

# Donald Vose: Home Grown Traitor

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ON JANUARY 12, 1916, in a Los Angeles courtroom, accused dynamiter and avowed anarchist, Matthew Schmidt, took the stand to address the court. On trial for murder and conspiracy in the 1910 bombing of the Los Angeles Times Building in which 20 people died, Schmidt had eluded capture for four years despite thousands of wanted posters and offers of massive rewards. Now the evidence was in, the jury about to go out for deliberation. Schmidt stood up to speak. In the audience sat the prosecution's chief witness against him, the man who had befriended him only to turn him in to authorities: Donald Vose from the anarchist community of Home Colony, Washington.

Witty, articulate and self-assured, Schmidt began slowly, delivering an impassioned appeal on behalf of the oppressed workingmen of America. Then, his voice full of scorn, he turned to the jury. "Let me ask you—do you believe Donald Vose? You would not whip your dog on the testimony of a creature like Vose. No honest man would. Any man who would believe Vose would not deserve to have a dog."<sup>1</sup>

The object of this outburst, a pale, wirey young man known to the jury as Donald Meserve, would be called much worse in the months and years ahead by his former associates. He was a "rat," a "cur," a "stool pigeon," a "liar, traitor, spy," a "Judas Iscariot." The son of an anarchist, raised among radicals at the famous anarchist community of Home Colony, he had been imbued since infancy with the teachings of his elders in the movement. Now he had committed the unforgivable. In betraying

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1. "Address of Matthew A. Schmidt before his Executioner in the court of Los Angeles, Cal., January 12, 1916," *Mother Earth*, vol. 10, no. 12 (February, 1916), p. 397.

Schmidt and his co-conspirator, David Caplan, Donald Vose Merserve symbolically betrayed his family, his friends, and his community as well.<sup>2</sup>

For the rest of his life Donald Vose would be haunted by the consequences of his actions. Eventually the story of his confused, unhappy life provided the model for a literary creation of one of America's most renowned playwrights, Eugene O'Neill. Remembered not for his accomplishments, like others of the happy anarchist children among whom he grew up, but for his moment of betrayal, Vose ultimately achieved a greater immortality. His contribution to literature was an ironic legacy to the ideals of individual freedom taught by the founders of Home Colony.

Every family has its black sheep, and it was inevitable that a community like Home would produce among its children at least one or two. Caught in the dilemma of how to rebel when one's parents and teachers have already thrown out all the conventional rules, Donald Vose was not the only child of Home to reject the values of his elders. But he was the only one to do it so dramatically and in such an unsavory manner.<sup>3</sup>

Born in 1892, Donald Vose came from a family of free-thinkers and individualists who traced their lineage in America back to the earliest white settlers of Massachusetts. His mother, Gertie Vose, was a well-known and respected member of the West Coast anarchist community. A single mother, free-lover, and American pioneer, Gertie was, by all accounts, a strong-willed, feisty woman. Indomitable and energetic, she showed little tolerance for those who disagreed with her—a "fireball" one family member called her. Believing passionately in the rights of women, she openly flouted the conventional morality of the times, particularly in her relationships with men.<sup>4</sup>

Both Donald and an older daughter, Bessie, were the children of a Mr. Meserve, whom Gertie never legally married and about whom virtually nothing is known. She and Meserve separated soon after Donald's birth, he taking Bessie, and Donald remaining with his mother.<sup>5</sup>

After a brief attempt at homesteading in Montana in the early 1890's, Gertie moved with her young son to Portland. Here she got involved with a group of comrades putting out the anarchist weekly, *The Firebrand*,

2. William Z. Foster, *Pages From A Worker's Life* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), pp. 208-209; Emma Goldman, "Donald Vose: The Accursed," *Mother Earth*, vol. 10, no. 11 (January 1916), p. 353.

3. Charles P. LeWarne, "The Children of Home," paper presented to the Home Historical Society, September 15, 1983.

4. Genealogical records of the Vose family in the collection of the Wyoming County Historical Society, Wyoming County Court House, Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania; interview with Ruth Rickabaugh, Gig Harbour, Washington, tape recorded by Charles LeWarne, July 18, 1979.

5. Rickabaugh interview, July 18, 1979; Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 353.

## 92 COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

becoming particularly close to the family of one of the editors, Abe Isaaks. Famous in anarchist circles for the extraordinary degree of freedom and self-expression they allowed their three children, Abe and his wife Mary exerted a strong influence on Gertie. "I lived with the Isaaks," she later wrote, "where they got out the grand little paper, *The Firebrand*, and I found my life with them the nearest approach to freedom and growth that I ever experienced."<sup>6</sup>

After the arrest of its editors in 1897, *The Firebrand* folded and Gertie again moved on. With her new lover, a comrade known only as J.W. Britian, she settled in the small lumber town of Scio, Oregon. It was here in 1898 that Gertie first met Emma Goldman, the prominent anarchist writer and activist known to the American public as "Red Emma." Dismayed by what she called "the vegetating swamps" of Scio, Gertie invited Goldman to speak in town and to stay in her home while the latter was passing through on a lecture tour of the West Coast.<sup>7</sup>

Emma Goldman later wrote of this meeting: "I had heard of Gertie through the pages of *Fire Brand* and *Free Society*, from a number of friends, and a few letters exchanged with her. As a result I was eager to meet the woman, who, in those days, was one of the few unusual American characters in the radical movement. I found Gertie to be even more than I had expected, — a fighter, a defiant, strong personality, a tender hostess and a devoted mother. She had with her at the time her six year old son, Donald Vose."<sup>8</sup>

Although the two women were not to meet again for another 16 years, they carried on a regular correspondence for some time, until, as Goldman put it, it was interrupted by "the stress and travail of life." Nonetheless, the warm feelings generated by their meeting continued, and as Goldman's fame as an activist and lecturer increased, the

6. Interview with R.H. (Harry) Vose by Mrs. Bertha Stearns, Hearthstone Extension Homemakers Club, County Extension Project, Flathead County, Montana, February 6, 1964, typed MS. in Flathead County Library, Kalispel, Montana; Record of Indenture #455, June 27, 1893, Office of Flathead County Clerk and Recorder, Kalispel, Montana; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications Inc. ed., 1970), vol., p. 224; "Cooperative Association," letter to Comrade J.A. Gillie from Gertie Vose, *Discontent*, May 29, 1901.

7. Carlos A. Schwantes, "Free Love and Free Speech on the Pacific Northwest Frontier: Proper Victorians vs. Portland's Filthy *Firebrand*," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (Fall, 1981), 271-293. Between 1898 and December 1901 Gertie signed both legal documents and her contributions to anarchist periodicals as G.V.B. or Gertie V.B. (*Discontent* June 19, 1901), or Gertrude V. Britian (Record of Indenture #241, April 26, 1901 and Record of Indenture #465, December 6, 1901, Office of Flathead County Clerk and Recorder, Kalispel, Montana). An article reporting on Emma Goldman's lecture in Scio in 1898 read in part, "She was our guest while here....," and was signed by "G.V. and J.W.B." (*Discontent*, June 28, 1899); *Discontent*, May 29, 1901.

8. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 353.

association provided Gertie with a certain status in the anarchist community as "a friend of Emma Goldman's."<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime Donald was growing up, and Gertie was determined to raise her son as a good anarchist. "I have a boy about as impetuous as they make 'em/' she wrote a friend early in 1901. "No child likes to be forced, and it certainly destroys the noblest impulses and nourishes the objectionable characteristics. He says he won't sing God and patriotic songs in school, and told the teacher he didn't want to carry the flag; but she had him do it just the same." Though Gertie meant well, her words suggest a lonely little boy already forced into the role of misfit by the imposition of his mother's rigidly held beliefs. It was largely her search for a more sympathetic environment in which to raise Donald that led Gertie to settle at Home Colony during the summer of 1901.<sup>10</sup>

Located on the banks of idyllic Van Geldern Cove on Puget Sound, Home had been founded five years earlier by disgruntled survivors of the Glennis Cooperative Industrial Company, a failed communitarian experiment near Tacoma. Disgusted by the excess number of meetings and bylaws which they felt had destroyed Glennis, the founders were determined to create a community of individuals rather than another cooperative. To this end they established the Mutual Home Association as a simple land-holding company, the only stated goals of which were "to assist its members in obtaining and building homes for themselves and to aid in establishing better social and moral conditions." Aside from a general guideline of two acres of land per person, the only prerequisites for residency were a belief in individual freedom and the ability to mind one's own business. Lacking any other rules, even this requirement remained unenforceable. Nonetheless, since many early settlers were recruited through the pages of the avowedly anarchist Home paper, *Discontent*, the colony attracted a remarkably homogeneous crowd of radicals, freethinkers, theoreticians, misfits and occasional crackpots.<sup>11</sup>

While not all settlers at Home called themselves anarchists, on the whole they tended to be highly intelligent, self-reliant sorts who loved to talk, argue and read books. Most, in one way or another, were rebels against the traditional order of things who valued their right to do as

9. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 353; interview with Evadna DeCrane Cooke, San Jose, California, June 8, 1978; interview with Siegfried Clyde, by Karyl Winn and Mrs. Meta Kaplan, Seattle, February 22, 1971, transcript in University of Washington collection.

10. *Discontent*, May 29, 1901; September 11, 1901.

11. *Discontent: Mother of Progress* was the second of seven newspapers to be published at Home during its 20-year history as a legal entity. While not claiming to be the official organ of the community but rather a voluntary effort by individuals, like its successors it did represent the views of many of the residents. Charles P. LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound 1885-1915* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 168-226; J.W. Gaskine, "The Anarchists at Home, Washington," *The Independent*, (April 28, 1910), pp. 914-922.

they pleased. The resulting atmosphere of tolerance, combined with an unusually high level of intellectual and cultural interests among its residents, quickly established Home as one of the liveliest and most successful intentional communities on the West Coast.

By the time Gertie and Donald arrived, the population of Home had grown to over 80 people, about half of whom were children. The community also claimed two newspapers (one weekly and one monthly), a school with two teachers, seven hundred fruit trees, twelve cows, six organs and innumerable books. As residents proudly pointed out, however, they did not have a single church, saloon, jail or police officer. Accessible only by boat, much of the back-breaking work of clearing the land, building houses and planting gardens still remained to be done. But what the residents lacked in roads and sidewalks, they made up for with enthusiasm and community spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Over the years Home gained notoriety as a haven for eccentrics as well as serious progressives and freethinkers. Education and the arts were highly valued by the community, as were all manner of what would now be called "New Age" beliefs: vegetarianism, fasting, yogic meditation and spiritualism. Among the numerous visitors to the colony were many notable radicals of the day including Emma Goldman, Elbert Hubbard of the Roycroft Community in New York, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and "Big Bill" Haywood of the I.W.W.<sup>13</sup>

Occasionally residents had cause to regret all the publicity. In September of 1901 when President McKinley was assassinated by a mentally disturbed young man claiming to be an anarchist, tragedy was narrowly averted when a group of patriotic vigilantes from Tacoma set sail for Home to root out the anarchist "vipers" in their midst. Several years of legal harassment followed when authorities closed the Home Post Office and arrested the editors of *Discontent* on charges of mailing obscene literature, the result of an article criticizing traditional marriage. And in 1911, Jay Fox, then editor of the Home paper, was arrested for writing an editorial entitled "The Nudes and the Prudes," upholding the rights of residents to go skinny-dipping in the bay. Eventually taken all the way to the United States Supreme Court, the famous "nude bathing" case produced both titters and outrage, and in the end proved divisive to the community. Growing up amid this kind of notoriety produced mixed effects on the children of Home, many of whom grew up to be solid conventional citizens, somewhat embarrassed by the activities of their elders.<sup>14</sup>

12. Radium LaVene, "There Was No Place Like Home." 2 pts., Mimeographed MS, (1945), p. 5; *Discontent*, July 3, 1901.

13. LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, pp. 189-200; LeVene, "There Was No Place Like Home," p. 20.

14. LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, pp. 177-186, 211-220; LeWarne, "The Children of Home."

Gertie Vose soon became a prominent member of this community—organizing meetings, attending study groups, entertaining an endless stream of visitors, and writing regular contributions to *Discontent* and other movement periodicals. Donald was left to his own devices and the good influence of like-minded neighbors. He attended classes at the colony school, and references in the Home papers indicate he occasionally joined other residents in community hop-picking expeditions, and picnics on the beach.<sup>15</sup>

In the early years Home was basically an agrarian community hacked out of what was then wilderness. Away from urban centers, most residents were dependent on whatever they could raise and grow themselves. While the school and a cooperative community store provided employment for a few, and some settlers relied on outside sources of income, most, like Gertie, found financial survival a constant struggle. Families were often separated while the men left to find work in nearby logging camps or shipyards. Once again alone without a man in her life, Gertie was periodically obliged to be away from the colony for months at a time working, probably as a domestic, cleaning or keeping house for well-to-do Tacoma matrons. While she was away Donald was left in the care of his grandfather, O.B. Vose, or his Aunt Jennie, both of whom, following Gertie's lead, had also settled at Home.<sup>16</sup>

If Gertie was often too busy or simply not available to pay much attention to her son, she was not particularly unusual in her absenteeism. Isolated from the temptations of the big cities, Home was considered a safe, healthy place in which to raise children. Most parents at Home allowed their children to simply run free, assuming that the lack of supervision would nurture in them a sense of self-confidence and independence. As one former resident put it, "my mother just let me go because she could see I was happy." But while other children thrived on the freedom, Donald seemed to get lost in it.<sup>17</sup>

In trying to understand Donald's subsequent behavior it is tempting to blame Gertie herself more than Home. Donald was nine years old

15. *Demonstrator*, March 1903; May 20, 1903; September 23, 1903; July 21, 1905; September 20, 1905.

16. In a letter to the editor from Tacoma, Gertie writes, "Since coming to Tacoma I have had a little experience hunting work; and it is surprising to note the arrogance and haughty air of the upper ten. They seem to think they are conferring honors untold upon persons to even allow them houseroom as servants." Later in the same letter she cryptically adds, "I am working nights \_\_\_\_ The only company I have during the long night hours is roaches, rats and mice." (*Demonstrator*, March 16, 1904; *Demonstrator*, April 27, 1904; May 25, 1904; June 29, 1904; September 28, 1904; March 15, 1905; October 4, 1905; *Discontent*, December 4, 1901; *Demonstrator*, February 3, 1904.

17. Cooke interview, June 8, 1978.

when his mother moved to Home, old enough for many other influences to have left their mark on his character. And while Emma Goldman called Gertie a "devoted mother," one Vose family member recalled that, "as kids we didn't really like her too well because she wasn't really child oriented at all — We were just in the way as far as she was concerned."<sup>18</sup>

Donald never showed much scholastic inclination. Although no clear records exist, in all likelihood he never finished high school. Instead, he spent his later adolescent years just hanging around, occasionally doing odd jobs for various Homeites to earn a bit of spending money. A loner, he seemed perpetually at loose ends. "He was always in trouble," a family member recalled. "I don't know why except that Gertie just didn't have that touch with children, even her own."<sup>19</sup>

By all accounts Donald tended to be irresponsible, lazy and bumblingly inept at almost everything he tried. He had some artistic talent and loved to draw. But whether from a lack of encouragement, initiative, or funds to foster his talents, nothing came of this ability. Although not an unattractive youth, he often appeared so because of his sullen nature.<sup>20</sup>

Former Homeites' memories of Donald as a young man were inevitably colored by his role in the Caplan-Schmidt affair. As a result it is impossible to assess whether he was really as unpleasant as the records portray him. Nonetheless, it seems clear that by his late teenage years he was already drinking heavily. He had become friends of sorts with a group of other aimless, underemployed young bachelors in the area, and spent most of his time carousing with his cronies, drifting from job to job, waiting for something to happen in his life.<sup>21</sup>

In October of 1910 news reached Home of the bombing of the Los Angeles Times Building. Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the *Times*, had long been at war with the unions over his open shop policies, and labor radicals were immediately suspected. A nationwide hunt ensued for the perpetrators of what the press soon began calling "the crime of the century." Much to the consternation of Home residents, two anarchist comrades, David Caplan and Matthew Schmidt, were wanted for complicity in transporting the dynamite used in the explosion. Caplan, in particular, was known to be a close friend of several Home residents, and his wife and children had recently visited the colony.<sup>22</sup>

18. Rickabaugh interview, July 18, 1979.

19. Radium LaVene, "There Was No Place Like Home," p. 23; Rickabaugh interview, July 18, 1979.

20. LaVene, "No Place Like Home," pp. 22-23; Rickabaugh interview, July 18, 1979; Foster, *A Worker's Life*, p. 208; Lucy Robins Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 77.

21. Interview with Radium LaVene, Los Angeles, California, April 16, 1977.

22. In April 1911, John J. McNamara, Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers in Indianapolis, and his brother, James B. McNamara,

At this point the famous private detective, William J. Burns, entered the picture. Founder of the Burns' Detective Agency and later Director of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice—a forerunner of the FBI—Burns saw the *Times* case as an opportunity to enhance his reputation while reaping financial rewards for his fledgling agency. Within weeks Burns' agents infiltrated Home disguised as surveyors. Renting rooms in the colony, they spent their days tramping through the woods in search of clues to David Caplan's whereabouts, and trailing Jay Fox, editor of the Home paper, whom they suspected of involvement in the affair.<sup>23</sup>

In his melodramatic and self-promoting book about the case, *The Masked War*, Burns quotes verbatim from the cloak and dagger reports filed by his "operatives" at Home. "7:30 a.m. Took up watch in stable loft... 9:15 a.m. A. arrived at Fox's home..." And so on. Despite the intrigue, their search proved temporarily fruitless, and Schmidt and Caplan disappeared into the underground world of life on the lam. There they may well have stayed had it not been for Donald Vose.<sup>24</sup>

Accounts differ as to exactly how and when Burns made contact with Donald. References in *The Masked War* suggest that during their surveillance of Home in 1910, one or more of Burns' operatives boarded with an unwitting Bessie Vose, then reunited with her mother and living at Home with her infant son. If this is true, they would certainly have met Donald at that time. Another often repeated story has it that Donald was

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were arrested and extradited to California to face trial for planning and executing the bombing of the Los Angeles Times Building. With Clarence Darrow taking on the case for the defense, the McNamara brothers became a national *cause celebre*. Led by Samuel Gompers among others, the labor movement claimed the charge was a frame-up designed to discredit the unions, and money and support for the defense poured in from thousands of workers and union supporters nationwide. When the McNamaras—at the instigation of Lincoln Steffens, who had been attempting to work out a deal to avoid the death penalty — suddenly changed their plea to guilty, the case turned into a fiasco for the labor movement. Darrow's health and career were nearly ruined, and he later faced charges of jury tampering in the case. Job Harriman, a member of the defense team, running as a Socialist for mayor of Los Angeles and a favorite to win, was soundly defeated at the polls. (He later went on to found the Llano del Rio Co-operative Colony in Southern California.) Lincoln Steffens was ostracized by his former union friends, and William J. Burns became a national hero.

The story of the Los Angeles Times bombing has been covered in numerous books and articles. For two interesting views, see Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), pp. 82-105, and Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America 1826-1934* (New York: Viking Press, 1931), pp. 187-252; Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, pp. 51-52; Cooke interview, June 8, 1978.

23. William J. Burns, *The Masked War* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1913); *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, vol. 24, pp. 209-210.

24. Burns, *The Masked War*, p. 89.

later caught in some act of petty thievery by a Burns' agent, and essentially blackmailed into assisting in their search.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the case, in May of 1914 Donald Vose showed up at Emma Goldman's apartment in New York armed with two letters. One was a letter of introduction from his mother to her old friend. The other was from "someone in Washington" addressed to Matthew Schmidt. The mysterious "someone" was, of course, David Caplan. In keeping with the tone of secretiveness used by all who knew the accused men, Vose had only to stress the importance of delivering his message to Schmidt to make himself understood.<sup>26</sup>

Caplan by then was hiding out in a backwoods cabin on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound. A number of Homeites knew who the reclusive chicken farmer going by the alias of Frank Moller really was, and did what they could to help him without giving him away. As Gertie's son, Donald found it easy to locate Caplan and ingratiate himself with the lonely man. Finding Schmidt proved more difficult.<sup>27</sup>

When Donald arrived in New York, Emma Goldman was away on a lecture tour. But her friends and associates living at the house took him in, as they would any comrade showing up with such reliable credentials. Some months later when Goldman returned, Donald was still there, his letter still undelivered. "My first impression of Donald Vose was not agreeable," Goldman later wrote, "perhaps because of his high pitched, thin voice and shifting eyes. But he was Gertie's son, out of work, wretchedly clad, unhealthy in appearance." Distracted by numerous personal and business concerns, Goldman thought little more about the young man living in her home, and rarely saw him.<sup>28</sup>

Donald was again drinking heavily. He had begun keeping company with a charming anarchist bum named Terry Carlin. Then in his fifties, Carlin was an intriguing character: brilliant, eccentric, a fascinating raconteur, he had a dark, bitter side that came out in drunken monologues delivered to anyone willing to listen. Philosophically opposed to

25. As quoted by Burns, a report dated November 5th read in part, "D... visited Fox today; also Mrs. V., the mother of our landlady," (*Masked War*, p. 82). On November 7th the same agent reported, "I ascertained that Emma Goldman was here, but how lately I could not learn... She is a great friend of the mother of 'my landlady.' Her parents and grandfather, so she states, are Anarchists, Socialists, free lovers and all that goes with it." (*Masked War*, p. 78); Cooke interview, June 8, 1978; Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, p. 80; Eugene Travaglio, "The Trials of a Noble Experiment," typed MS. (1966), p. 16.

26. Goldman, "Donald Vose," pp. 354-355.

27. Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, p. 79; *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, February 19, 1915.

28. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 354.

working, he had subsisted for decades on alcohol and his uncanny ability to sponge off friends and enemies alike. He seemed to know almost everyone.<sup>29</sup>

Although Carlin's interest in Donald was probably only that of a drinking companion, he may have briefly taken on the role of mentor and father figure for the younger man. It was a role Carlin would soon play for another young man—Eugene O'Neill. As an unknown, penniless drifter on the verge of alcoholic suicide, O'Neill spent several years roaming the bars, flophouses and back alleys of New York City with Carlin. O'Neill's biographers all acknowledge Carlin's pivotal role in the playwright's life. It was, in fact, Carlin's friendship with a group of avant garde writers and artists forming a new theater group, the Provincetown Players, which led to O'Neill's discovery and the launching of his career as a playwright in 1916.<sup>30</sup>

During September, 1914, a number of friends gathered at Emma Goldman's house. Among those present that afternoon besides Goldman herself were her longtime friend and associate Alexander Berkman, Lincoln Steffens, journalist Hutchins Hapgood, and a man calling himself Joe Hoffman, a.k.a. Matthew Schmidt. Just as Schmidt was preparing to leave, Donald Vose returned to the house, accompanied by Terry Carlin. Visibly nervous at the unexpected presence of a stranger, Schmidt was quickly reassured of Donald's identity, and told he was carrying a message for him. According to Goldman, their meeting took place in the presence of everyone in the room, and nothing of substance was exchanged.<sup>31</sup>

Though delivering Caplan's message to Schmidt had ostensibly been Donald's reason for remaining in the East, he still did not leave New York. Back at Home, Gertie was relieved that her son finally appeared to be finding some direction in life, and proudly boasted of his involvement with the New York comrades. In fact, however, Donald was doing very little with his time. Winter was coming on. Evidently too broke even to buy himself an overcoat, he took to hanging around the offices of Goldman's paper, *Mother Earth*, trying to keep warm. Whenever

29. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 354; Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O'Neill* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 286-294; Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian In the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), pp. 199-200, 368-371.

30. Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, pp. 286-294, 309; Louis Shaeffer, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1968); Hapgood, *Victorian In the Modern World*, pp. 396-397.

31. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 353; People of State of California, Plaintiff and Respondent, vs. M.A. Schmidt, Defendant and Appellant, District Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, Los Angeles, California (Bound copy of Respondent's Brief, Part 1, Statement of Fact), p. 287, in collection of *Los Angeles Times*.

Goldman questioned Donald about his plans, he claimed he was waiting to receive a check from Washington. Knowing that Gertie was too poor to send her son money, Goldman discreetly inquired of friends on the coast, who investigated and replied that no one was sending Donald funds.<sup>32</sup>

"The situation was becoming altogether too suspicious," Goldman later wrote. Though claiming poverty, "during all that time," as Goldman put it, "Donald Vose was dissipating with nearly everyone who was willing to carouse with him." According to his later testimony in court, one of these was Matthew Schmidt. Finally, in mid-February Donald left for the West Coast. Within days Schmidt and David Caplan were arrested: Schmidt while walking down the street in New York City, and Caplan while asleep in his cabin on Bainbridge Island.<sup>33</sup>

Radicals from coast to coast immediately suspected a traitor. A month or so later positive proof of Donald's complicity surfaced. While staying at the San Francisco home of some anarchist associates—whose hospitality he had again elicited on the basis of his mother's reputation—a suitcase in his room was inadvertently found to contain a gun and various incriminating papers and documents. About the same time he was seen in the company of a known Burns agent. Enraged, the San Francisco comrades hatched a plot to kidnap Donald, planning to hold him hostage until after the trials to prevent him from testifying against Schmidt and Caplan.<sup>34</sup>

Months of dramatic intrigue followed. While agents for the prosecution tried to protect the life and safety of their chief witness, friends of the accused men trailed Donald from one hiding place to another. Once they pursued him on a wild midnight automobile chase through the California desert. On another occasion labor radicals—"notorious desperadoes" as a member of the prosecution team called them—attacked Donald in the lobby of a Los Angeles hotel, resulting in a brawl between the would-be kidnappers and Donald's guardians.<sup>35</sup>

Emma Goldman, tortured by anger and guilt over her role in the affair, wrote an expose in *Mother Earth* denouncing Donald. Pleading with her old friend Gertie to "be brave" and "save the people from your

32. Goldman, "Donald Vose," pp. 355-356; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications ed., 1970), vol. 2, pp. 550-551.

33. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 356; People vs. M.A. Schmidt, Respondent's Brief, pp. 291-295; *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, February 15, 1915; February 19, 1915; February 20, 1915.

34. Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, pp. 77 - 80; Foster, *Worker's Life*, p. 209; James W. Noel, "Some Sketches of a Great Struggle," paper read before the Indianapolis Literary Club (May 8, 1916) and before the Indianapolis Bar Association (October 1916), privately printed MS in the collection of *Los Angeles Times*, p. 21.

35. Lang, *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, pp. 80-81; Noel, "Sketches of a Great Struggle," pp. 21-22.

traitor son," she railed against her former visitor. "You will roam the earth accursed, shunned and hated; a burden unto yourself, with the shadow of M.A. Schmidt and David Caplan ever at your heels unto the last."<sup>36</sup>

In the end, Donald's testimony clinched the case for the prosecution. Matthew Schmidt was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment in San Quentin. David Caplan, against whom there was much less evidence, received ten years.<sup>37</sup> After the trials Donald returned to Home. Presumably he had nowhere else to go. Whatever money he made in Burns' service had undoubtedly long been spent, as Home residents saw no sign of it. Gertie, although crushed by her son's betrayal, ignored Emma Goldman's advice and allowed him back in her home.<sup>38</sup>

Not surprisingly, Donald was ostracized by most of his former friends and neighbors. By this time the original cohesiveness of the Home community had long since started to unravel as more and more settlers with differing goals and beliefs moved in. Donald's actions did not so much contribute to the demise of Home as mirror the already fraying idealism in which the famous anarchist colony had been born.<sup>39</sup>

A few of Donald's old cronies saw no reason to avoid him and he still found friends willing to drink with him, though his activities were now confined to Gertie's house, away from the critical eyes of his neighbors. When replenishing his supply of liquor he often took backwoods paths into town to avoid meeting people. Once, however, he ventured out to attend a Home baseball game, a favorite event in the life of the community. Most of those in attendance simply ignored Donald, but one young man actively expressed the feelings of many: coming up to Donald he looked him in the eye, let loose a tirade of curses in French, and spat in his face.<sup>40</sup>

Soon after this incident Donald drifted off to Seattle where he got a job in the shipyards. Eventually he found work as a merchant marine, snipping off to distant ports where nothing reminded him of the past. Living the life of a semi-derelict loner, so far as is known he never married or formed any lasting attachments. Over the years he occasionally appeared at Home while on leave, always begging money from Gertie, who was invariably unhappy to see him come and relieved to see him leave again.<sup>41</sup>

In the late 1930's Eugene O'Neill began writing what critics consider one of his finest plays, *The Iceman Cometh*. A major character in this

36. Goldman, "Donald Vose," p. 357.

37. Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2, p. 573; *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1916.

38. Cooke interview, June 8, 1978; Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2, p. 566.

39. LaVene interview, April 16, 1977; LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, p. 220.

40. LaVene interview, April 16, 1977; LeVene, "No Place Like Home," pt. 2, pp. 22-23.

41. LaVene interview, April 16, 1977; Rickabaugh interview, July 18, 1979.

work, Larry Slade, is based on the real-life Terry Carlin. A wise old anarchist grown disillusioned with the radical movement he once devoted his life to, Slade is O'Neill's literary homage to his one-time mentor. Another character, Don Parritt, is based on the story O'Neill heard from Carlin about Donald Vose.<sup>42</sup>

In the play Parritt is a young man raised in the anarchist movement who has betrayed his mother and her friends for their involvement in a bombing on the West Coast. To heighten literary tension, O'Neill places Parritt's mother herself in jail facing a life sentence. But the other similarities between Parritt and Vose—their backgrounds, activities, physical appearances, and even their names—make it clear they are one and the same, a conclusion substantiated by O'Neill's biographers. Like the other characters in this complex, many-layered play, Don Parritt's dilemma reflects O'Neill's concern with issues of choice and motivation, of moral responsibility, and of tragedy as the underlying theme of human existence.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps like the real-life Carlin and Vose, Slade represents a father figure to the young Parritt. As Slade is gradually forced to acknowledge the truth about Parritt's actions, the younger man attempts to explain his motives. At first he claims a sense of misguided patriotism. "I saw it was my duty to my country," he tells Slade. In the next act Parritt abandons his former reasoning and admits it was just for the money. "I got stuck on a whore and wanted the dough to blow in on her and have a good time." Throughout the play Parritt rails against his imprisoned mother, with whom Slade was once romantically involved. Finally, his defenses broken down, Parritt confesses to Slade: "There's no use lying anymore ... I didn't give a damn about the money. It was because I hated her."<sup>44</sup>

By the end of the play a guilt-ridden Parritt realizes that the only honorable way out of his dilemma is suicide. Led on by the unspoken encouragement of Slade, he jumps to his death from an upstairs balcony of the flophouse above Harry Hope's saloon where the action of the play occurs.

42. Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, p. 831; Louis Shaeffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), pp. 427 - 428. The Gelbs credit O'Neill's editor and close personal friend, Saxe Commins (who was also Emma Goldman's nephew) with telling O'Neill the story of Donald Vose (*O'Neill*, p. 833). While Commins may well have discussed the case with the playwright, O'Neill's close association with Carlin in the months immediately following the incident suggest he would have first heard the story from the man who was personally involved with Vose, a conclusion shared by Louis Shaeffer (*O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p. 491).

43. Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, p. 503; Shaeffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p. 491.

44. Eugene O'Neill, *The Iceman Cometh* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1957), Act 2, p. 128; Act 3, p. 160; Act 4, p. 241.

There is no way Donald Vose could have known about O'Neill's immortalization of him in *The Iceman Cometh*. The play was not produced until 1946, a year after Vose's death, and O'Neill only published the text of this work after its initial performance. Yet in an ironic twist of life imitating art, the real Donald Vose—like Don Parritt—also met his death in a fall.<sup>45</sup>

In December of 1945, the "S.S. Whirlwind" on which Donald was then employed was docked in San Francisco. According to an employee of the shipping company who witnessed the accident, Donald was seen staggering up the gangplank carrying a case of beer on his shoulder. As he neared the top, he stumbled, lost his balance, and plunged 26 feet to his death on the dock below. He was 53 years old. As in Emma Goldman's prophecy, Donald Vose Meserve, the stool pigeon, had roamed the earth shunned and hated, with the shadow of Matthew Schmidt and David Caplan "ever at [his] heels unto the last."<sup>46</sup>

45. Gelb and Gelb, *O'Neill*, pp. 835, 863; Shaeffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p. 503.

46. Coroner's Register, City and County of San Francisco, Record of Death, Case no. 2514, December 16, 1945.