Hunting for Harmony

The Skaneateles Community and Communitism in Upstate New York: 1825-1853

Mitchell K. Jones

Photograph of the Skaneateles Community domain, circa 1939, by historian Arthur Bester.[1]

The Skaneateles Community House today.[2]

[1] "Skaneateles Community, New York: View 6," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, last modified June 5, 2018, https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/89a47e50-6ce9-0136-509a-0050569601ca-8.

[2] Photo by the author.

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From the 1830s to mid-1850s over a hundred utopian socialist communes emerged throughout the United States. Upstate New York became an especially fertile region for this kind of activity. Utopian socialism was a reaction to the social changes caused by the Market Revolution. The Erie Canal, completed in 1821, accelerated the Market Revolution in Upstate New York and brought frontier farmers water access to large markets like those in New York City. It also caused an explosion of Western New York's population. These shifting economic relations created changes in social relations. Market capitalism threatened the perceived harmony of the old agrarian subsistence economy. Many believed crass market competition undermined the old Christian values of piety and charity. The Panic of 1837, the first major depression of the Market Revolution, heightened these contradictions. It helped make the 1840s a period of unprecedented socialist agitation and utopian practice as people sought a system that promised security and safety from the perils of speculation and market fluctuation. Thousands of people put all their money, time, and labor into experimental communes through the 1830s and 40s.[3] These experimental efforts were not successful. Most dissolved after about two years. However, they were an indication that a radical zeitgeist had emerged in response to the Market Revolution. Utopian socialism throughout the young United States, especially in Upstate New York, was an attempt to create new economic and social relations that would resolve the problems caused by the Market Revolution.

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[3] Arthur Bestor Jr., "American Phalanxes: A Study of Fourierism in the United States (With Special Reference to the Movement in Western New York)," PhD diss., (Yale, 1938), 4.

In New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, the system of Association as described by French philosopher Charles Fourier was the fad ideology of the 1840s. Fourierism taught that all individuals have "passional attraction" and that philanthropically minded people must shape society to be in harmony with such attractions.[4] According to Fourier, society must nurture all individuals' innate passions in order to to make labor attractive. Attractive labor would smooth over the contradictions in society and achieve universal harmony. Batavia, New York born Fourierist Albert Brisbane wrote in 1843:

> *If a Social Reform can be effected, which will dignify Industry and render it attractive, increase immensely production or real wealth - secure abundance to the Poor and permanent prosperity to the Rich - extend the refining and elevating influence of superior education to all - widen the sphere of intellectual existence and combine the pleasures of Art and Science and social Life with the pursuits of useful Industry, how desirable would be the result, and how worthy of the persevering efforts of men of pure motives and exalted ambition.*[5]

Fourier's American followers did not just profess the virtue of his ideas. They translated those ideas into prefigurative practice. More than eighty communes claiming to be the true embodiment of Fourier's phalanstery system sprung up throughout the United States in the 1840s.

The city of Rochester, New York and the surrounding area proved to be one of the most receptive regions to Charles Fourier's message. The Clarkson Phalanx, the Sodus Bay Phalanx, the Bloomfield Association, the Ontario Union, the Mixville Association, and the Jefferson County Association all had their origins in the Fourier Society of the City of Rochester (FSCR).[6] John Humphrey Noyes, leader of the Upstate New York "bible communist" Oneida Community,

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[4] Charles Fourier, *The Social Destiny of Man or The Theory of the Four Movements*, (New York: Gordon Press, 1972), 117.
[5] Albert Brisbane, *Association or A Concise Exposition of the Practical Part of Fourier's Science*, (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1843), 8.
[6] John Humphre Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott &, 1870), 296-304.

called Western New York the "Volcanic District" after the explosion of utopian activity throughout the region in the 1840s.[7]

The Skaneateles Community, although originating in the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts, found favorable conditions in Upstate New York as the result of their comradeship with the Fourierists. While the Skaneateles Community was not Fourierist, they joined the movement for Association as comrades.[8] Unlike the Fourierists, the Skaneateles Community advocated the abolition of all private property. Even though the Fourierists thought them too radical, they encouraged the Skaneateles communitists and wanted them to succeed.[9] In turn, the Skaneateles Community solicited and welcomed the help of Fourierists. Skaneateles Community member Maria Loomis wrote, "...We hope all who have a heart to sympathize with a world's misery, will extend a helping hand…. [W]e are laboring in the same field,"[10] in 1844, soliciting donations for *the Communitist* newspaper, the propaganda organ of Skaneateles Community. John A. Collins, founder of the Skaneateles Community, would later call Fourierism "a great school for Communism."[11]

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[7] John Humphre Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, (Philadelphia: H. P. Lippencott & Co., 1870), 267.

[8] "Association" [capitalized] was Albert Brisbane's term for Fourier's system. In 1843, he described the Fourierist formula for the socialist reorganization of society: "An Association is an assemblage of persons (from four to eighteen hundred) united voluntarily for the purpose of prosecuting with order and unity, Art and Science, in which they engage; and in directing their efforts, energies and talents, in the best way for the Happiness and Elevation of the whole." Albert Bribane, *Association or A Concise Exposition of the Practical Part of Fourier's Science*, (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1843), 3.

[9] *The Harbinger*, 16 July 1846.

[10] Maria Loomis, "A note to our subscribers," *The Communitist*, July 27, 1844.

[11] Association, as noted above, was the name for Brisbane's version of Fourierism. John A. Collins and other utopians of the antebellum era used communism and communitism interchangeably. While Fourier's Associationism advocated joint stock corporations, personal property and a blending of business and socialism, communists or communitists believed the community should share all property in common. This work uses the term communitism to 1) establish it as a school of thought unique to the teachings of John Collins, distinctive from the religious communists such as the Shakers and Amanas (pre-1931 "Great Change") on the one hand and Robert Owen's secular communism on the other, and 2) to avoid confusion with the later Marxist usage of the term communism. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels used communism to distinguish their philosophy from that of the utopian socialists like Owen and Fourier. They devoted a whole section of their influential *Manifesto of the Communist Party* to a critique of utopian

The Skaneateles Community's belief in the abolition of private property was, like Fourierism, a response to the changing social conditions that resulted from the Market Revolution. After the Panic of 1837, the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts experienced a crisis that led many, including abolitionist personage William Lloyd Garrison, to become more radical.[12] Skaneateles Community leader John A. Collins was an adherent to the radical anarchist, passive resistance principles Garrison developed.[13] After witnessing the conditions the white workers endured in London, England, he decided wage labor was yet another form of slavery. He concluded society must abolish private property completely if it is to abolish slavery in all its forms.[14] Collins capitalized on the radical spirit of Upstate New York during this period and moved to Skaneateles, near Syracuse, New York to start his community.

Historians have identified the causes of the reform impulse in Upstate New York, but few have looked closely at the radicalism of the region. Historian Paul E. Johnson's book *A Shopkeeper's Millennium* argues the business class' fear of an autonomous laboring class led them to embrace first temperance and then other religiously motivated reforms as a means of social control. Prior to the 1820s, the workers of Rochester, New York mostly lived with their employers. Drinking was a form of social cohesion shared between the employer and his

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socialism. In an 1844 letter, Engels cheered the utopian experiments in America, writing, "For communism, social existence and activity based on community of goods, is not only possible but has actually already been realised [sic] in many communities in America… with the greatest success…." However, in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, he critiques this early kind of Socialism as unscientific utopianism led by bourgeois intellectuals who ignored the realities of class struggle. He describes utopianisms as "pictures of ideal social conditions." Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290., Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Nelly Rumyantseva, *Marx and Engels on the United States*, (Moscow: Progress, 1979), 33., Frederick Engles, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Edward Aveling, (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 32.

[12] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 107.

[13] Hinds, William Alfred, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1908), 298.

[14] Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 100.

employees under conditions the employer controlled.[15] After the 1820s, however, the business class increasingly left the laboring class to its own devices. Laborers developed a new, autonomous culture on and off their job sites. The employer went from patriarchal master to alienated boss. Businessmen feared the newly autonomous laboring class. No longer could they control the conditions under which their workers drank. Johnson argues this caused Rochester's business class to turn to temperance as a way to control the workers. Employers' insistence on sobriety made them likely targets for religious revivalism. In 1830, itinerant Methodist minister Charles Finney came to Rochester at exactly the right time. His ecstatic calls for sobriety and moral piety fit the managerial approach to social problems the business class was calling for.[16] The so-called Second Great Awakening, of which Finney was both leader and a pawn, spawned some of the widest reaching reform movements in American history.

Historian Robert H. Abzug argues the spirit of reform spearheaded by the Second Great Awakening was an attempt to reclaim the sacred in an increasingly profane world. The Market Revolution caused rapid change in society that threatened traditional values. Advancements in transportation like the Erie Canal accelerated these changes. Abzug asserts that, "The spectacular growth of the nation's economy and territory provided additional sources of real and imagined disorder, and new measures of virtue or vice…."[17] A political economy that rewarded those who were selfish and greedy confounded many devout people. Abzug explains, "All the ambivalence traditionally associated with pietistic Protestantism's grappling with individual material success became resymbolized for an era in which the marketplace, the factory, the city, and the

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[15] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, NY 1815-1837*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 81.
[16] Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 55.
[17] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

competition of individuals for wealth and advantage became keynotes of American culture."[18] The religious radicals of the 1820s and 30s redefined civic discourse in a way that made radical notions like utopian socialism plausible. Abzug concludes, "They provided a sacred structure of meaning that, while hardly incorporated as the code of daily life by most Americans, helped redefine the nature and limits of civic discourse."[19] Although many of the socialists were atheists and freethinkers, the free will theology and activist morality of the 1820s and 30s religious ultraists were prerequisites for the socialist agitation of the 1830s and 40s.

Historian Arthur E. Bestor Jr., in his dissertation, "American Phalanxes: A Study of Fourierist Socialism in the United States," argues that Fourierism and other radical utopian movements of the 1830s and 40s were continuations of the logic of the Second Great Awakening.[20] The Fourierist movement in Western New York was part of a long American tradition of social experimentation, beginning with the religious movement the United Believers in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, colloquially known as the Shakers, and continuing through other religious utopians and the secular socialist movement known as Owenism.[21] Bestor insists that economic factors are not sufficient to explain the uniquely 1840s phenomenon of utopian communities. The real reason for the popularity of Fourier's ideas in America, according to him, was that the belief in harmony between classes and the impermanence of class lines made Fourierism compatible with the American creed.[22]

Carl J. Guarneri, in *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, argues that accounts such as Bestor's, which attempt to put Fourierism into a broader context of

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[18] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 6.
[19] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 8.
[20] Bestor, "American Phalanxes," 17.
[21] Bestor, "American Phalanxes," 4.
[22] Bestor, "American Phalanxes," 10.

American reform movements, fail to judge Fourierism on its own terms. Instead, scholars who have taken Bestor's approach see Fourierism as a forerunner to other movements. Additionally, approaches that attempt to connect Fourierism with reform fail to account for their belief in total structural change. Although the Fourierists endorsed the efforts of their abolitionist and suffragist comrades, they were radicals, not reformers.[23] Guarneri argues, "From the 1830s to the 1860s rapid national expansion and the takeoff of industrial capitalism highlighted the distance the United States had traveled from the agrarian republic of the Founders, compelling Americans to reexamine inherited social ideals."[24] The Market Revolution and its side effects, in other words, caused a breakdown of the Founders' creed. Utopian socialism was an attempt to regain some of the old agrarian system, where workers and employers lived together and farming communities had utilitarian communal bonds, that America had lost with the rise of market capitalism. At the same time, it was not reactionary. It was a progressive reimagination of what kind of society was possible.

The Market Revolution led to unprecedented social change in Upstate New York. Western New York's Finneyite revivals of the 1820s and Robert Owen's socialist experiments in the United States were two reactions to the Market Revolution's repercussions. They provided subjective conditions that made the utopian explosion in the 1840s possible. However, the Panic of 1837 provided the material conditions that made it inevitable. The Panic of 1837 aligned the material interests of the laboring class and the business class. Fourierism's doctrine of harmony between capital and labor made it attractive to both workers and businessmen affected by the depression. Additionally, the Panic of 1837 precipitated a crisis in the abolitionist movement that

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[23] Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-century America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4.
[24] Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 6.

made antislavery advocates like William Lloyd Garrison turn to more radical tactics like nonresistance and no-government. Garrison's nonresistance inspired abolitionists to get involved in the socialist movement.

This work explores the utopian socialist movement of the 1840s and its connections to abolitionism through a case study of the Skaneateles Community. It begins by exploring the versions of American utopian socialism that preceded the Fourierist period. It then explores the linkages between the abolitionist message pioneered by William Lloyd Garrison and the socialist thinking of Skaneateles Community leader John Collins. Next it explores Collins' background and the motivations that led him to develop his own unique version of utopian socialism. It looks at other utopian communities that came out of the Garrisonian abolitionist movement, which inspired Collins and his group, before examining the so-called "Articles of Belief and Disbelief" of the community's founders. It then explores the contention that Collins' creed caused in the Fourierist and abolitionist movements. Finally, it explains the community's downfall.

American Socialisms

Fourierism drew on the earlier secular utopian tradition of Robert Owen's movement to, as they saw it, reestablish a social order based on harmony, not greed. In 1824, Scottish industrialist Robert Owen visited the United States. Owen had already become a well-known socialist in the United Kingdom. He requested to speak before Congress shortly after arriving in the United States. Congress granted his request. To the elite audience's bemusement, Owen wasted no time in advocating the overthrow of the economic system. Thomas Jefferson, the

second president of the United States, was among the famous dignitaries present that day.[25] Owen aped Jefferson's own words. Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."[26] The economic system elite Americans cherished, Owen argued, had become a despotic regime and it desperately needed overthrowing. The young nation could greatly increase liberty if the "national mind" rejected economic tyranny and embraced the "harmonious brotherhood" that his socialist system engendered.[27] Most in his audience thought Owen insane. Owen, however, was determined to prove them wrong by embarking on a series of practical experiments in socialism. By this time, he was already setting up his utopian community at New Harmony, Indiana.[28] New Harmony became a beacon for those seeking remedies to the rapidly apparent problems of the Market Revolution. Throughout the 1820s and 30s Owenism swept through America. Radicals formed about a dozen Owenite communes in the middle states of New York and Pennsylvania and on the Western frontier of Ohio, Indiana and Tennessee.

The Nashoba Colony, a utopian community in Tennessee, was the first experiment to connect Owenite socialism with abolitionism. Abolitionist Frances "Fanny" Wright founded the colony in 1825. Apparently, "Fanny Wright" became a pejorative term after Nashoba's failure.

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[25] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 44., Owen and Jefferson corresponded in 1825. Owen wanted to introduce his friends, who were interested in the architecture of Virginia University, to Jefferson. Apparently, Jefferson had inquired about Owen's "system." Owen promised his friends would report to Jefferson on the system's progress. In his 1858 autobiography, Owen describes Jefferson as his "warm disciple." Robert Owen to Thomas Jefferson. -11-25, 1825. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib025573/., Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen*, (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1920), 275.

[26] Thomas Jefferson, et al, July 4, Copy of Declaration of Independence. -07-04, 1776. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/.

[27] Frederick A. Packard, *Life of Robert Owen*, (Philadelphia: Ashmead & Evans, 1866), 200.

[28] Packard, *Life of Robert Owen*, 203.

The Skaneateles Community was later a target of the invective phrase.[29] According to utopian chronicler A. J. MacDonald, who visited Nashoba in the 1830s:

> *The objects were, to form a Community in which the negro slave should be educated and upraised to a level with the whites, and thus prepared for freedom; and to set an example, which, if carried out, would eventually abolish slavery in the Southern States; also to make a home for good and great men and women of all countries, who might there sympathize with each other in their love and labor for humanity.*[30]

Fanny Wright and her supporters purchased slaves at auctions and attempted to educate them in self-reliance and communal living to prepare them for life as free people. MacDonald declares, "She invited congenial minds from every quarter of the globe to unite with her in the search for truth and the pursuit of rational happiness."[31] Wright attempted to draw on the popularity of social reform to make a practical difference in the struggle against slavery.

Religious communism inspired Wright's plan. She visited sectarian religious communes throughout the South, including those of the United Believers in Christ's Second Coming or Shakers and the Harmony Society, known as Rappites after their founder Johann Georg Rapp. Both groups had practiced bible-based communism since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Eventually Wright studied the projects of the non-religious, freethinking Owenites at New Harmony, Indiana.[32] She concluded a socialist system similar to those practiced by the communities she visited was best suited to help blacks achieve their emancipation.

Nashoba failed the same way most of the Owenite projects did. It fell into financial ruin because it could not generate significant income. The response from the accounting trustees of

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[29] *New York Tribune*, 20 January 1846.
[30] A. J. Macdonald, "Skaneateles Community" in A. J. Macdonald Writings on American Utopian Communities, General Collection, (New Haven, CT: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library)., quoted in Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 66-67.
[31] Macdonald, "Skaneateles Community", Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 66-67.
[32] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 69.

Nashoba was to abandon the Owenite notion that a person's character is created for them, not by them. In 1828, the trustees of Nashoba published a declaration that undermined the abolitionist aspect of the project. Wright explained:

> *They [the trustees] show the impossibility of a co-operative Community succeeding without the members composing it are [sic] superior beings; 'for,' say they, 'if there be introduced into such a society thoughts of evil and unkindness, feelings of intolerance and words of dissension, it can not prosper.' That which produces in the world only common-place jealousies and every-day squabbles, is sufficient to destroy a Community.*[33]

She clarified "superior beings" were those with "moral qualifications..., who may be admitted without regard to color," who are able to pay $100 per year for board and could build their own house.[34] This price would have been virtually impossible for enslaved people to raise. The decree effectively ended the Nashoba experiment's practical abolitionism. By the end of the 1830s most of the Owenite communes had dissolved. Owenism died out and its critics gloated. Still, utopian socialism had not yet gasped its last gasp in America.

The 1840s were by far the most prolific years for utopian socialism in the history of the young republic. Albert Brisbane, born in 1809 in Batavia, NY, to a wealthy Dutch landowner, became the prophet of Fourierism to Western New York and the rest of the United States. Brisbane spread the gospel of Charles Fourier across the Northeast United States. Over eighty utopian communities sprung up in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Massachusetts between 1843 and 1844 based on Brisbane's interpretation of Charles Fourier's ideas. The Market Revolution of the 1820s and 30s caused a temporary alignment of class interests in those regions. Both small business capitalists and wage laborers suffered hardships that caused them to rethink the organization of society. Utopian socialism was one of the ways

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[33] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 70-71.
[34] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 71.

people in the Northeast tried to unite the radical demands of both the anti-speculation businessmen and the struggling laborers.

Rochester, about 35 miles from Brisbane's birthplace of Batavia, and the vicinity were particularly fertile ground for Fourierism and other radical movements of the period. Rochester had already established itself as a capital of ultraism. John Humphrey Noyes dubbed Western New York the Volcanic District writing, "Western New York was the region that responded most vigorously to the gospel of Fourierism.... Taking Rochester for a center, and a line of fifty miles for radius, we strike a circle that includes the birth-places of nearly all the wonderful excitements the last forty years."[35] The term Volcanic District was a modification of the term "the burnt over district" which had come to describe the fervor for religious revival that started when itinerant minister Charles Finney was evangelizing in Western New York in the 1830s.[36]

Finney popularized the belief that individuals have a moral responsibility to make the world more holy. Finney believed in millennialism. Finney's millenarian reading of the Bible argued that a thousand year reign of Jesus Christ would come. To usher it in, he taught, the faithful must use moral suasion to create heavenly conditions on Earth. John Humphrey Noyes later mused, "In 1831 the whole orthodox church was in a state of ebullition in regard to the Millennium."[37] Abolitionism, women's rights and utopian socialism all became part of this plan.

This revivalist spirit, coupled with the economic changes of 1837 transformed Western New York from the "burnt over district" to the Volcanic District. Many Western New Yorkers, both businessmen and laborers, lost a great deal in the Panic of 1837. Fourierism was especially

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[35] John Humphre Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, (Philadelphia: H. P. Lippencott & Co., 1870), 267.
[36] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 2.
[37] Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 110.

attractive to them for its promise of security and harmony between classes.[38] Both classes could see the benefits of socialism over the unstable, insecure world of the speculative capitalism. William Henry Fish, a member of the Massachusetts utopian community Hopedale, explained, "The old order of society had come to be felt, by many of the most progressive class of minds, to be selfish and burdensome, and they could not, with easy consciences, longer sustain it - at least without trying something better."[39] Both the propertied small business class and the propertyless laboring class agreed that they had to find a way to rein in speculation and financial tricks. The two classes united over their repugnance for reckless, amoral speculation and outright enslavement and exploitation.

New York Weekly Tribune publisher Horace Greeley was extremely concerned with the effects of the Panic of 1837. In April of 1837 he wrote, "[O]ne-fourth of all connected with the mercantile and manufacturing interests are out of business, with dreary prospects for the coming winter."[40] By the fall, some sources reported nine-tenths of all the factories in the Northeast had closed.[41] Horace Greeley became increasingly concerned with the problem of unemployment amongst the laboring class. He suggested philanthropically minded capitalists continue to provide work despite losing profits and that workers who had jobs should hang on to them no matter what.[42] In 1839, Greeley wrote "a series of articles entitled 'What shall be done for the laborer?'"[43] He fatefully acquainted himself with Albert Brisbane the same year. Greeley

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[38] Samuel Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression, 1837-1843," *The American Historical Review* 40, no. 4 (1935): 663.
[39] Spann, *Hopedale*, 18.
[40] Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression," 664.
[41] Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression," 665.
[42] Rezneck, "The Social History of an American Depression," 665.
[43] Charles Sotheran, *Horace Greeley and Other Pioneers of American Socialism. With a Forew. by W.J. Ghent and Reminiscences of Charles Sotheran, by A. Hyneman Sotheran*, (New York: Michael Kennerly, 1915), 122.

explains, "I believe these [articles] attracted the attention of Mr. Albert Brisbane, a young man of liberal education and varied culture, a native of Batavia, N.Y., which he still regarded as his home, but who had traveled widely and observed thoughtfully; making the acquaintance in Paris of… Charles Fourier"[44] By 1841, Greeley had completely converted to the gospel of Fourier as translated by Brisbane and he turned the *Tribune* into an organ of Fourierist agitation. He explained, "Association affirms that every child born into the world has a rightful claim upon the community around him for subsistence, until able to earn for himself an education, which shall enable him to earn efficiently, as well as rightly to improve and enjoy; and for the opportunity to earn at all times, by ones industry, steadily employed and justly remunerated."[45] Greeley believed Brisbane's preoccupation to be a natural solution to the problems presented by the crisis of 1837. Greeley's paper, the *New York Weekly Tribune* was one of the most widely circulated newspapers of the era.[46] However, Greeley's conversion to socialism was a symptom, not a cause, of the socialist fury of the 1840s.

Larger-than-life philosophers like Brisbane and Greeley did not sway everyone to the benefits of socialism. The Nothingarians of Massachusetts founded the Northampton Association in 1842. John Humphrey Noyes called them Nothinarians because they did not claim to follow any leader or ideology. They followed a path led not by ideology, but by their own sense of business practicality. They saw individual entrepreneurship as inherently reckless and unstable. Large-scale industry, they believed, required collective investment and cooperative labor in order to avoid unscrupulousness and over adventurous capitalism.[47] Most of the Northampton

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[44] Sotheran, *Horace Greeley and Other Pioneers of American Socialism*, 122.
[45] Sotheran, *Horace Greeley and Other Pioneers of American Socialism*, 125.
[46] Sotheran, *Horace Greeley and Other Pioneers of American Socialism*, 47.
[47] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 33.

Association's founding members were industrialists or farmers who had lost money in the Panic of 1837. Several were silk manufacturers. During the Panic of 1837, many investors felt it was responsible to invest in the silk trade. A second economic bubble burst in 1839, decimating the silk industry.[48] Farmers and silk manufacturers scrambled to figure out what to do. The Northampton Association bought what remained of the Northampton Silk Company in 1841, hoping to profit from the once lucrative industry while avoiding the instability of capital markets. They believed communal association would provide the security they sought.[49] According to historian Chris Clark, "As former manufacturers and traders, they sought not to overthrow the existing economic system, but to organize it on more stable and equitable principles."[50] The Northampton Association was, as John Humphrey Noyes claims, a preparation for Fourierism. Fourierism, sought to produce harmony and security in labor relations, not to exacerbate class struggle. The Northampton Association was Nothingarian, but their rational inquiry led them as close to Fourier's system as could be while still claiming to espouse "nothing."

Many in the Northampton Association were Garrisonian abolitionists prior to their involvement in Associated Industry. Economic factors forced the abolitionist movement to undergo its own tactical and theoretical Panic of 1837. Massachusetts capitalist, evangelical Christian and abolitionist Arthur Tappan had been a valuable financier of the Massachusetts anti-slavery movement. Tappan made a fortune during the Market Revolution of the 1820s from his silk importing business in New York City.[51] New Yorkers knew Tappan to connect business and religion. He demanded his employees live in Christian boarding houses and attend church every

[48] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 31.
[49] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 32.
[50] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 32.
[51] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 107.

week.[52] Like utopian socialist Robert Owen, who attempted to put his utopian ideals into practice at his textile factory in New Lanark, Scotland, Tappan attempted to blend business and his belief in the reorganization of society.[53] By the early 1830s, Tappan became a financier of Massachusetts abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *the Liberator* and the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS).[54] However, on May 1, 1837 the silk bubble burst and Tappan had to declare bankruptcy. The abolitionist movement in Massachusetts went into a panic. They lost their largest financial backer.[55] Tappan led a walkout of reactionary evangelicals at the 1840 meeting of the American Antislavery Society, protesting women's involvement in the group.[56] Garrison and other Massachusetts radicals who were in favor of women in antislavery leadership were loosed from Tappan's patronage. They saw an opportunity. They reevaluated their tactics and rejected everything they considered "worldly" as wholly corrupt. This included governments and institutional churches.

From Abolitionism to Communitism

Garrison increasingly advocated "nonresistance," a form of nonviolent civil disobedience, and anarchistic "no-government" ideas. In 1852, Garrison explained, "Non-Resistance is not a state of passivity, on the contrary, it is a state of activity, ever fighting the good fight of faith, ever foremost to assail unjust power, ever struggling for 'liberty, equality, fraternity,' in no national sense, but in a world-wide spirit. It is passive only in this sense — that it will not return

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[52] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 108.
[53] Arthur H. Estabrook, "The Family History of Robert Owen," *Indiana Magazine of History* 19, no. 1 (1923): 64.
[54] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 150-151.
[55] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 220.
[56] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 35.

evil for evil, nor give blow for blow, nor resort to murderous weapons for protection or defense."[57] Many interpreted Garrison's plea for nonresistance as a call to reject all human institutions. However, others interpreted non-resistance as a call to build more perfect, godly institutions. Christopher Clark argues, "Though they attacked existing 'human government,' they sought to establish the 'government of God' and social institutions that could embody it."[58] The Christian perfectionism of Charles Finney influenced the nonresistance and no-government advocates to build better institutions that could respond to the challenges of the day. Clark concludes, "Nonresistance in this form led not to a rejection of institutions as such but to a search for new social organizations uncorrupted by existing evils."[59] Utopian socialism answered the call to build radical alternative institutions. At least twenty of the Northampton Association's founders were non-resistance advocates.[60] John A. Collins and John O. Wattles of the Skaneateles Community were also outspoken advocates of nonresistance and no-government principles.

Collins' defense of Garrisonianism ultimately led him to found the radical Skaneateles Community in Upstate New York. When evangelical critics of Garrison's radicalism attacked him as an infidel, Collins immediately came to his defense. He wrote in 1841:

> *We have had the honour of an intimate acquaintance, and of labouring with him in the cause of the enslaved Negro, and have seen him in times of great trial and affliction, and have invariably found him crucified to the world, and the world to him. If we have ever met with a man… who made it the entire aim and object of his life to elevate and redeem his fellow-creatures, and thus to glorify his Creator, that man is Wm. Lloyd Garrison.*[61]

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[57] William Lloyd Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison on Non-Resistance, Together with a Personal Sketch by His Daughter, Fanny Garrison Villard, and a Tribute by Leo Tolstoi*, (New York: The Nation Press printing Co., 1924), 30.
[58] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 40.
[59] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 40.
[60] Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 40.
[61] John A. Collins, *Right and Wrong Amongst the Abolitionists of the United States*, (Glasgow: Geo. Gallie, 1841), 42.

Ultimately, the disunity in the Massachusetts abolitionist movement soured Collins on its prospects for achieving emancipation for the enslaved. Collins left Massachusetts seeking friendlier territory. After what his wife, Eunice Messenger Collins, called an "assault made upon Mr. Collins by [abolitionist Charles L.] Redmond & [Frederick] Douglass in a public meeting," Collins decided he could no longer continue working in the antislavery movement in Massachusetts.[62] He set upon establishing his utopian community in Skaneateles.

Shortly after the Skaneateles Community began in January of 1844, Collins visited the Sodus Bay Phalanx, a Fourierist community that originated in Rochester, New York. The phalanx, only a few months old at this point, already showed signs of disintegration. Collins reported in *the Communitist* newspaper that he had convinced the Sodus Bay phalangists of the folly of Fourier's system.[63] After discussing Fourier's philosophy for over an hour, they came to an agreement that "it was a useless effort to unite two opposite and hostile elements, which have no more affinity for each other than water and oil, or fire and gunpowder; that inasmuch as individual and separate interests are the cause or occasion of nearly all the crime, poverty, and suffering in civilized society, it follows that the cause and occasion must be removed, ere the effects will disappear."[64] Collins believed he had exposed a fundamental flaw in Fourier's system of "passional attraction." It was impossible, he believed, to harmonize the individual and collective interest.

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[62] Eunice Messenger Collins, "[Letter to] Mrs. Chapman. Dear Madam…," August 15, 1843, (Boston: Boston Public Library Archives).
[63] A phalangist is a member of a phalanx.
[64] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290.

Fourierism taught that all individuals must not submit their passions to the strictures of society. Philanthropically minded people must instead shape society to be in harmony with such attractions. Fourier explains:

> *Passional Attraction is that Force implanted by God in Man, which impels or attracts him to the external objects, relations, principles, and functions to which the Passions - the particular forces of the Soul - tend, and in which they find their gratification; it is the active principle, the original motor-power in Man existing prior to reflections, and persisting in its demands despite the opposition of conventional theories of right and wrong, of moral precepts, of laws and customs, of reigning prejudices, etc.*[65]

Passional attraction is like the biblical Holy Spirit. It is God's dynamic force that activates latent energy in humans. Fourier continues, "Coming from God, it is the interpreter of his Will and the Oracle of his decrees. In its collective action, it impels Man to fulfill his Destiny on Earth."[66] According to Fourier, society must nurture all individuals' innate passions in order to achieve harmony. Submission of the will of the individual to the collective was against nature. Thus, to Fourierists, the communitists like Collins and the Skaneateles group were perverting nature. The Skaneateles communitists, on the other hand, believed if one did not reform the individual to fit with the group, a community would not last. They were advocates of self-improvement, not of hedonistic capitulation to idiosyncratic desires and passions.

However, Collins did not discount the merits of Fourierism completely. He observed, "Still the difference between Communists and Associationists is not so great, that they should be opposed and alienated. It should be our object to see the points of agreement, rather than seek for points of disagreement. In the former we have been too active and earnest. Association is a great school for Communism. It will develop the false, and point out the good."[67] Shortly after Collins'

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[65] Charles Fourier, *The Social Destiny of Man or The Theory of the Four Movements*, (New York: Gordon Press, 1972), 117.
[66] Fourier, *The Social Destiny of Man*, 117.
[67] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290.

visit the Sodus Bay Phalanx dissolved. He ends his report by lamenting that "it was painful to think that those men and women, who for nearly two years had struggled against great odds, with their philanthropic, manly and heroic spirit, with all their enthusiasm, zeal and confidence in the beauty and practicability of the principles of social cooperation, must soon be dispersed and thrown back again, to act upon the selfish and beggarly principles of strife and competition."[68] Collins believed even the imperfect system of Fourierism was superior to the crass competition and precarity of market capitalism. He regretfully predicts the failure of Fourer's system would cast its disciples back into the cruel competitive world.

The Skaneateles Community was just one of the many progressive reactions to the Market Revolution. Collins had been one of the first to answer Garrison's call for a "non-government and non-resistance" approach to the abolition of slavery. However, in 1840, while on an abolitionist business trip to London, Collins, concluded that capitalism was just another form of slavery. In order to achieve emancipation of all peoples, Collins asserted that society must abolish private property itself.[69] Collins was not a Fourierist. However, he acknowledged, "Association is a great school for Communism."[70] He was primarily influenced by Robert Owen and William Lloyd Garrison among others. In 1844, an article in *the Communitist* newspaper, the propaganda organ of the Skaneateles Community, by Maria Loomis exclaimed, "Mr. Owen had all property in common. Mr Collins proposes the same. Thus far they go hand to hand…." However, Collins had his own way. "...[B]ut they go no further," Loomis continues. "[N]ot the least similarity can be discovered between them farther than this."[71] Collinsism was maverick

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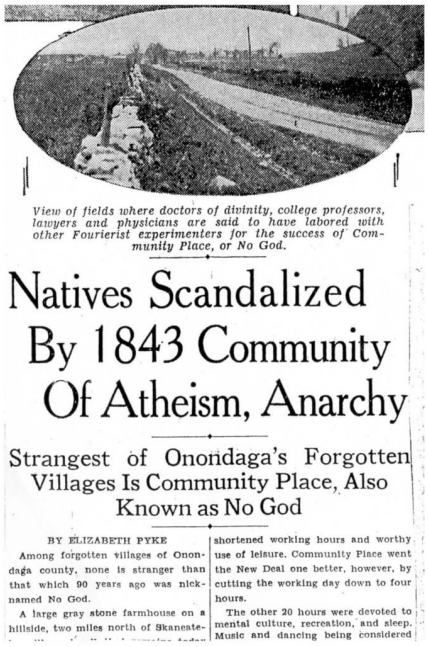
[68] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290.
[69] Sernett, *North Star Country,* 100.
[70] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290.
[71] *The Communitist*, July 10, 1844.

socialism, but the parallel utopian efforts of the day influenced Collins' philosophy. Collinsism, despite being an idiosyncratic form of utopianism, is still exemplary of the radical zeitgeist of the time.



View of fields where doctors of divinity, college professors, lawyers and physicians are said to have labored with other Fourierist experimenters for the success of Community Place, or No God.

Natives Scandalized By 1843 Community Of Atheism, Anarchy

Strangest of Onondaga's Forgotten Villages Is Community Place, Also Known as No God

BY ELIZABETH PYKE

Among forgotten villages of Onondaga county, none is stranger than that which 90 years ago was nicknamed No God.

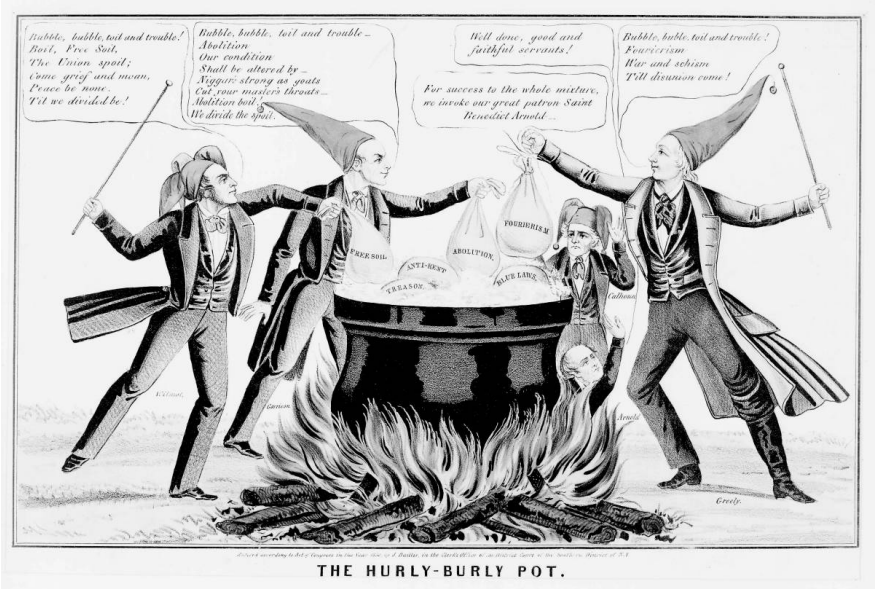
A large gray stone farmhouse on a hillside, two miles north of Skaneate-

shortened working hours and worthy use of leisure. Community Place went the New Deal one better, however, by cutting the working day down to four hours.

The other 20 hours were devoted to mental culture, recreation, and sleep. Music and dancing being considered

Sensationalist headline for a Syracuse Post Standard *newspaper article about the Skaneateles Community by staff writer Elizabeth Pyke from November 18, 1934, almost 90 years after the commune's demise.*[72]

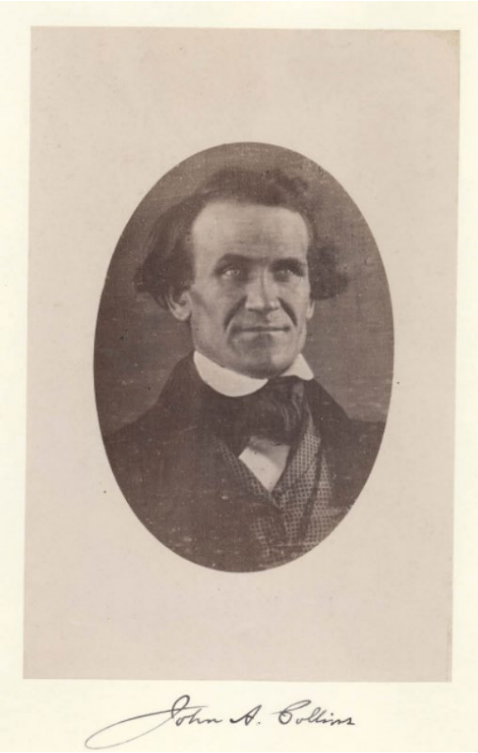
[72] Elizabeth Pyke, "Natives Scandalized by 1843 Community of Atheism, Anarchy," *Post Standard*, November 18, 1934.



Cartoonist James S. Baillie's "The Hurly-Burly Pot," published in 1850. Baillie depicts abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, free-soiler David Wilmot and publisher Horace Greeley as witches from the William Shakespeare play Macbeth. They are casting a spell to cause disunity in the nation. They put sacks of "free soil," "abolition" and "Fourierism" into the pot. Greeley says, "Bubble, buble [sic]*, toil and trouble! / Fourierism / War and schism / Till disunion come!"*[73] *Fourierism proposed harmony through Association. Many, especially Southerners, saw it as Yankee "ultraism" or fanaticism.*

[73] James S. Baillie, *The Hurly-Burly Pot*, 1850, (N.Y.: Published by James Baillie), Photograph, https://www.loc.gov/item/2008661525/.

The Syracuse Incident



John A. Collins[74]

John Anderson Collins had once been a minister. He came to Massachusetts in the 1830s to attend Andover Theological Seminary. However, he soon became distracted from his studies. He found abolitionism to be a more compelling cause than divinity.[75] Collins became a non-believer, a self-described "infidel," and put all his effort into the abolitionist movement. He took the job of general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS) and organized over a

[74] John A. Collins, Photo. 81.165, Portraits of American Abolitionists (a collection of images of individuals representing a broad spectrum of viewpoints in the slavery debate), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.
[75] Milton C. Sernett, "Collins, John Anderson (1810-1879), abolitionist and social reformer," *American National Biography*. 1 Feb. 2000; Accessed 8 Nov. 2019. https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1500140.

hundred conventions and lecture tours. In July of 1843, the MASS assigned Collins the job of finding a venue for formerly enslaved, self-freed black abolitionist Frederick Douglass to speak in Syracuse, New York. Collins was unable to find a suitable location. Douglass instead spoke at Fayette Park underneath a tree to a group of only five individuals. Little by little, more people came to hear Douglass speak until a crowd of 500 people gathered. When Collins got up to speak, Douglass got angry. Collins spoke mainly on socialism rather than on the emancipation of blacks. He spoke of the "bigotry and narrow mindedness of the abolitionists."[76]

Douglass, infuriated, wrote to Maria Weston Chapman, Collins' comrade in the MASS. He campaigned for Collins' resignation. The incident in Syracuse embarrassed Douglass. He wondered "whether it was just or honorable for Mr. Collins to labor in the one [cause] for the distruction [*sic*] of the other."[77] Collins defended himself to Chapman, writing that Douglass and another abolitionist, Charles L. Redmond, "accused me of a breach of confidence, charged me with treachery and deceit, by smuggling this question in through the influence of anti-slavery, and publicly renounced all antislavery fellowship with me, and those who would sustain me."[78] Collins felt Redmond and Douglass had treated him unfairly, but he also genuinely believed he had discovered something more important than "narrow minded abolitionism." Communitism, Collins proclaimed, was the way to end all forms of slavery. A faction in the MASS formed against him.[79] They believed his heart was no longer in the antislavery struggle. Collins had to acknowledge that they were right. His heart was no longer in the struggle for the abolition

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[76] Lester Grosvenor Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment: A Report to the Onondaga Historical Association," (Syracuse: Onondaga Historical Association, 1953), 4.
[77] Frederick Douglass to Maria Weston Chapman, 1843, Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.
[78] John A. Collins to Maria Weston Chapman, 1843, Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.
[79] Abbey Foster Kelley to Maria Weston Chapman, 1843, Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.

merely of chattel slavery. He wanted to abolish all forms of exploitation and servitude. He resigned from the MASS that same year in order to pursue his new project, the Skaneateles Community.[80]

William Lloyd Garrison and Robert Owen inspired Collins' beliefs. However, Collins refused to follow orthodox readings of either thinker. According to Christian Perfectionist writer William Alfred Hinds, "In its Communism and no-religion [*the Skaneateles Community*] was Owenistic, but in other things it might be termed Collinistic."[81] Collins created his own idiosyncratic brand of communism. He took inspiration from and was comradely with the Owenites and the Fourierists, but he would not allow adherence to dogma to hinder the Skaneateles Community. "Collinsism" was maverick socialism.

Collins and his comrades founded the community in the fall of 1843 and officially began operations on New Year's Day, 1844.[82] A group of about ninety people joined Collins in Mottville, NY, near Skaneateles Lake, to build a new kind of society. The Skaneateles experiment advocated not just the abolition of the ownership of *people*, as abolitionists had traditionally done, but the abolition of *all* privately held property. It was a unique and important attempt to emancipate all peoples from slavery to society's ills. They believed private property and competition were the root causes of suffering. Communitism, a unique direct democratic form of utopian socialism, would be the cure. The Skaneateles Community dissolved in 1846, just two years after its founding. Contemporaries blamed internal corruption and a general diminution of socialistic feeling amongst the members for the failure of the community. Despite

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[80] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 163.
[81] William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1908), 298.
[82] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 295.

only lasting for a couple of years, the Skaneateles Community played an important role in the progressive movements throughout Western New York at the time.[83]

The Skaneateles Community represented an intersection of all the major reform movements of the time. At the same time, it was symptomatic of the divisions within the reform movement.[84] Lester Grosvenor Wells' research on the community focuses on its contentious beginnings. They, unlike other utopians at the time, believed in atheism and the complete abolition of private property. Suffragist Ernestine Rose, who was an early advocate of the Skaneateles Community, had already made a name for herself as a freethinker and a radical. Her association with the community was a link to all the major reform movements of the antebellum age. However, to understand their origins one must look at the radical movement developing in 1830s Massachusetts.

Massachusetts' Socialistic Experiments

Oneida Community leader John Humphrey Noyes wrote of the Skaneateles Community, "In 1843 Massachusetts, the great mother of notions, threw out in the face of impending Fourierism her fourth and last socialistic experiment."[85] The first three major utopian experiments coming out of Massachusetts were the transcendentalist colony at Brook Farm, established in 1841, the Hopedale Community started by Adin Ballou in 1842 and the so-called "Nothinarian" Northampton Association, also started in 1842. Noyes described all three

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[83] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 2.

[84] Historian and archivist Lester Grosvenor Wells wrote a report on the Skaneateles Community for the Onondaga Historical Association in 1953. Wells argues the Skaneateles Community embodied the reform spirit that swept upstate New York in the 1840s. The spiritual revival movement spread radical, populist religious thought throughout Upstate New York. Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 8.

[85] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 162.

communities as "preparations for Fourierism."[86] He explained, "There was a mania abroad, that made common Yankees as confident of their ability to achieve new social machinery and save the world, as though they were Owens or Fouriers."[87]

Scottish industrialist Robert Owen attempted to put utopian socialism into practice at his factory in New Lanark, Scotland. However, it was not until he came to the United States to commence the commune at New Harmony, Indiana and the Franklin Community in Haverstraw, New York, that Americans took notice.[88] Owenism enjoyed brief acclaim. However, by the late 1830s, it was essentially dead in the United States. However, Owenism laid the foundation for Fourierism.

Brook Farm quickly became a beacon of Fourierism in the United States. Unitarian minister William Henry Channing inspired the initial formation of Brook Farm in 1841, but by 1843 the farm had converted to the gospel of Charles Fourier.[89] Brook Farm began as a transcendentalist community based on Channing's theory that humankind was suffering from evils that society as a whole must remedy. Many of the transcendentalists believed Albert Brisbane's English translations of Fourier's works held the formula to build the kind of society they wanted.[90] The farm voted to convert to socialism in 1843. Thereafter Brisbane established Brook Farm as a headquarters for Fourierism, printing the Fourierist newspaper *the Harbinger* there until the farm's demise in 1846.[91]

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[86] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 512.
[87] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 162.
[88] Arthur Eugene Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias. The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950) 116.
[89] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 512.
[90] John Van Der Zee Sears, *My Friends at Brook Farm*, (Desmond Fitzgerald Inc.: New York, 1912), 152.
[91] Sears, *My Friends at Brook Farm*, 155.

Hopedale, although not as famous as its cousin, Brook Farm, lasted a remarkable fourteen years.[92] Adin Ballou, Hopedale's founder, became a Universalist minister in 1823.[93] Garrisonian abolitionism radicalized Ballou in the 1830s.[94] He embraced Garrison's pacifistic, anarchistic doctrine of non-resistance and no-government.[95] Ballou believed Garrison's call to "the good fight of faith... struggling for 'liberty, equality, fraternity'" meant he should build an institution operating on non-nationalistic, pacifist principles that offered a model for a just and moral society .[96] By 1837, the mainstream Universalists ostracized Ballou. However, a small group of individuals affected by the Panic of 1837 was attracted to his teachings.[97] By 1839, Ballou and his group decided they should practice Christianity in their everyday life as much as possible.[98] By 1841, these "practical Christians" had raised enough money to buy the land at Hopedale near Milford, Massachusetts.[99] In 1849 Ballou wrote, "The problem… is to subject property to the great Christian law of love - to render it as power a means of promoting righteousness, peace, and happiness as it now is of promoting iniquity, selfishness, antagonism, war, violence, and misery."[100] Ballou opposed Fourier's libertine attitude toward human passional attraction, but believed a system of regulated economy similar to Fourier's was a step toward applying the "great Christian law of love" to economics.[101]

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[92] Edward K. Spann, *Hopedale: from Commune to Company Town, 1840-1920*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992) 1.
[93] Spann, *Hopedale*, 5.
[94] Spann, *Hopedale*, 9.
[95] Spann, *Hopedale*, 11.
[96] William Lloyd Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison on Non-Resistance, Together with a Personal Sketch by His Daughter, Fanny Garrison Villard, and a Tribute by Leo Tolstoi*, (New York: The Nation Press printing Co., 1924), 30.
[97] Spann, *Hopedale*, 12.
[98] Spann, *Hopedale*, 14.
[99] Spann, *Hopedale*, 24.
[100] Spann, *Hopedale*, 35.
[101] Spann, *Hopedale*, 36.

The Northampton Association was founded a year before agitation for the Skaneateles Community commenced. On April 2, 1842, seven men from Massachusetts met to form what, at the time, they called the Northampton Association of Education and Industry. Four more joined shortly after. Of the initial eleven men who led the formation of the Association, six were abolitionists, two were silk manufacturers, two were farmers and one was a mechanic.[102] The abolitionists, George W. Benson, Erasmus Darvin Hudson, William Adam, Samuel L. Hill, Hall Judd and David Mack were all, like Ballou, inspired by Garrison's teachings. The silk manufacturers, Joseph Conant and Early Dwight Swift, and the farmers, Theodore Scarborough and Samuel Brooks, saw association as a chance to avoid the insecurity of the market that resulted from the Panic of 1837.[103] They founded their community on the Garrisonian principles of nonresistance and moral suasion.[104] However, the Northampton Association was primarily a business venture. The Northampton Silk Company had owned the land previously. It already housed a four story silk factory.[105] Although they did not espouse Fourierism, they operated on a joint-stock principle similar to that of the Fourierist Associations.[106] Because they did not espouse any particular ideology, some referred to them as "Nothingarians." According to A. J. MacDonald, "They were persons who had been pleased with the avowed objects and principles of the Association, and with the persons composing it, and also looked upon it as a profitable investment of money."[107] By 1842 the Northampton Association was indeed operating a

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[102] Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: the Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 15.
[103] Clark, *The Communitarian Challenge*, 29.
[104] Clark, *The Communitarian Challenge*, 57.
[105] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 156.
[106] Clark, *The Communitarian Challenge*, 57.
[107] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 149.

profitable silk manufacturing business and it seemed their system of Associated Industry would be a success.[108]

When the Skaneateles Community commenced in 1843, these three communities were enjoying their most successful years. Noyes explains, "The Unitarians at Brook Farm, the Universalists at Hopedale, and the Nothingarians at Northampton, had tried their hands at Community-building in 1841-2, and were in the full glory of success."[109] The examples of these three remarkable communitarian projects emboldened radicals throughout Massachusetts and New York. By 1843 it seemed like association would engulf the country and bring security and equity to a fraught economy.

Collinsism

Although the Massachusetts communal projects' successes precipitated the formation of the Skaneateles Community, the community itself did not adhere slavishly to any particular doctrine. It was not Owenistic or Foureristic. It was Collinistic. John Collins was his own prophet. He, "a common Yankee" was, as John Humphrey Noyes put it, as "confident of [his] ability to achieve new social machinery and save the world" as though he was an Owen or Fourier.[110] As Noyes concludes, "It was time for Anti-slavery, the last and most vigorous of Massachusetts nurslings, to enter the socialistic field."[111] Many argued the community owed more to abolitionism than to the big names in socialist thought. Like Adin Ballou and the

[108] Clark, *The Communitarian Challenge*, 149.
[109] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 162.
[110] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 162.
[111] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 162.

abolitionists at Hopedale, and some of the founders of the Northampton Association, Garrisonianism inspired John A. Collins to embark on an experiment in practical socialism that he believed would end all forms of slavery and societal ill.

The Panic of 1837 caused the Massachusetts business leaders who helped bankroll abolitionism to lose everything. It threw the abolitionist movement into turmoil.[112] According to historian Robert H. Abzug, "Garrison and other New England radicals saw abolitionist setbacks as reason for reinvigorated spiritual opposition to 'the world' and its churches and ministers…. By 1836, Garrison… [was] promoting 'non-resistance' or 'no-government' doctrines in order to end war and other forms of violence."[113] This radical, anarchistic atmosphere allowed John Anderson Collins to emerge as a leading voice for radical no-government, no-god socialist living. As General Agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS), he had organized around a hundred conventions throughout the 1830s and 40s.[114] Now he had lost the Christian faith that drove him to divinity school and abolitionism and become an atheist freethinker preaching a new gospel of social reorganization.

By 1843, Collins had turned his interest almost exclusively to utopian socialism. In 1840, the MASS sent him on a fundraising trip to England. In the factories of London, he reported that he had discovered the condition of the white working class. He concluded that slavery was not a matter of race. It was something inherent to the capitalist system.[115] When he returned to the United States in 1841, he put most of his efforts toward ending all of society's ills though the abolition of property ownership.[116] He was not alone. Collins attracted followers from the

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[112] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 220.
[113] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 220.
[114] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 293.
[115] Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 100.
[116] Sernett, *North Star Country,* 100.

Massachusetts abolitionist movement. Even prominent abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison himself embraced some of the socialist leanings that Collins and others were popularizing.[117]

Since his interest had turned from abolitionism to utopian socialism, Collins felt he could no longer collect a salary as an anti-slavery agent in good conscience. His falling out with Frederick Douglass over the Syracuse incident had left him unenthusiastic about antislavery work. He left the MASS in 1843 to work exclusively on building the Skaneateles Community, or, as the locals knew it, "Community Place."[118] He announced his resignation by calling a large antislavery gathering in Massachusetts that same summer. He ended the abolitionist convention by calling on the delegates to hold a socialist convention immediately after, on the same spot. At the penultimate moment of the convention, Collins announced he no longer wished to be an agent for the MASS. The board issued the following resolution:

> *Voted, That the Board, in accepting the resignation of John A. Collins, tender him their sincerest thanks, and take this occasion to bear the most cordial testimony to the zeal and disinterestedness with which, at a great crisis, he threw himself a willing offering on the altar of the Anti-slavery cause, as well as to the energy and rare ability with which for four years he has discharged the duties of their General Agent; and in parting, offer him their best wishes for his future happiness and success.*[119]

The abolitionists wished him success, but some were also glad to see him go.

Commencing the Skaneateles Community

[117] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 220.
[118] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 163.
[119] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 163.

Today the Skaneateles Community is a private residence. They host wedding receptions in the old carriage barn. The Community House (shown) is still standing.[120]

In the fall of 1843, about ninety-one abolitionists and utopian socialists founded the Skaneateles Community in Mottville, NY, a few miles outside of the town of Skaneateles, near Skaneateles Lake in Onondaga County, NY.[121] Collins proposed a "Hunt for Harmony" and enlisted abolitionists from Massachusetts to join the hunt.[122] Locals knew the community as "Community Place," or pejoratively as "No-God" because of the atheistic views of Collins and others in the community.[123] Collins and the Skaneateles communitists sought to live in a godless, harmonious, communist utopia, free of both chattel and wage slavery. They eschewed private property, declared the virtues of communitism and shared everything.

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[120] Photograph by the author.
[121] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 51.
[122] Sernett, *North Star Country*, 100.
[123] Elizabeth Pike, "Natives Scandalized by 1843 Community of Atheism, Anarchy," *Post Standard*, 18 November 1934.

Collins started organizing the Skaneateles Community through a series of conventions. In August of 1843, the *Onondaga Standard* reported on a "meeting of friends of the re-organization of society" that happened on August 17. Collins had reported to the meeting on his progress in selecting a location for the Skaneateles Community. He wrote that he had found a suitable location and he could purchase the land for $15,000. The site had a "spring of soft water" and a hill, which made plumbing possible.[124]

In September of 1843, Collins presented a written account of the property in Mottville to a convention for the reorganization of society in Syracuse. The letter states:

> *The healthiness of the climate—the warmth, strength, and fertility of the soil—the splendor of its water-scenery, and the abundance of its hydraulic privileges — the beauty and value of its woodlands—the abundance of stone and timber for building; these, and other advantages, which we have not time to enumerate, render this one of the most valuable and delightful locations for the proposed Community which has ever fallen under our observation.*[125]

With the advantages clear and enthusiasm high, the convention delegates elected a committee to procure $5,000 "to meet the first installments on the domain, and to put in operation the necessary mills and machinery for immediate use and other necessary purposes."[126] The Skaneateles Community sought not merely to be an agrarian colony. They wanted it to have modern industry that would not operate on a wage system, but would be worked in common for the common benefit. In October 1843, Collins and three other members of the community, N. H. Whiting, John Orvis, and John O. Wattles, sent a declaration to the *Onondaga Standard* reporting they had commenced building the Skaneateles Community in September. The article

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[124] "Meeting of Friends of Re-Organization of Society," *Onondaga Standard*, 23 August 1843.
[125] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 294.
[126] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 294.

states they had invited upwards of 300 people to visit the site with the interest of spreading the news of the community and eliciting new members.[127]

A two-day convention inaugurated the Skaneateles Community project. It took place on a dark, rainy weekend at the community's domain on October 14 and 15, 1843. John Collins commenced the event by decrying the evils of the crass, capitalistic system.[128] Next, women's rights advocate Ernestine Rose spoke on Association, which she argued was the resolution of man's three contradictory tendencies: selfishness, sociability and universality. She argued, "Thou shalt not be happy short of the universal happiness of every human being."[129] After Rose, Nathaniel Peabody Rodgers, editor of the newspaper *The Herald of Freedom*, and Arnold Buffum, an abolitionist lecturer spoke.[130]

The second day of the convention, October 15, 1843, proved to be one of the most fateful of the Skaneateles Community's history. It rained even harder than it did the first day. According to the *Onondaga Standard,* hundreds of people "literally crammed" themselves into the barn to take part in debate over the practical matters of the community.[131] A group that included Collins and others campaigned for the community to be without a deed legally recognizing their ownership over the land. They argued that since they did not believe in property ownership of any kind, a deed would be a compromise of their principles. Still others, including Ernestine Rose, were in favor of a deed to protect the rights of the community members' usufruct land rights. They argued opposition to a deed was too extreme. The latter group managed to sway the

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[127] *Onondaga Standard*, 4 October 1843.
[128] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 5.
[129] Yuri Suhl, *Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights*, (New York: Reynal, 1959), 78.
[130] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 5.
[131] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 6.

majority at the convention to their point of view.[132] Unfortunately, the legal compromise they came up with would eventually spell the doom of the community. Still, on October 15, 1843, the outlook of the Skaneateles group was overwhelmingly positive.

The Founders' Creed

An article published in the *Skaneateles Columbian* newspaper included the following declaration, entitled "Articles of Belief and Disbelief, and Creed, prepared and read by John A. Collins, November 19, 1843." It outlined the creed on which they based the community. Here is the declaration with commentary on each line item:

> *1. Religion.—A disbelief in any special revelation of God to man, touching his will, and thereby binding upon man as authority in any arbitrary sense; that all forms of worship should cease; that all religions of every age and nation, have their origin in the same great falsehood, viz., God's special Providences; that while we admire the precepts attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, we do not regard them as binding because uttered by him, but because they are true in themselves, and best adapted to promote the happiness of the race: therefore we regard the Sabbath as other days; the organized church as adapted to produce strife and contention rather than love and peace; the clergy as an imposition; the bible as no authority; miracles as unphilosophical; and salvation from sin, or from punishment in a future world, through a crucified God, as a remnant of heathenism.*[133]

Collins and his predecessor Robert Owen were what people in the nineteenth century considered anti-religious "freethinkers." In the spring of 1846, Collins spoke at a freethinkers' "Infidel Convention." Robert Owen and Ernestine Rose also spoke at the convention.[134] However, Collins downplayed his atheist activities in order to make common cause with the

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[132] Suhl, *Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights*, 79.
[133] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 164-165.
[134] "John Collins speaks at Infidel Convention," *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 May 1846.

Fourierists. He praised the teachings of Jesus as "best adapted to promote the happiness of the race."[135] He wrote in *the Communitist*, "If the bible could be received on the ground of its own pretensions, we should perceive that it no where claims to govern or make laws for us and instead of the blind veneration, now everywhere paid to the forms, as a matter of obligations, we should look upon it as a book of other times and love it for the many truths it contains, for it certainly contains many important truths."[136] Collins concludes the bible should be read and loved not because it contains the stories of mythical heroes like God and Jesus, but because it contains good advice for communitarian living and moral reform. In May of 1843, the *Onondaga Standard* reported that Collins and his "friends from Ohio" spoke in Syracuse and appealed to the concept of "natural religion."[137] An 1846 issue of *the Communitist* reprinted Southern abolitionist Cassius M. Clay's anti-slavery address entitled "An Appeal to the Followers of Christ in the American Union." In in Clay calls slavery "our greatest national sin," which "must be destroyed or we are lost."[138] Thomas McClintock, of the Society of Friends or Quakers, wrote to Collins in the summer of 1843, approving of the Community Place project, hailing it as a "return to God's order," despite Collins' personal feelings towards religion.[139]

> *2. Governments.—A disbelief in the rightful existence of all governments based upon physical force; that they are organized bands of bandits, whose authority is to be disregarded: therefore we will not vote under such governments, or petition to them, but demand them to disband; do no military duty; pay no personal or property taxes; sit upon no juries; and never appeal to the law for a redress of grievances, but use all peaceful and moral means to secure their complete destruction.*[140]

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[135] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 164-165.
[136] John A. Collins, "Social Reform," *The Communitist*, 16 July, 1844.
[137] *Onondaga Standard*, 24 May 1843.
[138] Cassius M. Clay, "An Appeal to the Followers of Christ in the American Union," *The Communitist*, 15 January 1846.
[139] "Meeting of Friends of Re-Organization of Society," *Onondaga Standard*, 23 August 1843.
[140] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 165.

John Collins, like Robert Owen, believed it was a society's duty to shape the character of each individual. However, Collins and Owen both agreed that this work must be done through moral suasion, not by appealing to governmental authority. An 1844 *Communitist* article reiterates Collins' statements on government at the New England Social Reorganization Convention in Boston in June 1844. The article states, "Force begets force. There may be power in a bullet, but neither argument nor love follows its course. Touch not these governments, they oppress. They have their origin in oppression. Let the rich who need their protections, do all the work, and pay all the taxes. Touch not a ballot - it is a sheathed sword. Attend no election, they are powder magazines."[141] The Collinsites at Skaneateles considered government coercion a form of violence. In adherence to William Lloyd Garrison's non-resistance and no-government principles, they believed moral suasion would lead the people toward the morally righteous path. In order to achieve emancipation they must build a just and peaceful society independent of government authority that people would want to join voluntarily because of its inherent virtues.

> *3. That there is to be no individual property, but all goods shall be held in common; that the idea of mine and thine, as regards the earth and its products, as now understood in the exclusive sense, is to be disregarded and set aside; therefore, when we unite, we will throw into the common treasury all the property which is regarded as belonging to us, and forever after yield up our individual claim and ownership in it; that no compensation shall be demanded for our labor, if we should ever leave.*[142]

In approach to personal property, the Fourierists and Collinsists were entirely at odds. Members of the Skaneateles Community owned and shared all property. They conducted business according to communitist principles not found in Fourier's system. After visiting the Fourierist Sodus Bay Phalanx Collins reported, "Fourier's plan of distributing wealth, was both

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[141] "Social Reorganization," *The Communitist*, July 27, 1844.
[142] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 165.

arbitrary and superficial."[143] He took issue with its attempt to reconcile individual and collective interests. The Fourierists operated on a joint stock principle. Members could be residents of a Fourierist "phalanx," or community, or they could be non-resident investors in the phalanx by buying shares. Both resident and non-resident members had voting rights on matters concerning the phalanx. The Skaneateles Community operated on a common stock principle. All members had to buy a single $50 share and nobody could own more than a single share. Outside investors could buy a $50 share in the community, but the commune did not consider non-resident investors members. They did not have voting rights unless they were residents. Thus, one could be a shareholder, but not a member; but one could not be a member and without being a shareholder.[144] Community Place even tried to adhere to communitist principles in their legal proceedings, especially in relation to the domain's deed.

> *"4. Marriage.—(Orthodox as usual on this head.) That we regard marriage as a true relation, growing out of the nature of things—repudiating licentiousness, concubinage, adultery, bigamy and polygamy; that marriage is designed for the happiness of the parties and to promote love and virtue; that when such parties have outlived their affections and can not longer contribute to each other's happiness, the sooner the separation takes place the better; and such separation shall not be a barrier to the parties in again uniting with any one, when they shall consider their happiness can be promoted thereby; that parents are in duty bound to educate their children in habits of virtue and love and industry; and that they are bound to unite with the Community.*[145]

Although presented as "Orthodox as usual," the communitists' pro-divorce approach was considered radical for the mid-nineteenth century. In 1901, the *Skaneateles Press* published a retrospective on the Skaneateles Community recalling, "While marriage was regarded as a true relation, and licentiousness and polygamy were repudiated, marriage ties were considered no

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[143] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 290.
[144] *Onondaga Standard*, 3 May 1843.
[145] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 165-166.

longer binding when they ceased to promote love and virtue, which was the signal of separation."[146] Maria Loomis writes in the July 10, 1844 issue of *the Communitist*, "We speak of the present marriage relation as false, because the parties are bound by contrary law, instead of their affection and natural bond. We would have our friends make the distinction in their minds, between false and true, and no longer think of aiming to destroy the marriage bond. It is a natural relation, and is therefore in danger of being destroyed."[147] Rather than practice celibacy as the Shakers did, free love as Nashoba did or some form of polyamory like the "complex marriage" system of the Oneida Community, the Skaneateles Community advocated serial monogamy. They considered marriage an institution of love, but if that affection ceased to exist the partners should dissolve their union as quickly as possible. For the Skaneateles communitists, divorce and separation should be deliberately easy to obtain and common.

In March of 1852, the *Syracuse Daily Standard* newspaper reported Mister Samuel Sellers, who took control of the Skaneateles Community estate after its collapse in 1846, and Miss Sarah Abbot of the Skaneateles Community wedded under what the paper calls "Odd Marriage Vows." Sellers' vows read, "In the presence of all who are here present, I take Sarah Abbot to be my wife, making no promises of continued affection, and invoking no aid hitherto, but hoping, trusting and believing that our characters are sufficiently well adapted to enable us to be to each other faithful and affectionate husband and wife during our lives."[148] Sarah Abbot's vows were essentially the same.

The Skaneateles communitists' repudiation of "licentiousness, concubinage, adultery, bigamy and polygamy" was a repudiation of Fourierism. The American Fourierists attempted to

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[146] "The Doctrine of Free Love," *Skaneateles Press*, 28 May 1901.
[147] Maria Loomis, "Marriage," *the Communitist*, July 10, 1844.
[148] "Odd Marriage Vows," *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 15 March 1852.

emphasize Fourier's economic plans over his radical views on sexuality and religion. However, those that studied Fourier closely knew he was a radical libertine, especially when compared to American communist sects like the Shakers, who proscribed complete celibacy. Fourier appreciated an ability to carry on multiple relationships and felt pleasing others, including physically, was the greatest of virtues. He even wrote a book entitled *The Hierarchies of Cuckoldry and Bankruptcy* in which he classifies seventy-two different types of cuckoldry and argues that the prevalence of such phenomena is indicative of women's secret, innate revolt against the institution of marriage.[149] These French peculiarities in Fourier's canon of work confounded and embarrassed American Fourierists like Albert Brisbane who looked to appeal to the religiously pious. After all, the Second Great Awakening and the Methodist Charles Finney had inspired the "burned over district" to embrace philanthropy through the doctrines of perfectionism and moral suasion. Heaven on Earth, most American ultraists believed, would be possible only when the individual reformed his or her own character. Free love would not appeal to this crowd. Brisbane was constantly defending Fourierism against charges that it was against Christianity and moral piety. Collins and his comrades, despite being infidels, did not carry this hindrance to the propagation of their communitist system.

> *5. Education of Children.—That the Community owes to the children a duty to secure them a virtuous education, and watch over them with parental care.*[150]

An article in an 1846 edition of *the Communitist* argued that child mortality was one of the greatest problems facing the nation. The editors, which at the time included Collins, Sam Sellers, and John Orvis, cite "a popular writer" who asserts that one-fifth of all American children die within the first year. The editors argue, "Children are over-fed, over-clothed, take too little

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[149] Frank E. Manuel, Introduction, *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, by Charles Fourier, (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 7.
[150] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 166.

exercise in the open air, and these are the causes of mortality among them."[151] The "popular writer" was Nathaniel Hawthorne, who believed in educator Amos Bronson Alcott's contention that a young child's environment had profound and long lasting psychological and physiological effects. Hawthorne was Alcott's neighbor in Concord, Massachusetts. Their children were friends and often played together.[152] Both were transcendentalists involved with the Brook Farm commune and advocates of education reform.

Alcott founded the Massachusetts utopian community Fruitlands in 1843, the same year Collins and his comrades founded the Skaneateles Community. Alcott intended Fruitlands to restore society to a paradise state like the Garden of Eden through education and strict regimentation of diet.[153] Collins invited Alcott to speak at the Boston "Convention of Friends of Association" he organized in December of 1843.[154] Alcott visited the Skaneateles Community in July of 1844.[155] *The Communitist* frequently reprinted Alcott's writings.[156] His influence on the Skaneateles Community is apparent in their approach to both education and diet.

The editors of *the Communitist* recommend parents listen to experts. They contend, "We agree with the writer [Hawthrone], who recommends mothers to study Combe and Brigham, instead of Bulwer and Boz." Phrenologist George Combe and psychiatrist Amariah Brigham were influential on Alcott's educational philosophy. Alcott called Combe's influential work *Constitution of Man* the best essay he had read on human nature after reading it for the second

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[151] *The Communitist*, January 15, 1846.
[152] Martha Saxon, *Louisa May Alcott: A Modern Biography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 237.
[153] Richard Francis, *A Journey into the Transcendentalists' New England,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 57.
[154] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston," *New York Weekly Tribune*, January 1, 1844.
[155] Frederick T. Dahlstrand, *Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography*, (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1982), 201.
[156] *The Communitist*, July 10, 1844, Bronson Alcott, "Man, not a Flesh Eater," *The Communitist*, August 10, 1844.

time in 1831.[157] In it Combe recommended human beings study their own nature in order to work in harmony with such nature. This approach, he argued, would advance human happiness and divinity.[158] Inspired by Combe, Alcott wrote in his 1830 book *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction:*

> *All that connects the child with the pure, the good, and the happy around him, should be impressed deeply in his mind. From the opened volume of nature, always perused with delight by childhood; from the varied records of life and experience, and from the deeper fountains of the mind, and of revelation, illustrations of truth and love may be drawn to expand the infant soul, to elevate and enrich it with knowledge and piety, for the coming years of its existence.*[159]

Alcott recommended an early childhood education that connected a child's happiness with intellectual stimulation and an appreciation of God's creation.

Amariah Brigham spoke out on the effects of the Market Revolution on childhood development. He reported that the reasons brain diseases were more common in America than in other countries were the "strife for wealth, office, political distinction and party success in this free country."[160] Brigham contended that competitive republicanism and the Market Revolution had created a public health crisis. Hawthorne's interest in Brigham's work is reflected in his 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter* where a pathological, religious society leads to collective insanity.[161] The editors of *the Communitist* agreed with Hawthorne in recommending parents read Combe and Brigham over "Bulwer and Boz," the writers Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Charles Dickens.[162]

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[157] Dahlstrand, *Bronson Alcott*, 81.
[158] Dahlstrand, *Bronson Alcott*, 82.
[159] Amos Bronson Alcott, *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction*, (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830), 10.
[160] James Mancall, *Thoughts Painfully Intense: Hawthorne and the Invalid Author*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 3.
[161] E. Goldman, "Explaining Mental Illness," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59, no. 1 (2004): 32.
[162] Charles Dickens wrote for newspapers under the pseudonym Boz throughout the mid-19th century., Robert L. Patten, "Characterizing Boz (1834–1837): Sketches by Boz," *Charles Dickens and Boz*, n.d., 47.

Bulwer's novel *Lucretia* depicts a girl who is deprived of association with her peers and educated for masculine, capitalist pursuits. She becomes an egocentric, power-hungry woman as a result.[163] Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* depicts a boy born in a workhouse and immediately orphaned. He is forced to turn to crime to survive.[164] Both Bulwer's Lucretia Clavering and Dickens' Oliver Twist overcome their miseducation to achieve a measure of success and respectability in the crass world of market competition. To Hawthorne and the communitists this idea is an aberration. An unstructured or unnurtured upbringing, they contend, could not possibly result in a successful adult. In another article in the same issue of *the Communitist,* the editors declare, "[W]e are mis-educated and maltreated from the cradle to the grave… Our children are often bred to wrong employments. Most of us live, daily and hourly, at the expense of life."[165]

> *6. Dietetics.—That a vegetable and fruit diet is essential to the health of the body, and purity of the mind, and the happiness of society; therefore, the killing and eating of animals is essentially wrong, and should be renounced as soon as possible, together with the use of all narcotics and stimulants.*[166]

The Skaneateles communitists believed unhealthy lifestyles were responsible for what they perceived as skyrocketing mortality rates in America. Their insistence on temperance and strict vegetarianism led two Fourierists who visited Community Place to describe it as the "...No-Meat, No-Salt and No-Pepper system of Community"[167] The January 15, 1846 edition of *the Communitist* argues, "Nearly all die by violence, as much so (only more slowly,) as if the knife, the halter, the guillotine, were the instruments of their destruction. We manufacture for ourselves

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[163] Laura Ciolkowski,. "The Woman (In) Question: Gender, Politics, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 'Lucretia,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 26, no. 1 (1992): 82.
[164] "Dickens's Oliver Twist," *The Explicator* 63.3 (2005): 148.
[165] "Human Health and Longevity," *The Communitist*, January 15, 1846.
[166] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 166.
[167] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 180.

a formidable host of diseases, by means of which we perish."[168] The author cites "Prof. Caldwell of Louisville" who says "we have a hundred gluttons to every drunkard" in America.[169]

Charles Caldwell was a physician who started the University of Louisville School of Medicine. He became known for popularizing phrenology with his 1824 book *Elements of Phrenology*. Caldwell's phrenological theories influenced Bronson Alcott's educational and dietetic philosophy. They both taught that obedience to moral laws would help the body and mind to be in harmony. Thus, Caldwell and Alcott both advocated temperance, virtuous action, sexual restraint and self-improvement.[170] In Caldwell's *An oration on the causes of the difference, in point of frequency and force, between the endemic diseases of the United States of America, and those of the countries of Europe*, published in 1820, he attempted to explain an apparent imbalance in deaths and diseases between America and Europe. While Amariah Brigham argued competitive republicanism and the Market Revolution were to blame for America's high rates of mortality, Caldwell blamed a host of factors including the variation in climate and the presence of rotting vegetable matter. However, Caldwell also argued diet was a significant factor. He writes, "There is reason to believe, that, in the United States, children are more indulged in the use of improper food than in transatlantic countries."[171] Caldwell recommends children avoid eating unripe fruit, for example.

The Communitist newspaper reprinted an article by Bronson Alcott entitled "Man, not a Flesh Eater." Alcott pointed to various features of human anatomy and explained that when compared to herbivorous monkeys, humans do not appear to be evolutionarily suited to meat

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[168] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 180.
[169] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 180.
[170] Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*, 82.
[171] Charles Caldwell, *An oration on the causes of the difference, in point of frequency and force, between the endemic diseases of the United States of America, and those of the countries of Europe*, (Philadelphia: T. and William Bradford, 1802), 43.

eating.[172] Alcott attempted to blend science, religion, reform and utopia at Fruitlands. Robert Carter, writing for *The Pioneer* magazine in 1843, reported on a visit to Fruitlands, remarking that Alcott's approach was not necessarily radical or even political. Fruitlands was more a community of self improvement. Carter reported, "No animal substance, neither flesh, fish, butter, cheese, eggs, nor milk, was allowed to be used at 'Fruitlands.' They were all denounced as pollution and as tending to corrupt the body, and through that the soul. Tea and coffee, molasses and rice, were also proscribed, - the last two as foreign luxuries, - and only water was used as a beverage."[173] Alcott also did not allow crops to be fertilized with manure, nor would he allow the consumption of "base products which grew downwards into the earth…."[174] Ultimately Alcott's schemes were too extreme. Fruitlands' crops failed and Alcott's followers became disgruntled and left.[175] Fruitlands began on June 1, 1843 and did not last through the winter.[176]

The Skaneateles communitists advocated a raw, vegan diet and simple living. The February 5, 1846 edition of *the Communitist* reprinted a selection from vegetarian advocate Sylvester Graham's *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*.[177] Graham reported, "Again, if a man were to subsist entirely on food in its natural state, he would never suffer from concentrated ailment."[178] Graham further contends that the body naturally separates the useful and useless elements of food. To tamper with it artificially is to confuse the body by artificially separating

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[172] Bronson Alcott, "Man, not a Flesh Eater," *The Communitist*, July 27, 1844.
[173] Clara Endicott Sears, *Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands. Compiled by Clara Endicott Sears. With "Transcendental Wild Oats" by L.M. Alcott*, (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), 38-39.
[174] Sears, *Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands*, 39.
[175] Sears, *Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands*, 126.
[176] Barbara Packer, *The Transcendentalists*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 148.
[177] Graham became known for his advocacy of whole wheat instead of refined grains. Americans may know him as the namesake of the "Graham cracker." Karen Iacobbo and Michael Iacobbo, *Vegetarian America: A History*, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 29.
[178] Sylvester Graham, "Physiological: From Graham's Lectures on Human Life," *The Communitist*, February 5, 1846.

the useful and useless parts.[179] He argued the further human beings got from nature the more complicated life became and the more problems mankind acquired.[180] Graham had met William A. Alcott, Bronson Alcott's close friend and second cousin, through the Philadelphia Temperance Society.[181] William became a well known physician and advocate of "the Graham System" of diet. His influence on his cousin Bronson was immense. In 1836, Bronson Alcott wrote of Graham, "I deem him to be the *prophet of temperance* to his age, his mission consisting of turning men to the knowledge and purification of their bodies as the fit and appropriate baptism for the sanctifying influences of the spirit."[182] The editors of *the Communitist* clearly felt the same way. They devoted a regular column to Graham's lecture series as well as to Bronson Alcott's writings on vegetarianism.[183]

> *"7. That all applicants shall, at the discretion of the Community, be put upon probation of three or six months.*
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> *"8. Any person who shall force himself or herself upon the Community, who has received no invitation from the Community, or who does not assent to the views above enumerated, shall not be treated or considered as a member of the Community; no work shall be assigned to him or her if solicited, while at the same time, he or she shall be regarded with the same kindness as all or any other strangers—shall be furnished with food and clothing; that if at any time any one shall dissent from any or all of the principles above, he ought at once, in justice to himself, to the Community, and to the world, to leave the Association. To these views we hereby affix our respective signatures.*[184]

The Skaneateles Community, like most of the other utopian societies, feared the supposed wrong kind of person would be attracted to communal life and would throw off the balance and harmony they sought. Still, the Skaneateles communitists' idea of purity in the practice of their

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[179] Graham, "Physiological," *The Communitist*, February 5, 1846.
[180] Sylvester Graham, *Science of Human Life*, (London: Horsell, Aldine Chambers, 1849), 6.
[181] Andrew F. Smith, *Eating history : 30 turning points in the making of American cuisine*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 31., Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*, 21.
[182] Dahlstrand, *Bronson Amos Alcott*, 152.
[183] *The Communitist*, February 5, 1846.
[184] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 167.

beliefs meant they could not turn anyone away who was in need. Many visitors traveled to the domain to witness communitism in action. People were thus in and out of the Skaneateles Community frequently. The communitists wanted to make it clear they would operate with kindness, but would also not tolerate deviations from their moral values. A list of "Questions for those to put to themselves, who think of joining a Community" appeared in the July 10, 1844 edition of *the Communitist* signed "R.S." The author asked, "Can I live among quarrelsome neighbors without quarreling myself? Am I thorough in my efforts to moulding my habits, to moderate and direct every passion and appetite to subserviency to this end?" These questions were a test for potential community members. R.S. concluded, "It is believed that a community comprise of individuals who could honesty and satisfactorily answer the above queries in the affirmative could not only form a happy and permanent community; but they would not fail to acquire for a short time, the confidence of the world at large."[185]

Because of their doctrine of moral suasion and uncompromising spirit, the atmosphere at Community Place was at times tense. Abolitionist E. L. Hatch recalled a visit he made to the community, "There was not much of the home feeling there. Everyone seemed to be setting an example and trying to bring others into it."[186] The communitists, in their obsession with cooperative values, made a competition out of their purity. So constant was the atmosphere of moral superiority that it put off outsiders. As previously mentioned, Fourierist critics considered the strictures of the Skaneateles Community so harsh they called it the "No-God, No-Government, No-Marriage, No-Money, No-Meat, No-Salt and No-Pepper system of Community…."[187]

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[185] R. S., "Questions for those to put to themselves, who think of joining a Community," *The Communitist*, July 10, 1844.
[186] Sernett, *North Star Country*, 100.
[187] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 180.

Not everyone endorsed these strict rules. Many in the Skaneateles group did not want to tie themselves to any rigid set of rules or beliefs contingent for their membership. Later in 1843, a notice in *the Communitist* recanted the past positions stating:

> *We repudiate all creeds, sects, and parties, in whatever shape or form they may present themselves. Our principles are as broad as the universe, and as liberal as the elements that surround us. They forbid the adoption and maintenance of any creed, constitution, rules of faith, declarations of belief and disbelief, touching any or all subjects; leaving each individual free to think, believe and disbelieve, as he or she may be moved by knowledge, habit, or spontaneous impulses.*[188]

Skaneateles urged others to come to their own conclusions through inquiry and curiosity. "Belief and disbelief are founded upon some kind of evidence," they explained, "which may be satisfactory to the individual to-day, but which other or better evidence may change to-morrow. We estimate the man by his acts rather than by his peculiar belief. We say to all, Believe what you may, but act as well as you can."[189] These principles led them to recant their "Articles of Belief and Disbelief." *The Communitist*'s editors explained:

> *[W]e are happy to inform all our friends and the world at large, that such a document was not fully assented to and was never adopted by the Community; and that the authors were among the first to discover the error and retrace the step. The document, with all proceedings under it, or relating thereto, has long since been abolished and repudiated by unanimous consent; and we now feel ourselves to be much wiser and better than when we commenced.*[190]

The Skaneateles Community officially began operations on New Year's Day, 1844.[191] That summer, the editor of the *Onondaga Standard* visited the Skaneateles Community. He reported that in addition to planting a great deal of crops the Skaneateles communitists had erected a two-story stone-house with a thirty-foot extension, another, smaller two-story house, a

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[188] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 167-168.
[189] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 167-168.
[190] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 167-168.
[191] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 295.

log-cabin, four barns, a shed, a two-story saw-mill, two lathes, a stone sawing mill, a kiln, a tannery and a foundry. They also had a printing press and began printing their newspaper *the Communitist*. The editor reported there were more than ninety people on the site, all of whom the community employed in one vocation or another. They all seemed content.[192] The article concludes, "Their numerous difficulties and discouragements have been successfully encountered, their wants supplied, their crops put in, a mill erected, engagements promptly met, $4,000 paid on their property, and all this at the outset, and within the space of eight months—is it too much to expect that they will soon prove to the world that their efforts will be crowned with entire success?"[193] Clearly, the enthusiasm and optimism of the communitist project at Skaneateles was contagious at this early stage. It seemed like they were in a good position financially. They were making plans to build things and improve the land. The communitists were confident that by working together they would make a profit and be able to pay off their debts.

Contentious Comrades

Collins, though preoccupied with socialism, continued to maintain close ties to the abolitionist movement. He also continued to organize conventions. A notice in the *Tribune* from New Year's Day, 1844, the same day Community Place commenced operations, describes a convention held in December of 1843. The list of speakers and the description of the intention of the convention leaves no question about the close link between the abolitionist and socialist

[192] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 296.
[193] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 296.

movements. The article, signed "REVILO," describes the first "Convention of Social-Reorganization" but Collins and the other organizers officially dubbed it a "Convention of Friends of Association."[194] Association was Brisbane's term for Fourier's philosophy. Collins used Fourierist language to ingratiate the growing Fourierist movement.

Collins and others attempted to tie the antislavery and socialist causes together. They wanted to achieve solidarity and unity between the various progressive groups of nineteenth century Yankee civil society. The convention delegates appointed and elected prominent New England abolitionists and well-known utopian socialists to leadership roles. They elected Quaker abolitionist William Bassett of Lynn, Massachusetts president of the convention.[195] They elected Adin Ballou of the Hopedale Community and George Ripley of Brook Farm vice presidents. Charles A. Dana of Brook Farm took the position of secretary. John A. Collins and Frederick Douglass were members of the "committee of business to prepare resolutions." By that time, Douglass and Collins had apparently set aside the wedge the Syracuse incident left between them. Both men were willing to join in solidarity to strengthen the linkage between utopian socialism and abolitionism in the antebellum North. Revilo lists William Lloyd Garrison and Unitarian Brook Farm leader William H. Channing as two of the most favored speakers. They explain there were many diverse opinions on exactly how to reorganize society and what a reorganized society should look like at the convention. They write, "The sentiments put forth, in a convention thus composed, were various and conflicting; but the Spirit of Love and Harmony was strikingly manifested from start to close."[196] Although there was a great deal of disagreement, to Revilo, the spirit of comradeship left the strongest impression.

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[194] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston: Correspondence of the Tribune," New York Daily Tribune, January 1, 1844.
[195] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston."
[196] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston."

However, Revilo is sure to note, one of the most audacious and contentious rabble-rousers at the convention was none other than Collins himself. Collins' advocacy of "community of property," or "communitism," was the most controversial proposal of convention. Revilo lauds Collins' vigorous defense of communitism, but quips, "I think the convention had little sympathy for his peculiar opinions."[197]

Despite the contention, albeit comradely, at the convention, the delegates passed three resolutions. The first resolved that social reorganization was the legitimate result of "*Christian Brotherhood*, of *Liberty*, and of *Peaceful Reform*."[198] Collins, an atheist, apparently did not object to the inclusion of "*Christian Brotherhood*" in the resolution.[199] The second resolution was the most clear and unitary. It declared the "science of Fourier" the remedy for the ills of society. A disclaimer in the resolution recognized "individual Rights," "Religious sentiment," the "true Nature of Man" and the "Laws of God" as falling within acceptable limits of Fourier's science. The third resolved to print and distribute propaganda to spread the word of Fourierism.[200] Collins, a freethinking, non-Fourierist socialist, may have objected to these last two resolutions as well, but not forcefully. The delegates unanimously approved the propagation of Fourierism and its incorporation with religious notions of social reorganization.

Collins' relationships with both the abolitionists and Fourierists were paradoxical. They were comradely and contentious. To the abolitionists, Collins' ideas were too holistic to be practical. In 1843, William Lloyd Garrison wrote to controversial New England anarchist and abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright, "[Collins] holds, with Robert Owen, that man is the creation of

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[197] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston."
[198] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston."
[199] "Infidel Convention," *New York Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1846.
[200] Revilo, "Social Reorganization-Convention at Boston: Correspondence of the Tribune," New York Daily Tribune, 1 January 1844.

circumstances, and therefore not deserving of praise or blame for what he does - a most absurd and demoralizing doctrine, in my opinion, which will make shipwreck of any man or any scheme under its guidance, in due season."[201] Garrison's non-resistance, moral suasion doctrine relied on the Christian perfectionist idea that it is the individual's duty alone to morally regenerate their soul. Collinsism and Owenism relied on the freethinking idea that it is society's duty to morally rehabilitate the individual. Garrison's *the Liberator* newspaper clearly demonstrated the position of the Massachusetts abolitionists on Community Place when it said of the communitists, "Of the benevolent and reformatory intentions of our Skaneateles friends, we have not doubt; but we are constrained to believe that their community rests upon a sandy foundation and that their moral philosophy is disproved by myriads of facts, drawn from a world lying in inquiry."[202] Abolitionists were not afraid to air their disagreements and harshly criticize the communitists. Still, they were comradely in their criticisms. *The Liberator* concludes, "Nevertheless, we feel a friendly interest in their welfare, and trust they will not be reluctant to change those sentiments of today, which tomorrow they may peradventure find radically false."[203]

To the Fourierists, Collins' ideas were well meaning, but they were air headed, sectarian, and controversial. Before Community Place even began, an 1843 article in the *Tribune* by Horace Greeley expressed comradeship with Collins and the Skaneateles communitists. However, Greeley seems reluctant to admit that he must "condemn the scheme as cruel and inefficient."[204] In an op-ed published in the *Tribune* in December of 1843, the author decried a *New York Harold* article that associated Skaneateles with Fourierism. The author, possibly

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[201] William Lloyd Garrison, Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Henry Clarke Wright, 1843, William Lloyd Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.
[202] "The Communitist," *The Liberator*, January 5, 1844.
[203] "The Communitist," *The Liberator*, January 5, 1844.
[204] *New York Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1843.

Greeley, argued the Skaneateles Community should be associated more with abolitionism than with Fourierism. They stated, "They have never been connected with the Fourierists, but have always avowed themselves determined opponents of Fourier's system, and their undertaking had its origin in the Abolition cause, of which their noted men have been active and prominent champions."[205] In a letter to the editor in the *Tribune*, published in January of 1844, entitled "Let every Tub stand on its own Bottom," the author, who signed as "An Abolitionist," repudiates the *Tribune*'s claim that Collins and his group owed their origins to abolitionism. The "Abolitionist" wrote, "You are justly indignant at the dishonest attempt to identify Fourierism with the notions of the community at Skaneateles. Depend on it, Abolitionists will disclaim the alliance with equal spirit and indignation, and with equal justice also."[206] Apparently, Collins' abolitionist comrades were some of his harshest critics.

The Fourierists, on the other hand, cheered Collins as much as they criticized him. They believed Collins and his comrades to be foolhardy, but they hoped they succeeded. Evidence suggests this was the norm for progressive movements in the mid-nineteenth century. Historian Arthur Bestor, Jr. writes, "A narrow factionalism… was exceptional in early American socialism. Even the sectarian communities, narrow as their theology might be, proved surprisingly sympathetic to experiments that diverged widely from their own in purpose and plan."[207] Early American socialism was not divisive. The socialists sought to work together in coalitions rather than split into various belligerent factions. *The Communitist*, the newspaper published by the

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[205] *New York Daily Tribune*, December 29, 1843.
[206] "Let every Tub stand on its own Bottom," *New York Daily Tribune*, January 5, 1844.
[207] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 52.

Skaneateles Community, announced the successes of twenty-two other communal projects with encouragement, enthusiasm and apparent joy at their very existence.[208]

Fourierist George Ripley of Brook Farm explained his disagreements with Collins in a report on a visit he made to Skaneateles, published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1880. Collins and his Skaneateles comrades favored community of property and opposed the "joint stock principle" of the Fourierists, which divided the collective wealth of the phalanstery into individual shares. "The great problem is to guarantee individualism against the masses on the one hand, and the masses against the individual on the other," Ripley wrote problematizing communism. "In society as now organized the many are slaves to the few favored individuals in the community. I should dread the bondage of individuals to the power of the mass; While association [Fourierism], by identifying the interests of the many and the few, the less gifted and highly gifted, secures the sacred personality of all, gives each individual the largest liberty of the children of God."[209] Despite denouncing Collin's communitism as a tyranny of the majority, Ripley concluded, "I feel that all who are seeking the emancipation of man are brothers, though differing in the measures which they may adopt for that purpose."[210] Ripley reflected the general positive spirit of comradely criticism in the socialist movement at the time.

The Fourierist newspaper *The Harbinger* reported positively on Community Place in July 16, 1846, but ended with some pointed criticism. After emphasizing that they wished the Skaneateles communitists success and expressing comradely sympathies, the author of the piece explains, "At the same time, we have never been blind to the radical evils of his system, and the intrinsic difficulties of carrying it into practice. The spirit in which he attempted to realize it,

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[208] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 52.
[209] George Ripley, "Letter from Mr. Ripley to head of Brook Farm Association," *Harper's Monthly* 42, December 1880, 147.
[210] Ripley, "Letter from Mr. Ripley to head of Brook Farm Association."

seemed to us far too exclusive, too rash, too destructive, to warrant any very sanguine hopes that his efforts will succeed."[211]

Collins struck back at his critics in an article entitled "Is Association Practicable?" published in the Syracuse, New York newspaper the *Onondaga Standard* in the spring of 1843: "In all great reforms time and exertion are found necessary. People should not think of tearing down a system, however defective it may be considered, until they have become thoroughly convinced that they can form a better one in its place."[212] Collins appealed to the comradely spirit of the moment. He argued it was important to test the merits of different theories based on their practice. All the communes were experiments to that end. Collins continued, "The friends of Associated Industry believe that they have found a better system, on which will confer more benefits upon people than the one under which society is now organized and they ask the friends of humanity to examine it candidly, and if they discover it has defects to point them out." He welcomed constructive criticism in the spirit of good faith and a genuine desire to see them succeed. Collins concluded, "The *practicability* of Association is what many now desire to see tested."[213] He lauded the efforts of the Fourierists, who he calls "friends of Associated Industry," and even attempts to connect his project with theirs. Collins concluded the article with the Constitution of the Skaneateles Community, which included the disclaimer, "Some alterations, and provisions which this does not embrace, would probably be found necessary in carrying a plan into operation."[214] The constitution contained a plan for a common stock system. The initial capital for the venture was $50,000. Each member had to buy a share for $50. In order to be a

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[211] *The Harbinger*, July 16, 1846.
[212] John A. Collins, "Is Association Practicable?" *Onondaga Standard*, April 12, 1843.
[213] John A. Collins, "Is Association Practicable?" *Onondaga Standard*, 12 April 1843.
[214] John A. Collins, "Is Association Practicable?"

member of the Skaneateles Community one must both buy a $50 share and have "permanent residence on the domain."[215]

The common stock system was not the only controversial part of the constitution. Article eight deals with pay for women and children. It reads, "Women shall receive half the wages of men, and children from the age of 10 to 15 one-fourth, and from 15 to 16 years, one-third the wages of men."[216] To the men of the Skaneateles Community, women and children's labor, especially physical labor, was worth less than men's. Some women did have leadership roles in the community. Maria Loomis, for example, was the editor of *The Communitist* newspaper. However, the Skaneateles Community commonly assigned women the kind of household chores traditionally assigned to their gender. Skaneateles Community member George Taylor exemplified the hypocrisy of the community on gendered labor at a talk at a Social Reform Convention in 1844. He gave an example of a woman who came to the commune without being "sufficiently imbued with the true principle of Socialism."[217] She objected to doing kitchen work, considering it "servile and degrading." After some time, however, what Taylor calls her "better nature" prevailed and she volunteered for a position "even lower, in the estimation of a foolish world, than the one she abandoned."[218]

Ernestine Rose, a suffragist, abolitionist, and atheist was an early advocate of the Skaneateles Community. She apparently did not object too strongly to article eight at first. However, she was not afraid to challenge Collins and never passed up an

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[215] *Onondaga Standard*, May 3, 1843.
[216] *Onondaga Standard*, May 3, 1843.
[217] Carol A.Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 53.
[218] Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*, 53.

opportunity for a debate. Rose, as mentioned above, spoke at the founding of the community in October 1843. She and her husband, William Rose, planned to join the Skaneateles Community for a time.[219] However, Rose became disillusioned when she found out that the Skaneateles Community men almost exclusively assigned women housework and other roles traditionally assigned to women. This practice actually contradicted what John Collins wrote in an article printed in the *Workingman's Advocate* newspaper in 1844 where he argued men should do most of the housework.[220] By the summer of 1844, *the Communitist* newspaper stopped publicizing Rose's ideas and Rose ceased promoting the community.

Trouble Begins

Unfortunately, the Skaneateles communitists' unwillingness to heed Rose's warnings regarding the deed to the property led to their failure. One of the most contentious debates at their inaugural event in October of 1843 had been over whether or not they should have a deed. Rose and her husband were among the most vocal supporters of the deed. To settle this dispute, they came up with a creative compromise that allowed the whole community to own the property legally. Collins had already purchased the land from a farmer named Elijah Cole in May of 1843. They signed the deed for the land over to Collins and his wife, Eunice, *and* to Quincy A. Johnson and J. Josephine, his wife. The deed also lists a host of other names as collective owners. It

[219] Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*, 44.
[220] Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*, 52.

grants the listed individuals as well as those "who are at work for, upon and to improve the land" rights to collective ownership "for the use of and to be used, occupied and improved, cultivated and enjoyed in common henceforth and forever"[221] It was a creative way to use existing legal framework to legally recognize a community of property.

Unfortunately, it left legal holes that certain members used to enrich themselves. A letter to the editor published in the *New York Tribune* on January 20, 1846 states, "They have bought a large farm and partly paid for it, giving a mortgage for the balance due. But our existing laws do not allow them to hold their property as a community, so that they lie at the mercy of every unprincipled sharper who can get possession of any part of their goods, and have lost a considerable portion of their slender means - at one time by a great sacrifice narrowly escaping utter ruin."[222] The letter concludes by saying that they had petitioned the legislature to change the laws, but the legislature met them with resentment, calling them "infidels" and "Fanny Wrights," a reference to the Nashoba colony.

Collins had listed Johnson as a trustee in the deed to prove that he was honest and did not desire to be the dictator of the community. However, it soon became clear that Johnson was not trustworthy. A. J. MacDonald explains:

> *A calamitous error was made in the deeding of the property. It appears that Mr. Collins, who purchased it, and whose experiment it really was, permitted the name of another man* [Johnson] *to be inserted in the deed, as a trustee, in connection with his own. He did this to avoid even the suspicion of selfishness. But his confidence was misplaced; as the individual alluded to subsequently acted both selfishly and dishonestly. Mr. Collins and his friends had to contend with the opposition of this person and one or two others during a great portion of the time.*[223]

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[221] Onondaga County, NY, Quit Claim Deed, Abstract no. 10A, John A. Collins et al and David Cogswell et al, November 1, 1843, Skaneateles Community collection, Onondaga Historical Association.
[222] *New York Tribune*, January 20, 1846.
[223] William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1908), 297.

Johnson was apparently a lawyer and was likely responsible for drawing up much of the legal wording of the deed. Thus, he knew how to exploit its legal loopholes to his own advantage.

An Owenite who signed his name as Mr. Finch wrote in 1845:

> *Mr. Collins held to no-government or non-resistance principles: and while he claimed for the Community the right to receive and reject members, he refused to appeal to the government to aid him in expelling impostors, intruders and unruly members; which virtually amounted to throwing the doors wide open for the reception of all kinds of worthless characters.*[224]

Collins, an adherent of Garrisonian no-government and non-resistance, refused to use violence or to enlist the aid of the state to evict those who had outstayed their welcome at Community Place. Finch argued this stand was responsible for the community's downfall:

> *In consequence of his efforts to reduce that principle to practice, the Community soon swarmed with an indolent, unprincipled and selfish class of 'reformers,' as they termed themselves; one of whom, a lawyer* [Johnson]*, got half the estate into his own hands, and well-nigh ruined the concern. Mr. Collins, from his experience, at length became convinced of his errors as to these new-fangled Yankee notions, and has now abandoned them, recovered the property, got rid of the worthless and dissatisfied members, restored the society to peace and harmony, and they are now employed in forming a new Constitution for the society, in agreement with the knowledge they have all gained by the last two years' experience.*[225]

The lawyers styled themselves as reformers while caring only for their own enrichment. Some of those who got involved in the socialist movement were refugees from the Panic of 1837 who, hit by hard times, saw an opportunity to enrich themselves. They nearly destroyed the community. Johnson had taken advantage of Collins' kindness, generosity, moral conviction and legal naiveté. Using his knowledge of law, he arranged it so that things would work out for his own enrichment.

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[224] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 168-169.
[225] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 168-169.

Despite this sizable setback, John Collins did not give up. The Skaneateles Community had lost half of their land to the selfishness of dishonest, self-styled 'reformers' of the professional class, but Collins and those loyal to him regrouped and abandoned the naive libertarianism that led them nearly into ruin. MacDonald continues, "Owing to the dissensions that arose from their defective organization at the first, a considerable number of the residents have either been dismissed, or have withdrawn from the place."[226] Collins expelled the rabble. The only population that remained were three men, eight women and seven children. MacDonald wrote, "The whole number of members, male and female, labor most industriously from six till six; and having large orders for their saw-mill and turning shop, they work them night and day, with two sets of men, working each twelve hours - the saw-mill and turning shop being their principal sources of revenue."[227] The Skaneateles Community still had successful industrial operations. Unfortunately, now they lacked the personnel to make their industry profitable.

In the September 18, 1845 edition of *the Communitist*, Collins assured his comrades that they had removed the belligerent element and proceedings would go smoothly from now on. Collins began by describing two classes of people that get involved in utopian movements. One genuinely wants to be involved in a community project. The other seeks only what advancement these projects offered them. John Collins concluded:

> *Our previous convictions have been confirmed, that not all who are most clamorous for reform are competent to become successful agents for its accomplishment — that there is floating upon the surface of society a body of restless, disappointed, jealous, indolent spirits, disgusted with our present social system, not because it enchains the masses to poverty, ignorance, vice and endless servitude, but because they could not render it subservient to their private ends.*[228]

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[226] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 169.
[227] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 169.
[228] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 298.

Clearly, Johnson was one of those "disappointed, jealous, indolent spirits" who threatened to undermine the whole project out of selfishness and the speculator's land-grabbing mentality. Collins continues:

> *Experience has convinced us that this class stands ready to mount every new movement that promises ease, abundance and individual freedom; and that when such an enterprise refuses to interpret license for freedom, and insists that every member shall make his strength, skill and talent, subservient to the movement, then the cry of tyranny and oppression is raised against those who advocate such industry and self-denial — then the enterprise must became a scapegoat, to bear the fickleness, indolence, selfishness and envy of this class.*[229]

However, this is not reason to abandon the community cause. Collins remarks that there were indeed many "genuine philanthropists" who believed in "the great, noble and disinterested principles of the community.[230]

Collins reassured his followers he had taken care of the situation. He wrote, "For the last year it has been the principal object of the Community to rid itself of its cumbersome material, knowing that its very existence hinged upon this point. In this it has been successful."[231] He explained the community's approach to the expulsion was in keeping with non-resistance principles and at little expense to the project as a whole. "Much of this material was hired to go at an expense, little if any short of three thousand dollars."[232] Collins presented himself as unperturbed by this setback.

> *People will marvel at this. But the Community, in its world-wide philanthropy, cast to the winds its power to expel unruly and turbulent members, which gave our quondam would-be-called 'reformers' an opportunity to reduce to practice their real principles. In this winnowing process it would be somewhat remarkable if much good wheat had not been carried off with the chaff. With a small crew well acclimated we have doubled the cape, and are now upon a smooth sea,*

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[229] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 298.
[230] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 298.
[231] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 298.
[232] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 298-299.

> *heading for the port of Communism…. A Community of such members has an inexhaustible mine of wealth, though not in possession of one dollar.*[233]

Collins maintained his optimism. He was convinced that the community had corrected that which needed correcting. The selfish, extortionist elements had been purged and the Skaneateles Community was ready to enter its second phase. Collins felt "the dark clouds which so long hung over it, and at times threatened not only to destroy its peace, but its existence, had disappeared."[234] He wrote, "We now have a clear sky, and the genial rays of a brilliant sun once more are radiating upon us."[235] Despite their dwindling membership, the prospects still looked good for the Community in 1845.

Downfall of the Skaneateles Community

Unfortunately, Collins' optimism would soon wane and Community Place would never fully recover from the setback that resulted from the deed issue. In May of 1845, the community tried to turn "the Skaneateles Industrial Community" into a legal corporation. Unfortunately, the New York State legislature refused to allow them to incorporate.[236] The project would last only another nine months in this second phase. A. J. MacDonald recounted the last few months of the project:

> *After the experiment had progressed between two and three years, Mr. Collins became convinced that he and his fellow members could not carry out in practice the Community idea. He resolved to abandon the attempt; and calling the members together, explained to them his feelings on the subject. He resigned the deed of the property into their hands, and soon after departed from Skaneateles,*

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[233] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies,* 299.
[234] Hinds, *American Communities and Co-Operative Colonies*, 298.
[235] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 170.
[236] *New York Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1845.

> *like one who had lost his nearest and dearest friend. Most of the members left soon after, and the Community quietly dissolved.*[237]

Gone all of a sudden was the enthusiasm and optimism Collins and his supporters had in 1843. It is not clear what exactly caused Collins to lose his faith in communism, but without him holding the group together, it was unable to continue. MacDonald concludes, "This experiment did not fail through pecuniary embarrassment. The property was worth twice as much when the Community dissolved, as it was at first; and was much more than sufficient to pay all debts."[238] The Skaneateles Community did not fail as so many other communities did. They were not in financial ruin. They made money. They had successful industry. They improved the land. They paid off their debts. MacDonald argues, "So it may be truly said, that this experiment was given up through a conviction in the mind of the originator, that the theory of the Community could not be carried out in practice - that the attempt was premature, and the necessary conditions did not yet exist. The Community ended in May 1846."[239] John Collins gave up. He was disillusioned with socialism, the project on which he had spent years of his life and for which he had left his career as an antislavery agent. He blamed the "impracticable, inexperienced, self-sufficient, gaseous class of mind," the self-styled thinkers and reformers of the legal profession that threatened the community from the beginning, for socialism's failure in Skaneateles.[240]

In 1846, Sam Sellers wrote to Mary Weston Chapman, without Collins' knowledge. He pled for his friend, hoping the MASS could again employ Collins in some capacity. Sellers argued that Collins could again serve the antislavery cause since he abandoned his interest in the "community cause." Sellers wrote of Collins, "The

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[237] Macdonald, "Skaneateles Community," quoted in Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 173.
[238] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 173.
[239] Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 173.
[240] Sernett, *North Star Country*, 100.

Community enterprise he has got through with and has abandoned - principle and practice. He is out of money of excuse, out of business out of credit, to some extent out of spirit and out of breath, out of elbows, out in quite or roughly everything but of difficulties."[241] The community experience left Collins disillusioned, but Sellers was not ready to give it up. By 1851, Collins had defaulted on the mortgage for the Community Place domain. Sellers bought it at auction on July 23, 1851.[242] Sellers and Abbott attempted to restart the activities of Community Place, but without Collins and the other members, it was to no avail.[243] In October 1853, two speculators from Maine bought the sawmill on the Community Place domain. They turned it into a paper mill, finally ending the saga of the "No God, No Government" community.[244] The state sold the farm, equipment, furniture and animals on March 17, 1856.

Collins moved to California seeking gold. According to one Garrisonian, he became a cold, self-concerned businessman.[245] However, Collins continued to speak out against slavery. In May of 1856, he spoke before a meeting of the young Republican Party in Sacramento.[246] The dream of the socialist reorganization of society may have come and gone, but abolitionism was about to enter its most militant and most successful phase. Most Yankees had, as the abolitionist poet Harriet Ward Howe put it, eyes that had "seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." Collins may not have been as much of an ideologue in his later days, but he knew what side of the war to bet on.

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[241] Samuel Sellers, "[Letter to] Mrs. Chapman and abolitionists of Boston, friends of Mr. John A. Collins [manuscript]," 1846, Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.
[242] *The Post Standard*, April 24, 1851.
[243] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 9.
[244] *Onondaga Standard*, October 28, 1853.
[245] Sernett, *North Star Country*, 100.
[246] *New York Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1856.

Epilogue:

Wattles Under Water

John O. Wattles[247]

Some Skaneateles communitists were not so willing to give up on practical utopianism altogether. Several former members of the Skaneateles Community joined the bible communists at the Oneida Community, despite rejecting religion under Collins' regime.[248] Sam Sellers took control of the Community Place domain, but after Collins' abandonment was unsuccessful in recruiting more members to the communitist cause.

John O. Wattles, one of the earliest advocates of the Skaneateles Community and was one of its most enthusiastic members in 1843, became a spiritualist after the fall of the Skaneateles Community.[249] In 1847, he bought a community at Utopia, Ohio from

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[247] "Civil War on the Western Border: The Missouri-Kansas Conflict, 1854-1865," Wattles Family | Civil War on the Western Border: The Missouri-Kansas Conflict, 1854-1865, Accessed November 24, 2019, https://civilwaronthewesternborder.org/encyclopedia/wattles-family.
[248] Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, 55.
[249] Wells, "The Skaneateles Communal Experiment," 2.; *Onondaga Standard*, 4 October 1843.

anarchist Josiah Warren.[250] Warren himself had purchased the property from the Clermont Phalanx, a Fourierist phalanx that operated from 1844 to 1847.[251] Wattles had married former Quaker Esther Whinery, who was from the area. They brought about one hundred followers with them to Utopia to create a spiritualist community.[252] About a dozen families lived in shanties by the side of the Ohio River. There was also a large phalanstery, or communal building, and an underground church. In December of 1847, the Ohio River flooded. The shanties filled with water quickly so several families took refuge in the phalanstery. The building's structural integrity did not hold under the force of the water. Esther Wattles recalls, "It was no use to try to get out, for the water was seven feet deep all around us. John took me in his arms and said, 'Esther, in a few moments we shall be in heaven.'"[253] However, the Wattleses did escape. Ester recalls, "But - when all had fallen but our room, he said, 'We must get out. God has more work for us to do.'"[254] Seventeen out of the thirty-two individuals that took refuge in the house died, including several entire families. The remaining spiritualists refused to leave. However, the river did not relent. According to Esther Wattles, "a whirlwind that carried the water from the river, 40 feet high" decimated what remained of the community. One historian wrote in 1880, "This disaster, occurring at night and during a terrible storm, struck terror into the hearts of the people. The history of the community from its inception to its calamitous close is the most tragic event that has ever occurred in the

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[250] Randy McNutt, *Finding Utopia: Another Journey into Lost Ohio*, (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2012), 16.
[251] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 15.
[252] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 16.
[253] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 17.
[254] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 17.

country."[255] John and Esther Wattles had to concede to the river, but they still did not give up. They continued to scout locations for a spiritualist community in the West.[256]

The Skaneateles Community from which Wattles came may not have lasted long, but the Wattles' experience afterward proves the project was influential, controversial, and ultimately one of the most remarkable utopian socialist projects of the 1840s for its connecting abolitionism and socialism. The move from abolitionism to utopian socialism was the result of the Panic of 1837 and the related panic in the abolitionist movement. The Panic of 1837 hurt the finances of the abolitionist movement and caused abolitionist leaders to reevaluate their tactics. They increasingly turned to anarchism and socialism as answers to the problems of violence and slavery.[257] John A. Collins' move from abolitionism to socialism was a result of this atmosphere of reevaluation of political economy and a general interest in the reorganization of society. The Skaneateles Community arose from the actions of John Collins and others who were disillusioned with what they saw as a narrow minded, unholistic form of abolitionism. They believed they needed to abolish private property to free everybody everywhere from slavery and exploitation. At the time their project seemed just as viable as industrial capitalism. The Civil War would accomplish the progressive goal of ending slavery, but, as Collins and the communitists warned, would usher in a new era of wage slavery and exploitation of the laboring class.

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[255] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 19.
[256] McNutt, *Finding Utopia*, 19.
[257] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 220.

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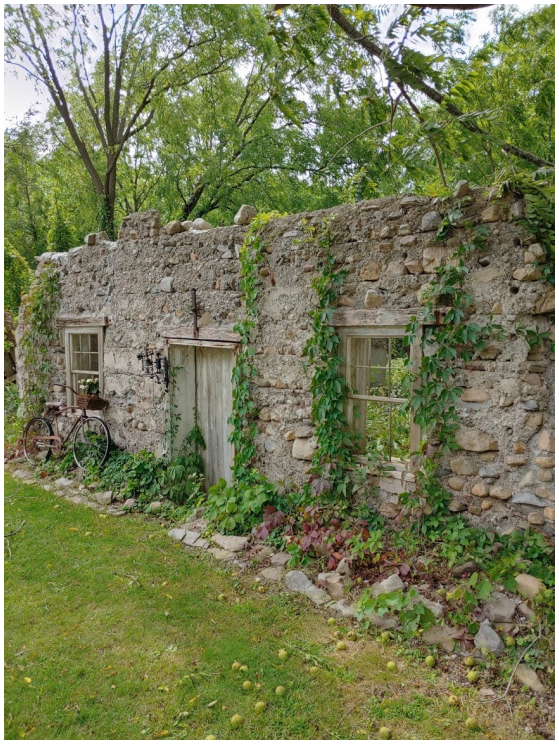
Arthur Bestor's Photographs of the Skaneateles Community domain

[258] "Skaneateles Community, New York: View 8," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, last modified June 5, 2018, https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/899d5af0-6ce9-0136-509a-0050569601ca-6.

[259] "Skaneateles Community, New York: View 6," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, last modified June 5, 2018, https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/89a47e50-6ce9-0136-509a-0050569601ca-8.



The Community Place domain 2019. Today the carriage house is a wedding venue. Private owners hold the deed to the property. They have dubbed the domain The Frog Pond.[260]

[260] Photographs by the author.

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