

CHAPTER 8

Brook Farm and the Architecture of Utopia

The spirit of a society is stamped upon its architecture. Do not the inanimate constructions which surround us proclaim the want of a new social order? Do not they speak to us ... of the falseness of society and the urgent necessity of a great Social Reform?

Albert Brisbane (1843:23)

Social reform was a prominent discourse in the United States in the first half of the 19th century (Guarneri 1991; Rose 1981). During this period, social issues such as abolitionism, women's rights, temperance, Grahamism, labor associations, education, and prison and asylum reform were popularly debated in almost every major city. Numerous national coalitions were formed such as the American Anti-Slavery Society, the Women's Rights Movement, and the American Tract Society. While these reform movements did much to raise the visibility of specific causes, none of them developed a coherent model of a new society. This task was left to the numerous utopian visionaries and their communities springing up across the country. These communities were committed to changing society by example and this required putting their radical ideas about economic and social organization into practice.

Over 60 utopian communities were founded in the decade from 1840 to 1850 (Berry 1992; Hayden 1976). The reformist zeal in New England is well captured in a letter by Ralph Waldo Emerson to Thomas Carlyle written in 1839 which recounted that "we are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket" (cited in Guarneri 1991:13). These communities included the Owenites in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio; the Oneida Perfectionists in New York; the Icarians

in Illinois and Texas; the Transcendentalists in Massachusetts; and the Mormons in Illinois, Utah, and Nevada. By far the most popular of these groups were the Fourierists, devotees of the teachings of French social theorist Charles Fourier. Between 1842 and 1858, 28 Fourierist phalanxes, unions, and societies were established in ten states (Table 8.1).

One of the most famous of these communities was Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. This fame is largely due to the scholarly and literary inclinations of

Table 8.1 Fourierist communities by founding date (data from Hayden 1976:Appendix B)

No.	Community	City	State	Date
1	Social Reform Unity	Barrett	PA	1842
2	Jefferson Co. Industrial Assn.	Cold Creek	NY	1843
3	Sylvanian Assn.	Darlingville	PA	1843
4	Moorehouse Union	Pisceo	NY	1843
5	North American Phalanx	Red Bank	NJ	1843
6	Brook Farm Phalanx	West Roxbury	MA	1844
7	Lagrange Phalanx	Mongoquinog	IN	1844
8	Clarkson Assn.	Clarkson	NY	1844
9	Bloomfield Union Assn.	North Bloomfield	NY	1844
10	Leraysville Phalanx	Leraysville	PA	1844
11	Ohio Phalanx	Bell Air	OH	1844
12	Alphadelphia Assn.	Galesburgh	MI	1844
13	Sodus Bay Phalanx	Sodus	NY	1844
14	Mixville Assn.	Mixville	NY	1844
15	Ontario Union	Bates' Mills	NY	1844
16	Clermont Phalanx	Rural and Utopia	OH	1844
17	Trumbull Phalanx	Phalanx Mills	OH	1844
18	Wisconsin Phalanx	Cereso	WI	1844
19	Iowa Pioneer Phalanx	Scott	IO	1844
20	Philadelphia Industrial Assn.	Portage	IN	1845
21	Columbian Phalanx	Zanesville	OH	1845
22	Canton Phalanx	Canton	IL	1845
23	Integral Phalanx	Lick Creek	IL	1845
24	Spring Farm Phalanx	Spring Farm	WI	1846
25	Pigeon River Fourier Colony	Pigeon River	WI	1846/7
26	Raritan Bay Union	Perth Amboy	NJ	1853
27	Reunion Phalanx	Dallas	TX	1855
28	Fourier Phalanx	Sparta	IN	1858

its members and sympathizers (Buell 1986; Miller 1950). The most distinguished Brook Farm author is Nathaniel Hawthorne, the first Treasurer of the Brook Farm Association. Hawthorne's (1852) popular novel *The Blithedale Romance* is a fictionalized account of daily life in the community during its Transcendentalist incarnation. George Ripley, the founder of the community, edited a popular series entitled *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature* and translated leading German and French philosophers into English. In addition, he was a regular contributor to *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist literary journal edited by Margaret Fuller. Upon its demise, he and fellow Brook Farmers, Charles Dana and John Dwight, wrote for the *Harbinger*, a pro-Fourierist journal devoted to social reform and published for three years at Brook Farm (Delano 1983). In addition, letters and notes of individual members are preserved (Cooke 1971; Dwight 1928; Haraszi 1937; Hawthorne 1932) and reminiscences by former members and students have been published (Codman 1894; Myerson 1978; Russell 1900; Sears 1912).

In this chapter, I adopt a semiotic perspective to reveal new insights into the relationships between the ideologies of social reform and the utopian architecture at Brook Farm.⁴⁶ All communities face the challenge of integrating ideal visions of the organization of space and the physical expressions of those visions, what Rappoport (1990) calls the "built environment." The relations between the ideal and the real, however, are particularly visible in utopian societies where new experiments in living are self-consciously implemented (Tarlow 2002). In the case of Brook Farm, I am particularly interested in understanding how Transcendentalism and Fourierism were encoded in architecture and settlement pattern and how practices of inscription dynamically shaped the form and character of the community. This analysis, I argue, not only provides a new understanding of the daily lives of the members of the community, but it also offers a partial answer to the perennial question posed by historians as to why the community failed as a Fourierist Phalanx.

Utopian Architecture

The 19th century American utopian communities are well known for their explicit use of architecture as a semiotic medium to embody their beliefs and distinguish themselves from mainstream culture.⁴⁷ This practice goes well beyond the standard use of architecture to signify meaning, since all details of utopian architecture are, in theory, governed by a single, coherent semiotic ideology. Architecture was, in many ways, the most visible material expression of the broader process of community self-representation. Utopian communities, however, faced persistent contradictions between the plans of their ideal community, usually supplied

by utopian theorists, and the actual realization of these plans in particular local contexts. In general, few communities were able to realize their ideal settlements due to the prohibitive financial costs. As a result, they tended to create vernacular expressions composed of a variety of architectural styles. This variety, however, was not a random choice of available styles, but rather a conscious selection that usually involved specific modifications appropriate for community needs.

Many utopian theorists provided detailed plans for their ideal communities (Hayden 1976:33–61). Robert Owen devised a plan based upon “parallelograms” and hired an architect, Stedman Whitwell, to prepare a model for presentation to President John Quincy Adams. Étienne Cabet provided architectural details for his city *Icar*. Charles Fourier, however, provided the most detailed plans of any utopian theorist. He designed entire landscapes of “passional attraction” consisting of Phalansteries, work areas, and gardens (Hayden 1976:150–155). Phalansteries were large unitary buildings flanked by symmetrical wings that enclosed a series of landscaped courtyards (Beecher 1990). These buildings were connected by interior streets, 18 or 24 feet wide, three stories high, called “galleries of association.” The galleries and courtyards were designed to encourage spontaneous meetings. The living quarters of the rich and poor were intermingled to provide an equitable distribution of social classes. Victor Considérant, a disciple of Fourier and an architect, drafted a plan of the ideal form of a Phalanstery, which was widely circulated among many utopian communities (Figure 8.1) (Beecher 2001). Several scholars have remarked on its striking similarities to the palace of Versailles (e.g., Hayden 1976:151).

The communal buildings constructed by North American utopian communities were imperfect realizations of the plans of the utopian theorists. Dolores Hayden (1976:49) has called these “intentional vernacular” architecture because they represented a pragmatic synthesis of literal Biblical imagery, visionary utopian ideals, and standard American and European building traditions. For example, none of the phalansteries built in the United States realized the model proposed by Fourier. The phalanstery built at the North American Phalanx resembled nothing more than a glorified boarding house (Figure 8.2). Some communities adopted architectural designs from pattern books on suburban housing and rural landscape (Hayden 1976:35). The Oneida Community, for example, drew inspiration from Andrew Jackson Downing and built Italianate facades adopted from his illustrations. The first Mormon Temple in Kirtland, Ohio was based upon a plate by Asher Benjamin. The Hopedale Community in Massachusetts built octagons based upon the plans of the phrenologist, Orson Squire Fowler.

Hayden (1976) has made an important distinction between authoritarian and participatory utopian communities. The former tend to be sectarian and the latter nonsectarian. Sectarian communities were often led by charismatic individuals

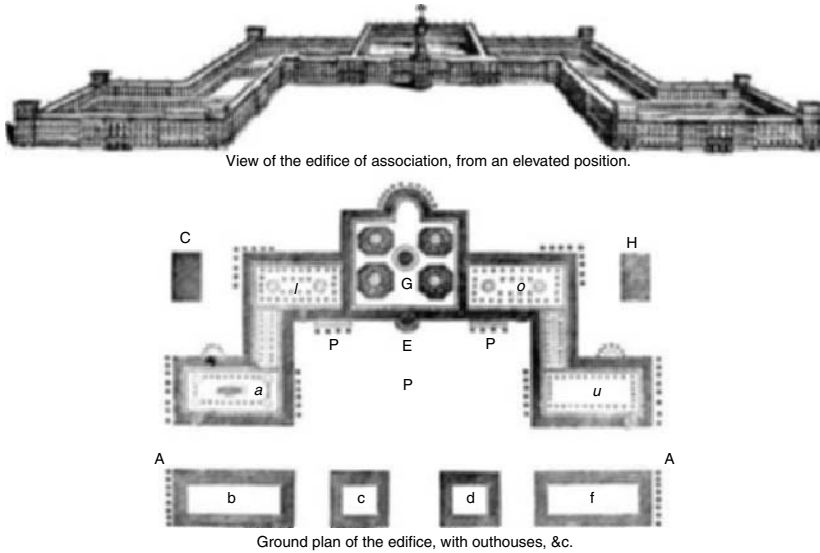


Figure 8.1 Victor Considérant's plan of an Ideal Phalanstery (Brisbane 1840).



Figure 8.2 The Phalanstery at the North American Phalanx in Red Bank, N.J., ca. 1890 (courtesy of the Monmouth County Historical Society).

who wielded considerable power. Some legitimized their plans for the community as being God's own design. Shaker leaders, for example, claimed that God revealed to them Millennial Laws regarding building. George Rapp asserted that an angel had shown him the plan of the Harmonist's Economy church. Hayden (1976:40) notes that the most authoritarian sectarian groups produced the most coherent

architecture statements. However, these same groups also had the greatest difficulty managing doctrinaire vision and growth. Nonsectarian communities tended to make decisions by consensus. Although this process was slow, it created a sense of collective purpose. For example, the Oneida building program lasted over 30 years and was a material expression of the community's stability.

In some cases, there was an explicit analogy drawn between the buildings and the community, such that the physical process of the building was identified with the process of spiritual growth and development (Hayden 1976:49). Among the Shakers, for example, the membership was addressed as the "living building." When Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright took over from Ann Lee and James Whittaker as the leading ministers of the United Society of Believers in 1787, they reorganized the Shakers into households called "families" composed of 30 to 100 people (Hayden 1976:67). These families were classified according to three categories – the novitiate, the junior order, and the senior order – and each community was to have at least one of each. Meacham characterized these families as a "living building" and linked their processual growth with the growth of the community (cited in Hayden 1976:68).

The Brook Farm Historical Site

The Brook Farm Historical Site extends from Baker Street (the old Dedham-Newton Road) to the Charles River in West Roxbury, Suffolk County, Massachusetts (Figure 8.3). At approximately 179 acres, it is the largest parcel of undeveloped land in the City of Boston. The site is bounded to the southwest by the Gardner Street landfill and Boston Conservation Commission land, to the northwest by the Newton town boundary and the Mount Lebanon cemetery, and to the southeast by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Parkway and St. Joseph's Cemetery. Approximately 20 acres in the central portion of the property is owned and used by the Gethsemane Cemetery, originally founded in 1873 to support the Martin Luther Orphans Home and today is operated as a nonsectarian cemetery.

The site contains archaeological features and historical remains associated with at least nine discrete occupations. Major occupations include the famous utopian community, as well as the lesser known Native American, Ward farm, Ellis farm, Roxbury almshouse, Camp Andrew, Munroe boarding house, Lutheran orphanage, and the Brook Farm Home, a facility for emotionally disturbed youth (Table 8.2). The longest historic period occupation was the Martin Luther Orphans Home from 1871 to 1943. The site also contains valuable wetlands which serve as flood control for the Charles River and provide a habitat for birds and wildlife. Brook Farm received National Landmark recognition in 1965 and was declared

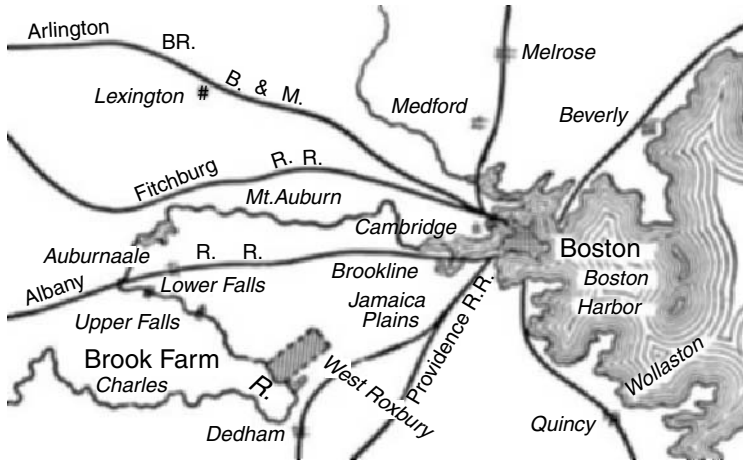


Figure 8.3 Location map of Brook Farm, West Roxbury, Massachusetts (Mitchell 1899:155).

Table 8.2 Occupational history of Brook Farm, West Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Occupation	Dates
Native American	Archaic–1690
Ward Farm	1700–1780
Ellis Farm	1780–1840
Brook Farm Institute for Agriculture and Education	1842–1844
Brook Farm Phalanx	1844–1847
City of Roxbury Almshouse	1849–1855
Civil War Camp Andrew	1861
Munroe Boarding House	1869–1871
Martin Luther Orphans Home	1871–1943
Gesthemane Cemetery	1873–present
Brook Farm Home	1943–1974
Brook Farm National Landmark	1965–present

a Boston Landmark in 1977. Today, it is owned by the Metropolitan District Commission and operated as a park in the public interest.

The most famous of these occupations is the utopian community founded by George Ripley (Figure 8.4). George Ripley (1802–1880) was born in the Greenfield, Massachusetts to a modest family (Frothingham 1882). His father, Jerome Ripley,



Figure 8.4 George Ripley (Frothingham 1882).

was a local tavern owner. George graduated Harvard College in 1823 and Harvard Divinity School in 1826. In the latter year, he accepted the call to become the pastor of the Purchase Street Unitarian Church in Boston (Rose 1981). He soon proved himself an outspoken critic of orthodox church theology which he saw as overly concerned with arcane dogma and neglecting deeper philosophical and social issues. Taking matters into his own hands, he organized the Association for Mutual Improvement at his church. He also put forth his controversial ideas in his review of James Martineau's *Rationale of Religious Inquiry* published in the *Christian Examiner* in 1836 and four years later debated Harvard Divinity School's Andrews Norton on "The Latest Forms of Infidelity" (Frothingham 1876:123).

By January of 1841, Ripley's disquietude had reached the point that he decided to resign from his Purchase Street ministry. His farewell address to his congregation is indicative of his state of mind, "I cannot witness the glaring inequality of condition and the hollow pretensions of pride, the scornful apathy 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" (Rose 1981:104). Ripley proposed to found an alternative community, which would reestablish social relations upon a more natural foundation.

Ripley decided to locate his new community of reformers on a farm in West Roxbury, where he and his wife had summered in 1840. His goals are eloquently stated in a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Our objects, as you know, are to ensure a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor than now exists; to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as is possible, in the same individual; to guarantee the highest mental freedom by providing all with labor, adapted to their tastes and talents, and securing to them the fruits of their industry; to do away with the necessity of menial services, by opening the benefits of education and the profits of labor to all; and thus to prepare a society of liberal, intelligent, and cultivate persons, whose relations with each other would permit a more simple and wholesome life, than can be led amidst the pressure of our competitive institutions (Rose 1981:133).

On October 11, 1841, Ripley purchased Charles and Maria Ellis's 170 acre farm for \$10,500 (Swift 1900:19). A month later, he established the Brook Farm Institute for Agriculture and Education as a joint stock company and offered twenty-four shares at \$500 apiece (Swift 1900). Stock was secured by the real estate which was held for the Association by four Trustees (Ripley, Charles Dana, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and William B. Allen) who served yearlong terms. Members were approved after a two-month probationary period and received five percent income from their shares which they were expected to reinvest by buying additional shares. The Institute took mortgages from the sinking fund of the Western Railroad Corporation and George Russell, Henry P. Sturgis, Francis Gould Shaw, and Lucy Cabott. Everyone was expected to share equally in labor to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and thus end "wage slavery" (Rose 1981:134). Those who were not inclined to work forfeited their income and risked expulsion. Tasks were to be rotated every two hours, so that no one individual could become a specialist. There was no religion test and house rent, food, fuel and clothing were offered at actual cost. Medical attention, use of library and public rooms was free.

Semiotic Ideologies of Social Reform

Semiotic ideologies are the basic frameworks for understanding the constitution of and interactions between specific categories of agents and social practices (Keane 2003:419). Although these ideologies may purport to be totalizing systems, they are never all encompassing. There are always aspects of the world that escape their purview and these have the capacity to challenge their legitimacy. During the occupation of Brook Farm, there were two dominant semiotic ideologies, Transcendentalism and Fourierism. In the former case, agenthood was based upon the

individual expressed in relation to nature, labor, equality, education, agriculture, industry, and divinity. In the latter, it was based upon the “new man,” conceived as an individual free to realize his or her full potential in connection with others by engaging in all spheres of life.

Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism can be defined as the belief in the intuitive perception of spiritual truth (Rose 1981:42). It possesses a close relationship to evangelical Unitarianism in that it is both an outgrowth from and critique of it. It also bears a strong debt to the French and German Romanticism. There is no definitive list of Transcendentalists, although Bronson Alcott, Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, John Dwight, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Peabody, George Ripley, Sophia Ripley, and Henry David Thoreau must surely be counted as among its leaders. To understand Transcendentalism as a historical movement, it is necessary to ground it within its social context.

The shift from mercantile to industrial capitalism in the first half of the 19th century promised unrestricted growth and prosperity in the Northeast. Commercial and industrial expansion created new opportunities for speculation and profit. In the urban centers, however, ownership of property was dominated by elites. By 1840, the richest one percent of city dwellers owned 40 percent of all tangible property, with an even greater ownership of intangible property such as stocks and bonds (Henretta et al. 1987:331). One by-product of industrial capitalism was the rise of wage labor. This fundamentally new social relationship severed the ties between employer and employee, and household and workplace. Factory workers, for example, were no longer responsible for the entire production sequence, this knowledge instead being restricted to a few individuals. Handsman and Leone (1989) have argued that it is through this process of labor segmentation that one can find the source of the ideology of individualism.

The Unitarian church, itself a reaction to Orthodox revivalism, was founded upon three precepts, namely reason, intellectual freedom, and moral duty (Rose 1981:11). Individualism was valued insofar as it was grounded in this trinity. With the rise of social stratification engendered by the profits from industrialization, the appeal of Unitarianism began to erode. Increasing numbers of individuals strayed from the church and began to criticize it openly. Even among the elite there was sharp debate over whether religion was a way of life or just something to do on Sundays (Rose 1981:21). Members of the working class began to see their rights and interests as distinct from Christianity, which was increasingly viewed as a tool of class oppression (Rose 1981:26). This challenge to Unitarianism was met by the development of an evangelical movement within the church, which targeted

specific social ills. In 1834, the nine Unitarian churches of Boston united to sponsor missionary outreach to the poor.

The philosophers of this Evangelical Unitarian movement were known as the Transcendentalists (Rose 1981:38). They broke with Unitarianism on a number of important doctrinal issues. They denied the validity of miraculous proofs and questioned the blind reliance upon tradition. Instead, they argued that religious institutions are human constructs and that all individuals possess the possibility of intuitive perception of spiritual truths by virtue of the common endowment of a soul. This position was extended to Biblical exegesis. Borrowing interpretive methods from the German idealists, they argued that the Bible was a historical document written by human authors in a less than enlightened age. These radical moves alienated the Unitarian church by threatening its liturgical teachings and challenging the existence of the priesthood.

Ripley's own unique contribution to this movement was to harness Transcendentalism as a theory for social reform. In 1841, he established the Brook Farm Association for Agriculture and Education to forge what he considered to be a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor by doing away with menial services and to provide the benefits of education and profits of labor to all. Ripley's form of Transcendentalism is distinct from Emerson's view, and it is significant that Emerson declined to become a member of the new community (Guarneri 1991:45). This reluctance seems to have been based on a disagreement regarding the relationship of the individual and society. In elevating the individual, Emerson argued that self-culture and self-education were prior to effective communal action. This philosophy was perhaps given its most idiosyncratic expression by Henry David Thoreau and his retreat to Walden Pond (Richardson 1986:56). In contrast, Ripley and the Brook Farmers felt that the ideal society could not be achieved by self-culture alone, but rather required the expression of individuality within a communal setting through immersion in the lives of others. The only other Transcendental experiment in communal living, Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands, combined elements from both Ripley's and Emerson's philosophies with Alcott's own puritanical devotion to self-sacrifice (Francis 1997).

The Brook Farm community was organized into four main "Directions." Ripley, Minot Pratt, and Allen were elected to the General Direction. Hawthorne, Dana, and Allen were elected to the Direction of Finance. Allen, Pratt, and Ripley were elected to the Direction of Agriculture. Sophia W. Ripley, Dana, and Marianne Ripley were elected to the Direction of Education. In addition, Dana was elected recording secretary and Pratt the treasurer.

During its Transcendentalist phase, between 1841 and 1844, 32 individuals joined Brook Farm. According to Rose (1981:132), 27 people can be identified with reasonable certainty as to their professions – ten were ministers, teachers, and

writers and their wives, and six were former students. Nine were working people (mainly farmers) and only two were businessmen. Most of these individuals were from classes most receptive to ideas of reform and were bound together through ties of kinship and friendship (Rose 1981:133). George Ripley brought his sister and Sophia brought her cousin and niece.

Considerable emphasis was placed on individual growth through freedom to live according to one's own conscience. Flexibility in work duties helped to ensure this. All members participated in farm work and household duties although the total number of work days was not to exceed 300. During this phase, records of individual work hours were apparently not kept. In the summer and spring months, leisure time was often spent outdoors in solitary rambles through the woods as described by Hawthorne in *The Blithedale Romance* or in group activities including musical soirees at the Eyrie, outings to Boston or West Roxbury town centers, dances, and masquerade parties.

Fourierism

Fourierism is the name of a short-lived social movement born in France and introduced into America in the 1840s (Brisbane 1840; Godwin 1844). It takes its name from its founder François Marie Charles Fourier (1772–1837), who as a youth was deeply affected by the French Revolution of 1789 (Figure 8.5). Fourier believed that conflict and suffering were the result of the perversion of natural human goodness by faulty social organization perpetuated by mercantile capitalism (Beecher 1990; Guarneri 1991). He developed a complex psychological theory of instinctive drives and devised a social blueprint with detailed instructions for the size, layout, and industrial organization of ideal communities he called Phalanxes, which accommodated innate differences in human personalities.

Fourier embedded his critique of capitalism within an elaborate theory of social evolution. For Fourier, human history was both progressive and regressive and is composed of 32 segments that can be subdivided into four phases (Beecher 1990). The first phase lasting 5,000 years is *Infancy*, or ascending incoherence, the second lasting 35,000 years is *Growth*, or ascending harmony, the third phase lasting 5,000 years is *Decline*, or descending harmony, and the final phase lasting 5,000 years is *Caudity*, or descending incoherence. He identified seven different stages within the Infancy phase. These are Confused Series, Savagery, Patriarchy, Barbarism, Civilization, Guarantism, and Simple Association. Significantly, these stages were defined in terms of the status of women. For example, Barbarism was characterized by the absolute servitude of women, Civilization was characterized by exclusive marriage and limited civil liberties of wives, and Guarantism was characterized by the development of an amorous corporation within which women would enjoy



Figure 8.5 Charles Fourier (courtesy of the Warren J. Samuels Portrait Collection of Duke University).

considerable sexual freedom. Fourier does not appear to have been especially interested in the earlier phases of social evolution, and most of his writings focus upon the transition from Civilization to Harmony.

Fourier's critique focused primarily on the institutions of commercial capitalism. For Fourier, the most egregious failing of civilization is its inability to resolve the problem of poverty. He notes ironically that poverty was most severe in the advanced societies saying that "the peoples of civilization see their wretchedness increase in direct proportion to the advance of industry" (Beecher 1990:197). He identifies three causes for the persistence of poverty. The first of these is wastefulness, or the inefficiency of capitalist methods of production and consumption. He singles out the French family farmer, observing that the use of communal plots, storage facilities, and kitchens would greatly reduce the amount of drudgery. The second cause is that production was uncontrolled and depended only on the profit motive. Because of competition among producers, overproduction periodically threw thousands of people out of work. The third cause is the inefficient use of human potential. This refers to the fact that the vast majority of workers were employed in jobs which were either redundant, or were a drain on the orderly

functioning of society. Fourier considered the merchant to be especially reprehensible and called him a parasite that only diverted capital from agriculture and industry.

According to Fourier, the root of these injustices was the repression of individual desires by existing social institutions. To resolve this issue, he developed his Theory of Passional Attraction, the idea that all human desires are governed by natural laws. He approached this problem from a positivistic philosophy and in his own mind made a scientific breakthrough on the order of Newton's discovery of gravity, an analogy that he often employed. He defined passionate attraction as "the drive given us by nature prior to reflection, and it persists despite the oppression of reason, duty, prejudice, etc." (Beecher 1990:225). Fourier identified 12 different passions growing from three branches of the tree of unityism. The *Luxurious* passions were the five senses (sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing); the *Affective* passions were love, friendship, ambition, familism; and the *Distributive* passions were cabalist, butterfly, and composite. These passions constitute the basic elements of Fourier's social language, and his many writings are attempts to work out a passional grammar complete with its own syntax.

Fourier's ideal community was called a Phalanx (Beecher 1990). It was to be composed of exactly 1,620 people, or twice the number of people necessary to ensure an adequate complement of the 810 passional personality types. Ideally, it was to be situated upon a square league of land in a rural setting and located within a day's ride of a large city for easy access to a market. The site was to be relatively hilly with a stream, and possess soils and a climate suitable for the cultivation of a wide variety of crops. Dominating the Phalanx was the Phalanstery, a massive building adorned with colonnades, domes, and peristyles resembling a cross between a palace and a resort hotel. Symmetrical wings segregated workshops, music practice rooms, and playrooms (noisy activities) from visitor quarters, entertainment halls, and communications centers (less noisy activities). Two special architectural innovations were pioneered by Fourier, the use of special rooms reserved for work groups known as Seristries and covered street galleries linking the Phalanstery to adjacent buildings.

In America, Fourierism caught the imagination of numerous social reformers seeking to merge diverse social critiques into a coherent workable system. The "Age of Fourierism in America" was precipitated by Albert Brisbane, the idealistic son of a New York merchant who had been introduced to Fourier's writings in 1833 while on a trip through Europe. Brisbane was so moved by what he read that he sought out Fourier for further instruction and became a convert. He writes that his sole goal in life was to "transmit the thought of Charles Fourier to my countrymen" (cited in Guarneri 1991:30). After a delay of several years due to illness, Brisbane took up the cause in earnest. In 1840, he published *The Social Destiny of Man*,

a translation of and commentary on Fourier's thought (Brisbane 1840).⁴⁸ He also enlisted the support of Horace Greeley, who was just beginning his newspaper career. In March 1842, Greeley sold Brisbane a front-page column in the *New York Tribune* and this became a vehicle for expounding the virtues of Fourierism.

The impact of Fourierism upon the Transcendentalists was initially slight. Reacting against its strict formalism, Ripley wrote in 1842 that he was not attracted to a science that "starts with definite rules for every possible case" (Rose 1981:143, note 88). This sentiment was echoed by Emerson, who wrote that "Fourier has skipped no fact but one, namely, Life" (cited in Cayton 1989:205). However, by 1843 it soon became clear that the organization of labor based upon voluntary measures was not working. Because of poor yields, the community was forced to take out additional mortgages and institute a retrenchment program. Ripley was thus searching for a way to increase productivity while being faithful to his desire to revalue intellectual and manual labor. The turning point was the Social Reform Convention held in Boston on December 27 and 28, 1843, a platform for Fourierist advocates which was heavily attended by Brook Farmers. In 1844, after considerable discussion, the community reincorporated themselves as the Brook Farm Phalanx, the second such phalanx in America.⁴⁹ The immediate outcome of this was a dramatic influx of new members, most of whom were lower-class tradesmen and women (Guarneri 1985; Rose 1981:152).

The first steps toward transforming Brook Farm into a Fourierist community involved the reorganization of labor and the construction of a Phalanstery. Following the prescriptions of Fourier, the Brook Farmers instituted a work program of Series and Groups. Three primary series were established – the Agricultural, Mechanical, and Domestic Industries, each of which was subdivided into a number of groups. For example, the Domestic Series was composed of the Dormitory, Constitory, Kitchen, Washing, Ironing, and Mending Groups. The chief of each group was to be elected each week, and one of his or her main duties was to keep a record of the work done by each member of the group. Great emphasis was placed upon the interchangeability of work, so that any member that became bored with one task could easily transfer to another group.

In order to diversify industry, the community threw its membership open to the public to attract skilled laborers. Numerous people took up the invitation including six cordwainers, a gardener and his family, and a pewterer (Guarneri 1985). These individuals helped established new industries such as sash and blind manufacture, Britannia ware production, a tree nursery, greenhouse and shoemaking. The influx was so great that the new arrivals quickly outnumbered the original members. Guarneri's (1985:71–72) analysis shows that fully 67 percent of the Brook Farmers were from artisan or blue-collar backgrounds. This mixture of social classes and ethnicities made for social tensions, hints of which are evident in the writings

of some members. Marianne Dwight probably echoed the sentiments of others when she blamed the failure of the community on the grounds of its catholicism. "We feel too, our brotherhood with those who have gone [left Brook Farm], but it always seemed to me a great mistake to admit coarse people upon the place" (Dwight 1928:162). For all their good intentions, Brook Farmers found that class lines were not easily bridged.

Due to the lack of specialized knowledge and experience and the limited availability of capital, the series and groups showed mixed results. The Carpentry Group acquired a less-than-distinguished reputation on the Boston market. It appears that the lumber that was used was not properly seasoned with the consequence that doors purchased from Brook Farm had an unfortunate tendency to warp and shrink (Swift 1900:43). The Cattle Group conducted a curious experiment in animal husbandry. Ripley tried to wean a calf by replacing milk with hay-tea. The calf died. The attempt by the Nursery Group to plant a large flower garden and sell flowers on the Boston market failed due to poor soil quality. Yet, even with this litany of setbacks, some groups were successful, and in 1844, the community turned a modest profit for the first time in its history (Rose 1981:150).

Finding Utopia

Steven Pendery, the Boston City Archaeologist, conducted the first archaeological research at Brook Farm as part of the Boston City Archaeology Program (BCAP) in 1990.⁵⁰ At that time, none of the original buildings of the utopian community were standing and their original locations were unknown. In addition, there were several misconceptions about the identities of the extant historic period buildings. For example, the Martin Luther Orphan's Home was popularly considered to have incorporated the Hive or to have been built on its foundations (Delano 1991; French 1971; Haraszti 1937; Schultz 1988; Sears 1912). The goals of Pendery's research program were thus to locate and identify the specific archaeological resources of the project area, including the locations of the utopian period buildings (Pendery 1991).

Pendery adopted a testing methodology using 50-by-50 cm test pits located at five and ten meter intervals along a series of transects placed in likely site areas. In this manner, he identified one prehistoric site and eleven historic sites including the Knoll prehistoric site, the Knoll historic site, the Hive, the Hive outbuildings, the Barn, the Eyrie, the Cottage, the Pilgrim House, the Greenhouse, the Workshop, and the Phalanstery (Figure 8.6). In his report to the Massachusetts District Commission, Pendery (1991) concluded that the majority of the sites possessed high levels of archaeological integrity and that the utopian period sites

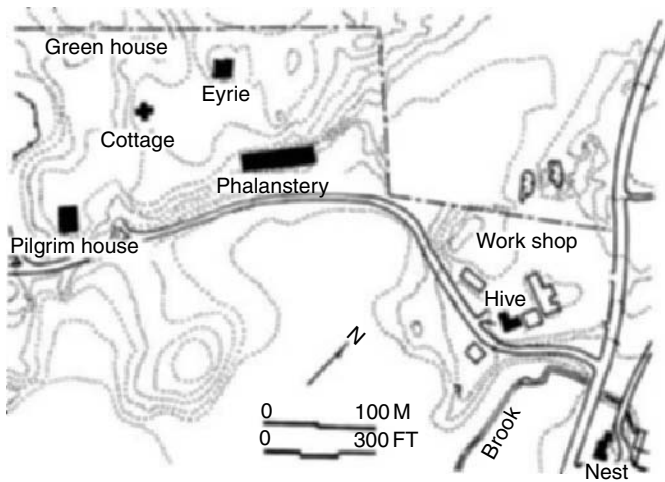


Figure 8.6 Locations of the utopian period buildings at Brook Farm (drawn by S. Pendery).

should be studied more intensively to generalize about the history of Brook Farm between 1841 and 1847.

In the summer of 1990, Pendery and I established the Brook Farm Hive Archaeology Project as a joint Boston City Archaeology Program and Harvard University research project. Our goals were to identify the Hive and resolve some of the confusions regarding its relationship to the Roxbury Almshouse and the Martin Luther Orphans Home. One popular view was that the Orphanage incorporated, with modifications, the original utopian period farmhouse (Delano 1991). However, Swift (1900:39) noted that the Hive burned down only a year after its use as an Almshouse, and that the Orphanage was erected partially upon its foundations.

In addition, there was evidence for the relocation of buildings on the site. During the early part of the Almshouse period, city documents record that \$350 was paid to Mr. James Brown for “moving buildings,” but unfortunately do not identify which buildings were involved (Committee on Accounts of the Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Roxbury 1852). On the basis of similar floor dimensions, Pendery (1991) has speculated that the Pilgrim House may have been moved to the Hive area to serve as the main administrative building of the almshouse. This hypothesis is consistent with the empty cellar hole and lack of architectural debris at the original site of the Pilgrim House.

A third issue involves the number and configuration of the different wing additions to the Hive. Codman (1894:47) reported that “passing by the front of the house I found that two wings had been added to it in the rear, leaving shed and carriage room beneath.” Prior to excavation, the area southwest of the

Hive/Orphanage gave no surface indication of a cellar hole. However, there is evidence for a cellar hole to the north of the Hive/Orphanage foundation which some have identified as the utopian period wing (Schultz 1988). But this addition may possess a link with the utopian period of a different sort. Swift (1900:40) has reported that it was popularly believed that the utopian period Workshop was removed from its original location northwest of the Hive and repositioned to form the north annex of the Orphanage. There thus is some confusion as to the location of the wing.

Two main research objectives guided the excavation strategy. The first goal was to evaluate the integrity of the archaeological deposits in the vicinity of the Hive/Orphanage following up on the results of the BCAP testing program (Pendery 1991). Was it possible to differentiate between the historically known occupations? What material culture patterning might reflect the activities of the utopian community? The second goal was to address contradictions in the historical record by examining the existing foundations of the Orphanage. Does the Orphanage building in fact date to the utopian period or was it a more recent construction built upon the foundation of the Hive? How many wing additions were built and where were they located? Was there any evidence for the removal of the Workshop and its incorporation into the north annex of the Orphanage?

In our 1990 fall field season, we excavated a series of 1-by-1 m test pits in the backyard area of the Orphanage. Although none of the test pits in the targeted area yielded architectural remains, two units on the southern periphery produced unambiguous evidence for a house foundation. One contained deep layers of sand fill above a cobblestone floor, and another revealed a corner formed by the intersection of a brick and stone wall containing a loosely compacted brick and stone rubble fill also overlying a cobblestone floor. This feature proved to be the kitchen ell of the colonial farmhouse christened "the Hive" by the utopian community. During our 1991 summer field season, we further exposed the foundations of the Hive and determined that its dimensions closely corresponded with its description in the City of Roxbury inventory (Young et al. 1849).

During the summer and fall of 1992 the Brook Farm Project expanded archaeological testing at the Hive (Pendery and Preucel 1992). Our primary objectives were fourfold: (1) to understand the different building episodes of the Hive with special attention paid to the wing additions constructed during the utopian period, (2) to examine the relationship between the Hive and the Lutheran Print Shop which we thought could have been built on the foundations of the utopian period barn, (3) to discover contexts of utopian period material culture for use in making comparisons between the utopian community and non-commutarian groups or families, and (4) to examine the garden areas surrounding the Hive to reveal their role in signifying how the community envisioned nature.

Our results provide some clarification of the wing addition. The two wings discussed by Codman were likely contiguous, similar to those of a standard New England connected farm (Hubka 1984), and built in two separated episodes. Our testing in the area of Feature G provided unambiguous evidence for the fire that destroyed the Hive and almshouse on August 8, 1854 (Committee on Accounts of the Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Roxbury 1854:56). But contrary to our expectations, foundation footings for the southern wall of the wing were found in only one unit and all our attempts to locate other foundations failed. **The testing of the Lutheran Print Shop foundation, although limited, is consistent with the interpretation that the Lutheran Print Shop was erected on part of the foundations of the original barn.**

House Agency

Brook Farm never constituted a “living building” in the Shaker sense, and yet its houses were integral to the community’s self-understanding. In the following section, I explore the roles of the Brook Farm houses as social actors in mediating the contradictions between the semiotic ideologies of Transcendentalism and Fourierism.⁵¹ I suggest that the houses fostered specific interpersonal relations and engendered a durable commitment to Transcendentalism.

My method involves juxtaposing two sets of textual artifacts for greatest interpretive effect. The first text is a formal description of the houses based upon the inventory conducted by the city of Roxbury after the community was disbanded (Young et al. 1849). It is an instrumental account of the houses where they are conceived as inanimate resources with economic use value. The second group of texts consists of selected reminiscences by members of the Brook Farm community. These texts are richer, more evocative renderings that suggest each house had its own unique biography due to the habitual associations and memories of individual community members.

The Hive

In 1849, the city of Roxbury commissioned a special report on the buildings and grounds of Brook Farm to evaluate its potential as a site for the relocation of the city almshouse. The Hive is described as follows:

The Mansion House (as designated by the Phalanx “the Hive”)

1st floor, 2 parlors: 1 large dining room, about 45×14, with closets: 1 kitchen, with Stimpson’s range, calculated for 60 to 80 persons: 3 large boilers (2 of copper and 1

of iron): 1 large wash room: 1 press room, for pressing clothes: 1 store room, closets: privy: large shed, with accommodations for horses and vehicles: 2 rooms beyond shed.

2nd floor. 2 large chambers, with fire places: 2 bed rooms: 13 sleeping rooms, with several closets.

The attic. 50×18, plastered on sides, 4 ft. high.

Attic in original house, 40×20. There is a cellar under the original house (Young et al. 1849:16–17).

Here each room is itemized with respect to its size, existing condition (the plastered attic), and function (e.g., dining room, washroom, press room, sleeping rooms with closets). The report also identifies the capital resources present within the house, items such as the Stimpson range and the copper and iron boilers. The sizes of the two attics can be used to estimate that the first floor contained 1,700 sq.ft. The ell addition is 100 sq.ft. larger than the original house.

The utopian period texts, by contrast, reveal a more intimate picture. The farmhouse was the vital center of the new community and quickly received the sobriquet “the Hive.”⁵² It was here where all members ate their meals, where they received guests, where they did their laundry, and where they put on dances and theatrical performances for their mutual entertainment.

Amelia Russell describes the Hive as follows:

the Hive was a common-sized house with two rooms on either side of the front door and two others back of them. The front door was but little used, there being a more convenient one between the two rooms, on the side of the driveway or avenue, by which we always entered, being nearer the refectory, which was the back room on that side of the building. The front room was the common parlor for the dwellers in the house, and was also used for the reception of strangers. The rooms on the other side of the front door were occupied by a lady and her children. She was not an associate, but her sympathies united her with the members and she became a permanent boarder. Back of the dining-room was the kitchen, not large, and connected with it were the pantry and a room used for laundry, but rather circumscribed in its proportions. The chambers above were used as sleeping apartments for the inmates of the house, and as there were many residents at the Hive, I need not say no one could have the luxury of a separate room, excepting one scholar who was an invalid (Russell 1900:7–8).

This account indicates how the community used the Ellis farmhouse to meet its communal and private needs. Certain spaces, such as the south parlor, kitchen, pantry, and laundry, were defined as communal spaces. The central hall contained Ripley’s books and was used as the community library. Other spaces, such as the north parlor and the sleeping quarters on the second floor, were reserved for private uses. The north parlor was occupied by Mrs. Almira Barlow and her three sons.⁵³

The sleeping quarters on the second floor included family suites such as those occupied by George and Sophia Ripley as well as barrack style accommodations for bachelors such as Isaac Hecker, the baker.

The first building project undertaken by the community was the enlargement of the Hive to accommodate students and the prospective members seeking to join Brook Farm. This project was the first attempt by the community to use architecture to materialize their communal beliefs. Russell writes:

When we began to increase our numbers we had also to increase our accommodations; the Hive received many additions, and the existing interior was much altered. The front and back rooms were thrown into one, making a long and convenient dining-room. The kitchen was much enlarged, and the laundry appointments made suitable to our increased population (Russell 1900:8-9).

This account stresses the changes to the communal spaces which dramatically transformed the character of the original farmhouse. These included the creation of a large dining room, a large kitchen, and laundry appropriate for the new members and residents. Growth beyond the original founding members, many of whom were related to the Ripleys, was crucial to the legitimacy of the community.

The Eyrie

The description of the Eyrie in the city of Roxbury special report is as follows:

The EYRIE (so designated by the Phalanx) This is a large building some 35 or 40 ft. sq. with out-houses attached.

1st floor. 2 large sq rooms: 4 small rooms

2nd floor. 8 bed rooms

Wood house, privy, cistern. There is a cellar under whole house, and furnace (Young et al. 1949:18).

The report describes the Eyrie as a square building with attached outhouses. It gives an account of the rooms by function. It also lists the outbuildings and associated features such as the woodshed, privy, and cistern. There is no discussion of architectural style.

According to the utopian texts, the Eyrie was constructed in March 1842 as a separate residence for the Ripley family and the boarding students attending the Brook Farm school (Delano 2004:77). It was the first freestanding building constructed by the community. Ripley set the house on the highest point of the property overlooking the farm, a practice strikingly reminiscent of that of a typical New England mill owner. The house was a two-and-a-half-story wooden structure

painted a light grey sandstone color and built in an Italianate villa style. It possessed low French windows that opened out onto a broad grassy terrace. The plan may have been taken from contemporary pattern books for rural architecture (see Downing 1850).

Russell describes the Eyrie as follows:

It was placed on a large rock, which formed the cellar and on two sides the foundation walls of the structure ... As it was built on the top of this large, high rock, many steps were needed to reach the terrace in front of the door, on either side of which was a large room, one used as a parlor, the other as a library. Behind these rooms were four small dormitories. Above, I think they were not divided in the same manner, but a greater number of rooms was made of the space, leaving two rather larger than the others. Mr. and Mrs. Ripley occupied one of these, and the others were given to the scholars. At first the library was used as a recitation room, and I believe Mr. Ripley still continued so to use it even after we had regular school rooms (Russell 1900:17–18).

This account reveals how some of the original functions of the Hive were taken over by the Eyrie. Most obviously, Ripley shifted his residence to the Eyrie and installed his library in one of its parlors. The other parlor contained a piano where John Dwight held music lessons. The Eyrie thus became the main cultural center for the community. Its library was first used as a recitation room and then later as an entertainment center. Concerts were held in its music room and lectures were given in its parlor.

The Cottage

The special report describes the Cottage as follows:

The Cottage. This is a building of cottage form, 2 stories high.

1st floor. 2 large rooms: 2 smaller rooms: 1 wash room: 1 store room: cistern: privy

2nd floor. 4 chambers

There is a cellar under the house, and a furnace (Young et al. 1949:18).

This description provides another inventory of rooms and their functions. The outbuildings and associated features are identified as a washroom, storeroom, cistern, and privy. There is no discussion of its architectural style beyond noting its cottage form.

The utopian texts indicate that the Cottage was commissioned by Mrs. Anna Alvord in the autumn of 1842 (Delano 2004:95). It was located along the ridge west of the Eyrie and built in the Cottage style made popular by Andrew Jackson Downing. The Cottage was a brown two-story house shaped like a Maltese cross with the

central portion devoted to the staircase and four wings to individual rooms. This design was not environmentally efficient since each room had three exposures.

The building's primary function was to serve as a home to Mrs. Alvord. Since she occupied only one room, the community allotted the other rooms to boarders as needed. School was held in the parlor. The Cottage was later pressed into service as a hospital during a smallpox outbreak.

Russell describes the Cottage as follows,

It was the next building erected after the Aerie, and was altogether the best finished house on the place. The form was something like a Maltese cross, the centre being devoted to the staircase and each of the four points containing a room. It was very pretty to look at on the outside, but as three sides of each room were necessarily exposed to the weather, the Cottage was warm in summer, and cold in winter, picturesqueness having been more studied than commonplace comfort. Still it was a very pleasant place to live in, bright and cheerful (Russell 1900:64-65).

This account links architectural aesthetics to quality of life. Russell notes that the Cottage was the most attractive building in the community ("the best finished house on the place," "pretty to look at"). These attributes made it one of the favorite places for members to stay ("a very pleasant place to live," "bright and cheerful"). When the community adopted Fourierism, the Cottage was chosen as the appropriate place for the school because of the association of aesthetics with education. "As it was decidedly the prettiest house on the place, it was thought the youthful mind would be impressed by it and lessons become easier" (Russell 1900:63). When Russell (1900:63) was reassigned from the Cottage to the Pilgrim house to make room for the school, she expressed regret, noting that she had become attached to it.

During this period, cottages were popularly considered as an ideal style for rural architecture because of their openness to nature (Downing 1842). The cottage style was popular among several other Fourierist communities. Marcus Spring, for example, built separate cottage style houses immediately opposite the phalansteries at the North American Phalanx and at the Raritan Bay Union (Hayden 1976). Significantly, Spring was an early nonresident stockholder in Brook Farm, so the Brook Farm cottage may have even served as the source of his inspiration.

The Pilgrim House

The special report describes the Pilgrim House as follows:

Large Double House. (Designated by the communists - the Pilgrim House) this building is 2 1/2 stories high, and built as a double house. Dimensions not accurately

ascertained, but thought to be about 40×35 with an L. It is so arranged that it is well adapted for a hospital.

1st floor. 4 large square rooms; 2 kitchens; 1 wash room, with large cistern under the same, and holding from 3 to 5000 gallons: 1 bakery: workshop; privy.

2nd floor. 9 chambers and bedrooms.

Attic. 4 large rooms.

Cellar under house, with furnace (Young et al. 1949:18).

For an unknown reason, this description is not based upon a formal survey (“dimensions not accurately ascertained”). It itemizes the rooms by function and identifies the various rooms that constitute the ell. Here there is a specific recommendation suggesting that Pilgrim House is well suited for use as the almshouse hospital.

The utopian texts reveal that the Pilgrim House was built by Ichabod Morton of Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1843 (Delano 2004:96). It was a large double house located on a ridge just southwest of the Cottage. Morton had hoped that his brother Edwin Morton and his family would join with him in the community. However, this did not happen and he only resided in the house for two weeks before deciding to leave. The house was then turned over to the community.

When the community took possession of the house, they immediately modified it to meet their communal needs. They tore down the walls between the two kitchens to create a spacious laundry room. They also constructed a large parlor by joining together the individual parlors of each house. This new room became the community’s ballroom. Russell writes,

Having originally been intended for two families, it had none of the quaint appearance of even a common country house. It was very much like two houses placed dos a dos instead of side by side, and was a very uncouth building, with many rooms in it which were useful for our increasing numbers, but did not satisfy an eye for symmetrical proportions. Among them were two large parlors, joined by folding doors, which became our ballroom whenever we were inclined for a dance, and were occupied on all convivial occasions (Russell 1900:56–57).

This account provides an aesthetic critique of the Pilgrim House. Russell notes that it was plain looking (“had none of the quaint appearance of even a common country house,” “a very uncouth building”) and was poorly designed (“did not satisfy an eye for symmetrical proportions”). Elsewhere she writes that “neither externally nor interiorly did it (the Pilgrim House) possess much attraction” (Russell 1900:57).

The Pilgrim House also housed the literary office of the *Harbinger*, the literary newspaper published by the Brook Farm Phalanx from 1845 to 1846 (Delano

1983).⁵⁴ The *Harbinger* was the direct heir to the *Dial*, Emerson's Transcendentalist newspaper published in Concord which ceased publication in 1844, and the *Phalanx*, Brisbane's Fourierist newspaper which ended a year later. It was devoted to issues of social reform and also contained translations, literary criticism, music and art criticism, and poetry. Especially notable are the writings of John Dwight, who is regarded as the father of modern music criticism. The paper itself was produced at the Workshop. By the fifth number of volume one of the *Harbinger* had a circulation of 1,000, although it is unlikely to have ever topped 2,000 (Swift 1900:267).

The Workshop

The special report describes the Workshop as follows:

Factory Building. 2 stories and attic. *Length*, 60×28.

1st floor. Room extreme length, (60×28)

2nd floor. 6 rooms.

Attic. 3 rooms.

A well of water which supplied the steam engine. Near this building is a corn barn (Young et al. 1949:17).

This description identifies the number of rooms in the Workshop, but provides no information on their uses. It does, however, note features (the well) and neighboring structures (the corn barn). It also omits an account of the Workshop's architectural style.

The utopian texts indicate that the Workshop was a two-story, white clapboard building built in the spring of 1843. It initially housed the shoemaking industry and then, during the Fourierist period, provided space for the Britannia ware, sash and blind, and carpentry groups. The Printshop was also operated from the building. John Codman portrays it as follows:

The workshop which was being built at the time of my arrival, was two stories in height, sixty by forty feet in size, with a pitched roof, well lighted with windows, and situated some three hundred yards behind the Hive, in a northwesterly direction. At its further end, in the cellar, was placed a horse-mill, afterwards exchanged for a steam engine, that carried machinery for all departments of labor (Codman 1894:88–89).

There is a discrepancy in the size measurements provided by the Roxbury report and the Codman description. The former indicates 60 by 20 feet while the latter says that it was 60 by 40 feet. Codman may be in error since he also mistakes the distance between the Workshop and the Hive.⁵⁵



Figure 8.7 Britannia ware whale oil lamp manufactured at Brook Farm (courtesy of Winterthur Museum and Country Estate).

Lewis Ryckman, a New York Fourierist, organized the shoemaking group and was quite successful (Francis 1997:93). George Hatch oversaw the sash and blind industry (Dwight 1928:109). There were apparently some irregularities in his bookkeeping. Ephraim Capen was in charge of the production of Britannia ware whale oil lamps, coffee pots, and teapots (Dwight 1928:78).⁵⁶ The production run of these articles is undocumented and only a few examples are known today. A Brook Farm whale oil lamp is held in the collection of the Winterthur Museum (Figure 8.7). It is marked with the semicircular Brook Farm stamp (Figure 8.8).



Figure 8.8 Brook Farm maker's mark (courtesy of Winterthur Museum and Country Estate).

Greenhouse

The Roxbury report described the Greenhouse as follows:

The Green House. This is, in main building, say 40×18 built of brick, with a wooden addition on one side, and end, making its dimensions, say 60×30 . It is built in the usual form of green houses, and is well provided with green house furniture, such as stands and shelves for flowers and plants. There are two well-finished rooms, a very large room in the wooden addition, for the storage and deposit of fuel and such things as are necessarily attached to a green house. There are accommodations for obtaining and keeping water, and a furnace with the proper fixtures for heating the same, and warming the house. It is in good repair (Young et al. 1949:18–19).

Unlike the other accounts that are lists and counts, this description of the Greenhouse is written out. This shift in style donotes a more casual approach to the inventory. Indeed no firsthand measurements were taken and the dimensions presented are qualified by the word “say.” It describes the existing condition and available resources such as furniture, plant stands, and shelves.

According to the utopian texts, the Greenhouse was built in the autumn of 1844 with funds from Frank Shaw and located northwest of the Cottage (Dwight 1928:60, 109). It was overseen by Peter Kleinstrup and he and his family lived in an

adjacent room. The flower group used it to cultivate a variety of ornamental plants such as azaleas, camellias, geraniums, roses, violets, carnations, and heliotropes for sale on the Boston market.

Codman also lived in a room at the Greenhouse and described it as follows,

The new greenhouse was built in the autumn, just in time to save the plants from frost. It was situated back of the cottage and garden, almost parallel with our boundary wall, and about fifteen feet from it. There was a little sleeping room connected with it, where I lodged summer and winter. Above me in the gable, a variety of beautiful doves, consisting of Pouters, Tumblers, Ruffs, Carriers and Fantails, was installed. They were very tame, and were much admired by our family and visitors. They came at my call, alighted on my hands, head and shoulders, and picked corn from out of my hands and from between my lips (Codman 1894:131).

Here Codman reminisces fondly about his unusual living quarters and his playful activities with the doves. The carrier pigeons were used to send messages to and from Boston (Francis 1997:117).

Phalanstery

The Phalanstery was the only building constructed after the community reorganized as the Brook Farm Phalanx. There is no Roxbury city report since it burned down in a tragic fire on March 3, 1846, the very week it was due to be completed. There are no surviving plans of the building. Hayden (1976:173) has speculated that it likely served as the model for the phalanstery erected at the North American Phalanx in Red Bank, New Jersey (see Figure 8.2).

The Brook Farm phalanstery was a vernacular adaptation of a Fourierist phalanstery. The project was too large to be undertaken by the carpentry group alone and Ripley hired an architect, a Mr. Rodgers, and workmen (Dwight 1928:133). Ripley (1846:221) writes that although it was not a model for the unitary edifice of a Phalanx, it served the community's present needs. Codman (1894:186) is somewhat less approving and indicates that it was called a phalanstery, "not that it resembled one, but more out of deference to the idea of one."

Ripley describes the phalanstery as follows:

It was built of wood, one hundred and seventy-five feet long, three stories high, with spacious attics, divided into pleasant and convenient rooms for single persons. The second and third stories were divided into fourteen houses, independent of each other, with a parlor and three sleeping rooms in each, connected by piazza which ran the whole length of the building on both stories. The basement contained a large and commodious kitchen, a dining-hall capable of seating three to four hundred persons, two public saloons [salons], and a spacious hall or lecture room (Ripley 1846:221)

Ripley's account reveals his desire to use architecture to signify the community's commitment to Fourierism. The Phalanstery was designed to mediate the relation between the community and the individual, the public and the private. His use of the adjectives "spacious," "large," and "commodious" to describe communal spaces indicates the importance of communal gatherings as the very lifeblood of the community. He also, however, recognizes the need for privacy such as the independent houses reserved for families and describes rooms for single members as "pleasant" and "convenient."

There was passionate debate about the construction of the phalanstery. Some members, like Ripley, saw it as the only way to achieve the goals of the community. Others, however, opposed it. Although Ripley's views held sway, there remained an undercurrent of discontent. For example, immediately following the phalanstery fire, Marianne Dwight (1928:148) confesses: "I looked at the bare hill this morning, I must say, with a feeling of relief - there was an incumbrance gone. Heaven had interfered to prevent us from finishing that building so foolishly undertaken, so poorly built and planned, and which again and again some of us have thought and said we should rejoice to see blown away or burned down."

The failure of the Phalanx

The failure of the Brook Farm Phalanx is usually attributed to two causes. The first is that it could not survive the blow to its economic base caused by the destruction of the phalanstery (Swift 1900). The phalanstery represented a substantial outlay of \$7,500 but there was no insurance to help the community recover from its tragic loss. The second cause is the class tensions that emerged between members with the shift to Fourierism (Delano 2004; Guarneri 1991). These tensions are clearly depicted in the diaries and letters of some of the members. Codman (1894:213), for example, observes that "the little, scarcely organized Community had increased into a godly number, so that its dining room was like a small hotel; and it was no longer held by the 'Transcendentalists,' but had become a portion of a large and increasing body of men who followed the wild ideas of a Frenchman named Fourier, and called itself the Brook Farm Phalanx."

I suggest that another reason for the failure is the constitutive force of the architectural expression of the Transcendentalist ideology. The houses of Brook Farm developed their own distinctive personalities due to their unique functions and social associations. This "house agency" actively thwarted the attempts by Ripley and others to adopt Fourierism and make Brook Farm the leading Phalanx in America.

The strong emphasis on individualism is evident in a comment from Charles Lane, a disaffected member who left the community. Lane (1844:353) writes that

Brook Farm “is not a community: it is not truly an association: it is merely an aggregation of persons, and lacks that oneness of spirit, which is probably needful to make it of deep and lasting value to mankind.” At this time, the community consisted of a dispersed group of isolated residences linked together by the Hive, where common meals were taken. Each of the buildings was constructed in its own distinctive architectural style. From a Peircian perspective, this eclectic style can be seen as a rhematic indexical legisign since it indexes a commitment to individuality celebrated in Transcendentalist belief. The individual buildings are indexical sinsigns since they are tokens of the eclectic style. They also incorporate iconic sinsigns in that they closely resemble specific forms of rural architecture, such as those made popular by Andrew Jackson Downing. They were not exact copies, however, because none of the houses had their own kitchens. This familiar architecture would have domesticated the radical ideas of the community and made them more palatable for members and visitors alike.

The Brook Farm houses physically structured relationships between community members and their encounters with the natural environment. In this capacity, they are operating as rhematic indexical sinsigns since they regulate movements and activities that are specific to communal living. What is distinctive about Brook Farm is that its members typically interacted with multiple houses during the course of a single day. Marianne Dwight’s account is instructive in this regard:

Now my business is as follows (but perhaps liable to frequent change): I wait on the breakfast table [at the Hive] (1/2 hour), help M. A. Ripley clear away breakfast things, etc. (1 1/2 hour). Go into the dormitory group until eleven o’clock, — dress for dinner — then over to the Eyrie and sew till dinner time, — half past twelve. Then from half past one or two o’clock until 1/2 past five, I teach drawing at Pilgrim Hall and sew in the Eyrie. At 1/2 past five go down to the Hive, to help set the tea table, and afterwards I wash teacups, etc., till about 1/2 past seven. Thus I make a long day of it, but alternation of work and pleasant company and chats make it pleasant (Dwight 1928:7–8).

Fourierism, by contrast, specified a radically different housing situation. According to Fourier’s model of an ideal community, the entire community was to be housed together in a phalanstery. The Brook Farm phalanstery was built to proclaim the shift to Fourierism and thus functioned as a dicent indexical sinsign. It was interpreted by members of the community as publicly marking the commitment to a new kind of community. Yet, it had clear implications for the existing housing stock. Ideally, the original buildings should have been removed to make room for the new phalansterian landscape. However, Russell (1900:91–92) notes that “it was not thought advisable to give up entirely the other houses, but still keep them as they were, feeling that the numbers who would undoubtedly join us

would need accommodation.” The implications of this decision for creating a set of new social tensions between the existing members and the new arrivals went unrealized due to the phalanstery fire.

Charles Crowe (1959:495) has suggested that the shift to Fourierism was not the result of a conscious desire to abandon Emersonian individualism. Rather, Ripley sought to merge the two philosophies together in order to achieve the goals of a new socialist society. Ripley believed that the Fourierist Phalanx was the means to create a Transcendentalist “heaven on earth.” In such a community, social relations would be “in perfect unison with the nature of man; to which every chord in his sensitive and finely vibrated frame will respond; which will call forth as from a well tuned instrument, all those exquisite modulations of feeling and intellect, which were aptly termed by Plato, the ‘music of his being’” (Ripley 1847:137). The Transcendentalist language of this statement is striking.

An example of house agency mediating the relationship of Transcendentalism and Fourierism is the celebration of Fourier’s birthday on April 7th, 1845 (Anonymous 1845:336–337, Dwight 1928:89). The Hive was chosen as the appropriate setting. The ceilings and walls of the dining hall were draped with evergreens and the tables were set with flowers from the greenhouse. A plaster bust of Fourier with a myrtle wreath was placed at one end of the hall. On the wall behind it, the name Fourier was spelled out in evergreen branches. On each side of the inscription were a beehive and an anchor, the emblems of Industry and Hope respectively. At the opposite end of the room, the banner of the association composed of the primary colors was hung. Over the banner was placed a blue plaque which contained the words UNIVERSAL UNITY in silvery white letters. A Lyre, representing the seven spiritual passions, was placed on one side of the room and an inscription from the New Testament proclaiming the promise of the Lord and the prophesies of heaven on earth on the other. Another plaque was inscribed with Fourier’s fundamental law, *Les Attractions sont proportionelle aux Destinees*. The rich semiotic ornamentation of the room simultaneously indexed Fourier and his philosophy, as well as nature and Transcendentalism.

Representing Brook Farm

Two oil paintings of Brook Farm are known to have been produced during the community’s existence. Both of these were painted by Josiah Wolcott and are currently held by the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. Wolcott was a little known ornamental and portrait painter who apprenticed as a chair painter in Boston in the 1830s and then trained in fine art with Thomas Doughty (Osgood 1998).⁵⁷ He received a diploma from the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association



Figure 8.9 Brook Farm, oil painting by Josiah Wolcott, dated 1843 (courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society and Mrs. Robert Watson).

certifying exemplary conduct and ability in 1835. Two years later, three of his landscape paintings were selected for inclusion in the Boston Athenaeum exhibition. In that same year, he listed himself in the Boston city directory as a painter. He married Mary B. Phinney in 1838 and, due to the need to support a family, turned to decorative painting. He began listing himself as a chair painter in 1839 and then as a sign and ornamental painter in 1843.

Wolcott became deeply interested in the social issues of his time, particularly Fourierism. In the winter of 1843, he attended the Social Reform Convention held at the Tremont Temple in Boston. It is here that he may have met some of the members of Brook Farm. Enthusiasm was so great that the New England Fourier society was founded and Wolcott was elected to its executive committee. Wolcott purchased shares in the Brook Farm community in November of 1844 and again in April, July, and October of 1845 (Osgood 1998:30, Note 29). Osgood (1998:12) has speculated that he was planning to join the community with his wife and new son, George, after the completion of the Phalanstery.

Wolcott's first painting, dated 1843, depicts Brook Farm as an idyllic community (Figure 8.9). It includes representations of the Hive and barn, the Eyrie, the Cottage, and the Pilgrim House set in a pleasant rolling landscape and beneath a double rainbow. The painting is executed in bright colors in a romantic effect. Osgood (1998) has compared the renderings of the buildings against their published descriptions and concluded that they are quite accurate. The painting thus captures the spirit of the community during the end of its Transcendentalist phase.



Figure 8.10 Brook Farm, oil painting by Josiah Walcott, undated (courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society).

Wolcott's second painting, undated, is a darker, more somber depiction of the community (Figure 8.10). It includes all of the buildings shown in the previous painting with the addition of the Workshop (behind the Hive) and the foundations of the Phalanstery (in front of the Eyrie). There is a bright glow in the sky, perhaps indicating sunrise. The standard interpretation is that it was painted in 1844.⁵⁸ However, it seems more likely that it was painted after the destruction of the Phalanstery in 1846. In this case, the painting would depict the Phalanstery in ruins. This interpretation is lent some support by two statements by members of the community. A day after the fire, Marianne Dwight wrote that "a part of the stone foundation stands like a row of gravestones – a tomb of the Phalanstery – thank God, not a tomb of our hopes!" (Dwight 1928:148). The depiction of the phalanstery does resemble gravestones. In addition, Rebecca Codman Butterfield, whose family owned the painting, stated that it was painted "about 1846, by Josiah Wolcott, one of our members" (cited in Myerson 1978:290). The painting would then represent the community during the latter part of its Fourierist phase.

In all the publications on Brook Farm, no scholar has thought to ask why the paintings were made. The likely answer is the need to have visual imagery to illustrate public lectures on Fourierism and the Brook Farm community. One of the ongoing challenges of Brook Farm was to raise funds to support the community and to disseminate its utopian philosophies. The primary means of accomplishing this was by members of the community going on the lecture circuit. George Ripley, Charles Dana, and John Dwight all traveled throughout the northeast

giving public lectures and visiting other utopian communities (Dwight 1928:127, 160). The two Walcott paintings were probably commissioned for this purpose. As decent indexical signs incorporating rhematic iconic signs, they would have contextualized the lectures of the Brook Farmers and given them a material reality necessary in a public forum where rival utopian theories were also being discussed. The 1843 painting would have introduced an audience to the physical form of the community and emphasized its intimate relationship to nature. The 1846 painting would have demonstrated that the community had withstood the loss of the Phalanstery and was confidently moving forward into the future.

Conclusions

Much of the literature on Brook Farm has focused on why the community adopted Fourierism and why the social experiment failed (Swift 1900, Miller 1950). The standard arguments have identified the economic loss posed by the destruction of the phalanstery and the class tensions caused by the influx of tradesmen and women. This is what Delano (2004) has called the “dark side of utopia.” There is no question that these factors were important. However, it can also be argued that house agency played a central and guiding role. The community never fully embraced Fourierism and there was never a conscious desire to abandon Transcendental individualism for Fourierist communitarianism (Crowe 1959:495). This persistence of Transcendentalism, however, posed an ideological contradiction that, in the end, was only resolved by the disbanding of the community.

Transcendentalism was above all else an extremely flexible doctrine, one that tolerated a considerable degree of latitude among its followers. The same critiques of industrial capitalism grounded in Evangelical Unitarian values that inspired Brook Farm also inspired Bronson Alcott’s consocial family at Fruitlands and Thoreau’s isolation at Walden Pond (Francis 1997). There is a sense of intellectual bricolage underlying the movement where ideas from German Idealists, British Romantics, and French Reformers are all mixed together with a dash of New England pietism thrown in for good measure. At Brook Farm this “working things out as they go” philosophy signified a commitment to egalitarianism where individual self-fulfillment could only be achieved through engagement within a social group.

Fourierism, by contrast, was a much more rigid, authoritarian system that specified all aspects of the ideal society even down to appropriate sexual partners. This aspect of Fourierism, and indeed other controversial elements, were carefully edited out for an American audience by Albert Brisbane and Parke Godwin resulting in a translation that retained the strength of Fourier’s vision, but lacked many of his psychological insights. The expurgated version was well received and served as

a social blueprint for the two dozen Fourierist phalanxes founded across the United States. This “sacred text” meant that there was much less leeway for experimenting with social relations. Especially problematic was the question of class that Fourier regarded as a natural condition of human existence. At almost all American phalanxes tensions developed externally between wealthy absentee stockholders and resident members, and internally between lower-class tradespeople and the “aristocratic element” (Hayden 1976).

The buildings used and constructed during the Transcendentalist phase are characterized by diverse architectural styles. The Hive was enlarged by a large wing extending from the kitchen ell, which dwarfed the original farmhouse. The Eyrrie was built in an Italianate villa style complete with low French windows, a decorative cornice, and terracing. The Cottage was a rural gothic structure with four gables and a central stairway. The Pilgrim House was a double house of the classical revival type. This variety was a material expression of the Transcendentalist celebration of the individual in society. And yet, the buildings were more than a reflection of this ideology. They actively engendered certain habits of thought and social practices at the core of Transcendentalism.

We can now return to the question of why the community abandoned its Transcendentalist principles and adopted Fourierism. The evidence suggests that Transcendentalism was never intentionally abandoned and, indeed, it coexisted alongside Fourierism. The housing stock built during the Transcendentalist period and its distinctive use by the community mediated tensions between individual and community, public and private, manual and intellectual labor. The houses acquired compelling biographies derived from the people who lived in them and the activities they housed. George Ripley expresses his emotional connection to the houses as follows: “We could not part with either of the houses in which we have lived at Brook Farm, without a sadness like that which we should feel at the departure of a bosom friend” (cited in Codman 1894:196). He then reveals that the community did not feel the same sentiment toward the phalanstery. “The house was not endeared to us by any grateful recollections; the tender and hallowed associations of home had not yet begun to cluster around it, and although we looked upon it with joy and hope as destined to occupy an important sphere in the social movement to which it was consecrated, its destruction does not rend asunder those sacred ties which bind us to the dwellings that have thus far been the scene of our toils and of our satisfactions” (cited in Codman 1894:195–196).