

Fourierist Colony in Iowa

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ANNALS OF IOWA

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FOURIERIST COLONY IN IOWA

Between 1830 and 1840 there were innumerable experiments in religious and social orders in Europe and America. Iowa was just then forming. Individual settlers in Iowa were often members of new cults or departures from established communions of the East or of Europe. They bore the light of their gospel with them into their first Iowa residence. Between 1836 and 1856 Iowa had "Salubria," the Free Thought colony of Abner Kneeland. The Amana Society arrived from Germany. Etienne Cabet, born in Dijon, France, in 1788 sent out his Icarian community that arrived at Nauvoo on our border, and replaced the Mormons there. Numerous other group accessions arrived in which some special or peculiar doctrine of church or state formed an adhesive quality of their organization.

But it is not generally known that the famous Brook Farm community, which was established in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1841 as an experiment on "plain living and high thinking," but which was reorganized in 1844 as the Brook Farm Phalanx of the Fourieristic system had its counterpart in our state.

That inference is clear, however, from the plat and field notes of W. L. D. Ewing, who as deputy U. S. surveyor subdivided Township 75, Range 17, now Scott Township, Mahaska County, Iowa, on July 29 to August 13, 1845, which notes and plat are reproduced on another page.

The proof seems clear that disciples of Fourier projected his philosophy into America, where settlements or phalasteries were established in several eastern localities. Dr. E. A. Boyer was at the location in Mahaska County above referred to when the survey was made. Born in Baltimore of French parents, he came into the Indian country ahead of the opening for settlement, his descendants tell us. He was a member of some French society

22

22

T75 N. R17 W. 5 Mer

Mar 10. 30

North Between sections 27 & 28.
8.01 Over river Des Moines to left
bank & set post.

- 6 L. Darings } Willow 8. N 72 E 20.
Cottonwood 24. S 50 1/2 W. 74.
20.00 Leave timber & enter field. N E
38.00 Leave field N W.
40.00 Set quarter section post in mound
in bottom prairie. Pit 4 links East
45.00 Phalanx 20 chs. West (a
Four-unit Association).
60.00 Enter grove of sparse timber &
herb.
75.00 Leave grove
80.00 Set post. corner, sections 21,
22, 27, 28 in mound in
prairie - Pit 4 links South
S. 40 chs. Land first rate soil.
N. 40 " second rate. Timber
Elm, Sycamore, Cottonwood,
black & burr oak.

whose tenets they do not now remember. He claimed and patented this location in his own right. There was a group of people with him. They erected a central structure, into which were gathered the women and the children for school, while the men maintained themselves in ruder structures on the outer portions of the settlement; that this group so remained for a year or two, when the others left, probably for California, as we are informed by Dr. Boyer's family.

Mr. James D. Edmundson, whose father, William Edmundson, the organizing sheriff for Mahaska County, writes to us:

"In looking over my father's papers, written in 1861 or 1862, I find a memorandum of which the following is an extract, and which I hope may help you some, to-wit:

"'In the winter of 1843-4 a branch of the Fourier Association commenced operations on the farm then and now owned by Dr. E. A. Boyer, a short distance above where Rochester now stands. They made some improvements in the way of farming but being without capital, they soon broke up.'"

Of the Brook Farm merging into a Fourierist Phalanx it appears that "In 1844, mainly owing to the influence of Albert Brisbane, 'Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education' was reorganized on the Fourieristic plan as a 'phalanstery' and incorporated in 1845 under the title 'Brook Farm Phalanx.' In the latter year the phalanstery, an incompleated wooden structure designed to lodge the entire community, was burned; in 1847 the experiment, having proved a failure financially, was given up. The system was founded in France by Francois Marie Charles Fourier, born in Besancon, France, in 1772.

"* * * The foundation of the system in the nature of the universe and the human soul, is awkward and insufficient, and its practical part, the Phalanstery, where 1800 people live, work, and enjoy together in one building, is a dream which perhaps would do away with much vice and misery, but it certainly would also do away with much virtue and heroism. * * * In order to get rid of the errors, crimes and horrors in which human destiny is involved he lowers this destiny to an eating, drinking, dancing and sleeping mediocrity. He is not at war with morals and religion, but has no use for them. He acknowledges property as a

reward to labor and talent, but does not understand it as a necessary compliment to the human personality. His phalans-tery is the monastery of the middle ages revived."¹



Reproduction of the original plat accompanying the survey of Scott Township, Mahaska County, Iowa.

¹Universal Cyclopaedia, Vol. II, p. 488.

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