University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

10-1-2013

Llewellyn Castle

Gary R. Entz

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples

Entz, Gary R., "Llewellyn Castle" (2013). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters.* Paper 225.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/225

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Llewellyn Castle

Buy the Book

Buy the Book

Llewellyn Castle

A Worker's Cooperative on the Great Plains

GARY R. ENTZ

University of Nebraska Press Lincoln and London

Buy the Book

© 2013 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Entz, Gary R.
Llewellyn Castle : a worker's cooperative on the Great Plains / Gary R. Entz.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8032-4539-6 (hardback)
1. Workingmen's Cooperative Colony (Kansas)—History. 2. Collective settlements—Kansas—Nemaha County—History—19th century. 3. Cooperative societies—Kansas—Nemaha County—History—19th century. 4. O'Brien, James Bronterre, 1805-1864. 5. Nemaha County (Kansas)—History—19th century. I. Title.
HX656.W67E67 2013
307.7709781332—dc23 2013021875

Set in Minion by Laura Wellington.

Buy the Book

For Ocie

Buy the Book

Buy the Book

When you allow the justice of private property in land, you justify everything the landed interest do, both on their own estates and in the Government, for the country is theirs; and what you call oppression, is only their acting consistently with their interest.

—THOMAS SPENCE, *Pigs' Meat*, 1796

Buy the Book

Buy the Book

Contents

List of Maps xi
Preface xiii

Introduction: Llewellyn Castle 1

1. The Sorrow of the Land: Bronterre O'Brien and the National Reform League 23

2. High Moral Chivalry: The Mutual Land, Emigration, and Cooperative Colonization Company 62

3. An Honest Social State: The Workingmen's Cooperative Colony 100

4. Moral Intoxication: Frederick Wilson 134

5. Hold Up the Lamp of Hope: John Radford 167

Conclusion: The O'Brienites 209

Appendix 227
Notes 233
Selected Bibliography 249
Index 259

Buy the Book

Buy the Book

Maps

Kansas 17
London 47
Nemaha County 93

Buy the Book

Buy the Book

Preface

The Workingmen's Cooperative Colony — also known as Llewellyn Castle — was an obscure communal utopia that played a role in American history far greater than its size would suggest. It was an underfunded, struggling operation through its brief existence, and today its faded memory has been swept away along with so much other ephemeral detritus that America's ancestors left behind on the landscape of the American West. The few recollections remaining of the colony are shrouded in local folklore and reflect little factual history. Nevertheless, the settlement was a real place and represents an instance when a group of marginalized people challenged the status quo and attempted to demonstrate the feasibility of radical, intellectual ideas in a practical setting. It was a remarkable social experiment that resonated well beyond the life of the colony.

There have been few scholarly attempts to study the colonization efforts of Bronterre O'Brien's followers in Kansas. It is not surprising. No one directly involved with the colony and none of the colonists' immediate descendants thought its records and annals worth preserving. A few documents and newspaper reports did survive, but they are fragmentary and widely scattered across two countries. The type of ferret work necessary to uncover, unravel, and piece them back together is daunting. Additionally, because the colony was located in a remote part of northeastern Kansas and tagged with the romanticized name of Llewellyn Castle, it became relegated to the realm of historical oddity rather than a sub-

Buy the Book

ject for serious study. Few researchers have even acknowledged its existence.

I first became interested in the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony when searching for a dissertation topic at the University of Utah. Admittedly, the linked name of Llewellyn Castle caught my eye, and the idea that someone had the ability to build a castle on the plains was intriguing. The castle proved to be a chimera. However, my interest in labor and communal history was paramount, and the working-class nature of the colony gave it much deeper roots in the struggle for human dignity than any mere architectural curiosity ever could. The colony name appeared within a handful of historical listings of communal utopias, many of which had question marks next to the dates of its existence. I made an overview of the settlement part of a dissertation that compared one example each of a political pragmatic colony, religious charismatic perfectionist colony, and a cooperative colony whose members worked together out of need or mutual agreement.

It became clear as the research progressed that there was much more to the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony than its brief existence as a political pragmatic settlement. The men and women who built the colony inherited a distinguished intellectual heritage and brought some significant concepts with them. These were beliefs and theories formulated in Chartist-era England, but ideas that any scholar of Kansas history and the Populist era would find familiar. Therefore, I continued researching the group members in order to collect their background histories and post-colony careers. The result is the story of Llewellyn Castle, from its Chartist origins to the final dissemination of its political ideas in Great Britain and the United States.

This book is unusual because it spans several distinct fields of historical study, including Chartism, British socialism, immigration, American communal studies, and late nineteenth-century labor unrest in the United States. It is a necessary overlap because the men and women who financed, built, and lived on the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony experienced and actively participated in

Buy the Book

all these arenas. My own field of expertise is in the Great Plains and American West, so the process of researching British labor history and exploring the extraordinary depth of the subject has been incredibly rewarding. Nevertheless, this remains the story of a band of British laborers who saw hope and the promise of a better life as immigrants in Kansas. They were idealists and leaders in the struggle for human rights and human dignity.

Throughout the process of research and writing there have been a number of people who encouraged, assisted, and stood by me. The creative process grows with nurturing, and I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who helped me get to this point.

This book could not have been completed without guidance from both sides of the Atlantic. In the United Kingdom I am indebted to the experienced staffs of several public institutions. The National Archives at Kew; the British Library's departments of printed books and manuscripts; the British Library newspaper collection at Colindale; and the Senate House Library of the University of London. In the United States I am indebted to the accomplished staffs of a number of institutions. The Kansas Historical Society; the Nebraska State Historical Society; the Nemaha County Historical Society; the University of Michigan, Special Collections Library; the California State Archives; the Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and the Office of the County Clerk, Nemaha County, Kansas. Additionally, several libraries came to my aid whenever I needed to use interlibrary loan or required help in finding an obscure item. These include the talented staffs of the Marriot Library, University of Utah; the Mantz Library and Archives, Bethel College, Kansas; and the Richard J. Brown Library, Nicolet College, Wisconsin. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to librarians Susan Taylor, Jill Brax, and Ray Santee. These three helped me locate numerous materials and made the Miller Library at McPherson College a collegial and inspiring place for study. They understood how learning emanates from an open exchange of ideas and endeavored to maintain the integrity of a genuine academic culture in the face of obscurant austerity. Their contributions are not forgotten.

Buy the Book

There are a number of colony descendants, some of whom have provided direct and indirect assistance for this work. These include Roy R. Bell, C. Rex Molineaux, Scott Suther, and Charles D. Terry. Of the colony descendants, I am particularly indebted to Debbie Osorio, John Radford's great-great granddaughter. The family information she provided helped tremendously in my understanding of Radford and what drove him in his quest for social justice.

Over the years there have been many individuals who assisted, motivated, and inspired me as friends and support. Some of these include Keith Sprunger, James Juhnke, and Marion Deckert of Bethel College, Kansas; Jacqueline Walker, Chong-kun Yoon, Raymond Hyser, J. Chris Arndt, and Michael Galgano of James Madison University, Virginia; Robert Goldberg, Edward Davies, Eric Hinderaker, Wesely Sasaki-Uemura, Ronald Smelser, and Dean L. May of the University of Utah. In addition, Tom Halliburton of McPherson College and Charles Sackrey of Bucknell University read and critiqued portions of the manuscript. Both offered valuable insight and useful suggestions that helped clarify my own thought.

Two people deserve special mention. Andrew Whitehead, editor of BBC World Service News, was the first scholar to give serious consideration to Bronterre O'Brien's followers in Kansas. His initial examination of the topic revealed many misconceptions about the settlers and opened the door to further inquiry. Since then he has been fully supportive of my own research, helping with a number of sources and taking the time to read the entire manuscript. It has been a privilege to know and work with him. Ocie Kilgus of Nicolet College has been the most supportive of all. She has stood by my side throughout this process, kept me focused, and critiqued the manuscript many times. She is the love of my life. I could not have completed this project without her.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Matthew Bokovoy, the members of the peer review committee, and the entire staff of the University of Nebraska Press. Their insightful suggestions have helped me think of new possibilities and moved the manuscript forward in a meaningful way.

Buy the Book

Introduction

Llewellyn Castle

John T. Bristow was born on December 31, 1861, north of Nashville, Tennessee, in the town of Clarksville. As the American Civil War ended in 1865, Bristow's parents, William and Martha, migrated west to northeastern Kansas to escape the hardships of Reconstruction. By 1869 the Bristows had settled in the soporific little village of Wetmore along the Central Branch, Union Pacific Railroad, where William plied his trade as a tanner and cobbler. John grew up in Nemaha County, Kansas, and by his teens was no stranger to the twenty-six-mile Star mail route connecting Wetmore with the county seat of Seneca. In 1876 the young Bristow applied to deliver mail on the route despite being more than a year shy of the requisite age of sixteen to serve as a mail carrier. After receiving the recommendation of local delivery contractor Willis Coburn, postmaster Alvin McCreery turned a blind eye to the fact that Bristow did not meet the age specifications and swore the youngster into the postal service.[1]

Nemaha County was a quiet land, and McCreery had little cause for concern. In the 1850s, immense wagon trains from the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell had lumbered across the area en route from Leavenworth to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, and in 1860 Pony Express riders had passed nearby as they galloped northward to the Marysville station. In 1862 the Confederate deserter Samuel Clemens had taken an overland stage ride through the locality on his way west to the Nevada Territory.[2] All travelers had passed safely

Buy the Book

through the sparsely populated region. In Bristow's own words, all that lay between Wetmore and Seneca was "prairie grass and wild roses and more prairie grass."[3]

The appointment of a fourteen-year-old Wetmore boy as a back country postal carrier would have been an unremarkable and long-forgotten episode were it not for the fact that many years later Bristow became a journalist and remembered, indeed, that something other than prairie vegetation had once broken the monotony of his mail route. Five miles on the path northwest of Wetmore an unusual edifice stood amidst the looping whorls of prairie wind and swaying grass: a weatherworn eight-room structure that an immigrant band of English settlers had constructed in 1869 to function as the communal home of a cooperative colony. The colony itself had been designed to serve as a pragmatic model of social and economic reform in the American West. To the wide-eyed young mail carrier, this bucolic building and the socialist utopia it symbolized made a lasting impression. Even though the colony had ceased practical operations in 1874, the former dormitory retained a striking presence on the open prairie. Bristow had attended school with some of the colony children, so the old house came as no surprise, but he nonetheless found it difficult to come to grips with the collectivist spirit that the solitary structure represented. Fifty-three years later, long after the aging dwelling had fallen into wrack and ruin and disappeared from the landscape, an elderly Bristow continued ruminating over his adolescent memories of the place. Putting his pen to work, he wrote a memoir that commemorated the building — and the colony it represented — by christening it with a flamboyant title it had never known during its existence: Llewellyn Castle. The name, a whimsical designation reflecting Bristow's boyhood imagination, was manufactured out of whole cloth, as evidenced by the response his published reminiscence received from newspaperman George Adriance of Seneca. After reading Bristow's tale, a skeptical Adriance remarked: "I had never heard of Llewellyn Castle before, although quite familiar with the English colony which settled in the Goff and Wetmore area."[4]

Buy the Book

The abandoned settlement that Adriance referred to as the English colony was familiar to people living in Nemaha County because the children and grandchildren of many of the original colonists still made their homes in the region. Although Bristow was the first to reference the settlement as Llewellyn Castle and became its most important chronicler, previous authors had kept memories of the colony alive. These initial outlines allowed Bristow to flesh out his own story with unacknowledged nuggets of information. The earliest account appeared only nine years after the experiment collapsed. In 1883, historian William G. Cutler produced a massive multivolume history of the state of Kansas that included a rundown of the sundry towns and communities in the various counties, including Nemaha County. At the time Cutler was preparing his history, many of the original colonists were still living in the region, and a few had become locally noteworthy enough to rate biographical profiles within Cutler's community vignettes. Cutler focused his tome on boosterism and had no interest in providing a detailed overview of a failed venture, but since a number of former colonists had risen to positions of importance in their adopted home, he credited the colony as a factor in bringing the English settlers to Nemaha County. According to Cutler's summation, in 1868 John Radford and James Murray formed the "Mutual Land, Emigration, and Co-operative Colonization Company (Limited)" in London, England. Through the sale of £1 shares in the company, the group purchased a 729-acre tract of land in Harrison Township, Nemaha County. The colony began operations in 1869 with the arrival of six families from England who were expected to lease the land directly from the company. Radford came to Kansas in 1874 as the organizing agent for the settlement, but the grasshopper plague and cheap land for sale nearby defeated the colony. Cutler noted that "Mr. Wilson, a liberal-minded English gentleman," took the land off the hands of the "embarrassed colonists."[5]

Cutler's brief abstract was buried within Radford's biographical profile, which itself was a nondescript entry inside the community sketch for the town of Wetmore. The story was incomplete and re-

Buy the Book

mained largely unknown outside of local anecdotes. It was another thirty-three years before local newspaper editor Ralph Tennal provided an equally brief but slightly different description. Born in 1872, Tennal was a native Kansan. He had no connection to the colony but possessed a keen interest in the historical record of his home county. In 1916 he published an exhaustive account of Nemaha County that included the story of the English colony. While Tennal was interested in the entire scope of Nemaha County history, the failed colony was a minor codicil to what he saw as a narrative that celebrated progress. Therefore, rather than devote an inordinate amount of time to locating records and collecting the remembrances of as many living participants as possible, Tennal invited one individual to chronicle the colony story for the entire group. The former colonist he chose was John Fuller.

In 1916 Fuller was eighty-one years of age and an esteemed resident in the town of Seneca. He was a master tin and coppersmith and the longtime proprietor of a prosperous metalworking shop. Fuller also was an accomplished author who in 1889 composed a comprehensive treatise on his métier entitled the *Art of Coppersmithing*. Immediately upon release, the distinguished work became the definitive text on the coppersmith's craft and has remained unsurpassed in the field. Local townsfolk recognized Fuller's intellectual achievements and acknowledged him with the honorific title "Sage of Seneca." There was more to Fuller, however, than his abilities as an artisan and scholar. Born and raised in England, in 1870 he and his family emigrated from London to become members of the English colony, the colony Bristow would later identify as Llewellyn Castle, although Fuller never referred to the settlement by that name. Fuller's reflections were about his own family's experiences and a troubled colonization effort that failed to live up to the grandiose promises of its founders.[6]

According to Tennal's narrative of Fuller's reminiscences, in 1870 London-area workingmen congregated at 18 Denmark Street in Soho to discuss possible ways to alleviate working-class grievances. Among the group were three leaders: John Radford, Jim Murray, and Char-

Buy the Book

ley Murray, who spoke to the assemblage about plans for a colony near Goff, Kansas. Edward Grainger Smith, who managed the colonization plan, was another "promoter and prime mover" of the endeavor. Membership in the "Mutual Land Immigration Operative [*sic*] Colonization Company, Limited" came through the purchase of £1 shares (to a maximum of fifteen shares) in the colonization company. Plans for the colony called for a fourteen-room communal house, and shareholding members had the right to lease land from the company once property had been obtained in Kansas. Six families originally settled the colony, with twenty more following soon thereafter. Overall, Tennal estimated that a total of fifty families arrived. However, the project ultimately failed because there was no incentive to cooperate communally. In Tennal's words, "Anyone could have Kansas land almost for the taking at that time."[7]

Tennal's narrative of the English colony followed Fuller's recollections, and for that reason the sequence of events was incomplete and riddled with inaccuracies. Tennal had sought out Fuller precisely because of the elderly man's reputation as an author and intellectual. In truth, Fuller had not been part of the colony project at its inception and could relate little firsthand information about the company's underlying principles or the colony's *raison d'être*. The reality was that he had been little more than a transient part of the collective. Born in Horsham, Sussex County, Fuller had apprenticed in the town of Dorking in Surrey County. He did not relocate to London until after the movement to plant a cooperative colony in the American West had already begun, and he had never been an active participant in the colony's parent organization. Fuller purchased shares in the company primarily for the opportunity to migrate to the United States, and he abandoned the colony less than a year after his arrival. Because of the brevity and peripatetic nature of Fuller's experiences, Tennal's description added little to Cutler's earlier text and left more questions than answers concerning the colony.[8]

In 1931, fifteen years after the appearance of Tennal's book, John T. Bristow published his first newspaper article on Llewellyn Cas-

Buy the Book

tle. Instead of a sketch on organized settlement, Bristow wove a tale of England's "surplus inhabitants," or people who were sent "over to this country to 'root hog, or die.'" By 1931 few of the settlers who had taken part in the cooperative experiment as adults were still living. Bristow believed he knew two surviving participants, William Conover and William Wessel, and arranged interviews with them.[9] Although he never realized it, Bristow erred in identifying Conover as a member of the colony. Conover's wife, Jane, emigrated from England and may have lived on the cooperative. William Conover himself had emigrated with his parents from Canada in 1865 and had lived on a nearby homestead but was never a shareholder or contributor in the colonization project. William and Jane were married at the time the colony was breaking apart. By 1931, however, Jane was deceased, and Bristow unsurprisingly extracted no useful information from Conover.[10]

In contrast to Conover, Wessel offered a more intriguing story. In 1931 Wessel was eighty-nine years old and resided with his daughter Emma Chase and her family in the small town of Goff, near the original colony site. Wessel was born in England in 1842 and had moved to Kansas in 1873 as a shareholder in the colonization project. He had been an agricultural worker during the final year of the collective farm and undoubtedly had an innate understanding of the colony and what its members had hoped to build on the Kansas Plains. Regrettably, Bristow demonstrated little interest in such commonplace details and instead held to his own woolly reminiscences as knowledge enough. During an interview in Goff, Bristow asked little of Wessel beyond confirming Bristow's own voyeuristic musings of hearing at one time "about a racy romance at Llewellyn Castle many years ago." Wessel gave no indication that he had any recollection of such an occurrence. To him the sketchy story of a dubious romantic tryst was negligible in comparison to his vivid memories of a group of men he identified only as "a bunch of damned rascals." Bristow never gave Wessel the opportunity to clarify exactly who the rascals were or what they may have done that was so upsetting. Instead, he abruptly dismissed the old colo-

Buy the Book

nist's thoughts as "living over the broken dreams of the past." Wessel could not provide the lurid anecdote Bristow sought, and Bristow assumed that he already knew the people whom Wessel was condemning. Therefore, with no further elaboration, he took his leave of the elderly man.[11]

Bristow took for granted that Wessel's ire was directed "at the shades of the original six, or, at most, only those who had actual management of the Colony affairs."[12] After all, the colony had failed, so any rascality must surely have come from those quarters. Bristow had gleaned from both Cutler's and Tennal's histories that six families originally had settled the colony. The trouble was that he really had no inkling of who the first six were, let alone the men in London who held financial accountability over the colony. At one point in his memoir Bristow confessed: "I do not choose to waste time in acquainting myself with the particulars. It takes a lot of research to do a story of that nature. And, historically written, it would be rather drab."[13] Although he wrote that statement in reference to the nearby Kickapoo Reservation and not Llewellyn Castle, his approach toward the colony reflected a similar tendency toward embellishment and a reliance solely on adolescent memory: "I grew up along with those bally English and I think I knew them pretty well."[14] Therefore, in order to avoid a colorless tale, Bristow picked six colonists he remembered and pointed an accusatory finger at George Dutch, John Fuller, Charles McCarthy, John Molineux, John Radford, and John Stowell, as "the original six to enter upon the duties of conquering this land — virgin wild land it was." By 1931 all six men were safely in their graves and incapable of raising any objection to the incriminating charges. Bristow was not entirely wrong, and he correctly identified two individuals, McCarthy and Stowell, as founding members of the colony. However, he felt obliged to exonerate only Stowell from being one of the scoundrels responsible for the colony's mismanagement and failure. Stowell apparently received Bristow's pardon because at the time of settlement Stowell had been a mere nineteen years old, but more to the point, in the 1880s he became Bristow's close friend and employer.[15] The

Buy the Book

other five men did not receive Bristow's absolution, despite the fact that Bristow erred somewhat when he haphazardly branded them all as founding settlers. Dutch, Fuller, Molineux, and Radford each purchased shares in the colonization project, and each eventually went to Kansas, but in 1869 all four still resided in England with only Radford holding a position of managerial or financial oversight.

Regardless of Bristow's fogginess in identifying the individual founders of Llewellyn Castle and who ultimately bore responsibility for tearing the colony asunder, his brief narrative provided anecdotal profiles for a small number of the colonists. His account noted the visit of company president Charles Murray, and it accurately pointed out a few external difficulties that created hardships for the group. Nevertheless, while it was true that inexperience, droughts, blizzards, prairie fires, and grasshoppers all contributed to the cooperative's collapse, Bristow again went wide of the mark when he characterized the English colony as "a glorious and ignominious failure from the very first, with romance and intrigue ever in the ascendancy." Bristow simply had no basis for his assumptions beyond the hearsay testimony of fellow Wetmore resident Tom Fish, who alleged that the colony failed because the colonists knew nothing about farming. Fish, born in 1865, had been a four-year-old living in England when the colony was founded. He may have attended shareholder meetings in London as Bristow claimed, but he would have been an inattentive child in the arms of his shareholding father, William Fish. The family of William Fish never emigrated to the United States during the colony's existence. Seven years after the settlement collapsed, the elder Fish purchased the section of the former colony grounds that included the dormitory and brought his family to Kansas. For a brief time after 1881, young Tom Fish lived in what had been the old communal building and complained about the snakes that resided under the floorboards. However, what Fish had never done was witness or take part in any of the earlier agricultural activities of the cooperative. Plus, William Wessel, John Molineux, George Cox, Robert Hill, and other former colonists who actually had worked on the collective farm went on to

Buy the Book

become successful area farmers in their own right. Therefore, what Bristow mistook as "an abiding ignorance of all things American" was in reality a resolute and unbending devotion on the part of the colony directors to remain true to their founding principles. Without knowledge of the colonists' core beliefs, however, Bristow simply presumed that a shady background combined with an unfamiliarity of local horticulture defeated the colony experiment.[16]

Had he wanted to make the effort, Bristow certainly had occasion during his lifetime to access information about the colonists' fundamental values. During Bristow's youthful days as a mail carrier, Willis Coburn offered his young apprentice the opportunity for an afternoon's conversation with one of the former colonists. The man Coburn introduced to Bristow was John Radford, who Bristow would later assume had been one of the "original six" founders of the English colony. In his reminiscences of the meeting, Bristow made it plain that he did not care for Radford and jeeringly referred to him as "Old Radidad." Radford was the only colony participant whom Bristow specifically singled out for derision. Bristow was never clear on why he disliked Radford, but he seemed to have a grudging respect for the former colonist and admitted that Radford had been an educated man with a well-developed sense of humor. He may have felt intimidated because Radford was an accomplished social radical whose "agile mind ground out astonishing facts as steadily as a grist mill that afternoon." Radford freely discussed colony matters in Bristow's presence, but the young Bristow allowed his mind to drift and admitted that he retained almost nothing of the talk. In his later years Bristow could remember only his own prurient imaginings that the discussion centered on the unlikely topic of "a racy romance that had budded, bloomed, and died at Llewellyn Castle."[17] It is perhaps just as well that Bristow had not been more attentive, because he might have gone beyond patronizing to open antagonism had he been fully cognizant of Radford's socialist convictions. As it was, Bristow was left with a vague understanding of Radford's importance. However, in his obsession over an alleged sex scandal, Bristow overlooked the fact

Buy the Book

that Radford was a central figure who undeniably knew more intimate details about the colony's philosophy, finances, operations, and ultimate demise than any other living person.

In 1948, Bristow expanded upon his earlier 1931 newspaper articles and assembled his Llewellyn Castle tales as a pair of chapters in a sundry book of local reminiscences. Bristow had learned nothing new in the intervening years, and most of his additions related to his personal recollections of the time he worked for former colonist John Stowell in the 1880s and not about the colony or its residents. The single-volume work was privately published, and Bristow reserved all copies as gifts for friends and select libraries. A few descendants of the former colonists were among those receiving his book of memories, and some of them understandably found Bristow's treatment of their family heritage insulting. For example, Alfred Molineux, son of colonist John Molineux and the last child born in the colony, was so incensed by what he read that he acquiesced to having his copy of the book burned.[18] Although Bristow had written a lighthearted account with no intent of spite, he gave his gossipy narrative an added fillip and in the end depicted Nemaha County's English colony as a lark and the colonists as incompetent fools. Thus, through no fault of the English settlers who had financially sacrificed, physically toiled, and in some instances died for their beliefs, Bristow's sequence of events trivialized their communitarian efforts and historically marginalized the colony they founded.

In 1987, historian Andrew Whitehead attempted to disabuse some of Bristow's more patronizing comments and noted that the story of the English colony in Nemaha County was not necessarily one of failure. "If the colony did not meet all the hopes of its founders," he wrote, "that does not diminish their courage in embarking on the project."[19] Whitehead was correct. The English colonists who struggled and sacrificed to establish the dream of a workingmen's cooperative on the Great Plains were audacious but not foolhardy. Their efforts merit an accurate accounting. The settlement Bristow dubbed Llewellyn Castle and that local Nemaha County residents

Buy the Book

recalled simply as the English colony was, during its brief existence, known by another name altogether. The men and women who built the colony, worked the collective farm, and financially supported the undertaking knew it formally as the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony, a utilitarian name lacking the romantic resonance of Llewellyn Castle but certainly more descriptive. It was founded in 1869 to provide a working model for the political, economic, and social ideals of its parent company, the Mutual Land, Emigration, and Cooperative Colonization Company, Ltd., of London, a joint stock organization that operated under the aegis of the late James Bronterre O'Brien's National Reform League. Although by 1874 the colony had become enmeshed in a downward spiral from which it could not recover, the undeniable truth that the cooperative had existed at all served as a remarkable testimonial to the tenacity of a group of working-class radicals determined to find a humanitarian alternative to the grinding poverty that exploitative liberal capitalism had inflicted upon England's laboring poor.

Despite the fact that it garnered little attention during its lifetime, the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony existed during what is now recognized as a transitional phase of communitarian thought and activity. The cooperative was significant because it borrowed heavily from the early nineteenth-century utopian socialist ideas of Thomas Spence, Robert Owen, Étienne Cabet, Josiah Warren, and, to a lesser degree, Charles Fourier. Its members experimented with elements of Karl Marx's scientific socialism while presaging ideas that Henry George, Edward Bellamy, and Laurence Gronlund proposed for use in cooperative labor commonwealths. The colony was a political pragmatic community of the sort that historian Robert Fogarty argues, with a few exceptions, "did not occur till the late eighties and mid-nineties."[20] Unlike many other communitarian experiments, the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony functioned through committees and lacked a single charismatic leader who could act as the public spokesperson for the group. It was neither large enough to arouse suspicions nor notorious enough to spark the popular imagination. What the English colony in Nemaha County did do, how-

Buy the Book

ever, was weave a physical and intellectual thread that connected the utopian socialism of the early nineteenth century to the scientific socialism of the late nineteenth century. While its direct impact on international affairs may have been slight, the organization responsible for the colony linked British Chartism of the early nineteenth century with Britain's Social Democratic Federation and Kansas's Populist Party. O'Brien's followers, known as O'Brienites, held open debates with diverse personalities such as Robert Owen, Karl Marx, Henry George, and Jay Gould. They were conversant with social theorists from Jean Jacques Rousseau to John Stuart Mill, and selectively grafted ideas they found useful to the teachings of their own mentor. After the colony's demise, men like John Radford continued promoting O'Brien's philosophy while speaking on the dais alongside Mary Elizabeth Lease and other Populist agitators. Thus, if one looks closely at how the colonists came by their ideas and what they did with them after the settlement's collapse, the colony becomes more substantial than the "free-floating bits of cultural ephemera" that historian Paul Boyer maintained as the fate of isolated communitarian experiments.[21] The Workingmen's Cooperative Colony and its members were very real and contributing participants in the labor and social history of two countries. It is the actions of unknown people, like the O'Brienites, who serve as the foundation for great moments in history.

The O'Brienites originated in Great Britain during the Chartist era but wound up in post–Civil War Kansas, which necessitates a brief overview of the various causes that pushed them out of their English homes and pulled them and others toward a largely undeveloped state in the Great Plains. As political pragmatists they had been strong advocates for ballot-box democracy and had rallied for it from the Chartist era of the 1840s through the 1860s. However, as government leaders continually thwarted desires for radical reform, they began looking for an alternative outlet in which to publicize and demonstrate their ideals. As a group the O'Brienites were conversant with Marxist socialism, and in the 1860s several of the organization's leaders served as members on the International

Buy the Book

Working Men's Association's (IWMA) General Council. For many years they had stood at the fore of London's radical organizations, but O'Brien had taught his followers to work cooperatively at the ballot box for the common good. Thus Marx's emphasis on the inevitability of class warfare and social strife had limited appeal. Despite their intimate involvement in British radicalism, the O'Brienite commitment to the commonweal may have served as a conservative brake to many of the calls for violent class action. They wanted to provide evidence that there was a viable and humane alternative to what they believed had proven to be ineffective ballot box democracy, selfish trade unionism, and Marx's revolutionary rhetoric. The O'Brienites were not armchair socialists and had an abiding commitment to fomenting radical social change. First and foremost, however, they were ordinary workingmen and women who were desperate to find something better than the degrading poverty of workers trapped in a capitalist system.[22]

Many factors drew the O'Brienites and other communal settlers to Kansas. Almost as soon as it gained territorial status in 1854, Kansas became a magnet for colony ventures. The New England Emigrant Aid Society's efforts in establishing free state settlements in Kansas served as an inspiration to many, and as early as 1855 the Vegetarian Settlement Company and Octagon Settlement Company made an effort to plant cooperatives in the region. The Civil War disrupted colonization endeavors, but once it ended, railroad advertisements and railroad-sponsored travelogues became responsible for much of the attraction. The isolation of the plains and the opportunity that the open spaces offered to separate a communal experiment from the debilitating influences of established commercial towns were appealing. As a result, by 1870 and continuing through the 1880s, writes Fogarty, "Kansas became a prime target for colony ventures and harbored more settlements than any other state." Thus, starting in 1869, Ernst Valeton de Boissiere, with assistance from Albert Brisbane and E. P. Grant, established the Kansas Cooperative Farm, or Silkville, in Franklin County. Silkville was the only Fourierist colony ever built in Kansas and one of the last at-

Buy the Book

tempts to build a phalanx anywhere in the United States. De Boissiere selected the location for two reasons. The climate reminded him of the silk-raising regions of his native France, and he believed that the environmental conditions would facilitate the Fourierist emphasis on handicraft labor.[23]

While the Vegetarian and Fourierist settlements harkened back to an earlier age of utopian socialism, other cooperatives in Kansas clearly intended to make a political statement. In 1871 two Russian immigrants, William and Mary Frey, established the Progressive Communist Community at Cedarvale, Kansas. Sometimes called the Cedarvale Commune, this colony had some Fourierist influence but was largely designed, as Norman Saul writes, to implement "basic reforms and socialist ideals based on the example of Russian peasant collectives." The small colony split in 1875, with the old Progressive Community moving toward spiritualism, while the new Investigating Community, under Frey's leadership, emphasized monogamy and communism. The collective dissolved in 1879, but during this latter period several key Russian figures spent time as colony members. Among them was Nicholas Chaikovsky, who later took a leading role in the 1917 Russian Revolution.[24] However, shortly after his departure from Cedarvale, Chaikovsky traveled to London where he met and debated Charles Murray, a leading O'Brienite and onetime director of the Kansas Workingmen's Cooperative Colony.

In 1877 Louis Pio, one of the founders of Denmark's Social Democratic Party and a member of the IWMA, founded a small socialist colony near Fort Hays in western Kansas. Dissatisfaction with the socialist movement in Denmark coupled with pressure from police encouraged Pio to leave, and travelogues and railroad advertisements pulled him toward Kansas. Like other political pragmatists, Pio sought to prove the feasibility of socialism in a real-world setting. Unfortunately, he had done little material preparation. One colonist remarked "that the plans he had conceived in Copenhagen with regard to founding a colony were 'castles in the air.'"[25] With little advance planning, poor leadership, and a location in the heart

Buy the Book

of one of the most environmentally challenging parts of Kansas, the colony disbanded after a mere six weeks.

In the same year, a small group out of New York established the Esperanza Community in the Neosho Valley at Urbana, Kansas. Esperanza was a progressive socialist community with a membership that gave vocal support to the Socialist Labor Party. Its fifteen-point political platform called for far-reaching legislation that included an equalization of wages for men and women, an end to child labor, and a graduated income tax. The colony's members believed that they were living in potentially violent revolutionary times, but they also had faith that Esperanza would "usher in an age in which communism would 'cure hard times, panics, starvation, and poverty.'" Regrettably Esperanza suffered from erratic and unreliable leadership. Without stability at the top to provide guidance, the colony lasted barely a year.[26]

One year after the demise of Esperanza, another political pragmatic colony appeared. Like Cedarvale, Thompson's Colony had oblique connections to members of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony. Elizabeth Rowell Thompson of New York, a wealthy widow and philanthropist, had long been a supporter of the Co-operative Colony Aid Association, and in 1871 she had underwritten the Chicago-Colorado Colony near Burlington, Colorado. She became a patron of the elderly British reformer George Jacob Holyoake and in 1879 sponsored his speaking tour of the United States. Holyoake, who came from the Owenite tradition, had been sympathetic to Bronterre O'Brien's journalistic efforts in the late Chartist period, and in the 1850s he debated the O'Brienite Charles Murray about co-operating with the middle classes on reform issues. In his 1879 tour, however, Holyoake fully endorsed Thompson's efforts to establish cooperative colonies, and it was from this fanfare that Thompson's Colony near Salina, Kansas, was born. With Thompson's financial support, a small group of about twenty-five people traveled to Salina to cooperatively work the land. They were to demonstrate the advantages of communal agriculture while simultaneously opening up opportunities — or a safety valve — for the urban poor. Op-

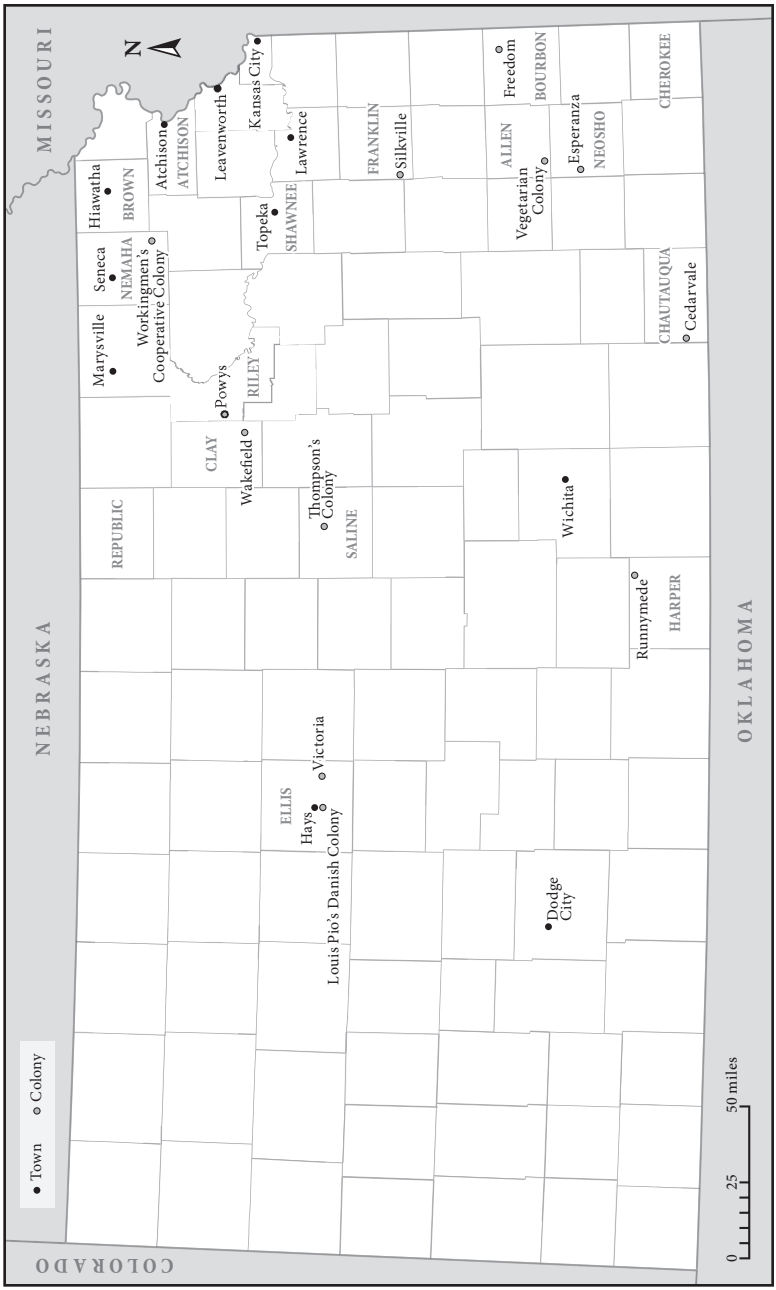
Buy the Book

erating under strict moral guidelines, one of the major tenets of Thompson's Colony was that its members adhere to the example of temperance reform. Like many other communal settlements, the members of Thompson's Colony lacked stable leadership and a cohesive program. The colonists were unprepared for environmental conditions, and after the drought of 1880, the colony disbanded.[27]

In 1893, G. B. de Bernardi of Kansas City, Missouri, wrote the *Trials and Triumphs of Labor* in which he outlined a plan for monetary reform through a system of labor exchanges. The idea of workers exchanging their labor, or the product of their labor, for other goods and commodities was not a new one, and de Bernardi did not intend for it to be the basis of a communal movement. He saw the plan as a means of relieving economic distress among urban workers. Nevertheless, the concept sunk its deepest roots in Kansas, and de Bernardi's followers in the state used his work as the foundation for a labor exchange settlement, the Freedom Colony. Established in 1897, Freedom was an altruistic community that mixed private and communal ownership. Members owned their personal possessions and individual town lots but leased agricultural land from the exchange. The members also communally operated public utilities, the exchange warehouse, and a coal mine.[28] As the national economy improved, disagreements over ownership appeared in Freedom. The colony began to disintegrate, and in 1905 it disbanded.

There were literally dozens of cooperative colonizers and religious charismatic perfectionist colonies in Kansas as well, but of the political pragmatic settlements the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony was the first. Founded in the late spring of 1869, the colony was contemporaneous with de Boissiere's Silkville and predated the Cedarvale Commune by a full two years. It was not, however, the only British colony to find Kansas attractive. In the late summer of 1869, the Reverend Richard Wake, a former Wesleyan minister, platted the town of Wakefield in Clay County, Kansas, on behalf of the Kansas Land and Emigration Company. The company purchased land from the Kansas Pacific Railroad and resold it to settlers from Great Britain. Wakefield was a settlement with religious undertones

Buy the Book


MISSOURI
N
Kansas City
Leavenworth
Atchison
ATCHISON
Hiawatha
BROWN
Lawrence
FRANKLIN
Silkville
Freedom
BOURBON
CHEROKEE
Topeka
SHAWNEE
ALLEN
Vegetarian Colony
Esperanza
NEOSHO
Seneca
NEMAHA
Workingmen's Cooperative Colony
Marysville
CHAUTAUQUA
Cedarvale
RILEY
Powys
CLAY
Wakefield
Thompson's Colony
SALINE
REPUBLIC
Wichita
Runnymede
HARPER
NEBRASKA
OKLAHOMA
Victoria
ELLIS
Hays
Louis Pio's Danish Colony
Dodge City
Town
Colony
COLORADO
0
25
50 miles

Buy the Book

that attracted middle-class English farmers who had the wherewithal to buy land and build homes. Although it had the distinctive feature of providing refuge for orphaned boys from London, Wakefield was never a communitarian venture.[29] Another colony, Powys (later Bala) in Riley County, emerged in 1870 through the efforts of the Welsh Land and Emigrant Society of Utica, New York. Its purpose was to resettle Welsh immigrants already in the United States on land of their own in the West. Powys had cooperative elements, but like Wakefield, communitarianism was not its purpose.[30]

The other two English colonies in Kansas, Victoria and Runnymede, were never mistaken for cooperatives. In 1873 a Scottish eccentric named George Grant purchased approximately 31,000 acres of land from the Kansas Pacific Railroad east of Fort Hays in western Kansas. It was here that he founded Victoria. Grant's dream was to transform the treeless plains into an English feudal estate, "with great stone mansions, deer parks, fountains, blooming gardens, and all the other amenities of English country living." To make money he planned on raising cattle and sheep while selling individual lots of land to English immigrants from the upper classes. While Grant enjoyed some success with both, it was not enough to make the colony prosper. By the time Grant died in 1877, Victoria was already in decline. The last British colony, Runnymede, was the most flamboyant of all. Runnymede came into existence in 1887 when Irishman F. J. S. Turnly purchased land southwest of Wichita in Harper County. Turnly proposed using his estate to educate the younger sons of the British gentry in agricultural techniques. The young dilettantes who came to Kansas had little interest in agriculture and instead amused themselves with horse races, parties, and fox hunting. They did almost no farming, and by 1892 the settlement had failed.[31]

There were other group migrations from the British Isles to Kansas, but no other attempts at establishing colonies. Therefore, of all the British colonization efforts in Kansas, the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony was unique in several aspects. It was the first of the British colonies; it was the only English communitarian exper-

Buy the Book

iment; and it was the only attempt by members of Great Britain's working classes to build a settlement in the state. Nationally the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony stands among the first wave of post–Civil War political pragmatic communities established in the United States and the only O'Brienite cooperative colony ever attempted anywhere. The colony existed as a viable community for five years, which, according to success-failure theorists like Rosabeth Moss Kanter and William McCord, means that it did not last long enough to be considered a success. However, historian Donald Pitzer has critiqued the success-failure formula as too simplistic because it fails to account for the persevering impact of social movements, like the O'Brienites, that founded shorter-lived colonies.[32]

If nothing else, perseverance is what defined the O'Brienites. For a group that mobilized during the social turmoil of Britain's Chartist era, members continued pushing their mentor's political, economic, and social agenda well into the 1890s in both Britain and the United States. Kanter argues that "a social movement generally characterizes a social system at a particular organizational stage, namely, mobilization. Utopian communities, on the other hand, exist in a relatively established and institutionalized form." This is a curiously narrow postulate, since social movements do not end with mobilization, and utopian communities do not spring into existence as fully institutionalized bodies. Doug McAdam provides a corrective with the observation that a social movement "represents a continuous *process* from generation to decline, rather than a discrete series of developmental stages." Because the process is continuous, "any complete model of social insurgency should offer the researcher a framework for analyzing the entire process of movement development rather than a particular phase (e.g., the emergence of social protest) of that same process."[33] This is particularly true when examining a collective such as the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony because, as William Niemi and David Plante argue, "The actions of social movements are predicated on contextual collective understandings." If the background organizational stage is movement education, then radical "education is tied to the creation of

Buy the Book

an alternative ideology that opens up possibilities for collective action, identity creation, and the ensuing political consequences."[34]

A complete examination of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony requires a look at the entire process of movement development, from education and mobilization of the intellectual ideas behind the colony, through the institutional life of the colony, and ending with the final dissemination of those ideas after the colony's collapse. Therefore, what follows is a chronological narrative of Bronterre O'Brien, John Radford, and the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony from its intellectual beginnings in the Chartist philosophy of James Bronterre O'Brien through Radford's involvement in the Kansas Populist uprising of the 1890s. The narrative is divided into three parts. Chapter 1 is set in Great Britain and examines the Chartist origins of O'Brien's philosophical ideas and how, through the National Reform League and his followers in London, his political and economic platform became the basis for a communitarian experiment in Kansas. Chapters 2-4 analyze the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony in Kansas, how it came into existence, and how the O'Brienites supported it from London. Chapter 5 explores the significance of the colony and the political contributions the O'Brienites made in both Britain and America.

While not a history of communitarianism per se, it places cooperative experiments such as Robert Owen's New Harmony, Étienne Cabet's Icaria, Josiah Warren's Modern Times, and Alice Constance Austin's architectural plans for Llano del Rio within the context of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony. Moreover, it provides a look at nineteenth-century labor through the eyes of a group that participated in some of the most significant events of the era. While this study places the history of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony in the larger context of the time, allowing for more than a communal history of a single cooperative, the settlement must be seen in terms of its own unique character. This small colony in Kansas was a radical O'Brienite experiment that had deep roots in British Chartism and branches that extended into modern British socialism and Kansas Populism.

Buy the Book

Among the membership of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony, John Radford was the one person whose name writers either disparaged or put forward as a key figure in almost every secondary account. To accomplish this feat Radford must have played a larger role than indicated because he did not sail to Kansas until 1874, which was the final year of the colony's practical existence. Radford was never an elected or appointed leader of the National Reform League and served no office higher than corresponding secretary for the Mutual Land, Emigration, and Cooperative Colonization Company. His stint as American agent of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony in Kansas was only to oversee its demise. He was financially poor, not particularly charismatic, and made no attempt to gather a following of devotees. In fact, many of his contemporaries, like John Fuller, found him to be an eccentric zealot. Yet more than any other individual, Radford embodied both the inner spirit and the outward bravado that brought the colony into being. Radford was a polished orator, and throughout his life he remained Bronterre O'Brien's most affectionate and devoted disciple. He sacrificed everything to bring O'Brien's philosophy to life in a utopian setting and refused to surrender. Even when it was obvious that the colony was failing and former colonists were assimilating into mainstream American life, Radford soldiered on and carried the Chartist teachings of his mentor into Kansas, where he utilized them as a local stump speaker for the Union Labor and Populist Parties. Thus the history of the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony, itself a legacy of the Chartist Movement and a contributor to Kansas Populism, is intimately connected and inseparable from Radford's personal life.

Unlike Radford, Bronterre O'Brien was renowned during his own lifetime as a distinguished Chartist scholar. In fact, historian Ben Maw argues that O'Brien was possibly "the single most important intellectual of 1830s British working-class radicalism."[35] O'Brien was not a proponent of emigration and devoted his life to peaceful, democratic reform in England. Among the more articulate and educated Chartists, O'Brien's philosophy evolved out of the utopian

Buy the Book

socialist traditions of the early nineteenth century. He idolized the French Revolutionary Maximilian Robespierre, but over time his thoughts advanced from a youthful embrace of violent uprising to a more mature policy of education and moral persuasion to achieve his goals. Throughout his career O'Brien developed a clear understanding of the class struggle. Long before Marx entered the scene, O'Brien had defined a reform philosophy that embraced collective action from the working classes. In contrast to Marx's violent proletarian uprising, O'Brien sought a form of state socialism by restructuring society through overwhelming collective action at the ballot box. Once government had been equalized among all classes, then a government truly of the people could enact O'Brien's social and economic reforms. It was his social and economic concepts, designed during the Chartist uprising, that his followers tried to implement on the Workingmen's Cooperative Colony in Kansas.

Buy the Book