Seven Utopias of Mid-Nineteenth-Century New England

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PART II

Northampton Association

THE Northampton Association of Education and Industry, established in April, 1842, was founded for the purpose of raising labor from drudgery to dignity. The Association recognized that life contains two kinds of laborers: those who engage in "frivolous occupations or vicious enjoyments," and those (most) who must "struggle for the bare means of subsistence." These Transcendentalists hoped, in their emphasis upon industry, to bring equality to all workers regardless of "sex, color or condition." Although a part of the same movement which resulted in the establishment of Hopedale, Fruitlands, and Brook Farm, Northampton did not institute any new religious dogma, but rather attempted to recognize "the intrinsic worth and dignity of the individual." Although based upon no single philosophy, the Association embraced the idea of personal freedom.

Located some three miles west of Northampton, in Broughton's Meadows, the Association grew from an original twenty acres, where until 1841 there had been a highly productive silk factory, to a sizable 455 acres with six dwellings, a sawmill, a waterwheel, a shingle mill, and other small facilities. This was in addition to the existing four-story silk mill, still in operation, but on a decidedly smaller ouput. Capitalizing on the fad of sericulture, the Association, in 1843, added "four new departments" to its industrial development—"Silkgrowing, Store, Accountant and Secretarial."

At one time the Association recorded a membership of 180 members. Living in crowded conditions provided by the six dwellings, the idea of communal living was a vivid reality! The original members included twenty-three whites and three blacks largely of Quaker background, with Joseph Conant, President, William Adam, Secretary, and Samuel L. Hill, Treasurer. David Ruggles, Frederick Douglass, and "Sojourner Truth" or Isabella Vanugner were the three well-known black members. Literary output was light, and the following records are now lost: Journal, Letter Book, Secretary's Book, and Account Book.

In nearly five years of existence, the Association managed to accomplish some of its goals. However, due to economic failures and some prominent membership withdrawals, the Association went bankrupt in 1846.

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Fruitlands

The most transcendental of all the New England Utopian communities was Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands. Established in 1843, two years after Brook Farm, its foundations were opposite to those of Brook Farm. Also known as "New Eden or the Con-Sociate Family," Fruitlands was located fourteen miles from Concord, Massachusetts. When purchased for $2,700 it was described as "a dilapidated farmhouse with a hundred or so acres, a few cankered apple trees, and a bit of woodland." Bronson Alcott is credited as its founder, but it was the Englishman Charles Lane who funded the experiment.

The original members of Fruitlands included Alcott, his wife, and family of four daughters, Charles Lane and his son, Samuel Bower, Isaac Hacker, Anna Page, Abram Wood, Joseph Palmer, Christopher Greene, Abraham Everett, and H. C. Wright. According to Alcott's daughter Louisa May, the burden of this community fell upon Mrs. Alcott who did the cooking and housekeeping.

Fruitlands was particularly noted for its peculiar taboos. Milk was forbidden because it deprived the calf; eggs were not allowed because they were the beginning of life; no animal, fish, or fowl was eaten or harmed in any way; in fact, animals were not used for anything—it was man's duty to keep all animals happy since they were not endowed with human intelligence. All beverages were forbidden; only pure water was drunk, because it was the only healthful drink to be found. Any food which was the product of slave production was also forbidden. Such taboos were applied to clothing and shoes—only materials that were of plant material could be worn.

A typical day at Fruitlands began at daybreak with everyone having a cold bath, either indoors or outdoors, and then enjoying a breakfast of cold water and cornmeal mush. Fruit might be included, as this was the basic food in the Fruitlanders' diets. After breakfast time might be spared for some conversation before the labors of the day began; however, there was little time for talk because all the work was done by the members' own hands. The children were educated by a Miss Ford who resided in the community for some time, although Alcott felt that teaching was, for the most part, intruding between children and the Spirit of Truth.

The evenings were devoted to intellectual activities, but such activities were to be completed before dark, since burning animal oil was another taboo. Robert Walker asserts that these evening conversations were the essential goal of Fruitlands—"time for philosophical speculation and exchange of ideas." Such conversations were held with the hope of keeping all members well informed, thus happy.

Failure of the short-lived Fruitlands has been attributed to many factors. The crops did not produce because the men simply could not do the necessary work. Many members left because of the strict regulations in diet. And some authors attribute the failure to the lack of a creed to which the members might act as individuals on a communal basis. One fact is certain; the financial backing of Charles Lane simply dwindled away, and, when he left, the community dissolved.

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Putney Corporation

Unlike the majority of Utopian-community founders, John Humphrey Noyes came from a wealthy family of high social status. His mother, the former Polly Hayes (and aunt of President Rutherford B. Hayes), brought up John, his brothers and sisters with firm Christian beliefs. It is not surprising, then, that the Putney Corporation originated as a Bible school.

The Bible school which Noyes maintained on his father's farm at Putney, Vermont, was begun in 1836. Its purpose was to teach Salvation from Sin and the Second Coming of Christ. Apparently this was a successful endeavor, and, a few years after its founding, Noyes' father died and left two additional farms to his children—this was the beginning of the Putney Corporation.

Putney consisted of approximately five-hundred acres of good farmland. Seven large houses comprised the living quarters for the members (whose number never exceeded forty). Additional buildings included a chapel, a library, a printing office, a store, and several mechanics' buildings. For six months of the year, the mornings were devoted to studies of all kinds for those who so desired. The afternoons were spent in the various labors. (Probably the remaining six months were spent farming the lands.)

After the corporation had increased beyond the immediate Noyes family (John, his mother, his two sisters, and one younger brother), to include John's new wife Harriet Holton Noyes, William H. Woolworth, John Skinner, the George Cragin family, John Miller (later made manager), the Reverend H. W. Burnham family, William Hinds, and a few others, a "Contract of Partnership" was drawn up by the members. The constituents of this contract made all property the possession of the corporation, and stated that henceforth all matters were to be considered on a mutual basis rather than individually. Only a year later (in 1845) the "Contract of Partnership" was replaced with the "Constitution of the Association of Perfectionists of Putney, Vt." A more detailed contract, it stated the objectives of Putney as "sustaining the publication of the gospel of salvation from sin" and "the social and economic advantages of union, mutual assistance and aggregate capital." The "Constitution" also provided for officers and directors of Putney, and for the procedures for the corporation; it provided the cornerstone for this community until it was dissolved in 1847.

One prominent goal of the Putney

members was to publish a daily paper which would be devoted to God and to be circulated without charge. This goal was achieved at first in the *Brooklyn Circular*, a triweekly paper whose motto read "Devoted to the Sovereignty of Jesus Christ." Eventually Putney published its own paper, *The Perfectionist*, which was also devoted to the Lord and to the strengthening of faith. A further publication of Putney was *Berean*, a book credited as the most complete explanation of Perfectionist doctrines ever published.

Putney's purpose was to learn the gospel of Christianity and to live accordingly. Although not a specific denomination, all the members held the same beliefs; one of the requirements for entrance was to profess the Christian teachings and to agree to live the Christian life prescribed by the Putney members.

Weekly revival meetings were held at which time personal criticisms were discussed. Sundays were devoted to chapel meetings attended by members as well as outsiders. John Noyes generally spoke at these meetings, and one member, William Hinds, rated them as being very successful and fulfilling the aims of the Putney Corporation.

Members of Putney came to regard themselves as chosen people of Jesus Christ—to do His work on this earth. In fact, many of them avowed that they had experienced miracles of healing, the most notable being that of Noyes' sister Harriet Hall. Such events aroused so much excitement that outsiders began to denounce the Putney Corporation; Putney was threatened with legal proceedings and their newspaper was stopped.

John Noyes and his followers were thus confronted with the decision of either dissolving Putney or fighting the accusations made against them. Their decision is puzzling; for some obscure reason these people with such strong faith decided to dissolve. On November 26, 1847, John Noyes left the Putney Corporation. Many of the members followed him to Oneida, New York and Wallingford, Connecticut where similar communities were founded. Putney is still remembered today as the first of the Perfectionist utopian communities.

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Wallingford

The Wallingford Community near New Haven, Connecticut, otherwise known as the Perfectionists, was established by John Humphrey Noyes and dedicated to a striving for moral perfection. Members of this society believed that perfection on earth would lead to heavenly perfection, so that all members might be ready for that perfect realm on the final resurrection. They believed that a sinless life was possible, though few had reached this level of perfection. A fanatical horror of form promoted a ready movement of members between Wallingford and Oneida, New York, the mother community of the two.

At its inception in 1851, the Wallingford Community consisted of "240 acres, mainly devoted to grazing and the production of small fruits" and made matchboxes, but later added fruit preserving (1858) and silk manufacturing (1866). Members erected "substantial dwellings and shops," and there was a silk factory and a printing office. The Community began in agriculture and horti-

culture but later established sawmills, a blacksmith shop (which Noyes himself tended for a time), and a lucrative manufacturing plant for animal traps.

The members were mostly New England farmers and mechanics, but there were lawyers, clergymen, merchants, physicians and teachers as well. Technical efficiency and inventiveness was maintained by the fact that many members were Yale students. Predominantly American, membership also included a few Canadians. Although there were widely diverse Protestant faiths represented, there were no Catholics. In 1874, the Wallingford membership reached forty-five, though no account provided the names of members because they frequently moved between Oneida and Wallingford.

The Wallingford and Oneida Communities made extensive use of the press, and the Yale graduates in the Community caused the *Circular*, their chief publication, to be a recognized communication for the edification of all like-minded people. Each of the Communities kept journals of their proceedings which provided much of the material for the weekly *Circular*. The only other major publication of the Community was Noyes's book *American Socialism*, printed at Wallingford in 1870. In his book, Noyes defines the Perfectionist doctrine of the community including sexual freedom. This freedom brought the downfall of the Community as outsiders forced the members to conform to the mores of the larger society.

In 1880 an unprecedented success in communal living ended as the membership neutralized and accepted the prescriptions of the outside world.

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Come-Outers

Little is known about the Come-Outers because the name applies more to an ideal than to any specific organization. Members of this movement were almost totally from Cape Cod. Much like the Wallingford group, the Come-Outers found no necessity in adhering to any organized creed or religion. They had literally "come-out" from religion's affinity with tradition and ceremony. Their belief was that God imparted divine truth directly to the individual's heart.

This "sort of family Community" as Ballou called them, was vehemently opposed to falsifiers within the organized church, especially were they abolitionists. In Henry C. Kittredge's *Cape Cod* proof of their opposition to the idea of slavery is vividly portrayed in an account of their most heated rebellion.

When the riot had ended, nothing had been settled, but what was established was the definite recognition of the Abolitionist principles of the group who called themselves the Come-Outers.

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