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A German Communistic Society In Missouri

The last decades of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries were marked by concentrated action on the part of various organizations to establish communistic settlements. A great number of these attempts were made in the United States. The Shakers, the Harmonists, the Separatists of Zoar, the Perfectionists, the Communities of Robert Owen and Brook Farm are but a few of the leading communistic attempts of this period. In a number of these, unique religious principles obtained and formed the bond of union between its members. Others again were held together by constitutional agreement for the sole purpose of economic betterment. Still others had for their aim the communion of high minded and highly intellectual individuals who sought the association of kindred minds, and who under the idyllic conditions of communal life hoped for an amelioration of conditions intellectual and spiritual.

Among the minor communities is classed the one at Bethel in Shelby County, Missouri. In some respects this society is unique. It existed from 1844 to 1879, without the semblance of a constitutional agreement. It had no peculiar dress, nor singular customs. The sole bond of union was the magnetic power and iron will of its founder. In a measure it may be said that its purpose was to carry out the whim of its founder and leader, but many of its members joined because they foresaw an immediate betterment of economic conditions. Its constituency, with the exception of a very few persons, consisted of Germans, who had either come directly from the Fatherland, or who had already become naturalized in the various parts of the United States. Nordhoff in his work: "Communistic Societies in the United States," page 319, says that several Protestant sects were represented, that there was even one Jew, but no Roman Catholics. (1) The site of the colony was on North River in Shelby County, Missouri, forty-eight miles from Hannibal.

Its organization took place in 1844 and the body remained intact until 1879 or shortly after the death of its founder-Doctor William [Wilhelm] Keil. Soon after the settlement was established in Shelby County, 3536 acres of land were purchased or entered near the present site of Bethel. This town became the center of activity. Other groups of houses near Bethel received the names of Elim, Hebron, and Mamri. In Adair county, not far from Kirksville, 731 acres of land were acquired and the town there established received the name of Nineveh. (2) In 1855, for reasons hereafter to be discussed, it was decided to divide the society, a large number of its members following Dr. Keil to Washington Territory, and later to Oregon Territory. Thus an unique condition in communistic life came about in that two bodies of people, so far separated as the State of Missouri and the Territory of Oregon, could be controlled by one head, at a time when communication was slow and difficult, and all this too with a body that was not held together by any written agreement. As stated previously, the singularly powerful will of Keil was the force that held this society intact. When this force disappeared by Keil's death, and no successor appeared strong enough to rule, the natural result was a dissolution of the organization, and a division of the acquired property. The dissolution is itself strikingly interesting, in that it was affected in the simplest manner possible and with very little friction.

Since the whole life of the society--as was pointed out already--was concentrated in the iron, indomitable will of William [Wilhelm] Keil, it will be necessary to preface the more detailed account of this study by a consideration of his life and activity. I base my account of Keil's life on: 1) A mass of letters written by himself to members of the society at Bethel; 2) On statements of trustworthy persons at Bethel, Missouri, and Aurora, Oregon,--not only those who praise Keil but also those who defame him,--and 3) On brief accounts found in the various histories of communistic life in this country, but

especially on the account of the early years of Keil's life, as found in a rare and odd book by a clergyman, Carl G. Koch, who at one time was an ardent adherent to Keil's views, entitled: "Lebenserfahrungen," printed in 1871 in Cleveland, Ohio, in the Verlagshaus der Evangelischen Gemeinschaft.

Of Keil's early life we have no further record than that he was born on the sixth of March 1811 in Bleicherode, District of Erfurt, Prussia. His parents were German, and seem to have been of the middle class. (3) It goes without saying that he must have attended the elementary schools of his town. There is no record of his attending a technical school or university. It is very doubtful, indeed, whether he was legally entitled to the title of Doctor, altho he is said to have practiced medicine in this country with apparent success. In his home country he followed the profession of man-milliner. He practiced his trade in Koellede, District of Merseburg, Prussia. He is said to have been very handsome in his youth and a most excellent workman and very industrious. Nordhoff gives us a picture of the man as he saw him in this country. (4) He describes him as a "short, burly man, with blue eyes, whitish hair and white beard." Nordhoff continues: "He seemed excitable and somewhat suspicious; gave no token whatever of having studied any book but the Bible, and that only as it helped him to enforce his own philosophy. He was very quick to turn every thought toward the one subject of community life; took his illustrations mostly from the New Testament; and evidently laid much stress on the parental character of God. As he discussed, his eyes lighted up with a somewhat fierce fire; and I thought I could perceive a fanatic, certainly a person of very determined, imperious will united to a narrow creed." I have been fortunate in securing from Jacob G. Miller of Aurora, Oregon, who was one of the leaders at Bethel, a large number of letters from Dr. Keil to the remaining members at Bethel. Most of these letters were written by his secretary, Karl Ruge, a college bred man, and are in fairly good style. Those written by himself are wretched illustrations of letter writing and show a most imperfect knowledge of his own language. His pictures show him as a man with broad and high forehead, rather thick nose and a square chin—in other words, the type of a strong animal with indomitable will and bull-dog tenacity.

It seems to be the prerogative of men of Keil's profession to be moody. Their work does not absorb their mental energy completely, and so they are frequently found to be the possessors of the most fanciful notions. Keil's pet inclination was first the stage. This did not prevail long, however. Soon he became a religious enthusiast and subsequently a devotee of such mystics as Jacob Boehme and his followers. He now began an investigation for an "Universalmedizin," a panacea which should heal all the ills the human flesh is heir to. This whim led him to a superficial study of botany, and in his fanciful search he no doubt got some smattering ideas of medicine. He made innumerable experiments to solve the laws of nature and to probe into the mystery of life. His queer experiments he continued even after he came to this country. Koch asserts that Keil showed him a flask in his (Keil's) drug store in Pittsburgh, Pa., which contained a fluid which Keil purported to represent the product of his long investigation. He claimed to be in possession of mysterious cures which he avowed to have received from an old woman. It is said that this person would not have parted with these secrets under any consideration, provided he did not leave the country. Thus Keil came in possession of these secrets before he came to the United States. Most probably these mysterious secrets were powwowing formulae, of which so many exist in certain parts of Germany, and so many of which are to this day found among the inhabitants, particularly the Germans of Pennsylvania.

The exact date of Keil's coming to America is not positively fixed. It is a very probably, however, that it was in 1835 or 36. He lived for a short time in New York City and then came to Pittsburgh. Soon after his arrival in Pittsburgh, he performed some strange cures, as it seems, somewhat in the manner of our modern magnetic healers, and was soon dubbed with the unsavory title of "Der Hexendokter," by the common people.

In 1838 Dr. William Nast, the founder of the German Methodist Church, conducted revival meetings in Pittsburgh. Keil attended these meetings and became converted. Soon after his religious awakening, he met the Reverend J. Martin Hartmann, whom he claimed as his real spiritual father. This

Hartmann was deeply interested in the principles of communism, and it is very probable that he augmented, if he did not give the initiative to Keil's closer consideration of Community life. At a Quarterly Meeting held October 12, 1839, at Stewardstown, Pennsylvania, he was licensed as local preacher, having previously shown much enthusiasm in religious work as Class leader. It is stated, however, that this license was never formally issued. The first field of church activity for Keil as local preacher was at Deer Creek, near Pittsburgh. Dr. Nast, in an interview with Koch, stated that in his opinion Keil seemed perfectly sincere in his conversion, and that at the outset of his ministerial career he was deeply concerned and eager to do good. For Keil the period of probation which the church imposed on him, as it does on all who come under its ruling, was extremely irksome, and frequent and urgent were his appeals to be given full charge of a congregation. Dr. Nast adds a queer story, in which he states that Keil was possessor of a mysterious book, written for the most part in blood, and which contained all sorts of mystic symbols and formulae, unintelligible to any one but Keil. These secrets were nothing more, I take it, than the powwowing formulae which had been communicated to Keil by the old woman above mentioned. After his conversion Keil invited Nast and several brethren to witness the burning of this mysterious book which was regarded as the work of the devil. The destruction of the old volume took place amid certain ceremonies and prayer. Hartmann is said to have humored Keil in his pet notions concerning religions, and to have stimulated him in his striving to ascend faster than the church usually permits its servants to rise. Thus encouraged and humored Keil soon became unruly. He rebelled against the church and its tenets. Then came his separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church. He avowed that he could not work in a church where men served God for pay. He adhered to the Biblical injunction: "Freely ye have received, freely give." He was opposed to Hartmann receiving \$400 from the missionary fund and certain stipulated sums of "Classmoney" as salary. When Keil's superiors waived these objections, he withdrew from the church, taking the entire congregation at Deer Creek with him. Thus Keil early demonstrated that he could not obey, that he had to rule. He gave up his medical practice entirely and devoted himself to independent preaching. He had no income, save what his members saw fit to voluntarily give him. The work as independent preacher circumscribed his field of activity too much, however, so he joined the Protestant Methodist Church. The entire congregation at Deer Creek again followed him blindly. Now he extended his work into the "Point," that is the lower part of Pittsburgh, where he made many converts among the iron-workers and factory employees. Refusing to obey the superiors of the Protestant Methodist Church, its head, the Reverend Geissinger saw himself compelled to exclude him from this body. With Keil the entire congregation again severed their connection with the church. Keil continued to denounce all ministerial service for pay as un-Christian; all sectarianism, all church regulation as the work of human hands and unessential to the moral teachings of Christianity. He renounced all title save that of Christian; accepted no rule save the admonitions given in the Bible. To serve Christ, not man, he claimed his sole aim. To act according to the Golden Rule; to live a moral pure life was the gist of his teaching. His whole congregation accepted these views implicitly and devotedly clung to him as their leader.

All this had transpired in rapid succession before 1840. Those who have heard Keil's preaching still assert that he was a forceful and fluent speaker. Believing him to be sincere they clung to him lovingly and devotedly, and spread his fame among those with whom they came in contact. Soon his fame extended to regions far removed from Pittsburgh. Among his ardent followers were young men of talent and the gift of speech. Foremost among these were Karl G. Koch, the same who wrote "Lebensaufzeichnungen," and three brothers; Christian, Andres, and Henry Geisy, as it is seen from the names, all Germans. The entire body of Keil's adherents at this time was composed of Germans. The young men whose names were given above, Keil sent out to preach his views among the Germans in the various parts of this country. They traveled for the most part on foot, preaching, in accordance with Keil's teaching, without money and without price, in the settlements of Germans, wherever they could get a hearing. They preached in private houses and in school buildings, and lodged with such persons in whom Keil's views seemed to find fruitful ground. Disdaining to adhere to any established creed, they

followed their leader in taking as the cornerstone of their spiritual edifice the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers. Rapidly the work spread until it extended thru western Pennsylvania, southern Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, even to Iowa, where in Bloomington, (now Muscatine) and Iowa City, and other places small groups of the "faithful" assembled. In Ohio the influence extended thru the counties of Columbiana, Stark, Trumbull, Monroe, and Washington. Sometimes Keil would follow the course his disciples had taken and strive to bring to a culmination the work they had begun and fostered. More and more Keil was regarded as an extraordinary man, and those outside of his magnetic influence assert, even today, that he regarded himself as such. His former love for the mystics asserted itself in him again. He preached in the manner of Jacob Boehm and charged his deputies to do the same. His unsophisticated followers stood aghast before this unheard-of wisdom. Moreover Keil knew how to perplex them by telling them that he had visions. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelations afforded him many a favorite text. Sometimes he perverted the text completely if his purpose was thereby the better accomplished. One time he is said to have made the startling assertion that on a certain day he would be publicly sacrificed. Throngs of people arrived to view the spectacle, some curious, some deeply concerned. Of course no untoward thing befell him. The explanation was simple enough for him—the Lord still had a mission for him to fulfill. Persons outside the pale of his influence believed that his followers worshiped Keil more than Christ. In fact it is vouched that women, carried away by his preaching and entering into a peculiar hypnotic state, cried out: "Thou art Christ." At my last visit to Bethel, I met a man who made the statement that Keil's wife, (whose maiden name, by the way, was Ritter), called on the speaker's father who had refused to join the society,—having known Keil in Germany and doubting his supernatural gifts,—and that Mrs. Keil, in the heat of the argument, made the startling assertion that her husband was as great as Christ himself. To such laudations Keil is said to have remained silent. The devotion of Keil's followers was certainly great and his influence over them grew from day to day. Keil knew well how to make use of all the demonstrations of loyalty they might bring him. After some time young Koch could not share Keil's views any longer and he frankly told him so. Keil used all the argumentative power at his command to hold him under his control, for he feared that Koch had a strong influence. The latter withdrew, however, and sought in every way to enlighten the people in regard to his opinion of Keil. But very few paid any heed to his admonitions. Keil designated himself as the "Centralsonne," central sun, and the leading subordinates received the title of "Lichtfuersten" and "Lichtfuerstinne," princes and princesses of light.

At Phillipsburg, 28 miles below Pittsburgh, on the Ohio River, a large body of Keil's followers lived. This town will be of interest to us in this study, as here the project of Keil's Community took definite form.

In 1805 George Rapp had established the famous Harmony Society—one of the largest communistic undertakings in the United States. (5) This society existed at Economy, Pa., only a few miles from Phillipsburg. In 1831 the visionary Bernhard Mueller, better known in the studies of communistic societies by the high-sounding title of Count Maximilian de Leon, arrived with a body of followers at Economy, and was admitted by Rapp into the Harmony Society. (6) Mueller caused trouble by preaching, to the younger generation, at Economy especially, the doctrine of greater personal liberty, and especially the right to live in the married state,—a privilege which the Harmony Society, according to the celibacy clause of its constitution, forbade. It soon became necessary for Rapp to take a determined stand. A vote was taken, and 176 persons who had been members of the society followed Count de Leon. (7) An indemnity was paid to the seceding members. After this separation Mueller and his followers betook themselves to Phillipsburg, where he established a colony on communistic principles, barring the celibacy provision and other strict rules of the Rapp Colony. After a short time Mueller was entrapped in fraudulence and was compelled to flee to Arkansas, where a few of his adherents followed him. A large portion of his old charge remained in Phillipsburg. Despite the disastrous experience, which they had had with two communistic societies, many of them regarded

communistic life as the only ideal way of living. They maintained that all that was necessary, was a leader of strong personality and undoubted integrity. In Keil they saw the ideal leader for such an undertaking. No doubt Keil himself was not very reluctant either, and so the beginning was made for the society which I wish to discuss. Here Keil foresaw such a chance to rule as he had never had before. The former members of the disbanded Leon Colony, as well as those who had been with Rapp gave Keil many hints concerning communistic undertakings. One of the things which they recommended to Keil as an especially strong factor in holding the people under one's control, was the practice of requiring confession from the members of the organization. Rapp had done this with great success. This confession consisted in subjecting the people to a series of questions on very delicate topics. It appealed to Keil. As a matter of experiment he instituted this confession in his church. Being subject to none of the older churches, he could do so with impunity. He had the young people come to him alone; the married people, however, were forced to come husband and wife together. Most of the interrogations, to which he subjected them, pertained to sex and sexual relations. Some of the persons turned from him in disgust, but many did confess sincerely. The strife which he thus conjured up in some of the families was very bitter, and the happy relations of many homes were unnecessarily disturbed. In his sermons he is said to have spoken freely of these things, and he made use of the information thus attained to intimidate the simple folk and to scourge them into line, to more easily compel them to do his bidding. Believing that he would be successful in a communistic venture, and feeling the great influence he had over the people in his charge, he definitely decided on the organization of such a society. He counseled carefully with the ex-Harmonists and the ex-Leonists. They having had experience in such matter and being men of rare ability as mechanics and artisans, he solicited their participation most earnestly. The number of the ex-communists was, however, too small for his undertaking. It was therefore necessary that more persons should become interested in the undertaking. The capacity of preacher had made him acquainted with a great many persons in various regions of this country. He knew, too, that he had a certain influence over them. Accordingly he sent out his messengers to the various communities where his deputies had preached. A general invitation was issued for all to join the undertaking. The advantages were not too much discussed, in order that there might not be too many discontented parties. The only offer which Keil is said to have held forth is that the participants in the attempt should have plenty of work and bread and water. But so certain was he of his power over these people, that he doubted not that many of them would willingly join him, in order that they might be under the immediate supervision of a man whom they regarded as more than ordinary. A number of those appealed to did accept the call. As fast as they could dispose of their property, they joined the society. I do not wish to be understood as saying that the majority of those who had come under the pale of Keil's preaching and the preaching of his deputies joined. Many of them had no wish of giving up individualism. Then, too, Karl Koch was very active in his attempts to prevent the people from joining. The ex-Harmonists and the ex-Leonists who expressed a willingness to participate insisted on having a written constitution. Accordingly such a document was drawn up. But as the people could not agree as to certain provisions it contained, Keil was called in and the matter submitted to him. He at once declared most emphatically that under no condition would he go bound and fettered by any written agreement. If a man's word was not as good as a written law, then he could and would have nothing to do with the entire project. The Bible should be the foundation of the society which he proposed to found; the Golden rule should be its motto. It is most interesting to know that such an old document did exist in the Bethel community. It is usually stated, even by ex-members, that there was never any written agreement. For practical purposes this is true enough, for it was never put into effect. But as a matter of historic fact, it is interesting to know that an attempt was made to build the society on a written agreement. The finder of this old document would be lucky indeed. The old gentleman in whose possession it was last found believes that it was destroyed with a mass of other old papers. He recalled, however, that some of the provision set forth therein, pertained to the admission and dismissal of members. Moreover he states that this writ provided that young men who were taken

into the society were forbidden to marry before the expiration of the third year of their membership. Furthermore it must not be overlooked that this was the time when the agitation of the Mormon affairs made exclusive societies of this nature very unpopular, in Missouri at any rate. Under the proposed arrangement the society had no legal existence. The various members must hold the property of the body in trust. The Bethel society remained an unincorporated body of persons until its dissolution. It was only a voluntary gathering of like-minded individuals. Nothing could possibly testify more ably to the astonishing power of Dr. Keil. For thirty-four years he was able to rule this extremely loosely-knit body dogmatically and dictated its policies to his own liking.

It has been made to appear by certain writers on this subject that the followers of Kiel were an ignorant lot who knew nothing but to toil. I am not willing to accept this affirmation without qualification. The majority of the members consisted of common toilers, to be sure, who brought naught but their willing hands. But is not every community made up in this manner? I have found among the surviving colonists men rather well-read, and extremely shrewd in business matters. Moreover I have conclusive proof that many of them possessed information that would have placed them side by side with the better informed men of an average community; men who were far more intellectual than Dr. Keil, their leader. Notable among these was Karl Ruge, a college-bred man prepared for the legal profession, who came to America with the great number of intellectual aristocrats in 1848. Here too is to be remembered Henry Finck, a master in music, to whom is due, in a large measure, the high position which the Colony at Bethel took as a center of music lovers in those early days. One of his sons has become a noted musical critic in New York City, while the other has made his mark as an attorney at law in the same metropolis. Nor must I pass by the great number of artisans whose handiwork still remains at Bethel as the strongest testimonial of their ability. Then there were men of the type of C. Wolf, who, conscious of their own strength and ability, had the temerity to oppose even Dr. Keil in some of his undertakings. After deliberate, impartial, and unbiased examination I am prepared to gainsay the statement that the colony consisted of ignorant men only. In trying to solve the problem as to why it was possible for Keil to gather so large a body of followers around him, it may be that Hinds in his "American Communities," (8) has found the right solution. He says: "I can only account for this by recalling, that when Dr. Keil began his independent career the people of the Eastern and Middle states had just passed through a series of religious and other excitements, that made them eager for new social conditions, and so quick to follow those who offered to lead them where such new conditions would prevail, and by supposing that Dr. Keil, however foolish his fanaticism and preposterous his claims, had yet wonderful powers of gaining and holding the attention and hearts of men." What effect Keil had on the intellectual life of the colony after its founding is another question that which will be considered in due time.

In the spring of 1844 the plans had matured sufficiently to make imperative the search for a location for the new colony. Of the instructions which the three deputies: Adam Schuele, David Wagner, and Christian Presser took with them, as they wandered west in search of land, we know nothing. Most probably they were never transmitted to writing, as nearly all the orders and transactions were oral, and without any tangible form. It seems reasonable to assume that Keil gave directions to the effect that they should find land in a region virgin in nature, where the contaminating influences of advanced civilization did not obtain to affect the new settlement. They selected a site in one of the choicest agricultural regions of Missouri. It is located in Shelby County on the North River. The place is not particularly romantic but for the purpose of the settlement there were many advantages connected with this location. According to the "History of Monroe and Shelby Counties," (9) Peter Stice lived here at the time of the purchase by the colony and operated a saw mill, using the water of the North River as motor power. According to the same source three other land owners were located here—Rookwood, Vandiver, and Chinn. Their land was acquired by the colony. Other tracts were later entered from the government.

In the autumn of 1844 Keil and his family together with George Miller and a few others arrived

in this western wild. They spent the winter amid considerable hardship, dwelling in some of the old log houses on and near the purchase. Vandiver possessed a good brick house which was built about 1840, and is still inhabited to this day. Here, most probably, some of the colonists found shelter, for the hospitality of the Missourian of that day has become proverbial. In the spring of 1845 many other colonists arrived. They did not all come at the same time, but they arrived as they were able to dispose of their possessions at home. Some of them purchased a boat to come down the Ohio and up the Mississippi. There joined themselves to these men, a number of adventurers who did not have the cause of the society at heart. The result was that the society grew rather rapidly, in fact too rapidly. For the adventurers soon became dissatisfied and severed their connection, often causing a good deal of unpleasantness and defaming the undertaking before the world. They could not attack Keil personally, for he had promised them nothing but hard work and bread and water. As has already been indicated, the members came from every region into which Keil had sent his deputies.

The men of the hour were the former members of the Harmony Society. Schooled in the ways of communistic life, and complete masters of some trade, they became the saviors in time of imminent danger and need. The names of these ex-Rappites are, according to the memory of the old men at Bethel, the following:” Adam Schuele, Matheus Schuele, Jacob Veiinger, John C. Bauer, Michael Forstner, George Forstner, George Ziegler, David Wagner, Adam Keller, Christian Smith, Samuel Schreiver, and George Schnauffer. Some of these men who were especially skilled in some trade were urged by Keil to join the society. Others came of their own free will. Having had experience, however, with Rapp and Leon, some of them would not join without imposing certain conditions. So they proposed to belong to the society for a specified time only. If at the expiration of this time the society pleased them, they would continue as members. If, on the other hand, the affair was not to their liking, they reserved the right to be free to withdraw. This was a rather odd condition to enter into on the part of Keil, but he needed these men exceedingly much in his new enterprise. Some of these men, in fact the greater number, it is said, withdrew at the end of the time specified in their agreement. It is impossible to find a written statement concerning this compact. Most probably it was only a verbal agreement, as most of the transactions of the society were of this nature. The word of a man was as good as his signed statement. Since these men had conducted to the stock of the society, they demanded the return of their investment. As the money had been spent in the acquisition and the improvement of the property of the colony, they could not be paid in cash. Hence certain pieces of property were assigned them as a remuneration. Their services to the colony having been most valuable, it is not hard to understand that they should demand some of the choice tracts of land. This demand had to be complied with, as so these men who had no more connection with the society became possessors of some of the finest building sites in Bethel. One of the most flagrant cases of this kind was that of John C. Bauer. He decided not to leave the town of Bethel although he had volunteered, on strength of the above named compact, to sever his connection with the colony. Many attempts were made to “freeze him out,” as a surviving kinsman of his puts it, but without success. Bauer was such an excellent mechanic that the society constantly had to employ him, when they found themselves in a predicament. So he continued to ply his trade with a good deal of success. Thus a strange condition had come about. In the midst of communism there was the purest individualism. Simple as the whole matter is it seems quite hazy in the minds of some of the writers of this subject. Hinds in his work “American Communities,” (10) says: “A small store in the heart of the village was owned and managed by an outsider. The explanation of this singular state of things is found in the fact that a few years after the founding of the community, to satisfy the malcontents, a partition of the property was made among the members, and a few availed themselves of the opportunity to withdraw their share from the the common interest, and have since managed it wholly for themselves.” Now this statement is misleading. There was no general division of the property at this time, as the above statement would imply. The young men who owned and operated the store in question were the sons of John C. Bauer. They erected their place of business on the site which their father had received, as per agreement, which was made

before they left Pennsylvania. All those who received a title to property in Bethel at this time had an agreement of the kind stated above. They cannot be called malcontents in the true sense, since they had a definite understanding with Keil to stay with him for a certain time only. In granting them property, Keil fulfilled only his part of the contract, they having already fulfilled their part. These sons of John C. Bauer, who by the way, are now spelling their names Bower, operated a very successful general merchandise business, selling to outsiders as well as to members of the society—for it must be remembered that this society which, so to speak, stands on the borderline of communism, allowed its members to have some private earnings. This income they were not compelled to turn over to the general coffers, and thus had some money to spend for things which the society store did not provide them with. From their gardens they also made some private earnings, and so the strange mixture of communism and individualism, manifested at Bethel, finds an easy, logical, and historical solution when the above facts and agreements are kept in mind.

Keil had been, and was still at the founding of the colony in Missouri, a religious enthusiast or if you choose a fanatic. For most of his action he cited parallel instances in the Bible. In accordance with such an inclination he called the places he founded on the North River after Bible names: Bethel, Elim, Mamri, and Hebron while in Adair County the place was named Nineveh. His ardor seems to have died out, however, for in Oregon he named the only place there founded by him after a favorite daughter of his—Aurora.

Soon after the most necessary needs had been met, the colonists proceeded to erect a church building. They spared no pains and trouble in making it a magnificent place of worship. All the skill of the local artisans and artists were represented in this edifice. It was constructed of brick and stone and finished in the most beautiful black walnut, of which an abundance grew on the banks of the North. According to Nordhoff, (11) the floor was made of large red tiles, and a narrow pulpit stood at one end. There were two doors, one for each of the sexes. The men and women sat on separate sides of the room. I am told by persons who saw the old church that a spacious gallery ran along three sides of this hall, a portion of which was railed off for the band which played on festival occasions. This gallery was faced with large and neatly carved panels of black walnut, 18 by 24 inches in size, and all of one entire piece of wood. In the massive tower hung three bells. When I remarked to one of the old members that this building must have been an enormous expense to the young colony, he said with an air of great pride that the whole church cost them nothing save what they had to expend for window glass, nails, and the three bells. All the rest of this fine structure was prepared by the colonists themselves. This church was the pride of the community as well as the entire County of Shelby. One can scarcely interview an old resident of Shelby County who knew the colony in its palmy days, who does not make reference to this magnificent edifice. In this church the colonists assembled every two weeks to hear Dr. Keil “preach” as they called it. As Keil professed allegiance to none of the established churches, he had no particular doctrine to uphold or defend. As one of the old men told me, he simply preached the doctrine of moral living. One hears so many contradictory reports concerning Keil, and is told so often that he indulged in excess himself, that it is difficult to see how he could have had unalloyed success. However, he had such a firm grip on his people, that they feared him and did not raise a voice against him. The chief aim of his preaching seems to have been to induce his followers to lead a moral life; to assert his authority; to compel the members to be industrious and thus foster the progress of the community. The strongest weapons he had were employed to instill fear and respect of his authority in his members. To give a concrete notion of his preaching, I shall cite a specific incident which was communicated to me by a wholly truthful person. Whether through the system of confession which he made of, or some other way Keil had an inkling that some of his members were guilty of illicit carnal intercourse. He resorted to the following drastic measures to expose the malefactors and to check the evil. In open meeting he made known his findings, and in conclusion charged those concerned to arise there and then before the assembly or upon failure to do so he would announce their names. So terrified were the guilty ones and under such awe they stood before the man, that they arose at once, confessed

their guilt and penitently bowed before the fearful upbraiding which was hurled at them from the pulpit. The most natural thing imaginable, namely that they would leave the community, the scene of their disgrace, did not happen. They remained and bore in contrition the contumely which followed such a confession or exposure.

Since Keil and his followers had no obligations to any established church, it was but natural that the usual observances of the church should be omitted. Thus they did away with baptism; they had no more confirmation, a custom which many of the members had been used to in Germany; they did not celebrate the Lord's Supper in the orthodox manner; if they observed it at all, it took the form of a general meal at the home of some member. The confession which Keil made use of, he employed solely for the purpose of instilling fear for his authority.

The church which is represented at Bethel now—for the days of the old Keil church has long passed—is the Methodist Episcopal. The services are all in the English language. A few years ago a German Methodist Church existed, but it had to be abandoned for want of support. In the building which the German Methodist owned, the Christian Church has begun to hold its meetings.

One of Keil's former followers told me that none of Keil's old members joined the Methodist Church after the dissolution of the society. They had gotten so out of tune with the old churches that they could not make themselves comply with their teachings, and so remained without the pale of all church organizations. The membership of the existing church at Bethel is made up of the younger generation in the town and of the surrounding country. The following significant statement of an old Keilite will throw some light on the subject of their attitude towards the church: "The churches do no harm as long as the preachers behave themselves."

There were several festivals during the year which were always celebrated in grand style. First among these was Keil's birthday which was always a colony holiday. Then came Easter and Pentecost and the Harvest Feast in the autumn. On these occasions great tables were spread and loaded with all the things that the German kitchen and cellar could offer. These feasts were held at Elim, the residence of Keil. Everybody was welcome and from far and wide the people came to share in the feast. A procession was formed in Bethel which, led by the band, marched to Elim. The band also played during the entire time of the feast. No charges were imposed, and all strangers were made to feel comfortable. In the evening there was dancing. The real purpose of this almost unparalleled generosity is not well known. Whether it be that they wished to induce outsiders to come into the fold of the society or whether it was simply pure altruism on the part of the colonists, I am not prepared to say. At Christmas time the church was decorated with two huge Christmas trees. The celebration which was rather unique took place at the early hour of four on Christmas day. To this occasion also hosts of strangers arrived. The program consisted of a talk by the preacher, congregational singing and music by the band. Then huge baskets of cakes and apples and quantities of candy were distributed. Colonists and strangers shared absolutely equal. The trees were allowed to remain standing until New Year's day and then its gifts were distributed among the children of the colony. This beautiful celebration was in time interrupted by rowdy elements which came from the surrounding region, and so, rather than compelling them to be orderly and thereby possibly making enemies, this unique custom was abandoned.

The description of the colony church logically suggests the mention of other structures and the prevailing style of architecture. As stated before, the site of the Bethel settlement is not particularly interesting, in fact it is almost wholly devoid of all that might be termed romantic. Most of the buildings and their surroundings do not help to alleviate the prosaic effect. The buildings are made to serve practical purposes, and are almost totally barren of all ornamentation. They are usually made of brick which the colonists made themselves, stone which was quarried along the North, and timber which was hewn and sawed in the surrounding forest. The houses are built close to the street. Most of them have no front yard whatever. The architecture is of that very plain style so common in many old German settlements of this state. The eaves drip on the street and there often is no porch at the entrance. The structures are carefully put up, however, and seem to be capable of surviving yet many a

decade. In some instances a wooden framework was erected and the intervening spaces were filled with brick and mortar. These buildings were plastered both on the inside and the outside. The hinges and locks are handmade.

Soon after the colonists came to Bethel, they erected a steam burr-mill. All the shafts and things of this nature were made of hard wood. They also established a distillery, a tannery, and a colony laundry. All these institutions needed much hot water. For economy a large boiler was purchased for the mill and this was made to supply the other three industries with hot water. Then the problem of how to convey the water to these various buildings had to be met. Metal pipes they could not afford nor were they easily obtainable. Here the colonists showed their inventiveness. They took long, straight beams, about twenty feet in length and a foot or a foot and a half in diameter at the larger end with a specially constructed bit, they drilled a two-inch hole thru the entire beam. By hollowing out the larger end and tapering the other they effected a joint which by wrapping with flax or hemp dipped in tar they rendered tolerably water-tight. From this one illustration it must be apparent that these people were very inventive indeed. Many of the Germans whom Keil gathered around him and especially the former adherents of Rapp and Leon were skilled artisans. At every turn one meets evidence of their aptitude. Altho the product of their labor is sometimes crude, it nevertheless shows what they are able to do. Apparently there were master workmen for every kind of labor, but especially apt were they in working in iron and wood. The old mill and distillery were destroyed by fire but a part of the old tannery stands to this day. Here, too, one is impressed with the inventiveness of the workmen. In those days all the fixtures and all the tools had to be made by hand. Altho they pursued this industry only in a small way, they nevertheless gained considerable proficiency in tanning. Their shoes were carefully made and strong, and many outsiders, especially those who owned slaves, purchased their work shoes here. In those days the deer was found in large numbers in North Missouri. Their hides furnished gloves which were made under the supervision of the head glove maker Aldoph Pfugh. These gloves are said to have been of excellent make. That they really must have been of superior quality and workmanship is attested by the fact that in 1858 they took a first premium at an exhibition in New York City. (12)

For the operation of the tannery much oak bark was necessary. The colonists did not like to rob their own trees of their bark. So they ascertained where an outsider contemplated clearing. They went to him, made the proposition to hew down his large oak trees on the condition that he would allow them to peel off the bark for their own use. When such permission was obtained, all men, regardless of the trade they plied in the colony, went to the woods, performed this task in common and conveyed the bark in huge loads to Bethel. Thus they accomplished their task quickly, and also gave their neighbors a laudible example of forest protection, which lesson in this land of plenty, however passed unheeded.

In the village smithy, which is now owned and operated by a direct descendant of the colony days, I was shown all sorts of tools that were made in the colony days. They are neat and seem to be better in many respects than the factory made articles of today.

For the making of linseed oil, the colonists resorted to the follow device. A very large stone was rendered perfectly smooth and laid down horizontally. On this stone rested two circular stones, each sixty-four inches in diameter and twelve inches in thickness. They were fastened by a strong axis to a heavy rod in the middle. To this horses and mules were hitched and made to roll the heavy stones over the horizontal stone. The horses going around in a circle very much as they do in turning a cane mill. The flaxseed was spread on the flat stone and the circular stones, moving over this, crushed the flaxseed into pulp, from which the oil was later extracted by intense pressure. One of these stones now rests over a public well in Bethel, the other is said to be used for a similar purpose in Shelbina.

(To be concluded)

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1. This statement of Nordhoff's applies directly to the Aurora, Oregon settlement which was the daughter colony of the Bethel, Missouri colony, as will be discussed in detail later on. But all of the members at Aurora had been members at Bethel or were their direct descendants, hence the statement may be regarded as applicable to the Missouri community also.
2. Now it is called Connelsville.
3. The statement of Hinds, in his "American Communities," page 287, in which he states that Keil was born in Nordhausen, Germany, is according to the best sources, fallacious.
4. "Communitistic Societies in the U. S.," page 318.
5. John Bole's "The Harmony Society," International Press, Philadelphia
6. Nordhoff's "communitistic Societies in the United States," pages 79 and 80; also Koch "Lebenserfahrungen," p. 129 ff; Bole's "The Harmony Society," p. 124 ff.
7. Cf. Bole's "The Harmony Society," p. 125
8. Pages 287-288
9. Page 861 f.
10. Page 293
11. Page 325
12. "History of Monroe and Shelby Counties." p. 863