


## Chapter 12i – Utopian Socialist Communities Spring Up And Fold

 <p>Ralph Waldo Emerson</p>	<p><b>Dates:</b> 1840</p>	<p><b>Sections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns Arise About America’s Core Values</li> <li>• Robert Owen’s “New Harmony” Experiment</li> <li>• Fannie Wright’s Nashoba Community</li> <li>• The Transcendentalists</li> <li>• Brook Farm</li> <li>• Walden Pond</li> <li>• The Oneida Institute</li> <li>• The Oneida Perfectionist Community</li> <li>• The Amana Colonies</li> </ul>
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Time: 1840

### Concerns Arise About America’s Core Values

Among the many other reform movements associated with the awakening spirit of the 1820’s is a search to organize a “perfect community,” an American version of the imaginary island society conjured by the Catholic saint, Saint Thomas More, in his 16<sup>th</sup> century work, *Utopia*.

This quest springs from concerns that:

- The growing focus on material wealth is eroding the drive for moral perfection.
- Competition to get ahead has left some with too much and others with too little.
- Abject poverty among factory workers and other manual laborers is on the rise.
- The promise of equality continues to be denied to women and blacks and other minorities.
- Not enough attention is being paid to improving the way children are educated.
- An overreliance on logic and reason has drowned out the power of man’s intuition and the senses.
- Traditional religious institutions are failing to foster genuine spirituality.
- Cities and factories are isolating men from important connections to the natural world.
- Too much daily time and energy is devoted to labor and too little to the intellect and the arts.

In response, a series of new experimental communities appear, each offering its own “solutions,” and each experiencing its own successes and failures.

### Some Utopian Communities In Early America

Name	Where	When	Key Figures
<b>New Harmony</b>	Harmony Indiana	1825-27	Robert Owens
<b>Nashoba</b>	Germantown, Tenn	1826-28	Francis “Fannie” Wright
<b>Transcendentalism</b>	Boston area	1836-on	Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fred Hedge
<b>Brook Farm</b>	West Roxbury, Mass	1841-46	George Ripley
<b>Fruitlands</b>	Harvard, Mass	1842	Bronson Allcott, Charles Lane
<b>Oneida</b>	Oneida, New York	1848-81	John Noyes
<b>Amana Colony</b>	Buffalo/Iowa City, IA	1855-on	Christian Metz, Barbara Heinemann

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Date: 1825-1827

#### **Robert Owen’s “New Harmony” Experiment**

Robert Owen is born in Wales in 1771, migrates at sixteen to Manchester, England, where he learns to operate a cotton mill. He is then off to Glasgow, to marry Caroline Dale, whose father sets him up in the family’s textile business in the town of New Lanark.

From early on, Owen is appalled by the living conditions endured by factory workers, and dedicates his life to running mills that balance the drive for commercial success with insuring a decent life for his employees. He initiates a series of social reforms at his mills to improve working conditions and wages for laborers, housing and education and healthcare for their families, and “company stores” offering them quality goods at fair prices.

As an atheist, Owen arrives at his own formula for creating a “Moral World” similar in many ways to the “socialism” espoused by two French contemporaries, comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Charles Fourier (1772-1837). All share a belief that poverty is the root cause of mankind’s afflictions and that it can be ameliorated through new forms of communal living, emphasizing early education and guidance, shared labor and rewards, equal rights and duties for all, cooperation and caring.

Their vision is of a society where personal self-interest is subjugated to the common good of all.

To achieve this end, Owen invents a new “formula” for community living, down to the details one might expect from a successful mill operator. He pegs the proper size of his communities at 500-2500 people; designs the proper quadrangular buildings for housing and work; identifies the proper industrial machinery needed; establishes his own currency, based on hours of work, and a store where it could be redeemed for goods; and decides that each day should be divided into eight hours of labor, eight of recreation and eight for rest. He also elaborates on the “pattern of life” appropriate for members of his ideal community:

### Owen's Life-Stage Formulation

For Ages	Focus On:
<b>1-5</b>	Being cared for
<b>6-9</b>	Education and light labor
<b>10-11</b>	Housework and gardening
<b>12-14</b>	Technical training
<b>15-20</b>	Additional education
<b>21-30</b>	Oversee production and teaching
<b>31-40</b>	Govern one's own home
<b>41-60</b>	Travel and promote community order
<b>over 60</b>	Provide wise counsel

In 1824, at age fifty-three, Robert Owen sails to America, intent on founding his utopian community.

He settles on an already developed village located on the extreme southwestern tip of Indiana, along the banks of the Wabash River. The site is called Harmonie, founded by Father George Rapp and currently occupied by 700 German Lutherans who have decided to move back east to Pennsylvania. Owen pays Rapp some \$125,000 for roughly 20,000 acres of land, together with the 180 log or brick buildings that housed the villagers. Soon after opening "New Harmony" in January 1825, Owen departs for Washington, where he discusses his plans with Jefferson, Monroe, J.Q. Adams, and issues a blanket call for additional recruits.

The result is a diverse collection of about 800 people, across the economic and cultural strata, who are expected to quickly coalesce into a unified community. One woman enrollee expresses her reservations about this hoped-for bonding as follows:

*Oh, if you could see some of the rough uncouth creatures here, I think you would find it rather hard to look upon them exactly in the light of brothers and sisters.*

With Owen gone, the actual start-up operation for the village is left in the hands of his twenty-three year old son, William, whose diary soon records dismay over the realities he encounters:

*The enjoyment of a reformer is much more in contemplation, than in reality ...I doubt whether those who have been comfortable and contented in their old mode of life, will find an increase of enjoyment when they come here.*

From the beginning, the community is plagued by a shortage of food and other essential household goods. Robert Owen recognizes this problem when he returns in April 1825. At that point he attempts to rally the troops, and sets up a new leadership council, before departing again for Scotland in June.

But little has changed when he returns six months later to find an endangered community begging him to personally take over all aspects of its daily administration. Despite the problems, Owen remains forever optimistic about a successful outcome, and is momentarily buoyed when the famed Philadelphia educator and scientist, William Maclure, moves to New Harmony and becomes a financial investor. Some notable victories follow in the spring of 1826: a solid K-12 school system begins for all, a trade school, a public library, a drama club, a women's organization.

These gains are not sufficient, however, to offset production shortfalls on food, clothing and other basic supplies. When internal dissension intensifies, Maclure convinces Owen to divide the community into three groups: Agriculture & Pastoral; Mechanics & Manufacturing; Schools & Education. The result is even more finger pointing and animosity, with manual laborers criticizing “mind workers” as lazy idlers, and the conscientious upset by “free riders” who take more than they contribute.

Owen’s “Village of Cooperation” soon retreats into the self-centered factions he set out to eliminate.

By 1827 several groups of farmers have gone off on their own, further threatening the food supply. Owen tries to prop up his community, but most of his fortune has bled away and he and Maclure have fallen out over finances and philosophies. On June 1 of that year, Robert Owen abandons New Harmony for good and returns to Scotland.

While his experiment fails, Owen is remembered as a kind soul who gambles his fortune on creating a society which eradicates poverty, treats all men and women as equals, and maximizes each person’s potential through education, rewarding employment and caring community support.

Critics of his attempt point to a host of tactical errors: his many departures during the start-up phases; poor screening of recruits; delegation blunders; blind optimism in the face of shortages in supplies; off-putting accounting systems to monitor work and payments; bans on religious meetings; inability to recognize the added complexities of running a community vs. running a cotton mill.

But in hindsight, the barriers to Owen’s “utopian socialist society” seem more profound.

His messianic vision demands that human nature be re-engineered, that self-interest and competition be harnessed in the way people think and behave in their daily lives. Even in a world of abundance – which the New Harmony experiment never achieves – Owen’s aspirational Moral Order would seem quixotic, out of touch with reality. Especially so in a new nation, with self-reliant people on the make, intent on realizing The American dream, for their own families.

Robert Owen lives for thirty-one more years after New Harmony closes. His career as industrialist is over, but not his public lobbying on behalf of the working poor and “socialism,” an idea that gains currency in the mid-1830’s in London.

It will soon be picked up and extended by two Prussians, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who argue that Owen’s error lay in trying to unite the two classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat) rather than totally abolishing class distinctions. To accomplish the latter, they found the Communist League which, over time, will utilize totalitarian violence, rather than pleading, to root out self-interest and competition.

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Date: 1826-28

### **Fannie Wright’s Nashoba Community**

One resident of New Harmony will go on to start up her own social experiment, in this case seeking a solution to the plight of slaves in America.

Fannie Wright is born in 1795 in Scotland, orphaned at three years old, but left with a large fortune from her factory owner father. She is raised and well educated by relatives, including first hand contact with political economists such as Adam Smith, David Hume and Jeremy Bentham. In her early twenties she is already an outspoken reformer, attacking the excesses of capitalism, the negligence of organized religion toward poverty, the lack of universal education, the repression of women and, worst of all, the practice of slavery.

In 1824, Wright makes her second visit to America, in the company of the French icon, the Marquis de Lafayette, and discusses slavery with both Jefferson and Madison. She then visits the New Harmony colony, founded by Robert Owen, her fellow Scotsman and supporter of Fourier's plans for a moral society. She becomes a U.S. citizen in 1825, and decides to see if the Fourier approach might provide a viable path to ending slavery.

Wright publishes her initial thoughts in *The New Harmony Gazette* in an article titled *A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South*.

Like those in the Colonization movement, she is convinced that blacks will never be successfully assimilated into white society, and therefore they must return to Africa for their freedom. But two other things must precede their departure: first, they must be purchased at a price deemed fair by Southern owners; and second, they must be given the education and tools they will need to thrive once they return home.

Wright decides to put her theory into practice in 1826. With support from Andrew Jackson, she locates 2,000 acres in the southwest corner of Tennessee and sets up a small village. She names it Nabosha, the Chickasaw word for the nearby Wolf River. She purchases fifteen slaves, who are joined by nine whites, to farm the land – the premise being that the profits generated will be used by the Africans to buy back their own freedom from their owner, Wright.

But as with almost all of the experimental communities, Nabosha is barely able to sustain itself, much less generate excess income.

When the financial problems become clear to Wright, she adjusts her sights to at least learn if an assimilated society of blacks and whites might be feasible after all. A trustee council is set up to oversee further operations. It is, however, limited to whites only, which produces racial friction. It also adopts a policy of "free love" and interracial marriage, which stigmatizes Nabosha and dries up all outside financial support.

Wright is stricken with malaria and departs for Europe in 1827 to recover. When she returns in 1828, she closes the settlement down for good, frees the slaves she has continued to own throughout the experiment, and returns them by boat to Haiti.

Fannie Wright continues to be a flamboyant figure after Nabosha. She marries and then divorces a French physician she meets at New Harmony, and remains on the lecture circuit as a "free thinker," supporting greater rights for women and the working classes to her death in 1852.

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Date: 1836-on

## The Transcendentalists



Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

The 1830's are also a time of great restlessness among the New England religious and intellectual community, especially on the Harvard campus in Boston. Much of it revolves around two men, Frederick Hedge and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who meet at the Divinity School in Cambridge, become Unitarian ministers, and organize what is known as The Transcendental Club, in 1836.

Their inner circle includes two other Unitarian pastors, George Ripley and George Putnam, along with Margaret Fuller – a teacher at Bronson Alcott's Temple School and later a journalist and women's rights advocate – and three prominent writers, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ellery Channing.

Their first agenda lies in establishing a uniquely American body of literature, across the full range of academic disciplines, capable of rivaling that found in Europe. It falls to Emerson to articulate this goal, and he does so in his famous August 1837 address to the Phi Beta Kappa society in Cambridge, titled *The American Scholar*:

*Perhaps the time is already come, when... the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill.... Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.*

The second priority for the Transcendentalists is to fundamentally rethink the meaning of, and path to, spirituality in the rapidly changing world around them.

As mostly Unitarians and Universalists they have already broken away from the religious traditions of the Trinitarian churches, and from Calvinism, with its beliefs about predestination and the harsh division between those “elected” versus those deprived of salvation.

From there, however, they begin a new quest for spiritual fulfillment. They are stimulated here by a variety of external material: challenges to conventional Biblical interpretations emerging in Europe; translations of Buddhist and Hindu scriptures marked by a circular view of existence, reincarnation and mysticism; and the contemporary German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who concludes that knowledge comes to man not only through logic but also through intuition.

It is time, the Transcendentalists argue, to break past the “corpse cold” constraints of “rationality” and activate mankind's God-given power of intuition to understand the universe. The answers we seek about

life reside in our minds. We see them manifested in the imaginative leaps of insight present in great works of art, literature and science, which “transcend” the narrow bounds of deductive logic.

Beethoven doesn't merely reason his way to the Ninth Symphony nor Shakespeare to King Lear. Instead, these are acts of transcendence.

The capacity to “transcend” exists in every man. It is activated, according to Emerson, through “self-reliance” – taking control over our own lives and discovering what matters most.

*We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul, which also inspires all men.*

According to the Transcendentalists, the path to achieving this break-out lies in reconnecting with Nature. The routines of our daily lives divert us from our spirituality and make us small. Immersion in nature expands our horizons, makes us large, enables us to find and express the meaning of our existence.

*The first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature ...so entire, so boundless... Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.*

The themes of “learning from nature” and “self-reliance” play into two famous “social experiments” associated with the Transcendentalist movement – one at Brook Farm, the other at Walden Pond.

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Date: 1841-46

### Brook Farm



Charles Dana (1819-1897)

Brook Farm is the brainchild of the Transcendentalist couple, George Ripley, and his wife Sarah. In 1841, Ripley's letter of resignation as Unitarian pastor of his church captures his dismay over the “selfish competition” driving mankind, and the failure of organized religion to confront it.

*I cannot witness the glaring inequalities of condition, the hollow pretensions of pride, the scornful apathy with which many urge the prostration of man, the burning zeal with which they run the race of selfish competition, with no thought for the elevation of their brethren, without the sad conviction that the spirit of Christ has well-nigh disappeared from our churches, and that the fearful doom awaits us, 'Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto the least of these, ye have not done it unto me.*

Ripley's answer lies in creating a new community he calls the Brook Farm Association For Industry And Education. Its goal will be that of true Christianity:

*To redeem society, as well as the individual, from sin.*

To fund this, he forms a joint stock corporation, with eleven investors buying in for \$500 apiece, and more cash added through borrowing at 5% interest. This enables him to buy a 200 acre farm along the Charles River, just nine miles from Boston, for \$10,500.

Ripley knows nothing about farming, but he plunges ahead, confident of success. He attracts seventy people to Brook Farm, promising "industry without drudgery," a proper balance between labor and leisure, equal respect for physical and mental work and equal rewards for the thirty women and forty men in residence. Most residents are young and single, creating a campus-like environment.

The cost of housing and board are carried by the Association, with the hope that these expenses will be off-set by income from the sale of excess farm produce, hand-crafted goods, and fees paid by those attending their community school.

But the economics are soon failing. The boarding school earns an excellent reputation and generates profits, but these are insufficient to offset losses from the farming operation, and \$6,000 in new debt for three more buildings. When resident Nathaniel Hawthorne departs in 1842, the Association owes \$15,000 and is unable to pay back his \$500 investment.

The cerebral George Ripley eventually recognizes his financial plight:

*The purely democratic, Christian principles (in) the community wouldn't provide even a single meal for seventy Brook Farmers living on a dairy farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts.*

In early 1844, with input from Charles Dana, who edits the Farm's *Harbinger* periodical, Ripley proposes adoption of the utopian model defined by Charles Fourier and utilized by Robert Owen at New Harmony.

This "regimented" approach, however, proves anathema to the "individualistic" Transcendentalists, like Hawthorne, who concludes that farming is no better than industry for enhancing the soul or the creative act of writing:

*I think this present life gives me an antipathy to pen and ink. In the midst of toil, or after a hard days work, my soul obstinately refuses to be burned out on paper. It is my opinion that a man's soul may be buried and perish under a dung heap, just as well as under a pile of money.*

Those who depart are soon replaced by a more "manual labor-oriented" set of recruits. This renews confidence, and Ripley and Dana decide on further investments – first, to construct a Philanstery, a giant rectangular building devoted to housing and work, which Fourier prescribes for societal success, and second, to acquire a steam engine to improve their milling operation.

But finances go from bad to worse in 1845. Parents who associate Fourier with "free love" and sexual depravity pull their children out of the boarding school. A smallpox outbreak quarantines a third of the



residents and interrupts both labor and income. Then the final straw, in early 1846, when a party to celebrate completion of the Philanstery ends in a fire that destroys the uninsured edifice.

Within a few months of the fire, only thirty people remain at Brook Farm, and the school closes down. In May 1846, the Association comes to its final end.

To his credit, Ripley is determined to pay off the accumulated debt which totals \$17,445. He begins by selling off his remarkable library collection, and then goes to work as a journalist – first for *The New York Tribune's* Horace Greeley, a Fourier enthusiast, than as editor of *Harper's Weekly*, and later as co-editor with Dana of *The American Encyclopaedia*, which allows him to cover all of his creditors in 1862 and leaves him wealthy to his death in 1880.

It will up to his friend and colleague, Charles Dana, to record the accomplishments of the five year Brook Farm experiment:

*In the first place we abolished domestic servitude. In the second place we secured thorough education for all. And in the third place we established justice to the laborer, and ennobled industry.*

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Date: 1845

## **Walden Pond**

A second Transcendental experiment will be more anti-social than social in character.

It involves Henry David Thoreau, who graduates from Harvard in 1837, teaches school, works in his family's pencil factory, then moves into Emerson's house to tutor his mentor's children and to write essays for the group's periodical, *The Dial*.

Thoreau lives briefly at Brook Farm, and is characteristically acidic in assessing his stay:

*As for these communities, I think I had rather keep a bachelor's room in Hell than go to board in (that) Heaven.*

Indeed, aside from his outspoken opposition to slavery, Emerson's young protégé shows absolutely no interest in reforming society. Instead his actions and beliefs bespeak an almost Buddhist-like intent to detach himself from the corrupting influences of everyday life.

*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*

From this blanket dismissal of his fellow man, Thoreau decides that he will retreat into nature to make sense out of what life should be – a classical theory for the Transcendentalists.

*We need the tonic of wildness...we can never have enough of nature....live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit... We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake.*

In 1845, at age twenty-seven, he moves from Emerson's home in Concord, Massachusetts to Walden Pond, located just two miles south of town. The pond reaches a depth of 100 feet, and is surrounded by a sandy shoreline that extends for 1.7 miles and an encircling forest. In the summertime, it is a popular site for swimmers and sightseers. Thoreau builds a one room wood hut along the northern edge, on property owned by Emerson. He lives there for two years, wandering the trails, visiting his parent's home nearby and keeping a detailed diary, which he eventually turns into his book, *Walden, Or Life In The Woods*. He explains the reason for his journey as follows:

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front on the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.*

In addition to nature, he looks to the eastern scriptures for personal inspiration:

*In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.*

What Thoreau appears to find in the woods is the capacity to separate body from spirit.

All things of the body that divert man away from the spirit are to be minimized or scorned as "the beginning of evil." In Thoreau's case, the list is long, and it includes most trappings that common men hold dear: good food, drink, household adornments, sensuality, marriage, organized religion -- and even companionship, which he tends to equate with "annoyance."

The result is a state of Buddhist-like detachment, Thoreau's version of the Eight-fold path, aimed at simplification, purification and spiritual enlightenment. He preaches this path in his memoirs:

*I say let your affairs be as two or three and no hundred or thousand. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity...My greatest skill in life has been to want but little.*

A host of other nostrums follow from Thoreau's pen over time. They sing a song of supreme self-confidence, of civil disobedience in the cause of what one deems justice, of keeping one's head in the clouds while seeing heaven under our feet, living in the present and finding eternity in each moment, of maintaining a broad margin of leisure, launching one's self on every wave, finding eternity in the snowflake and the smallest leaf.

Herein lies the intellectual Transcendentalist marching to his own drummer, discarding the shallow distractions of materialistic striving, using nature as his guide to a higher order spirituality.

On one hand, Thoreau's journey offers a breathtaking vision and achievement. But, unlike Ripley's attempt at Brook Farm, it often seems intensely self-centered, elitist and anti-communal in character, and devoid of many of the simple pleasures that add joy to everyday life.

Years later, the author Edgar Alan Poe casts a skeptical eye toward the Transcendentalist and Thoreau, and dismisses them all as “Frogpondians.”

Still they remain a force – particularly in the universities and intellectual circles of New England – for expanding America’s participation in creating new knowledge to benefit mankind, and new options to personal spirituality in a nation on the make and drifting toward materialism.

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Date: 1848-81

### **The Oneida Institute**

Another hotbed of social reform during the “awakening” decades is the “burned over (with religious fervor) district” in central New York. Two separate communities will form there, around the town of Oneida.

In 1829 a Presbyterian minister, George Gale founds his Oneida Manual Labor Institute on 115 acres in nearby Whiteboro. The Institute offers a university education that includes a heavy dose of manual labor, needed, according to Gale, to balance the development of both mind and body, and also to help fund the college. Graduates include the reformer, Theodore Dwight Weld, who preaches at Oneida and then conducts speaking tours on its behalf.

The Oneida program peaks the interest of the philanthropists, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, who decide to set up a similar “manual labor institute” twenty miles to the south, in Peterboro, NY. But their focus lies on advancing their abolitionist agenda by recruiting free blacks, who will learn how to farm as a path to assimilation into white society. The Tappans soon hire Weld to manage their initiative and tour the country on behalf of promoting an end to slavery.

In 1833, another fierce abolitionist, Beriah Green, becomes President of the Oneida Institute. Green opposes all efforts to re-colonize slaves in Africa, and spends the next decade admitting blacks into Oneida and preparing them to succeed in America.

Green also drives a wedge into the Presbyterian Church by forming a pro-abolition congregation in Whiteboro – before joining up with the Tappans, Weld, James Birney and Gerritt Smith to form the abolitionist Liberty Party in 1839.

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Date: 1848-81

### **The Oneida Perfectionist Community**

The Oneida area will also be home to a very controversial utopian community which opens up in 1848.

It is assembled by John Humphrey Noyes, born in Vermont in 1811 to a businessman father, who operates Noyes, Mann & Hayes, one of America's earliest chain stores. After graduating from Dartmouth in 1831, the youth experiences a religious conversion that shifts his interest from the law to enrolling at the Yale Theological Seminary.

Once there, Noyes throws himself into a personal analysis of the Bible and makes what he considers a startling insight – namely, that Christ's "second coming" actually occurred in 70AD. From there, he concludes that living a life of "moral perfection" is possible on earth, not just in Heaven, and he sets out to achieve that standard. In 1834 he amazes his colleagues by declaring that he is "free from all sin." He then establishes the Putney Bible School in Vermont with a congregation eager to follow in his footsteps.

In many ways the "heavenly society" Noyes envisions is similar to that attempted by Robert Owen at New Harmony and George Ripley at Brook Farm. To achieve a truly virtuous community, one must first purge all members of the corrupting influence of self-interest, which leads to competition rather than cooperation. For Noyes, however, competition begins not with labor and its rewards – rather with mating, monogamous marriage and the formation of family units that exist apart from the holistic community. His "solution" to this divisiveness lies in doing away with traditional marriage:

God did not intend that love between men and women be confined to the narrow channels of conventional matrimony.

In its place Noyes invents what he calls "complex marriage," whereby sexual encounters across partners become the norm, albeit controlled by strict male abstinence guidelines to limit pregnancies. Permission to have children lies with Noyes himself, and those born are raised on a communal rather than parental basis. When the citizens of Putney learn of these "free love" practices at Noyes's Bible School, they brand him an adulterer and drive his followers out of their presence in 1847.

One year later, Noyes and his band have moved west, to settle on 265 acres of farmland in Oneida, New York, their permanent home over the next thirty-three years. During that time, their numbers will grow from eighty-seven to just over three hundred members.

Unlike New Harmony and Brook Farm, the Oneida Perfectionists are bonded by deep religious convictions and kept financially viable by the organizational and business skills Noyes learned from his father's chain store successes. He creates nearly fifty administrative functions, each headed by a community member. To insure accountability for both business and spiritual progress, he holds regular "mutual criticism" sessions where each person is subjected to often harsh observations about their recent failings, and offered a "cure." These failings can range from "selfish love and exclusive intimacy" to shirking one's duties on the farm or factory. Absent corrective actions, they may lead to expulsion.

A breakthrough on the business front occurs early on when a new member from Minnesota arrives with an innovative steel trapping device that the community manufactures and that fur hunters, especially in the Hudson Bay firm, buy in abundance. From this foundation, other enterprises follow: a silk factory, orchards and a fruit cannery, a foundry, and the production of fine Oneida-branded silverware.

The community thrives over thirty years, held together by the firm hand of Noyes and the intense "covenant with God" felt by the members. But the perpetual charges of "sexual depravity" from outsiders

finally wear him down. In 1879 he flees to Canada to avoid arrest for “statutory rape,” and from there advises the community to end the principle of “complex marriage.”

Absent his leadership, the original utopian experiment ends in 1881, with some \$600,000 in the bank. Pierrepont Noyes, the founder’s son, uses the money to form a joint stock corporation, Oneida Limited Silversmiths, which prospers to the present day.

Noyes himself remains in Canada until his death at age 74 in 1881. His body is eventually returned to America and is buried on the original Oneida Perfectionist’s property.

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Date: 1855-on

### **The Amana Colonies**

The most enduring utopian community from the “awakening era” is the Amana Colony that begins in 1855 near Iowa City, Iowa.

Its roots are in the German religious movement called Pietism, which preaches that certain individuals are blessed with the gift of Inspiration and are chosen to act as “Instruments” to communicate God’s word to their communities. Two of these Instruments are Christian Metz and Barbara Heineman, who migrate to the U.S. in 1842, start their first community in Buffalo, and then head west to establish Amana, comprising seven villages and 300 members, spread across some 26,000 acres of land.

The Amana colony embraces many of the “socialistic” principles attempted by its predecessors. Schooling is mandatory for all boys and girls up to age fifteen; housing is provided for all; communal kitchens deliver three meals a day; every person is expected to share in a labor of their choice; each individual is allocated \$25-50 a year to be spent in the village stores; any persons who failed to prudently budget their expenditures could be asked to leave; hospitality is offered to all visitors who are in need.

Unlike the “Fourier-based” experiments, Amana is a tightly knit community bonded by a shared belief in Pietism and a willingness to conform to behavioral guidelines set down by the church elders and the acknowledged “Instruments.” For example, at Amana, marriage is delayed until age twenty-four and requires council approval; large families are discouraged; eleven religious services per week are mandatory; men and women are separated during worship and music is banned; prayers in German proceed every meal, where conversation is frowned up.

From the beginning, Amana is marked by the virtues that make it succeed up to the present – an expectation that all members will work hard and spend frugally to insure the community’s financial viability and then share the fruits of their labor in a selfless fashion in accord with their spiritual convictions.

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Date: 1825-1850

## Reflections On These Social Experiments

Taken together, the many utopian communities which spring up during the “second awakening” signal a growing concern that the nation is drifting away from its idealistic origins – with the simple pastoral life on the farm giving way to faster paced urban centers, with their more materialistic and secular outlook, and behaviors that violate the old Puritan norms.

In response comes not only the Evangelicals being re-born on behalf of “personal salvation,” but also a band of reformers, some religious others not, whose province becomes the community at large. To save the individual one must also reshape their environment. Or, as George Ripley says about Brook Farm, the need is:

*To redeem society, as well as the individual, from sin.*

As the outcomes of these utopian experiments demonstrate, reforming an entire society is easier said than done. The businessman Robert Owen’s attempt to run New Harmony according to Fourier formulas collapses in its third year. The Transcendentalist George Ripley’s Brook Farm is bankrupt after five years of constant struggle. Fannie Wright’s mixed race colony at Nabosha closes quickly. John Humphrey Noyes Oneida Perfectionists maintain their “covenant with God” for thirty years, despite constant public shunning for their “free love” practices. The lone enduring survivor in the group is the Amana colony in Iowa, held together by the shared values of German Pietism.

The messages here seem clear. Americans in 1840 are not about to sign on for any socialist systems that infringe on their personal freedoms, their competitive spirit, or their drive to secure what they deem best for themselves and for their families.

Still the utopian experiments are not total failures. They recognize genuine shortcomings that have kept America from realizing its full potential, and they make several moves in the right direction:

- Remarkable advances in the education of young children materialize at both New Harmony and Brook Farm.
- The role and power of women in society is expanded, along with greater recognition of their achievements.
- Models to relieve poverty and improve the treatment of factory workers and other manual laborers are explored.
- The Transcendentalists do spark America’s contributions to literature, science and culture.
- Long-term viability of the Amana colony reveals that some blend of socialism and capitalism might succeed, if overlaid with a strongly shared religious commitment.
- The cause of abolishing slavery and supporting assimilation is inched forward by initiatives at Nabosha and the Oneida Institute.