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Document: The Ora Labora Colony

Emil Baur

Editor's Note: The following account of the history of Ora et Labora was written by the community's founder. It is contained in one of Baur's manuscript copybooks in the Brumm Collection, Communal Societies Collection, Burke Library, Hamilton College. It was transcribed for publication by Mark Evans Tillson Jr.

Location.

Settlement began in Dec 1862 on Sec 29.7.17. N.R 10E from the sandridge down to Wild Fowl Bay shore where townlots were laid out and buildings Erected.

Mss [Monsieurs] Herman & Edward Goeschel & Rev. M. Maenz of East Saginaw selected the location. The rest of the members, living in all parts of the Northern States, had perfect confidence in the judgements of these candid men. In order to accommodate the members in taking up homesteads, Col. J.F. Driggs, Register of the Land office at East Saginaw, came to Cleveland, O. An agreement was signed to surrender these land to the common stock. About 28,000 acres were taken up in 3 (different) township. Most of this land was lost, as many members Kept them or disposed of them after purchasing them with landwarrant, Abt 3000 acres remained in the common stock, partly bot from Individuals, partly from home steads, purchased afterwards from the government, as we had a permit to do so from U.S. Land office at Washington.

Object.

The object was; cooperation by workmen to get home, and good schools and to Establish other benevolent Enterprises. As we were settling in a village the advantage of village life over scattered farm life ~~were considere~~ Entered into our consideration.

Scheme.

The Scheme was that of a joint stock company, operative for 10 years, during which time land was held in common with the Exception of individual property, consisting of Town lots and buildings on the same and such other property as Every member might acquire after conforming to

the conditions of membership. The stock was to consist of 4000 shares \$25- Each. The membership fee was \$25- The Earnings of Each member over and above his support, which came from the Common store, through the medium of greenbacks, made of pasteboard were credited in shares to such members.

Officers.

The officers of the society were Elected by the majority of the members for 2 years. The prest had no veto power and had to submit to the majority Even in business transactions. He and the recording secy held the land in trust for the society. The treasurer was the 3rd officer.

Numbers & Statistics.

The 22 of June 1883 there were 140 souls at Ora Labora, 28 heads of families, 28 wives, 10 single men, 5 single women & 73 children under 14 years. In 1884 13 dwellings 18 x 24, a barn 94 x 68, a store with post office, a blacksmith shop- and wagon maker shop, a steam saw, = grist = and shingle mill, a tannery and sundry buildings for stables and storehouses and a cripdock 800 feet long were erected, A scow and some smaller boats were purchased, also horses, oxen, cows, and agricultural Emplements representing a value 18 to \$20,000. A Road was built from the sandridge down to the dock.

Causes of Failure.

1. The cooperative system by working men proved a failure. The friction between the individual & common interest was appparent at once. On saturday devoted to the individual interest, enthusiastic work was done while during the other working days much time was lost in discussing the business before and during the work.

2. Our members, mostly mechanics, who were tired of city life, were unaccustomed to pioneer life in the woods, yet they did the very best they could under the circumstances. We had perpetual changes of comers and goers, who all lived on the common store for a while and left to shift for themselves. Some fisherman had put it into the heads of the members that a dock in 8 or 10 feet of water would make them all right Against the mill and the most convincing arguments of the president, that the society had not the means to venture such an undertaking & that spiles would be lifted

by the ice and the whole dock carried away in the spring, the majority voted for the building of a spile dock and the fall and winter of 1864 to 1865 was spent in making the dock with a praiseworthy zeal. In the spring the whole business went off with the ice.

3. The Exorbitant war prices and freight of those days – 50c per yrd for the poorest calico and other goods and provisions accordingly. At Port Austin, where many of our goods, Coming from Detroit, were landed at first- many goods were lost and stolen at the dock. During the existence of the colony we were mostly consumers, our tanner, not being used to steam-burned most of our leather.

4. The drafting of our able men into the army For a time we had a draft most every month Many of our neighbors were Canadians, who skipped to Canada when they heard of the draft The vacancies had to be filled from the colonists who were all patriotic republicans. At one time we had a few old men, the women & 84 children left.

We were obliged to borrow money and give mortgages on our lands. With the small means we had from time to time from honorary members and donations it is a marvel that we held out from Dec 1862 to March 1868. Three other companies which started after us on the bay with a much larger capital had to give up much sooner.

Dissolution.

After being convinced that the system would not work and circumstances were against us, the prst went before the Legislature in 1867 with a petition for the relief of the Colonists. Bill no 290 passed March 2 1867, granting to Every head of a family, that had been in the colony one year, 40 acres of land and 80 acres for 2 years residence in the Colony or service in the army or navy of the U.S. during the rebellion, or if died of disease or wounds in the service of the U.S. this act shall accrue to his widow and minor children or to either.

Many members sold their land, others are living on these state lands unto this day. The members who were in the Colony at the time of the dissolution, devided the Chattle property among themselves which gave them a start on the new homesteads.

The mortgagees, after using all patience and kindness toward the Colony and paying the taxes on the lands; finally empowered the president

