FROM FANCY TO FACT:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OWEN, FOURIER, CABET AND THE SEARCH
FOR EQUITY IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN SECULAR UTOPIAN
COMMUNITIES

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTERS OF ARTS
BY
KAREN MARKMAN
DR. JOSEPH LOSCO - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
NOVEMBER 2009
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
The Rise of Socialism and the Utopian Socialists.............................................. 5  
Owen......................................................................................................................... 9  
Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in America ...................................................... 20  
Cabet....................................................................................................................... 22  
Fourier.................................................................................................................... 33  
From Fancy into Fact: the Legacy of Owen, Cabet, and Fourier....................... 41  
Notes ....................................................................................................................... 46  
Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 48
Introduction

“Our ulterior aim is nothing less than Heaven on Earth, the conversion of this globe, now exhalting pestilential vapors and possessed by unnatural climates, into the abode of beauty and health, and the restitution to Humanity of the Divine Image . . .”

--Charles A. Dana, 1844

From the beginning of time, the history of political philosophy has largely been a history of the search for a perfect society. In 360 B.C. when Plato first considered the question, ‘what is justice and is it possible for true justice to be realized in a political society,’ he couldn’t have imagined that the quest for an answer would continue to confound us clear into the 21st century or that the struggle to actualize the answer would still make the news over 2,000 years later.

From the depiction of the Garden of Eden in ancient Hebrew scripture to Plato’s Republic; from Thomas More’s Utopia to the 19th century Transcendentalists; from the communes of the sixties to the eco-friendly intentional communities of the 21st century, people have been, and continue to be fascinated by the possibility of creating an ideal, truly just society: in other words, a utopia.

The term utopia was first coined in 1516 by Thomas More in his book of the same name. Utopia was a work of social commentary highly critical of the political and economic policies of Henry VIII disguised as the whimsical tale of a fantastical society far across the seas.¹ More called his non-existent civilization utopia, meaning “no place,” a play on the Greek word eutopia which means “good place.” More’s usage and purpose was to describe a non-existent place, perhaps even a non-existent possibility. But later theorists did not accept the impossibility of utopia. A more modern understanding of the meaning of the word now implies the acceptance of possibility. Robert V. Hine, author of California’s Utopian Colonies, defines a utopian society as “a group of people who are
attempting to establish a new social pattern based upon a vision of the ideal society and who have withdrawn themselves from the community at large to embody that vision in experimental form.\textsuperscript{2} Based on this definition, an argument can be made that the entire American experience has been nothing more than one huge utopian experiment played out on a grand scale. Is it any wonder then that this new world proved to be a magnet that drew so many dreamers to its shores?

From the very beginning, European settlers arriving in North America began to develop communities that often departed radically from the framework of traditional society in Europe. The fact that many of the early settlers were religious dissenters who had been persecuted for their beliefs in the old country encouraged new patterns of community organization as well as a diversity of thought and behavior throughout the English colonies that would have been unheard of in Europe. Even those who came for strictly economic reasons brought with them an openness to adaptation that allowed for the development of new institutional structures and made room for political experimentation. From the organization of the smallest self-governing communities to the eventual creation of state constitutions, new patterns of political behavior emerged.

The men who ultimately contributed to the creation of the United States Constitution in that hot summer of 1787 were an educated lot. Although they were well read in the classics and great admirers of the Greeks and Romans, they were influenced less by classical republicanism with its emphasis on civic virtue and the importance of the common good than by the natural rights philosophy of John Locke and its emphasis on the importance of the individual and the rights of the individual. Besides Locke however,
there were other thinkers and writers who influenced the Framers including James Harrington, author of a widely read utopian treatise called *Oceana*.

Published in 1656 against the backdrop of political unrest in England, Harrington’s *Oceana* was influential in the creation of several state constitutions in the early days of independence to the extent that a motion was made and seconded at the Massachusetts constitutional convention to substitute the word *Oceana* for the word *Massachusetts*. According to Joyce Hertzler in *The History of Utopian Thought*, *Oceana* was really nothing more than a written constitution in the guise of a story. Among the ideas promoted by Harrington in *Oceana* were: sovereignty of the people, an emphasis on written law, a balanced distribution in the ownership of property, free compulsory education, and religious toleration (except for Catholics and Jews). More specifically, Harrington called for elections by secret ballot, indirect election of governing officials (a precursor to our Electoral College), rotation of offices, and a two chamber legislature.

Harrington was also one of the earliest writers to focus on the importance of economic considerations and the connection of private property to political power:

“Where land is in the hands of one, there is a monarch; where it is owned by the few there is an aristocracy; where it is controlled by the people generally you have a commonwealth. Of these forms of property, land is the most important for upon it political power is usually based.” While Harrington and others like him are often overlooked in favor of bigger names, the influence of their ideas on the founders is unquestionable (John Adams was apparently a big fan). Their willingness to challenge the status quo in search of the greater social good contributed to the conditions that made America fertile ground for innovative social thinkers and reformers.
Once written, the Constitution, although assuredly a reflection of the long march of English political experience, was also a radical departure from standard operating procedure as far as governance in the 18th century. It also points to an interesting divergence in the path of reformist political thought. Although social contract theory and the proposition that the state was nothing more than a creation of the people for the purpose of providing security and well-being to its citizenry was widely accepted, the question as to whose security and well-being was of the most importance was left unresolved. Does the safety and security of the whole group trump the rights of an individual or do the rights of individuals transcend the needs of the group? It was on this point that the thinking of the founders and future political reformers diverged.

The Constitution ended up being a reflection of the influence of natural law theorists and hence supported the rights of the individual over the group. By implication it therefore also allowed for the unbridled capitalism which hand in hand with the development of new technologies created conditions that spurred later reformers to return to the classical republicanism of ancient Greece and Rome and its focus on the well being of the entire community, not just a privileged few at the top.
The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines the term *equity* as follows: “the state, ideal, or quality of being just, impartial and fair.” It further defines *just* to mean “consistent with moral right.” This then brings us back to that important question first articulated in 360 B.C.: what is *justice*? What do we mean by *moral*? Whose definition of *fair*?

Throughout the ages there were many who believed they had the answers. According to John Harrison there were one hundred and thirty identifiable communal societies in America before the Civil War\(^7\) and possibly as many or more for which no records are available. Up until the 1820’s the majority of these were religious communities designed to conform to a vision of service to God based on an interpretation of God’s word that was outside of mainstream religious experience and expectation for that time. Then the advent of industrialization and the influence of Enlightenment thinkers spawned a new breed of men who did not worry so much about recreating society to please God, but instead they concerned themselves with the creation of communities that would serve the needs of men. These secular utopianists ultimately had a tremendous impact on reformist legislation in this country through the introduction of new ideas about the true meaning of equity in a democratic society.

The political reformers of the 19\(^{th}\) century who are referred to as utopian socialists answered this conundrum by focusing on two main issues: first, the connection between political power and wealth through the distribution of property and compensation for labor and secondly, the connection between political power and citizen participation in
the decision making process. The word *utopian* conjures up the image of an idealistic dreamer scribbling down the blueprint for a perfect society that will never be realized. *Utopian Socialists* on the other hand are those who approached the answers to these questions by arguing that ownership of the means of production (property) should be more equitably distributed, that the rewards of labor should more fairly represent actual value to the community and that the decision making process should be shared by as wide a group of stake-holders as possible. The utopian socialists believed that they could transform their ideas into reality through the physical creation of communities that reflected these ideals and they actively worked to make that happen. Not to be confused with the later Marxian scientific socialists who believed in the inevitability of class struggle and revolution, the utopian socialists believed that society could be reformed peacefully through education and class cooperation.

Three men, Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Etienne Cabet are the most representative and widely known of the 19th century reformers that we call utopian socialists. Although they differed in the particulars of their solutions they had several characteristics in common. The first was that they all based their solutions on one basic assumption. They believed that man is inherently good, nature is good, and man in a state of nature is good, but that man had been corrupted by an evil environment supported by a system that allowed for unfettered greed and the unconscionable accumulation of wealth out of all proportion to deeds.

This environment that had helped to create the modern socialist movement and so influenced the thinking of the utopian socialist reformers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was a result of two convergent changes in the economic and social fabric of life
in Europe. Economically the first signs of change could be seen in England when the enclosure movement began to force peasants off their land while the near simultaneous development of new technologies in the textile industry along with the rise of steam power helped to create the modern factory system. At the same time, the theories of enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith and his invisible hand and John Locke with his natural right to property provided the justification for the long hours, dangerous conditions and lack of protective regulation that so many workers were forced to endure.

To the utopian socialists, the problems facing humankind due to this corrupted environment could be solved by actually re-creating the environment to make it more consistent with the principles of cooperation and harmony that they believed would exist in a true state of nature. As a part of this re-creation of the environment, an emphasis on education and the importance of educational opportunity became one of the basic cornerstones around which the philosophical solutions of these men would be built.

Another similarity that should be noted among these men is that while all of them were responding to the conditions created by the Industrial Revolution and influenced by the ideas coming out the Enlightenment, many of the utopian socialists were also French, and as such they were deeply influenced by the horrific events of the French Revolution and the social upheaval that followed. As a result, the prevention of a similar social catastrophe through an emphasis on the creation of mechanisms to avoid community discord became another hallmark of their reformist ideas.

In the end, by revisiting the attempts of these three exceptional visionaries to turn fancy into fact and social justice into reality, perhaps it is possible to move past the day to day hurly burly of contemporary political experience and remind ourselves of what is
sometimes easy to forget: we the people ordained our Constitution over 2 ½ centuries ago to do certain very specific things among which include, “establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility . . . promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” The utopian socialists discussed in this paper attempted to turn this larger political vision of the U.S. Constitution into literal fact through the creation of small communities specifically designed to ensure their version of justice and liberty for all. Although none of their communities survived, it is thanks in part to the legacy of their belief in the power of possibility that we the people have not yet given up on our quest to find the answer to that age old question ‘what is justice and is it possible for true justice to be realized in a political society?’
Robert Owen

The man who is widely credited with being ‘The Father of British Socialism’ would probably not be recognized as a socialist using today’s understanding of the term with its implicit expectation of political activism and class struggle. Quite the contrary. Robert Owen, a successful business man who made a fortune from his textile mills, was a dreamer who believed he could change the world through private action and class cooperation. He was a self-educated and self-made man with a deep sense of outrage at the injustice of a system that created so much wealth for a few men like himself but so much misery for the workers whose labor created that wealth.

Owen’s importance cannot be overstated. According to Max Beer in his introduction to the 1920 reprint of Owen’s autobiography, Owen was “the first British writer who grasped the meaning of the Industrial Revolution, . . .” who “saw the source and volume of the new wealth and . . . attempted to regulate the continually rising stream of production to control the inanimate machinery as well as the greed of the employers, and to educate the laboring population with a view to a peaceful readjustment of society to its new condition.” Because of his unique position as the successful capitalist owner of a large business enterprise, Owen was able to garner attention for ideas that otherwise would have fallen on deaf ears. So, who was this unlikely activist who believed he had found the answer to Plato’s eternal question? What was his answer and how did he plan to turn his vision of social justice into reality?

Robert Owen was born in Wales in 1771, the son of an ironmonger and the sixth of seven children. He was a precocious child who by his own account exhausted the
learning of the local schoolmaster by the time he was seven.⁹ He left home at the age of ten with 40 shillings in his pocket to go live with his older brother William in London where he was apprenticed to a draper. After moving several times and working his way up through several different positions and acquiring new skills along the way, he ended up in Manchester. Here with £100 borrowed from his brother he joined in a partnership to make spinning machinery. After Owen and his partners disagreed about business strategy, he left the partnership to form his own company with only three machines and two employees. He was soon making a net profit of £2 per week. In his first year he made a net profit of over £300. This evidence of his business acumen landed him a job at the age of 20 managing a large spinning mill that employed over 500 workers. He was soon made a partner by the owner and he retained this position for another four years before leaving to start a new firm called the Charlton Twist Company with the owners of two previously successful textile companies in London and Manchester.¹⁰ By this time, Owen was gaining a reputation for his unconventional views about proper factory management. His unwavering belief in the possibility of creating profit even while investing in the well-being of the workers and their families was viewed with suspicion and mistrust by his co-capitalists and entrepreneurs.

Owen’s new responsibilities for The Charlton Twist Company involved frequent travel and it was on a trip to Glasgow that his life took a new turn. It was here that Owen met Ann Caroline Dale, daughter of David Dale, the wealthy owner of one of the largest factories in Britain, the huge spinning mill in New Lanark. Although Owen’s interest in Miss Dale was reciprocated, she informed him that his lack of social standing, not to mention Scottish blood, would probably prove to be an insurmountable obstacle to their
courtship in her father’s eyes. Never one to acknowledge the possibility of an insurmountable obstacle, and knowing of Dale’s interest in divesting himself of the mill in order to pursue other interests, Owen arranged an introduction to Dale under the guise of being a potential purchaser. In partnership with several Manchester businessmen, Owen eventually succeeded in purchasing the mill in 1797. With the question of his social standing settled, he overcame the objections of her father and married Miss Dale in 1799.

Now, with the acquisition of the New Lanark Mill, Owen had the perfect proving ground on which to put his social theories to the test. During the next 24 years, Owen built New Lanark into a model for a new kind of enterprise. Not only was New Lanark visited by dignitaries from around the world who came to view Owen’s theories in action, it became the lab in which Owen refined his ideas and expanded his vision from the simple goal of improving the lives of workers in the workplace to the larger goal of improving the lives of mankind by creating a whole new society.

The foundation upon which all of Owen’s other ideas rested was that “a man’s character is formed for and not by the individual.” In his day, the common view of the poor ascribed to by the wealthy and used to justify the lack of concern that they showed towards them was that if people were poor it was because they were vicious, idle, and lazy. Owen on the other hand believed that the poor were vicious, idle and lazy because they were poor. He believed that changing the environment in which the poor were forced to live and the conditions under which they were forced to labor would change their character for the better. Owen acknowledged that changing the environment could
not take place unless one was willing to devote a huge amount of resources towards the education of the poor (as well as the rich). Education then became the basis for all subsequent environmental change and social action. Unlike later socialists whose plans for social change involved class struggle and conflict, Owen’s ideas were based on the twin themes of community and cooperation. He believed that a strong sense of community was crucial to the development of human happiness and well-being and that cross class cooperation was essential to the formation and sustainability of these communities.\(^\text{12}\)

Owen was a prolific writer and published a series of lectures through which one can trace the development of his ideas. In 1813, he published four lectures under the heading *A New View of Society* in which he first posits the general idea of creating a community of workers. Owen states that “. . . any community may be arranged . . . in such a manner as not only to withdraw vice, poverty, and in a great degree, misery, from the world, but also to place every individual under such circumstances in which he shall enjoy more permanent happiness than can be given to any individual under the principles which have hitherto regulated society.”\(^\text{13}\) Owen goes on to share in detail the steps he took at New Lanark to change the environment in which his workers lived and labored and how a community of workers was created there.

The first general ‘roll-out’ of Owen’s plan for creating whole new communities from scratch is found in his 1817 “Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Laboring Poor.” In it, Owen provides not only an explanation for his belief that the “depreciation of human labour” is the cause of the
untold number of poor in England but he provides the first practical description of the community he hoped to create as a solution to the problem.

The 1817 report describes a self-sustaining community of approximately 1500 people surrounded by anywhere from 1000 to 1500 acres of land. A detailed description of the community layout is provided complete with a supporting drawing. The community buildings are built to frame a huge rectangle surrounding a large open expanse of land. Inside these buildings on three sides are living accommodations for about 1200 people. Married couples are provided with private apartments (without kitchens as all meals are taken communally) that also have room for up to two infants. Children over the age of three are housed and educated separately by the community. Unmarried adults also sleep dormitory style on the fourth side. Inside the rectangle are public buildings including the kitchen, dining hall, lecture room, library, guest houses and all other facilities required to facilitate the maintenance of community members.

Owen envisioned a community that combined manufacture with agriculture and that would be entirely self-sustaining. The buildings required for manufacturing and agricultural work were to be located outside and surrounding the rectangle. Owen estimated the initial cost to purchase land and construct the buildings to be in the neighborhood of £96,000 which, divided by the number of people (1200) equaled an investment of about £80 per person. This investment would be paid off gradually through profits made by the community.

By 1821, Owen had developed his plan, conceived in 1817 as merely a method for unemployment relief, into a full-fledged reorganization of society. His “Report to the County of Lanark,” detailed the economic theory behind his plan as well as the economic
structure of his new society. It is in this report that Owen’s beliefs about the role of private property and the means for fairly compensating labor in a cooperative community are clearly outlined. Owen did not like the laws of classical political economics where the players buy low, sell high, pay the workers as little as possible and cut every corner in order to realize the greatest possible profit. Instead, Owen favored a return to an older and more moral “economy of cooperation”\(^{14}\) in which communities foster cooperation and use creativity and innovation to meet the local needs for production and exchange.

Owen’s theories on economics developed through simple observation of the world around him. In Owen’s estimation, a single man in a simple agriculturally based economy had been able to produce enough to sustain his family. Now, the introduction of mechanization into the process of production enabled each worker to produce a surplus of goods, far more than was needed to support a single family. This surplus had created incredible wealth and yet amid such riches, the majority of people were starving. How could this be? There were two reasons for the problem in Owen’s eyes and the first was what he called the \textit{standard of value}.

Standard of value refers to the way in which a society answers the need to place a value on goods being produced for exchange. Modern economies answer this need by using an artificial standard of value in the form of currency. According to Owen, since poverty wasn’t due to a lack of wealth or inadequate means of production the problem had to be due to an obstruction in the proper circulation of wealth and this obstruction was the standard of value – in other words, money. The real standard of value according to Owen should instead be manual labor which is “the source of all wealth and of natural prosperity.”\(^{15}\) Abolishing money and moving to a standard of value based on labor (a
value placed on the amount of labor required to produce an item for exchange) would give every item a real, unchanging, and fair value for exchange. Ultimately Owen’s attempt to put his labor based theory of value into practice at New Harmony failed but later reformers, most notably Josiah Warren with his *Equity Store* in Cincinnati, met with more success.

The second root cause of poverty according to Owen had to do with the *distribution* of value through the accumulation of property. In Owen’s economy of cooperation there would be no need for private property because “wealth could be so easily created for all, that after a comparatively short period all members obtained abundance without money and without price, and were removed from the fear of want, knowing by experience that they could and would be supplied with all things necessary for health and comfort with the regularity of the seasons.”

Owen’s optimistic beliefs rested on two assumptions. The first was that his communities would not only be self-sustaining but that they would be able to produce a large annual surplus. As it turned out, surplus creation proved to be a huge problem in Owen’s community building attempt at New Harmony. The second assumption was Owen’s childlike faith in the basic goodness of human nature and his refusal to accept that acquisitiveness or self-seeking was an inherent condition in the soul of man. In Owen’s new society there would be no need for “artificial rewards and punishments – for private property – for inequality of rank or condition . . . no desire to possess individual wealth, honour or privilege not common to the human race – no prostitution – but the most pure chastity of universal good and kind and charitable feelings.”
Although Owen’s optimism was embraced by many in his audience who shared his outrage at the general economic disenfranchisement of the masses at the hands of the few, others met his ideas with more skepticism. In 1823 when Owen gave several speeches to the Hibernian Philanthropic Society in Dublin in an attempt to generate interest in creating an experimental community in Ireland, a Select Committee of the House of Commons was created to explore the idea. Their conclusion was as follows: “. . . Mr. Owen’s plan is founded upon a principle that a state of perfect equality can be produced and can lead to beneficial consequences; your Committee consider(s) this position so irreconcilable with the nature and interests of mankind and the experience of all ages, that it is impossible to treat this scheme as being practicable . . . to conceive that any ‘arrangement of circumstances’ can altogether divest a man of his passions and frailties . . . is a result which can never be anticipated.”

Lack of support from the House of Commons helped lead Owen to the conclusion that America might prove a more practical location for the creation of his new society. In the first place land was still plentiful and cheap. In addition, Owen believed that the intellectual climate in America would prove more welcoming to his ideas. He was aware that communitarian ideas had already been successfully introduced in America. In fact, Owen had been so impressed by what he had read of the Shakers that he paid to have W.S. Warder’s A Brief Sketch of the Religious Society of People called Shakers reprinted in England. He also believed that the familiarity of Americans with Jeffersonian ideals like agrarianism and Deism would provide a more fertile testing ground for his own experimental ideas. Therefore, when Richard Flower came to England in 1824 seeking a buyer for Father Rapp’s already established community of
Harmonie located in Southern Indiana, Owen jumped at the chance. For $95,000 he was able to purchase 30,000 acres of fertile land on the Wabash River along with a complete village.

Owen arrived in America in December, 1824 to much acclaim. After giving two speeches in the Hall of Representatives about his plans for a new system of society in February and March of 1825 to many distinguished listeners including President Adams, former President Monroe and members of Congress he proceeded to New Harmony along with his son William in April, 1825. There he found well over 800 people already in residence, among them according to his son Robert, a “heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians and lazy theorists, with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in.” In fact, it is in Owen’s lack of practical planning as evidenced by this open door policy for admittance to the community that one sees the first hints of impending doom.

Upon his arrival, Owen initiated what he called a preliminary society which he intended would last for three years. Owen had at least enough foresight to understand that some groundwork had to be laid before many members would be able to accept a complete community of equality. People who wished to join the community agreed to work in exchange for the provision of food, clothing, lodging, health care and old age care. Those who wished to join the community without labor to sell could do so in exchange for the payment of a fixed yearly annuity. At the end of each year a reckoning of the value of each family’s service against their expenditures would be tallied and each family would receive proportional credit from the community profit. There seems to have been no consideration of the possibility of a negative balance.
Anyone was free to leave the preliminary society at anytime taking with them the credit balance from the last day of reckoning.

After seven weeks in New Harmony, Owen returned to Europe leaving his son William in charge. Ostensibly Owen’s main task in England was to enlist skilled tradesmen and artisans to join the community which was then unable to operate, among other things, the flour mill, saw mill, pottery shop and glaziers shop left behind by the Rappites due to a lack of workers skilled in these trades. Instead, Owen returned in January of 1826 with his famous “boatload of knowledge.” This was a boatload full of men and women with many intellectual skills but very few of the practical ones needed by the community.

Upon his return, Owen declared the preliminary society a success and proposed a new constitution based upon a complete community of property and the abolition of money. What ensued was a disaster. This new constitution was the second of what ended up to be seven constitutions established at New Harmony within the next two years. According to Everett Weber in Escape to Utopia, at New Harmony there “developed the pattern of trying one of three general solutions for most problems: pour in more money, draw up a new constitution, or make a speech.” The new constitution provided very little practical guidance and reflected a lack of careful economic planning. As seems typical of Owen, he simply believed that if the ideas were good enough, the practicalities would work themselves out. They didn’t.

The new constitution took New Harmony from a community based on the modified individualism of the preliminary society to pure communism. No longer were workers compensated for the value of their labor in credit from the community. Now
there was to be “no distinction between one man’s labor and another’s; nor any buying and selling within the bounds of the community. Each man was to give his labour according to his ability and to receive food, clothing, and shelter according to his needs.” In addition, all real estate was vested in the community as a whole and government was to be representative and by election.

Dissension arose almost immediately over points as disparate as religion, representation, equity in compensation for the value of labor, and fairness in general. In an attempt to address these issues several groups of dissenters broke away to form satellite communities with the blessings of Owen but the dream could not be salvaged. By the spring of 1827, Owen’s social experiment in New Harmony was over. Although all of the Owenite communities in America had ceased to exist by 1830, that does not mean that Owen’s ideas no longer had influence on utopian socialist thinkers or on their continuing attempts to remake the world on American soil.
The 1830’s and 1840’s was a time of upheaval and social change in America. The populist Andrew Jackson had been elected in 1828 and, unless one was Native American, the hopes and dreams of the common man moved again to the forefront of American life. Reformers like Dorthea Dix, Horace Mann, William Lloyd Garrison and Henry David Thoreau began to make themselves heard in the national debate at the same time that a great religious revival was sweeping the land.

America certainly wasn’t the only country suffering from the tremors that were a result of the clashing interests of old established elites and the more socially mobile working classes looking for an open door to a life, if not of luxury, at least one free of 15 hour work days. All around the world reformers were agitating for viable and just changes to political systems that had previously been controlled only by the land rich few.

In France, the political upheaval that followed the end of the revolutionary period in 1799 produced scores of political thinkers and social reformers who were deeply influenced by the ideals and events of the revolution. Among them were two men whose ideas would eventually influence the direction of the utopian movement in America far away from their native France. Etienne Cabet and Charles Fourier both experienced firsthand the events and effects of the revolution on themselves and their families. In addition, each man was influenced by those events in ways that eventually found expression in their political thought. Ultimately, the dreams of these two men would find
root in the fertile soil of an America that was far more open to experimentation than their politically exhausted compatriots in France.
Cabet

Etienne Cabet was born in 1788 into a moderately well off working class family in Dijon France. His father, a cooper, had been a patriotic supporter of the French Revolution and Cabet grew up surrounded by stories of Saint-Just, Robespierre, and their dreams of a glorious new republican France. For the rest of his life the mantra of the revolution Liberty, Equality, Fraternity would provide the fundamental backdrop to all of Cabet’s political thought. Sent to school by his father due to his frail constitution instead of being taught the family trade, Cabet earned first a law degree and then a doctorate by the time he was 24. He quickly joined the ranks of the political radicals in Dijon and due to his activism he found himself disbarred from the practice of law for one year. He subsequently moved to Paris where he joined the left wing Society of the Charbonnerie, a group whose goal was to overthrow the monarch and turn France into a democratic republic.

In 1830, Charles X was deposed and Louis Phillip, Duc d’Orleans was installed in his place. At first the members of the Charbonnerie, including Cabet who was appointed Procurer General of Corsica, benefited from the change in government. However within a few months, Louis Phillip had fired all the Charbonnerie from their posts and initiated secret police surveillance of all political organizations in France. Cabet gave up his post and returned to Dijon where he ran for and was elected to the National Assembly. Growing more and more disillusioned, in 1832 Cabet published a “vicious indictment“\textsuperscript{27} of Louis Phillip called History of the Revolution of 1830.
In 1833, Cabet began publishing a radical weekly newspaper called Le Populaire (The Populist) which provided him with a public forum for his views on a variety of issues and his protestations regarding what he believed to be the creeping authoritarianism of Louis Phillip. Because Cabet stridently opposed violent political action, advocating instead for communication and compromise as vehicles for change, he was allowed to continue publication of his paper even after Louis Phillip had begun to clamp down on other political opposition.

In 1834 however, Cabet finally went too far. He published two articles in Le Populaire in which he essentially accused Louis Phillip of being a murderer. This resulted in his arrest and conviction for printing material that “was an affront to the king.” He was given the option of two years in prison and a 4,400 franc fine or five years in exile. Cabet chose exile and moved with his wife and daughter to London. Here he spent his days thinking and writing in the reading room of the British Museum. According to his own account, it was while in London that he studied all of the world’s great philosophers and came to the conclusion that pure communism was the only solution to the troubles facing French society. Speaking of himself in the third person Cabet reports that “he consulted all ancient and modern philosophers and went through all the great philosophic works in the Great Library of London. He discovered with as much joy as surprise that all, with Christ at the head, admitted that Communism was the best social system.” In fact as we shall see, Cabet’s argument that communism is the only true manifestation of Christian principles became a recurring theme throughout his many publications.
It was also during this time in London that Cabet wrote his famous account of an ideal society called *Travels in Icaria*. Like More’s *Utopia*, *Travels in Icaria* is a work of fiction told as the account of a journey taken by a young Englishman to an island nation called Icaria. Icaria is the manifestation of everything “Robespierre had hoped to accomplish but failed to achieve.”\(^{30}\) It describes a society where private property has been abolished and the revolutionary goals of *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* have all been realized. Upon Cabet’s returned to France, *Travels in Icaria* became the blueprint for a political movement that by 1847 was reputed to have over 400,000 followers.\(^{31}\)

Cabet’s philosophy like Owen’s rested on the belief that the cause of evil, misery, and misfortune “is in a bad social and political organization, resulting from the ignorance, inexperience and error of Humankind from its beginning” and that “the remedy must be in a better social and political organization.”\(^{32}\) Unlike Owen however, Cabet bases his improved social and political organizational plan specifically on the guiding principles of the French Revolution combined with his interpretation of Christian pedagogy. Over and over again Cabet emphasizes the fact that his “Icarian communism is no other thing than Christianity in its primitive purity.”\(^{33}\)

Cabet was certainly not the first political reformer to connect communalism to Christian teaching. In fact, the majority of utopian communities in America prior to 1820 were religiously based and were founded on the principle of Christian communalism cited in *Acts IV*: “And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. . .” In addition, “there was not a needy person among them . . .” and “they would be distributed to each, as any had need.”\(^{34}\) To Cabet however,
Christianity was simply the justification for, not the purpose of, his vision for a new type of political community. For that we must return to the revolutionary ideals of 1789.

In the 1855 edition of Cabet’s History and Constitution of the Icarian Community, entire sections of the Icarian Constitution are devoted to discussions of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and how those principles manifest themselves in this new political community.

Cabet called Fraternity the “essential radical or fundamental principle and generator of all other principles . . .” To Cabet, the consequences of Fraternity are Equality and Liberty and the realization of those ideals could only be found in a democratic republic. Fraternity was the foundation of Cabet’s communism which with one exception was a total community of property. No individual who wished to belong to an Icarian community was allowed to hold or own private property: “This estate and capital belong undivided to the People, who cultivate and exploit them in common, administer them for themselves or their proxies, and distribute equally all agricultural and industrial products.” Unlike the residents of New Harmony who were not asked to submit to a community of goods until after a preliminary society had been in existence for one year, prospective members of the Icarian community knew in advance that they would be required to surrender all of their property to the community in addition to the payment of a fairly hefty fee in order to join. The fee called for in the Icarian Constitution was 400 francs or the equivalent $80.00 (one half of that for every child under the age of seven). In addition, prospective members had to bring their own tools, clothing and bed. Like Owen, Cabet believed that a community of goods would
inevitably generate a surplus upon which rested his optimistic expectation of the community being able to provide to each individual “according to his needs”.

The only exception to Cabet’s complete community of goods was within the individual family unit. All adult members of an Icarian community were strongly encouraged to marry. Although divorce was allowed, “each of the divorced parties will and must marry another.”38 Cabet believed that the institution of marriage was most likely to promote not just the happiness of individuals but social stability for the community as a whole. In fact, Cabet considered marriage so important that families lived in individual houses that were provided for them by the community and although members were required to share at least one meal per day communally, families were seated by family unit.

The revolutionary principle of Equality became particularly apparent in the Icarian beliefs about work and compensation for labour. In addition to surrendering personal property, another requirement for admission to an Icarian community was the willingness or ability to work. Unlike the open door policy of Owen’s New Harmony community, the Icarian Constitution provided for a careful and structured admissions process. As a result, Icarian communities were not subject to the vagaries of the “heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians, and lazy theorists with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in”39 who were complained of by Owen’s son Robert. Prospective members had to “generally follow a useful trade” and “be industrious.”40 However, all the trades and all skills were considered of equal value to the community and received equal compensation. No wages
were paid for labor. Instead, the material needs of each family were provided for by the community without regard to the profession of the laborer. The length of the work day was regulated by the community and in general, all members worked according to the same schedule.\(^{41}\) In addition, the jobs were often rotated so that no one was permanently relegated to the least desirable tasks. According to the Icarian constitution, “Equality is relative and proportional. Each has an equal right in the benefits of the Community, according to his needs, and each has the equal duty of bearing the burdens, according to his abilities.”\(^{42}\)

The revolutionary principle of Liberty found its expression through the exercise of political power in an Icarian community. Icarian communities were set up to be direct democracies with power divided into a legislature and an executive. All adult males were required to be members of the legislative General Assembly which met every Saturday. Adult women were “admitted to a separate place” in the assembly where they were expected to “give their advice on all questions which particularly concern them . . .”\(^{43}\) but they had no vote. According to Cabet, “taking part in the General Assemblies is not alone a right, but a duty; and this principle, that participation is a duty, is a great step in the practice and organization of the Democracy.”\(^{44}\) He further argues that lack of participation would render a man “indifferent to the public welfare and the happiness of his brothers . . . [and] would be an act of selfishness of the bad citizen and bad brother.”\(^{45}\)

The executive power was considered subordinate to the legislature and consisted of a Board of Managers made up of six members elected by the General Assembly to a term of one year. One of the six was the President who was elected separately by the
General Assembly. In the event of a disagreement the President had the deciding vote. The Board of Managers was responsible for the execution and enforcement of all the laws and also had the power to appoint “officers or agents who are needed to aid them in this administration . . .”

All elections in an Icarian community were public and decided by a simple majority. Written votes had to be signed. The sovereignty of the people was considered to be the fundamental principle in the exercise of political power. While the constitution of the Icarian community thoroughly outlines the political beliefs of its members, it also reflected an attention to organizational detail that was clearly lacking during the Owenite experiment in New Harmony. This being the case, how did Cabet’s plans for a communistic community of goods based on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity play out when actually put into practice?

After Cabet’s return to France in 1839 he resurrected Le Populaire as well as a new publication Le’ Almanach Icarrienne through which he continued to air his communistic views and build his Icarian movement. As the political situation in France grew more unfriendly to political agitators like Cabet, he began to consider the possibility of starting an Icarian community in America. In 1847 he traveled to England where he asked the advice of Robert Owen. Owen put Cabet into contact with an agent who represented a large Texas land company. Cabet contracted with the agent for 1,000 acres of land along the banks of the Red River. As long as Cabet’s Icarians could successfully establish homesteads by July 1, 1848, the land would be theirs for free. The impending move to Texas was not popular with many of the French Icarians who 1) felt that it was
their patriotic duty to attempt the experiment in France, 2) objected to the fact that Cabet had set himself up as the temporary dictator of the community until it was well-established, and 3) couldn’t afford the 600 franc fee to join the community.

Nevertheless, Cabet recruited an *Advance Guard* of sixty-nine men who left France on the morning of February 3rd.

From the beginning, everything that could go wrong did. Upon their arrival in New Orleans the men of the advance guard found that instead of one unbroken tract of land easily accessible by river, the land was broken up checkerboard fashion with every plot held by the Icarians surrounded by land still owned either by the land agent or the state of Texas. This was clearly not conducive to the creation of community. In addition the site was 250 miles inland from the river. Nevertheless the men of the advance guard made a heroic attempt to reach their Icaria. After running out of food, the men were beset by malaria and cholera and their doctor went insane and deserted them. Eventually the survivors struggled back to New Orleans. There they joined 480 more Icarians to wait for Cabet who finally arrived in January of 1849.

In the end, only 280 Icarians chose to stay and make another attempt. Like the Owenites before them, they purchased a ready made town that had been built and abandoned by a religious utopian community. Instead of Rappites in Indiana, the town purchased by the Icarians was in Illinois and had originally been built by Mormons who left after the death of their prophet Joseph Smith. The name of the town was Nauvoo.

The Icarians arrived in Nauvoo in March of 1849 and by the summer of 1855 there were 469 Icarians living in a thriving community complete with a “school, two infirmaries, a pharmacy, a refectory (that included the dining hall, theater, library, tailor
shop, and living quarters) . . . a saw and flour mill and a distillery” along with their own orchestra that gave regular Sunday afternoon concerts and a newspaper published in French called *Revue Icarienne.*

On the surface the Icarian community appeared to thrive. However there were political storm clouds on the horizon. According to the Icarian Constitution, the executive power made up of the Board of Directors which included the President, a position that Cabet was always elected to fill, was subordinate to the General Assembly. In reality however, Cabet made most of the decisions. Eventually dissension arose and in 1850 twenty Icarians accused Cabet of “suppression of liberties” and eventually left the community because of Cabet’s “spying and treachery.” The dissension grew worse after Cabet was forced to return to Paris in the spring of 1851 to answer a lawsuit brought against him by the Icarians who had returned to France from New Orleans. Although Cabet successfully defended himself against the lawsuit, he stayed in France to attend to his private affairs and did not return to Nauvoo until July of 1852. Upon his return, Cabet found a very different Icaria from the one he had left. Some ownership of private property had been reinstated, most communal work had ceased and the women were even wearing makeup. In an attempt to restore discipline and order, Cabet attempted to give himself dictatorial powers including the right to control the community finances, appointment power over all jobs including officers and committees in the General Assembly, and control of the community newspaper. An outright revolt ensued resulting in a near riot. In the end, Cabet along with the seventy-one men and forty-four women who continued to support him left Nauvoo.
Both sides in this dispute saw themselves as the true standard bearers of Icarianism and the true representatives of the Icarian ideal. Cabet and his loyal supporters believed that the majority who remained in Nauvoo had turned away from the spirit of Fraternity as evidenced by the laxity and individualism of their lifestyle while those in Nauvoo believed Cabet was a power hungry hypocrite to his own stated belief in the sovereignty of the people.

After leaving Nauvoo, Cabet and his supporters traveled to St. Louis intent on recreating a new and true Icaria. Unfortunately, Cabet was taken ill and died within weeks of arriving and although his followers did establish a community in nearby Cheltenham, they were beset by disease, financial problems, and internal dissension. By 1864, that community ceased to exist. Meanwhile, the Icarians remaining in Nauvoo were troubled by financial difficulties and decided to move further west to take advantage of cheap land available in Iowa. They established a new Icaria in Corning Iowa which prospered for eighteen years until internal dissension again resulted in a rift between the older Icarians who had become somewhat Americanized and the younger recent arrivals from France who wanted a return to the older, purer communistic ideals of Cabet. After some legal maneuvering, the “young” faction remained in control of the old community and also started an offshoot colony in California. Both eventually succumbed to the lure of individualistic living (aided by the financial value of the California property) and disbanded in 1887 and 1886 respectively. The “old” Icarians established themselves on property adjacent to the original Iowa community and prospered for an additional twenty years before the advanced age and infirmity of its membership finally spelled an end to the community.
The Icarian experiment was the longest lived of all the utopian socialist communities in America, spanning a period of fifty years. Carefully planned and peopled by members who shared a profound belief in the communistic ideal, the Icarian experiment managed to work for a surprisingly long time. Ultimately its demise, like that of so many other well intentioned utopian experiments in communal living, had much to do with the inadequacy of human nature when pitted against the high-minded idealism of a dream. Cabet, who like Owen believed in the fundamental goodness of man, thought that characteristics like greed, selfishness, and duplicity would disappear when the conditions that caused them were removed. The persistence of these human foibles even under different circumstances was not something he anticipated. In the words of historian Sylvester Piotrowski, “it can be safely said that Cabet loved humanity but certainly did not know it well.”

---

50
If the French Revolution began as a revolt of impoverished laborers against the idle aristocracy, it is also true that many members of the *petit-bourgeois* class, those in the middle, also lost their hard earned wealth in the chaotic upheaval. One such unfortunate man was Charles Fourier born in 1772 to a financially secure family in Besançon France. The loss of what should have been a substantial inheritance from his father had an everlasting impact on the young man who devoted the rest of his life to developing a social system that he believed would “prevent the recurrence of revolution, preserve his own petit-bourgeois class and abolish the appalling conditions of labour that were everywhere prevalent.” He worked in banking and business administration and when he finally received a small pension from his mother’s estate, he was able to devote his time to writing about his ideas and perfecting his new and more just social system. He published a number of books that outlined his ideas including *The Theory of Four Movements* (1808), *A Treatise on Domestic Agricultural Association* (1822), and *The New Industrial and Social World* (1830).

One hundred years later, the historian Lewis Mumford called Fourier a “prolific and incoherent writer.” His work displayed an eclectic mixture of ideas about the ideal future of the world that fluctuated from the brilliant to the insane: the sea will lose its salt and turn to lemonade and men will grow tails equipped with eyes are just two examples of the latter. It was ideas like those that earned him a number of critics in France and probably stood in the way of a more serious consideration of his work in that country. Fourier died in 1837 at the age of sixty-five without ever witnessing any serious attempt
at putting his ideas into practice. It wasn’t until a wealthy young American named Albert Brisbane became a disciple of Fourier while studying in France and published a book based on his social theories called *The Social Destiny of Man* in 1840 that Fourier’s ideas reached a more receptive audience in America.

Like Owen and Cabet, Fourier believed that human nature was good and inclined to “social unity, concord, and the development of all the sympathies” and that evil and injustice were the result of the “false organization of society alone.” ⁵⁴ He believed that happiness could only be realized if society was reorganized in such a way “as will permit man’s original nature to function freely.” ⁵⁵ In order to do this, the formation of voluntary associations according to inclination or skill called *Groups* (of about seven persons each) was required. Following this, five or more *Groups* would join to form a larger *Series* with each *Series* specializing in a certain type of industry. Eventually, these *Series* would combine to form what Fourier called a *Phalanx* of up to 1,800 people. A considerable amount of planning and attention to detail was devoted to the organization of the ideal *Phalanx*. Fourier envisioned these *Phalanxes* as cooperative communities ideally located on about 5,000 acres of land. Members of each *Phalanx* would live together in a common building called a *phalanstery* and could chose occupations based on their own personal interests and skills. Individuals were free to join as many *Groups* as they wished and could change occupations frequently and at will. Fourier’s ultimate hope was that the individual *Phalanxes* would eventually unite into a world *Federation* with one government and one language.

The concept of *Association* was the axis around which Fourier’s philosophy revolved. According to Brisbane, “It is only in Association, that a combination of capital
and talent . . . is possible; association consequently is the only system which the creator could have calculated upon . . .” However, he is quick to disassociate the ideal fourieristic Association from other experiments in communal living particularly those “monotonous and monastic trials which have been attempted or executed by Mr. Owen, the Rappites, Shakers, and others.” Fourier’s concept of Association in contrast resembles the modern theory of economies of scale (Brisbane called it *economies of association*) with the central idea being that “colossal profits . . . would result . . .” from the greater efficiency of “these large Associations” with a corresponding focus on the inefficiency of individual families whose conflicting interests operate against each other even as they strive to achieve the same goal.

The following example outlines the principle on which Fourier’s theory rests: “Instead of three hundred kitchens, requiring three hundred fires, and wasting the time of three hundred women, one vast kitchen with three fires for preparing the food of three different tables, at different prices, for the various classes of fortune, would be sufficient; ten women would perform the same function which now requires three hundred.” This example is instructive in that it also highlights a major point of departure between Fourier’s concept of communalism and that of Owen and Cabet. This is Fourier’s acceptance of the “various classes of fortune” and his insistence on the continued inviolability of the ownership of the private property which creates those differences.

Although Fourier disapproved of ostentatious living and hoped to eliminate the extreme disparity prevalent in the distribution of wealth produced by laissez faire capitalism, he did not believe that this disparity was the consequence of the ownership of private property. He is unequivocal on this point. According to Brisbane, “In
Association, no community of property can exist nor can any collective payments to whole families take place. An account is kept with every member individually, even with children over four and a half years of age; and every person is remunerated according to Labor, Capital, and Skill.”

To Fourier, the fundamental reason for the unfair distribution of wealth was society’s attitude toward labor. He believed that the extremes of overabundant wealth and gut wrenching poverty so evident in his day were a result of the way in which labor was compensated by society. Because most men are “constrained to toil and drudge because of stern necessity,” which results in a “perfect system of Industrial Servitude,” Fourier proposed a radical reorganization of the way in which society should approach the problem of labor and its remuneration behind the driving idea that “Industry can be rendered attractive!”

The primary way he proposed to achieve this unlikely goal was to turn the usual method for compensation on its head by rewarding the least attractive forms of work with the highest pay. At the end of each year after every individual had already been provided with food, clothing, and shelter commensurate with the worth of goods he had brought into the Phalanx, the profits of the Association would be divided among the members as follows: 5/12ths to labor, 4/12ths to capital, and 3/12ths to practical and theoretical knowledge. Unlike the standard capitalistic system which rewards capitalists with the highest margin of profit, the “professional class” with the next largest slice of the pie, and the laborers getting the least, Fourier’s system rewarded manual laborers with the largest margin of profit.
Fourier argued that his system of financial compensation would not only address the issue of equity by rewarding work that was more useful to the continued survival of the community (i.e. manual labor) with greater pay but also, by enhancing the reward for manual labor more workers would be attracted to those jobs thereby decreasing the number of hours required of each worker to complete these least attractive tasks. Fourier believed that this system would also improve the social harmony of the Phalanx by equalizing the regard for every type of occupation among the members for “if repugnance or disgust should discredit any branch of industry, the Série devoted to it, would, as a consequence, become abased, and its members considered as a vulgar class. Such a result would disturb the whole mechanism of Association.”

What about truly repugnant work (like cleaning toilets) for which no amount of money can serve as an inducement? Fourier had an inventive solution to this problem: let the children do it! His idea was that since children were drawn to dirt, (“whence comes this inclination for filth in boys from ten to twelve?”) they should be rewarded for working in it. He suggested the creation of groups of children called “Little Hordes,” similar presumably to scout packs, who would be compensated not only financially but with social recognition during community events and given special rewards to honor them for their contribution to the overall good of the Phalanx. According to Brisbane, the Little Hordes “will smother, by assumption of all filthy occupations that pride, which in undervaluing any of the industrial classes, would tend to establish anew distinctions of rank, and destroy general friendship.”
In order to achieve these lofty goals for harmonious association, what was the internal organizational structure of a Phalanx? It is in his discussion of the political organization of a Phalanx that Brisbane is at his most vague. He describes a governing body with little to no actual authority somewhat akin to the legislature of the United States under the Articles of Confederation. Brisbane describes a Phalanx headed by an “Areopagus which is a supreme council of Industry in Association. This council is composed of the higher officers of each Serie, of men of age and experience, and of the principal stockholders who have a vote for each share.” The Areopagus has the power only to suggest general policy for the Phalanx. Under the Areopagus sits a general Council “composed of stockholders, distinguished for their wealth or their industrial and Scientific acquirements” which is responsible for the day to day business of the Phalanx. Neither council had the power to order policy or coerce any individual action. In addition, one could be a member of a Phalanx without owning stock in the Association and one could be a stockholder without becoming a member. However, only members were entitled to share in the profits of the Association.

The publication of Brisbane’s Social Destiny of Man in 1840 ignited a storm of associationist activity in America. The enthusiasm of Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune and his offer to Brisbane of space for a regular column to promote the principles of Association helped to spread the fire. By the mid-1840’s numerous newspapers and journals propagating Association had sprung into existence. Eventually
over forty attempts were made to turn Association into reality in America but only three
lasted for over two years. Of those, Brook Farm Colony in Massachusetts was probably
the most well known due to the prominent people associated with it. Established in 1841
by George Ripley, a Unitarian minister, Brook Farm did not begin as a Phalanx but rather
as an experiment in communal living that reflected the popular “New Learning” now
known as Transcendentalism. The general idea was that if all men, including the
intellectuals, did their fair share of manual labor, everyone would have more time to
pursue the higher calling of culture and overall intellectualism. Originally designed so
that members shared equally in work, remuneration, and benefits, Brook Farm converted
to Fourierism in 1843 and was officially renamed the Brook Farm Phalanx in 1845.

Unfortunately but perhaps not surprisingly, the intellectual members of Brook
Farm turned out to not be very good at farming. In addition, the neighboring farmers
were unappreciative of the competition for their produce and were most definitely
uninterested in pursuing the higher calling of culture. In the words of Nathaniel
Hawthorn who spent part of one year at Brook Farm, “Oh, labor is the curse of the world
and nobody can meddle with it without becoming proportionately brutified! Is it a
praiseworthy matter that I have spent five golden months in providing food for cows and
horses? It is not so.” By 1847, the combination of an inability to financially sustain
itself along with three suspicious fires which burned down several buildings (and which
some suggested had been set by the neighbors) spelled the end of the Brook Farm
experiment.

Two other experiments with Fourierism are worthy of note. The North American
Phalanx established in New Jersey in 1843 was generally financially stable throughout its
existence and at twelve years was the longest lasting. It was disbanded in 1854 after internal dissension weakened the cohesiveness of the community and a fire destroyed its mill and workshops. A Phalanx in Wisconsin headed by Warren Chase lasted for six years and was arguably the most financially successful. It was the only such experiment that “dissolved without loss to its founders and stockholders.”74 In the end, it was “the love of money and want of love for Association . . .” that caused the demise of this Phalanx. “Their property became valuable” and “they sold it for the purpose of making money out of it.”75

Although communities purporting to be Phalanxes continued to be founded clear until the end of the century, by the early 1850’s the public enthusiasm for Association had begun to wane. Even so, Albert Brisbane never believed that the failure of the communities begun in Fourier’s name meant the failure of the idea of Association. According to Brisbane, Association had never really been tried because none of the so called American Phalanxes had organized following the very specific requirements laid out by Fourier. Still, regardless of the inability of these experimental Phalanxes to sustain themselves over the long term, Fourier and Brisbane, like the other utopian socialists, had shown a bright light on the inequalities and injustices of the new industrial system and their ideas became a vanguard for the social change yet to come.
From Fancy into Fact: The Legacy of Owen, Cabet, and Fourier

“Utopianism is not expressed in vain; sooner or later in some form, it becomes fact.”
-- Joyce Hertzler, History of Utopian Thought

In Arthur Bestor’s classic study of communitarian socialism in America, Backwoods Utopias, he suggests that it was the peculiar nature of the American political landscape that fueled the many alternative models for an ideal society that took place here. According to Bestor, “of all the freedoms for which America stood, none was more significant for history than the freedom to experiment with new practices and new institutions.” In particular, Bestor suggests that federalism, the division of power between federal and state governments created the model for legislative experimentation on the part of the states which ultimately allowed for the development of the many small communal societies that were attempted here. Without the peculiar backdrop of political place, the numerous small plays that were acted upon the American stage might never have been performed. Although the dreams of Owen, Cabet, and Fourier were all conceived in Europe, it was only in America that they could be born and it was in America that the ideas of each of these men had their greatest impact.

While Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet, and Charles Fourier all reached adulthood with a modicum of middle class means, all three found themselves outraged at a social system that allowed a select few to enjoy a life of ease and luxury while living on profits earned through the labor of others. In addition, all three men shared a profound belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. They blamed not man, but rather the social system and the institutions created by that system for the overwhelming misery that inspired their drive to create better systems. Ultimately it was their insistence that a
better system was indeed possible that became their greatest gift for it was this that laid the groundwork for future social reform in America.

In modern America the term socialist carries such a negative connotation that it is considered an insult when leveled at modern politicians. Images associated with socialism include violent political agitation, the loss of individual liberty, government takeover and threats to the right of individuals to better their lives through the financial success that is assumed to come with hard work and perseverance. It is perhaps ironic then that the fundamental concern of the socialists of the 19th century was this very same right of individuals to benefit from the profits and by extension the wealth, earned by the sweat of their own brows.

Accumulation of wealth and a life free from want for all was the common goal of these socialists. Owen, Cabet, and Fourier each saw the unfairness of a system that distributed profit solely to the owners of the means of production. Although the response of Owen and Cabet was to remove ownership from the hands of one and place it into the hands of all while Fourier left the ownership of property in individual hands, all three recognized the importance of shifting profit into the hands of the labor that created it instead of allowing it to remain solely in the hands of the capitalist who only supplied the opportunity.

By redefining the terms through which wealth could be acquired and shared, a corresponding shift in our understanding of social class and the entitlements associated with the upper half is also implied. Owen, Cabet, and Fourier all recognized that education was one of the principle vehicles for maintaining the status of the upper classes. Their insistence on the importance of education for all members of the
community was intended as a level that would allow for more equitable and thereby harmonious relationships within the community. By moving away from unearned and unshared entitlements, these men were prodding their audience to move away from the unbridled individualism and competition associated with laissez faire capitalism and towards a new meaning of community.

The 19th century America that opened its doors to social experimentation by radical thinkers was a society that heretofore had allowed wealth to remain in the hands of the propertied classes and largely kept the political decision making there as well. Owen, Cabet, and Fourier all advocated broadening the base of political participation not just by class but also by gender. All three to varying degrees recognized the importance of the contributions of women to society and saw the need for their inclusion in the political process. According to Brisbane, “Nature made [woman] the equal of man and equally capable of shining with him in industry and in the cultivation of the arts and science . . .”77 This connection of the socialist movement these men helped to create with the quest for gender equality that continued clear into the 20th century was natural given the attempts of the socialists to broaden the field of political participation by breaking down the exclusionary barriers created by class.

Did this quest to expand the opportunity for political participation extend to issues of race? For the two European transplants it did not. In fact, in a speech given on April 25, 1825 to the people of New Harmony, Owen declared the society open to all “except persons of color.”78 Cabet’s exclusionary policies had less to do with race than with the idea of French-ness. All of the business of the General Assembly at Nauvoo was conducted in French and while non-French speakers were not prohibited from joining the
community, Cabet made it clear that in order to be a good citizen and participate in the General Assembly, learning French ought to be a priority.79

Only American born Brisbane tied his attack on wage labor to the efforts of abolitionists to eradicate slave labor. Brisbane devoted an entire chapter of Social Destiny of Man to “Servitudes of labor and abolitionism.” According to Brisbane, the grounds for disagreement between North and South could not be resolved because both sides were arguing about different things: “religious zeal in the North” as opposed to the “spirit of property in the South.”80 He argued that “the root of evil is in our incoherent system of industry” and that the problem “cannot be met and solved by present means; it requires those of Association and Attractive industry.”81

It can be argued that the collapse of the small experimental communities based on the theories of these men was inevitable. Although they each set the optimal size for a successful cooperative community to be no more than around 2,000 souls, it was this small size that spelled the doom of each. The smaller the community, the more personal the decisions became and the more sway individual personalities had over the community at large. Internal dissension is a common theme. According to one contemporary observer in New Harmony there was “too much democracy – the community was talked to death.”82 However, while the dream was unable to withstand the impact of human character on a small scale, many of their ideas were absorbed into the fabric of the larger civic experience of the United States. The impersonal nature and larger size of the institutional structure already in place allowed for the institutionalization of the best ideas of the utopian reformers: universal suffrage, humane workplace management and the
importance of education for all were themes that were eventually incorporated into the evolving reality of American life.

From the influence of the Utopian Socialists of the early 19th century to the Progressives of the later 19th century and the New Dealers of the 20th century, the American experience has been a long journey towards a society much closer to the vision of the original founders than most people ever believed was possible. Without the dreams and actions of men like Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet, and Charles Fourier the privileges and rights associated with American life today might never have become reality.
In his 1946 book *Nowhere Was Somewhere*, Arthur Morgan argued that More’s *Utopia* was actually based on ancient Incan society in Peru. Although Pizarro did not reach Peru until almost 15 years after More published *Utopia*, Morgan provides numerous arguments in defense of his thesis that More had access to information from earlier Portuguese explorers.

According to Owen in his autobiography, he had read *Robinson Crusoe*, *Pilgrims Progress*, *Paradise Lost*, and Rollin’s *Ancient History* all before the age of 9 (pg. 4). The high opinion in which he held himself is also made apparent by his mentioning (several times) that he was the favorite of everyone in town and how as a child he only had to be corrected one time.

“Father” George Rapp was the leader of *The Harmony Society* a religious group that left Germany and came to America due to persecution. They eventually settled in Indiana but in 1824 they decided to return to Pennsylvania.

In the Illinois community the workers rose to reveille at 6:00 a.m. and all the men downed a shot of whiskey before reporting to work. (Sutton, pg. xxxii)
41 Ibid, pg. 264
42 Ibid, pg. 269 - 270
43 Ibid, pg. 270 - 271
44 Ibid, pg. 264
45 Sutton, “Critical Introduction,” pg. xxxi - xxxiii
46 Ibid, pg. xxxiv
47 Ibid, pg. xxxv
48 Piotrowski, Etienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie, pg. 140
49 Holloway, Heavens On Earth, pg. 134
50 Mumford, The Story of Utopias, pg. 118
51 Webber, Escape to Utopia, pg. 187
52 Brisbane, Social Destiny of Man, pgs. 2 & 3
53 Mumford, The Story of Utopias, pg. 118
54 Brisbane, Social Destiny of Man, pg. 36
55 Ibid, pg. 29
56 Ibid, pg. 349
57 Ibid, pg. 35
58 Ibid, pg. 353
59 Ibid, pg. 109
60 Ibid, pg. vi
61 Ibid, pg. 354
62 Ibid, pg. 444
63 Ibid, pg. 445
64 Ibid, pg. 450
65 Ibid, pg. 56
66 Ibid, pg. 355, 356
67 Ibid, pg. 353
68 Holloway, Heavens on Earth, pg. 142
69 Trahair, Utopias and Utopians, pg. 49
70 Webber, Escape to Utopia, pg. 180
71 Holloway, Heavens on Earth, pg. 152
72 Ibid
73 Bestor, Backwoods Utopias, pg. 1
74 Brisbane, Social Destiny of Man, pg. 6
75 Podmore, Robert Owen A Biography, pg. 293
76 Cabet, History and Constitution of the Icarian Community, pg. 275
77 Brisbane, Social Destiny of Man, pg. 97
78 Ibid, pgs. 98 and 100
79 Webber, Escape to Utopia, pg. 154
Bibliography


Brown, Paul. Twelve Months in New Harmony: Presenting a faithful account of the Principle Occurrences which have taken place there within that period; interspersed with Remarks. William Hill Woodword, Cincinnati, 1827


Claeys, Gregory and Sargent, Lyman Tower. The Utopian Reader, New York University Press, New York, 1999


Harrison, J.F.C. Quest for a New Moral World; Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America, Scribner, New York, 1969

Harrison, J.F.C. “Robert Owen’s Quest for a New Moral World in America,” Robert Owen’s American Legacy, Donald E. Pitzer, editor, Indiana Historical Society,
Indianapolis, 1972

Harvey, Rowland Hill. Robert Owen, Social Idealist, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1949

Hertzler, Joyce Oramel. The History of Utopian Thought, Cooper Square Publishers, New York, 1965

Hine, Robert V., California’s Utopian Colonies, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966


Mumford, Lewis. The Story of Utopias, Buni & Liverwright, New York, 1922


Owen, Robert. A Discourse on A New System of Society; As Delivered in the Hall of Representatives of the United States, In the Presence of the President of the United States, the Ex-President, Heads of Departments, Members of Congress, &c. on the 7th of March, 1825, Gales & Seaton, Washington, 1825


Owen, Robert. *The Life of Robert Owen, Vol Ia.* (this is the appendix and collection of his writings referred to in his autobiography), Effingham Wilson, London, 1858


Pitzer, Donald E. *Robert Owen’s American Legacy*, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1972


