

The Uses of the American Communal Past:  
Keynote Address for the Tenth Annual  
Historic Communal Societies Conference,  
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*Opening Remarks: Reviewing Our First Decade*

*In 1959 Mariann Hershey, who was to become my wife the following year, gave me a copy of Herbert J. Muller's The Uses of the Past. On the inside she wrote "A portion of the past to help you enjoy the present and anticipate the future." At that time I was two years away from graduate school and seven years away from a Ph.D. in history. I was unaware of how my reading of Muller's work would influence my intellectual and career development. I could not have known then that I would become fascinated by the history of communal societies in graduate school at Ohio State University and that I would join the faculty of Indiana State University, Evansville, near New Harmony where I would do research in the Workingmen's Institute and help organize the Robert Owen Bicentennial Conference in 1971. I could not have known in 1959 that I would be inspired to seek out and visit the homes of scores of historic and living communal groups where I would make friends with you curators, with your staff members and supporters, with you current communitarians, and with you descendants of communitarians. Twenty-three years ago I could not have known that I would become acquainted with all you communal scholars from so many disciplines and from several countries. I could not have imagined that together we would form the National Historic Communal Societies Association and the Center for Communal Studies, conduct ten annual conferences in seven states from Massachusetts to Oregon, publish a newsletter, a scholarly journal, Communal Societies, and produce a recording of original Shaker, Moravian and Harmonist musical compositions. In 1959 I could not have foreseen my standing in the Utopian town of George Rapp and Robert Owen on an October evening in 1983 presenting a paper on "The Uses of the American Communal Past" at the tenth annual Historic Communal Societies Conference. This is a night for celebration.*

Dr. Donald E. Pitzer is Professor of History and Director of the Center For Communal Studies at Indiana State University, Evansville, Indiana, and Executive Director of the National Historic Communal Societies Association.

*In the past nine years you and I have traversed the continent in search of a more intimate acquaintance with the American communal tradition. We have met in the Harmonist buildings of New Harmony, Indiana, and Economy, Pennsylvania, and sat in the stone seat of Father Rapp on the high bank of the Connoquenessing at Harmony, Pennsylvania. We have thrilled to the sounds of the hand-made, nineteenth-century back-firing trumpets and the Schellebaum of the Keilites at Aurora, Oregon. We have slept and eaten in Shaker buildings at Pleasant Hill and South Union, Kentucky, and Hancock in Massachusetts. We have danced with the Sufis at the Abode of the Message in New York. We have lunched with the Hutterian Society of Brothers at Deer Spring in Connecticut and been served a vegetarian meal by the Holy Order of Mans in Oregon. In Pennsylvania we have heard the beautiful notes of the Moravian Tannenberg organ at Lititz and have sung hymns by candle-light in one of the oldest Mennonite meeting houses in Lancaster County. We have met descendants of historic communal groups and listened to the testimonies of current communarians. In Omaha, Nebraska, we heard Allen Michael from the One World Family headquartered in California explain his role as the Cosmic Messiah channeling the World Master Plan to earth from beings hovering in flying saucers. During our meeting in South Union, Kentucky, Daniel Wright outlined the beginnings of the New Age at God's Valley in Indiana.*

*We have seen museums, slides, and films and been lectured to by the most knowledgeable scholars of communitarianism from the United States and abroad. At Zoar, Ohio, our Board of Directors persevered into the wee hours of the morning to draft a constitution for the National Historic Communal Societies Association. And, together we have seen the purpose stated in that document begin its realization: "to encourage the restoration, preservation, and public interpretation of America's historic communal sites and the study of communal societies past and present."*

*None of this could have been possible without the encouragement and support of several individuals who were associated with our efforts from their inception and whom I would like to recognize at this time. In 1974 Charles Beck, my former history student, and Ronald Spilker of the Bethel (Missouri) German Communal Colony, Inc., both accompanied me to several past and present communal locations in the Midwest and East. While visiting these communities the idea of organized cooperation emerged. The members of the Interim Committee on Historic Communal Cooperation which planned the first Historic Communal Societies Conference in New Harmony in November of 1974 were Karen Platz Hunt of Bethel, Missouri; Ronald Nelson of Bishop Hill, Illinois; Daniel Reibel of Old Economy Village, Pennsylvania; and James Thomas of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky. Three people were added to this Interim Committee to prepare for the 1975 conference at Shakertown at Pleasant Hill: Allen Epp of Aurora, Oregon, Robert Meader from the Shaker Museum at Old Chatham, New York, and Ralph Schwarz of Historic New Harmony, Inc. After we organized formally as the National Historic Communal Societies Association at Pleasant Hill, Susan Keig of Chicago helped design our unique logo. On the campus of Indiana State University, Evansville, our efforts have had the invaluable support of President*

David L. Rice, Social Science Division Chairman Dr. Daniel A. Miller, Archivist Emerita Josephine M. Elliott, Vice-President Robert L. Reid, and our NHCSA treasurer and present program chairman, Associate Professor of Sociology, Dr. Charles F. Petranek. Please join me in showing our appreciation for these invaluable friends.

I would like to dedicate this keynote address to my mother, Gladys Pitzer, who is in attendance from Ohio, and to the cherished memory of Helen Elliott of New Harmony. Miss Elliott, a descendant of James Elliott of the Owen Community, attended our first conference in the same Harmonist dormitory, now restored as Thrall's Opera House, where we are meeting tonight. Through her farsighted generosity she continues to support our efforts through the Helen Elliott Perpetual Fund of the Indiana State University, Evansville, Foundation. Later in our conference, the first Helen Elliott Lecture will be presented by Owen scholar and Miss Elliott's friend, Professor John F. C. Harrison of the University of Sussex in Brighton, England.

FROM COLONIAL TIMES to the present, the American communal past has been used as "an example and a beacon," to repeat a phrase that Robert Dale Owen applied to his father's early-nineteenth-century venture here at New Harmony, Indiana.<sup>1</sup> Communal societies have been viewed as experimental, progressive *Utopias* and as deviant, repressive *dystopias*. They have been variously lauded and damned, applauded and scorned, imitated and rejected. This has been true from the first recognized commune on North American soil, the Mennonite Commonwealth of Pieter Plockhoy on the Delaware River in 1663, to the unexpected, but massive, communal revival begun by the hippies of the 1960's and continuing in varied forms to the present.<sup>2</sup> We can observe

1. *Free Enquirer* (New York) I (June 6, 1829): 262.

2. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950; 1970 edition), pp. 27, 277, 300. The field of American communitarianism awaits a new comprehensive history of the caliber of Bestor's work. The other standard surveys are useful but badly dated; Victor F. Calverton, *Where Angels Dared To Tread* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941) and Mark Holloway, *Heavens On Earth: Utopian Communities in America, 1680-1880* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966). Three works that have helped to fill the gap in our knowledge of communes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are Robert V. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966); Laurence Veysey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Cultures in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) and Robert S. Fogarty, "American Communes, 1865-1914," *Journal of American Studies* 9 (August 1975): 145-162. Paul Kagan, *New World Utopias: A Photographic History of the Search for Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), shows the condition of the historic California communal sites and societies by the 1970's. Kenneth Rexroth, *Communalism: From Its Origins to the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), puts American communes in a world context. Robert S. Fogarty, *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980) is an indispensable reference tool.

this process from the Moravian villages and Ephrata Baptist Cloister of the 1700's right down to current communes like The Way, Unification Church, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Rajneeshpuram currently. We can study these public reactions to communitarian groups in the nineteenth century from the Shakers, Harmonists, Zoarites, Mormons, Inspirationists, Keilites, Benedictines, Hutterites, Owenites, Fourierists, Icarians, Brook Farmers, and Hope-dalers to the Spiritualists, Theosophists, Single-taxers, Koreshans, Socialists, Marxists, and Anarchists. In this century we can trace the same phenomenon from the Vedanta Society, Llano del Rio, the Ferrer Colony, Koinonia, and the Society of Brothers to The Farm, Reba Place Fellowship, God's Valley (Padanaram), Ananda, the Stelle Group, Renaissance Community, Sirius, Kerista Village, and the Federation of Egalitarian Communities.<sup>3</sup>

The imagination of the general public was first animated about communal societies in the last century by the widely-read accounts of John Melish, the Duke Bernard of Weimar, John Finch, A. J. Macdonald, and Charles Nordhoff based on their research and personal visitations.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the earliest nonsectarian communes in America, especially those inspired by Robert Owen and Albert Brisbane, were predicated upon these early reports of the demonstrable success of sectarian groups such as the Shakers and Harmonists. Americans were given early glimpses into the communes of the current movement through the observations and experiences of Richard Fairfield, William Hedgepeth, Dennis Stock,

3. No general history of the communal movement since 1965 has been written, but the following studies offer valuable insights and analyses: Lewis Yablonsky, *The Hippie Trip* (New York: Western Publishing Company, 1968); Benjamin Zablocki, *The Joyful Community* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); Richard Fairfield, *Utopia U.S.A.* (San Francisco: Alternatives Foundation, 1972); Ronald M. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopia in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Keith Melville, *Communes in the Counter-Culture* (New York: William Morrow, 1972); Laurance Veysey, *The Communal Experience; judson Jerome, Families of Eden: Communes and the New Anarchism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974); Marguerite Bouvard, *The Intentional Community Movement: Building a New Moral World* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975); Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); and J. Gordon Melton and Robert L. Moore, *The Cult Experience: Responding to the New Religious Pluralism* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982).

4. The insights of Macdonald and Nordhoff are readily available in John Humphrey Noyes, *Strange Cults and Utopias of 19th-century America* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966) a reissue of Noyes' 1870 *History of American Socialisms*; and Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States from Personal Visit and Observation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966; reprint of 1875 original).

Roy Aid, Ron Roberts, Stephen Diamond, Kathleen Kinkade, and Dave and Neta Jackson.<sup>5</sup> Since 1965, for the first time ever, professional sociologists, historians, psychologists, political scientists, economists, architects and scholars from other disciplines have had an opportunity to make their own on-sight studies of sizeable numbers of living intentional and experimental communities.

The attractiveness of this field of investigation and the usefulness of the communal past itself relate mostly to the fact that communal societies are social microcosms. Each has miniature philosophical, religious, governmental, social, and economic systems. Let us define communes as small, voluntary social units partly isolated from the general society in which members share an economic union and lifestyle in an attempt to implement, at least in part, their ideal ideological, religious, political, social, economic, and educational systems. We can then appreciate their experimental, Utopian character and the importance of learning from their accomplishments and failures.

Because of the large total number of such communal units in relation to the few that survive long enough and are studied carefully enough to become part of our substantiated knowledge, we must constantly remind ourselves that we are not dealing with "typical" communes. Our generalizations and conclusions always must be tempered with caution. Approximately 600 communal societies are known to have existed in English colonial America and the United States

5. Richard Fairfield pioneered the reporting of the new wave of communalism when he began publishing periodic numbers of *The Modern Utopian* in 1966 under the auspices of the Alternatives Foundation, P.O. Drawer A—Diamond Heights Station, San Francisco, California. Later, his communal experiences were summarized in his *Communes USA: A Personal Tour* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972). See also, William Hedgepeth and Dennis Stock, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); Roy Aid, *The Youth Communes* (New York: Tower Publications, 1970); Ron E. Roberts, *The New Communes* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1971); Kathleen Kinkade, *A Walden Two Experiment: The First Five Years of Twin Oaks Community* (New York: William Morrow, 1973); and Dave and Neta Jackson, *Living Together in a World Falling Apart: A Handbook on Christian Community* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1974). Twelve current intentional communities are detailed in a series of articles beginning with the July/August, 1984, issue of *The Mother Earth News*. A study of twenty-six contemporary communes in Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces was published as Novia A. M. Carter, *Something of Promise: The Canadian Communes* (Ottawa, Ontario: The Canadian Council on Social Development, 1974). Invaluable directories of current communes and articles by contemporary communitarians have appeared in *Communities: Journal of Cooperative Living* printed five times annually since 1972 by Twin Oaks Community, Box 426, Louisa, Virginia; *Spiritual Community Guide* published annually after the early 1970's by Spiritual Community Publications, Box 1080, San Rafael, California, and more recently as *The New Consciousness Sourcebook* from Box 1067, Berkeley,

before 1965.<sup>6</sup> In the communal explosion *since* 1965, which can only be described as a new order of communitarian phenomenon, as many as 100,000 communal groups have been formed in this country. Most of these have involved fewer than a dozen persons living together in urban housing for less than a year.<sup>7</sup>

Two other potentially distorting factors enter into our images and uses of the American communal past. First, sectarian rather than non-sectarian communities have received the greatest public and academic attention. Since groups with strong religious commitments and authoritarian leadership have tended to exceed their secular rivals in membership, earthly goods and longevity, they have been accorded the most acclaim for achievements and the most severe condemnation for real and imagined threats to the norms and interests of society.

This has led to stereotyping as a second distorting factor. Over the decades communes have been viewed either as wholesome centers of creativity in the arts, architecture, music, education, invention, moral philosophy, and righteous living or as threatening conspiracies of deviance in sexual activity (celibacy, polygamy, complex marriage, and free love); pacificism; monopolistic business; activist politics; physical and psychological mistreatment; hedonism; and drug abuse. While seeking a more balanced approach we cannot forget that these simplistic stereotypes usually have informed the reaction of contemporaries to, and often the interest of scholars in, communal societies.<sup>8</sup>

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California; *New England Network of Light Directory* edited by Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson for Sirius Community, Box 388, Amherst, Massachusetts, in two editions, the latest in February, 1983; *A Guide to Cooperative Alternatives* (New Haven, Connecticut and Louisa, Virginia: Community Publications Cooperative, 1979); J. Lipnack and J. Stamps, *Networking: The 1st Report and Directory* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company); *Unity In Diversity Directory* published by the World Trade Center, 350 S. Figueroa #370, Los Angeles, California; *Community Service Newsletter* of Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio; and *The Whole Again Resource Guide*, Capra Press, Box 2068, Santa Barbara, California. A helpful reference on current communes is J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Wilmington, North Carolina: McGrath Publishers, 1979). Networking among present American communal societies is being coordinated through The New England Network of Light, c/o Sirius Community, Box 388, Amherst, Massachusetts; Earth Communities Network, c/o Betty Didcott, 603 1st Street, Langley, Washington; and Central Intentional Communities Network, c/o Box 123, Stelle, Illinois.

6. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, pp. 235-243; Otohiko Okugawa, "Annotated List of Communal and Utopian Societies, 1787-1919," in Robert S. Fogarty, *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History*, pp. 173-234; and Gardner, *Children of Prosperity*, p. 3.

7. Jerome, *Families of Eden*, pp. 3-24; Gardner, *Children of Prosperity*, pp. 8-9.

8. These stereotypes help to explain legal and illegal attacks upon communal groups. The Harmony Society was accused in the Indiana General Assembly of holding an economic monopoly in Posey County. More than twenty Mormons, including Joseph Smith, died at

Keeping in mind, then, that our knowledge is derived from a very small percentage of the total number of communal groups, that religious communes have occupied the center stage of prominence and that stereotyping has seriously plagued our reactions and understanding, let us draw upon as broad a base of communal experience as possible in turning to four age-old dilemmas upon which the American communal past contributes useful perspectives: (1) community versus individuality, (2) cooperation versus competition, (3) authority versus equality, (4) Utopia versus dystopia.

### *1. Community Versus Individuality*

The benefits of community and the vital ways in which community and individual expression complement each other are implicit in communal societies. One of the most attractive aspects of communal living is the genuinely warm, personal, caring, family-like relationship attained within many groups and often projected to the outside world. This condition was expressed poetically by Father George Rapp as he mused about his own Harmony Society here in New Harmony. In 1824, he wrote of this millennial community as one in which

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the hands of mobs who opposed their economic success, polygamy, and political activism. John Humphrey Noyes fled Oneida for Canada and Thomas Lake Harris his Spiritualist Fountain Grove in California for Europe under charges of sexual misconduct. All twenty-one pacifistic Hutterite colonies moved from Montana and the Dakotas to Canada when the United States entered World War I and withdrew its original promise that these communalists would never be required to bear arms. South Dakota revoked the colonies' incorporation and announced its intention to "absolutely exterminate the Hutterites." Two Hutterian men were beaten to death by prison guards after their arrest on charges of draft evasion. Kidnapping family members who had joined groups like the Children Of God and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness under legal "conservatorships" and having them "deprogrammed" by professionals such as Ted Patrick was widely practiced by individuals and groups after the late 1960's. Beginning with Patrick and other parents of members of the Children of God who formed FREECOG (Free Our Children from the Children of God), the anticult movement evolved into a national network of similar, controversial organizations by the 1980's. See Karl J. R. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society, 1785-1847*, new ed. (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), pp. 261-265; Karl J. R. Arndt, ed., *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society, 1814-1824. Vol.1, 1814-1819* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1975), pp. 78, 216-217, 440-443; Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971 edition), pp. 20, 27-30, 86; Robert D. Thomas, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect: John Humphrey Noyes and the Utopian Impulse* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), pp. 174-176; Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, pp. 30-32; Rexroth, *Communalism*, pp. 217-218; and J. Gordon Melton, *The Cult Experience*, pp. 72-92. For a survey of the architecture by which many communes have been stereotyped, see Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1976).

those who occupy its peaceful dwellings, are so closely united by the endearing ties of friendship, confidence and love, that one heart beats in all. Here, the members kindly assist each other, in difficulty and danger, and share with each other, the enjoyments, and the misfortunes of life; and one lives in the breast of another, and forgets himself; all their undertakings are influenced by a social spirit, glowing with noble energy, and generous feeling, and pressing forward to the haven of their mutual prosperity.<sup>9</sup>

Americans since the mid-nineteenth century have been forced increasingly to choose between the qualities of community (*Gemeinschaft*) and the characteristics of the marketplace (*Gesellschaft*). Industrialization and the growth of cities caused a division of these elements in our society. The sanctuary of (*Gemeinschaft*) was eroded by the waves of rationality, functionalism, individual self-seeking, and impersonality represented by the expansion of *Gesellschaft*. Communal societies remained as rare, free-standing monuments to the humanistic ideals of community.<sup>10</sup> It was not by accident that the Moravians named the oldest building (1741-42) that still remains from their settlement at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the *Gemein Haus* (Common or Community House). The Inspirationists of Amana, Iowa, purposefully spoke of their seven villages as the *Wahre Inspirations Gemeinden* (True Inspiration Congregations). The Hutterites continue to refer to their special form of community as the *Gutergemeinschaft* (Community of Goods).

Today, it is more imperative than ever that we heed the importance of the spirit of community preserved in the communal heritage. Americans find themselves in an urbanized, computerized, depersonalized society in which selfishness, alienation, and aggression result so often in isolation, despair, and destruction. Nevertheless, communitarianism continues to offer working models of human relations based on affection rather than intimidation, care rather than exploitation, and understanding rather than disregard. In such stabilizing, humanizing, and healing face-to-face relationships individual worth and dignity can be restored, self-respect renewed, wounded egos repaired, and the loving security of family feeling reestablished. The very secret of mankind's survival may rest upon the adoption of this simple communal formula and ultimately in the establishment of a "global community."

Yet, individuality must be served as well as community. Communal societies would remind us not to make the mistake of assuming

9. *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* (New Harmony, Indiana: Harmony Society Press, 1824), p. 66.

10. Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1978), *passim*.



that the two are mutually exclusive. As William James observed, "The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual, the impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community." As social microcosms communal societies often encourage their members to exercise their individuality in creative avenues not readily available to the average citizen. Opportunities in the arts and trades, in teaching and leadership, in architecture and philosophizing, and even in publication may be afforded. One thinks of the thousands of hymns composed by the Ephrata Baptists, Moravians, Shakers, Harmonists, Inspirationists, Hutterites, and Hare Krishnas. Dramas and pageantry have blossomed at Brook Farm, in the Greek amphitheater overlooking the Pacific in Katherine Tingley's Theosophical Point Loma in California, and in the Saturday night entertainment at God's Valley near Bedford, Indiana. Dancing has thrived in Shaker meeting houses, Owenite socials, and the Sufi's temple at the Abode of the Message in New York. Artwork has been created from the calligraphy of the Ephrata Cloister and American Benedictine monasteries to the Shaker spirit drawings and line sketches of the children of the Society of Brothers. Excellent needlepoint, quilting, handicrafts, craftsmanship, and printing have all been done by individual communarians.

John Van Der Zee Sears, who had been a young student at the Brook Farm school, later recalled that even clever conversation was an individual expression that buttressed community feeling and ideals. "It was conversation," he wrote,

the mutual exchange of bright ideas that afforded their chiefest enjoyment. Not literature, not the drama, not the dance, but the fascination of human speech in its best employ attracted and held their enthralled attention.

The alert sallies and quick retorts, the pat allusions and apt quotations, the exaggerations, the absurdities, the shrewd witticisms, the searching satires, the puns and improvised nonsense verses might possibly have been registered on paper, but the spirit of merriment, of good fellowship and mutual understanding that made thoughts to live and words to sing—the spirit of Brook Farm—no snap-shot camera could ever have caught.

These talks were not all for fun, either. Happy and blithesome, the Farmers were, at heart, earnestly devoted to purposes held sacred. They were inspired by high ideals. Noble conceptions and beautiful beliefs found expression in fitting phrase. Rippling mirth flowed in an undercurrent of serious, sincere faith and hope and love.<sup>11</sup>

We must recognize, however, that most individual expressions in communes are contributions to the group for its own appreciation and

11. *My Friends at Brook Farm* (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1975; reprint of 1912 edition), pp.103-105.

that only rarely does the individual seek or obtain public recognition. Micajah Burnett of Shakertown at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, was a precocious exception. He became famous as that community's town planner and architect. He designed the remarkable cantilever spiral staircases in the Trustee's Office and the trestle system to support the upper stories of the Meeting House thereby permitting the dances in the sanctuary below to proceed unobstructed by columns.<sup>12</sup> Wallrath Weingartner of the Harmony Society and Olof Krans of Swedish Bishop Hill in Illinois became well known, respectively, for their water color and oil paintings.<sup>13</sup> Most communitarians who have gained public attention from their writing have been leaders of their groups: Richard McNemar and Frederick Evans of the Shakers, Johann Beissel at Ephrata, Joseph Bimeler of the Zoar Separatists, Robert Owen of New Harmony, Christian Metz and Barbara Heinemann of Amana, and Joseph Smith of the Mormons. More recently, Clarence Jordon founder of Koinonia Farm in Georgia, Eberhard and Emmy Arnold of the Society of Brothers, David Berg of the Children of God, Swami Kriyananda of Ananda in California, Sun Myung Moon of the Unification Church and Stephen Gaskin at The Farm in Tennessee have gained similar notice for their publications.

For our purposes it is useful to observe that, in their finest hours, communal societies past and present have achieved that ideal blend of community and individuality which has mutually strengthened both.

## 2. Cooperation Versus Competition

Numerous communal societies have demonstrated an effective balance between cooperative collectivism internally and competitive capitalism externally. Religious communes were the first social entities in the United States beyond the family or partnership to show that cooperative economic projects could be successful. The Shaker settlements and Harmonist towns established the fact that collective economies could be effective for large communal populations living from agriculture and light industry. In a land that championed individualism and private enterprise, these intentional, communistic communities

12. Samuel W. Thomas and James C. Thomas, *The Simple Spirit: A Pictorial Study of the Shaker Community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky* (Harrodsburg, Kentucky: The Pleasant Hill Press, 1973), pp. 15-16, 60-66, 114-121.

13. Donald E. Pitzer, "Harmonist Folk Art Discovered," *Historic Preservation* 29 (October-December 1977): 11-12; Olov Isaksson and Soren Hallgren, *Bishop Hill: A Utopia on the Prairie* (Stockholm: L T Publishing House, 1969), pp. 162-173; Ronald E. Nelson, "Bishop Hill: Swedish Development of the Western Illinois Frontier," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 1 (Fall 1978): 109-120.

became objects of curiosity to businessmen, reformers, and Utopians. Christian communism and economic necessity often inspired the internal economic systems of sectarian groups. The Acts of the Apostles clearly stated that

All that believed were together, and had all things common: And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. . . . Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.<sup>14</sup>

When combined with millennialism these phrases have been the most compelling inspiration for the organization of Christian communes in America. Wherever commitment to a cause, leadership by capable men and women of wide practical experience, and a careful screening of members have prevailed, both sectarian and secular communal societies have proven the effectiveness of not only communistic, cooperative, and collective economies, but of joint-stock as well. The ways and means of these successes should not be lost on the general society. They include wholesale purchasing, frugal lifestyles, dormitory and apartment-like housing, arduous work for long hours in the common cause, production of superior products, and reputations for ethical business practices.

The benefits of cooperative economies are apparent. They usually boast full employment. Contrast that with the Department of Labor's recent announcement that the jobless rate in the United States for September, 1983, was 9.3 percent of the workforce, a seventeen-month low. Communal work is lightened and made a joy when done amid the comradery of the group. Members of the Harmony Society at New Harmony were known to march to the harvest fields to the rhythm of their band. Workers at Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia, make hammocks to the music of their stereo system. Economic security often is offered to members of communal societies. In the labor of one's brothers and sisters, the individual has insurance against illness, injury, and old age. Jobs may be rotated to avoid boredom and to acquire new skills. Although recent studies show a continuation of traditional sex-oriented job distribution even in radical communal groups, sometimes communes have provided diversification of work

14. *Acts* 2:44-45, 4:32, 34-35.

and innovative leisure activities for women.<sup>15</sup> Technology itself is addressed on a manageable, human scale by communitarians rather than on the gigantic proportions so often encountered in the general society.

Communal societies represent in human society the fundamental principle in nature that cooperation is at least as important as competition for growth and survival. Astronomer Carl Sagan gave eloquent expression to this universal cooperative principle in his 1980 television series and book *Cosmos*. He noted that the origin of life itself was dependent upon an event four billion years ago when "molecules with specialized functions eventually joined together, making a kind of molecular collective—the first cell." "Every cell in your body," he asserted, "is a kind of commune, with once-living parts all banded together for the common good. And you are made of a hundred trillion cells. We are, each of us, a multitude." Around the planet Sagan described "a marvelous cooperative arrangement—plants and animals each inhaling the other's exhalations (plants giving off oxygen and animals carbon dioxide), a kind of planet-wide mutual mouth-to-stoma resuscitation, the entire elegant cycle powered by a star 150 million kilometers away."<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, when competition has been required, many communal societies have proven themselves equal to the challenge. Again examining their economic dimension we find that communes have employed their internal cooperation to compete successfully in the external world of capitalism. A few have become so prosperous as to threaten the underpinnings of their own solidarity, discipline, and commitment. Johann Beissel became so worried by the rapid economic development of his Ephrata Cloister that in 1745 he nearly wrecked the community by closing its mills, cancelling its contracts, dismissing its employees and ousting its best businessmen.<sup>17</sup> George Rapp moved his Harmonists from Harmonie, Pennsylvania, to New Harmony, Indiana, and again to Economy near Pittsburgh as their towns became prosperous. From here in New Harmony by 1824, the Harmonists were trading with twenty-two states and ten foreign countries in the

15. Jon Wagner, *Sex Roles in Contemporary American Communes* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), passim; Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Communes: Creating and Managing the Collective Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 287-307; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Raymond L. Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), also in paperback (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974).

16. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), pp. 31, 33.

17. Holloway, *Heavens On Earth*, pp. 47-48.

products of their fields and factories, including woolen goods and strong beer. At Economy, Frederick Rapp sought outside advice on how to preserve the group from the corruption of riches by disguising the fact of their rapidly-growing profits.<sup>18</sup> It is well known that Shaker communities in seven states flourished on the sale of everything from seeds and chairs to opium. They competed so well in the general economy that although their membership declined after the mid-nineteenth century, they hired outsiders, relaxed their austerities and enjoyed the fruits of their economic success.<sup>19</sup> Other communes had similar success: Oneida with animal traps and hand bags; the Hutterites in agriculture and chicken farming; God's Valley in lumber; the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in books, flowers, and incense; and the Unification Church in various industries, including the *Washington Times*.

In a world in which economic security in the forms of food, clothing, shelter, and care in adversity and old age cannot be assumed, communal societies offer useful illustrations of what can be achieved by wedding cooperation with competition. But they do more. They demonstrate, as social microcosms, that flexibility for change is the secret of institutional and economic survival. A few have wisely employed a device which generally has gone unnoticed, but which I would like to call to our attention and identify as "developmental communalism." Developmental communalism is the practice of using communal living and a cooperative economy as necessary components during the formative stages of a movement in a process that is altered over time to meet changing conditions and needs. Groups using developmental communalism have been able to avoid most of the divisive problems caused by the influx of new members and the rise of new generations who may not see the need of continuing the initial demands of cooperative economics and communal living. The experience of these groups reminds us that success should be measured in terms of the realization of long-range goals rather than by whether original organizational structures have been preserved.

The first-century Christians, themselves, provide a prime example of developmental communalism. Although they were obviously practicing communists in the beginning, they modified their social and economic structures, if not their ideals, as the church grew. Although many communal groups in America have chosen to imitate the organization of

18. Donald E. Pitzer and Josephine M. Elliott, "New Harmony's First Utopians, 1814-1824," *Indiana Magazine of History* 75 (September 1979): 233-241.

19. Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search (or the Perfect Society)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), passim.

the early Christians, they also have often found the need to change from communist to other social and economic arrangements: cooperative, collective, joint-stock, individual. Witness, for example, the developmental communalism of the Moravians, Mormons, and Inspirationists. The Moravians, who practiced Christian communism at Bethlehem and Nazareth, Pennsylvania, in the eighteenth century, utilized this principal of flexibility to become a current body of more than 50,000.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints instituted the first form of communalism expounded by an American when they accepted Joseph Smith's revelation of the communitarian "United Order" at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. Under this system, each Mormon was to "consecrate" all real and personal property to the bishop who would redistribute the communal wealth as "inheritance" grants to meet the needs and wants of all families while the church kept the remainder. Each family was then responsible to employ its resources as a "stewardship" for gain through its own enterprise. Annually, each family head was responsible to submit all profits to the bishop and await the family's next "inheritance." This plan, which promised economic equality, socialization of surpluses, free enterprise, and economic security within the group, soon proved too complicated to enforce among the constantly migrating, highly persecuted membership, some of whom even sued to recover their "consecrations." Therefore, while holding to the concept of the United Order as a Utopian system once practiced in the ancient time of Enoch and to be realized again in the future City of Enoch in Jackson County, Missouri, the Mormons took the steps dictated by developmental communalism. In 1841, they replaced the law of consecration and stewardship with the simpler, more practical tithe.<sup>20</sup> Today, tithing and cooperation remain cardinal tenets alongside private enterprise in the Mormon Church that numbers more than 3,000,000 internationally.

Developmental communalism also has spelled survival for the German-American Inspirationists. They adopted pure communism of necessity at their four Ebenezer Society villages shortly after immigrating to the Buffalo, New York, area in 1842. Communism was continued by their charter as the Amana Society in seven Iowa towns

20. Leonard J. Arrington, "Early Mormon Communitarianism: The Law of Consecration and Stewardship," *Western Humanities Review* 7 (Autumn 1953): 341-369, as reprinted in Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen, eds. *Mormonism and American Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 37-58. The standard account of the United Order of Enoch is Mario S. De Pillis, "The Development of Mormon Communitarianism, 1826-1848" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1961); and see Mario S. De Pillis, "The Social Sources of Mormonism," *Church History*, 37 (March 1968): 50-79.

where they migrated in the mid-1850s.<sup>21</sup> However, by the days of the Great Depression they had suffered a long vacuum of charismatic leadership since Christian Metz' death in 1867 and were facing severe financial problems complicated by a young generation in open rebellion to forsake the isolation of the past for the attractions of modern life. Thus, the Inspirationists chose to preserve their faith and association in new forms. The new Amana Society and the Amana Church Society were incorporated in 1932, replacing communism with capitalism and intentional community with individualism.<sup>22</sup> This action liberated the spirit and energy of their organization and people in a new age. While retaining their piety, they now welcome half a million visitors to the Amanas each year, and many more know their movement through its by-products, Amana refrigerators and radaranges.<sup>23</sup>

Developmental communalism is just now being used by the hippies at The Farm in Tennessee to save their 1960's-style community from bankruptcy. After a decade of pure communism, 1983 marks their transformation to "family oriented economics," their term for private capitalism.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Hutterites are for the most part an outstanding exception to the rule of developmental communalism, many other groups have left us an unmistakable lesson by choosing to hold inflexibly to their own earliest communal structures in the face of insurmountable obstacles, only to succumb.<sup>25</sup>

21. Frank J. Lankes, *The Ebenezer Community of True Inspiration* (Gardenville, New York: privately printed, 1949); Frank J. Lankes, *The Ebenezer Society, Part III* (West Seneca, New York: West Seneca Historical Society, 1963); Jonathan G. Andelson, "Communalism and Change in the Amana Society, 1855-1932" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974); Bertha M. H. Shambaugh, *Amana That Was and Amana That Is* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1932); and Henry Schiff, *The Amanas Yesterday: A Religious Communal Society* (Amana, Iowa: The Amana Society, 1975).

22. Lawrence L. Rettig, *Amana Today: A History of the Amana Colonies from 1932 to the Present* (South Amana, Iowa: privately printed, 1975), pp. 4-12, 20, 42-60, 126-157.

23. It also should be noted that the Oneida Community of Noyes lives on in the widely distributed silverware of Oneida Silversmiths, Inc. And the memory of Henry George's Single-Tax crusade is enshrined in Fairhope, Alabama, established by his communitarian disciples who found it expedient to modify his secular system over the years.

24. Tom Tiede, "Hippie-era Commune Yields to Capitalism; Life on 'The Farm' turns easy, profitable," *The Evansville (Indiana) Press*, April 16, 1984, p. 15.

25. Joseph W. Eaton, "The Hutterite Accommodation to Social Change," in Rosabeth Moss Kanter, ed., *Communes*, pp. 509-521; John A. Hostetler and Gertrude E. Huntington, *The Hutterites In North America*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967); Paul S. Gross, *The Hutterite Way: The Inside Story of the Life, Customs, Religion and Traditions of the Hutterites* (Saskatoon, Canada: Freeman Publishing Company, 1965); and Victor Peters, *All Things Common: The Hutterian Way of Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

### 3. Authority Versus Equality

Communal societies have experimented with both authoritarian and equalitarian systems. They thus provide us with valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each. The authoritarian type has appealed most to religious and cultist groups.<sup>26</sup> Its strengths lie in the provision of strong, positive, and sometimes charismatic leadership. There is a sense of mission. Motivation is supplied both by the leader and his or her set of religious beliefs and practices which constitute *the* truth. This is illustrated by The Children Of God periodical *The New Improved Brand Truth*. Solidarity, efficiency, and longevity are often hallmarks of authoritarian communal governance.

Authoritarianism also has displayed weaknesses which at the extreme have proven disastrous. Members' lives are usually regimented. Surveillance is often evident, as with the guards of the Peoples Temple, the "Bless Patrol" of the Way, and the small windows in Shaker buildings through which workers and worshipers could be observed. The individual may be asked to give up not only his family, friends, and possessions, but also his doubt, reason, and inner self. His financial, social, sexual, and political choices may be made for him. He may no longer be able to make independent moral judgements. When led by healthy, constructive leaders he may bring credit to himself and the group. Under leaders who are diseased, perverted, or deranged, he may destroy others and himself.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's study of the use of authority in nineteenth-century communes illuminates these strengths and weaknesses. In *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (1972), she investigated the fact that of the ninety-one known communal societies from 1780 to 1860, only eleven managed to survive at least one sociological generation of twenty-five years under the same organization. She discovered that all of these survivors were religious communities and all made use of authoritarian "commitment mechanisms." She concluded that the more commitment mechanisms used effectively by a group, the more apt it was to survive not only twenty-five years, but in some instances much longer. Snowhill, Pennsylvania, lasted seventy years; Zoar, Ohio, eighty-one; Amana, Iowa, ninety; the Harmony Society one hundred; and the Bon Homme Hutterite colony in South Dakota, is still thriving after one hundred and nine years. But the Shaker settlements are the longest-lived in

26. Donald E. Pitzer, "Collectivism, Community and Commitment: America's Religious Communal Utopias from the Shakers to Jonestown," in Peter Alexander and Roger Gill, eds., *Utopias* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1984), pp. 119-135.



United States history. Fourteen lasted more than one hundred years and two of these, Canterbury in New Hampshire and Sabbathday Lake in Maine, have eleven active members after 189 and 191 years, respectively.

Kanter identifies six commitment mechanisms by which the religious communitarian groups she studied satisfied their needs for continuance, cohesion, and control. These mechanisms are progressively authoritarian and personally restrictive. "Sacrifice" and "investment" appeal rationally to prospective members. They are asked to sacrifice the few pleasures of the world to be invested with the many benefits of the communal fellowship. "Renunciation" and "communion" build the emotional ties within the community. Members are required to renounce outside relationships and attachments in order to cultivate and enjoy the communion of their communal brothers and sisters. "Mortification" and "transcendence" bring members under complete authoritarian control. They are mortified through confession of all problems, failures, and doubts. They lose their inner privacy by sharing every thought. They may take vows and oaths, undergo tests of loyalty, adopt a uniform, wear peculiar hair styles, shave their heads, change their names, and abandon their personal identities. Transcendence occurs when the member finds that the power of the authoritarian leader and his divinely ordained movement have become the only sources of moral authority and meaning in his life.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, commitment mechanisms present the opportunity for the abuse of authority. Thousands of Americans have lived under the Rule of St. Benedict which indicates that if the newcomer "owns anything, he must either give it to the poor beforehand, or deed it to the monastery, keeping nothing for himself, for he now owns nothing, not even his own body." And further that "without the abbot's permission a monk may not receive from or give to anyone, even his parents, letters or parcels."<sup>28</sup> One Shaker hymn indicates the extent to which Mother Ann Lee's disciples have been induced to reject their biological families:

Of all the relations that ever I see  
My old fleshly kindred are furthest from me  
So bad and so ugly, so hateful they feel  
To see them and hate them increases my zeal  
O how ugly they look!  
How ugly they look!  
How nasty they feel!<sup>29</sup>

27. Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 61-74, passim.

28. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. del Mastro, translators, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1975), pp. 93, 95.

29. Edward Deming Andrews, *The Gift To Be Simple* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), p. 20.

George Rapp discouraged members of his Harmony Society from writing letters and censored their mail. He treated women according to his utilitarian prejudices and through personal jealousy removed capable men from positions in which they might challenge his leadership. He and Frederick never shared reports of communal income and expenses with the faithful, but speculated heavily with their multiplying wealth without their knowledge. After forty years of research into the Harmony Society, Karl J. R. Arndt reached the conclusion "that an element of doubt and uncertainty, if not premeditated 'pious' fraud, clings to most of the important documents of Rapp's Society as far as its honesty toward the members of the Society is concerned."<sup>30</sup>

Under the persuasive leadership of John Humphrey Noyes at Oneida, New York, in 1869, fifty-three young women demonstrated their commitment by signing the following pledge to begin his eugenic experiment:

1. That we do not belong to ourselves in any respect, but that we belong first to God, and second to Mr. Noyes as God's true representative.
2. That we have no rights or personal feelings in regard to childbearing which shall in the least degree oppose or embarrass him in his choice of scientific combinations.
3. That we will put aside all envy, childishness, and self-seeking, and rejoice with those who are chosen candidates; that we will, if necessary, become martyrs to science, and cheerfully renounce all desire to become mothers, if for any reason Mr. Noyes deem us unfit material for propagation. Above all, we offer ourselves "living sacrifices" to God and true communism.<sup>31</sup>

Together with Noyes and thirty-eight young men who signed a similar pledge, selected women from this group in the next decade gave birth to fifty-eight children, at least nine of whom were sired by the communal father himself.

Upon the suggestion of their own communitarian authority figures, the Ephratans, Shakers, and Harmonists adopted celibacy. Only Catholic communes or "orders" like the Benedictines began with celibacy as a requirement. The Mormons chose polygamy, while David Berg's Children of God became "hookers for Jesus."<sup>32</sup> And thousands

30. Karl J. R. Arndt, ed., *Harmony on the Wabash in Transition, 1824-1826. Transitions to: George Rapp's "Divine Economy" on the Ohio, and Robert Owen's "New Moral World" at New Harmony on the Wabash. A Documentary History* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Harmony Society Press, 1982), pp. 597.

31. Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1970), p. 338.

32. Thomas Moore, "Where have all the Children Of God gone?" *New Times* (October 4, 1974): 39; Children Of God tract number 22 by Mother Eve David, "In the Beginning ... Sex," (December, 1973) and tract number 266 by Moses David, "The Drugstore," (September 4, 1973).

of Unification Church members have had their mates chosen for them and been married in mass ceremonies by Sun Myung Moon, more than 4,000 in one nuptials conducted in Madison Square Garden in 1982.<sup>33</sup> At the most violent extreme, the tribe of Charles Manson committed the Sharon Tate murders; and 900 men, women and children at Jim Jones' Peoples Temple Agricultural Project in Guyana were destroyed in the tragic suicide-massacre of 1978.<sup>34</sup>

Psychological experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale University in the 1960's cast a clearer, if not more comforting, light on this important matter of commitment in its relation to authority. Attempting to find clues to why Germans obeyed the inhumane commands of the Nazis, Milgram discovered an unexpectedly pervasive human tendency to submit to authority figures and symbols. Voluntary subjects were told that in a scientific learning experiment they should administer progressively higher levels of electric shock to their fellow subjects when the latter failed to repeat series of words correctly. Sixty percent of those tested, regardless of age, sex, education, or socioeconomic level, chose to give what they were led to believe were highly injurious if not actually lethal amounts of electric shock. Milgram concluded that this obedience in the commission of a heinous act which the subjects normally would have considered immoral, unreasonable, and inhumane demonstrated their submission, even if under protest, to the authority represented by the experimenter in his gray lab coat, the university, and the cause of science. He found that although subjects expressed misgivings and showed signs of emotional trauma as the experiment progressed, most eventually entered an "agentic state" in which they reconciled their will to the authority and its symbols to which they transferred all moral responsibility. Sixty-five percent of those who became "agents" of the authority administered what they thought to be the maximum possible amount of electric shock (450 volts).<sup>35</sup>

In ways that resemble the Holocaust, My Lai, and Watergate there are parts of the American communitarian past that substantiate Milgram's findings. Therefore, a message urges itself upon us. As

33. Joseph Fichter, "Marriage, Family and Sun Myung Moon," *America* 141 (October 27, 1979): 226-228; *New York Times*, July 2, 1982, pp. B1, B4.

34. See Charles A. Krause, *Guyana Massacre* (New York: Berkley Publications Corporation, 1978); Mark Lane, *The Strongest Poison* (New York: Dutton Press, 1979); Shiva Naipaul, *Journey to Nowhere: A New World Tragedy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); John P. Nugent, *White Night: The True Story of What Happened Before and After Jonestown* (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1980); James Reston, Jr., *Our Father Who Art In Hell: The Life and Death of Jim Jones* (New York: Times Books, 1981) and Min S. Yee and Thomas Layton, *In My Father's House* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981).

35. Stanley Milgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," *Human Relations* 18 (1965): 57-76.

individuals and as nations we are vulnerable to authority symbols. We are challenged to protect our right to judge *all* institutions, leaders, ideas and actions, regardless of the authority they claim, on the basis of our own best rational, moral, and humane standards. To relinquish this right is to put our minds, our liberty, and our lives in jeopardy.

One might wish that we now could turn in complete safety from the authoritarian to the egalitarian communal model. But here, too, we find strengths and weaknesses. Who would not opt for the liberation of body, mind and spirit? Who would not seek to educate and develop each person to the limits of his or her potential? Who would not desire to fully express ideas in open forums of discussion? Who would not favor the safeguarding of civil liberties and human rights? Who would not want to practice equality of race, sex, age, and religion? Who would not desire democratic organization and consensus decision-making? Who would not prefer individual freedom of choice and action?

The American communal experience teaches that groups founded upon these ideals have enjoyed their blessings for a season only to encounter severe intrinsic difficulties that usually have caused their early demise. Almost always nonsectarian, these are the shortest-lived of all communal types. They usually lack a compelling, cohesive philosophy and discernable membership requirements. With no eternal rewards or punishments at stake, they often have a notable absence of mission, purpose and motivation. Leadership may be minimal or rejected altogether in favor of a hippie-style blend of anarchism and antinomianism.<sup>36</sup> Gatherings for inspiration and planning are sometimes nonexistent, sometimes marathon "town meetings" that too-often end in heated debates and ill-will. Although an individual or a clique may emerge to suggest direction, most such communes prefer inaction until an elusive consensus can be found. Although many members may work diligently, others may refuse, preferring to "do their own thing." A few communities have even instituted programs of "contractual anarchism" by which members can formally agree to work a fixed length of time each year while having the rest absolutely free. Inefficient management and factionalism engender bitter internal and external conflicts. After a few weeks or months, hundreds of egalitarian communes in America have experienced economic collapse just before they dissolved.

Robert Owen's socialistic experiment here in New Harmony set this pattern as America's first notable nonsectarian communal society.

36. Benjamin Zablocki, "Problems of Anarchism on Hippie Communes," in Rosabeth Moss Kanter, ed., *Communes*, pp. 167-177.

Education, science, and technology were to blend with liberal idealism and communitarianism to produce human happiness. Egalitarianism was to be realized first on the Wabash, then worldwide. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1826, Owen delivered an oration here that contained his own Declaration of Mental Independence. Everyone was to be free from established religion, private property and unhappy marriage based on religion and property. During its two-and-one-half years of existence, Owenite New Harmony sowed seeds for the liberation of women and slaves, for religious toleration, scientific inquiry, and democratic organization. Yet Owen himself spent only a few months in his budding Utopia, preferring to travel about, preaching the gospel of his New Moral World to noted politicians and businessmen. Consequently, the vacuum of leadership was filled by endless meetings and debates resulting in the drafting of a dozen constitutions. Ironically, dissolution came before Owen could transform his privately-owned village into the intended Community of Equality. Honest differences had divided laborers from educators, mechanics from scientists and Owen from his own partner, William Maclure. Equality and democracy had fallen prey to suspicion, animosity, and disorganization.<sup>37</sup>

Josiah Warren, who as a member of the New Harmony community differed with Owen's collectivism, later experimented with his own brand of communal egalitarianism. Of his effort at Utopia, Ohio, which lasted from 1847 to 1851, he said that

Throughout the whole of our operations at this village, everything has been conducted so nearly on the *Individual* basis, that not one meeting for legislation has taken place. No organization, no delegated power, no consitutions, no laws or bye-laws, rules or regulations, but as each individual makes for himself and his own business; no officers, no priests, nor prophets have been resorted to. . . . Not even a single lecture upon the principles upon which we were acting, has been given on the premises.<sup>38</sup>

Equality to be implemented in a system of representative government motivated nearly 300 Frenchmen to follow Etienne Cabet and his Utopian vision of Icaria to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1849. After purchasing the former Mormon town, the Icarians formed one of the most promising nonsectarian intentional communities in American history. Like the successful Harmonists, they possessed the cultural solidarity of an

37. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, *passim*; Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *Robert Owen's American Legacy* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972); and Donald F. Carmony, "New Harmony, Indiana: Robert Owen's Seedbed for Utopia," *Indiana Magazine of History* 76 (September 1980): 161-261.

38. Quoted in Noyes, *Strange Cults and Utopias of 19th-century America*, p. 98.

immigrant ethnic group, skilled craftsmen, adequate initial capital, and capable leadership under an inspired, if aging, communal father. Despite these advantages and the rapid development of Nauvoo's economic and cultural dimensions Cabet's dream failed to withstand its inherent susceptibility to political factionalism. Violence broke out in the streets of Nauvoo as Cabet's conservative faction fought their legitimately elected liberal brethren. When the very author of *Voyage en Icarie*, Cabet himself, was ousted in 1856, he took 180 true believers with him to St. Louis, but died within a month. Five other attempts to institute a lasting communal Icaria in Missouri, Iowa, and California during the next forty years were split by similar divisions as liberals fought conservatives, young fought old, Marxists fought capitalists, and feminists fought sexists.<sup>39</sup>

Whether we look for egalitarian examples in the capitalistic Fourierist Phalanxes or the socialist and Marxist communes of men like Burnette Haskell, the results are the same. Some 8,000 Americans joined about fifty joint-stock phalanxes in the 1840's and 1850's with the promise of realizing Utopia through equal opportunity and individual initiative. Due to insufficient initial funds, investment in poor land, and entanglement in Fourier's overly-complicated communal system, only three lasted longer than two years. Those were the North American Phalanx in New Jersey for twelve years, the Wisconsin Phalanx for six, and Brook Farm near Boston for the last two of its five years existence.<sup>40</sup> Burnette Haskell's Kaweah colony in the Sequoia redwoods near Visalia, California, is an illustration from a different economic and political orientation. It was founded by labor unionists and Marxists on egalitarian and humanitarian principles in 1885. But it was doomed from the start by its heterogeneous mixture of philosophies, life-styles, and personalities in ruinous combination with endless debates intended to let everyone have a voice in each decision. After seven hectic years, the debates ended when the federal government claimed the commune's land for Sequoia National Park. The giant redwood that the Kaweahans had lovingly christened the Karl Marx tree became the now-famous General Sherman Tree.<sup>41</sup>

39. Albert Shaw, *Icaria: A Chapter in the History of Communism* (New York: n.p., 1884); and Roger H. Grant, "Icarians and American Utopianism," *Illinois Quarterly* 34 (February 1972): 5-15; Robert D. Bush, "Communism, Community and Charisma: 'The Crisis in Icaria' at Nauvoo," *The Old Northwest* 3 (1977): 409-428 and Jacques C. Chicoineau, "Etienne Cabet and the Icarians," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 2 (Spring 1979): 5-19.

40. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "American Phalanxes: Fourierist Socialism in the United States" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1938); Edith R. Curtis, *A Season in Utopia: The Story of Brook Farm* (New York: Thomas Nelson Press, 1961); and Holloway, *Heavens On Earth*, pp. 148-154.

41. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, pp. 78-100.

Bronson Alcott's summertime extravaganza at Fruitlands in Massachusetts was an 1843 precursor of the freedom-loving hippie communes of the 1960's. For eight months, the happy Fruitlanders sang, swam, wrote poetry, and ran nude in the woods. Egalitarianism and vegetarianism coexisted with communitarianism for one delightful moment, then vanished.<sup>42</sup> More than a century later in 1966, Dr. Lou Gottlieb, well-known musician with the Limelighters, created a vanguard hippie commune called Morning Star on his own land in Sonoma County, California. Voluntary primitivism, meditation, nudism, and self-expression in discussion, music, sex, diet, clothing, and housing had full reign. When neighbors complained about the unsanitary conditions, Gottlieb was arrested in 1967 for operating an "organized camp." In court he told the judge in his own defense, "If you can find any traces of 'organization' here, let me know and I'll destroy them immediately." After failing in an attempt to solve the legal problems of Morning Star by willing it to God, Gottlieb saw his dream of ushering in the new egalitarian age through communal living crumple before the bulldozer in 1969.<sup>43</sup>

The American communal past teaches us by these and hundreds of other examples that there are both benefits and dangers to authority and equality. From them we would do well to learn never blindly to sacrifice our individual freedom for promises of social solidarity, longevity, and Utopia. At the same time, we would know that freedom is extremely fragile if not structured carefully about responsibility. One would hope that in a society such as the United States in which democratic institutions and individual equality are prized, we would take cognizance of this lesson. Secular communes that have tended to champion freedom of thought and action, egalitarianism, and democracy have usually failed to generate the philosophical cement and commitment necessary to endure. Thus, we might assume on a larger scale that a secular, democratic society like our own must create a unifying mystique of manifest destiny based upon widely accepted values, common cultural usages, and a recognizable cosmological sanction in order to sustain its vitality for a long period of time.

#### 4. *Utopia Versus Dystopia*

Finally, referring again to Robert Dale Owen's expression with which we began our discussion, the American communal past has been

42. Louisa May Alcott, *Transcendental Wild Oats, and excerpts from the Fruitlands Diary* (Harvard, Massachusetts: The Harvard Common Press, 1975); and Holloway, *Heavens On Earth*, pp. 131-133.

43. Gardner, *Children Of Prosperity*, pp. 134-137. A first-hand memoir of Morning Star appears elsewhere in this issue of *Communal Societies*.

useful both as "an example and a beacon." As we have seen, for three centuries American communal societies have given us attractive examples of microcosmic *Utopias* and warning beacons of microcosmic *dystopias*. When Americans have balanced community and individuality, cooperation and competition, authority and equality with communal living, their accomplishments have been remarkable. Communitarianism, therefore, has fulfilled its promise if defined as a nonviolent method of social change for either good or ill within small, voluntary, and partly isolated social units. But unlike its rivals of gradual reform through legislation and immediate reform through political revolution, communitarianism has *not* proven effective as a means of altering human institutions or the human condition on national or international levels, with the possible exception of the *kibbutzim* of Israel.<sup>44</sup>

American communes have deep roots in ideologies fueled by unrealized visions of global destruction and redemption—inevitable dystopias out of which were to rise Utopias of divine or human design. Apocalypticism, millennialism, and an eschatological interpretation of history have permeated the communal tradition of the Western world in both religious and secular forms. These concepts originated in the Middle East as expressed in the Essene community at Qumran on the Dead Sea a century before Christ.<sup>45</sup> Driven by such powerful ideas, communal societies have organized their personal and collective lives, values, and energies around dire prophecies that for the most part have not come to pass. Thousands have looked for the imminent "end of the world" from the ancient Essenes to Rapp's nineteenth-century Harmonists and Benjamin and Mary Purnell's early-twentieth-century House of David in Benton Harbor, Michigan.<sup>46</sup> Since the 1960's the "end-times" emphasis had been perpetuated in the coast-to-coast "houses" of the Jesus Movement, the colonies of the Children of God, The Unification Church, Robert de Grimston's Chicago-based Process-Church of Final Judgement (now known as The Foundation Faith of God), and many other communal groups. Just as steadfastly these and other communitarians have clung to millennial hopes and Utopian schemes that have not found universal application either through prophetic divine intervention or conscious human adoption.

44. Joseph R. Blasi, *The Communal Future: The Kibbutz and the Utopian Dilemma* (Norwood, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1978); Dan Leon, *The Kibbutz: A New Way of Life* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1969); and Aryei Fishman, *The Religious Kibbutz Movement* (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Post Press, 1957).

45. Rexroth, *Communalism*, pp. 11-17.

46. Robert S. Fogarty, *The Righteous Remnant: The House of David* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1981).



Although three decades ago Arthur Bestor referred to communal societies as "patent-office models of the good society," history has proven everyone mistaken who has imagined that communes could act as pilot projects ready for endless replication in the outside world.<sup>47</sup> It is true that Robert Owen unveiled a six-foot-square architectural model of his planned New Harmony Utopia at the United States Patent Office in 1825, but that office did not issue a patent for Utopia any more than it has granted one for a perpetual motion machine.<sup>48</sup> Charles Fourier was so convinced that his Utopian phalanxes would be replicated worldwide that he predicted exactly 2,985,984 of them would be governed from Constantinople by an Omniarch in a perfect future age of unity, peace, and plenty.<sup>49</sup> Fourier's principal American spokesman, Albert Brisbane, wrote enthusiastically of his mentor's coming associative Utopia:

I saw humanity united in a great whole—united in all the details of its material life: unity in the means of communication; unity in all its enterprises, in its weights and measures, in its currency; concert and combination everywhere. I saw this associative humanity working with order, with concert, to realize some great purpose. I had a vivid conception of a great function as the destiny of this humanity; I saw the association of our globe and the humanities upon it to the Cosmic Globe to which they belong; I felt an instinctive pride in the great human race and an ambition to serve it—an ambition to be a part, however small and humble, in the vast organism.<sup>50</sup>

Brisbane had no doubt that this could be accomplished by the example of Fourieristic demonstration communities. "The whole question of effecting a Social Reform," he asserted in 1843,

may be reduced to the establishment of one Association, which will serve as a model for, and induce the rapid establishment of others. . . . Now if we can, with a knowledge of true architectural principles, build one house rightly, conveniently and elegantly, we can, by taking it for a model and building others like it, make a perfect and beautiful city: in the same manner, if we can, with a knowledge of true social principles, organize one township rightly, we can, by organizing others like it, and by spreading and rendering them universal, establish a true Social and Political Order.<sup>51</sup>

47. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "Patent-Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships Between Social Reform and Westward Expansions," *American Historical Review* 58 (April 1953): 505-526, reprinted in Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, pp. 230-252.

48. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, pp. 128-129.

49. Holloway, *Heavens On Earth*, p. 138.

50. Quoted from Brisbane's reminiscences in Charles A. Madison, *Critics and Crusaders: A Century of American Protest* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1959), p. 123.

51. Albert Brisbane, *A Concise Exposition of the Doctrine of Association*, 2nd ed. (New York: n.p., 1843), pp. 73-74.

Two simple facts explain why Brisbane and all other communitarians who have longed for a general Utopia have been frustrated. First, the very characteristics that make communes ideal for small-scale social experimentation also render them powerless to serve as the foundations for large-scale reform. By definition communal societies are small, voluntary social units partly isolated from the general society in which people of like mind choose to share a communal economy and life-style in the hopes of realizing their common ideals. Escape is therefore an inherent element in the communal approach to reform. Many groups have struggled with, but none has solved, the dilemma of being both adequately separate from and yet effectively involved in the outside society.<sup>52</sup> The second reason that communes have not been effective for the realization of wider Utopias is that they are social laboratories. Like all laboratory experiments, communes are restricted by the natural limitations that accompany controlled environments. Results that can be produced in laboratories may not and often *cannot* occur in nature at large. The Utopian plans that can be implemented under carefully prescribed circumstances with eager, selected volunteers, rarely, if ever, can be expected to be feasible in the unselected and relatively uncontrolled general population of which all political units are composed. Ashleigh Brilliant reminds us that "the world is a very strange community, but it's the only one we all belong to."<sup>53</sup>

In what sense, then, are communal societies Utopian?<sup>54</sup> Many have achieved their potential of becoming unique, free-standing Utopias in their own right, by their own humanitarian and moral standards, in their own tiny, closed and protected spheres. If only briefly, in

52. Yaacov Oved, "Communes and the Outside World: Seclusion and Involvement," *Communal Societies* 3 (Fall 1983): 83-92.

53. *Appreciate Me Now and Avoid The Rush* (Santa Barbara, California: Woodbridge Press Publishing Company, 1981).

54. Writers have assumed the Utopian character of communal societies as indicated by the titles of their works; Bestor's *Backwoods Utopias*; Holloway's *Heavens On Earth*; Everett Webber's *The Escape to Utopia: The Communal Movement in America* (1959); John Egerton's *Visions of Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, and the "New Communities" in Tennessee's Past* (1977); Charles LeWarne's *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915* (1975) and Gairdner Moment's *Utopias: The American Experience* (1980). Several have addressed the matter of communal utopianism itself. See, for example, Peyton E. Richter, ed., *Utopias: Social Ideals and Communal Experiments* (Boston: Holbrook Press, Inc., 1971); Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: The Viking Press, 1922; reissued 1962); George Kateb, *Utopia and its Enemies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963; reissued 1972); Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967); and Peter Alexander, *Utopias*. The broadest recent treatment of utopianism, including communal Utopians such as Fourier and Owen, is Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979).

these intentional communities, and possibly in these communities alone, humanity has realized relations and institutions that have made Utopia "now here" rather than "no where." Communitarians have gone beyond the Utopian novelists to hazard the risks and to accept the scorn of testing their dreams in practice. Only a few Americans such as Charles W. Caryl and Ralph Borsodi have both written about their ideal communities and tried to bring them into communal being.<sup>55</sup> Most, like Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells, Laurence Gronlund, Henry George, Henry Olerich, and B. F. Skinner, have not even lived in the communal societies in which others tested their plans.<sup>56</sup> Communal Utopians have mostly escaped the boredom, stagnation, and game playing to which the equilibrium of Utopia theoretically can reduce any society.<sup>57</sup> Communal Utopias are conceived in the

55. Sixty Utopian novels were published in the United States between Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* in 1887 and the end of the century. See Robert L. Shurter, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1865-1900* (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1973). Charles W. Caryl wrote *New Era* (Denver: n.p., 1897) and attempted rather unsuccessfully to begin the New Era at three experiments based on his plan in Colorado. See H. Roger Grant, "One Who Dares To Plan: Charles W. Caryl and the New Era Union," *The Colorado Magazine* 51 (January 1974): 13-27. Ralph Borsodi's *Flight From the City* (New York: Harper and Row, 1933; reissued 1972), which became a textbook for young communalists wishing to live off the land in the 1960's, is a description of Borsodi's escape from New York City to a small upstate farm where he successfully tested his subsistence, domestic production system. He became an advisor for the New Deal Farm Security Administration helping to set up the Homesteading Experiment at Dayton, Ohio. See Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959). In 1936, Borsodi and friends began their "School of Living" to teach his methods at their first communal society called Bayard Lane in Suffern, New York. Borsodi's movement has had a significant impact through publications such as *Balanced Living*, later titled *A Way Out*, and *The Green Revolution*, into which Richard Fairfield merged his *Alternative* and *The Modern Utopian* in 1972, and which persists as a voice for communal homesteading ideas. Since 1965, Borsodi's teachings have been disseminated from the intentional farming community of Heathcote in Freeland, Maryland, mostly under the direction of Margaret Loomis.

56. In California, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* influenced Tingley's Point Loma, Haskell's Kaweah, Harris's Fountain Grove, Job Harriman's Llano del Rio, and Erastus Kelsey's Winters Island. Howell's *A Traveler from Altruria* gave a name and certain ideas to Rev. Edward B. Payne's Altruria in the Sonoma Valley of California in the mid-1890's. Kaweah used Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth* (1884) as a communal model, and the founders of Fountain Grove and Altruria were impressed by Gronlund's book. Fairhope, Alabama, was the principal application of George's ideas in communal form, but his thought also affected members of Kaweah, Altruria, and Llano del Rio. See Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, pp. 162-163, *passim*. Olerich wrote *A Cityless and Countryless World* (1893) and was involved with a commune in Colorado in 1895, but never joined. Twin Oaks at Louisa, Virginia, and many other behaviorist communes that began in the 1960's and 1970's were based on Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948). Skinner has visited Twin Oaks and appeared on a film made there, but indicated that he was not interested in becoming a member.

57. Bernard Suitts, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); and "The Grasshopper: Posthumous Reflections on Utopia," in Peter Alexander, *Utopias*, pp. 197-209.

human spirit and built by human hands. Utopia, in this sense, is the Shakers with "hands to work and hearts to God." Utopia is the Owenites experimenting with a New Moral World of human happiness through projects of education, science, and communal living. Utopia is the Harmony Society and a thousand other millennial groups purifying themselves in preparation for Christ's Second Advent and the coming of God's Kingdom On Earth. Utopia is the Sufis dancing and the Hare Krishnas chanting. Utopia is the brothers and sisters of the Roman Catholic Orders performing their services for God and man. Utopia is the monks of the Lama Foundation and a hundred *ashrams* doing their yoga. Utopia is the hippies at The Farm upholding pacifism and vegetarianism. Utopia is the Hutterites farming and the Society of Brothers making wooden toys while pursuing righteousness. Utopia is God's Valley creating songs and plays about the New Age.

From the Dutch immigrant Mennonites of Plockhoy's Commonwealth in 1663 to the American Mennonites of Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, Illinois, today, communal Utopia implies all the endeavors and aspirations of communitarians to raise mankind to the highest possible plane. And if we are wise, we can make use of the Utopian examples and dystopian beacons of the American communal past to help steer us away from the threat of natural and man-made catastrophes and toward a more hopeful future for all creatures both here on earth and in our preplanned, semiutopian, "enacted communities" in outer space.