

AMERICA'S  
COMMUNAL  
UTOPIAS

EDITED BY DONALD E. PITZER

FOREWORD BY PAUL S. BOYER



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FOREWORD

America's *Communal Utopias*, a welcome and much-needed book, brings into sharp focus a hitherto ill-mapped stretch of American social-history terrain. In some respects, of course, fragments of the story told here are already well known. As long ago as 1944, after all, Alice Felt Tyler published her engaging and readable account of many of these groups—along with much else—in a popular work called *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War*. Most Americans probably know something about the Shakers; many have visited restored Shaker settlements or admired reproductions of Shaker furniture. Thanks to the composer Aaron Copland, the Shaker song "The Gift to Be Simple" has become almost as familiar—not to say clichéd—as the dour farm couple immortalized by Grant Wood in *American Gothic*.

Many, too, have heard of John Humphrey Noyes and his Oneida community, around which swirl titillating (and wildly distorted) tales of sexual experimentation and "free love." The word "phalanstery" echoes dimly in the penumbra of some Americans' cultural awareness. Brook Farm is remembered, too, for its connections with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Amana Colonies of Iowa are a major tourist attraction, their name preserved in a line of appliances found in many American homes. Historians and antiquarians keep alive the memory of Robert Owen and his utopian New Harmony venture in Indiana. In more recent times, "hippie" communes and various communal ventures loosely linked to the amorphous New Age movement have attracted attention—sometimes admiring, often puzzled and disapproving.

In short, when the American communal tradition is remembered at all, it tends to be in a confusing and disjointed fashion, as free-floating bits of cultural ephemera. Isolated communities or movements are rarely seen as

comprising a distinctive historical phenomenon whose ideological underpinnings, organizational strategies, and complex interconnections can be studied systematically and traced over time. Though in recent years insightful studies of specific movements have appeared, interest in the hundreds of utopian communities that dot the American past (and present) has in general flourished more among antiquarians and local-history buffs (who deserve high praise for preserving endangered sites and saving crumbling records) than among social historians.

Apart from the tendency toward fragmented rather than comprehensive attention, other reasons for the paucity of serious scholarly consideration of these communal ventures might be suggested. Is not the "communal" impulse vaguely unpatriotic? Have not Americans from time immemorial, as Alexis de Tocqueville and many others tell us, prided themselves on their individualism, preferring the open road, the remote log cabin, or at most the isolated nuclear family, to the constraints of more complex social organizations? When Huck Finn takes off alone for "the territory" at the end of Mark Twain's novel, is he not acting out an impulse buried deep in the American breast? This aspect of the national mythology has perhaps also stood in the way of Americans' fully coming to terms with the communal strand of their history. Even the word itself, with its unsettling similarity to "communism," has heightened the sense that this is a vaguely alien phenomenon, best confined to the periphery of American social history and Americans' sense of national identity.

Marxist and radical historians, meanwhile, have dismissed these communal experiments as the definitive example of romantic "Utopian" socialism, the dreamy movement whose only historical interest lies in its role as the forerunner of its revolutionary, "scientific," and allegedly non-Utopian successor, Marxian socialism. Labor historians have tended to emulate Norman J. Ware, who as long ago as 1924, in *The Industrial Worker, 1840–1860*, viewed the utopian communities, especially those modeled on the ideas of the French visionary Charles Fourier, as a middle-class diversion from the serious business of trade-union organization and working-class consciousness raising.

For a variety of reasons, then, American utopian communities have not fared well at the hands of historians. Arthur Bestor made a promising interpretive beginning in the early 1950s, but his work found few successors.<sup>1</sup> Textbook references tend to be superficial, treating these movements (if at all) in a catch-all chapter on "antebellum reform" and evaluating them in bland terms reminiscent of Alice Felt Tyler's patriotic conclusion in 1944 that while these communities failed, their ideals nevertheless entered "the mainstream of

American life . . . , contributing their share to the democratic philosophy of the New World."

In reality, of course, these often marginalized and patronized movements arose from basic human needs and impulses. All human populations, including Americans, display the tendency to come together in extended social groups. Indeed, as Donald Pitzer reminds us in his introduction, the communal impulse seems encoded in the genetic makeup of nearly all life-forms. The much-celebrated, much-vilified "American individualism," while it no doubt offers one key to understanding the national character, has always been balanced by a powerful affiliative drive drawing men and women into religious congregations, fraternal lodges, ethnic organizations, sports clubs, reform groups, mutual-improvement juntas, professional societies, civic associations—and communal ventures. As Michael Fellman noted in his 1973 work *The Unbounded Frame: Freedom and Community in Nineteenth-Century American Utopianism*, the tension between freedom and individualism, on the one hand, and social commitment and submission to true authority, on the other, is a central dynamic in American history. In one sense, indeed, the intentionally formed communities examined in *America's Communal Utopias* merely represent a particularly strong manifestation of a much more pervasive social process.

The communitarian impulse can hardly be claimed as uniquely American. Few things are. Indeed, the ideological and social antecedents of many of the groups considered in this volume lay in Europe. But American society, with its comparative lack of hierarchy, freedom from the weight of tradition, and openness to social innovation, has historically provided a particularly congenial environment in which communal experimentation could flourish.

From the days of the Puritans to the latest California commune, the impulse to form highly cohesive communities knit together by a common ideology and a shared vision of social harmony has been a constant in American history. While communalism enjoyed its greatest efflorescence in the 1820–50 era (with a second wave in the post-1960 years), it has never been absent from the American experience.

Yet, surprisingly, American historians have had difficulty making sense of the nation's utopian tradition—a difficulty mirrored in the profession as a whole. As Frank E. Manuel wrote in 1965 of the many Utopian communities that have arisen in the history of the West, "Their full collective story has not yet been told, despite the availability of individual accounts." When this movement found its historian, he concluded, assessments of its significance would surely be amended in important respects.<sup>2</sup> The three decades that have

elapsed since Manuel wrote these words have seen the publication of a number of monographic studies and histories of specific movements—some of them excellent<sup>3</sup>—but the comprehensive work that he envisioned remains unwritten.

The historians who have collaborated on *America's Communal Utopias*, many of whom are active in the Communal Studies Association, have taken a major step toward filling this gap in the historical literature. The work represents a significant advance in viewing this phase of American social history comprehensively and highlighting its central contours.

The scholars represented here respect the uniqueness and rich diversity of the various communities and movements they examine, but they are also sensitive to the continuities and commonalities that come into focus as one looks at these movements broadly rather than in isolation. In these essays on many different utopian communities and movements, one can recognize both their individual differences and their family resemblance.

The essays also illustrate the chameleon-like adaptability of the communal impulse. Over a span of three centuries, this mode of social organization has served the needs of German Pietist sects, millenarian visionaries immersed in Bible prophecy, religious perfectionists, sexual reformers, secular ideologists searching for alternatives to the emerging urban-industrial order, and a host of spiritual seekers from theosophists to devotees of various Eastern gurus. Taken together, these histories add up to a rich tapestry of American social experimentation.

*America's Communal Utopias* moves beyond earlier studies in the breadth of its coverage, including not only the comparatively well known communities rooted in the German Pietist or English dissenting traditions, but also communities founded by Roman Catholic monastics, impoverished Jewish immigrants, and destitute African Americans coping with the Great Depression. Further, as Donald Pitzer notes in his introduction, the work challenges the dismissive “forerunner” interpretive model and the simplistic “success/failure” dichotomy of some earlier studies. The social historians represented here assess these movements on their own terms and view them from a developmental perspective in which communalism may be embraced by a group for a period of time and then yield to another mode of social organization.

This is not by any means a ramble down some arcane byway of American social history. These communities tell us much about the culture that spawned them and the time periods in which they arose. These efforts to devise radical new forms of social organization illuminate the fears and issues of their day. While these ventures attracted relatively few active participants, and while from one perspective they seem on the margins of American soci-

ety, the concerns they addressed and the goals they sought resonated far more widely.

The men and women who planned these communities, and the thousands who joined them, are at last beginning to find their place in American history. The contributors to *America's Communal Utopias* have made a major contribution to this process.

Paul S. Boyer

## Notes

1. Arthur E. Bestor Jr., *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663–1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950) and “Patent Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships between Social Reform and Westward Expansion,” *American Historical Review* 58 (1952): 505–26. For further discussion of the historiography of American utopian communities, see Paul Boyer, “A Joyful Noyes: Reassessing America's Utopian Tradition,” *Reviews in American History*, March 1975, pp. 25–30, and “Association Forever: A New Look at the Fourier Movement,” *Reviews in American History*, March 1992, pp. 35–40.

2. Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. xiii.

3. See, for example, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), by Carl J. Guarneri, also a contributor to this volume.

## PREFACE

This book has two purposes. The first is to make available to students and general readers the stories of America's historic communal utopias in clear and concise form based on the latest scholarship. The second is to present communal utopias from the perspective of "developmental communalism." This developmental approach places communal groups in the broader context of the movements and historic circumstances that create, change, and sometimes destroy them.

Public and scholarly interest in communal utopias increased dramatically in the decades after the sunburst of communes founded by the youth movement of the 1960s. The creation of thousands of communal havens to escape the Establishment and to build Utopia raised pressing questions about the benefits and dangers of living communally. Most of these could be answered best by an examination of the historical record. Therefore, historians and scholars from a wider variety of other academic disciplines than ever before became attracted to the study of utopian communalism. These students of communalism have enjoyed greater access to historical documentation and to information from practicing communitarians than any previous generation of researchers. They have used these advantages to produce new analyses of the many forms, purposes, and results of communal usage from ancient times to the present.

This anthology became possible, if not imperative, as a product of the burgeoning of such recent scholarship. The growth of knowledge reached a critical mass by the 1990s through the interchange of ideas occurring in publications, networks, and meetings. Three organizations arose after 1975 to facilitate the sharing of communal and utopian information by means of conferences, journals, and newsletters: the National Historic Communal Societies Association (NHCSA) (begun in 1975 and renamed the Communal Studies Association [CSA] in 1990), the Society for Utopian Studies (1976), and the

International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) (1985). The NHCSA/CSA grew out of the first annual Historic Communal Societies Conference in New Harmony, Indiana, in November 1974. This meeting was sponsored by the history department of Indiana State University in Evansville (now the University of Southern Indiana [USI]), which had granted me a leave of absence the previous spring. During this leave, I visited numerous historic and contemporary communal sites in the United States and Europe and made the contacts from which the New Harmony meeting became possible. It was my privilege to represent the university and New Harmony on the conference planning committee with others who became active in the NHCSA: Ronald Nelson of Bishop Hill, Illinois; Karen Platz-Hunt-Adams of Bethel, Missouri; and Daniel Reibel of Old Economy Village in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. The second annual Historic Communal Societies Conference that met in November 1975 in the restored Shaker Village at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, witnessed the formal organization of the NHCSA. By 1976 the Center for Communal Studies, for which I was named director, was established by Indiana State University in Evansville (USI) as NHCSA headquarters, a clearinghouse for information and an archival repository. In the meantime, interaction of scholars on communal themes progressed on other fronts. Sociologist Ruth Shonle Cavan, who attended the meeting at which the NHCSA was founded, had organized a Conference on Communes: Historical and Contemporary the previous April at Northern Illinois University. She guest edited the papers from that gathering in the *International Review of Modern Sociology* 6 (Spring 1976).

In 1976 another professional organization, the Society for Utopian Studies, sprang from a meeting called by history professor Merritt Abrash at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He and English professor Arthur O. Lewis of Pennsylvania State University were leading founders. Several of us who attended the early utopian and communal meetings took the opportunity to begin the ICSA in 1985 during the International Conference on Kibbutz and Communes directed by historian Yaacov Oved at Yad Tabenkin in Eyal, Israel. Elected executive director of the ICSA headquartered at Yad Tabenkin, Professor Oved has organized triennial conferences in Scotland, the United States, and Israel. Also important in bringing together communal scholars from various disciplines was political scientist Charles Redenius of Pennsylvania State University at Erie. In the 1980s he introduced a track of sessions on utopianism and communitarianism at the annual meetings of the Popular Culture Association.

Developmental communalism, the theoretical framework for the essays in this book, grew from provocative seeds of thought sown by Madeline Roemig during a 1981 conference at the Inspirationist Amana Colonies in Iowa. After

my paper "Phases of American Communalism," Roemig, a community descendant, asked why I had indicated that the Amanas no longer fit into communal history after 1932 when the Inspirationists abandoned strict community of goods. In essence, she said, "We are still a community. We still share common concerns. We still care deeply for one another. We still practice the faith of our religious movement. We still worship together. We still have an Amana Society."

At that moment my mind was not open to the developmental process she understood by experience. I could not then conceive that in the seven Amana villages I was witnessing the postcommunal phase of a living religious movement. After its German origin in the eighteenth century and migration to the United States in the nineteenth, the Inspirationist movement had adopted common property in 1843 to satisfy specific needs. After nearly a century, in 1932 its members had just as consciously decided to abandon their imitation of first-century Christian communism in order to adjust to new circumstances. They were realistically permitting their movement to continue its developmental process in other organizational forms. Perhaps unwittingly, they were following the pattern of structural adjustment seen when the early Christians themselves, as well as the later Moravians, Mormons, and others, stopped requiring the sharing of property. The Inspirationists had shown the vitality of innovative decision making that I would later term "developmental communalism."

In 1983 my first visit to the Jewish communes known as kibbutz in Israel began to help me clarify the developmental process at work within movements that chose to organize communally in response to needs. Before me stood communal settlements that served as Jewish sanctuaries begun since early in this century by the socialist Zionist movement that helped secure an independent Israel by 1948. I began to understand that movements sometimes find communal, cooperative, and collective organizational structures attractive during a formative stage for the strength, solidarity, and security they offer while the group reaches hopefully toward an ultimate secular or religious objective. Yet in 1983 I found kibbutzim in different stages of development. Some were just forming while others were pondering whether they had fulfilled their basic national purpose and could now abandon the disciplines of communal living even though they treasured kibbutz fellowship, equality, and other benefits. I wondered whether the larger Zionist movement was still viable as a driving inspiration or had lost its identity to the communal form and communal objectives of its own creation, the kibbutz. Could the two now be separated? Had communal living become an end in itself, maybe the new objective? If the last were true, I was concerned whether the kibbutz faced the

withering trend that had beset the movements that sacrificed their identities to the communal and other disciplines they had adopted in an early stage of development. The Shakers, Harmonists, Zoarites, Keilites, and Janssonists came readily to mind.

Coincidentally, Madeline Roemig of Amana and I both attended the 1985 International Conference on Kibbutz and Communes at the Yad Tabenkin in Israel. After a session in which she spoke about the Amana Colonies, she fielded a standard question: "Why did the Amana Colonies fail?" As she had done for me in 1981, Roemig quickly explained that the Amana Colonies had not failed. They were still functioning communities, and their Inspirationist religious movement was still very much alive. By that time I already had become convinced enough of the validity of the developmental communalism concept to mention it in an earlier meeting of the NHCSA. Now, when I introduced the idea following Roemig's comments, I discovered that this developmental approach seemed to open new avenues of understanding and to stimulate significant interest.

Developmental communalism as described in the introduction and illustrated in the essays of this book builds on these early insights as supported by subsequent investigation and the refinements provided by the shared wisdom and critical comments of academic colleagues and current communitarians. In its present form, developmental communalism rests on three assumptions. First, communal living is a generic social mechanism available in all ages to all peoples, governments, and movements. Second, communal structuring usually is adopted in an early stage of development (or during a crisis) because of the security, solidarity, and ease of experimentation it promises. Third, communal arrangements that are not adjusted over time to changing realities or abandoned altogether for organizational strategies more compatible with long-range objectives may contribute to the decline or demise of the original movements, governments, or peoples that chose them. In actuality, then, developmental communalism suggests that double jeopardy may confront all communal utopias. If movements that found them eventually make needed adjustments away from communal living, the communes dissolve. If movements embrace communal living as a "permanent" structure or tenet of faith, the resulting rigidity of discipline may cause the stagnation or death of the movements themselves and, thus, their communal units.

The understanding and encouragement of many colleagues and communitarians assisted me in formulating the developmental interpretation. My close associate in the NHCSA/CSA and Center for Communal Studies, sociologist Charles Petranek, encouraged me to pursue my earliest conceptions of a developmental hypothesis regarding communal groups and would not let me

quit until I researched the idea further and stated it publicly. My late friend Charles Redenius gave me the opportunity to present my first paper completely devoted to developmental communalism at the Popular Culture Association meeting in Atlanta in 1986. Several contributors to this book and I have discussed examples of developmentalism in communal history on panels at NHCSA/CSA conferences and at one meeting of its Pacific Coast Chapter. Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson permitted me to test the developmental concept with a broader audience in an address to a plenary session at the ICSA meeting at the University of Edinburgh in 1988 and published it as "Developmental Communalism: An Alternative Approach to Communal Studies" in their *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience* (1989).

I am particularly grateful for the theoretical observations of Jonathan Andelson, Albert Bates, Joe Peterson, Don Janzen, Timothy Miller, Michael Cummings, Elizabeth Schoenfelder, Allen Butcher, Dan Questenberry, Yaacov Oved, Carol Jean Rogalski, Marjorie Jones, Thomas Askew, Jon Wagner, Mildred Gordon, and Robert Brown. Kibbutz members and scholars at meetings at Yad Tabenkin, Harvard University, and New Lanark, Scotland, shared their critical perspectives. To the contributors to this book who ventured to test developmental communalism against the experience of the movements about which they know best, I express special appreciation. Beyond all the exposure, critiques, and testing, however, any errors and gaps that remain in the developmental communalism approach remain my own.

The possibility of editing this volume derived from opportunities for which I am grateful. As the first president of the NHCSA in 1975 and 1976 and its executive director from 1977 to 1993, I was privileged to become acquainted with the people, places, and resources essential to producing such an anthology. The consistent, enthusiastic support of administrators of the University of Southern Indiana for my historical research and direction of annual conferences expressed itself in the creation of the Center for Communal Studies as a base of operation under my direction in the history department and School of Liberal Arts. Especially helpful have been Social Science Division Chair Daniel Miller, School of Liberal Arts Dean James Blevins, Academic Vice-President Robert Reid, and Presidents David L. Rice and H. Ray Hoops. USI archivist emerita Josephine Mirabella Elliott, the predominant inspiration for my work, has been a storehouse of ready information on her beloved New Harmony. Current archivist Gina Walker has tirelessly pursued needed references. A USI faculty research grant relieved many expenses in producing the manuscript. The authors themselves gave unsparingly of their time and expertise to summarize their understandings of the history and development of the utopian movements and communal initiatives in which they are specialists,

while generously agreeing that virtually all the proceeds will accrue to the CSA. My special thanks go to Jonathan Andelson and Lawrence Foster for tendering seminal suggestions on textual form and content throughout the project. Donald Janzen, Timothy Miller, and the late Lawrence Anderson contributed freely from their own research to the appendix listing of communal utopias founded by 1965. Geoph Kozeny, Dan Questenberry, Laird Schaub, Harvey Baker, and other members of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) shared their extensive knowledge of contemporary intentional communities. The FIC itself permitted me to guest edit its Winter 1985 *Communities: Journal of Cooperation* as a survey of historic communal groups in essays by several of the authors featured in the current anthology.

Since this volume is addressed particularly to students and general readers, I found it useful to have the comments of the students in my communal history seminar, who read most of these essays in early drafts. I am especially grateful to Leigh Ann Chamness, my graduate student who collaborated with me in preparing Karl J. R. Arndt's essay for publication after his death. In the Center for Communal Studies and School of Liberal Arts offices, Mary Hayden oversaw the constant flow of drafts and proofread copy while Kim Reddington, Cheril Griswold, and Mary Jane Schenk assisted with word processing.

Professor Paul Boyer of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin gave invaluable support and counsel from the inception of the project and contributed the foreword. Barbara Hanrahan, Sian Hunter White, David Perry, and Ron Maner of the University of North Carolina Press kindly encouraged and wisely guided the editorial and production efforts. Stephanie Wenzel expertly copyedited the manuscript. My wife, Mariann, graciously endured yet another of my academic ventures while our daughter and son, Tonja and Don, volunteered their usual unbiased criticism of my writing.

The authors affectionately dedicate this work to the memory of distinguished historian Arthur E. Bestor Jr. In 1950 he set the standard for scholarship in the communal field with his *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829*. Although his main focus later moved away from communitarianism, Professor Bestor encouraged the communal studies of others and endorsed the work of the NHCSA. He participated in NHCSA/CSA meetings in Aurora, Oregon, and Tacoma, Washington. In 1988 Professor Bestor returned to New Harmony to give the address commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Workingmen's Institute Library, where he had cataloged much of the Owenite collection during his communal research in the 1940s.

On May 14, 1988, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Southern Indiana in recognition of his scholarly achievements. It was my privilege to read the citation honoring Dr. Bestor on that occasion and on that of his receipt of the Distinguished Scholar Award of the Communal Studies Association during its Aurora, Oregon, conference in 1991. The opening era of communal scholarship ended with the death of Arthur Bestor at his home in Seattle on December 13, 1994. With this anthology we open the next era in his honor.

Center for Communal Studies  
University of Southern Indiana  
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## Introduction

Communal sharing is as old as the earliest known fossils of living things on earth and as new as electronic communities in cyberspace. More than 3 billion years ago, stromatolite bacteria formed colonies to protect all but those on their exteriors from deadly ultraviolet sunlight. “This may have been a potent early impetus for a communal way of life,” according to Carl Sagan in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. “Some died that others might live. . . . We glimpse the earliest lifeforms on Earth and the first message conveyed is not of Nature red in tooth and claw; but of a Nature of cooperation and harmony.”

In the dim recesses of the past as human beings began to develop, they also discovered the security, solidarity, and survival offered by cooperative and communal organization. Bands, kinship groups, and tribes, then and now, display certain features of community of goods and shared responsibilities. In their formative stages and during crises, many religious, social, and political movements have chosen the benefits and discipline of tight-knit communal cooperation. Essenes and the early Christians lived communally. Social reformers have urged building self-contained communities. Governments sometimes have encouraged or forced citizens to live communally, as in Soviet collective farms, New Deal homesteads, and Maoist Peoples Communes.

Since the youth movement and hippie communes beginning in the 1960s, communal sharing has burgeoned into new forms to serve new purposes. Traditional communes of common property or joint-stock agreements have been outnumbered by cooperatives, collectives, and land trusts. Intentionally formed communities now satisfy needs not only for religious commitment and social reform, but also for alternative lifestyles, cohousing, private

Those who occupy its peaceful dwellings [at New Harmony, Indiana], are so closely united by the endearing ties of friendship, confidence and love, that one heart beats in all, and their common industry provides for all.

GEORGE RAPP, *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man*, 1824

It is of all truths the most important, that the character of man is formed FOR—not BY himself.

ROBERT OWEN, *The Crisis*, 1833

schooling, medical care, and retirement opportunities. Most recently, electronic communities have emerged as individuals with common interests communicate with, fraternize with, and assist one another on computer online networks.

Like communal sharing, utopian dreaming has ancient origins and modern applications. Early Western civilization imagined paradise and the ideal state in the Hebrew account of the Garden of Eden, Plato's *Republic* of the fourth century B.C., and the Zoroastrian and Christian conceptions of a transcendent heaven of splendor. In 1516 Thomas More coined from one of two Greek words, *Outopia* (no place) or *Eutopia* (the good place), the ambiguous term *Utopia* as the title for his now-famous book. Before and since the Protestant Reformation, Christian sects have anxiously awaited the peace and plenty to follow an imminent second coming of Christ. America itself beckoned like a utopia to such millennialist sectarians and to a myriad of secular dreamers. Meanwhile in England, Sir Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* offered a vision of a scientific promised land in 1627, and James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana*, printed in 1656, explained how political control could be balanced ideally among monarchical, aristocratic, and popular factions. Utopian socialists in eighteenth-century Europe imagined ways to alleviate the human hardships that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. Their plans for rebuilding society inspired movements led by generations of socialists and communitarian socialists. In the United States the perfect system labeled "Nationalism" by Edward Bellamy in his influential 1888 novel *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* was Socialism under a more palatable name. American Theosophists by the late nineteenth century and many counterculture youth during the Vietnam War era drew upon Eastern thought for their ideal models of society and enlightenment.

From the perverted, private utopias conceived in the minds of Stalin, Franco, Hitler, Mussolini, Mao, Hussein, and others sprang the *dystopias* of our century in the ugly forms of imperialism, war, racism, and the Holocaust. Alarmed by such nightmares and the growing nuclear threat, "New Utopians" appeared in America. Since the 1980s their New Age movement has called for personal and planetary transformation. They champion cooperation, human values, common sense, holistic health, consensus decision making, and worldwide networking for peace. By the 1990s virtual reality through computer imaging was being declared the ultimate frontier for human social experimentation by one of its pioneers, Jaron Lanier. In the artificial cyberspace of this revolutionary technology, he claims, our species has its first opportunity to create entirely new environments and interactions for good or ill—utopia or dystopia.

When utopian dreams and communal sharing combine, they produce communal utopias, the intriguing social phenomenon discussed in this book. In this type of close-knit community much or all property is shared communally. Members join voluntarily and live in rural settlements or urban housing partly isolated and insulated from the general society. They share an ideology and lifestyle while attempting to implement the group's ideals. As microcosms, they form unique and instructive social laboratories.

Communal utopias formed by the religious and social movements examined in this volume are often described by a host of rather confusing terms. You will meet their "communists" and "communitarians" in "communes," "communal societies," "utopian communities," "millennial sects," "socialist phalanxes," "monasteries," and "cults." Regardless of the names used to describe and deride them, communal utopias have been a perennial topic of fascination for generations of Americans—both scholars and the general public. Until recently, however, much of this popular interest has been relatively unsophisticated, sensationalistic, or sentimentalized. Communal experimenters have often been portrayed simply as colorful "freaks," psychological misfits outside the "mainstream" who inevitably "failed" because they allegedly were out of step with American life and values. Although some sensitive scholarship has appeared, communitarians have more commonly been presented as if they were primitive natives in some exotic foreign culture or mindless actors in a circus side show. Even the early Marxists, whose communistic efforts often have been misleadingly equated with those of the communitarians, criticized such groups as visionary and impractical "utopian socialists" only frustrating the coming revolution of the proletariat. Seldom have the efforts of those who chose the communal way been judged on their own merits, from the point of view of what *they* were trying to accomplish and how well they succeeded from their *own* perspectives. Seldom have such groups been considered effectively as an important element in the larger American social and cultural context of which they were a part.

This book reflects the new thrust of scholarly interest in alternative communal living that has emerged during the past three decades. This new scholarship continues to convey the lively and colorful character of American utopian communal experimentation. But it also goes beyond this surface level to look more closely at what these groups themselves were trying to do, how they went about doing it, and how well they achieved their goals before, during, and sometimes after a communal stage. The dynamic developmental process at work within their founding movements rather than merely a static snapshot of their communal days has been the major focus of these newest studies. This new scholarship also has emphasized the relationship of alterna-

tive communal experiments to the larger fabric of American society. Precisely because tightly organized intentional communities frequently exaggerate characteristic American values or carry particular concerns to their extreme logical conclusion, they may more vividly highlight issues easily overlooked when studying more conventional movements. In particular, utopian communal experiments suggest new perspectives on the distinctive character of American religion, ethnicity, and social reform, as well as on our particular sense of national mission.

The roots of self-conscious communal experimentation in America go back to the early days of English colonial settlement. Both the Pilgrims who settled Plymouth Colony in 1620 and the Puritans who started their "Bible Commonwealth" in Massachusetts in 1630 expressed many concerns that continued to influence later American immigrants' efforts to create cohesive communal societies. As a survival technique, the Calvinist Pilgrims of Plymouth accepted the discipline of community of property from 1620 to 1623. The Puritan effort to set up a "City upon a Hill" that would serve as a model for the transformation of both English and American society has been particularly influential and studied by scholars. The Puritan village, which historian Kenneth Lockridge characterized as an example of "Christian closed corporate utopian community," and the larger Bible Commonwealth of which it was a part, served, in the words of historian Perry Miller, as an "ideal laboratory" through which the process of social change can more readily be studied than in larger and more complex social contexts. Despite the original "declension" and loss of a sense of the intensity of the original Puritan vision of their ideal society, the idealism of these early formative experiments has continued to influence the development of America's distinctive sense of mission. Although this book contains no essays on the heavily studied Pilgrims and Puritans, who developed more readily beyond their communal sharing phase than some later groups, their experience nevertheless set an important precedent for later communal experiments assessed in this volume.

Closely connected with such early efforts to create planned societies in America was the millennial religious emphasis associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition of a coming Messiah. Millennialism, the idea that Christ, the Christian Messiah, will come a second time and reign on earth during a thousand-year "Millennium" of peace and redemption, abundance and wealth, justice and happiness, is one of the most potent ideas in Western civilization. The primary sources of millennialism come from biblical prophecies, especially those of Daniel, chapter 2, and Revelation, chapter 20, and statements in the Gospels about Jesus' return to establish a kingdom of heaven on earth. Of special significance for those religious movements seek-

ing to recapture the faith and social structure of early Christianity is the passage from Acts 2:44-45, which states, "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need." The fact that millennial and communal passages can be interpreted in a variety of ways has encouraged a proliferation of blueprints for the ideal society by those who are convinced that a corrupt existing system will eventually be replaced by a new and more just order under divine guidance. Eventually many of these millenarian religious hopes also came to influence secular social reformers, such as Robert Owen, in their parallel efforts at achieving a more equitable social order.

Let us look briefly at the different communitarian experiments discussed in this book and some of their unique stories. European immigrants who followed the Pilgrims and Puritans to colonial America and who chose to be even more fully and lastingly communal also had millenarian religious roots. The earliest of these were the ill-fated Dutch Mennonites of Plockhoy's Commonwealth, founded in 1663 by Pieter Plockhoy and completely destroyed the next year as the English captured the Dutch settlement on the Delaware River, possibly selling some of the communal settlers into slavery. Several decades later Jean de Labadie, "the second Calvin," founded a community, like several he had already started in Europe, at Bohemia Manor in Pennsylvania. Thinking Christ would descend from the skies in 1694 and that they would never die, forty celibate male scholars from Europe calling themselves The Woman in the Wilderness, created an engrossing community near Germantown, Pennsylvania. The Ephrata Cloister of the Seventh Day Baptists, now an inviting historic restoration in Lancaster County, thrived for decades after 1735, known for its calligraphy, manuscript illumination, and choral music. And the Moravian Brethren, the first Protestant denomination, following Jan Hus, who had been martyred in 1415, and later Count Nicholas Zinzendorf, developed a successful plan for settling their converts in America by means of communal "congregation towns" organized temporarily under a "general economy." Known for their music, schools, and painting, extensive Moravian towns can still be seen at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Old Salem in present-day Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The best-known religious movement to espouse communal living as a tenet of faith in nineteenth-century America was the group popularly known as the Shakers. Originating in a small revivalistic English sect that its leader, Ann Lee, led to America in 1774, the Shakers by the 1830s had attracted some 4,000 members to more than sixty celibate community units called "families" in nearly twenty different agricultural settlements from Maine to Indiana. Controversial in the nineteenth century because of their lively religious ser-

vices, requirement of celibacy, and veneration of Ann Lee, the movement survives after more than 200 years in one small community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine. Many know the Shakers today because of the prominent role they accorded women; the simplicity of their furniture, textiles, and other products; and their original songs such as "Simple Gifts."

Among the many immigrant groups of Germanic and North European origins who turned to the security of communal economies in illustrious and long-lived communities in America, this book focuses on four: the Harmonists, the Inspirationists, the Janssonists, and the Hutterites. Patriarchal Pietist George Rapp came to America in 1803 followed by more than 1,000 disciples awaiting the cosmic Harmony to follow Christ's return. As members of the celibate Harmony Society, they built Harmony and Economy (now Ambridge), Pennsylvania, and New Harmony, Indiana, where guides still bring their dreams, music, and crafts to life. Often still mistaken for Amish, the residents of the seven closely welded Amana villages in Iowa are Inspirationists, a separate German sect led for a time, like the Shakers, by a woman of special spiritual gifts, Barbara Heinemann. In 1932, nearly a century after adopting community of goods out of necessity in New York, the Inspirationists sought to preserve the vitality of their movement by returning to the freedom of private ownership. The famous Amana brand of refrigerators is one result. A third communal group from Europe highlighted here are the Swedish Separatists who followed the controversial Pietist Eric Jansson to their communal haven in Bishop Hill, Illinois, where they nearly froze upon arrival in 1846 and later saw their leader murdered by a disgruntled convert in 1850. The thriving Swedish town survived Jansson's death in communal form for more than a decade. Visitors now enjoy its lingering Swedish flavor, faithfully restored buildings, and famous paintings of Olof Krans memorializing the Bishop Hill colony and its citizens.

Today the most numerous and economically successful of all the Germanic immigrant communitarians in America, the Hutterites, trace the roots of their Anabaptist movement to 1528 in the Austrian province of Tyrol. One of their earliest leaders, Jacob Hutter, was burned at the stake in 1536 in a martyrdom later suffered by thousands of Hutterites. Following the first-century Christian example, these pacifists united in communal *bruderhofs* for their own protection against persecution in several European countries. In 1874 800 fled to the Dakota Territory from Russia. Four hundred of these chose to continue their tradition of community of goods and now have branched into some 400 Hutterite colonies with 40,000 residents spread across the western United States and Canada. Hutterites are closely related religiously to the Amish, who nevertheless found the secret of building their sect on the spirit

of community without demanding community of property. Further, where the Amish use modern technology very selectively, the Hutterites enthusiastically embrace the latest devices from complex farm machinery to fax machines. A few areas of the United States and Canada have passed laws limiting Hutterite acquisition of land because of the opposition of commercial farmers who have difficulty competing with them. The Hutterites share this challenge with the Amish as well as the threat of erosion from within presented by the influx of secular culture.

Two millennial groups that originated in America also engaged in some of the most controversial and interesting communal experimentation. The largest and most successful of all the millennial movements that have had a strong communal emphasis is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as Mormons. Although the rapidly growing Mormon community is the fifth largest denomination in the United States today, with some 9 million members worldwide, when begun by Joseph Smith in the 1820s and 1830s the group was violently attacked because of its distinctive theology, binding communal commitments, and practice of polygamy—all of which were important components in its successful colonization of Utah and adjacent areas of the Great Basin during the last half of the nineteenth century. Far smaller, but even more unorthodox, were the Perfectionists of John Humphrey Noyes at the Oneida Community in New York. For more than thirty years they practiced a form of birth control, a group marriage misleadingly described as "free love," and, eventually, a unique eugenic experiment. Public reaction to such radicalism forced Noyes to flee into Canada, while his perfectionists reorganized in 1880 as a joint-stock corporation that still produces the well-known Oneida silverware.

In addition to the religious millenarian groups, three important secular communitarian efforts of the nineteenth century are assessed in this volume. Robert Owen, the wealthy cotton manufacturer who set up his model factory town at New Lanark, Scotland, dreamed of a New Moral World based on education, science, and the communal living he learned from the Shakers and Harmonists. He organized an influential but short-lived community at New Harmony, Indiana, during the mid-1820s that inspired twenty socialistic communities elsewhere in the United States and Britain. In the early 1840s, American followers of the reclusive French social theorist Charles Fourier began the formation of dozens of generally short-lived, joint-stock communities called "phalanxes" devoted to ameliorating problems suffered by rapidly industrializing America in the wake of the panic of 1837. And in the late 1840s, Etienne Cabet, the French social reformer and author of the utopian novel *Voyage en Icarie*, came to America to plant a series of Icarian communities that

expanded for nearly fifty years from Texas and Illinois to Missouri, Iowa, and California.

Almost all previous studies of communitarians in America, influenced by the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant biases that have pervaded American scholarship until recently, have ignored the role of the numerous Roman Catholic, Jewish, and African American communal associations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The essay on Roman Catholic monasticism in America provides, for the first time in a book of this type, a synoptic overview of the Catholic religious orders, encompassing hundreds of thousands of individuals carrying on in America the rich traditions of more than 1,500 years of organized Roman Catholic monasticism. Now struggling mightily in their own developmental process to prove the ability of their celibate orders to overcome the odds of an aging membership and a dearth of novices, these Catholic communitarians have founded and served schools, hospitals, and churches whose immense impact on American history are beyond calculation.

A similar overview analysis demonstrates how the communal method was used to settle Jewish immigrants in more than eighty farming colonies founded from 1820 to 1938. The ideals of this collective effort suggest much about the impulses that later gave rise to the use of communal kibbutz by the Zionist movement to settle thousands of immigrant Jews in Palestine to help achieve an independent state of Israel. Although communal settlements were also used in America to assist hundreds of former slaves into the life of freedom, as at Frances Wright's Nashoba community near Memphis, Tennessee, the essay devoted to African American use of communalism deals with the Peace Mission Movement of Father Divine in this century. The religious movement he founded has challenged America to live up to its egalitarian ideals and has offered insight into how Americans of varied ethnicity have united their efforts in a single movement combining religion, community, and social uplift to help solve the problems of urban, industrial America.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the focus of much of America's communal utopian experimentation shifted to California, Oregon, and Washington, where all manner of religious and social causes found a sympathetic hearing. Two essays in this book concentrate on movements that introduced utopian communalism along the Pacific coast. One details the proliferation of communities founded by disgruntled socialists, communists, and labor unionists in California. At Kaweah Cooperative Commonwealth, where they had the giant redwood they dubbed the "Karl Marx Tree," now known as the "General Sherman Tree," they labored bravely against impossible conditions to found a utopia based on lumber production. Outside Los

Angeles, socialists under Job Harriman set up Llano del Rio, one of the largest and most family-oriented communes, boasting the earliest Montessori school in California. The essay on Theosophical communities illustrates the impact of the first wave of Eastern mysticism in America by the late nineteenth century as a precursor of the widespread effects it would have on the youth movement in its counterculture communal experimentation after the mid-1960s. One wing of Theosophy, led by humanitarian Katherine Tingley, created at Point Loma near San Diego the most culturally oriented collective group of its day. It emphasized music, education for Cuban orphans, and plays in its own Greek amphitheater that still overlooks the Pacific shore as a physical monument to the Theosophical utopian dream.

As seemingly bizarre to outsiders as any modern flying saucer group led by a channeler was the Koreshan Unity founded by a medical doctor, Cyrus Reed Teed, who experienced an "illumination" proclaiming him the new messiah in 1869. Although in no way related to David Koresh's Branch Davidians who were assaulted in 1993 by agents of the federal government at Waco, Texas, both Teed and Vernon Howell adopted the Hebrew form of "Cyrus" as a new name—Teed becoming simply "Koresh." Teed's Koreshans combined a complex hollow-earth cosmology with feminist and environmental concerns that would resonate with many today. The "immortal" Koresh died in 1908, but his faithful endured for decades at his lovely communal estate in Estero, Florida, now preserved as Koreshan State Park with the movement's archives in the adjacent headquarters of the Koreshan Unity Foundation.

Any book such as *America's Communal Utopias* inevitably must be selective. For a variety of reasons, many groups worthy of consideration have been omitted from this volume. One example would be tribal Native Americans, either during the early days of European contact or in modern, New Age-influenced incarnations. Another omission is additional Germanic groups that began Zoar, Ohio; Bethel, Missouri; and Aurora, Oregon, which possess excellent historic sites but whose inclusion would have overloaded the Germanic component of the book. In other instances important movements and their communal expressions were omitted because the leading scholars found it impossible to contribute an original essay at this time. We hope that future editions of this study will include some of these critical missing analyses and others worthy of consideration.

The most significant omission for many of our readers is one made deliberately. No communitarian experiments founded since 1965 are included. Although several contributors to this volume first became interested in communitarianism in response to the proliferation of communal experimentation by the youth movement, the past thirty years of communal experimentation in

America are simply too rich, fluid, and close to us to allow for a brief survey that would do justice to the most recent past. Even though the absolute number of communities appears to have declined from an estimated 10,000 or more in the late 1960s and early 1970s to 2,000 or so now, the 1995 *Communities Directory* describes more than 500 groups in North America. This list could be doubled or tripled easily because it only includes 11 of the 400 Hutterite colonies and none of the numerous Roman Catholic monastic communities. If interest warrants, *America's Communal Utopias* may be supplemented eventually by a follow-up volume covering the most recent decades of communal development.

How does this volume differ from previous analyses of communal experimentation in America? Most importantly, each essay in this study is written by one of the foremost scholars familiar with the primary sources of each group and able to interpret the founding movement's significance to a larger popular audience. In addition, photographs bring the uniqueness of each group to life, brief chronologies aid in quickly understanding the story of each movement, and authoritative reading lists with each essay open doors for further exploration. Also, the most complete list of American communal utopias ever printed appears in the appendix. It has been compiled under my direction at the Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana during the past twenty years from all available printed sources, from the contributors to this anthology, and from many other scholars of the Communal Studies Association and International Communal Studies Association.

Finally, this book is significantly different from all such previous studies because its essays offer a new approach to the subject that takes into account the dynamic quality of communal utopias. We call this approach "developmental communalism" as explained in my "Developmental Communalism: An Alternative Approach to Communal Studies," published in 1989 in *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, edited by Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson. Developmental communalism examines whole movements and how they change over time, from their idealistic origins to their communal stages, and beyond. Anything but static, as the term *utopian* immediately implied to earlier writers, the communes of the most vital historic and current movements are creatively engaged in a developmental process that both precedes and may extend well after their communal phase. Thus, our essays clearly depict how and why certain movements chose the discipline of communal living to survive or to implement a utopian plan and why certain of them later moved beyond the close fellowship and collective strength of a communal period into other ways of organizing that proved better for their movement's development.

Our essays include the following communitarians who found ways to develop beyond their communal stage: Ephrata Baptists, Moravians, Owenites, Mormons, Fourierists, Amana Inspirationists, Theosophists, Jewish immigrants, and disciples of Father Divine. We also examine the present state of the Roman Catholic religious orders and the Hutterite *bruderhofs* that are being weighed now in the balance of the developmental communal process that will determine the future of their movements and their communal way of life.

The developmental approach also offers escape from the unfortunate "success-failure" pattern of earlier studies, which only considered communal groups "successful" if they maintained their communal bonds for a long time. Rosabeth Moss Kanter and other writers used twenty-five years as a yardstick. Ironically, some of the groups considered the most "successful" in terms of communal longevity are seen from the newer, developmental point of view to have helped doom their larger founding movements by making a lifetime commitment to community of property a rigid membership requirement and, in many cases, a tenet of faith. In this category, essays here treat the Shakers, the Harmonists, the Zoarites, the Oneidans, the Janssonists, and the Koreshans.

In this volume we see the developmental process posing a double jeopardy threat to communal longevity. The movements that make needed adjustments away from their communal stage abandon their communes. The movements that become locked into their communal discipline often stagnate, killing their movements and their communes. Therefore, regardless of their time in existence, we prefer to evaluate the success of communal utopias in terms of how well they achieve their own objectives, service the needs of their own members, and influence the general society, as suggested by Jon Wagner in his "Success in Intentional Communities" (*Communal Societies*, 1985).

In our examination of the colorful and sometimes tragic stories of the religious and secular movements that produced America's most noted communal utopias, we find real human beings struggling with real human problems and trying to realize hopes and dreams common to us all. We find in their brave, sometimes foolhardy, efforts to bring new, more creative solutions to bear on the universal condition of humanity a serious challenge to take their communal experiments seriously and to be no less innovative than they in our own world today.