

# Bolton Hall's Free Acres Experiment: The Single Tax and Anarchism in New Jersey

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## *1. Introduction*

A tiny community in New Jersey persists as a continuing reminder of a curious communal experiment founded more than three quarters of a century ago. Free Acres is located in the suburban Township of Berkeley Heights and spills over into Watchung, New Jersey in the central part of the state. It was established in 1910, a manifestation of the social ferment so prevalent just before the First World War. Bolton Hall, the community's founder and benefactor, was influenced by both the writings of the political, economist Henry George and the nineteenth-century philosophic anarchists as well as by other communal experiments started during his lifetime. His Free Acres experiment was an attempt to put his thoughts to action by establishing a rural summer retreat for impecunious but artistic New Yorkers.

Initially, the colony was situated on a cleared, but neglected farmstead complete with a ramshackle eighteenth-century farmhouse. Today, it consists of eighty heavily wooded acres, easily distinguished from the surrounding suburban sprawl. The community is inhabited by eighty-five leaseholders who own their own homes, but continue to lease their land from the Free Acres Association. The members of the Association meet at the farmhouse on the last Sunday of each month except December as has been the custom since the community's founding. In this way, Free Acresites have managed their communal affairs and kept in close contact with their neighbors for the past seventy-five years.

Free Acres is not the same community as the one founded by Bolton Hall. It has evolved, having had to accommodate itself to a changing social environment. Nevertheless, a semblance of its original organization

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and founding spirit persists. In what way has this tiny communal experiment bent to the pressures of the wider society? How has Free Acres succeeded or failed to meet the expectations of its founder? What factors have permitted the survival of this curious experiment after so many years?

## 2. Bolton Hall—Free Acres' Founder

Bolton Hall was an attorney, a real estate developer, social critic and reformer. He was described as an idealist and cynic, dreamer and realist.<sup>1</sup> Hall's associate and client, Emma Goldman, remembered him as an "unconditional libertarian and single-taxer." She remarked that he had emancipated himself from his affluent origins except for his conventions of dress. "His frock coat, high silk hat, gloves, and cane make him a conspicuous figure in our ranks."<sup>2</sup>

Hall was born in Northern Ireland, the son of a successful Presbyterian minister. He emigrated to New York City with his family in 1868 at the age of fourteen, when his father assumed a prestigious post at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Bolton eventually graduated from Princeton University and later completed his legal studies at Columbia University Law School.

In 1886, Hall campaigned for Henry George in the political economist's bid for the New York City mayoralty. Hall's background and intellectual predilections were strikingly similar to those of George. Both men had English and Scottish roots. They each experienced strong religious training, George the son of an officer of the Episcopal Church and publisher of religious texts; and Hall, the offspring of a Presbyterian minister. Both men infused a strong religious and moralistic tone into their economic views. They each abhorred monopoly and held hallow the virtues of Jeffersonian Democracy. Indeed, both Henry George and Bolton Hall seemed to be grappling with the very same intellectual conflict, namely, how to reconcile deeply held religious beliefs with the brutality of the capitalist industrialization which they witnessed.

Henry George argued in his popular text *Progress and Poverty* (1879) that modern material progress had simultaneously led to greater economic insecurity and inequality because of the private ownership of land. However, George believed that neither nationalization nor confiscation were attractive alternatives. He proposed instead, a tax on the value of land. The single-tax, as it came to be called, would avoid unnecessary conflict brought on by revolution and yet meet all the criteria of sound

1. Konrad Bercovici, *It's the Gypsy in Me* (New York), pp. 68-69.

2. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2 vols. (New York, 1931), 1:348.

and reasonable taxation. Such a tax would not bear heavily on production, would be easily administered, and would minimize the potential for corruption. It would also be borne by all of the citizenry without undue advantage. Both labor and capital would get their due, as only the unproductive land speculators would chafe under this approach.<sup>3</sup>

Henry George was not a proponent of absolute equality. Rather, he sought harmony with some vaguely defined natural law. He believed that the imposition of the single-tax would lead to a distribution of inequality, which was roughly based on a standard of merit. Inequality, he wrote, would reflect the "degree in which the industry, skill, knowledge, or prudence of each contributed to the common stock. The non-producer would no longer roll in luxury while the producer got but the barest necessities of animal existence."<sup>4</sup>

Bolton Hall, as a George disciple, echoed George's views and carried them a bit further. In 1887 Hall founded the Manhattan Single-Tax Club. Under his tutelage the club developed a reputation for political reform and became, according to his biographer, Charles A. Barker, "a propaganda agent along business lines, in business circles, and by business methods."<sup>5</sup> Hall was regarded as the leading single-taxer in New York City at the time.<sup>6</sup> In 1891 Hall was also among the founders of the New York Tax Reform Association. He maintained that real estate should bear the primary burden of taxation because it was most easily administered, it placed the lightest burden on producers, and it provided the most incentive to enhance production. He was vociferous in his attack on the income tax which he viewed as socially destructive, as it inhibited thrift and individual industry.<sup>7</sup>

Hall, like George, did not dislike the rich per se. He dedicated his book *Money Making in Free America* (1909) "to all who are poor and wish to become richer." He detested the monopolists who derived their wealth not from industry or thrift, but through monopolistic manipulation. Hall believed that the monopolists had wrongfully gained control over the land, the natural resources, and the American communication and transportation networks. The consequence of monopolistic control was plutocracy, which also led to the coerced idleness of the masses and the corruption of the entire society through the maldistribution of wealth.<sup>8</sup>

Iconoclastic in many of his views, Hall balanced what could be a

3. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1879; reprint 1975) passim.

4. Ibid., pp. 408, 452-453.

5. Charles A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), p. 521.

6. Richard P. Duddon, *Joseph Fels and the Single Tax Movement* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 192.

7. Bolton Hall, *Who Pays Your Taxes* (New York, 1892).

8. Ibid., 78.

biting wit with an underlying idealism. He wrote of the potential for social improvement through education.<sup>9</sup> He emphasized the importance of human development through mutual aid and cooperative behavior.<sup>10</sup> He observed with approval the transformation of impoverished European peasants into intelligent American citizens.<sup>11</sup> Hall truly believed that America had a special role to play in providing a model for modern civilization.

Although both George and Hall were concerned about social inequality, each avoided subscribing to socialist philosophy. George hoped for a mixed economy in which only land values would be socialized through the mechanism of the single-tax. Hall was apprehensive that socialism would create and impose a state monopoly over economic activities which might prove even more oppressive than private monopolies. In a 1914 letter to the editor of *The Newark News* Hall took pains to correct the impression of a previous writer that Hall was a socialist. Hall's riposte was that "I am not a socialist, but on the contrary, one of the strictest of individualists." He believed that the imposition of the single-tax on land combined with the abolition of extant monopolies would guarantee an equitable distribution of wealth while maximizing the potential for individual liberty for the future<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century Hall was an important proponent of the "back to the land" movement<sup>13</sup> In 1907 he wrote his popular *Three Acres and Liberty*<sup>4</sup> The next year he authored *A Little Land and a Living*<sup>5</sup> Both books had similar themes. If the speculative, private ownership of land could be broken, the impoverished masses could move from their urban slums to become small prosperous and self-sufficient proprietors. Hall's thinking had roots in the Jeffersonian ideal of a rural democracy.

Hall's concerns about twentieth-century urban life were also influenced by the prominent philosophic anarchists of this period. While anarchism has at times been associated with violence and terrorism, its positive vision of small cooperative communities in which the simple life could maximize individual opportunity and creativity has been submerged. The anarchists, such as the Russians Leo Tolstoy and Peter Kropotkin, or the Englishman William Morris, viewed economic progress with

9. Bolton Hall, *The New Thrift* (New York, 1923), p. 223.

10. Bolton Hall, *A Little Land and A Living* (New York, 1908), p. 254.

11. Bolton Hall, *Free America* (New York, 1904), p. 17.

12. Letter, February 15, 1914.

13. See the Bolton Hall Papers in the New York Public Library.

14. Bolton Hall, *Three Acres and Liberty* (New York, 1907).

15. Bolton Hall, *A Little Land and A Living* (New York, 1908).

ambivalence. Modern life had created disharmony, alienating humanity in the process. People were alienated from their natural environment, from each other, and from their own innate potential.

There was a significant, if not well-defined, American anarchist tradition. These American roots may be traced to the antistatism of the colonial period to men like Thomas Paine, through Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and John Brown. In this regard, anarchist, Emma Goldman, recounted a meeting with Frank B. Sanborn, Thoreau's biographer. It was Sanborn who supposedly introduced John Brown to Thoreau and Emerson. Goldman suggested that Thoreau was a precursor of American anarchism. She noted in her autobiography: "to my surprise, Thoreau's biographer was scandalized by the remark. No, indeed!, he cried, anarchism means violence and revolution."<sup>16</sup> Goldman goes on to recount her attempt to dissuade Sanborn from his prejudice.

Hall's associations with this intellectual thread are evidenced in a number of ways. First, Hall corresponded with Leo Tolstoy and edited a collection of the Russian writer's essays. In a commentary on one of those essays, Hall described Tolstoy's philosophy as a combination of the law of love as enunciated by Christ, the political rights of people as defined by Thomas Jefferson, and the economic views of Henry George.<sup>17</sup> His own views could be similarly described.

Like both Hall and Henry George, Leo Tolstoy's religious and economic beliefs were closely tied. Both Hall and Tolstoy became critical of organized religions. Tolstoy, before his death, also advocated a comprehensive land reform through the imposition of the single-tax. Tolstoy was unsuccessful in his efforts to convince Czar Nicholas II to institute such reform before his death in 1910.

Bolton Hall also served on the Board of the Kropotkin Publishing Company in New York City. The Society endeavored to promote the publications of this anarchist philosopher. Peter Kropotkin, like Tolstoy, was of Russian aristocratic background. He, too, hoped that a new social order might restore the balance between urban and rural life, individual and communal concerns, and human and technological imperatives. Kropotkin was hopeful that change could be accomplished through education and demonstration. His views on land echoed those of George and Count Tolstoy.<sup>18</sup>

An additional European influence on Hall was the English poet, writer, artist, and furniture maker, William Morris. After reading Edward

16. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2:585.

17. Bolton Hall Papers, New York Public Library.

18. See Peter Kropotkin, *Field, Factories, and Workshops*, (reprint New York, 1975); Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, ed. Paul Avrich and Allen Lane (London, 1972); see also, George Woodcock and Ivan Akumovic, *The Anarchist Prince* (New York, 1971).

Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Morris published his popular "News from Nowhere" in serialized form. For Morris, human happiness was not tied to enhanced production. He was interested in the re-establishment of communal life, a life which had suffered tremendously under the pressures of the industrial age.<sup>19</sup> The concentration of wealth and power made it necessary to rethink the future direction of modern society. Morris, consistent with the other philosophic anarchists, envisioned a return to decentralized, tiny communities where personal relationships remained the key element.

Bolton Hall remained a friend and correspondent of Elbert Hubbard, who was also a disciple of Morris's. Hubbard later planned and implemented a community experiment, Roycroft, in Aurora, New York.<sup>20</sup> Hall was also an associate of Frank Stephens who founded with Will Price and others a single tax colony at Arden, Delaware at the turn of the century. In a talk given in 1923, Frank Stephens clarified any ambiguity about the philosophical origins of such activities:

We were so disgusted with civilization that we determined then and there to go out into the open and make a better one, in which the land theory of Henry George should make the social basis for the industrial theory of Kropotkin, as well as the art theory of William Morris.<sup>21</sup>

Some of these views were also advanced by a diverse range of communarians. These groups hoped that society might be altered through the establishment of their Utopian communities. Such experiments were to serve as both levers for social change and as models of social reform. Often they relied on some underlying religious ethos or a strong leader to bind the community. Despite some obvious differences, these communities were reacting to the commonly perceived disintegration of society and social chaos around them. To this way of thinking, the economic transformation of American society after the Civil War had wrought dilemmas of a new kind. The growing reliance on industrial technology and a sense of the lessened importance of individual initiative in an increasingly complicated world along with the growing unequal distribution of wealth spurred the range of reformist and revolutionary thought including the Georgists, anarchists, and communarians.<sup>22</sup>

19. See M. L. Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia* (New York, 1950); William Morris and E. B. Bax, *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (Chicago, 1909).

20. See Bolton Hall Papers, New York Public Library.

21. See *The Arden Book* (Arden, Delaware, 1974), p. 3.

22. A valuable discussion of the protean forces and philosophies affecting these community experiments and their adherents is provided in the introductory chapter of Charles Pierce LeWame's *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915* (Seattle, Washington, 1975). This work addresses the same time frame from which Free Acres emanated. See also W. A. Hinds, *American*

Bolton Hall, in addition to his ties to both Georgism and anarchism, also showed more than a passing interest in communal experimentation. He was an early member of an experimental single-tax colony founded at Fairhope, Alabama, in 1894.<sup>23</sup> He served on the Board of the Pels Fund, which was established by Philadelphia philanthropist Joseph Fels. The Fund financed the single-tax colony at Arden, Delaware, at the turn of the century. Hall was also a member of the "Straight Edge" in New York City. That group took its name from the carpenter's tool, an allusion to Joseph of Nazareth. The "Straight Edge" was a Christian Socialist group which attempted to introduce Christ's teachings into daily business affairs. The group successfully ran a bakery and health food store in Greenwich Village as well as a rural retreat in New Jersey for some time.<sup>24</sup>

Bolton Hall also frequented Upton Sinclair's experimental colony in New Jersey during its brief history. Sinclair founded the colony, "Helicon Hall," in 1906, allegedly with royalty money from his best-selling work, *The Jungle*. "Helicon Hall" burned down after just six months, reportedly firebombed on March 16, 1907. It was visited by such contemporary luminaries as John Dewey, William James, Emma Goldman, and Lincoln Steffens. Sinclair Lewis and Alan Updegraff served as janitors while still attending Yale University. Upton Sinclair described his experiment as one for "young literary couples who had one or two children and did not know how to fit them into the literary life."<sup>25</sup>

Hall was also a member of the Board of Directors of the "Garden Cities Association of America" at the turn of the century. This Association took on the responsibility of advancing the ideas of Ebenezer Howard and the garden cities movement in the United States. Howard, like Hall, was preoccupied with the appropriate balance between urban and rural in order to create an attractive living environment for working people.<sup>26</sup>

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*Communes and Cooperative Colonies*, (Chicago, Ill., 1908); and Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, (New York, 1966) both of which take a closer look at the later nineteenth-century roots of such experiments. Finally, also see Paul A. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, New York, 1959), which connects this Federal government program of the 1930's with some of its earlier nineteenth-century roots.

23. P. Alyea, B. P. Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954: The Story of a Single-Tax Colony*, (Birmingham, Ala., 1954).

24. See Hinds, *American Communes and Cooperative Colonies*. Also Interviews with Jane Eberlein Hall.

25. See Upton Sinclair, *Autobiography* (New York, 1962); David Karsner, *Sixteen Authors to One* (New York, 1928).

26. Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow: A Peaceful Pathway to Reform* (London, 1960). Bolton Hall was a member of the Board of Directors of the Garden Cities Association of America. See Bolton Hall Papers, New York Public Library.

### 3. *The Founding of Free Acres*

Bolton Hall was not merely a visionary or idle thinker. Through the founding of Free Acres he hoped to turn his thought to deed. In 1905 Hall purchased land in New Providence, New Jersey, close to the Berkeley Heights Railway depot. He formed the Berkeley Heights Association for the purpose of "erecting houses, buildings, and works of every description."<sup>27</sup> He was both President and Treasurer of the corporation. Sebastian Liberty, a local resident, served as Hall's real estate agent.

The Berkeley Heights Association owned more than 160 acres. Liberty erected a small bungalow close to the railway depot to attract travellers. Hall offered campsites, tents, platforms, and cabins for rent. He hoped to attract the masses from the city to more scenic and rural Berkeley Heights. The railway lines had recently made the area more accessible.

In 1910, Hall turned his attention to a smaller parcel he had purchased just up the hill and south of the Berkeley Heights Association holdings. The site was known as the "Murphy Farm." While Hall decided to keep his original holdings for more conventional use, he planned to use the Murphy Farm site for his single-tax experiment.

The farm site included an abandoned farmhouse overlooking two fields. The higher ground just to the north of the farmhouse was marked by a widened path set apart from its woodland border by large boulders. Hall named the widened path Emerson Lane, after the American writer. He then set about to create a legal structure which would create and preserve the social arrangement he sought.

### 4. *Free Acres' Legal Structure*

One observer of Utopian communities has noted that "Utopians are, by nature, busy bodies."<sup>28</sup> Frequently, their limitless visions lead to complicated solutions to relatively minor problems. Bolton Hall avoided such pitfalls. He demonstrated his skill not only as a social reformer, but also as an attorney in fashioning the legal foundation of the Free Acres Association. He steered away from issues of human perfectability. Instead, he sought to establish a legal arrangement which would have a positive impact on social relations which was consistent with his social ideals. He sought to change the nature of the balance between individual and communal concerns. The legal structure which he fashioned

27. Berkeley Heights Association Charter of Incorporation, 1905, unpaginated. New Jersey Secretary of State, Trenton, N.J.

28. Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia*, (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1978), p. 12.



consisted of four interlocking parts—a corporate charter, a deed of gift, a constitution, and a leasehold agreement.

The corporate charter organized the Free Acres Association as a non-profit corporation under the laws of the State of New Jersey. Its purpose was "to conduct a community for the purpose of study and demonstration of problems of municipal government and taxation, in which all members of the Association shall be free from all forms of private monopoly of natural resources, and which shall secure to all members equality of opportunity and a full reward of individual efforts. . . ." <sup>29</sup>

The Deed of Gift conveyed the Murphy Farm site to the Free Acres Association from Bolton Hall and his wife. The deed included a number of unusual features. The Association was prohibited from mortgaging, granting, or ever conveying the land with the penalty of reversion to Hall's heirs and /or assigns. In addition, the Association was directed to lease the lands in such portions as the Trustees might deem proper with rental values appraised pursuant to the Free Acres' Constitution, and "excluding improvements on those premises." The Deed of Gift also made brief mention of a payment of the Association to Hall for \$8,000. <sup>30</sup>

Hall did not convey the entire Murphy Farm site to the Association under the Deed of Gift. Instead, he retained a small portion, about four acres in the northeast corner of the parcel which included the deteriorated eighteenth-century farmhouse. He may have had plans to convert the farmhouse into an inn or general store. In any event, he did eventually transfer ownership of this second parcel to the Association in 1919 for \$2,500.

The third critical piece of the Free Acres' legal structure was the Free Acres' Constitution. In all probability, the Constitution was drafted by Hall alone. There is no mention of the document in early Free Acres' meeting minutes. Moreover, Hall mentioned the constitution in the original Deed of Gift.

The document Hall drafted was quite forward looking for its time. Its preamble enunciated the Association's goals:

We, the leaseholders and residents of Free Acres, desiring to create a community for the study and demonstration of problems of self-government, social progress, and taxation where all shall be mutually helpful and free from all forms of

29. Free Acres Charter of Incorporation, 1910, unpaginated, in the Free Acres Association Files, Berkeley Heights, N.J.

30. Long time Free Acres resident Edith Schulze commented that this payment was a long standing joke at early Free Acres meetings. The \$8,000 payment was a "gentlemen's agreement" between Hall and the Association. Hall supposedly told members of the Association that he never expected to be paid the \$8,000. See Joseph Fomano, "The Free Acres Single Tax Colony, 1910-1930: An Experiment in Pleasant Living," (M. A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1970), references to interviews with Edith Schulze.

monopoly of natural resources, in order to secure to all equality of opportunity and to each a full reward of efforts, have this day organized ourselves under the name of the Free Acres Association.<sup>31</sup>

The Free Acres' Constitution included the rights of referendum and initiative, a prohibition against monopolies entering Free Acres' lands, and the right of women to vote nearly a decade before they achieved that right under the United States Constitution. The Free Acres' officers included three trustees, a clerk, and treasurer with a monthly meeting chairman selected at the time of each meeting. Finally, the Constitution required that taxes be assessed within the community pursuant to the philosophy and principles of the single-tax as expounded by Henry George.

The fourth building block was the Free Acres' leasehold agreement. The agreement was for a term of one year between the Association and the individual leaseholder. The leaseholder was required to pay an annual rent for which he received an unsurveyed parcel of roughly estimated acreage. The land rents were collected annually and were applied first to pay local real estate taxes, "and thereafter for such communal purposes as are properly public in that they cannot be left to individuals without giving them some advantage over others."<sup>32</sup>

Under the leasehold agreement, the Trustees had the right to terminate a lease upon sixty days' notice if the land rent was unpaid; if the land was used in a manner harmful to other leaseholders as determined by a majority vote at an Association meeting; or if timber of Free Acres' lands were cut without permission by the Free Acres' forester.

Using his legal ingenuity, Hall drafted an interlocking set of documents which when taken together established a community consistent with his social philosophy. In effect, he created a community land trust in which the land was owned by the community, not individual property owners. The land was protected from future abuse by the Association by the reversionary clauses in the deed of gift. The Association protected itself and the land from individual abuse through the leasehold agreement. Democracy with respect to managing the land was protected by the nature of the corporate charter and constitution. Through these documents, Hall sought to advance two notions: the single-tax idea of Henry George, and the notion of land stewardship. These would make speculative gain and monopoly manipulation impossible. In Hall's social experiment, real property was a God-given, community

31. Free Acres Constitution (n.p., 1910), unpaginated. The Free Acres Association Files, Berkeley Heights, N.J.

32. Free Acres Leasehold Agreement (n.p. 1910). The Free Acres Association Files, Berkeley Heights, N.J.

protected resource, to be carefully managed by the community through a circumscribed system of democracy.

##### 5. *Free Acres' First Summer: 1910*

Life in Free Acres during its first summer was rugged. During the Spring, Hall and a few close associates sifted through applications of would-be pioneers. Meanwhile, Hall engaged a local farmer to construct a small cabin close to the farmhouse along with a number of tent platforms. Hall also converted a small chicken coop for his personal use. Just reaching the site presented its hazards. Trains from New York City ran only infrequently. The Murphy Farm site was more than two miles away from the Berkeley Heights Railroad depot. Roads in the area were for the most part unimproved. Free Acres, itself, had only overgrown rocky paths, marked by wandering cows in search of a meal. The farmhouse was damp and musty, and suffering from years of neglect. Hall's personal secretary, Ella Murray, recalled that the first summer was one when "the water was scarce, the nearest grocer was four miles away; there were no lights, no roads, and no motor cars."<sup>33</sup>

Bolton Hall visited only on weekends, commuting from New York City. However, his close friend and confidant, Ami Mali Hicks remained in Free Acres throughout the summer. She served as the colony's first town clerk and marked off the leaseholds with the aid of Frank Shaffer who had been among the Association's original incorporators and another friend of Hall's. Hicks was of Dutch and English descent. Hicksville, Long Island bore her ancestors' name. Shaffer lived in Berkeley Heights but was originally from New England, and reportedly a cousin to American poet, Emily Dickinson.

Ella Murray remembered Hicks as "an example of unperturbed satisfaction,"<sup>34</sup> while another early Free Acreite recalled that she was a "forbidding feminist with a career brusqueness."<sup>35</sup> Edith Schulze, another Free Acre pioneer, described Ami Mali Hicks as a "forceful woman who could vanquish a man with ten words and who held sway here until she resigned."<sup>36</sup>

The Fischers arrived in the Watchung woods in March, 1910, having heard of the communal experiment in Greenwich Village where they lived during the year. Otto Fischer had worked in the silk trade in Chicago and New York and had been treasurer of the Village of Pelham, New York.

33. Ella M. Murray, "Free Acres' 20th Anniversary," (1930). Copies in the Free Acres Files, Rutgers University Archives, Alexander Library, New Brunswick, N.J.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Peter Berlinrut, correspondence with the author, 1980-1985.

36. Fomano, *Free Acres*, p. 25.

His wife Emma could trace her origins to the Winthrops of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Fischers selected a leasehold along the Green Brook, where they planned to spend their summer.<sup>37</sup>

Dr. Benzion Liber, his wife and son also came to Free Acres that first summer. Dr. Liber was the brother of Sebastian Liberty, Bolton Hall's local real estate agent. The Libers were Rumanian Jews who had fled the pogroms of Eastern Europe. Dr. Liber had studied medicine and psychiatry in Paris and Vienna before opening a practice in Manhattan. He was a pioneer in the areas of public health, mental health, preventive care, and holistic medicine.<sup>38</sup>

Another first-year resident was Harry Kelly. Kelly, despite his Irish sounding name, was of English background, tracing his roots to the Calverts of Baltimore. He was born in 1871 in Missouri, but orphaned at a young age. As a youth he took to labor organizing. In 1892, at the time of the Homestead Steel Strike, Kelly announced that he was an anarchist, travelling to England where he met the Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta, and also the Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin. He also fell under the influence of William Morris.<sup>39</sup>

Kelly's companion at the time was an independent suffragette, Mary Krimont. Her family had had a history of being involved with community experiments. She and Kelly resided at Free Acres during the first summer along with the Krimont children. Several years later, Krimont and Kelly formed the nucleus with others of the anarchist colony at Stelton, New Jersey, about twenty-five miles from the Free Acres' site.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout that first summer, most of the thirty or so residents were preoccupied with the improvement of their personal holdings. They drew drinking water from a spring in an adjacent pasture and from an artesian well sunk at Hall's expense near the farmhouse. Green Brook which meandered through the property was used to cool food and for bathing as well. In addition, Bolton Hall donated a smart one seater carriage to the "Horse Association," which was organized to get people to and from the railway depot.

Ella Murray lived at the farmhouse that first summer and as Bolton Hall's personal secretary, she dutifully observed and recorded the evolution of this community experiment. Looking back and assessing that early start nearly twenty years later, she commented on Free Acres' humble beginnings. She believed that the community had succeeded because

37. Interview with Ethel Fischer, July 4, 1982.

38. Benzion Liber, *The Doctor's Apprenticeship* (New York, 1956). See also Liber's obituary in the *New York Times*, June 7, 1958.

39. Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton, N.J., 1980).

40. Ibid., See also Terry M. Perlin, "Anarchism in New Jersey: The Ferrer Colony in Stelton," *New Jersey History* 89 (Fall 1971): 133-148.

individual undertakings were separated from those tasks which need to be left to the community. The community attained its goals because "Publicly created values have been used for public purposes."<sup>41</sup>

#### 6. *Free Acres' Early Years: 1910-1930*

Throughout the first two decades of the community's growth, Free Acres attracted an interesting collection of artists, writers, and actors from New York City. They came in search of a rugged commune with nature as well as interaction with the unusual group of people who had discovered the place.

Nevertheless, health considerations were persistent worries. Manure mixed with borax was used to fill fly and mosquito breeding places. Swampy areas had to be carefully drained each summer. Members of the community were repeatedly warned at meetings of the dangers of malaria and the necessity for proper drainage, and the importance of burying waste and refuse.

In 1920, Bolton Hall had decided to sell to the Free Acres Association the farmhouse and adjacent property. The sale was arranged through a bond sale. Renovations to the farmhouse followed which included the erection of a platform to be used for outdoor summer meetings and dances.

The resident and writer Konrad Bercovici commented that in addition to the "deftly decorated" farmhouse, the once run-down farm site now sported more than fifty structures.<sup>42</sup> Others described the improvements which dotted the sloped site as "architectural experiments which expressed a spirit of adventure in homemaking."<sup>43</sup> The range of accommodations actually varied from tents to lean-tos for as little as \$75 to more elaborate structures with fireplaces and indoor plumbing selling for as much as \$2,500. But few if any regarded the physical characteristics of the community as important.

The importance of the Free Acres' experiment had to do with the colorful characters and vital social life which began to sprout there. As early as 1915, an article appeared in the *Newark Sunday Call* which emphasized the unique social flavor of this enclave:

A woman resident of the colony desiring music lessons for her daughter from a well-known musician resident proposed an arrangement whereby she would

41. Murray, "Free Acres 20th Anniversary," p. 8.

42. Konrad Bercovici, "Colonies, Campfires, and Theories," *New York Times Magazine*, October 21, 1923, p. 6.

43. *Touchstone Magazine*, 1920. In the Free Acres Files, Rutgers University Archives, Alexander Library, New Brunswick, NJ.

teach the musician's little son rhythmic dancing in which she was an expert. The plan proved eminently satisfactory to both and next summer classes in arts and crafts, dancing, sewing, singing, embroidery, and dramatic expression will be formed, instructed by those especially equipped, whose only payment will be interchangeable service.<sup>44</sup>

This intense social life based on mutual aid grew up with little attention paid to orthodox ideology. Konrad Bercovici remarked that the colony was a single-tax colony but not one of single-taxers. Instead, "there were bahaists, anarchists, spiritualists; each with a different creed, but all agreeing to disagree."<sup>45</sup> The Association's business meetings were held throughout the year, usually in New York City in the nonsummer months. As the word spread about this rural retreat, new people signed on as leaseholders. Soon there were more than fifty families who regularly came out to the wilds of New Jersey to commune with nature and exchange their ideas and skills with their fellow leaseholders.

Amongst the leaseholders during this period were John Francis Tucker, an outspoken socialist and principal in New York's Theater Guild. The Boni family, also connected to the Theater Guild, lived in Free Acres during this period. The Bonis were later to make their mark as book publishers, first as Boni and Liveright and later after a separation with Horace Liveright. In 1919, the Eberleins came to Free Acres. They had lived at Helicon Hall and at Arden, Delaware, before coming to Free Acres that summer, accommodated in the upstairs of the Farmhouse. Charles Eberlein had first met Bolton Hall at the "Straight Edge," making a name for himself as a lithographer in New York City. His wife Undeena DeGuilbert was a stage actress and dancer.<sup>46</sup>

Free Acres attracted a curious collection of dancers, artists, actors, writers, and storytellers, as well as just plain folks who were stimulated by what transpired there. They reflected a mix of older American stock and more recent European arrivals, all sharing a common desire for a more simple life away from the city. Much of their energy was channeled into political discussion and ambitious theatrical productions. Residents worked much of the summer learning their parts and preparing the sets for the plays which were put on in their dimly lit outdoor theater. On some occasions they were visited by theater groups from Arden.

Novelists MacKinlay Kantor and Thorne Smith as well as the later, better known actors, Victor Kilian and James Cagney, came to Free Acres during the 1920's. Kantor, who made his reputation with his short story

44. *Newark Sunday Call*, November 21, 1915. In the Free Acres file, New Jersey Reference Room, Newark Public Library, Newark, N.J.

45. Bercovici, "Colonies . . . ."

46. Interviews with Jane Eberlein Hall.

and historical novel writing discovered Free Acres and gave talks there on subjects ranging from mushroom picking to the Civil War. Thorne Smith, who moved to Free Acres from Greenwich Village each summer, authored his famed novel *Topper* while sitting in the sun on his front lawn, part of the leasehold which had been transferred from John Francis Tucker. In addition to assisting his friend Victor Kilian in Free Acres' theatrical productions, James Cagney played catcher on Free Acres' baseball team. Meanwhile, Kilian's sister, Catherine Blohm, transformed the basement of the farmhouse into a Greenwich Village tearoom which became the site of lively political debate in addition to its tea and sandwiches.

Cagney, Kantor, and Kilian were drawn to Free Acres by perhaps the community's most memorable character, Will Crawford. Crawford came to Free Acres around the time of the First World War. He seemed to personify the community's underlying ethos. He had been a newspaper and magazine illustrator before the widespread use of photography. As a young man, he had travelled throughout the American west where he became friendly with American western artists Frederick Remington and Charles Marion Russell. Crawford also counted amongst his friends entertainers such as Will Rogers and William S. Hart. Crawford lived in Free Acres for several years in his self-constructed teepee. Later he invited his friends, Kilian and Cagney to assist him in building a cabin around his huge fieldstone fireplace.

Hunchback and diminutive, "Uncle Bill" related nature tales to Free Acres' children, organized the "Lochsley Archers" (Free Acres' archery club), and led star gazing hikes on warm summer nights. Will Crawford was always ready to talk politics, but admitted that he had given up voting years before. He was most stubborn about the injustices of capitalism, and optimistic about the benefits of socialism. He was a humanist who denied the existence of god, but also a vegetarian who also denied the right of humans to kill animals for food. In describing Free Acres residents Crawford characterized the community as one of "free thinkers," conceding that despite the wide diversity of opinion, most were unashamedly "radicals."<sup>47</sup>

Subsequent Free Acres' residents painted a poignant picture of Will Crawford. Konrad Bercovici who came to the colony in the early 1920's was glad that his children grew to know "Uncle Bill." Bercovici remembered him as a great storyteller whose tales were like genealogical trees, starting out with a root and spreading into branches and twigs which eventually intertwined. "He was America," according to Bercovici,

47. *Newark News*, September 1, 1923.

a journalist, novelist, and screen writer of the period, adding that when we touched him, "we touched some of the best in this country."<sup>48</sup>

MacKinlay Kantor, who later built a short story around a Will Crawford inspired character, gave a eulogy for Crawford at the time of his death in 1944, as did Victor Kilian.<sup>49</sup> Kantor described Crawford as "My Most Unforgettable Character I Ever Met," for the *Readers' Digest* in 1966.<sup>50</sup> Finally, James Cagney in his autobiography also provided a glowing portrait of his old friend "Uncle Bill."<sup>51</sup> Cagney was instrumental in getting work for Crawford as a Hollywood consultant on the Old West.

Bolton Hall remained aloof from much of the community's social and political life during this twenty-year span. However, he seemed pleased at what he had started. In 1923, he wrote that the colony was "on the road to showing that a landlord is a needless and expensive luxury." He observed Free Acres' beautifully scenic setting, its clear running brook, and bountiful fruit. Life was simple and the need for money nearly eliminated. Sunday afternoons were filled with stimulating discussion. The community's theatrical productions were great exhibits of human creativity. The ball field, swimming pool, tennis court, and open air theater were all centers of community activity and great sources of pride.<sup>52</sup>

### 7. *External and Internal Pressures on the Colony: The 1930's*

Changes in the nature of the colony's residents as well as external social pressures altered the relationship between Free Acres' founder and the community throughout the 1930's. Despite Hall's adherence to a libertarian ideology and his conscious stance of noninterference during the colony's early years, he ultimately came to express a profound distaste for some of the changes taking place.

With the coming of the Great Depression, a growing number of Free Acres' families winterized their "architectural experiments." At the same time, Free Acres experienced an influx of German immigrant families. Many were socialist. Most were associated with Camp Elsinore, a German nature and hiking club which owned land on Free Acres' southern border. Most of these German families included skilled craftsmen—carpenters, machinists, masons, and plumbers. They shared a number of common bonds—a love for nature, respect for mutual aid, and disgust for the political turmoil occurring in their homeland. They were also clearly

48. See Bercovici, *It's the Gypsy in Me*, pp. 79-81.

49. See MacKinlay Kantor, *Storyteller*, (Garden City, N.Y., 1967).

50. MacKinlay Kantor, "My Most Unforgettable Character I Ever Met," *Readers' Digest* (December, 1966), p. 222.

51. James Cagney, *Cagney by Cagney* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), p. 176-185.

52. Hall, *The New Thrift*, p. 229-230.



distinguishable from the odd collection of Greenwich Village artists and "free thinkers" which comprised Free Acres' former residents.

In a number of ways, the dozen or so German families were a stabilizing influence. They planned and built new roads, provided for a more reliable water supply, and built an attractive swimming pool. They also began to construct more substantial homes. They exchanged skills, working on each others' homes.

These exemplary efforts, however, created new tensions. Local municipal officials became aware of Free Acres' more respectable existence and began to tax the improvements on the property more aggressively. There was soon internal clamor. A leaseholder with just a lean-to and a large plot of land would pay more in rent to the Association than a family with a substantial house complete with fireplace and indoor plumbing if their parcel of land was smaller. The taxes assessed by the local municipality would not take into account Henry George's notion of the single-tax.

Heated discussions ensued. A "Bolton Hall Committee" was established to begin negotiations with the community's founder. Hall was urged to support changes in the Constitution, but he was unmoved. He complained that the community had fallen to spendthrift habits which was the real motivation behind desiring a change in the taxing structure.

Between 1934 and 1936, Hall was attacked regularly at Free Acres meetings. He was denounced as a land speculator who founded the colony to enhance his own privately held holdings in the area. In 1936, Peter Berlinrut, chairman of the "Bolton Hall Committee," circulated a memorandum on the single-tax, urging its abolition in light of the social changes which had occurred.

From the time of its founding up to recent years, Free Acres seemed to function smoothly under the single tax and the flat rental according to the amount of land held. And it is claimed that this was true despite the conflict between its system and that of the outside world. There are reasons. First, the houses were small, simple and unpretentious. Second, they were uniform in large measure. Third, and most important of all, the township assessors didn't bother to evaluate houses individually. They simply took several quick looks, decided Free Acres as a whole was worth so much, sent a tax bill and that was that.<sup>53</sup>

Berlinrut offered a "communal tax advantage" system instead. Under this plan assessments made by the local authorities would simply be passed through to individual leaseholders who would then be required to pay an additional assessment to cover any internal Free Acres expenses.

53. Correspondence between Peter Berlinrut and the Free Acres Association, 1936. Free Acres Files, Rutgers University Archives, Alexander Library, New Brunswick, NJ. Correspondence between Peter Berlinrut and the author, 1980-1985.

A community compromise adopting such an approach was eventually accepted, although without the approval of Bolton Hall. Hall left the community, unhappy, in 1936. He died two years later in Georgia without ever returning to the colony.

#### *8. Free Acres without the Single-Tax*

While changing the colony's tax structure may have been a bitter and dramatic break with the past, other changes were evolving which would have even more important long range effects. In 1933, Emerson Lane was widened and paved, bringing the outside world ever closer to Free Acres. Long time Free Acresite Ronald Hotson wrote that "the trees are being slaughtered to make way for a Roman Highway." He argued in Free Acres' monthly newsletter that the beneficiaries of this "improvement" were only those who sought commercial benefit from the area's further development.<sup>54</sup>

Another resident voiced similar concerns, but with additional resignation. Fred Scheff, a printer and actor, wrote:

If we consider that the colony was founded originally for the purpose of enabling the poor man to build and enjoy a little nest for summer recreation, it will become clear that that purpose is being rapidly annihilated.

Thus, Free Acres is furnishing additional proof that an intrinsically ideal theory as embodied in the single-tax and related economic theories, cannot assert itself amidst a society upon whose laws and graces it depends.<sup>55</sup>

As Scheff cleverly noted, Free Acres was never completely isolated. Instead, it was at best a temporary rural retreat from the city. Complicated questions of economic production and distribution were never confronted by this community, which relied on the external society for most of its sustenance. It evolved as a pleasant colony for artists, actors, and intellectuals who cherished a rugged communing with nature. Management came to be left to a rather practical corps of German craftsmen and to a smaller bank of Jewish business people, who also discovered Free Acres during the 1930's. By the time of its Twenty-fifth Anniversary in 1935, Free Acres' internal composition was becoming decidedly more heterogeneous, while it was also being penetrated and pulled by the society outside.

In April, 1933, the Free Acres newsletter described its residents as a "mixture of masons, bricklayers, carpenters, mechanics, clerks, businessmen, lawyers, teachers, artists, actors, and bums . . ." The

54. See *Post Mortem*, The Free Acres Newsletter, courtesy of Harold Breen, former Free Acres leaseholder. December, 1933.

55. See *Post Mortem*, April, 1933.

*Post Mortem*, which drew its name because of the analyses it provided of a "moribund" capitalist society, continued, "We are all struggling to make ends meet. Many of us are out of work, with houses that have little or no architectural lines. Our clothes are out of style. . . . We are a plain woods people, voluntarily here from the Big Town." <sup>56</sup>

In addition to the expansion and paving of Emerson Lane, in 1937, the local electric company and the telephone company were invited to enter upon Free Acres' lands despite earlier strictures prohibiting the entry of such monopolies. The pressures of modern society and the winterization of many of Free Acres' abodes led to their entry.

Throughout the 1930's and 1940's Free Acres' guilds and working committees functioned in a way alien to much of the rest of society. In this way its anarchist tradition seemed to outlast its roots in the single-tax. The Dramatic Guild continued to produce elaborate summer theatrical productions. The Library Guild created a storehouse of intellectual stimulation in the woods, making good use of the second floor of the Free Acres farmhouse. The Garden Guild dedicated Free Acres' Bog Garden in 1934 to be kept as a natural preserve. The Young People's Guild kept the community's children engrossed throughout the summer months. The Lochsley Archers developed a reputation that transcended the local community.

Free Acres' working committees attended to more mundane matters—roads, water, health and safety, forestry, swimming pool, and the farmhouse. The finance committee which carried Trustee representation as well as a representative from each of the standing committees managed the community's fiscal affairs.

In the early 1930's a summer camp was organized and an outside director hired. The community also boasted a number of professional puppeteers and marionettists who performed regularly. Weekly discussions throughout the summer touched on topics ranging from cooperative buying to mushroom picking to mental healing as well as the troubling rise of fascism in Europe.

The community was not without conflict. In addition to the battles with the community's benefactor, there were arguments rooted in global politics as well as disputes between neighbors. The Spanish Civil War sparked some controversy as did the Soviet-Nazi Non-Agression Pact. Neighbors' squabbles broke out over a controversial addition to someone's house or appropriate dress at Free Acres' meetings. The local and global occasionally intersected as when a Free Acreite was visited by a relative sporting a Nazi flag on his automobile which most of the community's residents found offensive.

56. Ibid.

Life continued throughout the Second World War in this way, although the dimly lit theater in the woods was closed down to comply with the blackouts. More than a dozen of Free Acres' sons also went off to war. However, the post war period would have more dramatic effects on Free Acres.

#### 9. *Free Acres in Suburbia*

After the Second World War Free Acres found itself in the direct path of rapid suburban growth. What was once a rugged half day's journey from New York City had become a well accepted hourly commute to work. More than two-thirds of the residents lived in Free Acres year round by 1950. Many of the homes were fully winterized and complete with indoor plumbing.

However, many residents noted that in evolving into a year round community there was a loss of communal spirit, rather than a reinforcing communal bonds. The importance of mutual aid and the benefits of its founding anarchist philosophy were eroded by the onslaught of the enveloping suburban culture. Yet, a semblance of the community persisted. In September, 1949, an account in a local newspaper reported the following:

Residents regretfully note a decline in community spirit as compared with earlier days when primitive living prompted greater cooperation. They point with pride, however, to the group activities which still prevail. There is a weekly folk dancing class . . . and volunteers make annual repairs to the tennis court and baseball fields. . . . Many Free Acres children attend the day camp operated by the colony during the Summer . . . .

Democracy is still more than an ideal at Free Acres, where untiring efforts have been devoted to running the community in compliance with the wishes of the majority. . . . The Free Acres Constitution gives husband and wife the privilege of casting a split vote. The practice is not only considered democratic, but it leaves the door to domestic tranquility ajar.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the changing political climate of the community was symbolized by the transfer of a leasehold from the Gold family to the Maslow family in 1946. Michael Gold, an outspoken writer and social critic, had lived in Free Acres for nearly a decade. His brother had been the director of the Free Acres summer camp throughout the 1930's. Gold had been

57. *The Newark Sunday News Magazine*, September 4, 1949, in the files of the Newark Public Library, Free Acres. In this modern period, Free Acres was transformed into a kind of rural agrarianism for commuters, with its economy directly tied to the commuting mass society, but offering an alternative in terms of residential community life. For similar occurrences in this vein see, William E. Leverette, Jr., and David E. Shi, "Agrarianism for Commuters," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 79 (Spring 1980): 204-218.

a Greenwich Village radical at the time of the First World War, later linked romantically with the Worker activist, Dorothy Day in the 1920's, and politically with the Communist Party in the 1930's. In 1946, Gold transferred his leasehold to Harry and Theresa Maslow. Maslow a well-known architect and town planner, like Gold cherished the Free Acres' ideals of community and direct democracy. However, Maslow, who would come to serve as Free Acres' trustee rather regularly for the next forty years, urged a more activist stance with respect to the surrounding community. Maslow became chairman of the Berkeley Heights Township Planning Board and took an interest in local politics and school board affairs, as did increasing numbers of other Free Acresites.

This altered role became more significant as Berkeley Heights and Watchung were transformed from rural, agricultural communities to dormitory suburbs in the 1950's. Property values in the area continued to rise with significant population growth and the attraction of a number of corporate complexes to the area, most notably Bell Laboratories.

Rising property values in the surrounding community eventually affected relations inside Free Acres as well. So long as Free Acres remained a legal anomaly, with its real estate values uncertain, some insularity could be maintained. The sales of Free Acres' experiments continued to be largely financed by sellers or through the transfers made within families. However, as surrounding property values rose precipitously, there was increased pressure to seek outside financing.

Banks and title companies in the area eventually agreed to service what was once considered a high risk venture. The community accommodated by rewriting its lease, from one year to ninety-nine years with an option to renew. With the risk to capital greatly reduced, financial institutions were no longer reluctant to lend mortgages in the enclave. Consequently, Free Acres' property values quickly came to reflect the values in the surrounding communities.

Benzion Liber who lived in Free Acres during its first summer and returned regularly through the early 1920's, returned for a visit in the mid 1950's. In his autobiography (1956) he recounted his impressions, noting the changes in the property values and the nature of the community. He wrote that "at present, this settlement seems to be inhabited by prosperous persons of a social color which, at least at first glance, seems to be quite different from what it was in 1910 and during the few following years."<sup>58</sup>

The inroads made by the wider society continued unrelenting. In the early 1960's, the State of New Jersey shaved off a leasehold and brought the world ever closer by constructing an interstate highway on Free Acres'

58. Benzion Liber, *The Doctor's Apprenticeship*, p. 555.

southern doorstep. A few years later, the Association voted to hook up to the Berkeley Heights sewer system. This move led to a Township redrafting of Free Acres leasehold lines, although the redrafting has never been officially accepted by the Association.

Moreover, what once may have appeared peculiar and for many the object of scorn could be touted by the mid-1970's as an attractive curiosity. Real estate brokers, formerly foreign to the colony, could hawk Free Acres' homes by pointing to the community's attractive amenities, its wooded ambience, curious history, swimming pool, eighteenth-century farmhouse, and vibrant social life. Further hesitation on the part of prospective purchasers was worn down by comparisons to cooperatives and condominiums, familiar forms of ownership by the end of that decade. A follow-up by the Berkeley Heights tax assessor was predictable. In 1982, when the Township of Berkeley Heights revalued, Free Acres found itself in the center of political controversy and its taxes more than doubled. A settlement was eventually reached which pared the increase by 10 percent; and allowed Free Acres assessments to be based on a single parcel rather than a lot by lot basis which had been proposed by the tax assessor. The municipal health inspector followed on the heels of the tax assessor. He insisted that improvements be made to the Free Acres' swimming pool to ensure compliance with the state code. The improvements were eventually made under threat that the pool would be closed.

### *10. Afterword*

Although the single-tax and Henry George are rarely mentioned, and current Free Acresites know even less about nineteenth-century philosophic anarchists, this curious colony continues to maintain a semblance of its founding identity. The community has been seduced and battered, pushed and pulled by the mass society. The pressures to conform have been nearly overpowering, emanating from both the marketplace and government regulation. Consequently, Free Acres is no longer the community of artists, writers, actors, and "free thinkers" it once was. Current residents tend to be business people, educators, professionals, and scientists. Yet, Free Acres remains a pleasant residential enclave, maintaining its own social life and bucolic ambience.

What lessons might Free Acres provide for other communal experiments? Bolton Hall's understating of the importance of the land and the social relationships which would emanate from a legal foundation which provided for the communal ownership and management of the land are important. Although modified, Hall's basic building blocks—the corporate charter, deed of gift, constitution, and leasehold agreement, all remain critical parts of Free Acres life. The reversionary clause in the

deed of gift has remained unchallenged and binds the community, even in the face of rapidly rising property values. Avoiding elaborate institutional structure, as well as an overreliance on either ideological doctrine, strong personal leadership, or aspirations for individual human perfection, Hall devised a relatively parsimonious scheme which has, with only minor modification, stood the test of considerable time.

Purists might be disappointed with Free Acres. The community has persisted, in large part, because it has accommodated itself to the pressures of a changing society. When powerful political and economic forces threatened, rather than resist, the enclave seemed to bend. Heightened real estate market pressures, a preoccupation of both George and Hall, have curiously engendered other social changes. The community also came to accept the intrusion from both private monopolies and government regulation.

Nevertheless, in other ways, the mass society became more like Free Acres. Such values as racial and sexual equality, liberation from Victorian custom, and renewed respect for the natural environment were odd at the time of Free Acres' founding but enjoy widespread public acceptance today. In this way, Free Acres' early pioneers would hardly be considered "free thinkers" by today's standards.

Therefore, while Free Acres clearly failed to meet the high expectations of its founder in extracting speculative gain from real estate, or in providing low cost housing for impecunious but creative urban dwellers, it would be an error to simply write off Free Acres as a failed social experiment. The community continues to function, albeit in mutated form, held together by the basic building blocks put in place by its founder. Free Acres continues to offer an alternative lifestyle through its different balance of the public and the private and urban versus rural concerns. Although older residents commonly decry the loss of communal spirit, newcomers still undergo a unique socialization process and generally comment favorably on the community's comparative advantages. Ironically, in light of some of these advantages, in today's marketplace, this once "radical" communal experiment commands a market premium.