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## **Personal Visits and Observations: Charles Nordhoff's Remarkable Tour of American Communal Societies**

**Peter Hoehnle**

In 1873 and 1874 Charles Nordhoff, the former managing editor of the New York *Evening Post*, then working as a freelance descriptive writer, made a personal survey of the major communal societies in the United States. In a period of political and economic turmoil, Nordhoff wanted to observe how ordinary Americans, many of them European immigrants, formed cooperative communities to meet their spiritual, religious and physical needs. The result of his investigation was a book with the ponderous title, *The Communistic Societies of the United States from Personal Visit and Observation*.

*The Communistic Societies of the United States* was the dominant work on that subject published in the nineteenth century. The two other communal surveys, by John Humphrey Noyes and William Hinds—both of the Oneida Community of New York—were more limited in scope and neither achieved the almost universal pervasiveness of Nordhoff's writing. One hundred and forty years after its initial publication, *Communistic Societies* is one of the most frequently studied and cited of all sources on the movements that it documents. Indeed, some later books, most notably Mark Holloway's *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America 1680–1880*, depend so completely on Nordhoff that they fail to address the later history of the societies after 1874. Practices described by Nordhoff are accepted by Holloway, and others, as characterizing the communal experience in Amana, Zoar, and among the Shakers throughout the decades that followed, although these communities each experienced tremendous change in later years.

Carl Hermann Nordhoff, the son of and Arnolda Nordhoff, was born in Erwitte, Prussia on 1830. In 1835 the family immigrated to the United States and the parents soon separated. Nordhoff traveled the American west with his father, eventually settling near Cincinnati. Following his father's 1838 death, and while under a guardianship, Nordhoff attended school in Cincinnati and began a printing apprenticeship. At age fourteen, enthralled by the books about life at sea he had been reading, Nordhoff ran away to Philadelphia and, after many failed efforts, finally managed to



*Engraving of Charles Nordhoff, ca. 1880s.*

join the crew of the *USS Columbus* on a voyage around the world. Over the next decade, Nordhoff served aboard naval, merchant, and whaling ships.

After quitting his ocean going life in 1853 the young man translated his adventurous early life into three popular books. Beginning a career in journalism, Nordhoff rose quickly through the ranks, first at the firm of Harper Brothers and later as managing editor of the New York *Evening Post*, edited by the legendary William Cullen Bryant. As an editor, Nordhoff managed the *Post's* coverage of the Civil War, himself writing important accounts of the 1863 New York City draft riots and the experiences of freed slaves in South Carolina. After a dispute with the *Post's* leadership, Nordhoff began a career as a freelance travel writer. His first book, *California, For Health, Pleasure and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers*, was an immediate success and helped to spur settlement of the state. He followed that with *Northern California, Oregon and the Sandwich Islands* before turning his attention to communal societies, a topic in which he had been interested for many years.

Unlike his California writing, Nordhoff's survey of American communal societies, was not underwritten by a sponsor. Nordhoff felt

passionately about his topic and wrote with a sense of urgency. He identified with “the working man” and, in his mind, this project would expose the average American with a window into a possible solution for the economic and social ills of the age—communalism. To Nordhoff, communal cooperation was not antithetical to capitalism, rather it might help to stabilize it. Nordhoff was concerned, as he wrote, that labor’s efforts to unionize created a situation of “eternal enmity between capital and labor” which could be averted if the working classes sought practical solutions, such as economic and social cooperation.

The communal world that Nordhoff explored in the 1870s was dominated by religious sectarian organizations with European antecedents; of the communities he visited only the Oneida Community of New York did not have a direct European origin. Additionally, all of the communities he visited had a religious basis, although in the case of the Icarian movement, religion was far from central to the driving social and economic objectives of the community. Nordhoff was intent on visiting the successful communal enterprises of his day, and presenting communal and cooperative living, whatever its basis, to advantage.

The flowering of nonsectarian communalism had come in two distinct waves in the decades prior to Nordhoff’s investigations. The first began in the 1820s and was influenced by the theories of Robert Owen. The most famous of the several communities based on Owen’s thought was New Harmony, Indiana. The second wave occurred in the 1840s when followers of the French theorist, Charles Fourier, attempted to translate his plans for grand common phalanxes, to the American frontier. Although the faithful founded nearly thirty phalanxes, only a handful survived for more than a year or two. Nordhoff chose to ignore these earlier movements in his research entirely. Instead of developing a complete historical overview of American communal experiments, he focused on communities that were still functioning at the time of his research, with the exception of Bishop Hill, Illinois, which he included as a cautionary tale.

While his accounts of the different communities are factual, blunt, and not always favorable, Nordhoff was a sympathetic observer. He believed in reform and championed new forms of social interaction. The very fact that he undertook the grueling travel needed to write a book with an uncertain financial return, suggests his devotion to the cause.

Nordhoff’s personal proclivities become evident in his accounts, particularly when describing restrictions on the behavior of individual

members, such as prohibitions of smoking, alcohol, or sexual activity, that did not fit with his own ideals of American freedom and liberty. A devout Methodist who later wrote a popular Christian book, *God and the Future Life*, Nordhoff was also unsympathetic to deviations from middle class Christian values, such as the “complex marriage” system at the Oneida Community. Unlike some observers, Nordhoff restrained himself from exploiting potentially salacious material, such as the aforementioned complex marriage at Oneida and rumors promulgated by opponents of the Shakers, but wrote instead with a dry sardonic tone.

Although a habitual letter writer, the paucity of letters from Nordhoff during the research and writing of the *Communitistic Societies* is frustrating. Nordhoff’s movements during this period, however, can be reconstructed by references in his book, and from records maintained by the societies that he visited. The Shaker communities, in particular, made careful note of visitors in their records. The significance of this documentation is that it proves that Charles Nordhoff actually visited the communities he described; a massive undertaking given the state of transportation in 1874. Fortunately for the journalist, the most well-known communal groups in America at that time were located in the northeast, or as in the case of the Amana Society, along rail lines.

As a native German speaker, Nordhoff conversed directly with the members of the German communal societies he visited, and was able to ascertain the character of communal life on a deeper level than the English-speaking journalists who typically dashed off short visitor accounts of their brief stays in Amana, Zoar, and Economy. In the case of Amana, Nordhoff obtained several of the Society’s religious books, read them, and provided illustrative translations.

Nordhoff likely struck the communal society members whom he encountered as an unusual figure. Not only did he demonstrate a keen and sympathetic interest in their lives but he was an informed visitor familiar with many of their religious and other texts. In appearance, Nordhoff stood five feet, eight and a half inches tall, had a high forehead and “glittering” brown eyes “that missed nothing” and were framed by wire rimmed spectacles above a massive goatee. He walked with a “sailor’s roll” and his tailored suit concealed arms covered with tattoos from his sailor days. The seemingly polished and worldly man from New York had only twenty years before, been a menial sailor, or, as he would have said, a “working man.” Although known for his brusque speech, Nordhoff was



*A photograph of the Aurora, Oregon, community taken in the late nineteenth century.*

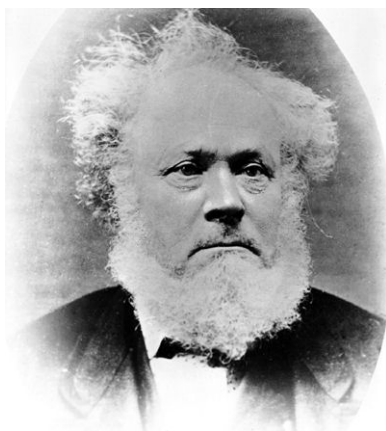
remembered by associates as a kindly and just man, simple, honest, direct, and with a great sense of humor.

Nordhoff's visits were brief but long enough for him to gather the statistics and general observations which he liberally sprinkled throughout his account. Nordhoff was well known in 1874, and his hosts clearly took pains to highlight the best aspects of their respective communities in the hope of a favorable report.

Nordhoff's first visit, to the Aurora Colony south of Portland, Oregon, occurred in 1873 during his tour of northern California and the Pacific northwest to gather material for his book, *Northern California, Oregon and the Sandwich Islands*. Nordhoff made his survey of this region after having left his family behind in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Because of its isolated location, the Aurora Colony was the subject of far fewer journalistic visits and accounts than better known communal societies in the east, rendering Nordhoff's account particularly valuable.

In *Northern California*, published in 1877, Nordhoff offered a terse, uncharitable opinion of the Aurora colony: "If you are curious in bizarre social experiments, you may very well stop a day at Aurora, thirty miles below Portland, and look at some of the finest orchards in the State, the

property of a strange German community which has lived in harmony and acquired wealth at this point.”



*Wilhelm Keil (1812-1877).*

During his visit to Aurora, Nordhoff visited Wilhelm Keil, the eccentric and charismatic leader who had formed the Bethel Colony in Missouri in 1844 and then led a portion of his followers west to Oregon where they founded Aurora in 1856. Keil was approximately sixty-one years old, and a fellow Prussian who spoke no English and conversed with Nordhoff in German. Nordhoff commented that Keil appeared “excitable and somewhat suspicious,” with eyes lit “with a somewhat fierce fire.” Nordhoff hinted in his account that he found Keil to be a fanatic, who constantly brought the topic of discussion back to his own beliefs. During their walking tour of Aurora, they visited the small cemetery in which Keil family members had been buried. Nordhoff recalled Keil’s comment, gazing at the stones marking the graves of his deceased children:

“Here,” he said, “lie my children – all I had, five; they all died after they were men and women, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. One after the other I laid them here. It was hard to bear; but now I can thank God for that too. He gave them, and I thanked him; he took them, and now I can thank him too.” Then, after a minute’s silence, he turned upon me with somber eyes and said: “To bear all that comes upon us in silence, in quiet, without noise, or outcry, or excitement, or useless repining – that is to be a man, and that we can do only with God’s help.



Nordhoff attended an Aurora wedding and met the community school teacher, whom he noted bore “a remarkable resemblance to the late Horace Greeley,” the famous New York editor whom he had known during his years at the *New York Post*. By Nordhoff’s estimate, Aurora had four hundred members and owned eighteen thousand acres of property including, what he believed were, “the most extensive orchards in the state.” He found the young women “undersized,” observing that they “did not look robust or strong.” He observed, “[i]t seemed to me that I saw in the faces and forms of the people the results of this too monotonous existence.” In general, his opinion of Aurora was negative.



THE BETHEL COMMUNE, MISSOURI

*This woodcut view of Bethel, Missouri, appeared in Nordhoff's* *Communitic Societies*.

Later, presumably while he was traveling in Iowa and Illinois to visit the Amana, Icarian, and Bishop Hill communities, Nordhoff visited the remnant of Keil’s original colony in Bethel, Missouri. Nordhoff concluded that the older settlement demonstrated “to what Aurora trends.” While there, the journalist learned that community members would gladly join their leader in Oregon if they could sell their land. The Bethel property included four thousand acres of land, not including a satellite settlement at Nineveh. In total, the Bethel community had two hundred members, a grist mill, a saw mill, and several small craft shops. The community woolen mill and its distillery had been destroyed by fire before Nordhoff visited.



The journalist found the community similar to Aurora, but not well kept, with limited sidewalks and cattle and hogs wandering in the “poorly kept” street. Overall, he concluded, Bethel “did not look very prosperous.”

Nordhoff was stunned to learn that in 1847 Keil had divided much of the community property, giving members deeds for their share, but asked not to file them. If a member desired to file their deed, however, the community allowed them to do so, and to continue living at Bethel. Thus, Nordhoff found private homes and businesses owned by former members, interspersed among the communal property. He commented that “[t]his appeared to me a really extraordinary instance of liberality or carelessness; but no one of the community seemed to mind.”

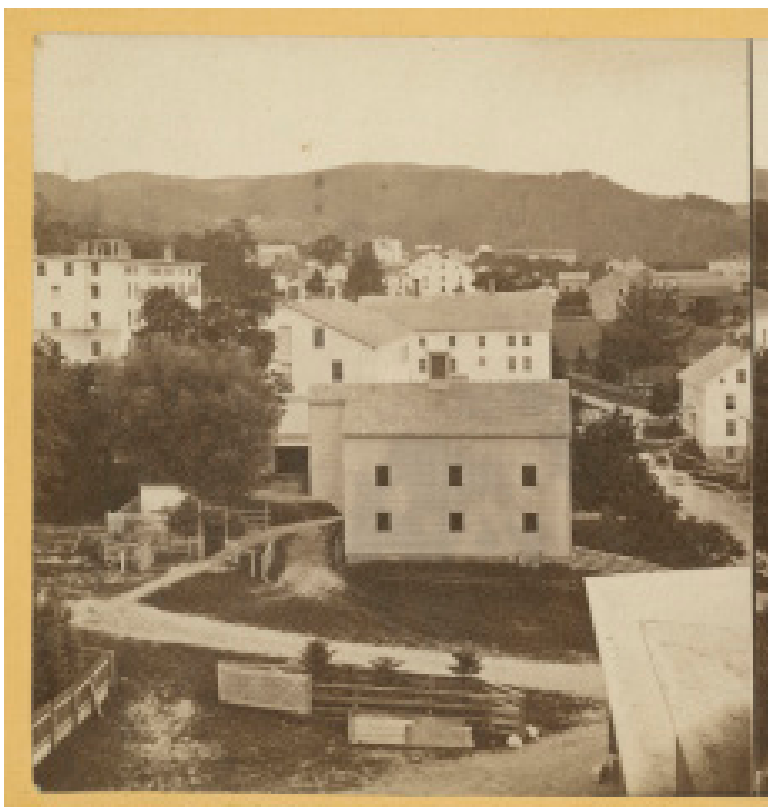
Bethel residents, according to Nordhoff, were “simple Germans of the lower class.” He found things inside the homes neat, remarking, “it is only out of doors that litter is to be found.” As David Nelson Duke observes in a study of the religious evolution of the Keilite communities, Nordhoff’s account relied not only on his own observations but, clearly, drew on the account of Carl Koch, a former member of Keil’s community who wrote from the antagonistic viewpoint of an apostate, which contributed to the negative cast of Nordhoff’s account.

Despite his reservations, Nordhoff still was attempting to argue in favor of cooperative living, so he concluded his assessment of the communities of Aurora and Bethel with mingled praise observing, “In weighing results, one should not forget the character of those who have achieved them; and considering what these people are, it cannot be denied that they have lived better in community than they would have lived by individual effort.” In other words, the followers of Keil were lower class people who had, nevertheless, benefitted from communal living. Nordhoff, however, was keenly aware of the charismatic nature of Keil’s leadership and sensed that the leader was the glue that held his people together, rather than a strong shared religious belief or economic ties.

The contemporary reaction to Nordhoff’s characterization of Bethel and Aurora by members of the community is unrecorded. Sixty years later, however, author Robert J. Hendricks chastised Nordhoff for reporting “misinformation,” and for describing Keil as untidy, claiming that surviving members of the community “cannot remember this as a conspicuous fault of Dr. Keil’s.” Hendricks characterized Nordhoff as a “casual visitor, and more or less unreliable reporter,” an assessment without counterpart among the scholars who have reviewed Nordhoff’s accounts of other communities.

Wilhelm Keil died in 1877 and Aurora and Bethel abandoned communal living in 1883. The loose bonds of communal living that had so shocked Nordhoff broke with the death of the community's charismatic founder, evidently the only thing that held them together.

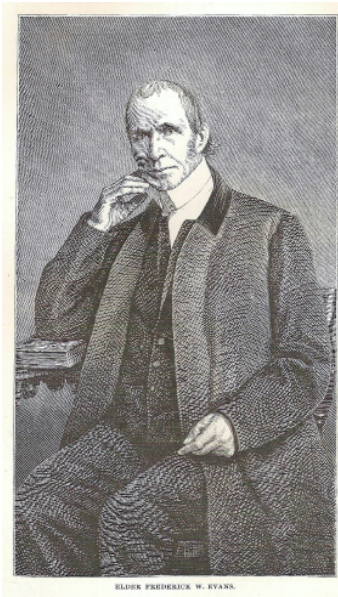
In 1873 the Nordhoff family returned to New York and soon thereafter Nordhoff embarked in earnest, and alone, on visits to communal societies. By 1874 thousands of miles of rail lines crisscrossed the northern United States, greatly facilitating a journey of exploration such as Nordhoff intended, and which would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, in the years preceding the Civil War. Nordhoff enjoyed rail travel, and wrote glowingly of the ease and comfort he found in his travels.



*A stereoview of the New Lebanon, New York, Shaker community, ca. 1875.*

One of the first stops for Nordhoff was the Shaker community of Mt. Lebanon, New York. The Shaker movement originated in England and came to the American colonies in 1774 under the leadership of the charismatic Mother Ann Lee who proselytized and gathered converts. After Lee's early death, Joseph Meacham, Lucy Wright, and other leaders crafted a communal system based on Lee's teachings about celibacy, confession, simplicity, and the second coming of Christ. Eventually, over twenty-two Shaker communities formed, stretching from Maine to Indiana and, at their height, had more than four thousand members. Today known for their graceful furniture, architecture, folk art, and music, in Nordhoff's day the Shakers were the largest and most successful communal movement in the United States.

*Shaker Elder  
Frederick W Evans,  
(1808-1893),  
as depicted in Nordhoff's  
Communitistic Societies.*



Situated near the border with Massachusetts, Mt. Lebanon was home to Frederick W. Evans, an English immigrant, socialist, and Shaker elder, perhaps the best known Shaker figure of all time due to his prolific writings. Evans's presence at Mount Lebanon was probably why Nordhoff chose it for his first Shaker visit. Other Shaker communities, such as Watervliet and Groveland, New York, were far more accessible to his New Jersey home. Because Mt. Lebanon was also home to the central ministry of the entire Shaker movement, it was even more of a natural choice to start from for a journalist intent on visiting all, or at least most, of the Shaker settlements.

The media-savvy Evans was quite comfortable with journalists like Nordhoff, and was a font of carefully-honed descriptions of Shaker life and belief that he wished to highlight. Nordhoff was taken with Evans, whom, he wrote, had “such natural abilities as make him a leader among his people, and a man of force any where ... a person of enthusiastic and aggressive temperament, but with a practical and logical side to his mind.” Nordhoff used Evans as his primary source for Shaker doctrine, belief, and management, augmented by conversations “with several of the brethren.”

On December 11 the diarist at the Mt. Lebanon North Family, where Evans was an elder, noted that “Charles Nordhoff, is here, & he is going to write a work on Communities.” Nordhoff described his entrance at Mt. Lebanon that day in his book:

As I came by appointment, a brother ... received me at the door, opening it silently at the precise moment when I had reached the vestibule, and, silently bowing, took my bag from my hand and motioned me to follow him.... We entered another house, and, opening a door, my guide welcomed me to the “visitors’ room.” “This,” said he, “is where you will stay. A brother will come in presently to speak with you.” And with a bow my guide noiselessly slipped out, softly closed the door behind him, and I was alone.

At Mount Lebanon, Nordhoff toured the community and was permitted, by Evans, to attend a funeral service, which he described in detail in his book. He found the village well-kept and orderly, but lacking in “architectural effect.” He made this observation to Evans, who responded “the beautiful, as you call it, is absurd and abnormal. It has no business with us.”

Evans provided Nordhoff with a letter of introduction, addressed to the elders of the other Shaker communities. Mentioned in several Shaker accounts of Nordhoff’s visits, the letter proved to be a golden key into the inner sanctums of many of the leading elders and trustees.

Further sanction of Nordhoff’s work came in a notice published in the *Shaker and Shakeress*, the official publication of the Shaker societies, edited at that time by Evans and his close associate Antoinette Doolittle. Published in July 1874, the short article noted that:

CHARLES NORDHOFF has been engaged in collecting the materials for a detailed account of the Communistic Societies now existing in the United States. He has been visiting and personally examining all of these societies – no slight undertaking, as they are scattered from Maine to Oregon. He proposes to give an account of the religious creeds and practices, the peculiar social customs and regulations, the history and present numbers, condition and industries of each society. The subject is novel and attractive, and the facts collected by him will be so presented as to be not only of interest to the reader for amusement, but of value to the student of social science, for their practical bearing and illustration of the possibilities and difficulties of a community of goods, a subject which is now widely agitated among workingmen here and in Europe. Such a work will be a valuable contribution to the discussion.

While at Mt. Lebanon, Nordhoff also gathered information about, but did not visit, the nearby Tyringham and Hancock Shaker villages in Massachusetts. Nordhoff wrote tersely that they were small and had no distinctive features, and he chose not to describe the settlements. At that time, Tyringham, which never had more than eighty adult members, was in serious decline and, indeed closed in 1875.

Nordhoff's decision to ignore Hancock is more puzzling: why was this community any less significant than the others he visited? Why did the famous architecture of the Hancock Church Family, including its massive brick dwelling house and the round stone barn fail to attract his attention? Hancock was only a few miles from Mt. Lebanon, and although its population was less than half of the peak of 247 recorded in 1829, it was still a thriving settlement in 1875.

Leaving Mt. Lebanon, Nordhoff continued traveling, writing his friend Gordon L. Ford from Buffalo on December 17 that "I find I am drifting a little further from home than I planned when I set out.... I have seen much that is curious & valuable & think even more than I did of my project."

In January 1874 Nordhoff traveled to northern New England to visit the eastern-most Shaker communities. He first visited the community at Alfred, Maine, where he presented his letter of recommendation from Evans on the afternoon of January 28 and impressed the diarist of the Church Family there as "[a] man of some literary celebrity" who "appears

like a pleasant and agreeable man.” The diarist noted Nordhoff’s purpose in gathering material on community life and that “he may publish a book.” While at Alfred, Nordhoff visited with Elder Otis Sawyer who, in addition to sharing information, provided a second letter of recommendation. From Sawyer Nordhoff learned that the community had attempted to sell their land and move west a few years before.

Founded in 1793, Alfred reached a peak population of approximately 200 in 1823. Despite being an unimpressive community at the time of Nordhoff’s visit, Alfred leadership would continue to be strong and provided the strong spiritual basis that has helped to sustain Shakerism in Maine, through the life of the Sabbathday Lake community with which Alfred merged in 1931, to the present day.

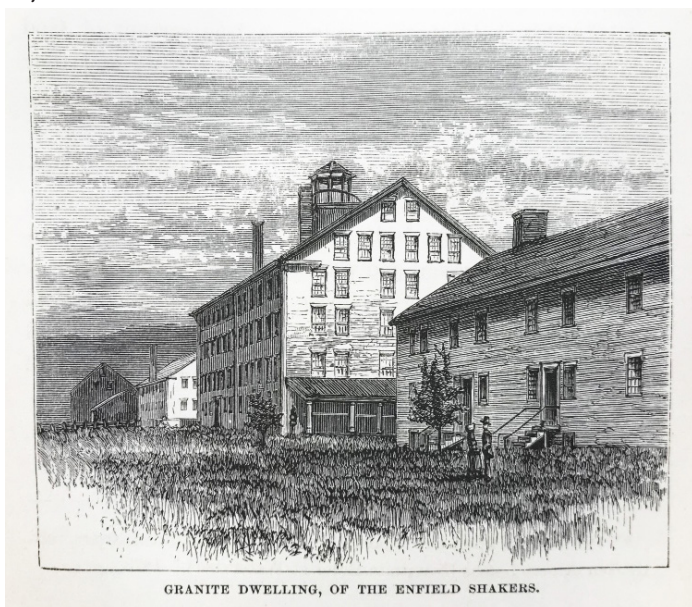
Nordhoff spent the night at Alfred before continuing on to the Shakers near New Gloucester at Sabbathday Lake. The Sabbathday Lake journal noted Nordhoff’s presence there on January 29, mentioned his letters of recommendation as well as his purpose in visiting communities in order to “collect material facts enough to write a book on communistic life.” Nordhoff found the community at Sabbathday Lake to be less well kept, and “less prosperous than most of the others.” Like Alfred, this community had also considered relocating to Kansas, although Nordhoff apparently was not told this during his visit. Isolated and small, the community was known among the Shakers as “the least of Mother’s children in the East.” Despite its condition in 1874, able leadership, and an openness to accept new members has allowed the Sabbathday Lake community to survive to the present day—the only communal settlement of all those visited by Nordhoff that today maintains communal living.

On his return through New England, Nordhoff stopped at the Shaker settlement at Canterbury, near Concord, New Hampshire. A community journal recorded his presence on January 31, and noted that he had come “to investigate communism among the Shakers in N.H. as well as in other States and other communistic Societies.... [He] was escorted by the Elders about our places of general interest.” During a meal in the visitor’s dining room, Nordhoff copied a printed notice that admonished visitors not to waste food and requesting that married visitors sleep in “separate sleeping apartments” during their visit. The Shakers told Nordhoff that there were 145 members at Canterbury, a decline from a high of approximately 300.

The year after Nordhoff’s visit, the small New Hampshire community became the publisher of the Shaker’s journalistic organ, *The Manifesto*,



under the editorship of Elder Henry Clay Blinn. The *Manifesto* allowed Canterbury to become the “public face of Shakerism.” Because of its visibility and strong leadership, Canterbury remained an active Shaker community until 1992.



*This woodcut view of the Great Stone Dwelling at the Enfield, New Hampshire, Shaker community, appeared in Nordhoff's Communitistic Societies.*

Nordhoff also visited the Shakers at Enfield, New Hampshire, around this time. Founded in 1792 this community of which it was said, had the best land of any Shaker settlement, and had reached a peak population of 215 in 1850. Nordhoff was impressed by the massive dwelling of the Church Family, which he described as built “of beautiful granite, one hundred feet by sixty and of four full and two attic stories.” Known as the “Great Stone Dwelling,” the structure was the largest of all Shaker dwelling houses. His hosts allowed Nordhoff to review their death register and apparently continued the friendly exchange that the journalist had found in other Shaker communities. Under the leadership of such able trustees as Caleb Dyer, the Enfield community had prospered, reaching a peak population of 297 in 1840.

Nordhoff visited the Shirley and Harvard Shaker communities, located near one another in eastern Massachusetts and found both settlements in

serious decline. Nordhoff visited Shirley on February 3, 1874, when the author of a Shirley community journal noted “Charles Nordhoff from Alpine N Jersey came here.” Nordhoff’s main informant at Shirley was apparently Elder William Wetherbee (1810–1886) of the Church Family. The next day, the journal recorded, “Elder Wm conveys Charles Nordhoff to Harvard.”

At Shirley, Nordhoff found forty-eight residents, of whom twelve were children, six adult men and thirty women. He noted that the Society had 150 members thirty-five years before and that the numbers declined due to a lack of applications for membership and the fact that of children raised within the community “not one in ten becomes a Shaker.” Nordhoff’s historical population figures were incorrect: in truth, the highest population at Shirley was in 1820 when records indicate a population of 118, making it one of the two smallest of the original eleven Shaker settlements. Shirley always operated in the shadow of the Harvard community, and in some accounts authors have confused the surviving records of the two communities. Because both communities were small and located so near each other, scholars have puzzled why Shirley was founded.

The Harvard Shaker community had been founded in 1793. When Nordhoff visited, he found ninety Shakers living there. Of the seventy-four adults, Nordhoff found that fifty-seven of them were women. Overall, the Society was debt free, although he found that the settlements buildings were not “all in first-rate order according to the Shaker standard.”

From Massachusetts, Nordhoff continued to the Shaker community at Watervliet, near Albany, New York. Founded in 1775, Watervliet was the oldest Shaker community. In 1838 the Shaker “Era of Manifestations” had begun at this location, which was also the burial site of Mother Ann Lee, the founder of the movement. The community had been home to 304 Shakers at its population peak in 1840. The recorder of the journal for the Watervliet South Family noted, “Chas Nordhoff, a writer upon Communistic literature is here; a valuable correspondent.” Nordhoff was told that 235 Shakers lived at Watervliet, and he overall found this settlement “in a very prosperous condition.”

Nordhoff next traveled west. In February, he visited the Shaker settlement at Groveland, New York, where he found just fifty-seven members but described as having buildings “in excellent order.” Forty years before, in 1836, Groveland had reached its peak population of 148 members. The community had started at Sodus, New York, and moved

to the Groveland site in 1836–1838, the only Shaker community to completely relocate. Groveland survived until 1892, when the Shakers sold the site to the state of New York for use as an epileptic treatment facility. The remaining members joined the Watervliet Shaker community.

In March, Nordhoff visited the Amana Society and the Icarian community in Iowa, described later, before continuing his visits to Shaker communities in Kentucky and Ohio on his return trip to New Jersey.

On his way west, Nordhoff visited the North Union Shaker community in early February 1874. Located near Cleveland, Ohio, North Union was the only Shaker settlement located so near a large city. He found 102 Shakers present. This number would fall rapidly to just twenty-seven in 1889, the year the community closed. Nordhoff conferred with Elder James Prescott, a longtime member of the community, a stonemason, and schoolteacher who was also the community historian. Prescott clearly approved of Nordhoff and entrusted the journalist with a copy of his manuscript history of North Union, which Nordhoff carried home and later returned. Nordhoff's published account of North Union, despite his personal visit and access to the Prescott narrative, was little more than a basic recital of facts with a lone observation that, "[t]he buildings of this society are not in as neat order as those of Groveland or others eastward. I missed the thorough covering of paint, and the neatness of shops."

Historians of North Union have incorporated Nordhoff's account of the community in their own accounts without critical analysis. The first authoritative account of North Union by an outsider, written by J. P. MacLean in 1900, provides a neat paragraph summary of Nordhoff without comment.

Nordhoff made his visits to the South Union and Pleasant Hill Shaker communities in Kentucky within a matter of days in the spring of 1874. South Union was founded in 1807 and reached its peak population of 50 members in 1827. At South Union Nordhoff likely presented his letter of introduction to the venerable Shaker conservative, Harvey Eades. Eades was in the midst of an ongoing feud with Evans, who represented a liberal interpretation of Shakerism, a dispute that would erupt within months when Eades made a climatic journey to Mt. Lebanon to protest a statement that Evans had printed declaring that Jesus Christ had been a sinner before being called by God as His chosen one. Thus, Eades likely did not appreciate Nordhoff's association with Evans.



*Shaker Elder  
Harvey L. Eades,  
(1807-1892).  
Courtesy South Union  
Shaker Village*

Nordhoff found Eades “a somewhat remarkable man, who studied Latin while driving an ox team as a youngster, and later in life acquired some knowledge of German, French, and Swedish while laboring successively as seed-gardener, tailor, and shoemaker. His mild face and gentle manners pleased me very much.” Eades noted in his journal, “Sun 29 Society Meeting – Friend Norholff [sic] from New York visiting us – I gave him some books and pamphlets.”

South Union members told Nordhoff of the great Kentucky revival that had led to the formation of the western Shaker communities. They gave him descriptions of the “jerks” and other manifestations of religious fervor that the journalist later recorded. Nordhoff, who had read Richard McNemar’s book on the revival, observed, “[t]here is no reason to doubt that McNemar’s descriptions are accurate; from what I have heard at South Union, I imagine that his account is not complete.” On Sunday, he attended the Shaker meeting where he described the community children “all clean and neat, and looking happy in their prim way” participating in the service.

Nordhoff spent his nights in the large Shaker tavern, constructed in 1869 to serve railroad passengers. The brick structure, broke with the simple lines of Shaker architecture, and featured a two story colonnade

facing the tracks and served as a resort, which was the case with many of the communally owned hostelrys that Nordhoff visited. As rail connections improved mobility, spending several days, or even weeks, in the quiet surroundings of a Shaker village, the Harmony Society, Amana or Zoar became popular and, in turn, generated significant income for those communities.

Pleasant Hill community records record that Nordhoff arrived there on April 1, 1874, “from South Union having with him [a letter] from Eld. F.W. Evans to visit Shakers.” Founded in 1806 during the Kentucky Revival, Pleasant Hill reached a peak population of nearly 500 during the 1820s. By 1874, however, the Shakers told Nordhoff that there were 245 Shakers in their community. Nordhoff was particularly impressed by the architecture of the community, for which Pleasant Hill was well known and which was largely due to the work of member Micajah Burnett in the 1820s and 1830s. Nordhoff observed “[t]he buildings at Pleasant Hill are remarkably good. The dwellings have high ceilings, and large, airy rooms, well fitted and very comfortably furnished.”

From Pleasant Hill, Nordhoff made his way to Union Village, Ohio. Founded in 1805, Union Village was the oldest and largest Shaker community in the west. In 1818 the community had reached its peak population of 634 and, at one time, was briefly larger than the largest community in the east, Mt. Lebanon. William Reynolds, writing the Church Family journal entry of Friday, April 3, notes: “Charles Nordhoff a reporter for some of the periodicals is here taking notes on Shaker life.” Nordhoff spent the night at Union Village and left the next day “Sat 4 Charles Nordhoff who has been here for two days left today. He says he intends to publish a work on communism and will have it out in about six months and said he would notice believers favorably in his work.”

The Union Village Church Family Journal contains a lengthy mention of Nordhoff’s visit on April 3 and 4:

Charles Nordhoff Before me lies a Card with this cognomen on it this gentleman came from Mount Lebanon, bearing a letter of recommendation from Elder Frederick W. Evans; this of course entitles him to our consideration and favor; special attention has been shown him as a Visitor by our Leading Characters; and supper added, he had fared sumptuously.

In a subsequent entry, the diarist continued (italics indicate underlining in original entry):

[April] four. Charles has made a tour of the Eastern Societies, and interview them critically; *he speaks of their conditions*, both temporal and spiritual, as One having Obtained faith; on being asked, he gave the *Shades of Difference* between the societies, summing the parallels with nice precision, commencing at New Gloucester [sic] Maine, and terminating at Union Village U c. Ohio having visited in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York and Kentucky & Ohio. Charles is a German by blood. Came to the U.S.A. when a boy; of course has been educated and raised on this continent, and is a scholar and well informed gentleman; he is some forty years old, had the appearance of health, and good living. I am told, he is a writer for the Magazines; Harpers & c; but his travels and *investigations* have reference to a future publication – a Treatise on *Communism* of course Shaker Communities are to come in for their part of his *Notice* in the forth coming Volume. If he should speak of the Village, as he now does, it will be favorable.”

Nordhoff described Union Village, which was located near Lebanon, Ohio, as having 215 Shakers, with its primary income coming from stock breeding.

Historian Thomas Sakmyster, in his work on Union Village apostate author Augustus Wager, compared Wager’s account of the settlement in the early 1870s with Nordhoff’s. Sakmyster found, through his comparison and reading of Union Village records, that the journalist was apparently too eager to accept the information he received from his hosts when, in fact, he was “very much misinformed.” While Nordhoff stated that the population of Union Village in 1874 was stable, it had, in fact, been in serious decline starting in 1850, falling from 448 in that year to 232 in 1870. While Nordhoff reported that the community was in a solid economic position and free of debt, the opposite was true and, in fact, the community was in a “severe economic crisis” exacerbated by a heavy debt that the elders did not disclose to Nordhoff. Additionally, Nordhoff’s remark that “it was not uncommon” for children raised in the society and who left to return and “made good Shakers” was based on his informants’ wishful thinking, rather than on fact.



While Nordhoff was at Union Village, he received the information from the elders there that he later used in his accounts of both the Watervliet and White Water, Ohio communities. Nordhoff opted not to pay a visit to these communities and, instead, to rely on his Union Village informants. Despite his failure to visit these two Ohio communities, Nordhoff's descriptions are accurate for the time, with some minor errors of fact. Watervliet, located near Dayton, Ohio, was founded in 1806 and reached a peak population of one hundred in 1823. Only twenty-two miles from Union Village, it essentially functioned as an "out family" of that larger community.

In his book, Nordhoff devoted 139 pages, 33 percent of his total text, to the Shakers. Although he was sympathetic to them, he nevertheless concluded that they lived a life well suited to the fussy manners of "a parcel of old bachelors and old maids."

Nordhoff's visits to the Shaker communities were interspersed with his stops at other communal settlements, as he worked his way across New England, the Middle Atlantic and the Middle West. Some of these visits, such as his initial sojourn with the Harmony Society and his visit to the Aurora community in Oregon, occurred in 1873; his stops at Oneida, Zoar, Amana, and Icaria were all part of his major fact finding foray in the winter and spring of 1874.

Nordhoff visited the Harmony Society at Economy, Pennsylvania, in December of 1873, The Harmonists he met were the surviving remnant of the followers of a charismatic German lay preacher, Georg Rapp. In 1805 Rapp and his Pietistic followers came to the United States, entering the "wilderness" in advance of what they saw as the imminent second coming of Christ. They built their first community, Harmony, in southwestern Pennsylvania. In 1814 Rapp relocated his 800 followers to the wilderness of southwestern Indiana Territory, before relocating them a third time to Economy, a thriving community on the Ohio River, just a few dozen miles west of the growing city of Pittsburgh. The Harmonists became wealthy through prudent management and investment, so much so that they survived an 1832 schism in which a third of the membership left the society under the leadership of the charismatic imposter, Count de Leon.

When Nordhoff visited, the celibate Harmonists were declining in population and strength. In spite of their decline, Nordhoff's account of the community, in *Communitistic Societies*, is one of the most favorable; clearly he was charmed by the Germanic architecture of the well-maintained village writing, "Neatness and a Sunday quiet are the prevailing characteristics of

Economy.” The large factories that had built the wealth of the Harmony Society were shuttered, but, Nordhoff found that “even now [it is] a model of a well-built, well-arranged country village.”

*Trustee Jacob Henrici  
of the Harmony Society;  
(1804-1892).*



Nordhoff got along quite well with the urbane leader of the Society, Jacob Henrici. Upon returning home, he wrote to Economy to wish Henrici, “and all your good people a happy new year.” Nordhoff commented on the “quiet hours I spent at Economy & have delighted my wife with my stories of the Sunday services” and suggested that he would call again in a few weeks as he made traveled to the Separatist Community at Zoar, Ohio.

In July, Nordhoff dispatched an artist to Economy to produce some illustrations, writing a letter urging Henrici to “please let the man who hands this to you, an artist, make some sketches of Economy for me and also of you and Miss Rapp, too.” He informed Henrici that the artist had been instructed to sketch Henrici’s residence, the church and the main street of Economy “in such way as to show the neatness and excellence of your architecture.” While Henrici apparently refused to sit for a portrait, Nordhoff’s artist slyly included him in a group scene.

Nordhoff later mailed proofs of his manuscript to the Harmony Society asking for corrections. In late July the Harmonist leaders responded with

friendly corrections to Nordhoff's proof sheets. These letters, including a draft list of corrections, survive in the Harmonist papers. There is no evidence that Nordhoff conducted similar correspondence with other communities or that he extended the courtesy of editorial comment to any of them. The Harmonist's primary historian, Karl Arndt, characterized Nordhoff's interactions with the Society, as well as his account as being "gentlemanly" and of "sincere character." Nordhoff drew much of his historical information from a history by Dr. Aaron Williams recommended to him by the Harmonists. Given the fact that Nordhoff allowed trustee Jacob Henrici to review a draft, and then politely made all the requested corrections, Arndt concludes that "the Nordhoff account presents an authentic picture of the situation at Economy in the year 1874."

In February 1874 Nordhoff visited the Oneida Community near Syracuse, New York. John Humphrey Noyes had founded the community in Putney, Vermont, in 1838. Noyes was a "Perfectionist," an adherent to the belief that, following conversion, it was no longer possible for the faithful to sin. He also came to advocate "complex marriage," a system by which he and his followers believed that they were replicating Heaven itself, where there was no marriage tie, in effect, considering themselves all married to each other. Sexual relationships between members included a unique system of male birth control, male continence, which prevented most pregnancies at Oneida. (Nordhoff characterized "complex marriage" as a "singular and, so far as I know, unprecedented combination of polygamy and polyandry.") Derided by their neighbors for their unusual living arrangements, the Perfectionists relocated to a site near Syracuse, New York where they eventually built an impressive unitary dwelling, "The Mansion House." At times, the Oneida Community maintained satellite communities in New York and Connecticut, published a newspaper, manufactured animal traps, sewing thread, and cutlery, and, like the Harmonists, became wealthy.

Aside from his comments on the Shakers, Nordhoff's account of the Oneida Community would prove the most interesting to contemporary reviewers of *Communitistic Societies*. Nordhoff's middle-class Victorian sensibilities were offended by much of what he found there. His attitude is conveyed by his remark that, "It is an extraordinary evidence of the capacity of mankind for various and extreme religious beliefs ... that many men have brought their wives and young daughters into the Oneida Community."



*The Oneida Community Mansion House, Oneida, N.Y.*

When Nordhoff visited, Oneida was in the midst of a eugenics experiment known as “stiripculture.” The experiment involved pairing individuals with desirable traits for procreation. The resulting children had limited contact with their birth parents and were raised in the community nursery. Nordhoff, a father of five, found the children “a little subdued and desolate, as though they missed the exclusive love and care of a father and mother.” He commented, “I should grieve to see in the eyes of my own little ones an impression which I thought I saw in the Oneida children—difficult to describe—perhaps I might say a lack of buoyancy, or of confidence and gladness. A man or woman may not find it disagreeable to be part of a giant machine, but I suspect it is harder for a child. However, I will not insist on this, for I may have been mistaken.”

Nordhoff described a Sunday evening meeting he attended, and also one of the community's sessions of "mutual criticism." During these sessions, a small group of community members offered criticism of character traits and habits of the individual who had volunteered for the process, with the idea that these comments would help improve the person under examination. Nordhoff attended a session with the permission of the young man under examination. Fifteen members were there, including Noyes who facilitated the half hour long session. Nordhoff provided a detailed account of the criticism, running to four pages in his book. Nordhoff observed beads of sweat on the young man's face as the criticism continued and was clearly unnerved, if not disgusted, by the procedure. Nordhoff found Noyes's remarks at the conclusion "strange" and "horrible."

Nordhoff concluded his Oneida account by tersely stating, "and with this picture of their daily life I may conclude my account of these people," an abrupt ending that leaves the impression that open-minded and worldly as he was, Nordhoff was relieved to complete writing about complex marriage, stiripculture, and the other practices at Oneida that ran so completely counter to traditional Victorian practices of the day.

After his visits to the Shakers and to Oneida, Nordhoff turned his attention to the west. Here, he visited Shaker communities in Ohio and Kentucky, as well as the German pietists at Zoar and Amana, the remnants of the Swedish pietist colony at Bishop Hill, Illinois and the French utopian socialists at tiny Icaria in western Iowa.

One of Nordhoff's visits, in February 1874, was to the Society of Separatists at Zoar, Ohio. Zoar had been founded by a group of German religious separatists who had arrived in the United States in 1817 assisted by the Philadelphia Quakers and purchased a tract of land in east central Ohio and established their community. Under the leadership of Joseph Bäumlér (Bimeler), the separatists built a comfortable, if austere, village.

The journalist found a general air of neglect and shabbiness at Zoar which he noted "shocks one who has lately visited the Shakers and the Rappists." In his accounts of different communities, Nordhoff always assessed their current leadership and their past leaders and founders. Joseph Bäumlér, the head of the Zoar community from 1817 until his death in 1853, was, Nordhoff believed, "doubtless a man of considerable ability, but not comparable, I imagine, with [Georg] Rapp" of the Harmonists. In Nordhoff's opinion Bäumlér had "left upon the society no marks to





*The Church at Zoar, Ohio, as illustrated in Nordhoff's Communistic Societies.*

show that he strove for or desired a higher life here, or that he in the least valued beauty, or even what we Americans would call comfort.”

Overall, especially compared with his flattering account of Economy, Nordhoff was critical of the Zoarites writing, “[t]hey are therefore unintellectual; and they have not risen in culture beyond their original condition.... The little town of Zoar, though founded fifty-six years ago, has yet no foot pavements; it remains without regularity of design; the houses are for the most part in need of paint; and there is about the place a general air of neglect and lack of order, a shabbiness.” Elsewhere he qualified his impression, “rude and uninviting as the life in Zoar seemed to me, it was perhaps still a step higher, more decent, more free from disagreeables, and upon a higher moral scale, than the average life of the surrounding county.”

Although Nordhoff's Zoar account was unflattering, it was largely accurate and, despite its tone, actually fueled an influx of letters of application to join the community from some of his readers.

Nordhoff included the Bishop Hill community in his survey although it had ceased to live communally in 1861. The Swedish residents of the



community had arrived in the United States in 1846, locating in Henry County, Illinois, under the leadership of the charismatic Erik Jaanson, whom they believed represented Christ's return. After Janson's 1853 murder, the community prospered under the leadership of capable trustees. The coming of the Civil War and financial issues led the community to dissolve in 1861, thirteen years before Nordhoff visited.



*The Steeple Building at Bishop Hill, Illinois.*

Nordhoff stated that he included his record of Bishop Hill as a cautionary tale. Nordhoff's terse account of this Illinois utopia may also be a reflection of his frustration with its residents. Ashamed of their past, the residents of Bishop Hill refused to speak of colony days. During his own research visits to Bishop Hill a decade and a half later, Michael Mikkelsen was told that Nordhoff had been heard to say, "D\_\_\_ these people; I can't get anything out of them," when he left the village.

Nordhoff's visit to the Amana Society in east central Iowa occurred in March 1874. The Society was founded by members of the Community of True Inspiration, a pietistic Lutheran sect from southwestern Germany, whose members believed that certain individuals could deliver direct

revelations from God. Under the leadership of Christian Metz, the Inspirationists had begun immigrating to the United States in 1843, settling on a 5,000 acre tract of land near Buffalo, New York. Here, the community instituted a temporary community of goods that was made permanent within a few years. In 1854, searching for a more isolated location as well as more land, the Inspirationists began relocating to a 26,000 acre tract of land in east-central Iowa where they built seven small villages. When Nordhoff visited, the Amana Society had the largest unified domain of all the American communal societies and, aside from the Shakers, the most members.



*This copy of a long lost original photograph, shows the diagonal street leading to the Amana Woolen Mill, the identical view depicted in the woodcut “Amana, a General View” in Nordhoff’s Communitistic Societies (opposite). While Nordhoff’s illustrations are the earliest dated images of Amana, this photograph may be even earlier. It is possibly the work of William H. Masters, a photographer from the nearby town of Marengo who is known to have photographed Amana in the early 1870s. Although altered through almost a century and a half of use, virtually every building in this photograph is still standing.*

During his visit, Nordhoff spoke not only with community leaders, but with rank and file members of the Society, a process facilitated by his knowledge of German. Most visitors to Amana did not have this kind of access, but had to depend on conversations with members who knew English or whose words were translated.



AMANA, A GENERAL VIEW.

*Amana, Iowa, as illustrated in Nordhoff's Communitistic Societies.*

Nordhoff's primary contact while in Amana apparently was Johann Beyer, the longtime secretary of the Amana Society and, later, its president. Nordhoff noted that Beyer (whom he did not identify by name) mentioned "that he had been during all his early life a merchant in Germany; and he had the grave and somewhat precise air of an honest German merchant of the old style—prudent, with a heavy sense of responsibility, a little rigid, and yet kindly."

Several times in his account, Nordhoff quoted members on topics as he described the craft shops, factories, schools and churches of Amana. Nordhoff described the communal kitchens and noted that "they live well, after the hearty German fashion, and bake excellent bread." After discussing the school curriculum, he wondered at the fact that both boys and girls were taught how to knit. He wrote, "one of the teachers said to me that this work kept them quiet, gave them habits of industry, and kept them off the streets and from rude plays." Throughout his visit, Nordhoff made wry comments about the Society's separation of men and women and promotion of celibacy. In describing marriage practices, Nordhoff remarked that the groom "marries the object of his affection, in spite of her black hood and her sad-colored little shawl."

Nordhoff gained some of his information through conversations with ordinary members of the Society. Apparently, he stationed himself in some of the workshops and other public places, asking questions. As he recounted:

At the little inn I talked with a number of the rank and file, and noticed in them great satisfaction with their method of life. They were, on the surface, the commoner kind of German laborers; but they had evidently thought pretty thoroughly upon the subject of communal living; and they knew how to display to me what appeared to them its advantages in their society: the absolute equality of all men – “as God made us;” the security for their families; the abundance of foods; and the independence of a master.

He commented that “the members do not work hard” and that he had “found it generally true that the members of communistic societies take life easy.” He thought that the people he spoke with were good solid German peasants and laborers, as he called them, working under capable and intelligent leadership.

The Amana elders whom he interviewed provided Nordhoff with several of their publications which he read and even translated portions of in his book. Nordhoff found Amana to be restrictive, even oppressive. He spoke glowingly of the economic aspects of communal life, and wrote sympathetically of a number of individuals, including his hotel keeper, with whom he had visited:

I think I noticed at Amana, and elsewhere among the German communistic societies, a satisfaction in their lives, a pride in the equality which the communal system secures, and also in the conscious surrender of the individual will to the general good, which is not so clearly ... felt among other nationalities.

Either while traveling to the western communities that he visited, or returning home, Nordhoff took the highly unusual step of visiting the site of the Eben-Ezer Society, the forerunner of the Amana Society, near Buffalo, New York. In all the contemporary literature of the Amana Inspirationists, Nordhoff was the only chronicler to take this extra step in his investigation. Arriving at the former Eben-Ezer settlement, Nordhoff found many of the buildings from the original community still standing, now occupied, largely, by Germans. He found that “the present residents speak of their predecessors with esteem and even affection,” in one store, Nordhoff even found manufactured goods from Amana for sale.



*The 1860 Icarian schoolhouse, the only Icarian building still extant from the time of Nordhoff's visit. In recent years, this building has been relocated adjacent to the Icarian cemetery.*

Nordhoff's visit to the Icarian community near Corning in Adams County, Iowa, likely occurred in March 1874 after his visit to Amana. Icaria had been founded in 1848 and was based on the writings of its founder and leader, Etienne Cabet, who had authored the novel *Voyage en Icarie* in 1839 describing a fictional utopia. After years of revolution and economic turmoil, Cabet's enthusiastic French adherents obeyed their leader's call to establish a real Icaria in the United States. After a failed attempt in Texas, the faithful relocated, with Cabet, to the former Mormon community at Nauvoo, Illinois. Following a schism in which Cabet and his loyalists left the community to found a short-lived "Icaria" in Missouri, the remaining Icarians moved to Adams County, Iowa, where Nordhoff visited them.

Nordhoff's contempt for Icaria was evident in his writing about the community, with much of his animosity directed to the long dead founder of the community, Etienne Cabet, whom he flatly condemned as "not a fit leader." In *Communitistic Societies* Nordhoff mused,

Alas for the dreams of a dreamer! I turned over the leaves of his pamphlet while wandering through the muddy lanes of the



present Icaria, one chilly Sunday in March with a keen sense of pain at the contrast between the comfort and elegance he so glowingly described, and the dreary poverty of the life which a few determined men and women have there chose to follow, for the sake of principles which they hold both true and valuable.

It is notable that the only instance in which Nordhoff used the term “utopia” in *Communitistic Societies*, was in reference to Icaria. Coined by Thomas More in 1516, Utopia can be translated as meaning either “the good place” or “no place,” the latter possibly suggesting that More believed a perfect society was an impossibility. Nordhoff valued practical communal or cooperative effort above utopian missions. He found Icaria the most impoverished of all the communities he visited, but carefully laid the blame on the poor leadership and guidance of Cabet. Again and again, Nordhoff referenced the hard work, dreams and sacrifice of the sixty remaining Icarians, but made their community into an object lesson of poor administration.

Nordhoff found that the Icarians owned 1,936 acres of land, a saw mill, a grist mill, 120 cows, 550 sheep, 30 horses and fifty hogs—an unusually-detailed accounting of a communal farming operation. He found the houses “small and very cheaply built.” Although the colony was French, Nordhoff found that he could converse with some of the members in German.” He was clearly sympathetic to the rank and file members whom he met, blaming the condition of the settlement on poor management. He tried to sound a hopeful tone, stating, “I should say that they had passed over the hardest times, and that a moderate degree of prosperity is possible to them now; but they have waited long for it.”

Nordhoff concluded his comments on Icaria in a similarly sympathetic vein:

This is Icaria. It is the least prosperous of all the communities I have visited; and I could not help feeling pity, if not for the men, yet for the women and children of the settlement who have lived through all the penury and hardship of these many years. A gentleman who knew of my visit there writes me: “Please deal gently and cautiously with Icaria. The man who sees only the chaotic village and the wooden shoes, and only chronicles those, will commit a serious error. In that village are buried fortunes, noble hopes, and



the aspirations of good and great men like Cabet.”

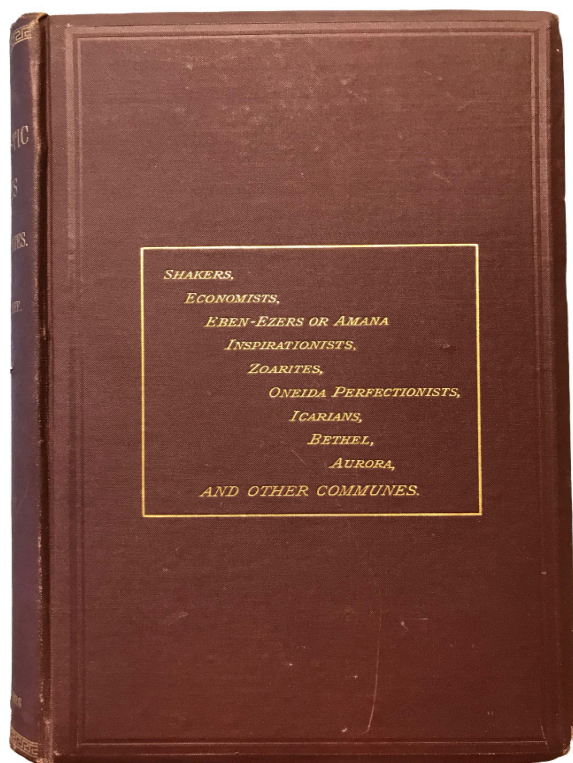
He would go on to observe “I am far from belittling the effort of the men of Icaria. They have shown, as I have said, astonishing courage and perseverance.”

Nordhoff’s account of Icaria, even with its qualification and respect for the high minded ideals of its members, has proven to be an inconvenient record for many historians of the movement. The standard modern history of the Society does not even cite, let alone mention, Nordhoff, and one scholar took the tone of his Icarian account to mean that the journalist “was not enthusiastic about communism.”

Returning home, Nordhoff made a brief return visit to Economy, where the community hotel recorded that “Mr. Nordfof” [sic] had a bill of 60 cents for his stay. Once home, Nordhoff wrote *Communitistic Societies*, completing a draft by July 1874. Nordhoff based his account not only on his own observations, but on the reports of other visitors, including Benson Lossing, and a wide reading in a stack of literature that he acquired from the different communities. Among the sources Nordhoff consulted were the works of Shaker apostate, Hervey Elkins, whom he quoted at length in *Communitistic Societies*. Some of the books he used were in the collection of friends or at the Library of Congress. The extensive bibliography that concluded *Communitistic Societies* is today acknowledged as the first attempt at a bibliography of Shaker publications and, almost certainly of the Inspirationists of Amana. Nordhoff quoted liberally from some of these sources. In the case of the German communities, these quotations were his translations of the original texts.

On July 1, 1874, Nordhoff signed a contract for the publication of *Communitistic Societies* with his old firm of Harpers. The book appeared, simultaneously in the United States and Great Britain in January 1875. Bound with cloth covers, *Communitistic Societies* retailed for a hefty \$4.00 a volume, a considerable sum for the time, and a price beyond what the laboring classes, to whom Nordhoff addressed his work, could afford to pay.

Nordhoff assembled the illustrations in the *Communitistic Societies* from a variety of sources. For example, twelve of the illustrations utilized in the Shaker section, were recycled from Benson Lossing’s 1857 study of the Shakers, an account also published by Harpers. Lossing’s article was the first detailed and illustrated life about Shaker village life. Other Shaker



*The first edition of Communitistic Societies was issued in a cloth binding with community names stamped in gold on the front board.*

illustrations in *Communitistic Societies* are based on photographs that were then being sold in the Shaker stores at Enfield, New Hampshire, and Mt. Lebanon, possibly purchased by Nordhoff during his visits or sent to him later by the Shakers and then engraved by the Harpers's staff. The portrait of Frederick Evans in *Communitistic Societies* was based on a photograph taken during an 1871 visit to London. In the case of the Harmony Society, Nordhoff did, in fact, dispatch a Harpers artist with instructions to illustrate particular buildings and scenes. In the case of Amana, at least two artists signed the engravings accompanying Nordhoff's chapter on that community, suggesting that he obtained these images from other sources.

Reviews of *Communitistic Societies* were generally positive. Most reviews praised Nordhoff for his diligence in visiting the communities and praised his observational skills and straightforward reporting. Several reviews contrasted Nordhoff's writing with more recent studies of American communal societies, including John Humphrey Noyes's *A History of American*

*Socialisms* and William Hepworth Dixon's *New America*. Noyes's work was that of a biased proponent of communal living while, reviewers noted, Dixon's work was sensationalistic. A reviewer for the *English Independent* went so far as to reference readers "who have had the misfortune to peruse Mr. Hepworth Dixon's, "New America."

A review in *The Galaxy* assessed Nordhoff's "sensible and interesting work" as "more solid than brilliant; but its descriptions are often very graphic, and are done with admirable skill and completeness; while its observations are usually marked by shrewdness, terseness, and vigour." Writing in *The North American Review*, Franklin Sanborn criticized Nordhoff for avoiding the Mormons and for unmethodical organization, but concluded that "No recent observer has told their story better, on the whole, and there are few who may not profit in their speculative theories or their practical living, by considering the facts brought to light in this entertaining volume."

The author of a review in *Scribner's Monthly* rightly observed, however, that Nordhoff's accounts needed to take into consideration the manner in which he conducted his visits. Because, the reviewer assumed, leaders such as Frederick Evans and John Humphrey Noyes knew Nordhoff's intent, they and their followers would have highlighted the best aspects of communal life, and not disclosed any of its less admirable traits. A regular visitor, the reviewer opined, "might find his conclusions differed seriously from those of an author known to be an author, treated as an author, and receiving authorized and authoritative facts and statistics fitted to his understood intention." The reviewer, instead, praised those moments when Nordhoff "forgetting himself for a moment ... breaks out in expressions of horror and disgust at the Oneida beastliness, and lets his honest indignation have its way."

The most notable review of *The Communistic Societies* was by the young novelist Henry James, published in *The Nation*, a liberal journal that Nordhoff had once been recruited to edit. James praised Nordhoff's effort: "Mr Nordhoff offers us here a copious volume on a subject deserving of liberal treatment. His researches have been minute and exhaustive, and he makes a very lucid and often an entertaining exposition of their results." James also criticized Nordhoff for dipping "his pen in rose-color," noting that "[it] would have been possible, we think, for an acute moralist to travel over the same ground as Mr. Nordhoff and to present in consequence a rather duskier picture of human life at Amana, Mount Lebanon, and

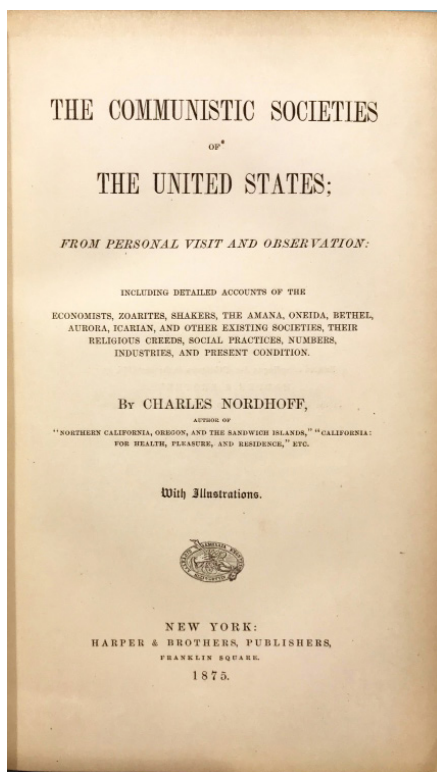
Oneida.” James’s keen sense of human nature is demonstrated by the material that he chose to highlight. The reviewer found the story of Dr. Keil at the graves of his children affecting enough to quote it. Elsewhere, James noted that “[o]ne is struck ... with the existence in human nature of lurking and unsuspected strata, as it were, of asceticism, of the capacity for taking a grim satisfaction in dreariness.” Clearly not an admirer of the Shakers and their aesthetic celibate life, James sardonically noted, “Everything is told here about Shakerism that one could possibly desire to know.... He explains everything indeed in the matter but one – how twenty-five hundred people, that is, can be found to embrace a life of such organized and theorized aridity.” James had similar compulsions against the Oneida Community, commenting “morally and socially it strikes us as simply hideous.”

The reaction of individual communities to Nordhoff’s work is difficult to gauge. References to Nordhoff’s book survive in a variety of Shaker sources. The anonymous author keeping the Union Village “Journal of Daily Activities, 1858-1881,” added a short note to his earlier entry about the journalist’s visit: “March 9th 1875. His book is out and it does more than justice to believer communities.”

In 1888 Martyn W. Miles of Mt. Lebanon listed Nordhoff as one of “several eminent men who have written favorably of the Society,” and in 1895, F. Silsby Tripp of Pleasant Hill quoted from *Communitistic Societies* in a letter published in the *Shaker Manifesto*.

The Oneida Community *Circular* both reviewed the book and printed excerpts. The anonymous Oneida reviewer began by proclaiming “Here at last we have a book on Communism written in a candid, truth-loving spirit. The author neither panders to popular prejudice nor strives after sensational effect. He gives in his clear, attractive style, his own observations.” The reviewer praised Nordhoff’s objectivity and, for an Oneida member, offered the high praise of suggesting that Nordhoff’s volume “should be placed side by side with Mr. Noyes’s ‘History of American Socialisms’ in every good library.” Accustomed to unsympathetic and sensationalized treatments, Oneida members, the reviewer stated, could rest assured that “it is sufficient to say the author evidently aimed to do the Perfectionists justice as well as the other societies, and has succeeded better than most folks.” In the next week’s edition, the *Circular* began excerpting portions of Nordhoff’s Oneida commentary remarking that “[t]he sketch is on the whole so truthful that we have little disposition to sharply criticise [sic]

*The title page of  
the first edition of  
Communitistic Societies.*



any part of it." The *Circular*, however, did correct errors of fact in the excerpts that it reprinted, ranging from the editor's disagreement with some assessments to correcting Nordhoff's transcription of the popular Oneida Community Song. Even these criticisms, however, were made with the caveat, "It is impossible that any one should be able to truthfully portray the inward experience of two or three hundred persons on such a short, and necessarily, superficial acquaintance as Mr. Nordhoff had with the O.C."

Many other reviewers of *Communitistic Societies* were open with their own negative views of Oneida. Although negative critiques of the other communities profiled were uncommon in the reviews, reviewers were unrestrained in their critique of Oneida. Remarkd one British reviewer, "the little that we are here told is sufficiently horrible and disgusting and is in direct conflict with the most sacred instincts of human nature." Other reviews were equally negative, referencing Oneida as "this disgusting sect

... system despotic to the last degree ... a scandal to civilization ... this ugly experiment in communal living” and “the least reputable of the communities mentioned.” One reviewer expressed hope that “this hideous enormity [of Oneida] will not long survive.”

Many reviews provided brief summaries of notable facts about each community, and a few offered their own appraisals of communities based on Nordhoff’s descriptions. Aside from Oneida, reviews treated other communities with respect and even praise. One reviewer, for example, praised the Harmony Society as “the most interesting, being this one solitary communistic association whose abodes show any sense of beauty, taste or refinement.”

In 1876 William A. Hinds of the Oneida Community followed in Nordhoff’s steps and visited many of the same communities in order to provide material for a series of stories published in *The American Socialist* and later collected as the book *American Communities*. Hinds revised this book in 1902 and 1908, updating, correcting and adding materials to his original accounts. In all his editions Hinds cited Nordhoff’s facts and figures and made quotations from it.

On March 5, 1876, John Humphrey Noyes wrote to Nordhoff enclosing a prospectus, presumably for his new paper, *The American Socialist*, which began publication on March 30, and praising Nordhoff’s volume. Noyes drew Nordhoff’s attention to the quotations from his book contained in the prospectus and commented “We regard that book as in some sense the introduction to our undertaking and shall be likely to quote it largely hereafter.” Noyes suggested that, “if we succeed, as we hope, our labors may increase its sale,” noting, “We shall be glad to advertise it.” Noyes also remarked that his new paper would promote the interchange between the existing American communal societies that Nordhoff had advocated in his own work. Noyes concluded by stating “We cannot ask you of course to embarrass yourself by any complication with us; but beg leave to assure you that we highly appreciate what you have done for Communism, and shall be ever ready to welcome and remunerate according our ability any help by writing or otherwise which you may be free to give us.” Apparently, Noyes’s comments were meant to elicit support from Nordhoff and more than likely do not reflect his own candid appraisal of *Communistic Societies*. In fact, Nordhoff, with his strong sense of morality and the ideal of middle class family life, found Oneida the least palatable of the communities he visited.



The Society of Separatists at Zoar reported a large influx of letters begging for admission following publication of *Communitistic Societies*, in spite of the journalist's lukewarm appraisal of the community. Typical of the "several" application letters received at Zoar was one from a doctor and teacher, T. H. Rose of Marietta, Ohio: "I have been reading ... Nordhoff's book and have been captured by it." Rose went on to request permission to join noting, "you would find me a steady, quiet, industrious man with good moral habits—and a desire to be good and do good." Zoar leaders typically responded to these requests with a form letter, bluntly rejecting the request. The leaders clearly found the attention brought by Nordhoff's book unwelcome, in part because the community population at the time was stable and new members were perceived as both unnecessary and potentially destabilizing.

The Amana Society apparently, had no immediate reaction to the publication. Like Zoar, however, the book was referenced by outsiders writing for more information about the community. In 1877 John Beyer, secretary of the Amana Society, may have had Nordhoff in mind when he wrote to William A. Hinds, trying to dissuade him from publishing an account about the Society: "we do not wish to have any publications about our Society made. We are not meddling with other peoples affairs and wish to be treated the same. Every article of publication about our Society brings us a flood of Letters of Inquiries and applications for admission, which are quite an annoyance to us." Beyer also commented on Nordhoff's work, which Hinds had evidently asked about in an earlier letter, "[W]e have read Chas. Nordhoff's account but found that he has misrepresented us in a good many Respects, also dealing to much in trifles, not worth while to mention.

The \$4.00 price of *Communitistic Societies* may have served to limit its appeal. When writing his own survey, *American Communities*, William Hinds praised Nordhoff, but hinted at the issue of price by noting that his shorter work was cheaper. As his biographer Carol Frost notes, *Communitistic Societies* was a very personal book for Nordhoff, and one that he wrote for himself. As a result the author failed to consider his audience. Allusions and language are not directed at the very working men that Nordhoff ostensibly hoped to reach. The long quotations from community-written poetry, songs and religious texts, reflected Nordhoff's desire to preserve these materials in print. For a working class reader they were probably tedious, repetitive and uninteresting reading.

Although well reviewed at the time, *Communitistic Societies* did not achieve the popularity of Nordhoff's landmark work on California. While many of Nordhoff's books, such as *California* and *Politics for Young Americans* went through numerous editions in his lifetime, *Communitistic Societies* did not. It was not until the resurgence of public interest in communal societies in the early 1960s that publishers began to reissue *Communitistic Societies* and the book has, seemingly, never been out of print since. Typically reprinted in facsimile form, reprint editions of *Communitistic Societies* have also included essays by noted scholars, such as Franklin Littell, Mark Halloway, and Robert Fogarty.

Following the publication of *Communitistic Societies*, Charles Nordhoff returned to journalism, accepting a highly lucrative offer to serve as a special correspondent for James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* in Washington, D.C. For nearly seventeen years he had a front row seat to the politics of the national capitol, continuing to meet, influence, and advise a string of the era's political notables. Nordhoff became known in Washington circles, as "the ambassador from Mr. Bennett." Bennett paid him an annual salary of \$10,000, reportedly the largest received by any editorial writer at the time, a fact often reported in the press. Politically Nordhoff moved from the liberal Republicans to the Democrats. He continued to promote social causes, although, it seems, did not advocate for communalism after the publication of his book on that topic. Novelist Gore Vidal immortalized Nordhoff, the consummate insider journalist of Gilded Age Washington, in his novel, *1876*. The fictional Nordhoff serves as a guide through Washington politics and society for the protagonist of the novel which the author set during the tumultuous contested presidential election of 1876 and its contested aftermath.

Nordhoff also continued to publish books including *Politics for Young Americans* and *God and the Future Life* which grew from his own deep religious faith. Nordhoff retired to California in the autumn of 1890. In retirement, Nordhoff received a generous \$5,000 annual pension from Bennett.

The old journalist emerged from retirement to make a final trip to Hawaii at Bennett's behest to report on the Hawaiian revolution and attempts to annex the island nation to the United States. Nordhoff vehemently voiced his opposition to annexation and, as a result, was castigated by the public and the press. His frequent criticisms of the provisional government of Hawaii led to threats of arrest on charges of libel. His Hawaiian expedition behind him, Nordhoff returned to his home in Coronado.

A sharp, unexplained, falling out with his son, Walter, clouded these later years. The younger Nordhoff moved to London where, in 1889, his son Charles Bernard Nordhoff was born. Walter Nordhoff, under a pseudonym, authored a popular work of historical fiction, *The Journey of the Flame*. The younger Charles Nordhoff, perhaps inspired by his estranged grandfather's adventuresome early years, served as a pilot in World War I, during which he met James Norman Hall. After the war, Hall and Nordhoff collaborated on the bestselling novel *Mutiny on the Bounty* in 1932, based on the famous mutiny against Captain Bligh in the South Pacific. Selling millions of copies, the novel has been the basis for two feature films. Today, the notoriety of the Charles Nordhoff who wrote *Mutiny on the Bounty* has far eclipsed that of the author of *The Communistic Societies of the United States*.

Nordhoff died at a private sanitarium in San Francisco on July 14, 1901, from the effects of diabetes. At his death, he was already well on the way to being forgotten by the public.

Nordhoff's posthumous life has largely been based upon *Communistic Societies* and his California guides. He is repeatedly cited in studies of the societies he visited. The casual visitor to the historic sites and museums at Aurora, Oregon; Amana, Iowa; the Oneida Community Mansion House; Old Economy Village in Ambridge, Pennsylvania; and at Shaker sites; finds reproductions of the illustrations from *Communistic Societies* and exhibit text and interpretation that quote from Nordhoff or are informed by his observations. In 2004 Nordhoff's communal exploration was the focus of a major special exhibit at Hancock Shaker Village, in which artifacts from most of the communities he visited were featured.

If Nordhoff made his tour of American communities today, he would find himself visiting museums and restorations. With the exception of the Sabbathday Lake Shakers, all of the communities he visited ceased to live communally long ago. The different Shaker villages closed, one by one, starting with Tyringham in 1875 and ending, in 1992, with the death of the last Shaker at Canterbury, New Hampshire, leaving Sabbathday Lake as the lone outpost of Shakerism. Later in the twentieth century collectors discovered Shaker design and furniture, musicologists collected Shaker music and half a dozen Shaker villages, including Pleasant Hill, South Union and Canterbury were purchased by enthusiastic preservationists, restored, and opened to the public. While the Shakers may eventually vanish, the cultural legacy that they have produced is tightly woven into American life.

The Oneida Community bowed to public disapproval and abandoned complex marriage a few years of Nordhoff's visit. In 1881 the community reorganized as a joint stock corporation, spawning a highly successful silverware company that endured into the early 2000s. Today, descendants of the Oneida members Nordhoff met continue to inhabit the Mansion House. The Bethel and Aurora communities ended communal living in 1883; Zoar and Icaria both dissolved in 1898. The Harmony Society lasted until 1905, when its affairs were wound up in the courts. Today, the central portion of the village of Economy which so entranced Nordhoff is a state historic site.

Other than the Shakers, the Amana Society had the longest life of any community that Nordhoff visited. After decades of successful operation, the community eventually fell victim to the economic stresses of the Great Depression and the simmering discontent of its youth. Amana followed the Oneida Community's lead and formed a joint stock corporation which continues to function, and which gave rise to a popular appliance brand in the mid-twentieth century. Today, the Amana Church Society continues as a religious organization. Amana remains an important tourist attraction, although its visitors are less attracted by the unusual communal history that brought Charles Nordhoff there, but more by quaint craft shops and a Bavarian style Oktoberfest celebration.

In short, Nordhoff's hopes of communal and cooperative living as a solution to the social and economic stresses of the 1870s went unfulfilled. With the closure of the communities that Nordhoff visited, the communal experience in the United States lay largely dormant until the 1960s. The counter culture of that tumultuous decade gave rise to hundreds of communes and cooperatives, and today there are, literally, thousands of broadly-defined communal societies, ranging from the 40,000 Hutterites who live in the Great Plains, to hundreds of small co-housing units, to long-lived counter culture communities like Twin Oaks in Virginia. The communal dream survives, but in a different form than in 1874.

As long as scholars and the public have an interest in American communal movements the gifted printer, turned sailor, turned editor, turned journalist, turned reformer, is bound to endure.

## Notes

1. Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies*, 11; Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 221.
2. Historian Donald Pitzer provides a cogent analysis of both the value and limitations of Nordhoff's work in a bibliographical essay found in Donald E. Pitzer, ed. *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Pitzer also notes that Nordhoff avoided discussions of the Mormons and Moravian movements, both of which had transitioned from earlier communal existence into less restrictive cooperative arrangements.
3. Nordhoff's biographer, Carol Frost wrote Shaker scholar, Robert Emlen, "I am sorry to say that one of the enduring frustrations of my work on Nordhoff has been the scarcity of source material relating to his trips to the 'communistic societies.' It was very important to him, but he seems to have been so busy writing his book that he didn't write many letters during that period (12/1873 – 3/1874)." Carol Frost to Robert Emlen, quoted in an email to the author, May 4, 2012.
4. Nordhoff, *Northern California, Oregon and the Sandwich Islands*, 155.
5. Coincidentally, Keil's own religious conversion occurred in a Methodist religious revival at Pittsburgh led by Wilhelm Nast, who was Nordhoff's second guardian after the death of his father. If the two men were aware of their shared connection to Nast is both is unrecorded. David Nelson Duke. "The Evolution of Religion in Wilhelm Keil's Community: A New Reading of Old Testimony, *Communal Societies* 13 (1993), 87. No sources that the author has consulted have made this connection between Nordhoff and Keil, which is understandable given the fact that Nordhoff's background is not well known.
6. Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 318.
7. *Ibid.*, 319.
8. *Ibid.*, 310.
9. *Ibid.*, 311.
10. *Ibid.*, 313.
11. Nordhoff's visit to Bethel probably occurred during the spring of 1874. In his account, he noted that his visit to Bethel was "after I had seen the Oregon community" (Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 324-25.)
12. Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 326-27.
13. *Ibid.*, 329; Duke, "The Evolution of Religion in Wilhelm Keil's Community," 85.
14. Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 330.
15. Robert J. Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora: An Experience in Communism as Practical Christianity with Some Account of Past and Present Ventures in Collective Living* (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1933), 204-5, 207.
16. Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 153.

17. Ibid., 158.
18. Shaker Collection, mss. No. 20, New York Public Library.
19. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 115. Nordhoff noted that his guide, whom he did not identify by name, was a former University student from Sweden. The guide was almost certainly Emil Bretzner, then approximately twenty-four years of age, who had come to the Shakers in 1870 after reading about them in William Hepworth Dixon's book, *New America*. In 1873, Bretzner was working as a gardener at the North Family. Bretzner fielded a barrage of questions from Nordhoff, who later observed, "I do not doubt that my tireless questioning sometimes bored him." (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 152.) I am grateful to Christian Goodwillie and Glendyne Wergland for their identification of Bretzner (Christian Goodwillie, to the author, email communication, January 14, 2014.)
20. The deceased sister, whom Nordhoff does not identify, was Rhoda Offord, who died on December 10 at the age of thirty-four. Offord had written two pieces that were published in the *Shaker Manifesto* and had been a girl's caretaker at Mt. Lebanon. Her funeral was on December 12, the second day of Nordhoff's visit. ("Obituary," *Shaker and Shakeress* 4, no. 1 (January 1874): 8; Christian Goodwillie, email communication to author, November 1, 2018; Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 164.)
21. *Shaker and Shakeress* 4, no. 7 (July 1874): 56.
22. Stephen J. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 218. For the history of Tyringham, see Stephen J. Paterwic, *Tyringham Shakers* (Clinton, New York: Couper Press, 2013).
23. For Hancock Shaker Village, see Christian Goodwillie and John Harlow Ott, *Hancock Shaker Village: A Guidebook and History* (Pittsfield, MA: Hancock Shaker Village, 2011). Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 101, 103.
24. Charles Nordhoff to Gordon L. Ford, December 17, 1873, Ford Family Papers, 1833-1910, New York Public Library.
25. Alfred records confirm this account, mentioning that the intended point of relocation was Kansas, but that the effort failed because a buyer for their Maine property did not materialize.  

Sawyer (1815-1884) was one of the most prominent of all the Maine Shakers, serving as both an elder and an historian. He founded the Shaker library at Sabbathday Lake, now an important repository for Shaker materials, and located in the only active Shaker community. Stephen Paterwic notes of Sawyer that "[h]is fatherly presence and the confidence he inspired helped shape a whole generation of Maine believers." (Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 185.)
26. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 3. For the history of the Alfred Shakers, see Sister R. Mildred Barker, *Holy Land: A History of the Alfred Shakers* (Sabbathday



- Lake, Maine: Shaker Press, 1986).
27. Brother Otis Sawyer, Church Record and Journal for Sabbathday Lake, Vol. 1, January 29, 1874, Shaker Library, Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, New Gloucester, Maine. I am indebted to Charles Rand for locating this obscure reference after much searching. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 183; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 181. For the history of the Sabbathday Lake Shakers, see Sister R. Mildred Barker, *The Sabbathday Lake Shakers: An Introduction to the Shaker Heritage* (Sabbathday Lake, Maine: Shaker Press, 1985).
  28. "1792-1885 Current Record of Events," Hamilton College, Communal Societies Collection. It is likely, although not noted by Nordhoff or Shaker sources, that one of his informants at Canterbury was Elder Henry Clay Blinn (1824–1905), an important figure in Shakerism who later edited the *Shaker Manifesto*. He was a leader of the Canterbury Shakers for sixty-one years (Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 20).
  29. Canterbury records indicate that the actual peak population, reached in 1840, was 260 (Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 30).
  30. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 31.
  31. The dwelling was designed by a professional architect hired by the Shakers. Built in 1837-1840 the building is two feet narrower than reported by Nordhoff, has 200 windows and cost some \$50,000. (Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 65, 90-91.)
  32. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 65.
  33. Elder William Wetherbee's obituary appears in *Manifesto* 16, no. 5 (May 1886): 120.
  34. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 191-92. For the history of Shirley and Harvard, see Edward R. Horgan, *The Shaker Holy Land: A Community Portrait* (Harvard: The Harvard Common Press, 1982).
  35. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 193.
  36. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 227. For the history of Watervliet, see Dorothy M. Filley, *Recapturing Wisdom's Valley: The Watervliet Shaker Heritage, 1775–1975* (Albany: Town of Colonie and Albany Institute of History and Art, 1975).
  37. [Watervliet South Family Journal]. Western Reserve Historical Society, Shaker Collection, mss. No. V:B-312, p. 208
  38. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 197.
  39. *Ibid.*, 199.
  40. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 96. For the history of the Sodus–Groveland community, see Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr. *The Sodus Shaker Community* (Lyons, New York: Wayne County Historical Society, 1982).
  41. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 205.
  42. J. P. MacLean, "The Society of Shakers: Rise, Progress and Extinction of the Society at Cleveland, Ohio." *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (July 1900): 50-51. Very little attention has been paid to North Union,

a reflection both of its early demise and the scanty historical and physical remnants that have survived.

43. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 201.
44. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 62. Eades's name is sometimes spelled Hervey Eads. His protest at Mt. Lebanon led to a formal reprimand of Evans and the latter's resignation as editor of *The Shaker and Shakeress*. Ultimately, the journal would be relocated to Canterbury under the editorship of Henry Clay Blinn.
45. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 209. Eades was a prolific writer, as well, and, as Nordhoff observed, a genuinely beloved figure at South Union, although a poor financial manager. During his long leadership, the community lost \$80,000, an enormous sum for that time. (Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 63.)
46. "Journal (Kept by John Rees Cooper et al.) July 21, 1871-January 22, 1878, South Union Kentucky Shaker Collection.
47. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 209.
48. *Ibid.*, 211.
49. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 174.
50. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 212. For the history of South Union and Pleasant Hill, see Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982).
51. Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 221.
52. "Church Journal of Current Events at Union Village Kept by William Reynolds," Western Reserve Historical Society, Shaker Collection, V:B-258.
53. "Union Village Daily Record of Events at the Church Family," Western Reserve Historical Society, Shaker Collection, V:B-232, folder 232.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 200-202.
56. Sakmyster also notes that while Nordhoff mentioned the Lyceum that had been started by younger members of the Society, which Nordhoff characterized as "a kind of debating club," he failed to realize the significance of this effort by younger members intent on reforming Shakerism. Nordhoff's account of Union Village is found in Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 200-204; Thomas Sakmyster, email to the author, October 23, 2018. See also Sakmyster's *The Last Shaker Apostate: Augustus Wager and Union Village, Ohio* (Clinton, NY: Couper Press, 2018). Cheryl Bauer and Rob Portman, *Wisdom's Paradise: The Forgotten Shakers of Union Village* (Wilmington, Ohio: Orange Frazer Press, 2004), 224-25, references Nordhoff's visit, but does not evaluate his account.
57. The journalist misstated the date of White Water's founding as 1827 rather than 1823, understated its landholdings, which were actually more than 1,500 acres, and the peak population of White Water, reached in the 1850s, was closer to 180 individuals than the 150 recorded by Nordhoff.

More significant is Nordhoff's statement that "many among [White Water's] members came from the [Shaker] society which broke up in Indiana." While some members of the West Union, Indiana, community did, in fact, join the White Water community, many more actually went to Union Village and to the two Shaker settlements in Kentucky. More significant in terms of White Water's membership, were the large number of Adventists who joined the community in the late 1840s, a membership pattern unnoted by Nordhoff. See Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 206 for his descriptions of Watervliet and White Water, Ohio. I am indebted to Dr. Thomas Sakmyster for his careful review of this account and for noting the errors mentioned. (Thomas Sakmyster, email to the author, October 26, 2018; Paterwic, *Historical Dictionary*, 229).

58. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 168.

59. He wrote of entering the hotel sitting room there "on a chilly December morning." Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 65.

60. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 64.

61. *Ibid.*, 77.

62. Charles Nordhoff to Jacob Henrici, January 5, 1874. Folder 72, Box 17, MG 437, Correspondence, Old Economy Village State Historic Site, Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

63. Henrici evidently reconsidered his refusal to sit for a portrait, as photographs of the Harmonist leader do exist. These photographs make it possible to easily identify the elderly man with top hat and cane at the center of the illustration "A Street View in Economy" as Henrici (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, between 88 and 89). Written in another hand on Nordhoff's letter of introduction for his artist is the name "Jasper Lawman Pittsburgh." Jasper Holman Lawman (1825-1906) was an established landscape and portrait painter who moved to Pittsburgh in 1846 (Charles Nordhoff to Jacob Henrici and Jonathan Lenz, July 3, 1874, MG 437, Box 17, Folder 72, Old Economy Village State Historic Site; [http://www.internetantiquegazette.com/paintings/1357\\_lawman\\_jasper\\_h\\_american\\_artist/](http://www.internetantiquegazette.com/paintings/1357_lawman_jasper_h_american_artist/) (accessed on September 9, 2019).

64. Although they corresponded in English, Nordhoff was quick to suggest, in his almost illegible heavy scrawl that, should Henrici prefer, they could use German.

65. Karl J. R. Arndt, *George Rapp's Successors and Material Heirs, 1847-1916* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1971), 110-11. Arndt did note that the journalist had scrupulously avoided mentioning a controversy faced by the Harmonists the previous year over the employment of Chinese, as opposed to American, workers in a cutlery factory that they owned (Arndt, *George Rapp's Successors and Material Heirs*, 112).

66. In his account, Nordhoff quoted from the February 2, 1874, edition of

the *Oneida Circular*, suggesting he has acquired the copy during his visit. Nordhoff also states that his population figures for the community were as of “February, 1874.” (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 262.) Apparently, neither the *Oneida Circular* nor community records made mention of Nordhoff’s visit at the time, although *Communal Societies* received a great deal of attention from community members once it was published. (Anthony Wonderley, email communication to the author, August 7, 2012.)

67. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 272.

68. Ibid, 281-82.

69. Ibid, 292, 293.

70. Ibid, 301.

71. Nordhoff’s letter to the Harmonists suggests that his visit to Zoar occurred later during February 1874, probably immediately after his visit to the nearby Shaker community at North Union. In *Communitistic Societies*, Nordhoff made a reference to the population of the Society in the “spring of 1874,” providing a much more general indication of the timing of his visit. (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 103.)

72. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 102, 109. Kathleen M. Fernandez, *A Singular People: Images of Zoar* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003), provides a well written overview of life at Zoar, profusely illustrated with contemporary images of the village. Fernandez intersperses quotations from various writers, including Nordhoff, among the illustrations.

73. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 109.

74. Ibid., 110.

75. Kathleen Fernandez, “Unwanted Publicity: Zoar’s Reaction to Nordhoff’s Book,” Unpublished paper presented at Communal Studies Conference, October 2, 2004. I am grateful to the author for sharing her manuscript with me.

76. For the history of Bishop Hill see Paul Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah: Eric Jansson of Bishop Hill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997).

77. Michael A. Mikkelsen. *The Bishop Hill Colony: A Religious Communitistic Settlement in Henry County, Illinois* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1892), 6.

78. Nordhoff likely arrived on the Rock Island Railroad at Homestead, one of the seven Amana villages, and may have stayed at the hotel there. Nordhoff mentioned talking with the hotel keeper about his experiences in the Sandwich Islands (today’s Hawaii). Clues in Nordhoff’s writing suggest that he spent much of his time in the village of Homestead.

79. Although Nordhoff did not record the fact, he was one of the two men who had located the site for the Amana Society in Iowa, back in December of 1854 (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 41).

80. Ibid., 33.

81. Ibid., 34.

82. Ibid., 35.
83. Ibid., 41.
84. Ibid., 40.
85. Ibid., 41.
86. Ibid., 29.
87. This date is surmised based on the location of the colony and Nordhoff's description, "In the spring of 1874 they had nearly a dozen frame houses." (Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 337.)
88. For Icarian history see Robert P. Sutton, *Les Icariens: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
89. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 335.
90. Ibid., 334-3.
91. Ibid., 336.
92. Ibid., 337.
93. Ibid., 339.
94. In 1876, two years after Nordhoff visited, the Icarian community split into two communities, one representing younger progressive members of the community and the other the conservative, largely older, members. The new community, *Jeune Icarie* (Young Icaria) eventually relocated to California in 1881 and ceased to function in 1886. The other branch of the colony remained faithful to Cabet's philosophy until 1898. Some historians have interpreted Nordhoff's disparaging remarks as illustrating contempt for communal living. "A strong opponent of communism, Nordhoff was the more aggressive and disdainful observer, casting a heavy doubt on the validity of such a system of government." Paul Gauthier, *Quest for Utopia: The Icarians of Adams County* (Corning: Gauthier Publishing, 1992), 64. Diane Garno notes, "Nordhoff was not enthusiastic about communism." (Diana M. Garno, *Citoyennes and Icaria* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 188n35.) Robert Sutton. *Les Icariens: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), a standard history of Icaria, does not mention Nordhoff.
95. Mg-185 Hotel Accounts, 1867-1881, I-4993, Box 359, Harmony Society Papers.
96. Nordhoff, *Communitistic Societies*, 170-79. Nordhoff's quotation from Elkins is nine pages in length!
97. For comparisons with Dixon in reviews of *Communitistic Societies* see, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harpers' New Monthly Magazine* 50 (January 1875): 283; "American Communists," *English Independent*, January 28, 1875, 87; *Guardian*, March 3, 1875; "Socialism in America," *Fraser's Magazine* 11 (June 1875): 512; and "American Communitistic Societies," *Literary World* 11 (February 5, 1875): 81.
98. "Socialism in American," *Fraser's Magazine* 11 (April 1875): 512.

99. "The Communistic Societies of the United States," *North American Review* 120 (January 1875): 226-29. Sanborn was a noted reformer, famous as one the "Secret Six" who helped fund John Brown's raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry in 1859. Sanborn championed a variety of reform causes, was a founder of the National Social Science Association, the National Prison Association, the National Conference on Charities, editor of the *Journal of Social Sciences*, and a frequent writer and lecturer on reform topics. A friend of Emerson, Thoreau, and Ellery Channing, he spent most of his life living near these literary luminaries in Concord, Massachusetts.
100. "Communism in America," *Scribner's Monthly* 9 (April 1875): 769.
101. Carol J. Frost, *The Valley of Cross Purposes: Charles Nordhoff and American Journalism, 1869-1890* (Xlibris, 2017), 74.
102. "Nordhoff's Communistic Societies," *Nation* 20 (January 14, 1875): 26-28. Although unsigned, the review is unquestionably James's work and, indeed, is included in a volume of his literary criticism in the Library of America Series [*Henry James: Literary Criticism* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 560-67. James makes a curious error in his review. In mentioning the criticism at Oneida that Nordhoff observed, he refers to the young man being criticized as "Henry;" in the actual book the name is "Charles."
103. Nordhoff's *Politics for Young Americans* received a short but positive review in *Shaker* 6, no. 4 (April 1876): 32.
104. "The Communistic Societies of the United States" in *Oneida Circular*, January 4, 1875.
105. Ibid.
106. "Nordhoff On the O.C." *Oneida Circular*, January 11, 1875.
107. Ibid.
108. "American Communities," *English Independent*, January 28, 1875, 87.
109. "Socialism in America," *Fraser's Magazine* 11 (April 1875): 514; "The Communistic Societies of the United States," *Galaxy* 19 (May 1875): 716.
110. "Communism in America," *Scribner's Monthly* 9 (April 1875): 770.
111. "The Communistic Societies of the United States," *Galaxy* 19 (May 1875): 716.
112. The prospectus for *The American Socialist*, as printed in the first issue, March 30, 1876, quotes Nordhoff, as Noyes mentions in his letter. Given the date of the letter, and the date of the first issue of the *Socialist*, this is almost certainly the prospectus to which Noyes refers, although the copy enclosed with the letter to Nordhoff has been lost.
113. John H. Noyes to Charles Nordhoff, Esq., March 5, 1876, Katherine Kellock Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society. If the Oneida Community library ever held a copy of *Communistic Societies* is unknown as none is among the current collection, still curated in the Oneida



Community Mansion House. Interestingly, however, the library does contain a copy of Nordhoff's *Northern California, Oregon and the Sandwich Islands* and the 1895 edition of his book *Whaling and Fishing*. The original library of the Oneida Community is in the collection of the Oneida Community Mansion House. Staff from Hamilton College Library Special Collections completed a monumental catalogue of that library which is available to researchers online at: <http://oneidalibrary.hamilton.edu/>

114. Fernandez, "Unwanted Publicity," 3. The original letter, dated July 14, 1877, is part of the Nixon Family Papers at The Ohio Historical Society, Box 2, folder 17.
115. Fernandez, "Unwanted Publicity," 5.
116. John Beyer to William Alfred Hinds, August 23, 1877 in Peter Hoehnle, ed., *The Inspirationists, 1714–1932*, 3:113. Punctuation and capitalization are reproduced as in original letter.
117. William A. Hinds, *American Communities: Brief Sketches of Economy, Zoar, Bethel, Aurora, Amana, Icaria, The Shakers, Oneida, Wallingford, and the Brotherhood of the New Life* (Oneida: Office of the American Socialist, 1878), 4. At 175 pages, Hinds' original edition was also much shorter than Nordhoff's work.
118. The first reprint was a Hillary House edition in 1960, then Schocken Books in 1965 and, finally, Dover in 1966.
119. "How Editors are Paid," *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 21, 1877; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 4, 1884.
120. Gore Vidal, *1876: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 1976).
121. "Nordhoff on the Annexers," *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 29, 1893.
122. "Charles Nordhoff," *New York Times*, July 16, 1901.