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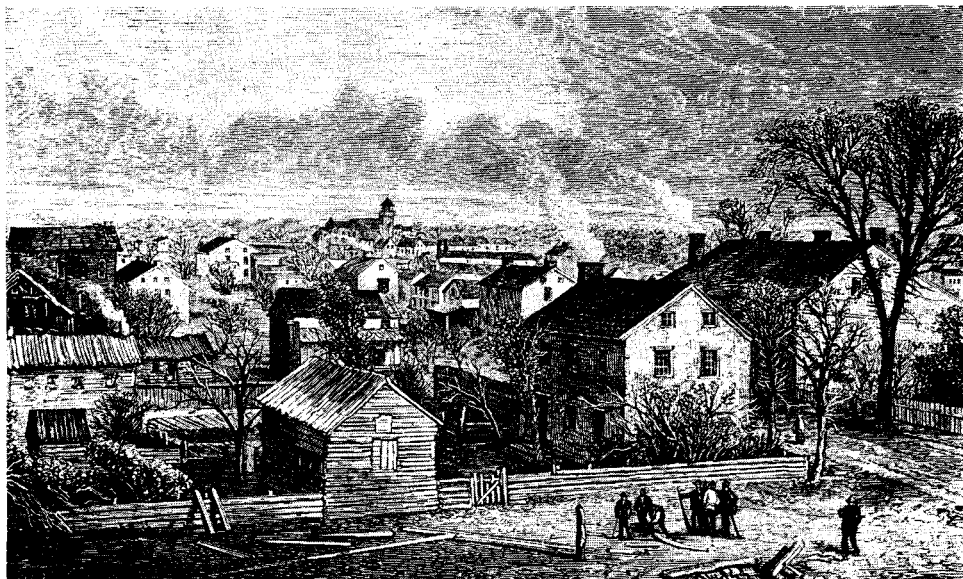
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The sketch of the Bethel commune appeared in Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (1875).

## Missouri's Utopian Communities

BY H. ROGER GRANT\*

Nineteenth-century America witnessed a rash of utopian communities. In all sections of the country zealous men, reformers, seekers after the perfect society, withdrew from the community at large to establish their own types of "utopia." Some American utopians modeled their new communities after European theories of industrial cooperation, while others, following their religious dictates, sought to either build heaven on earth or to prepare for the millennium. Thus in the annals of American utopianism two essentially different communities existed: the secular and the religious colonies. These two types of colonies, however, often shared similar forms of organization. Both might be communistic, with community rather than individual ownership of property. Both, too, might be merely cooperative in a generalized sense, with in-

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dividual ownership of personal property allowed, but have cooperative sharing of a common social, economic and intellectual life.

Missouri's utopian movement, which became one of the largest in the country in terms of number of colonies established,<sup>1</sup> followed the national pattern of having communities that were both religious and secular, communistic and cooperative. Therefore to describe and analyze utopianism in Missouri, the classification of communities into religious and secular categories will be used.

The first group of religious utopians to settle in Missouri arrived in 1831. In the summer of that year Joseph Smith, Jr., led a small band of his Mormon followers from their settlement at Kirtland, Ohio, to Jackson County, Missouri. Shortly after arriving Smith claimed to have received a divinely inspired revelation designating a 63-acre tract of land in the frontier boom town of Independence as the location for the "New Jerusalem." Here the Mormon prophet and his followers planned to build a religious community that would serve as the world center for members of the newly organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>2</sup>

The prophet Joseph Smith decided that this new Missouri settlement would follow a form of religious communism. Such a plan came as no surprise to his followers, for the prophet had had connections with early American utopianism and had previously announced his support for such a life style. Jason Mack, the eldest brother of Smith's mother, had established a communistic religious community in Canada early in the century. And, at the time that Mormonism was founded, several prominent utopian groups had constructed colonies in the immediate area of Palmyra, New York, the birthplace of Smith's church. What influences these two factors had on Smith's thinking is not known, but one of the prophet's most important early converts and close associates, Sidney Rigdon, espoused communal living and had led a socialistic community in Kirtland prior to his conversion to Mormonism.<sup>3</sup> Rigdon's

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on such published compilations as Ralph Albertson, "A Survey of Mutualistic Communities in America," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XXXIV (October, 1936), 375-444; Frederick A. Bushee, "Communistic Societies in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly*, XX (December, 1905), 625-664; Helen D. Jones, *Communal Settlements in the United States: A Selected List of References* (Washington, D.C., 1947); and Alexander Kent, "Co-operative Communities in the United States," *United States Department of Labor Bulletin*, XXXV (July, 1901), 563-646.

<sup>2</sup> Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire* (East Lansing, Mich., 1967), 47; Edward H. Anderson, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Independence, Mo., 1928), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago, 1957), 6, 14-15, 41-42.

utopianism probably moved Smith in 1830 to a revelation which declared: "And let every man . . . be alike among his people, and receive alike, that ye may be one. . . . For if ye are not equal in earthly things, ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things. . . . you are to have equal claims on the properties. . . . And let not any man among you say that it is his own, for it shall not be called his, nor any part of it."<sup>4</sup>

Following this revelation, the Mormons organized the United Order or as it was occasionally referred to in church circles, the "Order of Enoch."<sup>5</sup> Under this plan all properties in the Kirtland community were dedicated to the church and returned to members to be worked on an individual basis. All surpluses and profits derived from such workings went to the Kirtland bishop, Edward Partridge, who then used these resources to aid the community's poor and aged and to conduct the church's day-to-day operations and missionary programs.<sup>6</sup>

With the building of the "New Jerusalem" in Missouri, Smith hoped to implement more fully the church's new economic plan. The religious communism contained in the United Order, however, never came to full fruition. After having a spectacular beginning, the Independence settlement soon ran into difficulty. The problem facing Missouri Mormons proved to be external rather than internal. The outspoken opinions of the approximately 1,200 Mormon residents concerning their divine right to the region, their continued land expansion, their friendly attitude toward native Indian tribes, their thrift and industriousness, and their suspected abolitionism antagonized non-Mormons in the Jackson County area. This anti-Mormon feeling soon turned to violence. Early in November 1833, non-Mormons forcibly expelled the Saints from their Independence utopia. Most fled across the Missouri River into Clay County where they remained until 1836. In that year, due to increased anti-Mormon sentiment, the Missouri General Assembly designated Caldwell County as a special "Mormon County," where the Saints might live in peace.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Albertson, "Survey of Mutualistic Communities," 382-383.

<sup>5</sup> This name came from Enoch, the seventh patriarch in descent from Adam, who, according to Mormon theology, practiced the "United Order" successfully in biblical times. See James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, 1901), 358, 362, 450.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton Gardner, "Communism Among the Mormons," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXXVII (November, 1922), 134-174; John H. Evans, *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet* (New York, 1933), 241-248.

<sup>7</sup> Warren A. Jennings, "The Army of Israel Marches into Missouri," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, LXII (January, 1968), 107-135; *The History of the*



The sketch entitled "Prophet's Flight from Missouri" is from L. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873).

At Far West, the Saints' new Zion in Caldwell County, Smith and Rigdon attempted for the third and final time to fulfill the 1830 revelation. The prophet soon perceived that communitarianism would not work since a majority of his followers opposed the idea. He, therefore, decided that instead the church should establish cooperative stores and businesses to be known as the "Big Field United Firms." The cooperative movement at Far West, like communism at Independence, never got beyond the initial stages of development. Latent anti-Mormon feeling in the Caldwell County area erupted into violence and forced the Saints to flee. By 1840 most Mormons had left the state for a new utopia in western Illinois at Nauvoo.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after the Mormons fled Missouri, another group of religious utopians arrived in the state. These new seekers after the perfect society were the devoted followers of a German mystic, Dr. William Keil. In Shelby and Adair counties Dr. Keil and his fellow utopians built the communities of Bethel and Nineveh, the state's most successful experiments in communal living.

The colonies' founder, William Keil, a Prussian by birth, had led a varied career as tailor, actor and medical practitioner before turning his energies to religion. After immigrating to the United States in the mid-1830s, Keil became active in the German Methodist Church in Pennsylvania. The religious practices of the Methodist Church, however, did not suit this twenty-seven-year-old religious zealot. Keil, therefore, withdrew from the church, gave up his medical practice entirely, and launched his own independ-

*Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo., 1951), II, 74-75.

<sup>8</sup> O'Dea, *Mormons*, 46; Gardner, "Communism Among the Mormons," 155; *History of Caldwell and Livingston Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis, 1886), 122.

ent church based on a literal interpretation of the Bible and Christian mysticism. After a short time he decided to affiliate with the Protestant Methodist Church and led his followers to this small but firmly established branch of American Methodism. But Keil and the Protestant Methodists could not agree on dogma and general church policies, so they parted company, thus leaving Keil and his congregation once again without church affiliation.<sup>9</sup>

Bitter toward Methodism, Keil now turned away from organized religion and became involved with utopian communism. Living in western Pennsylvania near one of the nation's largest communistic colonies, the Harmony Society of "Father" George Rapp at Economy, Keil learned of communal life and apparently liked what he saw. At the time of his break with the Protestant Methodists, dissension within the Rappist community prompted a number of its members to leave. By chance these utopians settled in Keil's hometown of Phillipsburg. Leaderless, the ex-Rappists gravitated to the Keil church. Keil, whose strong personality instilled confidence and devotion among his followers, enjoyed being a leader of men and warmly welcomed these new members to his church. The inevitable then occurred. Keil enthusiastically accepted Rappist communism although he would not tolerate Rapp's celibate principle.<sup>10</sup> He also refused to accept a written constitution like the ones Rapp and other communitarians used to govern their colonies. As William Godfrey Bek, an early student of Keil, noted: "He . . . once declared most emphatically that under no condition would he go bound and fettered by any written agreement. If a man's word was not as good as a written law, then he could and would have nothing to do with the entire project. The Bible should be the foundation of the society which he proposed to found; the Golden Rule should be its motto."<sup>11</sup> A written constitution, however, later existed, designed for those, especially the ex-Rappists, who demanded such a document. But for the most part the new utopian colonies were to be governed directly by Keil's own dictates.

In the spring of 1844, not long after Dr. Keil's conversion to communism, he sent three followers west to find land suitable for

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<sup>9</sup> William Godfrey Bek, "A German Communistic Society in Missouri," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, III (October, 1908), Part I, 54-58; Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (New York, 1875), 306-307.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>11</sup> Bek, "German Communistic Society," Pt. I, 62-63.



William Keil

*Courtesy Mrs. Robert R. Boardman  
and Paul Hendricks*

a permanent colony. The site selected proved ideal. The initial land purchase, consisting of 2,560 acres, was located in the fertile valley of the North River in northern Shelby County, Missouri. Keil and his family moved to the site in the fall of 1844 and by the next spring many other colonists had arrived. Named Bethel, after an ancient city near Jerusalem, the colony mushroomed. Within a few years Bethel's population exceeded six hundred.<sup>12</sup>

Directed by Dr. Keil, the industrious colonists of the "Society of Bethel" immediately began to cultivate their nearby farm lands and to construct the necessary buildings to carry on communal life. Charles Nordhoff, who visited a host of communistic societies in the United States during the early 1870s, described the colony.

They have a saw-mill and a grist-mill, a tannery, a few looms, a general store, and a drug-store, and shops for carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, tanners, tailors, shoemakers, and hatters, all on a small scale, but sufficient to supply not only themselves but the neighboring farmers. They had formerly a distillery, but that and a woolen factory were burned down a few years ago. . . .

<sup>12</sup> Deed Record Book D, Shelby County, Missouri, 48; *Hannibal Gazette*, October 7, 1847, quoted in *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, LIII (April, 1959), 287-288.



It has one main street . . . the brick dwellings which lined the street were substantially built, and the saw and grist mill which lies at the lower end is a well-constructed building of brick. Half-way up the main street was a drug-store, large enough I should have said to accomodate with purges and cathartics a town of twenty-five hundred inhabitants; and on a cross-street was another. . . .

At the head of the street stands the tavern or hotel, kept in the German . . . way—with a bed in the large common room, and meals served in the kitchen.<sup>13</sup>

The building, though, that the colonists took greatest pride in was their church. They spared no pains and trouble in making it the showplace of the colony. Constructed of brick and native stone and finished in black walnut, the church rested on a gentle rise overlooking the town. Nordhoff depicted its interior: "The church has a floor of large red tiles; a narrow pulpit at one end; a place railed off at the other end, where the band plays on high festivals, and two doors for the entrance of the sexes, who sit on separate sides of the house."<sup>14</sup>

The magnificent church became more than just the pride of the colonists; it served as the center for the colony's religious and social life. Twice monthly Keil preached to his followers. Since he adhered to no particular doctrine, his sermons generally exhorted members to practice the Golden Rule, to obey the Commandments and to be industrious. Dr. Keil and his followers also used their church and a large colony house known as "Elim,"<sup>15</sup> east of Bethel, as places to celebrate such colony festivals as Keil's birthday, Easter, Pentecost, the Harvestfest in autumn, and Christmas.<sup>16</sup>

As indicated previously, Keil exercised virtually total control over the life of the colony. Government was simple. Keil served as president with dictatorial powers, but he did allow four advisors, whom he selected, to aid him in making day-to-day decisions. Supposedly though, the whole community discussed any vitally important change or experiment and nothing could be done without general consent. At no time, however, did the colony deviate from Keil's point of view. As president, Keil also controlled all

<sup>13</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies of the United States*, 324-325.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>15</sup> "Elim" or "Das grosse Haus" was a large three-story colony house located one and one-fourth mile east of Bethel which for a time served as Keil's home. See William Godfrey Bek, "The Community at Bethel, Missouri, and Its Offspring at Aurora, Oregon," *German American Annals*, VII (November-December, 1909), 309.

<sup>16</sup> Bek, "German Communitistic Society," 69-70.

colony property. Technically, the title to much of the colony land, which by 1850 exceeded four thousand acres, was in the names of the three members of the 1844 purchase party. Yet Keil allotted members town lots, divided farm acreages and made all decisions involving land acquisition and disposal.<sup>17</sup>

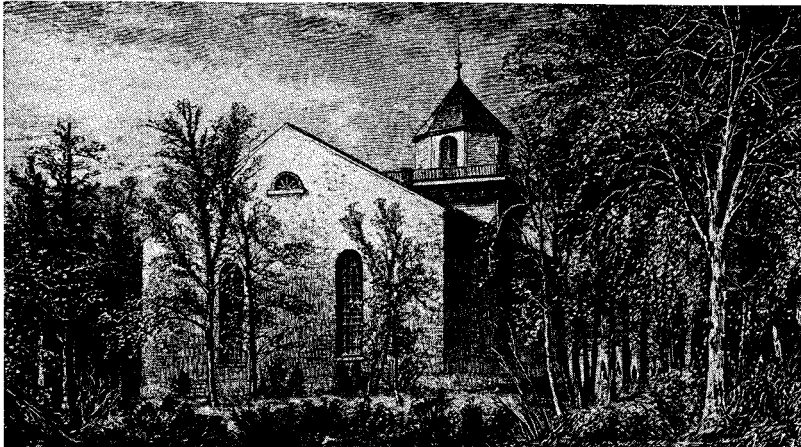
Keil, the autocrat, at first apparently alienated few if any of his followers. Bethelites seemed to enjoy communal living. Since Keil allowed marriage and couples could live together in private quarters, the celibacy problem that plagued Rapp's Harmony Society never existed in Bethel. The colony's general prosperity also satisfied members. As one early visitor noted, "The common storehouse and commissary supplied all that existence needed."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, a Keil follower commented, "The only pledge that Dr. Keil made to us was that if we would come with him we would have plenty of bread and water. He kept that pledge and more. We had clothes to wear and a good roof for our heads. We were not wealthy, but we had all that we needed and were happy."<sup>19</sup> And, unlike Missouri Mormons, Keil and his followers had excellent rapport with their neighbors. Even during the Civil War when Keil ordered a strict neutrality, Bethel's pro-Southern and pro-

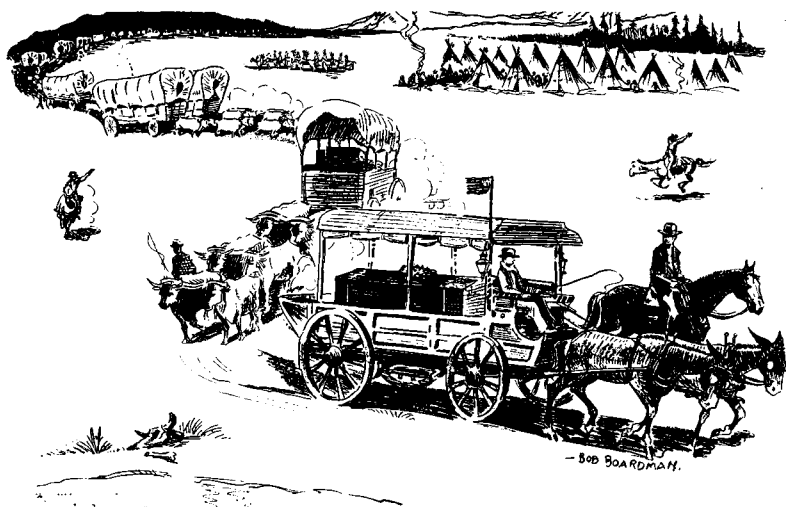
<sup>17</sup> Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies of the United States*, 310; *General History of Shelby County Missouri* (Chicago, 1911), 173.

<sup>18</sup> *Palmyra Spectator*, April 2, 1919.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Harold Dailey, "The Old Communitistic Colony at Bethel," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LII (1928), 163.

The sketch of the Bethel church appeared in Charles Nordhoff, *The Communitistic Societies of the United States* (1875).





Courtesy Mrs. Robert R. Boardman and Paul Hendricks  
 "Wee Willie's" Funeral Procession

Union neighbors as well as Confederate and Federal forces honored their neutral position.<sup>20</sup>

A major event in Bethel's history occurred in 1849. In that year Keil, believing that the advancing forces of civilization would in time engulf the Shelby County settlement, decided to establish a branch colony in a more remote region of the state. Subsequently, Keil and a fellow colonist selected a 160-acre farm on the Chariton River in Adair County. In the spring of 1850 twenty-five Bethelites moved to the new site, known as Nineveh. Here the colonists attempted to reproduce life as it existed in Bethel. Within a short period of time they purchased nearly two thousand acres of additional land, built homes and constructed a steam mill, tannery, shoeshop, blacksmith and wagon shops, and a carpentry shop. These industries, however, never proved as extensive as those at Bethel and farming became the colonists' major vocation. Even though Keil never spent much time at Nineveh, he nevertheless, kept tight control over colony affairs, through a board of three elders whom he selected. At its zenith, Nineveh had approximately 150 residents living in some thirteen buildings.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bek, "German Communistic Society," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, III (January, 1909), Pt. II, 103.

<sup>21</sup> E. M. Violette, *History of Adair County* (Kirksville, Mo., 1911), 411-417; *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Adair County, Missouri* (Philadelphia, 1876),

Continuing to worry about the encroachment of civilization, and at times dreaming of a chain of utopian communities, Keil decided to found still another colony. This time he wanted his new settlement to be in a fertile but unsettled region of the far west. So in 1854, after having sent an advance party to the Pacific Northwest to select a suitable site, Keil agreed to move to the Willapa Valley in Washington Territory. Early in the spring of 1855 Keil, along with a sizable number of Bethelites, began the trek westward.<sup>22</sup>

The journey from Bethel to Washington Territory proved to be one of the most unusual in the annals of western history. This trip fulfilled Keil's promise to his favorite son, William, that he, too, could go west. Shortly before the journey began, William died. Keil, nevertheless, kept his promise to "Wee Willie." He had his son's corpse placed in a metallic coffin filled with alcohol and loaded upon a six-mule wagon for the long funeral procession westward.<sup>23</sup> This strange act was not so much a product of Keil's mystic background as it was a demonstration of his own Christian beliefs. As one of his followers noted, "To my mind, that one thing has exerted more influence for good than all else the doctor did. It was not a pleasant task to escort his boy's dead body 2,000 miles and to have with him amid that wild and lonely country the depressing influences of his boy's remains; but it made his people think; the purpose was plain. A colonist dared not lie."<sup>24</sup> The fulfillment of his promise to William exemplified, then, Keil's credo that a man's word was his bond.

The Washington Territory site, mountainous and isolated, displeased Keil. After burying his son, he led his followers to a more favorable location in Oregon's Willamette River Valley. Here, as at Bethel and Nineveh, Keil directed the construction of a communistic community. Named Aurora after Keil's daughter, the new settlement flourished.<sup>25</sup>

Continuing his authoritarian ways, Keil refused to relinquish control over the Missouri communities. Unique to the history of American utopianism, Keil conducted the affairs of the two colonies

79; Jefferson City *Missouri State Tribune*, August 20, 1902; *Ninth United States Census* (1870), Nineveh Township, Adair County, Missouri, 6-8.

<sup>22</sup> See Robert J. Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora* (New York, 1933), Chapters 5, 10-16.

<sup>23</sup> Bek, "German Communistic Society," Pt. II, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Dailey, "The Old Communistic Colony at Bethel," 166.

<sup>25</sup> Bek, "German Communistic Society," Pt. II, 105-106.



**William Keil's Monument in  
Family Cemetery, Aurora, Oregon**

*Courtesy Mrs. A. J. F. Zieglschmid*

by letter from Oregon. By the 1860s he wanted to abandon utopianism in Missouri and unite all the brethren together at Aurora. The dwindling number of colonists at Bethel and Nineveh, however, seemed hesitant to leave Missouri and remained deaf to his pleadings.<sup>26</sup>

The death of William Keil in December 1877, brought major changes to the Missouri and Oregon colonies. Since no one with Keil's leadership ability lived in any of the three colonies, his experiment in utopian communism now rapidly began to crumble. Even before his death, the Missouri colonies, especially, had shown signs of weakening. As early as the late 1860s a number of colonists had withdrawn from Nineveh. In subsequent years Bethel, too, had lost members. They left for several reasons. Keil's increasing

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

authoritarianism and his remoteness from their daily lives displeased or even angered many.<sup>27</sup> Outside forces proved to be the major reason for depleting membership rolls at both colonies. Many colonists, mostly the younger generation, realized that their noncommunistic neighbors seemed to possess more property and apparently enjoyed a higher overall standard of living. Jacob Culler, who left Nineveh shortly before Keil's death, remarked, "There are more *opportunities* outside Nineveh. . . . A good farm is relatively inexpensive and my family will have a better life. I admire the doctor but with better times my future is with my own farm in Adair County. . . ."<sup>28</sup> When Culler departed, he, like all other withdrawing colonists over twenty-one years of age, received a share of colony property; those under twenty-one got a small cash settlement.

The crisis precipitated by Keil's death prompted a division of all remaining properties at Bethel, Nineveh and Aurora. Begun in late 1878 the liquidation became final in June 1879.<sup>29</sup> While Nineveh rapidly disappeared, most Bethelites remained in their homes, making their living either from farming or by practicing their former colony trades. One member, Jacob G. Miller, tried to revitalize the "Society of Bethel." But by 1883 his small following abandoned the scheme and divided what common property they held.<sup>30</sup>

In the same year that William Keil began his communal settlement at Bethel, another German utopian, Andreas Dietsch, launched a similar community near the small Osage County village of Westphalia. Unlike Keil's colonies, Dietsch's experiment proved to be one of the least successful of all Missouri utopian ventures.<sup>31</sup>

Andreas Anton Dietsch, born in 1807, had been a brushmaker in his native Alsace before turning his full energies to utopianism. In 1842, alarmed and sickened by social and political upheavals caused by expanding industrialization, and influenced by the writings of the French utopian communist Charles Fourier, Dietsch

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 110; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies of the United States*, 327.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in the *Nowinger Record*, April 27, 1905.

<sup>29</sup> Deed Record Book 31, Shelby County, Missouri, 1-9.

<sup>30</sup> Bek, "German Communitistic Society," Pt. II, 125.

<sup>31</sup> Although New Helvetia is the last of Missouri's religious utopian communities to be described, two other such colonies are known to have existed. The first, called the "German Socialistic Colony," had less than a dozen people. This group abandoned its utopian plans shortly after arriving in Atchison County in 1846. See *The History of Holt and Atchison Counties, Missouri* (St. Joseph, 1882), 648-649. The other group, known as the "Bible Community," was located at Plattsburg in Clinton County. While the dates

published in Switzerland a pamphlet advocating communal living as a solution to society's ills.<sup>32</sup> In *Das tausendjährige Reich* (The Millennium) Dietsch depicted the ideal society as one based on agriculture which allowed individuals to follow their own interests and abilities. All property should be held in common, thus preventing man's greed from destroying the good life. Although at times tending to show no great interest in religion, Dietsch called for his society to use the Bible as a guide to living and to have prayer and religious singing. Like Dr. Keil, Dietsch believed that men should live by the Golden Rule.<sup>33</sup>

Dietsch's humanitarianism, coupled with *Das tausendjährige Reich* and subsequent writings, attracted the attention of a small number of impoverished Swiss and German artisans and farmers. Believing that a utopian colony could be successfully established, Dietsch in March 1844, published a twelve-page pamphlet which contained the constitution and bylaws for the "Society of New Helvetia."<sup>34</sup> He then petitioned the Swiss cantonal government of Aargau for financial assistance. Dietsch expected government help since the Canton of Aargau had previously given "30 fr per head to those emigrating poor persons to whom their districts also gave aid."<sup>35</sup> A government agency, however, quickly rejected Dietsch's request.

Undaunted by seemingly unsympathetic government officials, Dietsch gathered his followers together, asked them to pool their meager resources, and began preparations for the journey to America where he would establish his "Thousand Year Kingdom." Why Dietsch selected the United States, and specifically Missouri, as the location for his utopian settlement is not clear. Perhaps he believed America to be a natural location for launching a utopian

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of its existence are not certain, it was in operation in 1879. See Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *A Russian's American Dream: A Memoir on William Frey* (Lawrence, Kan., 1965), 87-88. The large immigration of Saxon Germans into Perry County between 1839 and 1840 is sometimes mistakenly thought to be a utopian movement. While the Saxons initially pooled their resources, their communities were neither communistic nor utopian. See E. M. Lottes, "East Perry County," (1953) and "The Saxon Colony in Mo." in Garland Carr Broadhead Scrapbook, 254-255, in State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.

<sup>32</sup> George Schulz-Behrend, "Andreas Dietsch and Helvetia, Missouri," *The Swiss Record*, II (March, 1950), 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Das tausendjährige Reich* (Aargau, Switzerland, 1843), English translation, 1953, in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>34</sup> *Nebst Plan und Statuten zur Gründung von "New Helvetia im Staate Missouri in Nordamerika,"* (Aargau, 1844).

<sup>35</sup> Schulz-Behrend, "Andreas Dietsch and Helvetia, Missouri," 9, 14-15; Quotation in *ibid.*, 17.

society. Since the early seventeenth century various Europeans, including Swiss and Germans, had found frontier conditions in America ideal for colonization. Missouri was probably chosen because numerous emigrant guides and groups had popularized the state as a place for pleasant, carefree living. Furthermore, Missouri in the 1840s had large tracts of cheap and sparsely populated land, conditions ideally suited for Dietsch's New Helvetia.

On June 2, 1844, Dietsch, his two children and thirty-seven others left Switzerland for Missouri. After a long and uncomfortable journey, the band of hardy utopians arrived in New York City. From there they made their way to Pittsburgh and then to St. Louis. Upon arriving there in late August, the colonists lost no time in looking for a suitable site for their new community. Hearing that cheap but fertile land could be obtained in the vicinity of Westphalia near Jefferson City, Dietsch led an exploratory party which visited this German settlement in early September. Pleased with an offer of land from Dr. Bernard Bruns, Westphalia's founder and largest landowner, the Dietsch party quickly purchased the 363-acre tract located on the Osage River five miles northwest of town.<sup>36</sup>

The careful selection of land for New Helvetia did not insure the colony's success. Upon returning to St. Louis, Dietsch found a sizable number of his followers in revolt. Some decided that they preferred employment and the certainty of life in the city to the hardships or even death in the wilds of Osage County. Quarrels, too, over colony policies and funds prompted additional members to leave. Dietsch, nevertheless, continued with his plans to build New Helvetia. On September 14, he boarded the packet *Huntsville* along with six other adults and eleven children to return to the recently selected site.

Shortly after they had constructed a small log house, disaster struck the utopians. Overwork, lack of regular and adequate food, and polluted water made the New Helvetians susceptible to disease, probably malarial fever. Although most colonists regained their health, one member, Oswald Babler, died, leaving his large family to the colony's care. Still New Helvetia remained intact. Dietsch, a diehard optimist, believed that his followers could successfully adapt to communal living even though there were signs

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-25; Record of Deeds Book A, Osage County, Missouri, 652; *Sectional Map of the State of Missouri Compiled from the United States Survey and Other Sources . . .* (St. Louis, 1844).



Etienne Cabet



Jules Prudhommeaux, *Icarie et son Fondateur, Etienne Cabet* (1907)

of greed, egotism and laziness among those few who remained. He also held hope for the colony's ultimate prosperity. He visualized, for example, New Helvetians floating logs down the Osage and Missouri rivers to St. Louis for sale as firewood, the starting of vineyards and the building of a barrel-stave factory.<sup>37</sup>

Andreas Dietsch's plans for New Helvetia never materialized. During the winter of 1844-1845 or 1845-1846, the date is uncertain, Dietsch died.<sup>38</sup> With his death this Missouri utopian community disappeared. His daughter, Rosetta Dietsch, however, continued to own most of the colony's land until 1859.<sup>39</sup> A handful of Dietsch's most devoted followers, who continued to believe in communal living, moved to northeastern Iowa where they established a communistic settlement known as Communia. This colony, which proved more successful than New Helvetia, lasted nearly ten years and thus continued Dietsch's dream of a New World utopia.<sup>40</sup>

Missouri's first group of secular utopians arrived nearly a decade after the establishment of the state's last major religious

<sup>37</sup> Schulz-Behrend, "Andreas Dietsch and Helvetia, Missouri," 26-29.

<sup>38</sup> George Schulz-Behrend in *ibid.*, 30, says that the "date of his death remains uncertain, for it may have been in the winter of 1844-45 or 1845-46." Carl Wittke, *The Utopian Communist: A Biography of Wilhelm Weitling Nineteenth-Century Reformer* (Baton Rouge, La., 1950), 240, lists the date of Dietsch's death as "probably during the winter of 1845-6" in St. Louis.

<sup>39</sup> Record of Deeds Book H, Osage County, Missouri, 291.

<sup>40</sup> Albertson, "Survey of Mutualistic Communities," 406; Wittke, *Utopian Communist*, 240-241.

utopian settlement, Dr. Keil's Nineveh. In 1856, 180 French communists settled in St. Louis. Known as Icarians, these colonists followed the famous French utopian, Etienne Cabet.

Born in 1788, Cabet had gained fame in his native France as a lawyer, politician and writer. In 1839, after a five-year exile in England, Cabet published a popular romantic novel entitled *Voyage en Icarie* in which he described a communistic utopia.<sup>41</sup> An environmentalist like the vast majority of utopian socialists, Cabet believed that the reason men suffered was because society was unjust. If the basic social evil of inequality were abolished through a system of communal ownership, he argued, society could then be perfected.<sup>42</sup>

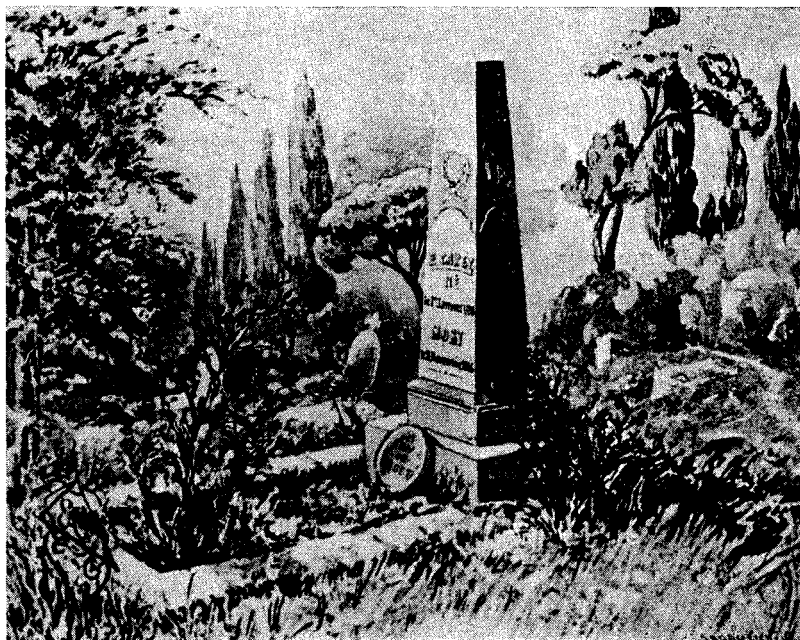
Cabet did more than dream about utopianism. Like Andreas Dietsch, he decided to bring his utopian schemes to fruition in the New World. Sixty-nine of his fellow countrymen established a

<sup>41</sup> The novel originally appeared as *Voyage et Aventures de Lord William Carisdall en Icarie, Ouvrage Traduit de l'Anglais de Francis Adams* (Paris, 1839). However, it was republished in 1840 as *Voyage en Icarie*.

<sup>42</sup> Sylvester A. Piotrowski, *Étienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie* (Washington, D.C., 1935), especially Chapters 3-4.

#### Cabet's Tomb in Holy Ghost Cemetery, St. Louis

Jules Prudhommeaux, *Icarie et son Fondateur, Étienne Cabet* (1907)



colony in 1848 on the banks of the Red River in Texas. His followers consisted largely of individuals who had experienced the ravages of early industrialization and who viewed *Voyage en Icarie* as the best guide to human happiness. A series of unfortunate incidents, however, forced the Icarians to abandon the Red River settlement and to return to New Orleans, their initial point-of-entry where they were presently joined by Cabet. Learning that the Mormons had recently abandoned Nauvoo, Illinois, Cabet decided to move his ever-increasing flock to this ready-made community. In March 1849, 281 Icarians arrived at Nauvoo.<sup>43</sup>

Although Cabet's new Illinois settlement continued to grow, all was not well. Dissension in the colony broke out in late 1855 when Cabet demanded dictatorial powers to meet a financial crisis. Shortly thereafter the colony became polarized into two warring camps, the "Cabétistes" and the "Dissidents." Being a minority the Cabétistes lost in their attempt to make their leader all powerful. Disgruntled, Cabet and his supporters left Nauvoo for St. Louis.<sup>44</sup>

Attracted to St. Louis because of the city's French heritage and beckoning opportunities, Cabet began to make preparations for the construction of a permanent colony, but suddenly after his arrival, the utopian leader died. Leaderless and destitute, Cabet's followers decided to seek work in St. Louis as tailors, shoemakers or mechanics until they could afford to purchase a suitable colony site.<sup>45</sup>

In May 1858, the Icarians purchased an estate called Cheltenham, located six miles west of St. Louis. This site had two principal advantages. Near the city, the colony's men could continue to work at their trades. Secondly, the estate included a large stone house and six smaller log structures large enough to accommodate most of the colonists. Unfortunately for the Icarians, Cheltenham contained little land, the purchase price of \$25,000 was too high, and the location proved unhealthy.<sup>46</sup> As one student of the colony noted,

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<sup>43</sup> Étienne Cabet, "History and Constitution of the Icarian Community," trans. by Thomas Teakle, *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XV (April, 1917), 221-224; *Quincy [Illinois] Whig*, March 20, 1849.

<sup>44</sup> Émile Vallet, *Communism: History of the Experiment at Nauvoo of the Icarian Settlement* (Nauvoo, Ill., n.d.), 8-26; *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, November 15, 1856.

<sup>45</sup> J. P. Beluze, *La Colonie Icarienne à Saint Louis* (Paris, 1857), 2-24.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Gide, *Communist and Co-operative Colonies* (New York, 1928), 142-143; Albert Shaw, *Icaria: A Chapter in the History of Communism* (New York, 1884), 68.

"The intermittent fever was as regular in its semi-annual visits as the appearance of spring-time and fall."<sup>47</sup>

At Cheltenham the Icarians busily began to perfect their social and industrial order. Within weeks after moving to their new estate they established the "Cours Icarien," a Sunday afternoon literary society. The program of the "Cours Icarien" usually consisted of readings from various authors' works, including those of their late leader, discussion groups, music and dramatic productions. The Icarians also opened a school for their children which included a type of kindergarten, known as the "salle d' aisle." To establish themselves economically, they constructed workshops for their blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tailors, carpenters and shoemakers. In addition to providing for their own needs, these shops did work for non-members. As a result, the Icarians earned enough money to meet their property payments as they first became due.<sup>48</sup>

Although prospering, the Icarians' Missouri utopia began to disintegrate rapidly after 1859. In that year the colony became embroiled in a constitutional dispute similar to the one that had earlier wrecked the Nauvoo settlement. The majority of the Icarians, adhering faithfully to Cabet's views that great if not absolute dictatorial powers should be given to a chosen leader, would not compromise their position and accept the minority's desire for participatory democracy. Forty-two colonists refused to accept the majority's demands and left the community. Their withdrawal proved to be Cheltenham's deathblow. In addition to the loss of these members, some of those who remained became disillusioned with communal living and decided to seek their fortunes in St. Louis.

Cheltenham valiantly struggled five years longer. The withdrawal of many skilled craftsmen drastically lowered annual revenues, thus causing the colony to fall in arrears on its mortgage payments. Aid, too, from sources in France, which had helped to sustain the Icarians since 1848, ended when the colony's plight became known. Shortly before the end, the community sent two representatives to Nebraska to find a suitable location on public lands, but the demoralized Icarians abandoned this plan. In March 1864, the few remaining utopians sorrowfully announced the official dissolution of Cheltenham.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-72; Gide, *Communist and Co-operative Colonies*, 143; Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York, 1906), 132-133;

The collapse of Cheltenham did not end secular utopianism in Missouri. In 1868 Alcander Longley, a man devoted to the cause of human perfection, organized a non-religious communal colony in Jasper County near Carthage. Although this settlement, known as Reunion, was Longley's first in Missouri, he had had a long affiliation with utopianism.

Born in Oxford, Ohio, on March 31, 1832, the son of a Universalist minister, Alcander Longley's childhood and early manhood included unique opportunities to experience utopian life. Between 1844 and 1846 he lived with his parents at the Clermont, Ohio, phalanx colony and as a teenager joined the famous North American Phalanx in Monmouth County, New Jersey. In the mid-1850s Longley even founded his own but short-lived phalanx at Moore's Hill, Indiana.<sup>50</sup> All of these utopian communities practiced communal living based on Albert Brisbane's 1840 discourse, *Social Destiny of Man*. In this work Brisbane introduced to the American people the theories of the French reformer and utopian, Charles Fourier.

The phalanx, or colony, according to the Brisbane-Fourier view, would be the ideal form of social organization. Each phalanx was designed to consist of 1,500 to 2,000 persons and was organized on a joint-stock basis with members either purchasing or earning shares and receiving dividends according to their investments. Labor, however, was usually organized in a communistic fashion with all members required to perform certain specified tasks. Many phalanx groups conducted religious services although members were often either non-religious or anti-religious. Even though differences existed between individual phalanxes, all followers of Brisbane and Fourier dedicated themselves to establishing a new social and economic order. Like many utopians, they wished to escape the dehumanizing effects of industrialism and to get relief from "boom or bust" economic cycles.<sup>51</sup>

In the late 1860s, after failing in additional attempts to establish successful phalanx-like colonies in the Old Northwest region, Longley and his wife became probationary members of the Icarian

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William Hyde and Howard L. Conard, eds., *Encyclopedia of the History of St. Louis* (New York, 1899), II, 1091.

<sup>50</sup> Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1933), XI, 389; Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopias* (Philadelphia, 1950), 56.

<sup>51</sup> Albert Brisbane, *Social Destiny of Man* (Philadelphia, 1840), *passim*; Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 21; John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (New York, 1870), 91-101.

# THE COMMUNIST.

*From Each According to His Ability--To Each According to His Wants.*

Devoted to Unitary Homes, Mutual Support, United Labor, Common Property, and Equal Rights to All.

Vol. 7--No. 12.

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community near Corning, Iowa. This utopian colony consisted of French-speaking communists who, while living in Nauvoo, Illinois, had refused to follow Etienne Cabet to St. Louis and had subsequently migrated to western Iowa. For reasons that are unclear, the Longleys withdrew after several months and moved to St. Louis. Here he began publication of a utopian newspaper. *The Communist*.<sup>52</sup>

In an early issue of *The Communist* Longley expressed his philosophy of utopianism. He noted that man could only be in harmony with himself when he acted "in unison with his fellows." He, therefore, believed that it would be necessary to reorganize society "on the basis of mutual assistance, cooperative labor and common property."<sup>53</sup> Longley's demand for common property indicates that he now had rejected the Brisbane-Fourier concept of joint-stock ownership and had accepted the basic tenets of Icarian communism.

Longley's first Missouri utopian colony, Reunion, began to take shape shortly after his arrival in St. Louis. In March 1868, he chairmanned a "community convention" which adopted a constitution for a communistic colony and called for its immediate establishment. Although only a few local idealists showed genuine interest in his utopian venture, Longley appeared optimistic about the colony's future. In April the Reunion colony, which consisted of six members, "one wagon, five work horses and two colts, a wagon load of grapevines, dwarf fruit trees and shrubbery

<sup>52</sup> Malone, *Dict. of Amer. Biography*, 389.

<sup>53</sup> St. Louis *Communist*, February 1871.

and personal baggage, etc., but not much money,"<sup>54</sup> made arrangements to purchase a quarter section of rich farm land eleven miles west of Carthage near the Center Creek Post Office.

For the next two and one-half years, the Reunion colony struggled to become a successful utopian experiment. However, internal wrangling over marriage and sexual practices, exacerbated by continual financial problems, resulted in dissolution of the colony by December 1870.<sup>55</sup> Longley and his fellow colonists sold their land and improvements, which consisted of a stable, chicken house, one-room kitchen building and an unfinished 12-by 24-foot-frame house; paid off their debts; and "had barely enough left to get away with."<sup>56</sup>

The failure of the Reunion colony did not deter Longley from founding still another utopian community. During the winter of 1871-1872 the indefatigable utopian visited the Buffalo area in Dallas County to select an appropriate location for his new "Friendship Community." Longley planned to exercise more personal control over the new colony's affairs than he had at Reunion, thereby hoping to prevent internal dissent and financial problems.<sup>57</sup>

In the spring of 1872 Longley recruited a handful of followers, including William H. Bennett, "a gentleman of some property,"<sup>58</sup> and launched his second Missouri utopian settlement. At Bennett's insistence and with his financial backing, the colonists leased a hotel, the Ohio House, and opened a general store in Buffalo. This gave them suitable living accommodations and an outlet for their corn and truck-garden goods which they raised on a nearby farm. Bennett, however, soon became disgruntled over the colony's failure to grow, and withdrew, "taking with him the hotel, the co-operative store and the forty acres of corn—pretty much all there was to the concern, except the membership."<sup>59</sup>

Although the loss of William Bennett and his financial support proved to be a severe blow to the Friendship Community, it was not a fatal one. Longley quickly raised \$500 and purchased an un-

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Hal D. Sears, "Alcander Longley, Missouri Communist: A History of Reunion Community and a Study of the Constitutions of Reunion and Friendship," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, XXV (January, 1969), 128-129.

<sup>55</sup> *Buffalo Reflex*, August 13, 1872; Yarmolinsky, *Russian's American Dream*, 16-17, 19-20.

<sup>56</sup> Sears, "Alcander Longley, Missouri Communist," 130-131.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 133; *Buffalo Reflex*, March 8, 1872.

<sup>58</sup> *St. Louis Missouri Democrat*, August 11, 1872, reprinted in the *Buffalo Reflex*, August 23, 1872.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

improved farm four and one-half miles west of Buffalo.<sup>60</sup> One visitor described the colony's new holdings as consisting of "five hundred acres—three hundred of beautiful undulating prairie, and two hundred covered with the scrubby undergrowth which, by courtesy, is called timber."<sup>61</sup> The Friendship Community, now consisting of only five members, immediately pitched a tent for temporary shelter and began construction of a 16-by-20-foot frame communal house. Since it was now July and too late to plant field crops, the utopians hoped to survive the winter months with food from a small vegetable garden and earnings from their newly established blacksmith shop.<sup>62</sup>

The colony's inauspicious beginning did not prevent Longley from either seeking new members or implementing his utopian plans. In an 1873 issue of *The Communist*, Longley discussed Friendship's status and organization:

It now has but few members in beginning but desires a correspondence and personal acquaintance with such persons as fully approve of its principles, with a view of gradually admitting others who may be acceptable. No initiation fee is required except that every member must give all they have and may obtain; but at present it is necessary for additional members to bring with them some means.

It does not interfere with the legal rights of the members in their marriage or family affairs, and all are free in their religious, political and other opinions. All the members, both men and women, have equal rights and privileges, and the business affairs of the Community are conducted in accordance with the three-fourths vote of all members by its officers who are thereby elected to serve during its pleasure.

The members all live and work together, and their entire resources, including all the property and labor of all the members, belong to the Community and are appropriated for securing mutual happiness, assistance and support of all the members.<sup>63</sup>

Depressed conditions coming in the wake of the Panic of 1873 caused Friendship's membership to increase. Unemployed artisans and factory workers, mostly from Missouri, joined the colony, seeking temporary relief from hard times. With the return of

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<sup>60</sup> Deed Record Book D, Dallas County, Missouri, 453.

<sup>61</sup> *Buffalo Reflex*, August 23, 1872.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *St. Louis Communist*, March 1873.



prosperity, however, the colony's membership rapidly dwindled. Sensing that new members could not be recruited and facing a financial crisis, Longley liquidated Friendship's holdings early in 1877. Accompanied by his family, he returned once more to St. Louis.<sup>64</sup>

Even after twice failing to establish a permanent Missouri utopian community, Longley's enthusiasm for utopianism showed no signs of flagging. In St. Louis he began preparations to launch still another Missouri utopian colony. Between 1877 and 1883 it appears that Longley tried unsuccessfully to establish a settlement, named Principia, in Polk County, but virtually nothing is known of this ill-fated utopian project.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, he did succeed in founding a utopian community near the hamlet of Glen Allen in Bollinger County.

Incorporated on November 28, 1883 as the "Mutual Aid Community," with the same constitution that had governed Friendship, the 120-acre colony attracted few members and showed no signs for potential growth. Yet the doughty utopian described the colony in his traditionally optimistic terms. Glen Allen would be a "perfect community" and the harbinger of a new way of life. And, too, the colony would in time hopefully attract "500 members and obtain \$50,000 worth of property."<sup>66</sup> Longley's description of his new utopia, however, indicates that it was more primitive than either the Reunion or Friendship colonies. Writing in *The Communist* he noted:

Our house is built of hewed logs, the front part being one and a half stories high and the back part one story, each being 20x22 feet wide, with an eight feet wide room and covered passage between them, and it has a small porch in front facing to road on the west side. We have a hewed log smoke house 10x14 feet wide, a small spring house and a hewed log barn with shed covering a space of 26x46 feet, and also a log stable with loft 14x20 feet wide.

About 25 acres of our place is in cultivation and the balance is in timber. We have ten acres of meadow, an

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<sup>64</sup> *History of Laclede, Camden, Dallas, Webster, Wright, Texas, Pulaski, Phelps and Dent Counties* (Chicago, 1889), 546-547; abstract of the Friendship Community property in possession of the present owner, C. A. Fowley, Buffalo, Missouri, checked by the author April 27, 1970.

<sup>65</sup> See Albertson, "Survey of Mutualistic Communities," 419; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 26, 1909; Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 56; Shaw, *Icaria*, 181.

<sup>66</sup> *St. Louis Communist*, September 1884, February 1885.

orchard of 40 large good bearing apple trees . . . quarter of an acre of strawberry plants, 200 raspberry bushes. . . .<sup>67</sup>

For want of membership and financial support Longley dissolved the Mutual Aid Community sometime in 1887 and returned once more to St. Louis. For the next fourteen years he remained in St. Louis where he published his newspaper, now called *The Altruist*, wrote tracts espousing his utopian plans, and sought support for his pet system of phonetic spelling.<sup>68</sup> It appears that Longley may have established another ill-fated colony in the small Randolph County community of Higbee between 1895 and 1897, but no records of its existence remain.<sup>69</sup>

Shortly after the turn of the century Longley, now a widower in his late sixties, began his last utopian community. He purchased a small tract of land for a colony site near the Mississippi River at Sulphur Springs, twenty-two miles south of St. Louis. Unable to find followers, Longley waited until 1907 before his "Altruist Community" began operations. Once again he tried to establish a utopian community based on secular communism and dedicated to the perfection of man.<sup>70</sup> The Sulphur Springs colony proved to be the smallest and most pathetic of his many utopian ventures. A reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* visited Longley in the fall of 1909 and noted that his Altruist Community consisted of "himself [Longley] and . . . an elderly woman stricken with paralysis and rheumatism, bed-ridden but enthusiastic." They lived in "an ancient weather-boarded house of two rooms, one upstairs, one down. It is unpainted. . . ." The colony also consisted of "another house, likewise unpainted, of one room. Front steps are missing. The only entrance is by way of the back door. This is the printing office."<sup>71</sup>

The Sulphur Springs community lasted only a few years. Although too old for utopian building, Longley continued to publish *The Altruist* in St. Louis. Then he moved to Chicago where he died at the home of his daughter in April 1918.<sup>72</sup> Shortly before his death, Longley reflected on his many utopian experiments. He explained his numerous failures in a succinct and insightful fashion: "I never had enough capital; people never realized that oppor-

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, December 1884.

<sup>68</sup> Bidwell, "Alcander Longley," 389; Alcander Longley, *What Is Communism?* (St. Louis, 1880).

<sup>69</sup> See St. Louis *Altruist*, March 1904. A careful search of the *Higbee Weekly News* for 1895 through 1897 revealed no mention of a Longley colony.

<sup>70</sup> St. Louis *Altruist*, June 1901, April 1907, January 1909.

<sup>71</sup> St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, September 26, 1909.

<sup>72</sup> Bidwell, "Alcander Longley," 389-390.

**William Bennett's Cabin. The structure, still standing, is located 2 miles north of Long Lane, Dallas County, Mo.**



tunities could be found in my communities; and good times caused interest in communism to wane.”<sup>73</sup>

The final phase of utopianism in Missouri began during the latter half of the nineteenth century with the rise of cooperativism. Unlike communal utopians, the cooperatives, both in Missouri and the nation, rejected the older notion that all property had to be commonly owned. Rather, these utopians argued that society could be remade simply by having community industries—“the means of production”—owned and operated in common. But like many earlier communitarians, the cooperatives despised the effects of massive industrialization and hoped to reform or even radicalize American social and economic life.

Excluding Mormon cooperative plans at Far West during the late 1830s, Missouri had two cooperative movements, the Home Employment Cooperative Company and the Multitude Incorporated. In 1873, one year after he had left Alcander Longley's Friendship Community, William H. Bennett launched his own utopian experiment. Instead of practicing Longley's communal living Bennett chose to organize a cooperative enterprise near the crossroads settlement of Long Lane in eastern Dallas County. Unfortunately, nothing is known of the operations of the “Bennett Cooperative Company,” except that it probably ceased operations in 1877 with the return of general prosperity following the Panic of 1873. Land records, however, indicate that Bennett remained in the area and acquired additional farm land as well as town lots

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in New Llano [La.], *Llano Colonist*, July 1925.

in Long Lane between 1894 and 1895. In 1894 Bennett reconstituted his cooperative venture, now calling it the Home Employment Cooperative Company, likely in response to the severe economic depression triggered by the great bank panic of 1893.<sup>74</sup>

Although information relating to Bennett's new cooperative venture remains tantalizingly obscure, two contemporary surveys, one public, the other private, gave a brief description of the community's operation. In 1901 the United States Department of Labor noted that the Long Lane cooperative's "principal object is to furnish homes and employment for its members. It is socialistic in theory and cooperative in practice and has no particular religious leanings." The report went on to describe the colony as having "180 acres and \$1,500 of other property. It has a membership fee of \$300 and at present only ten members. . . . There are a broom factory, a mill, a barber shop, and a blacksmith shop. Workers have an eight-hour day and a maintenance fee."<sup>75</sup> William Alfred Hinds, an early student of utopian movements, reported that the community planned to "build a model co-operative home, and that one thousand good members are wanted." And according to Hinds, their newspaper, *Industrial Freedom* "welcome[d] those who are ready to roll up their sleeves and work" but warned that "there are no berths for kid-glove gentry, or those who want to live off other people's labors. We are not in this enterprise for whims of any kind, but down to solid business."<sup>76</sup>

Bennett's Home Employment Cooperative Company proved to be as ephemeral as his earlier cooperative experiment. For reasons that are unknown, Bennett and his wife Emily liquidated their Long Lane holdings between 1904 and 1906 and moved to Arkansas.<sup>77</sup>

Just as William Bennett's Long Lane cooperative began to disintegrate, a group of socialists and reformers, led by the altruistic Walter Vrooman,<sup>78</sup> organized in Missouri one of the nation's most spectacular cooperative ventures, the Multitude Incorporated.

<sup>74</sup> *Buffalo Reflex*, June 6, 1873; Kent, "Co-operative Communities in the United States," 634; Deed Record Book 35, Dallas County, Missouri, 546; *ibid.*, Book 39, 376; *ibid.*, Book 34, 478.

<sup>75</sup> Kent, "Co-operative Communities in the United States," 634.

<sup>76</sup> William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities* (Chicago, 1902), 404.

<sup>77</sup> Deed Record Book 51, Dallas County, Missouri, 534-535; *ibid.*, Book 60, 320; *ibid.*, Book 61, 40; *ibid.*, Book 64, 525; *ibid.*, Book 67, 25; Letter from James D. Attebery, Osceola, Missouri, to Mrs. Dorothy J. Caldwell, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, July 1960.

<sup>78</sup> The life of Walter Vrooman is found in Ross E. Paulson's study of the Vrooman family, *Radicalism and Reform, The Vrooman Family and American Social Thought* (Lexington, Ky., 1968).



**Walter Vrooman**

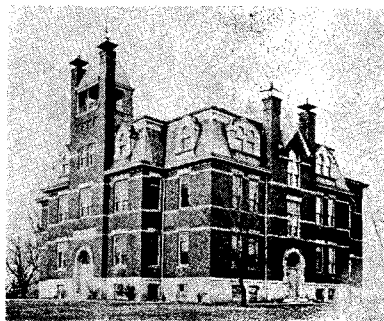
In 1900, two years prior to the official founding of the Multitude Incorporated, Vrooman and his fellow reformers converted the defunct Avalon College of Trenton, Missouri, into Ruskin College, a school patterned after the English Ruskin Hall Educational System. Founders of the new Missouri school dedicated their institution to “peaceful progress and the co-operative commonwealth.”<sup>79</sup> Ruskin students, most of whom were attracted by the college’s reform philosophy and outstanding faculty,<sup>80</sup> directly participated in cooperativism. They worked in such college industries as the carpentry shop, sewing department and the Trenton-Ruskin factory, a concern involved in canning, broommaking and wood-novelty manufacturing. These industries served a two-fold purpose: “to train the student for the practical duties of life and to enable him to earn his way through college.”<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *Catalog of Ruskin College and Ruskin Business College* (Trenton, Mo., 1902), 6.

<sup>80</sup> Ruskin’s faculty included such well-known educators as George D. Herron, Frank Parsons and Thomas E. Will. The college reached a peak enrollment of 320 in 1902.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas E. Will, “A College for the People,” *The Arena*, XXVI (July, 1901), 17.

**Avalon College, Trenton, Mo.**



Cooperativism did not stop with Ruskin College and its affiliated industries. In February 1902 Walter Vrooman incorporated under New Jersey laws the Western Co-operatives Association, which in March of that year became a Missouri-chartered corporation. Vrooman and his supporters designed their new cooperative, joint-stock corporation to grant workers and consumers alike relief from corporate arrogance and exploitation which they believed to be destroying America. Thus the Western Co-operative Association was to be a type of public or "people's trust" to combat the great wave of trust formation which followed the depression of the 1890s.<sup>82</sup>

To coordinate and to legally protect the operations of both the Western Co-operative Association and Ruskin College, Vrooman organized the Multitude Incorporated on April 9, 1902. This new organization in reality became a holding company for Vrooman's cooperative ventures.<sup>83</sup>

Under the control of the Multitude Incorporated, Vrooman's cooperative crusade in Missouri went into full swing. By the end of 1902 the Western Co-operative Association, with an authorized capital of \$500,000 had purchased a hardware store, drug store, dry goods store and two grocery stores, along with a chemical manufacturing plant in Trenton, and had acquired a tract of land in Jackson County southeast of Kansas City for a proposed model cooperative community to be called "Graffin." The name honored the late George W. Graffin from whom Vrooman had inherited \$750,000 in 1901.<sup>84</sup> The Multitude Incorporated also opened a Kansas City bank with a capitalization of \$100,000 and a general store at Liberal in Barton County.<sup>85</sup>

Unfavorable business and public reaction in both Trenton and Kansas City, which included price-cutting agreements against Multitude stores, coupled with a precarious financial situation,

<sup>82</sup> Paulson, *Radicalism and Reform*, 174-175.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 175; Earl A. Collins, "The Multitude Incorporated," *MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXVII (July, 1933), 303-306.

<sup>84</sup> *Trenton Weekly Republican*, March 27, May 8, 1902; *Kansas City Journal*, April 20, 1902; James Everett Ford, *A History of Grundy County* (Trenton, Mo., 1908), 152. The Multitude Incorporated also controlled the Kansas Western Co-operative Association of Enterprise, Kansas, the Southern Co-operative Association located in Apalachicola, Florida, and other similar ventures.

<sup>85</sup> Paulson, *Radicalism and Reform*, 176; *Liberal Enterprise*, May 9, 1902, December 25, 1903. It is not surprising that the Multitude Incorporated established a store in Liberal since the community had a large population of reformers and radicals. Founded by the life-long reformer George H. Walsler in 1880, Liberal became a haven for freethinkers and spiritualists in the 1880s and 1890s. After the collapse of the Multitude Incorporated, the Liberal store continued to operate for several years as the Liberal Cooperative Association.

resulted in the collapse of Vrooman's complex cooperative structure between 1903 and 1904. The cooperativists subsequently sold their Missouri stores and land, liquidated the bank, and moved their college to Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where it merged with Midland University to become Ruskin University in April 1903.<sup>86</sup>

Several major conclusions can be drawn concerning utopianism in Missouri. The founders and organizers of both religious and secular communities shared a common goal of building a better life for themselves and their followers. Although they were idealists and dreamers, most leaders carefully calculated and executed their plans. While the reasons for the establishment of utopian communities are readily apparent, the reasons for their failures are more complex. The principal reason for the demise of Missouri's utopian communities appears to have been the existence of greater economic opportunities elsewhere. The contentions of the American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, that the availability of free or inexpensive land and opportunities in frontier areas fostered the desire for individual gains seem particularly valid in the cases of the collapse of Bethel, Nineveh, New Helvetia, Cheltenham and Alcander Longley's settlements. Similarly, changes in economic conditions which brought good times help to explain the fall of William Bennett's cooperative ventures.

Inadequate financial backing proved to be a common handicap to many colonies, especially Longley's ventures and the cooperative movements. Other reasons for the failure of Missouri's utopian communities may be attributed to external difficulties that plagued both the Mormons and the Multitude Incorporated. A period of crisis contributed to the dissolution of various colonies, as witnessed by the deaths of William Keil, Andreas Dietsch and Etienne Cabet. And, too, internal dissension and bickering befell two of Longley's communities as well as the Icarians' Cheltenham colony.

Finally, it would seem that of the two types of utopian communities in the state, the religious settlements appear to have been the more durable form of utopianism. Reasons for this perhaps stem from the dedication of colonists to a more permanent higher goal than simple economic ends. Yet it would appear that to be successful, a utopian community needed a delicate balance of purpose and economic well-being which none, however, was ultimately able to attain in Missouri.

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<sup>86</sup> Paulson, *Radicalism and Reform*, 183.