

STORIES of New Jersey

New Yorker to an "advocacy of the great social revolution . . . rendering all useful labor at once instructive and honorable, and banishing Want . . . from the globe." In September some of the families took possession of the two farm-houses on the property. In most instances the men preceded their families in order to prepare suitable quarters for the women and children who followed in the spring.

The first two years were extremely difficult for the settlers. Nathan French later said that the first winter they lived on buckwheat cakes and sorghum, and the second winter on buckwheat cakes without sorghum. The farm was impoverished and none of the colonists knew much about farming. There were only two farm buildings and a pre-Revolutionary barn. But the settlers were not easily discouraged. They had pledged themselves "not to rest nor turn back until the whole people were convinced of the practicability of associative living."

By 1847 the population was about 90, including about 40 children under 16. The colonists represented a cross-section of people from all walks of life: scientists, writers, doctors, lawyers, artisans, farmers. New quarters had to be provided for all these people, and a multi-family house was erected on the plans of Fourier. This phalanstery was 40 by 80 feet, three stories high and was flanked on each side by the two old farm buildings. The top floor was reserved for bachelors, the middle floor for the families. Each family had two bedrooms and a sitting room. The first floor or "grand salon" was used as a dining room. When there were dances or lectures the tables were pushed aside. Here the colonists staged their amateur plays and charades. Music was often provided by a famous Negro fiddler, Caesar Johnson, who lived near the Phalanx.

Each person bore his or her share of the work of the entire community. A woman who had spent the morning in the dairy, or in canning fruits or vegetables, might in the afternoon teach French or music to a group of children. After a day's digging in the potato field, teachers, writers and farmers would congregate in the evening to discuss the political or social questions of the day. One settler declared that "our days were spent in labor and our nights in legislation for the first five years."

There was some criticism of the unconventional behavior of the colonists. Women of the surrounding communities were shocked at seeing the Phalanx women wearing a sort of Turkish trouser over which was worn a skirt reaching a little below the knees. These loose trousers, known as bloomers, were named after Mrs. Amelia Jenks Bloomer of New York, who had introduced them in 1848. The Phalanx women found the trousers more comfortable for work in the fields. So much excitement did the bloomers cause in the streets of Red Bank (a tiny settlement itself at that time) that the colonist women usually put on long skirts when they went shopping.

The Phalanx people were far beyond their time in many things. They believed in and practiced religious toleration, the 30-hour week, and profit-sharing. All forms of work were considered equally honorable, with no differences in pay according to age or sex.

In addition to reserves for old age and accidents, a fund was to be maintained for the education of children, which was an important factor in the systems of both Fourier and Owen.