

Brandy L. Bourne. Cultures of Information Policy and Practice: The Ethnoinformatic Research Potential of America's Utopian Experiments. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2004. 56 pages. Advisor: Evelyn Daniel

The presumption of this research is that information organization and policy is not only utilitarian but is also in service of particular goals and worldviews. Just as the ways in which societies organize themselves into buildings, communities and towns reflect their particular needs and values, so too does their organization of records and texts, their selective provision of information resources, and their choices of what to preserve, how, and for how long.

America's rich history of experimental, microcosmic utopian communities provides a unique opportunity to examine the role of information in their attempts at social reorganization. Short vignettes of the cultural histories of information in New Harmony, Icaria, Brook Farm, Ruskin, Shaker, Harmony, Rugby, and Moravian communities are examined to offer some insight into the ethnographic research potential of information in America's utopian societies.

Headings:

Libraries/History

Utopian Societies

Shakers

Rugby, Tennessee

Moravian Church

Icaria

CULTURES OF INFORMATION POLICY AND PRACTICE: THE
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH POTENTIAL OF AMERICA'S UTOPIAN
EXPERIMENTS

by
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Introduction

The value of applying an intercultural perspective to scientific and scholarly disciplines that were once thought to exist on a purely rational level, above culture, is becoming ever more appreciated. College course lists are abundant with ethnosciences like ethnomusicology, ethnobotany, ethnopharmacology, ethnoecology, ethnozoology, ethnopsychiatry, ethnogeography, ethno linguistics, ethnomathematics, and ethnohistory as well as the anthropologies of religion, architecture, education, and the like. All of these fields of study enrich their base subject matter by providing a fresh perspective on core practices and precepts that may have appeared normal and universal rather than based in culture. It would seem that the field of librarianship and information sciences would benefit from greater anthropological attention to the role information has played in societies of different places and time. The presumption of this research is that information organization and policy is not only utilitarian but is also in service of particular goals and worldviews. Just as the ways in which societies organize themselves into buildings, communities and towns reflect their particular needs and values, so too does their organization of records and texts, their selective provision of information resources, and their choices of what to preserve, how, and for how long.

This paper argues that the ethnographic study of information in a particular society – a type of research that might be termed *ethnoinformatics* – could be approached from a number of angles, including information access, provision, policy, physical and

conceptual organization, and preservation strategies. America's rich history of experimental, microcosmic utopian communities provides an opportunity to examine the role of information in the communities' attempts at social reorganization. Looking at the hundreds of nineteenth century communities that have since declined or disappeared, researchers can evaluate the cultural bases of their information practices and the effects of certain information policies and practices on the social groups examined and on the documentary record that remains. While a holistic study of a particular community's information history might constitute a thesis in itself, this project, essentially a series of vignettes, seeks to offer some insight into the research potential of America's utopian experiments and of ethnoinformatic research itself. The New Harmony, Icaria, Brook Farm, Ruskin, Shaker, Harmony, Rugby, and Moravian communities described here illustrate the cultural complexities surrounding issues like censorship, funding choices, and preserving documents and information systems in times of turmoil.

Related Scholarship

The problem in finding literature about intercultural information organization and behavior is that, while much has been written about international libraries, these libraries have generally been organized according to specifically American librarianship standards. In fact, it is commonly the case that American library professionals oversee the opening or reorganization of international libraries (particularly in non-Western countries), and it is frequently they who write the account for journals of librarianship. The problem here is that one learns how American standards are applied in an international setting but not how information is locally conceived, organized and utilized.

Alexander Stille's *The Future of the Past* deals with information and artifacts as they have been viewed historically around the globe (2003). In one chapter, he describes how Asian notions of information and artifacts differ from those of Westerners and the implications of these differences on international museum and library cooperation.¹

Cheng's 2001 article, *The Effect of the Cold War on Librarianship in China*, tells the story of Chinese libraries and is useful as a model for describing the effects of social change on information access and organization. Cheng follows librarianship from the era prior to 1840, when libraries were open to the elite only, to the 1840-1949 period, when American library standards were adopted, to the 1949 revolution and adoption of Soviet standards, the 1966 Cultural Revolution when libraries and academics were subjects of scorn and finally, to the 1977 pendulum swing back to Western librarianship and its attendant technology. Kasinec also deals with the effect of political ideology on information organization and provision in his account of conducting research in a major Soviet library in the 1970s (2001). He discusses the difference in availability of materials to researchers, the public and upper-level staff, how numerous organizational systems were in place to accommodate varying levels of access, and the effect of the system on research produced during that era. Both articles illustrate how information systems can speak to social systems, as well as the reverse.

Hernandez's *Trends in Philippine Library History* (1999) and Sommerhauser's *Tuvalu Archives/Library* (1979) tell less dramatic library histories. Hernandez describes the changing information needs of Philippine society and details the development of

libraries in the Philippines since the 1800s. Sommerhauser's account of the opening of Tuvalu's first library offers a very different scenario, one of putting together a library and archive on a shoestring in order to support historical documents that had been donated to the country. Unique social needs and governmental support issues are explored. In both cases, a great deal of attention is paid to the processes of, and difficulties faced by, the American librarians in charge of the library organization. Still they do offer information on librarianship in a foreign environment and the development issues that often come into play.

Reid and Garberson describe two very different types of libraries and how they evolved out of their particular social and historical climates. Reid's *The Decline and Fall of the British Country House Library* tells the story of the English aristocracy's appreciation of books as something akin to an appreciation of pieces of art and how that evolved into a particular type of library, where collecting priorities privileged the rarity and value of books and manuscripts as artifacts, rather than their intellectual content or pragmatic usefulness (2001). He ties the fate of these libraries to the diminishing status of the aristocracy and describes the trend toward purchase of these libraries wholesale by members of the middle class. Garberson's *Eighteenth-Century Monastic Libraries in Southern Germany and Austria* deals mainly with the physical structure of the libraries, but it does attend to some extent to the philosophy behind them as well (1998). Libraries of this time and place were meant to impress, displaying the magnanimousness of their sponsor and intended as grand monuments to their valuable collections and to the pursuit of learning. Garberson relates the religious priorities of scholarship and iconography to

the development of these libraries and describes how this thinking has informed U.S. library history, providing models for such institutions as the Library of Congress's Thomas Jefferson Building.

Finally, a number of works treat the development and increasing sophistication of the world's first libraries and archives, and while Western libraries have evolved out of this tradition, these ancient institutions are far enough removed to be instructive. Casson examines library history from 4000 B.C. to the Middle Ages and does a nice job of reconstructing social context – including literacy rates, bureaucratic structure and ideology – and relating it to the development of various libraries (2001). Staikos deals with libraries from antiquity to the Renaissance, offering founding stories and some discussion of cataloging and classification (2000). Sickinger specifically addresses Athenian public archives, explaining their creation and use and how they fit into society at the time (1999). He deals with the evolution of their archival practices as well as literacy and information needs of the time. These and other recent works like them deal extensively with the social and cultural environment from which these libraries sprang.

Etta Madden's *Bodies of Life* most closely resembles the ethnographic study of information systems that this research seeks to explore, and, indeed, was utilized as a major source of reference for this study. Madden looks deeply and comprehensively at literacy and literary practices of the Shakers but not specifically at their information organization. Similar studies include Andrea Fishman's *Amish Literacy* (1998) and

Richard Bauman's *Let Your Words Be Few* (1983), which deals with Quakers in the seventeenth century.

As these examples demonstrate, scholarship related to information organization and culture does exist, but it is found in piecemeal more often than in comprehensive form. Rather than dealing with a society or community's overall information behavior and systems, existing articles are likely to tell the story of a library or other particular aspect of information behavior, with cultural information offered only secondarily or separately from the information system. That is, many such works deal with library and information standards and their implementation in other cultural settings as if they were above culture. Little research is available that deals with broadly conceived information and cultural systems in an integrated way.

Utopian Writing

Plato's *Republic*, which is generally considered the first significant work of utopian literature, depicts a system of rule by philosophers, censorship for the protection of the whole, and communal living among the upper class. It was twelve centuries later, however, that Saint Thomas More coined the term that would define the concept in his *Utopia*. More began with a critical description of sixteenth century English life and followed by detailing his notion of an ideal society, from its economic and governmental systems to its religious and cultural practices. Tommaso Campanella's 1623 *The City of the Sun* had as its subject a community bounded by walls of concentric circles. These walls were engagingly inscribed with the society's knowledge, and it was through daily

exposure to them that the populace was educated. Also following the form made famous by More were Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* in 1627, James Harrington's *Oceana* in 1656, and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* in 1872. Ideas common to most utopian literature throughout time are labor and education reform, equality of men and women, and the need to live simply (Hollis, 1998).

Recent utopian and dystopian fiction has frequently dealt with information issues. Authors have asked us to consider what the future holds for books, how information will be recorded and passed on, what will become of libraries, and what would happen to society if books were taken away or altered. Katherine Pennevaria examined fictional descriptions of books and libraries in societies of the future. She noted that Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, is in keeping with the utopian value for education. It depicts an imagined Christian socialist Boston that offers unlimited public access to books and publishing facilities (Pennevaria, 2002, 230). It is, however, more often cautionary dystopian tales that deal prominently with the place of information in society.

In 1895, H.G. Wells published *The Time Machine*, the story of a time in the distant future where human history and accumulated knowledge have been lost and with it the sense of progress or place in the universe and the will to create. Perhaps anticipating our own fears of losing books to technology, Wells wrote in the 1897 "A Story of the Days to Come" of a time when books are replaced by record players. Pennevaria describes the forcible removal of books from society in Aldous Huxley's

1932 *Brave New World*. Huxley's state has deemed history useless, closed museums and libraries and instituted a program of universal psychological conditioning. It is finally revealed that the ruling class has retained a secret library to which only its members are privy. E.M. Forster's 1909 "The Machine Stops" describes a world in which an outdated machine governs society, and the contents of the *Book of the Machine* are all that remain of human knowledge. In 1949 Orwell published 1984 in which a totalitarian state has outlawed books and made the keeping of diaries a major offense. A television that can't be turned off is the link between the state and the individual, and the written record is unreliable. Yet another depiction of a bookless society is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. This 1953 depiction of the future involves a "fireman," whose job is to blowtorch books whenever someone is discovered hoarding them. The fireman eventually rethinks his job and joins a resistance movement dedicated to memorizing important texts. Again and again dystopian fiction warns of what may become of human society if alienated from the texts that bear its history and thought (Pennevaria, 2002, 233-244).

These descriptions of bookless dystopias illustrate the soullessness of societies that lack both documentation of the past and the prospect of individual and collective documentation of the present. Pennevaria points to John Wyndham's 1951 *The Day of the Triffids* and Walter Van Tilburg Clark's 1941 "The Portable Phonograph" for their depictions of people facing imminent death and the extinction of the human race, one by alien invasion and the other, by war. In these stories, the characters are desperate both to remember human history and to record their own, futile as it may seem. Wyndham's characters appoint one person a "remembrancer," who tells stories of human history, and

another who is a recorder of the society's current history. These stories are typical of much of the body of utopian, dystopian, and science fiction literature in that they depict information, stories, history, and texts as fundamental to humanity and as having the power to alter a people's quality of life and sense of human dignity in dramatic ways (Pennevaria, 2002, 246-248).

Utopian Experiments

While writers look to the future and imagine possible utopian or dystopian scenarios, experimental communities try out those scenarios and provide sociological models for the larger society. Utopian writers and community leaders are driven by a similar impulse to imagine a possible alternative way of life and to think or act out the possibilities. The Industrial Revolution is credited with leading to such social experimentation by enabling Europeans to focus on creating a more ideal society rather than on meeting immediate basic needs. After the Protestant Reformation paved the way by giving validity to individual experience and by arguing the equality of all types of labor in the eyes of God, a number of sectarian utopian experiments were established in Europe and soon spread to America (Hollis, 1998). From Europeans' first awareness of its existence, America was a land of possibility, a "New Eden." The unspoiled romance of it coupled with the available land and political freedom made it a good choice for religious and political groups finding life outside the mainstream in Europe difficult.

For over a century after the founding of Jamestown, communities were clannish and primarily defined by religion. Virginia was Anglican and Massachusetts Puritan, and

those not conforming to the dominant religion were likely to find life difficult. William Penn changed the tenor of American society by working to make religious liberty a central precept in the founding of Pennsylvania. He spurred what was the largest movement of Europeans across the Atlantic by effectively advertising it as a land of religious tolerance, and many of America's utopian societies were born of that movement and out of that sentiment (Herndon, 2003). Mizrach argues that "It is almost impossible to understand some of America's enduring features without studying these communities' peculiar qualities: relentless perfectionism, constant innovation, a cooperative spirit, and the search for spiritual and physical purity which stretches from the Puritan regime to aerobicizing at the gym" (2003).

The 1800s saw more than a hundred utopian communities form in America with tens of thousands of members (Kesten, 1993, 3). Scholars have grouped these communities roughly into two categories. There are those, like the Shaker and Amana communities, that see sin as the root of human problems and heaven, or heaven-like existence on Earth, as the solution to those problems. The others, like New Harmony and Brook Farm, see societal problems that can be solved primarily by redistribution of wealth, education reform, and gender and racial equality (Kesten, 4). Kesten argues that the utopian communities as a whole formed a revolutionary movement that differed from earlier ones in Europe in their nonviolence and commitment to democratic principles. Utopian community leaders generally believed that they were effecting social change by presenting an example of what society could be and that the larger society would, in time, follow their particular example (Kesten, 6).

American utopian communities in the nineteenth century, of both religious and secular bent, were primarily influenced by three utopian theorists: Robert Owen, a popular figure in the 1820s, Charles Fourier in the 1840s and Étienne Cabet in the 1850s. Owen saw an educated populace as the way to a more perfect society. Fourier wrote voluminous social criticisms, focusing particularly on labor and women's issues, but most who invoked his name did so without actually following his social plans (Kesten, 1993, 7). Cabet, a toughened veteran of French class struggle, also considered education the cure for society's ills and was adamant that those ills were curable and human society perfectible.

At the time, even basic free education was not widely available. When the poor were educated, it was generally the work of charitable organizations. This became a major draw of the new utopian communities. According to Kesten, "almost every colony in the movement promised education and enshrined the promise in a fundamental document. For example, the constitution of the Sylvania Association mandated 'a complete system of Education in all useful and elevating branches of physical, intellectual and moral science'" (1993, 114). Education was the foundational principle of Owen's New Harmony, and Cabet planned to spend as much as necessary to produce a viable educational system (Kesten, 36). This kind of thinking was progressive. Horace Greely wrote that "In our day, the teacher – not the warrior, worker, / nor statesman – leads the vanguard of humanity" (as quoted in Kesten, 113). Educational initiatives were not to be limited to the upbringing of children. Communities intended also to improve

their adult members through education of varying degrees of practicality. Leaders also saw indoctrination of community members and proselytization as a function of their educational missions. The imagined facilities of these communities were generally geared toward intellectual enrichment, with schoolrooms outfitted for imaginative educational schemes, as well as libraries and concert and lecture halls. As education was a privilege of the wealthy, so was access to books. They were expensive and there were few free libraries in existence at the time.

The lure of the utopians' promise is understandable, but their written plans weren't easily realized. As Kesten had it, "the movement's strength lay in words, its weakness in deeds. So despite the promises of leaders and the desires of the membership, education in these experiments, with one notable exception, bore no resemblance to the crucial role that Owen, Fourier, Cabet, and others had assigned to it" (1993, 116). Most found providing for the basic needs of their communities more of a struggle than anticipated, and many failed having barely begun. Even those that managed a measure of prosperity, however, generally put less effort behind educational initiatives than their ambitious plans had suggested. The Wisconsin Phalanx, for example, which established the movement's most successful agricultural community, continually found reasons to delay the formation of even a small library (Kesten, 159). The communities in many ways took on different characters in practice than their founding members intended.

The process and nature of many community transformations over time are left to supposition. Kesten writes, "These groups set off on the utopian road with great hope

and faith. But most ran into a dead end so quickly that it crushed dreams and left members frustrated and bitter. In that mood we would hardly expect them to think about preserving records and other documents for us, and few did. That creates blank spots in almost every case” (1993, 9). Long Island’s *Modern Times*, for example, was the most well known of the Individualist communities around mid-century, but hardly a decade later it fell apart with little fanfare, and its end today is a mystery. There do remain letters and memoirs of utopian life in the nineteenth century, but the objectivity of these is often difficult to gauge, and they rarely give a full picture of the “state of the human spirit: books, pictures, songs, and musical instruments” (Kesten, 10). They are often too closely focused to provide full context. Historians are left with the stories, provided by documentary evidence, of about a dozen communities, including New Harmony, Brook Farm, and Icaria.

Methodology

This paper looks at the information climate of some of America’s utopian communities in order that their ways of dealing with information issues and the processes by which their story remained to be told might become clear. This project is exploratory in nature and is based upon secondary resources. Literature concerning a number of utopian societies was searched for, first, an overall sense of information culture, and, second, mention of particular information practices that might be of interest in the field of information and library science. Those societies with information stories of particular significance or bearing on current issues in the profession have been included as examples of the kinds of information stories that these communities hold. Some of the

vignettes included pertain to active societies, while others concern the collection, disposition, and preservation practices of a defunct society's accumulated artifacts. The three major themes around which the paper is structured are: the value placed on information provision and education as a societal investment, the social consequences of literacy and information access policies, and the implications of particular strategies to collect and preserve community information. It is hoped that future research into primary source material will expand upon this work by looking more deeply into the information practices of these unique communities and others like them.

Information Provision and Education as a Societal Investment

New Harmony

The New Harmony community in Indiana was begun in 1825 by Welsh social reformer and cotton mill owner, Robert Owen, with “education, science, social equality, rational religion, and communal living” as the professed pillars of the community (Pitzer & Weinzapfel, 2001, 18). Owen’s intention was to use “education to form character” among the community members. Geologist William Maclure became Owen’s partner in the venture and brought with him a two thousand volume library. Maclure also found intellectual supporters for the community, academics who were excited about the plans for a new educational system. New Harmony’s constitution ended with the grand statement, “We seek intelligence...as we seek happiness itself” (Kesten, 1993, 128). Though New Harmony had more than adequate financial backing, and a school was opened almost immediately, the educational system grew into something quite different than originally anticipated, and the society closed after only two years. Kesten contends

that, especially at first, Owen attended more to obligations abroad than to the management of the newly formed community, and seemed far less interested in the implementation of his utopian plan than he had been in conceiving and promoting it.

Though books were available in the community, there was never a true New Harmony library, and reading was not entirely embraced. Maclure brought a significant collection of primarily scientific titles and shared them with community members, but apparently little to none of New Harmony's funds were invested in books for the advancement of the community's high educational aims. Library books were donated, and, while records of purchases were meticulously maintained, Kesten reports that no entry exists for the purchase of schoolbooks. An article in New Harmony's Gazette argues against intellectualism, saying, somewhat obliquely that "words" are less important than "things." The teachers hired weren't trained in the society's highly touted new educational system, and, by the close of the society, children were being taught gender-based practical skills, woodwork for boys and needlecraft for girls, for example. Rather than walking between classes, children were marched in strict ranks and were put to work at money making industry during the school day – even those paying tuition (Kesten, 1993, 130-131).

William Maclure went on to found the Workingmen's Institute, which contains the oldest continually open library in Indiana, and Robert Dale Owen became a force for public education and women's rights in the state, but the society that brought them together closed in 1827 and little resembled the planned progressive society that would

invest in and reap the fruit of its populace. The contrast between Owen's promise of putting education first and the reality of not sparing adequate funds or effort for it at New Harmony is as yet not fully explained. Nor is the reversion to traditional educational methods when progressive principles were so highly touted. Of course, a society whose reality differs from its rhetoric is nothing new. Librarians struggling with funding decisions that do not meet community objectives might well be interested in a study of the forces at play in implementing the New Harmony and other community educational plans as well as the social implications of inadequate funding.

The Icarians

Like Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet made a name for himself as a proponent of an education-oriented society. His *Voyage en Icarie* inspired utopian experimenters, who tried to bring the fictional city of Icaria to life in America (1973). The novel's ideal society would have progressive taxation, compulsory labor, commonly held property, and allocation of goods on the basis of need. Most importantly, it would have an educational system where "children learn through love not punishment" and where nothing would be spared for the improvement of schools and libraries (Kesten, 1993, 122). The first Icarian society was begun by a group of supporters in 1848 in Fannin County, Texas but failed within a year. Cabet himself led the second attempt at Nauvoo, Illinois in 1849.

The community at Nauvoo was one of "total regulation" (Kesten, 1993, 72). The constitution contained 183 articles, 20 pages of fine print and voluminous additional regulations. Cabet wanted "to codify the details of daily life" (Kesten, 118). Each

community member was required to own Cabet's writings and to study *Voyage en Icarie* (Kesten, 117). Slogans posted around the community bore messages like, "Develop Intellect. Perfect Humanity!" and "Teach The Elements Of The Arts And Sciences!" (as quoted in Kesten, 113).

As inspired as Cabet's writings may seem, Kesten reveals that "the records contain nothing to suggest that Cabet or his followers approached education in a way remotely resembling the mandate of *Voyage en Icarie*" (1993, 121). Cabet's novel described, for instance, the creation of custom schoolbooks as a matter of utmost importance to the community. Talented authors were to be commissioned to write them, and the basic text was chosen from among entries from a pool of authors. Navoo's schoolchildren actually used the standard *McGuffey's Reader* (Kesten, 119). Rather than experts in each of the subjects, Navoo had a single teacher to cover all students and all subjects. Rather than learning from love, children were punished for even small infractions with the loss of the privilege of visiting their mothers, which was itself only allowed infrequently. Apparently far from a nurturing environment, Icarians expected children to march in ranks and, in general, to be silent. After twenty years, the community gave up trying to educate its own and sent the children to a local school.

The Icarian community did not lack for a library. Cabet pleaded for any books his supporters in France could send, and they responded. Cabet claimed to have a collection of four thousand volumes, and though Kesten believes this an exaggeration, the collection was impressive if it came close that number. Among the holdings were French works of

literature, philosophy, history, and science, as well as English language imprints including Milton, Byron, Shakespeare, Dante, a number of biographies, and works of science and travel. Unusual in a utopian community was the very large number of works of fiction in both French and English. Perhaps a function of soliciting donations, fiction made up eighty five percent of the collection. Clearly not concerned that community members would spend too much time idly reading, Cabet arranged for a table to be placed in the dining hall and spread with French, and some German, newspapers from around the world (Kesten, 1993).

The library Cabet provided might have absolved him of Icaria's imperfect educational system, had he not allowed it to be vandalized in an act of political revenge. Cabet was asked to leave the community after a hostile period of division amongst community members. He and his supporters did leave but only after tearing out pages of library books and destroying key volumes of sets. When the remaining Icarians moved to Iowa around mid-century, they took brought along the damaged but serviceable collection, and the books remained strewn on the floor of a log hut for twenty years. A young girl named Maria Marchand delighted in them throughout her childhood and, when she was ten years old, was allowed to organize them on shelves after finishing regular daily work. She cleaned them and served as their caretaker for years. Eventually, some were moved onto shelves in the dining room, where they would see more regular use. Some books from the Icaria collection were eventually turned over to the state of Iowa by the family of Icaria's last president. Others remained in the abandoned buildings or were taken by community members as they moved on. An Icarian catalog list that is

the surviving record of the contents of the collection has helped historians to put together a model of an information and educational system as it evolved from plan to practice to artifactual collection.

Brook Farm

In contrast with New Harmony and Icaria, Brook Farm put its educational principles into practice and then some. The community grew out of the Transcendentalist Club and was founded in 1841 by former Unitarian minister George Ripley, who wanted to form a society where one could balance a working life of manual and intellectual labor. Located in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, Brook Farm was largely a community of intellectuals – “bookish divinity graduates from Harvard teaching poetry and philosophy” – and progressive educational principles were put into practice from the beginning (Kesten, 1993, 24). “Almost every aspect of Brook Farm life confirmed those qualities,” writes the author of *Utopian Episodes* (Kesten, 142). Reasons given for joining Brook Farm were, first, the desire for the experience of an ethical community, second, to improve one’s life materially, and, third, for educational advancement (Kesten, 24).

To the existing barn and farmhouse, Brook Farmers first added a community center called “The Eyrie,” located on the highest point of the two hundred acre estate. Ripley moved into the new building and brought his own extensive library, which was open to community members and contained extensive philosophy, religion, and modern European literature holdings, many in their original languages of publication. Three levels of schooling were offered – nursery, primary, and farming or advanced studies for

college-bound students – to both members and paying outsiders. The school stressed learning through experience and encouraged students' individual interests. Notable lecturers included Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, William Henry Channing, and Theodore Parker. It was primarily the school that supported the society financially (Kesten, 1993, 20).

The documentary record makes mention of bookshelves in the rooms of community members, and Brook Farmers also utilized libraries outside the community. *The Harbinger*, Brook Farm's newspaper, ran book reviews, and review copies of the books were added to the library. Reading habits at Brook Farm tended toward the esoteric, and there were problems of intellectual snobbishness. The Brook Farm ideal was a mingling of the physical and intellectual and of the working class and denizens of the Ivy League. In practice, however, more manual labor was required than many had anticipated, and there were tensions between the original intellectuals and those "who had never read Goethe or Schiller, and possibly neither Shakespeare, Scott, nor Robert Burns" (as quoted in Kesten, 1993, 172).

Though successful for a time, peaking at one hundred and twenty members, a nationwide economic downturn, a smallpox outbreak and a disastrous fire at the community proved too much to overcome, and the society closed after six years. The library had to be sold off when the community fell into financial difficulty; Ripley compared the experience to attending his own funeral (Kesten, 1993, 170). In the years after the society's demise, the community's buildings were put to various uses and

eventually pulled down. The society was, even in its own day well known and a tourist attraction, and its association with wealthy intellectuals generated interest in saving the papers and effects that remained. The literary habits of community members produced a large body of record in the form of letters and journals that are held today by The Massachusetts Historical Society. The fame of its members and their literary publications have ensured that the story of Brook Farm and its commitment to investing in education and information resources was not lost to history even though the physical community has not survived.

Literacy and Information Access Policies

Ruskin

Ideological and practical shifts like those concerning education and provision of information resources in the previous section also occurred around policies that restrict or allow access to certain kinds of information. Founded in 1894, the socialist Ruskin Cooperative Colony in Tennessee enshrined in its by-laws an intention “to provide education and recreative facilities of the highest order” (Bakker, 2002, 139). Founder Julius Wayland wrote at the society’s beginning that “Every boy and girl will have the best education our resources can provide,” and an admirable effort was made to this end (as quoted in Bakker, 1). The community’s social center included a library, schoolroom, and auditorium for lectures, and the educational system was widely praised (Bakker, 19). Ruskin educators allowed students, who came from both inside and outside the community, the freedom to determine their own courses of instruction and guided their individual experimentation in the arts and sciences. In general, children were expected to

learn one art and one practical skill, in addition to the rudiments of language and mathematics, and the instruction space was divided into areas for pursuits ranging from horticulture to sculpture to tailoring (Bakker, 31).

The Ruskin library catalog lists approximately two thousand titles and a sizeable collection of children's literature that included titles like, *A Swiss Family Robinson*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Black Beauty*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *Little Women*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and a number of works by Dickens. The library also held anthologies of poetry, biographies, and a wide array of books on radical political and social topics, including free love, atheism, mysticism, vegetarianism, and, of course, socialism. Children were not restricted in their reading choices, and this fact made the contents of the collection a point of controversy (Bakker, 2002, 33).

Ruskin community members were bound by a common commitment to socialism, but beyond this they were a diverse group and were, in general, tolerant of difference. Multiple religious groups coexisted in the community, and lively debates on social issues filled the community newspaper. The matter of free love rose above the level of friendly debate, however, and tested the limits of the community's tolerance for freedom of information access. The inclusion of texts advocating free love in the library sparked controversy, particularly over the matter of children being allowed to read the books that many of their parents found offensive. The librarian, who was said to be connected with the free love faction, was dismissed and replaced by a more conservative community

member. The disagreement between factions led to a comical back and forth process of sneaking books about free love and birth control into the library and stealing them back out. The same happened with free love pamphlets that were continually posted and torn down around the community (Bakker, 2002, 94). Conservatives in Ruskin charged that community publications were controlled by the free love faction, though the issue was generally avoided in print. Besides upsetting the community's freedom of information policies, the social turmoil brought about by division over the free love issue was sufficiently distressing to lead some members to abandon life at Ruskin altogether.

Though community publications painted a rosy portrait of Ruskin life in order to attract ever more members, financial and legal troubles, in addition to doctrinal controversy, plagued the community. Poor land quality led the community to leave their original site in Tennessee for a better prospect in Georgia, but the community was more fractured than ever following the move, and it eventually dissipated. When the society's breakdown was suspected to be near, colonist Isaac Broome was asked to write a history of Ruskin, and his *Last Days of the Ruskin Cooperative Association* was published in 1902 (Bakker, 2002, 84). Its objectivity has been questioned, but Broome's work began a process of assessing the successes and failures of the community that has been continued by historians through the years. The ideological struggle that took place in this diverse and largely radical community to define the limits of both the right to information access and of freedom of speech remains for study by scholars of information policy and culture.

The Shakers

The Shaker story of information access might be seen as the reverse of that of Ruskin. That is, the initially strict control of information access, is gradually loosened in Shaker communities for reasons of necessity more than ideology. The Shaker story begins in 1774, when Ann Lee fled religious persecution in her English homeland, where her radical notions and practice of Christianity had stirred the ire of the Church and authorities. Guided by a vision, she believed she was to establish an earth-bound heaven in America for herself and her followers. Mother Ann, as she came to be known, led the formation of society where property was held communally. The members, called Believers, were celibate, physical labor was considered a blessing, and the sexes were, in theory at least, equal. They called themselves The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, but to everyone else they were Shakers.

The Shakers grew to nineteen sizeable isolationist communities by the mid-nineteenth century and were known for their ascetic lifestyle and ecstatic, highly physical worship services. Another defining characteristic of the Shakers was their value for order and uniformity as a means to living simply. Shaker society was rigidly hierarchical and bound by regulations sent from the central governing body to satellite communities stretching from Florida to Maine. Every Shaker belonged to a Family, which was a part of a Village, which was itself a part of a Bishopric, all of which were led by the Central Ministry at New Lebanon, New York. Each unit was led by an equal number of Elders and Eldresses, who distributed and enforced regulations sent from the Central Ministry. These regulations determined job rotation patterns, economic matters, religious practice,

taxation, and even seemingly insignificant aspects of the Shaker daily routine. Edicts sent from the central ministry determined everything from morality, taxation, and job assignment to the minutia of the daily routine. Some of the earliest Shaker rules deal with the proper use and place of books, and, indeed, in the early years there was little place for books or education in Shaker society (Madden, 1998, 94). With each generation, however, both ideology and practice evolved, so that, for example, the early value for simple work and divine revelation, gave way eventually to bookish, theological philosophy.

The Shakers flourished for the century following their arrival in America, taking in the religiously inspired as well as those with no place else to go, particularly orphans. Aiming for self-sufficiency, they grew or manufactured everything they needed, and eventually came to prosper by selling a wide variety of goods to the outside world. Most every utopian society begins publishing tracts, newspapers, and books almost immediately as a means of appropriating the legitimacy of print for their cause, and the Shakers were no different. Shakers published widely, and their writings imply that research materials on a range of subjects were at hand. All of these aspects of Shaker life, community structure, industry, and publishing, would seem to presuppose a reliance on sophisticated information structures. As the volume of their publications increased, however, membership declined, slowly during the nineteenth century then precipitously after the turn of the twentieth, with one community after another closing its doors and leaving residents to join the few functioning communities or to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Today only a few living Shakers remain, and a number of Shaker

communities are kept open and functioning as historic sites. Fortunately, they left an impressive documentary legacy for the use of scholars in determining the causes of their decline.

The Shaker story speaks to information issues on many levels. First, it comes close at times in its history to some of the bookless dystopias depicted in fiction, where literacy and bookishness are, to varying degrees, deemed corrupt. It also demonstrates the impact of information policies, like censorship, on a society, and, its many far-flung communities show how the same information policies may be differently implemented and enforced and how the social consequences may not be the same in every environment. The Shaker case overall raises questions about the choices that are made in governing a society.

Strict censorship, especially in the early years, opened the Shakers up to strong criticism in the media and by disaffected members, but this control is often credited with maintaining internal and inter-community unity. Single-mindedness is considered essential by most utopian thinkers in maintaining a common sense of identity and purpose among members of experimental communities. Some believe the Shakers lost that and contributed to their own social fragmentation and eventual demise with the literary permissiveness that arose later in their history.ⁱⁱ

Mother Ann's inability to read shaped a great deal of Shaker history. Both Madden and Stein argue that "the early hostility of the society toward written creeds,

statements of belief, and even written testimonies’ emerged ‘in part from Ann Lee’s illiteracy, a limitation that fueled her rejection of all writing” (Stein, 1992, 9). Lee distrusted writing and considered it, and the extraneous knowledge it seemed to convey, an impediment to spiritual development. The early Shakers relied on “orally conveyed teachings” and “dismissed formal education as unnecessary and undesirable” (Madden, 1998, 2; Stein, 100). It wasn’t long before the Shakers began to realize “the importance of print to gather, strengthen, and sustain the sect” (Stein, 18). After 1790, when they released the first published account of their theology, “writing and reading of texts began to take on added significance. Leaders wrote letters on behalf of the Society, kept communal journals and records, composed tracts for the world and read enough popular periodical literature to be familiar with the world’s events. This pragmatic move into more literate practices served two purposes: ‘instructing members’ and providing ‘defense’ against ‘the sting of repeated attacks’ by the world” (Stein, 9). Although the value of codifying their theology and having educated representatives became ever more apparent to members of the society through the years, they would always struggle to reconcile these needs with Lee’s teachings. Undercurrents of disdain remained for those who became too immersed in literary pursuits.

It is difficult to generalize about the education offered by Shakers as the quality of their schools varied – often depending on the attitude of particular presiding elders toward them – through time and from community to community (Stein, 1992, 14). The conflicting reports on the state of Shaker schools, and their likewise variable tolerance for bookishness, illustrate the messy nature of human society, even where it is supposedly

governed by uniform regulations. There are accounts, for example, of books like Norton's *Agriculture Improved*, *An American Reader*, *Travels in the North of Europe*, *the Life of Washington* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* being given as prizes for students at New Lebanon, New York in 1856 (Madden, 1998, 26). However, Nicholas Briggs, who in 1920 published an account of the life he had at Canterbury, New Hampshire before leaving the Shakers, wrote that intellectualism was not valued among them and that their reading was limited primarily to the Bible, Almanacs, and Shaker religious publications. They were also fond of saying, as Briggs reports, that "God hates grammar." Thomas Brown wrote in 1812 of being told that he "must put away his books, if he intends to become a good believer" (as quoted in Madden, 11).

Lack of freedom to read and write as one wished was a frequent criticism of life in Shaker communities. Madden concluded that "from the early days of Lee, Shaker leaders have, to a degree, controlled the *kinds* of texts Believers have written and read, the *situations* in which the writing and reading acts have occurred, and the *ways* in which Believers have written and read" (Madden, 1998, 3). Larson wrote that, "common members are not allowed to read newspapers, nor to read anything on Saturday and Sunday except the Bible...[and] it is forbidden to write any thing [sic] without the knowledge and approval of the elders. Every letter sent, or received, must be read to the elders" (as quoted in Madden, 1998, 24). Elkins, a fan of romance novels, was likewise frustrated with the intolerance Shaker leaders showed toward many types of reading. Shaker rooms might have Bibles, Shaker publications, a concordance, grammar, and dictionary, but little more in the way of reading material (Madden, 25). Isaac Newton

Youngs was desperate enough that his journal writings be private that he wrote in his own system of code. The control that drove him to this seems not to have been uniformly exercised, however, and, in general, did decrease as the nineteenth century wore on.

Until 1828, literary activities were the province of the upper echelon of Shaker society, and it was generally at their discretion that ordinary Shakers read, wrote, or learned anything beyond Shaker theology and the practical tasks laid out for them. That year through 1850, however, marked a period of increased personal writing by Believers and “ritualization of writing and reading practices” (Madden, 1998, 22). The leadership distributed blank books for use by community members in recording both their daily labor activities and accounts of their spiritual growth. This era saw a flourishing of Shaker creativity in hymn writing and “spirit drawing.” Shaker drawings from this time were said to be the products of ecstatic visions and are today highly valued as artistic objects. Apostate Hervey Elkins recalled that all of the Shaker youth were given journals in the 1830s and asked by the elders to use them for writing about religious matters (Madden, 23).

It was after 1850 that the Shakers began to embrace non-Shaker literature and to value knowledge about world history and current events. Canterbury society of the time was particularly progressive, subscribing to *The Scientific American*, *Phrenological Journal*, and *Life Illustrated* and keeping a library of about 3,000 volumes (Madden, 1998, 26). This library was composed primarily of books brought by joining members but was almost entirely free of works of fiction. Briggs wrote, “I do not recall a single

book of this kind; it was and always had been banished absolutely from the society. Yet naughtily we boys and young men now and then allowed ourselves to read the stories.” Of Canterbury Eldress Dorothy Durgin, he remembered that “she imposed no restriction upon herself in reading. She managed to get most of the leading novels of the times. She had quite a library of fiction, and sometimes loaned the books to those with whom in her opinion it was safe” (as quoted in Madden, 26). Sabbathday Lake Elder, Otis Sawyer, is said to have collected enough books to require him to catalog and label them. Madden notes that with this period came a “privatization of the reading act,” in that it became an individual and individualistic pursuit (Madden, 26).

Emiline Kimball, Canterbury Physician and nurse, was responsible for an obituary project that demonstrates changing Shaker attitudes toward literary endeavors, embellishments, the value of individuals in relation to the whole of the community, and the attitude toward and methods of record-keeping. Entitled *An Obituary Journal of Members connected with this society since the first opening of the gospel AD 1782; ten years before the gathering of the Church. Embracing the date of birth: the time of death, the age at that time; the disease; also a passing notice to each one*, the three-volume set memorialized all four hundred deceased members of the community with a poem and statistically significant details of their lives. The project, examined in detail in Madden’s *Bodies of Life*, was a major undertaking, requiring the eighty, primarily female, poets to uncover details of the lives of even long-dead and barely documented members.

Compiled in 1856, the Journal is telling in many ways. First, it is a non-essential, though major, project that probably would have been considered a frivolous use of time in earlier years. Second, Madden notes that the sentimental poems are in stark contrast to the earlier antipathy to anything not strictly utilitarian. Third, the project focuses on individuals whereas the early church required that members abandon individual desires and proclivities in favor of simplicity and uniform service to the community. Finally, the ordered structure of the document reflects Shaker principles, but Madden points out that the skilled indexing and chronological ordering are evidence of a high degree of literacy not intended by founding Shakers. Composing the Journal is also, according to Madden, an act of a society that is becoming conscious of both tapering membership and of itself as a historical subject (Madden, 1998, 133-134).

The years after 1850 were a time not only of varied reading among the Shakers but also of the publication of a great deal of literature by the Shakers for non-Shakers. The Shakers were responsible for a periodical from 1871-1899. First called *The Shaker*, it would be published under the subsequent titles: *Shaker and Shakeress*, *The Shaker Manifesto*, and *The Manifesto* (Stein, 1992, 261). While it did promote Shakerism, it also addressed myriad social issues, and the style and topics covered evince a highly literate staff of writers. Contributing Shaker authors, many of whom also penned their own monographs, discussed philosophy, the merits of Eastern religions, and issues in contemporary science, sometimes in relation to their faith and always with concern for the greater social good. For a publication distributed outside of Shaker communities,

there seems relatively little proselytizing in *The Shaker's* content as though the concern with bringing new members into the fold had waned.

According to Madden, the Shakers dealt with the decline in their numbers by reading and publishing. They revised their idea of the legacy they were to leave, offering their written faith in lieu of a living example of Zion. Madden wrote that, "In this period of numerical decline and theological shifts, inscribed texts achieved primacy as they replaced physical bodies." The increase in reading and writing acts "actually allows them to revise their theology so that they see Shakerism as continuing to grow rather than as in numerical decline" (Madden, 1998, 3). The Shaker story offers a complex ethnographic case study of the society's conception of information and literacy and the place of texts in Shaker communities. While Madden has written beautifully of the shifting Shaker attitudes toward reading and education, community differences in this area are yet to be fully explored, as is the effect of changing approaches to literacy on the actual physical organization of information in the communities' business and social administration.

Strategies to Collect and Preserve Community Information

The Shakers

Beyond their social effects, changing attitudes toward text and documentation affected the ways in which Shaker artifacts were collected and treated through time. In this way, Shaker history also provides a case study of how textual materials come to be preserved or lost and how the collecting and archival practices, both in and outside of

Shaker communities, produced the current historical record. Because literacy was considered unnecessary and a barrier to spiritual progress by early Shakers, the society's beginnings were not well documented and are today shrouded in mystery. The size of the communities and their industries led to thorough record keeping in the nineteenth century, however, and a large body of publications was born of Shakers' mindfulness of the need to spread their faith and to leave something of themselves. The Shakers and those interested in their history also became aware of the need to preserve their textual history.

The impulse to leave a textual legacy led Alonzo Giles Hollister to take up the mantle of first Shaker archivist in the late 19th century. Hollister used his private time to write and edit Shaker publications and took great pride in this role, though the society's leadership at times discouraged it, telling him, for instance, to refrain from buying books (Madden, 1998, 113). He helped to compile the first bibliography of Shaker literature and "spent an enormous amount of time collecting, copying, and preserving documents from the past" (Stein, 1992, 335). Hollister's were among the first efforts to create an historical rather than evangelical library, but his allegiances were to traditional Shakerism rather than to historical accuracy, as he apparently altered documents where they did not correspond with the history he wished to present (Madden, 7).

With the turn of the twentieth century, Shaker membership numbers continued to fall, and outside collectors became interested in the artifacts gathering dust on Shaker properties. Promising to save the Shaker past for posterity or offering to buy when funds

were much needed, they were able to secure items and sometimes long-term relationships with particular Shakers who were of like mind or in a position to sell. John Patterson MacLean put together a bibliography of Shaker literature in 1905 and became the distributor of Shaker publications to individuals and organizations like the Library of Congress. At the Library of Congress he helped to develop what was at the time the largest collection of Shaker artifacts outside of Shaker hands (Stein, 1992, 370). Soon after, Wallace H. Cathcart, with the Western Reserve Historical Society, began lobbying prominent Shaker and author Catherine Allen to develop a collection at his institution. He criticized the handling of the Shaker collection at the Library of Congress and convinced Allen of his affinity for Shaker theology. The resulting lengthy collaboration between the two yielded what is today the world's largest collection of Shaker artifacts. Allen wrote of her sense of obligation to help create such a collection, "Our history belongs to the nation and to the world and it is our bounden duty to use every reasonable means in having it preserved and perpetuated thro' historical libraries" (as quoted in Stein, 372).

John S. Williams, another of the early collectors of Shaker materials, opened a private museum, the Shaker Museum and Library in Old Chatham, New York in the 1940s. His primary Shaker contact was Emma King, who thanked him for his work, thanked God for him and promised him exclusive access to materials in her care at Hancock (Stein, 1992, 379). King had earlier dealt with the Western Reserve Historical Society but was unhappy with its approach to the items entrusted to it, which included selling them where it was deemed appropriate (Stein, 510). King's decision to place

items with Williams, a private collector, further fragmented the collection, though the materials have continued to be publicly available.

Perhaps the person most responsible for the Shaker's contemporary notoriety is antique dealer Edward Deming Andrews. He became aware of the collecting possibilities at Shaker villages in 1923 and for years after traveled with his wife, Faith, from one to another, getting to know Shakers, their history and the historical materials in their possession. Called "antique pilgrims" by some Shakers, the Andrews were able to acquire an impressive collection of manuscripts, books and general items of material culture over the next forty odd years and to buffer what were very difficult economic times for the society. Andrews wrote romanticized histories of the Shakers and generally fanned the flames of interest in all things Shaker, making a profit but also facilitating reconstruction efforts at defunct Shaker communities. He served as curator of the reconstructed Hancock site and oversaw the library there. Begun with books and manuscripts bought or donated by supporters, it now has a research and publications program and is complemented by a museum (Stein, 1992).

When the still-functioning Sabbathday Lake, Maine community decided to form a library, they found that, as society trustee Mildred Barker remarked, though she was "trying desperately" to find materials, they had little with which to build their collection (as quoted in Stein, 1992, 368). Theodore Johnson, a librarian who became interested in the society, helped to organize the new library in the late 1950s and later became director of it and the village museum and, in 1961, editor of the new *Shaker Quarterly*. Though

not a Shaker he remained a prominent figure in the community and advisor to those remaining society members until his death in 1986. The library currently serves visitors, students, and scholars (Stein, 386). Access to the Sabbathday Lake archives, however, has become a point of contention between the society and researchers. Barker contends that it is private property and use of it is necessarily at the discretion of the community to whom it belongs. Helen Upton argued the point of access for interested scholars in correspondence with Barker: “The Shaker era is such a significant part of Amer. social & religious history that we believe there should be every opportunity for its study” (as quoted in Stein, 508). Efforts to control the historical record are a factor in contemporary studies, as has been true in earlier research and as is common in historical study.

Shakers left behind theological treatises, membership records, land deeds, surveys, maps, financial information, letters, diaries, journals, daily log-books, autobiographies, essays, hymnals, textbooks, recipes, prescriptions, books, pamphlets, broadsides, litigation information, and information concerning their charitable activities, and a large body of these materials are publicly accessible. In addition to the materials on display at Shaker community museum sites, these and other bits of Shaker material culture are housed in various repositories, including the Shaker Museum and Library in Old Chatham, NY, the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum in Delaware, which includes the Edward Andrews Shaker library, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Warren County Historical Society in Lebanon, Ohio, and the American Museum at Bath in Great Britain. Shaker artifacts are also still being sold into private hands (Stein, 402). The study of Shaker information

organization was facilitated by the preservation of materials through the efforts of Shakers, collectors, and enthusiasts over the years but was made difficult by the disjointed nature of many of the collections. Shaker collections today reflect the society members' desperation as they fell into serious decline and the enthusiasm of those hoping for a piece of the Shaker past.

The Harmonists

Unlike Shaker textual artifacts, which were held by a number of individuals in various communities, the Harmony society's records passed as a whole into the custody of a single society member. This difference allowed the collection to remain almost entirely intact, but it also meant that the high stakes of caring properly for such an important body of records were very apparent to those interested in the community's history and preservation. The archival and preservation methods most suitable became a point of long-standing debate.

Harmony society founder George Rapp preached his own brand of Christianity in the late eighteenth century until he and eight hundred of his followers traveled to America in 1800. In Pennsylvania, they established the communities, Harmony and Economy, and came also to be known in America as, Harmonists, Harmonites, Rappites, and Economites. The Harmonists lived celibately for eighty years, and the Harmony community is now a living museum. For roughly the first two decades of the society's existence, they followed the record keeping practices of their contemporaries, binding documents together and organizing them by year. From 1829 to 1877, they noted the

record type, client or sender's name, and date and grouped them by year and record type and then alphabetically by client or sender's name. From 1878 to 1893 records were primarily affixed into books, and following 1893 they were haphazardly boxed (Dructor, 1983, 4). The records now available to researchers have been somewhat diminished and damaged by intentional destruction or alteration, the efforts of preservationists themselves, and by use, particularly in resolving legal matters involving the society.

It is known that the Harmony leadership chose to destroy the record of properties contributed by each member in 1818, but most of the loss of the community's records occurred in the twentieth century. An inventory taken soon after the society closed in 1905 is available and gives an indication of what has been lost (Dructor, 1983, 5). Methods of preserving Harmony records and making them accessible became points of contention between interested parties soon after the closing of the society. John S. Duss was the society's only surviving trustee and, as such, considered the records his personal property. Intending to write his memoirs, he was anxious that Harmony's history be his to tell and so limited access to the records. Archivists and historians negotiated with Duss for years over access, stewardship, and ownership of the records, and a later curator of the collection would report that he was asked by Duss to destroy particular records that Duss found, for unknown reasons, objectionable. While the curator refused, Duss may have destroyed or altered the records himself before turning them over, and others with access to the collection may have been approached (Dructor, 9).

The records were placed for ten years beginning in the 1930s with the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (HSWP). During this time records were allowed to be taken home for study by scholars like Harmony Society Historical Association director John M. Tate. This not only subjected records to unknown environments and use but also resulted in confusion about custody. In 1931 Duss required that all materials dealing specifically with Harmony be returned to him but allowed that items related to general U.S. or Pennsylvania history could be left on temporary loan with the HSWP. Two years later he became displeased with the HSWP and moved the nineteen thousand item collection to the Pennsylvania Historical Commission (PHC). The General State Authority and Works Progress Administration (WPA) began to take interest in Harmony society historical projects in the mid-1930s, and the WPA took an inventory survey of the collection.

Duss at last sold the collection to the PHC for a dollar in return for assurances that the community would become a state park and be restored and the collection would be known as the Duss Memorial Exhibit. A 1937 WPA Museum Extension Project set out to clean, sort, arrange, and catalog the collection and, for this project, the PHC was also granted custody of records held by the HSWP (Dructor, 1983, 7). Margaret Lindsay had charge of the project but by 1940 was busy both discouraging the implementation of a planned Historical Survey Project that duplicated the WPA effort and dealing personally with charges of communist sympathizing. The WPA project was widely criticized by those in the Shaker and historical archive communities, and Duss claimed that those working on the project had pocketed a substantial number of Harmony documents.

Harmony Society scholar, Dr. Karl J. R. Arndt wrote that “all the vast number of papers had been filed with much care and at the cost of much labor in alphabetical order by author or subject and in chronological order within that order...In spite of some errors the extensive project was well-managed...[and] established a very good working order for the Archives.” In spite of this evaluation, however, the WPA records were deemed worthless and destroyed in 1949 (Dructor, 9).

Dr. Lawrence S. Thurman was appointed first curator of the collection in 1949. He commissioned the “Eddy Report” by State Records Officer Henry Howard Eddy, who evaluated the collection and recommended archival measures to be taken. The implications of Eddy’s pronouncement on the collection would be debated for some time afterward by the historical records community. He wrote that, “the present order is good, although it is not necessarily the original system of filing. It is, rather, the product resulting from sorting and sifting by lawyers and other investigators over a half century, plus the activities of numerous WPA workers. The present order has no significance which need be greatly respected, but it is probably good enough to serve....The present arrangement needs no overhaul but merely completion and perfection...” (as quoted in Dructor, 1983, 9).

The existing order, many felt, was hardly any order at all, and some argued that the collection contained misidentified and improperly categorized materials and that efforts at cataloging as the collection changed hands over the years had resulted in an incomprehensible system of subject headings. In 1953 a committee of consultants was

engaged to decide if an entirely new system needed to be implemented. The committee concluded that it did and recommended that simple, broad categories, like letters, receipts, contracts, etc. be used to group materials. In 1961 Dr. Thurman announced that he had reorganized and recataloged the collection in the manner of the original Rapp library. Then in 1966 further processing was completed, and the collection was designated the Old Economy Papers, with two subgroups, the Harmony Society Papers, 1770-1906, and the John Duss Papers, 1906-1951. Extraneous cataloging information was thrown out and four series were identified – correspondence, accounts, legal papers and miscellaneous.

In 1965 a short-lived microfilming project was begun under the auspices of a new curator, Daniel B. Reibel. The project was aborted within three months because of problems with the organization of materials and poor filming by project staff. In 1977 The Harmonie Associates, Inc, a local historical group, received a \$25,000 grant from the NEH “to catalogue, index, microfilm and publish a finding aid to the collection” (Dructor, 1983, 11). The terms of the grant were changed that year to simply “organization and inventorying,” but still the effort failed due to inadequate staffing and the underestimated complexity of the collection and project (Dructor, 11).

In 1978 after being placed in the custody of the State Archives on the recommendation of the state archivist, the collection was once again evaluated and deemed improperly arranged. The evaluation also pointed to misidentified items,

chronological inaccuracies, and incomplete legal records. Approximately twenty-five volumes appearing in the 1966 survey were reported missing in this evaluation.

In 1979 the NEH awarded the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) a two-year grant in the amount of \$72,308 “to arrange and describe the series according to modern archival techniques and then to microfilm them” and to produce a finding aid that would “provide access to the collection at the series rather than subject level” (Dructor, 1983, 12). The PHMC tried to avoid the “elaborate schemes of indexing, processing and conservation” planned in the first NEH grant project, but their project still went over schedule and budget, and a supplementary five months and \$10,735 were added by the funding agency. The project successfully filmed 719 volumes and 172 boxes of documents or sixty-nine percent of the collection. Not filmed were sermons, poetry, school exercise books, real estate volumes, and postal materials.

It is fortunate that those involved in the decisions that determined the disposition, organization, and preservation treatment of the collection recognized the value of documenting that process. Tracing the post-society history of the Harmony records is instructive for librarians and archivists in that it illustrates the degree to which personalities influence collection building. It also points to the importance of skilled project management. This lesson is timely as digital projects are taken on with a learning curve perhaps similar to, if even more complex, than that of early microfilm. The history of Harmony microfilming efforts suggests the importance of full appreciation for the medium’s potential technological limitations and for the necessity of extensive

preliminary testing and planning. Similar research into documented preservation and archival processing of other utopian collections might prove helpful in learning and teaching about proper management of historical collections and the projects that involve them.

Rugby

Though it did not receive the level of active preservation shown to Harmony artifacts, the Rugby community's library has remained to tell a remarkably complete story of its own and its community's history. Founder Thomas Hughes was a prominent figure in England before coming to Tennessee in 1880 with a plan to solve one of his homeland's social ills – the displacement of the second sons of nobility in favor of the first born. He was troubled by the predicament of their disinheritance coupled with the social unacceptability of their finding employment. His aim was to create a genteel community where such men could work without shame. The community was established at Rugby, seventy miles north of Knoxville. At its peak it had sixty major buildings and three hundred and fifty residents.

A committee formed in the first days of Rugby set out to put together a free public library from donated books and periodicals. Donations from British and American publishers soon amounted to a 7,000 volume collection consisting of 1870s and 1880s novels, “period books on social mores, foreign travel, science, and sports; phrenological journals and issues of *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*; and its earliest holding, a

1687 Amsterdam edition of a work by Lactantius” (Eberhart, 1998, 83). Called the Thomas Hughes Free Public Library, the facility opened on October 5, 1882, and a “straitlaced German expatriate named Eduard Bertz” was appointed librarian and given the task of cataloging the collection (Eberhart, 83). He sought the advice of William Frederick Poole, founder of the American Library Association, at the ALA’s Annual Conference in Cincinnati and chose to use a “weirdly modified version of Charles A. Cutter’s classification system that depended on the order in which a book sat on the shelf” (Eberhart, 84).

Hughes’s social position and contacts eased the early days that other communities often found so difficult, but the leisurely habits of the community members, harsh climate, poor soil, and a typhoid outbreak combined to force Rugby into decline. Library circulation records show that the large collection of novels, unlike practical books on farming, circulated frequently. Hughes himself was also frequently absent from the community, and it suffered from resulting lack of management and poor record keeping. After twelve years, the society disbanded, though a small group lived on at Rugby as an unincorporated community.

The library fell into disuse after the decline of the community, only being taken advantage of occasionally by local schoolchildren. It and the church were maintained by Will and Sarah Walton, two children of colonists, until their deaths in the 1950s. By the time of the Waltons’ deaths most of the buildings had been lost. The community’s saving grace came in the form of a local 16-year-old who recognized the historical value of the

buildings and their contents and petitioned the Tennessee Historical Commission in 1964 to take steps toward its preservation. Having gotten Rugby on the preservation map, Brian Stagg undertook the work of restoring the library, the church and the Hughes home and formed the Rugby Restoration Association before dying in 1976. His sister Barbara continued his work, overseeing the repainting of the library's exterior in original gray and red and the restoration of its swinging, green-baize-covered front doors, including original gilt lettering, in 1979 (Sweeny-Justice, 2001).

The collection as it was in the nineteenth century, including original spine labels, catalog slips, and circulation records, remain for study today. No twentieth century books were ever added to the library. The circulation information has benefited local genealogical study and could provide an interesting basis for sociological research of Rugby reading habits. The library was never wired for electricity and is even today heated only sparingly. The area's remoteness and natural environmental conditions, in addition to structural elements like a triple-thickness floor and vented roof that allows warm air to escape, have facilitated the collection's preservation. Based upon a preservation evaluation instigated by Barbara Stagg, a dehumidifier, a Halon firecontrol system, and ultraviolet shielding on the windows were added. Efforts are underway to create an online catalog of the collection (Sweeny-Justice, 2000; Eberhart, 1998).

The Rugby example demonstrates the often capricious nature of preservation. As is so often the case, benign neglect proved a successful preservation strategy – at least for a time. It was a fortunate combination of the community's social and physical

environments and the timely efforts of interested individuals that ensured the long-term preservation of the Rugby library collection. The library itself remains to provide genealogical evidence as well as a window into the intentions and practices of the Rugby leadership and citizenry.

The Moravians

While the previous examples have dealt with the collection and preservation of artifacts from defunct communities, the Moravians show an active community's care of its textual record. The Unitas Fratrum, generally known as the Moravians, began as a Protestant religious group in 15th century Europe. Believing in communalism, non-violence, and a responsibility to spread their faith, the Moravians faced persecution for centuries in Europe. They were eventually able, however, to conduct missionary expeditions to Greenland, South Africa, and the Virgin Islands and to establish communities in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. In the 1950s U.S. preservationists became interested in Moravian sites, but the Moravians were concerned with preservation long before.

The Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania contain records from 1740 to the present. A mandate issued by Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, head of the Moravian Church in Europe and the Americas, to maintain detailed records of the society gave reason to establish a stewarding institution. The Archive today holds over a million pages of handwritten documents, including "the records of industrial, commercial, civic, ecclesiastical, educational, medical, and musical institutions as well as personal diaries

and correspondence, ethnographic materials, prints, broadsides, photographs, and maps” (“MAB-Resources,” 2003). Today there is also an associated research library of 1,600 titles, including many 18th century imprints. The archives holds diaries of Moravian communities from all over the world, the personal papers of Moravian leaders, church registers including demographic information, and information related to the communities and areas where the Moravians have conducted missionary expeditions (Barnes, 2001).

Dating from 1753, the Moravian Archives in Salem, North Carolina is older than the United States Archives as well as any of the state archives. Their holdings are related to the Southern Province of the Moravian church and include personal and congregational diaries dating from 1753 (Southern Province Agencies and Outreach, 2003). The Archives recently partnered with the North Carolina Division of Cultural Resources to publish the 12th volume of *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*. Still today Moravian pastors submit materials from their church on the first Thursday of October, Provincial Archives Day, to continue the church record (“Archival Facts,” 2003).

A 1999 federal Library Services Technology Act grant awarded by the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Libraries to the Bethlehem Area Public Library and the Reeves Library, at the Moravian College and Theological Seminary has allowed the creation of the Bethlehem Digital Library Project. Selected key primary source materials from 1741 to 1844, the founding years of the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania community, have been digitized and published to the internet, and additional grants have been awarded to

expand the project. Documents to be digitized may be written in German and English; translations into both languages are planned (Bethlehem Digital History Project, 2001).

Moravian archival materials reflect both the need to know the goings on of various widely-dispersed communities in order to maintain unity of culture and practice and the strength of the relationship between church leadership and individual communities. The establishment of archives would seem also to be the mark of a mature community, one that, though similar in many ways to other utopian societies, was begun earlier than most, survived its early growing pains, established itself, and become aware of itself as a historical body. The archives also appear well suited to the central missionary impulse of the society, providing record of the social context in various locations and the experiences, relative successes or failures, of each missionary group. Publicly funded, the digital library project makes no claim of a missionary intent but does indicate an active desire to communicate and encourage research into the society's historical background.

Conclusion

From fledgling to full-fledged, utopian communities in America have left the results of their social experiments to be pieced together. Rich in sociological value because of their experimental and isolationist nature, the hundreds of utopian communities that have tried to make it in America suggest intriguing information histories.ⁱⁱⁱ Rediscovery of their varied stories speaks to issues of societal governance and cohesion on multiple levels, and one of these is information. Tracing the thread of

information though each of these communities, researchers may find how each one regarded its worth, managed it, how they and others after them saved it, and how information policies shaped and were shaped by communities. The information histories of the New Harmony, Icaria, Brook Farm, Ruskin, Shaker, Harmony, Rugby, and Moravian communities suggest the kinds of stories contained in the documentary history of America's utopian societies.

The founders of New Harmony, Icaria, and Brook Farm all planned to achieve their social goals through the education of children and adults alike, and they used progressive educational philosophies to attract new members to their communities. They differed, however, in their levels of investment toward executing those theories. The extent to which they met or altered their goals for education and information provision over time is a subject that bears directly upon the cultural study of information in society. How the unrealized educational objectives of New Harmony and Icaria seem to have resulted in a disaffected populace, but despite its educational success, Brook Farm's members faced their own doubts about the community's future. Circumstance brought the society to an early end before the long-term social effects of its accomplishments could be gauged. Future research might further explore the paths leading to the different results achieved by these three societies whose initial aims were so similar.

Attitudes toward literacy and policies regarding information access were as liberal at Ruskin as they were restrictive in Shaker communities, but both their initial positions on these issues were tested in time. The ideologically diverse Ruskin community invited

students to follow their own interests educationally and to explore even the radical titles in the community library, but they found that their permissiveness did have bounds. In a period of social contentiousness, some information was deemed inappropriate for inclusion in the library or for publication by or around the community. The Shakers, on the other hand, at first considered literacy and textual information unnecessary and undesirable, but as their society grew they accepted the necessity of publishing, providing, and keeping information. Both examples illustrate ways in which information policy evolves with social circumstance.

The Shaker, Harmony, Rugby, and Moravian vignettes show the processes by which materials are collected and preserved and the present archival collections are built. Illustrating the way that individuals and historical conditions shape collections, the transition of active Shaker communities to groups of artifacts offers a valuable historical study of collection building and would bear further exploration in still greater detail. Efforts to preserve Harmony's documentary record demonstrate the way that individuals and groups interact to make preservation and archival decisions and the effect that these decisions have on collections. In contrast with the heavily acted upon Shaker and Harmony artifacts, the intact preservation of the Rugby library facilities and collection is an example of the utility of benign neglect, particularly when it is coupled with timely active preservation measures. While the Rugby collection benefited from abandonment, however, the Moravian archives have thrived through efforts to collect and preserve information that will be of use to them as an active society. As preservation methods evolve along with changing forms of information, it is worth bearing in mind both the

effects of preservation decisions on archival collections and examples of past successful preservation strategies.

Learning from past historical paths and policies may be wise as digital systems require information professionals to change rules of information ownership, access, and provision. Ethnoinformatic research may help to provide historical and cultural guidance through the process of policy change, adding the lessons of history to scholarly theories of the social implications of information policy. It is not only information professionals who may learn from ethnoinformatic study; students of culture may also find that a society's information policy and organizational structure can inform cultural research. While study of the role of information may be conducted in any society, the nature of utopian experiments makes them particularly useful as test cases. The ethnoinformatic exploration of America's early utopian communities might also prove instructive in the approach toward other intentional or liminal communities, like contemporary communitarian movements and refugee, migrant, or otherwise transient societies, where new cultures are constructed and information practices are established according to need. Just how, why, and to what effect their information is put to use, is a matter of cultural as well as practical interest.

Notes

ⁱ Stille writes particularly of differences in the concepts of original and copy between the East and West. There is in China, for instance, a strong and respected tradition of copying works of art. These copies are produced by respected artists and are considered original. Stille surmises that this tradition may have grown out of the inability to preserve fragile wooden structures and works of art on paper in ancient China. This cultural difference has resulted in misunderstanding in cooperative agreements between museums and is a source of confusion for Western tourists visiting historical exhibits and finding the same items at multiple institutions (2003).

ⁱⁱ Stein wrote, for example, that, “education would become one of the most corrosive forces within the society” (161).

ⁱⁱⁱ Some communities whose histories suggest worthiness for further ethnoinformatic inquiry are Pennsylvania’s Ephrata Colony and the utopian experiments of the Puget Sound area. Ephrata was responsible for a major colonial printing operation, wrote in a unique form of German calligraphy called *frakturschriften* (broken writing), and burned some of their early texts. Much of their history is still unknown, but their approach to printed information seems worthy of investigation (Mohn, 2001).

Likewise, descriptions of the utopian communities of the Puget Sound area, which was known for its reformist and radical tendencies in the late nineteenth century, indicate information histories worthy of further exploration. The working class organizers of The Puget Sound Co-operative Colony hoped to see their community grow to include schools, lecture halls, music halls, and large libraries, but they only managed a small collection of books and a short-lived lecture and discussion group. The socialist Equality Colony aimed to convert the state to socialism and make their own community an intellectual haven. Conversation and lively debate on social issues was common, and forums on social topics were held weekly. A small community library at Equality consisted of books donated by supporters. The thirty-three publications held by the library at Freeland dealt primarily with socialism. The collection was turned over to the University of Washington in 1968 (Lewarne, 1975, 127). Members the Home community held lectures, classes, clubs, reading groups, and other educational programs for children and adults alike and even planned to open a university. Home offered instruction in a variety of subjects, from oriental philosophies to Esperanto (Lewarne, 1975, 200). In 1899 the community began putting together a library from donated materials, and a library association assembled a year later (Lewarne, 1975, 196). The information histories of these communities might be studied individually or as a group.

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