

Preview “Handout”

for

Fall 2023 LIR Seminar:

19th Century American Utopian Societies

Moderator: Jay Russell

Hybrid (in-person & on Zoom) seminar: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 beginning September 26th. In-person at the Five College Libraries Annex building, 202 Plain Road, Hatfield.

According to one historian, “utopia” was coined by Sir Thomas More from two Greek words and literally means “nowhere.” However, far from going nowhere, the founders and members of the utopian societies that this seminar will cover all went somewhere to establish communities apart from mainstream 19th century American society in which they could live according to their various values.

Through presentations by its participants, this seminar will examine in chronological order 16 utopian societies or communities, starting with the Shakers and concluding with the present day Twin Oaks Community in Virginia. Some were religious; others secular. Some had philosophical bases, such as Transcendentalism or Fourierism; others were based on political principles, such as abolitionism, socialism or anarchism. Some were inspired by novels (e.g., the Icarians by Étienne Cabet’s *Un Voyage en Icarie*, the Nationalist Clubs by Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1877*, Altruria by William Dean Howells’s *A Traveler from Altruria* and Twin Oaks by B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two*); others inspired literary works (Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* and Louisa May Alcott’s memoir *Transcendental Wild Oats*.)

The moderator hopes that each 25-35 minute presentation will incorporate, to the extent possible, primary sources and firsthand accounts (perhaps an ancestor’s) to address most of the following questions: who were the founders and what influenced them to establish their society; what were the community’s core principles, philosophies, ideals and day-to-day living and governing practices; what were women’s roles; what was the social, political and economic context of the times in which the communities existed, how did earlier communities influence later ones; and why did the particular community fail to endure?

Because I will not be attending the Preview, please do not hesitate to email (j7m4russell@gmail.com) any questions you may have.

Topic and Presentation Schedule

- Sept. 26 Introductions & administrative matters
 Shakers Societies (esp. the Hancock [MA] Shakers 1830s)
- Oct. 3 New Harmony (IN) 1825-1829
 Brook Farm (MA) 1841-1846 & Fruitlands (MA) 1843-1844
- Oct. 10 North American Phalanx (NJ) 1841-1856 (Fourierist Associations)
 Hopedale Community (MA) 1842-1868
- Oct. 17 Northampton Association of Education and Industry (2
 presentations) 1842-1846
- Oct. 24 Oneida Community (NY). 1848-1880
 Icarians (various) 1848-1898
- Oct. 31 Amana Colonies (IA). 1850s-1932
 Modern Times (NY). 1851-1864
- Nov. 7 Aurora Colony (OR) 1853-1883
 Looking Backward 2000-1877 and Nationalist Clubs
- Nov. 14 Altruria. (CA) 1894-1896
 Home Colony (WA) 1895-1919
- Nov. 21 Twin Oaks (VA) 1967-present
 Wrap up

Suggested Readings and Resources

The best resources for this seminar will be found in the Five Colleges libraries, especially books in the Mount Holyoke and Smith libraries. A library card obtained at any one of the colleges (one of the major benefits of LIR membership) provides borrowing privileges from all five. As with the C/W MARS library system, books can be requested from any of the five for delivery to the college library of the borrower's choice. Online resources, such as articles in academic journals and e-books, can be accessed in person at the libraries. Excerpts from books and other physical resources at the libraries can also be scanned at the library and emailed to one's self.

I will provide an annotated bibliography for each of the utopian societies on the topic list to the members of the seminar.

As background reading for the seminar, I recommend the following books:

Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (2016). 16 copies available in the C/W MARS system

Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880* (1966) 6 copies in the C/W MARS system (including one on reserve at the Meekins library in Williamsburg). 4 copies in the college libraries

Charles Nordhoff, *American Utopias* (1966). Originally published (in 1875) as *The Communistic Societies of America*. (This author's grandson, also Charles Nordhoff, wrote *The Bounty Trilogy*.) 4 copies, under one title or the other, in the C/W MARS system. 12 copies under the original title in the college libraries. Also available as an e-book at Smith and Mount Holyoke.