A few years after the early glory days of Byrdcliffe another subsidized community, the MacDowell Colony, began to take shape at Peterborough, New Hampshire. Edward MacDowell (1867-1908), a prominent composer and music professor at Columbia University, had proposed to establish a colony for artists, although mental illness kept him from realizing that goal. His wife Marian, believing that he had been driven mad by the pace of city life, tried to help him by moving him from New York to Peterborough and there building him a log cabin where he could compose without interruption.

By 1907 some other artists had begun to arrive to join the MacDowells. After Edward's death in 1908, Marian promoted the artists' community more earnestly. Old farm sheds became men's and women's dormitories (dubbed "M'Annex" and the "Eaves"); the barn was turned into a dining room and clubhouse. By the mid-1920s there were several hundred acres of land and many studios and homes.<sup>94</sup> Artists were allowed to disperse each morning to scattered studios—eventually over twenty-five of them, each out of sight and sound of the others; lunches were delivered by silent couriers, and interruptions were discouraged. (Indeed, the "no-interruptions, no-visitors" policy was so firm that it took thirty years for the colony to decide to hold its first open house.)<sup>95</sup>

At the end of the day came lively suppers and sometimes roisterous evenings. Artists—composers and writers were the most frequent residents—thrived on the regular cycle of solitude and stimulus. Those who lived at the colony were charged a small fee for room and board, but it could be waived when need required. Although it was begun as a summer colony, it eventually had some population all year.<sup>96</sup>

The MacDowell colony was popular among artists from the first. By 1911, when the colony was just over three years old, a visitor reported that fifty artists had lived and worked there and that a number of significant literary and artistic achievements had been created on the

94. Rollo Walter Brown, "Mrs. MacDowell and Her Colony," *Atlantic* 184, no. 1 (July 1949): 42-46.

95. "Rustic Studies for Creative Folk," *Literary Digest* 124, no. 2 (10 July 1937): 24.

96. Herbert Kubly, "The Care and Feeding of Artists," *Horizon* 5, no. 4 (March 1963): 26-33.

premises.<sup>97</sup> When the "place of dreams untold" celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1957, it had reached six hundred acres in size, had around a thousand applicants for the approximately ninety-five spaces available, and had seen its denizens pick up no fewer than eighteen Pulitzer prizes (a number that continued to grow in subsequent years).

The most enduring presence was Edwin Arlington Robinson, who, after initially regarding with grave misgiving the concept of writing in a colony setting,<sup>98</sup> spent his summers there for two or three decades.<sup>99</sup> Other prominent sometime residents included Willa Cather, Aaron Copland, Sara Teasdale, Thornton Wilder, William Rose Benét, and Stephen Vincent Benel. Nearly a century after its founding MacDowell continues to be a cooperative center of the arts.<sup>100</sup>

Similar to the MacDowell Colony in many ways is Yaddo, which formally opened in 1926 near the spa of Saratoga Springs, New York, on land that encompassed five hundred acres of pine groves, vast lawns, lakes with ducks, rose gardens, and marble fountains, along with a fabulous fifty-five-room Victorian mansion built by patrons of the arts Spencer Trask (-1909) and his wife Katrina Nichols. Yaddo—its name came from the Trask children's mispronunciation of its original name, The Shadows—started out as what Marling has called "an interminable summer house party where writers and artists hobnobbed with statesmen and celebrities."<sup>101</sup>

The death of Spencer Trask in 1909 delayed their plans to turn Yaddo into a more focused artists' colony, but Katrina's second husband revived the project and finally oversaw its completion. Yaddo was (and is) in many ways like its predecessor at Peterborough, especially in its provision of early breakfasts, far-flung studios, and delivered lunches. Most guests stayed in private rooms in the mansion. As in the case of the MacDowell Colony, nonartistic spouses were usually not invited to accompany their mates.<sup>102</sup> In 1946 it was reported to be averaging around twenty resident artists each summer. Among

97. L. E. Brown-Landone, "A New Idea in Art," *Harper's Weekly* 55, no. 2862 (October 1911): 15.

98. For an account of the conversion from skeptic to enthusiast, see Edwin Arlington Robinson, "The Peterborough Idea," *North American Review* 204, no. 730 (September 1916): 448-54.

99. Theodore Pratt, "Place of Dreams Untold," *New York Times Magazine*, 24 March 1957, 19-22.

100. Information about the current activities of the MacDowell Colony is available through the colony newsletter, *The MacDowell Colony News*, 100 High Street, Peterborough, NH 03458.

101. Marling, introduction to *Woodstock: An American Art Colony*, unpaginated.

102. "Yaddo and Substance," *Time* 32 (5 September 1938): 50.

those who had worked there at that time were James T. Farrell, Katherine Anne Porter, Malcolm Cowley, Aaron Copland, and Truman Capote.<sup>103</sup> Like MacDowell it continues to be a center of creative activity today.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

Other communities periodically appeared as well, generally small and short-lived but testifying to the power of the communitarian impulse in the arts and crafts movement. In most cases little is known of them. The Elverhoj Colony, for example, was founded in 1913 by A. H. Anderson and Johannes Morton, both painters and silversmiths, at Milton-on-the-Hudson, New York, and took for its motto "Live close to nature for inspiration." Housed in an old colonial mansion on 150 acres, in 1916 the colony was reported to have eight permanent members, male and female, and a good crop of summer students for its painting, etching, gold and silversmithing, other metalwork, weaving, and bookbinding courses.<sup>105</sup> Another New York colony called "Briarcliff" made furniture, but it is difficult to determine whether or not it had substantial communal features.<sup>106</sup> It did, however, market its furniture as being made by "The Craft Settlement Shop" in Ossining.<sup>107</sup> Gustav Stickley, a leader in popularizing arts and crafts furniture among the American public, purchased land near Morris Plains, New Jersey, and spent several years trying to develop a cooperative community called "Craftsman Farms" there, although at times he seemed to envision his enterprise more as a private school than a typical intentional community, and his energies were in any event more than absorbed by his many other projects.<sup>108</sup>

In later years, past the heyday of Morris and the arts and crafts movement, colonies of artistic bent popped up again here and there. In 1933 John A. Rice, who had been fired from his faculty position at

103. "Life Visits Yaddo," *Life* 21 (15 July 1946): 110-13.

104. News about current activities at Yaddo is available through a variety of sources. The enclave's basic fellowship program is now publicized on the World Wide Web.

105. Hanna Astrup Larsen, "The Craft Work on the Hills of Fairies," *Craftsman* 30 (September 1916): 634-37.

106. Ludwig, *Arts and Crafts Movement in New York State*, 47,48.

107. Advertisement for "Briar Cliff Furniture" *House Beautiful* 18 (August 1905): 27. The advertisement featured chairs for \$6.50 and \$7.50 and stools for \$4.00.

108. Stickley and his associates published several articles about Craftsman Farms in Stickley's journal, *The Craftsman*. See, for example, Gustav Stickley, "A Message from Craftsman Farms," *The Craftsman* 21, no. 1 (October 1911): 112-13; Raymond Riordan, "A Visit to Craftsman Farms: The Impression It Made and the Result: The Gustav Stickley School for Citizenship," *The Craftsman* 23, no. 2 (November 1912): 151-64.

## 70 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

Rollins College in Florida for his unconventional behavior, led a group of bohemian artists to establish Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The experiment, as much a colony of the arts as a college, attracted such creative minds as John Cage, Anais Nin, Buckminster Fuller, Charles Olson, and Robert Rauschenberg to its campus where students and faculty lived in communal poverty. Although the wolf was never far from Black Mountain's door, it survived until 1956.<sup>109</sup>

In the meantime other art colonies appeared as well. One, Quarry Hill, located near Rochester, Vermont, was founded as an art colony in 1946, and has been a "haven for creative and open-minded people" for half a century. At this writing it is reportedly the largest intentional community in Vermont, with eighty or more members.<sup>110</sup> Still later Drop City was founded as an art colony in Trinidad, Colorado, in 1965, and with its beyond-bohemian flair became one of the founding locations of hippie communalism.<sup>111</sup> There were, moreover, undoubtedly many dreams of community for every one actually established.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the world of intentional community was in flux. Most of the largest nineteenth-century communes and communal movements were declining or defunct, and the rise of Russian communism would soon make all kinds of common enterprise suspect. The human quest for community, however, was not extinguished, and the portion of that quest that involved communal living developed new options for a new social era. The arts and crafts movement, dedicated to art with a social mission, was an important engine that helped drive intentional community into a new and challenging century.

109. The most complete account of Black Mountain College is found in Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Experiment in Community* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1973).

110. "Quarry Hill," *Communities: Journal of Cooperation* 79 (Winter 1993): 25.

111. On Drop City, see Timothy Miller, "Drop City: Historical Notes on the Pioneer Hippie Commune," *Syzygy: Journal of Alternative Religion and Culture* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 23-38; for a free-wheeling, partially fictionalized account by a resident, see Peter Rabbit, *Drop City* (New York: Olympia, 1971).