

The Shape of Utopia: The Architecture of
Radical Reform in Nineteenth-Century America

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ABSTRACT

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In the tumultuous atmosphere of the decades leading up to the Civil War, the combined effects of religious millennialism, technological revolutions, and the growth of a capitalist economy led numerous Americans to propose radical schemes for transforming their society. At least a hundred cooperative colonies were founded in the 1830s to 50s, leading Ralph Waldo Emerson to famously observe that it seemed every “reading man” had a “draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket.” This dissertation explores a unique strain of mid-nineteenth-century utopianism that featured geometrically distinct architectural and urban plans. These schemes include a square land reform grid and radial republican village proposed by the National Reform Association, phrenologist Orson Fowler’s octagon house, Henry Clubb’s anti-slavery vegetarian Octagon Settlement Company, a hexagonal city published by the anarchist Josiah Warren, and an ovoid house and circular institution of Equitable Commerce proposed by the Spiritualist John Murray Spear and his followers. I also analyze Thomas Jefferson’s octagonal houses and square land grids as precedents for the nineteenth-century utopian projects.

The creators of these plans were motivated to embrace geometric forms in part because of an emerging functionalist view that regarded the built environment as capable of not just representing but also directly shaping bodies and minds. At the same time that the geometric utopians spoke a language of functional effects, however, they also, consciously and unconsciously, used their plans as aesthetic and rhetorical devices to convince and

inspire potential converts. Social reformers employed geometric diagrams to convey an affect of transparency at a time when many antebellum Americans saw the levers of political and economic power as increasingly mediated and remote. By exploring the links between utopians' ideas about architecture and causes such as phrenology, Spiritualism, anarchism, land reform, abolitionism, vegetarianism, and spelling and writing reform, I construct a deeper context for these geometric utopian projects that recovers some of their radical, imaginative, and critical spark, while shedding new interpretive light on the visual culture of mid-nineteenth-century radical reform movements.

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Introduction

“How long, then, my fellow-labourers, will you suffer the burdens of the present irrational arrangements of society? Will you ever delve in poverty and rags, when a little thinking, a little enterprise, would place you in a terrestrial paradise. Then arouse from your lethargy and assume the dignity of men. You have it in your power, not only to relieve yourselves, but to regenerate a world.”

- Lewis Masquerier (1841)

In the spring of 1856, a band of intrepid settlers set out for an unusual venture in Kansas: an octagonal vegetarian abolitionist colony. Its founder, a recent English emigrant named Henry Clubb, hoped to establish “ONE TRACT OF LAND on this fair earth free from the stain of habitual bloodshed...where the birds shall fill the air with melody without fear or trembling...”¹ Besides its commitment to dietetic reform, the Octagon Settlement Company was also distinguished by its proposed design—an eight-sided layout, with wedge-shaped farm lots radiating from a central park—which was prominently featured in the company’s prospectus. (Fig. 0.1) Engraved in spare white lines on a black background, accompanied by a measured scale, and annotated with letters corresponding to a legend in the manner of a scientific illustration, the diagram lent a sense of rationality and credibility to what must have appeared to many a quixotic experiment. The prospectus text did little to dispel the mystery of the plan’s octagonal shape, apart from claiming that the centralized arrangement would give equal advantages of locality to all residents.

¹ *The Illustrated Vegetarian Almanac for 1855* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1855), 24.

Surprisingly, some 80 individuals purchased shares in the enterprise. Less surprisingly, the community dissolved within a few months of its establishment near Fort Scott. In 1855-56, prospective settlers were lured to purchase lots in the newly organized Kansas territory both by ideology (at the time, Kansas was a prime battleground between pro- and anti-slavery forces) and by the promise of profit (speculation in western land was at fever pitch). The records suggest that the Octagon Company settlers were inspired by a similar combination of pecuniary and idealistic motives. Whatever its utopian overtones, Clubb's vegetarian colony was also at its core a speculative real estate venture, and like other new towns, employed the plan to help sell itself.

We can only speculate about the influence exerted by the printed image of the town plan, which also appeared in reform journals and newspapers, in attracting colonists. Nineteenth-century illustrated plats of new towns served a double purpose—addressing both the functional need to demarcate lots for sale—and the more chimerical task of attracting settlers with the promise of amenities that likely existed only on paper. Charles Dickens lampooned the all-too-common chasm between representation and reality in a pair of illustrations in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842-43), which showed a western American city called “Eden” as it was depicted in the land office, and in its more humble actuality. (Fig. 0.2) As Dickens's visual satire highlights, idealized town plats such as the one issued by the Vegetarian Octagon Colony were both illusory—representing cities that did not exist—and manifestly material: the mere existence of a plan, printed in ink on paper, lent concreteness and legitimacy to the most improbable ventures. Nineteenth-century Americans understood two-dimensional orthographic plans to be a form of technical drawing employed in the building process. Such drawings could lay claim to being the very

instruments for transforming ideal into actuality. The images' functional quality was part of their rhetorical, persuasive power: they promised to help overcome the gap between representation and fact, idealized vision and reality. This helps account for the images' equivocal blend of the sober and the eccentric, function and fiction.

This dissertation focuses on several drawings of utopian projects proposed by American reformers in the nineteenth century.² Clubb's eight-sided scheme, it turns out, was not an isolated example but part of a larger constellation of projects that I call "geometric utopias"—plans that employed distinct urban and architectural forms to bring about individual and social reform. The projects include Thomas Jefferson's octagonal houses and square land grids, an eight-sided republican village proposed by a radical workingmen's group, an octagon house design developed by a phrenologist, a hexagonal "anarchist" city, and a series of oval and circular buildings envisioned by Spiritualists in western New York. Although the vast majority of American intentional communities did

² I use the terms "radical," "reformer," and "utopian" fairly interchangeably but it is also important to make some distinctions. In his useful overview of American antebellum reform, Ronald Walters distinguishes radicals—those who want to fundamentally change structure of society—from reformers—those who want to improve individuals or existing social, economic, and political arrangements. "Introduction," in Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997). Walters's differentiation is similar to Karl Mannheim's distinction between utopia and ideology: the former encompassed beliefs aimed at opposing the present state of society; ideology was composed of ideas intended to confirm the status quo. Just as Mannheim's binary can become blurry, so too Walters also points out that the difference between reformer and radical in the nineteenth-century US was often hazy. Indeed, just as turn-of-the-nineteenth-century penal reform was regarded as humane and radical in its day, having connections with pacifism, recent historical interpretation has cast the movement as reactionary if not repressive. By the same token, individuals who were radical in one sense might also be conservative in another: Josiah Warren, the subject of Chapter 5, on one hand wanted the state to enforce a radical leveling of wealth, but on the other, espoused libertarian views, all while seeking to reform the system of musical notation. He was literally radical, reactionary, and reformer in one. Part of the problem stems from the confusion of nineteenth-century and contemporary political spectrums, which don't align. (One need only think of the way the term "republican" has changed from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.) Because of these complications, Walters opts to use the catchall term "reformers"—the word most often applied by nineteenth-century Americans to social visionaries of many stripes. I will continue to use all three terms—reformer, utopian, and radical—relatively interchangeably to describe the figures in the dissertation, almost all of whom sought to remake society according their own unique vision. Untangling and differentiating their politics will be an important task of the chapters that follow.

not feature such formalistic architecture and urban schemes, enough did to constitute a distinct strain of nineteenth-century utopianism. (Fig. 0.3) Almost all the inventors of these geometric utopias presented their plans on functional grounds: Orson Fowler, the chief promulgator of the octagon house, claimed its compact floor plan would save footsteps and hence improve health; Josiah Warren asserted his radically decentralized hexagonal city would help prevent the spread of fires and disease.

Historians have often accepted these functional explanations, just as quickly dismissing the plans as hopelessly naïve. I present an alternate interpretation here, arguing that that the nineteenth-century geometric utopians exploited the ambiguous status of geometric, diagrammatic plans as simultaneously technical drawings and imaginative forms, possessing both functional and aesthetic properties, and that this blurring, or overdetermination, is what enabled the plans to take on a political role. The reformers who concocted eight-sided vegetarian cities and circular institutions of non-capitalist commerce were proposing forms of social organization different from the status quo—in some cases only mildly departures and in other cases quite radical ones. The imagery of their proposals had to represent this difference, to make the proposed reforms seem appealing—even fantastical, while also portraying change as plausible and necessary. The plans were forms of rhetoric as much as, perhaps more than, they were functional blueprints.

Looking closely at, but also beyond, the reformers' own explanations for their plans, towards the wider context of the nineteenth-century American culture, I argue that geometric utopian plans conjoined aesthetic and political effects in several specific ways. The reformers drew on a cultural milieu that associated geometry with proof, certainty,

and “self-evidence.” It’s not accidental that many early American political theorists referred to geometry in making political arguments. As technical, scaled diagrams, the images seemed to constitute a form of transparent, unmediated representation at a time when political and economic systems seemed increasingly obscure and distant to many working and middle-class Americans. In some cases, geometric utopias provided “cognitive maps” of Jacksonian society, making visible existing social relationships and critiquing the status quo. Yet geometric images could also be seen as furthering the obscuration and abstraction of politics, since their inventors often held that an orderly, rational plan could obviate political struggle and conflict. Finally, some geometric utopians suggested that the diagrams could not only facilitate comprehension, or persuasion, but also spark readers’ own powers of imagination.

Historiography

As architectural, urban, and territorial plans created by men who were not professional architects or designers, the history of these geometric utopias have tended to fall into a caesura between studies of American history and architectural history. Historians have long recognized the middle decades of the nineteenth century as a period of utopian fervor—a time when, as Ralph Waldo Emerson famously observed, it seemed every “reading man” had a “draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket.”³ Some of the

³ Emerson, letter to Thomas Carlisle, 1840, quoted in David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 134. The literature on 19th-century American reform and utopian communities is vast, but general references include Arthur Eugene Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950); Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., “Patent-Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships between Social Reform and Westward Expansion,” *The American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1953); Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District; the Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic*

reformers I examine, especially Orson Fowler, Josiah Warren, and George Henry Evans, are reasonably well-known among historians of nineteenth-century culture and politics. However, historians have tended to focus on the content of reformers' ideas, neglecting the spatial or visual aspects of their projects.⁴ The historiography of American reform movements has gravitated toward questions of intentions and ideological motivations—either affirming reformers' radicality and progressiveness, or unmasking their activities as a form of social control and class domination.⁵ On the other hand, architectural historians who focus on the nineteenth-century United States have traditionally been preoccupied with questions of style and with designs by architects and urban planners, rather than the

Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950); Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875); John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1870); Donald E. Pitzer, *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1965); Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*.

⁴ Despite the recent "visual turn" in history, most studies of nineteenth-century visual culture have focused on figural images like cartoons and photographs rather than abstract diagrams. Hence the geometric utopian diagrams have largely gone unexplored. To my knowledge, no one has adequately investigated the visual culture of the land reform movement, for example, or the American Spiritualist movement (apart from a few works on "spirit" photography). To pick on just one example of a relevant historical study that includes no images, see, Jamie Bronstein's excellent book *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). This is not a criticism but simply an observation about the methodological preoccupations of labor history. In contrast, Sean Wilentz's older book contains many excellent illustrations but these are treated *as* illustrations rather than as images to be analyzed at length. See *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Unfortunately, some visual culture studies also fall into the problem of treating images more or less as transparent vehicles of meaning, that is, as mere illustrations.

⁵ For a summary on the historiography of antebellum reform movements, from progressive to revisionist to new left to critical approaches, see Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers*, xv-xvii. One problem with broad generalizations about this historiography is that interpretations differ depending on the reform movement in question, with causes like temperance usually being seen as conservative and middle-class in impetus, and causes like pacifism seen as more radical. The ideology of anti-slavery has received some of the most intensive scrutiny. The literature is too vast to name, but one good historiographically focused introduction is Thomas Bender, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

work of social reformers or broader cultural and social developments. This disciplinary narrowness has started to relax in the last forty years, especially with the rise of vernacular and popular architectural histories. Nevertheless, questions about the relationship between aesthetics and politics, between form and content, and between geometry and utopia, have not been adequately explored. It is this conjunction that I am interested in unraveling: How to explain this curious affiliation between radical politics and geometric architectural form in nineteenth-century America?

A common answer to this question suggested by recent scholarship is that reformers looked to architecture and urban plans because of an emerging ideology of “environmental determinism.”⁶ This was the idea that architecture and landscape could not only *represent* their inhabitants (a traditional view of architectural expression), but also *mold* individuals’ bodies and minds. The roots of this nineteenth-century idea of architectural potency lay in part in psychological theories that emphasized the importance of the external environment on character formation, developed first by sensationalist philosophers like John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac and later by social reformers like Robert Owen.⁷ As a result, the physical design of many kinds of spaces—

⁶ This ideology is also sometimes referred to as “environmentalism”—not to be confused with contemporary movements for sustainability or ecology. For a broad historiographic perspective on environmental determinism, see especially the essays “A Brief Excursus on Formalism” and “Persons as Uncaused Causes” in Thomas L. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). On domestic environmentalism—the belief that the home could have a positive moral effect on its inhabitants, see the Introduction in Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). On the influence of environmental determinism in the design of nineteenth-century mental asylums, see Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). For prisons, see Robin Evans, *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁷ In the eighteenth century, Locke and Condillac had speculated on the mechanisms by which the human psyche could receive, store, and be influenced by sense impressions from the external world. Locke famously

from prisons to asylums to houses to gardens—came to be seen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as having a profound power to shape both individual bodies and social collectivities. A few architectural historians have described this idea as a kind of proto-functionalism, defined as the belief that buildings can have predictable effects on individual and social behavior.⁸ For instance, in the case of Bentham’s circular Panopticon, or of radial hospitals, the particular geometries were justified on functional, performative grounds such as the enabling of surveillance or better ventilation. These environmental relationships and conditions, it was believed, would in turn yield more docile and healthy bodies. Still, most historians have stopped at identifying this new proto-functionalist view of architecture and accepting (or rejecting) its validity—in a sense, taking the reformers’ claims of functionalism at face value. Additionally, the study of reform architecture has tended toward “disciplinary” readings—the idea that medical, penal, and other reformers employed environmentalist ideologies to alter other people’s behaviors, at the expense of recognizing how utopian designs could also be seen as a tool of self-liberation or other aims, such as greater economic equality.

This dissertation builds and expands upon the “environmentalist,” “proto-functionalist” interpretation of reform architecture and urban design in trying to

described the human mind as a blank page upon which external images were impressed. Such sensationalist thinking contributed to the rise of nineteenth-century reformers’ belief that environmental conditions could elevate or degrade individuals’ moral and psychic health.

⁸ On the many definitions of functionalism, see the essay on “Function” in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000). Forty argues functionalism thus understood as I have defined it does not develop until the 20th century, and opposes those who try to trace this idea to the early nineteenth century discourse around prisons and other reform architectures (presumably he is thinking of Robin Evans and Anthony Vidler). Anthony Vidler argues that eighteenth-century reform architecture in France anticipated functionalism in *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987).

understand the emergence of these geometric utopias. I am interested in thinking of functionalism itself as a kind of aesthetic, a representational style, and in exploring what other effects these designs may have had as visual images. Approaching these plans and diagrams as aesthetic objects allows us to value them differently—not just as (failed) functional instruments or projections of built forms. Rather than seeing the projects’ eccentricities, including their geometric forms, as symptoms of weakness or irrelevance, we might interpret seemingly excessive or arbitrary features as precisely those elements requiring further critical, hermeneutic effort. This study would therefore contribute to what Fredric Jameson has called a “Utopian formalism”—a method of reading not just the explicit political content of utopian projects but also their unspoken parameters, with the goal of creating a dialogue between formal, representational questions and political ones.⁹

The Content of Utopia

The projects examined here all emerged out of the expanding democracy and developing capitalist economy of Jacksonian America. Between the 1780s and 1850s, American society underwent a massive and rapid transformation from an economy based on farming and small-scale commerce to modern industrial capitalism.¹⁰ The new market economy ushered in the dominance of wage labor as well as new forms of finance and credit that rendered traditional paths to autonomy and assumptions about value unstable. Dissenters

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), xiii. As part of a utopian formalism, Jameson proposes a reevaluation of the seemingly “gratuitous” aesthetic details of utopias, reading them as “placeholders and symptoms” of what cannot yet be thought by the Utopian imagination. (p. 44)

¹⁰ On the transformation of the U.S. economy in the nineteenth century, see Christopher Clark, *Social Change in America: From the Revolution through the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

to this “market revolution,” including many of the reformers in this study, believed that the new wage servitude, capitalist accumulation, and credit economy posed serious threats to the egalitarian, democratic promise of the American Revolution, and to an older vision of a republic composed of independent equals. Already at the turn of the nineteenth century, an older republican ideology—with its view of independent, virtuous citizens working to cultivate the common good—began to give way to a liberal ideology emphasizing individual rights and competitive self-interest.¹¹ Each of the utopian projects I study can be interpreted as staking a position on this central problem of how to reconcile individual freedom and interests with concerns for equality and the collective good in a capitalist society. Some of the plans prioritized equality: In the 1840s, George Henry Evans advocated a Jeffersonian-derived land grid that would facilitate the distribution of free homesteads to landless workers. Other reformers emphasized self-interest and advancement: Fowler’s octagon house, for example, was intended to maximize individual economy and health, enabling the inhabitant to advance in the competitive market society. Without necessarily using the terms “liberal” or “republican” (although some did), each of the thinkers studied here proposed a distinct view on the question of how to integrate individual and collective aims.

Despite the differences, most of the geometric utopians shared certain assumptions, for example, that individual land ownership of some form was the basis of personal autonomy. This privileging of freehold land tenure can be related to the fact that

¹¹ For an overview of the historiography of republican ideology, see Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (1992).

all the geometric utopias I have found were created by white men.¹² While many reformers held what would have been understood as “radical” views in their day regarding race and gender (all except Jefferson were abolitionists and most supported “woman’s rights”), nevertheless, the utopians’ proposals revealed the constraints of what Dana Nelson has identified as a rising ideology of “national manhood” during the period I examine—one that assumed an imagined community of white men and entailed differentiation from, if not outright subordination of, women, blacks, and Native Americans. The land reformer Evans was typical: although deeply critical of Indian removal, his proposed solution to the “problem” of white occupation of Native lands was that Indians could also obtain free homesteads apportioned in his grids. In other words, he presumed a white European conception of property, excluding the possibility of other, more communally based or non-proprietary forms of land tenure.

The geometric utopians tended to overlook their own gendered and racially based biases, since most identified themselves as, like women and slaves, without access to the levers of power. Among nineteenth-century white radicals, it was not uncommon to find unreflective comparisons of wage slavery to racial slavery. The reformers’ turn toward architecture and urban planning can partly be explained by the fact that the reformers by and large did not see politics—at least, electoral politics—as an adequate means to resist the changes wrought by the capitalist economy. Continuing an older post-Revolutionary-era tradition of hostility toward the abstraction of representative democracy (as embodied in the U.S. Constitution, and as contrasted with more direct face-to-face democratic

¹² For a fascinating study of black utopias, see William Henry Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963). As far as I have been able to ascertain, none of the black utopias described by the Peases featured unusual urban designs.

praxes), many radicals saw government as part of the problem rather than the solution, as an obscure, unintelligible, and rigged system. Reformers viewed themselves as operating directly on and through the social rather than the political realm, as developing nothing less than a science of society. Geometric diagrams, with their connotations of objectivity, rationality, and transparency, may have seemed an appropriate medium for those interested in constructing such a social science. Yet this orientation to the social totality, and desire to fashion a positivist science for reconstructing society, betrayed another aspect of the geometric utopians' tendency toward cognitive hegemony. Resorting to geometric diagrams allowed the reformers to assert the universalism and rationality of their proposals. As Dana Nelson observes, laying claim to such an objective, disembodied, and universalist standpoint was precisely one of the privileges exerted by white men in the nineteenth century.¹³

The Form of Utopia

The political *content* of the utopian projects I study concerned negotiations of individualism and collectivity, of freedom and equality, whether in a liberal, republican, or radical mold. The central question of this dissertation is the relationship between these political contents and the forms of the utopians' plans. "Form" can be understood in two senses here: First I am interested in the medium of the diagrams—that is, the culture of print in which they appeared. The key actors in my dissertation were principal participants in an expanded mass culture of print enabled by improvements in lithography

¹³ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 9-10.

and transportation. All projected their ideas into the public sphere through publications, handbills, and lectures. Not coincidentally, several were themselves printers, or started their own publishing firms. Josiah Warren, the subject of Chapter 5, invented a new kind of printing press intended to reduce costs and bring “the printing press equally within the reach of all.” As he wrote to *The Free Enquirer* in 1830, the expense of printing deprived the great mass of people of influence, while increasing the power of the wealthy few.¹⁴

Warren, like most of the other figures studied here, did not produce finely detailed architectural drawings but instead broadcast his plans in the form of rough, woodcut plan diagrams that could be quickly reproduced and distributed to the broadest possible audience.

The second kind of “form” that I examine is the geometry of the reformers’ architectural and urban plans—visual attributes such as shape, line, and color—in other words, the kind of form that architectural and visual studies scholars traditionally focus on. Architectural historians have taken a variety of approaches to interpreting the geometries of reform architectures, which could be heuristically classified as formalist, social, and functionalist. The formalist attitude to utopian form is exemplified by Colin Rowe. In his essay “The Architecture of Utopia,” Rowe sketched a brief history of utopian urban forms, focusing on the circle in particular as an enduring formal trope of modern ideal cities, from the Renaissance schemes of Filarete to Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City diagram. Rowe attributed the circle’s popularity during the Renaissance to

¹⁴ Josiah Warren, “Printing in Private Families,” *The Free Enquirer*, March 13, 1830, 157. Warren patented a printing press in 1835 and further typographic innovations in 1846. On Warren’s innovations in this field, see Madeleine B. Stern, “Every Man His Own Printer: The Typographical Experiments of Josiah Warren,” *Printing History* 2, no. 2 (1980).

the webs of analogy and symbolism linking it to the ideas of divine creation and a harmonious cosmic, natural order. Yet Rowe also detected a dissolution of this symbolism over time. By the age of Enlightenment, when Ledoux and Boullée were composing their circular cities and monumental buildings, Rowe asserted the concentric form was “no longer quite so ‘natural’ as it once had been.”¹⁵ This unraveling relationship between architectural form and social meaning reached its nadir in the nineteenth century. According to Rowe, it was then that Utopia saw “its ultimate formal degradation” in the form of projects like Robert Pemberton’s Happy Colony of 1854. (Fig. 0.5) Pemberton’s plan, influenced by Robert Owen and intended for New Zealand, called for a circular college to be built at the center of a town, containing workshops, baths, conservatories, botanic and horticultural gardens, as well as “terrestrial and celestial maps” laid out on the ground, for the edification of the students.¹⁶ Pemberton’s project can be read as a foreign cousin of the American examples that I study. For Rowe, whereas Filarete and other Renaissance planners had related the geometry of their ideal cities to a contemporary cosmogony of symbols and emblems, by the mid-1850s such geometric references had lost their organic connection to society, leading to a rift between utopian form and content. Although “Platonic forms persist they are no longer infused with a corresponding content.” Rowe doubted “whether many of those to whom the Happy Colony was addressed were conscious of its author’s transpositions of the traditional iconography.” As a result, he observes: “[T]he *appearance* of Utopia must have come to

¹⁵ Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 210.

¹⁶ Robert Pemberton, *The Happy Colony* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1854).

seem unduly mechanical. . . . [D]eserted by intellect, Utopia now becomes naïve.”¹⁷

Rowe’s comments raised the question of how contemporary nineteenth-century audiences would have understood the geometry of Pemberton’s plan. However his suggestions that the designer was merely transposing traditional forms, or that nineteenth-century audiences would not have understood this iconography, are not substantiated. As a historian primarily interested in timeless, ideal forms, Rowe did not undertake the history of reception that he hints at in passing. Nor could he see beyond the visual homology of the nineteenth-century and Renaissance plans to recognize the new meaning that circular cities held in the nineteenth century.

If Rowe dismissed the geometry of nineteenth century utopian plans as naïve vestiges, then many other scholars of US utopias and reform buildings—particularly those who adopt a social history methodology—have tended to downplay urban and architectural form, or even castigate it as a factor in the projects’ failures. In her study of asylum architecture, for example, Carla Yanni concludes that the emphasis of nineteenth-century psychiatry on architecture, and on the theory of environmental determinism, was one of the signs of its demise. In the end, Yanni writes, the architecture of facilities for the mentally ill doesn’t matter nearly as much as the quality of the staff.¹⁸ Architecture in Yanni’s account is subordinated to the social. Dolores Hayden, too, in her seminal survey of American utopias, while far from renouncing architecture entirely, nevertheless stressed the “history of organizing and building processes” over and above the communities’ “odd architecture.” In extrapolating the lessons from her utopian case studies, she concludes

¹⁷ Rowe, *Mathematics*, 210-11.

¹⁸ Yanni, *Architecture of Madness*, 146, 158.

that “Social and economic reorganization must be the basis of any environmental reorganization.”¹⁹ Hayden too ultimately also gives primacy to the social.

A third group of historians, including scholars such as Anthony Vidler and Robin Evans, have identified in the stripped-down geometries of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century reform architecture the emergence of a new, proto-functionalist understanding of the relationship between architectural form and content.²⁰ In a set of parallel investigations conducted in 1980s, Vidler and Evans argued that the simple, apparently rational geometries of late-eighteenth-century utopian and reformist buildings in England and France marked a significant shift in the understanding of architectural form—from a traditional view that beauty was embodied in a building’s proportions and facades, to an idea that geometry should serve social or environmental needs, primarily via the organization of the plan. Vidler describes the new view as a kind of “primitive functionalism” that saw the plan as the primary tool of social control and reform, and the façade of the building as the instrument for affecting spectators’ morals and sensations.²¹

While some other historians have interpreted this emergent functionalist theory of architecture as a desacralization, a loss of buildings’ old expressive and symbolic

¹⁹ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 349.

²⁰ To be clear, Vidler shares Rowe’s view that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architects re-elaborated ideal forms inherited from the Renaissance. However, unlike Rowe, Vidler emphasizes that both the deployments and the metaphors animating circular forms changed over time. See the eponymous essay in Anthony Vidler, *The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2011).

²¹ *Writing*, 3. Evans outlines a similar shift in approaches towards the design of English prisons around the turn of the nineteenth century: Whereas the architecture of eighteenth-century prisons was imagined to represent values like virtue or justice on its facades, at the start of the nineteenth century, buildings were seen to have a more direct and instrumental power to shape their inhabitants’ minds, bodies, and souls. Prison architecture shifted away from the *representation* of events and into the *fabrication* of events, particularly via the coordination of movement, position, sight, smell, and sound. Evans, *Fabrication*, 417.

capacity,²² Evans and Vidler instead recognize new possibilities for architecture's engagement with the sociopolitical realm. As Evans writes: "Architecture was now an active agency in the world rather than a representation of it, and would have to be judged by results. Thus, while architecture seemed to be in retreat in so far as it had to do with visible form, its orbit was made capable of extending indefinitely over the lower reaches of society.... This was surely architecture unlimited."²³ If Evans here sounds almost giddy about the expansion of architecture's agency into the social realm, it is not because he is unaware of the disciplinary aspects of turn-of-the-century prison reform. Both Evans and Vidler allude to the problematic practices of normalization, individualization, isolation, and pacification proposed by the new architectures of social improvement. Neither is blind to the failures of the reform buildings. Yet they are both intrigued by historical intersections of architectural and social projects and how these might point to new forms of socio-political agency for design.

The Aesthetics of Functionalism

Whereas Rowe dismisses nineteenth-century utopian forms as unaesthetic and Hayden and Yanni subsume the importance of form to the socio-political, Evans's and Vidler's work points to a third possibility—one that is not explicitly stated but seems hinted at—which is to interpret late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century proto-functionalism as a new kind of aesthetic, one with cultural and political effects. One of the main arguments

²² For this position, see Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

²³ Evans, *Fabrication*, 417-18.

of this dissertation is that the architecture of reform, while claiming to be functional, also had an aesthetic dimension. I use the term “aesthetic” in its widest sense to mean something that is affective, acting on the imagination as well as the rational mind. This entails reading the architecture of nineteenth-century reform differently than its creators intended. It is to not accept their claims of functionality—for example, the assertion that a particular land division would effect social equality, or that an octagon house would produce healthier children—but rather, to read the reformers’ diagrams and plans as ideology-laden objects whose effects can only be decoded by understanding the broader cultural milieus in which they circulated.

Utopian geometric drawings were not intended merely as literal “blueprints” for construction but, with their stripped-down geometries and minimal graphic content, served to indicate more intangible qualities, including relationships, movements, and ideas. These images produced at least four kinds of conjunctures of political and aesthetic effects: First, diagrams served as rhetorical devices, instruments of legitimation. The apparent truth-value of diagrams stemmed from their transparency, as well as their longstanding association with geometry and the formulation of self-evidential proofs. The 1828 edition of Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary* defined the diagram as “In geometry, a figure, draught or scheme delineated for the purpose of *demonstrating* the properties of any figure, as a square, triangle, circle, &c.”²⁴ Diagrams—geometric images—were associated with the idea of proof and certainty. As Jefferson famously put it regarding his love of mathematics: “We have no theories here, no uncertainties remain on the mind,

²⁴ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828).

but all is demonstration and satisfaction.”²⁵ This linkage of geometry and proof was not infrequently put to political use. In *The Federalist*, No. 31, Alexander Hamilton began his argument for the national government’s power of taxation with a lengthy rumination on geometry. Just as in mathematics, there were “primary truths, or first principles” that contained an “internal evidence, which, antecedent to all reflection or combination, commands the assent of the mind,” he reasoned, so too, in the spheres of ethics and politics, there were propositions “so obvious in themselves, and so agreeable to the natural and unsophisticated dictates of common sense, that they challenge the assent of a sound and unbiased mind, with a degree of force and conviction almost equally irresistible.”²⁶ This connection between the “self-evident” form of the diagram and a type of political reasoning so forceful as to be almost “irresistible,” continued to hold sway in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Second, as forms of representation with origins in technical and geometric drawing, plan diagrams implied a one-to-one relationship between image and function. In other words, they suggested a kind of transparent relationship between image and objective reality. The selection of the diagram had much to do with reformers’ desire for forms of representation that seemed truthful, direct, and unmediated. This is the thread that links together many of the radicals’ apparently eclectic interests—for example Josiah Warren’s reforms in musical notation, his proposal for a labor note currency, and his hexagonal city plan. In the nineteenth century, one task of radical politics was to remove

²⁵ Jefferson to Reverend James Madison, Dec. 29, 1811. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), <http://founders.archives.gov>.

²⁶ Alexander Hamilton, “The Federalist No. 31,” *The Federalist Papers* (1788), http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_31.html.

the multiple layers of mediation that those in power were imposing in all spheres—whether in the form of “phantom” representative governments, or paper currencies controlled by a distant central bank. As one historian has written regarding nineteenth-century English working-class cultural debates: “It was resistance to these elusive yet dominant accounts of representation, rather than obtuse empiricism or inadequate theorization, that led to the radical movement’s overwhelming faith in simple, descriptive representation. In electoral politics as in language, reformers sought to strip away accumulated layers of corruption and mediation.”²⁷ Placing the utopian plans in the context of early nineteenth century ideas about representation helps us recognize the wider political implications of reformers’ choices about medium and form.

Thirdly, the nineteenth-century utopian diagrams made visible existing social relationships and sometimes operated as implicit critiques of the status quo. Here I am thinking, for example, of the land grid championed by the National Reformers. The image of a perfectly and evenly divided square operated as a counterpoint in the popular imagination to the actually existing (but rarely representable) unequal distribution of property. In this sense, utopian diagrams could operate as what Jameson has called “cognitive maps” of the social totality—representations that enabled individuals to conceptualize their own relationship to larger social structures and forces.²⁸

²⁷ Kevin Gilmartin, “Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere,” *Studies in Romanticism* 33, no. 4 (1994): 552. Gilmartin links this discussion back to the passage on the “Image, Phantom, or Representative of the Commonwealth” in Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. Gilmartin writes, “The early nineteenth-century English radical movement was a calculated intervention in the political history and manipulation of these images and phantoms.”

²⁸ Jameson describes the function of cognitive mapping as one of making visible relationships of the individual to the social totality that are normally not representable: “To enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s

At the same time that geometric diagrams could serve to make visible certain inequities in the existing social structure, we must also recognize the fundamental impulse of abstraction that undergirded the images. By abstraction I mean a process of distancing, reducing, and organizing information to produce a compressed and highly aestheticized image. The reformers' octagons, hexagons, circles, and grids conjured forms of societal organization that were neat, clean and untroubled by complexities and contradictions, whether social or aesthetic. But the nineteenth-century utopians were hardly alone in this endeavor. As Eric Slauter has recently argued, proponents of the U.S. Constitution engaged in a similar project of idealizing the state as a work of art, to be appreciated for its formal beauties. Slauter points out the rising use of architecture as a metaphor for government in the 1780s as evidence of this tendency to aestheticize government and, more generally, to valorize a distant, static, and less democratic form of polity.²⁹

Yet there is evidence that some in the nineteenth century saw abstraction as abetting rather than hindering democracy.³⁰ Some reformers at least saw the abstraction of their diagrams as giving space for their readers' imaginations. The editors of an 1844 issue of *The Working Men's Advocate* explained their reasons for publishing the images of

structures as a whole." Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Elsewhere, he has suggested that literary utopias can function as such cognitive maps, by making visible social contradictions in dramatic or aesthetic forms, and in ways that can grip the imagination and speak to larger social groups. See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 13.

²⁹ Eric Thomas Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 41.

³⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville remarked on the prevalence of abstract language in democracies like the United States: "[D]emocratic peoples have a taste and often a passion for general ideas.... This love of general ideas manifests itself in democratic languages through the constant use of generic terms and abstract words..." He continues, "An abstract word is like a box with a false bottom: you can put in any ideas you please and take them out again without anyone being the wiser." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 552-53.

their republican township and equitable land grid: “That our readers may have a *distinct idea* of what [we] are aiming at, and that they may be the better enabled to *carry out in their own minds* the consequences that would result from their schemes.”³¹ What the land reformers were describing was an act of projection and imagination. At a basic level, the inclusion of a visual provided readers with a tangible, concrete illustration of the land reformers’ policies, but the statement above hinted at another idea—the notion that the image could also act as impetus and incitement for readers’ own imaginary capacities—in other words, that the image had an open-ended, generative quality. In their very reductiveness, diagrams suggest the possibility of proliferating interpretations—a way one might project a new world out of the materials of the present one.³²

These five effects of the nineteenth-century diagrams help explain the geometry of the utopian plans explored here. Nineteenth-century octagons, ovals, and circles were not merely late vestiges of Renaissance aesthetics, as Rowe claimed. Nor were they simply distractions or naïve panaceas for core social problems, as some historians have suggested. In order to act effectively as prescriptions for functional relationships, as cognitive maps, and as rhetorical-political instruments, the images and their forms had to be of the utmost simplicity and clarity. The creators of these images implicitly understood that the so-called functionalism of the images was an aesthetic property, capable of affecting the social imaginary.

³¹ *The Working Man’s Advocate*, May 18, 1844.

³² Jameson has described this as a structural problematic common to utopias—what he calls a “dialectic of identity and difference.” Our imaginations are always constrained by present: “even our wildest imaginings are all collages...made up of bits and pieces of the here and now.” Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, xiii.

Organization of Chapters

For a project focusing on “minor” figures, this dissertation begins paradoxically with a far-from-peripheral historical persona, Thomas Jefferson. I approach him as a kind of prologue figure, not because he was the direct antecedent of the later geometric utopians (though he was an important reference point for some, especially for the land reformers). Rather, as an amateur architect and creator of territorial and urban grids, he was one of the first Americans to grapple with the relationship between spatial forms and politics—and in ways that significantly shaped the terms of American land distribution through the establishment of the national land survey system. This chapter reads two geometries in his work—the octagon and the grid, figure and field—as two halves of a multivalent spatio-political program. On one hand, in his handling of octagons, Jefferson was wrestling with a new idea about how architecture, especially the house, could both represent and help to produce a liberal subject. On the other hand, Jefferson saw the territorial grid as an instrument to help effect a more radical distribution of land, wealth, and power and to create his ideal republic of freeholders.

By the early decades of the nineteenth-century, Jefferson’s grid would come to be seen mainly as an instrument for the commodification and sale of land. But in the 1840s, a group of workingmen led by George Henry Evans revived and modified Jefferson’s land grid as part of an effort to achieve economic independence for all white men—at a time when mechanization and the rise of an industrial economy were closing traditional paths to artisan autonomy. Chapter 2 explores the National Reform Association’s use of the image of the township grid, as well as an octagonal republican village designed by the

reformer Lewis Masquerier, as part of the Association's proposal to give each landless American a free farm and to create a more direct, unmediated form of democracy.

If the land reformers were the inheritors to Jefferson's grid, then Orson Fowler, best-known as one of antebellum America's leading popular phrenologists, was the legatee of Jefferson's obsession with octagons. In his book *A Home for All* of 1848, Fowler presented the geometric house as a tool for creating an autonomous liberal subject—that is, an economically self-sufficient, physically strong, and emotionally nourished self.

Chapter 3 examines the functionalist logics that underlay the phrenologist's house design.

Fowler directly influenced at least one enterprise that attempted to transform his individualistically directed use of geometry for collective ends—Henry Clubb's anti-slavery Vegetarian Octagon Settlement Company, established in Kansas in 1856. Clubb, who, besides being an abolitionist and vegetarian, was also an advocate of shorthand reform, presents an opportunity to explore the linkages and tensions between various seemingly disconnected reform efforts. Chapter 4 argues that Clubb attempted to resolve some of the contradictions within his and other nineteenth-century reform enterprises—between, say, individuality and sociality, and between urban and rural models—through the apparent simplicity of the octagon diagram.

Chapter 5 turns to Josiah Warren, often described as the first American anarchist, who included a plan for a hexagonal city in his book *Practical Applications of the Elementary Principles of "True Civilization"* (1873). Warren, a former Owenite who turned against socialism and advocated a starkly individualistic model of society, was linked through numerous ties to both the land reformers and Fowler and was almost

certainly aware of their geometric utopian plans. I relate Warren's hexagonal plan to his theories of language and representation—as manifested in his interest in the reform of spelling and musical notation. My contention is that Warren believed that diagrammatic images could cut through the obfuscation of words and politics in nineteenth-century America.

The final chapter focuses on several projects related to John Murray Spear, leader of a Spiritualist community in western New York called Kiantone. In the 1850s, the group around Spear promoted a distinct strand of geometric utopianism—a circular and ovoid architecture that promised to “harmonize” social relations and to elevate the earthly world to a higher plane of development. I trace the origins and resonances of Spiritualism's aesthetic of circularity, pointing out the evasions inherent in their vision of a “heavenized” society, while gesturing toward its potentially productive qualities.

Toward a History of Minor Utopians

The five sets of projects at the core of this study would be deemed “minor” by any standard historical measure—humble cousins of the best-known nineteenth-century utopian plans, Robert Owen's New Harmony and Charles Fourier's phalanstery, both of which were influential among American reformers. Whereas Owen and Fourier are usually studied independently, and in isolation, by looking at five little-known utopian projects together I am able to ask questions about patterns of thought rather than individual intentions, and to build up a more general history out of dispersed elements rather than trace a continuous evolutionary narrative of one movement or of significant historical

actors.³³ This dissertation is not about singular, visionary geniuses, but about an aggregation of ideas and projects that together tell us something about how nineteenth-century Americans viewed the relationship between spatial form and politics. The concerns that preoccupied these figures—economic independence, personal freedom, collective governance, equality, social bonds, the transparency of political and economic systems, land, health, sexuality, spirituality, and machines—were symptomatic of the major social and cultural problems confronting the antebellum United States.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the figures I study were not typical of their age. While they reflected and responded to their time periods and societies, these were also self-consciously exceptional men who adopted positions considered radical and unpopular for their times. Although I follow Foucault's interest in detecting the "murmur" of anonymous voices within texts, I remain interested in the self-conscious agency of historical actors, especially those who took critical or agitational positions towards antebellum American society. Also, although I try to tease out contradictions inherent in these figures' thoughts, I resist treating them as unwitting agents of social control or of deeper ideologies beyond their awareness.

Interpreting geometric utopias as both historical *and* aesthetic artifacts also allows for a revaluation of these minor projects in another sense. Whereas historians tend to assess the importance of events or figures based on the degree to which they influenced later individuals, events, or ideas; literary and artistic critics often resuscitate "minor

³³ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). I also have in mind Giedion's notion of an anonymous history composed of a constellation of objects and figures. See the introduction to *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948).

literatures” or cast a light on hitherto unknown artists because the critics see the works as having contemporary cultural *resonance*. As Roland Barthes wrote, explaining his decision to revisit the work of three apparently minor literary figures, including the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, “The social intervention of a text (not necessarily achieved at the time the text appears) is measured not by the popularity of its audience or by the fidelity of the socioeconomic reflection it contains or projects to a few eager sociologists, but rather by the violence that enables it to exceed the laws that a society, an ideology, a philosophy establish for themselves.”³⁴ I have something similar in mind here. The contemporary significance of, say, Orson Fowler’s octagon house does not lie primarily in its possible influence on the Keck Brothers or Buckminster Fuller—later architects who also experimented with eight-sided geometries, but in the way that Fowler and his fellow geometric utopians linked aesthetic form and sociopolitical content. Such connections are surely still relevant to study, and to critique, today.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 10. The phrase “minor literature” comes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Deleuze and Guattari identify three attributes of a minor literature: it deterritorializes a major language from a marginalized position; it is political; and it has a collective value as a social, possibly revolutionary, enunciation. All of these attributes could arguably be applied to the utopian projectors in my study.

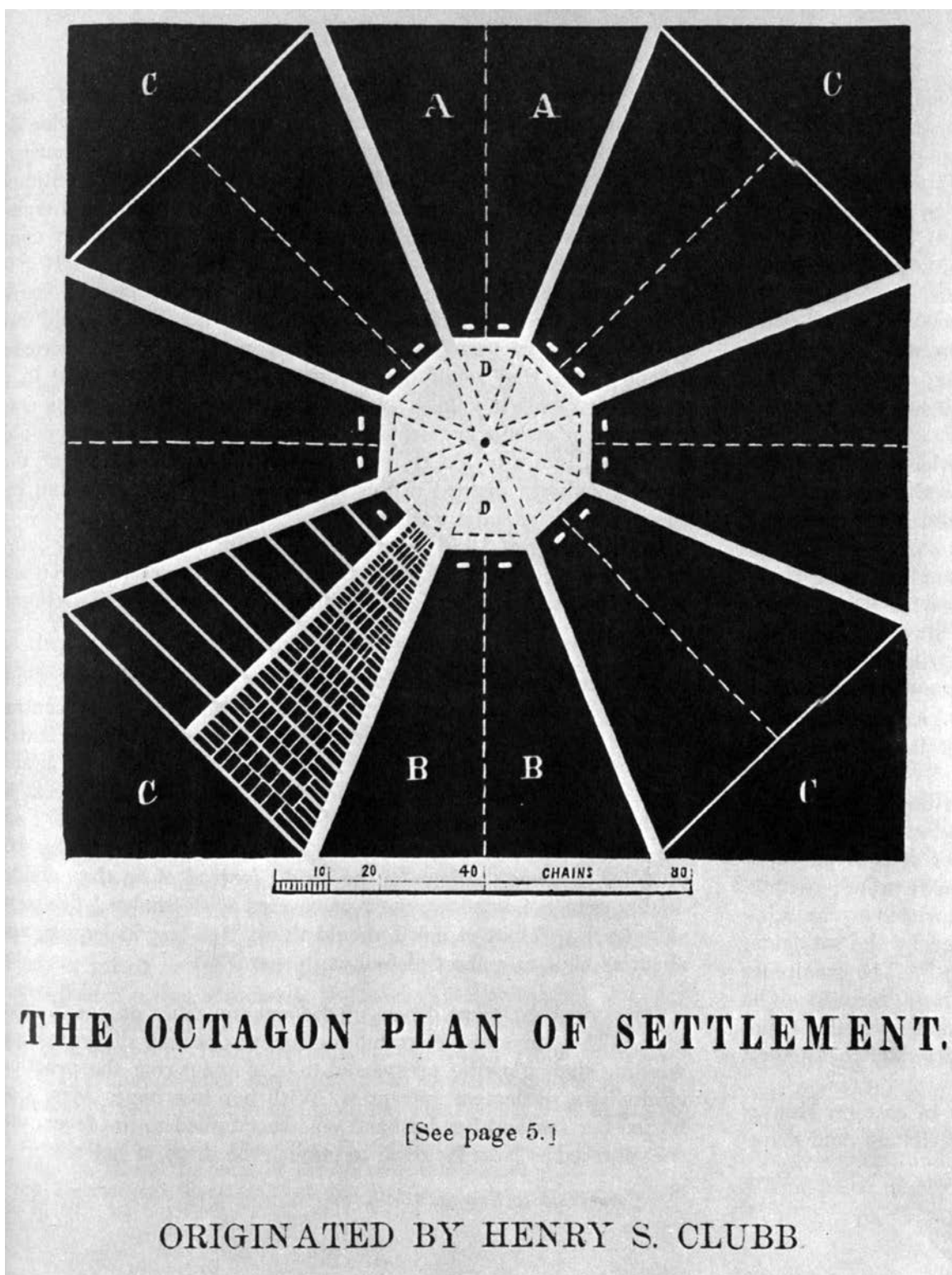


Fig. 0.1 Illustration in the prospectus for the Octagon Settlement Company, 1856

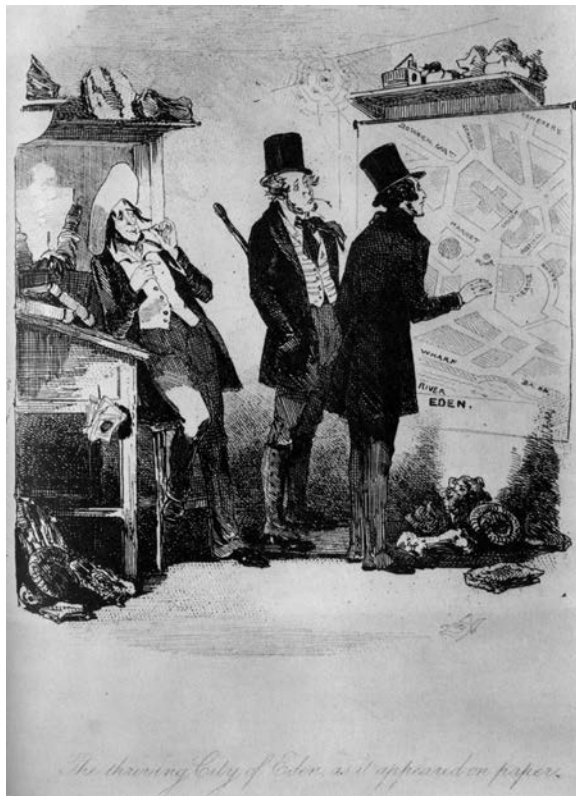


Fig. 0.2 Images from Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842-43) showing a western American city called “Eden” as depicted in the land office, and in actuality

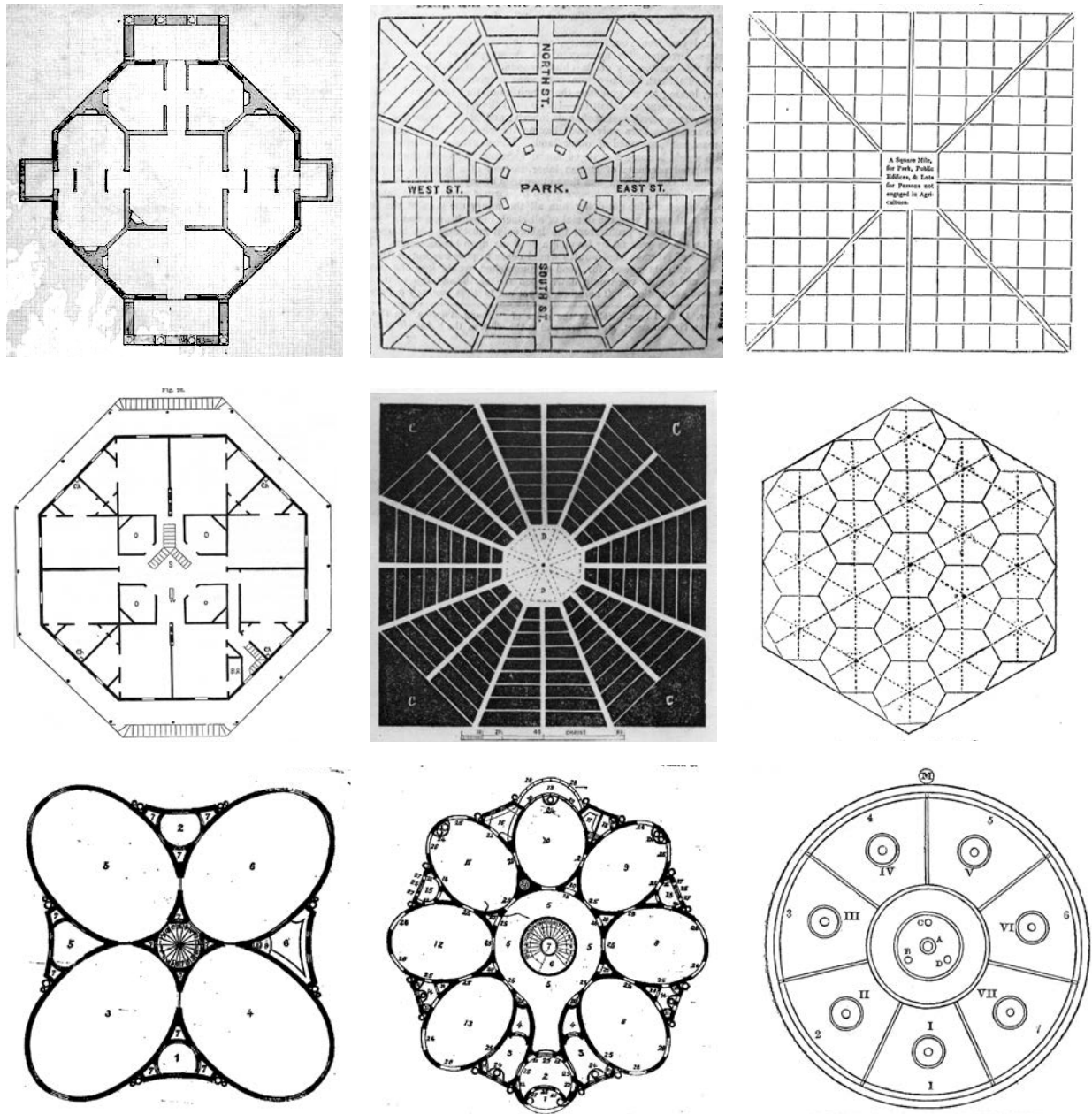


Fig. 0.3 (from top left) Thomas Jefferson, Poplar Forest; the National Reform Association's republican village and township grid; (center) Orson Fowler, octagon house; Henry Clubb, Kansas Octagon Settlement Company; Josiah Warren's hexagonal city; (bottom) two versions of Simon C. Hewitt's Homes of Harmony, and John Murray Spear's institution of Equitable Commerce

YOUNG AMERICA!

Our first step must be to compel the law books to receive the spirit of the earth in its bosom. And as the reformers give the ruling away by the title to the land, in particular, are not only not "ghosts or shadows," but not so much by the purpose, I mean by following nature will not struggle to compel such resolution, but only from motives of policy, but also from their sense of justice."—*John H. Hunt*

The remedy I propose for the increasing population of the East of these, and of New York, in particular, in the location of the poor on the lands of the far west, which would not only afford permanent relief to our military frontier, but would secure that settlement and homestead for a considerable time.—*Geo. W. Brown*

Man's natural right in relation to things, are, his right to the things produced by his own labor, and the natural endowment, and his right to participate in those benefits which nature has afforded him or all."—*Wm. D. Howells*

If man has a right to light, air, and water, which no one will attempt to question, he has a right also to the land, which is just as necessary for the maintenance of his subsistence. If every person had an equal share of the soil, poverty would be unknown in the world, and there would disappear with want."—*John W. Ward*

The land was originally given to supply the natural wants of man, and while man is obliged to labor to obtain the means and articles of nature, it may not long be long before the property of the soil is given by him to the soil itself."—*Thomas Allen*

The mass of the people are deprived of knowledge of the soil, and are consequently unable to make the most of it. The soil, being now divided from working for themselves, are obliged to sell their labor to work for those who possess the soil."—*John A. Collins*

In the nature and extent of all men are alike, the matter of all used be equal, and an honest evaluation is dependent on the same consideration. It follows that the same field for its extension, and the same amount of all wealth, the earth, is the common property of all its inhabitants."—*John Payne*

Some, however, of the most honest and virtuous of the Republic have shown the intention of private property in the soil to be wholly really to, security on soil of the first magnitude, and now the situation of which must be an early end of the political establishment of the people."—*Wm. D. Howells*

It is by a system of law, taxation, rent, or sale to others, the non-productive parts of society are what is done those who are desirous to see forth, the industry for the purpose of raising, the source of sustenance and health, a virtuous and a peaceful, the natural right of man, and the people's opinion."—*L. W. Spence*

A Township of Six Miles Square.

The question of the ownership of the land, I am pushed into it in the most real to our political institutions."—*Richard Cobden*

If man has a right to the earth, he has a right to land enough to raise a subsistence on. If he has a right to soil, he has a right to land enough to till the soil. Improve him, and the soil of the earth will be his as the property of those who possess them."—*Henry Richard*

The earth, the air, the water, and all their products, are the common property of humanity. Every one has a right to enjoy those common benefits to such an extent as shall not be prejudicial to the rest of mankind."—*James Rogers*

What naturally infinite wealth of earth vegetables or that of land? It is not the soil, but the natural property. The people, the only creatures of earth, possess knowledge, they possess industry and they possess land, they would not all cultivate as follows. They would have been enabled to employ machinery for their own benefit, and the world would have been different and more happy, for the soil of the "Empire of America," when properly directed."—*Wm. D. Howells*

What equal right might the communities be looked, for the same alike benefited up, and will not in law to soil purchase, as the earth is to be divided in price and divided into its equal shares."—*W. G. Brown*

Go back to the first period of man's existence! What shall we find there? Nothing but one who possessed a wilderness, on which soil for the first time, has improved his feelings. Of course, it is long to all equity."—*Thomas Wilson*

Capital is every product he made it has led to the Creator's product in the soil, and gave it not to a part, but to all the human race."—*W. G. Brown*

The land of earth, in any country or neighborhood, with every share of it on the same, or producing thereby, belongs to all those in the first instance of the soil country or neighborhood in an equal manner. For those who are not to be divided, and its production, consequently, what we cannot live without, we have the same property in it as the rest."—*Thomas Brown*

The earth is the habitation, the natural inheritance of all men alike, the source and the source of all human intelligence is the soil, the soil is the source of all human life, and the soil is the source of all human life."—*John G. Brown*

A people which will not equally regard, would possess every thing they wanted where they possessed the means of subsistence. Why would they possess unlimited wealth or territory? The soil can cultivate more than a certain portion of land."—*Wm. D. Howells*

The soil is able to produce a harvest from heaven, or the soil has to be in a particular position in its nature."—*Wm. D. Howells*

GEORGE H. EVANS, EDITOR.

VOL. II. . . . NEW SERIES.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED AT THE TRUE SUN BUILDING,

OPPOSITE THE PARK.

1846.

Fig. 0.4 Cover of the National Reform Association's journal *Young America*, 1846, showing their township grid and republican village design

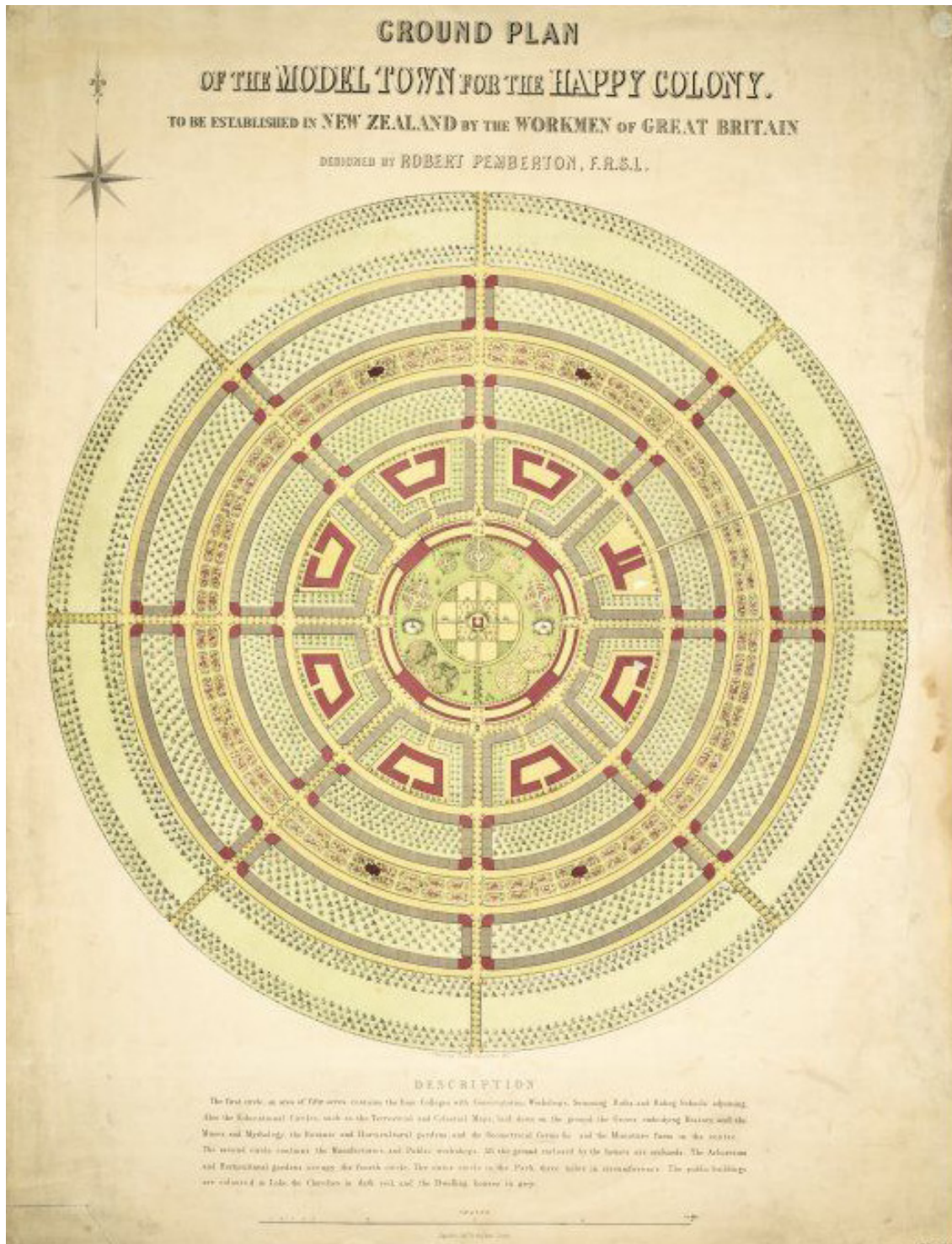


Fig. 0.5 Robert Pemberton, Happy Colony, 1854

1. Antinomies of American Utopia: Thomas Jefferson's Grids and Octagons

In addition to his other accomplishments, Thomas Jefferson could be considered a pioneer of geometric utopianism. To see him as such requires looking at three bodies of his work that are not normally treated together: his political theory, his architectural designs, and his territorial planning projects. This chapter draws some threads through these three aspects of Jefferson's oeuvre, emphasizing the inextricable links between geometric form and political content. When we look at Jefferson's designs at the architectural and territorial scales, two forms dominate: the octagon and the grid. Eight-sided shapes proliferated in his sketches for various kinds of buildings, especially private houses. Grids, on the other hand, were his favored figure for schemes of land division. This chapter reads these two geometries—octagon and grid, figure and field, as two halves of a multivalent spatio-political program. On one hand, in his handling of octagons, Jefferson was wrestling with a new idea about how architecture—especially the house—could both represent and help to produce a liberal subject through the choreography of vision, sound, and movement. On the other hand, Jefferson saw the territorial grid as an instrument to help effect a more radical distribution of land, wealth, and power—that is, a more direct and egalitarian democracy.

In a sense, this is a very simple argument: liberal octagons (individual buildings) versus radical grids (territories, cities, social formations). And it would be easy to trace

this tension through the rest of the examples that follow—through the land reformers’ egalitarian grids, Orson Fowler’s individualistic octagon house, through to the octagon and hexagon cities that tried to balance individual property ownership within some larger figure of social totality. However, as I explore below, there are two complications to this story: First, Jefferson’s politics were not simple, and neither were his geometries. Both the octagon and grid figures were overdetermined and ambiguous. The octagon was a figure of autonomy and visual mastery, but also could become overexposed, leading to an uncomfortable blurring of private and public realms. So too the grid, a figure of egalitarianism, also carried within it an implicit tendency toward fragmentation and atomization.

Second, rather than simply draw a line between a geometrical and a political position, one of the aims of this dissertation is precisely to problematize *how* geometry was understood to either carry meaning or to produce certain effects. To say that a given form “manifested” a political content is quite vague. My concern therefore is not just to elucidate Jefferson’s forms and their political contents, but to ask *how* form and content were linked. One way these have been related by architectural historians is to treat aesthetic form as the “expression” or “representation” of political ideas. Thus, for example, Jefferson’s adoption of the Maison Carrée, a Roman temple in France, as the model for the Virginia State Capitol is often cited as an instance of architecture “expressing” or “evoking” the political concept of republicanism: Politics and architecture are imagined as bound through a chain of iconographic associations occurring in the mind of the author and/or audience. The form of a classical temple evokes ancient Rome, which calls to mind republican form of government. (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) Yet what I want to argue

in this chapter is that in Jefferson's utopian geometries, we see glimpses of a different understanding of the connection between aesthetic form and political content—one where form is seen to materially produce a political subjectivity and social relations. I will call this latter view a “performative” theory of form. Such a view is incipient, I argue, in Jefferson's octagons, particularly in the way these shapes were imagined to organize relations of sight to produce a sense of private, autonomous personhood. A performative view of geometry is even more fully manifested in his use of the grid to try to effect his ideal of an egalitarian democracy composed of freehold farmers. Jefferson is therefore presented here as a transitional and anticipatory figure. His design work was poised between a classical, symbolic view of geometry and a newer understanding that saw forms as capable of producing specific effects on sentient subjects and on society at large.

Liberalism, Republicanism, Radicalism

Before looking more closely at Jefferson's geometries, it will be necessary to consider in a schematic way his political theories—what I am calling the “contents” of his utopian geometries. Jefferson is one of the most contentious figures in early American intellectual history. He was a notoriously inconsistent yet incisive thinker—a consummate “sphinx,” alternately depicted by historians as a champion of liberty, hypocritical apologist for racial slavery, nostalgic agrarian, social radical, Lockean liberal, communitarian, genocidal expansionist, and defender of small government.¹ Precisely this protean quality has enabled political thinkers as varied as Michael Hardt and Ron Paul to stake claims to

¹ The term “sphinx” is a reference to the title of Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 88.

Jefferson's legacy in the last decade, portraying him alternately as a forefather of radical democracy or of libertarianism.²

Here I want to highlight three main strands of Jefferson's political philosophy—which I will diagrammatically call his liberal, republican, and radical utopias. Each of these can be related to an established interpretive framework for approaching Jefferson. The oldest of these is the one that sees him as an American expositor of Lockean liberalism—a view argued by Carl Becker in his classic *The Declaration of Independence* (1922) and developed by consensus historians in the 1950s. This icon of liberalism is the image that continues to dominate the popular imagination today. On this view, Jefferson is an expounder of some of liberalism's defining tenets: Man is a free, autonomous agent, a bearer of “natural rights” who exists prior to civil society; he enters into a “social contract” in order to protect his own interests; his freedom is defined negatively as the “private sphere” that must be guarded from intrusion by the state; one of his “inalienable” natural rights is the right to property, which becomes the basis for his citizenship and his participation in the civic and political domains.³

In the 1960s this view of Jefferson as a liberal *par excellence* was challenged by a “neo-Whig” or “republican revisionist” wave of interpretation, associated with the historians J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon Wood, and Bernard Bailyn. The neo-Whigs

² See Michael Hardt, “Jefferson and Democracy,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2007). Jefferson is cited nine times in Ron Paul's *The Revolution: A Manifesto* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2008).

³ Joyce Appleby is the most recent major proponent of the liberal interpretation of Jefferson, though she adopts a critical rather than affirmative stance towards liberal ideology. See Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also her book *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

emphasized the influence on the US revolutionaries of English republican ideals, with roots extending to the civic humanism revived during Machiavelli's era. Republican thinking emphasized disinterested and virtuous citizenship and sacrifice for the public good.⁴

Finally, several historians and political theorists, including Richard K. Matthews, Hannah Arendt, and most recently, Michael Hardt, have interpreted the seeds of a more radical democratic tradition in Jefferson. Arendt, for example, saw in Jefferson's late celebration of "ward-republics" (local township-style governments) the seeds of a revived space for public deliberation and political participation. More recently, Michael Hardt has interpreted Jefferson's writing about the distribution of public lands as an affirmation of "free and universal access to the common" and as a recognition that economic equality is inextricable from political liberty.⁵

Rather than argue that one of these strands represents Jefferson's "true" thought, I will adopt the position that some elements of all three ideologies—liberal, republican, and radical—can be found in his work, overlapping and blurring occasionally. All three can be described as utopian in the sense that they project a normative ideal, a fantasy about the essential nature of persons, how we are bound together in society, and the nature of our relationship to the state. Further, I want to suggest that each of these three ideologies has

⁴ The key works on republicanism are J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992).

⁵ See Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984); Hardt, "Jefferson and Democracy." Both Hardt and Matthews rely on Arendt's reading of the ward-republics in *On Revolution* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

a corollary to a specific geometric form in Jefferson's designs. The octagon became a vehicle for him to explore the construction of a liberal subjectivity—an all-seeing, enlightened, private, and property-bearing person. The grid, on the other hand, was his favored device for producing a more flattened distribution of both property and political power. I want to turn now to examine each of these utopian geometries more closely.

1.1 Jefferson's Octagons

As an architect, Jefferson was obsessed with octagons.⁶ The figure's telltale 135-degree angles appear again and again in his drawings, materializing in the form of single bows, double-, triple- and quadruple- projections, and freestanding volumes. He used them for myriad programs—a chapel, courthouse, observatory, but above all, in his designs for private dwellings, including his own and several houses that he designed for friends and neighbors.

In characteristic fashion, Jefferson's octagons had multiple valences and drew on both older and newer sources for inspiration.⁷ Here I focus on three such antecedents for

⁶ Clay Lancaster counted some 50 drawings by Jefferson that included eight-sided shapes. Clay Lancaster, "Some Octagonal Forms in Southern Architecture," *The Art Bulletin* 28, no. 2 (1946). Jack McLaughlin wrote that Jefferson was "obviously infatuated with the octagon." Describing Monticello II, McLaughlin observes: "The finished floor plan was a rampant self-indulgence in octagons: four semi-octagon rooms, two semi-octagon piazzas, a semi-octagon balcony, a full octagon bedroom (the northeast chamber), and an octagonal dome." Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder* (New York: H. Holt, 1988), 253-54. Allan Brown agrees: "Jefferson had a life-long fascination." C. Allan Brown, "Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest: The Mathematics of an Ideal Villa," *Journal of Garden History* 10, no. 2 (1990): 119. Roger Kennedy called him "obsessed" with octagons. Roger Kennedy, "Jefferson and the Indians," *Winterthur Portfolio* 27, no. 2/3 (1992): 118. Kimball observed that "Various combinations of octagonal elements had preoccupied [Jefferson] from his earliest designs to his latest." Fiske Kimball, "Jefferson's Designs for Two Kentucky Houses," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 9, no. 3 (1950): 16.

⁷ Jefferson himself never states explicitly why he is so enamored of octagons, leading to a host of speculations by historians. Some scholars have pointed to Jefferson's fondness for mathematics and see the octagon as an attempt to "square the circle." (See Brown, "Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest," 131.) Others cite Jefferson's love of light and air. Quasi-psychological explanations have also been ventured: McLaughlin saw a "maternal allusion" in the octagon's "deeper psychological geometries." McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello*, 254. Roger Kennedy proposed that Jefferson derived "solace" and "healing" from the archetypal power of the octagon and circle." Kennedy, "Jefferson and the Indians," 120.

the meaning of octagonal geometry—Renaissance symbolism, Enlightenment rationality, and picturesque optics. I argue that each evoked the liberal subject in a different way. By liberal subject, I mean the autonomous, private, property-bearing, and “free” man conjured by political theorists like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and invoked in Jefferson’s writings.

Renaissance Harmonies

Jefferson’s earliest known design incorporating the octagon reveals the unmistakable influence of Renaissance ideas about geometry on his thinking. A sketch he drew in the 1770s depicts a chapel likely intended for Williamsburg. The 30-foot-diameter building is a freestanding octagon in plan and features an encircling portico in the Tuscan order.⁸ (Fig. 1.3) The inspiration for the design is easy to decipher because Jefferson tells us his source on the back of his sketch: Plates 38 and 39 from Palladio’s *Four Books of Architecture*, which depicted the circular Temple of Vesta. (Fig. 1.4) In characteristic fashion, Jefferson played with precedent loosely, freely converting the pagan temple into a church, and turning the circle into an octagon.⁹

⁸ Inside, a pulpit is located against one wall, opposite the entrance. Benches are arranged concentrically on both the main level and a gallery, with an altar in the center. For more on the chapel, see Fiske Kimball, “Jefferson and the Public Buildings of Virginia: I. Williamsburg, 1770-1776,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1949). Kimball dated this drawing to around 1770 based on an analysis of the paper. Douglas Wilson has suggested a later date, 1778, based on analysis of the handwriting on the drawing. See Douglas L. Wilson, “Dating Jefferson’s Early Architectural Drawings,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 1 (1993): 56.

⁹ It is not known why Jefferson made this alteration. Perhaps he thought an octagon would be easier to erect in the provincial context of eighteenth-century Williamsburg. Or it is possible he had in mind Williamsburg’s magazine, a freestanding octagonal brick building built in 1715. Or he could have drawn inspiration from several precedents for octagonal churches that had been built in both the colonies and in England—including the Chapel at Norwich, which has a plan quite similar to Jefferson’s. There is no evidence that Jefferson knew of

The circle and square—but especially the circle—held privileged places in Renaissance architectural cosmology. The round form was imagined to evoke the Platonic harmony of the universe: it connected the divine, the human body, and the building through a single underlying figure. Palladio, whose book Jefferson referred to as the “Bible,” held that the circle was the “most perfect and excellent” figure and linked its properties to God, explaining: “Neither end nor beginning can be found nor distinguish’d from each other, and having all its parts like one another and that each of them partakes of the figure of the whole;... it is therefore the most proper figure to show the Unity, infinite Essence, the Uniformity, and Justice of GOD.”¹⁰ For Palladio, as for Alberti and Vitruvius before him, these divine qualities were mirrored in the human body.¹¹ Vitruvius imagined the body as inscribed within a circle, centered on the navel and touching the fingers and toes; his verbal description was translated into iconic visual form by Renaissance architects like Francesco di Giorgio to Leonardo da Vinci. The Vitruvian figure became a symbol of the mathematically manifested sympathy between microcosm and macrocosm, between the body, architecture, and the universe.¹² (Fig. 1.5) Palladio translated this cosmology directly into precepts for architectural design: “A fine building,”

these models, however. Finally, he could have been looking at Robert Morris’s book *Select Architecture*, which he acquired around 1770 or 1771, and which also featured an octagonal chapel.

¹⁰ Andrea Palladio, *The Architecture of A. Palladio; in Four Books* (London: John Darby, 1721), 45-46. Jefferson owned several editions of Palladio’s *Four Books*, including the Leoni version of 1715, which was the first English printing.

¹¹ Alberti advocated for the superiority of circular temples on the grounds that: “It is obvious from all that is fashioned, produced, or created under her influence, that Nature delights primarily in the circle. Need I mention the earth, the stars, the animals, their nests, and so on, all of which she has made circular?” Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 196.

¹² Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 16.

he wrote, “ought to appear as an entire and perfect body, wherein every member agrees with its fellow, and each so well with the whole.”¹³ Architecture, like the body, should be governed by harmonic, numerically defined proportions that determined part-to-part and part-to-whole relationships.¹⁴

If the idea of a resonance between the universe, god, the body, and the form of the temple or church seems alien to contemporary eyes, perhaps it is because the logic that enabled such linkages was so specific to the Renaissance. Michel Foucault has described the Renaissance *episteme* as characterized by a semiology relying on similitudes, sympathies, and analogies among seemingly unrelated entities. “The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.”¹⁵ The logic whereby Renaissance architects linked the circle, body, building, and God through geometrical analogy is symptomatic of this semiological system.¹⁶

This Renaissance humanist cosmology experienced some bumps in its migration to the eighteenth-century United States, where, in spite of the ascendance of Enlightenment

¹³ And again, later, in discussing the distribution of service parts of a house, “For in the same manner as we see in the human Body, some noble and beautiful Members, and others again as disagreeable and ugly. . . so some parts of a Building must make a fine and noble appearance, and some others be less beautiful and elegant.” Palladio, *Four Books*, 1, 58.

¹⁴ On Renaissance harmonies and geometry, see Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things; an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17.

¹⁶ As Paul Hirst has observed, geometry was the medium through which analogies between the body, buildings, and the universe were made manifest to human subjects. “The figures of geometry correspond to the constitutive proportions of the world, and the two fundamental proportional relations accessible to experience are those of the human body and those of the harmonic scale. Such ‘devices’ provide traces and resemblances whereby man can be put into immediate contact with the divine.” Paul Q. Hirst, “Foucault and Architecture,” in *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005), 161.

liberal values, all bodies were glaringly not deemed perfect, nor equal. Jefferson had an ambivalent, not to say hypocritical, stance on the equality of men. The writer of the Declaration of Independence proclaiming the self-evident truth that all men are free and equal was also a lifelong slaveowner who defended the idea of a natural hierarchy of races. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson explained the differences in the physical appearance of the races as one of geometry and expression: White bodies had “a more elegant symmetry of form.” Furthermore, white countenances allowed “the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour” whereas black faces were plagued with an “eternal monotony... that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions.”¹⁷ Such statements point to the intertwining of geometry, race, and aesthetics in the late eighteenth century, as well as the contradictions confronting physiognomic metaphors in architecture. The classical humanist aesthetic had no way of accounting for difference or deviation from an ideal type except by castigating it as unbeautiful, thereby undermining the supposedly universal web of Renaissance humanist analogies.

Enlightenment Calculability and Proof

On the same sketch of an octagonal chapel where Jefferson cited Palladio we can find evidence of a second context for his interest in geometry, namely its relationship to the Enlightenment exaltation of calculation and proof, which were regarded as vehicles for human reason to access truth. Next to the drawing of the chapel, Jefferson included a tabulation of the bricks that would be required—50,632. (Fig. 1.6) And on the back were

¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia,” in *Writings*, ed. Merrill Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 265.

calculations for the lengths of the benches and the number of persons that would be accommodated. Such annotations abound in Jefferson's drawings. Indeed, throughout his papers, one finds evidence of constant, habitual, not to say obsessive, calculating, including tabulations of the efficiency of enslaved workers on his plantation. In 1773, as Jefferson was helping prepare a spot in the graveyard at Monticello for a recently deceased friend, he wrote in his notebook "2. hands grubbed the Graveyard 80 f. square = 1/7 of an acre in 3 ½ hours so that one would have done it in 7 hours, and would grub an acre in 49 hours = 4 days."¹⁸ These examples suggest that Renaissance harmony and resemblance jostled with Enlightenment rationality as the relevant frames with which to construe Jefferson's interest in architectural geometry.

Several Jefferson scholars—most notably Gary Wills—have identified Jefferson's penchant for ciphering and mensuration as exemplary of the Enlightenment world-view, which posited a universe susceptible to measurement and calculation. The *philosophes* believed that not only the paths of astronomical bodies but also human behavior could be understood mathematically, leading to the possibility of a social calculus. Condillac's political mathematics, Beccaria's geometry, Condorcet's *mathématique sociale* and Frances Hutcheson's moral algebra were all manifestations of this belief in the possibility of a veritable social science. Wills writes that "To chart man's life by a moral geometry, using algebra and the calculus, was the philosopher's stone to men of the Enlightenment, men who dreamed of Newtonizing all reality."¹⁹ Jefferson subscribed to this idea of a rational

¹⁸ Jefferson, "Memorandum Book," May 23, 1773.

¹⁹ Gary Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 96, 133.

social mathematics, as evidenced by his land grids and his proposals to establish a decimal system of weights and measures.

Yet the evidence from Jefferson's own drawings and words points to another aspect of geometry motivating his love of octagons in particular, one no less related to the Enlightenment celebration of reason. Jefferson's love of mathematics is well-known—he called it the “passion” of his youth.²⁰ Like many eighteenth-century men, he saw Euclidean geometry as a way of training minds to think.²¹ John Locke had advocated mathematical learning as “a way to settle in the mind a habit of reasoning closely and in train.”²² Jefferson echoed this when he advised his grandson that mathematics “gives exercise to our reason, as soon as that has acquired a certain degree of strength, and stores the mind with truths which are useful in other branches of science.”²³

²⁰ Jefferson to William Duane, October 1812. Jefferson's love of mathematics is well documented. Here I focus on his penchant for geometry, but others have emphasized his love of calculation and manifestations of early statistical thinking in his thought. See chapter 3 in Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). David Kazanjian discusses Jefferson's “quantifying spirit” in relation to statistics and population thinking in *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 106-11.

²¹ According to Drew McCoy, “Euclid's geometry had become, by Jefferson's time, a testament to the power of human reason to deduce truth. On the basis of some formal definitions of terms and five postulates and five axioms whose truth was self-evident—such as, ‘things that are equal to the same thing are also equal to one another,’ or ‘the whole is greater than the part’—Euclidean geometry ‘deduced an elaborate system of propositions that seemed both to accurately describe physical reality and to compose a flawlessly logical system.’” Drew R. McCoy, “An “Old-Fashioned” Nationalism: Lincoln, Jefferson, and the Classical Tradition,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 23, no. 1 (2002): 58.

²² John Locke, “Of the Conduct of the Understanding,” in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education; and, of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth Weissbourd Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 181. Jefferson owned a copy of Locke's text.

²³ Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., August 27, 1786. See also Letter from Peter Carr to Jefferson, May 1, 1791. “Vaughan is a most excellent Reporter, and remarkable I think for the soundness and perspicuity of his decisions. His deductions are strictly logical and one may easily see he has been very conversant with Euclid.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), <http://founders.archives.gov>.

Mathematics, and geometry especially, was seen as having a special role in the formation of the mind and character. As taught in eighteenth-century textbooks, geometry was equated with the production of proofs: In a typical exercise, the student began with a set of definitions (for example, of point, line, and surface), a limited set of self-evident axioms (such as “Things which are equal to the same thing, are equal to one another”), and then solved certain propositions by proceeding through a series of logical steps, undertaken with the help of a compass and rule.²⁴ (Fig. 1.7)

Jefferson enjoyed practicing this form of reason, as is evidenced in two sketches of octagons, including one found in his notebooks for Monticello. Although the drawings ostensibly have a pragmatic end—delineating an octagonal bow for the house—it is striking that Jefferson rendered them in the form of an abstract geometric proof. (Figs. 1.8–1.10) He described his steps thus:

Bisect [the line] by the line d.e.
 take c.a. & lay it off towards d. at f.
 on the center f. with radius f.a. describe
 the quadrant a.g.b.
 on the center g. with the radius g.a. describe the arc a.h.i.b.
 this arc cuts af. and b.f. at the angles of the octagon required.

²⁴ Jefferson owned at least two editions of Euclid during his life—the Simson edition of 1756 and Tacquet’s Latin edition of 1710. A variation of Jefferson’s octagon theorem, the problem of how to inscribe an octagon within a circle, appears in contemporary geometry texts, and even in some architecture treatises. It can be found in Sebastien Le Clerc’s *Traité de Géométrie* (1764), Batty Langley’s *Practical Geometry* (1729 ed.), and in Isaac Ware’s *Complete Body of Architecture*. Many of these modern texts were themselves based on Euclid’s *Elements*, which in its fourth book included methods for inscribing a triangle, square, pentagon, hexagon, and quindecagon inside a circle (though not an octagon). See Book IV of Robert Simson, *The Elements of Euclid* (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1756). Sowerby states that Jefferson acquired his copy of Le Clerc in 1791. This would have been long after he drew the Octagon Theorem. Jefferson’s technique, designed as it was to solve a specific architectural condition, seems to have been unique. Yet what all of them share is an understanding that the octagon is a shape geometrically derived from the circle. See E. Millicent Sowerby, *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, 1952).

For Jefferson, the drawing of the octagon was much more than a practical design problem. It was an exercise in reason, one that he would relate to the cultivation of a rational and virtuous body of citizens. In his “Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia” (1818), Jefferson articulated this link between mathematical education and citizenship. Americans should be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and “the elements of mensuration” in order to know “their rights, interest, and duties, as men and citizens.” And higher levels of education, including more advanced training in “the mathematical and physical sciences” would “develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order.”²⁵

Yet here again, the notion of a universal reasoning subject, capable of being improved and cultivated, ran into the contradictions of racial inequality. In spite of the democratic—or perhaps more accurately, meritocratic—spirit behind Jefferson’s educational policies, he did not deem all Americans equally fit to enjoy the edifying effects of mathematical instruction. In *Notes*, Jefferson wrote disparagingly of African Americans’ capacity to learn geometry: “Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid.”²⁶ Following Jefferson’s logic linking citizenship with reason, a people who lacked the capacity to reason geometrically could,

²⁵ Jefferson, “Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia,” 1818. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 459-60.

²⁶ Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia,” in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 266.

by extension, be excluded from the corpus of rational citizens. Here again, we meet one of fundamental contradictions of liberalism: its formal claims of equality were undermined by countervailing assumptions of innate inequality among subjects. Liberal ideology deals with inequality by displacing racial (and gender) difference from the realm of politics to biology—that is, by naturalizing what are actually socially constructed hierarchies.²⁷

Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment ideology both imagined humans that were universalized, abstracted, and idealized. But in the world of eighteenth-century America, this idealized subject ran aground against the realities of racial subordination. These conflicts are evident in the octagonal forms built at Monticello. Jefferson's first "octagon proof" was drawn in 1771, after he had begun construction on the first Monticello, which in its original conception featured a rectangular cruciform plan, with no octagonal elements. Yet midway through construction, Jefferson changed his mind, adding three octagonal bows to the back and sides of the house.²⁸ (Figs. 1.11 and 1.12) These additions, with their bilaterally symmetrical arrangement and connotation of "rounded" forms, reinforced the classical composition of the house and its analogy to the human body. In the 1790s, Jefferson enlarged his house again, and one of the key additions was an octagonal dome with oculus windows that, in Renaissance semiology, could be read as

²⁷ I draw this insight from Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, who adds, "In its recourse to biological essentialism, liberalism is the more insidious for defining as *natural* what is in fact a *political* distribution of power among those who will count as subjects and those who will not." Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 16.

²⁸ Gene Waddell has provided the most meticulous accounting of the process of design and construction at Monticello and he asserts that the addition of the bows occurred after 1764. Construction began in 1769. A 1772 elevation (K23) does not show the bows. Evidence from the foundations and records of orders for brick and windows also support Waddell's dating. Gene Waddell, "The First Monticello," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46, no. 1 (1987): 17, 22-23.

analogous to the “head” of the house. The resulting building, with its symmetrical composition, classical portico, and geometrically rational forms, gave the appearance of being a fitting domicile for an Enlightenment subject. (Fig. 1.13) Its harmonies echoed the rationality and order of the natural and social universe. Robert F. Dalzell has called Monticello a “fragment of utopia,” a memorial “to a world that never was: a virtuous American republic presided over by disinterested, independent gentlemen.”²⁹ Yet concealed in a pair of half-submerged accessory wings were spaces for labor and circulation primarily occupied by the plantation’s large cadre of enslaved workers. (Figs. 1.14 and 1.15) In other words, the image of a house for a humanistic, rational subject literally relied on the occlusion of the hierarchies and labor that prop up that enlightened persona. As Dell Upton has observed, “Visually Jefferson’s house claims that the home of many people, white and black, is the home of one man.”³⁰

Sensational Octagons

In Renaissance architectural theory, buildings iconographically represented or evoked the harmony of the universe and the human body. This symbolic semiological system suggested a certain way of reading Monticello, one that could incorporate other significations, such as Enlightenment rationality. But what the Enlightenment concept of mathematics as a *process* of both calculation and reasoning hinted at is that geometry could be more than a sign; it could actually produce effects directly on the mind and on the

²⁹ Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., “Constructing Independence: Monticello, Mount Vernon, and the Men Who Built Them,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26, no. 4 (1993): 580.

³⁰ Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30.

physical world. This possibility was developed even more explicitly in the third context for Jefferson's eight-sided fixation: an emerging body of picturesque theory that conceived architectural geometry both from without and within, both as volumes to be read symbolically *and* as visual fields producing specific sensory effects.

This new view of architecture's potency can be found, for example, in the book that was likely the direct source for a number of Jefferson's octagonal forms, Robert Morris's *Select Architecture* (1755).³¹ Of the fifty plates in the book, nine feature octagonal shapes—most in connection with garden follies and country houses. Morris described the eight-sided elements in his architecture primarily in perceptual terms—as objects meant to be viewed both from without and within. In his accompanying notes for an octagonal pavilion, he explained: “A Building of this Kind would be an Object seen at a Distance” and would contribute to creating “a new Succession of pleasing Images” in the landscape.³² (Fig. 1.16) Octagons were also optical devices for viewing the surrounding landscape.³³ One house was described as best suited for “an Eminence, where an agreeable Prospect may be had round the Horizon.” Its “many Windows” were designed to enable

³¹ On Morris's influence on Jefferson, see Clay Lancaster, “Jefferson's Architectural Indebtedness to Robert Morris,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 10, no. 1 (1951). Jefferson acquired a copy of *Select Architecture* in 1770 or 1771. Lancaster argues that Morris, not Palladio, was the source of Jefferson's preoccupation with polygonal forms. He suggests that Plate 30 in Morris was the source of Jefferson's plan for Poplar Forest. Lancaster emphasizes Jefferson's visual borrowing: “The Morris text being brief and slight, it was the plates themselves that attracted Jefferson.”

³² Robert Morris, *Select Architecture*, 2nd ed. (London: Robert Sayer, 1757), 8. Jefferson owned the 1755 (first) edition of Morris's book.

³³ Morris included eight plates showing octagonal forms (out of fifty) in his *Select Architecture*. These included designs for houses, a retreat, a garden pavilion, a bath pavilion, and a temple or chapel. The other two are a pleasure room on a terrace, and an “odd” design that Morris says could be used as a synagogue, mosque, chapel, dissecting room, or cold bath. In the two houses, one features a projecting octagonal “saloon” and the other has four octagonal rooms fitted within a square block. When they are used in houses, the octagon tends to be a projection within a volume. When they are used for other programs they can be freestanding.

“more easy obtaining [of] a Variety of Views.”³⁴ (Fig. 1.17) Another house, also intended for a hill with 360-degree views, would ensure that “each Room is an easy and quick Transition to some new Object...”³⁵ (Fig. 1.18)

Jefferson’s library contained numerous English architectural treatises that emphasized this new perceptual approach to architectural geometry. A commonplace in eighteenth-century treatises was that simple forms were best, but that some variety of form relieved the eye.³⁶ In *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Lord Kames argued that a square was more beautiful than a hexagon or octagon because its outline could best hold the attention of the perceiver. Yet he also warned that too much uniformity would be “dulling to the mind” and elsewhere deemed that an octagon room is a desirable feature of a great

³⁴ Morris, *Select Architecture*, 2.

³⁵ A “Pleasure-Room” in the form of a freestanding octagon [plate 50], was conceived to take advantage of an “extensive Prospect, almost uninterrupted; 3 Fourths round the Horizon.” *Select Architecture*, 5,8.

³⁶ Isaac Ware, for example, in *The Complete Body of Architecture* (1756-58) acknowledged the popular demand for forms that departed from that “everlasting figure, a long square,” the figure of a house, a great deal has been said, but perhaps too little has been thought; more variety may be introduced than there is at present, but not so much as some have imagined.” Ware’s octagonal designs included a rectangular house with two octangular bow windows (of which he wrote, the “angulated forms” give “a very fine room... the whole out-line will be agreeable to the eye, and very well contrived for use”) and the other an octangular garden temple. Ware also insisted that convenience should not be sacrificed to whim—citing the example of a recent pair of buildings in London where the bow windows actually blocked one another. *A Complete Body of Architecture* (London: , 1768), 300. Common to many of these English speculations about the merits of the octagon was an attention to the effects of polygonal forms on the eye and mind of the beholder. Simple forms were considered most beautiful on the basis of optics: The authors of the *Builder’s Dictionary*, for example, acknowledged that a “sameness of form” can be dulling to the mind, but simultaneously hewed to Henry Wotton’s dictum that “*Building* neither loves many nor few Angles.” Triangular plans were “condemn’d above all others,” while edifices “of five, six, seven, or more Angles” were deemed “much fitter for Fortifications, than Civil *Buildings*.” At the same time, the *Dictionary’s* authors also stated: “But a *Contrast of Figure* must be preserved even in the Midst of this Simplicity. ‘Tis in Building, as in Musick, the Parts are various and disagreeing in themselves, ’till reconcil’d by the Skill and Judgment of the Master. A Sameness of Form betrays a Poverty of Imagination; and is the same in Architecture, as Dulness is in Writing: The Mind is glutted with it instantly, and turns away dissatisfy’d.” *The Builder’s Dictionary: Or, Gentleman and Architect’s Companion*, (London: A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch 1734).

house.³⁷ In his *Lectures on Architecture*, Morris still employed the terms of classical proportion and harmony to praise the circular and cubical shapes, but it was clear that the rationale behind using these geometries had shifted from cosmic harmony to visual sensation. He wrote that disproportion in shapes would “naturally shock the Eye” while objects of uniform proportion, such as the square, circle, or cube would “give the Eye...an agreeable pleasure.”³⁸ These arguments drew heavily on contemporary English sensationalist philosophy, which posited a mind shaped through sensory perception of the exterior world. Within the sensationalist framework, aesthetics was a matter not only of the art object but also of the perceiving subject and the physical act of reception. As Kames put it: “Beauty...depends upon the percipient as much as upon the object perceived.” It “cannot be an inherent property in either.”³⁹

The art historian Rudolf Wittkower has described this shift occurring in eighteenth-century English theory, from a classical understanding of architectural geometry to a perceptual one, as nothing less than a “revolution.” In rejecting the traditional analogy between the body, geometry, and beauty, figures like Kames, Burke and Hogarth “overthrew” the entire structure of classical aesthetics. Although architects like Morris continued to reference harmonic ratios and order, their explanations of polygonal architectural geometries emphasized the perceiving subject as much as the properties of the objects. In eighteenth-century England, geometry and proportion

³⁷ Henry Home Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh 1765), 464.

³⁸ Robert Morris, *Lectures on Architecture* (London 1734), 73-74.

³⁹ Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 196.

became a matter of individual sensibility rather than supposedly absolute mathematical ratios.⁴⁰

The new perceptual approach to architecture had a political dimension. Picturesque landscape and architectural theory grew out of the design of houses and gardens for landed estates in England, and out of changes in the structures of property ownership in seventeenth-century England—specifically, a historic shift from feudal patterns of land tenancy that included unenclosed commons to absolute individual ownership.⁴¹ Octagonal architecture was associated with garden follies, with devices that allowed owners to look out over these newly privatized and domesticated landscapes.⁴² The power to see was here linked inextricably with the power of possession. This is clearly expressed by Henry Wotton in a dictum concerning the selection of a site with a good view that was frequently reprinted in the eighteenth century. Wotton refers to something he calls a “royalty of Sight”: “For as there is a Lordship (as it were) of the Feet, wherein a Man walketh with much Pleasure about the Limits of his own Possessions, so there is a Lordship likewise of the Eye, which being a Ranging, and Imperious (I had almost said) Usurping Sense, cannot indure to be Circumscribed within a small Space, but must be satisfied both with Extent, and variety.”⁴³ Wotton’s evocation of a “lordship of the eye”—

⁴⁰ See Part IV of Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*.

⁴¹ See Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁴² In the books most often cited as Jefferson’s sources—Morris, Becker, Gibbs—octagons are used overwhelmingly in the context of garden pavilions or in connection to viewing a landscape. In Gibb’s *Book of Architecture*, seven of 150 plates contain octagonal forms. All seven are for garden pavilions or “summer houses.”

⁴³ Richard Neve, *The City and Countrey Purchaser, and Builder’s Dictionary: Or, the Compleat Builder’s Guide. ... By T. N. Philomath* (London: printed for J. Sprint, G. Conyers, and T. Ballard, 1703), 59. Neve is quoting from Henry Wotton’s *Elements of Architecture* 1624.

a “ranging,” “imperious,” and “usurping” sense, engaged in surveying one’s possessions, makes clear the link between picturesque perception and the power of ownership over a piece of land. The octagon was an aesthetic technology enabling this visual sovereignty.

An Eight-Sided Agrarian Republic

There is little doubt that Jefferson prized the visual qualities of octagons and the sense of optical mastery over his land that they afforded him.⁴⁴ He sited Monticello on the top of a hill, allowing him to step outside his house and easily survey the plantation below (Fig. 1.19). He designed the octagonal projection of the main parlor so that it faced onto a large lawn, providing an immediate view of an expansive domesticated landscape. Whereas the typical bows in English pattern books were three-sided, Jefferson’s in the first Monticello were five-sided, yielding spaces suffused with light and air and permitting even more unfettered visual access to the exterior landscape.

Jefferson was so enamored of octagons that over the years, when friends and neighbors would occasionally ask him to sketch a plan of a dwelling, his drafts frequently included eight-sided forms.⁴⁵ One of Jefferson’s Albemarle County neighbors recounted a conversation with the third president: “as you predicted he was for giving you Octagons.

⁴⁴ Dell Upton has interpreted the design of Monticello as an attempt to dominate nature and to subordinate it to the gaze of the patriarch. He reads the house’s octagonal dome in particular as expressing the Enlightenment tradition of surveillance as visual power. The dome, he writes, was “visual pivot around which the entire countryside revolved, the symbolic eye of Jefferson.” While I agree with the spirit of his reading, Upton’s interpretation works only at the level of symbolism, since there is no evidence that Jefferson regarded the dome as a space from which to actually view the surrounding landscape. The windows are too high to permit much of a view to the exterior. Upton, *Architecture*, 36-37.

⁴⁵ On Jefferson’s domestic designs for friends, see Hugh Howard, *Thomas Jefferson, Architect: The Built Legacy of Our Third President* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 86-114.

They were charming. They gave you a semi-circle of light and air.”⁴⁶ Sometime before 1802, for example, Jefferson provided his friend George Divers with a plan to add an octagonal wing to a traditional rectangular two-room house in Albemarle County. (Fig. 1.20) A slightly modified version of Jefferson’s plan was built.⁴⁷ Around 1817, Jefferson produced a design for his friend Governor James Barbour, for a property just outside Charlottesville. The house is a smaller variation on the plan for the second Monticello, featuring a central projecting octagon housing a parlor, flanked by two double-loaded wings.⁴⁸ (Fig. 1.21) This plan—a rectangular house with a central projecting octagonal parlor—would become something of a type in Jefferson’s *oeuvre*, one that Hugh Howard would call “a paradigm for Jefferson’s agrarian ideal.”⁴⁹ He modified it for numerous purposes, including a Governor’s House in 1780, a townhouse around 1800, and Edgemont circa 1803-6.⁵⁰ (Figs. 1.22–1.24) One can speculate that he imagined these as fragments of what might become a national pattern—each independent citizen ensconced in his own octagon-endowed house. Of course, most of the houses that Jefferson designed were for wealthy plantation owners, gentlemen who relied on slave labor, rather than yeomen engaged in the day-to-day labors of the farm.

⁴⁶Isaac Coles to John Hartwell Cocke, February 23, 1816.

⁴⁷ Whereas Jefferson’s drawing indicates the long octagon being broken into two rooms, in the built version it was left as one large room.

⁴⁸ James Barbour to Thomas Jefferson, March 29, 1817. Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Howard, *Thomas Jefferson*, 112.

⁵⁰ On the Governor’s house in Williamsburg, see Mark R. Wenger, “Jefferson’s Designs for Remodeling the Governor’s Palacr,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 32, no. 4 (1997).

Although many of Jefferson's octagonal drawings have not been definitively linked to specific projects, overall the profusion and repetition of his explorations of eight-sided geometries is striking. His octagonal designs veered between fairly conservative plans that featured just one central projection, and others that revealed him playing more freely with the form. (Figs. 1.25-1.26) In these more asymmetrical designs, Palladian dicta about harmonious proportion seem to have been laid aside and the octagons take over. These drawings show Jefferson thinking from inside out, as if considerations of experiential quality, efficient use of circulation space, and maximizing visual connections between interior and exterior have taken precedence over any preconceived symbolism attached to the forms. That is, sensational and performative criteria have become paramount.

If Jefferson's octagons were vehicles for increasing the visual and sensory access of inhabitants to the surrounding landscape, then we must also see them as inextricably intertwined with his agrarian political philosophy, which elevated the life of the farmer to the status of utopian ideal. In *Notes*, Jefferson had written that "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God"—a sentiment echoed repeatedly in his writings.⁵¹ In a letter to John Jay in 1785, he again opined: "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous..."⁵² Conversely, he held a derisive view of manufacturing, arguing that the United States economy should focus on agriculture rather than industry. "Let our workshops remain in Europe," he wrote in *Notes*. Jefferson linked manufacturing to the "mobs

⁵¹ Jefferson, "Notes," in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 290.

⁵² Jefferson to John Jay, August 23, 1785. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

of great cities,” which he compared to sores on the body.⁵³ So committed was Jefferson to the idea of a citizenry of landed farmers that as a legislator in Virginia in the 1770s, he proposed giving every landless white man 50 acres of free public land—a plan that, as we shall see shortly, was intimately connected to the geometry of the grid.

Jefferson’s praise of husbandry and his vociferous denigration of cities and manufacturing has frequently been interpreted as a nostalgic, reactionary economic position, especially when contrasted with the supposedly forward-looking, pro-commercial, proto-capitalist policies of Alexander Hamilton. Such depictions make Jefferson out to be “the heroic loser in a battle against modernity,” as Joyce Appleby has observed.⁵⁴ But such simplistic oppositions have been dismantled by recent historians on two grounds: On one side, Appleby emphasizes that as president, Jefferson actually supported manufacturing, and that within the economic context of the post-revolutionary United States, his advocacy of scientific agriculture, including production for an international grain market, was actually an economically progressive position. Thus she argues that the debate between Jefferson and Hamilton was really a disagreement between two visions of capitalist development.⁵⁵ From another perspective, several historians have stressed that Jefferson’s agrarianism must be put into the context of republican theory, which held that freehold farmers—those who owned their own means of livelihood—would be more independent, less subject to coercion, and therefore be better citizens.

⁵³ Jefferson, “Notes,” in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 291.

⁵⁴ See the essay “The ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic” in *Liberalism*, 258.

⁵⁵ *Liberalism*.

Jefferson's praise of agrarian life was deeply influenced by the republican view, as this passage from *Notes* makes clear:

Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.⁵⁶

Yet Jefferson departed from precedent in one key respect: whereas in republicanism, the yoking of property ownership to citizenship was seen as compatible with a “natural” hierarchy of gentlemen versus (non-voting) laborers, Jefferson radicalized this notion by insisting that the ranks of property ownership and thereby citizenship be widened if not quite universalized. He proposed to do this through policies on land distribution and inheritance—about which I will say more later.

For now, however, I want to emphasize the liberalism implicit in Jefferson's notion of freehold farm ownership. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has characterized the difference between republican and liberal theories of property thus: “In republicanism, property ownership is a prerequisite to virtuous public activity; in liberalism, property ownership is a palpable good and apolitical right in and of itself.”⁵⁷ By this criteria, Jefferson certainly seems to fall on the republican side. But the liberalism of Jefferson's agrarian philosophy is also evidenced in the fact that in his writings and policy proposals, the assumption is always that one man will have authority over one plot of land. Nowhere

⁵⁶ Jefferson, “Notes,” in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 290-91.

⁵⁷ Dillon, *Gender*, 261, fn. 26.

does he entertain the notion of collective or cooperative ownership.⁵⁸ Moreover, when confronted with a different theory of land tenure—for example, that of Native Americans, Jefferson’s response was that Indians should also become land owners and adopt to sedentary agricultural methods. As President, Jefferson employed both coercion and brutal force to seize Native lands and to redistribute them to white settlers.⁵⁹ As we shall see in the next chapter, this rather blindered view of property would be adopted by the land reformers led by George Henry Evans in the 1840s. Jefferson’s liberal agrarian utopia could countenance no alternative way of incorporating citizens save as individualistic property owners.

Privacy and Publicity

Jefferson’s houses were prostheses that granted their owners the power to survey their properties. They manifested his liberal utopia of freehold farm ownership by generating a visual field organized around the eye of the autonomous owner. The houses’ octagonal bows did more than just “express” a political ideology; they were imagined to actually reinforce and produce it. Picturesque theory encouraged just such an instrumental understanding of polygonal architectural geometries.

⁵⁸ Both Richard Matthews and Michael Hardt interpret Jefferson as presenting an alternative to the Locke’s labor theory of property and affirming a social right to property or the primacy of the “commons,” respectively. My own view is that these readings, while appealing, are a stretch. See Matthews, *Radical Politics*, 25-27. Hardt, “Jefferson and Democracy.” I discuss Locke’s labor theory of property in greater detail in Chapter 2.

⁵⁹ On the history of Jefferson’s troubled relationship to Native Americans, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction; Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, VA, 1973).

To see the uniqueness of Jefferson's approach to octagonal forms, it may be useful to compare his view with that of John Adams, who likewise betrayed a fascination with eight-sided rooms and described their special properties in visual terms. Whereas Jefferson the architect was engaged in literally producing an optical field, for Adams, the views were metaphorical. In his book *Defence of Constitutions*, Adams wrote that Americans should regard the history of Greece as a kind of "boudoir"—which he explained as "an octagonal apartment," mirrored on every side, that was found in European houses. According to Adams, these apartments were used:

when any of the young ladies, or young gentlemen if you will, are at any time a little out of humour, [so] they may retire to a place where, in whatever direction they turn their eyes, they see their own faces and figures multiplied without end. By thus beholding their own beautiful persons, and seeing at the same time the deformity brought upon them by their anger, they may recover their tempers and their charms together.⁶⁰

Elsewhere, Adams described the *Defence* itself as an "American boudoir" that would allow the newly formed American states to "see themselves...in every possible light, attitude and movement. They may see all their beauties and all their deformities."⁶¹

These passages from Adams lend further evidence for the argument that octagonal architecture was associated with visual effects productive of liberal subjectivity in early-nineteenth-century America. Only for Adams, instead of enabling the vision of a sovereign

⁶⁰ John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (London: Printed for C. Dilly, 1787), 210-11.

⁶¹ Adams to William Cunningham, Jan 3, 1809. In this letter, Adams explains the boudoir again in visual terms: "What is a Boudoir? It is a *Pouting room*. And what is a Pouting room? In many gentlemen's houses in France, there is an apartment, of an octagonal form, twelve or fifteen feet across, or thirty six or forty-five feet round, and all the eight sides, as well as the ceiling over head, are all of the most polished glass Mirrors: so that, when a man stands in the centre of the room he sees himself in every direction, multiplied into a row of selfs, as far as they eye can reach." *Correspondence between the Hon. John Adams, Late President of the United States, and the Late Wm. Cunningham, Esq.*, (Boston: E. M. Cunningham, 1823), 73-74.

subject outward, octagons produced a reflected gaze, enabling introspection and self-understanding. This capacity for self-reflection is one of the constitutive fictions of Enlightenment liberalism: Only subjects capable of self-knowledge are competent to engage in self-government, consent, and dissent. Yet whereas Adams used the octagon room as a *metaphor* for self-inspection (albeit based presumably on actual octagon rooms that he had seen or heard about), Jefferson the architect believed that eight-sided architectural forms could literally and materially produce specific effects on sentient subjects.

Besides enabling house owners visual dominion over their properties, Jefferson himself became aware of yet another visual dynamic produced by the octagon that we can relate to the production of liberal subjectivity: the defining of private and public domains. Jürgen Habermas has argued that the separation of private and public spheres is a constituent feature of liberalism: the bourgeois public sphere relies on the prior demarcation of the conjugal family as a private domain. According to Habermas, it is in the intimate sphere of the family that bourgeois man is created—a private subject with a “saturated and free interiority.” These privatized individuals then enter into the public sphere to rationally debate their previously constituted and known needs and desires.⁶²

Jefferson’s thinking reflected this incipient separation of private and public spheres, especially his insistence on distinguishing between his duties as a citizen on the public stage and his life as a private farmer. For Jefferson, participating in the polis was

⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). This liberal view of the separation of public and private spheres has been criticized by numerous feminist theorists, including Dillon, who argues that we must see the public and intimate spheres as mutually constitutive rather than sequential and separate. See Dillon, *Gender*.

equated with performance—one he did not always enjoy.⁶³ In 1775, as a 32-year-old lawyer being drawn into the disputes between England and her colonies, he wrote to his friend John Randolph of his yearning to “withdraw myself totally from the public stage and pass the rest of my days in domestic ease and tranquility, banishing every desire of afterwards even hearing what passes in the world.”⁶⁴ In a letter to James Madison almost twenty years later, Jefferson reflected somewhat bitterly on his already quarter-century “tour of duty” in public service, saying he longed to be in “the lap and love of my family, in the society of my neighbours and my books, in the wholesome occupation of my farms and my affairs.”⁶⁵ Based on these and other statements, Joyce Appleby has argued that for Jefferson, “The private came first. Instead of regarding the public arena as the locus of human fulfillment where men rose above their self-interest..., Jefferson wanted government to offer protection to the personal realm where men might freely exercise their faculties.”⁶⁶

Jefferson saw architecture as a tool for literally carving out a private sphere—a space of retreat from the public stage of politics. In 1792, for example, in his capacity as Secretary of State, he was obliged to rent a house in the new national capital of Philadelphia. In typical fashion, Jefferson remodeled the residence to suit his tastes. In his redesign, he expressed his desire to create a room with no windows except for a skylight,

⁶³ On Jefferson and the eighteenth-century culture of performance, see Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁴ Jefferson to John Randolph. August 25, 1775. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁶⁵ Jefferson to James Madison, June 9, 1793. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁶⁶ Appleby, *Liberalism*, 299.

explaining in a letter to the landlord: The object was “that I might have a place to retire and write in...unseen and undisturbed even by my servants, and for this purpose it was to have a skylight and no lateral windows.”⁶⁷ In twenty years, Jefferson went from maximizing the number of windows in his abode to desiring spaces that had no windows except from above.

Later, back at Monticello, Jefferson made a number of architectural interventions to increase the privacy of the house. In 1809, following his retirement from two tumultuous terms as President, he ordered the construction of what he termed “porticles” outside his bedroom window—essentially a box made of Venetian blinds.⁶⁸ (Fig. 1.28) Jack McLaughlin suggests that the main purpose was to shield Jefferson’s study from the prying eyes of the hordes of visitors who were by now making their way to Charlottesville. As the house was overrun with guests, both invited and uninvited, Jefferson’s octagons, which had allowed him maximum visual access to survey his plantation, became a kind of curse. The public was now perched outside his bedroom window.⁶⁹

In search of refuge from his “public” home, Jefferson began in the 1800s to design a private retreat at Poplar Forest. The house, a freestanding octagon in concept, had the geometric purity of a mathematical theorem. (Figs. 1.29 and 1.30) Its central dining room

⁶⁷ Jefferson to Thomas Leiper, December 16, 1792. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. For more on Jefferson’s renovation of the Philadelphia residence, see Mark R. Wenger, “Thomas Jefferson, Tenant,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 26, no. 4 (1991).

⁶⁸ They were built around 1808.

⁶⁹ McLaughlin writes: “Windows were an architectural paradox for Jefferson: they admitted the light and ventilation that he found essential for work and comfort, but they also denied him solitude and privacy.” Therefore he became obsessed with blinds and shutters. “Blinds were at once a functional, utilitarian device and a symbol of the Jefferson personality. He was a man who revealed to others only what he chose to; he remained fixedly concealed behind what we could call his defenses—observing all but seldom revealing.” McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello*, 327.

was a perfect 20-foot cube, illuminated only from above by a skylight.⁷⁰ The house was as close as he could get to realizing the conceit of a garden pavilion-as-house.⁷¹ Here again Jefferson was interested in using octagons to create a visual link to the outdoors. The primary public space is an elongated octagonal parlor with two windows and a door opening onto an elevated covered porch, with no direct access to the ground. He actually ordered workers to excavate the land below the porch, so as to make the house appear higher. Jefferson could walk out onto the porch and gaze out at his property but not actually walk out onto the land. In other words, vision was primary. Jefferson could indulge the dream of a rational, enlightened self able to see all, yet free of prying eyes and a judging public—a panoptic fantasy of an eye looking out with no returning gaze.

Yet the house was also full of contradictions, particularly related to the myth of independence that Jefferson attached to it. As at Monticello, these tensions are manifested in the section of the house—in contrast with the geometric purity of the plan. Although he imagined it as a space where he could retreat in solitude, at least one and maybe more enslaved people accompanied him during his stays at Poplar Forest. In his initial plan Jefferson had neglected to include stairs connecting the living spaces above and the work

⁷⁰ The perfect geometry of the dining room was disrupted in the built version by the awkward addition of a fireplace in one corner. Jefferson's early sketches clearly indicate that he was thinking of the form as a free-standing octagon. Jefferson decided to add two porches and two stairways after construction had begun. We know this from a letter he sent to the builder Hugh Chisolm, on September 7, 1806. For a detailed account of the design and construction of the house, see S. Allen Chambers, *Poplar Forest and Thomas Jefferson* (Forest, VA: The Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest, 1993).

⁷¹ Chambers speculates that Jefferson may have been directly influenced by a plate from Wilhelm Gottlieb Becker's *Neue Garten-und-Landschafts-Gebäude* (1798-99), which Jefferson acquired in 1805, a few months before construction on Poplar Forest began. *Poplar Forest*, 33.

spaces below. After construction began, he asked his builder to add the stairs, acknowledging, if grudgingly, the interdependence of freedom and slavery.

An Octagonal Prison

Approximately a decade earlier, Jefferson had designed another “pure” octagon plan—a prison that he apparently sketched and sent to the governor of Virginia alongside his proposal for the State Capitol in 1797. In this octagonal prison, we can see even more starkly the new, performative understanding of his architectural geometries. In a missive accompanying the sketch, Jefferson wrote that he had modeled his design on one by an “architect of Lyons” from 1761, which was based on the then-novel idea of solitary confinement. Pennsylvania had recently adopted the practice, which was conceived as a more humane form of punishment and rehabilitation, and Jefferson urged his colleagues in Virginia to follow suit.⁷² Jefferson’s drawing does not survive, but we do have the original plan by the “architect of Lyons,” a P. G. Bugniet. (Fig. 1.31) Bugniet’s design resembles a Bentham-esque panopticon in plan, but instead of a guardhouse in the center, he places a chapel, conceiving of the central atrium as a space for the circulation of air and sound. This would allow the prisoners in the surrounding individual cells to hear mass without the risk of riots occurring.⁷³

⁷² Jefferson to James Wood, March 31, 1797. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Jefferson also described the prison design briefly in his “Autobiography,” *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 41–42. Jefferson was an admirer of Cesare Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), one of the key texts of Enlightenment political theory, in which the author argued against the death penalty in favor of a rational system in which punishment would be a deterrent means of reshaping the subject rather than retributive tool. Underlying Beccaria’s arguments were a precise calculus of the effects of different measures on human behavior.

⁷³ For more on Bugniet’s plan, see Howard C. Rice, Jr., “A French Source of Jefferson’s Plan for the Prison at Richmond,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12, no. 4 (1953).

Jefferson described his own scheme as similar to Bugniet's only smaller, with an octagonal periphery of barracks, two stories high. The lower cells should be designated as "cells of rigorous confinement," to be screened by "a Venetian blind to exclude the sight while it admits air." After describing numerous other details related to security, construction, and expense, Jefferson added that if his plan should be adopted, he would gladly "send a drawing of a plain neat cornice, and give some other directions respecting appearance."⁷⁴ In this octagon, performance—that is, the organization of sound, sight, and the movement of bodies—would be paramount, and representation a mere afterthought.

The paradox of these two formally homologous designs is that Jefferson saw political life as a kind of imprisonment. In 1809, after retiring from public life, he said he felt like "a prisoner, released from his chains."⁷⁵ The Venetian blinds that he proposed for the prison were the very devices that he used to screen out prying eyes at Monticello. In specifying cells of solitary confinement, Jefferson was granting his prospective prisoners an inverted version of the isolation and privacy that he himself coveted. There is a strange consistency in Jefferson's use of the octagon form for house and prison alike. In both projects, the octagon is employed as a device for creating a field of visual or sensory relations that would contribute to the fashioning of an ideal autonomous, self-possessed subject.

⁷⁴ Jefferson to James Wood, March 31, 1797. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁷⁵ Jefferson to Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours, March 2, 1809. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1203.

1.2 Jefferson's Grids

In Jefferson's octagons, whether for houses or prisons, we see the stirrings of a performative approach to geometric form. This performative theory of geometry is even more explicitly expressed in his designs at the territorial scale. If the octagons were imagined as operating on individual bodies—whether bodies ensconced in the home or in a prison cell, the land grid was Jefferson's chosen device for just as directly shaping relationships on the societal scale. Specifically, Jefferson treated grids as devices to help create a radical agrarian democracy. But, as I will discuss, the grid's attributes—especially its replicability and divisibility—also manifested the ways that a democratic utopia threatened constantly to blur into imperialism and libertarianism.

The Utopianism of the Early Republic

Before examining Jefferson's grids, it is useful to consider the broader "utopian" context in which he was operating. Today the American Revolution is often thought of as a conservative affair—a rebellion by colonials against the taxation policies of an imperial government. Yet, in the years after the war, many American revolutionaries saw themselves as engaged in an Enlightenment project of creating a new order, one that

involved designing a government according to the precepts of reason. As Thomas Paine put it, America “hath a blank sheet to write upon.”⁷⁶

Yet the Utopia of the new republic quickly turned conservative, as the Constitutional framers became obsessed with the perceived threats to the future of the state—consisting of, on one hand, the demagoguery of the masses (as evidenced in the “irresponsible” laws passed by numerous state governments in the 1780s favoring debtors), and on the other, corruption of those in power. The longevity of the state therefore hinged on the construction of an elaborate architecture of government that would provide a bulwark against the vagaries of democracy and tyranny. In the writing of the Constitution, the framers crafted a system of checks and balances intended to forestall oligarchy, and a representative scheme of government calculated to provide a shield between the masses and the state. Constitutional provisions such as an unelected judiciary and an indirectly elected president all betray the framers’ fundamental distrust of democracy. Benjamin Rush stated the Federalist view most baldly: though “all power is derived from the people, they possess it only on the days of their elections. After this it is the property of their rulers.”⁷⁷ The Constitution can be regarded as a kind of conservative blueprint, intended to constrain and shape an idealized future. One historian has described Madison as attempting to “build a machinelike system, a structure of

⁷⁶ Quoted in Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 190.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Arendt, *On Revolution*, 228. The standard historical interpretation views the Declaration as a radical document and the Constitution as a conservative one. See Joyce Appleby, “The American Heritage—The Heirs and the Disinherited” in Appleby, *Liberalism*. Appleby argues that the Constitution was a conservative effort by Federalists to counter radical stirrings among state governments. See also Eric Thomas Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

government that will automatically divert and diffuse factions; furthermore, the system will check itself by not allowing its human operators to become too powerful. It will be a self-perpetuating government...⁷⁸

Jefferson, it should be pointed out, was in France during the Constitutional debates and had numerous objections to the document as written. Of the Revolutionary-era statesmen, he was arguably the most utopian, the most steeped in Enlightenment idealism, and the most open to totally reinventing all aspects of life in the new republic. In 1790, for example, he proposed enacting decimal systems of currency and weights and measures, with standard units derived from the seconds pendulum (a pendulum whose period is two seconds)—a unit derived from the laws of Nature rather than custom.⁷⁹ Jefferson saw the Revolution as an opportunity for reforming all aspects of society in a more rational image.

Jefferson's view of constitutions was markedly different from the Federalists. He saw these charters not in negative terms, as bulwarks against futurity, but in a more positive light, as instruments to remake society in his desired image. Most strikingly, he didn't see constitutions as permanent, and castigated all who regarded them "with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be

⁷⁸ Matthews, *Radical Politics*, 113.

⁷⁹ The decimal dollar but not the weights and measures was adopted. Creating a new system of weights and measures was one of the tasks of the new post-revolutionary France as well. The length of a seconds pendulum is 39.2 inches. France would shortly set its meter at 39.4 inches, based on the circumference of the earth. For a fascinating account of Jefferson's system of measurement, see chapters 7 to 9 of Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy* (New York: Walker & Co., 2002).

touched.”⁸⁰ In the famous letter to Madison in which he asserted the self-evident principle that “the earth belongs in usufruct to the living,” Jefferson posited that “The constitution and the laws of their predecessors extinguished then in their natural course with them who gave them being. . . . Every constitution then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force, and not of right.”⁸¹ In the same spirit, Jefferson, responding to Shays’ Rebellion in 1786 (an uprising of farmers in western Massachusetts to obtain government assistance with debt repayment), argued that a little rebellion now and then was salutary for a society. “It is like a storm in the Atmosphere.”⁸² And to another correspondent he wrote: “God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion.”⁸³ Jefferson held a progressive, relativizing view of constitutions and political ideals. In an 1816 letter, he explained that “[L]aws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened. . . . institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”⁸⁴ Jefferson’s utopian vision was not static (one of the most common criticisms of utopias) but anticipated perpetual change.

⁸⁰ Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1401.

⁸¹ Jefferson to James Madison, September 6, 1789. Julian Boyd, in his editorial notes to this letter, argues that it was really a thesis developed with the writing of the French Constitution in mind, disguised as a letter to Madison. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁸² Jefferson to Abigail Adams, February 22, 1787. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁸³ Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, November 13, 1787. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁸⁴ Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1401.

What was the content of Jefferson's utopianism? We can get an idea in his own take on a constitution—drafted for his home state of Virginia in 1776.⁸⁵ In his proposal, not surprisingly, we see hints that his ideal state is composed of independent, virtuous freehold farmers. He offered two specific measures to help realize this utopian society, which we can summarize under the terms “distribution” and “division”—concepts that would find their corollary in the figure of the grid. First, he proposed giving 50 acres of free public land to every white male adult not already in possession of such an amount. This provision, a strategy of “distribution,” would essentially expanded suffrage to all adult white males, since elsewhere Jefferson proposed lowering the property requirement for voting to 25 acres. Taken together, these measures would have significantly widened the terms of citizenship. However membership in Jefferson's imagined polity was still far from universal, since it excluded large segments of the population, namely most blacks and all women.

Another important measure of Jefferson's constitution, which we can categorize under “division,” was the abolishment of entail and primogeniture—the rules of inheritance stipulating that landed estates be passed on intact, to the eldest son alone, rather than equally distributed among all the children of the deceased. Existing laws had tended to preserve large estates rather than breaking them up into smaller pieces. Jefferson wanted instead to permit and even accelerate the division of these large plots into smaller ones. He saw inheritance laws as a key means of undoing the concentration of property that in Europe kept the masses in poverty. Reflecting on the instances of misery that he

⁸⁵ Jeffers, “Draft Constitution for Virginia,” 1776. In *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 336-48.

had encountered in France, Jefferson wrote to Madison in 1785 of the necessity of a more radical distribution:

I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable. But the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, *legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property*, only taking care to let their subdivisions go hand in hand with the natural affections of the human mind. The descent of property of every kind therefore to all the children, or to all the brothers and sisters, or other relations in equal degree is a politic measure, and a practicable one. Another means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise.⁸⁶

Jefferson here was proposing something quite radical—a “natural” subdivision that would accord with the “natural affections of the human mind”—that is, still following the bonds of family rather than some more artificial seizure or redistribution. Jefferson used the provisions—or “devices”—of distribution and division in his proposed state constitution as a way to bring about the ideal society he imagined: one composed of economically independent freeholders.

Utopian Grids

The visual and technical tool for these strategies of distribution and division was the grid. Jefferson was enamored of grids and employed them in various designs, for example in the few city plans that have been attributed to him.⁸⁷ Here, however, I want to focus on two proposals in which the grid was employed to effect Jefferson’s utopian politics: his 1784

⁸⁶ Jefferson to James Madison, October 28, 1785, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ John William Reys, “Thomas Jefferson’s Checkerboard Towns,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 20, no. 3 (1961).

proposal for the division of new states, and his contribution to the establishment of the national survey grid, codified by the Ordinance of 1785.

In 1783, the new Congress was facing a problem over how to organize the excess western lands that had been ceded by individual colonies and purchased or coerced from Indians.⁸⁸ This was largely a practical matter: Straining under war debts, the young federal government saw the sale of the public lands as a panacea. Yet the land ordinances also had a utopian dimension. The task was essentially to draw a blueprint for the western territories, conceived as a *tabula rasa*. Peter Onuf has observed that for the founders, “a flourishing republican West” was “a ‘dream’, a visionary world that only existed ‘within ourselves.’”⁸⁹ The drafting of the land and territorial ordinances of the 1780s presented Congress with an opportunity to begin elucidating their vision of the future of the republic.

Already in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, most Americans and even Europeans assumed that the future of the new nation was intimately tied to territorial expansion. Indeed, many saw the west as precisely the area on which America would be able to realize its most utopian incarnation. The English writer “Candidus” wrote that the grand object of the United States should be to “improve these immeasurable tracts of

⁸⁸ As Jefferson put it in a draft of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, these land “purchases were sometimes made with the price in one hand and the sword in another.” Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans*, 24. My account of the debates over the size and formation of states is largely drawn from Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). and Bill Hubbard, *American Boundaries: The Nation, the States, the Rectangular Survey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁸⁹ Onuf, *Statehood*, xii-xiv.

land” in the “bosom” of the continent.⁹⁰ Beyond simply seeing the Northwest as a blank canvas for planting his ideal agrarian republic, Jefferson, like many early American leaders, understood that the future of the eastern colonies hinged on the West. Benjamin Franklin had articulated the notion of western land as a “safety valve” for eastern cities as early as the 1750s.⁹¹ And Jefferson wrote in 1805 that the availability of western lands reduced eastern workers’ risk of exploitation and degradation: “As yet our manufacturers are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to; because whenever it shall be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of subsistence, they will quit their trades and go to laboring the earth.”⁹² The continual presence of “vacant lands” on the frontier was an integral component of realizing a utopia of “independent and moral” citizens. In the policies of the 1780s, one could find the seeds of a vision of expansion that would manifest itself again in Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Territory, and in the U.S.’s series of campaigns and wars of expansion in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁰ Quoted in *Statehood*, 5.

⁹¹ In “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.” (1755), Franklin wrote: “So vast is the territory of North America that it will require many ages to settle it fully; and till it is fully settled labor will never be cheap here where no man continues long a laborer for others but gets a plantation of his own, no man continues long a journeyman to a trade but goes among these new settlers and sets up for himself. Hence labor is no cheaper now in Pennsylvania than it was thirty years ago, though so many thousand laboring people have been imported.” William Clarke and Benjamin Franklin, *Observations on the Late and Present Conduct of the French, with Regard to Their Encroachments Upon the British Colonies in North America* (London: John Clarke, 1755), 8.

⁹² Quoted in Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 203. On the history of the “safety valve” theory of western land, see *Virgin Land*, 201-10. And Fred A. Shannon, “A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety Valve Theory,” *Agricultural History* 19(1945).

In the 1780s, Congress confronted two pragmatic questions, both of which it tasked to Thomas Jefferson, as leader of a committee to draft the 1784 Ordinance, to help answer. The first problem was how to establish the boundaries of new states. The second was how to establish new western governments. Another key question was whether slavery would be permitted in the new states.⁹³ Jefferson's committee created a plan that bore all the marks of Enlightenment: The borders of the new states would be determined largely by longitude and latitude lines, resulting in a grid of "scientifically divided" new states.⁹⁴ These states, each two degrees, or 120 nautical miles, tall, could be easily subdivided into 100-square-mile units that Jefferson called "hundreds."⁹⁵ In other words, Jefferson wanted to impose a decimal system onto the territory of the United States, just as he tried to do, unsuccessfully, with its system of weights and measures.⁹⁶ In

⁹³ Jefferson tried to include a clause in the 1784 Ordinance prohibiting slavery, but this was not incorporated in the final version, due to southern states' objections. The prohibition was later included in the 1787 Northwest Ordinance.

⁹⁴ The longitudinal lines would be drawn through the Falls of the Ohio and the meeting point of the Ohio and Kanawha rivers, with the westernmost boundary defined by the Mississippi. The lateral lines in Jefferson's scheme would begin with the 31st parallel and recur every two degrees north. According to Robert F. Berkhofer, the specification of the state boundaries was probably Jefferson's main contribution to the 1784 Ordinance. See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Jefferson, the Ordinance of 1784, and the Origins of the American Territorial System," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1972): 243.

⁹⁵ Although Jefferson appropriated the term "hundred" from tradition, his dimensions for it—based on the geographical mile (calculated from the circumference of the earth) rather than traditional English measures, were novel. The word "Hundred" was believed by Jefferson to be Anglo-Saxon in origin: It may have originally referred to a plot of land large enough to sustain approximately 100 households. The term was used as a unit of subdivision in a few middle-Atlantic colonies in the seventeenth centuries, and a few plantations in colonial Virginia had the word in their names. Jefferson's choice of the word "hundred" may have to do with his interest in pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon culture as the root of English republicanism. See his letter to Major John Cartright, June 5, 1824, for an example of Jefferson's views on this subject. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1490-96.

⁹⁶ Jefferson makes clear in a letter to Frances Hopkinson of May 3, 1784 that the he saw the various forms of decimalization—in this case, of land measurement and of currency—as related and that he thought that his new system of land measurement would ultimately be more practical in terms of calculability: "In the scheme for disposing of the soil an happy opportunity offers of introducing into general use the geometrical mile, in such a manner as that it cannot possibly fail of forcing it's way on the people. However this bearing some relation to astronomy and to science in general, which certainly have nothing to do with legislation, I doubt whether it can

his notes, he suggested names for these new states that were classicized versions of Indian names—as if to evoke the republican legacy of Rome as well as the Enlightenment “state of Nature” as incarnated in America. These proposed names—including Sylvania, Michigania, Assenisipia, Cherronesus, Polypotamia—give a hint that the task of creating new states was as much ideological as pragmatic. The approximate boundaries of these new states were drawn in a map copied by David Hartley in 1784 or 1785 from an original by Jefferson.⁹⁷ (Fig. 1.32)

Jefferson’s proposal for the 1784 Ordinance established boundaries for fourteen new states.⁹⁸ It gave much autonomy to the new states to decide and organize their own affairs, and welcomed new states on equal footing with the old. Jefferson stipulated that the free male residents of a new state could establish temporary governments for themselves by adopting the constitution and laws of one of the original states. When any new state numbered more than 20,000 inhabitants, it could draft its own constitution.

be carried through. Were it to prevail it would lay the foundation of a very dangerous proposition; that is, to subdivide this geometrical mile into 10. furlongs, each of these into 10. chains, each of these into 10. paces, differing very little from the British furlong, chain, and fathom, but I hope it will be foreseen that should we introduce so heterodox a facility as the decimal arithmetic, we should all of us soon forget how to cypher. I have hopes that the same care to preserve an athletic strength of calculation, will not permit us to lose the pound as a money unit, and it’s subdivisions into 20ths. 240ths. and 960ths. as now generally practised. Certain innovators have been wishing to banish all this cunning learning, to adopt the dollar for our Unit, to divide that into 10ths. 100ths. &c. and to have a gold coin of the value of 10. dollars, a silver coin of the value of a dollar, another of the value of 1/10 of a dollar or the Spanish Bit, and a copper one equal to 1/100 of a dollar, and of course very near the value of a New York penny.... This is surely an age of innovation, and America the focus of it!” Thomas Jefferson to Francis Hopkinson, May 3, 1784. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

⁹⁷ Versions of this map, along with Jefferson’s proposed names, were printed in several contemporary publications, including Francis Bailey’s *Pocket Almanac for 1785*, although with some inaccuracies. For an excellent detailed analysis of these state names, and their fate in the eventual bill, as well as the publication and circulation of the maps related to the Ordinance, see Julian Boyd’s Editorial Note on “Plan for Government of the Western Territory in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.”

⁹⁸ The actual number of states proposed in Jefferson’s draft is somewhat ambiguous, although the general consensus is that he intended fourteen. See Boyd’s notes in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. for a detailed explanation.

When its population equaled that of the smallest existing state, it would be granted admission to the union.

Within two years, however, there was a perceived need in Congress to change the ordinance, as Congressmen became increasingly skeptical about giving western settlers—seen as a rowdy and unruly crowd by the gentlemen in Congress—so much power and autonomy. James Monroe led a committee to revise Jefferson’s scheme, eventually leading to the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. The general tenor of the changes was towards more federal control over the process of state formation: instead of indigenous governments, new states would start out with a federally imposed territorial government. Once the state numbered 60,000 inhabitants, it could write a constitution and apply to Congress for admission to the union. The Northwest Ordinance also included a ban on slavery in the new states—something Jefferson had proposed in 1784 but which failed to make it into the final bill.

The 1787 Ordinance also departed significantly from Jefferson’s scheme in another important respect—the shape and size of the new states. Whereas Jefferson had drawn a tight grid of relatively small states, the new ordinance provided for three to five large states to be delineated in the space that Jefferson had placed nine.⁹⁹ Monroe justified the move on practical grounds, saying that many small states would have difficulty meeting the population requirement for entry into the union.¹⁰⁰ Other members of

⁹⁹ The Northwest Ordinance only carved out states from the territories already ceded by states, whereas the 1784 Ordinance had included lands from anticipated cessions, thereby covering a much larger area.

¹⁰⁰ A few contemporaries also raised the objection that the state boundaries were arbitrary and did not follow natural geographical contours. Onuf, *Statehood*, 90. The phrase “ideological geography” comes from Berkhofer, “Jefferson.”

Congress worried that predetermining the boundaries of all the new states opened the land to spare, premature settlement. James Madison and others also raised the concern that numerous small states would soon outnumber the old states, threatening the balance of power in the union.¹⁰¹

Beyond these political considerations, there was also a more philosophical one at stake. Jefferson favored a tighter gridding of new territories because, like Montesquieu, he believed that republicanism worked best in small states with relatively homogeneous populations. According to Montesquieu, such communities must be bound by shared customs, habits, and interests.¹⁰² Jefferson argued to James Monroe:

How may the territories of the Union be disposed of so as to produce the greatest degree of happiness to their inhabitants? With respect then to the Ultramontane states, will their inhabitants be happiest divided into states of 30,000 square miles, not quite as large as Pennsylvania, or into states of 160,000 square miles each, that is to say three times as large as Virginia within the Alleghaney? They will not only be happier in states of a moderate size, but it is the only way in which they can exist as a regular society. Considering the American character in general, that of those people particularly, and the inergetic nature of our governments, a state of such extent as 160,000 square miles would soon crumble into little ones. These are the circumstances which reduce the Indians to such small societies. They would produce an effect on our people similar to this.¹⁰³

Jefferson thought small states were the most appropriate form to accommodate unruly, independent-minded westerners engaged “energetically” in republican self-government. In contrast, James Madison argued during the debates over Constitutional ratification that an extensive republic encompassing a greater diversity of views and populations

¹⁰¹ Onuf, *Statehood*, 56.

¹⁰² Jefferson was also following a stipulation by the state of Virginia upon its cession of claims that the new states be less than 150 miles square—a provision motivated by similar rationale to Jefferson’s.

¹⁰³ Jefferson to James Monroe, July 9, 1786. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

would work better. Diverging “factions” would contend with each other, preventing any one party from dominating. In the same issue of *The Federalist* in which he made this argument, Madison defended representative over direct democracy as a mechanism to prevent the tyranny of the (presumptively ignorant and poor) “majority” from trampling on the rights of the “minority.”¹⁰⁴ At stake, therefore, in the 1780s debate about the size and shape of new states was nothing less than competing visions of American democracy. For Jefferson and the other federal framers, the size and shape of the states could directly influence political relations.¹⁰⁵

The second grid that Jefferson created at the behest of Congress was a land survey system for dividing western lands into small lots, so as to be able to sell them off. Congress saw the two measures as going hand in hand: One would establish the political structure of the new states; the other would organize the mechanisms for sale of individual parcels. Jefferson interpreted both tasks through the figure of the grid. Whereas the state grid defined the shape and scale of political communities, the land survey grid, with its 1 mile x 1 mile constituent unit, delineated the plot of an individual settler. Jefferson tried to connect these two tasks by making a land survey grid that fit neatly into the state grid, by using nonstandard geographical (nautical) miles rather than the customary statute

¹⁰⁴ James Madison, “The Federalist No. 10,” *The Federalist Papers* (1787), http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_10.html.

¹⁰⁵ On the political debates about the size and shape of states, see the illuminating analysis in Rosemarie Zagari, *The Politics of Size: Representation in the United States, 1776-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Bill Hubbard provides an interesting reading of the significance of Jefferson’s versus “Madison’s” state sizes in *American Boundaries*, 120-21.

miles.¹⁰⁶ Here again, Jefferson essentially imagined “decimalizing” land: Each state would be apportioned into squares or “hundreds” of 10 geographical miles on each side. Twelve of these hundreds fit perfectly into two degrees latitude. Each hundred would then be subdivided into 100 one-square-mile lots, each containing 1000 geographical acres. A 3 x 3 square of hundreds would form an administrative unit known as a “District,” overseen by a Surveyor. The decimalization was an example of Jefferson’s abstraction—since it would have imposed an alien unit onto conventional practices.

As with the Ordinance of 1784, Congress adopted a modified version of Jefferson’s plans—one that was less abstractly rational, and more rooted in convention and tradition. In place of Jefferson’s hundreds, Congress designated the land be divided into “townships” of six statute miles square, which would be further subdivided into 36 lots of 640 acres each.¹⁰⁷ (Fig. 1.33) The statute mile was rooted in long tradition, having its origins in the scale of an agricultural furrow and related intimately to the Gunter’s chain—a standard surveying measure developed in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁸ The six-mile-square township had also already become a conventional type of New England settlement by the

¹⁰⁶A geographical mile is a unit of length equivalent to one minute of arc along the Earth’s equator, or approximately 6,086 feet, as opposed to 5,280 feet to the statute mile.

¹⁰⁷ Congress later renamed these lots “sections.” Congress’s 640-acre lots were smaller than Jefferson’s proposed 1000-geographical-acre lots, which, factoring the conversion, would have been about 850 conventional acres.

¹⁰⁸ Gunter’s chain is a surveying chain composed of 100 links that is 22 yards long. An acre is 10 square chains. Since one mile = 80 units of a Gunter’s chain, 640 acres fit precisely in a square mile of ground. John Stilgoe writes that “No mathematical ratio is more important in the American Enlightenment landscape. Gunter synthesized the ‘customary’ English system of land measurement—the traditional acre and the mile—and the increasingly useful decimal system.” John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580 to 1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 100-1. This amount could be halved several times and still produce whole numbers, allowing for easier subdivision. This point is made in Linklater, *Measuring America*, 72.

seventeenth century.¹⁰⁹ (Fig. 1.34) Thus Congress's plan replaced the Enlightenment rationality of Jefferson's scheme with a modified grid rooted in custom. Congress also added some key provisions: four lots in each township (numbers 8, 11, 26, and 29) would be reserved for the U. S. government, and one (no. 16) would be preserved to fund education. In a compromise between northerners who favored emigration of entire communities versus southerners who wanted to enable piecemeal purchase of prime lots by individuals, alternating townships would be sold off as either entire townships, or by lots, producing the "stripe" effect seen in the Seven Ranges survey.¹¹⁰ (Fig. 1.35) The banding was literally a geometric-geographic compromise imprinted on the land: Congress couldn't settle on one pattern of settlement, so it merged two into one diagram. Land offices would be located in the east, so as to neutralize the preemptive advantages of squatters and "unruly" westerners, and favor settlement by orderly and industrious easterners. Land would be sold at the relatively high price of \$1 per acre.¹¹¹

The imposition of the land survey grid has sometimes been depicted by historians as an instance of gratuitous Enlightenment rationalization run riot over the natural landscape.¹¹² Or it has been interpreted as a purely expedient, even capitalist act: a prerequisite step for converting land into property, in order to meet an immediate

¹⁰⁹ For the history of the acre and Gunter's chain, see Hubbard, *American Boundaries*, 194-203; Linklater, *Measuring America*.

¹¹⁰ Jefferson would later apply a similar strategy to city planning—in the form of a "checkerboard" town grid with alternating built and unbuilt park lots, though there the end seems to have been urban sanitation and health. See Reps, "Thomas Jefferson's Checkerboard Towns."

¹¹¹ Onuf, *Statehood*, 31, 40.

¹¹² For the "Enlightenment" interpretation, see Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, 103. Stilgoe writes "Jefferson's report is a model example of Enlightenment abstraction, a perfect scheme for ordering a wilderness *tabla [sic] rasa*."

practical need—the retirement of the federal government’s war debt. But here again, the geometrization of land had another valence for Jefferson: Not only was it a tool for the wide distribution of land in an agrarian republic, but it also was the armature for a specific vision of more widely distributed political and economic power.

All three interpretations have a kernel of truth and can be tied with specific attributes of the grid. For example, the scale of the grid was significant and had important political repercussions. Whereas Jefferson wanted to distribute the public lands directly to settlers, in small parcels, and at nominal prices, other individuals, such as Alexander Hamilton, advocated the rapid sale of large parcels of land to wealthy individuals and speculators.¹¹³ In 1790, after the first land auctions produced disappointing sales, Congress out of desperation actually sold one million acres of prime Northwest land to the Ohio Company at a price equivalent to less than ten cents per acre (compared to the \$1 per acre it was asking of individuals), and authorized the Treasury to arrange other such large land sales. Congress also asked the Treasury Secretary Hamilton to propose measures for accelerating sales. Hamilton tailored his proposals to a different class of prospective buyer, “moneyed individuals and companies, who will buy to sell again.”¹¹⁴ To cater to these individuals, Hamilton stipulated that purchasers of tracts larger than 10 miles square, could buy on credit, while individual buyers and small associations would

¹¹³ Richard N. L. Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 82.

¹¹⁴ Alexander Hamilton, “Public Lands: Report of a Uniform System for the Disposition of the Lands, the Property of the United States,” in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. 8*, ed. Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 88. On Hamilton’s land proposal, see also Malcom J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 12-14.

have to pay specie—a provision obviously slanted toward the affluent. These plans were not adopted, but they do serve to demonstrate the implications of a larger versus a smaller scale for the grid. For Jefferson, a tightly spaced grid could itself be seen as one of those “devices” for dividing and subdividing—that is, widening the distribution of property that Jefferson wrote to Madison about in 1785.¹¹⁵

The size of sub-units in the grid—that is, the “townships” or “hundreds”—also had important political ramifications for Jefferson’s ideal form of democracy, as Hannah Arendt argued in an influential interpretation. Jefferson had long been interested in the organization and subdivision of political units. In 1779, as a member of the Virginia State legislature, he had proposed subdividing counties into hundreds for the purpose of organizing local primary schools.¹¹⁶ In the 1810s, Jefferson returned to the idea of the

¹¹⁵ There is one evident problem with this interpretation: The lots in Jefferson’s proposed grid would have been 850 acres, far larger than what an average settler would need for subsistence. (Recall that in 1776 he proposed giving each landless Virginian 50 acres of land.) And there is evidence that he originally intended the land survey plots to be even slightly larger. Julian Boyd says that in Jefferson’s draft of the 1785 Ordinance, the number 805 appears over another crossed-out number, which appears to be 908. See Boyd’s notes to Jefferson, “Report of a Committee to Establish a Land Office,” 1784, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 110. Why would Jefferson have designated such a large plot? Jefferson may have been carried away by the perfect decimalization of his grid. He may also have been trying to avoid land disputes among those already squatting on plots. Jefferson’s plan actually allowed more rights for squatters than the later Ordinance as passed, because his designated process would have allowed some claims on individual lots in advance of the survey (whereas the final ordinance mandated the survey of all lots in advance of sales). Under Jefferson’s plan, early claimants would go to the District Surveyor and identify their lots by distinguishing features. The Surveyor would hold the claim until the survey was run. The bigger the grid, the more likelihood that the settler’s domain would lie within one lot, thereby forestalling boundary disputes. This is entirely speculative, however. For an explanation about how exactly Jefferson’s proposed process would have worked, see Hubbard, *American Boundaries*, 184-5.

¹¹⁶ In the “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” Jefferson specified that the hundreds should be sized to contain “a convenient number of children to make up a school, and be of such a convenient size that all the children within each hundred may daily attend. Jefferson, “A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” 1779 in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 365-73.. The preamble of Jefferson’s Bill made clear the relationship between his plan for universal common education and his political vision. It began by warning that even the best forms of government were subject to perversion into tyranny, and that the “most effectual means of preventing this” would be to “illuminate...the minds of the people at large,” and especially, to teach citizens history so that “they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes and prompt to exert their natural

“hundred” only now he called it a “ward” and its purpose was now not only administrative but also political. In several letters to friends regarding the efforts of Virginia legislators to rewrite their state constitution, he advocated subdividing the counties into wards.¹¹⁷ Whereas counties were 24 miles square on average, the wards should be six-miles-square (that is, equivalent to a township, or one of Jefferson’s “hundreds”). Each ward would include an elementary school, a militia company, a justice of the peace and constable, provisions for the poor, administer roads and police, and conduct elections for jurors and representatives.¹¹⁸

Jefferson’s wards were not just a convenient administrative unit but a way to promote the kind of democracy he envisioned, one in which citizens would be active members of the political community. He explained in a letter to Joseph Cabell that localism would be a way of overcoming the abstraction and distancing of representative government:

“Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, he will let his heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte.”¹¹⁹

powers to defeat its purpose.” Moreover, because governments require “wise and honest” leaders, it is in the interests of the state to educate all youth “endowed with genius and virtue” regardless of their wealth or birth.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson to Major John Cartright, June 5, 1824. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1490-96.

¹¹⁸ In a letter of Jan 27, 1800 to Dr. Joseph Priestly, Jefferson recalled that these school-based “hundreds” were to be about five- or six-miles square, but in his draft of the 1795 Ordinance, which would have been nearly twice as large: 11.5 miles (or 10 geometrical miles) square. Assuming a central school, the former would put most children within a one-hour walk from school, whereas the latter would put most within a two-hour walk—slightly less practicable. Why Jefferson adopted such a large unit is not clear, and a little inconsistent with his general preference for smaller community units. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

¹¹⁹ Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1380. He wrote similarly to John Cartright: “Each ward would thus be a small republic within itself, and every man in the State would thus

Regarding the ward structure, Jefferson concluded: “The wit of man cannot devise a more solid basis for a free, durable and well-administered republic.”¹²⁰

Hannah Arendt has argued that with his idea of ward-republics, Jefferson restored one of the most important features left out of the U.S. Constitution—the spirit of the townships and town-hall meetings, the “original springs” of the spirit of the revolution itself. According to Arendt, it was only Jefferson who realized that “the Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised. Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of ‘expressing, discussing, and deciding’ which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom.”¹²¹

The size of the ward—which is to say, the size of the grid, was crucial for producing Jefferson’s intended political effects. Relationships of proximity could have a profound effect on the vigor of democracy. In the letter to Cabell, Jefferson recalled the political energy of the New England townships compared with the lassitude of the middle-Atlantic colonies regarding the controversial Embargo of 1807: “I felt the foundations of the government shaken under my feet by the New England townships. There was not an individual in their States whose body was not thrown with all its momentum into action.” In contrast, he pointed out “What would the unwieldy counties of the Middle, the South,

become an acting member of the common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties, subordinate indeed, yet important, and entirely within his competence.” Jefferson to Cartright, June 5, 1824. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1492.

¹²⁰ Jefferson to Cartright, June 5, 1824. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1493.

¹²¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 227.

and the West do? Call a county meeting, and the drunken loungers at and about the courthouses would have collected, the distances being too great for the good people and the industrious generally to attend.”¹²² In Jefferson’s mind, the township-cum-ward, a subdivision of a subdivision, by drawing citizens close together in tight-knit and spatially compact communities, was a device that could literally make the foundations of government shake.

While several recent historians and political theorists, following Arendt, have seen in Jefferson’s ward republics the kernels of a vision of popular democracy, it is important to recognize, once again, that Jefferson’s radical utopian vision, as embodied in the grid, also harbored more troubling elements. For, following Montesquieu, this intensive democratic participation was seen as relying on a relative homogeneity of citizens. Besides its reliance on territorial expansion, Jefferson’s vision of the ward republics also hinted at the possibility of atomization implicit in the grid’s theoretically endless divisions. In the letter to Cabell, Jefferson specified a division of powers among the different levels of government, from the national to the state to the county, to the ward, and ultimately down to individual citizens. The secret to ensuring liberty, Jefferson wrote, was in making every person:

the depository of the powers respecting himself, so far as he is competent to them, and delegating only what is beyond his competence by a *synthetical* process, to higher and higher orders of functionaries, so as to trust fewer and fewer powers in proportion as the trustees become more and more oligarchical. The elementary republics of the wards, the county republics, the State republics, and the republic of the Union, would form a gradation of authorities, standing each on the basis of

¹²² Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1381.

law, holding every one its delegated share of powers, and constituting truly a system of fundamental balances and checks for the government.¹²³

Some political theorists, following Arendt and clues in Jefferson's own language, have interpreted the relation between these forms of government as a pyramidal hierarchy, emphasizing the idea of power flowing upwards, "synthetically," from the mass of individuals at the bottom.¹²⁴ This image, which is hinted at but not employed by Jefferson himself, holds obvious appeal to those who would read him as a radical democrat: In a layered pyramid, the greatest mass is at the bottom; and citizens are lumped together in one body that comprises the dominant volume.

But instead of, or perhaps in addition to the figure of a pyramid, I think it might be more accurate to relate Jefferson's concept of ward republics to the grid with its telescoping scales. The grid is a figure not of vertical hierarchy, but of distribution and division. At the largest scale is the nation; this is gridded into states, which are gridded into counties, which are gridded into wards/townships/hundreds, and finally into lots. The grid captures the sense of spatial and power dispersion that Jefferson imagined to be essential to a republic. In the letter to Cabell, Jefferson continued: "It is by *dividing and subdividing* these republics from the great national one down through all its subordinations, until it ends in the administration of every man's farm by himself; by placing under every one what his own eye may superintend, that all will be done for the best."¹²⁵ Here we see hints that Jefferson's vision of widely distributed economic and

¹²³ *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1380.

¹²⁴ See Hardt, "Jefferson and Democracy," 70; Matthews, *Radical Politics*, 82-83.

¹²⁵ Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, February 2, 1816. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, 1380. Emphasis added.

political power, could end either in libertarianism, or in radical democracy. Both possibilities resided in the grid.

Ambiguous Geometries

Jefferson's grids, like his octagons, were ambiguous figures. The grid was unquestionably a prime tool for converting public, common land, into private property. At the same time, Jefferson believed the grid's capacity for distribution and division harbored the possibility of a more radical form of democracy—one capable both of spreading power more widely and defining a scale of community supportive of direct democratic action. But the grid's innate capacity for division also raised other troubling possibilities: On one hand, it could imply an endless subdivision to the point of atomism, ending in a polity composed of individual owners on discrete plots of land, each in charge of his own affairs—a liberal utopia. Or it could augur endless replicability—a reminder that Jefferson's agrarian republicanism was dependent on imperial expansion.

The political ambiguities hovering around octagons and grids would linger well into the nineteenth century. As liberalism spread and became the dominant social ideology in Jacksonian America, Jefferson's "right to happiness" became increasingly defined as private happiness, the right of each individual to pursue his own advancement and ends. In the 1830s and 40s, the radical possibilities, as well as contradictions, of Jefferson's grid would be revived by workingmen land reformers, led by George Henry Evans, seeking an alternative to liberal capitalism. Just a few years later, the phrenologist Orson Fowler would transform the octagon house into a full-fledged instrument of liberal self-fashioning. Both the land reformers and Fowler drew on the legacies not only of

Jefferson's political thought but also his insight that geometric forms could provide the very instruments for individual and social transformation.



Fig. 1.1 The Maison Carrée, Nîmes, France, 16 BC (painted by Hubert Robert, 1783, collection of the Hermitage)

Fig. 1.2 Thomas Jefferson, Virginia State Capitol, 1785 (Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey)

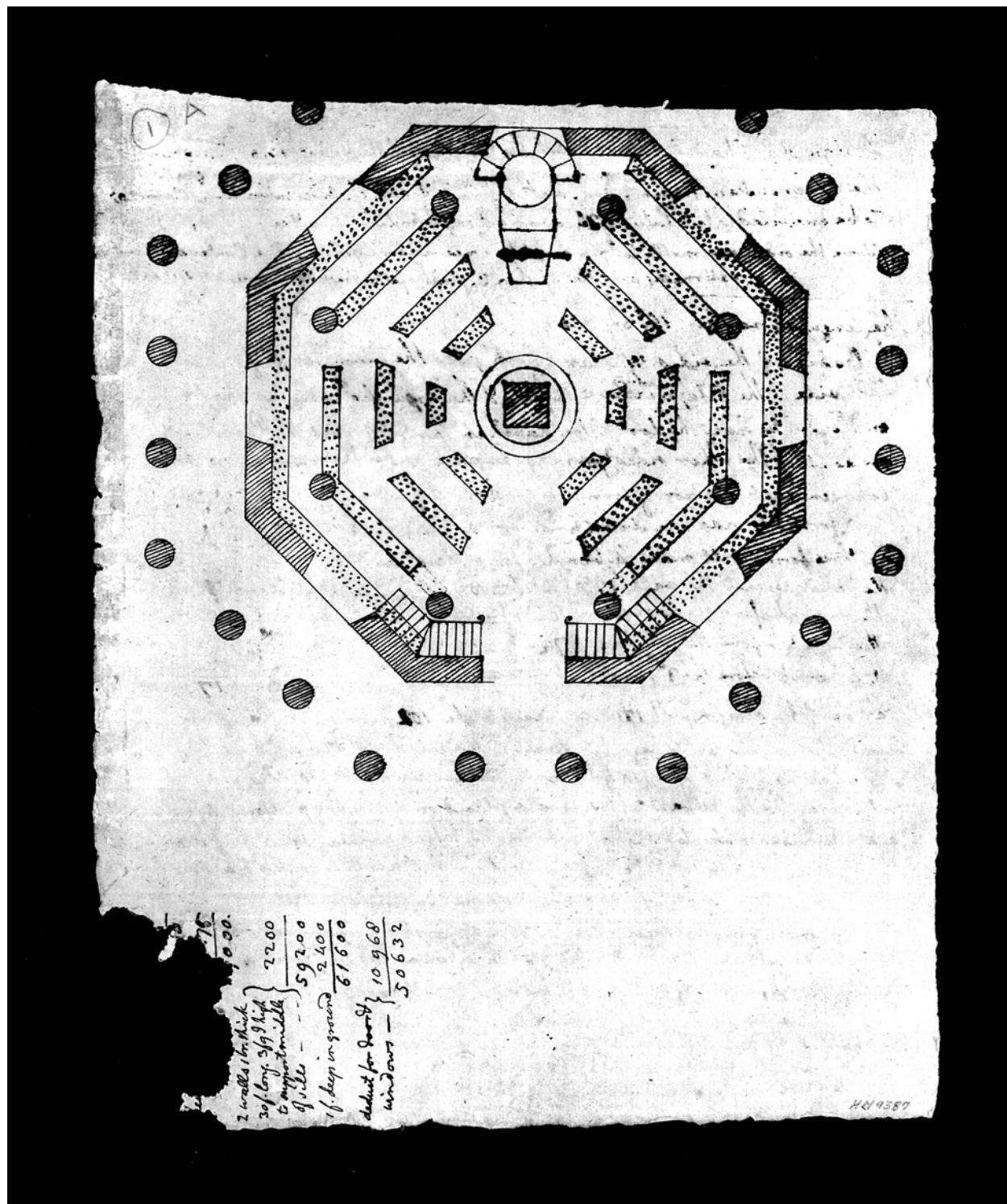


Fig. 1.3 Thomas Jefferson, Design of a chapel, c. 1770-78 (Huntington Library HM9387, N419r)

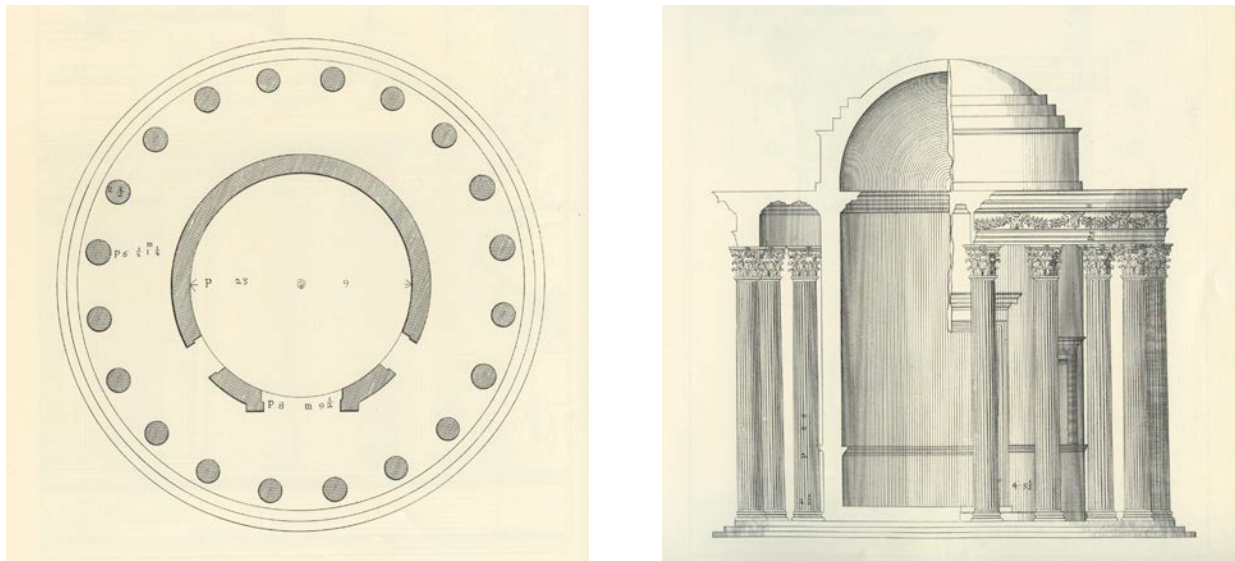
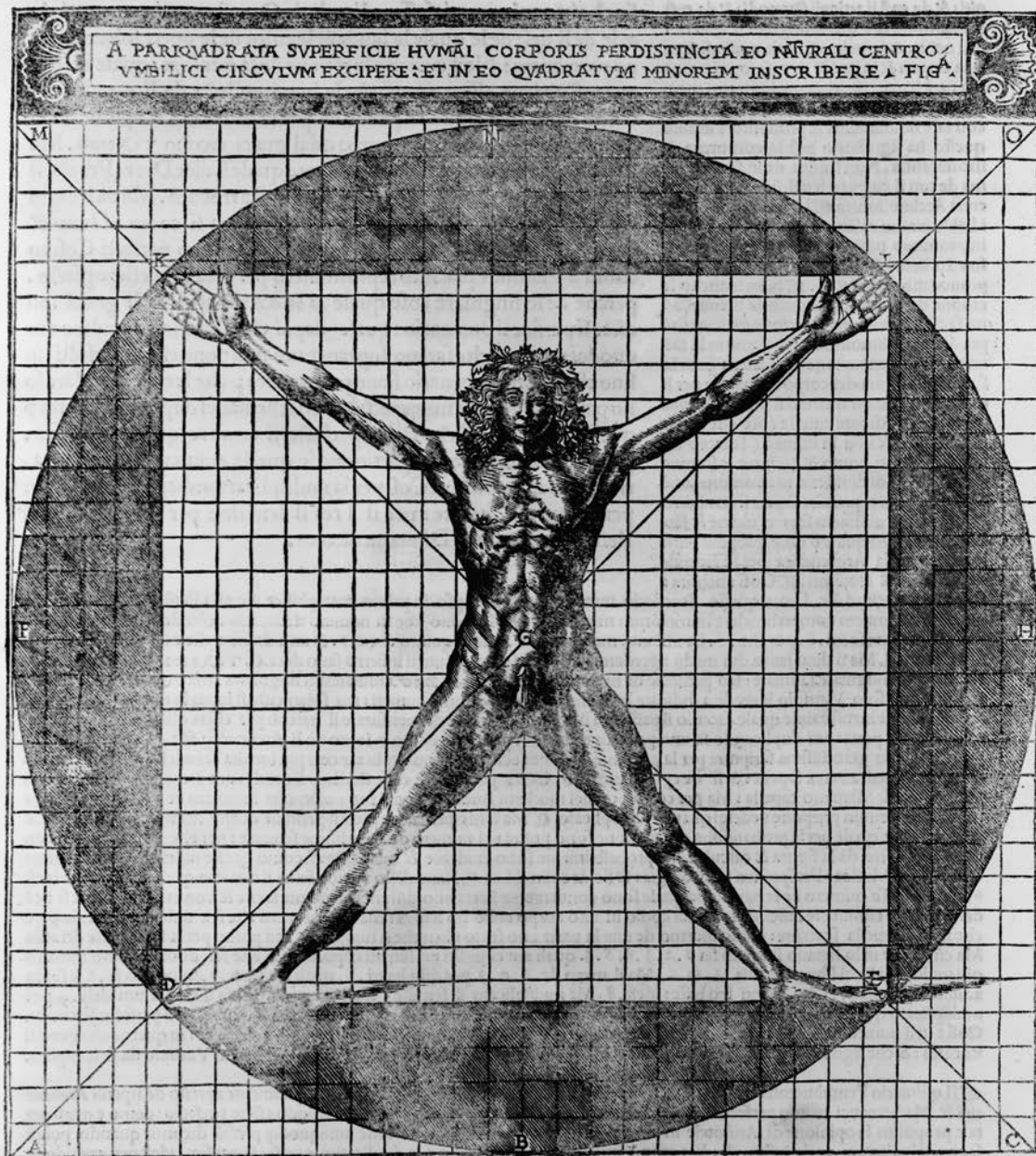


Fig. 1.4 Temple of Vesta, Plates 38 and 39 from Andrea Palladio, *Four Books of Architecture*, Book IV



Adunche si la natura ha così composto il corpo del homo: Questelectione si forse altramente le volesse qualcuno fusseno distinte p ordine: como alcuni phisici hano scripto: Ma per le supradicte: si etiam per le presente ratione che Vitruvio qua in seque: mi pareno assai explicate: Ma considerando che potessimo fare grandissima scriptura in explicare la insequentia de questi numeri: le quale cose a me pareno facile: & così penso debeno essere a tutti li periti de Arithmetica: cum sia apertamente si traia per la compositione de li numeri simplici: potere peruenire a formare uno composto de qualũq; quantita uoglia si sia: Poi de cpo ut alias supra diximus: per potere cpa quantita diuidere proportionatamente in diuerse portione in le quale si dice consistere la symmetria: Et di questo Vitruvio da lo exemplo prazipue in li nostri humani corpi trouaite: uel per epso potere perducere tute le ratione de li numeri & propor

Fig. 1.5 Humanist geometry. Illustration from Cesare Cesariano, *De architectura* by Vitruvius Pollio, 1521.

2 walls 1 br. thick
 30 f. long. 3/4 high
 to support middle
 of sills - - - } 2200
 1 f. deep in ground } 2400

 59200

 deduct for door } 10968
 windows - }

 50632

Fig. 1.6 Detail of calculations next to Jefferson's chapel sketch, c. 1770-78 (Huntington Library HM9387, N419r)



PROPOSITION VI.

To bisect a given finite right line.

POSITION.

Let A B be the right line proposed to be divided into two equal parts.

OPERATION.

Upon the extremity A
as a center, describe the arc C D

Without altering the distance of the legs of the compasses.

Upon the other extremity E
as a center, describe the arc E F

These arcs are to be made so as to intersect each other.

Draw the right line G H
through the interfections G & H
A B then will be bisected at the point O

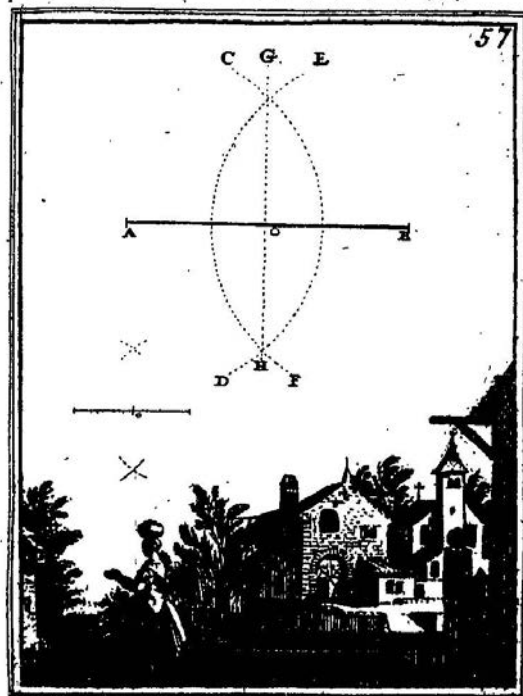
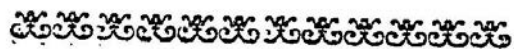


Fig. 1.7 The practice of geometry in the eighteenth century was conceived as the production of proofs. Two pages from Sebastien Le Clerc's *Traité de Géométrie theorique et pratique*. Jefferson owned a copy of the 1774 edition of this book.

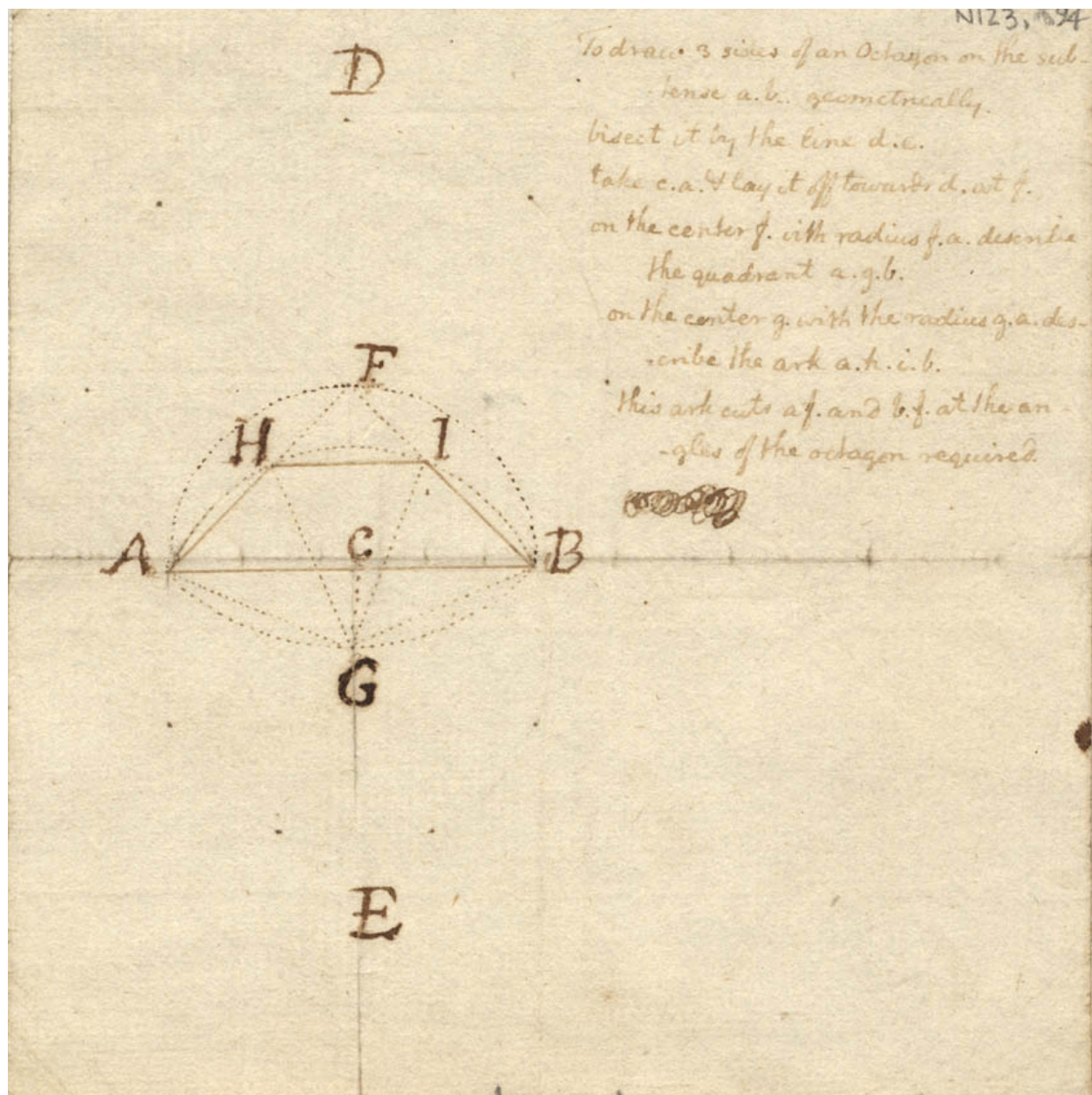


Fig. 1.8 Thomas Jefferson, Sketch labeled "To draw 3 sides of an Octagon..." c. 1771 (Massachusetts Historical Society N123, K94)

within
 lower 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ deep.
 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ wide
 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ + 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ long

without
 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ deep
 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ wide
 12 l. long

Case of the Drawer. sides & end $\frac{1}{2}$ l. thick
 bottom $\frac{1}{8}$ l.
 top $\frac{1}{8}$ l. in the middle
 $\frac{1}{2}$ l. in the margin

2. upper lids 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 8 $\frac{1}{4}$
 $\frac{1}{2}$ l. thick
 joining frame $\frac{1}{2}$ l. wide $\frac{3}{16}$ thick
 notches $\frac{1}{8}$ deep
 looking glass outside $\frac{3}{8}$ thick
 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ l. by 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ l.
 glass itself 10 l. by 7 l.

a. x. x. x. a. x. x. x. x.
 x. x. x. x. x. x. x. x.
 x. x. x. x. x. x.

12000
 144000
 11733
 55 $\frac{2}{3}$
 15
 2-10
 17 14-5
 22,500/500,000
 25,000
 36/2000(55
 100 14 8088.5
 200 21/26665.5
 265 127
 349 1

32570
 27853
 058370
 66522
 58480
 3150
 22050
 1905
 28623

Spain France Engl
 Portugal Spain Denmark
 Barbary Prussia Hamburg
 Italy Russia
 Turkey

4464.4
 17777.6
 5925.9
 1925.3
 21/2929.5 (1410
 86
 22
 19

See 2434 Lines
 14608. Ends cutting

2x + 4x² = a²
 4x² = a² - 2x
 2x = a² - 4ax + 4x²
 x = a² - 4ax + 2x²
 * = a² - 2ax + x² 35 D

x² - 2ax = -a²
 x² - 2ax + a² = a² - a²
 x - a = ±√(a² - a²)
 px = a ± √(a² - a²)

To draw 3 sides of an Octagon on the end
 - longer into geometrically
 bisect it by f.g.
 with c. a. lay off c. d.
 draw the lines a. d. & b. d.
 * bisect f.g. on the line a. d. the point
 a. equidistant from d. the line a. b.
 having found it, with d. c. lay off d. e.
 draw the line e. l.

* reverse
 with d. a. draw the quad^t a. b.
 make c. i. lay off from d. s. l.
 draw e. l. parallel to a. b.
 a. e. e. l. Ch on the 3. sides of the

month of the river N. H. 1835

Fig. 1.9 Thomas Jefferson, Sketch labeled "To draw 3 sides of an Octagon," undated (Massachusetts Historical Society MH129)

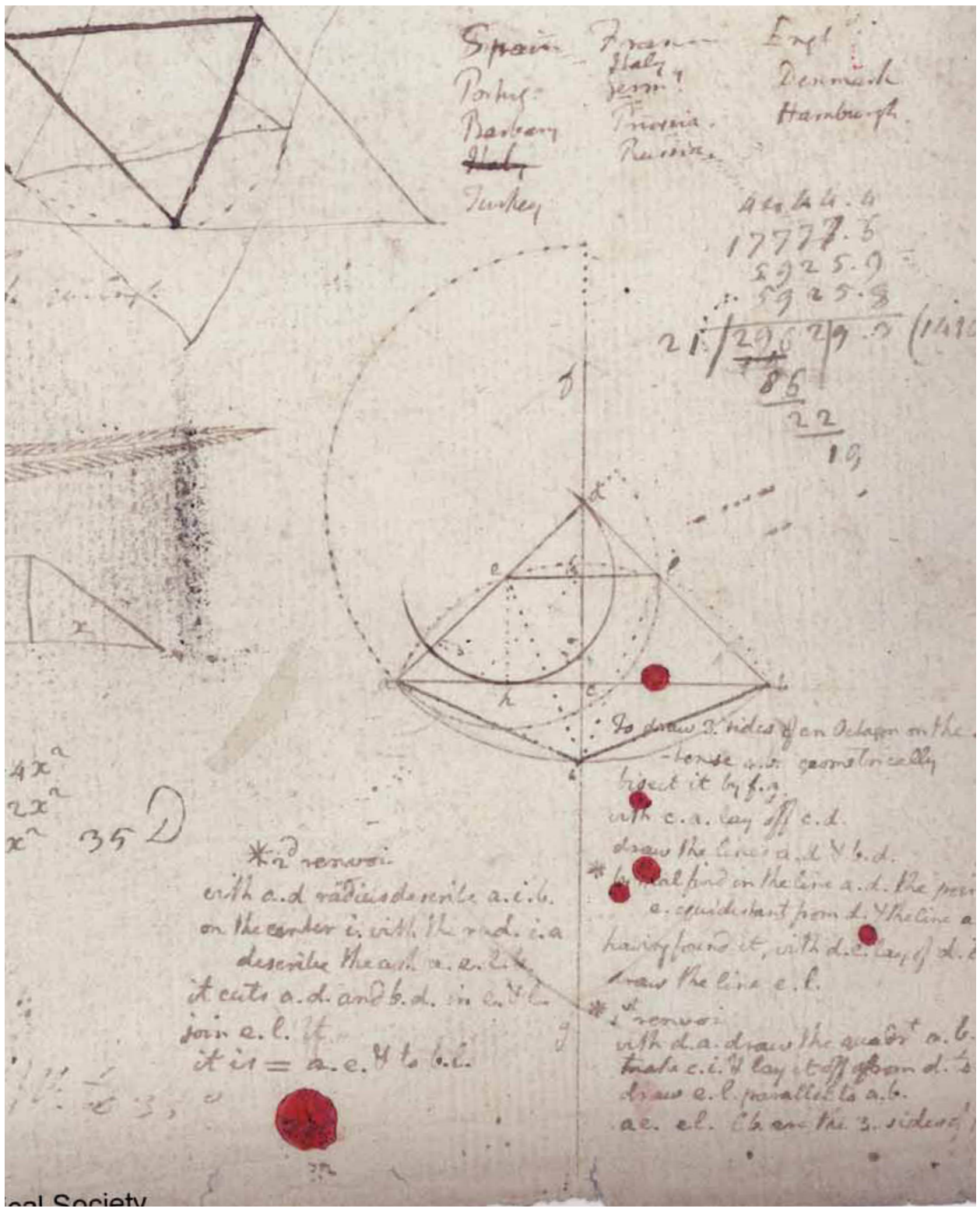


Fig. 1.10 Thomas Jefferson, Detail of Sketch labeled "To draw 3 sides of an Octagon," undated (Massachusetts Historical Society MHi29)



Fig. 1.13 Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, west elevation of second version, drawing by Robert Mills, 1803. (Massachusetts Historical Society N154, K155)



Fig. 1.14 Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, view from northwest (Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey)

Fig. 1.15 Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, view of south service wing (Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey)

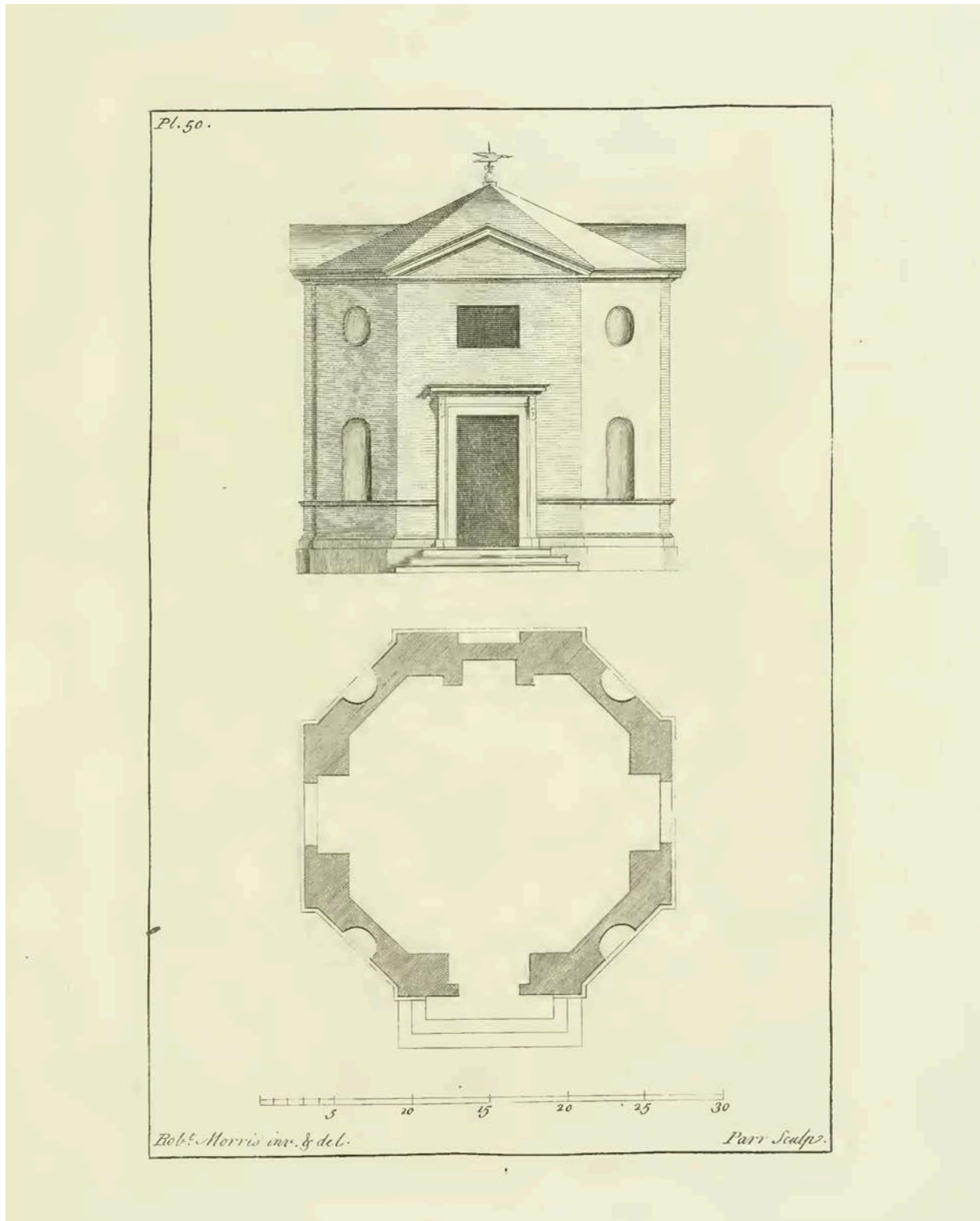


Fig. 1.16 Robert Morris, *Select Architecture*, 1755 ed., Plate 50. In his description of the plate, Morris wrote “This octangular Plan and Profile of a small Pleasure-Room, I proposed to be placed on a Terrass near Windsor, which has a very pleasing, and extensive Prospect, almost uninterrupted, 3 Fourths round the Horizon.... A Building of this Kind would be an Object seen at a Distance, and render it as well an Amusement to entertain the Fancy of others.”

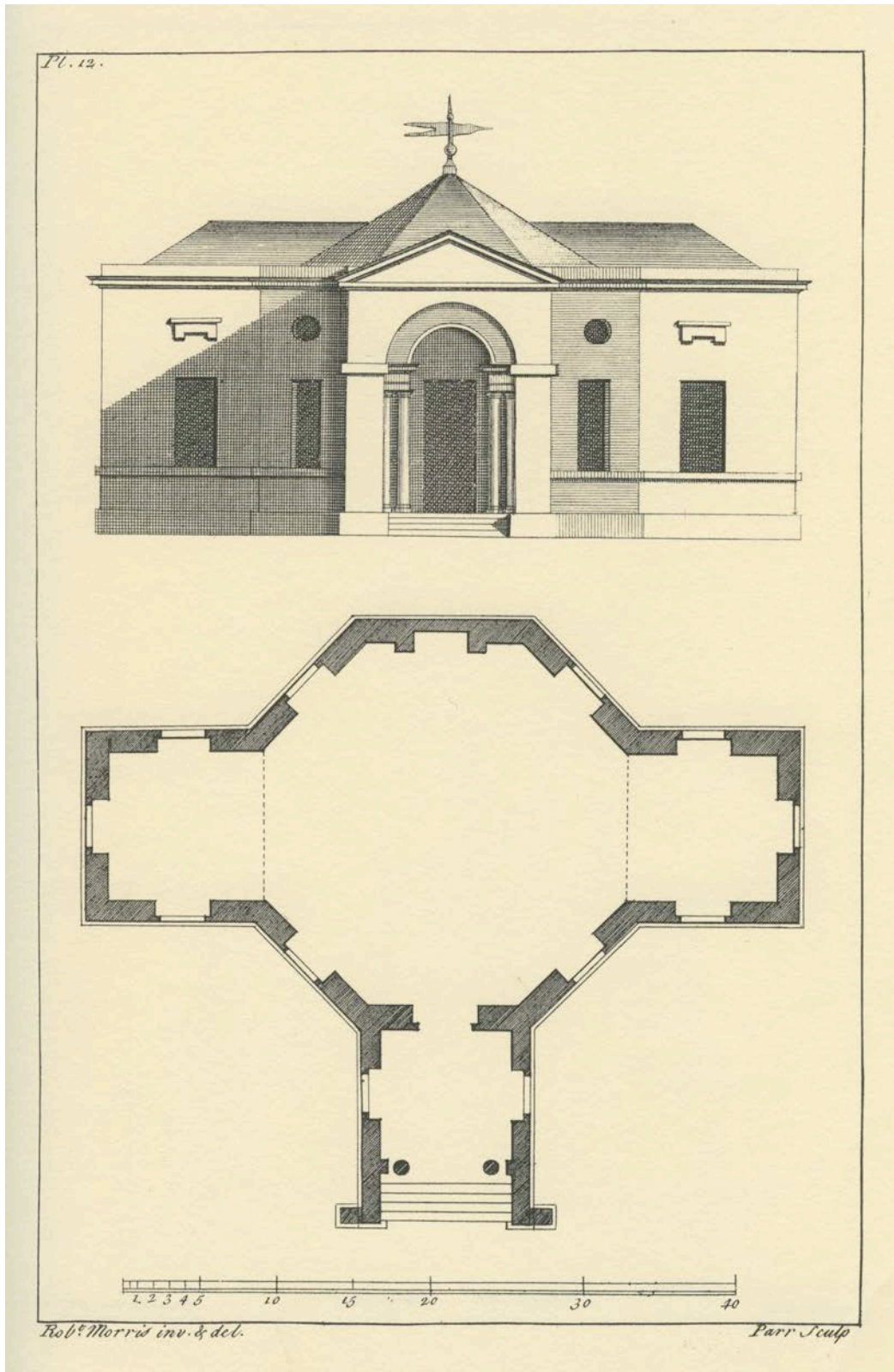


Fig. 1.17 Robert Morris, *Select Architecture*, 1755 ed., plate 12. "A Pavillion intended to terminate the Boundaries of a Garden, on an Eminence, where an agreeable Prospect may be had round the Horizon.... I made so many Windows in it, for the more easy obtaining a Variety of views."

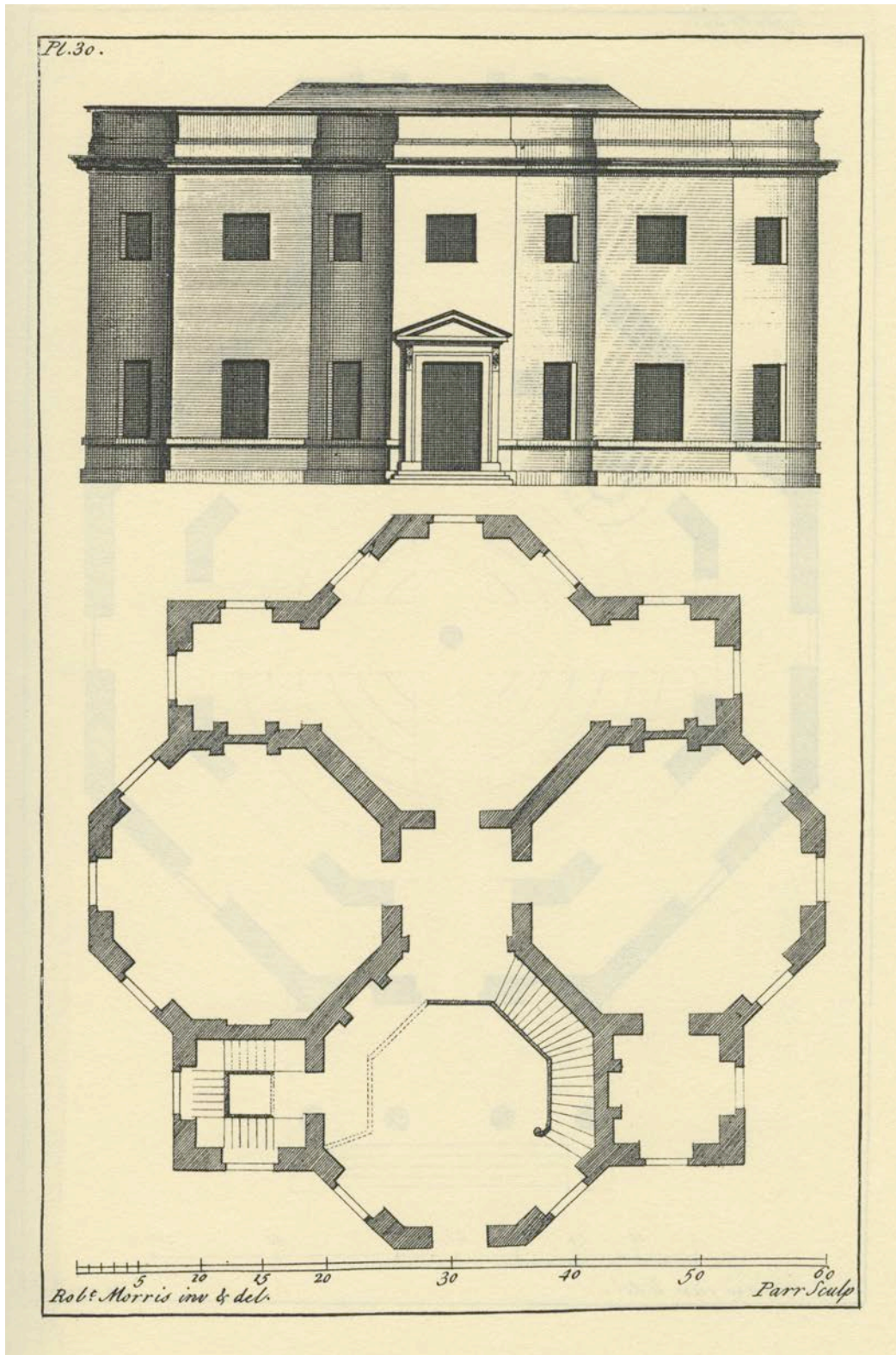


Fig. 1.18 Robert Morris, *Select Architecture*, 1755 ed., plate 30. A house. “The Situation for this Sturcture should be on an Eminence whose Summit should overlook a long extended Vale... such a Spot would be habitable only a Part of the Year.”



Fig. 1.19 Aerial view of Monticello

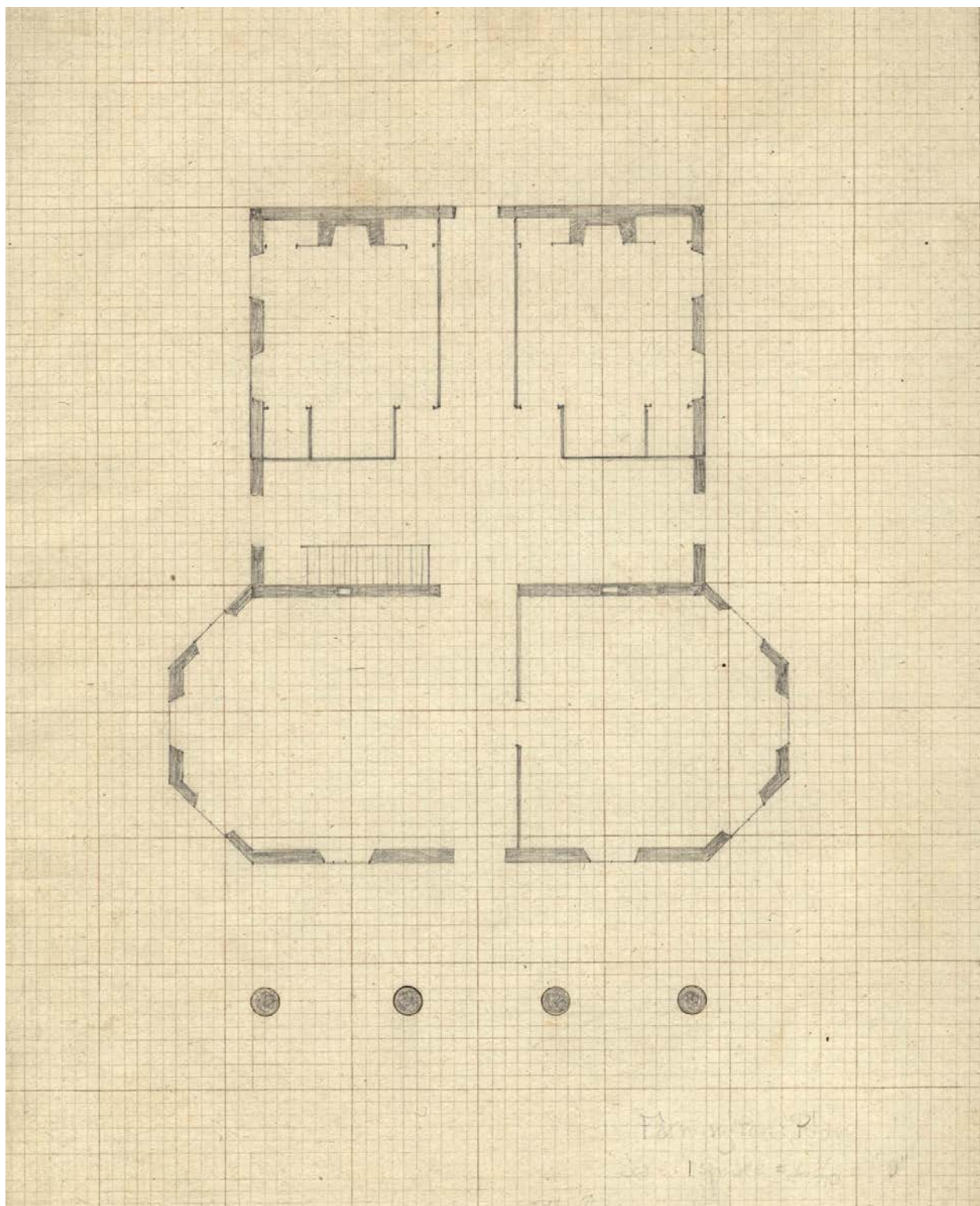


Fig. 1.20 Thomas Jefferson, Plan of Farmington, a house for George Divers, 1802 or earlier. (Massachusetts Historical Society N14, K183)

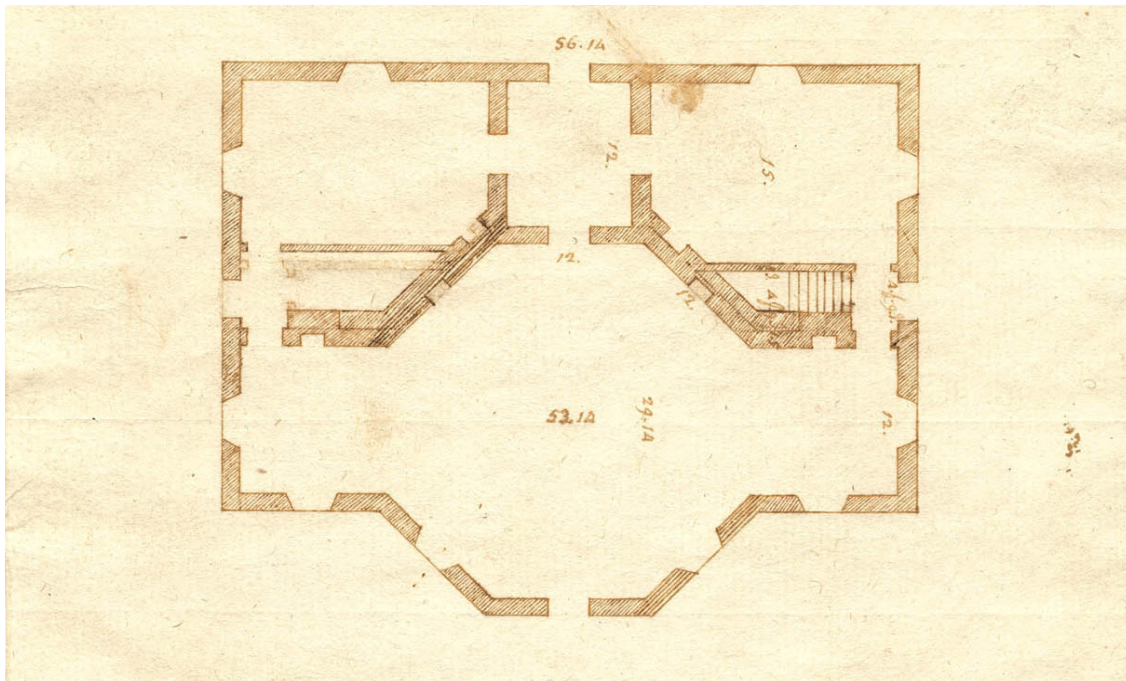
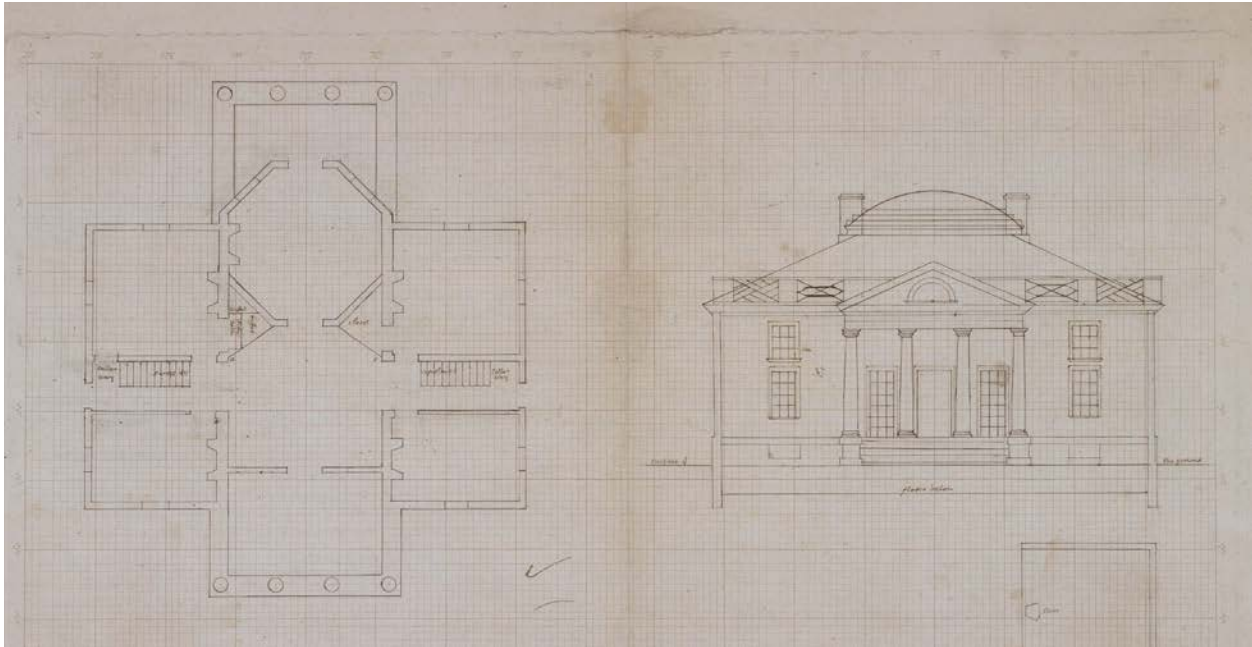


Fig. 1.21 Thomas Jefferson, Plan of Barbourville, a house for James Barbour, 1817 (Massachusetts Historical Society N5, K206)

Fig. 1.22 Thomas Jefferson, Study Plan for Governor's House in Richmond, Virginia, 1780 (Massachusetts Historical Society N283, K104)

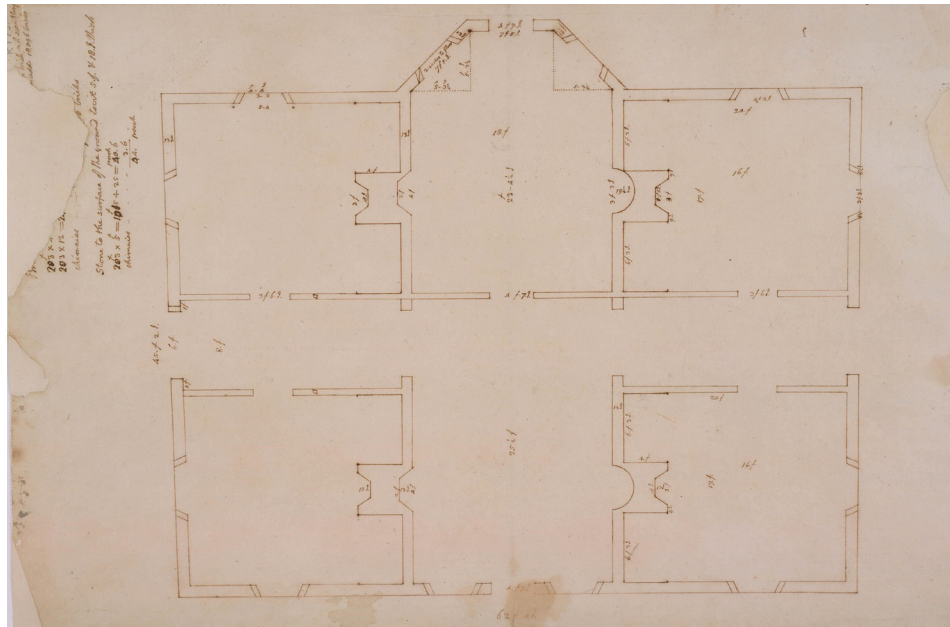
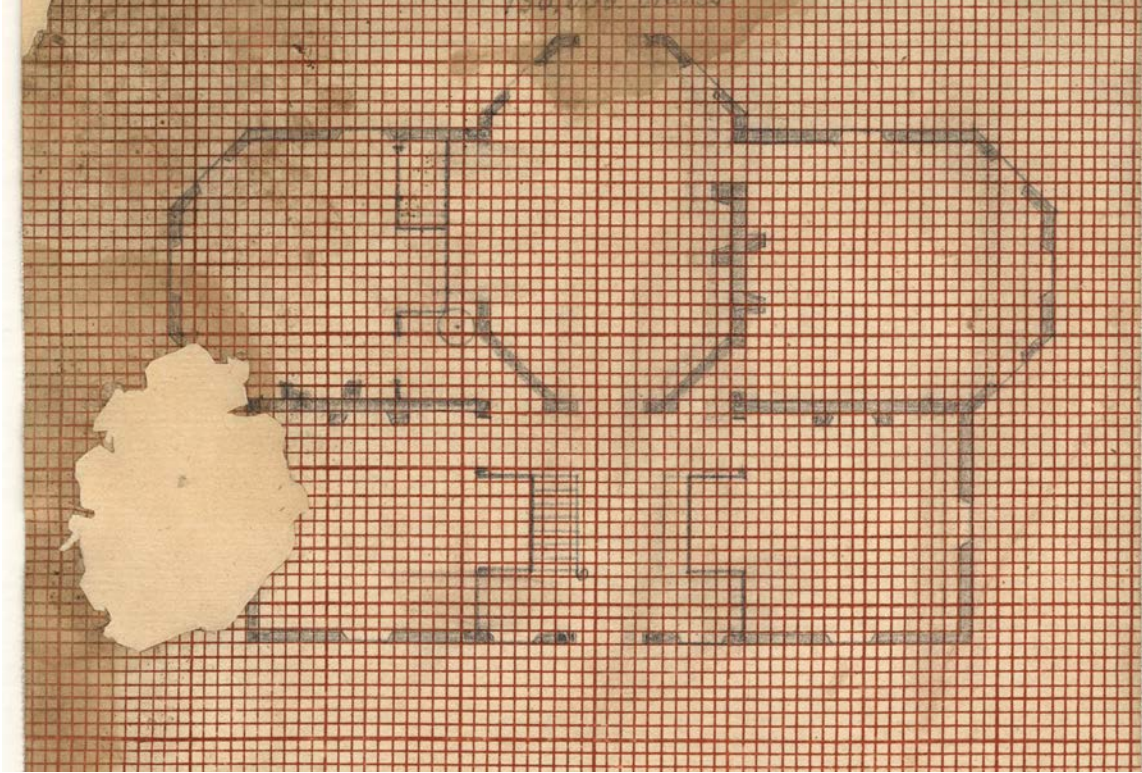


Fig. 1.23 Thomas Jefferson, Study for an Urban House, 1789-94 (Massachusetts Historical Society N450, K219)

Fig. 1.24 Thomas Jefferson, Plan of Edgemont, c. 1803-06 (Massachusetts Historical Society N9, K173)

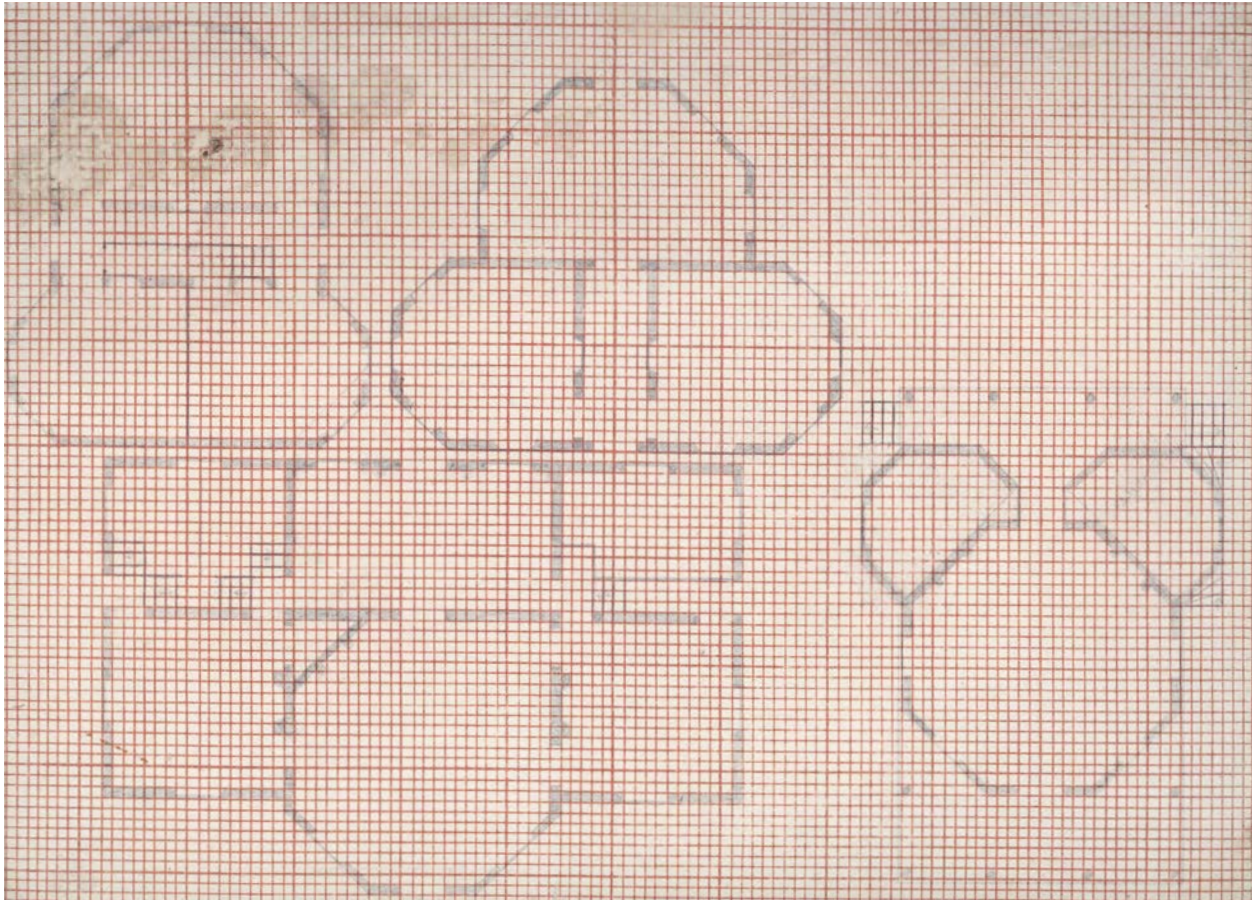


Fig. 1.27 Thomas Jefferson, Studies for a retreat, 1789-94 (Massachusetts Historical Society N490, K217)



Fig. 1.28 Porticoes outside Jefferson's bedroom at Monticello, installed in 1809.

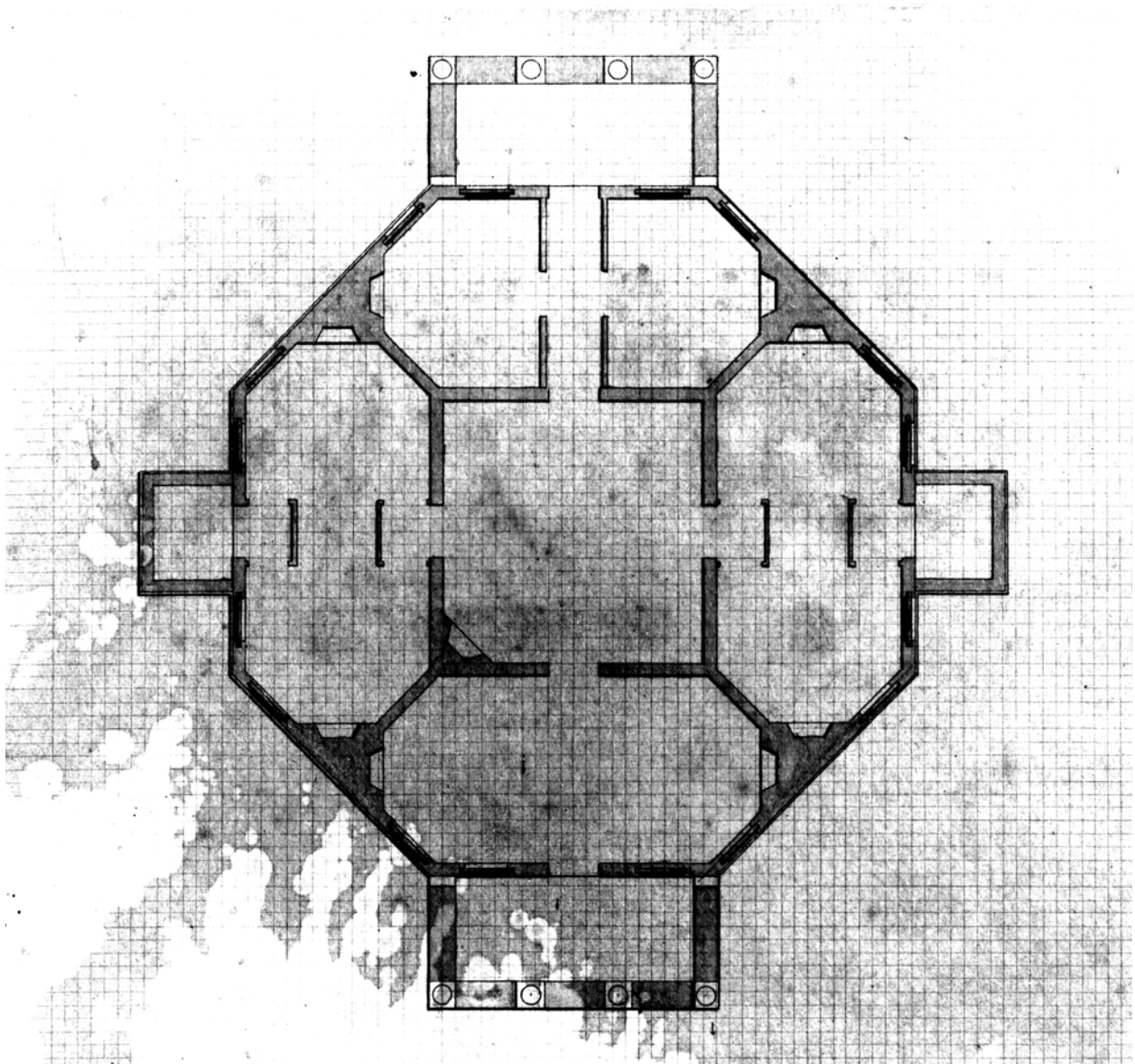


Fig. 1.29 Thomas Jefferson, Plan of Poplar Forest, undated, drawn by John Neilson (University of Virginia, Special Collections Department, Thomas Jefferson Papers, N350)



Fig. 1.30 Thomas Jefferson, Poplar Forest, Bedford, Virginia (Library of Congress Historic American Buildings Survey)

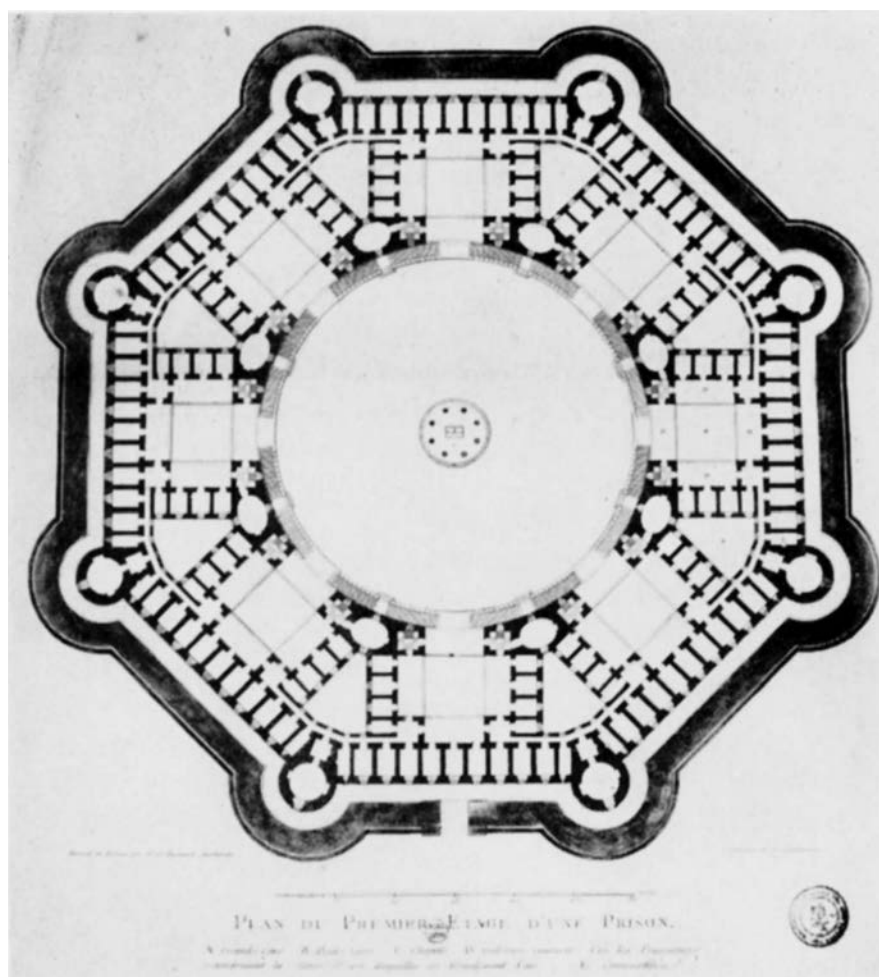


Fig. 1.31 P. G. Burgniet, Prison, 1761 (Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon)



Fig. 1.32 Jefferson-Hartley map, drawn by David Hartley, 1784 or 1785

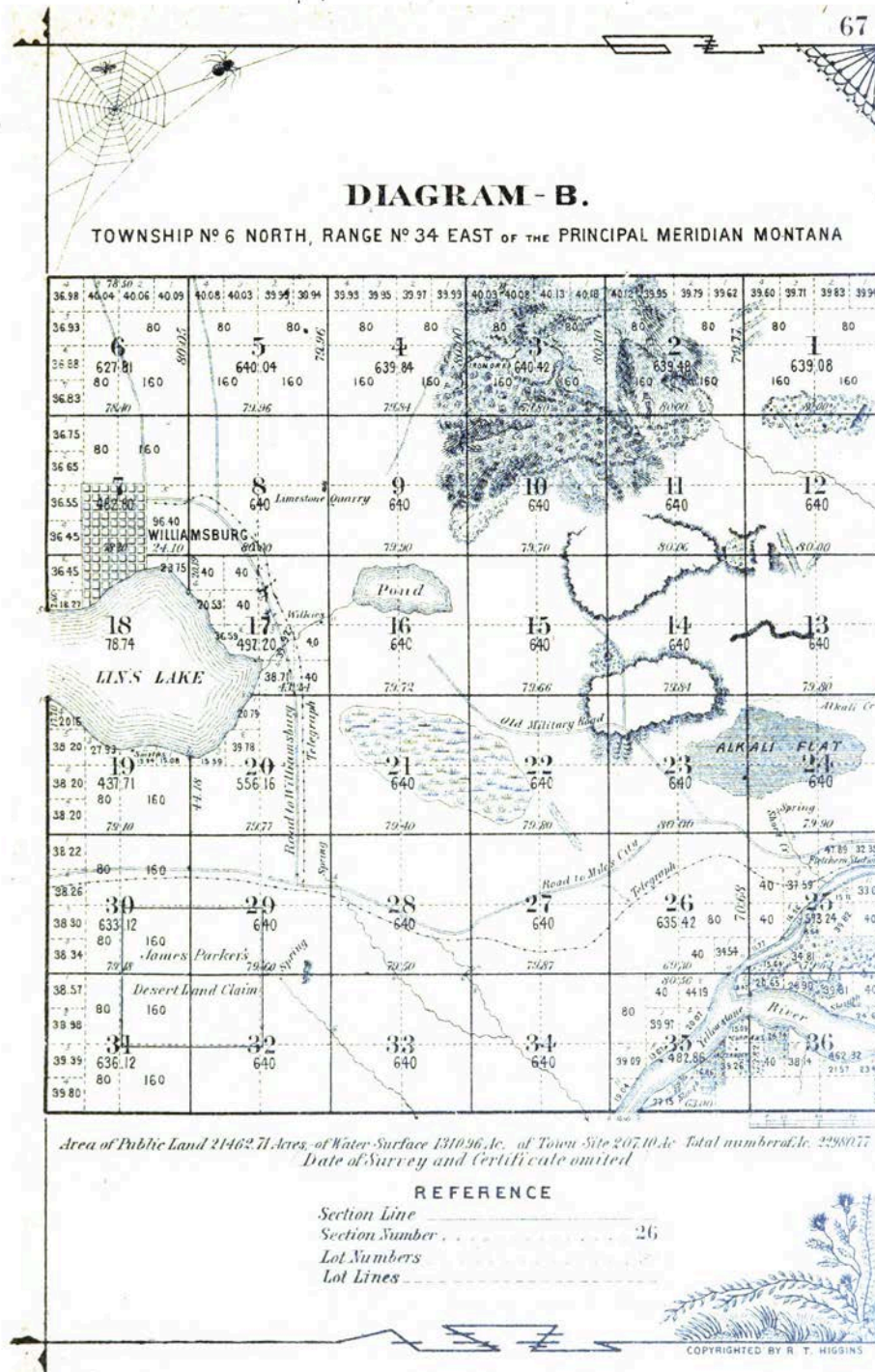


Fig. 1.33 Sample division of a township into sections, from Jerome Higgins, *Subdivisions of the Public Lands*, 1887

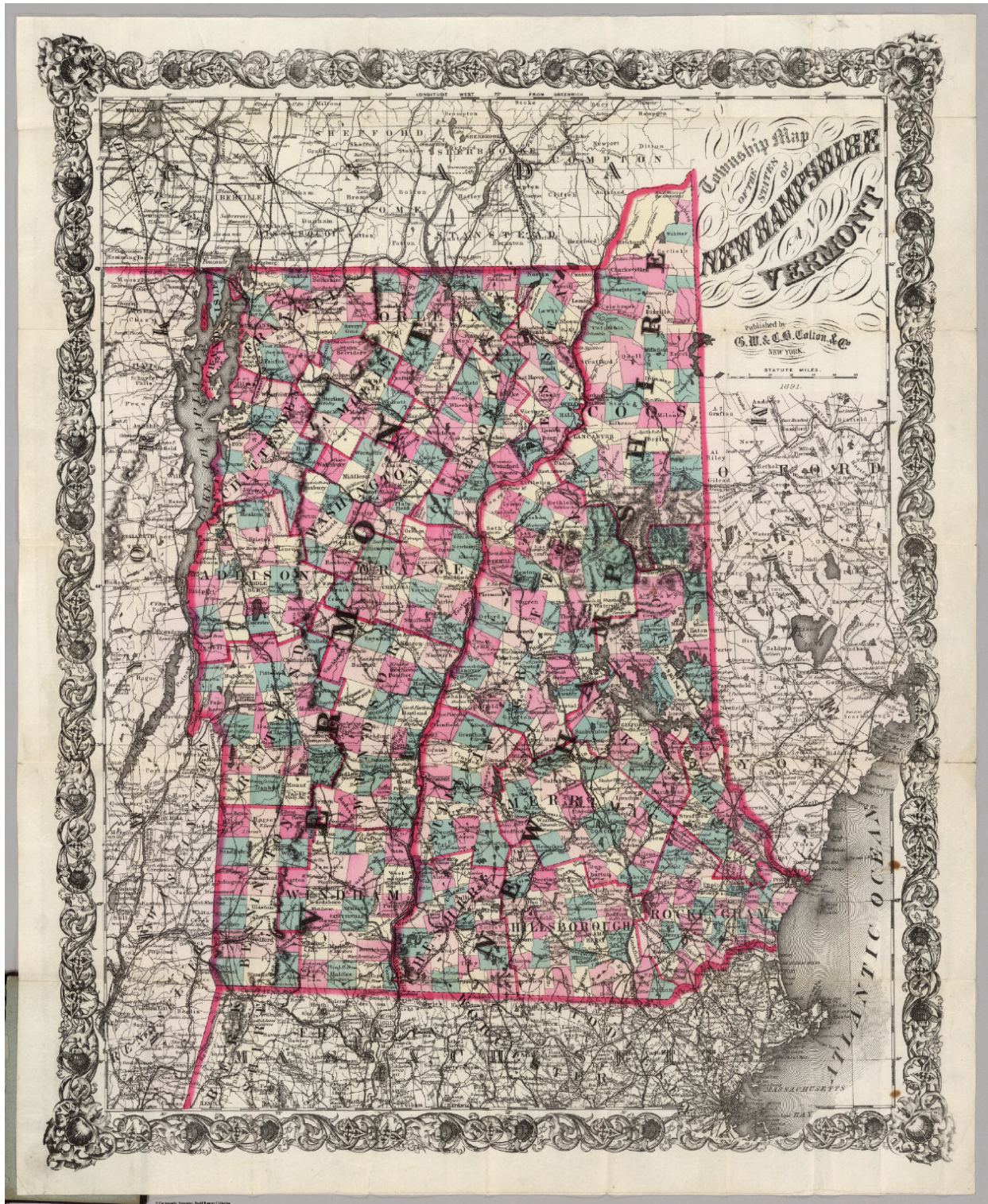


Fig. 1.34 Congress replaced Jefferson's proposed land division units with a grid based on six-mile-square townships, a unit with roots in colonial New England. Township map of New Hampshire and Vermont, published by G. W. and C. B. Colton & Co., 1891 (David Rumsey Historical Map Collection)



Fig. 1.35 Survey of the Seven Ranges, showing Congress's checkerboard scheme of alternating sales of whole townships and individual lots

2. The Geometry of Land Reform: Grids, Octagons, and Radical Politics in the 1840s

Rights are like truths, capable of being understood alike by all men;—as much so as the demonstrations of Euclid. If, what are called so, are *not* so understood, it is proof that they are not rights; for it is scarcely to be presumed that they could not be rendered apparent to our perception—and that they are rather the arbitrary commands of power, than anything else.

- Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829)

In 1844, representatives of the National Reform Association (NRA), a radical workingmen’s group based in New York, stood on several corners of lower Manhattan circulating a call to arms. Entitled “Vote Yourself a Farm,” the one-page handbill exhorted its readers:

Are you an American citizen? Then you are a joint-owner of the Public Lands.... Are you tired of slavery—of drudging for others—of poverty and its attendant miseries?... Are you endowed with reason? Then you must know that your right to life necessarily includes the right to a place to live in—the right to a home. Assert this right, so long denied mankind by feudal robbers and their attorneys. Vote yourself a Farm.¹

To nineteenth-century ears, these words, with their references to wage slavery and a common right to a share of the nation’s landed wealth, would have sounded nothing less than incendiary. Printed on the back of this page were two drawings: a diagram of a gridded six-mile-square township consisting of 140 family-sized farms, and a plan of the

¹ “Vote Yourself a Farm,” 1845. Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections.

octagonal village that would lie at the center of each township. (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2) These plans, the handbill suggested, would be a means to achieving the NRA's goals of giving each landless white American a free share of the public domain, and establishing a direct democracy based in local townships.

Emerging in an era when the northern U.S. economy was shifting from an agrarian to an urban capitalist economy, the land reform movement looked to the public domain as the solution for modern society's ills. As the growth of industrial wage labor and the decline of an older urban artisan economy made the dream of economic independence more and more remote for urban Americans, several workingmen sought to revive the Jeffersonian dream of a republic of independent agrarian citizens. These men seized on land ownership—and the figure of Jefferson's land grid—as both the symbol and instrument for rectifying the growing monopoly of wealth and power in Jacksonian America. In selecting the grid as an icon, they sought to recode a figure that by the 1840s was thoroughly imbued with the idea of capitalist land ownership, and to rekindle some of the egalitarian sparks that it had possessed in Jefferson's time. The land reform movement thus once again yoked the geometry of land to a radical sociopolitical project. As Lewis Masquerier, the designer of the octagonal township plan, wrote with hardly a trace of hyperbole, these “diagrams of a township and village...are the most important divisions for the social relations of man.”²

² Lewis Masquerier, “A Scientific Division and Nomenclature of the Earth, and Particularly the Territory of the United States into States, Counties, Townships, Farms and Lots; for Promoting the Equality, Individuality, and Inalienableness of Man's Right to Sovereignty, Life, Labor and Domain, While at the

It hardly needs observing that historians have not shared Masquerier's estimation. Although the nineteenth-century land reform movement has been studied thoroughly by labor historians like Sean Wilentz, Mark Lause, and Jamie Bronstein, none have given more than passing consideration to the NRA's township and village diagrams. The group's plans also have largely escaped the attention of architectural and urban historians of nineteenth-century utopias such as John Reps and Dolores Hayden, as well as scholars of nineteenth-century visual culture who have tended to focus on figural representations such as cartoons and photographs rather than technical and abstract diagrams.³ Yet as artifacts that lie at the intersection of the spheres of popular political culture and urban design, these drawings offer an intriguing opportunity to explore how some nineteenth-century Americans conceived of the relationship between the geometry of land and social reform. The land reformers' grid and octagon are also important because they established a precedent for using geometric plans as an instrument of social (as opposed to individual) reform that would influence later schemes by reformers such as Henry Clubb and Josiah Warren.

Same Time It Constitutes a Scientific Geography of the Earth: Also a Constitution for Nebrashevil or Any Other State," (New York: L. Masquerier, 1847), 9.

³ The history of nineteenth-century diagrams is woefully underdeveloped, having barely evolved beyond Edward Tufte's beautiful but scantily narrated collections of images, *Envisioning Information*, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, and *Visual Explanations*. Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton's *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2012) is a notable exception. John Bender and Michael Marrinan's *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). contains some insightful information but its historical analysis focuses on Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.

Several questions are raised by the NRA's diagrams. To begin, why did a radical workingmen's movement choose to feature *plans* over cartoons or emblems—rhetorical image types more often employed in political propaganda? How precisely did the land reformers expect the diagrams to advance their political aims? When Masquerier equated the diagrams to “divisions for the social relations of man,” what relationship, what chain of causes and effects, did he imagine to exist between the plan and its inhabitants? And finally, what drew the land reformers to the particular geometries of grid and octagon?

It may seem only natural that the land reformers would, like other social visionaries of the day, choose the plan as a medium to project a different future. A plan, after all, is by nature simultaneously a pragmatic *and* utopian instrument. As a spatial description and a blueprint, it is the first and necessary step for translating intention into concrete reality. And, it is an imposition not only in space but also in time: like a constitution, it constrains and shapes future actions. By investing in the plan as an instrument of reform, the National Reformers were operating on a functional understanding of design—the idea that the *form* of a territory or city could play a determining role in social relations. Specifically they believed that the imposition of certain geometric and other organizational *systems* could actually render social relations more rational and just. Besides the geometry of land, NRA leader Lewis Masquerier also applied this obsession with improved structures to the worlds of spelling and geography. As I hope to show, his rather maniacal faith in the redesign of systems as a means of social reform grew out of a mixture of Enlightenment-inflected ideas about human nature, mechanisms of cause and effect, and the desire to create a science of society.

Despite the land reformers' claims about the functionalism of their diagrammatic plans, what I want to develop here is the idea that their grid and octagon plans were also aesthetic objects—that is, products of preferences and predilections that were not reducible to function or rationality. These diagrams were, after all, forms of rhetoric—mass-media images intended to incite the popular imagination. As such, they contained within them associations and evocations that went beyond their ostensible functional ends: these penumbral affects included echoes of geometric proofs and Newtonian diagrams of a harmonious, orderly universe. Although the land reformers conceived of their diagrams as functional objects—as forms that produced certain social effects, the *content* of these diagrams actually exceeded their intended functions, and included a residual symbolic and affective element. In the end, what enabled the plans to be deployed as political weapons was precisely their ambiguous, multivalent nature as technical diagrams *and* persuasive images, their fusing of function and affect into what could be called an aesthetic of functionalism.

The Nineteenth-Century Land Reform Movement

The mid-nineteenth-century land reform movement was not a farmers' cause—a common misconception—but was distinctly urban in origin.⁴ Begun in New York in 1844, the National Reform Association was spearheaded by George Henry Evans (1805-1856) and

⁴ In contrast, the roughly contemporaneous anti-rent movement was a farmers' struggle based in the rural areas of the Hudson Valley and Catskills. On the links between the land reform and anti-rent movements, see Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially chapter 6.

other workingmen radicals who had been active in the city's early labor movement. It is telling that many NRA leaders, including Evans and Lewis Masquerier (1802-1888), were printers by trade—men who spent their lives putting text and image into circulation in the public sphere. (Figs. 2.3-2.5) As several historians have argued, the workingmen's uprisings that emerged in several northeastern cities in the 1820s and 1830s represented a revolt against recent changes in the urban economy, as an older workshop system of masters, journeymen, and apprentices gave way to a manufacturing economy increasingly reliant on mechanization and unskilled immigrant wage workers.⁵ Under the old system, journeymen could reasonably expect to someday own a small shop of their own and thereby attain an independent means of living; in the new market economy, such hopes for self-determination seemed increasingly remote. The land reformers were also responding to a perception of increased inequality, and of concentration of wealth in the hands of men like John Jacob Astor and Philip Hone. (The term "millionaire" was coined around 1840.) While the press sometimes depicted vast wealth as the result of individual struggle and effort, journalists also often pointed to inheritance and real estate speculation as the sources of fortune.⁶ This perception of wealth accumulated through speculation

⁵ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1967). Pessen also cites John R. Commons's argument that the trade union movement was a reaction to the sharp rise in prices resulting from the widespread use of paper money. (p. 6)

⁶ Christopher Clark, *Social Change in America: From the Revolution through the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006). While historians have long asserted that economic inequality increased in the 1840s—according to Edward Pessen, the richest 5 percent of free males owned 70 percent of real and personal property in the largest cities—recent scholars have suggested the picture is less clear. See Daniel Howe's summary of the

rather than labor led workingmen radicals to develop a sharp rhetoric of producers versus idle non-producers.

The economic Panic of 1837 and subsequent depression exacerbated the workingmen's plight: wages plummeted and laborers struggled to meet basic needs. (Fig. 2.6) The Panic effectively decimated the fledgling workers' movements, and Evans retreated to a farm in New Jersey for several years. In 1844, he returned to New York City with a new strategy. Evans and his fellow reformers now saw western land, rather than higher wages or a shorter work day, as the key to remedying unjust economic relations in Jacksonian America.⁷ The land reformers advanced three main proposals: a homestead policy granting free land for the use of settlers only—not speculators, an exclusion of land from seizure for debt (or as we might put it in contemporary terms, an end to all foreclosures), and, most controversially, a limit to the amount of land that any individual could hold.⁸ The last provision led to contemporary accusations of “agrarianism,” which in the parlance of the day was synonymous with redistributive socialism.

In turning to a landed domain as the source of autonomy, the land reformers were continuing the eighteenth-century agrarian myth or “freehold concept”—that complex of

latest evidence in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 538-39.

⁷ Evans had been interested in land reform since the 1830s, but it became his principal focus only after 1844. In *Chants Democratic*, Sean Wilentz acknowledges previous interpretations of the land reformers as a petit bourgeois movement that diverted workers from more radical avenues of class warfare. However, Wilentz disagrees, arguing instead that the NRA kept alive a network of labor radicals, and tried to uncover the economic relationships undermining workers' independence, while sketching out an alternative American republic and the means to achieving it. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 342-43.

⁸ This last provision was notably omitted from the 1862 Homestead Act, which watered down the radical proposals of the 1840s reformers.

ideas which included the belief that agriculture is the source of real wealth, that every man has a natural right to land, and that ownership of land makes the farmer independent, virtuous, and happy.⁹ These and others of the reformers' ideas about land, including the concept of the west as a safety valve for urban workers, and even the notion of land as a means of effecting wealth redistribution, could be traced to Jefferson, Paine, and other eighteenth-century thinkers frequently cited in the NRA literature.¹⁰

The land reformers' turn to land as a panacea occurred at a moment when the northeastern U.S. was rapidly changing from an agrarian to an increasingly urban, industrial society. In 1850, 19 percent of the population of New York state lived in urban areas; within a decade this figure had risen to 39 percent.¹¹ But before we write the land reformers off (along with Jefferson) as backwards-looking agrarians, we must recall that land in the antebellum U.S. was still the principal source of wealth. A good number of the founders and many of the mid-nineteenth-century America's wealthiest individuals

⁹ On the freehold concept, see Chester E. Eisinger, "The Freehold Concept in Eighteenth-Century American Letters," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1947); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

¹⁰ On land as a means of wealth distribution, see Jefferson's 1776 proposal to give every Virginian not already possessed of land 50 acres. In the same year, he drafted and saw passage of state bills abolishing primogeniture and entail—measures intended to prevent the creation of a landed aristocracy and to distribute property more widely across society. Thomas Paine proposed a different method of evening out social inequalities in his pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1795): levying a 10 percent tax on all inheritances, to contribute to a general fund that would be redistributed to the landless and elderly. As I mention in chapter 1, Benjamin Franklin articulated the safety valve theory—the notion that western lands could siphon off excess urban labor, keeping wages high in cities, as early as 1755. On the history of the "safety valve" theory of western land, see *Virgin Land*, 201-10; Fred A. Shannon, "A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety Valve Theory," *Agricultural History* 19(1945).

¹¹ Between 1790 and 1840, the urban population as a proportion of the total US population increased by about 20 percent each decade. Rhode Island was the most urbanized state, with two-thirds of its population living in cities by 1860. Clark, *Social Change*, 152, 190.

derived their riches from land speculation—a fact frequently trumpeted in the press in the 1840s. Ordinary farmers too bought and sold plots in the hopes of a quick profit, as well as acquiring enough property to pass on a landed inheritance to children. As the eastern states became more densely settled and farm plots grew smaller through divided inheritances, rates of freehold farm ownership declined, and more and more Americans turned to the frontier to fulfill the goal of owning, and profiting on, a homestead.¹² Lastly, the federal government's policies on disposal of the public lands further encouraged the movement west. Under pressure to raise revenue and without the power of direct taxation, Congress enacted measures throughout the first half of the nineteenth century to accelerate land sales to settlers and to clear Indians from the frontier, for example by reducing the minimum purchase size of parcels from 640 acres to 40 acres by 1832, and by enacting the Preemption Act of 1841, which gave squatters the legal right to settle on a 160-acre piece of public land and later purchase it at a price of \$1.25/acre if they improved it by plowing or building a cabin.¹³

Within a society that increasingly viewed land as a commodity—something to be traded and speculated on—rather than as a possession for use and subsistence, the land reformers' insistence on giving land only to actual settlers had a radical tinge. Nevertheless,

¹² Christopher Clark gives a good general history of land settlement patterns and policy in *Social Change*. According to Clark, in revolutionary-era Connecticut, only about 5 percent of households owned no landed property. (p.22) By 1815, however, one-quarter to one-half of rural families in the U.S. either possessed no land at all, or lived on land too poor to provide a minimum subsistence. Paul Keith Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity: America's First Political Economists* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

¹³ Congress also began allowing purchase on credit rather than cash, making it easier for ordinary settlers to acquire land.

Evan and company's turn toward land reform can also be seen as a kind of knight's move—a shift away from the more agitational labor politics of the late 1820s and early 30s, which relied on tactics like strikes, direct confrontations with employers, and the disruptive infiltration of middle-class public spaces, to a less agonistic approach.¹⁴ Instead of fighting against bosses and other non-producers, the provision of free land would give workers an alternate path to economic independence. This point was graphically illustrated in a cartoon in Thomas Devyr's *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century* that depicted the fate of workers with and without land reform.¹⁵ (Figs. 2.7 and 2.8) In the image of a society with free homesteads, workers stand their ground in a dispute with a factory owner over wages, because behind them is the alternative of a choice of 40-acre farm tracts. In the second cartoon, showing the world without land reform, workers are depicted walking to a variety of fates: tramping, begging, prison, a poor house, and even death. Lest any readers miss the point, a couple figures are portrayed falling off a cliff into a chasm labeled "Eternity," with the word "suicide" hovering ominously above.

The land reformers' turn to the west can also be seen as an evasion, betraying a symptomatic utopian approach to social problems like poverty or economic injustice.

Employing a logic similar to that used by contemporary advocates of African colonization,

¹⁴ Jamie Bronstein notes the parallelism of Evans's turn to land reform with a similar change of tactic adopted by Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor in England—though in the case of O'Connor the shift was from a political movement to an economic one. See also Bronstein's discussion of the American land reformers' agitational tactics in Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 142-9.

¹⁵ The cartoons were included in Thomas Ainge Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century, or, "Chivalry" in Modern Days: A Personal Record of Reform--Chiefly Land Reform, for the Last Fifty Years...* (New York: The author, 1882).

the NRA proposed that the problem of exploited labor could be transferred someplace else. As William Channing put it in a quote included in the masthead of *The Working Man's Advocate* in 1844, "The remedy I propose for the increasing pauperism of the United States, and of New York, in particular, is the location of the poor on the lands of the far west, which would not only afford permanent relief to our unhappy brethren, but would restore that self-respect and honorable principle inseparable from citizenship."¹⁶ By removing the poor to the west, and blacks to Africa, many mid-century reformers demonstrated an urge to locate the solutions to intractable social divisions elsewhere, to begin a new, better society on "virgin" land.

Theories of Property

The "elsewhere" that the land reformers proposed to grid and redistribute was, of course, not virgin land. Evans was aware of this, and in his writings, was highly critical of US expansion and the unfair expropriation of Indian lands. But he also naively suggested that land reform would be a panacea to the problem of white-Indian relations. For example, he opposed the war against the Seminoles in Florida and the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia, but also held that "The danger of Indian aggressions would be materially lessened

¹⁶ "To the People of the United States," *The Working Man's Advocate*, July 6, 1844. On the history of the safety-valve theory, see Smith, *Virgin Land*, 201-10. See also Shannon, "A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety Valve Theory." Jefferson articulated a version of the safety-valve idea when he wrote in 1805 that the availability of western lands reduced urban workers' risk of exploitation and degradation: "As yet our manufacturers are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to; because whenever it shall be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of subsistence, they will quit their trades and go to laboring the earth." Jefferson quoted in Smith, 203.

if our people only took possession of land enough for their use.” He added: “The strongest motives to encroachments by Whites on the rights of the Indians would be done away with by prohibiting *speculation* in land.”¹⁷ He also argued—as Jefferson had done—that Indians could claim their own homesteads along with other landless Americans. But as the literary historian Shelley Streeby has incisively argued, this fantasy of peaceful coexistence between Indians and white Americans depended on naturalizing white liberal ideas of property and assumed that Native Americans would happily be converted to farming isolated plots of land.¹⁸

In positing an individual’s “natural” right to the land, the National Reformers drew on a tradition going back to John Locke, and transmitted via Jefferson and Paine.¹⁹ In *Two Treatises of Civil Government*, Locke had written that the earth and its fruits were given to mankind in common.²⁰ But by applying his labor to nature, man could claim dominion over it. Thus labor was the basis of private property: “Whatsoever then [Man] removes out of the State that Nature hath provided and left in it, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.”

¹⁷ From “Memorial to Congress,” in “Young America!” pamphlet, 1845. Syracuse University Library.

¹⁸ Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 182-183.

¹⁹ See Chester E. Eisinger, “The Influence of Natural Rights and Physiocratic Doctrines on American Agrarian Thought During the Revolutionary Period,” *Agricultural History* 21, no. 1 (1947).

²⁰ Jefferson echoed the Lockean position when he wrote: “The earth is given as a common stock for man to labour and live on.” Quoted in A. Whitney Griswold, “The Agrarian Democracy of Thomas Jefferson,” *The American Political Science Review* 15, no. 4 (1946): 672. Paine too held that “the earth, in its natural uncultivated state, was, and ever would have continued to be, the *common property of the human race*.” Thomas Paine, *Agrarian Justice, Opposed to Agrarian Law, and to Agrarian Monopoly* (Paris: W. Adlard, 1797), 6.

Labor by definition belonged to persons as a result of the principle of self-ownership:

“Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his.”²¹

The ideas that land was a common inheritance, and that individuals claim rights over it through their labor, left some ambiguity, however, when it came to justifying present-day distributions. Was land the equal right of all, or the specific right of a few who applied their labor to it? What about those who had inherited vast holdings of land yet no longer worked on them? The National Reformers dealt with some of these tensions by using a language of usufruct, proposing that each settler be granted the “*use* of a Lot or a Farm” “to till for his subsistence” rather than outright ownership.²² In speaking of “*use*” and “*improvements*” rather than simple ownership, the land reformers were suggesting a more radical conception of land not as something to be owned individually in perpetuity, but held temporarily through common consent. At the same time, wary of being written off as agrarians, land reform leaders insisted that their proposals would not touch present-day holdings of land, but only affect future distributions. They thus deferred the more radical implications of their ideas to futurity.

²¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Printed for Awnsham Churchill, 1690), 245-46.

²² See National Reform Association, “Vote Yourself a Farm,” in *Gerrit Smith Papers* (Special Collections, Syracuse University Library, 1845); “Young America,” ed. Syracuse University Library. Gerritt Smith Collection (1845).

Thomas Skidmore's Radical Grids

One of the few early-nineteenth-century thinkers to reject this deferral to the future and Locke's labor theory of property was the radical Thomas Skidmore. Born into a poor Connecticut family in 1790, Skidmore had been Evans's more extremist rival for leadership of the Workingmen's Party in 1829.²³ He was also, like many of the subjects in this study, a self-taught tinkerer and machinist who experimented with papermaking, gunpowder production, and telescopes. Besides being an important influence on the land reformers, Skidmore is also significant for us because his book *The Rights of Man to Property!* used a series of square diagrams to illustrate his argument against the contemporary distribution of property. (Fig. 2.9)

Skidmore agreed with Locke, Jefferson, and Paine that in the state of nature, the land belonged to all, but found the labor theory of property absurd. An Indian might take a stick to make a bow, but the Indian's labor did not make the stick his property; only the consent of all could assign such ownership rights. In other words property rights were not "natural" but "social."²⁴ At various points in history, individuals had seized pieces of land or property for themselves, setting off chains of possession and inheritance, but this did not confer on the holders a natural right to their wealth. Just because the Astors of the world had arrogated property to themselves did not give them a natural right to it. "No man has any just and true title to any possessions at all...they are in fact, possessions

²³ Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 183. For more on Skidmore, see Edward Pessen, "Thomas Skidmore, Agrarian Reformer in the Early American Labor Movement," *New York History* 35, no. 3 (1954): 183-216.

²⁴ Paine said something similar: "Land...is the free gift of the creator in common to the human race. Personal property is the *effect of Society*." Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, 13.

growing out of injustice, perpetrated by all governments, from time immemorial.”²⁵

Because these original seizures (Marx would call them “primitive accumulations”) were compounded generation after generation, Skidmore concluded that the contemporary distribution of property was unlawful. Accordingly, he argued that property should be redistributed in a new “general division”: all possessions should be transferred to the state, and then divided equally to all adult citizens. Individuals could enjoy the fruits of their labor in augmenting such allotment in their lifetimes, and then, upon death, relinquish their property back to the state.

Skidmore is remarkable not only for the radicality of his ideas—Sean Wilentz calls *The Rights of Man to Property!* “the most thoroughgoing ‘agrarian’ tract ever produced by an American,” but also for the unusual way in which he used geometrical diagrams to support his argument.²⁶ Skidmore proposed to give a “mathematical mode of treatment” to his argument against inheritance, for instance. Let us “go back to the first period of man’s existence,” he wrote. “What shall we find there? Nothing but one wild common,” owned by all equally.²⁷ This he proposed representing with an abstract square, “since the shape is immaterial.” (Fig. 2.10) In this scenario, in which all property is owned in

²⁵ Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property! Being a Proposition to Make It Equal among the Adults of the Present Generation, and to Provide for Its Equal Transmission to Every Individual of Each Succeeding Generation on Arriving at the Age of Maturity* (New York: Printed by A. Ming, 1829), 5.

²⁶ Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 184.

²⁷ Skidmore, *The Rights of Man*, 97.

common, there would be no just way to will one's individual portion. Thus, he concluded, "the power of making a will is altogether unsupported by nature."²⁸

Then Skidmore proposed a second scenario—this one illustrated by another square, which he took to represent an alternate "original and primary condition of man" in which the world was wholly private property, divided equally among the population. (Fig. 2.11) The majority of families could then decide how to distribute the land and what term it should be held. The term of land tenure could be limited to a year, or ten, or a lifetime, but Skidmore argued that under no circumstances would such a collectivity allow individual occupants to dictate successors. Inheritance would be a "palpable invasion and assumption of the public authority" and allow one generation to infringe on the rights of the next.²⁹

The Rights of Man included a third and final diagram, yet another square representing the surface of the globe, this time divided into four unequal portions. (Fig. 2.12) Imagine the earth had 10,000 inhabitants but four individuals took for themselves a part of the square, leaving the other inhabitants with nothing. "No. 1" has "much, very much more than belongs to him." Through his seizure, the other inhabitants who had

²⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁹ Ibid., 112. Note the way Skidmore's language echoes Jefferson's on the severing of obligations between generations in his famous letter to James Madison, September 6, 1789: "I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self evident, 'that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it. The portion occupied by an individual ceases to be his when himself ceases to be, and reverts to the society.... What is true of every member of the society individually, is true of them all collectively.... Then I say the earth belongs to each of these generations, during its course, fully, and in their own right. The 2d. generation receives it clear of the debts and incumbrances of the 1st. the 3d of the 2d. and so on. For if the 1st. could charge it with a debt, then the earth would belong to the dead and not the living generation." *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), <http://founders.archives.gov>.

nothing would be dependent on him for resources. In a footnote, Skidmore added that this diagram was similar to the actual original distribution of land in the state of New York, where the Rensselaer family had been granted an enormous tract.³⁰

Skidmore explained his reasons for including these geometric images by referring to the high epistemological status held by mathematics. Regarding the first diagram, he wrote:

[C]onclusive, against the propriety or justice of the power of making wills, as this [verbal] train of reasoning will probably appear to the candid reader, the subject is still capable of a *more rigid, and, as it were, a mathematical mode of treatment; such that no man, after having understood it, can possibly have a moment's hesitation in renouncing it forever.*³¹

For Skidmore, as for Jefferson, mathematics was a particularly powerful mode of argumentation, one that was more “rigid” and convincing because of its apparent objectivity, its freedom from rhetoric. As Edmund Burke put it, “It is from this absolute indifference and tranquillity of mind, that mathematical speculations derive some of their most considerable advantages; because there is nothing to interest the imagination; because the judgment sits free and unbiased to examine the point.”³²

More specifically, however, for Skidmore, it was not just mathematics but geometric images that best conjured this special persuasive power. Introducing his third diagram, he wrote: “Perhaps a diagram will give force to these reflections, and tend to

³⁰ Skidmore, *The Rights of Man*, 336-39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

³² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 93. On the eighteenth-century view of mathematics as a rhetoric-free discourse, see I. Bernard Cohen, *Interactions: Some Contacts between the Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 30.

make *more visible* than can otherwise be done, the injustice of the title by which those who are rich pretend to hold what they call their own..."³³ Elsewhere in his text, Skidmore compared rights to the "demonstrations of Euclid"—capable of being rendered "apparent to our perception" and hence evident to all men.³⁴ The visibility of the diagrams lent them an air of obviousness that he hoped would transfer to his arguments about property.

Skidmore employed geometric diagrams to perform the same rhetorical trick that Jefferson used in the Declaration of Independence—conjuring an effect of self-evidence.³⁵ Although Skidmore was making claims that most of his contemporaries would find controversial, he wanted to clothe them in an appearance of clarity and incontrovertibility. In fact, his diagrams only had an illustrative relationship to the arguments they accompanied. The one depicting an unequal distribution of property, for example, did not so much prove indisputably that such a division was unjust or unnatural so much as render it more palpable—that is, visible. The diagrams were a form of visual rhetoric, seeking to persuade through an affect of transparency.

The Land Reformers' Plans

Whereas Skidmore used the grid as a form of argumentation, evoking the rationality and self-evidence of a mathematical proof, the land reformers approached geometric diagrams as literal instruments for creating an egalitarian and direct democracy. In employing the

³³ Skidmore, *The Rights of Man*, 336. Emphasis added.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ On the rhetoric of self-evidence in the Declaration, see Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

grid as symbol and tool, the land reformers made no secret of their indebtedness to the national land survey system proposed by Jefferson, citing him frequently by name and image in their literature. (Fig. 2.13) In taking the figure of the township grid, the land reformers were reappropriating a device that by the 1840s had come to be indelibly associated in the public imagination with the commodification and sale of land, and recoding it with more egalitarian meanings.³⁶ (Fig. 2.14) After 1845, the NRA grid usually appeared in the land reform literature alongside an octagonal plan of a “republican village” designed by Lewis Masquerier.³⁷ (Fig. 2.15) Masquerier also developed an image of four of these townships assembled together, which was published in *Sociology* (1877), though it is unclear if it was ever used in the NRA’s promotional materials. (Fig. 2.16) At a later point, perhaps in the early 50s, they also produced an aerial perspective rendering of the octagonal village that was sent to members of Congress along with a petition to pass a Homestead Act.³⁸ (Fig. 2.17)

³⁶ This, after all, was the purpose of the original Land Ordinance—to survey the land so it could be sold. The association of gridding with land sale was affirmed with the 1811 Commissioners’ Grid of Manhattan, as well as the standardization of the gridiron in the 1830s and 40s among townsite speculators.

³⁷ Born in Kentucky in 1802, Masquerier was a printer by trade and, early in his life, a follower of Robert Owen, the British industrialist and social reformer. In Masquerier’s thirties, he became involved with the workingmen’s movement. His reforming mind was incredibly prolific, recognizing few bounds. He also contributed an idiosyncratic entry for the competition to design Central Park. Perhaps foreseeing the obsolescence of print books in the digital age, he thought to record his ideas in stone. (Fig. 2.21) Masquerier was a prolific writer and, late in his life, collected these musings in a volume with the modest title *Sociology: or, The reconstruction of society, government, and property, upon the principles of the equality, the perpetuity, and the individuality of the private ownership of life, person, government, homestead, and the whole product of labor, by organizing all nations into townships of self-governed homestead democracies—self-employed in farming and mechanism, giving all the liberty and happiness to be found on earth* (New York, 1877).

³⁸ “Freedom of the Public Lands,” petition enclosed in a letter from Henry Smith, President, Monmouth County National Reform Association to the U.S. Senate, May 22, 1852, (National Archives), SEN 32A-H20. SEN 32A-H20.

Under Jefferson's sway, the land reformers approached these geometric diagrams as literal blueprints for creating their ideal society. Although the grid and village plans both featured striking geometries, nowhere did Masquerier or Evans refer to these diagrams in symbolic or cosmic terms. Instead, they consistently explained both plans in terms of their direct effects on social relations. The land reformers thought the grid and octagon would shape society in at least three ways: First, the divisible, self-similar grid would help effect an equal distribution of family-sized plots, while accommodating future redivisions. Second, the proportion between township and village would help calibrate the balance between manufacturing and farming in the republic, enabling more equitable economic exchanges. And lastly, the square shape of the township divisions and the concentric layout of the village would help bring about a more direct (as opposed to representative) form of democracy.

The Grid

The NRA township grid made its first appearance in the revived *Working Man's Advocate* of March 16, 1844.³⁹ Repeated in subsequent issues as well as in the organization's main leaflets and pamphlets, the illustration was typically accompanied by a text explaining the land reformers' policies, particularly their belief that each person had a natural right to a portion of the earth "to till for his subsistence."⁴⁰ Each square of the grid was understood

³⁹ George Henry Evans published *The Working Man's Advocate* from 1829 until 1836. He revived it, with John Windt, in March 1844.

⁴⁰ *The Working Man's Advocate*, March 16, 1844.

to correspond to an individual's right, creating a symbolic identity between a geometric form and a political claim. But for the land reformers, the grid was more than symbolic—it was an essential tool. Masquerier saw the act of gridding as directly instrumental to creating social equality, explaining: “That each man and association may demand their due proportion of the earth, it must be regularly surveyed.”⁴¹ In this way, Masquerier was giving a radical spin to the commonplace that land had to be surveyed before it was sold—yet in reaffirming the parcelization of territory into smaller units, he was upholding the fundamental principle of individual ownership as opposed to other forms of possession.

The land reformers' grid was a refinement of Jefferson's land survey: It accepted the six-mile-square township as the basic political unit. Whereas the 1785 Ordinance divided each township into 36 sections of 640 acres, the NRA thought the ideal unit should be smaller, to correspond with subsistence rather than profit. In debates over the proper scale of the grid, Evans and his colleagues considered how the size of plots would affect the density, sociability, efficiency, and independence of individuals within a community, finally settling on an ideal plot of 160 acres—a size that was deemed appropriate for family farms.⁴²

⁴¹ Masquerier, “Scientific Division,” 10.

⁴² In the January and June 1841 issues of *The Radical*, Evans variously suggested that farms should be 100, 50, or 80 acres each, or the size “an ordinary family can cultivate WELL with their own hands.” At the same time, he was concerned not to scatter the population unnecessarily. Although Evans initially proposed that a quarter section (or 160 acres) was too large, “because it would scatter the population unnecessarily, and of course cause more roads and bridges than would otherwise be required,” in the end the NRA accepted the quarter section as the basic unit of their grid, as this was the individual holding codified by the 1841 Preemption Act.

The size of the grid was also implicated in another important issue over which land reformers differed: what to do when the population grew and land began to run out. Many land reformers opposed expansion, but they were also conscious of a Malthusian framework that calculated population against resources, as well as the historical pattern of the northeast U.S., where family farm sizes had steadily been reduced since the Revolutionary period. NRA's leaders foresaw that the minimum acreage would eventually have to shrink. Mike Walsh, an NRA supporter and leader of the working-class Spartans, proposed that a new division occur every 21 years—a solution that echoed Skidmore's vision of periodic, and perpetual, property redistribution.⁴³ Lewis Masquerier suggested that the 160-acre plots could be quartered to 40 acres, and then quartered again into 10-acre lots, which he deemed the minimum necessary to support a family.⁴⁴ Masquerier's "quartering" solution demonstrated how the formal properties and logic of the grid began to constrain the imagination of land reformers, structuring their designs for the future.

⁴³ See also Mike Walsh, "Freedom of the Public Lands," *The Subterranean*, June 6, 1846.

⁴⁴ Lewis Masquerier, *Sociology: Or, the Reconstruction of Society, Government, and Property, Upon the Principles of the Equality, the Perpetuity, and the Individuality of the Private Ownership of Life, Person, Government, Homestead, and the Whole Product of Labor, by Organizing All Nations into Townships of Self-Governed Homestead Democracies--Self-Employed in Farming and Mechanism, Giving All the Liberty and Happiness to Be Found on Earth* (New York: The author, 1877), 19. See also *Appendix to Sociology: Or, the Scientific Reconstruction of Society, Government and Property. Upon the Principles of the Individuality or Separateness of Ownership, the Equality or Equalness in Quantity and the Perpetuity or Entailment of the Private Ownership of Life, Manhood, Government, the Homestead and the Whole Product of Labor, by Organizing All Nations into States and Townships of Self-Governed Homestead Democracies, Self-Employed in Farming and Mechanism Combined, Giving All the Liberty and Happiness to Be Found on Earth* (Brooklyn, New York: L. Masquerier, 1884), 5-6. Further evidence of the Malthusian influence could be found in Masquerier's proposal, in *Sociology* in 1877 that population and family size would have to be limited at some future time. "When the earth reaches the utmost fertility it can support, parents must not leave more than the average number that can be supported. Modes for limiting offspring and stirpiculture will be sued and population kept at an even number." (p. 14)

Township and Village

One of the key features that distinguished the NRA grid from Jefferson's survey grid was the square-mile village that the land reformers located at the center of each township.

Appearing initially as a blank square, the details of this village were fleshed out by Masquerier sometime in 1845.⁴⁵ At its center would be a public park of about 30 acres, containing a town hall, school, and store.⁴⁶ (Fig. 2.2) One reason the land reformers cited for including the village was they recognized that not everyone wanted to be a farmer, and

⁴⁵ The sources for the NRA's radial plan are not known, but several may be hypothesized. Masquerier, who was born in Kentucky and lived in Illinois in the 1830s, may have known of a handful of western U.S. towns with centralized, radial plans. These include Circleville, Ohio, platted around 1810; Perryopolis, Pennsylvania, laid out in 1814; and Marienville, Pennsylvania, platted circa 1841. (Fig. 2.18) Little is known about the origins of these "pinwheel plans." John Reps speculated that these towns, like the numerous small nineteenth-century western towns that adopted diagonal street grids, arose "simply from a desire of the founders to create something different from the ordinary grid pattern." One exception is Circleville, which was platted around 1810 by Daniel Dreisbach on the site of several Hopewell mounds, from which the shape of the town plan was said to derive. Similar to Masquerier's later plan, the core of Circleville was organized with eight streets radiating from a central open space, in the middle of which sat a courthouse. Several buildings formed a perimeter ring around the central open space. By 1837, however, many of the town's citizens felt the circular radial plan awkward and inconvenient. Calling it a hindrance to growth and a piece of "childish sentimentalism," the town obliterated most of the circular plan by the 1850s. For the history of Circleville and the other circular U.S. cities, see John William Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 484-92; *History of Franklin and Pickaway Counties, Ohio*, (Cleveland: Williams Bros., 1880), 178-81.

While examples of Baroque-inspired diagonal street designs were certainly known in the U.S. in the early 1800s (L'Enfant's plan of Washington furnishing a prime example,) it is also not known whether Masquerier or the surveyors who platted earlier American circular cities knew of European radial towns like Mariembourg, Belgium; Karlsruhe, Germany; the concentric motifs in Christopher Wren's plan for London; or of the rich tradition of ideal circular cities going back to antique and Renaissance theory. The art historian Kathleen Curran has found an example of an octagonal radial plan for the center of St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, possibly drawn ca. 1845 by Friedrich Gärtner at the request of Ludwig I of Bavaria. Ludwig patronized several building projects in the United States as a way of assisting German immigrant communities. Kathleen Curran, *The Romanesque Revival: Religion, Politics, and Transnational Exchange* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 85-87. For more on the history of circular cities, see Norman J. Johnston, *Cities in the Round* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983).

⁴⁶ In *Sociology*, Masquerier elaborated on these: the central buildings should include an "equitable exchange mart, college, museum, library, reading-room, etc."

that manufacturing and trade required greater density.⁴⁷ The relationship between township and village was also critical from a macroeconomic view: striking the right balance between farming and manufacturing could produce a smoothly functioning and balanced economy in which all needs would be met, without the artificial inflations caused by scarcity and oversupply.⁴⁸ The NRA's township and village plan therefore included 140 quarter-section farm lots and 100 city lots of between two and ten acres. Despite the apparent hierarchy generated by its concentric form, the octagon plan also was supposed to be egalitarian—since sites farther from the center would be larger than those close to the center. As we shall see, Henry Clubb and Josiah Warren both picked up on this idea of the radial plan as conducive to generating equality of property values in formulating their own city schemes.

Masquerier also believed that balancing farm plots with village lots, manufacturers with artisans, would facilitate more just economic relations, by cutting out the interventions of middlemen, who he blamed for doubling the price of clothing and food.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Evans explained: “[M]echanics, traders, and others besides farmers ought to be near together, as well for their own convenience as for that of the farmers, and ought, therefore to have apportioned to them a class of smaller lots.” *The Radical*, February 1841.

⁴⁸ Masquerier, “Scientific Division,” 9. Within the same document, Masquerier specifies either 40 or 100 village lots. Masquerier had written about the importance of the balance between agriculturalists and mechanics as early as 1844, in an article entitled “Declaration of Independence, Of the Producing from the Non-Producing Class,” in *The Working Man's Advocate*, September 28, 1844. See also “Mental, Chattel, and Hireling Slavery,” *The Boston Investigator*, January 7, 1863. The six-mile-square township was deemed the appropriate size to ensure “the proper proportion of each employment, for production, distribution, consumption and assemblage in one place.” *Sociology*, 17. And again on p. 13: “[E]ach township may contain the proportionate number to produce an assortment of the most necessary articles of subsistence and not too many to meet in their hall and vote direct in person for the very little law needed.”

⁴⁹ “Working Men!,” *Young America*, February 14, 1846. Paul Conkin writes that before 1815, the exchange of goods and services largely occurred within neighborhoods, without the intervention of middlemen. After

His octagonal village would include a “town mart” where surplus products would be exchanged for each other on the “equitable principle of equal time of labor for labor.”⁵⁰ This was a reference to the “equitable exchanges” pioneered by Robert Owen, and championed by Josiah Warren in the United States—exchanges where individuals traded skills and commodities directly, without the intervention of merchant-capitalists.

These villages would be sites of manufacturing and trade, but they would still be primarily rural, not urban, in nature. Land reform leaders—most of them based in New York City—had an intense antipathy to the metropolises that emerged in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. Masquerier, who lived most of his adult life in Manhattan and Brooklyn, condemned the landscape of contemporary cities as warehouses for human bodies, “stifled with gasses and putrid air, breeding plague and raising puny, half-formed children to fill up the cemeteries.” Cities were destructive of not only “physical but moral nature.” And he contrasted the “toil-worn tenant-housed hireling of the great crammed cities” with the “independent, self-employed freemen tilling their rural farms and homes in a health-giving and odorous atmosphere.”⁵¹

By 1877, perhaps under the influence of Josiah Warren’s “anarchist” ideas, Masquerier’s anti-urbanism grew even more extreme, and he renounced his earlier village

1815, merchant-capitalists slowly began to dominate certain household industries, diminishing the independence of masters and journeymen, who increasingly took on the role of wage employees of the merchant. The artisans’ resulting loss of independence and status helps explain Masquerier’s and other radicals’ antipathy for middlemen. Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity: America’s First Political Economists*, 9-13.

⁵⁰ Masquerier, “Scientific Division,” 11.

⁵¹ Masquerier, *Sociology*, 17-18.

plan, saying that while he would keep the central park with its market and town hall, there should be no village lots, only homesteads no smaller than ten acres each.⁵² Each homestead would contain its own dwellings, barns, shops, fields, gardens, orchards, and woods. Instead of a central schoolhouse, each farmstead would have its own school room, containing “books, maps, slates, and everything to stimulate their ideas,” with students traveling to the township college only to recite their lessons. Thus would farm, village, and park be combined into one, forming a “paradise of rural cities” over the entire earth.⁵³ (Fig. 2.16) If, before, he had tacitly acknowledged the need for some denser quasi-urban areas, the new vision was of a more homogenized, decentralized, and largely agrarian population.

The Concentric Village and Direct Democracy

Even more important to Masquerier than creating an economy without middlemen was enacting a democracy without elected representatives. He condemned officeholders as “incubuses and dead-heads” and wrote that “a delegated and representative republic is ... a chimera, and is only a modification or species of monarchy.”⁵⁴ Echoing Jefferson, he asked, “How much purer would legislation be if done by township divisions and not by officers and office-holding government.”⁵⁵ As Edward Pessen has observed, antebellum

⁵² *Ibid.*, 98. On the relationship between Masquerier and Warren, see Chapter 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15, 16, 18.

⁵⁴ *Sociology*, 98; *Appendix*, 31. “How much purer would legislation be if done by township divisions and not by officers and office-holding government.” *Appendix*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Appendix*, 5.

labor leaders harbored a deep hostility to the American political system, which they saw as controlled by the wealthy, even as they occasionally attempted to engage in electoral or legislative politics: “Without exception the labor leaders regarded the American political system as a hoax.”⁵⁶ Masquerier and other land reformers’ opposition to elected officers must be put into the context of early-nineteenth century politics, and local New York City politics in particular, which were still dominated by the Tammany Hall machine, and where the franchise was still limited by property restrictions.⁵⁷ The workingmen had also called for a simpler legal code free of “unintelligible and unmeaning jargon.”⁵⁸ Parties and obfuscatory language were both deemed obstructions to a more genuinely popular democracy.

Reviving anti-Federalist opposition to forms of political representation that removed power from citizens’ hands, the land reformers advocated direct, face-to-face deliberations among the people—an idea reflected in their design for a republican village. In an echo of Jefferson’s ward-republic concept, public amenities were centrally located to ensure that every inhabitant was within an hour’s walk from the seat of government and business, and could therefore engage in the activities of government and exchange directly. Masquerier explained:

⁵⁶ Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 124.

⁵⁷ As a Workingmen Party leader in 1829, Evans criticized the existing system for allowing “combinations and parties to take the power of nominating candidates out of the hands of the people, and to confer it upon ‘committees’ and ‘conventions’ for their own special advantages.” Quoted in Walter Edward Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class, a Study of the New York Workingmen’s Movement, 1829-1837* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), 141.

⁵⁸ Hugins, 142.

[E]very man can meet in Township Hall, and by direct speech and vote, declare his consent to a brief statement of all the laws proposed, and send it round to all the other Townships, so that a committee meeting at the capital may digest these briefs of laws, enacted by a majority of the townships in a State, into a well written form and send it back to the people to be confirmed, amended, or rejected. Thus honest legislation, for the first time in the history of man, will be done by the people themselves.⁵⁹

A system of radial roads would facilitate direct democracy and communication, connecting all corners of the township to the village, and linking with the principal roads from other townships to create a continuous network across the globe.⁶⁰ Masquerier even drew up a state constitution for his proposed democratic system, one that placed the bulk of power in township assemblies composed of all citizens, with minimal roles for the judiciary and executive branches.⁶¹

In both economics and politics, Masquerier and other land reformers sought “purer,” more transparent systems in which forms would be reduced to their essential functions, without additional layers of mediation—an economy of immediate exchanges, a government of direct deliberation. He believed that the design of his radial village, with its central organization and rationally apportioned lots, and could help effect his ideal of an unmediated society.

⁵⁹ Masquerier, “Working Men!” In *Appendix*, he wrote that all citizens should “vote direct for law by means of township divisions throughout a state, and not attempt to do it through the absurdity of a supposed or charlatanic delegate. The usurpation of sovereignty, or the power of government is violated by a viceregent, by a substitute, or a so-called representative, who only votes his own identical will for law.” *Appendix*, 5.

⁶⁰ Masquerier specified that the main roads should be wide enough to accommodate railroads. He also outlined a system for naming the streets: diagonal and orthogonal avenues would be named according to their direction, while concentric village streets would be numbered sequentially beginning with the innermost circle.

⁶¹ Masquerier, “Scientific Division,” 11.

Farmstead plan

Masquerier applied his reforming vision not only to the scales of the territory and village but also to individual farmhouses. Like Robert Owen, Masquerier was an early supporter of women's rights and recognized that the institution of marriage was often constraining for wives. He therefore proposed that farmsteads be built symmetrically, with a party wall separating the two halves, so that in the case of a separation, each spouse could retreat to his or her half—the husband to the east, and the wife to the west.⁶² (Fig. 2.20 and 2.21)

Here Masquerier may have had in mind the Shaker practice of dividing meetinghouses into male and female halves. (Owen had written admiringly about the Shakers as a model of communitarianism.) In Shaker practice, the gendered division of space was conservative in intent—a way of limiting contact between the sexes and preserving celibacy. For Masquerier, in contrast, architectural organization could be a means of advancing women's autonomy and control over reproduction. He explained: “[T]he double-structure of the one and a half-story dwelling...is for the purpose of preserving the individual rights and independence of the wife from the tyranny of the husband, and the slavery of rearing too many children.”⁶³

⁶² “Scientific Division,” 14, 49-50. The only illustration we have of this farmstead design comes from Masquerier's tombstone in Cypress Hill Cemetery, Brooklyn.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

System / Organization

The land reformers' faith in the plan as an instrument of reform was influenced by a broader belief in the necessity of reforming *systems*. The origins of this faith in systematic reform lay in their Enlightenment mindset, in the influence of Owen, Lockean sensationalism, a Newtonian aesthetic, and in a mechanistic view of humans and society.⁶⁴ Masquerier applied his fascination for systematic, formal reform—evident in his designs for farm and village—to several other arenas, most notably geography and spelling.

For example, in a pamphlet entitled “A Scientific Division and Nomenclature of the Earth,” Masquerier presented a system for gridding the entire earth, and for naming new territories and towns systematically. He proposed dividing the entire globe into states of exactly 7 degrees in height and width. Subtracting the oceans and frozen regions, this system would yield approximately 380 states. Masquerier would subdivide these states into 18-mile-square counties, composed of 9 townships, further subdivided into 160-acre farmsteads. No doubt inspired by Jefferson's earlier schemes for state and land division, Masquerier imagined the world as gridded into a series of telescoping self-similar squares.⁶⁵ (Fig. 2.22 and 2.23)

⁶⁴ On the workingmen as “children of the Enlightenment,” see Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians*, 103-11.

⁶⁵ Just as Jefferson and the framers had understood a relationship between the size of the grid and politics, and the land reformers debated the size of the land division grid, so too Masquerier weighed the advantages and disadvantages of having counties composed of 9, 16, and 25 townships. (He later disavowed the county level of organization and advocated township divisions only—in the interest of removing excess layers of government administration.) The second option would not allow for a central township, whereas the third would be too large, giving rise to political disputes. Masquerier, “Scientific Division,” 5.

Masquerier also invented a standardized system for naming the states, counties, and villages: He suggested taking the name of a prominent object in it, cutting off the last syllable, and affixing two suffixes according to a rule set. Within the state, counties would be named according to a system transposing their numerical order, starting with the southeast corner, into letters. Under his rather convoluted system, Nebraska would be named “Nebrashevil,” and its first county “Wuwushe” (the syllable “wu” deriving from “one”), followed by “Wutushe,” and ending with “Twetweshe.”⁶⁶ The idea behind his system for “scientific naming,” he explained, is that the appellation of the place should indicate its location, facilitating postal services and place finding, and preventing the disagreements so common in the settling of new localities.⁶⁷

Masquerier also developed a new simplified alphabet in which the number of consonants and vowels would be reduced, and there would be a one-to-one correspondence between sound and letter. (Fig.2.24-2.25) Here again we see an emphasis on wanting to create a clearer, more direct relation between appearance and meaning, signifiers and signifieds. As with his geography, Masquerier believed this more “rational”

⁶⁶ Oregon should be “Oregonagerton,” whose capital would be “Dedekatonopolis,” and California would be renamed “Kaliforkovila.” Within each county, townships would be named according to their geographical location: Norwestownship, Northownship, Noreastownship, and so on.

⁶⁷ Masquerier was not alone among reformers in his attention to geographical nomenclature. He almost certainly had seen an earlier proposal by Steadman Whitwell, best known as the designer of Owen’s model village. In 1826, Whitwell wrote a letter to *The New Harmony Gazette*, in which he complained of the “confusion, uncertainty, and error” caused by the haphazard system of township naming in the United States, and proposed a new method by which longitude and latitude digits would be transposed into letters. 1 = a or b, 2 = c or d, and so on. New York, at 40.42N, 74.9W would be Otke-Notive, London would be Lafa-Tovuta. Under Whitwell’s system, “the situation of any place would be instantly known as soon as its name only, was seen or mentioned.”⁶⁷ Masquerier and Whitwell’s attempts to find a rational geographical nomenclature can be compared with contemporary debates within zoology and biology about the proper relationship between nomenclature and an organism’s attributes (whether physiognomic or functional). All were concerned with systematizing the relationship between names and functions.

spelling system would have positive social effects, by making literacy more accessible to all, and assisting people from different nations to communicate.⁶⁸ “How easy could the different nations learn each other’s languages, if they were all spelled according to the sound of the letters of one alphabet, and with all their accented syllables marked,” he predicted.⁶⁹

In Masquerier’s view, language was like a mask, a veil obscuring the meaning of words. Remarking on a public debate he’d attended on socialism, he wrote that “after all, Messrs. K. and O. do not differ as much from each other in idea as in language. Their difference is mostly verbal, and it is owing to the imperfection of language.... *Could men reason about things stripped naked from their appellatives*, they would perceive more of their truth.”⁷⁰ Here we see Masquerier engaging in a fantasy of transparency, of unmediated

⁶⁸ For a contemporary review of Masquerier’s alphabet by a fellow would-be spelling reformer, see Abner Kneeland’s review in *The Boston Investigator*, May 29, 1835, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Lewis Masquerier, “To Robert Owen,” *The Crisis, and National Co-Operative Trades’ Union Gazette*, July 5, 1834. Masquerier wrote to Robert Owen, urging the great philanthropist to call a convention of philologists and lexicographers and “direct them to spell all their languages strictly according to the sounds of the letters of my alphabet.” Masquerier’s enthusiasm verged on authoritarianism: “By having children taught in books of proper sentiments and written in this new orthography,” he expounded, “they could not read any of those written in the old and thus would be guarded against Christian dogmas.” This last suggestion was roundly rejected by the editor of *The Crisis*, who wrote: Masquerier’s idea “is not only infinitely absurd as a project, but it involves in it a spirit of tyranny and illiberality which may be paralleled, but never was exceeded, either in ancient or modern times.... We hope that there are few of our friends who entertain such delusive projects as this, or waste the energies of their minds in brining them into being.” *The Crisis*, July 19, 1834.

As we shall see, Masquerier was not the only reformer interested in freeing the “truth” from the veils of language and external forms. Henry S. Clubb, the subject of Chapter 4, also dabbled in phonographic reform, while Josiah Warren, discussed in Chapter 5, invented a new system of musical notation that, like Masquerier’s alphabet, sought to create a more direct relationship between notational symbols and their meanings. All of these men believed that by reforming outward forms and systems of organization and making these more directly linked to their functions, social relations could be transformed.

⁷⁰ “Discussion on Socialism,” *The Boston Investigator*, October 27, 1841. Emphasis added.

relationships between things and their names or things and their appearances that one finds in other geometric utopians studied in this dissertation, especially Josiah Warren.

Functionalism and Environmentalism

Masquerier's emphasis on reforming whole systems was indicated of his broader approach to social transformation. In contrast to an older Christian view of reform, which attributed evils to individual sinners—for example, blaming slavery on the slaveholder, or drunkenness on the drunkard—early-nineteenth-century reformers saw the problem in reverse. The trouble lay with the environment—the institution of slavery corrupted the slaveholder, the depravity of urban environments drove individuals to drink.⁷¹ In Masquerier's view, social problems—and their solutions—lay in systematic redesign of forms. A convoluted system of orthography produced confusion and miscommunication. Reform spelling, he thought, and social harmony would follow. Therein lay his functionalism as well—he believed that altering the structures and shapes of phenomena could produce predictable social effects.

Masquerier undoubtedly absorbed some of this environmentalist thinking from Robert Owen, one of the most influential and radical purveyors of a distinctly environmentalist understanding of human nature. Masquerier wrote to Owen several

⁷¹ The historian Thomas Haskell has described these contrasting views as “formalist” versus “antiformalist” or “environmentalist” understandings of human nature. Whereas formalists, following a traditional Christian view, construed persons as autonomous agents responsible for their own actions, antiformalists attributed individual actions to “deep,” “structural,” or “radical” causes. Thomas L. Haskell, *Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Explanatory Schemes in History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

times in the 1830s and 40s, and some of his letters were published in Owen's journal *A New Moral World*. Owen was famous for having written that "THE CHARACTER OF MAN IS, WITHOUT A SINGLE EXCEPTION, ALWAYS FORMED FOR HIM; MAN, THEREFORE, NEVER DID, NOR IS IT POSSIBLE HE EVER CAN, FORM HIS OWN CHARACTER."⁷² A few years after Owen penned these words, some of his followers created a pamphlet entitled *Diagram Illustrative of the Formation of the Human Character*, which put his theory of human nature in visual form: a series of concentric circles symbolized all the levels of external influences shaping an individual, represented by the center. (Fig. 2.26 and 2.27) The circles' influence waned as they extended outward: the innermost one represented the strongest forces—childhood influences such as parents and nurses, followed by circles representing education, religion, and ending with country and the laws of property as the outermost circle.⁷³

Masquerier echoed Owen's environmentalist doctrines in his own writings, arguing that man's character is "the product of his organization [and] the impression of

⁷² Robert Owen, *A New View of Society, or, Essays on the Formation of the Human Character Preparatory to the Development of a Plan for Gradually Ameliorating the Condition of Mankind* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), 91-92. In 1839, Masquerier printed a pamphlet of Robert Owen's "Outline of the Rational System of Society..." in which Owen stated "Each individual comes into existence within certain external circumstances, which act upon his peculiar original organization, during the early period of his life, and by impressing their general character upon him, form his local and national character." And again, "Each individual is so organized, that his *feelings* and his convictions are formed *for him* by the impressions which circumstances produce upon his individual organization." "[T]hus his whole character, physical, mental, and moral, is formed independently of himself." *Outline of the Rational System of Society, Founded on Demonstrable Facts* (New York: Printed by L. Masquerier, 1839).

⁷³ Another example of circular geometries in Owen's oeuvre—and a possible influence on Masquerier's scheme—is the revised version of his colony, published in *A Development of the Principles and Plans on which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies...* (1841). See Fig. 2.28.

surrounding institutions.”⁷⁴ Like Owen, Masquerier blamed society’s flawed policies towards poverty, punishment, and other issues precisely on the myth of individual autonomy. As Masquerier wrote in a letter to Owen, the “error” of believing in “free will, free belief, free conscience, free reason and free agency” was the source of all social ills. The belief in free will “suppresse[d] the sentiment of charity towards the errors, follies, and misfortunes of each other” and was the cause of “unjust and cruel penal codes, and ... barbarous wars and persecutions.”⁷⁵

Perhaps even more explicitly than Owen, Masquerier’s environmentalism was undergirded by a theory of mind drawn from eighteenth-century sensationalist philosophy.⁷⁶ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke had refuted the Cartesian principle that innate ideas were the basis of knowledge, instead famously proposing that the mind at birth was a *tabula rasa*. Knowledge comes about when sensory impressions are stored in the form of images and then sorted into simple or complex ideas, which constitute the building blocks for more advanced knowledge. In numerous articles in the 1830s to early 40s, Masquerier advocated a Lockean view of the mind’s operations, writing, for example: “The essence of mind consists in the organization of the brain undergoing a motory and figured representation, corresponding to the shape of the external objects first received by impression through the medium of the senses; and of

⁷⁴ In a letter to the *Boston Investigator* in 1839, Masquerier wrote that “[M]an’s intellectual and moral character is the product of his organization, the impression of surrounding institutions, and of the whole series of causes which have produced them through all time.”

⁷⁵ Lewis Masquerier, “Letter to Mr. Owen,” *The New Moral World*, April 9, 1836.

⁷⁶ Scholars on Owen have traced his environmentalist views to Helvetius via Godwin.

transfiguring themselves into each other by means of association.”⁷⁷ Masquerier saw humans as shaped by their external environments through sensory impressions.

However, this environmentalist outlook only goes part way to explaining why Masquerier focused his reform efforts on the geometry of land or the organization of the village. It is significant that neither Masquerier nor any other land reformer ever claimed that the grid or octagon village would shape human subjects perceptually, in the way that Bentham’s panopticon was intended to direct its inhabitants’ senses of sight and sound. Instead, what Masquerier seems to have absorbed most strongly from sensationalist theories of human nature is the view that all phenomena, even the human psyche, could be explained mechanically and scientifically, as a series of causes and effects.

Indeed, in his writings on human nature, Masquerier articulated a strikingly mechanistic view of humans as not very different from plants, or machines. In one essay entitled “On the Simplicity of the Structure and Operations of the Mind,” he compared human sight both to a camera obscura and to the operation of capillaries in a plant.”⁷⁸

Masquerier saw all phenomena as subject to the physical laws of nature, arguing that

⁷⁷ Masquerier, “Letter to Mr. Owen.” Here Masquerier is weighing in on a debate among the Scottish philosophers about whether the immediate impression of the senses was necessary.

⁷⁸ “We see in a vegetable an organization for the distribution of fluid substances in producing its growth. So do we also see in the structure of the senses—the sight, for instance, an apparatus [*sic*] for concentrating the images of objects upon the retina like that of a camera obscura.” “On the Simplicity of the Structure and Operations of the Mind,” *The New Moral World*, July 31, 1841, 33. Owen too had occasionally indulged in a fantasy of persons as machines, such as when he beseeched industrialists to apply the same care that they showered on their mechanical equipment to their “living machines.” Just as “inanimate mechanism was greatly improved by being made firm and substantial,” so too, Owen thought, the “more delicate, complex, living mechanism would be equally improved by being trained to strength and activity,” being kept “neat and clean,” treated with kindness so that “its mental movements might not experience too much irritating friction,” and supplied “regularly with a sufficient quantity of wholesome food and other necessaries of life, that the body might be preserved in good working condition....” Owen, *New View of Society*, 75.

humans were simply “part of the great system of causes and effects progressing in an endless series.”⁷⁹ Elsewhere, he affirmed this materialist, mechanistic view of the world by denying the existence of uncaused causes—a reference to divine explanations, as well as the idea of free will. Masquerier insisted: “[T]here can be no such thing as an *un*-caused or *self*-organized cause or production; and therefore feeling, thought, will, belief, and conscience, cannot be innate or self-caused, and can act only from the strongest motive or cause. Hence, rewards and punishments can only be justified upon the principle that they become new causes or motives to change the conduct of men for the better.”⁸⁰

Masquerier’s references to a “great system of causes and effects progressing in an endless series” and his opposition to the existence of “uncaused causes” manifested a secular, materialist, and distinctly Newtonian world view that saw society as operating on observable rules and principles, just like nature.⁸¹ Like many radical thinkers of the day, Masquerier wished ardently to make sociology and politics into a science. He engaged in both scientific and social-political pursuits simultaneously. In addition to his political

⁷⁹ Masquerier, “Simplicity,” 34. For other writings in which Masquerier articulates his theory of the human mind, see his letters to Robert Owen published in *The Crisis, and National Co-Operative Trades’ Union Gazette*, July 5, 1834, and *The New Moral World*, April 9, 1836; “The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists,” *The Boston Investigator*, December 4, 1839.; “To Reformers, Tenants, Anti-Renters, Squatters, and Slaves,” *Young America*, July 12, 1845.

⁸⁰ “The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists.”

⁸¹ On the importance of Newton in the nineteenth-century United States, see Cohen, *Interactions: Some Contacts between the Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences*. Cohen writes, “In the nineteenth century Isaac Newton still symbolized the highest level of scientific achievement, and the words used in relation to Newtonian science—“rational,” “exact,” and even “mathematical”—denoted a science at the zenith of scientific hierarchy.” (p. 33) Dell Upton insightfully interprets the broader cultural effects of Newtonian natural philosophy, including its influence in architectural and urban thinking, in *Another City*, 127-29. Upton writes that the Newtonian vision of “voluntary but coordinated action” of apparently independent physical bodies “lay at the heart of the systematic spatial imagination and pervaded writings about cities and city life.” (129)

writings, Masquerier also penned a number of scientific articles, such as a piece published in the *Boston Investigator* and *The American Repertory of Arts, Sciences, and Manufacturers* in 1841, in which he challenged the Newtonian theory that gravitational attraction caused the orbit of the earth and the tides, proposing instead the earth's own rotary motion as the cause.⁸² Although Masquerier's scientific reasoning was shaky, these articles reveal his enthusiastic engagement with contemporary science in general, and in astronomy in particular. Given the familiarity he evinced with astronomical principles in these articles, there is little doubt that Masquerier would have been exposed to the diagrams of planetary orbits commonly found in popular mid-nineteenth-century scientific texts. (Fig. 2.29)

Masquerier's conflation of natural and "social" sciences was performed in part through frequent slippages of metaphor, analogy, and form. One example can be seen in his attempt to formulate a "scientific" classification of political rights and wrongs, complete with orders, genera, and species, that linked "natural" rights to specific components of human physiology.⁸³ (Fig. 2.29) The principle behind Masquerier's classification was an attempt to ground all kinds of political rights—such as the rights to movement, labor, and farm, in the organs of the human body.⁸⁴ For Masquerier,

⁸² Masquerier, "New Theory; suggesting the Rotary Motion of the Earth as the Cause of its Curvilinear Direction in its Orbit, and also of the Tides." *The Boston Investigator*, June 16, 1841, and *The American Repertory of Arts, Sciences, and Manufacturers*, June 1841. Another version of the article was republished in 1861 in *Transactions of the American Institute of the City of New York*. Masquerier wrote: "Why should the Newtonians go off to the moon and sun for the *far-fetched* cause of attraction for the tides, and overlook the *near* cause of the immense whirl of the earth?"

⁸³ Masquerier, *Sociology*, 37-45. In the same volume, see also "Politicology" and "The Nerves and the Nervous."

⁸⁴ As Masquerier explained, the "classification of the organs of man's body, while it aids us in grasping the science of anatomy, and the treatment of diseases, is the true substratum or pedestal upon which to erect the

grounding political rights in human physiology justified their universality and equality. Because all humans have the same basic needs, he reasoned, they are entitled to the same rights: “As each person’s natural wants and producing powers are so nearly equal, they entitle all to an equal share of the soil, appurtenant elements, and the whole product of their labor.... The equalness, then, of each one’s natural wants for light, warmth, air, water, food, clothing, and shelter, is the true foundation and necessity for an equal share of homestead.”⁸⁵

Despite his quibbling with the “Newtonians” over the cause of the tides, it is clear that Masquerier was deeply influenced by the Newtonian view of the universe as composed of equal and balancing forces. In his classification system, the equality of human need was counterbalanced by an equality of rights. Indeed, Masquerier saw the entire universe, including its natural, social, and aesthetic artifacts, as governed by laws of proportion—what he called a “principle of equivalence or equality in quantity.” This principle was evident “in the proportions of the regular bodies, in architecture, colors, musical sounds, etc.”⁸⁶

What I want to suggest is that this sense of the universe as governed by rules of equivalence, balance, and proportion—what I am rather imprecisely calling a

science of society and government, and which already becomes a classification of rights with their opposing wrongs.” Hence, he claimed that “vitality, or the property or function of the vascular or vital system, gives rise to the want and right of life; which divides into the security of body, limb, health, peace, etc., with other subdivisions...” By the same logic, the “locomotive organs” gave rise to the “rights of locomotion, labor, self-owning, and self-employment.” “The Nerves and the Nervous,” *Sociology*, 5-6.

⁸⁵ *Sociology*, 56. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

“Newtonian” worldview—was just as influential in shaping Masquerier’s design of the township and farmstead as ideologies of functionalism, sensationalism, or environmentalism. An aesthetic predilection for circles, equilaterals, and bodies in balance operated alongside and mingled with his beliefs about the malleability of the self, producing that curious synthesis of platonic forms and functionalist rhetoric that characterizes so much of nineteenth-century reformist architecture.

Geometry as Rhetoric

One could argue that in giving expression to a Newtonian view of the relationship between forms and functions, or the operations of the universe, Masquerier was merely reflecting an older, eighteenth-century worldview. After all, Jefferson and his English sources, like Gibbs and Morris, had regarded the geometries of circle and octagon as mirroring the underlying harmonies of nature. Yet what was new about Masquerier, what made his approach distinctively of the nineteenth century, was his view that geometric design could not only reflect the universe’s hidden order, but also participate actively in reshaping that world. This is not simply to reiterate their functionalist argument that redrawing the township grid or village plan could equalize property. Rather, what I want to emphasize is that the land reformers’ marriage of functionalist logic and Newtonian aesthetics was a specific intervention into contemporary political and visual culture. Printed on leaflets and broadsheets, the grid and octagon diagrams were employed rhetorically, as propaganda. Whether consciously or not, the land reformers selected forms that evoked the certainties and harmonies of the natural world—a Newtonian universe in


which social bodies, as well as heavenly ones, existed in a perfect equivalence of balanced forces. Not unlike Skidmore's use of grids, a Newtonian aesthetic helped to cloak the radicality of the land reformers' ideas, to give them an affect of inevitability, naturalness, and precision.

As rhetoric, the land reformers were aware that the land grid and octagon village had the capacity to spark more than readers' rational faculties. Thus, Evans offered the following reason for including the grid diagram in the May 18, 1844, issue of *The Working Man's Advocate*: "That our readers may have a *distinct idea* of what these modern disciplines of the Jeffersonian school are aiming at, and that they may be the better enabled to *carry out in their own minds* the consequences that would result from their schemes."⁸⁷ Evans's phrasing suggested that the intention of the diagrams was not merely to evoke certainty, or even just clarity, but to inspire an act of imagination on the part of the audience. The diagrams would help Americans envision the repercussions of a reformed land policy in the form of a transformed physical and social landscape. In spite of their claims to functionalism, the land reformers' diagrams still gestured to an aesthetic dimension beyond function.

⁸⁷ *The Working Man's Advocate*, May 18, 1844.

"The Land shall not be sold forever."—Moses.

"There is no foundation in nature or in natural law, why a set of words on parchment should convey the dominion of Land."—Blackstone.



"The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately by the grace of God."—Thomas Jefferson.

VOTE YOURSELF A FARM.

ARE you an American citizen? Then you are a joint-owner of the Public Lands. Why not take enough of your property to provide yourself a home? *Why not vote yourself a Farm?*

Remember Poor Richard's saying:—"Now I have a sheep and a cow, every one bids me 'good morrow.'" If a man have a house and a home of his own though it be a thousand miles off, he is well received in other people's houses, while the homeless wretch is turned away. The bare right to a farm, though you should never go near it, would save you from many an insult. Therefore, *Vote yourself a Farm.*

Are you a party-follower? Then you have long enough employed your vote to benefit scheming office-seekers: use it for once to benefit yourself—*Vote yourself a Farm.*

Are you tired of slavery—of drudging for others—of poverty and its attendant miseries? Then, *Vote yourself a Farm.*

Are you endowed with reason? Then you must know that your right to life necessarily includes the right to a place to live in—the right to a home. Assert this right, so long denied mankind by feudal robbers and their attorneys. *Vote yourself a Farm.*

Are you a believer in the Scriptures? They assert that *the land is the Lord's, because He made it.* Resist then the blasphemers who exact money for His work, even as you would resist them should they claim to be worshipped for His holiness. Emancipate the poor from the necessity of encouraging such blasphemy—**VOTE THE FREEDOM OF THE PUBLIC LANDS.**

Are you a man? Then assert the sacred rights of man—especially your right to stand upon God's earth, and to till it for your own profit. *Vote yourself a Farm.*

Would you free your country, and the sons of toil everywhere, from the heartless, irresponsible mastery of the Aristocracy of Avarice? Would you disarm this aristocracy of its chief weapon, the fearful power of banishment from God's earth? Then join with your neighbors to form a true AMERICAN PARTY, having for its guidance the principles of the American Revolution, and whose chief measures shall be—1. To limit the quantity of land that any one man may henceforth monopolize or inherit; and, 2. To make the Public Lands free to actual settlers only, each having the right to sell his improvements to any man not possessed of other land. These great measures once carried, wealth would become a changed social element: it would then consist of the accumulated products of human labor, instead of a hoggish monopoly of the products of God's labor; and the antagonism of capital and labor would forever cease. Capital could no longer grasp the largest share of the laborer's earnings, as a reward for not doing him all the injury the laws of the feudal aristocracy authorize, viz., the denial of all stock to work upon and all place to live in. To derive any profit from the laborer, it must first give him work; for it could no longer wax fat by levying a dead tax upon his existence. The hoary iniquities of Norman land-pirates would cease to pass current as American law. Capital, with its power for good undiminished, would lose the power to oppress; and a new era would dawn upon the earth, and rejoice the souls of a thousand generations. Therefore, forget not to *Vote yourself a Farm.*

Price, 10 for 1 cent. Sold at the office of "Young America," in the True Sun Building, Nassau-street, New York, and at the office of the "Anti-Renter," Albany

Fig. 2.1 National Reform Association, "Vote Yourself a Farm," 1845 (Syracuse University Library Special Collections)

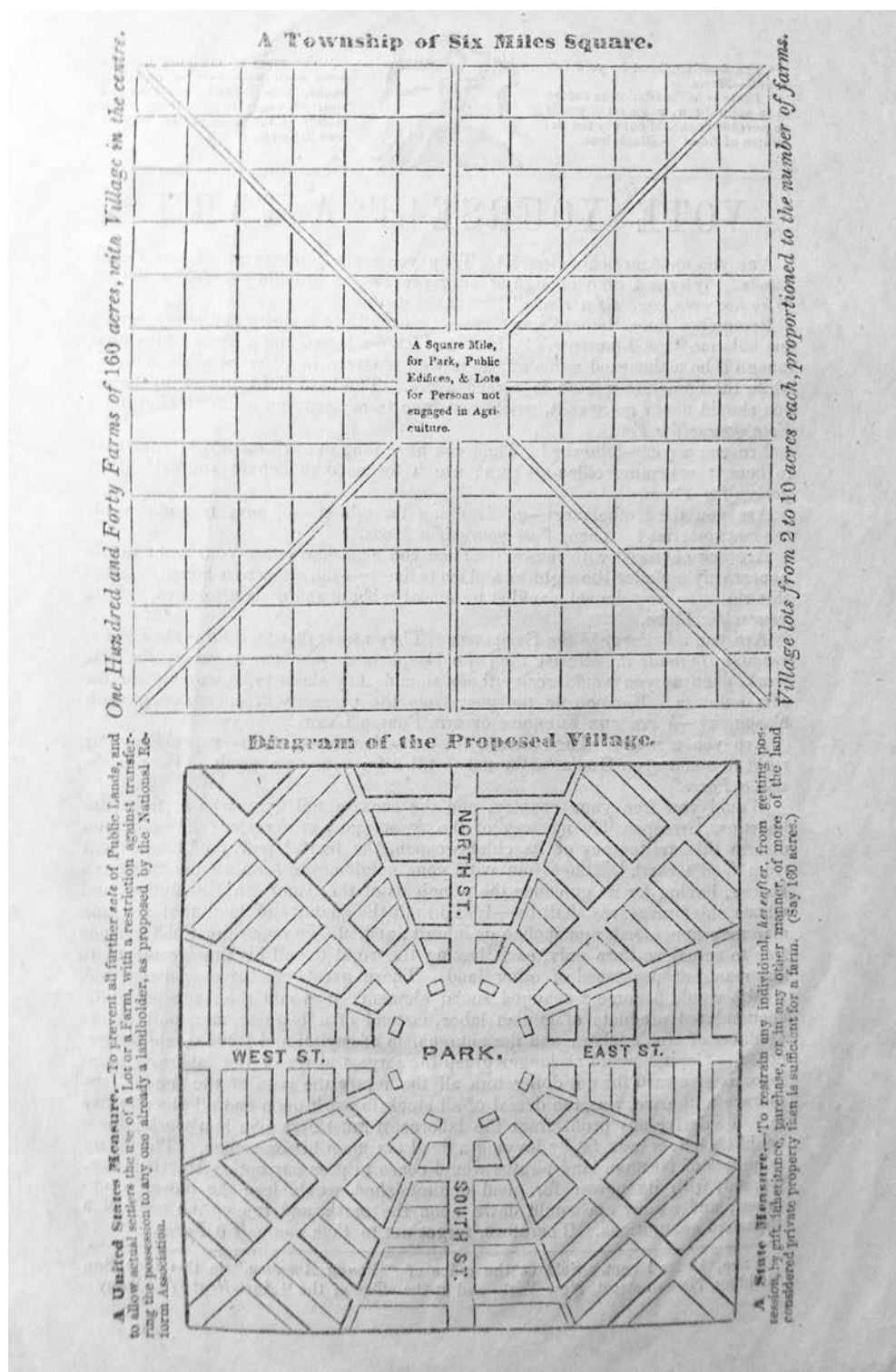


Fig. 2.2 National Reform Association, "Vote Yourself a Farm," 1845 (Syracuse University Library Special Collections)



Fig. 2.3 George Henry Evans

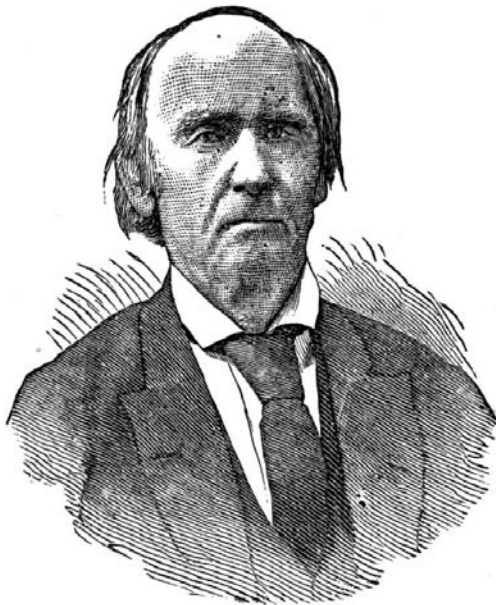


Fig. 2.4 Lewis Masquerier (from Masquerier, *Sociology: or, the Reconstruction of Society, Government, and Property...*, 1877)

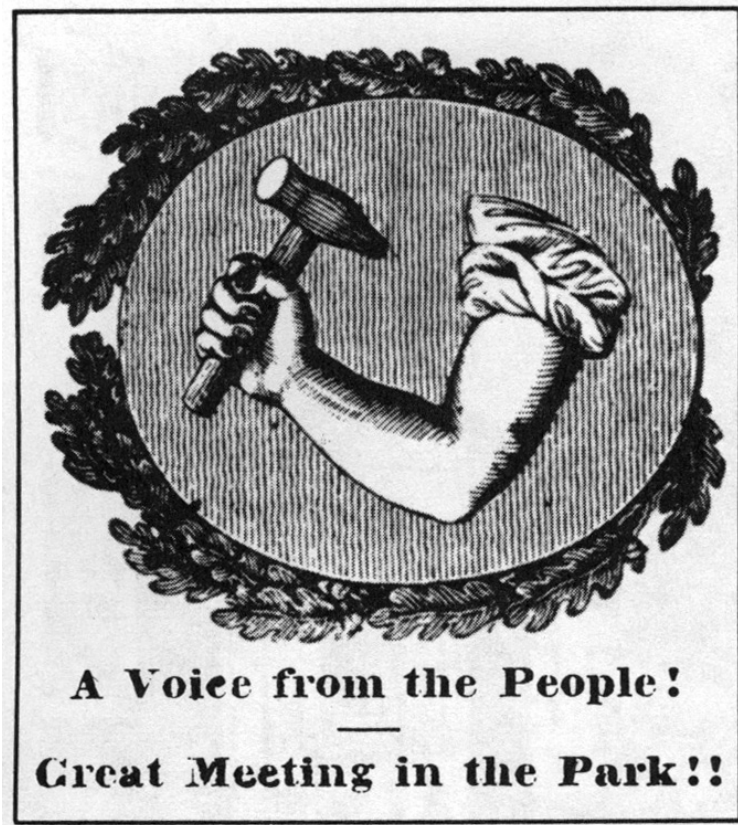
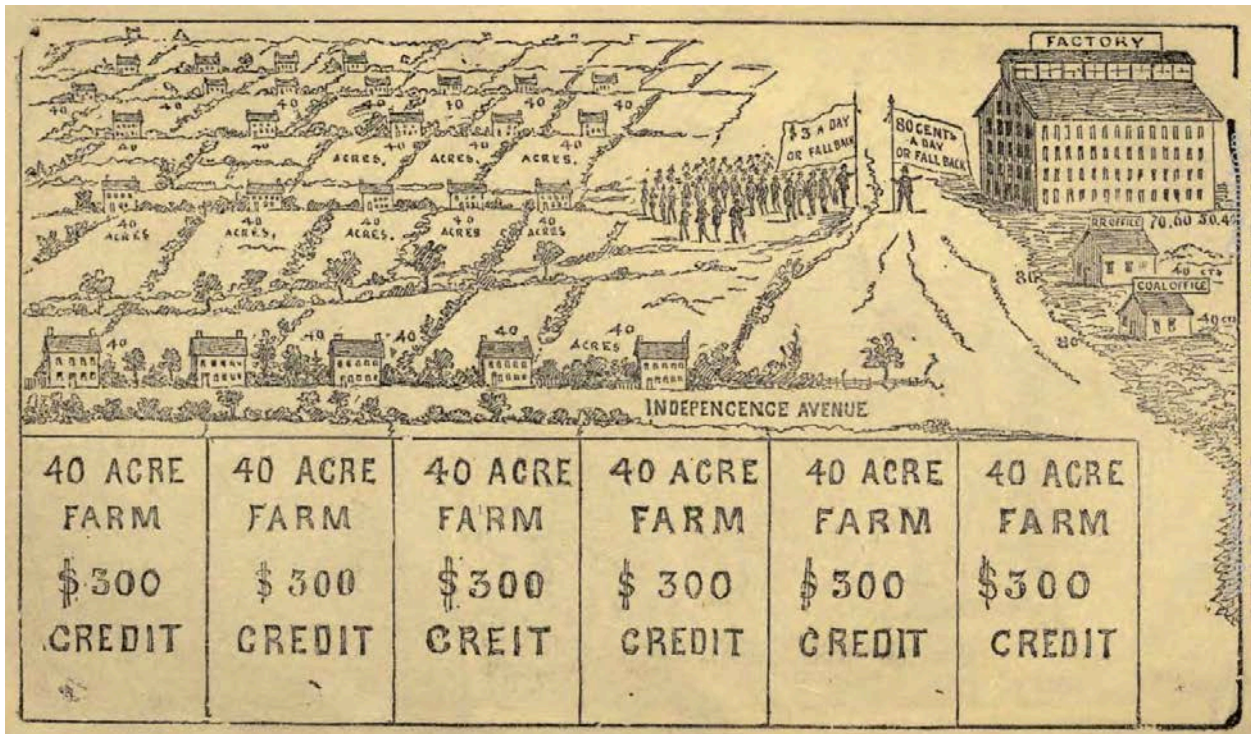
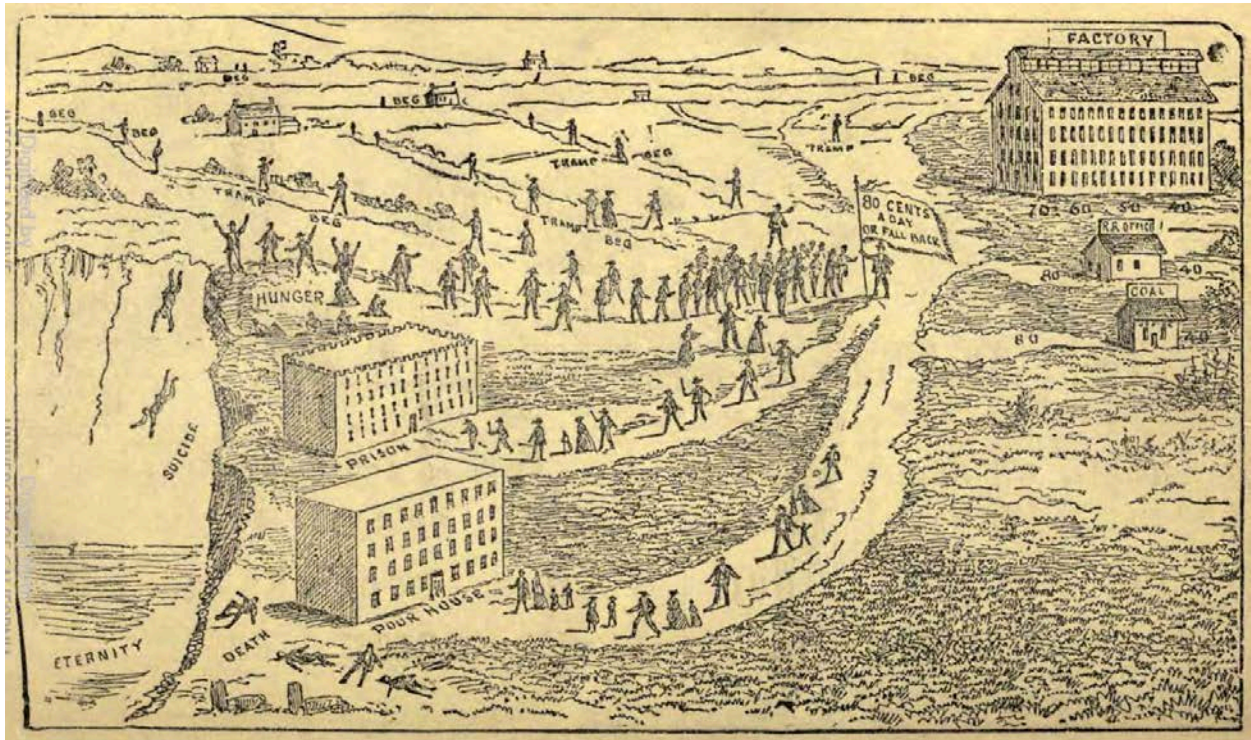


Fig. 2.5 Workers' symbol from the General Trades Union journal *The Union*, 1836



Figs. 2.7 and 2.8 Cartoons from Thomas Devyr's *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century...*, 1882

THE
RIGHTS OF MAN
TO PROPERTY!

BEING A PROPOSITION

TO MAKE IT EQUAL AMONG THE ADULTS

OF THE

PRESENT GENERATION:

AND TO PROVIDE FOR ITS EQUAL TRANSMISSION TO EVERY
 INDIVIDUAL OF EACH SUCCEEDING GENERATION, ON
 ARRIVING AT THE AGE OF MATURITY.

ADDRESSED TO THE
 CITIZENS OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK, PARTICULARLY, AND TO
 the people of other States and Nations, generally.

"I hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights; and that among these are life, liberty and *property*."—Altered from Mr. Jefferson's Declaration of American Independence.

BY THOMAS SKIDMORE,

New-York :

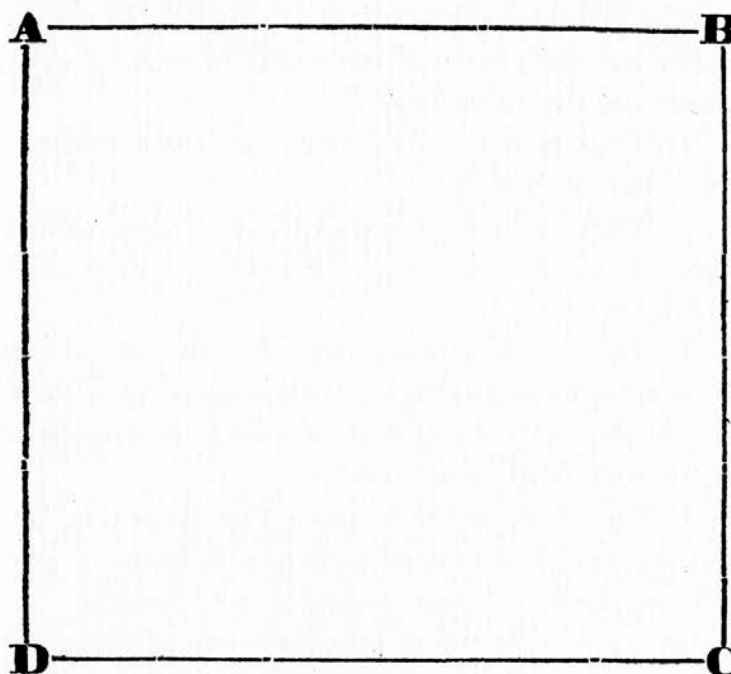
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY ALEXANDER MING, JR.

106 Beekman-street.

1829.

Fig. 2.9 Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829)

one has title to any specific part, or to a proportion, greater than any of his fellows. Let this undivided common be represented by the following diagram, in the shape of a square, since shape is immaterial, denoted by the letters, A, B, C, D. To make the application of arguments to this diagram, free of captious objections, let it be supposed to represent the whole world.



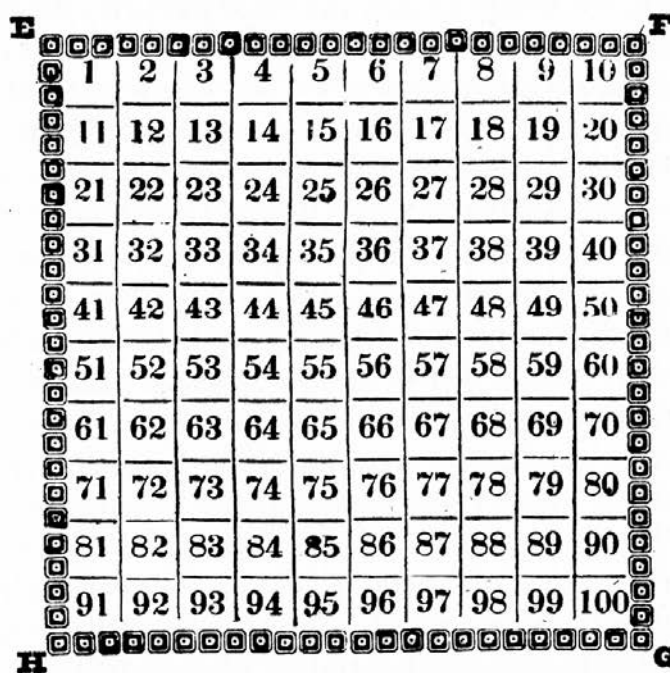
Here, then, we have the whole world before us, and the supposition is that there is a race of beings present, ready to occupy it. How does it appear, that these beings have *acquired* this property? Is it meant that the mere act of occupying, or rather, of being present upon it, is an act of

Fig. 2.10 Diagram of a "common, owned by all equally," from Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829)

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nearly every thing, is held by a personal and exclusive tenure.

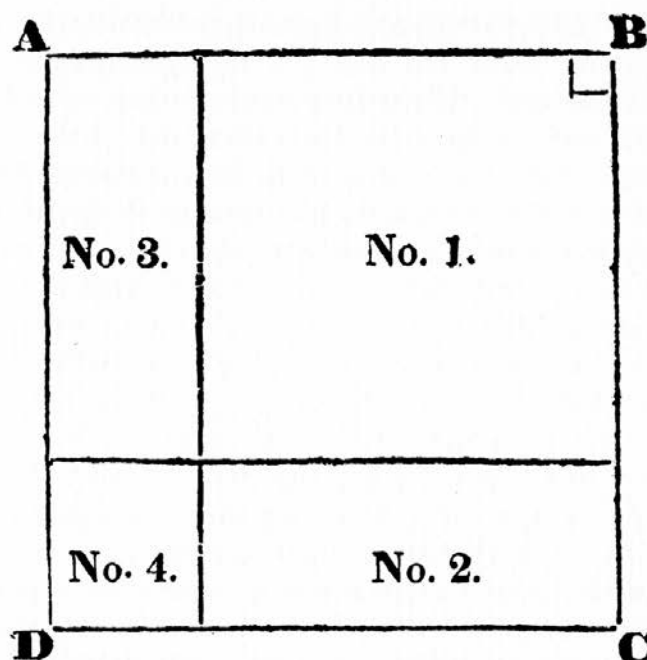
Let us take again, our square, the representative of our imaginary world, and under some modification or other, of the original and primary condition of man, make it wholly private property. Let the families, if you please, amount to one hundred, constituting, for argument's sake, the entire population of the human race at this period. Let the square E, F, G, H, be equally divided among these families.



I divide it equally, because I suppose it to be equally valuable in all parts of its surface; and because I take it for granted, that this Communi-

Fig. 2.11 Diagram of a world with equal individual property, from Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829)

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Allowing now, that there were, for example, ten thousand equal human beings, upon the surface of this square, previous to its being subdivided; what enormous injustice, would not be perpetrated, if, by any means whatever, one man only, should take to himself the portion of territory marked "No. 1;" another "No. 2;" a third "No. 3;" and a fourth "No. 4;" the remainder having nothing. If the whole territory were divided equally and properly among them; he who now is supposed to own "No. 1" would have, for example, the small square near B, and no more, for his own equal portion; whereas, by possessing himself of the whole of the large square marked "No. 1" he has actually much, very much more than belongs to him. Those who have none are obliged to hire of him. They pay him for the use of that very soil, which does *not* belong to him, and which *does* belong to themselves

Fig. 2.12 Diagram of unequal property distribution, such as found in New York state, from Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829)



Fig. 2.14 Map of the City of New York, showing the Commissioners' grid of 1811, drawn by William Bridges after the design of John Randel, 1814 (Library of Congress)

*Diagrams of the four central townships subdivided into homesteads,
as a part of a state, with a plan for their villages.*

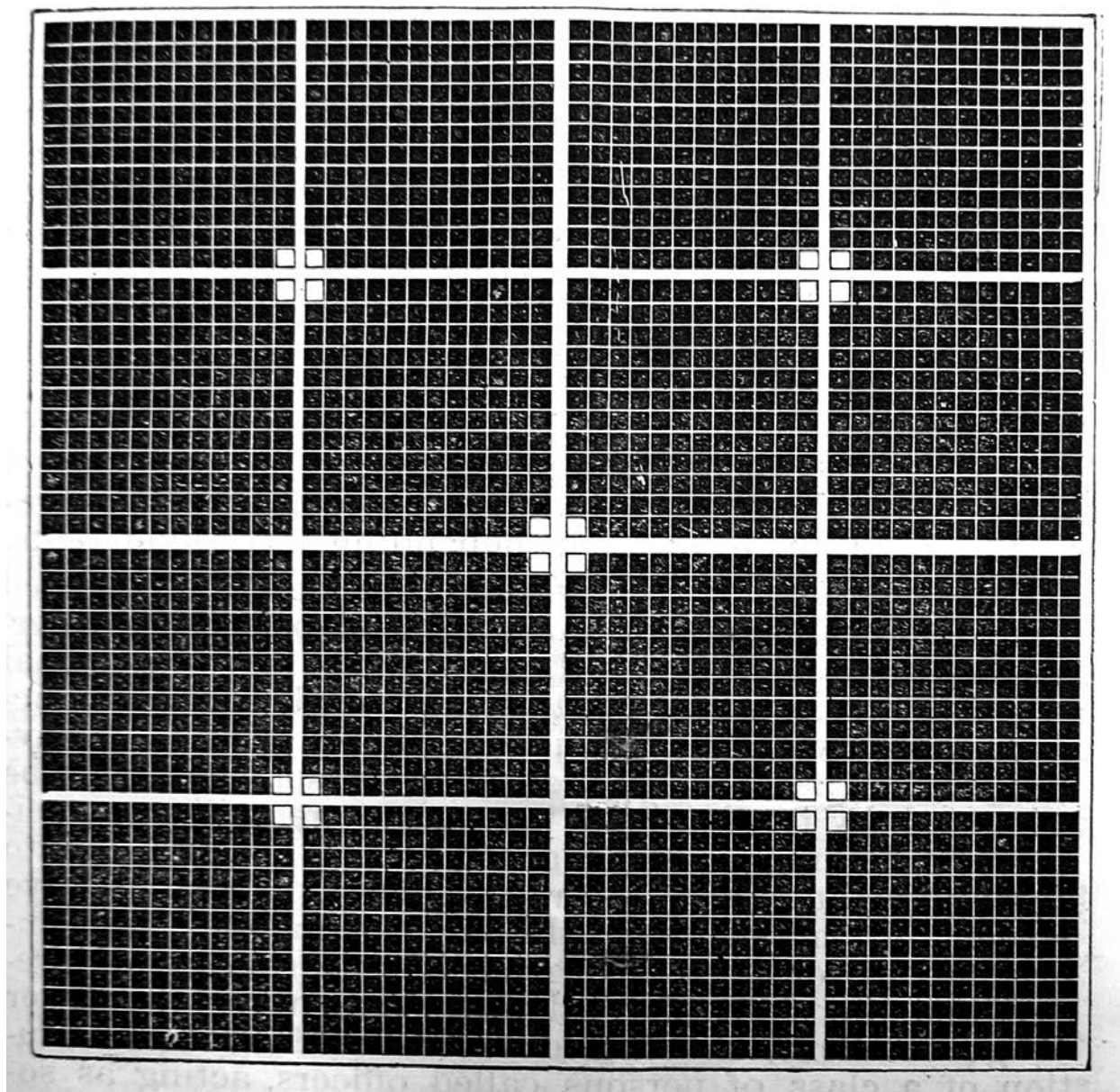


Fig. 2.16 Plan of four republican townships tiled together (from Masquerier, *Appendix to Sociology: or, the Reconstruction of Society, Government, and Property...*, 1884)

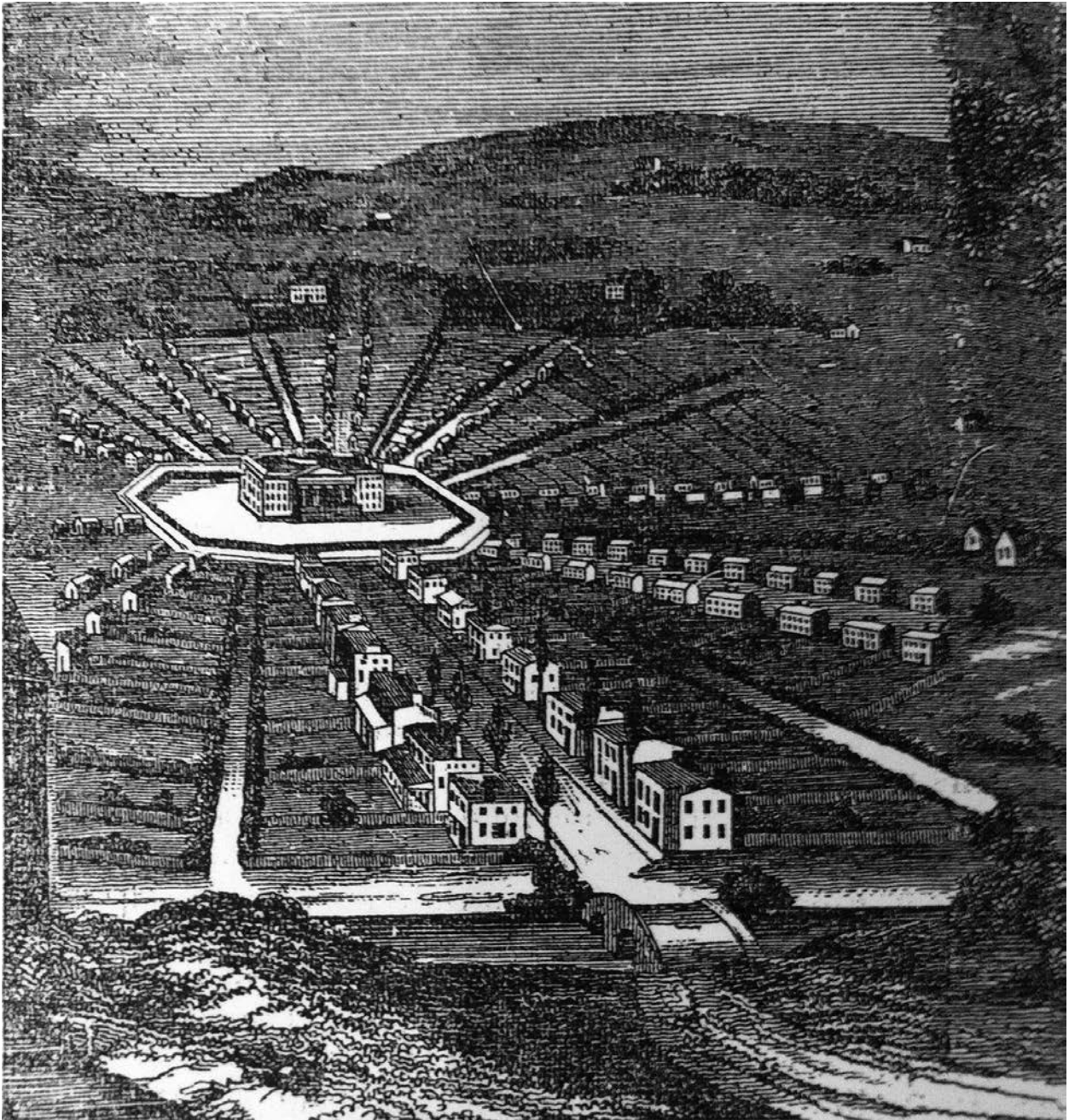


Fig. 2.17 Aerial perspective of the octagonal village sent along with a petition to the U. S. Senate in 1852 (National Archives)

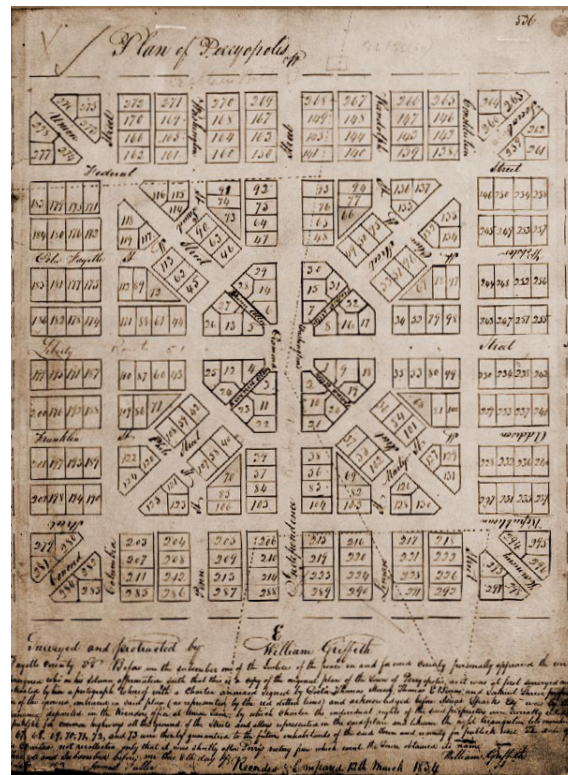


Fig. 2.18 Perryopolis, Pennsylvania, 1814

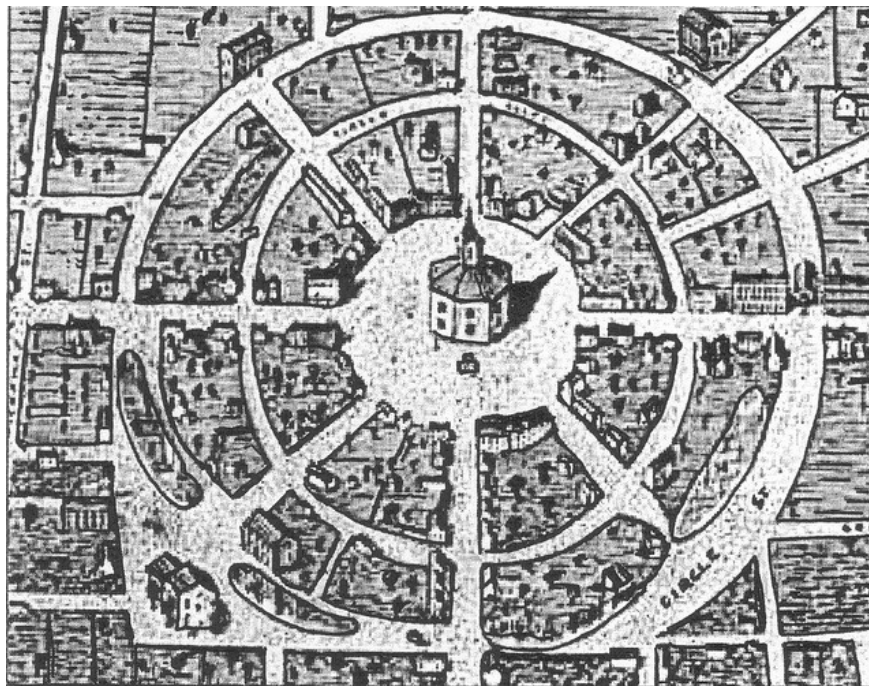


Fig. 2.19 Circleville, Ohio, c. 1810



Fig. 2.20 Lewis Masquerier, Farmstead plan, engraved on his tombstone in Cypress Hill Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY



Fig. 2.21 Lewis Masquerier's tombstone in Cypress Hill Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY

North American section of the Earth divided into States

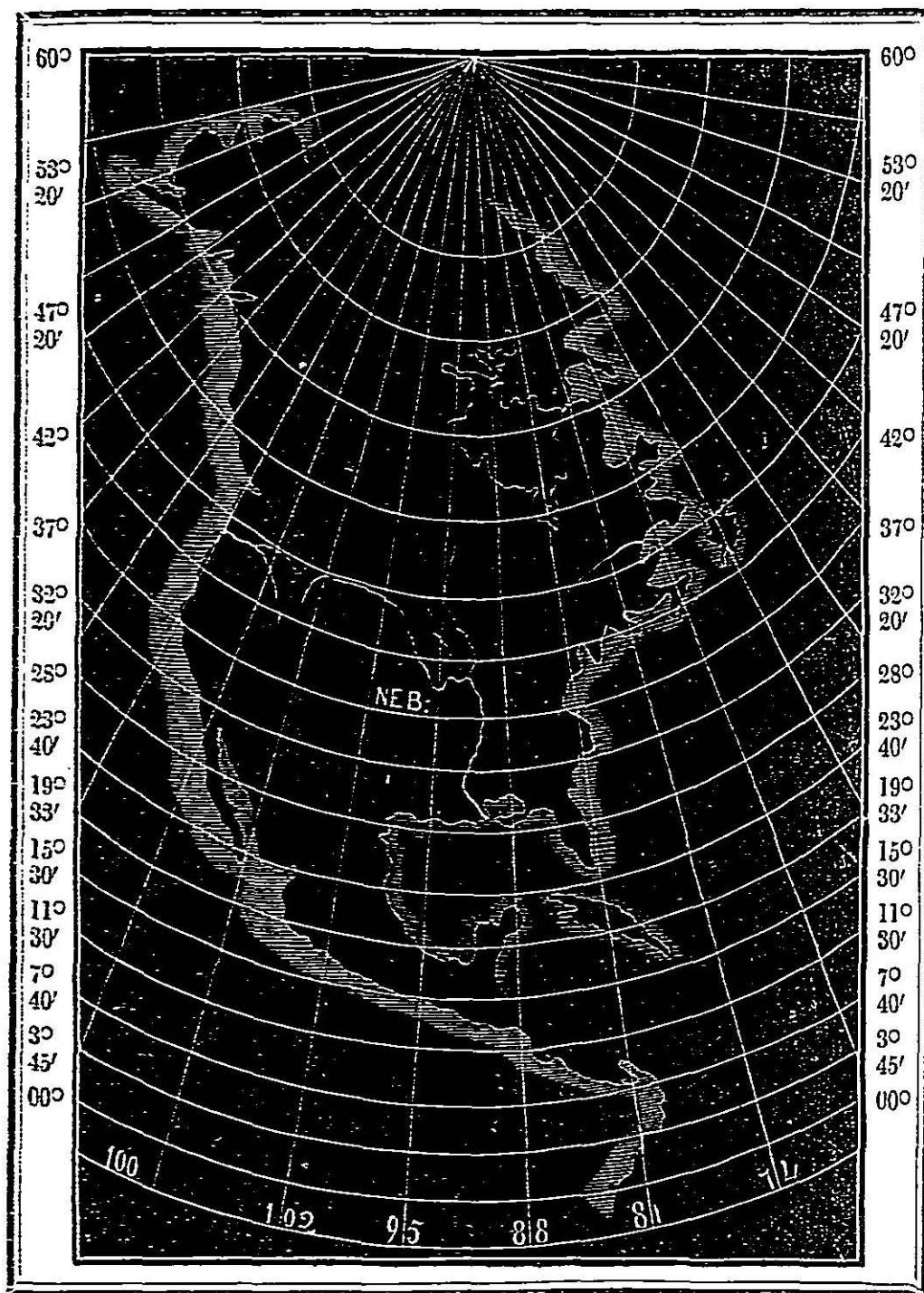


Fig. 2.22 Image of scientifically gridded globe from Lewis Masquerier, *A Scientific Division and Nomenclature of the Earth...* (1847)

Specimen of a scientific Geography of names of the Shires and Villes for the south east fourth of the proposed State of Nebraska, embracing the Platte and Kansas river vallies.

Teteshe, TETEVI, LÓPDLIS	Tenishu o Tenivil	Teatshu o Teatvil	Tesoshu o Tesevil	Tesishu o Tesevil	Tefishu o Tefivil	Tefoshu o Tefovil	Tethreshu o Tethrevil	Tetushu o Tetuvil	Tewushu o Tewuvil
Niteshe o Nitevil	Nimishu o Ninivil	Niatshu o Niatvil	Niseshe o Nisevil	Nisishu o Nisivil	Nifishu o Nifivil	Nifoshu o Nifovil	Nithreshu o Nithrevil	Nitushe o Nituvil	Niwushu o Niwuvil
Atteshe o Attevil	Atnishu o Atnivil	Atatshu o Atatvil	Atseshe o Atsevil	Atsishu o Atsivil	Atfishu o Atfivil	Atfoshu o Atfovil	Atthreshu o Atthrevil	Attushe o Attuvil	Atwushu o Atwuvil
Seteshe o Setevil	Senishu o Senivil	Seatshu o Seatvil	Seseshe o Sesevil	Sesishu o Sesivil	Sefishu o Sefivil	Sefoshu o Sefovil	Sethreshu o Sethrevil	Setushe o Setuvil	Sewushu o Sewuvil
Siteshe o Sitevil	Smishu o Sinivil	Siatshu o Siatvil	Siseshe o Sisevil	Sisishu o Sisivil	Sifishu o Sifivil	Sifoshu o Sifovil	Sithreshu o Sithrevil	Situshe o Situvil	Siwushu o Siwuvil
Fiteshe o Fitevil	Finishu o Finivil	Fiatshu o Fiatvil	Fiseshe o Fisevil	Fisishu o Fisivil	Fifishu o Fifivil	Fifoshu o Fifovil	Fithreshu o Fithrevil	Fitushe o Fituvil	Fiwushu o Fiwuvil
Foteshe o Fotevil	Fonishu o Fonivil	Foatshu o Foatvil	Foseshe o Fosevil	Fosishu o Fosivil	Fofishu o Fofovil	Fofoshu o Fofovil	Fothreshu o Fothrevil	Fotushe o Fotuvil	Fowushu o Fowuvil
Th'eshe o Th'evil	Th'nishu o Th'nivil	Th'atshu o Th'atvil	Th's'shu o Th's'sevil	Th's'ishu o Th's'ivil	Th'n'shu o Th'n'sivil	Th'f'oshu o Th'f'ovil	Th'u'shu o Th'u'sevil	Th't'ushe o Th't'uvil	Th'rewushu o Th'rewuvil
Tuteshe o Tutevil	Tunishu o Tunivil	Tuatshu o Tuatvil	Tuseshe o Tusevil	Tusishu o Tusivil	Tufishu o Tufivil	Tufoshu o Tufovil	Tuthreshu o Tuthrevil	Tutushe o Tutuvil	Tuwushu o Tuwuvil
Wuteshe o Wutevil	Wunishu o Wunivil	Wuatshu o Wuatvil	Wuseshe o Wusevil	Wusishu o Wusivil	Wufishu o Wufivil	Wufoshu o Wufovil	Wuthreshu o Wuthrevil	Wutushe o Wutuvil	Wuwushu o Wuwuvil

Wuwushe County with names for its townships and towns.

Norwestowship, o Norwestown.	Northtownship, o Northtown.	Noreastowship, o Noreastown.
W U Westowship, o Westown.	W U S Centertownship, o WUWUVIL.	H E Eastowship, o Eastown.
Souwestowship, o Souwestown.	Southtownship, o Southtown.	Soueastowship, o Southeastown.

Fig. 2.23 Township division and naming systems from Lewis Masquerier, *A Scientific Division and Nomenclature of the Earth...* (1847)

A UNIVERSAL ALPHABET AND KEY.

VOWELS.		CONSONANTS.	
<p>ROMAN CAPITAL AND SMALL PHONETIC LETTERS</p> <p>ITALIC CAPITAL AND SMALL PHONOGRAPHIC AND TYPIC. NAMES, SAME AS ABOVE.</p> <p>KEY WORDS, PREFIXING THEIR ELEMENTARY DIFFERENCE.</p> <p>WRITES ACCORDING TO THE SOUND OF THEIR LETTERS.</p>	<p>DIVISION OF THE CONSONANTS ACCORDING TO THE PARTS OF THE MOUTH EMPLOYED IN THEIR FORMATION.</p> <p>SUBDIVISION BY THE DIFFERENT HARDENING OF THE MUSCLES OF EACH PART.</p> <p>ROMAN CAPITAL AND SMALL PHONOGRAPHIC LETTERS.</p> <p>ITALIC CAPITAL AND SMALL PHONOGRAPHIC AND TYPIC. NAMES, THE BRIVES OF C, VARYING IT INTO SPECIES, KEY WORDS, EXHIBITING THEIR MODIFYING POWER & THE PRINCIPAL DIPHTHONGS.</p> <p>WRITES ACCORDING TO A PERFECT ORTHOGRAPHY OR SOUND OF THEIR LETTERS.</p>	<p>Co <i>Co</i> cc KEAT BET</p> <p>Ii <i>Ii</i> ih! BIT BIT</p> <p>Ra <i>Ra</i> ay BATE BET</p> <p>Ex <i>Ex</i> eh! BET BET</p> <p>Aa <i>Aa</i> ah! BAT BAT</p> <p>Uu <i>Uu</i> oo BOOT BUT</p> <p>Oo <i>Oo</i> owe BOAT BOT</p> <p>Qq <i>Qq</i> qh! BAR BAR</p> <p>Uv <i>Uv</i> uh! BUT BUT</p> <p>Uu <i>Uu</i> uh! BULL BUL</p> <p>Do <i>Do</i> awe BOT BOT</p>	<p>Labials</p> <p>Sharp P p P p PE PINE Pá-IN</p> <p>Medial B b B b BE BITE BÉ-IT</p> <p>Flat M m M m ME MIE MĊ-M-UR</p> <p>Labiodentals</p> <p>Sharp F f F f FE FOUL FÁ-UR</p> <p>Medial V v V v VE VOW VĊ-U</p> <p>Flat W w W w WE WOO WU</p> <p>Lingvodentals</p> <p>Sharp Th th Th th TH THIN THĊN</p> <p>Medial N n N n NE THIS NĊ</p> <p>Flat M m M m ME NEW NĊ-U</p> <p>Lingvodentals</p> <p>Sharp T t T t TE TUBE TĊ-UR</p> <p>Medial D d D d DE DRAW DRU</p> <p>Flat L l L l LE LOW LO</p> <p>Typingvocal</p> <p>Sharp R r R r RE RUIN RĊ-UN</p> <p>Flat</p> <p>Lingvopalatal</p> <p>Sharp S s S s SE SOIL SĊ-IL</p> <p>Medial Z z Z z ZE ZEAL ZĊL</p> <p>Flat</p> <p>Medialingvopalatal</p> <p>Sharp Sh sh Sh sh SHE SHUS SHĊN</p> <p>Medial J j J j JE VISION VĊ-UN</p> <p>Flat</p> <p>Basalingvopalatal</p> <p>Sharp K k K k KE CAR KĊ-AR</p> <p>Medial G g G g GE GIRL GĊ-ĊRL</p> <p>Flat Y y Y y YE USE YĊ</p> <p>Basalingvofacial</p> <p>Sharp H h H h HE HIE HĊ</p> <p>Medial</p> <p>Basalingvovulval</p> <p>Sharp H h H h HE HIE HĊ</p> <p>Medial</p>

*G IN GEM AS DJ IN DIEM.

The Old English Alphabet.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Fig. 2.24 Masquerier's reformed alphabet (from *Sociology: or, the Reconstruction of Society, Government, and Property...*, 1877)



Fig. 2.25 Reformed alphabet engraved on Masquerier's tombstone in Cypress Hill Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY

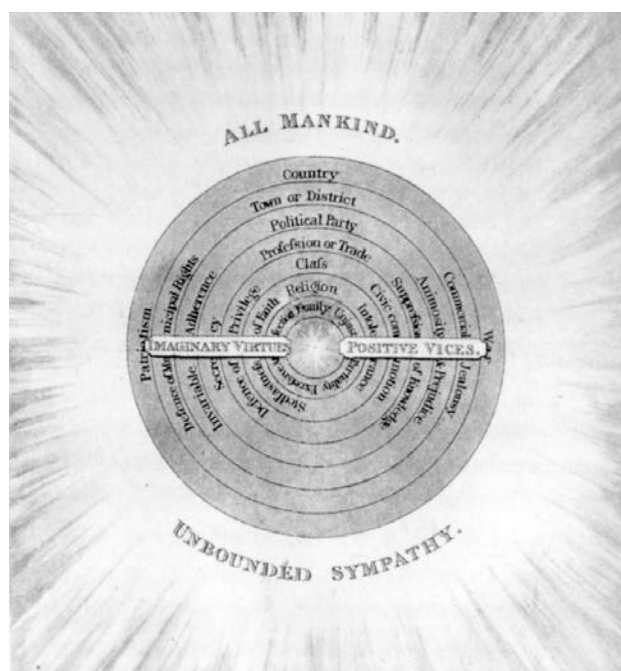


Fig. 2.26 John Minter Morgan, Diagram of Virtues and Vices, from *Hampden in the Nineteenth Century* (1834)

Fig. 2.27 “Diagram illustrative of the Formation of the Human Character suggested by Mr. Owen’s Development of a New View of Society” (Printed for Wheatley and Adlard, 1824). “The centre of the circles represents the individual;--the circles themselves denote the different classes of objects and circumstances by which he is surrounded and influenced, from birth to death...” The text of this pamphlet compared the intellectual advancement of mankind, properly cultivated, to “those undeviating, beautiful, and harmonious movements, observable in the more stupendous and magnificent works of the creation.”

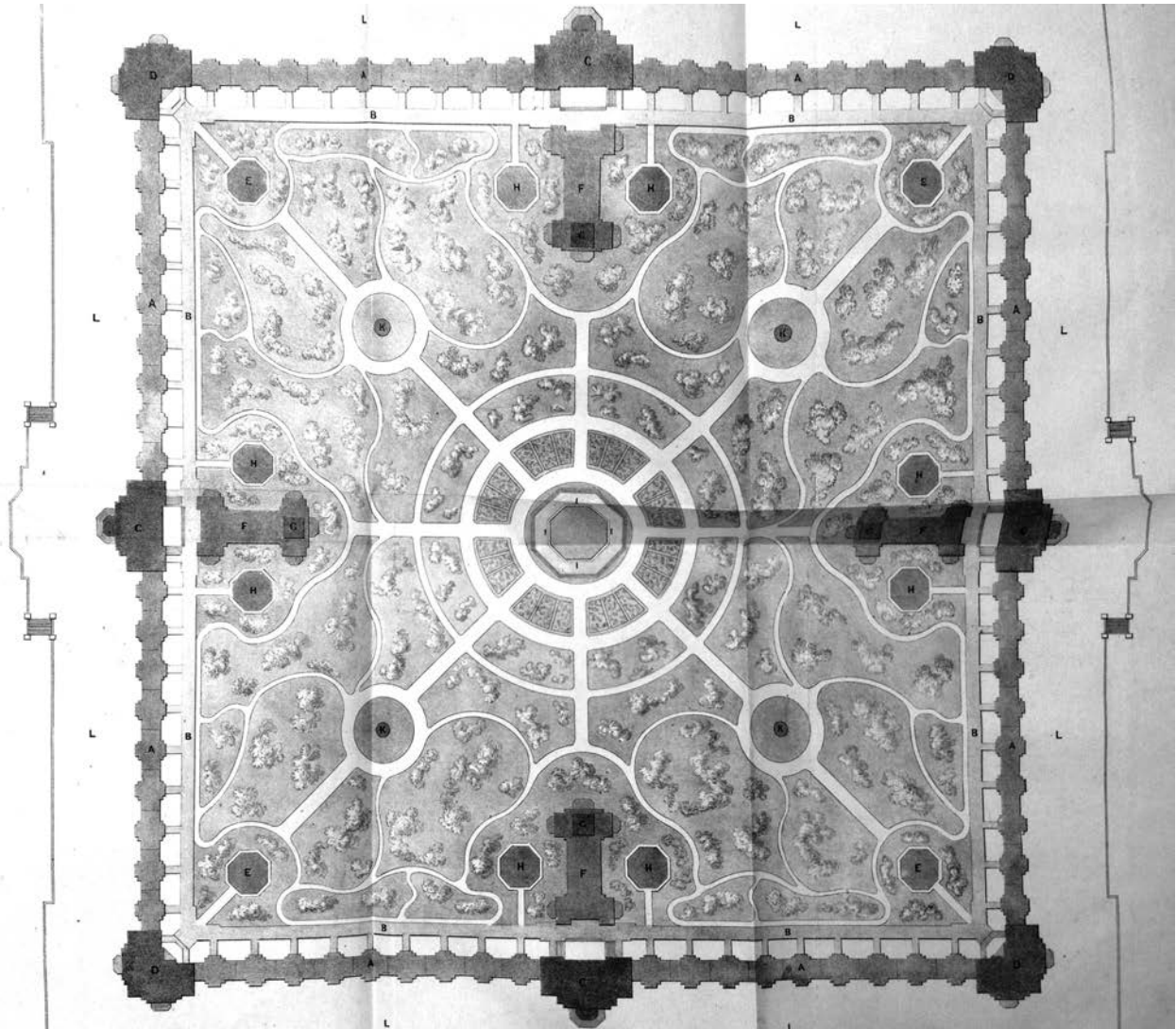


Fig. 2.28 Robert Owen, Plan of a home colony, from *A Development of the Principles and Plans on which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies...* (1841)

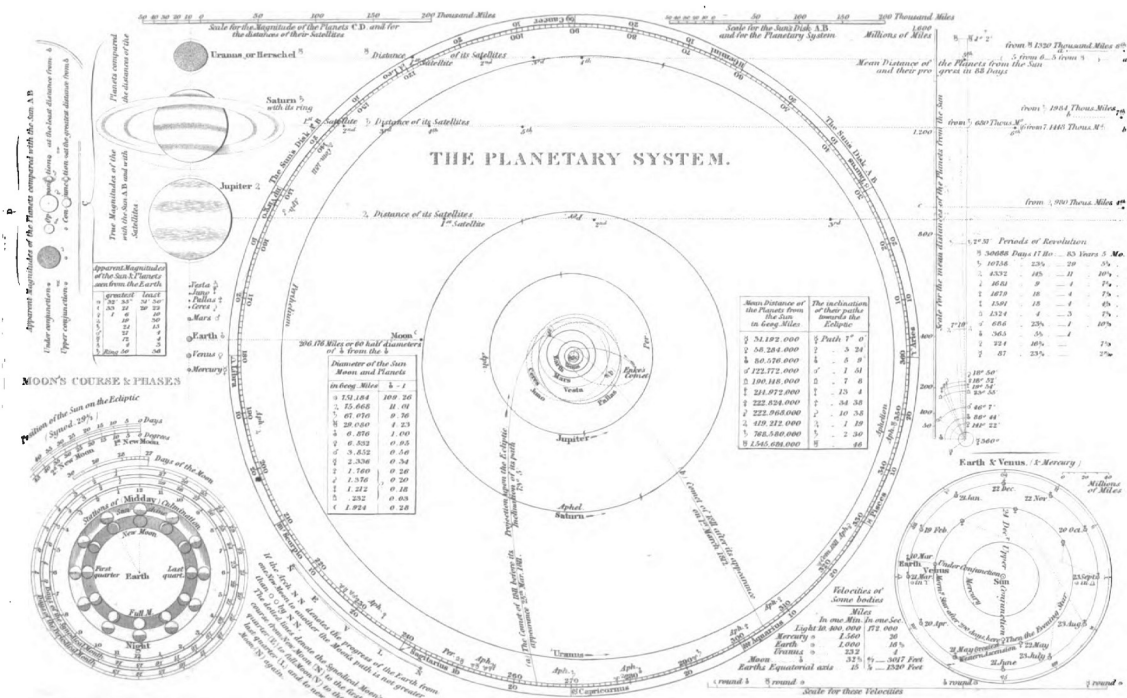


Fig. 2.29 Page from *A Popular Encyclopedia* (1835) showing planetary orbits

Principles of Rights.	Classes.	RIGHTS.		
		Orders.	Generas.	Species.
INDIVIDUALITY or SEPARATENESS.	Rights of Person or Personality.	VITALITY OR LIFE.	Body.	{ Peace, Personal Security, Health.
			Limbs.	{ Potency, Skillfulness, Virility.
			Reproduction.	{ Paternity, Maternity, Monogamy.
		MOBILITY, INDUSTRY, OR LABOR.	Mankood.	{ Self-ownership, Self-employment, Citizenship.
INALIENATION or PERPETUITY.	Rights to Property or Subsistence.	MENTALITY, VOLITION, OR SOVEREIGNTY.	Locomotion.	{ Personal Liberty, Exercise, Emigration.
			Democracy, or Peopledom.	{ Township Commune National International "
		HOMESTEAD OR MANSIONRY.	Morality, or Humanity.	{ Opinion, Reputation, Philanthropy.
			Improvements or Farm.	{ Soil Minerals, Water, Air, Light, Electricity
EQUALITY or QUANTITY.	Rights to Property or Subsistence.	PUBLIC PROP'Y FOR COMMON USE.	Land or Natural Elements.	{ Dwellings, Barn, Shop, Store, Garden, Field, Orchard, Forest, Fishery, Poultry.
			Public Grounds and Buildings.	{ Parks, Squares, School, Museum, Town-Hall, Wharfs,
		MOVEABLES OR PRODUCTS.	Highways or Roads.	{ Common Roads, Railroads, Bridges, Depots.
			Products.	{ Foods, Materials, Tools.
		Fabrics.	{ Clothing, Ornaments, Furniture.	
		Currency.	{ Specie, Equitable Exchange, Note.	

Principles of Wrongs.	Classes.	WRONGS.		
		Orders.	Generas.	Species.
PARTIALITY or ALIENATION or INEQUALITY or DISPROPORTION.	Wrongs of Tyranny to Person.	VIOLENCE OR BATTERY.	Homicide.	{ Aggressive War, Murder, Capital Punishment.
			Mutilation.	{ Mayhem, Emasculation, Maiming.
			Prostitution.	{ Polygamy, Polyandry, Promiscuity.
		SLAVERY OR BONDAGE.	Mancipation.	{ Chattel Slavery, Hireage Slavery, Banishment.
PARTIALITY or ALIENATION or INEQUALITY or DISPROPORTION.	Wrongs of Monopoly in Property.	OFFICERY (Office holding Gov't) or URSPURATION.	Incarceration.	{ Captivity, False Imprisonment, Inquisition.
			Aristocracy.	{ Monarchy, Hereditary Oligarchy Elec'd Olig'y or Rep'c
		LANDLORDRY OR MONOPOLY.	Hierarchy.	{ Paganism, Christianity, Mahometandom.
			Conquest or Land Robbery.	{ Non-cultivation, Non-occupancy, Primogeniture.
PARTIALITY or ALIENATION or INEQUALITY or DISPROPORTION.	Wrongs of Monopoly in Property.	TENURE OR LEASAGE.	Land Traffic.	{ Taxage, Mortgage, Debt, Bequests, Rentage.
			Vassalage or Feudary.	{ Incendiarism, Burglary, Thievery, Mutiny, Robbery.
		PROFIT-MONG'Y OR EXTORTION.	Usury.	{ Banking, Government Bonds, Duties, Tariffs.
			Peculation.	{ Default, Forestallery, Stock-gambling.
		Fraud.	{ Embezzlement, Counterfeiting, Forgery.	

Fig. 2.30 Masquerier's classification of "rights" and "wrongs" based on human physiology (from *Sociology: or, the Reconstruction of Society, Government, and Property...*, 1877)

3. Orson Fowler and the Octagon House as Technology of the Self

Reflecting on the state of American house design in 1848, Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887) wrote: “Why so little progress in ARCHITECTURE, when there is so much in all other matters? We continue to build in the same square form adopted by all past ages. Is this necessary? ‘Why not take our pattern from NATURE? Her forms are mostly SPHERICAL... Why not, then, adopt this spherical form for houses?’”¹

Around the kernel of this disarmingly simple idea, Fowler, an amateur architect better known as one of America’s leading phrenologists, developed a treatise entitled *A Home for All: Or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building* (1848), in which he advocated constructing dwellings on octagonal plans—the eight-sided polygon being the closest practicable shape to nature’s sphere. (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2) Fowler addressed his book toward middling and working-class Americans, offering the octagon house as a tool for those of humble means to raise themselves up in the age of “go ahead.” To those who claimed they didn’t have the resources to build an octagon house, he admonished: “Your poverty is the very reason why you should build. . . . I consider it no disgrace to BE poor, but I do consider it disreputable to REMAIN so any great length of time. He who, in a country of liberty and plenty, cannot rise from the deepest poverty to comparative

¹ O. S. Fowler, *Home for All, or, a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building*, 1st ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1848), 6.

comfort, lacks either the wisdom to plan, or the energy to execute, his liberation from his galling yoke.”² Fowler’s ideology of self-sufficiency and self-liberation was perfectly attuned to a society struggling to reconcile the emergence of wage labor with an older republican ideal of yeomen living in equality and independence. As Eric Foner has observed, in this period of transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, working as a “wage slave” in a factory or store was seen as a temporary state on the road to propertied independence: “Frugal laborers,” it was believed, could save money, purchase their own homes, eventually acquire a farm or shop, thereby escaping the status of wage labor and assimilating into the republic of property holders.”³ Fowler’s octagon house book offered these workers a tool to help them accomplish the leap to personal autonomy.

The impact of Fowler’s book was widespread, immediate, and short-lived.⁴ It went through at least six printings within a decade and his house plans were reprinted in newspapers and other house manuals.⁵ In the half century that followed its publication, Fowler’s book inspired the construction of over a thousand octagon houses nationwide.⁶ (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4) The majority of these builders were middling and prosperous white

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xxi.

⁴ Walter Creese limits the octagon building wave mainly to the seven years between 1850 and 1857. “Fowler and the Domestic Octagon,” *The Art Bulletin* 28, no. 2 (1946): 89.

⁵ Octagon house plans either copied directly or inspired by Fowler appeared in Charles Dwyer’s *The Economic Cottage Builder* (1856), John Bullock’s *The American Cottage Builder* (1854), Zepheniah Baker’s *Modern House Builder* (1857) and *Cottage Builder’s Manual* (1856), Daniel Jacques’s *The House: A Pocket Manual of Rural Architecture* (1859)—the last published by Fowler and Wells.

⁶ By some estimates, over a thousand eight-sided houses were erected around the United States in the decade after the publication of Fowler’s tract. See Madeleine B. Stern’s introduction in Fowler, *The Octagon House: A Home For All* (1853; New York: Dover, 1973), v.

men living on the edge of settled zones—in places like upstate New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin—who heeded Fowler’s advice for how to get ahead, while perhaps also wanting to stand out.⁷ (Fig. 3.5-3.8) By the 1880s, however, the phrenologist’s own eight-sided dwelling had been dubbed “Fowler’s Folly,” and in 1897 it was razed. (Fig. 3.9) Since then, the subject of octagon houses periodically has resurfaced in the popular imagination, but almost always in proximity to words like “whimsy,” “fad,” or “fancy.”⁸ Writing in 1946, the architectural historian Walter Creese called the eight-sided house “an invention that has appeared to succeeding generations as an anomaly and a failure.”⁹ I would contend, however, that the rapidity and intensity of the house’s rise and fall is precisely what makes it an interesting object of historical speculation. If history requires the scholar to estrange herself from a given phenomenon, to see with unfamiliar eyes, than fads are

⁷ The builders of octagons tended to be white, middle or upper class, artisans, lawyers, and progressive farmers. A map of nineteenth century octagon houses reveals that the houses were most prevalent in areas dominated by the ethnic group known as “Yankees”—white men who originated in New England and migrated in the mid-nineteenth century to western New York and to the “Old Northwest” of Michigan and Wisconsin. A number of people who built octagon houses were also involved in building octagon schools. They tended to be involved in their community. Many were budding civic leaders or individuals with no discernable radical leanings. Octagon houses were always considered a novelty. The author of a book on country homes, for example, wrote in 1868: “Eccentric people only, fancy that an octagon dwelling is their ‘beau ideal’ of a dwelling-house. If a person desires something that is more odd than convenient, let him build a rotunda, or a dwelling with eight sides.” Sereno Edwards Todd, *Todd’s Country Homes, and How to Save Money to Buy a Home; How to Build Neat and Cheap Cottages; and How to Gain an Independent Fortune before Old Age Comes On* (New York, 1868), 121. In a similar vein, Daniel Jacques, in presenting readers with a perspective and plan of Enoch Robinson’s Spring Hill, Massachusetts, round house, editorialized: “There are queer people in the world—a great many of them—and it is not strange that there are also queer houses. Now, as our little book is made for everybody, it is but just that queer people and their houses should be represented in it.” Daniel Harrison Jacques, *The House: A Pocket Manual of Rural Architecture* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1859), 92.

⁸ For examples of books and popular articles that treat the octagon house as a historical curiosity, see Carl Frederick Schmidt, *The Octagon Fad* (Scottsville, NY: Carl F. Schmidt, 1958). Michael de Courcy Hinds, “Domed Octagon House: Glorious Whimsy Again,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1981; Dan Kelley, “A Fad from the 1800s Survives in a Dozen Connecticut Towns,” *The Hartford Courant*, December 28, 1980; and Sarah Booth Conroy, “The Public Fancy: An Octagonal House Dreams are Made Of,” *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1976.

⁹ Creese, “Fowler and the Domestic Octagon,” 90.

perfect objects of history, since time has already performed the necessary distancing at faster-than-normal speed. This chapter attempts to unravel the extraordinary appeal to so many ordinary mid-nineteenth-century Americans, such as the journalist in the *Hudson North Star* who wrote in 1855 that the rooms in an octagon house are “so much more contiguous, so much better placed as regards each other, so much better graduated as regards size, some larger, others smaller, and especially so many closets, which renders a house so convenient, that it really captivates the women, and promotes every family end.”¹⁰ (Fig. 3.10)

In exploring the allure of the eight-sided house for the *North Star* reporter and other antebellum Americans, I argue that the eight-sided house was a figure deeply entwined with the emergence of liberal individualism in mid-nineteenth-century America.¹¹ Fowler presented his house as a tool for attaining autonomy—for fostering an economically self-sufficient, physically strong, and emotionally nourished subject. In a

¹⁰ “Octagon House,” *Hudson North Star*, June 20, 1855.

¹¹ My focus on the diachronic aspects of the octagon house idea departs from the synchronic approach taken by Walter Creese in his 1946 *Art Bulletin* article, which is still probably the best scholarly source on Fowler’s invention. Creese locates the octagon house in a long lineage of polygonal structures, from eight-sided Dutch churches of the seventeenth century to George Fred Keck’s twelve-sided House of Tomorrow at the Chicago Fair of 1933. In other words, he performs the customary art historian’s task of outlining a progressive development of form. Although Creese reads the octagon house as a representative figure of nineteenth-century pragmatism, romanticism, and individualism, he also cites Fowler’s emphases on economy and technology and his equation of the functional and the beautiful as anticipations of Sullivan’s credo of “form follows function.” Thus he situates the house within a teleological chronology that ends with Sullivan’s revelation of functional expression—in other words, the octagon house becomes a way station on the road to modernism. Although Creese’s article refers repeatedly to Fowler’s occupation as a phrenologist, phrenology itself is tactfully sublimated. A broader question raised by this examination of the octagon house is whether the architecture of the nineteenth century, long depicted by many architectural historians from Pevsner to Giedion as an anomaly within—or sometimes as the “unconscious” precursor to—the development of modernism, can be broken out of the interpretive stranglehold of concepts like “romanticism,” “eclecticism,” “eccentricity,” and “proto-functionalism.” How would the octagon house look if we examined it not through the backwards telescope of modernism but against the backdrop of larger cultural and economic currents within its own time? What other narratives, concepts, continuities, and fissures might emerge?

sense it operated as what Michel Foucault has termed a “technology of the self”—a prosthetic tool for cultivating a particular kind of modern, liberal subjectivity.¹²

Fowler’s house can be seen as a complement and extension of the National Reformers’ land grid. The octagon was the figure to the land reformers’ field. If Evans and Masquerier saw themselves as inheritors of Jefferson’s grid, then Fowler was the progeny of the Virginian’s private octagons: Like Jefferson, Fowler imagined that his houses would be distributed across the land, incarnating each individual’s right to a parcel. The first edition of *A Home for All* included a statement of support for the cause of land reform, repeating several elements of the justification for free land:

[The] pre-emption right to actual settlers is a law of nature. Land, like air and water is the common heritage and constitutional birthright of every human being, and belongs equally to all. Only the IMPROVEMENTS on lands can justly be called private property. God gives a quit-claim deed to every one of his children of as much land as, well tilled, will supply them with the necessities of life; and this putting of a government deed of vast tracts into land-holding pockets, on which to speculate, and making the poor pay an exorbitant tax for the right to cultivate, is a violation of the laws of nature. Whence did government obtain its right to sell? Of the Indian. And where he is? Echo answers, Where? I go for free lands, as well as free air and light...¹³

Fowler’s book also shared with the land reformers a kind of amateur, or plebeian, functionalism, only here applied to the house rather than to a territorial grid. At a time when most contemporary architecture critics—or what passed for such in the antebellum United States—were opining on whether to build in the gothic, Italianate, and Greek styles, Fowler focused almost exclusively on the functional considerations such as

¹² Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1994).

¹³ Fowler, *A Home for All*, 1st ed., 9. Further along in this passage, Fowler expresses support for rendering homesteads inalienable and not liable for debt—this was one of the three main proposals of the 1840s land reformers.

ventilation, circulation, the organization of spaces, and economy of building material.¹⁴ (Fig. 3.11) Here I am using the word functional in two senses—both in the sense of being guided by utility, rationality, and calculation, and also in the sense of imputing certain cause-and effect relations between the house and its inhabitants. The key to Fowler’s functionalist claims was the plan. For Fowler, the plan—through its attributes of compactness and its choreography of movement, spaces, and atmospheres—was the locus of architecture’s potential radicalism, the means by which it could shape individual bodies and souls most directly. Wielding the plan, Fowler applied a functionalist theory of architecture to advance an ideology of liberal individualism, asserting that the octagon house could directly influence the development of individual health and sexuality, the nuclear family, and a sense of self-ownership.

In spite of his claims about the house’s practical effects, however, I want to argue finally that the octagon house was still just as much a figment of aesthetics—an aesthetic of functionalism. Fowler wielded this functionalist aesthetic, evident in the rhetorical use of geometric diagrams as proof, to conjure a double-edged liberalism that constrained as much as it freed.

Phrenology and the Epistemology of Visibility

Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887) was known in his day as the most famous popular phrenologist in nineteenth-century America.¹⁵ (Fig. 3.12) Today phrenology is usually

¹⁴ See, for example, A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1850; repr., New York: Dover, 1969).

¹⁵ Orson had become interested in phrenology while still a student at Amherst College, where he and a classmate, Henry Ward Beecher, came to share an enthusiasm for the new science of the mind through

thought of as the deterministic and racially charged science of reading character traits from the shape of the head, yet Fowler ironically transformed it into a doctrine of self-improvement.¹⁶ To better oneself, he argued, one had to “know thyself”—the latter expression was the motto of his publication the *American Phrenological Journal*. (Fig. 3.13)

From his base in New York City, Fowler, along with his siblings Lorenzo and Charlotte, established a veritable media empire, publishing their own writings as well as those of supporters like Walt Whitman, and issuing periodicals like the *American Phrenological Journal* and later the *Water Cure Journal*. In addition, the family company spread the

reading Spurzheim and his British follower George Combe. After graduating in 1834, Orson abandoned a plan to join the clergy and decided to try his hand at lecturing on phrenology. Capitalizing on the national vogue for popular lectures on entertaining and useful topics, Fowler, according to his own recollection, “got out a thousand copies [of advertisements], along with my handbill; ordered a bust, and thirty-two dollars’ worth of books on Phrenology, opened my lecture, threw out my card, charged men twelve and a half cents for a phrenological chart, marked, and ladies and children six and a quarter cents; cleared forty dollars...” He soon began to supplement his lecturing with writing. His first book, *Phrenology, Proved, Illustrated, and Applied*, was published in 1837 and went through 62 editions in the next 20 years; it was only one stream in a steady torrent of books that Fowler wrote on wide array of subjects throughout his life. This and other sales figures are given in John Davies, *Phrenology: Fad and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955). According to Davies, Fowler’s *Love and Parentage* and *Amativeness* sold approximately 40,000 copies, while *Matrimony*, *Hereditary Descent*, and *Maternity* each sold over 50,000. Orson soon got his brother Lorenzo, and eventually his sister Charlotte, involved as purveyors of what they called “practical phrenology.” They were joined in 1843 by Samuel Wells, who would marry Charlotte and become a partner in the firm. On Fowler’s conversion to and early career in phrenology, see Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

¹⁶ The science of phrenology was initiated by Franz Joseph Gall at the end of the eighteenth century. Gall, a Viennese physician, established the main tenets of the discipline that he called “craniology”: first, that the brain was the seat of the mind; second, that mental “faculties” or attributes could be associated with specific, distinct, zones of the brain; and third, that the development of the faculties affected the size and contour of the cranium. Thus character traits theoretically were legible from the shape of the head. While Gall was rather pessimistic about the conclusions to be drawn from his investigations—he thought that the existence of innate powers meant that human nature was essentially fixed, his protégé Johann Gaspar Spurzheim transformed phrenology into a progressive doctrine of individual and social perfectibility. Orson Fowler and his brother Lorenzo continued and Americanized what Spurzheim began, turning phrenology into a full-fledged credo of practical self-improvement. On the history of phrenology, see Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Stephen Tomlinson, *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-Century Social Thought* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005); Davies, *Phrenology*; John van Wyhe, *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004).

gospel of phrenology through lecture tours and a museum where consultations and head readings were dispensed. The museum was reported to rival P. T. Barnum's American Museum in popularity. (Figs. 3.14-3.16)

The secret to the Fowlers' success lay in their use of mass media to purvey an epistemology of visibility—the idea that what you see is what you know. After all, one of the guiding principles of phrenology was the notion that one could discern inner character from externally visible attributes. Part of phrenology's appeal lay in its promise to reveal individuals' "true" natures at a time when rapid urbanization, increasing mobility, an expanding market economy, and heightened consciousness of racial difference brought strangers into novel and, for many, uncomfortable proximity.¹⁷ People sought guidance, assurance, and certainty in this new and supposedly unassailable science of the mind. This explains in part the immense popularity of phrenology—whose vocabulary and logics pervaded the worlds of literature, art, and business. Job applicants were asked to bring their phrenological charts to determine their suitability. Fowler's publishing company fed the popular appetite for books answering questions like "whom to marry," "what occupation to pursue," and "how to behave," all backed up with the certainty provided by a bona fide science.

The Fowlers thought earlier advocates of phrenology had focused too much on theory, neglecting pragmatic usefulness and the need for visible proof. They argued that if the science of the mind was to sway the masses, "it will be, not so much by *reasoning* upon

¹⁷ Ronald Walters makes a similar point in *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, Rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 163. On the anxieties about strangers and judgments of character engendered by urbanization and modernization in antebellum America, see Karen Halttunen's classic *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

the subject, as by *practical application of its principles*. . . [the public] must see its truth *practically demonstrated*.¹⁸ The Fowlers made it their mission to *show* Americans exactly how phrenology could be made useful in daily life, by appealing to nineteenth-century audiences' desire to see for themselves. Like his contemporary P. T. Barnum, Fowler was master of what the historian Neil Harris has called an "operational aesthetic"—the pleasure derived from exhibits that exposed their processes of action, that were empirically testable, and that invited their audiences to debate the veracity of what they'd seen. In displays like the "Fejee mermaid," Barnum recognized that not only the hoax but also the resulting argument and controversy were part of the amusement.¹⁹ The Fowler brothers were not above employing Barnum-esque tactics as part of their phrenological performances. In an 1836 handbill, the brothers promised to prove their claims irrefutably and to "meet opposition publicly, and on *any ground*—either by fair argument, or by application of the principles of the science to the heads and skulls of animals, or *to the heads of individuals selected by the audience*—either with or without *their eyes covered*—and let phrenology stand or fall by this test."²⁰ Such public head readings and "double blindfold" performances were trials not only for the phrenologists but also for audience members, who regarded the events as matches of wit and incredulity.²¹ The Fowlers were

¹⁸ O. S. and L. N. Fowler, quoted in Davies, *Phrenology*, 30.

¹⁹ Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 62. It seems the "mermaid" actually was composed of fish and monkey carcasses sewn together.

²⁰ Quoted in *American Phrenological Journal* 10 (1848), 511.

²¹ As the Fowler team traveled the country performing cranial readings, communities would try to confound the visiting "professors" by putting forward clergymen disguised in loud colors. In other instances, the brothers would engage in double blindfold tests in which one sibling was taken away while the other, blindfolded, read the character of a subject by feeling the person's head. Then the first brother would return and be asked to attempt the same reading, also blindfolded. See Stern, *Heads and Headlines*, 18-19.

masters at contriving and playing on the pleasures of firsthand witnessing, of visual revelation and proof.

The rise of this epistemology of visibility was related to the emerging scientism of the nineteenth century, when the rapid pace of scientific discovery and technological invention led to a general mood of both credulity and skepticism: In the age of the telegraph and the railroad, nothing seemed impossible, yet every claim required (visible) proof.²² The Fowlers operated within and exploited this scientific milieu. In their books they likened phrenology to recent technological innovations like steamboats and railroads. Although the brothers themselves did few if any systematic experiments, they often cited phrenology's scientific credentials as evidence of its infallibility. As they wrote in *The Illustrated Self-Instructor*, phrenology puts “the finger of SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTY upon every mental faculty...and thereby reduces mental study to that same *tangible* basis of *proportion* in which all science consists; leaving nothing dark or doubtful, but developing the true SCIENCE OF MIND.”²³

Diagrams were an important way of making the knowledge of self and others promised by phrenology visible. Visitors who received head readings at the Fowler's Phrenological Cabinet were given a table precisely delineating their propensities and aptitudes. (Fig. 3.17) On the left hand were arrayed rows of phrenological faculties, grouped under the headings “domestic,” “selfish propensities,” “moral faculties,” “intellectual faculties,” and so on. The columns at the top of the table listed seven

²² Harris, *Humbug*, 72.

²³ O. S. Fowler and L. N. Fowler, *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1857), 9 and 11.

degrees—very large, large, full, average, moderate, small, and very small—in which the faculties could be held by an individual, along with columns for “cultivate” or “restrain.” The Fowlers developed their own graphical system for marking the chart according to the measurements of each subject. Numbers pre-printed in the table indexed the page or paragraph where one could find one’s particular attributes described. Shorthand notation was used to accelerate the process of head reading and recording.²⁴

As Neil Harris has observed, nineteenth-century Americans were fascinated with information printed in statistical tables, and data lists—these were all part of the general appetite for scientific and useful information.²⁵ The Fowlers’ phrenological charts fed this scientific visual aesthetic. The *form* of the phrenological tables helped shape the knowledge contained therein, constructing the idea that for each trait there was an ideal quantity with graduated levels of deviance from the norm. The phrenological chart also helped create the notion that each person was a unique entity, possessing a singular combination of traits. And just as the distinctive shape of the octagon house would buttress that style’s popularity, the form of the phrenological charts, with their aesthetic appeal to scientific objectivity, contributed to their proliferation: Phrenological descriptions of famous men became a common article of popular interest.²⁶

Fowler’s octagon treatise also relied on an epistemology of visibility. The book included a series of diagrams and calculations in support of his claim that the octagon house enclosed space more efficiently than a square house—and precisely two and a half

²⁴ On the relation of shorthand to radical reform in the mid-nineteenth century, see chapters 4 and 5.

²⁵ Harris, *Humbug*, 87-88.

²⁶ Stern, *Heads and Headlines*, 38.

times as efficiently than a rectangular “winged house,” a type then being advocated by Andrew Jackson Downing and other proponents of the gothic revival style. (Figs. 3.18-3.20) Domestic space was rendered an object of calculation. Fowler included details of his arithmetical figuring. Resorting once again to an operational aesthetic, he challenged disbelievers to perform their own reckonings: “If such doubt my figuring, they will find their own to agree substantially with these results, for arithmetic cannot lie.”²⁷ (Fig. 3.20)

In another pair of diagrams, Fowler used dashed lines to show that an octagon house would allow its inhabitants to move from room to room with far less footsteps and hence expenditure of energy. In the text he explained “the difference, especially to a weakly woman, between going from room to room by a few direct steps, and by those long and crooked roads, as illustrated by those tracks or dotted lines in the two houses, is very great—MORE THAN DOUBLE—in the square, compared with the octagon house.” (Figs. 3.21 and 3.22) The octagon, Fowler claimed, would permit housekeepers to do “TWICE THE WORK.”²⁸ These diagrams and calculations are remarkable for their simplicity. One pair of diagrams included a blank square that took up almost two-thirds of the page. But this was precisely the point—the images were intended to appear obvious.

²⁷ Fowler, *A Home for All*, 1st ed., 29. Apparently some readers were not convinced by these diagrams. George Barrett, author of an 1854 book on houses that was inspired by Fowler’s, wrote that in proposing the octagon form, the phrenologist “has certainly overstepped the limits of truth, the effect, rather, of a mind hallucinated with the notion of a new-fangled theory, than of any direct intent to deceive.” Barrett pointed to his own diagrams and analyses demonstrating that a square could offer a better arrangement of rooms than an octagon. George Barrett, *The Poor Man’s Home, and Rich Man’s Palace; or, the Application of the Gravel Wall Cement to the Purposes of Building* (Cincinnati: Applegate, 1854), 44. (Fig. 3.29)

²⁸ O. S. Fowler, *A Home for All, or, the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building New, Cheap, Convenient, Superior and Adapted to Rich and Poor*, rev. ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1853), 98. Fowler continued: “What a vast number of steps will the octagon save a large and stirring family annually over the square!.... It will at least enlist all HOUSEWIVES—I do not mean parlor toys—in its favor.”

Fowler employed an aesthetic of transparency, of optical verifiability, to make the virtues of his house appear utterly self-evident. (Fig. 3.23)

Self-Culture and the House

The aim of Fowler's book, as he explained in the preface, was to demonstrate a method "to cheapen and improve human homes, and especially to bring comfortable dwellings within reach of the poorer classes."²⁹ By enclosing space with less material, and providing a compact floor plan that would save housewives from taking unnecessary steps, the octagon house provided an economical and "rationalized" mode of building for antebellum Americans intent on getting ahead in the new market economy.

Fowler naturally gave his book a phrenological spin, relating the construction of the house to two phrenological attributes: Inhabitiveness and Constructiveness. (Fig. 3.24–3.25) Just as foxes had holes, birds their nests and even plant seeds their pods, man too was endowed with a primitive faculty of Inhabitiveness, an organ located at the back of the head and defined as "the HOME feeling; love of HOUSE, the PLACE where one was born or has lived, and of home associations. Adapted to man's need of an abiding place, in which to exercise the family feelings; patriotism. Perversion—homesickness when away from home."³⁰ The other faculty relevant to home-building was Constructiveness, located on the side of the forehead and defined as "the MAKING instinct; the TOOL-using talent; SLEIGHT of hand in constructing things. Adapted to man's need of things

²⁹ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 3.

³⁰ Fowler and Fowler, *Illustrated Self-Instructor*, 60.

made, such as houses, clothes, and manufacturing articles of all kinds.”³¹ Constructiveness followed the paradox characteristic of American phrenology in general: the faculty was both innate and yet could be cultivated. On the one hand, Fowler amusingly suggested that men’s cranial shapes determined the forms of houses they would build. Thus, “men with the eagle form of nose and physiognomy... will build on high ground, where they can have a commanding prospect, while those of a rabbit or squirrel form of teeth and face will dig their foundation in a bank....”³² On the other hand, the purpose of Fowler’s own house treatise was to propose a “home for all,” implying that anyone could build an octagon house and thus improve his own character and life situation.

The contradictions inherent in Fowler’s fusion of biological determinism and ideology of improvement was most evident in a passage from *A Home for All* describing the relationship between race and architecture, in which he described a scale of human types and building capacities, beginning with the lowest “orang-outang” and proceeding up through the Hottentot, all the way to the Caucasian at the peak: (Fig. 3.26)

The half-human, half-brute orang-outang constructs a rude hut out of sticks and bushes, while the more advanced Bosjowan builds a habitation a little better, but of the lowest class of human architecture, as he is at the bottom of the ladder. The Hottentot, Carib, Indian, Malay, and Caucasian, build houses better, and still better, the higher the order of their mentality.³³

In spite of such deterministic pronouncements, ultimately it was the doctrine of progress that won out in Fowler’s credo. Fowler promised that no matter one’s natural endowment, his octagon house—like his phrenological prescriptions—could help one advance. Indeed,

³¹ Ibid., 96.

³² Fowler, *A Home for All*, 1st ed., 12.

³³ Ibid.

the stated aim of *A Home for All* was to encourage each man to build the best home possible. To those who protested that they were too poor to obtain an octagon house, Fowler admonished: “The poorer you are, the better able you are to procure one, or, rather, the LESS able to do WITHOUT one.” Combining a Jeffersonian belief in the small independent homestead, a Jacksonian faith in the possibility of each man pulling himself up through his own ingenuity, and a retributive sense that anyone down and out had only himself to blame, Fowler argued that owning one’s own home was not just a confirmation of one’s worth, but a means of attaining success.

The octagon’s suitability as a tool for pulling oneself up stemmed not only from the efficiency of its shape, but also its unique building material. In the original edition of *A Home for All*, Fowler had advocated employing a “board wall” system made of solid wood planks laid on top of each other, but in the 1853 edition presented a new technology that he called the “gravel wall”—basically a type of concrete made of lime, stone, and gravel, which he called “Nature’s own building material.”³⁴ Fireproof, decay-resistant, and capable of being mixed from materials readily at hand, the gravel wall was four times cheaper than wood (by Fowler’s calculation). He had no doubt that the gravel-wall would revolutionize building, making it possible for even those with virtually no financial means to build a house.³⁵ Fowler’s idea apparently found not a few receptive ears.

³⁴ See Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 19-20, 45. He had discovered the technique while on a phrenological tour in Wisconsin, where he had come across a gravel wall house built by an innkeeper named Joseph Goodrich. Goodrich apparently also understood well the operational aesthetic: As a demonstration of the strength of his invention, he invited Fowler to strike the walls with a sledge hammer for six cents per blow. Fowler was converted, and by 1850 was erecting his own grand octagon house using the system. For more on Goodrich, see Creese, “Fowler and the Domestic Octagon,” 92-93.

³⁵ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 149-51.

As we shall see in chapters 4, 5, and 6, this idea of concrete as a cheap, pliable, and even utopian material was adopted by reformers like Henry Clubb, Josiah Warren, and John Murray Spear. George Barrett, a mill owner in Spring Valley, Ohio, read about the gravel wall in a newspaper article by Fowler. Unable to find a mason willing to try the new material, he undertook the work on his own, “at times tremulous and wavering,” and in the face of skepticism from neighbors. However he completed the house, was pleased by the result, and even wrote his own tract promoting the use of the material.³⁶ (Figs. 3.27–3.28) Fowler apparently saw the gravel wall as only the first step in the innovation of construction materials: In the 1853 edition of *A Home for All*, he raised the possibility of using glass as a flooring and roofing material, and even suggested developing a technology to cast glass in place. Glass roofs could be cast in attractive patterns, “interweaving, as in carpets, any varieties and combinations of beautiful figures,” all at a cost accessible to workers. After all, he reasoned “glass material is almost as cheap as dirt, and abundant everywhere.”³⁷

Although Fowler’s book was singular in many ways—including its projection of the utopian potentials of glass architecture, his identification of the house with personal advancement in mid-nineteenth-century America was not. Indeed, numerous other manuals of cottage building and the construction of “cheap houses” proliferated during

³⁶ Barrett, *The Poor Man’s Home*, 9. Barrett pointed to a contradiction in Fowler’s argument for a concrete octagonal house. Whereas the form was originally advocated because it was intended to be built out of wood, an increasingly expensive material, the advent of the gravel wall system obviated this need for economy. “It seems, indeed, remarkably strange that Fowler, after demonstrating, as he effectually does, that the walls of our houses need cost but the merest trifle, comparatively, should insist on the octagon form on the ground of economy, in regard to the greater proportional amount of space thereby to be gained, with a pertinacity which could only be in good keeping were those walls to cost five dollars a foot.” (50-51)

³⁷ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 149-151.

the 1840s and 50s. These books affirmed the importance of the single-family house as a symbol of independence, as well as a vehicle of moral inculcation.³⁸ This popular literature on houses comprised a segment of a larger universe of books on self-improvement and “self-culture” that publishers like Fowlers and Wells helped to proliferate in the mid-nineteenth-century. In the late 1850s for example, the firm published a series of pocket manuals that included the titles *How to Write*, *How to Talk*, *How to Behave*, and *How to Do Business*, as well as volumes on *The Farm*, *The House*, and *Domestic Animals*. (Figs. 3.30 and 3.31) As Emerson famously observed, the mid-nineteenth-century was the age of the first-person singular, further evidence of which could be found in the 1841 edition of Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary*, which added 67 new words beginning with the prefix “self.”³⁹

The literature of self-culture accorded with what Eric Foner has identified as an ideology of free labor—the notion that by working hard, all Americans could attain economic self-sufficiency and “self-ownership” in a dynamic, expanding, capitalist society. As Foner puts it, “[T]he average American of the ante-bellum years was driven by an inordinate desire to improve his condition in life, and by boundless confidence that he

³⁸ On this literature, see chapter 5, “Independence and the Rural Cottage” in Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). Examples include Charles P. Dwyer, *The Economic Cottage Builder, or, Cottages for Men of Small Means, Adapted to Every Locality, with Instructions for Choosing the Most Economical Materials Afforded by the Neighborhood* (Buffalo: Wanzer, McKim, 1855); A. J. Downing, *Cottage Residences* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842; repr., New York: Dover, 1981); Jacques, *The House*; Barrett, *The Poor Man’s Home*.

³⁹ The list of self words old and new included “self-aggrandizement, self-confident, self-destructive, self-determination, and self-knowing.” This insight comes from Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men’s Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 123.

could do so.”⁴⁰ As Scott Sandage has shown in his history of failure in America, the consequences of this idolization of the self-made man included the identification of capitalism’s “losers”—such as the many who declared bankruptcy in the century’s periodic depressions—as misfits whose misfortunes derived from personal rather than systemic failings.⁴¹ The emerging idea of “self-ownership” was also intimately related to debates over slavery. During the 1840s and 50s, free labor ideologues—many of them anti-slavery men—distinguished between Northern wage labor and slave labor, arguing that while white workers might not own productive property, they at least possessed the right to their own labor. Foner points out the irony that arguments for abolition helped legitimate “wage slavery” even as the latter was coming under attack from labor activists like Evans and Masquerier.⁴²

Fowler’s book was a manifestation of the era of liberal individualism and a manual for succeeding in it. But its guidance on the cultivation of liberal selves was not limited to providing the means of sheltering oneself cheaply and efficiently. The octagon house book was, after all, only one small book in Fowler’s larger *oeuvre*, which encompassed hundreds of lengthy tomes and articles on phrenology, physiology, memory, parenting, and what he called “sexual science.” Fowler, who promoted the notion that anyone could rise up so long as he “knew himself” (phrenologically, that is), emphasized that self-advancement relied on individuals staying attentive and vigilant to their bodies and minds. Specifically,

⁴⁰ Foner, *Free Soil*, 13.

⁴¹ Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁴² Foner, *Free Soil*, xxii-xxiii.

he argued that the octagon house could institute a sense of individual sovereignty through several means—not only by enabling men to obtain their own homes, but also by strengthening their bodies, by enabling the cultivation of sexuality within the nuclear family, and by giving each member of the family his or her own space.

Biopower and Sexual Science

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault uses the term “biopower” to describe the general process by which “life” and its mechanisms came to be subjected to political calculation and manipulation in the nineteenth century. It was then, Foucault writes, that life itself became the object of political struggles—“the ‘right’ to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness... the ‘right’ to rediscover what one is and all that one can be...”⁴³ He further argues that one sign of the rise of biopower was the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie’s problematization of its own health and increased attention to techniques for maximizing life. Yet whereas Foucault uses the term biopower to critique the encroachment of state and institutional forms of power into individual bodies through practices of self-discipline, I want to emphasize a different point here, proposing instead that Fowler’s obsession with personal health was part of the growth of a liberal individualist ideology during the early nineteenth century. As Christopher Castiglia has observed, antebellum U.S. society witnessed an “interiorization” of political life—a growing preoccupation with self-scrutiny and self-management of individual appetites and desires, at the expense of public

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 145.

association and political life.⁴⁴ Fowler's house figured this interiorization literally: In the turbulent new market economy, individuals must look after their own health in order to maximize their productivity and chances of success. The house would be just one means to accomplish this interiorization.

A Home for All

To fully understand Fowler's concept of the house, we must look at his wider body of writings, which encompassed books and articles on phrenology, physiology, memory, parenting, and what he called "sexual science." In the first volume of his book *Life: Its Science, Laws, Faculties, Functions, Organs, Conditions, Philosophy, and Improvement...* (1871), for example, he described such basic techniques of the body as how to breathe, what to eat, what to wear, how to bathe, and when to sleep. To give just a flavor of the prescriptions: he advocated a mostly vegetarian diet; the proper ventilation of buildings; four to six hours of vigorous muscular exercise each day; and a host of alternative treatments such as homoeopathy, coldpathy, food-pathy, electropathy, and the breathing, sleeping, laughing, and let-alone (i.e. mind) cures. (Fig. 3.32)

In these books, Fowler often displayed an intense attention to his own body processes. In one section of *Life*, for example, he recounted his discovery of a new method of breathing: Worn out by a taxing schedule of lecturing and examinations, the phrenologist one day found himself dizzy and panting for breath. By taking shorter, quicker breaths, however, he was able to producing a prickling sensation accompanied by

⁴⁴ Christopher Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

renewed energy. After lecturing in the evening, he boasted he was able to walk two and a half miles home, and then write until after sunrise without food or sleep. It was a feat, he wrote, “seemingly in defiance of all the known laws of physiology.”⁴⁵

As revealed in this anecdote, one rationale for this extraordinary attention to the body was the resultant increase in productivity. Fowler took great pride in his own prodigious output and constantly sought ways to increase it. He extolled the necessity of sleep for productive labor: “Great workers are always correspondingly great *sleepers*. . . . To cut short the full time required for sleep, is to cut short one’s *capacity* to work.”⁴⁶ This same assiduous awareness of body processes was manifested in *A Home for All*. One of the claimed advantages of the octagon, as I discussed earlier, was the compactness of its plan, which Fowler believed would save the housewife time, increase her productivity fourfold, *and* soothe her psyche. Inconvenient house plans caused “fretfulness and ill temper, as well as exhaustion and sickness.” The octagon plan would restore both mental and physical health. Fowler’s concern with health and vitality permeated every aspect of the octagon house. The dome, he claimed, would make an ideal play area for children, a gymnastic room for females, or a dancing room. The provision of these spaces was a matter of life and death, especially for delicate women. “How many hopeless invalids,” Fowler asked, “now dying by inches, would such rooms in our buildings restore to life, health, and happiness! How many a child save from a premature grave!”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ O. S. Fowler, *Life: Its Science, Laws Faculties, Functions, Organs, Conditions, Philosophy, and Improvement...* (Boston: O. S. Fowler, 1871), 303.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁴⁷ Fowler, *A Home For All*, 1st ed., 71.

Yet another physiological advantage claimed by Fowler for the octagon house was its capacity for regulating ventilation and temperature. Chimneys, ventilating tubes, and even speaking tubes could easily be created in houses cast of concrete by placing round poles in the framework. Ventilation, of course, was an obsession of mid-century reformers. Human respiration was widely believed to produce poisonous “carbonic gases,” which, if not properly evacuated from a room and replaced with fresh air, led to exhaustion, debility, and disease. As Fowler explained, “foul air thickens the blood, and thereby renders intellect obtuse, memory confused, and the feelings blunt.” Commenting on the ventilation of schoolhouses, he equated inattention to ventilation with “child-murder”: “in almost every schoolhouse these death-inducing causes are silently, insidiously, but most venomously at work...”⁴⁸ Fowler’s book was original in tying the house’s performance directly to human processes of respiration, not only symbolically but functionally. The novelty of his functional approach can be seen when we compare it to a volume like William Andrus Alcott’s *The House I Live In* (1839), in which the body was conceived metaphorically as a kind of house.⁴⁹ Fowler’s book, in contrast, presaged Catharine and Harriet Beecher’s *The American Woman’s Home* of 1869, which juxtaposed illustrations of the lungs with a ventilating chimney to stress the influence of a building in physically regulating the body’s processes. (Figs. 3.33 and 3.34)

Fowler’s attentiveness to the precise correlation of environment and human activity and productivity was also evident in his specifications regarding four windowless

⁴⁸ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 154.

⁴⁹ Alcott also wrote a book on the construction of schoolhouses which treats ventilation physiologically. William A. Alcott, *Essay on the Construction of School-Houses* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1832).

interior rooms in his own house. (Fig. 3.35) He suggested they would serve well either as bedrooms or as writing studios, since the authorial process required the “*all-powerful* exercise of the whole mind”—causing the blood to rush to the head, leaving the skin and extremities cold. These rooms would be cool in summer, warm in winter, and inaccessible to mosquitoes, providing a regulated environment capable of alleviating the special physiological demands of the writing process.⁵⁰ He further specified that these rooms should feature skylights made of half-inch-thick “Crystal Palace glass” that could be walked on above.

Fowler’s preoccupation with health and the house had sexual, racial, and political implications. His concern for the “deranged” nerves of “sedentary fashionables and confined operatives” (in other words, women in a modern, industrial society) was not entirely altruistic. For Fowler, maintaining women’s health was a prerequisite to ensuring their ability to bear strong, vigorous children. (Fig. 3.36) For example, he argued that a poorly laid out house could even affect its inhabitants’ unborn children. By “perpetually irritating mothers,” such homes soured the “tempers of their children, even BEFORE BIRTH, thus rendering the whole family bad-dispositioned BY NATURE, whereas a convenient one would have rendered them constitutionally amiable and good.” This idea relied on Fowler’s sexual theories, which held that influences on a pregnant woman could affect a fetus in the womb. By linking the functionality of the plan to the laws of procreation, Fowler thus staked a radical claim about the capacity of the house to shape even its unborn inhabitants.

⁵⁰ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 131-32.

Sex and reproduction were, in fact, some of Fowler's principal obsessions:⁵¹ He saw sexuality as "the master problem, as yet unsolved, of every individual of the whole family of man.... To ORIGINATE LIFE, and to PREDETERMINE INNATE CHARACTER, and thereby govern conduct, is its exalted mission. This renders it the grand motor wheel of everything human."⁵² Fowler saw the problem of sexuality as intertwined with the health of the nation as a whole. He claimed that healthy, "scientific" reproduction—especially among those of native New England stock—was essential to the livelihood of the republic.⁵³ Like good health, sexuality—or more precisely, reproduction—was not only a virtue but also a patriotic obligation.⁵⁴ The responsibility to reproduce was bound with a millenarian eugenic vision. Echoing a not uncommon concern in his day, Fowler warned of the need to perpetuate Anglo-Saxon bloodlines

⁵¹ Fowler's voluminous writings on the subject buttress Foucault's argument that rather than repression, what we find in the Victorian era is a veritable discursive explosion on the subject of sex. For an overview of the literature by American male moral reformers on sexuality, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America," *American Journal of Sociology* 84(1978). Smith-Rosenberg's thesis essentially follows the "repressive hypothesis" criticized by Foucault in *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. She argues that the literature expressed "timeless fears of the power and uncontrollability of orgasms, of Oedipal conflict, of male fears and fascination with woman's sexuality" and that these fears arose in response to the growth of an urbanized middle class, especially urban adolescent males, who posed a particular threat to traditional familial structures." Although scholars have occasionally interpreted Fowler as belonging to the tradition of Jacksonian-era male moral reformers who wrote conservative proscriptions on sexuality, Fowler was no typical moralist. In fact, he saw himself as battling societal prudery. Although he affirmed some of the dominant beliefs of the era—for example, maintaining that the primary purpose of intercourse is reproduction, proscribing masturbation and same-sex relations, and promoting "one love" over free or communitarian arrangements, his purpose was precisely to bring a long buried subject to light. Rather than speak less about sex, Fowler claimed, it was necessary to talk more: "Of this so much needed love-knowledge there is almost a total dearth and barrenness," he lamented. "Suffering humanity needs many things much, but needs nothing half as much as accurate, scientific, family knowledge." O. S. Fowler, *Sexual Science: Including Manhood, Womanhood, and Their Mutual Interrelations; Love, Its Laws, Power, Etc.* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1870), 23.

⁵² Fowler, *Sexual Science*, viii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 274-75

⁵⁴ "As when a nation is attacked, it becomes the duty of all to help defend it; so it is a national duty to all 'to raise up seed' unto the body politic, if not for war then for peace." Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 274.

against foreign infiltration: due to “the great diminution of births belonging to the native New England stock...in not more than two generations those of foreign origin will outnumber the descendants of the Puritans!”⁵⁵

According to Foucault, this eugenic thinking was endemic to the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, which became obsessed with genealogy and heredity as a way of asserting its own power. “The bourgeoisie’s ‘blood’ was its sex.”⁵⁶ Orson Fowler, who wrote an entire book on heredity and advised individuals on whom to marry based on the compatibility of their phrenological faculties, contributed to this eugenic preoccupation and infused it in his writings on the house.

Sex in the House

This open obsession with sexuality and reproduction differentiates Fowler from more mainstream home reformers like the Beechers. (Fig. 3.37) In later writings that would cause him notoriety, the phrenologist argued that the home was the principal locus of sexuality—not only for relations between husband and wife, but also for parents’ sexual training of their children. Fowler shared the era’s preoccupation with preventing children’s masturbation, yet flouted conventional prohibitions against incest, arguing instead that the attraction between father and daughter and between mother and son should actually be encouraged.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 275.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1, 124.

Consider, for example, Fowler's description of an ideal interaction between father and daughter:

Sometimes a little girl, passionately fond of her father, watching his return, the moment she sees him, exclaims, "O, there comes my pa!" and springs to the door, which bursts open as by magic; and bounds to the gate which flies back at her first quick touch. Up go her outstretched arms. Her face is all aglow. Her eyes are on fire. Burning kisses mount her warm lips. He takes her into his arms. Convulsively she clasps his willing neck. Kiss follows kiss in quick succession, loud, hearty, and free. Impurity there? Then are angels impure. He lays aside his dignity, plays as boy with girl, till both are tired; she clammers on his lap, pats his cheeks with genuine love-pats; runs her fingers through his locks with real love-touches; twists his hair and whiskers into scores of fantastic forms, &c. Behold them as lovers, besides as parent and child, and see our meaning lived out. Would that every father and daughter lived thus!⁵⁷

The spatial setting of the scene above is significant: Sex began as soon as the father entered the gates of the homestead. Fowler's work affirms Foucault's observation in *The History of Sexuality* that the family emerged as the central locus of sexuality beginning in the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ This belief in the home as the chief site of sexuality is not explicitly broached in *A Home for All*, but can be discerned between the lines of the text and drawings.⁵⁹ In the upper stories of the sixteen-foot octagon, for example, Fowler provided two bedroom suites, each with a parlor opening onto two private rooms. He emphasized

⁵⁷ Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 404. Fowler explained that sons should be encouraged to love their mothers, and daughters their fathers, as a way of exercising and developing their sexuality: "The mistake is fatal that it must remain dormant till marriage....[D]eveloping this mental phase of gender in loving her father, beautifies her person and develops this element.... Kept at arm's length from their fathers, denied male association and sympathy, their sexuality weakened by its starvation, commanded and subdued, they grow up comparatively unloving, unlovely, awkward... instead of well-sexed and charming women." (402)

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1, 108-109. Foucault writes that incest came to occupy a central place in the nineteenth-century—as something constantly solicited and refused, an object of constant attraction and obsession.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Fowler believed the faculty of Amativeness should be cultivated outside the home as well. Schools, he thought, should be mixed gender, and young men and women should be encouraged to socialize at public gatherings. "Males and females should associate a hundred-fold more than is now customary. Picnics, fairs, parties &c., are public benefactions." Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 289.

that this arrangement allowed a family to take in boarders, while still providing each household with its own private space. In other words, the nuclear family was preserved and protected, enabling the recommended intra-familial sexual training to occur. In addition, each suite enabled just the right balance between privacy and publicity: children and parents could have their own rooms, without a walk-through or a bed in the sitting room, but also without an intervening distance that might put children dangerously “out of hearing.”⁶⁰ (Fig. 3.38)

Sexuality was also latent in the floor plans of the main story of the octagon house. In his book *Sexual Science*, Fowler named the parlor as a crucial site of sexual training: “THE PARLOR” is a truly glorious institution of Nature. It supplies a human necessity; but is not used a hundredth part enough. By furnishing a refined amatory feast, it sanctifies, elevates, and develops the sexualities of both sexes, and promotes marriage, with all its virtues and blessings.⁶¹ The parlor was the antipode to the nefarious “club-room.” In an age when young males were moving from country to city in growing numbers, Fowler warned: “Young men, whatever you do or omit, you really must not affiliate with men alone. Resort, in leisure hours, to parlors always, club-rooms never. They are most expensive to morals, as well as pockets. ‘Men with men work that which is unseemly.’”⁶²

⁶⁰ In the revised edition of *A Home for All*, Fowler made the relationship between separate rooms and proper sexual training slightly more explicit, writing, “[Children] sleeping by themselves is also a first-rate plan, both for health, and *to prevent their imbibing any thing wrong from other children.*” Fowler, *A Home For All*, rev ed., 64; emphasis added.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 296.

Thus Fowler placed a great deal of emphasis on the layout of the public areas in his house. Folding doors would allow the parlor, dining room, sitting room, and kitchen to be united into one large space, promoting social gatherings and thereby cultivating humans' natural faculty of "sociality."⁶³ (Fig. 3.39) Moreover, he asserted that the geometry of an octagonal space was more conducive to communal feeling: "To gather around a spherical or elliptical table, occasions more harmony and agreeable sensations than around a square one. To have a truly agreeable chit-chat, we require to form into a *circle*." Citing the phrases "family circle," and "circle around the fireside," as well as the practice of phrenomagnetism (that is, hypnotism), Fowler speculated that circular arrangements facilitated a magnetic "flux and reflux of emotion."⁶⁴ In promoting the house as a space for dancing, debate, and speeches, Fowler in effect was relocating the functions of the church, lyceum, barroom, club and other spaces of public gathering into the individual home, enacting again an interiorization of political and social life.⁶⁵

Own feeling

The final place in *A Home for All* where Fowler's promotion of an ethos of individualism emerges is his discussion of what he called the "own" feeling. He emphasized the necessity of cultivating this "own" feeling by giving each person, especially each child, his or her

⁶³ Fowler, *A Home For All*, 1st ed., 62.

⁶⁴ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev. ed., 151.

⁶⁵ Though to be clear, in the revised edition of *A Home for All*, Fowler also proposed that the octagon form be employed to house schoolrooms, churches, and other public buildings. Nevertheless, the thrust of his book is a focus on the house.

own room.⁶⁶ Girls especially, he argued, should be able to receive visitors in their own spaces, in order to foster their training as independent homemakers. Fowler arranged the upper level of his own 32-foot octagon so that each bedroom would have its own ante-room or parlor.⁶⁷ (Fig. 3.35)

By giving each person in the family essentially a home within a home, Fowler assumed that individuality would be cultivated. Yet the concept of the “own feeling” had larger significance for Fowler, as evidenced by the fact that it reappears in *Sexual Science*. There, he used it first to condemn communitarian ideas about “free” love, claiming that key element of love was the feeling of owning one’s partner exclusively. But he also thought the “own feeling” incorporated a sense of self-ownership, explaining, “I own myself. My title to do whatever I please with myself is even higher than landed titles, because derived directly ‘from on high.’ My right is absolute...”⁶⁸

Fowler’s concern with the “own feeling” must be read within larger debates about self-ownership swirling during the late 1840s and 1850s in the United States. Many Northern anti-slavery men argued for the abolition of slavery on the grounds that “self-ownership”—defined as the right to one’s labor and the product of one’s labors—was a universal right, one that should be extended to blacks. This discourse of universal individual rights represented a shift from the republican ethos of an earlier generation.

⁶⁶ Fowler, *A Home for All*, rev ed., 64; emphasis added.

⁶⁷ Fowler further explained: “Visitors in the parlor are not *their* company, so that to treat them becomingly is not their special duty. Otherwise, [in the upstairs parlor] when their visitors cross their threshold, they then put on the lady and take the lead, and become clothed with the dignities of mistress of ceremonies.... In ways innumerable like these will this ‘own room’ plan promote the development of children.” Ibid.

⁶⁸ Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 257.

When Jefferson had written the *Declaration of Independence*, it was about the right of a people to sovereignty, rather than the right of individuals. Fowler appropriated the language of natural rights to describe his vision of individual sovereignty. In doing so, he helped to enunciate an emergent ideology of liberal individualism that was double edged: it simultaneously served to advance claims for abolition and for women's and blacks' political enfranchisement while cementing a conservative and expansionist ideology of free labor and free land within a free market.

In this new world of putative freedoms, Fowler promoted the notion that anyone could rise up so long as he "knew himself" (phrenologically, that is), stayed attentive and vigilant to his own body and soul, and availed himself of the techniques promoted by the reformer, including the eight-sided house. Specifically, he argued that the octagon house could institute a sense of individual sovereignty through its organization and plan—not only by enabling men to build their own domestic domains, but also by strengthening their bodies, by cultivating sexuality within the nuclear family, and by giving each member of the family his or her own space for self-development and self-realization. The house would be a tool for fashioning and producing a liberal self, one that was well-equipped to compete in a burgeoning capitalist society.

The innovation of Fowler's house did not lie solely in its political content, however, but also in the novel relationship that he proposed between architecture and subject. The radicality of the octagon house in this regard can best be seen by comparing it to the nearly contemporaneous book by Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), perhaps the most popular house book of the day. Downing too

thought that the house should be related to its inhabitants. Yet Downing's treatise emphasized the expression of individuality through the selection of a style—classical, gothic, foreign—to fit the personality of the inhabitants; in other words, it relied on the logic of eighteenth-century expression. As Downing put it, "The villa—the country house, should, above all things, manifest individuality. It should say something of the character of the family within—as much as possible of their life and history, their tastes and associations, should mould and fashion themselves upon its walls." Whereas Downing's house expressed its subject, Fowler proposed instead that the arrow of causality could be reversed—that architecture could actually shape and mold the subjects within.

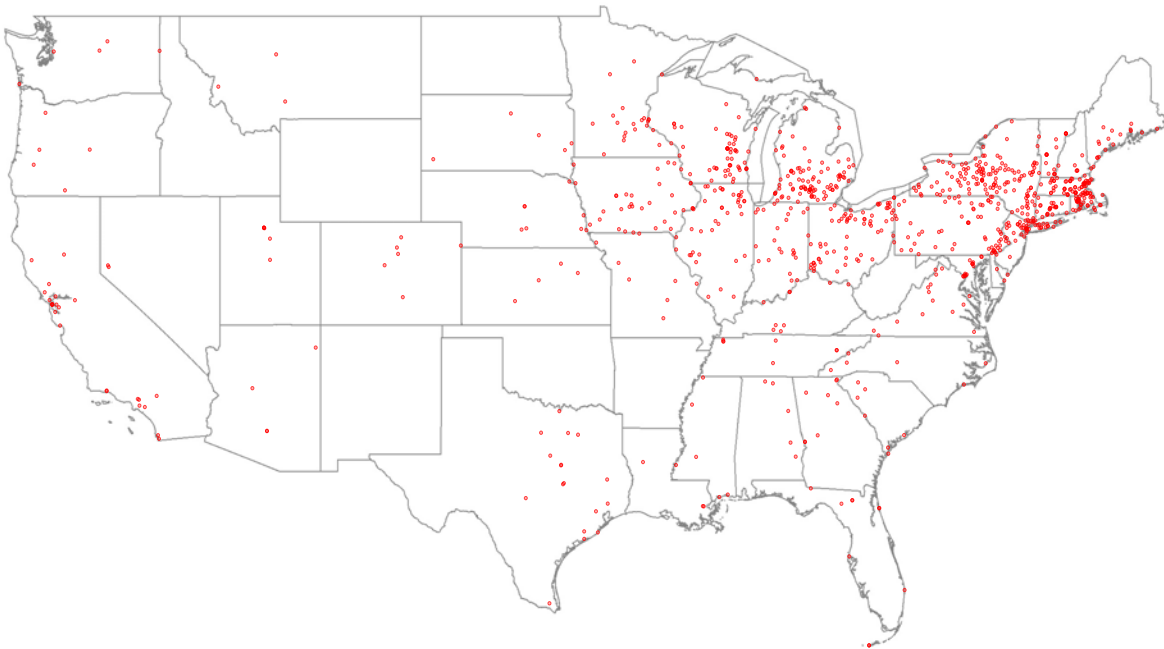


Fig. 3.3 Map of octagon houses built in the nineteenth century. The houses were concentrated on the edges of settled areas--in places like upstate New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin.



Fig. 3.4 Examples of nineteenth-century octagon houses



Figs. 3.5 and 3.6 William Weeks House, Yaphank, NY. Weeks was a Yale graduate and the son of a President of the Long Island Railroad. He built his octagon house sometime between 1848 and 1851, and was involved with the construction of an octagonal schoolhouse in 1854. (Yaphank Historical Society)



Fig. 3.7 Yaphank Schoolhouse, built 1854 (Yaphank Historical Society)

Fig. 3.8 William Weeks (Yaphank Historical Society)

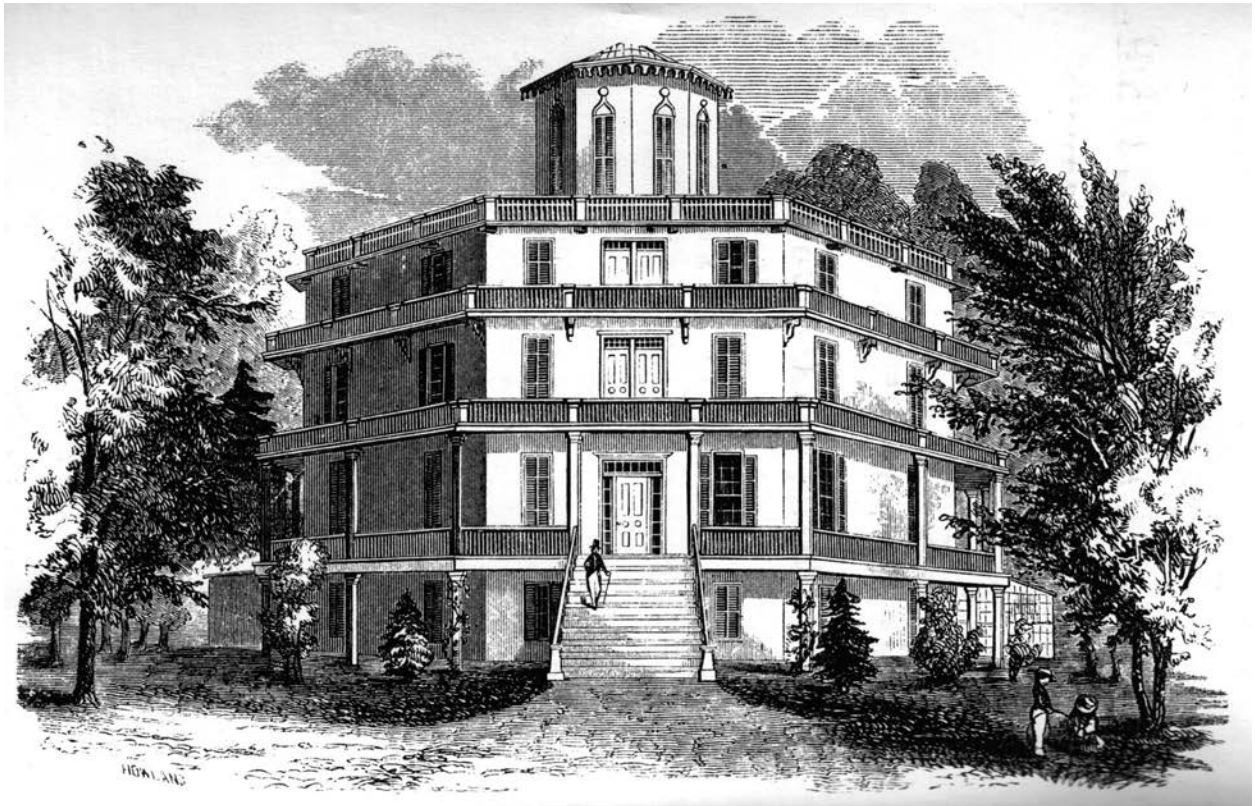


Fig. 3.9 Orson Fowler's own octagon house, Fishkill, New York

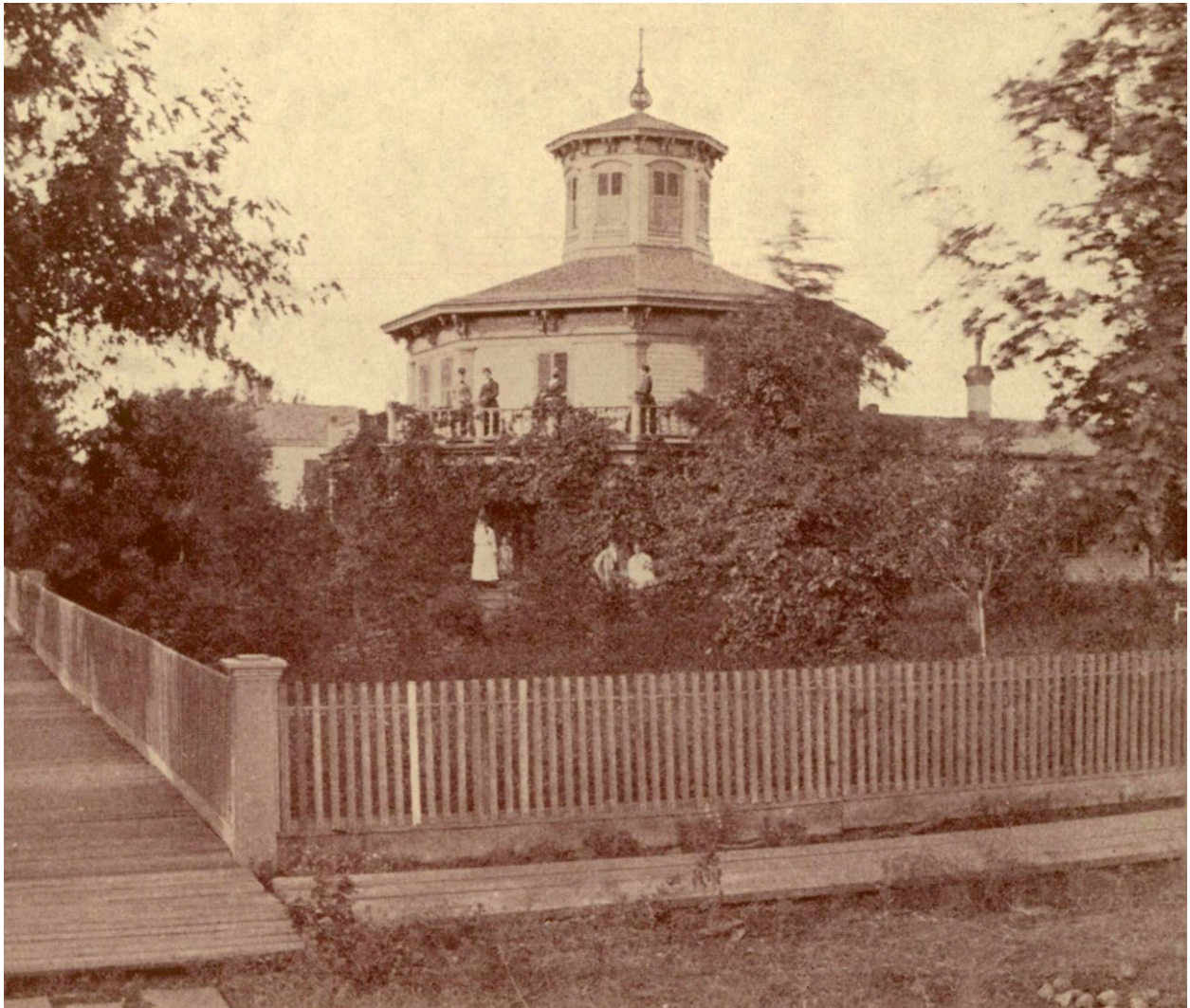


Fig. 3.10 William Moffatt House, Hudson, Wisconsin, 1855. A local journalist wrote in 1855 that the rooms in an octagon house are “so much more contiguous, so much better placed as regards each other, so much better graduated as regards size, some larger, others smaller, and especially so many closets, which renders a house so convenient, that it really captivates the women, and promotes every family end.”



Fig. 3.11 Plate from Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) Whereas Fowler focused on the functionality of the plan, professional architectural critics like Downing were preoccupied with issues of style.

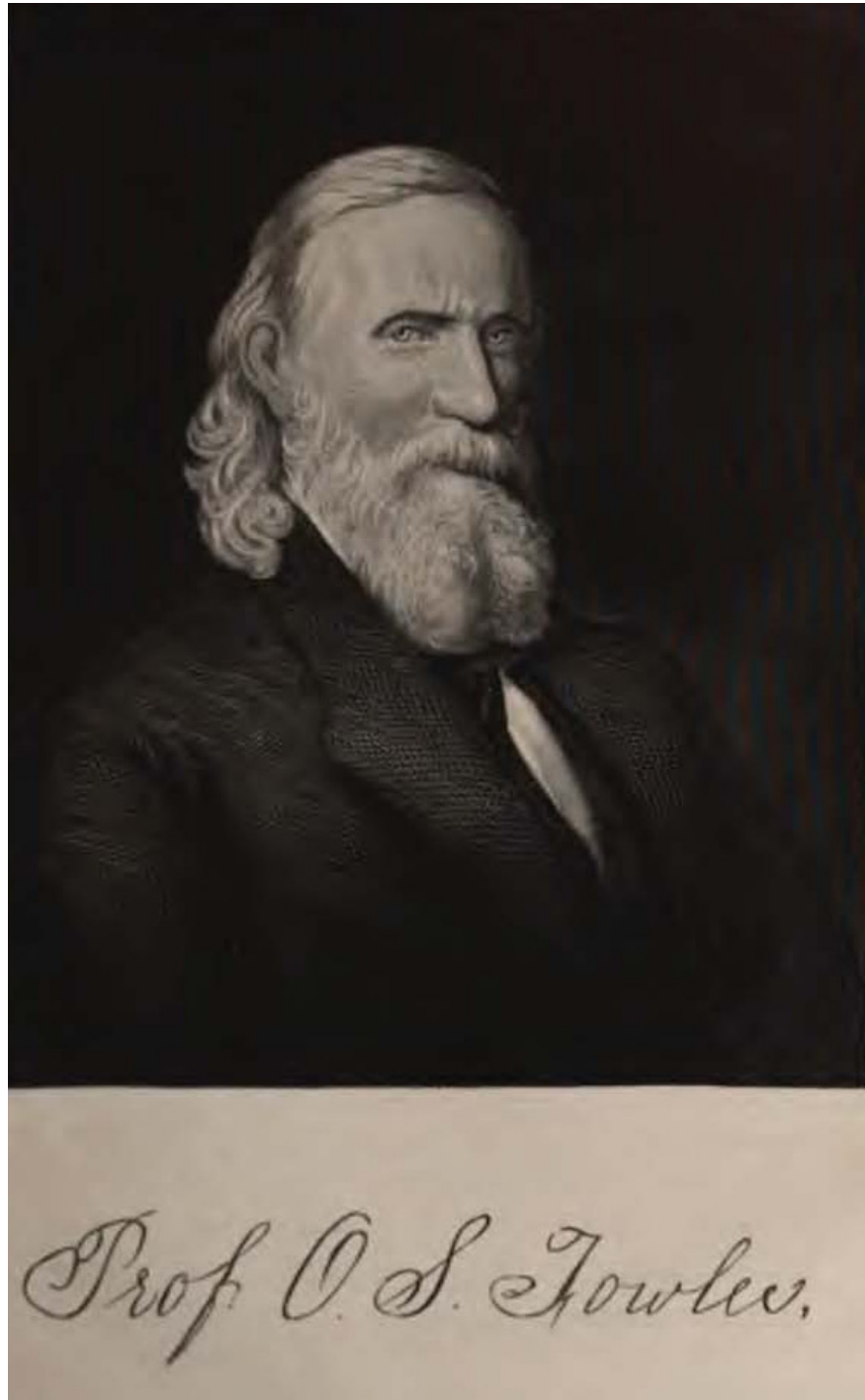


Fig. 3.12 Orson S. Fowler (1809-1887) (from *Sexual Science*, 1870)

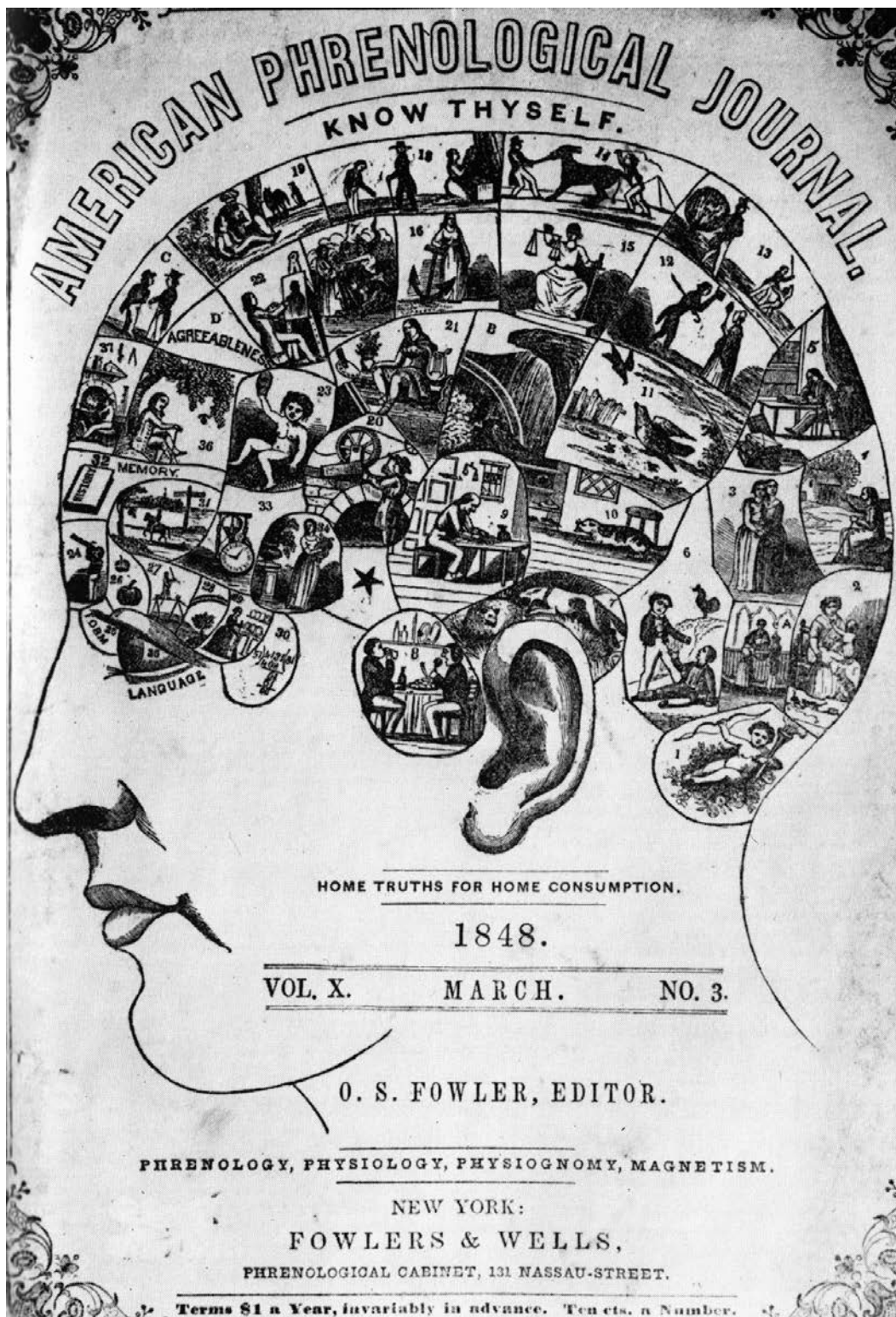
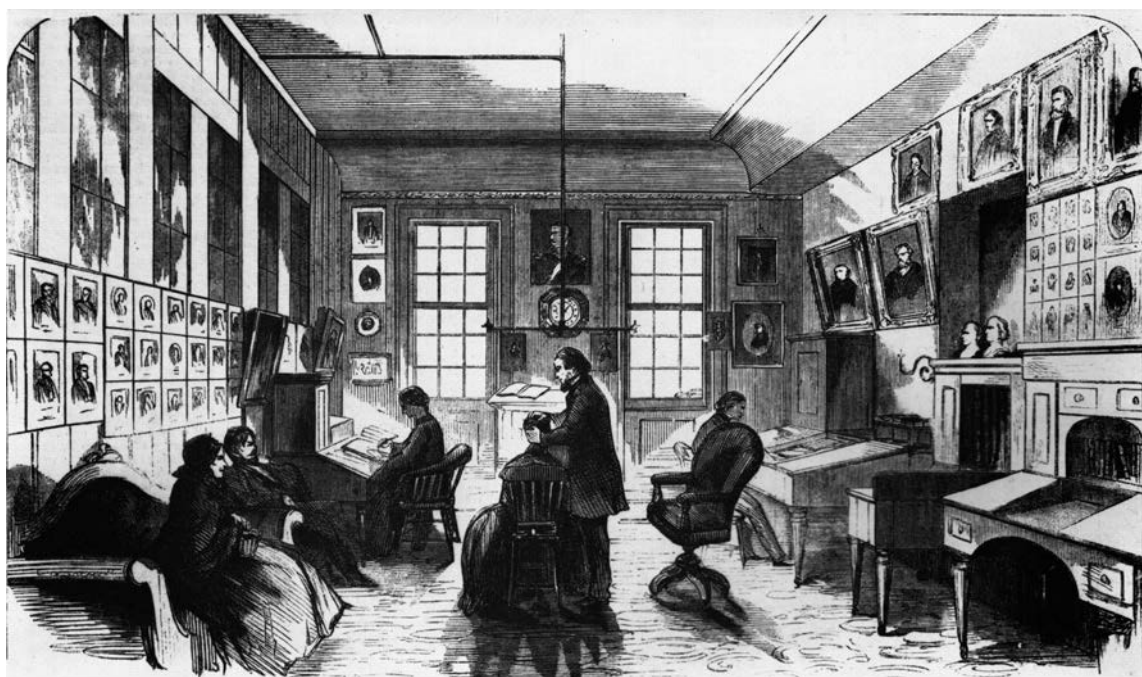


Fig. 3.13 Title page of the *American Phrenological Journal*



Figs 3.14 and 3.15 The Fowler's Phrenological Museum and Cabinet at 308 Broadway, New York City (from *New-York Illustrated News*, February 18, 1860)



Fig. 3.16 The Phrenological Cabinet (Fowler-Wells Papers, Cornell University Special Collections)

Conditions.	Large.	Very Large.	Full.	Average	Moderate.	Small.	Cultivate.	Restrain.
Vital Temperament,	17	17	17	17	17	17	* 165	
Powerful or Motive.	18	18	* 18	18	18	18	137	
Active or Mental. -	* 19	19	19	19	19	19		
Excitability of ditto,	* 20	20	20	20	20	20	157	175
Constitution. - -	34	34	* 34	34	34	34		
Organic Quality. -	* 47	47	47	47	47	47		
Present state, - -	47	47	47	* 47	47	47		
Size of head, - - -	48	49	* 49	49	49	50		
DOMESTIC GROUP.								
1. Amativeness, - -	* 52	52	53	53	53	54		218
2. Parental Love, - -	55	55	* 56	56	56	56	220	
3. Adhesiveness, - -	* 57	57	58	58	58	58	226	
4. Inhabitiveness, - -	60	60	61	61	* 61	61	* 232	
5. Continuity, - - -	* 62	62	62	62	62	62	234	
SELFISH PROPENSITIES,								
E. Vitativeness, - -	* 64	65	65	65	65	65	236	237
6. Combativeness, - -	66	66	* 66	66	67	67	239	240
7. Destructiveness, - -	67	68	* 69	69	69	69	242	243
8. Alimentiveness, - -	* 70	70	70	71	71	71	245	246
9. Acquisitiveness, - -	* 72	73	73	73	74	74	249	250
10. Secretiveness, - -	75	75	76	76	76	77	252	253
11. Cautiousness, - -	* 78	78	78	78	79	79	255	256
12. Approbateness, - -	79	* 80	80	80	80	81	258	259
13. Self-Esteem, - - -	82	82	82	83	83	* 83	* 261	262
14. Firmness, - - - -	* 84	85	85	85	85	85	265	266
MORAL FACULTIES,								
15. Conscientiousness. -	* 87	88	88	88	89	89	268	270
16. Hope, - - - - -	89	* 90	90	90	90	91	272	273

Fig. 3.17 Phrenological chart from *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology* (1857)

Fig. 8—The Square.

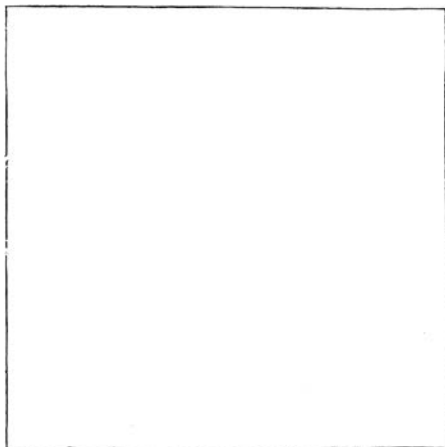
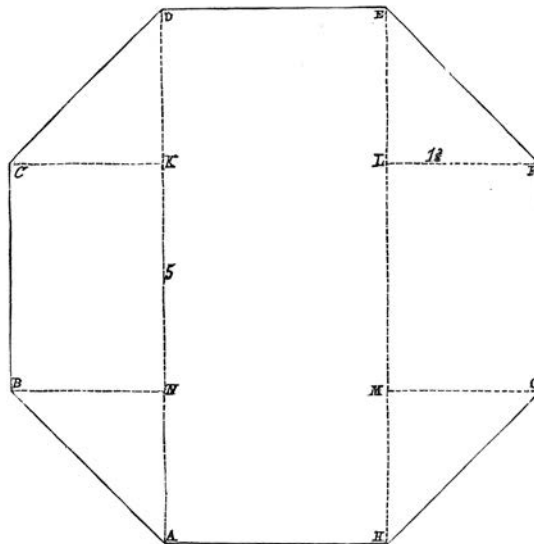


Fig. 9 is an octagon, with two-inch or sixteen-foot sides, on the same scale, and having of course the same circumference, namely, 128 feet. But it contains 1218 square feet, as seen by the following demonstration :

	Square feet.
A, D, E, H, is 16 by 30, and contains	624
B, C, K, N, is 11 by 16, and contains	176
I, G, M, L, is also 11 by 16, and contains	176
The four half-squares, A N B, C D K, E I L, and G H M,	
make two squares, each 11 feet	242
Total number of square feet in the octagon	1218

But the square of the same circumference contains only 1024 square feet. So that the octagon exceeds the square by 194 square feet—a gain of ONE FIFTH.

Fig. 9—The Octagon Form.

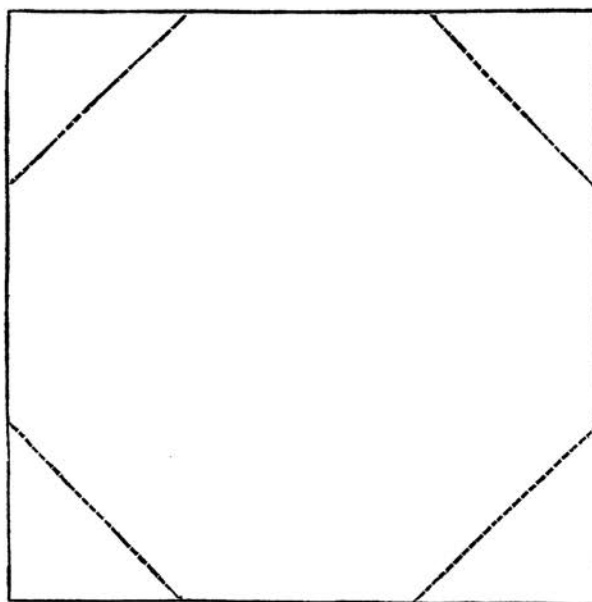


To show this difference by reducing their respective numbers of square feet to fractions. Dropping eighteen square

Fig. 3.18 Diagrams from *A Home for All* (1850 ed.)

ners, but to the room lost in the corners themselves. The corners of rooms are of precious little use any way, because

Fig. 7—Loss occasioned by Corners.



they are dark, far from the fire, disparaging to furniture, and rarely ever occupied. This is true of all corners, and of course the loss is THREE TIMES as great in the cottage, cross, and winged styles, as in the square one, because they contain three times as many corners, and these nearer together. And this loss appertains to both stories. Let the above diagram (Fig. 7) illustrate the principle here involved.

A house with these corners left out, as in those dotted lines, would contain just about as much AVAILABLE or useful room as with them. Now suppose, instead of losing four corners in each story, you lose TWELVE, this loss amounts to considerable, in ADDITION to all those other losses already pointed out. Away, then, with all three of these fancy styles. Those who fancy or adopt them must be either weak or thoughtless—weak if they cannot perceive their inferiority in every respect, and thoughtless if they can, but do not.

24-by-40 feet house, though the circumference of both are exactly the same.

The FORM of our houses, then, is not so trifling a matter after all. The practical difference between building a house for \$3000, or just as large and good a one for \$2000, or in that proportion, is considerable, especially to those laborers who earn their money by bone and muscle.

But the difference between the octagon and the winged is still greater. Suppose the upright of a winged house to be 20 by 15 feet, and the wings 10 by 15 feet each. Its circumference will then be 130—two feet more than the circumference of the sixteen feet octagon. The winged house will contain only $20 \times 15 + 15 \times 10 + 15 \times 10 = 600$, which compares with the octagon as follows :

$$\frac{1218}{600} \div 8 = \frac{152}{75} \div 6 = \frac{25}{12} \div 2 = \frac{12}{6} \div 6 = \frac{2}{1},$$

OR NOT ONE HALF

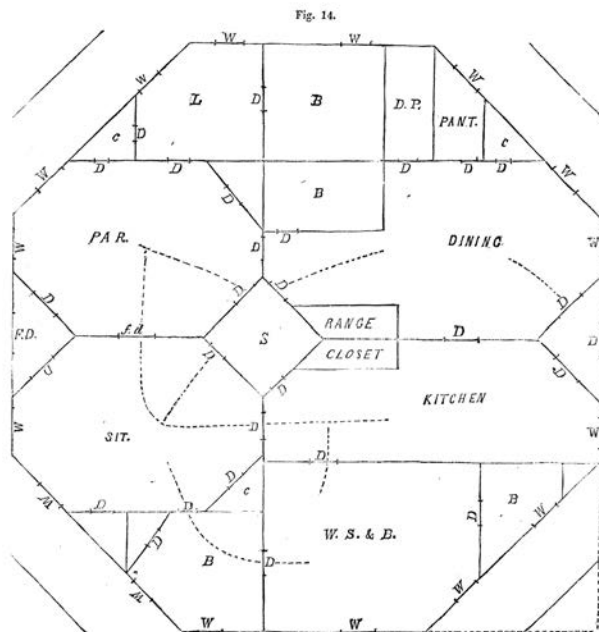
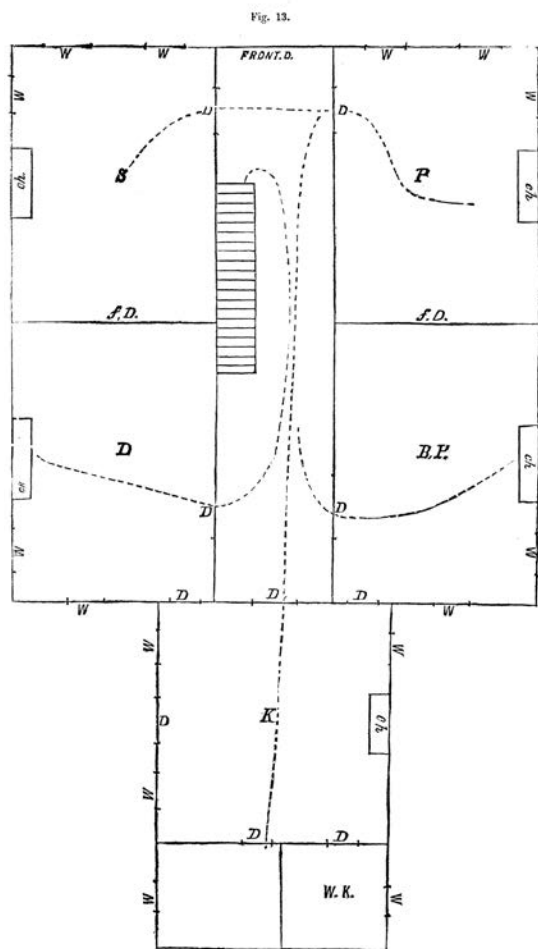
But suppose the upright to be two stories, while the wings are only one, which is usually the case, while the octagon is two stories, which it should be to look well, the winged will contain only 900 square feet, while the octagon will contain 2436. Thus :

$$\frac{2436}{900} \div 12 = \frac{203}{75} \div 7 = \frac{29}{11} \div 11 = \frac{2\frac{1}{2}}{1},$$

TWO AND A HALF times as much room in the octagon as in the winged shape, though two feet more in circumference. Now the difference between building a winged house for \$5000, or just as large an octagonal one for \$2000, is something worth considering. All this TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY PER CENT. SAVED, just by the octagonal FORM, over the winged ! Yet even all this saving, great as it is, is but a small part of the advantages of the style of building which this book was written to propound over others now in use, which we shall see as we proceed.

One other advantage of the octagonal style over the square, and especially over the cottage and winged styles, deserves to be reckoned in this comparison, namely, their CORNERS.

Fig. 3.20 Calculations from *A Home for All* (1850 ed.)



Figs. 3.21 and 3.22 Diagrams from *A Home for All* (1850 ed.) showing the greater efficiency of circulation in an octagon house over a "winged" house.

LONG AND NARROW HOUSES.

23

portioned, small houses should, therefore, be a story and a half, and large ones two or three stories, according to their size.

9. LONG AND NARROW HOUSES

Are by no means the thing. They are out of all proportion, in the first place, and, in the second, their rooms are necessarily far apart, and very inconvenient, so that you must perform quite a journey in going from one extreme to the other. COMPACTNESS of rooms is most desirable in a house, and this is prevented just in proportion as a house is longer than it is wide.

Another loss consists in its taking more WALL to enclose a given amount of room in a long and narrow than in a square one. To illustrate by diagrams :

Fig. 1 is four inches long by a quarter of an inch wide, and contains one square inch.

Fig. 1.



Fig. 2 is two inches long by half an inch wide, and contains one square inch.

Fig. 2.

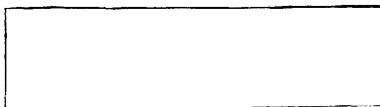


Fig. 3 is one inch square, and contains one square inch.

Fig. 3.

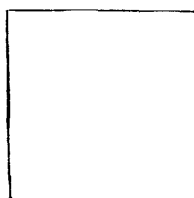


Fig. 3.23 Diagrams from *A Home for All* (1850 ed.). Fowler's images were intentionally simple.

4. INHABITIVENESS.

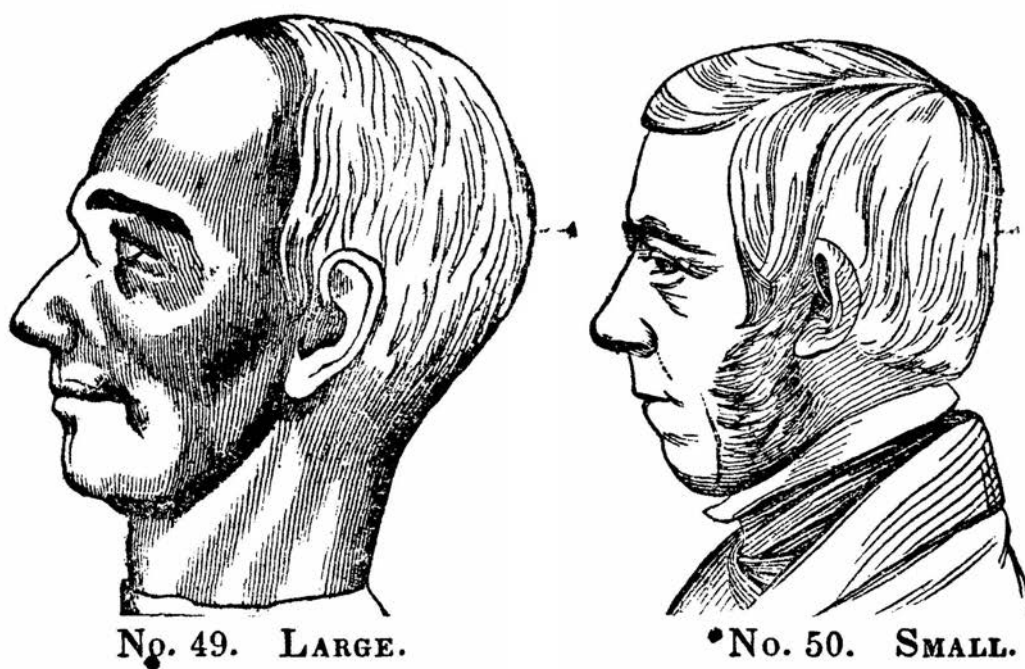


Fig. 3.24 The faculty of Inhabitiveness, from *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology* (1857)



Fig. 3.25 The faculty of Constructiveness, from *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology* (1857)

The ORANG-OUTANG has more forehead than any other animal, both perceptive and reflective, with some moral sentiments, and accordingly is called the "half-reasoning man," its Phrenology corresponding perfectly with its character.

PERCEPTIVES LARGER THAN REFLECTIVES.



No. 38. AFRICAN HEAD.

THE VARIOUS RACES also accord with phrenological science. Thus, Africans generally have full perceptives, and large Tune and Language, but retiring Causality, and accordingly are deficient in reasoning capacity, yet have excellent memories and lingual and musical powers.



No. 39. INDIAN CHIEF.

Indians possess extraordinary strength of the propensities and perceptives, yet have no great moral or inventive power; and, hence, have very wide, round, conical, and rather low heads.

Indian skulls can always be selected from Caucasian, just by these developments; while the Caucasian race is superior in reasoning power and moral elevation to all the other races, and, accordingly, have higher and bolder foreheads, and more elevated and elongated top heads.

Finally, contrast the massive foreheads of all giant-minded men—Bacchs, Franklins, Miltons, etc., with idiotic heads.

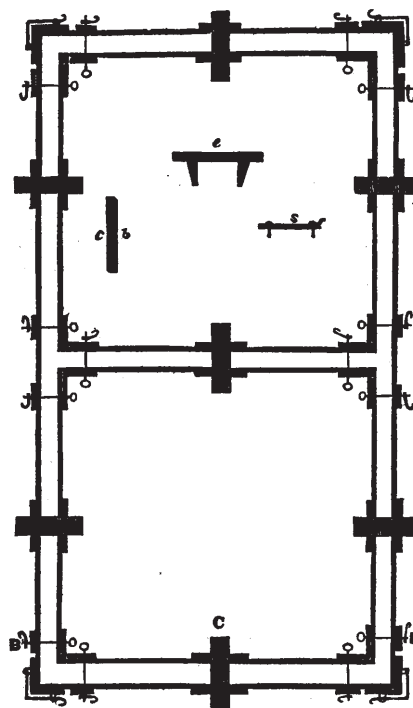
In short, every human, every brutal head, is constructed throughout strictly on phrenological principles. Ransack air, earth, and water and not one palpable exception ever has been, ever can be adduced. This

THE
 POOR MAN'S HOME,
 AND
 RICH MAN'S PALACE.
 OR, THE APPLICATION OF
 THE GRAVEL WALL CEMENT
 TO THE PURPOSES OF BUILDING.
 BY GEO. BARRETT.

CINCINNATI:
 APPLIGATE & CO., PUBLISHERS.
 No. 43 MAIN STREET.
 1854.

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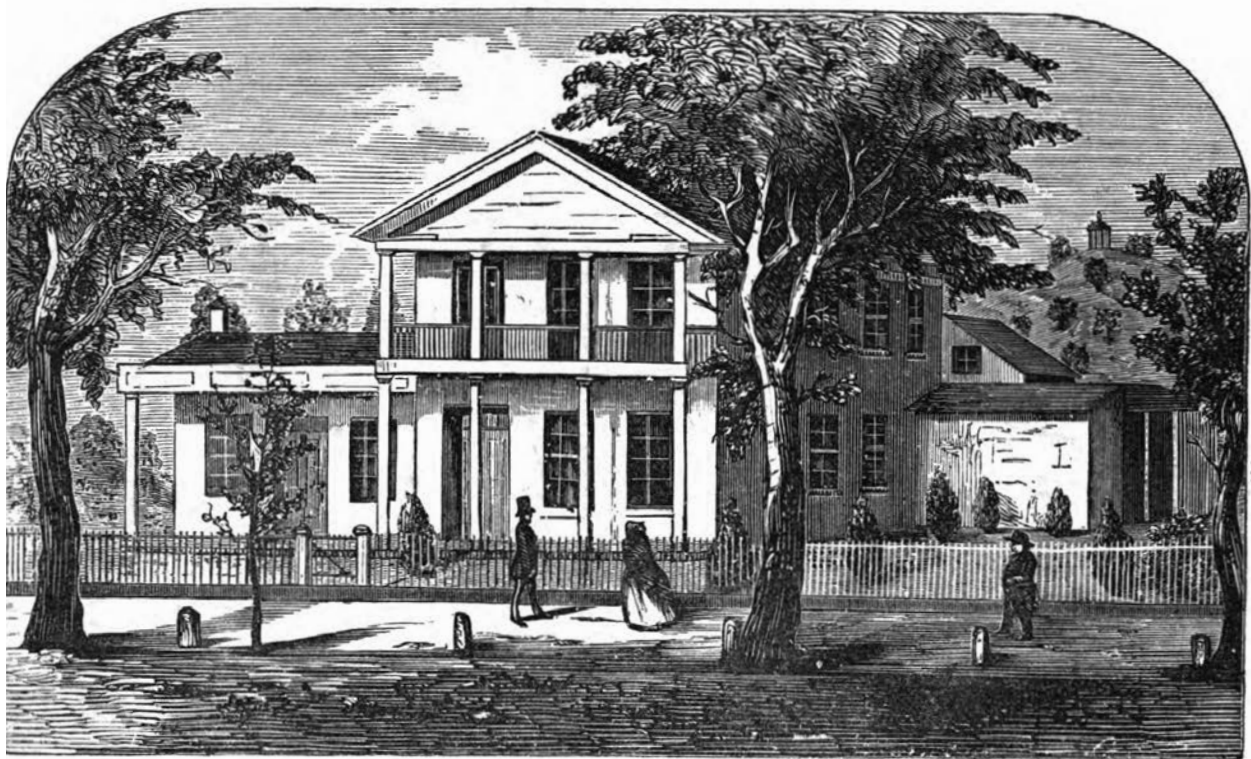
THE POOR MAN'S HOME,



clasps marked C. The interior cross-wall, as here presented, is in full connection with the main walls, solid

Digitized by Google

Fig. 3.27 Title page and illustration of formwork from George Barrett, *The Poor Man's Home, and Rich Man's Palace; or, the Application of the Gravel Wall Cement to the Purposes of Building* (1854). Barrett was inspired by Fowler to build his own gravel wall house.

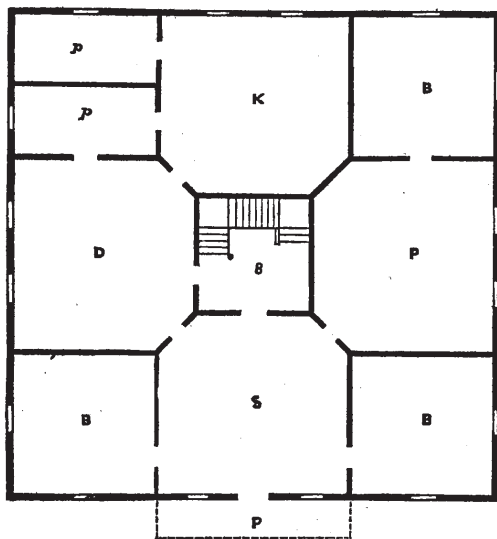


VIEW OF THE RESIDENCE OF GEO. BARRETT, ESQ., SPRING VALLEY, GREENE COUNTY, OHIO.

Fig. 3.28 Barrett's house in Spring Valley, Ohio. This image was the frontispiece to *The Poor Man's Home, and Rich Man's Palace; or, the Application of the Gravel Wall Cement to the Purposes of Building* (1854)

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THE POOR MAN'S HOME,

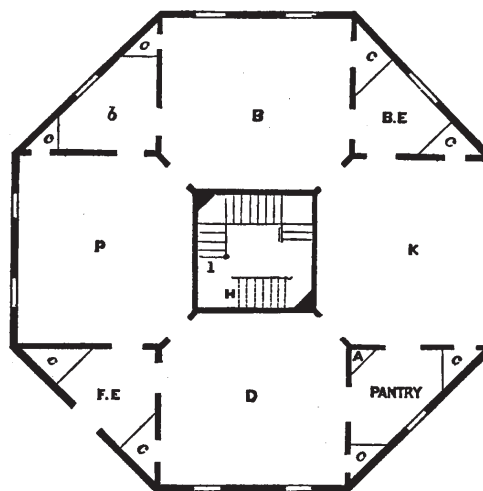


gives 900 square feet, what will 100 feet length of wall give, that the answer will be 750. This shows a loss of 12 feet to the 900, equal to one closet of three by four feet square. This is all that is gained by the octagon form, after all has been said; 12 feet in 900, and that, too, within walls so easily made, and costing so little.

And now, I would have the curious reader examine the drawings of the various octagon forms in Fowler's

AND RICH MAN'S PALACE.

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book, and if he does not see more lost room, or rather, room *worse than lost*, in the multitude of angular sides and triangular corners, then I have only to say, that his judgment and taste are very different from mine.

Fowler says that a square house *will not admit* of that *superb arrangement of rooms* of which an octagon is susceptible. Now I will here contrast the two forms, by drawings of each. The octagon I copy from Fowler, page 161, and which he, with strong emphasis, pronounces "*the very best plan yet.*" And so, undoubtedly,

Fig. 3.29 Diagrams from George Barrett, *The Poor Man's Home, and Rich Man's Palace* (1854). Barrett adopted Fowler's gravel wall technique but disagreed with the phrenologist's assertions about the efficiency of an octagonal over a square plan. Barrett included plans and calculations in his book to prove his point.

HAND-BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

HOW TO WRITE;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Composition and Letter Writing, with Hints on Penmanship and Writing Materials, and Practical Rules for Literary Composition, Newspaper Writing, Punctuation, and Proof Correcting, etc., etc.
Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

HOW TO TALK;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Conversation and Debate, with Directions for Acquiring a Grammatical and Graceful Style; with more than Five Hundred Common Mistakes Corrected. Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

HOW TO BEHAVE;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits; with Rules for Debating Societies and Deliberative Assemblies. Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

HOW TO DO BUSINESS;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Practical Affairs and Guide to Success in Life; with a Collection of Business Forms, and a Dictionary of Commercial Terms. Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

THE GARDEN;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Practical Horticulture; or How to Cultivate Vegetables, Fruits, and Flowers. With a Chapter on Ornamental Trees and Shrubs. Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

In Preparation.

THE FARM;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Practical Agriculture. Paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 c.

THE HOUSE;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Rural Architecture. Paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS;

A NEW POCKET MANUAL of Cattle, Horse, and Sheep Husbandry, etc., etc.
Price, paper, 80 c.; cloth, 50 cents.

Sent to any Post-Office by Return Mail, on Receipt of the Price

Fig. 3.30 Titles in a series of pocket handbooks published by Fowlers and Wells in the late 1850s

tory of eminent agriculturists, a standard work on Chemistry, another on Hydraulics, a large street committee, several Know-Nothings and our compositor on unintelligible copy, we mastered the first three lines in the first half day. We were happy within the first hour to ascertain when we had the manuscript right side up—for it looks about as much like writing one way as another. It is now in the hands of a competent committee, to decide in what language it is written, and if it is ascertained that it is neither Hebrew nor Greek, we must infer that it was intended for English, and shall proceed to decipher it.”

III.—POSITION IN WRITING.



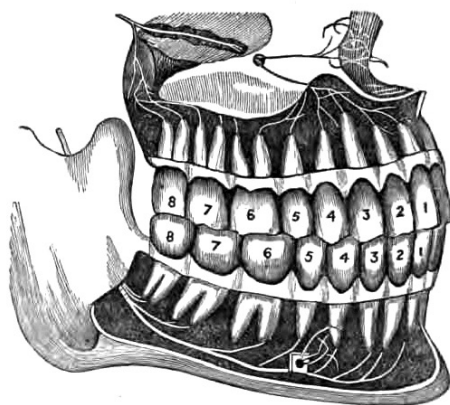
A bad position in writing is as destructive to beauty of form as it is to health. Persons who write much in the

Fig. 3.31 Visual instruction in the proper position for writing, from *How to Write* (1857)

130 FOOD; ITS NECESSITY, SELECTION, AND DIGESTION.

ferred. Comparative anatomists have, from a single tooth, described, and made drawings of the extinct creature to which it belonged, which have been found to agree exactly with a skeleton afterwards discovered."

No. 5. VIEW OF THE HUMAN TEETH.



NAMES OF THE HUMAN TEETH.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1, 1. Middle incisors. | 4, 4. First bicuspidate. |
| 2, 2. Lateral incisors. | 5, 5. Second bicuspidate. |
| 3, 3. Canine. | 6, 6, 7, 7. Molars. 8, 8. Wisdom. |

That the teeth of every animal, known and unknown, accord perfectly with its natural food, is universally admitted; so that the form of the human teeth will determine, with absolute certainty, the natural dietetic character of man. If constituted to eat meat, the shape of his teeth will approximate towards that of lions and tigers. His front teeth will be small and sharp; his eye teeth, which correspond with the tusks, hooked, long, and enormously large; and his back teeth sharp for tearing, instead of broad for crushing; whereas, if his natural diet is vegetable and farinaceous, his back teeth will be adapted to grinding, and his eye teeth not longer than their neighbors.

The following engraving of the cow furnishes a standard sample of herbivorous teeth, as do those of the tiger of the teeth of the

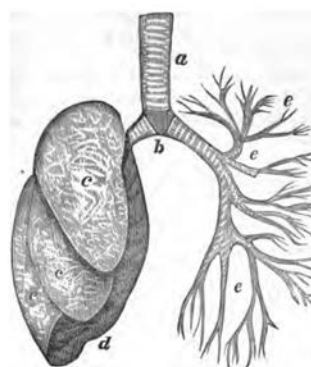
100 RESPIRATION, ITS LAWS, ORGANS, AND PROMOTION.

the first rib downward about one third the length of the body proper, occupying most of the chest. They are composed of two hemispheres, the right containing three lobes, as seen in engraving No. 2, while the left has only two; it being scooped out in the middle, so as to allow the heart to be partly enveloped in it.

THE TRACHEA, or windpipe, is an air tube, connecting between the mouth and nose above, and the lungs below, branching at its bottom into the bronchia; the inflammation of which causes bronchitis, while consumption consists in the inflammation and suppuration of the lungs. This trachea conducts the air into and out of the lungs.

IT BRANCHES into the right and left hemispheres of the lungs,

No. 2.—SHAPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE LUNGS.



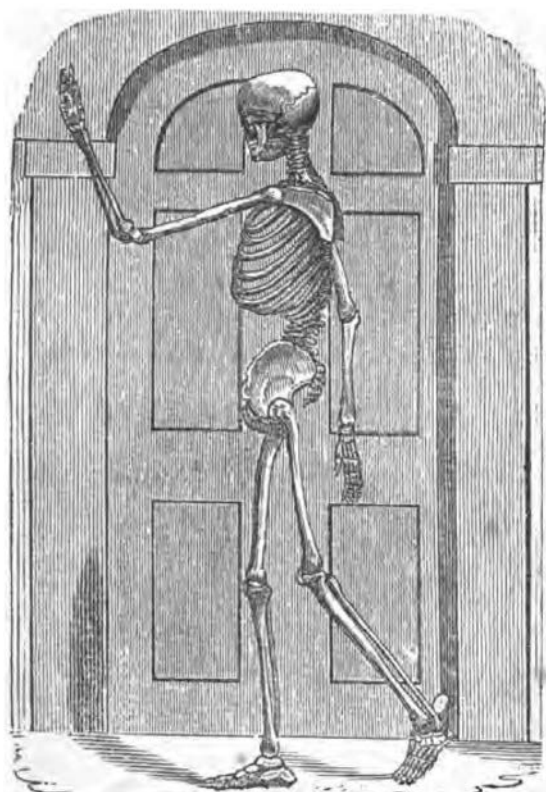
- a. The trachea, or windpipe.
 b. Its branch to the right and left lung.
 c c c. The three lobes which compose each right lung.
 e e e. The air cells of the lungs dissected.
 d. The pulmonary arteries, or entrance and egress of the blood from and to the heart.

and then re-branches into each lobe, and continues to bifurcate and ramify into cells smaller and still smaller, until they become too small to be seen by the naked eye, amounting to *six hundred million* in a single pair of lungs! This air-cell branching is evinced in the right-hand hemisphere of engraving No. 2, and the three lobes of the right lung, as well as their general external appearance, are shown in the left hand.

BLOOD-CELLS also ramify throughout these same lungs; each set of cells occupying about half of them. These

blood-cells have their entrance from behind, at *d*, and 14 and 15 in engraving No. 3, which ramify like the air-cells into the minutest conceivable cellules, and lie along, side by side, with the air-cells.

Fig. 3.32 Illustrations from Fowler's book *Life: Its Science, Laws, Faculties, Functions, Organs, Conditions, Philosophy, and Improvement...* (1871)



"I am fearfully and wonderfully made!"

THE
HOUSE I LIVE IN;
OR
THE HUMAN BODY.

FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS.

BY WM. A. ALCOTT,
Author of the *Young Husband*, *Young Wife*, *Young Mother*,
and *Young Man's Guide*.

Sixth Stereotype Edition.

BOSTON:
GEORGE W. LIGHT, 1 CORNHILL.
NEW YORK:—126 Fulton Street.
1839.

Fig. 3.33 William Andrus Alcott's *The House I Live In* (1839)

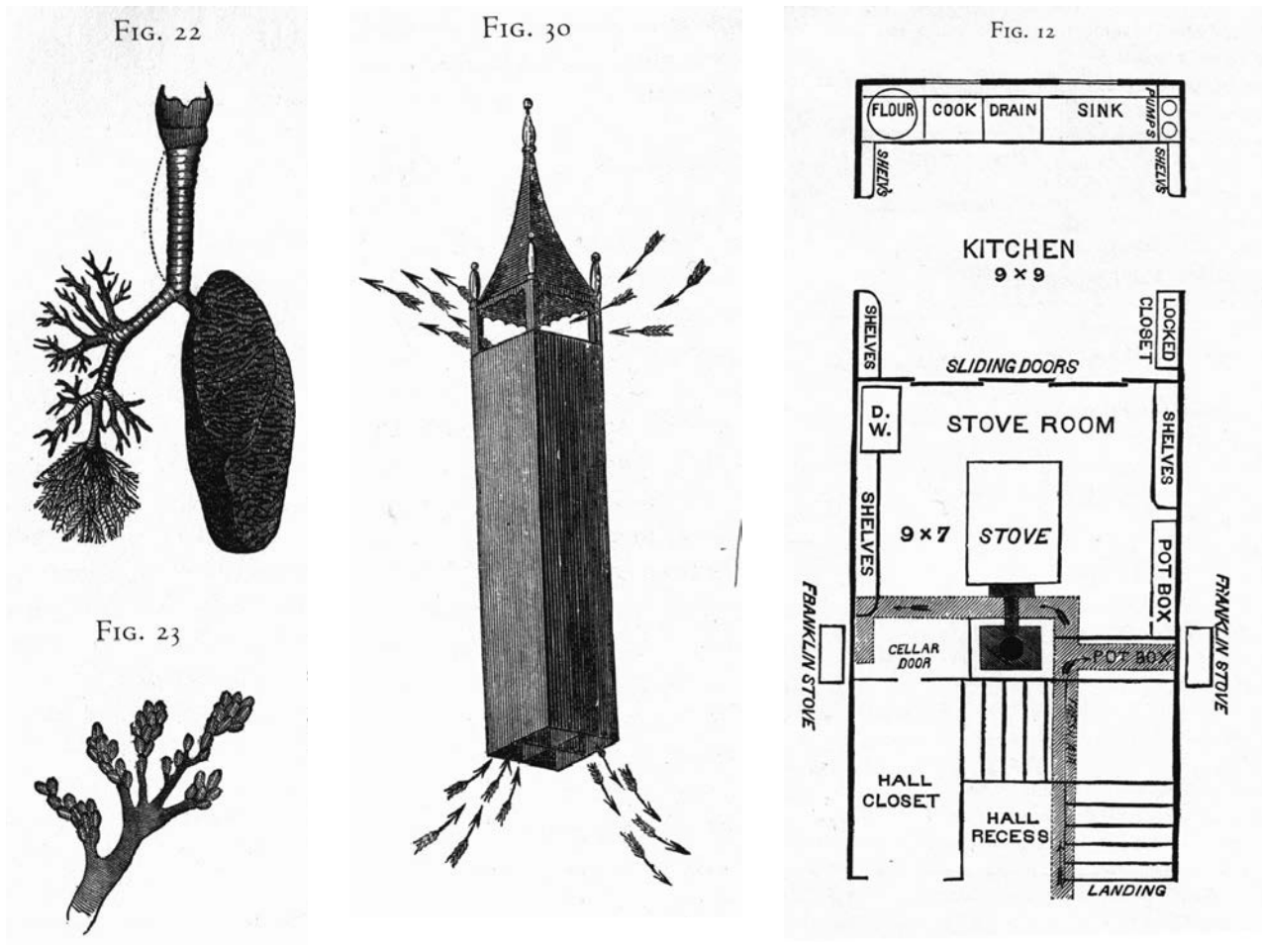
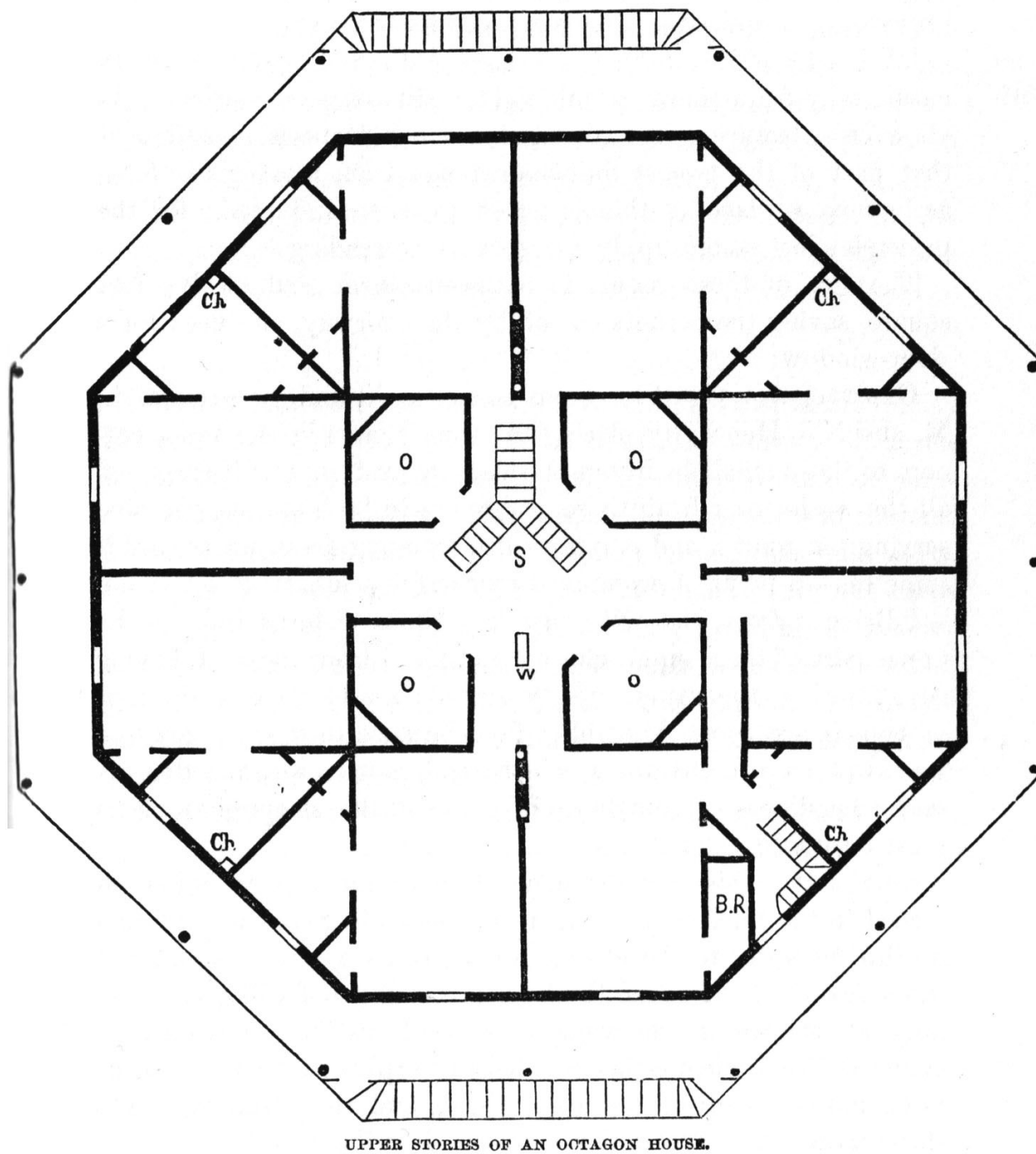


Fig. 3.34 Illustrations from Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869). The images give an indication of how Beecher linked the operations of the lung to the that of the ventilating chimney in a house.

Fig. 26.

Fig. 3.35 Upper stories of a 32-foot octagon house from Fowler, *A Home for All* (1853 ed.)

THE PERFECT FEMALE FORM.

NO. 217. — POWERS'S "GREEK SLAVE."

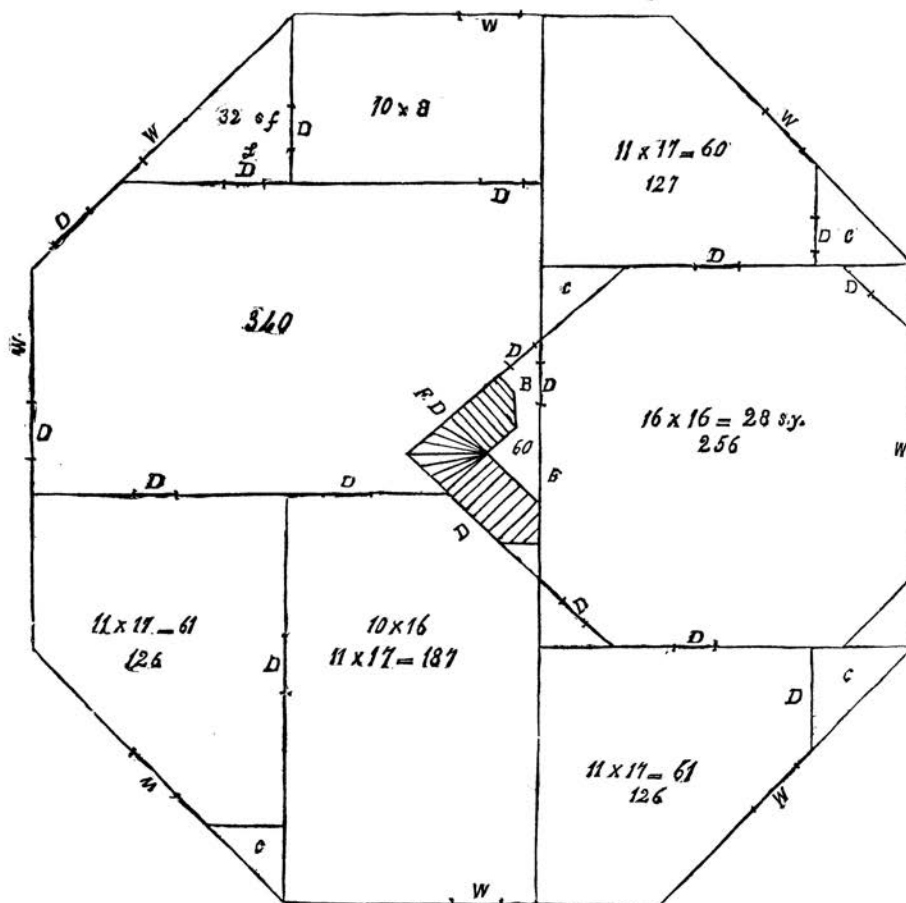
Fig. 3.36 Illustration of Hiram Power's statue "The Greek Slave" from Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 1870. Power's statue was considered to embody the ideal female figure. The accompanying text explained "Woman was created feminine solely to bear children..... Therefore that alone is beautiful in woman which contributes to maternity..."



Fig. 3.37 Parlor scene from Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 1869. Fowler saw the parlor as the scene of a “refined amatory feast” and the house more generally as a site for parents’ sexual training of children.

two or three steps, as our space will allow, we will turn on a broad stair, and go up that central partition, rising high enough to clear the cellar door, and, perhaps, turning again before reaching the top, let us see how this suite of rooms can be divided.

Fig. 15—Third story of the sixteen-foot octagon.



We will start our stairs so as to land at B on a broad stair, and turn to the right into a delightful room rendered octagonal by making a closet in each corner, thus corresponding with

5

Fig. 3.38 Upper stories of a 16-foot octagon, from *A Home for All*. Although the layout appears slightly haphazard, Fowler intended that it could provide two separate bedroom suites, in case a family wanted to take on boarders while still maintaining the privacy of the nuclear family.

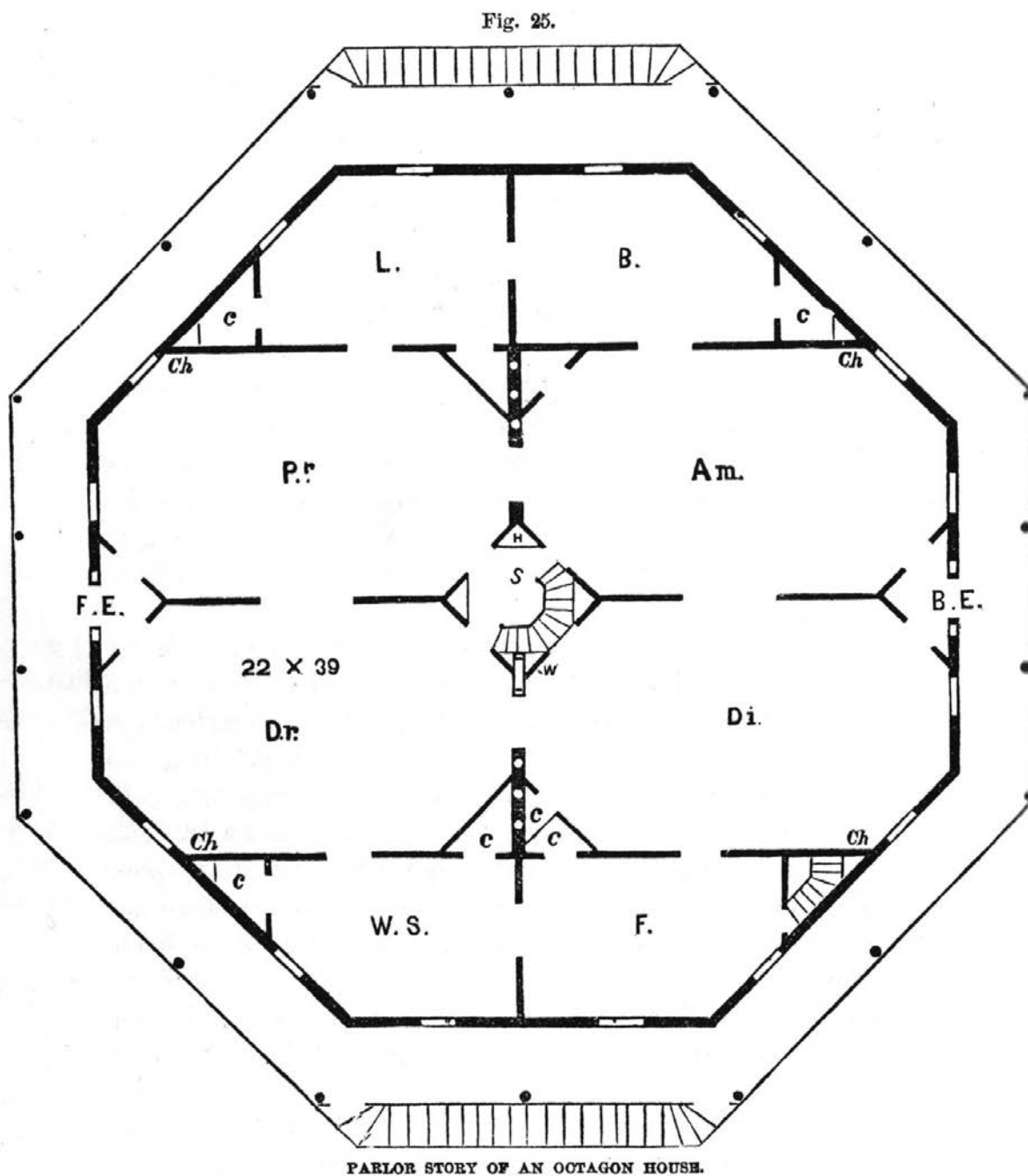


Fig. 3.39 Ground floor plan of the 32-foot octagon house, from *A Home for All* (1853 ed.). Folding doors would allow the parlor, dining room, sitting room, and kitchen to be united into one large space, promoting social gatherings and thereby cultivating humans' natural faculty of "sociality."

4. Sociality without Socialism: The Kansas Vegetarian Octagon Colony

“We are a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform... One man renounces the use of animal food, and another of coin; another of domestic hired service, and another of the State.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1840)

“A crank is a little thing that makes revolutions.”

- motto of *The Crank* magazine (1904)

In spring of 1855, Fowler and Wells began publishing notices of a new enterprise in its reform journals: an octagonal vegetarian colony to be established in Kansas—at the time, the prime battleground in the national debate over the expansion of slavery. The settlement was the brainchild of an English immigrant and journalist named Henry S. Clubb (1827-1922), whose reform convictions encompassed vegetarianism, anti-slavery, shorthand, and land reform. (Fig. 4.1) In the April 1855 issue of *The Water-Cure Journal*, Clubb announced the formation of a joint-stock company to build a permanent home for Vegetarians. Out west, renouncers of animal foods would find rich soils, a healthful climate, and pure water—in short, all the elements necessary to generate “fruits and farinaceous productions.” And they could do so in a novel form of settlement: an octagon city, featuring a central park and eight radiating avenues dividing wedge-shaped farm lots.

By July 1855, an image of the Kansas plan and more details were being circulated in *The American Phrenological Journal*. (Fig. 4.2) And in March of 1856, the first intrepid colonists, including Clubb and his new wife, set out for the western bank of the Neosho

River, just west of Fort Scott. The colony was an almost immediate failure. One member, Miriam Davis Colt, would later recount that upon arriving at the Octagon City, “Not a house [was] to be seen.” The promised mills had not been built. What had been described in brochures as a powerful river, sure to support a thriving light industry, was barely a creek: “The water is so low in summer-time that one can walk over it on the stones,” Colt lamented.¹ Within three months, she headed back east, but before completing the return journey, her husband and young son both died. Most of the other early settlers left just as quickly. By the spring of 1857, as one local historian chronicled, “hardly a trace of the settlement remained,” except that the stream near the former settlement was still known as Vegetarian Creek.²

Not surprisingly, the story of the Kansas Vegetarian Settlement Company has mainly been regarded as a footnote to a footnote—a quixotic, tragi-comic episode in the narrative of Fowler’s octagon, bleeding Kansas, or vegetarianism.³ The enterprise’s assemblage of vegetarianism, land reform, anti-slavery, and unconventional urban planning appears to be an extreme example of nineteenth-century radical faddism, or

¹ Miriam Colt, *Went to Kansas; Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to That Fairy Land, and Its Sad Results; Together with a Sketch of the Life of the Author* (Watertown, NY: L. Ingalls & Co., 1862), 44-45, 60.

² Russell Hickman, “The Vegetarian and Octagon Settlement Companies,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1933): 384.

³ See, for example, the mentions of the project in James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

“fadicalism.”⁴ Yet the intersection of these concerns in one project presents an opportunity to inquire more precisely about the curious convergence of reforms that one finds in so many of the figures examined in this dissertation. The English vegetarian John Wright captured the sentiment of many nineteenth-century reformers when he declared in 1850 that vegetarianism, teetotalism, peace and international arbitration, abolition of capital punishment and slavery were “of the same class of principles.”⁵ The octagon colony was characterized both by amalgamation and by the internal tensions resulting from the confluence of multiple agendas and desires. Clubb hoped to assemble a group of like-minded individuals to promote “freedom”—whether dietary, political, or economic. Yet even before the first settlers set out, ambiguities abounded: Was the colony was intended as simply an instrument of mutual aid of otherwise independent individuals? Or was it envisioned as a tight-knit commune along the lines of the one that he himself had participated in as a teenager outside London? Was it a liberal or a communitarian enterprise? Would it be a rural or an urban community?

This chapter argues that Clubb tried to resolve these myriad ambiguities through the apparent simplicity of the octagon plan itself. The plan was conceived as a diagram of a longed-for harmonious relationship between the individual and the collective. By representing private plots and public spaces, and rural and urban conditions, together in one lucid, cohesive form, the plan of the community seemed to effortlessly reconcile

⁴ The term “fadicalism” was coined by G. Dunn in “A Defeated Transcendentalist,” *Blackwood’s Magazine*, February 1893. I first encountered it in Gregory’s book *Victorians and Vegetarians*.

⁵ Quoted in Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 118.

opposites. Here, individualists would be able to reap the benefits of sociality and maintain relative equality while retaining their separate rights of property *and* perhaps even becoming very rich. Here, a farming village could transition into a centralized city without conflict, simply through the ingenuity of the diagram.

Below, I trace the genealogy of the vegetarian colony in the interrelated English and American reform movements that Clubb participated in during the 1830s to 50s, including vegetarianism, phonography (shorthand), land reform, and anti-slavery. I then return to the Kansas octagon colony, looking closely at its presentation in publicity materials and in periodicals, to unpack how its geometry was conceived to harmonize individual with collective interests, and agrarian with urban visions. Lastly, I draw from firsthand accounts of colony members to consider the conflicting meanings that vegetarianism and land reform—and by association the octagonal plan itself, held in nineteenth-century America.

Henry Clubb

Henry S. Clubb's radical roots were planted in his native England at an early age. Born in 1827 in Colchester, Essex, Clubb was the youngest of nine children in a Swedenborgian family.⁶ He picked up the rudiments of an education by attending evening school. By age

⁶ The main source for Clubb's biography is *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church for the First Century of Its Existence, from 1817 to 1917*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1922). Additional sources include "The Rev. Henry S. Clubb," *The Vegetarian Messenger* (1896); "A Michigander, a Patriot, and Gentleman: H. S. Clubb, President of the American Vegetarian Society," www.kancoll.org/voices_2001/0701gregory.htm. Clubb's extant papers are held at the University of Michigan's Bentley Library.

thirteen, he was a clerk in the local post office. Around this time, he was converted to vegetarianism through the proselytizing of William G. Ward, a commercial traveler and family friend who described “the horrors and cruelties of the slaughter house and the dangers of eating the flesh of animals killed there, under various degrees of suffering and disease.”⁷ As the allusions to the suffering of animals and the dangers of disease attest, Clubb was probably initially motivated to forsake meat-eating by a combination of health and humanitarian concerns—two of the most common rationales for early-nineteenth-century vegetarianism. Julia Twigg has argued that the opposition to meat-eating emerged in this period from the convergence of urbanization and romanticism: as citydwellers grew distant from farm life, concern for the suffering of animals and revulsion to the brutality of rural life increased. Moreover, as food became part of an industrial market economy, concerns about the purity and safety of food also led some to renounce meat.⁸ It is no accident that the first hotbeds of vegetarianism in England were in the industrial North.

At age fifteen, Clubb was recruited to join the Concordium at Ham Common, Richmond, Surrey (about twelve miles outside London), an experimental community and alternative school founded by the mystic and reformer James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-

⁷ *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church*, 69. Various accounts give the year of his conversion to vegetarianism as 1838 or “around 1840.”

⁸ Julia Twigg, “The Vegetarian Movement in England, 1847-1981: A Study in the Structure of Its Ideology” (Ph.D. Dissertation, London School of Economics, 1981). Besides Twigg, the best source on the history of English vegetarianism in the nineteenth century is Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*. On the history of US vegetarianism, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Karen Iacobbo and Michael Iacobbo, *Vegetarian America: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Gerald Carson, *Cornflake Crusade* (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

1842).⁹ (Fig. 4.3) Greaves preached a doctrine of “sacred socialism” that emphasized the development of the “Divine Spirit,” or “love instinct,” dwelling within each person. He believed that personal reform of the inner man should take priority over social reform, and criticized his contemporary Robert Owen for focusing too much on the “outer man.”¹⁰ As an 1841 Prospectus for the Concordium explained, “[P]olitical reforms however rigid, or social reforms however scientific, can never attain to man’s personal renewal.” Thus, the Concordium focused on “fortifying, awakening, and increasing the good in man” by promulgating an ascetic regimen. Rather than act directly to address social ills, the community would “withdraw itself from the external discordance and disagreement of actual society, ...to place itself in more immediate connection with the universe harmonizer.”¹¹ This withdrawal was spiritual as well as physical: the prospectus specified that the community should be located in the country. Yet the Concordium’s leaders also seemed to hold open the possibility that this withdrawal might be a temporary measure anticipating an eventual re-engagement with worldly affairs, describing the community

⁹ Greaves founded the community in 1838 with support from a wealthy patron, Sophia Chichester. On the Concordium, see J. E. M. Latham, *Search for a New Eden: James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-1842), the Sacred Socialist and His Followers* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999); Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 21-30. Greaves was known to Engels. In a letter published in Owen’s *The New Moral World* in 1844, Engels referred to the “Love-Spirit” preached by the “Ham Common folks.”

¹⁰ Latham, *Search for a New Eden*, 7. Latham points out that although Greaves founded the Concordium, he had hardly anything to do with its subsequent daily management. (82)

¹¹ *A Prospectus for the Establishment of a Concordium; or an Industry Harmony College*, (London: Strange, Paternoster Row, 1841), 3, 6.

further on as “a preparatory practical school for the community, the phalanstery, the republic, and the universal commonwealth.”¹²

Members of the community at Ham Common practiced strict vegetarianism and teetotalism. Following the advice of numerous dress and health reformers on the evils of tight-lacing, the women forsook corsets. The men wore a distinct loose attire comprised of a shirt, trousers, and blouse that Clubb later recalled as “similar to the dress worn by Tolstoi.”¹³ (Fig. 4.4) Life at the Concordium followed a strict regimen: Individuals woke at dawn, bathed in cold water, worked for an hour in the garden, and then ate a breakfast of oatmeal, porridge, bread, fruit, and water. After breakfast, they engaged in instruction or schooling. Lunch was followed by two hours for individual education and instruction and two hours of work for the community. After a simple dinner, members dedicated an hour to social communion.¹⁴

Besides the health and humanitarian justifications for vegetarianism, the Concordium emphasized another rationale: the notion that meat eating dulled the mind through direct physiological effects. Twigg has linked this idea to a new norm in

¹² *A Prospectus for the Establishment of a Concordium; or an Industry Harmony College*, (London: Strange, Paternoster Row, 1841), 5. George Jacob Holyoake, responding to the Concordist *Healthian*, responded favorably to the idea that social reform must begin with self-reform: “He may be an enthusiast who expects to reform mankind, but he fails in his first and most important duty who neglects to reform himself.” Quoted in Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 123.

¹³ Austin Feverel, “Personalities: The Concordists of Alcott House,” *Surrey Comet*, March 31, 1906.

¹⁴ The Concordium’s published schedule emphasized frequent alternations of activity—every two hours or so. This may have been inspired by Fourier’s notion of work as a passionate activity, facilitated by frequent changes. Greaves was interested in Fourierism, though believed that it, like Owenism, was too focused on outward reform. (Latham, *Search for a New Eden*, 117.) Clubb gave a slightly different account of the schedule in Feverel, “Personalities: The Concordists of Alcott House.”

nineteenth-century genteel culture and urban industrial society that valued alertness rather than strength.¹⁵ Concordium members saw vegetarianism as enabling them to access their higher spiritual natures, rather than remaining mired in lower, animal existence. The community's prospectus explained that the vegetarian meal, "being simple, leaves the intellect clear, and the energies renewed for the various mental and physical employments which will follow."¹⁶ Clubb echoed these views many years later in a 1903 pamphlet entitled *Thirty-Nine Reasons Why I am a Vegetarian*. First and foremost, he cited the spiritual benefits of abstaining from flesh: "I believe that human life is destined to become a divine life. That man is created for a higher condition than that of a carnivorous or an omnivorous animal." Man had the choice—he could either "sink himself to a level with the lower animals or by cultivating intelligently his higher faculties...enjoy the rapture of the spiritual and celestial life."¹⁷ Accessing this higher plane required a vigilant modulation of the appetite against "overstimulation." Clubb would later recall that the simplicity and "unstimulating character" of the food at the Concordium "prevented any tendency to excess in quantity." For this reason, besides meat, tea, coffee, and cocoa were avoided.

¹⁵ Twigg, "Vegetarian Movement."

¹⁶ *Prospectus*, 7.

¹⁷ Clubb further cited the physiological / health rationale: flesh contained "a considerable quantity of decaying material forming uric acid and ptomaine poisons that cannot be taken as food without rendering the person so using it liable to the most distressing diseases." He also cited the humanitarian argument: animals previous to being killed were "subject to the most cruel and heartless treatment" and "excruciating pain." Consumption of flesh, like use of tobacco and alcohol tended to "deaden the moral and intellectual faculties." Henry S. Clubb, *Thirty-Nine Reasons Why I Am a Vegetarian* (Philadelphia: The Vegetarian Society of America, 1903), n.p.

Although the philosophy of the Concordium stressed man's inner, spiritual development, it also held that such development was best not carried out in isolation. "Singly, the aspiring mind finds itself weak and inefficient.... In the absence of true constitutional relationship with the universe-being-law we are impelled to seek the companionship and co-operation of our fellow men." The Concordium was to be an "associated residence of human beings in concert." In "social union," the Prospectus explained, "an accelerated progress is obtained."¹⁸ The idea was to withdraw from the world, but in community. Clubb would bring this belief in the voluntary association as a vehicle of reform to the United States.

Like the Fowlers' Phrenological Depot in New York, the Concordium was a something of a gathering point for international reformers and utopians in the 1840s. Robert Owen visited on three occasions, and several of the Concordium's members were former Owenites.¹⁹ The German-American utopian John A. Etzler stayed at Ham Common with his wife and an associate, C. F. Stollmeyer, for a period in 1843-44, around the same time that Clubb was in residence there.²⁰ Etzler, was a technological utopian who invented machines for applying wind and ocean power to increase agricultural outputs at vast scales and wrote several books, including *The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery* (1833). Etzler

¹⁸ *Prospectus*.

¹⁹ On the links between Owenites and the Concordium, see Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 26-28.

²⁰ Latham, *Search for a New Eden*, 163. On Etzler, see Joel Nydahl, "Introduction," in *The Collected Works of John Adolphus Etzler, 1833-1844* (Delmar, NY: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977).

delivered a series of lectures at the Concordium, and the community published two books by him in 1844, including one outlining his scheme for an emigration colony in Venezuela.²¹ Another important visitor was the American Bronson Alcott, a vegetarian and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson known primarily at the time for his work as an educational reformer with the Temple School in Boston.²² Greaves, who had worked with the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, was an admirer of the American Transcendentalists, and invited Alcott to visit the Concordium. After his visit in 1842, the community was renamed “Alcott House.” Alcott in turn brought two key Concordium members back with him to Massachusetts to establish his own short-lived vegetarian colony, Fruitlands, on the model of the Concordium. By the time Clubb arrived at the Concordium, Greaves had already died and Alcott had left. Clubb spent about a year at Ham Common, during which he taught shorthand. He also picked up some knowledge of printing from Vincent Torras, a Spanish printer, and assisted with the publication of the community’s periodical, *The New Age and the Concordium Gazette*.

After leaving the Concordium, Clubb became a shorthand teacher and reporter and started a society dedicated to phonography, a form of shorthand introduced by Isaac Pitman in 1837.²³ This was not as random a career choice as it might first appear. As we

²¹ J. A. Etzler, *Emigration to the Tropical World, for the Melioration of All Classes of People of All Nations* (Surrey, UK: Concordium, 1844); *Two Visions* (Surrey, UK: The Concordium, 1844).

²² Elizabeth Peabody helped publicize Alcott’s work in two books, *Records of a School* and *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. Alcott is also known today for being the father of the novelist Louisa May Alcott.

²³ It was as an enthusiastic devotee of Isaac Pitman’s shorthand system that Clubb first took to public speaking as still a teenager. “The chief pursuit in which Mr. Clubb delighted was reporting in shorthand.” *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church*, 72.

glimpsed already with Lewis Masquerier (and as we shall see with Josiah Warren in the next chapter), spelling and writing reform preoccupied many nineteenth-century radicals, in part because literacy and printing were seen as the conduits for transmission of new ideas and knowledge, and hence social transformation. Pitman was a Swedenborgian, a vegetarian, and a friend of Greaves who had visited Alcott House on a number of occasions.²⁴ Like many other spelling and writing reformers, including Noah Webster in America, Pitman saw English as an unnatural language hobbled by inconsistencies and archaisms. Pitman's innovation was to base his shorthand system on the sounds of words; hence he called it "phonography"—literally, the writing of sound. He imagined it to be a more natural, systematic, way of transcribing speech (and meaning) into text (or image).²⁵

Pitman repeatedly referred to his stenography as "nature's alphabet."²⁶ Although he acknowledged that it drew on previous shorthand conventions, he reasoned that he had rationalized the system by making image and sound, form and content, correspond more closely. Sounds similar to each other, such as "p" and "b" were represented by similar strokes, for example. "In Phonography, it may almost be said that the *very sound of every word is made* VISIBLE; whereas, in deciphering any other system of short hand, the

²⁴ Latham, *Search for a New Eden*, 182.

²⁵ Lisa Gitelman has observed that shorthand advocates saw their system as "practical, progressive, standard, scientific, universal, mathematical." They wanted to overcome the "artificiality" of signs and to achieve "natural" or "philosophical" ones. Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 34.

²⁶ Isaac Pitman, *Stenographic Sound-Hand* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1837), 9. And *A Manual of Phonography; or, Writing by Sound: A Natural Method of Writing by Signs That Represent the Sounds of Language, and Adapted to the English Language as a Complete System of Phonetic Shorthand* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1845), 9.

context, the memory, the judgement [*sic*], all must be called in to assist the eye.”²⁷ This statement seems incredible to us today, since it seems to suggest that the meaning of shorthand text is almost self-evident—that is, free from convention. It illustrates Pitman’s belief, shared by many followers, that phonography represented a “natural” rather than an “artificial” language, and that the quality of naturalness was somehow linked to an attribute of visibility, in particular, the way that signs were functionally related to meaning. (Fig. 4.5)

In his 1837 tract, Pitman represented his system using a diagram of a circle that incorporated all of his stenographic symbols (Fig. 4.6 and 7) The accompanying text explained: “With reverence be it spoken, that the characters *appear* to be adapted to the sounds, as though the circle, mathematically dissected, were contrived by the Great, the Wise, and the Benevolent author of Nature to suit the English language; a dot or a stroke to a sound.”²⁸ What Pitman’s statement seems to suggest is that his invention, by following a functionalist imperative of making signs correspond to sounds, mirrored the operations of Nature. The corollaries were that Nature operates by such a functionalist logic, and that his invention put him on proximate footing with God or Nature. Yet his circle diagram here was more symbolic than functional, since the system of signs was in no way derived from it, and it did not appear in Pitman’s later manuals. The circle diagram was an emblem of naturalness, understood as synonymous with functionalism.

²⁷ *A Manual of Phonography*, 8. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ *Stenographic Sound-Hand*, 9. Emphasis in original.

Pitman projected that his shorthand system would yield numerous practical benefits, such as making literacy easier to acquire and speeding the jobs of nineteenth-century clerks, scribes, and court reporters contending with the explosion of paperwork brought on by the market economy.²⁹ Books could be printed more cheaply and compactly—for example, he envisioned a Bible the size of a watch. Shorthand would also be a boon to writers and inventors, by removing the alienation of thought from expression: “Every composer finds that frequently his thoughts outstrip his pen, and many embryo ideas perish as soon as they are conceived, there being no means for their delivery according to our present circuitous mode of writing. Here Short-hand steps in, and adds a sevenfold celerity to writing, enabling it to keep pace with invention.”³⁰ Shorthand would also help fuel reform. Pitman imagined the man who, on top of his “daily avocation, employs an hour a day in composing books for the instruction and benefit of mankind.” Using shorthand, such a person could accomplish in his life the work of 300 years. Indeed, Pitman saw the restoration of a more natural form of language as the first step in a glorious new age:

[A]s the world is now beginning to experience a *wondrous* change, we have the assurance that a bright period is opening up upon us; order will be restored; and according to the sure declaration of HIM who maketh “all things new,” heaven will yet descend upon earth, and “wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of the times.”³¹

²⁹ On the rise of the clerking class, see Michael Zakim, “The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26(2006).

³⁰ Pitman, *Stenographic Sound-Hand*, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Even as he enthusiastically pursued shorthand, Clubb also continued to write about vegetarianism for movement journals like *The Truth Tester* and *Vegetarian Advocate*. His articles eventually drew the attention of James Simpson, the President of the Vegetarian Society, who hired Clubb as his secretary and as editor of the Society's journal, *The Vegetarian Messenger*, which was launched in 1847. Clubb's association with Simpson and the Vegetarian Society put him at the very heart of the early English vegetarian movement, which was focused around Manchester. Although early vegetarian doctrine was often associated with physical Puritanism and self-denial, the Vegetarian Society prized the trappings and pleasures of sociality. The Society and its local branches frequently held meetings and elaborate, jovial dinners. One event attended by Clubb and held in Manchester in 1849 was described in the *Vegetarian Advocate* as a "festival of a very brilliant character." A detailed report of the speeches, toasts, and cries of "hear, hear" was published, alongside a diagram showing the ceremonial arrangement of seats, and the placement of foods on the banquet table. The dinner included moulded barley, beet-root, savoury and mushroom pies, moulded sago, and assorted custards. James Simpson gave the first toast, calling on guests to fill their glasses "with a beverage which never does harm."³² (Figs. 4.8 and 4.9)

Simpson was a member of a Swedenborgian Christian sect known as the Bible Christians or Cowherdites, named after founder William Cowherd. The Cowherdites

³² On the practices of dining and toasting in nineteenth-century English radical reform culture, see James Epstein, "Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity," *Albion* 20, no. 2.

practiced temperance and vegetarianism, and were a key force in establishing the first vegetarian societies in both England and the United States. Vegetarianism as preached by the Bible Christians was a working- and middle-class movement. Twigg has linked the Cowherdites to the “proletarian Enlightenment” because they promoted independent, free thinking as a tool to combat obfuscation, priestcraft, and traditional claims to privilege and power.³³ Clubb converted to Bible Christianity, and in the 1870s would become minister of the church’s congregation in Philadelphia. During the late 1840s Clubb gave local lectures on vegetarianism, and along with a brother and sister, helped found a colony near Colchester dedicated to vegetarianism, shorthand, and “mutual improvement,” in 1845.³⁴ Though little is known about this short-lived enterprise, it does evidence Clubb’s belief in the founding of communities or enclaves as a reform tactic.

In the late 40s, Clubb also became involved with another radical cause: Chartist land reform. In 1848 he was the local secretary for both the Vegetarian Society and the National Land Company, an organization founded by Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor to resettle urban workers onto small farms.³⁵ Chartism had begun in 1838 as a working-class movement to attain universal suffrage and more democratic political representation.³⁶

³³ Twigg, “Vegetarian Movement.”

³⁴ Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 44. Henry’s sister Sarah published a children’s vegetarian book.

³⁵ See the January 29, 1848; April 1, 1848; and April 8, 1848 issues of the Chartist newspaper *Northern Star and National Trades’ Journal*. In the January 29, 1848, issue, those interested in land reform are directed to Mr. H. S. Clubb at his Phonographic Class Rooms, 12, St. John-street, in Colchester.

³⁶ On Chartism, see Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

The “Charter” contained six political demands: universal suffrage, the secret ballot, abolition of property qualification for members of Parliament, the payment of members of Parliament, annual parliamentary elections, and equal electoral districts.³⁷ The Chartists were enormously successful at generating mass support—an 1842 petition included over three million signatures, and public rallies drew tens of thousands of supporters. (Fig. 4.10) But after five years, the insurrection failed to achieve any of its political aims in the face of entrenched opposition. In 1843 O’Connor therefore turned to another strategy: land reform—a move that tracks the arc of George Henry Evans’s career as well, as described in Chapter 2.³⁸ O’Connor’s idea was to follow the “friendly society” model, pooling contributions from workers, buying land, subdividing it, and then renting allotments to individual shareholders.³⁹ He formed the Chartist Co-Operative Land Company in 1845, and by the following year established the first Chartist estate at Herringsgate—soon renamed O’Connorville.⁴⁰ (Figs. 4.11 and 4.12) The English land reformers used appeals similar to that of their contemporary American counterparts:

³⁷ In the April 8, 1848 issue of the Chartist newspaper *The Northern Star*, Clubb wrote a message “To the people of Essex and Suffolk” calling for support for the six principles of Chartism—universal suffrage, secret ballot, abolition of property qualification for members of Parliament, the payment of members of Parliament, annual parliamentary elections, and equal electoral districts., *Northern Star and National Trades’ Journal*, April 8, 1848, 6.

³⁸ After a period of labor radicalism in the 1830s, Evans too turned to land reform in the early 40s. For an excellent analysis comparing English and American land reform, see Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

³⁹ Friendly societies had originated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as organizations of people who joined resources for mutual benefit and aid—for example, providing a form of insurance.

⁴⁰ Between 1844 and 1848, the National Land Company purchased five estates. Settlers were selected by lottery. In 1848, a committee of Parliament ordered the Company to be shut down. Several Chartist villages still exist today.

Allotments would enable workers to attain independence—both political, economic, and in terms of control over one’s time and resources. (Though in contrast to the American movement’s advocacy of 160-acre plots, the Chartists believed that workingmen would be able to support themselves and their families on as little as two acres through intensive cultivation—a reflection of the very different conditions of land and population on either side of the Atlantic.⁴¹) Like the National Reformers in the U.S., Chartist land reformers claimed rural land would be a safety valve to siphon off excess workers from cities, enabling wages to rise.⁴²

As Jamie Bronstein and others have pointed out, Chartist land reform ideology had roots both in radical agrarian ideas (such as those of Thomas Spence) and the conservative “home colonization” movement. Proponents of the latter saw the provision of allotments to the poor as a way to counteract emigration to the colonies and to stanch the flow of laborers to the cities, as well as help retain power with the landed gentry. The movement was also paternalistic: Leaders of home colonization organizations like the Labourer’s Friend Society argued that granting workingmen small allotments on which to tend gardens in their leisure time would inculcate workers in values like thrift and

⁴¹ O’Connor advocated cultivate by spade rather than plow. Spade husbandry, Bronstein observes “came to be a symbol of contented poverty, and of hand labor against the encroachments of mechanical improvement.” Bronstein, *Land Reform*, 48.

⁴² Bronstein, *Land Reform*, 11-12.

temperance, and make them more governable.⁴³ Bronstein observes that in contrast to America, in Britain “land for the laborers could be a Tory as well as a radical demand.”⁴⁴

These antinomies in the politics of allotments also plagued vegetarian-Chartist encounters.⁴⁵ Vegetarians’ concern with diet as an arena of self-discipline and path to enhanced health and productivity could easily merge into the kind of paternalistic discourse of moral uplift articulated by the Labourer’s Friend Society. In 1850-51, Clubb was involved in an allotment scheme founded by James Simpson in which workers were given small gardens to cultivate.⁴⁶ The Fox Hill Bank Temperance Garden Allotment experiment began in April 1850 with 20 small plots, about 1/16th of an acre each. The size of the gardens demonstrates that they were intended to occupy workers’ time in the evenings and weekends, rather than providing a livelihood or any measure of real economic independence. Participants, who were required to abstain from alcohol, rented their lots for a rate of 10 shillings 6 pence per year. Rents went into a common fund for the purchase of seeds and tools, and insurance against crop failure. Crops were specified

⁴³ Ibid., 43-47.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵As James Gregory has pointed out, besides Clubb, there were several other individuals who migrated between both movements. Others listed by Gregory include Charles Neesom and Robert Gammage. Gregory, *Victorians and Vegetarians*, 28.

⁴⁶ Details about the allotment project were serialized in a supplement to *The Vegetarian Messenger* beginning in the January 1851 issue of *The Vegetarian Messenger* entitled “The Cultivation of Land.” In the March 1851 supplement, Henry Clubb was reported as delivering an address on “the advantages of the allotment system to the working classes in their various positions in life, and giving various practical suggestions in relation to the management of small gardens.” (p. 9)

and included potatoes, parsnips, peas, beans, onions, broccoli, and cabbage.⁴⁷ As *The Vegetarian Messenger* explained, the idea was to provide useful pursuit to working men “whose labour tends to exhaust the physical or mental powers” so that they “commonly yield to sensual indulgence.” The articles argued that the cultivation of gardens would lead to the “formation of temperate and industrious habits.”⁴⁸ The aesthetic dimension of gardening would contribute to these social benefits: Working men were encouraged to grow flowers in order to cultivate their taste and “mental sensibilities.”⁴⁹

Clubb Goes to America, and Kansas

By the time Clubb emigrated from England to the United States in 1853, he was 26 and already a veteran of several radical, reform, and utopian movements. The existence of a trans-Atlantic reform network allowed him to quickly find a community of sympathetic minds in Philadelphia and later New York City.⁵⁰ One of his first stops was at the Fourth Annual Meeting and Festival of the American Vegetarian Society at the Bible-Christian Church in Philadelphia—the American outpost of the Cowherdites.⁵¹ Clubb quickly got

⁴⁷ *The Vegetarian Messenger*, March, May, and June 1851.

⁴⁸ “The Cultivation of Land,” *The Vegetarian Messenger*, January 1851, supplement 2-4.

⁴⁹ *The Vegetarian Messenger* 2, no. 21, June 1851, supplement 22-23.

⁵⁰ Thee British and American Vegetarian Societies had many contacts. British vegetarian journals frequently mentioned or featured articles by Sylvester Graham, Bronson Alcott, and William Alcott. William Horsell, the publisher of the *Vegetarian Advocate* (for whom Clubb was a contributor) was the British agent for Fowler and Wells. For links between the US and British land reform movements, see Bronstein, *Land Reform*, 5.

⁵¹ *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church*, 75.

work as a journalist for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* (Greeley was one of the major advocates of land reform in the United States). Clubb also went to work as a writer and editor for Fowlers and Wells, authoring two books on the temperance movement and editing a volume by the dietary and health reformer Sylvester Graham, as well as the firm's *Vegetarian Almanac of 1855*.⁵² (Fig. 4.13)

Clubb also became caught up in the most heated political debate of the day: the extension of slavery into the territories.⁵³ The English vegetarian movement had counted anti-slavery as an affiliated reform (along with temperance, peace, sanitary reform, opposition to fox-hunting, abolition of capital punishment, and a host of others). Vegetarians on both sides of the Atlantic associated meat-eating with violence, greed, and "slavery" of the soul to the lower, physical nature.⁵⁴ Clubb probably arrived in the US already a staunch abolitionist. While working as a Congressional reporter for the Democratic *Washington Union*, he watched the debates over the Kansas-Nebraska Act with active interest.⁵⁵ In 1854, these debates culminated in Franklin Pierce's signing of the

⁵² Henry S. Clubb, *The Maine Liquor Law: Its Origin, History, and Results, Including a Life of Hon. Neal Dow* (New York: Pub. for the Maine law statistical society, by Fowler and Wells, 1856); Sylvester Graham, *The Philosophy of Sacred History Considered in Relation to Human Aliment and the Wines of Scripture*, ed. Henry S. Clubb (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1855); Henry S. Clubb, *Results of Prohibition in Connecticut, Being Special Returns Received from Every County as to the Effects of the Maine Liquor Law, Containing Contributions from the Governor and Upward of Fifty Clergymen, Judges, Editors, and Private Citizens* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1855).

⁵³ On the history of disputes over Kansas, see Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

⁵⁴ Iacobbo and Iacobbo, *Vegetarian America*, 61-64.

⁵⁵ Clubb was apparently fired from the pro-slavery *Union* because of his abolitionist sympathies. *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church*, 76.

Kansas and Nebraska Act in 1854, negating the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in new states north of the 36°30', except in Missouri. The Kansas and Nebraska Act instead divided Nebraska (which should have been free territory under the old law) into two territories and allowed settlers in those areas to vote on whether to allow slavery within their borders. Seen as a concession to slave states, the 1854 Act provoked massive outrage among anti-slavery advocates, eventually leading to the formation of a new political party, the Republicans.⁵⁶ The debate over “free soil” was *the* inflammatory issue that brought the nation to the brink of war.⁵⁷

Although speculators were already combing over Kansas before the 1854 law, the Act set off a race between pro- and anti-slavery groups to populate the new territories. Pro-slavery settlers came mostly from neighboring Missouri and were popularly referred to as “border ruffians” by their opponents. (Figs. 4.14-4.16) Pro-slavery forces founded the cities of Leavenworth and Atchison. Not to be outmaneuvered, anti-slavery groups organized several emigration companies to assist northern migrants. Groups like the New England Emigrant Aid Company, the Connecticut Kansas Colony (also known as the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony), the Union Emigrant Aid Company, and the Worcester County Kansas League were instrumental in founding cities like Lawrence, Osawatamie,

⁵⁶ One of the key sites for the formation of the Republican party was Ripon, Wisconsin—perhaps not coincidentally, the former site of the Wisconsin Phalanx and home to an octagon school and two octagon houses.

⁵⁷ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

and Topeka.⁵⁸ (Fig. 4.17) This was war by city-making: The self-proclaimed aim of the New England Emigrant Aid Company was “to dot Kansas with New England settlements” so that “no matter how heterogeneous the great living mass which flows into the Territory may be, it will all eventually be moulded into a symmetrical form.”⁵⁹

Clubb’s Octagon City plan must also be placed in the context of another phenomenon enveloping Kansas at the time: an extraordinary speculative fever over new towns. As John Reps has pointed out, although the aim of anti-slavery emigrant groups was ostensibly political and cultural, the promise of a handsome profit was probably a more powerful influence on settlers on both sides of the slavery debate.⁶⁰ In the three years after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, hundreds of towns were founded, or at least advertised. The writer and Union spy Albert D. Richardson visited the state in 1857, just before a bank panic in the northeast burst the bubble, and recalled the atmosphere:

When Themistocles at a feast was asked to play upon a musical instrument, he replied: ‘I cannot fiddle; but I know how to make a small town a great city.’ Every Kansan thought himself a Themistocles. Nearly all transactions were cash, and money was plentiful, though commanding from three to five per cent a month. Shares often doubled in price in two or three weeks. Servant girls speculated in town lots. From enormous buff envelopes men would take scores of certificates elegantly printed in colors, representing property in various towns, and propose to

⁵⁸ Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas; a Cyclopaedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc* (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 586-87. Reps pointed out that the anti-slavery communities were at a disadvantage—they came from Northeast, were not familiar with frontier life, and had to bring supplies from far away or pay inflated prices for supplies in Kansas City. John William Reps, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 430.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Edgar Langsdorf, “S. C. Pomeroy and the New England Emigrant Aid Company, 1854-1858,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1938): 233.

⁶⁰ Reps, *Cities of the American West*, 436.

sell thousands of dollars worth, certain to quadruple in value within a few months! If you declined to purchase, they might ask to borrow six shillings to pay their washerwoman, or twelve dollars for a week's board. Three days later, meeting you again, they would cancel the debt from pockets burdened with twenty-dollar gold pieces, and offer you five hundred or a thousand dollars for a few days, if it would be the slightest accommodation.⁶¹

So excited was the pace of city founding that, according to Richardson, some jokingly “proposed an act of congress reserving some land for farming purposes before the whole Territory should be divided into city lots.”⁶² Henry Clubb could be counted among these Themistocles of the Kansas frontier. And it was amidst these two fevers—anti-slavery and speculative urbanization—that he began organizing his octagonal settlement company in 1855.⁶³

⁶¹ Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi from the Great River to the Great Ocean: Life and Adventure on the Prairies, Mountains, and Pacific Coast* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1867), 58. Richardson also gave the following account of how prototypical towns were founded in Kansas during 1857: “In founding a city, a few speculators become corporated, by special act of the legislature, as a town company. Then, if the land is already open for preemption, they survey and stake out three hundred and twenty acres—the quantity which Government allows set apart for a town-site—at one dollar and a quarter per acre. But the large ideas of the West will ever be satisfied with such a pent-up Utica. So they engage settlers each to present one of the adjacent quarter-sections... Thus the company secures from five hundred to a thousand acres, cutting it into building lots usually twenty-five by one hundred and twenty-five feet. Ordinarily ten lots are embodied in a ‘share.’” (30)

⁶² Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 59. Richardson's quote reminds us of John Reps's argument, contra Frederick Jackson Turner, that the settlement of the west was as much an urban as a rural phenomena. Reps observes that Turner and those influenced by him, such as Ray Allen Billington, emphasized the agricultural aspect of western settlement, portraying cities as emerging organically towards the end of settlement. Instead, Reps argues that townsite speculation and planned communities were on the “vanguard of settlement” and that “urban residents, not farmers and ranchers, dominated Western culture.” John William Reps, *The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West before 1890* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 2-3.

⁶³ Clubb was interested in Kansas at least since 1854, and was apparently working on editing a *Kansas Emigration Almanac & Guide* to be published by Fowlers & Wells in 1855. Henry Clubb to Edward E. Hale, September 22, 1854. The New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers, Kansas Historical Society. Appended to the letter is a prospectus for the forthcoming Kansas Emigration Almanac. A similar prospectus appeared in the *Vegetarian Almanac for 1855* that Clubb edited and which was published by Fowlers and Wells. It's not clear if this was ever published—I have not been able to find a copy.

The Octagon Settlement Company

The first notice of the Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Company was published in *The Illustrated Vegetarian Almanac for 1855*, a volume edited by Clubb and published by Fowlers and Wells. The goal of the company seemed clear enough. Its founders wanted to:

secure at least ONE TRACT OF LAND on this fair earth free from the stain of habitual bloodshed; where they can adopt the most complete physiological principles, uninterrupted by the established customs of society; where they can enjoy the beauties and bounties of Nature without violating her laws; where the birds shall fill the air with melody without fear or trembling, because protected from the cruelty of man...⁶⁴

In this passage we see evidence of what the historian Arthur Bestor called the “patent office model” that characterized many early-nineteenth-century American communitarian movements. In the first half of the century, hundreds of such communal experiments were founded, each one intended not simply to be a blueprint of the future but an “actual, complete, functioning unit of the new social order” that would be infinitely replicable.⁶⁵ As Carl Guarneri has observed of the American Fourierist phalanxes of the 1840s, the appeal of this model of reform was that it could be an alternative to both violent revolution and slower political transformation: a successful community did not have to confront the existing order directly, but through a process of incubation and replication,

⁶⁴ *The Illustrated Vegetarian Almanac for 1855*, ed. Henry S. Clubb (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1855), 24.

⁶⁵ Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., “Patent-Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships between Social Reform and Westward Expansion,” *The American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1953).

could simply replace it.⁶⁶ Hence the emphasis by Clubb and his fellow vegetarians on establishing “ONE TRACT OF LAND” free from “bloodshed” and unhindered by established social customs. The founding of just one such model could produce a seed to be propagated. And like a patent-office model, the replicability of the experiment depended on its tangibility as a form, its representability as a clear diagram.

In early notices of the enterprise, Clubb was careful to tamp down expectations. In the April 1855 issue of *The Water-Cure Journal*, he warned that “care and caution is [*sic*] necessarily taken to avoid raising the expectations of those desiring to embark in such an enterprise, in order to prevent disappointment.”⁶⁷ Within three months however, such notes of circumspection had disappeared. An article in the July issue of *The Water-Cure Journal* traced the lineage of the Kansas vegetarian colony back to the Garden of Eden—the first recorded instance “of a spot on the earth’s surface being consecrated to the Vegetarian principle.”⁶⁸ Other precedents cited included Pythagoras’s Magna Grecia, the Epicureans, Brahmins, Cowherd’s Bible-Christian Church, and, of course, Greaves’s Concordium.

From the beginning, the Company’s promotional materials repeatedly trumpeted the benefits of community and proximity. Even before the first official meeting of the

⁶⁶ Carl Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 133.

⁶⁷ Henry S. Clubb, “Vegetarians for Kansas,” *The Water-Cure Journal*, April 1855.

⁶⁸ Drawing an oblique connection between meat-eating and the Fall, the article added: “The departure from the simple and pure life of Eden, has been accompanied with disease of every kind, and misery and death to body and mind.” “Vegetarian Company,” *ibid.*, July, 10.

company, Clubb pointed out that one object of the Company had already been met—namely, to overcome the isolation of vegetarians interested in migrating to the west. He sought to gather together those who “would perhaps settle at remote distances from each other, and feeling themselves solitary and alone in their Vegetarian practice, might sink into flesh-eating habits.”⁶⁹ For a reform movement that was based on personal practice or what we might today call “alternative lifestyles,” closeness to likeminded believers was crucial, both for emotional and practical support. An 1856 prospectus for the Octagon Settlement Company put the importance of sociality in even broader terms: “In isolation men become indifferent to the refinements of civilized society, and sometimes sink into barbarism; but living in proximity in this way, will cause emulation to excel in the arts of domestic and social life, and in the elevating influences of mental and moral cultivation.”⁷⁰

As the plan matured, the company continued to stress the benefits of sociality over isolation, eventually linking this desideratum with the physical features of Clubb’s octagonal urban plan. Images and details for the eight-sided scheme were first published in the July 1855 issue of the *American Phrenological Journal*. (Fig. 4.2) The accompanying article made clear that the main rationale for the plan was to bring the benefits of dense, urban settlement to western settlers, thereby addressing one of the most common complaints of pioneer life—social isolation. As the Octagon Company’s prospectus pointed out, “On the ordinary plan of settlement, on square farms, settlers become

⁶⁹ “Vegetarians for Kansas,” *ibid.*, April, 87.

⁷⁰ “The Octagon Settlement Company, Kansas, Containing Full Information for Inquirers,” (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1856).

isolated, and sometimes their nearest neighbors live at a distance of some twenty or thirty miles, rendering border life unfavorable to cultivation and refinement.” Under these conditions, “settlers can afford but little assistance and protection to each other; while the advantages of social intercourse, education, cooperation, and mutual safety can be enjoyed only under difficulties.⁷¹ In citing the importance of density and sociality, the Octagon Company was rather explicitly targeting city-dwellers rather than farmers as potential members (though it apparently did attract some of the latter). The article in the *Phrenological Journal* concluded: “No plan has yet been devised which appears so well calculated to inspire the dwellers in cities with a desire for the pursuits of agriculture, horticulture and gardening, and to make them compatible with refinement, and education, and social intercourse, as the ‘Octagon Plan of Settlement.’”⁷²

In fact, although it included provisions for sixteen 102-acre farms, the Octagon plan was really a thinly disguised city. The article in the *Phrenological Journal* called it the “ground work” for a town and explained how the settlement could be adapted in four stages from a “village settlement” to a “county settlement” to an “octagon town” and eventually an “octagon city,” through subdividing the farm lots. The article included illustrations of the settlement in the first and third of these phases. In the later Prospectus, these drawings were cleverly combined into one diagram demonstrating all four stages of development. (Fig. 4.18) Although Clubb’s Kansas plan bore some formal similarity to

⁷¹ “The Octagon Style of Settlement,” *American Phrenological Journal*, July 1855, 17.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Masquerier's republican village plan for the land reformers, the vegetarian's anticipation of rapid future urbanization of the west was a key difference between the two schemes.

Masquerier had envisioned his villages punctuating a primarily agrarian landscape; in his later thinking, he became so disenchanted with cities that he abolished these villages altogether. In contrast, Clubb's scheme betrayed no such ambivalence about cities: the octagon plan was a vehicle for rapid urbanization.

The geometry of the octagon plan was heralded as a key device enabling this production of an urban sociality, even in its earliest, most rural stage of development. For example, the farm plots were to be arrayed radially around a central park, rather than simply conforming to the typical land ordinance grid.⁷³ By siting each house at the narrower, central end of the lot, families could be within walking distance (an eighth of a mile) of their nearest neighbors. Each home would also be within a quarter mile of an octagonal central public building, intended to house a market, school, and meeting-house or church. This central building was advertised in an 1856 prospectus as providing a crucial space of community gathering. The schoolhouse would provide educational advantages to children and would have a "peculiarly healthy" location amidst a large park, with plenty of playground space and "pure air around the building."⁷⁴ The central building was conceived as a space for frequent assemblies, featuring discussions of

⁷³ William Penn's plan for Philadelphia included a similar layout designated for outlying rural areas—the farm lots would have been radially arranged. There is no evidence Clubb knew of this precedent, however. (Fig. 4.19)

⁷⁴ "The Octagon Settlement Company," 5. The emphasis on air echoes contemporary school design manuals, which placed an inordinate emphasis on ventilation. See, for example, William A. Alcott, *Essay on the Construction of School-Houses* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1832).

“agriculture, physiological, mechanical, and other sciences, politics, theology, and morals.” The community would also include a hydropathic establishment, a scientific institute and a “Museum of Curiosities and Mechanic Arts.” Through this vibrant communal intellectual life, the “greatest amount of intelligence will be kept active, and the dulness [*sic*] and monotony, often incident to country life, avoided.”⁷⁵ The prospectus thus betrayed the prejudices of its metropolitan authors. It also reflected Clubb’s many years of travel among metropolitan reform circles. One can speculate that he anticipated recreating in Kansas some of the lively atmosphere of the vegetarian banquets and meetings that he had attended in Manchester, London, New York, and Philadelphia. In the Octagon City, settlers could live on their farms *and* enjoy the pleasures of urbanity—Eden and Babylon would be combined.

The benefits of community were more than social and intellectual, of course, but also economic. In an early notice for the colony, Clubb presented this economic dimension as having potentially radical overtones. He pointed out that the “concerted action” of Vegetarians in the colony would enable a “system of direct dealing” between producers and consumers “without the enormous profits of speculators and retailers coming between these respective parties.”⁷⁶ In Clubb’s evocation of speculators and intermediaries we can hear echoes of Masquerier’s critique of middlemen in the market economy—a critique that was also central to Josiah Warren’s anarchist utopia (as we shall

⁷⁵ Hickman, “The Vegetarian and Octagon Settlement Companies.”

⁷⁶ Clubb, “Vegetarians for Kansas,” 87.

see in the next chapter). Here we have a hint that Clubb too sought more direct and unmediated relationships, not only in writing but also in economic transactions. Another shared feature between Clubb's and Masquerier's octagon village plans was the progressive sizing of lots, so that those closer to the center would be smaller, leading to a relative leveling of land values.⁷⁷ A measure of equality was therefore built into the plan.

Clubb's octagon colony also presented a distinct approach to the division of private and public land, and therefore property. In addition to the large central park devoted to pasture, common, or landscape gardening, the corners "left over" from the octagon's inscription within the square boundaries of the land ordinance grid lines were also to be held in common, and used as woodland or grassland for hay. (These are labeled C in Figs. 4.2 and 4.18) By establishing four octagon villages next to each other, the corners would form a large square of nearly 600 acres, where an agricultural college would be located. Adding together the central park, corner woodlands, and public roads, no less than one-third of the total acreage of the colony was to be held in common rather than privately, a remarkably high figure.⁷⁸ One cannot help but speculate that the provision of such ample common lands was a response by Clubb to the history of enclosure in England—the process by which previously shared lands were privatized in the hands of a few landowners.

⁷⁷ The Prospectus stated: the lots "although varying in size, will probably be of equal value, owing to their proximity to the centre decreasing with their increase in size." "The Octagon Settlement Company," 6. Thomas Jefferson had sketched a square block plan that may have tried to achieve the same end.

⁷⁸ 928 out of 2560 acres were to be held in common. The specific areas were provided in the 1856 Prospectus.

To understand the uniqueness of the octagon colony design it is helpful to compare it with contemporary plans for frontier settlements in Kansas. As John Reps has shown, these generally followed a uniform pattern: Located near a railroad or river, the plans were almost universally straightforward gridirons, with a few scant squares set aside for public spaces.⁷⁹ Occasionally some thought was given to dividing commercial from residential areas. Leavenworth, founded by pro-slavery speculators from Weston, Missouri, just twelve days after the approval of territorial legislation, was a typical example. (Fig. 4.20) Lots measuring 24 feet by 125 feet were laid out in a relentless gridiron pattern. The only interruptions to the grid were one public square and a series of double width lots along the water for warehouses and industry. Differences between pro- and anti-slavery cities were minor. Richardson, not an unbiased observer (he was later a Union spy), described pro-slavery cities as having a “dull, thriftless air.”⁸⁰ Since the abolitionists tended to hail from the urbanized northeast, a handful of the anti-slavery cities featured slightly more elaborate plans devoting greater space to public amenities. An example of the latter is the plan of Council City, a community sponsored by the New York-based American Settlement Company. (Fig. 4.21) The plan included two large parks with diagonal pattern

⁷⁹ See Reps, *Cities of the American West*, chapter 13.

⁸⁰ Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 57. An article in the (anti-slavery) 1856 *Tribune Almanac* also detected a difference in the quality of pro- and anti-slavery urbanisms: “While Douglas and other towns, commenced by the Pro-Slavery politicians, have fallen into decay, the towns which we have named, and many others, are in a flourishing condition, and exhibit all the evidences of prosperity, which invariably accompany Northern industry and enterprise.” *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register for 1856*, (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1856), 15.

of smaller parks radiating from each one. Like many such cities, it disappeared within a few months of its founding.

The gridiron was the rule among both pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces because, as John Reps has pointed out, it was the natural tool of the speculator: rectangular lots were easy to survey, describe, and to sell.⁸¹ The planners of the Octagon City self-consciously departed from the “square plan of settlement” and referred to their own scheme as the “best plan.” They asserted its superiority in providing the benefits of sociality to settlers. With its highly centralized form, there could be little doubt that it looked far different from the hundreds of gridiron plans for western cities in the 1850s that hung in land offices back east. These adopted a predictable form—high-quality lithographed engravings, usually highlighting the town’s proximity to a river or railroad. The name of the city always appeared in “fancy” type, along with a few explanatory notes about the virtues of the site. Some maps included an inset showing the location of the settlement within a larger geographical context, or an engraving of a dignified public building (usually unbuilt). A few years later, these maps would frequently be accompanied by a birds’ eye perspective view of the town in a flourishing state, complete with steamers puffing through the water and multiple church steeples dotting tree-lined streets. (Figs. 4.22-4.23)

In contrast, the images of the Octagon Colony were rendered in spare plain black-and-white diagrams. (Figs. 4.18 and 4.24) These woodcut images were far cruder than the

⁸¹ John William Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 302.

speculators' maps. They were inserted into cheap periodicals and circulars to be mailed to far-flung readers and correspondents, rather than hanging in land offices. These images bore much more resemblance to the National Reform Association's similarly "crude" propagandistic woodcut engravings of the land reform grid and republican village. Yet even Evans's workingmen's group had managed to create an aerial perspective of their proposed village, which they sent to members of Congress in 1852. In contrast, no "birdseye" view of Clubb's Octagon Colony was ever created. It might be easy to assume that this relatively stripped down aesthetic was a matter of necessity, lack of time, or lack of access to more sophisticated printing or illustration tools. Yet Fowler & Wells had certainly proved themselves capable of producing finer-grained images in their other affordable publications, such as the bucolic renderings of hydropathic establishments in *The Water-Cure Journal*. (Fig. 4.25) We may never know the precise aesthetic reasons for the Octagon Company's rather sober visual presentation. But we can speculate that a reforming mindset that prized the clear, "natural" expression enabled by shorthand, as well as the simple, restrained, and disciplined characteristics of a vegetarian life, sought to project these same qualities onto the new town.

At the same time, the octagon was far from a straightforward emblem of ascetic communitarianism in opposition to the capitalist grid. The colony's publicity materials stressed its pecuniary advantages. Clearly aware of the fever of speculation already hovering around numerous paper cities in Kansas, the author of a *Phrenological Journal* article on the octagon colony claimed that the plan, by speeding the process of urbanization, would

make the whole land “proportionally more valuable.”⁸² In terms that echoed the claims made about every other speculative western city, the Octagon Company’s brochure promised: “The prospects of forming a city of considerable wealth and importance are very good,” and “every shareholder may reasonably anticipate a handsome return for capital and labor invested.”⁸³ The organizers pledged that those whose labor exceeded the value owed on their shares would be paid interest for their effective “loans” to the company, “in the same way as capitalists.”⁸⁴ And yet, even as it appealed directly to the “capitalist” in each prospective settler, the prospectus also pledged to secure members “against the impositions of speculators” by ensuring that the Company’s provisions would be “sold at prices agreed upon by the members, or subject to their control.”⁸⁵ Thus, the Vegetarian Colony paradoxically promised its members both the benefits and of protection from the capitalist marketplace.

Like many emigration companies, the Octagon Colony was organized as a joint-stock company in which subscribers pooled capital by buying shares.⁸⁶ This was not a

⁸² “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 5. The Prospectus underlined this point: “[T]he formation of a village always increases the value of the land all around.”

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Miriam Davis Colt, *Went to Kansas : Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to That Fairy Land, and Its Sad Results : Together with a Sketch of the Life of the Author, and How the World Goes with Her* (Watertown, NY: L. Ingalls, 1862), 18.

⁸⁵ “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 4, 7.

⁸⁶ Shares of the American Settlement Company, for example, also cost \$5 per share, and entitled members to one city lot, though members were limited to six shares per person. “Great Kansas Enterprise: Circular of the American Settlement Company,” Kansas State Historical Society. Some organizations, like the New England Emigrant Aid Company, did not sell land directly but left it to affiliated local town companies. The Emigrant Aid Company limited its assistance to helping settlers secure reduced-cost passage to Kansas,

charity but a “generous business co-operation of capital and labor.”⁸⁷ Members of the Octagon Colonies were required to pay a \$1 entrance fee, plus purchase from 20 to 240 shares for \$5 each, with each share entitling the member to a city lot averaging an acre.⁸⁸ Shares could be paid in either money or labor, and in installments, with the first payment a mere 10 cents per share. It was assumed that many members would sell their shares once prices had increased, before having to pay up the full \$5. The colony’s organizers could not promise to keep the price at \$5 after January 1856, explaining that “the location being favorable, there is no doubt but shares will rise rapidly in price” and might even double after January.⁸⁹ This was not irrational exuberance: As Albert Richardson observed, at the height of the speculative bubble, prices for urban lots in Kansas were doubling in a matter of weeks: “Any thing was marketable. Shares in interior towns of one or two shanties, sold readily for a hundred dollars.”⁹⁰ Those joining the Vegetarian Company would have the first choice of lots and their names would be applied to the streets. Since the government price for land was \$1.25/acre, yet the company was charging settlers \$5/acre, the company’s prospectus explained that the additional \$3.75/acre would go towards the

running a hotel and boarding houses for new settlers, helping buy steam and grist mills, and establishing a newspaper. See New England Emigrant Aid Company circular dated February 13, 1855 in the Kansas State Historical Society.

⁸⁷ Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 20.

⁸⁸ “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 6.

⁸⁹ Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 19. Later the Circular to Members projected that the price of land within a few years might be \$25, \$50, or even \$100 per acre. (p. 21)

⁹⁰ Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 59. Richardson reported that 25-foot by 125-foot lots on Leavenworth’s river landing were selling for ten thousand dollars in 1857. (p. 53)

purchase of provisions and the construction of streets, schools, mills, and stores, with any profits being divided equally among shareholders.

The prospectus for the Octagon Settlement Company took pains to stress its individual rather than collective ownership structure: “Every shareholder possesses, in his own right and title, the land included in his or her lots corresponding to his or her shares.”⁹¹ Cooperation would not be allowed to interfere with the principle of individual reward for individual effort: “Every member will reap the full reward of his or her own industry, and will not be subjected to loss by the indolence or indifference of other members, the cooperative principle being adopted so far as to *promote*, and not to supersede, individual enterprise.”⁹²

The principle behind the joint-stock company was the same one that had underlain Chartist land reform: the idea that individuals could pool their resources to purchase the means of production, including land and implements. Today the joint-stock company is often seen as the foundation of the modern capitalist corporation. But as Carl Guarneri has pointed out, during the 1840s and 1850s, it was not yet regarded as an exclusively capitalist form but could also serve as a device for working-class empowerment and utopian reform. Most of the American Fourierist phalanxes founded in the 1840s, for example, were organized on the joint-stock principle.⁹³ As employed in nineteenth-century

⁹¹ “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹³ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 127.

utopian communities, joint-stock was a mechanism intended to balance individual interests and the principle of individual reward for labor with more communitarian aims. Guarneri has argued that the Fourierists looked to *mechanisms* like the joint-stock company, as well as Fourier's elaborate social mathematics (involving an intricate system of rotating work schedules and occupations), to achieve a mythical medium between capitalism and socialism—or as another historian has put it, communalism without communism.⁹⁴ As Albert Brisbane, the leader of the American Fourierist movement, explained it: “*Selfishness* will be rendered *Social*, and be made to serve the interests of the whole.”⁹⁵ The Vegetarian settlement's employment of the joint-stock form, but also, crucial for our purposes, its octagonal plan, could be seen as another such mechanism of reconciliation in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Failure of the Octagon City

The ambivalence displayed in the colony's promotional materials was mirrored in its fate as played out on the ground. The first meeting of the Company was held on May 16, 1855, at Russell Trall's Hydropathic School, located at 15 Laight Street, New York. Clubb's official title was Secretary; Charles H. De Wolfe, a “gentleman” from Philadelphia, was listed as President. That summer, the company sent Dr. John McLauren (or McLaurin)—listed in a prospectus as a water cure physician—to Kansas to find a

⁹⁴ Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 139. Steven Stoll, *The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor, Death in the Tropics, and the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 79.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 138.

location. It was he who selected the site near Fort Scott, on the Neosho River.⁹⁶ In the manner cherished by all townsite speculators, this location was subsequently “puffed” in all the colony’s promotional materials: It was said to feature an abundance of water-power, timber, coal, limestone, and sandstone, pure water springs, and fine, rolling prairie. Some parts of the land had been known “on rare occasion to produce *two full crops of corn* within the year.” And, in a more poetic vein, the scenery was described as “very beautiful,” with “the surface undulating like the waves of the ocean subsiding after a storm.”⁹⁷

Around August 1855, due to popular demand, the Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Company leaders decided to broaden their reach by establishing a second colony, committed to temperance but without the vegetarian requirement. This was to be located across the river from the Vegetarian colony.⁹⁸ By 1856, a prospectus listed 60 members of the Vegetarian Company and 14 of the temperance Octagon Company. (Fig. 4.26 and 27) The printed list of pioneers included eighteen farmers, four physicians, three teachers, two mechanics, a lecturer, two single ladies, and three widows, who hailed from several states from Georgia to Wisconsin, and Canada.⁹⁹ Members were advised that the first party would depart St. Louis by steamer on April 2, 1856.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 9. Both spellings of his name are used in the prospectus.

⁹⁷ See the articles in *Life Illustrated*, December 15, 1855, p. 52, and February 23, 1856, p. 133.

⁹⁸ The second company was announced in the August 1855 issue of the *American Phrenological Journal*.

⁹⁹ “The Octagon Settlement Company,” 10.

¹⁰⁰ The plan was to travel from St. Louis to Batesville, Missouri, (300 miles) by boat and then journey the remaining 50 miles from Batesville to the settlement by wagon.

Miriam Colt's account of her journey, published by Laura Ingalls in 1862 and entitled *Went to Kansas; Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to that Fairy Land, and Its Sad Results...*, provides a detailed and illuminating view of one company member's experience. (Fig. 4.28) In January 1856, her husband sold the family's farm in New Jersey and purchased shares in the Vegetarian Company. Colt recounted the optimism with which they started their journey. Having converted to vegetarianism for health reasons, they looked forward to living among "people whose tastes and habits will coincide with our own."¹⁰¹ She wrote of her belief that going in a company would allow the family to escape the hardships confronting those going singly: "It will be better for ourselves pecuniarily, and better in the future for our children." Together with fellow company members encountered en route, she mused whether they would be neighbors in the "great 'Octagon City.'"¹⁰²

In mixing a predilection, if not quite a radical conviction, for vegetarianism, with ideas about the mutual economic benefits to be gained by joining the company, Colt's profile illustrates one feature of the Octagon Company community that made it different from the Ham Concordium. This was not a tight-knit group of believers committed to a shared ascetic regimen or spiritual mission, operating under the sway of a charismatic father figure. Instead, as the Colony's own publicity materials anticipated and invited, the

¹⁰¹ Miriam Colt claimed that she turned to vegetarianism after a sleigh accident, after which a course of treatment involving "emetics of a carbonate of potash obtained from blue flag roots" nearly destroyed the functions of her stomach. Since then, she had survived only by exercising "the greatest amount of self-denial in submitting the good things of life to my stomach for digestion," only eating "the plainest and coarsest" fare. Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 243-44.

¹⁰² Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 21, 43.

colonists' reasons for adopting vegetarianism ranged widely, as did their rationales for joining the colony. Many had been touched by reform fervor and were subscribers to Fowler and Wells publications like *Life Illustrated* and *The Water-Cure Journal*.¹⁰³ Watson Stewart, for example, a stonecutter from Indiana, was born in 1827 to a New Light, temperance, and antislavery family; his father was an advocate of Thompsonian medicine, including "vegetable remedies, cold and hot baths, etc."¹⁰⁴ As a young man, he tried a turn as a phrenological lecturer, and he was sympathetic to anti-slavery. But his motives for joining the Kansas colony were also individualistic: he had established himself successfully in the business of gravestone engraving, yet like many, he viewed true independence as lying in a homestead, and he "cherished a hope of sometime removing to the country and engaging in farming."¹⁰⁵

Given the mild commitment of individuals like Colt and Stewart to the collective enterprise, it is no surprise that the community unraveled so quickly. On May 12, 1856, Colt's family arrived at the settlement. "Can any one imagine our disappointment," she wrote. "Not a house is to be seen." Instead, they found families living in tents, "some of cloth and green bark just peeled from the trees...stuck up on the damp ground, without

¹⁰³ John Milton Hadley, Watson Stewart, and Miriam Colt all cite the Fowlers' magazines and books. Colt recalls attending a lecture by Orson Fowler in Jackson, Michigan, on December 27, 1856, following her return from Kansas. "I have long been anxious to hear Fowler, having read so many of his works." *Went to Kansas*, 202.

¹⁰⁴ Watson Stewart, "Personal Memoirs of Watson Stewart," www.kancoll.org/articles/stewart/. The original manuscript of Stewart's memoir is held at the Kansas Historical Society.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

floors or fires.”¹⁰⁶ Stewart came to a similar conclusion: “After spending one day in conversation with Mr. Clubb, our Secretary, and other members of the Company on the ground, we became convinced that the company would prove a failure.”¹⁰⁷ Around the same time, on May 24, the weekly paper *Life Illustrated* (another Fowler and Wells organ) published a report from Clubb in Kansas saying that work on the Octagon City was underway and that a “great majority of the members present express themselves well pleased with the location.... The sound of the axes is heard echoing through the woods, and the merry voices of women and children are filling the air with gladness.”¹⁰⁸

Stewart diagnosed the problem as one familiar to historians of failed utopian settlements, from Brook Farm to Fruitlands. Like the Kansas octagon colony, many radical communities were founded by urban intellectuals who romanticized agrarian life and the return to Eden. About Clubb, Stewart wrote: “He was wholly unacquainted with Western life; he was an Englishman, about thirty years of age, with a wife but no children; had been connected with the *New York Tribune*, I think, as a reporter, and knew nothing outside of office work.”¹⁰⁹ Stewart came to a similar assessment of his fellow colonists: “They were mostly from the far East; mechanics, professional men, and men from offices and stores in the cities, and altogether unable to adjust themselves to frontier life.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 44-45, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, “Personal Memoirs.”

¹⁰⁸ Henry S. Clubb, “Octagon and Vegetarian Settlements of Kansas,” *Life Illustrated*, May 24, 1856.

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, “Personal Memoirs.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

On her arrival, Colt reported that the octagon city had been surveyed, but the land there being wetter than expected, most of the earlier settlers had repaired to higher ground a mile away. A “center octagon,” or log cabin had been built—16 x 16 feet, without doors or windows.¹¹¹ She and her family, along with some other recent arrivals, moved into this structure and set about trying to make it livable. On May 17th, five days after arriving, Colt reported that most of the settlers who had come with them had departed already. A few members of the company—including Mr. Adams, Mr. Herriman, the Broadbents, Father Cosgrove, and Henry Clubb—were building cabins or planting on their city lots. Several others, like Stewart, had abandoned the company and were staking preemption claims nearby. Colt’s family chose the latter path.

By late June, Colt’s entire family, including her husband, son, and in-laws had come down with fever; their oxen were lost or stolen. In August, her husband went to see Clubb about getting some money back, but was turned away. “Mr. Clubb had no money to refund, but let us have some corn starch, farina, a few dates, and a little pearled barley.” Colt, whose view of Clubb was rather less generous than Stewart’s, heard a rumor that “H. S. Clubb has resorted to his present abode, that he may make his way quietly out of the Territory.”¹¹² At last, in early September, Colt’s family (minus her in-laws, who decide to stay) procured seats on a wagon headed out of the Territory. En route to find relatives in

¹¹¹ It’s not clear if this building was octagonal. Colt continued to refer to it in her account as the “center octagon” but always in quotes.

¹¹² Colt, *Went to Kansas*, 129.

Michigan, her husband and son both died of fever. Her in-laws, who had stayed in Kansas, passed away not long after. Clubb himself would leave within a few months.

The failure of the Octagon Settlement can hardly be attributed to its unique plan or its reform principles. After all, as John Reys had written, countless speculative towns in Kansas never made it beyond paper, or else rapidly disappeared, during the land boom and subsequent panic of 1857. Many easterners—and not just idealistic vegetarian abolitionists—traveled west with unrealistic expectations and romanticized notions about the agrarian life. So too, nearly every settlement company or speculative town projected an image of a city that was far different from conditions on the ground. Albert Richardson recounted in 1867 that:

On paper, *all* these towns were magnificent. Their superbly lithographed maps adorned the walls of every place of resort. The stranger studying one of these, fancied the New Babylon surpassed only bit its namesake of old. Its great parks, opera-houses, churches, universities, railway depots and steamboat landings made New York and St. Louis insignificant in comparison.¹¹³

Richardson satirized the chasm between projection and reality in a pair of cartoons of the “New Babylon,” as depicted on paper and “in fact.” (Fig. 4.29) Most of these would-be Kansan metropolises, depicted so grandly in large lithographs, in reality consisted of “one or two rough cabins, with perhaps a ten and an Indian canoe on the river in front of the ‘levee.’”¹¹⁴ Richardson’s rendering of the city of New Babylon was itself a riff on an American city called “Eden” described by Charles Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842-

¹¹³ Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi, From the Great River to the Great Ocean*. Hartford, CT: 1865.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

43), demonstrating how the idea of “paper versus fact,” or “representation” versus “reality” had become a cliché of the American west by mid-century. (Fig. 4.30)

Colt had referred to Kansas as a “fairy-land,” a place enswirled in false representations. Richardson recorded the ingenious ways that settlers in Kansas “proved” their claims: Preemption laws required that settlers build a habitable dwelling of a certain dimension in order to demonstrate that they were residing on the land and improving it. But sometimes, “the only building upon the claim was one whittled out with a penknife, twelve *inches* by fourteen” (Fig. 4.31) He related similar stories of single women who temporarily adopted a child in order to qualify for a preemption lot as a widow or “head of family.”¹¹⁵ Such subterfuges were emblematic of the speculative atmosphere that had enveloped western lands. All of these schemes were based on exploiting the gap between the reality of a thing and its representation—whether that representation took the form of an engraved city plan, a sworn description of a claimant’s “house,” or the nominative title “head of family.” In this agitated atmosphere, language became slippery in a way that the most “natural” shorthand could not overcome. Even the value of something as apparently real as land was hard to pin down. The fever generated by the prospect of rapid pecuniary gain was ironically exactly the kind of “overstimulation” that vegetarianism was designed to oppose. But the precision and plainness of Clubb’s octagon diagram lent it an air of concreteness, sobriety, and “reality” that betrayed a desire for something beyond the dreams embodied in the typical speculative town grid. The octagon’s shape, rendered in

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 141.

spare black and white lines, enticed settlers with the promise that individuality and sociality, country and city, wealth and simplicity, could be harmoniously reconciled in one form.

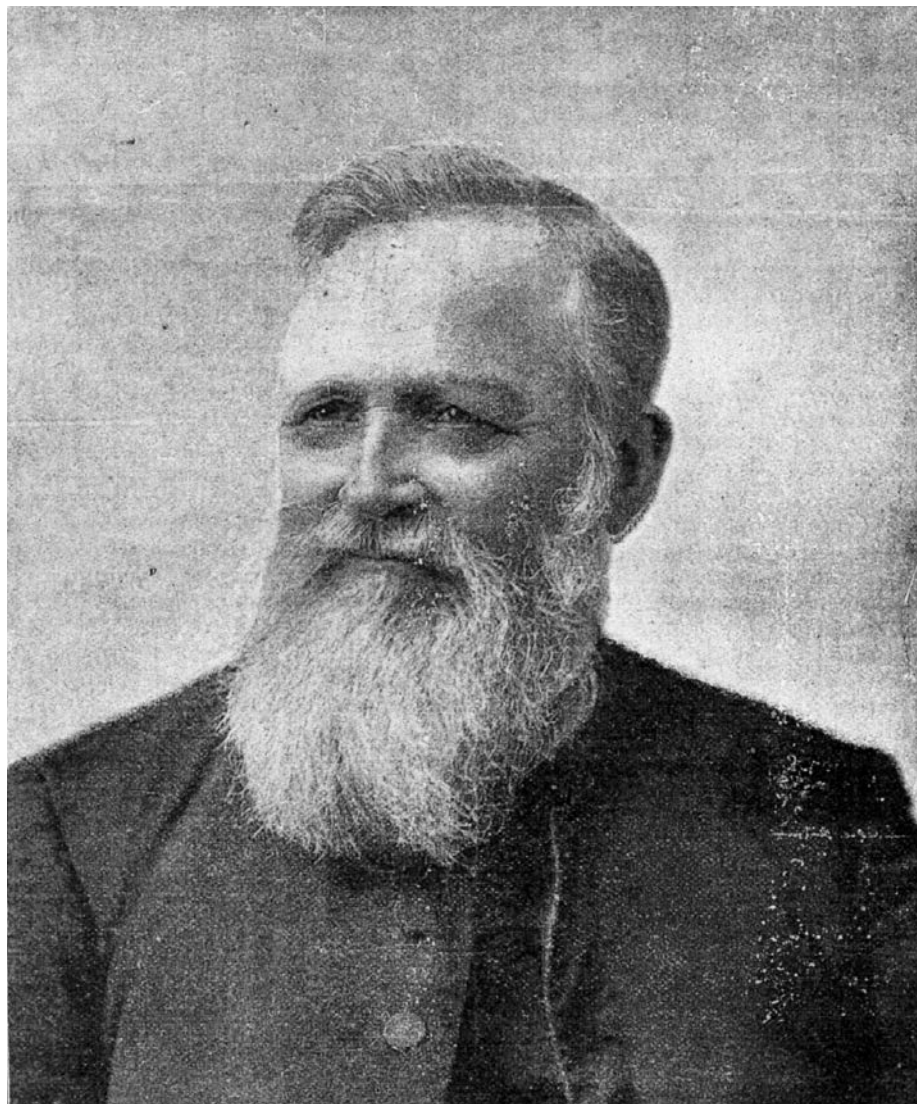


Fig. 4.1 Henry S. Clubb (1827-1922)

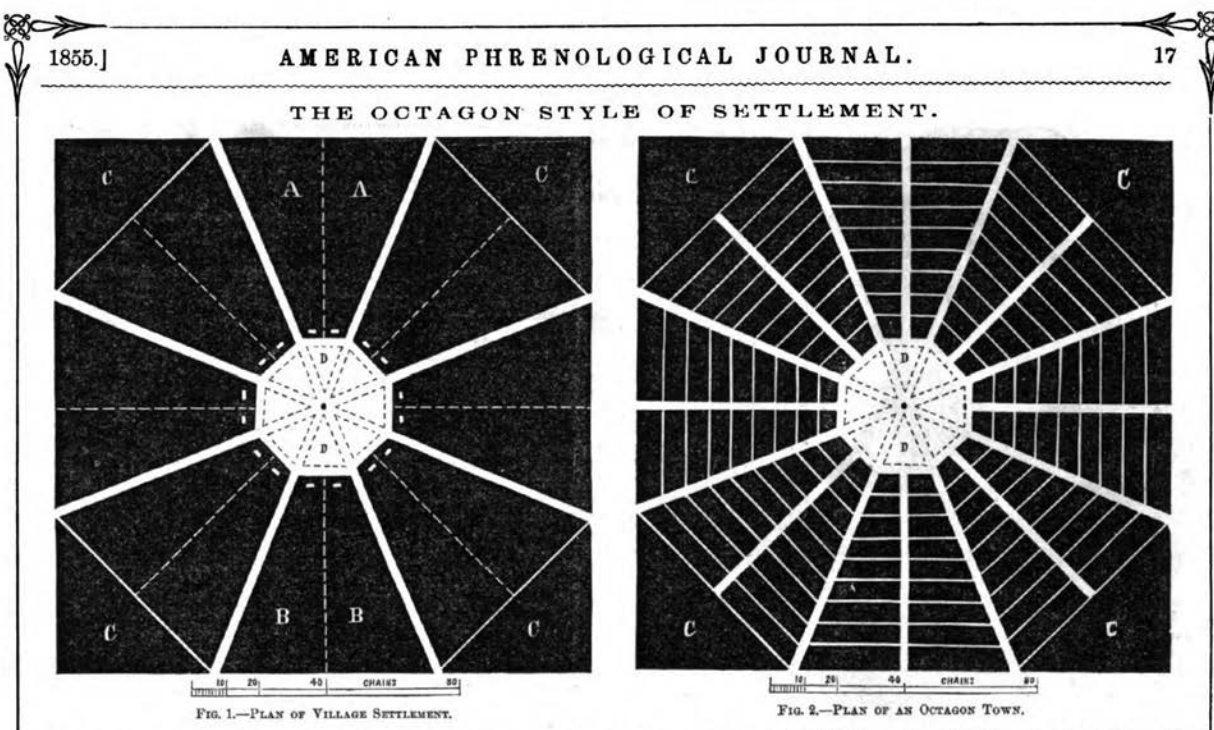


Fig. 4.2 “The Octagon Style of Settlement.” The two plans show the settlement at different phases of development: on the left, a village plan with sixteen farms organized radially around a public park and building, and on the right, a town in which the farm lots have been subdivided into large urban lots. The areas marked C are shared lands for woodland and pasture. (*American Phrenological Journal*, July 1855)



Fig. 4.3 James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-1842) (from *Letters and Extracts from the MS Writings of James Pierrepont Greaves*)



Fig. 4.4 Portrait of Tolstoi by Ilya Repin, 1901. Henry Clubb described the dress of Concordium members as similar to that worn by Tolstoi.

10

CONCLUSION

ing of at least five hours out of six. And what is of more importance, *the marks are suited to the sounds, so that* WHEREVER A LETTER IS RELATED TO ANOTHER, EITHER BY ORGANIC FORMATION, OR BY BEING COMBINED WITH OTHER LETTERS. IT IS SIGNIFIED BY ITS SHAPE. Still it is not sent forth as a *perfect* system. It strikes out a new path, especially as to the manner of writing the vowels. It is a wonder to the author

out, to delight
quire t
stitute
not, it
any of
to the
be den
best sy
be con
the *cha*
18. 1

Fig. 4.5 Detail of page from Isaac Pitman, *Stenographic Sound-Hand* (1837). An example of the use of typography (the form of letters) to graphically convey meaning.



Fig. 4.7 Detail of a plate from Isaac Pitman, *Stenographic Sound-Hand* (1837). The caption written in shorthand above the circle states: “This alphabet contains sixteen vowel sounds, twenty-five single consonants, and twenty-four double ones; total sixty-five letters, including every vowel sound in the language, and every combination of consonants that will commence a syllable, all drawn from this Diagram.”



Fig. 4.8 The Vegetarian Society banquet at Freemason's Tavern, London, 1851 (*Illustrated London News*, August 16, 1851)

SECOND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY.

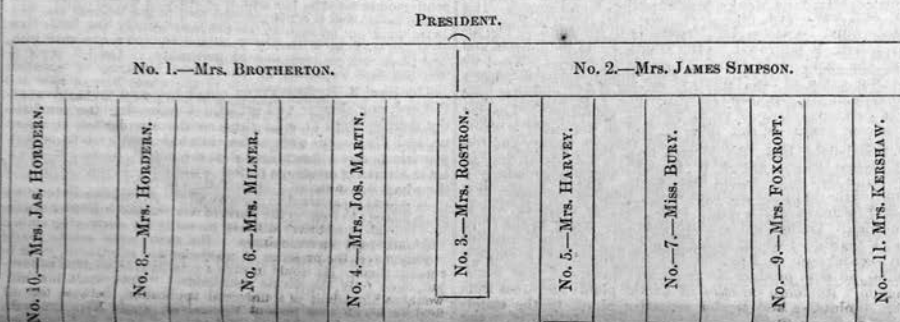
The Festival.

On Thursday, July the 12th, 1849, the second anniversary of the establishment of the Vegetarian Society was celebrated by a festival of a very brilliant character, in the Town Hall, Manchester. At 4 o'clock, on the entrance of the guests, the scene presented was most enchanting: a long line of tables on a raised platform at the further side of the Hall, and nine others diverging therefrom, displayed a beautiful variety of flowers, in handsome vases, intermingling tastefully decorated savoury dishes, sweets, and fruits in rich profusion; the stewards, with the emblematical badge of an ear of wheat in a white satin rosette, (representing the substantiality and purity of vegetarian diet,) were seen actively engaged in providing seats for the respective guests, carefully placing together those most likely to contribute to each other's happiness; the choir was performing some lively airs; the light of heaven darted its

bright rays to all parts of the beautiful hall, from the glass dome at the top of the building; the angels and cherubs which are represented in exquisite painting on the ceiling, floating in the clear blue sky, seemed to smile approvingly on the scene below; the arrangements indeed seemed to indicate a great and holy purpose, and bore close relation to that principle which is calculated to elevate and refine the feelings, and to prepare the mind for the enjoyment of those "more than earthly scenes," which poets and artists have always loved to describe and to pourtray, and which those who love and practise truth must ultimately realise.

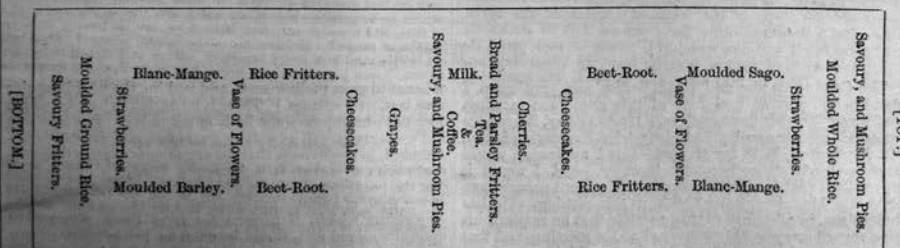
The same ladies, with one or two additions, who so successfully provided for the Vegetarian Banquet last year, kindly rendered their valuable services on this occasion, as will be seen by the annexed plan.

No. 1.—PLAN OF THE TABLES.



ORCHESTRA.

No. 2.—PLAN SHOWING THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL DISHES, &c. OF EACH TABLE, FOR 29 GUESTS.



No. 3.—PLAN SHOWING THE MINOR ARTICLES OF THE SAME TABLE.

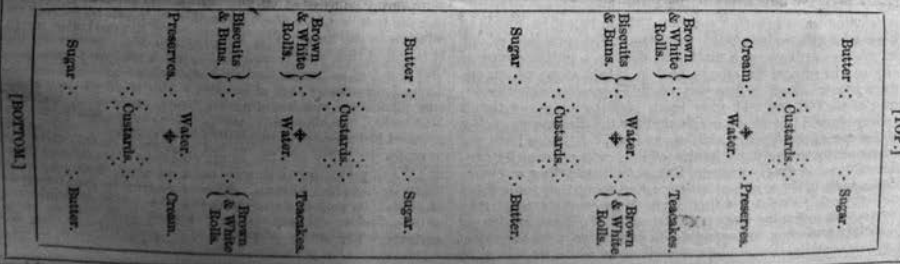


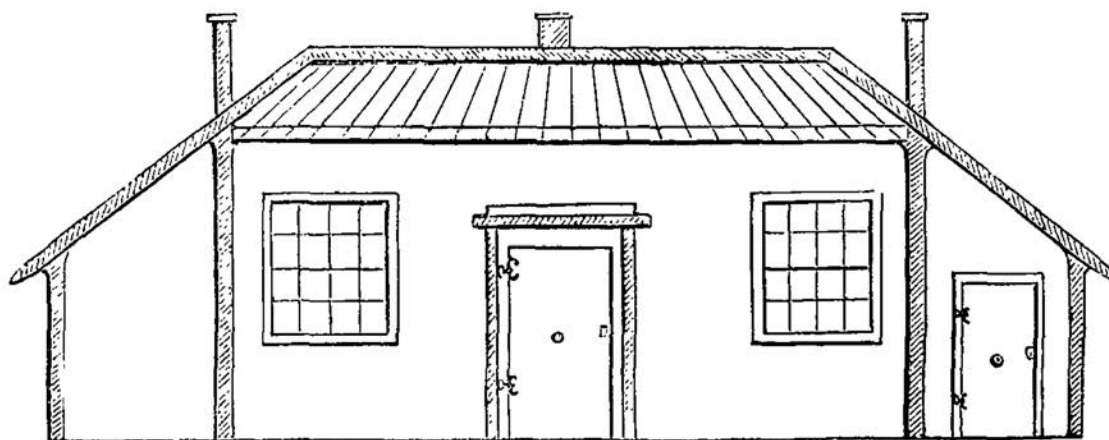
Fig. 4.9 Plan of tables at the Second Annual Meeting of the Vegetarian Society, held on July 12, 1849 in Manchester. Clubb attended the event as a Steward. He may have been the author of this diagram and accompanying article, which described the event as "festival of a very brilliant character."



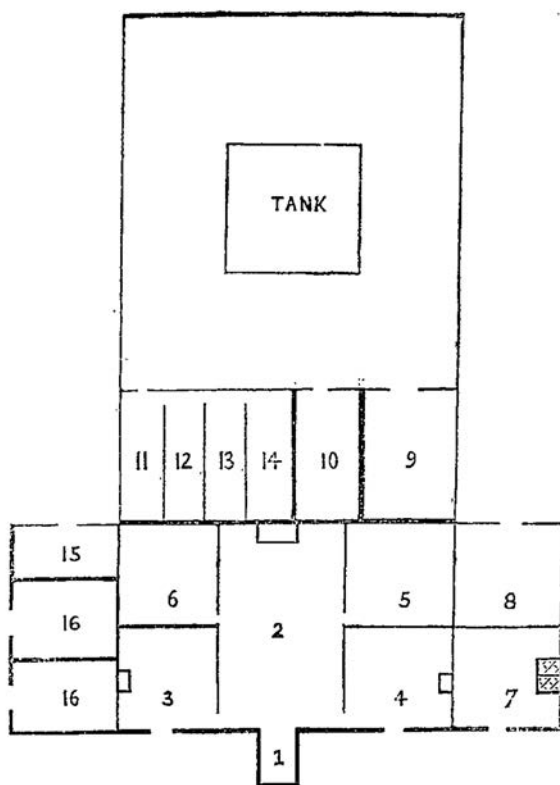
Fig. 4.10 Great Chartist Meeting on Kensington Common, London, April 10, 1848



Fig. 4.11 O'Connorsville, 1847 (The British Library)



ELEVATION.



GROUND PLAN OF DWELLING HOUSE, OFFICES, AND FARM YARD.

- No. 1.—Porch; six feet square, with benches for wash-tubs and sink.
- „ 2.—Kitchen; sixteen by eighteen feet.
- „ 3.—Parlour; ten feet by twelve.
- „ 4.—Front Sleeping-Room; ten feet by twelve.
- „ 5.—Sleeping-Room; twelve feet by eight.
- „ 6.—Sleeping-Room; twelve feet by eight.
- „ 7.—Dairy; twelve feet by ten.
- „ 8.—Potatoe and Fuel-house.
- „ 9.—Pig-stye.
- „ 10.—Sheep-house.
- „ 11, 12, 13, 14.—Cow-houses.
- „ 15.—Privy.
- „ 16.—Fowl-house, and Shed for Farming Implements.

Fig. 4.12 Illustration of a model dwelling house for an allotment farm, from Feargus O'Connor, *A Practical Work on the Management of Small Farms* (1845). Jamie Bronstein notes the similarity of O'Connor's designs to those presented by the conservative Labourer's Friend Society.

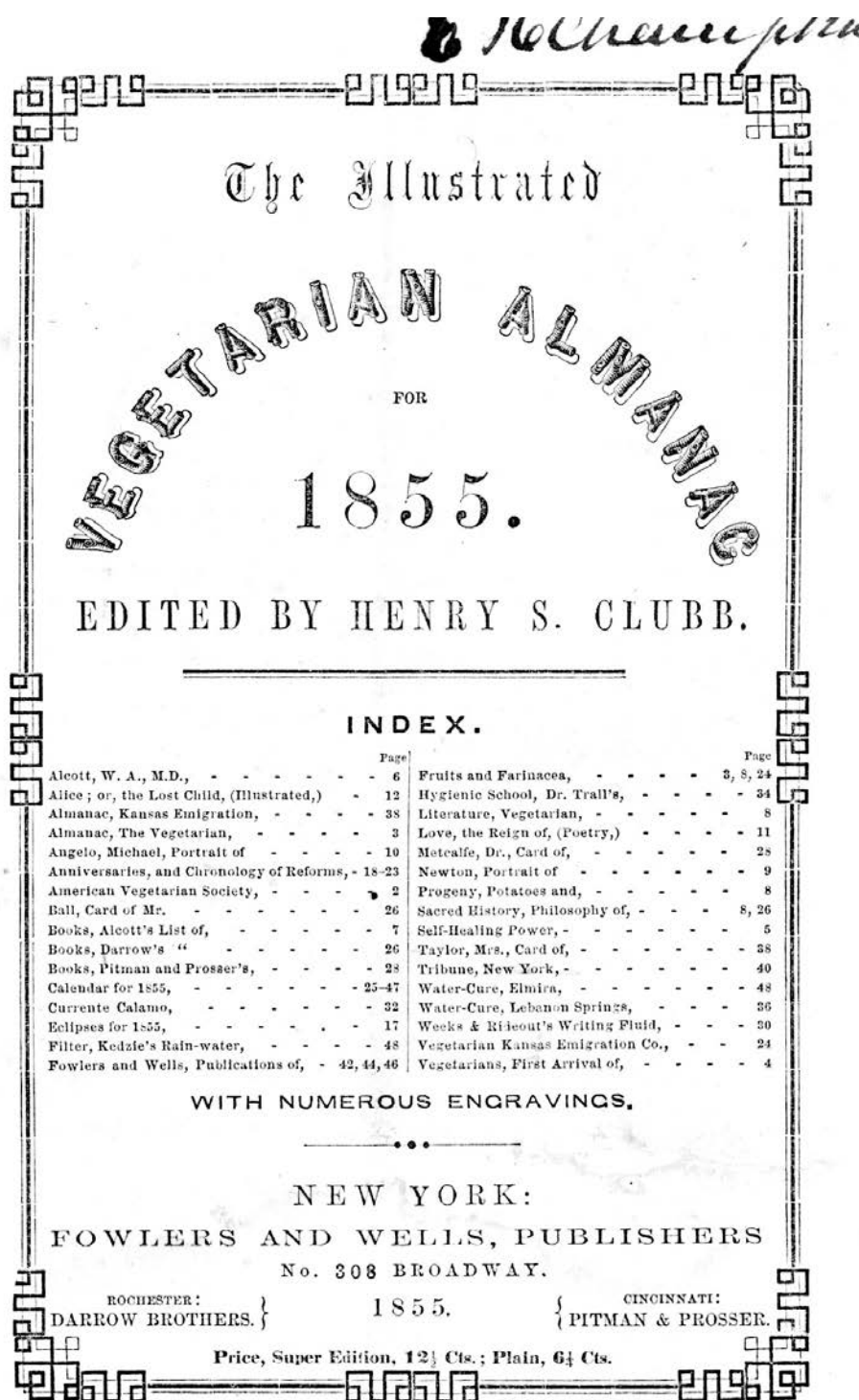


Fig. 4.13 Cover of the *Vegetarian Almanac of 1855*, edited by Henry Clubb and published by Fowler and Wells



A PEACE CONVENTION AT FORT SCOTT, KANSAS, PAGE 128.

Fig. 4.14 "A Peace Convention at Fort Scott Kansas." Illustration of a confrontation between pro- and anti-slavery factions in 1858 (Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 1869)

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Vol. 7
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1855

KANSAS A FREE STATE.

Squatter Sovereignty VINDICATED!

NO WHITE SLAVERY!

The Squatters of Kansas who are favorable to **FREEDOM OF SPEECH** on all subjects which interest them, and an unmuzzled **PRESS**; who are determined to do their own **THINKING** and **VOTING** independent of **FOREIGN DICTATION**, are requested to assemble in

MASS MEETING

at the time and places following to wit:

The following speakers will be in attendance, who will address you on the important questions now before the people of Kansas.

At Fish's Store	on Monday	September 24th	at 2 o'clock	p. m.	- Lane	Saturday Oct	6th	at 2 o'clock	p. m.
" Fort Scott	" Friday	" 28th	" 1 "	" "	" See's Town	" September	29th	" 1 "	" "
" Stockton's Store, Little Sugar Creek	" Sat	" 29th	" 1 "	" "	" Haysden	Monday Oct	1st	" 2 "	" "
" Elijah Tucker's, Big "	" Monday Oct	" 1st	" 2 "	" "	" Nympho, at H. Smith's Store	Tuesday "	" 2d	" 2 "	" "
" Onwatomie,	Tuesday "	" 2d	" 1 "	" "	" Columbia	Wednesday "	" 3d	" 1 "	" "
" Mr. Partridge's, Pottowatomie Creek	Wed	" 3d	" 2 "	" "	" Palmyra	Friday "	" 5th	" 2 "	" "
" Baptist Preoria	Thursday "	" 4th	" 2 "	" "	" Blanton	Saturday "	" 6th	" 2 "	" "
" Springfield	Friday "	" 5th	" 2 "	" "					

DR. CHAS. ROBINSON,

J. A. Wakefield, C. K. Holliday, M. F. Conway,
W. K. Vail, J. L. Speer, W. A. Ela, Josiah Miller, O. C. Brown, J. K. Goodin, Doct.
Gilpatrick, Revs. Mr. Tuton and J. E. Stewart, C. A. Foster, J. P. Fox, H. Bronson,
G. W. Brown, A. H. Malley and others.

TURN OUT AND HEAR THEM!

Wor. Sept 24 1855

Fig. 4.15 Poster for an anti-slavery meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1859 (Kansas State Historical Society)

GREAT KANZAS ENTERPRISE.

CIRCULAR

— OF —

AMERICAN SETTLEMENT CO.

ANXIOUS to do something PRACTICAL for the speedy settlement of the new Territory of Kansas with free laborers, a number of gentlemen have formed themselves into a Joint Stock Association, under the name and style of

The American Settlement Company,

with the purpose of locating a city in Kansas, which should become the centre of most important business and social interests, and offer inducements to Emigrants, not otherwise presented. The Stock of the Company has been divided into Shares of five dollars, but the price of shares not taken may be at any time increased, at the option of the Company. Each share will entitle the holder to a City Lot. In order to prevent even the suspicion of any speculative aim, they have made it a rule that no person shall subscribe for more than six shares.

The first share is to be paid for in full; on every subsequent share the half only will be demanded, the balance being subject to call at sixty days notice. The Company propose these easy terms to meet the necessities of actual settlers; and they feel warranted in saying that the small amount thus expended will be amply repaid in that sympathy, so much needed by Pioneers, which it will secure among members of the same Association, for each share, while entitling to a City lot, will, at the same time, constitute the holder a member of the Settlement Company.

In carrying out their plans, the Company have located a city, to which has been given the name of

COUNCIL CITY.

This City occupies a site on the great Santa Fe Road—a thoroughfare as well beaten and clearly defined as any road in the old states; and nothing can prevent its becoming as highly important of trade in cattle and produce, to farmers and merchants, not only with the settlers, but the Santa Fe traders, who have long had a camping ground in the vicinity.

The City's limits will be more than two miles square. It will have a Public Park, of eighty acres, in its centre, and smaller public grounds for health and pleasure. The location is in one of the best watered regions of the Territory, which abounds with Coal Mines, and Limestone well adapted to building purposes. In a word, the site of Council City has been pronounced, by disinterested residents, superior for health, richness of soil, mineral wealth, mercantile and mechanical advantages, to any other point in the Territory.

Among the first objects, will be to supply Council City with Churches, Free Schools, Grist Mills, Saw Mills, Public Houses, &c., for the convenience of the earlier settlers. Missionaries are already on the spot, and Steam Mills are being erected to facilitate the improvement of the lots.

The public are particularly notified that this enterprise has not been undertaken for speculation. It is expected that the greater part of the subscribers will be actual settlers, and therefore mutually interested in the welfare of the Settlement. The whole amount of money derived from the sale of stock, after defraying the current expenses of the Company, will be expended in improving the City, and will thus go to the benefit of the members. Measures will be provided to insure an equitable distribution, as soon as the requisite number of shares shall have been taken.

It should not be forgotten, that, in addition to the ownership of City lots, through the purchase of shares, each settler will have the right by pre-emption to one hundred and sixty acres of land. Each member is to pay Government for his Farm, but will not probably be called upon in less than two years. The great favor with which the "Homestead Bill" is received, gives strong hopes that nothing will be required from those who settle upon the public lands; but in any case, it will be only at the FIXED GOVERNMENT PRICE.

Fig. 4.17 Cover of a circular published by the American Settlement Company, founded in New York in 1854

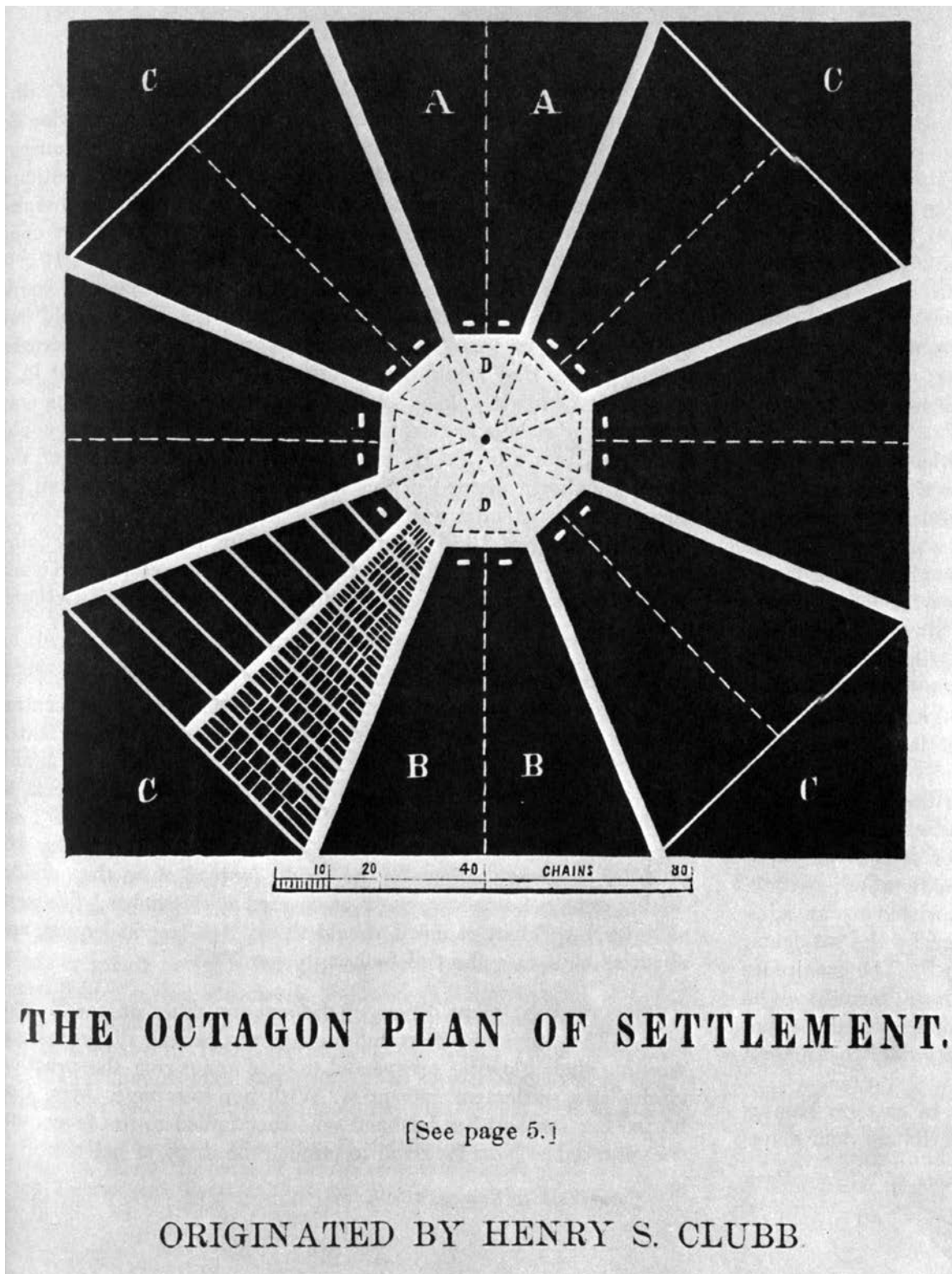


Fig. 4.18 Illustration in the prospectus for the Octagon Settlement Company, 1856. The diagram shows how each of the original wedge-shaped farm lots can gradually be subdivided into urban lots.



Fig. 4.19 Detail of a map of Philadelphia and surroundings, c. 1720. A possible precedent for the octagon farm-city can be seen on the right side of the image.

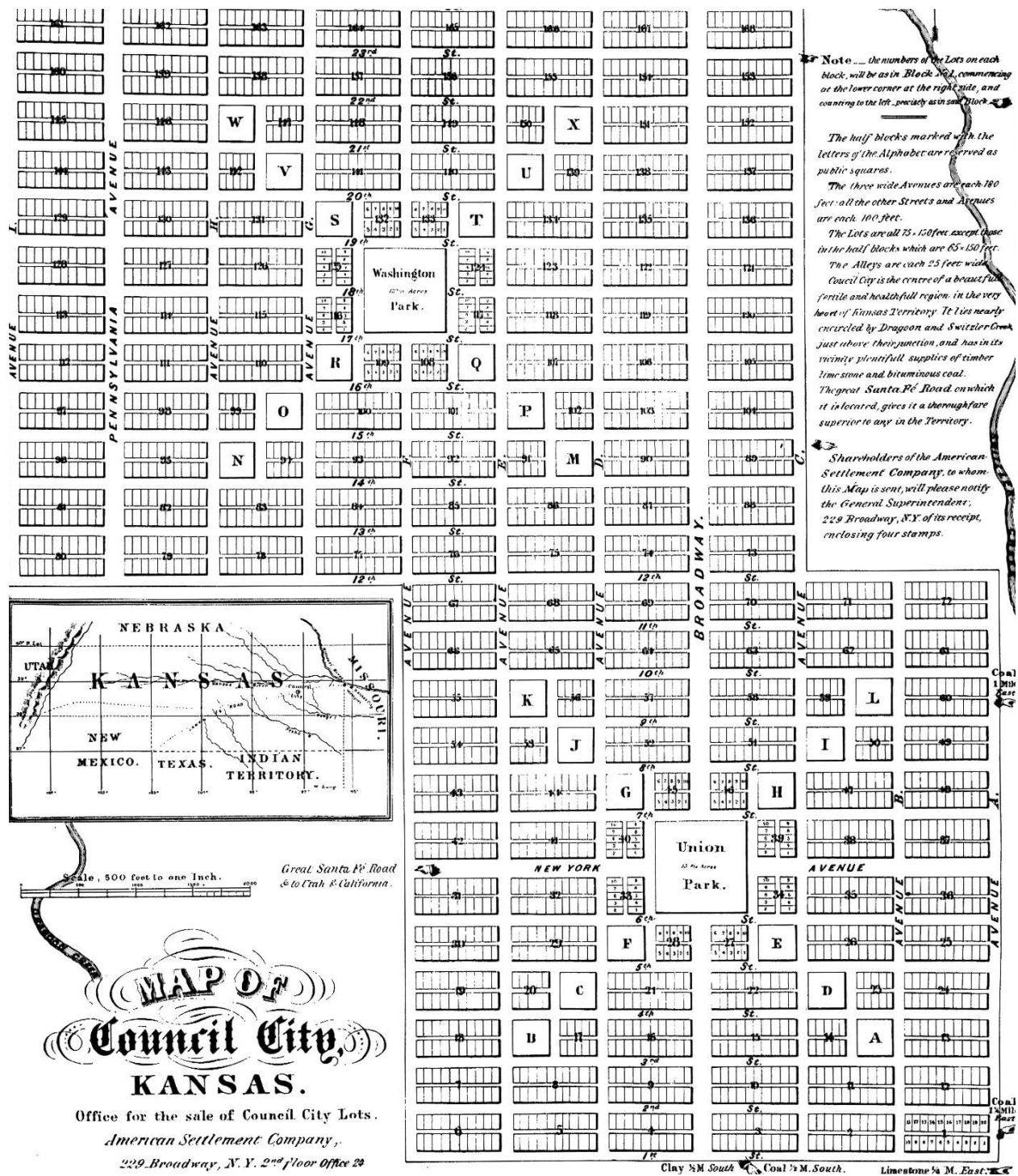


Fig. 4.21 Plan of Council City, Kansas, c. 1855, founded by anti-slavery forces (John Reps, *Cities of the American West*)

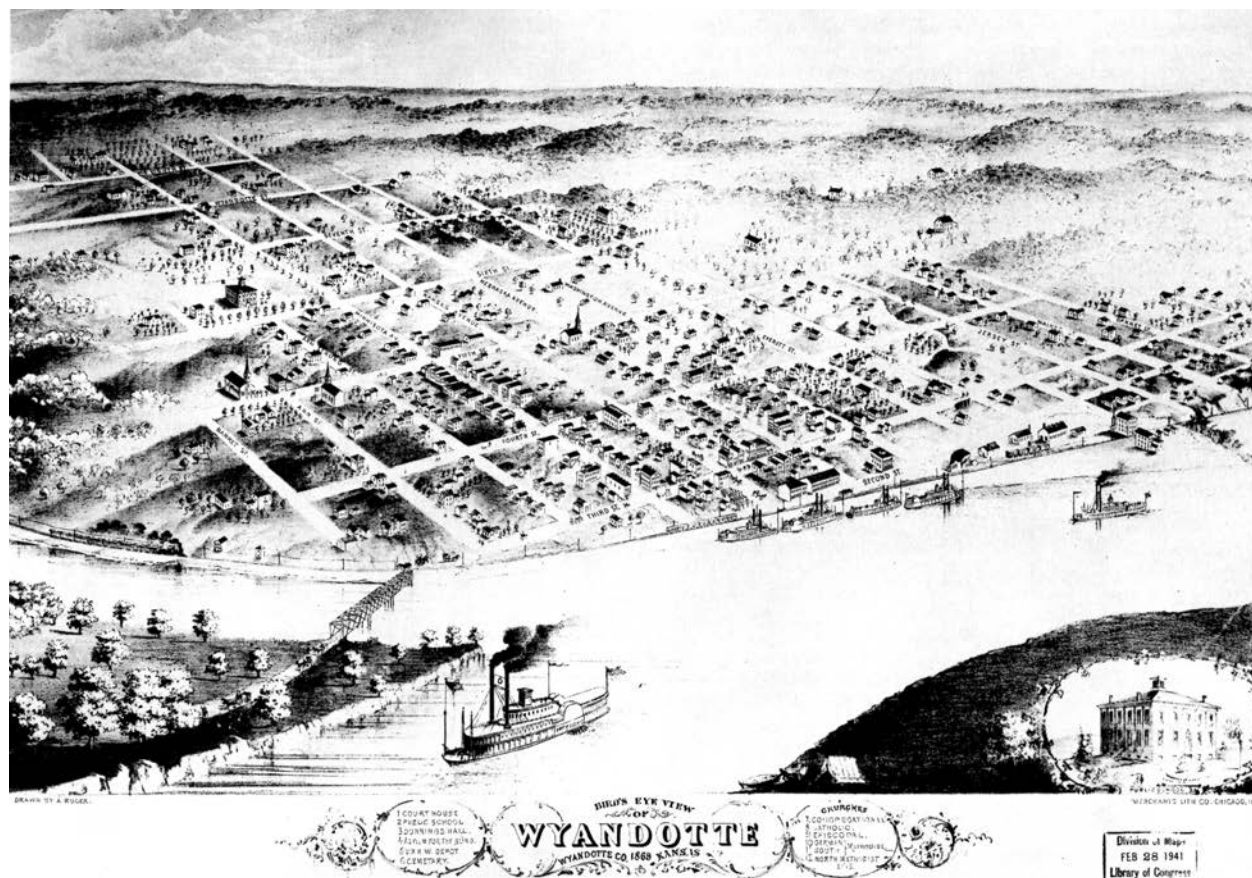


Fig. 4.23 Birds-eye view of Wyandotte, Kansas, 1869 (John Reps, *Cities of the American West*)

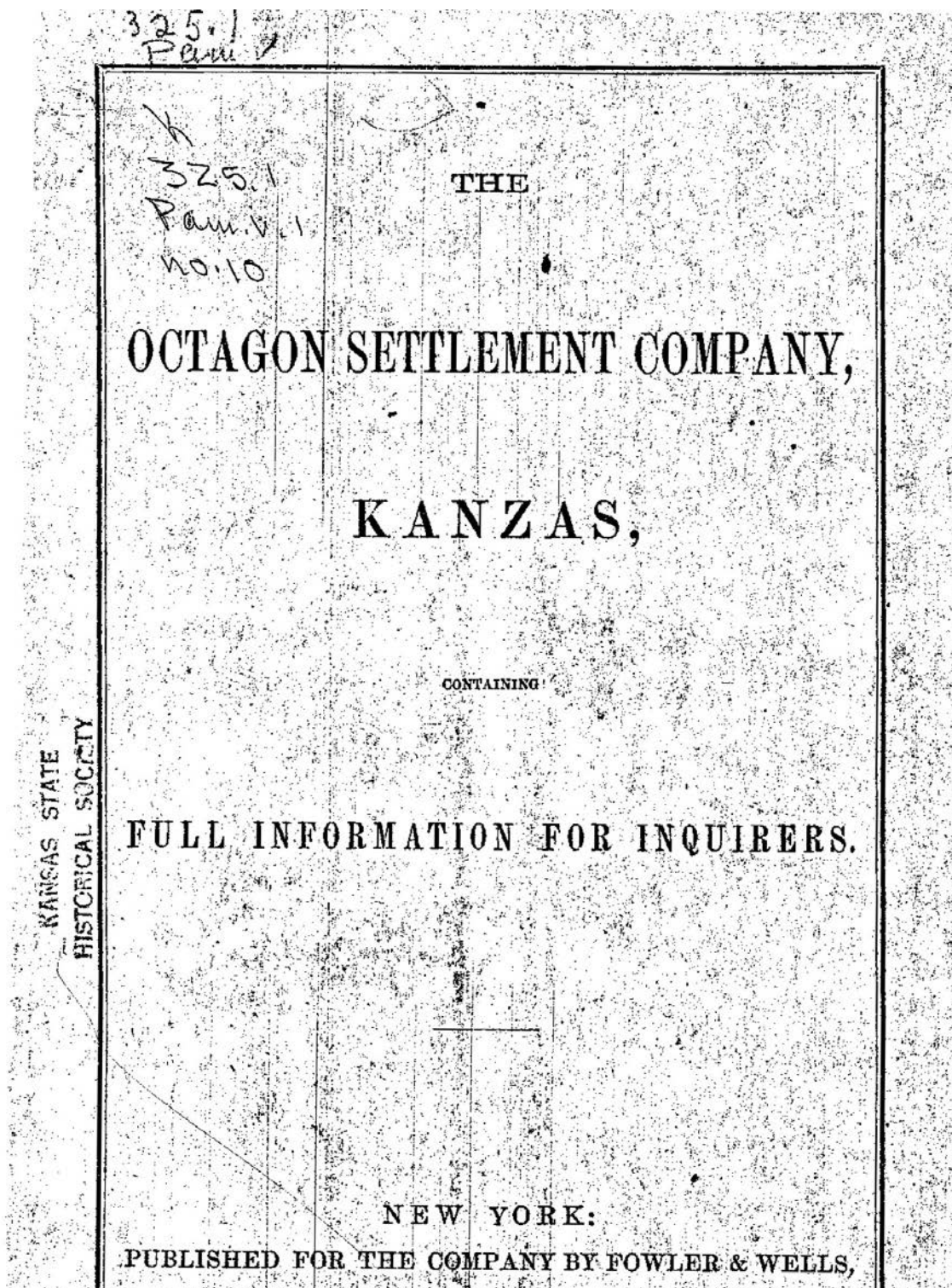


Fig. 4.24 Cover of the Octagon Settlement Company prospectus

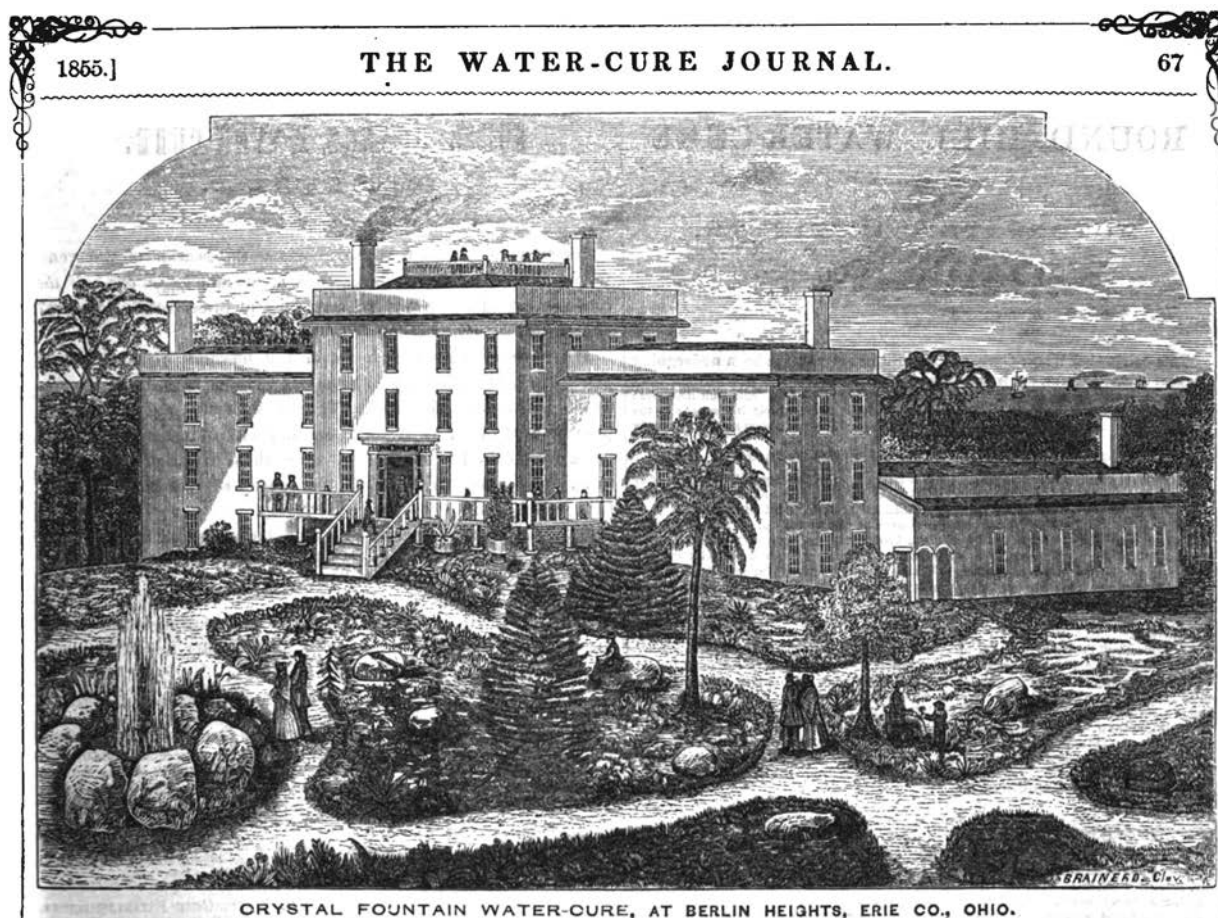


Fig. 4.25 Illustration of the Crystal Fountain Water-Cure in Berlin Heights, Ohio, from Fowler and Wells's *The Water Cure Journal*, March, 1855. Clubb's printers were certainly capable of producing more elaborate renderings of the octagonal colony.

4. Each member to start as nearly as possible according to the following arrangement:

- ADAMS, James**, Rabway, N. J., *Blacksmith*, wife and one son. To leave New York City, Wednesday, March 12th, at 6 p.m. When in St. Louis, inquire of Mr. B. SLATER, 19 Levee, for the Secretary.
- * **ADAMS, Archibald**, Rushford, N. Y. See **SAYLES**.
- ALLEN, George**, Monrovia, Morgan Co., Indiana. *Farmer*. To join Mr. SAMUEL STEWART's party, at La Fayette. See **STEWART, Samuel**.
- ATKINSON, William, Jr.**, Peoria, Ill., *Tailor*. To proceed to St. Louis. Call on Messrs. Walter & Campbell.
- BAGNALL, Thomas**, Mercer, Pa., *Farmer*, wife and three children. To come either by teams and caravan to St. Louis, or via Ohio and Penn. R.R., from Pittsburgh. See **ADAMS**.
- BARRY, J. B.**, City Institute, Philadelphia. *Librarian*. To come with the next party.
- * **BARKER, Anna M.**, New York City, *Widow*. See **ADAMS**.
- BERRY, John C.**, Lampsville, Belmont Co., O., *Farmer*. To come by Ohio and Penn. R.R. to St. Louis. See **ADAMS**.
- BLACKBURN, D. F.**, Hampshire, Tenn., *Printer*, wife and three children. By team, via Springfield, Missouri, to Fort Scott.
- BROADBENT, John**, Bluff City Mills, Memphis, Tenn., two sons, *Woollen Manufacturer*. See **BLACKBURN**.
- BROWNING, Matthew P.**, 15 Laight st., N. Y. City, *Hairdresser*. To be represented by his brother ROBERT BROWNING, Davenport, Iowa. See **ATKINSON**.
- BUSL, C. D.**, Chemung, McHenry Co., Ill., *Farmer*, wife and four children. See **ATKINSON**.
- BUYTON, Josiah**, Pontiac, Oakland Co., Mich., *Farmer*. To start with SAMUEL STEWART's party, Lafayette. Via Michigan City. See **STEWART, Samuel**.
- * **BYINGTON, Wm.**, Columbus, Warren Co., Pa. See **BAGNALL**.
- CLUBB, Henry S.**, N. Y. City, *Secretary, Journalist*, wife. To start Saturday, March 8th, via Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, where he will stay two days, then to St. Louis, where he will stay probably ten days. Address at St. Louis, care of B. Slater, 19 Levee. After April 2nd, Fort Scott, K. T.
- CLULEY, William**, Phalanx, N. Y., *Tinsmith*. To come by next party.
- COLT, Wm. H.**, Hopkinton, N. J., *Farmer*, wife and two children. To St. Louis, by March 25. See **SOBER**.
- COOKE, John**, Port Albert, Huron Co., C. W., *Farmer*. See **HERRIMAN, Nathaniel**. Arrange with Mr. HERRIMAN as to time and place of meeting.
- COSGROVE, John**, West Point, N. Y., *Gardener*. See **ADAMS**.
- CROWELL, David**, Philadelphia, *Mechanic*, wife. To come with the next party.
- DAVIS, David**, Pittsburgh, *Merchant*. See **ADAMS** for routes, and start via Ohio River.
- DE WOLFE, Chas. H.**, Box 1703, Philadelphia, residence cor. of 10th and Morgan streets, *President, Lecturer*. To start early in the summer (after lecturing on the plans of the Company in the States) with a party of Philadelphia members and others.
- * **EDWARDS, John**, Northampton, N. Y., *Farmer*. To come with a large party in 1857.
- * **FLETCHER, D. D.**, Burlington, Vt. See **REED, Daniel**.
- FRANCE, Israel**, Pittsburgh, Pa., *Farmer*. See **ADAMS** and **CLUBB**.
- GIBSON, Thomas**, and wife, Brookville, Ind., *Shoemaker*. Meet Secretary at Cincinnati. See **CLUBB**.
- GAINS, John**, Boonton, N. Y., *Physician*. See **DE WOLFE**.
- GRIMES, John**, Boonton, N. Y., *Physician*. See **DE WOLFE**.
- GRISWOLD, William A.**, La Porte, Ind., *Machinist*. See **STEWART, Samuel**.
- HADLEY, John M.**, Friends' Mission, K. T., *Teacher*. Meet the Secretary, or write. See **CLUBB**.
- HARDING, Wm. B.**, 122 W. 34th Street, N. Y. City, wife, *Builder*. See **ADAMS**.
- HALL, Harvey R.**, Council City, K. T., *Farmer*, wife, two children, and nephew. To be on the site of the settlement early in March.
- HERRIMAN, Angus A.**, Greenbush, Wis., wife, *Farmer*. See **SMITH, J. H.**
- HERRIMAN, Nathaniel**, Owens' Sound, C. W., *Lumberman*. April, Via Detroit, Chicago, Alton, St. Louis.
- HICKS, A. B.**, Jelloway, Knox Co., Ohio, *Farmer*. Withdrawn.

Fig. 4.26 Page from the Octagon Settlement Company's 1856 prospectus showing list of members

- HOBBS, Geo.*, Mt. Vernon, Ohio, *Nurseryman*, wife and brother-in-law. To come via Indianapolis. See *ADAMS* and *CLUBB*.
- HOBBS, Osker R.*, Zievia, Ohio, *Farmer*. See *HOBBS, Geo.*
- KINGSBURY, Samuel A.*, Pawtucket, R. I., *Merchant*. See *CLUBB*.
- LAYARD, J. C.*, Mitchell's Map Office, cor. 5th and Chestnut st., Philadelphia, *Merchant*. See *ADAMS*.
- * *LEHNERT, Sing Sing*, N. Y., *Professor of Music*. See *DE WOLFE*.
- McCOWN, Richmond*, Ind., wife, *Builder*. See *STEWART, Samuel*.
- McDIARMID, Times Office*, Cincinnati, *Printer*. See *CLUBB*.
- * *McLAURIN, Peter*, Rievville, South Plantagenet, C. W., *Machinist*. See *HERRIMAN, Nathaniel*.
- McLAURIN, John*, *Treasurer, Water Cure Physician*. See *CLUBB*.
- MAGEE, Morland R.*, Toronto, C. W., *Carpenter*; 1 brother, a carpenter. See *HERRIMAN, Nathaniel*; also, *COOK* and *ORR*.
- * *MASON, Jones*, Peekskill, N. Y., *Painter*. See *ADAMS*.
- MORLEY, Charles*, Topeka, K. T., *Colporteur*, wife. See *HALL* and *CLUBB*.
- ORR, John K.*, Brantford, C. W., *Millwright*. See *HERRIMAN, Nathaniel*.
- ORR, Wm. H.*, *Vindicator office*, Oshawa, C. W., *Printer*. Bring press, type, and partner. See *HERRIMAN, Nathaniel*.
- PARMINTER, W. W.*, Mount Vernon, Ohio, *Farmer*. Come via Indianapolis. See *ADAMS* and *CLUBB*.
- * *PARKES, E. A.*, Horseheads, N. Y. See *ADAMS*.
- RANDALL, Mrs.*, Philadelphia, *Physician*, 2 sons. See *DE WOLFE*.
- REED, Captain Daniel*, Columbia, Me., *Lumberman*, wife and 4 children. Via New York City. See *ADAMS* and *CLUBB*.
- REED, M. R.* —, *Teacher*. See *DE WOLFE*.
- ROBBINS, Deerpark*, L. I., *Cooper*. See *CLUBB*.
- ROOT, George H.*, Boonton, N. Y., *Farmer*. See *ADAMS*.
- ROOT, Mary*, Boonton, N. Y., *Widow*. See *GRIMES*.
- ROYLE, John*, 72 Slater Street, N. J., *Ironworker*. See *ADAMS*.
- SA VAGE, Monticello*, Platte Co., Ill., *Carpenter*. See *CLUBB*.
- * *SAYLES, Ira*, Rushford, N. Y., *Engineer and Surveyor*. See *DE WOLFE*.
- SIMONS, James Y.*, Lodi, Wis., *Farmer*. See *SMITH, J. H.*
- * *SIMONS, Jehiel H.*, 52 Cliff street, N. Y. City, *Furnace Manufacturer*.
- SMALL, Joseph Fergus*, Wellington Co., C. W., *Farmer*, desires to sell his 160 shares, taken June 18th, 1855. These shares secure right of first choice. Apply to Secretary for terms. See *CLUBB*.
- SMITH, Isabella*, Marcellus, N. Y. See *YOUNG*.
- SMITH, J. H.*, Sheboygan Falls, Wis., *Mechanic*. To come via Milwaukee, Chicago, and St. Louis. See *CLUBB*.
- SOBER, Albert J.*, Salem, Washtenaw Co., Mich., *Farmer*, 1 brother. See *BUYTON* and *SMITH, J. H.*
- SOMERVILLE, Wm.*, Lonsdale, R. I., *Weaver*, wife and daughter. Ohio River from Pittsburgh. See *ADAMS, James*.
- STEVENS, Mrs. Jane A.*, Postville, Allinakee Co., Iowa, *Teacher*, one son and one brother. See *STEWART, Samuel*.
- STEWART, Samuel*, Lafayette, Ind., *Farmer*. To form a party about March 1st, and come by teams and wagons to St. Louis. See *CLUBB*.
- STEWART, Watson*, Lafayette, Ind., *Stonemason*, wife, mother-in-law, and 2 children. To come via St. Louis. See *CLUBB*.
- * *STILLMAN, Wm. H.*, Westerley, R. I., *Postmaster*. See *SOMERVILLE*.
- TEBB, Wm.*, Blackstone, Mass., *Accountant*, wife. See *SOMERVILLE*.
- * *VAIL, E. S.*, Romulus, Seneca Co., N. Y. See *YOUNG* and *COLT*.
- VOORHUIS, Henry*, Pontiac, Mich., W., *Farmer*. See *BUYTON*.
- WALBRIDGE, J. B.*, 15 Laight street, New York City, *W. C. Physician*. See *SOMERVILLE*.
- WHEELER, Lyman*, Oxford, Butler Co., Ohio, *Farmer*. See *CLUBB* and *ADAMS*.
- * *WILSON, H.*, Johnson Village, Ga., *Merchant*. See *REED, M. R.*
- YOUNG, Stephen*, Poplar Ridge, wife and one child, *Cabinetmaker*. Via Cincinnati. See *CLUBB*.

* Those marked thus * are members of the Octagon Company. Those not marked are members of the Vegetarian.

Fig. 4.27 Page from the Octagon Settlement Company's 1856 prospectus showing list of members

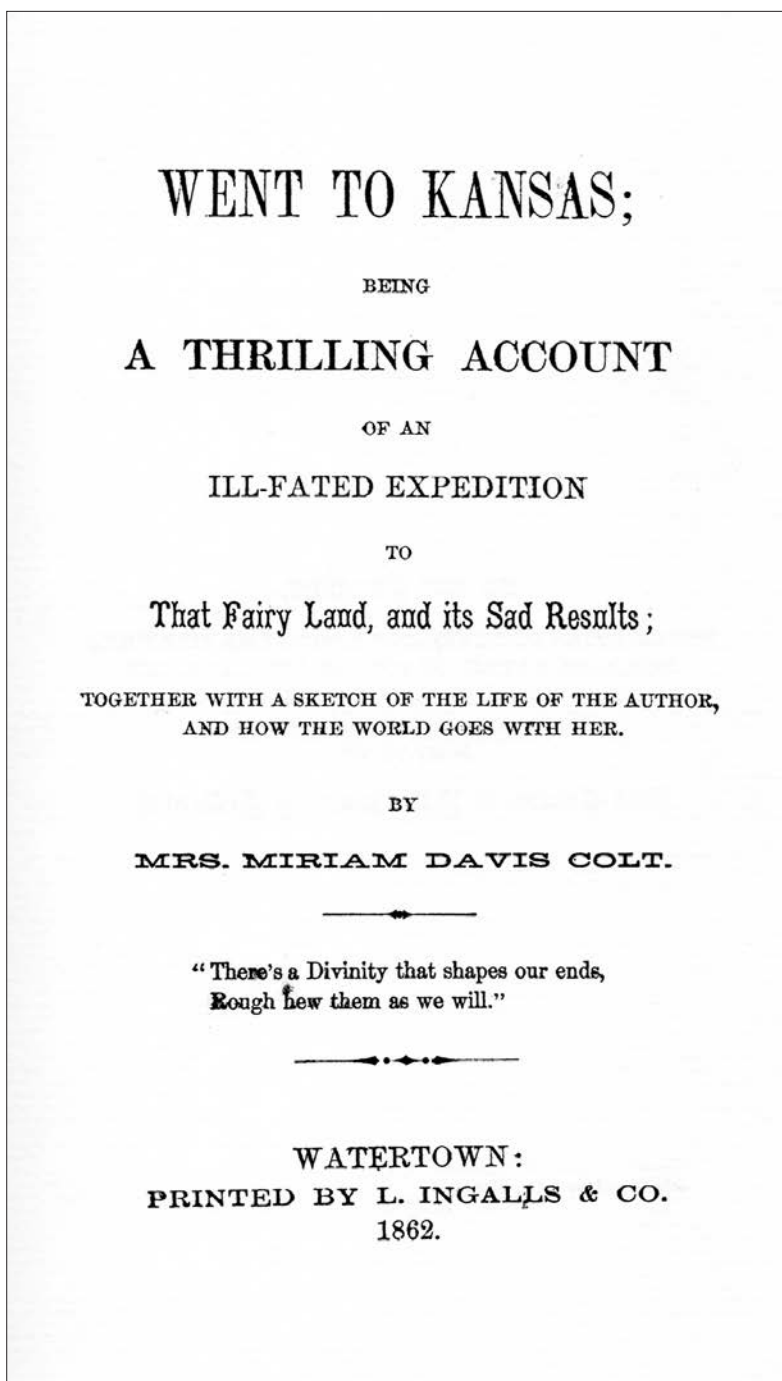
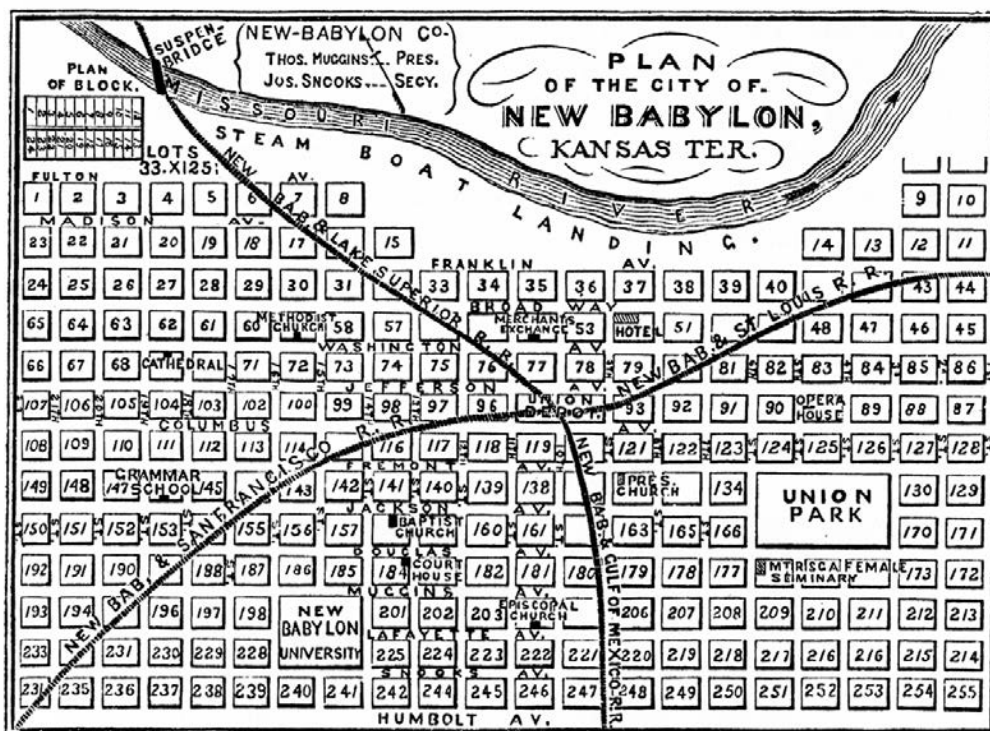
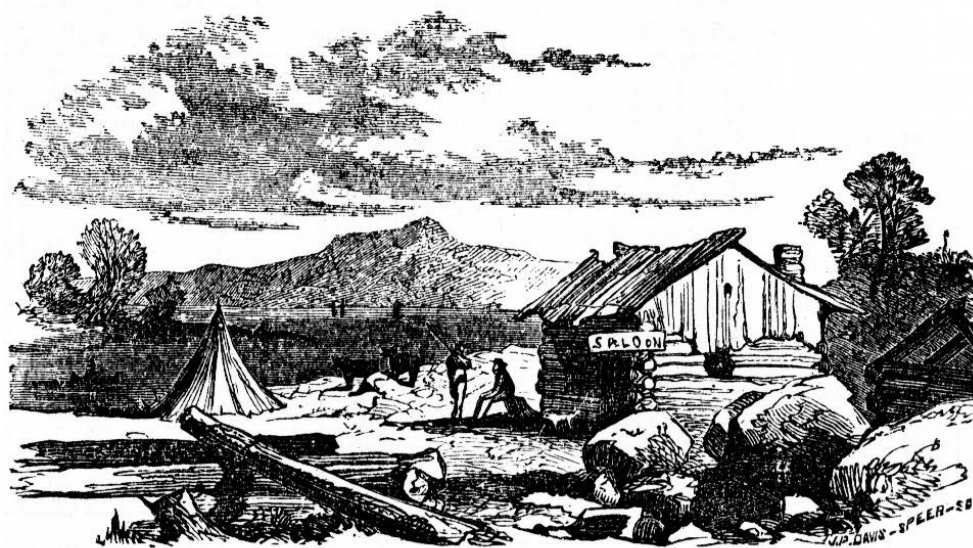


Fig. 4.28 Title page from Miriam Colt’s account of her brief membership in the Vegetarian Octagon Colony, entitled *Went to Kansas; Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to that Fairy Land, and Its Sad Results...* (1856)



THE CITY OF NEW BABYLON ON PAPER.



THE CITY OF NEW BABYLON IN FACT.

Fig. 4.29 Hypothetical Kansas city of New Babylon “on paper” and “in fact” (Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 1869)

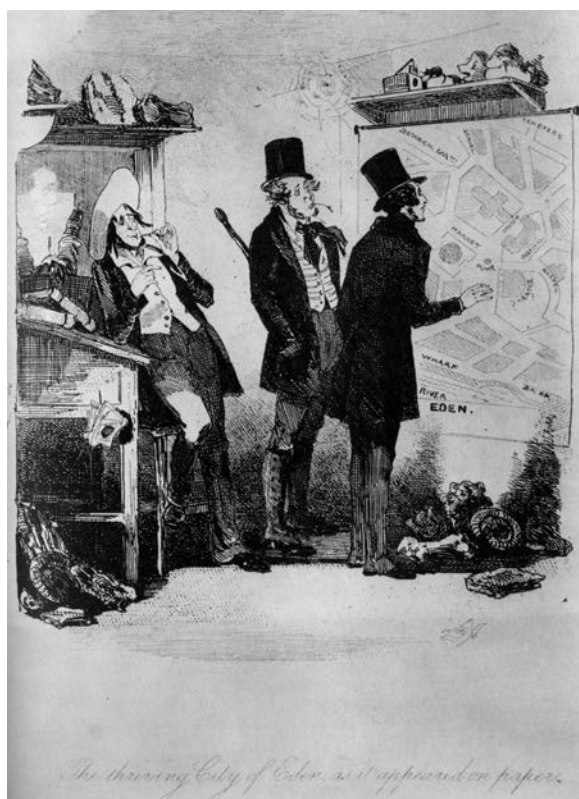
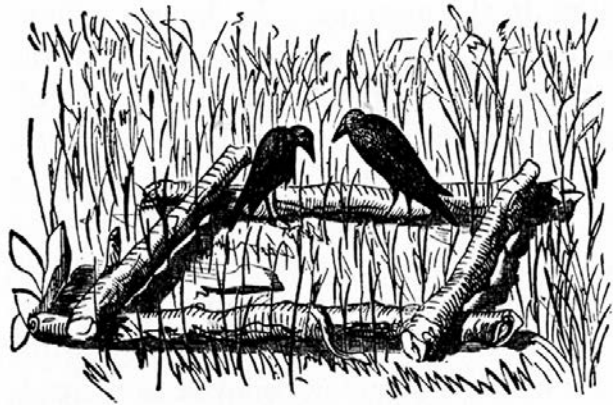


Fig. 4.30 Images from Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842-43) showing a western American city called “Eden” as depicted in the land office, and in actuality.



A HOUSE 'TWELVE BY FOURTEEN.'



A HABITABLE DWELLING.

Fig. 4.31 Satirical images showing various preemption subterfuges. (Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 1869)

5. City of Individual Sovereigns: Josiah Warren's Hexagonal Experimental Machines

Liberty! LIBERTY! Has been the battle-cry, and liberty! the last sound that hung upon the dying martyrs quivery lips—yet liberty is still but a sound. It refers to no condition in civilized life; it has no archetype in society; but like sweet music in the dead of night, it bursts upon the ear and enchants the soul, only to die away, leaving us nothing but the memory of a departed sound.

- Josiah Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce* (1852)

Nearly twenty years after the swift collapse of Henry Clubb's octagonal vegetarian city, an afterimage of his geometric plan suddenly appeared. Printed on the last pages of an obscure, self-published book entitled *Practical Applications of the Elementary Principles of "True Civilization"* (1873) were two plans: One showed a radially organized "section of a city" that was strikingly similar to Clubb's octagon village scheme, only with six instead of eight sides. The other depicted an entire city composed of hexagons tiled together to form a larger hexagon. (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2) The author of the tract was Josiah Warren (1798-1874), who at age 75 was in the twilight of a long career in reform. (Fig. 5.3) Regarded by many today as the first American anarchist, his reform program was grounded in two main principles: "individual sovereignty" and "cost the limit of price." The first tenet insisted on the preservation of individual liberties from encroachment by constitutions, governments, joint-stock companies, and all other forms of combination through a radical separation of interests. The second sought a form of free market economy that would be equitable and

free of exploitation. Warren's combination of libertarian, anarchist, and socialist ideas was as novel in his own time as it is almost unthinkable in our own.

Given Warren's political philosophy, his inclusion of these hexagonal drawings is enigmatic for several reasons: Why would someone so devoted to the individual's freedom from external constraints, and to the "abolition of systems and systems making" have advocated such an apparently rigid geometric plan?¹ The hexagon diagrams appear on first sight to be a complete contradiction in Warren's thinking—a thoroughly formalist project endorsed by someone who railed against artificial forms. Also, though he founded several colonies during his life, nowhere in his previous books did he evince much of an interest in urban planning, so it is a mystery why he should have ended his last publication with a list of "Points Suggested for Consideration in Laying Out of Towns."² In the text, he attributed the plan drawings to a J. Madison Allen of Ancora, New Jersey, a little-known vegetarian, spiritualist, and spelling reformer whose precise connection to Warren is mysterious. Last is the question of whether Warren and Allen knew of Henry Clubb's or

¹ The phrase "abolition of systems and system making" appears in Josiah Warren, *Practical Details in Equitable Commerce, Showing the Workings, in Actual Experiment, During a Series of Years, of the Social Principles Expounded in the Works Called "Equitable Commerce," by the Author of This, and "the Science of Society," by Stephen P. Andrews* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852), 92.

² There is one possible exception. James J. Martin cites a publication by Warren from 1864 entitled *The Emancipation of Labor* where he discusses a plan for decentralized cities with central parks and intensively planned nuclei. However I have not been able to locate the 1864 book and WorldCat has no record for it. Crispin Sartwell, who edited a recent anthology of Warren's work, also does not have a copy. See James Joseph Martin, *Men against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-1908* (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1957), 99. In any case, the general point holds true: Warren does not discuss urban planning in either of his "major" works, *Equitable Commerce* (1852) or *True Civilization* (1863).

Lewis Masquerier's octagonal city plans, and, if so, what was the rationale for changing the geometry from eight to six-sided.

One response to the puzzle of these plans is to simply write them off as an anomaly—an afterthought at the end of a book written late in life.³ Apparently drawn by Allen, one can speculate that they were not even representative of Warren's own thought. Yet whoever created them, there they are: further evidence of mid-nineteenth-century American reformers' belief that geometric spatial plans could help express and effect radical social transformation. In Warren's specific case, the geometric utopia also grew out of a functionalist theory of representation that regarded certain kinds of diagrammatic images as capable of cutting through the obfuscation of words and politics in nineteenth-century America.

This chapter begins with an account of Josiah Warren's and J. Madison Allen's major reform beliefs and activities. Both were members of a network of reformers, connected through shared printers, publications, and overlapping memberships in movements and associations. Warren and Allen were almost certainly aware of one or more of the previous octagonal plans and their hexagon plan tackles the same basic problem as those other utopian geometries—providing both a cognitive image of, and an

³ Nearly all the contemporary scholarly treatments of Warren, for example, have simply ignored the city diagrams. There is no mention of it in William Bailie, *Josiah Warren, the First American Anarchist; a Sociological Study* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906); Roger Wunderlich, *Low Living and High Thinking at Modern Times, New York* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992); Martin, *Men against the State*. In his recent anthology of Warren's writings, Sartwell includes excerpts from *Practical Applications*, including Warren's textual prescriptions for laying out towns, but does not include or allude to the images. Crispin Sartwell, ed. *The Practical Anarchist: Writings of Josiah Warren* (New York: Fordham University Press).

instrument for realizing, an alternative organization of the relationship between individuals and society. Comparing the features of Warren and Allen's hexagonal plan to the land reformers' or vegetarian octagon settlements helps elucidate how it would have effected Warren's twin principles of individualism and equality. One of the most distinct aspects of Warren's urban diagram is that he saw it as a kind of machine for producing experimentation. While the first part of the chapter looks at *what* Warren and Allen believed the diagram could do, the second part takes up the more difficult question of *why*—that is, it tries to extricate an implicit theory of representation from Warren's writings on language, politics, notation systems, and machines. Like many nineteenth-century advocates of writing and notational reform, Warren sought a more transparent, rational system of representation in which form was linked directly to function (or sign to sound, in the parlance of orthographic reform). This functionalist theory of representation led Warren to see images—particularly diagrams—as capable of structuring society in a way that words, with their tendency to misinterpretation and mystification, could not. For Warren, diagrams were ideal vehicles for conveying abstract, rational principles—which he imagined his own concepts of individual sovereignty and equitable commerce to be. Yet this desire for universal principles could be at odds with Warren's equally strong commitment to radical social experimentation.

Josiah Warren

Sometimes identified as the United States' earliest anarchist, it is probably more accurate to say that Warren's own thinking represented an original combination of socialist, liberal, and anarchist ideas.⁴ Like Fowler, Masquerier, and Clubb, Warren was a product of what some have called the "village Enlightenment." Highly literate but not well-read in the traditional sense, he operated outside the privileged intellectual orbits of a Thomas Jefferson or a Ralph Waldo Emerson while pursuing similar concerns and problems.

Warren developed his theories from a homespun mixture of popular reform and scientific ideologies, all processed through the sensibilities of a highly original and determined free thinker. Also like many nineteenth-century reformers, Warren was an inventor whose innovations encompassed the realms of music, printing, lighting, and economics. Crispin

⁴ This identification of Warren as anarchist forerunner began with his biographer William Bailie, *Josiah Warren, the First American Anarchist: A Sociological Study* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906). James Martin continued this positioning of Warren as anarchist in *Men against the State*. Although Warren himself never used this term (indeed it was not even coined until 18xx), his ideas were influential on later explicitly anarchist figures like Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner. In his introduction to *The Practical Anarchist*, Crispin Sartwell points out that the contemporary division of left and right along lines of statist socialism versus libertarian, laissez-faire capitalism cannot be mapped onto the antebellum political spectrum. "What we might think of as the far Left [in the early nineteenth century]—the feminist movement, abolitionism, the peace movement—attacked the very idea of state power." In analyzing the proto-anarchist elements of Warren's thought, Sartwell helpfully schematizes the later split between left- and right-wing anarchism in his introduction to Warren's writings: Left-wing or "communist" as expounded by Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, attacked private property and called for spontaneous cooperation or "mutual aid." In the U.S., left-wing anarchism reached its height with Emma Goldman and the Haymarket riots, and came to be associated with the image of the bomb-wielding immigrant terrorist. Right-wing anarchism, as developed by Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker and later Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard, emphasized voluntary contract and promoted self-seeking acquisitiveness. Sartwell argues—and I agree—that Warren doesn't fit either of these models. Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 44-48.

Sartwell has called Warren “a half-cracked monomaniac but also an omni-competent human being.”⁵

Warren was born in 1798 in Boston and moved to Cincinnati around 1820, where he established himself as a music teacher and performer. He was also an inventor, and in 1821, received his first patent—for a lamp that burned lard instead of more expensive tallow. Shortly after, he established a business to manufacture the new lamp. In 1825, Warren’s life was changed when he heard the Welsh industrialist and social reformer Robert Owen speak. Converted, Warren sold his business and joined Owen’s colony at New Harmony, where he led the community’s band and taught music in the school. (Figs. 5.4 and 5.5)

New Harmony collapsed by 1827, and Warren spent the rest of his life trying to correct what he saw as the root cause of its failure. While historians of the community have pointed to a number of factors contributing to its demise—including internal disputes over the pooling of resources, Owen’s lack of direct involvement with daily operations, and the community’s shortage of practical farmers and mechanics, Warren attributed the failure to one word: communism.⁶ In his view, joint ownership suppressed individual initiative and responsibility, and ignored the fundamental law that human

⁵ *Practical Anarchist*, ix.

⁶ Although Owen and many Owenites supported community of property in theory, it was never fully implemented at New Harmony. See J. F. C. Harrison, *Quest for the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 75-76 and 181-82. On Owen and New Harmony, see Harrison’s book and Arthur Eugene Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950).

beings were bound to disagree. Warren therefore dedicated himself to finding ways to enforce a radical separation and individuation of interests, or what he termed the principle of individual sovereignty.

Individual Sovereignty

Warren's principle called for each person to have absolute control over his or own actions, body, and circumstances:

When one's person, his labor, his responsibilities, the soil he rests on, his food, his property, and all his interests are so *disconnected, disunited* from others, that he can control or dispose of these at all times, according to his own views and feelings, without controlling [*sic*] or disturbing others; and when his premises are sacred to himself, and his person is not approached, nor his time and attention taken up, against his inclination, then the individual may be said to be practically SOVEREIGN OF HIMSELF...⁷

In some ways, Warren's principle of individual sovereignty was an extreme variant of the liberal ideology that was gathering steam in the nineteenth century—a world view that saw individual “freedom” as a fundamental value requiring protection from government intrusion. The relation of Warren's thought to the core of liberal theory is suggested by the fact that John Stuart Mill adopted Warren's phrase “sovereignty of the individual” in one of the canonical treatises of nineteenth-century liberalism, *On Liberty* (1859).⁸

⁷ Josiah Warren, *Equitable Commerce: A New Development of Principles, as Substitutes for Laws and Governments, for the Harmonious Adjustment and Regulation of the Pecuniary, Intellectual, and Moral Intercourse of Mankind.*, ed. Stephen Pearl Andrews (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1852), 61.

⁸ In his autobiography, Mill wrote: “[A] remarkable American, Mr. Warren...had obtained a number of followers [at Modern Times] (whether it now exists I know not) which, though bearing a superficial resemblance to some of the projects of the Socialists, is diametrically opposite to them in principle, since it recognises no authority whatever over the individual, except to enforce equal freedom of development for all

In Warren's thought, individuality was not only a political goal but an ontological and epistemological fact—one that he based in the fundamental nature of language and persons. Attempts at combination of interests were futile, Warren argued, because no two people could ever see something in the exact same way, just as they could never understand a given word the same way. Take, for example, the word "individuality," Warren wrote. "Such is the indefinite diversity that will spring up out of the peculiarities or individualities of persons, times, and circumstances when the word is used; and this diversity is *inevitable*."⁹ This multiplicitous and indeterminate nature of language lay at the root of many of the age's political conflicts. The problem with all laws and constitutions, Warren held, was that they were interpreted differently by different people. The fundamental flaw also applied to reform schemes: Even if a utopian plan could be perfectly formulated in the form of a book or constitution, each person would interpret the plan differently.¹⁰

The solution was a world in which individuals were radically atomized to the point where no person's actions or beliefs impinged on anyone else's. This was the only way to ensure social harmony. Hence, he opposed not only all forms of community ownership, but also all manner of government impositions and business combinations—any form where interests could be blurred. In Warren's view, governments throughout history had

individualities.... I borrowed from the Warrenites the phrase, the sovereignty of the individual." Quoted in Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 44.

⁹ Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 17.

¹⁰ Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 24.

invaded the private household, meddled, and presumed to regulate individual matters, producing countless wrongs.¹¹ He condemned voting and government by majority will, which inevitably led to a minority living under laws not agreeable to them.¹² Warren decried demands for unity and “one-ness” of mind or action, writing emphatically: “WE SHOULD BE NO SUCH THING AS A BODY POLITIC! EACH MAN AND WOMAN MUST BE AN INDIVIDUAL—NO MEMBER OF ANY BODY BUT THAT OF THE HUMAN FAMILY!”¹³

By the same logic, Warren opposed both business combinations and reform communities. Joint-stock investments were only advisable on very limited terms—each person should be able to withdraw his investment at pleasure and not be subject to any decisions made by others against his or her views, unless such delegation was clearly agreed to from the start.¹⁴ Warren did not rule out all forms of cooperation—only those that unnecessarily mingled individuals’ interests. For example, he recognized the benefits of division of labor, and commended boardinghouses whose communal dining rooms enabled savings of labor and expense. Such arrangements would “relieve the females of the family, from the dull, mill-horse drudgery to which they otherwise are irretrievably

¹¹He cited the egregious example of a woman, abandoned by her husband, forced to take in a boarder who refused to pay. The villainous boarder “has consumed her last loaf; she appeals to the law for redress; the villain brings the drunken husband into court.” Instead of getting the money she is owed, the woman is put into prison. Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 49-50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

doomed.”¹⁵ However he insisted that in such establishments, each tenant should contract individually with the boarding house owner, producing “cooperation” without “combination.” Thus would “each in pursuit of his own interest [promote] the interests of all others.”¹⁶ Any cooperation should be voluntary and not coerced.

Although some of Warren’s exclamation-point-laden screeds against government tyranny sound similar to contemporary right-wing rhetoric, it is important to put his views the context of early-nineteenth-century America, when quasi-anarchist positions were associated with the ultraist wings of the pacifist and abolitionist movements. These groups repudiated all use of force, including laws and government. Radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison famously refused to pay taxes to or vote within a government system that supported the iniquity of slavery. Anarchist views were thus most closely identified in the nineteenth-century with radical left-wing Christianity.

The other problem with linking Warren’s individualism with modern libertarianism or right-wing anarchism is that although Warren disagreed with Owen about the *means* of reforming society, he agreed wholeheartedly with the utopian industrialist’s goal: to create a more equitable society, free of exploitation. Warren was passionately concerned with transforming a society torn apart by “the grinding power of

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

capital.”¹⁷ He simply saw individualism, not collectivism, as the means to rectify present injustice.

Cost the Limit of Price

The source of oppression and inequality, Warren claimed, was the practice of price being determined by value—that is, its price according to market demand—rather than its “real” cost, defined as the amount of labor employed in making a given object. Here Warren was presenting a modification of the labor theory of value as articulated by Adam Smith.

Unlike Smith, however, who equated the value of an article with the amount of labor it would command in trade, or the amount of “toil and trouble” it would save the acquirer to purchase it, Warren proposed a more direct formula: the labor expended to produce it.

As an illustration of his heterodox principle, Warren cited the traveler dying of thirst who requested a glass of water from a stranger. The value of the water to the traveler was extraordinary but its cost to the giver was nothing. On Warren’s principle, the price should be free.¹⁸ Yet under the prevailing system of price based on value, “the most successful speculator is he who can create the most want in the community and extort the most from it.”¹⁹ Warren’s was explicitly a moral economy that aimed at justice rather than simply efficiency or rationality. The current system of price based on value, he wrote

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41; *True Civilization an Immediate Necessity, and the Last Ground of Hope for Mankind* (Boston: J. Warren, 1863), 71.

¹⁹ *Equitable Commerce*, 42.

passionately, was “the origin of *rich* and *poor!* the fatal pitfall of the working classes! the great political blunder! the deep-seated, unseen germ of the confusion, *insecurity*, and iniquity of the world! the mildew, the all-pervading poison of the social condition!”²⁰

Warren opposed speculation of all forms. Speculators were the epitome of those who trafficked in phantom rather than definite values. He especially condemned individuals who wagered on land and buildings, who preyed on “the want or distress felt by the landless and houseless; the greater the distress, the higher the *value* and the price.”²¹ He believed that implementing his cost principle would enable all to have “a home upon the earth, instead of one half of men and women being homeless.”²²

Labor Notes, Time Stores, and Experimental Communities

To facilitate exchanges based on cost instead of value, Warren proposed a system of economic exchanges using labor notes—an idea borrowed from Robert Owen (though Owen himself never put it into practice). Warren understood the advantages of a medium of economic circulation over direct barter. The problem with money in Jacksonian America, however, was that no one knew what it was worth. At a time when there was no uniform national currency, thousands of different bank notes of uncertain value circulated. (Fig. 5.6) Some contemporaries estimated that as much as 40 percent of the

²⁰ Ibid., 48.

²¹ Ibid., 46.

²² Ibid., 38.

bank notes circulating were counterfeit.²³ Booms and busts made the value of goods subject to severe fluctuation: “a dollar sometimes commanding twenty pounds of flour, and sometimes double that.”²⁴ Advocates of hard money wanted all currency to be backed up by specie—that is, metals of “intrinsic” worth. However, for Warren, the only “object” of intrinsic worth was individuals’ labor. He therefore proposed a system by which individuals could issue notes for definite quantities of labor of a particular type, or for an equivalent amount of goods. These notes would be used as tender at a central Time Store where goods could be purchased and services exchanged. (Figs. 5.7 and 5.8) Warren believed that the use of labor notes would lead to greater equality of wealth. Since time would essentially become the unit of capital, and all individuals had roughly the same amount of it, differences would be minimized.²⁵

Armed with the principles of equitable commerce, Warren embarked on what would be a lifetime of social experimentation, tirelessly setting up a series of test-trials in

²³ Michael O'Malley, “Specie and Species: Race and the Money Question in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (1994): 373-74. On the history of antebellum banking more generally, see Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America, from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

²⁴ Warren, *Practical Details*, 15.

²⁵ “[E]ach one having the same amount of [time]...the difference between them will be chiefly in their different degrees of credit in the community, and their different natural capacities.” *ibid.*, 83. Though in early articulations of equitable exchange, Warren proposed that different kinds of labor should not be valued differently, in later versions, he modified this so that more onerous forms of labor would be valued more highly.

equitable commerce and communities of sovereign individuals.²⁶ He opened his first Time Store in Cincinnati on May 18, 1827, at the northwest corner of Fifth and Elm Streets.²⁷ Warren described this enterprise explicitly as a kind of experiment: The intent was to try out the principle of equitable commerce at a small scale. If it was successful, then it could be publicized and propagated. If it failed, revealing some “unforeseen radical defect,” then, like a faithful empiricist, he pledged to abide by the results of his experiment and “let all systematic reforms entirely alone.”²⁸ Warren’s Time Store seems to have been moderately successful.²⁹ After two years, he had broken even, and sought to move on to the next, larger trial—a full community.

In 1833, after several delays, Warren finally succeeded in planting a colony with six families on 400 acres in Tuscarawas County, Ohio.³⁰ James Martin has called this the

²⁶ My account of these experiments is drawn from *ibid*; *Practical Applications of the Elementary Principles of “True Civilization” to the Minute Details of Everyday Life*. (Princeton, MA: The Author, 1873); Martin, *Men against the State*, 15-64.

²⁷ Warren designed a way for this system to be gradually introduced: Customers at the time store at first would pay for the cost-value of goods with legal tender, only paying the storekeeper for his time in labor notes. Eventually, once the cooperative became large and established enough, it could operate on labor notes alone.

²⁸ Warren, *Practical Details*, 14. Warren’s account of the opening of the first time store is rather comical: To get it underway, he asked a friend to come and make a purchase. “The keeper was there in waiting, but he never came!” Warren asked another friend, and then a third. “Desperate with disappointment and chagrin,” he prevailed on a relation (probably his brother) to come and purchase some coffee, sugar, and paper for \$1.50 plus 15 minutes of labor. The name “Time Store” was apparently invented by the public (in reference to the clock measuring the merchant’s time) rather than Warren himself.

²⁹ Warren reported positive responses from customers and even some neighboring storekeepers who saw the rationality of his system—despite the fact that he was undercutting their prices.

³⁰ The delay was due in part to some dealings between Warren and Robert Dale Owen: Although the details are a little unclear, Owen promised to support Warren’s establishment of a community in New York, but ended up going to Europe and withdrawing his support. Warren himself was having trouble mustering up interest in his colony, despite the success of the Cincinnati Time Store. In the interim, he Warren engaged

first anarchist community in America. However, the village was done in by disease—probably malaria—and abandoned by 1835. Warren returned to New Harmony and started another time store, which he operated for two or three years before establishing his second community in 1847. Utopia, Ohio, (also known as “Trialville”) was founded in partnership with veterans of the recently dismantled Clermont phalanx, a Fourierist community outside Cincinnati. The residents of Utopia operated a Time Store, labor exchange, a steam mill, and a grist mill. Warren also started a music school. At its height, in 1852, the community may have numbered nearly one hundred. Admission to the community was controlled: new members had to be approved by the old. Streets and alleys were laid out with 80 quarter-acre lots. Lots were purchased for fifteen dollars each—this price was set for three years, and each person was limited to two lots. According to Warren, within five months, four of the six previously destitute families owned houses, all built through labor exchanges rather than cash expenditures. One of the Utopians, a Mr. E. G. Cubberley, recounted in 1848 that the equitable commerce system had enabled him to erect a one-and-a-half-story brick house with a cash outlay of only \$11.85. This in contrast to his experience in the Clermont Phalanx, where he had paid

in various reform experiments—he was involved with a manual training school in Spring Hill, Ohio from 1830 to 1831, and he worked on developing an improved printing press. In 1833 he started a newspaper, *the Peaceful Revolutionist*. Warren portrayed this period as one of preparation: [A] whole series of investigations and experiments ... constituted a regular, daily pursuit. Investigations in the working of iron, making things...constructing spinning machinery, learning the printed art, cheapening the modes of printing and of casting types, and of constructing houses, occupied this interval.” Warren, *Practical Details*.

\$207 over three years and ended with nothing. “I feel now that I am a whole Individual—not a piece of a mass, or of somebody else, as I was in combination.”³¹

Throughout the 1830s and early 40s, Warren operated in intentional obscurity—setting up his “experiments” away from public notice until such time as he could demonstrate the viability of his principles. After the success of the initial Time Stores, however, he decided it was time to publicize the results in order to propagate the principle of equitable commerce. Warren was acutely aware of the power of the media: “Printing is a power that governs the destinies of mankind,” he wrote. “[T]hose who can control the Printing Press, can control their fellow creatures.”³² His efforts to attract notice from mainstream reform journals failed miserably, however. At one point, he sent copies of one of his books to 200 newspapers but received no response; he started a periodical but managed to get only four subscriptions.³³ In *Practical Applications*, he recorded his frustration at being consigned to giving away his books “to here and there one who could be induced to look at them.”³⁴ Stymied by the indifference of the mainstream press, Warren set about investigating what he called “*Amateur Printing*”—new printing techniques that would lower the cost of reproduction and “emancipate” the power of the

³¹ *Practical Applications*, 10.

³² “Printing in Private Families,” *The Free Enquirer*, March 13, 1830, 20.

³³ *Practical Details*, 92. Warren was critical of the mainstream press, writing in *Practical Applications* that “[T]he public have learned but very little of the subject, because the common, mercenary news papers could not or would not do it any justice, and it has been kept out of them as much as possible.” *Practical Applications*, 16.

³⁴ *Practical Applications*, 16.

press “from the exclusive control of ‘capital.’”³⁵ Warren patented two of his printing innovations in 1835 and 1846. These involved the substitution of lead and later a rubber mix for expensive copper matrices, making the tools of printing more widely accessible.³⁶ To the extent Warren can be considered a predecessor to modern day anarchism, his early self-published pamphlets can also be seen as forerunners of zines. Like these later homemade photocopied pamphlets, Warren’s journals had their own homespun typographic aesthetic and contained numerous innovations—for example, indexing systems that allowed the reader to trace a theme throughout the text rather than read it in linear order. (Figs. 5.9-5.11)

In search of a larger audience for his ideas, around 1848 or 1849, Warren traveled back to Boston, where he made an impression on Stephen Pearl Andrews, an abolitionist, spiritualist, free love radical, and spelling and language reformer.³⁷ (Fig. 5.12) Andrews called Warren the “Euclid” of the social sciences and drew on Warren’s theories in later developing his own “science of society.”³⁸ The two men were unlike in many ways: Whereas Warren was low-key and publicity-averse, Andrews was flamboyant,

³⁵ *Practical Details*, 93.

³⁶ On Warren’s printing innovations, see Madeleine B. Stern, “Every Man His Own Printer: The Typographical Experiments of Josiah Warren,” *Printing History* 2, no. 2 (1980).

³⁷ For more on Andrews, see *The Pantarch: A Biography of Stephen Pearl Andrews* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968). Andrews was a colorful figure: Among his reform activities were his founding in 1844 of a secret club in New York, the League of the Men of Progress. He later founded a splinter group, the Grand Order of Recreation, and a Unitary Home near Union Square. Andrews translated the *Communist Manifesto* and orchestrated its first American publication in 1871.

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 74.

entrepreneurial, and well-connected in the world of New York reformers. Andrews acted as a kind of impresario to Warren, editing and arranging for the publication of the latter's books by Fowler & Wells. Together, the two men founded the village of Modern Times, Long Island, in 1851 as another test in the principles of individual sovereignty and equitable commerce.³⁹ Here, as in Utopia, Ohio, one of the main objectives was to enable individuals with few means to build their own homes—to secure “homes for the homeless.” (Fig. 5.13)

Warren and Andrews selected a site in the undeveloped center of Long Island. Following Warren's prescriptions, this was located near enough to a city (in this case, New York) to take advantage of transportation and commercial networks, but sufficiently removed to be independent.⁴⁰ Warren surveyed the land in a rectangular grid of eight east-west avenues and seven north-south streets, with one-acre lots. (Fig. 5.14) Lots were sold on the cost principle. As at Utopia, new members were initially screened by existing members, but this requirement was later dropped. The initial purchasers of lots included Warren, Andrews, Samuel Wells (Orson Fowler's brother-in-law and partner in Fowlers and Wells), and Horace Greeley (editor of the *New York Tribune* and advocate of land reform).

³⁹ For details on the history of Modern Times, see Wunderlich, *Low Living*; Charles A. Codman, “A Brief History of 'the City of Modern Times' Long Island, N.Y. And a Glorification of Some of Its Saints,” (Brentwood, NYca. 1905). Brentwood Public Library.

⁴⁰ In *Equitable Commerce*, Warren wrote that ideally, new cities were to be located within an hour's travel from existing cities or towns, to ensure access to supplies and markets (including for surplus labor). Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 109.

Wood was scarce on the site, so Warren developed a method of making bricks out of gravel and mortar—this might have been related to his publisher Orson Fowler’s advocacy of the gravel-wall system, as expounded in the 1853 edition of *A Home for All*. The use of homemade bricks combined with labor exchanges allowed the first houses to be erected with little capital. As Warren recounted, “those who never had homes of their own before, suddenly had them.”⁴¹ He set up a Time Store, a print shop, and a “Mechanical College”—a vocational school where he taught printing, stereotyping, bricklaying, and carpentry.⁴² The village came to boast two octagonal structures—one a house built by carpenter William Upham Dame, probably inspired by Fowler’s book, and the other a school built in 1857.⁴³ (Figs. 5.15-5.17) By December 1854, Warren reported the village had 60 to 70 residents.

The downfall of *Modern Times* was precisely the publicity that Warren sought, and which came for all the wrong reasons. In 1853, Andrews invited the controversial health reformers Dr. Thomas Low Nichols and Mary Gove Nichols to the community.

⁴¹ *Practical Applications*.

⁴² Wunderlich, *Low Living*, 32-33. Wunderlich quotes settler Henry Edger’s description of Warren’s building: a “square brick building, thirty-two feet each way, containing two stories and attics. The ground floor is occupied by the time store and several workshops—a smithy, carpenter’s shop and printing Press. The upper part is dwellings.” This building apparently was not very durable and was destroyed by “wear and tear” by 1870. The other buildings were similarly primitive. According to a contemporary report: “The houses are each one different...they plaster the *outside* and leave the interior unfinished. Some of the roofs are of paper: there are a profusion of sunflowers and crimson princess’ feathers.”

⁴³ Dame was a carpenter from Boston. The second floor of his octagon house was apparently used as an assembly room and was named “Archimedian Hall.” In 1904, the mayor of New York visited *Modern Times* (by then, Brentwood) and asked Dame why he had built an eight-sided house. Dame responded “economy of space, no space being lost in acute angles.” *ibid.*, 37. Both the house and the school are still standing today, although the school has been moved.

Among pet causes likes Spiritualism, water cure, and sex education, the Nichols were prominent advocates of “free love”—which, in the context of the mid-nineteenth-century, meant not unlimited sexual license, but rather the freedom of women to divorce, and to have greater control over sexual activity and reproduction.⁴⁴ It was a position often associated with Spiritualists, many of whom criticized orthodox marriage as constraining and oppressive for women and men alike and sought more “harmonious” unions based on spiritual affinity. (John Murray Spear, the subject of Chapter 6, was a noted proponent of a more “divine” approach to sexual relations.) Following the Nichols’ arrival, *Modern Times* began attracting all manner of eccentrics, each one believing “the salvation of the world depended on his displaying his particular hobby.”⁴⁵ Warren later recounted these individuals with humor: Besides the free lovers, there was a man who preached and practiced nudism, another woman who dressed in men’s clothing (“she cut such a hideous figure, that women shut down their windows and men averted their heads as she passed”), and another young lady who lived almost wholly on unsalted beans and “tottered about a living skeleton for about a year” before falling down dead. Warren didn’t approve of these lifestyle choices, but stayed true to his principle of individual sovereignty, and tolerated all.

⁴⁴ As Ann Braude points out, the term “free love” is misleading: It was more often a term of accusation leveled by critics, rather than one of self-identification in the nineteenth century. Also, most “free lovers” during the period actually recommended less sex rather than more. Free love was centered on opposition to the traditional institution of marriage, rather than advocacy of unrestrained license. Critics of conventional marriage saw it as a feudal form that gave men unrestrained access to their wives. As Braude explains, “Free love meant the freedom of women to refuse their husband’s sexual advances.” Braude explains the close affinity between Spiritualist and Free Love movements: “Most spiritualists did not support free love, most free love advocates were Spiritualists.” Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 128-29.

⁴⁵ Warren, *Practical Applications*, 17.

“Whoever tries what is vulgarly known as ‘free love’ . . . will find it more troublesome than a crown of thorns: and there is not much danger of its becoming contagious where the results of the experiments are made known.”⁴⁶ The Nicholsons left before long, but the community became indelibly associated in the public imagination and press with eccentricity and immorality. In the 1860s, to escape the taint of scandal, the residents changed the name of the town to Brentwood.

Warren split his time between *Modern Times* and Boston in the 1850s, finally leaving the colony for good in 1862. Throughout the 1850s, he was either involved in or inspired various experiments to introduce the principles of equitable commerce in an urban setting. One of his followers established a House of Equity in Boston in 1855: this was a kind of urban center with an equitable store, lectures, recreational areas, printing facilities.⁴⁷ In the 1860s Warren became involved with the New England Labor Reform League. And apparently he continued to imagine new colonies late into life, exploring the possibility of setting up communities in Jamaica and Central America.⁴⁸

Warren saw his Time Stores and colonies as demonstration experiments. The aim was not permanent survival but the creation of models for replication. Crispin Sartwell has called *Modern Times* a kind of “Temporary Autonomous Zone.”⁴⁹ And in his own

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18-24.

⁴⁷ Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 261-62.

⁴⁸ Martin, *Men against the State*, 9.

⁴⁹ Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 43.

reminiscence of the scandals caused by the Warren reflected that “there must be FREEDOM TO DIFFER before there can be peace or progress.... The world needs new experiences and it is suicidal to set ourselves against experiments, however absurd they may appear.”⁵⁰

James Madison Allen

It is not clear precisely how Warren, by 1873 in the twilight of a long career as a reformer, came into contact with J. Madison Allen, a little-known spiritualist, vegetarian, and spelling and writing reformer who was 38 years younger. (Fig. 5.18) Like Warren, Allen was a Massachusetts native and a musician.⁵¹ Both men also had affiliations to the network of reformers around Fowler. In an 1898 profile, Allen reminisced that the publications of Fowler and Wells had introduced him to phrenology and led him to the adoption of vegetarianism.⁵² This profile was published in *Food, Home and Garden*, a vegetarian

⁵⁰ Warren, *Practical Applications*, 19.

⁵¹ Allen was born in 1836 in East Bridgewater to a shoemaker and his wife. The 1861 Census lists a James M Allen, born about 1836 in Massachusetts, living in Boonville, Indiana, and working as a music teacher. *1880 United States Federal Census*, East Bridgewater, Plymouth, MA. Ancestry.com. On September 14, 1861, Allen enlisted as a musician in the Company Band of the Massachusetts 20th Infantry Regiment. He deserted on April 6, 1862. Historical Data Systems, comp. *American Civil War Soldiers* Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1999.

⁵² “Rev. James Madison Allen,” *Food, Home and Garden* 2, no. 16 (1898): 52. Allen also references Fowlers and Club in his short book *Figs or Pigs? Fruit or Brute? Shall We Eat Flesh?* (Springfield, MO: J. M. and M. T. Allen, 1896), 13,17,34.

journal edited by none other than Henry S. Clubb, the man who had led the ill-fated Kansas octagon colonization venture with support from the Fowlers.⁵³

Besides vegetarianism, Allen's two principle reform passions were spelling and spiritualism—also possible points of connection with Warren. Allen authored several pamphlets on new systems of writing in the 1860s and 70s.⁵⁴ (Fig. 5.19) As I discussed in Chapter 4, orthographic reform was a favorite cause of many mid-century radicals, including Stephen Pearl Andrews, Warren's cofounder at *Modern Times*.⁵⁵ These men and women saw the invention of a new, more “natural” and rational orthography as the key to synthesizing the discordant cacophony of society and producing universal harmony.⁵⁶ Warren too was convinced of the revolutionary possibilities of orthographic reform, relating it both to his principle of individuality and his proposals for a new system of musical notation: “PHONOGRAPHY, a gigantic improvement in letters, which is

⁵³ In the 1890s, Allen apparently attempted to start a vegetarian colony in northwestern Arkansas—it is possible he had Clubb's venture in mind as an inspiration (or cautionary tale).

⁵⁴ James Madison Allen, *The Natural Alphabet, for the Representation, with Types or Pen, of All Languages* (Blue Anchor, NJ: The author, 1867), 17; *The Panophonic Printing Alphabet, for the Philosophical Representation of All Languages, Based Upon an Original and Comprehensive Classification of the Elementary Sounds* (Rutland, VT: McLean & Robbins, 1867); *Normo-Graphy: (Normal, or Natural Writing.) Full Style, for Beginners* (Ancora, NJ: J. M. & S. S. Allen, 1872); *The Pan-Norm-Alpha* (Ancora, NJ 1872). Allen advertised three forms for his new spelling and writing system, which may explain the multiple titles and neologisms: a Full, Unabbreviated style; a brief, or Consonantal style; and a Reporting (shorthand) style.

⁵⁵ Andrews introduced Pitman's stenography to the United States in 1844 with the publication of the *Phonographic Class-Book* in 1844. He opened up a Phonetic Institute in Boston, and in 1845 established the American Phonographic Society. On Andrews's activity in spelling and language reform, see Stern, *The Pantarch: A Biography of Stephen Pearl Andrews*.

⁵⁶ Allen described his system thus: “[F]rom its *universal* as well as philosophical character, Panaphonics removes the chief obstacle to the acquisition of foreign languages, and furnishes a connecting link—a common tie—to bind together in closer fraternity the various nations of the earth. It thus becomes a stepping-stone to a Universal language and that condition of universal peace, intelligence, virtue and happiness, which has long been the fond dream of philanthropists.” Allyn, *Panaphonic Printing Alphabet*, 1.

probably to work a total revolution in literature and book education, consists in *Individualizing* the elements of speech and the signs which represent them.”⁵⁷

Similarly motivated by a vision of universal harmonization through language, Andrews, a linguist who claimed to read thirty-two languages, would invent his own universal language, Alwato—a kind of precursor to Esperanto. But whereas Andrews had the resources and connections to found journals and organizations devoted to shorthand, Allen seems to have labored at the obscure edges of the movement. Even *The American Journal of Phonography* in 1872 called Allen’s publications a “curiosity” and noted that his system bore no resemblance to Pitman’s.⁵⁸ Like Pitman, Allen built his system on the notion of creating a strict correspondence between sign and sound. Allen claimed that his “Panormalpha” (a universal normal alphabet for writing all languages) was based on the “self-evident” and “natural” principle that the “organic peculiarities and relationships of the sounds reappear in the gometric [*sic*] peculiarities and relationships of the letters which represent them.”⁵⁹ (Fig. 5.20)

Besides spelling reform, Allen was also an active Spiritualist lecturer, and this may have been another point of connection with Warren’s circle, since Warren’s wife, partner Andrews, and numerous residents of Modern Times were Spiritualists. Although Warren never wrote publicly about Spiritualism, his private letters suggest his interest in the

⁵⁷ Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 21.

⁵⁸ “New Phonographic Works,” *The American Journal of Phonography*, June 1872, n.p.

⁵⁹ Allen, *The Pan-Norm-Alpha*.

phenomenon as early as 1853.⁶⁰ According to notices in Spiritualist newspapers such as *The Banner of Light* and *The Spiritual Republic*, Allen was a Vermont-based “trance and inspirational speaker” in the 1860s, and was known to occasionally channel John Adams. In 1868, Allen became the principal of the Blue-Anchor Industrial Institute in Ancora, New Jersey, the site of a Spiritualist community.⁶¹ (John Murray Spear, the subject of chapter 6, was a resident of Ancora in 1867-8 and apparently knew Allen.⁶²) In addition to the Industrial Institute, the organizers of the colony dreamed of building a unitary palace, model homes, a cooperative store, a hygienic institute, and a lecturers’ retreat. An early prospectus for Blue Anchor promised houses of “unique design,” and at least one and possibly more octagon houses were built there. It is possible that Allen himself lived in a hexagonal house.⁶³ Probably not coincidentally, Horace and Samuel Fowler (Orson’s

⁶⁰ Warren to unknown correspondent (probably A. C. Cuddon), March 12, 1853. Josiah Warren Papers. Labadie Collection. University of Michigan Library. Caroline Warren, Josiah’s wife, also mentions spiritualism to her husband in several letters—see the letters dated January 25, 1855, August 26, 1855, and July 20, 1856. In the last letter, she mentions seeing the diagrams for S. C. Hewitt’s “Homes of Harmony”—probably printed in Robert Owen’s *New Moral World*. Caroline mentions that “The Spirits promise a new and improved style of architecture through Mr. H.” These diagrams are the subject of Chapter 6. This last letter also mentions a spiritualist “discourse” that Josiah had sent to her. On Warren and Spiritualism, see Shawn Wilbur’s analysis of a possible article by Warren on spiritualism in the *Boston Investigator* at http://libertarian-labyrinth.org/archive/The_Rappings.

⁶¹ On the Ancora community, see John B. Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 262-64; Milo Adams Townsend and *Social Movements of the Nineteenth Century*, (1994), www.bchistory.org/beavercounty/booklengthdocuments/AMilobook/chapters.html.

⁶² Spear and Allen almost certainly knew each other. On Blue Anchor, see *Remarkable Life*, 262-64. *Banner of Light*, March 16, 1867; *Milo Adams Townsend and Social Movements of the Nineteenth Century*.

⁶³For the reference to houses of unique design, and to an the eight-sided residence of Milo Townsend, one of Blue Anchor’s leaders, see *Milo Adams Townsend and Social Movements of the Nineteenth Century*. 85, 88. An article in the *Macon Telegraph*, July 15, 1886, mentioned that Allen lived in a “Harmonial Home” that was hexagonal in front, about thirty feet in diameter. A second building ‘built in the same shape’ was also on site. “The place is as cheerless looking as it can well be.” (5)

younger brothers), also founded a community, the Ancora Productive Union, there in 1872.

Allen also ostensibly was a practitioner of free love principles. Although, as I pointed out earlier, Warren himself did not subscribe to free love notions, he was surrounded by and tolerated its advocates, including Andrews. A scattering of news articles gives a hint of Allen's own practices: In 1881 he was arrested for polygamy in Ancora, though the case was abandoned for lack of evidence. And an 1886 newspaper article reported that he had been found living with four others in a "Harmonial Home, or free love institute" in a "state of semi-starvation for months past."⁶⁴ Perhaps to avoid the scandals and get a fresh start, Allen and a wife, Theresa, moved in 1893 to George Walser's Spiritual Institution near Liberal, Missouri, where they worked as mediums.⁶⁵ Allen passed away in Springfield, Missouri, in 1909.

⁶⁴ *The Galveston Weekly News*, April 14, 1881, 2; *The Macon Telegraph*, July 15, 1886, 5.

⁶⁵ A local newspaper reported that Allen intended to "dispense psychic truths such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, mediumistic powers, psychometry and follow with phrenology. His wife, Mrs. Theresa Allen, will devote herself to 'circle work', or the making of mediums." *The Sunday World-Herald*, December 3, 1893, p. 16. Thirteen years earlier, the 1880 Census listed Allen, age 44, as living in East Bridgewater, MA, living with a spouse, Sarah, age 37, and a boarder, Theresa Deckner (age 27). This living arrangement may have been the cause of the polygamy charges in 1881 and 1886. Allen's free love practices may have started earlier. In the 1860s, Allen, whose name was sometimes publicly spelled "Allyn" was listed in various spiritualist magazines as having the same address as a C. Fannie Allyn (sometimes spelled Allen). Cordelia Fannie Sampson Allyn was a spiritualist speaker and later labor reformer. According to census records, she had a child in 1863, but by 1870 was raising him alone, and in 1900 was listed as "divorced." One can only speculate about the identity of the father of Fannie Allyn's child.

The Hexagon City

The personal histories sketched above make clear that both Allen and Warren were part of a wide network of reformers centered around New York and Boston who shared interests in land reform, spiritualism, spelling reform, phrenology, vegetarianism, and free love. These were not just eclectic assortments of interests but were seen collectively as related elements in the reform of the world along more equitable, free, rational, and “harmonious” lines. Both Warren and Allen had links to several of the geometric utopians in this dissertation, including Fowler, Masquerier, Evans, Clubb, and John Murray Spear. Warren certainly knew of Fowler’s octagon house idea and very likely was aware of Lewis Masquerier’s octagon village. (In *Equitable Commerce*, Warren had praised Masquerier as a “deep and clear thinker” with a “good heart.”⁶⁶) As we saw, Allen was in contact with Clubb by the 1890s and possibly earlier.

Given the likelihood that Warren and Allen’s hexagonal town design was influenced by the earlier octagonal village plans, we must then look more closely at the differences between the plans—especially the decision to change from eight to six sides. In his text accompanying the town diagrams, Warren listed nine points “for consideration in laying out towns” that give us a clue as to how a specifically *hexagonal* urban plan would help enact his twin goals of individuality and economic fairness. Although Warren did not elucidate or explain the features of the hexagon plan, many of his points can be mapped

⁶⁶ Warren objected to Masquerier’s support of majority rule, however. “I tremble for the fate of the great problem, when such deep and clear thinkers, with such good hearts as Lewis Masquerier, are liable to such fatal mistakes when trusting to mere theory.” Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 102.

onto the urban diagram, suggesting a functionalist understanding of the relation between geometric urban form and social reform. Like the earlier octagon plans, Warren and Allen's urban diagram specified individual plots or "cells" of land, once again linking independence (or individuality) to the ownership of a house and a piece of the earth in a grid (whether hexagonal or square). But unlike Clubb's plan, which prized sociality and created a dense centralized urban community with generous collective spaces, Warren's and Allen's hexagon scheme stressed the autonomy of the cells, which, when repeated, resulted in a non-hierarchical, centerless settlement. The end effect was a potentially endless field with no central figure—a fitting spatial analogue of Warren's anti-statist, individualist vision for society.⁶⁷

In his points for laying out cities, Warren's first aim was to secure to each settler all the land "necessary" to him or her while cutting off the power to monopolize the soil. This was virtually a restatement of the 1840s land reformers' goals, and no doubt reflected Warren's contact with Evans and Masquerier. Like the land reformers, Warren was committed to a redistribution of property and to greater equality of wealth—and this redistributionist goal again found a corollary in the form of a cellular grid. But the scale of the grids differed: the land reformers had specified farm lots in their agrarian utopia of 10 to 640 acres—enough to sustain a family freehold; in his Kansas vegetarian colony, Clubb called for 102-acre farm lots, eventually to be subdivided into one-acre urban lots. Warren

⁶⁷ The similarity with Masquerier's later views, when he renounced cities and called for all individuals to live on independent 10-acre farmsteads, is striking, and hints at the reciprocity of ideas between him and Warren. For Masquerier, see chapter 2.

and Allen, in contrast, wanted lots of three to five acres—a size that was too small to sustain a family farm, yet far too large to produce any kind of urban density. This strange in-between dimension can be related to Warren’s reform program: an inventor, machinist, and onetime factory owner himself, he was no agrarian. Like Jefferson and many utopian reformers, Warren saw existing cities as irredeemable “sores,” he did not view freehold farming as the answer. He believed that commerce, mechanization, and the division of labor had the possibility of improving civilization—but only if conducted on equitable principles. In fact, equitable commerce, with its reliance on direct labor exchanges, required a certain degree of proximity and density to work. Warren’s and Allen’s hexagon town thus represented a strikingly different pattern of settlement than what had hitherto existed or been proposed in the United States a low-density, disarticulated, decentralized anarchist city where, as Warren put it, individuals would have “sufficient room to avoid mutual disturbance.”⁶⁸ In his points for laying out towns, Warren also cited two functional reasons for dispersal—to provide security against the spread of fires and contagious disease. These concerns may reflect Warren’s experience with the failed colony in Tuscarawas County (which was done in by malaria), and his knowledge of the recent Chicago Fire.⁶⁹ The desire for isolation from “mutual disturbance” and for preventing

⁶⁸ Warren, *Practical Applications*, 45. For Warren’s remarks on cities, see *Equitable Commerce*, 62. “[T]he whole fabric of society has to be begun anew from the foundation. This requires removal from cities as they are now constituted, and the building up of new ones upon entirely new pecuniary principles. If we can not introduce some true, scientific, and regulating principles, and thereby change the general modes of action, I look for no permanent improvement in the social condition.” *Practical Details*, 24.

⁶⁹ In 1873, the same year as the publication of Warren and Allen’s plan, the Royal Institute of British Architects published a paper read by John Burley Waring (1823-75) regarding “The Laying Out of Cities.”

these two forms of “contagion” help explain another feature of the hexagonal plan: In Allen’s drawing, all the farm plots are separated by roads, limiting the contiguity of domains and making each plot more island-like.⁷⁰

The next three of Warren’s points for urban design centered on the goal of equality: Every resident should have “equal advantages of locality” in terms of proximity to roads, businesses, and amenities, and minimizing the distances between dwellings and businesses. As in the land reformers’ and Clubb’s octagonal plans, this “equality of locality” was produced by a concentric, centralized organization. Each house on a wedge-shaped plot would be equidistant from a central public building and yard. Yet in Warren’s and Allen’s hexagon scheme there was a twist: this central organization operated at the scale of a six-house cluster. But when nineteen of these urban sections were tiled together to form a “whole city” of over 100 households, the result would have been a town with nineteen public buildings evenly distributed over the whole hexagon, with no overriding center—in other words, a radically decentralized city.

Allen and Warren may have been drawn to the hexagon in part because of how easily the figure tiled. Unlike the octagon, which, as we saw in the Clubb plan for Kansas, left behind corner triangles when placed together with other octagons, the hexagon can be

In it, Waring presented his own proposal for rebuilding Chicago, based on the model of the web of the “Geometrical spider” and inspired in part by Wren’s plan for London. Waring’s paper included a diagram of the cobweb plan. Waring does not cite fire prevention as a justification for the radial scheme but rather the convenience for reaching the center from all points. Between square, parallelogram, or circle, Waring says the circle is the best figure for both beauty and convenience. He added that he had sent the Mayor of Chicago a paper on the subject. It is unknown if Warren and Allen knew of this scheme.

⁷⁰ Allen does not show roads at the back sides of the lots, so each lot would still directly abut two neighboring lots on the back but not the sides. He may have imagined the rear borders as fenced.

repeated with no, or almost no, extraneous spaces. Clubb had used these “leftover” triangles to provide generous commons for woodland and grazing. In contrast, Warren and Allen’s plan stayed true to Warren’s individualist principles, designating a minimum of space for shared “public” amenities or urban elements that might incite conflict by blurring responsibilities and rights.

The Problem of Representation

It would be easy to leave our interpretation of the relationship between Warren’s politics and his diagrams here, with the argument that the hexagon city was basically an “anarchist” plan emphasizing the separation, isolation, and equality of individual domains at the expense of common public spaces. In the juxtaposition of Warren’s text and the hexagon plans, there was a strong suggestion that the urban plan could have a direct, instrumental role in bringing about Warren’s ideal society. But I am interested in digging further into this relationship between form and content, and in speculating not only on *what* Warren and Allen might have believed, but also *why* they resorted to a geometric urban plan rather than simply explaining their scheme in words. What did they think the diagram could do that words could not?

Warren himself was terse about the images’ role in his text. All he says is that “It is believed that the following plan (furnished by *J. Madison Allen*, of Ancora, N. J.) would enable us to attain all these ends, and some other advantages.”⁷¹ Warren’s book left a

⁷¹ Warren, *Practical Applications*, 46.

caesura between text and image—between his verbal points and Allen’s diagram, between social reforms and urban plan—which we must now try to fill in. The argument I develop here is that Warren in fact had a deeply considered, implicit theory of representation that underlay his beliefs about spelling reform, musical notation, language, politics, and—by inference—visual representation. His frustrations with the opacity and vagueness of language, especially political speech, drove him to seek a more transparent, natural, and functional form of representation. This was what lay behind his invention of a reformed musical notation, currency, and his inclusion of the hexagon diagrams.

Warren’s theory of representation was deeply influenced by the semiotic theories of a little-known upstate-New-York banker and philosopher named Alexander Bryan Johnson, the author of *The Philosophy of Human Knowledge: A Treatise on Language*.⁷² (Figs. 5.21 and 5.22) Warren wrote that “Mr. Johnsons’ elucidation of language is a bridge over which I have escaped from the bewildering labyrinths of verbal delusions called arguments and controversies.”⁷³ Johnson’s book presented a radically nominalist worldview. He argued that concrete experience was the only true basis of knowledge, and that language only obscured matters, by applying the same words to entities that were different. For example, “No two parcels of calomel possess the perfect identity which the

⁷² In *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, Warren wrote of the “singular coincidence of my own views with those of such a mind as Mr. Johnson’s” and claimed that he used “language with a constant regard for its principles as developed by Mr. Johnson.... I do not intend to enter into any argument where the language does not refer to some sensible phenomena.” “Individuality,” *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, April 5, 1833. Reprinted in Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 106-107.

⁷³ Warren, “Individuality.” Reprinted in Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 106-107.

sameness of their name implies. No two men possess the perfect identity which the sameness of their manhood implies.” Johnson even extended this variability to man himself: “[N]or possesses any one man, at all times, and under all circumstances, the complete identity with which language invests his individuality.”⁷⁴ In other words, nothing in Nature, not even persons, were the coherent singular identities implied by words.

Johnson saw language as impossibly vague and indeterminate. He argued, *avant* Saussure, that words had no necessary relationship to the objects or sensations they represented. As Johnson put it, “Words may be compared to a mirror. It is naturally void, and varies its representations as you vary the object which is placed before it.” Hence, for example, “The word William, when applied to a child, signifies the child; and when applied to a flower, signifies the flower.”⁷⁵ Johnson believed that there was a fundamental gap between representation and represented. Reaching for a metaphor close to home, Johnson the banker compared this fundamental emptiness of language to currency.

Neither had any innate value:

We employ words as though they possess, like specie, an intrinsick and natural value; rather than as though they possess, like bank notes, a merely conventional, artificial, and representative value.... Some banks, when you present their notes for redemption, will pay you in other bank notes; but we must not confound such a payment with an actual liquidation in specie. We shall possess, in the new notes,

⁷⁴ Alexander B. Johnson, *A Treatise on Language: Or, the Relation Which Words Bear to Things, in Four Parts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 67.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 96. Johnson's book was first published in 1828 under the title *The Philosophy of Human Knowledge, or A Treatise on Language* (New York: G. & C. Carvill, 1828). My page references are to a revised and expanded edition published in 1836.

nothing but the representative of specie. In like manner, when you seek the meaning of a word, you may obtain its conversion into other words, or into some verbal thoughts; but you must not confound such a meaning with the phenomena of nature. You will still possess in the new words, nothing but the representatives of natural existence.⁷⁶

As Jean-Christophe Agnew has observed, this was a “hard-money,” radically nominalist approach to language.⁷⁷ For Johnson, words were “empty” representations; true knowledge came from direct sensory experience of concrete objects.

Johnson’s meaning must have resonated with Warren, who likewise saw both words and currency as impossibly amorphous in value. Warren wrote that we must “look through words to things.”⁷⁸ In place of money—which had no definite value at any time, he argued that a circulating medium should have just one purpose:

that of *standing in the place of the thing represented*, as a miniature represents a person. Money represents robbery, banking, gambling, swindling, counterfeiting, etc., as much as it represents property; it has a *value* that varies with every individual that uses it, and changes as often as it is used—a picture that would represent at one time a man, at another a monkey, and then a gourd, would be just as legitimate and fit for a portrait, as a common money is fit for a circulating medium.⁷⁹

Compared with the protean and phantom quality of money, Warren believed the value of his labor notes was based on something real and concrete: “bone and muscle, the manual

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁷ Jean-Christophe Agnew, “Banking on Language: The Currency of Alexander Bryan Johnson,” in *The Culture of the Market: Historical Essays*, ed. Thomas L. Haskell and Richard F. II Teichgraber (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁸ Warren, “Individuality.” Reprinted in Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 106.

⁷⁹ Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 67.

powers, the talents, and resources, the property, and property-producing powers of the *whole people*—the soundest of all foundations.”⁸⁰

The solution to the problem of the tenuousness and indeterminacy of representations was to make them as transparent as possible, so that they were pure stand-ins for the concrete things represented. For Warren, the key to creating a transparent system of representation was, following Johnson, the principle of individuation. Warren drew an analogy with phonography and the letters of the alphabet: “The more the letters of the alphabet differ from each other, i.e., the more Individuality each possesses, the more efficient and perfect are they for the purposes intended. The same is true with regard to arithmetical figures, and everything of this kind.”⁸¹ This concern for finding signs that were “efficient and perfect ... for the purposes intended” was the basis of Warren’s functionalist theory of representation. What’s more, disconnection and difference were seen as the means to achieve a closer correspondence between sign and signified, between form and function.

The character of Warren’s theory of representation is most evident in his proposal for the reform of musical notation, as recorded in *Written Music Remodeled and Invested with the Simplicity of an Exact Science*, published in 1860.⁸² (Figs. 5.23 and 5.24) Warren

⁸⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁸¹ Ibid., 21.

⁸² *Written Music Remodeled, and Invested with the Simplicity of an Exact Science* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Company, 1860). Warren first self-published the book in the 1840s, but it was not widely circulated. It is interesting to note that J. P. Jewett and Company was also the publisher of reform books like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1855).

argued that the current system of musical notation was too complicated to allow music to be widely accessible, giving rise to an undesirable diversity of interpretation: “What is ‘*Forte*’ to one, is ‘*Piano*’ to another.”⁸³ This, he complained, enabled two competent performers could play the same piece differently. He therefore proposed that the elements of musical sounds be “*divided, separated, DISUNITED,*” and that each element be given “its peculiar *Individual* representative on paper.”⁸⁴

Warren identified six key elements to all music—stress, time, tune, articulation, legato, and silence, and attempted to represent each with a specific graphic attribute. His method would signify the elements of sound “exactly in the *notes themselves*”—that is, through form.⁸⁵ Thus, for example, the volume of the notes was represented by its size, with a “swelling” of volume indicated by a corresponding swelling in the shape of the note. By a similar logic, the relative length of the stem of the note represented its length in time.⁸⁶ (Fig. 5.25) Warren claimed that his system reformed musical notation on “geometric or scientific principles”: By creating a direct analogical relationship between graphic form and musical effect, it was more transparent and rational.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ *Equitable Commerce*, 21.

⁸⁵ *Written Music*, 9.

⁸⁶In a technique notably reminiscent of Jefferson’s system for creating a uniform system of weights and measures, Warren proposed establishing a standard measure for the length of beats using a pendulum of specified length. Take a cord “about a yard and a half long,” attach a weight and make a pendulum. Every swing would equal one second. *Ibid.*, 6.

Warren believed that his rationalized system of musical notation would, like a reformed orthography, make the things being represented—sound and meaning—more widely and universally accessible. Music, after all, was a “most heavenly element of social intercourse,” whose “beauties and powers” should be made accessible to humankind.⁸⁷ Whereas before, music had been used to subjugate the masses, now it could be deployed to emancipate people.⁸⁸ By attracting and delighting, music could become “a great agency in moral elevation and refinement, and even as a basis of extended national amity.”⁸⁹ Functionalism in musical notation could therefore have a democratizing and progressive political effect.

There was a paradox here that Warren never fully acknowledged: He was deeply suspicious of all systems of representation, and yet he sought to make more transparent systems of representation. The key to explaining this apparent contradiction is to understand that Warren saw texts and images as very different kinds of representations. He argued that his graphic system of musical notation would enable a “scientific exactness of expression which the words never enable us to attain.”⁹⁰ Warren was hostile—perhaps even afraid—of the ambiguity of verbal language. Explaining why he had not published his ideas earlier, Warren wrote:

⁸⁷ *Equitable Commerce*, 21.

⁸⁸ *Written Music*, ii.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

I have many times sat down to perform the task now before me; but when I contemplated the overwhelming magnitude of the subject—the bewildering complication of its different parts—the liability to err, to make wrong impressions through the inherent ambiguity of language, and the impossibility of conveying new ideas by old words, I have shrunk with fear and trembling from the task, have laid down my pen in despair, and returned to the silent, but safe, though tardy, language of experimental action. This speaks unequivocally to those who see and study it...⁹¹

Whereas words were liable to err because of their inherent ambiguity, causing “fear and trembling,” graphic notation systems had the potential to be rationalized and perfected. Musical notation and Pitman shorthand were, after all, essentially geometric diagrammatic systems—ones in which the formal attributes of lines and circles had precise functional relations to “real” sensory properties like sound, duration, and volume. Belief in the special capacities of diagrams to convey meaning precisely and analogically may help explain the proliferation of diagrams in the work of several of the thinkers and reformers in Warren’s circle, including Johnson and especially Andrews. (Figs. 5.26-5.29)

James Madison Allen, the designer of the hexagon plan and an orthographic reformer himself employed a similarly functionalist theory of representation. In explaining his proposal for a new “normal” orthography, defined “normal” in functionalist terms: “*Accomplishing the end* or destiny; performing the *proper function*; not abnormal; *regular*; *analogical*.”⁹² Allen with his rational shorthand and Warren with his reformed musical notation both claimed to have found a way to link sound and sign, form and function in a direct, natural, and rational way.

⁹¹ *Equitable Commerce*, ix.

⁹² Allen, *Normo-Graphy*, 8.

Drawings of Machines, Drawings as Machines

As a form of drawing, diagrams originated in geometry, but in the nineteenth century, they began to proliferate in virtually domain of culture—including politics, education, religion, and especially science and engineering. Whereas the 1828 version of *Webster's American Dictionary* defined the diagram as “In geometry, a figure, draught or scheme delineated for the purpose of demonstrating the properties of any figure, as a square, triangle, circle, &c. Anciently, a musical scale,” by 1886, this was augmented to include “Any illustrative outline, figure, or drawing” and a cross-reference to “*indicator diagram (steam-engines)*.”⁹³ This alteration signals how widespread the diagram had become as a mode of representation, and how closely it was linked to the representation of machinery.

Warren would have been intimately familiar with drawings of machines, of course, having taken out patents for a printing press in 1835 and a new type of stereotyping composition in 1846. The 1835 patent included several drafts executed in the typical style of nineteenth-century machine drawing: simple black and white wood-cuts with parts depicted in outline, without shadow, and featuring letters indexing a verbal description of parts. (Figs. 5.30 and 5.31)

Machine drawings were different from other kinds of visual representations. By the mid-nineteenth century such drawings already followed their own well-established conventions, as codified in the books of S. Edward Warren, a professor at the Rensselaer

⁹³ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: S. Converse, 1828); *Webster's Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1886).

Polytechnic Institute. (Fig. 5.32) Warren's book *Elements of Machine Construction and Drawing* (1870) began with the general principle that "Bodies, in addressing the eye, exhibit not only the attributes of color, transparency, or opacity; polish, or roughness; but the two *fundamental geometrical attributes* of *Form* and *Size*." Warren next defined "form" as "a determinate arrangement of an assemblage of points, according to some law. It depends upon the *relative* lengths and *directions* of the bounding lines of a body." In other words, form consisted of an orderly ("lawful") organization of parts, defined by relative lengths and external contours. Warren distinguished between two classes of drawings—perspective renderings that represented "apparent forms" and were "intended chiefly for ornament, or for popular illustration," and working drawings that used the conventions of measured, orthographic projection, and that focused on an object's geometric attributes—what he called their "real forms."⁹⁴ Working drawing constituted a special "graphic language, by which the thoughts of a designer can be most clearly conveyed to a workman, who can thence construct the objects represented." Whereas one kind of drawing was "ornamental," the other was instrumental.

The hexagon plans, like Warren's patent drawings, were instances of the latter. They shared the features of machinic drawing—spare, black and white woodcut lines, with no shadows or indications of texture, color, or material. The information contained in them was limited to geometric forms, relative sizes, and the organization of parts to whole. Lastly, they were instrumental—that is, intended to be translated into reality.

⁹⁴ S. Edward Warren, *Elements of Machine Construction and Drawing: Or, Machine Drawing, with Some Elements of Descriptive and Rational Cinematics* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1870), 1-2.

Why would Allen and Warren have selected such diagrammatic representations to illustrate their ideal city? One possibility is that machine drawings may have seemed appropriate because Warren saw society itself as a kind of machine. Metaphors of machinery permeate his writing. In *Equitable Commerce*, he wrote “Society is a complicated machine, which will not work rightly in the absence of some of its necessary parts.”⁹⁵ Warren could wield this analogy to savagely satirical effect. In an essay in *The Free Enquirer*, in 1830, he proposed replacing political parties with machines, in light of how elections had become rote, mechanical performances: “The routine of words in praise of our party and in abuse of the others are generally the same, or vary so little.” Warren therefore proposed creating two machines that would replace newspapers, pundits, and party operatives and spit out phrases like “scoundrel,” “traitor to his country,” “heartless demagogue,” “hero,” “patriot,” “defender of his country,” and “friend to infant manufacturers” in endless succession. Replacing the usual political show with an “inanimate machine,” Warren observed, would be economical and “save the addling of so much (or so little) brains,” as well as save a great deal of paper.⁹⁶

Warren recognized the humor of the society-machine analogy, but he also took it seriously. In a sense, his whole social philosophy was premised on thinking of himself not

⁹⁵ Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 3.

⁹⁶ Warren, “Improvement in the Machinery of Law.” *The Free Enquirer*, July 17, 1830, reprinted in Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 222-25. Warren was here expressing an attitude of disdain towards party politics typical of many Jacksonian-era radicals, who saw politicians as the puppets of the wealthy. According to Edward Pessen, “Without exception the labor leaders regarded the American political system as a hoax...” Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1967), 124.

as a reformer—he hated the term—but as a kind of machinist fixing (and drawing) the mechanism of society. In his notebook, he mused that society was like a “clock” and individuals the “pendulums”:

The organization of society is artificial: an invention, a continuance. The most ingenious person would be likely to succeed best in the invention of any machine, combining a number of elements for the accomplishment of certain objects. But to succeed well he must know the objects to be accomplished and the principles involved, and he must be able to trace any defect to the proper cause, not alter a wheel when it is a lever that is at fault, nor apply more power to force it forward when the wheels are out of true.⁹⁷

To Warren, the clarity of machines offered the very opposite of the ambiguity and subjectivity of the written word. As suggested above, he saw the emptiness of political speech, laws, constitutions, and all verbally based forms of government as hopelessly confused. Using a metaphor from the world of machining, he recalled the problems of New Harmony, and warned that “[W]e cannot construct any *verbal organization* that will not wear itself out by its own friction.”⁹⁸

Warren proposed to remove such friction by separating society’s parts using a machine-like plan. Thus, the hexagonal urban design, delineated in the manner of a technical diagram, depicted the city as a kind of idealized, frictionless machine. So too, in contrast to “verbal” systems of social organization, Warren saw his plan of Equitable Commerce as akin to an arithmetical law. “Our enterprise is not based in human

⁹⁷ Sartwell, *Practical Anarchist*, 130. In *Equitable Commerce*, Warren wrote similarly: “I propose to supply only such as appear to be wanting; if, indeed, a man can be said to supply that which man never made....” Warren, *Equitable Commerce*, 3.

⁹⁸ *Practical Applications*, 8.

inventions, but on natural laws.”⁹⁹ Warren didn’t want to see himself as, like other reformers, simply imposing his own subjective schemes. He conscientiously sought “to avoid the constant repetition of the egotistical pronoun *I*,” and insisted on treating the principle of “Equitable Commerce” as an objective, non-human agent, writing sentences like “E.C. proposed...” and “E.C. takes charge....”¹⁰⁰ Warren the machinist-cum-social reformer proposed fixing society according to scientific and rational principles.¹⁰¹

Experimentalism

We can see Warren’s inclusion of the hexagon plans—diagrammatic, machine like drawings—as reflecting his preference for the clarity and certainty of machines over the obscurity and subjectivity of words. But the machine metaphor—drawing as machine, plan as machine—also contained its own ambiguities, which manifested themselves when Warren tried to explain how his hexagonal, anarchist cities would propagate themselves—that is, how they would effect social transformation. In his “Points for Laying out Towns,” he presented two slightly different views on this problem. On one hand, he described his utopian town as something that, once perfected in model form, could simply be replicated

⁹⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Practical Details*, 48-49.

¹⁰¹ This preference for machines over words can also be related to Warren’s views on human subjectivity. Following Robert Owen and Alexander Bryan Johnson, Warren saw humans as empty containers, infinitely changeable: “Not only are no two minds alike now, but no one remains the same from one hour to another!... The surrounding atmosphere, the contact of various persons and circumstances, all contribute to make us more the *mirrors of passing* things than the possessors of any fixed character.” *Equitable Commerce*, 37.

and spread. The plan should be a model, he explained, “in a small way, yet complete in itself” and capable of “continuously extend[ing] outwards.” Future growth would “be only a repetition of what has already been done.”¹⁰²

Yet this vision of a small circular (or hexagonal) model being perfected and then replicated identically is very different from another possibility raised by Warren in his text, which is the idea of the hexagonal city as a breeding ground of different models. His final point for laying out of towns was that the plan should facilitate radical experimentation:

The world needs free play for experiments in life. Almost every thinker has some favorite ideas to try, but only one can be tried at a time by any body of people, and there is but little chance of getting the consent of all to any thing new or untried. If a new project can find a half a dozen advocates, it is unusually fortunate: If a hundred experiments were going on at once, there might be fifty times the progress that there would be with only one. To attain this very desirable end, it should be practicable for the few advocates of any new project to try it without involving any others in risks, expenses, or responsibilities or disturbances of any kind, and yet all might benefit by the results of such experiments, either positively, or negatively as warnings.¹⁰³

Within Warren’s text, and indeed, the image of the hexagon plan itself, there was a tension between these two visions—one imagined a single model, perfect and replicated

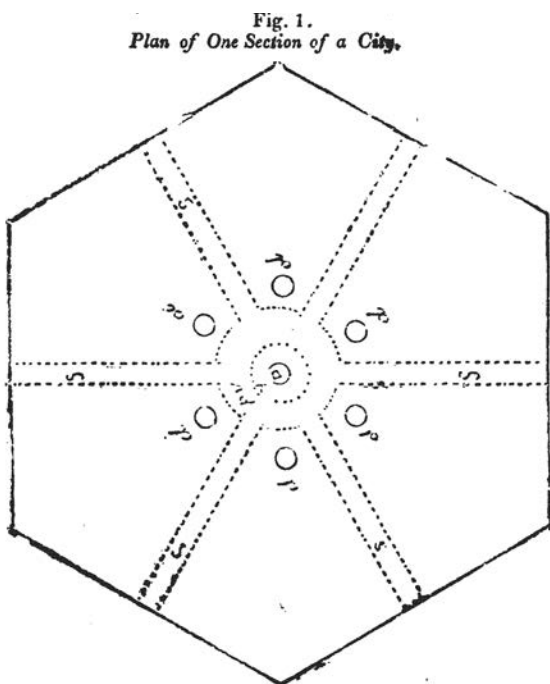
¹⁰² *Practical Applications*, 45-46. This idea of an organic process of spread is found in *Equitable Commerce*—twenty years before the diagram was published, Warren was already imagining the propagation of his plan in terms of circles to be repeated. Describing how he imagined his equitable settlements would grow:

One [settler] after another can be added to the circle, till those living in its circumference are too remote from the boardinghouse, the schools, and the public business of different kinds; then another commencement has to be made, another nucleus has to be formed, and thus in a safe and natural manner may the new elements extend themselves toward the circumference of society. Commerce, on these principles, will be proposed with *individuals* in foreign countries, which may give rise to similar beginnings in different parts of the world, each nucleus extending its growth outward till the circles meet—obliterating all national lines, national prejudices, and national interests and in a safe, natural, and rapidly progressive manner reorganize society—and harmonize the interests and feelings of all mankind. *Equitable Commerce*, 51.

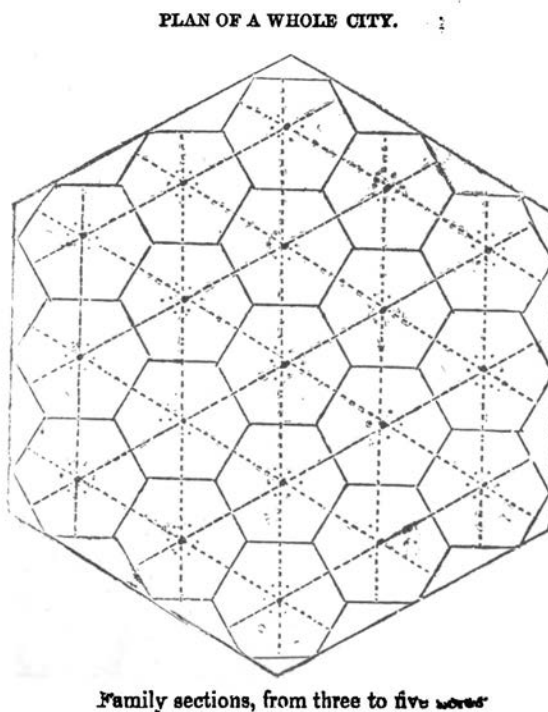
¹⁰³ *Practical Applications*, 45-46.

infinitely. The other imagined a beehive, if you will, with different experiments occurring on each one. This was not so much a contradiction—after all, Warren ultimately believed that the purpose of experimentation was to find one right solution.¹⁰⁴ But there was a distinct difference in emphasis. The first vision was a cliché of nineteenth century utopianism. The second signaled an openness to radically other possibilities that was unique to Josiah Warren.

¹⁰⁴ “Giving full latitude to every experiment (*at the cost of the experimentors*), brings every thing to a test, and insures a harmonious conclusion. Among a multitude of untried routes, only one of which is right, the more Liberty there is to differ and take different routes, the sooner will all come to a harmonious conclusion as to the right one.” *Equitable Commerce*, 26.



P, Building for Public purposes.
Y, Yard around public building.
Pv, Pavilion, or circular street passing round the public building and in front of each dwelling.
d, Private Dwellings.
S, Streets, separating the family sections.



Figs. 5.1 and 5.2 Plan of a city section and whole city from Josiah Warren, *Practical Applications of the Elementary Principles of "True Civilization"* (1873)



Fig. 5.3 Josiah Warren (1798-1874)

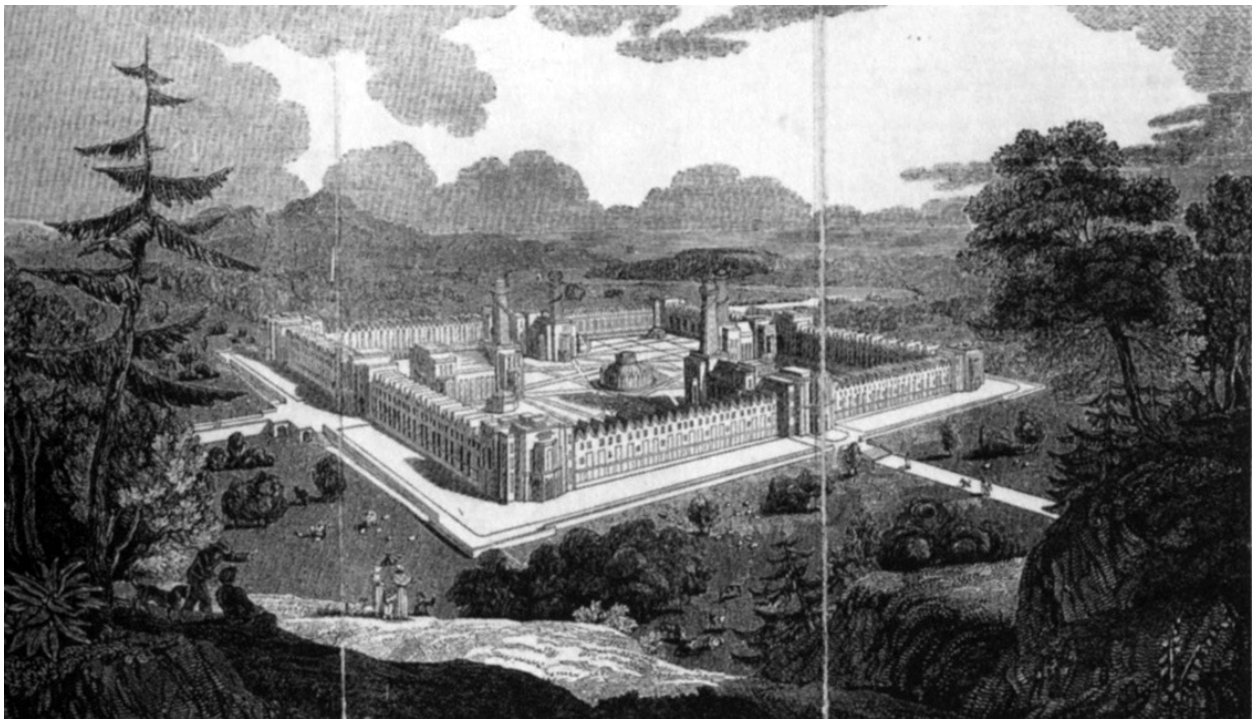
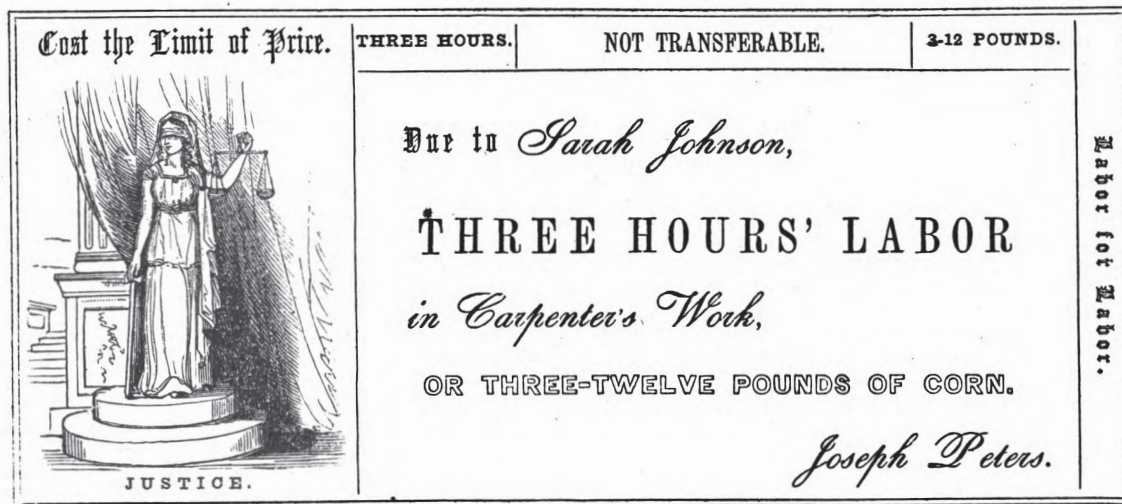
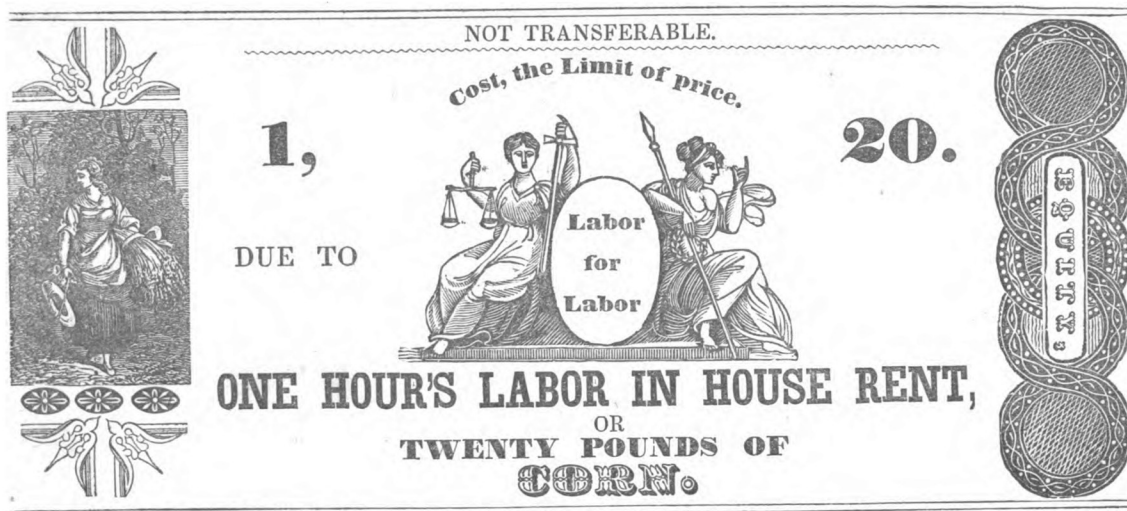


Fig. 5.5 Rendering of Owen's projected vision of New Harmony by Stedman Whitwell (c.1838)



Fig. 5.6 Various bank notes from the Free Banking Era (1837-1863)



Figs. 5.7 and 5.8 Examples of Warren's labor notes, as printed in the 1849 (top) and 1852 (bottom) editions of *Equitable Commerce*

UNIVERSAL TYPOGRAPHY.

WITH many thanks to the Editors of the Vincennes Gazette, Evansville Courier, Indiana Statesman, U. S. Gazette, Morning News, Princeton Chronicle, and others, who have so liberally noticed my inventions in Typography, I would respectfully inform them and enquirers generally, that I am now ready to communicate them to those who can come to New Harmony for practical instructions.

The sudden and severe illness of my agent, Mr. Robinson, having compelled him to return home, no other agent abroad will be employed in this country; but those who wish to possess themselves of these facilities in Typography, will find me, or some one acting for me, permanently at New Harmony, for the purpose of making contracts and giving practical instructions.

The art is denominated Universal Typography, on account of its applicability to almost every kind of printing now known, and some that are not known, among which is printing from type produced by one's autograph, or *writing* and drawing, which I denominate Auto-Typography; all of which are easily executed in a common printing office, or by the fireside of the private citizen.

The plate above is a specimen of the Xylographic branch of the art, and this advertisement is a specimen of the *stereotyping*, from the letter with which the Indiana Statesman is printed; and the art is applicable to all the purposes indicated in the plate: but as I would guard against exciting too great expectations, I refer to *specimens*, rather than state to what degree of perfection either branch will be found, on experience, to rival the arts now in use for these purposes; but in cheapness in first outlay, facility of execution, and in adaptation to the common wants of printing offices, (particularly those remote from cities) and to those of *Amateur* printers, these inventions so far exceed those now in use for similar purposes, that no just idea can be formed but from experience; nor will any verbal description of them, nor anything short of practical example, enable any one to use them successfully.

Those who wish to purchase the art, by addressing me, *post paid*, can have a book of specimens, and statements of cost, &c., as soon as this is completed: but the successive developments of new capacities in the art, not at first contemplated, have given rise to several series of experiments that have consumed much time and have delayed the completion of the specimens far beyond the period first anticipated.

JOSIAH WARREN

New Harmony, Dec. 13, 1845.

Figs. 5.9 Illustration advertising Warren's new "universal typography," a stereotyping method directed to "amateur printers," in the New Harmony *Indiana Statesman*, December 27, 1845 (reappeared March 7, 1846)

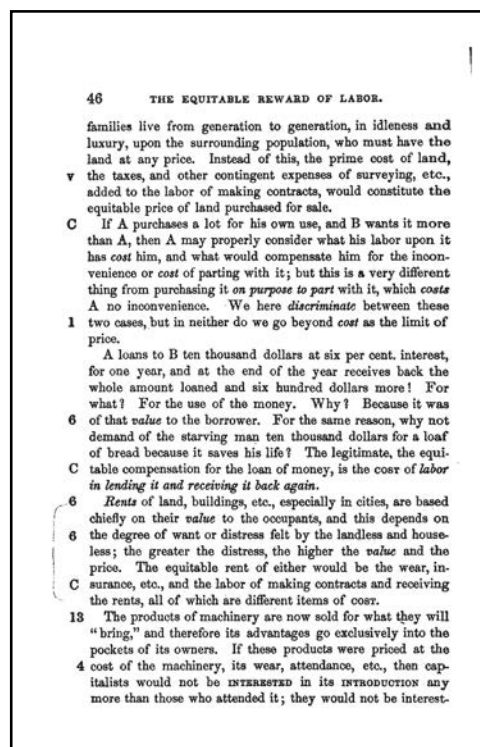
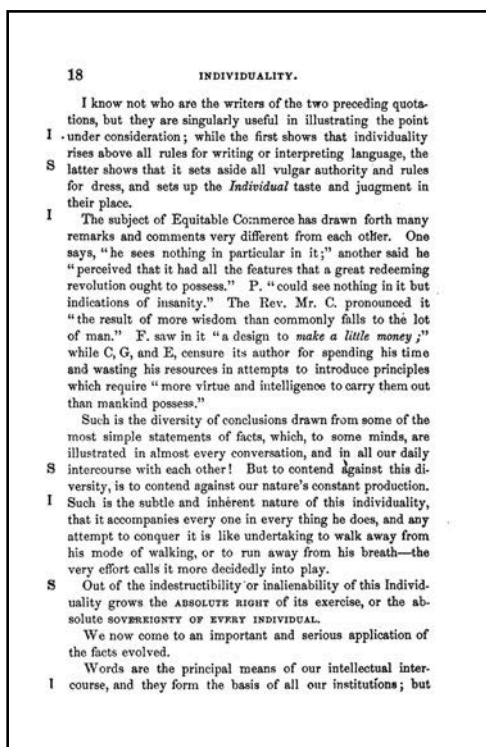
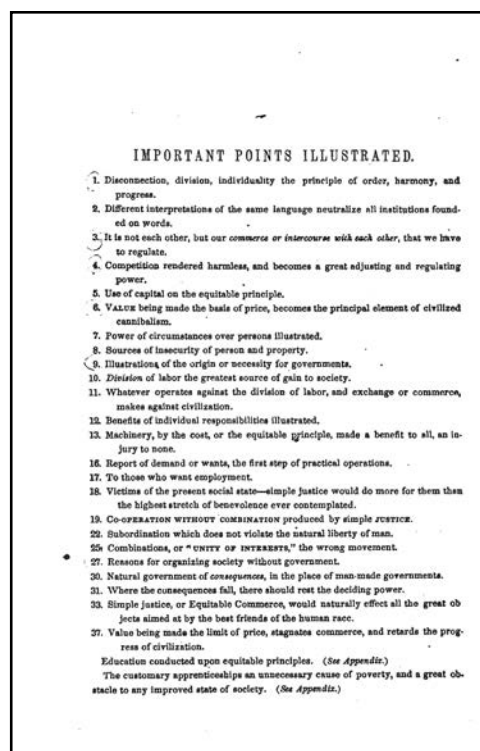
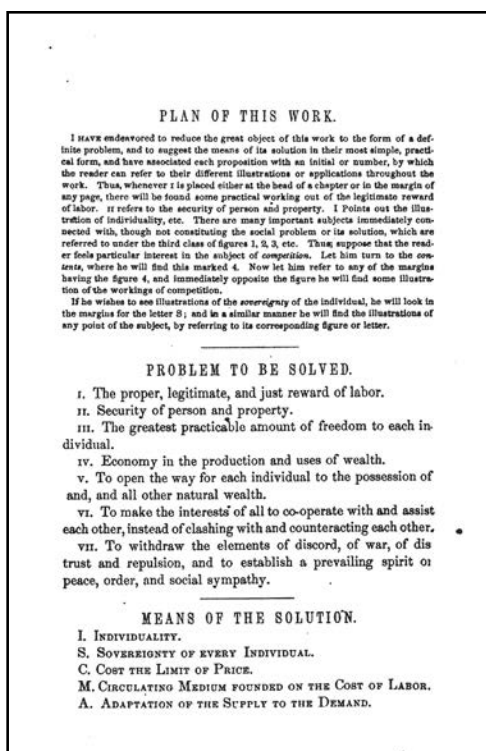


Fig. 5.11 Pages from *Equitable Commerce* (1852) showing Warren's margin indexing system. The letters in the left margin refer to a list of concepts at the front of the book, with "I" referring to "Individuality" and "S" to "Sovereignty."

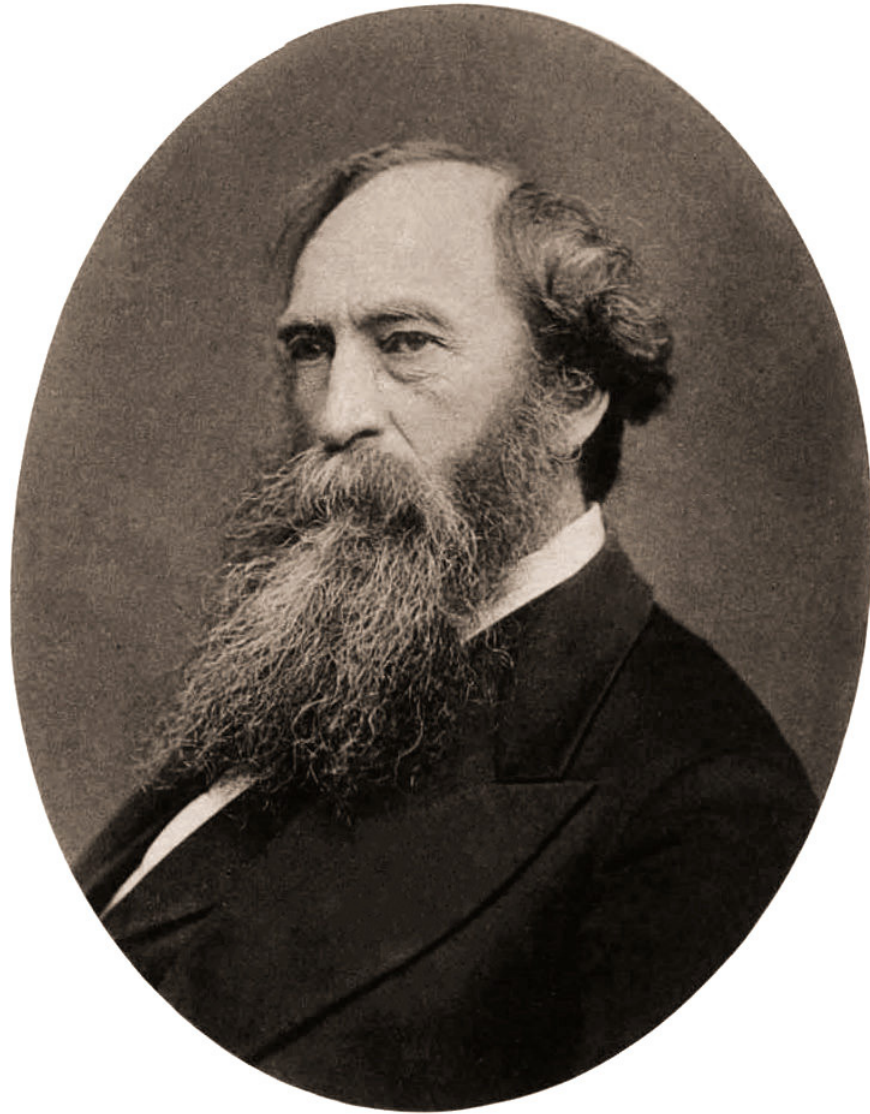


Fig. 5.12 Stephen Pearl Andrews (1812-1896) (Massachusetts Historical Society)

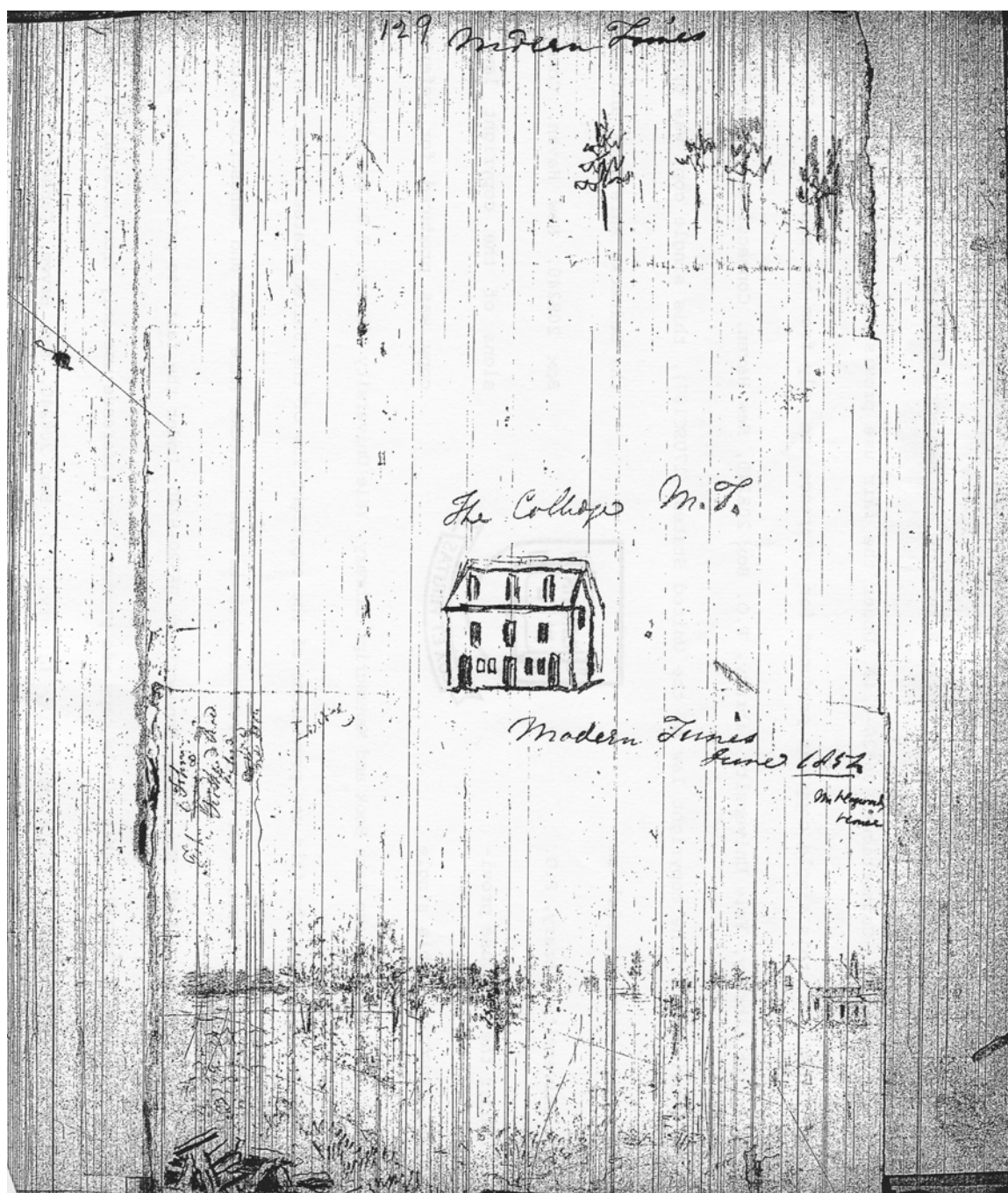


Fig. 5.13 Sketch of Modern Times by A. J. Macdonald in 1852 (A. J. Macdonald Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University)



Fig. 5.15 Octagonal school at Modern Times, c. 1865 (Brentwood School District, from the National Register of Historic Places Report for the Modern Times schoolhouse)



Fig. 5.16 William Upham Dame house, Modern Times (now Brentwood, NY)

Fig. 5.17 William Upham Dame (1815-1896), resident of Modern Times and builder of the octagon house. He is listed in the 1860 as a "box builder." (Brentwood Public Library, NY)



Fig. 5.18 James Madison Allen (1836-1909) (from *Food, Home and Garden*, 1898)

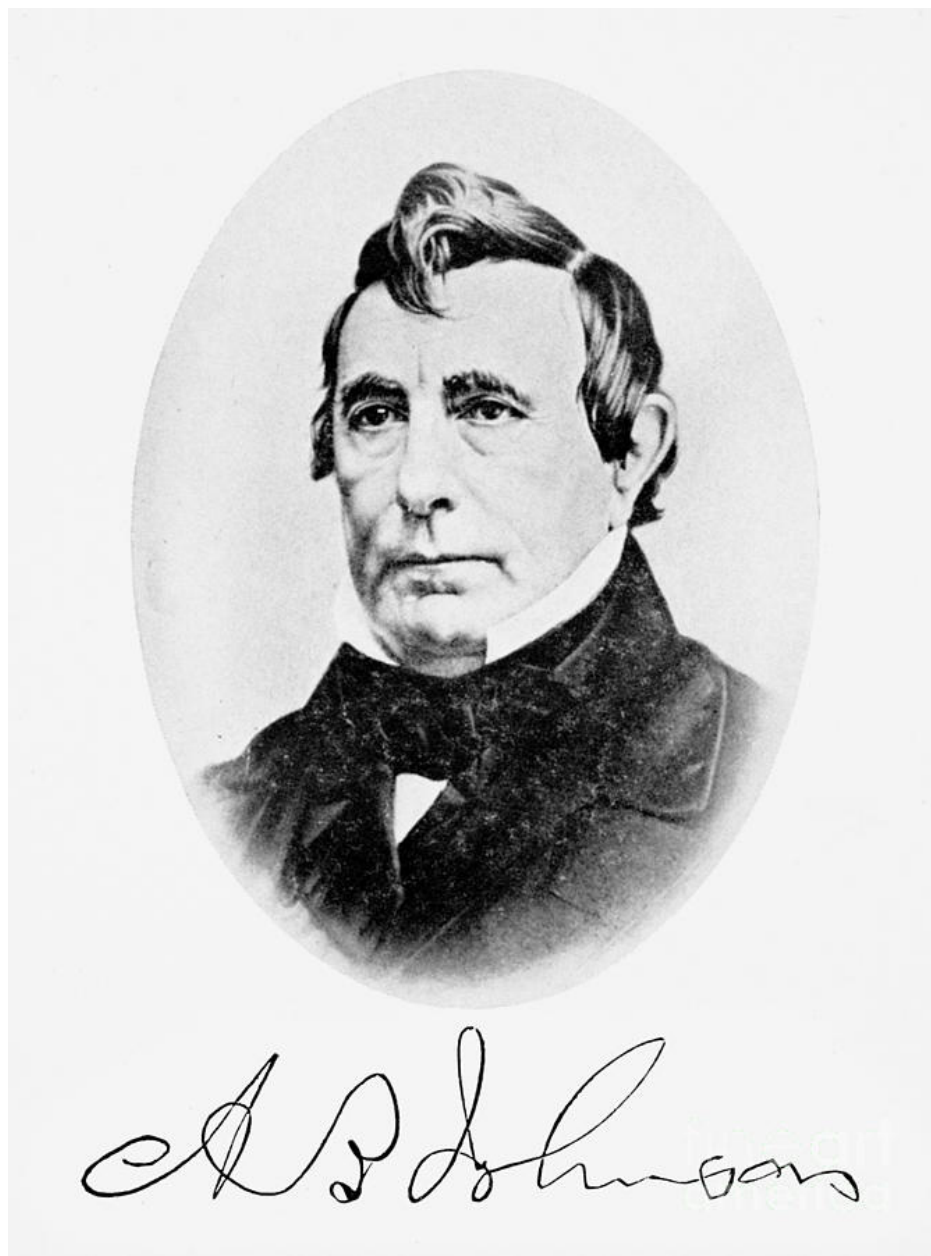


Fig. 5.21 Alexander Bryan Johnson (1786-1867)

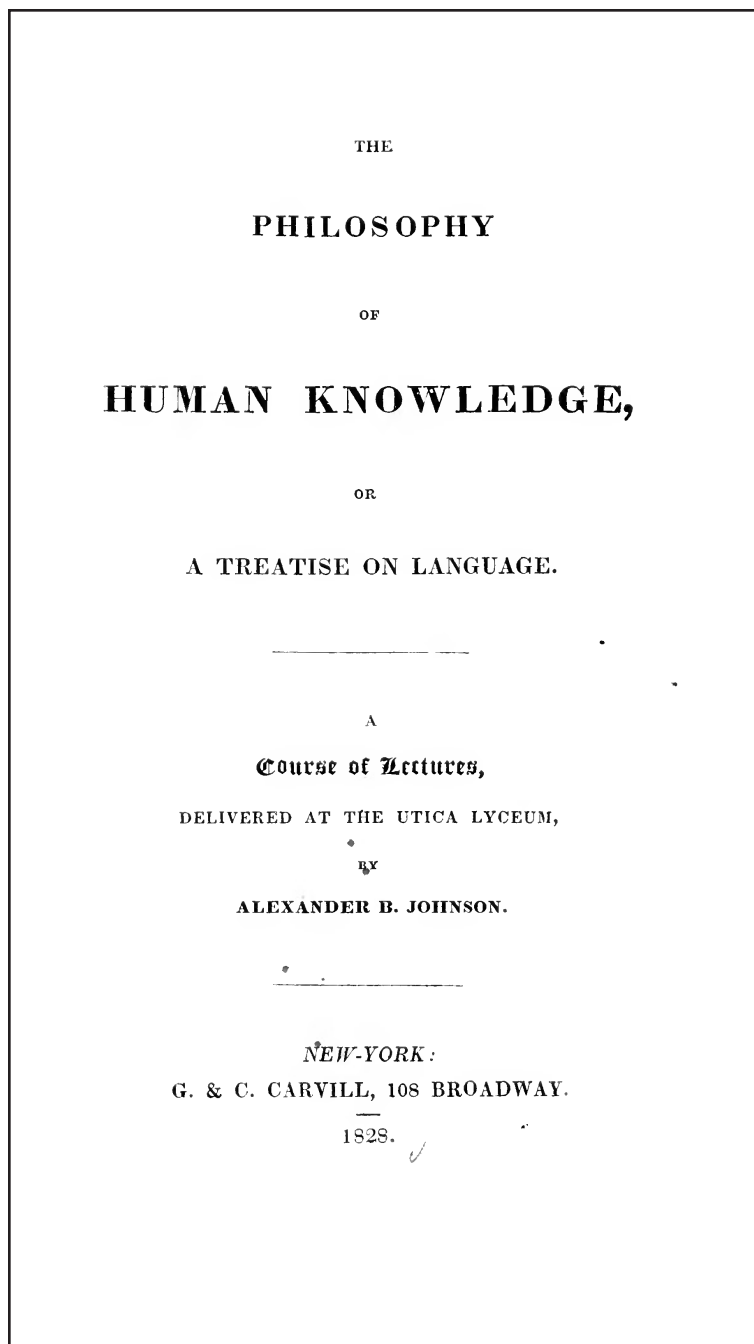


Fig. 5.22 Title Page to Alexander Bryan Johnson, *The Philosophy of Human Knowledge* (1828). Josiah Warren wrote that “Mr. Johnson’s elucidation of language is a bridge over which I have escaped from the bewildering labyrinths of verbal delusions called arguments and controversies.”

WRITTEN MUSIC REMODELED,

AND INVESTED WITH THE

SIMPLICITY OF AN EXACT SCIENCE

The elements of expression recognized and rendered definite, thereby securing the great object of musical performance everywhere, and abolishing multitudes of ambiguous words adopted in vain to secure that end. The unnecessary transposition of keys in vocal music dispensed with, and the principal use, and the bewildering study of flats and sharps thereby abolished.
The confusion of clefs abolished.

A SYSTEM OF SHORT HAND ACCOMPANIMENT INTRODUCED.

NO UNNECESSARY INNOVATIONS MADE; BUT THE EASY TRANSITIONS FROM, AND TO, THE COMMON NOTATION MADE AN OBJECT OF SPECIAL CARE.

BY JOSIAH WARREN.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT AND COMPANY,
No. 20 WASHINGTON STREET.

1860.

Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1859, by JOSIAH WARREN, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts

Fig. 5.23 Title page to Josiah Warren, *Written Music Remodeled and Invested with the Simplicity of an Exact Science* (1860)

the most prevailing and the most common "swell" and is represented by these same characters standing obliquely thus , ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ the size, denoting the degree of loudness intended. The first and last half of the characters ◀ ◀ ◀ ◀ ◀ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ expressing the first and last half of the swell as their shape implies. Or the common "swell" placed over a whole passage. This arrangement enables us to express on paper exactly every possible degree of loudness or **STRESS**. We now proceed to the consideration of

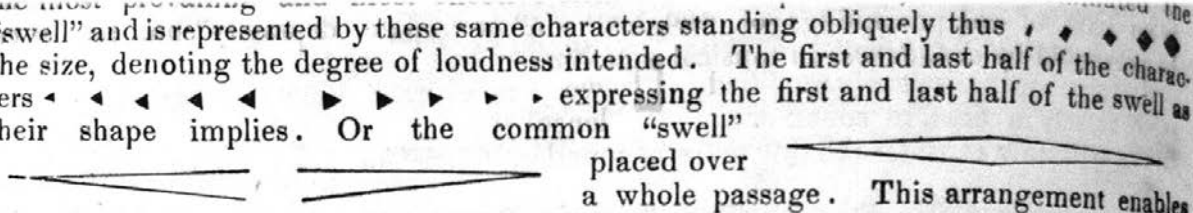
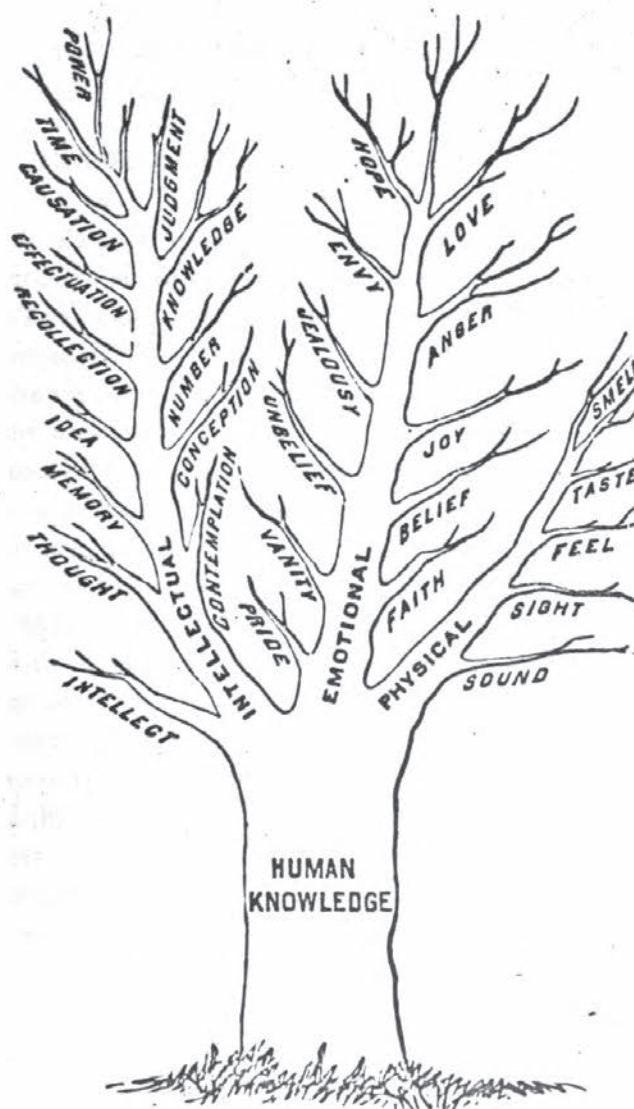


Fig. 5.25 Diagram from Josiah Warren, *Written Music Remodeled and Invested with the Simplicity of an Exact Science* (1860) showing how the form of notes would reflect the musical effect--in this case a "swelling" of volume.

MAN'S TRIPPLICITY.

15



THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL,
WITH SOME OF ITS GERMS AND FRUIT.

Fig. 5.26 Diagram from Alexander Bryan Johnson, *Deep Sea Soundings, and Explorations of the Bottom: or, the Ultimate Analysis of Human Knowledge* (1861)

Diagram No. 9.

Figure 1. Indeterminate Form.



Figure 2. Determinate Form.

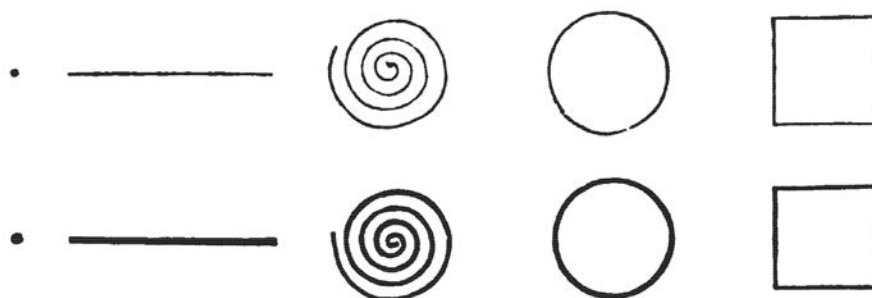
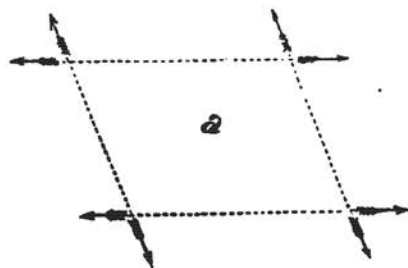
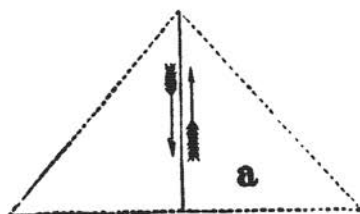
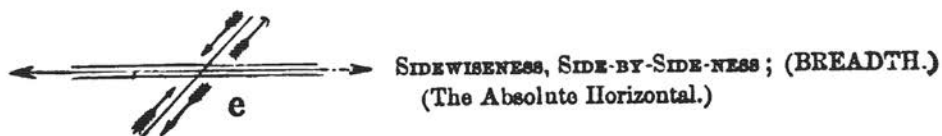
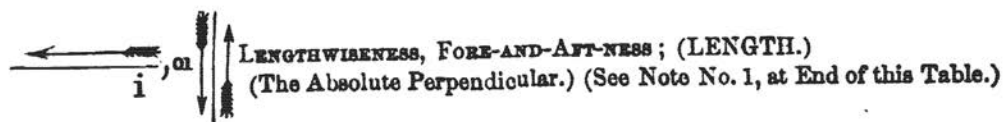
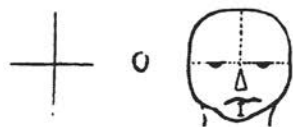


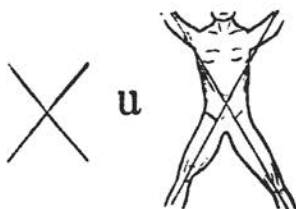
Fig. 5.27 Diagram from Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Basic Outline of Universology* (1872)

(DIAGRAMMATIC) TABULAR VIEW. No. 1.

Fig. 5.28 Diagram from Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Basic Outline of Universology* (1872)



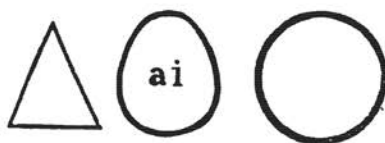
NON-INCLINISM; (AB-INCLINISM); RECTI-POSITION.
(Proto-faci-Dimensionality.)
(Prospective, Frontoscopic,—Luminous, Clear.)



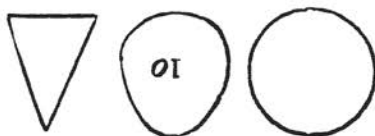
INCLINISM; (BINCLINISM.)
(Convergo-Divergent Cruciality.)
(Perspective—Shaded, Obscure.)



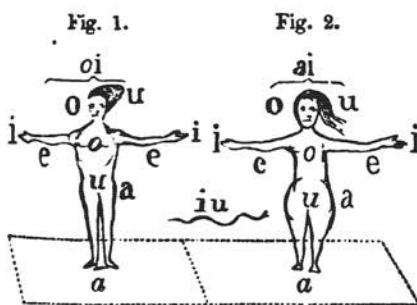
MEDIANISM; (EQUATORISM.)
(Midway, the Equatorial Cleavage and Produced Line.)
(Nuptialism; Union of Hemispheres.)
(t. 322-323.)—Colorific.



SUBDOMINANCE.
(Feminoid Type of Structure.)
(t. 990, and Egg-Diagram, do.)



SUPERDOMINANCE.
(Masculoid Type of Structure.)
(t. 990, and Egg-Diagram, do.)



OMNIVARIA DIMENSIONALITY.
(Résumé of all the Dimensions.)
(Representatively The Serpent(ine).)
(Elaborately The Human Figure Outlines.)

Note 1.—From the Centre of the Earth every Radius going out from it is Perpendicular, no matter what its Direction may be. This is what is meant by the Absolute Perpendicular. It is the same with Radii from any Centre, and, in fine, with any Line viewed or considered

Fig. 5.29 Diagram from Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Basic Outline of Universology* (1872)

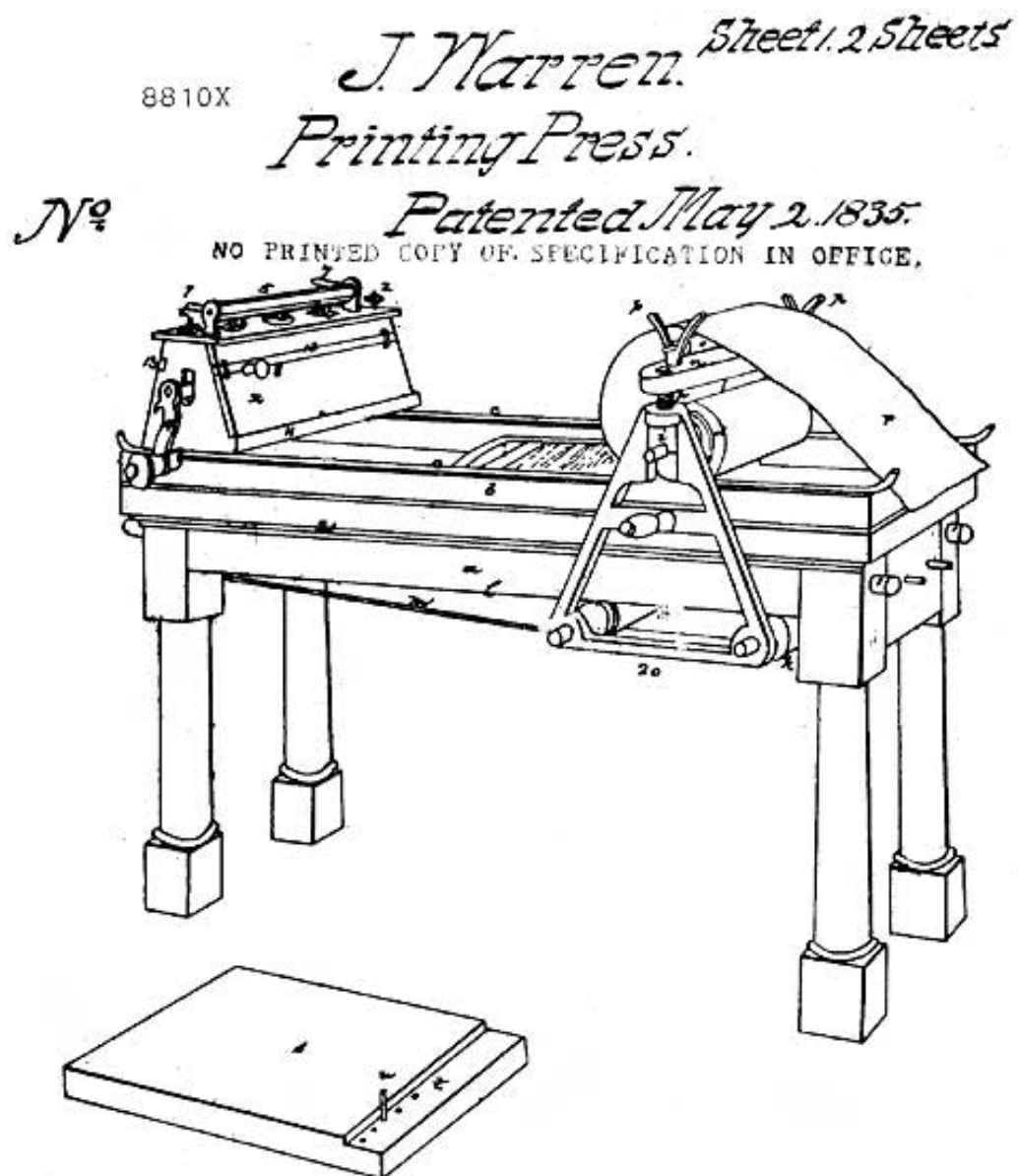


Fig. 5.30 Warren's patent for an improved printing press, 1835 (U.S. Patent Office)

8810X

J. Warren. Sheets 2. 25 Sheets

Printing Press.

Patented May 2. 1835.

No.

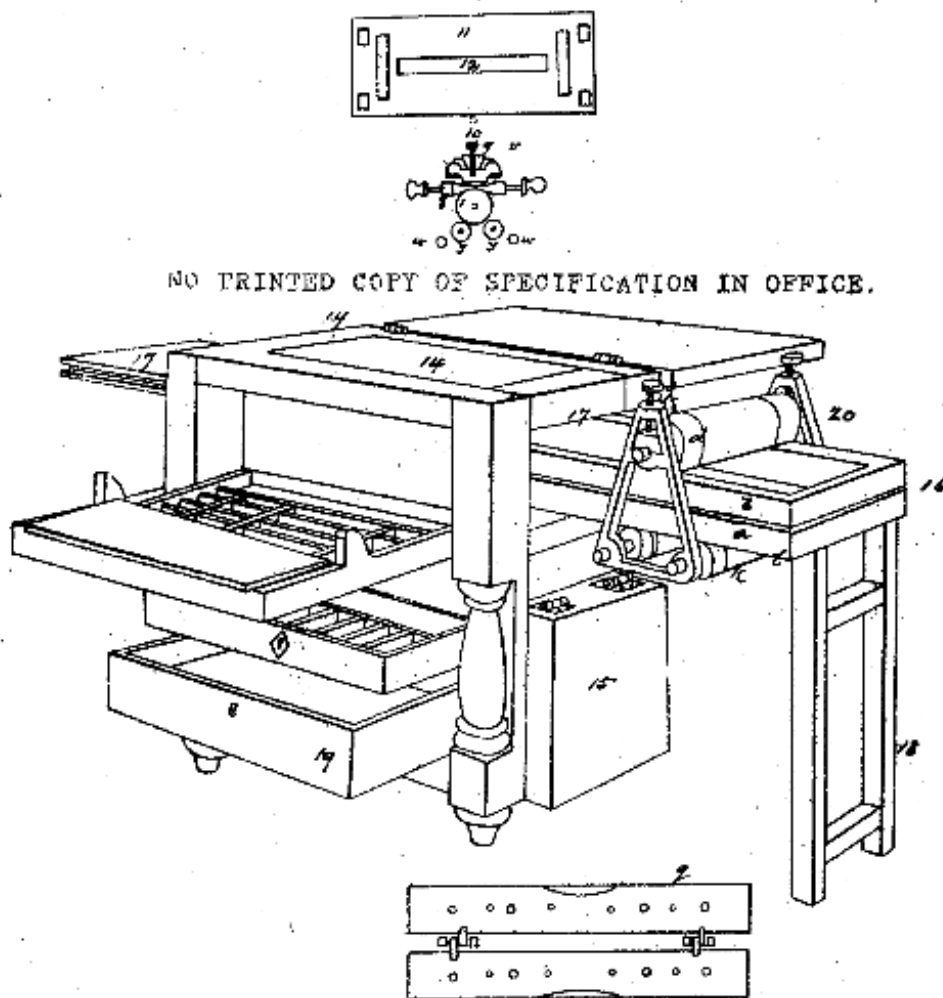


Fig. 5.31 Warren's patent for an improved printing press, 1835 (U.S. Patent Office)

6. Architecture, Heavenized: John Murray Spear's Spheres

MACHINE:

1. An artificial work, simple or complicated, that serves to apply or regulate moving power, or to produce motion, so as to save time or force.
2. An engine; an instrument of force.
3. Supernatural agency in a poem, or a superhuman being introduced into a poem to perform some exploit.

- Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1841)

On May 25, 1857, some 100 people gathered at the Mechanics' Institute in New York City for a Spiritualist convention, where they listened to excited reports of two recent revelations from the spirit world: The first was an Electric Motor—a kind of perpetual motion machine—presented by Thaddeus S. Sheldon and Simon Crosby Hewitt. This machine, or “New Motive Power” as it was dubbed, promised benefits to the world “beyond calculation”: it propel ships and enable nations, and even planets, to communicate with each other without wires or submarine cables. The second revelation was a house designed in a new “spiritual style of architecture,” communicated to Hewitt. The main principle animating the design of the house was its analogy to the human body, with a cupola corresponding to the head, providing spaces for reading, writing, and thinking; lower stories, corresponding to the abdominal region, housing kitchen and dining areas; and windows akin to eyes, configured with telescopes for lunar and stellar

observation.¹ Hewitt presented models of both the Electric Motor and the Harmonial Home. The latter may have borne some resemblance to drawings he had published a year earlier in Robert Owen's *New Millennial Gazette*, showing a series of house designs composed of oval forms.² (Figs. 6.1–6.3) The speakers at the convention were careful to specify that these two new objects were heavenly, not human, creations: As Sheldon pointed out, the electric motor was “not invented, not created by man's wisdom, but discovered.”³

Hewitt and Sheldon were associates of John Murray Spear (1804-82), a Boston-based Spiritualist seer who in 1854 had established a small spiritualist colony in western New York variously called Kiantone, Harmonia, or the Domain.⁴ It was here, in the 1850s, that the group around Spear promoted a distinct strand of geometric utopianism—a circular and ovoid architecture that promised to “harmonize” social relations and to elevate the earthly world to a higher plane of development. Besides building and residing in prototypes of the Harmonial Homes at Kiantone, the group projected plans for a future

¹ “Convention of Spiritualists,” *New York Daily Times*, May 26, 1857, 5.

² S. C. Hewitt, “Architecture of the Future—Designs for Homes of Harmony, Transmitted from the Spirit World,” *Robert Owen's Millennial Gazette*, July 1, 1856.

³ “Convention of Spiritualists,” 5.

⁴ The village was primarily a summer community, founded near the site of a spring with supposed healing properties. Spear first examined the spring water in 1852 but did not begin building the community until 1854. On Kiantone, see John B. Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 86-91, 166-71; Ernest C. Miller, “Utopian Communities in Warren County, Pennsylvania,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 49, no. 4 (1966); Oliver F. Chase, “The Kiantone Movement,” in *The Centennial History of Chautauqua County* (Jamestown, NY: Chautauqua History Company, 1904); Russell Duino, “Utopian Theme with Variations: John Murray Spear and His Kiantone Domain,” *Pennsylvania History* 29, no. 2 (1962); Deborah K. Cronin, *Kiantone: Chautauqua County's Mystical Valley* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006), 69-118.

circular city, as well as promulgating a proposal for a round institution of Equitable Commerce.

One of the central ideas in Spear's thought and practice was the necessity of "models"—tangible, concrete analogs for that which was intangible, whether the spirit world itself, or an abstract principle such as "equitable commerce." As such the idea of the model carried with it an implicit theory of representation—a concept of how a visible form comes to stand for something invisible. For the Kiantone Spiritualists, the notion of the model also suggested a theory of utopian transformation—indicating how an imagined ideal could be born into reality. As Spear put it, "The first great work is *to construct a model*,—to show man that which the mind is capable of conceiving *can be brought forth*."⁵ Like Josiah Warren, Spear believed in the need to create miniature versions of an ideal society that would demonstrate his ideas and facilitate their replication and transmission. Yet departing from Warren, whose hexagonal city projected a city of independent equals, Spear and company's rendition of equitable commerce and the ideal home represented a turn towards a more authoritarian and privatized version of utopia. Compared with Warren's hexagon, or the National Reformers' republican land grid, the Spiritualists' geometric utopia was more concerned with social harmonization than justice. And whereas most of the other geometric utopians from Masquerier to Warren saw their urban or architectural plans as *instruments* for gradually effecting a more equitable world—either by

⁵ John Murray Spear, *The Educator: Being Suggestions, Theoretical and Practical, Designed to Promote Man-Culture and Integral Reform, with a View to the Ultimate Establishment of a Divine Social State on Earth*, ed. A. E. Newton (Boston: Office of Practical Spiritualists, 1857), 54.

materially constraining and shaping property relations, or by providing a cognitive image of a different social structure, the Spiritualists presented their constructions as literal *deus ex machina*—interventions from on high that would magically sweep away the problems of the earthly sphere and bring about a more harmonic universe. Utopia, in the Kiantone Spiritualists' view, already existed in the spirit land. All that was required to realize a "heavenized earth" was to communicate its contours to those on earth and to "modelize" it in concrete form.

This chapter begins by putting Spear's and Hewitt's personal trajectories and revelations within the context of the American Spiritualist movement of the 1840s and 50s. Like many Spiritualists, both Spear and Hewitt had been active in other reform causes in the 1840s—especially prison and labor reform, respectively, before turning to Spiritualism in the late 40s. As scholars like Ann Braude, Brett Carroll, and Christopher Castiglia have shown, mid-century Spiritualism was often linked to radical causes like women's rights, but it also had conservative, autocratic, and privatizing tendencies.⁶ Within the arcs of Spear's and Hewitt's careers, the turn to Spiritualism marked a shift away from radical, agitational political practices towards a more interiorized, politically evasive utopianism. The second part of the chapter explores the two main architectural proposals of the Kiantone Spiritualists: Spear's circular equitable commerce institution,

⁶ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Christopher Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Russ Castronovo, *Necro-Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

and Hewitt's ovoid homes of harmony. I use these examples to explore two key issues in Spiritualist architecture: the aesthetics of circularity which permeated Spiritualist thought and practice, and the pervasive use of models as a way of ushering in a more "harmonial" universe. Perhaps the most famous model created by the Kiantone group was the Electric Motor: examining its history illuminates the Spiritualist tendency to resort to machines—and geometric buildings—as a detour around seemingly intractable political conflicts. In the conclusion of the chapter, I also consider an alternate reading, one that recognizes not only the political evasions of Spiritualist utopian architecture, but also its potentially productive qualities.

From Worldly Reform to Spiritualism

John Murray Spear and his acolyte Simon Crosby Hewitt shared several biographical details. Both were born in Boston to families of modest means, were active in other reform movements early on in life, became Universalist ministers, and then converted to Spiritualism. Spear and Hewitt were part of what some historians have identified as the "philosophical" wing of the mid-nineteenth-century American Spiritualist movement (as opposed to the "popular" wing associated with séances and spirit rapping)—a group consisting of mostly white, middle- and upper-class former Protestants drawn to Spiritualism's blend of scientific rationality and an intuitive, individualistic form of

religion—its fusion of Enlightenment and Romanticism.⁷ As John Lardas Modern has argued, far from being an eccentric mid-nineteenth-century fad, Spiritualism for many middle-class Americans represented a way to come to terms with the spectral quality of modernity itself. “To attend a séance was to interact with the abstraction of the public—people and forces that had nothing essentially to do with you.”⁸ Spiritualism was the religion of choice for those seeking a way to reconcile the technological materialism of modern American life—its telegraphs, railroads, and markets—with a desire for a deeper metaphysical, spiritual, and social resonance.

For both Spear and Hewitt, the transition to Spiritualism represented a distinct break from an earlier career in radical reform—a pattern that Ann Braude has identified in other biographies of nineteenth-century Spiritualists such as Stephen Pearl Andrews and Eliza Kenney. In her book *Radical Spirits*, Braude makes the general argument that Spiritualism’s emphasis on anti-authoritarian individualism made it hospitable to many different radical reform ideologies, especially women’s rights, but she also acknowledges that the turn to the spirit world sometimes “distracted” reformers away from their earlier radical work on behalf of abolition, prisoners’ rights, and women’s rights.⁹ Prior to

⁷ See Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, chapter 1. The prime exemplar given for the more “highbrow” branch of Spiritualism is Andrew Jackson Davis. However, Carroll is rightly cautious about affirming previous historians’ dichotomization of the movement into philosophical and popular variants, emphasizing the connections between the two.

⁸ John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America: With Reference to Ghosts, Protestant Subcultures, Machines, and Their Metaphors; Featuring Discussions of Mass Media, Moby-Dick, Spirituality, Phrenology, Anthropology, Sing Sing State Penitentiary, and Sex with the New Motive Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 41-42.

⁹ Braude, *Radical Spirits*.

receiving his first spiritual communications in his late 40s, Spear had been an active abolitionist, pacifist, and advocate of prisoners' rights.¹⁰ It was through these causes that he came into contact with leading reformers like William Lloyd Garrison and Adin Ballou. In 1844 he was one of the key speakers in Garrison's "100 Conventions," lecturing on abolition around the northeast. In Portland, Maine, on December 24, 1844, he and fellow abolitionist Stephen Foster were severely beaten by an angry mob.¹¹ Shortly after this incident, Spear resigned his ministry and devoted himself full-time to reform, focusing on the issues of prison reform and abolition of the death penalty. With his brother Charles he established a newspaper, *The Hangman*—later renamed *The Prisoner's Friend*—and co-founded the Massachusetts Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment. The Spears also traveled and gave lectures. After 1846, John Spear was also involved in direct advocacy work with specific prisoners, assisting with bail payments, legal representation, and support for newly released inmates. During the 1840s, Spear's political style was radical, strident, and confrontational. He saw the incarcerated as "the victims of a criminal social order."¹² Outraged by ministers who defended capital punishment, he sent a

¹⁰ For Spear's biography, see Buescher, *Remarkable Life*. Also useful is Neil B. Lehman, "The Life of John Murray Spear: Spiritualism and Reform in Antebellum America" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1973).

¹¹ Lehman, "Life of John Murray Spear," 80-82. According to Lehman the attack was not related directly to Spear's stand on slavery but a response to a statement by Spear at a gathering defending freedom of speech.

¹² Quoted in Lehman, 84.

petition to the Massachusetts State legislature proposing that clergymen who supported hanging act as hangmen.¹³

Simon Crosby Hewitt also came to Spiritualism with a background in earthly reform. In the 1840s, he was a lecturer and activist in the ten-hour movement spearheaded by the New England Workingmen's Association, centered in Fall River, Massachusetts.¹⁴ In several letters from Hewitt to the Association's newspaper *The Mechanic* in the spring of 1844, he described himself as a mechanic, a "minister, clergyman, preacher &c." A believer in Fourierism for the long term, he nevertheless supported measures like the ten-hour day as tactics of short-term amelioration. In the summer of 1844, the Association sent Hewitt to several towns in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and eastern Connecticut to organize local associations of workingmen and women for the ten-hour movement. A letter from a J.E.D., Jr. of Newport, Rhode Island, wrote *The Mechanic*, calling Hewitt an "indefatigable friend to the laboring classes and warm, firm and eloquent advocate of their rights," while acknowledging that the immediate effects of his lecture were "not very gratifying."¹⁵ In Norwich, Connecticut, Hewitt crossed paths with a phrenological tour by the Fowlers and found Orson Fowler "quite favorable to my object and very much

¹³ Lehman, "Life of John Murray Spear," 88.

¹⁴ The information on Hewitt's activities in the early 1840s is drawn from Philip S. Foner, "Journal of an Early Labor Organizer," *Labor History* 10, no. 2 (1969): 206.

¹⁵ *The Mechanic*, September 7, 1844. Quoted in *Ibid.*

interested in our cause.” Fowler allowed Hewitt to speak to the phrenologist’s sizable audience, and even promised to take up the cause of the laborer in his next lecture.¹⁶

Hewitt’s reports from the road were published in *The Mechanic* and offer us a glimpse of his beliefs about reform during this period. Like Spear, Hewitt saw his political work as a form of agitation, and occasionally wielded fiery rhetoric. From Pawtucket, Rhode Island, he wrote, “[T]he working man should take the business of *reform* into his own hands and show himself a MAN!.... If the working man will take a stand and feel disposed to do something for himself, capitalists, to a great extent, will at last cease to prevent his efforts to rid himself of his evils.”¹⁷ Responding to accusations that he was trying to set the classes of employer and employed “at swords points with each other,” he wrote that he was instead trying to “heal the breach” and “fill up the awful chasm which is already existing between the laborer and the capitalist.” Yet he also defended conflict as necessary, arguing that there was at present “little or no harmony in the interests of the producing classes and the capitalists... it is almost impossible to make this antagonism greater than it is now.” He continued that when a body is diseased, “in order to expel the cause, the patient must sometimes be made to feel the *greater disagreeable effects of medicine*, for a short time.” His own activities were not creating new prejudices and antagonisms, but merely “*showing* those more clearly, which have already too long

¹⁶ Foner, “Journal of an Early Labor Organizer,” 217.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

slumbered and slept."¹⁸ At this period in his reform career, Hewitt saw the expression of disagreement as politically useful, even necessary.

Yet even in these early musings there were hints of the change to come in Hewitt's and Spear's orientation. Visiting Hopedale, Adin Ballou's Christian socialist community, Hewitt described the colony's conviction that "associative unity in industrial pursuits," combined with the development of a "higher spiritual life," would lead to a harmony of interests. These beliefs, with their emphases on unity, harmony of interests, and a higher spiritual life—as opposed to confrontational political agitation for materialistic concerns like higher wages or a ten-hour workday—were much closer to the positions that Hewitt and Spear would both eventually adopt as Spiritualists.

Ballou, Spear, and Hewitt were predisposed to an interest in Spiritualism by their shared Universalist background.¹⁹ Universalists believed that the progress of the human soul continued after death—an idea that made the thought of communications from the spirit world conceivable. Spear expressed an interest in Spiritualism as early as 1847, when he read Andrew Jackson Davis's book *Divine Revelations* and was impressed by its

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 221-22.

¹⁹ Many early Spiritualist leaders were Universalists. On the links between Universalism and Spiritualism, see John B. Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004); *Remarkable Life*; Lehman, "Life of John Murray Spear," 54-59. Lehman writes that a high percentage of early editors and lecturers on Swedenborgianism and Spiritualism in the United States were Universalists. Besides Ballou, Spear, and Hewitt, these included Thomas Lake Harris, William Fishbough, and Samuel Brittan. Universalism, a liberal Christian denomination founded in the late eighteenth century by John Murray in Massachusetts, was premised on the belief that all souls would eventually be saved—that is, that salvation was universal. Some believed that the course of reconciliation with God continued from life after death, through a process of gradual improvement. This last idea was especially sympathetic with Spiritualist ideas.

rationalist cosmology.²⁰ But his own mediumistic activities only began on March 31, 1852, when he received his first direct communications from the spirit world.²¹

Reform, Spiritualized

Over the next several decades, Spear would be the recipient of hundreds of communications from the spirits explicating the structure of spirit society and proclaiming the start of a new era of harmony on earth.²² By 1854, he was receiving revelations about important developments in the spirit world: Several agents there had organized themselves into an “Association of Beneficents” and were preparing to communicate certain “wise schemes” for a new and better era, the keynote of which was harmony. The Association, whose members included Benjamin Rush, John Howard, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, had selected Spear as their earthly agent for communicating their plans: (Fig. 6.4)

We come to harmonize things apparently discordant, and out of discords to bring concords. We come to instruct the uninstructed of things supereminently practical. We come to inspire the inactive to high states of activity. We come to

²⁰ Davis was also an admirer of Spear, as evidenced by an 1851 address in which Davis praised Spear as an exemplar of reform. Quoted in Buescher, *Remarkable Life*, 67.

²¹ The spirits instructed Spear to find a stranger in Abington named David Vining. When Spear finally found Vining in Weymouth, not Abington, he apparently healed the sick man—at least momentarily. See the account in S. C. Hewitt, *Messages from the Superior State: Communicated by John Murray, through John M. Spear, in the Summer of 1852* (Boston: B. Marsh, 1852), 27-32.

²² These “messages” were recorded, edited, and collected by his associates into a handful of volumes, including *Messages from the Superior State; Communicated by John Murray through John M. Spear, in the Summer of 1852, containing Important Instruction to the Inhabitants of the Earth* (1852), edited by Hewitt, and *The Educator: Being Suggestions, Theoretical and Practical, Designed to Promote Man-Culture and Integral Reform, with a View to the Ultimate Establishment of a Divine Social State on Earth...* (1857), edited by A. E. Newton.

promulgate a more critical knowledge of Nature's laws. We come to raise the low to conditions eminently high...²³

Besides the Association of Beneficents, there were six other Associations in the spirit world—the Electricizers, Elementizers, Educationizers, Governmentizers, Healthfulizers, and Agriculturalizers, each responsible for reforming a particular area of society, including religion, education, architecture, government, fashion, and diet. All of these were overseen by a General Assembly.

The reference to “harmonizing” things discordant was a symptom of Spear’s shift to a more passive, nonconfrontational style of reform. While the spirits held to many of the positions that Spear had formerly advocated—including an end to competition, oppression, and war, they proposed a different path to accomplish these aims. No longer would Spear intentionally face down hostile audiences, hoping to convert them through a mixture of oratory, reason, and suasion. The spirits recommended avoiding the “angularity” of past eras, and instead developing Truth in its “completeness, or *circularity*.” Reform would occur by “influxes” of inspiration and revelation from the spirits to earth and the “unfolding” of men’s inward divine natures, not by working men awaking and taking up matters into their own hands, as Hewitt had called for in 1844.

Spear’s revelations mirrored several common elements of Spiritualist rhetoric. His communicants emphasized the interiorized, spiritualized origins of reform over material conditions: “The new era dwells not in *outer* forms, ceremonies, or observances. These are

²³ Spear, *The Educator*, 42.

but the scaffoldings of the superstructure; they are transitory...”²⁴ Also, there was an emphasis on organic images of wholeness, harmony, individuals’ rapport with the cosmos, and the frictionless reconciliation of opposites, especially individuality and sociality—the “grand problem of the times.”²⁵ Lastly, Spear’s Association, with its department of Electrizers headed by Ben Franklin, evinced a fascination with new technologies of communication and machines that was symptomatic of Spiritualism’s intense love affair with the technologies of telegraph, electricity, and railroad.²⁶ As John Lardas Modern has observed, the spread of these mass-media forms presented Americans with a social environment that increasingly announced itself as networked and interconnected.²⁷ Like many utopians, Spears, Hewitt, and their associates saw machines as capable of unlocking nearly limitless new powers and resources, facilitating communications across nations and even planets, and sweeping away the material constraints that underlay human misery.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Spiritualism was one form of what Sydney Ahlstrom has identified a strain of American “harmonial religion” in the mid-nineteenth century which emphasized that a person’s well-being stemmed from his or her rapport with the cosmos. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

²⁶ In the opening pages of *Radical Spirits*, Ann Braude cites an episode in 1842 when Samuel Morse requested money from the U.S. Congress for the development of his telegraph. Various Congressmen mocked the new technology, comparing it to mesmerism. Spiritualists were deeply interested in and inspired by the new communications technologies. One Spiritualist called electricity “God’s principles at work” and one of the movement’s leading journals was titled *The Spiritual Telegraph*. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 4-5.

²⁷ Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 27-38.

Angels in the Market: A Circular Establishment of Equitable Exchange

One area in which we can see the distinct contours of a Spiritualist approach to social reform is in Spear's reworking of Josiah Warren's principle of equitable commerce. Spear, like Warren, was critical of the inequalities and avarice produced by the modern capitalist system.²⁸ Around 1855 he and an associate, John Orvis, began promulgating a new system of exchange communicated by the spirits, which they explained in a pamphlet entitled *Equitable Commerce* that was undoubtedly a nod to Warren.²⁹ The pamphlet picked up on several ideas developed by Warren, Fourier, Masquerier, and other antebellum critics of the capitalist economy—these included the abolition of credit and paper money, the creation of a form of commerce free of the profit motive, and the necessity for new mediating mechanisms to make commerce more transparent.³⁰ Like Warren, the spirits

²⁸ Spears, Warren, and Andrews knew each other. As indicated above, Andrews spoke in favor of Spear's new motor at the 1857 Spiritualist Convention. And by the mid 1850s, all three, along with John Orvis, were members of Andrews' secret society in New York, the Order of Patriarchs by the mid 1850s, which later became the Sacred Order of Unionists.

²⁹ *Equitable Commerce: A Proposal for the Abolition of Trade, by the Substitution of Equitable Exchange, with Full Plans and Details, in a Series of Papers Communicated from the Spirit-Life*, (Boston: New England Association of Philanthropic Commercialists, 1855). The key ideas were also repeated in *The Educator*, 27-38. The two men also lectured on the subject and published a prospectus for an earthly organization, the New England Association of Philanthropic Commercialists, to promote their ideas. On the history of the Association, see Buescher, *Remarkable Life*, 163.

³⁰ Opposing the insubstantiality and uncertainty around paper currency, for example, Spear and Orvis's spirits insisted on the use of hard metals to conduct transactions. "You have this representative of property, under your own individual eye; and can inspect it at your will; giving to you a strength, a certainty, a substantiality, which other commercial institutions do not command." *Equitable Commerce*, 21-22. Under the credit system, Orvis and Spear wrote, "various concerns are inwoven; and often, when one large concern breaks down, smaller concerns also, go down from absolute necessity."

believed their new model would attract public attention and be replicated, eventually sweeping away the present system of capitalism.³¹

Yet whereas Warren was ever pragmatic and focused on plans that were immediately implementable, the spirits' scheme was highly idealized—at once precise and atmospheric. Commerce was imagined almost as a religious rite—a choreographed set of relationships occurring within a temple-like edifice. The new commercial structure would take the form of a perfect circle, in conformance with Nature's law of centrality. (Figs. 6.5 and 6.6) In the center would be an elevated chamber occupied by a "Leading Mind," who would oversee the activities of the three principal actors in each commercial transaction: a purchaser, receiver, and transmitter. (Woman made an ideal receiver and transmitter, the spirits observed, with her innate "ability to judge of garments;... her nice discriminating taste enabling her to select the choicest foods..."³²) These three actors would stand on an elevated platform in the center of the commercial structure, surrounded by a circular band sub-divided into seven departments: nutriments, garments, fuels and lumbers, implements, furnishings, books and papers, and remedials. Circumscribing these departments would be a narrow ring for a hallway, to be used by a "sentinel, or general inspector, or outside agent, or messenger" who would visit from department to department and report all his or her observations back to the Leading Mind. This outer

³¹ "Attracting public attention, intelligent persons would observe its workings, copy the model, and thus a commercial tie would eventually bind together the inhabitants of this planet, and trade would be swept away." *Equitable Commerce*, 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

ring or “whispering gallery,” the spirits informed Spear, would allow persons to “transmit intelligence from branch to branch” discreetly, allowing the central space to maintain an ambience of tranquility. The Leading Mind would oversee all transactions. At the touch of a spring, each party could send a message or package up to this central figure and vice versa. Springs would also allow goods to appear instantaneously as soon as they were called for. These commercial exchanges were imagined as quasi-aesthetic experiences: In time, the spirits promised, special garments suited to active life in the commercial structure would be introduced, “rendering the employees interesting persons to look upon— attraction, beauty aiding commerce.” Odors “agreeable in economic methods” would be released.³³

One of the inspirations for this spiritualized market was Charles Fourier. In 1855, as editor of Paulina Wright Davis’s pioneering feminist magazine *The Una*, Hewitt published an excerpt by Fourier entitled “Angels in the Market!” In the article, Fourier imagined a market system in which guardian angels would warn buyers when they were about to be cheated—for example, when they were about to be sold ersatz Madeira or a cloth of false dye. “People would know by the angels the real value and defects of every article exposed for sale.” Fourier projected that this spiritual intervention in commercial affairs would lead to the creation of great exchanges in which goods would be sold from afar for fair prices (at cost, plus a reasonable profit), sweeping away the current market system: “Deception and bargaining would then be out of the question, the rows of

³³ *Equitable Commerce*, 16, 20. Numerous other details were given, down to the shelves for arranging goods and the specification that steam pipes should pass all around the structure.

shopkeepers who garnish our streets would be useless, and must return to productive labor; sales being prompt and easy, orders would be sent from a distance, saving the purchaser the expense of time and money.”³⁴

In Fourier’s system, the angels ensured the transparency of the market, by preventing frauds and keeping parties honest. So too, Spear and his associates saw information as a key component to creating a more just commercial system. By collecting all information and directing all transactions centrally, the Leading Mind would ensure the smooth and equitable flow of goods. Elsewhere, Spear’s spirits proposed a kind of mental telegraph system, which would enable individuals in different parts of the planet—and even between planets—to transmit images and messages to each other, without submarine cables. (The spirits warned that the latter contained the “snake of a most dangerous monopoly.”)³⁵

Spear and his associates saw their system of equitable commerce as a “magic wand” that would strike down capitalism and its oppressions, and initiate a “divine social order.”³⁶ Under the new system, “with comparatively little friction, and without loss, all things would move harmoniously, commercially onward.”³⁷ In this spiritualized approach to reform, social tensions would disappear magically, objects would be transmitted

³⁴ Charles Fourier, “Angels in the Market!,” *The Una* 1855.

³⁵ Spear, *The Educator*, 538.

³⁶ *Equitable Commerce*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

effortlessly, and all would occur in a rarefied, elevated atmosphere of pleasant scents and colors.

The spirits' vision of a reformed marketplace was at once authoritarian and libertarian. They insisted that "one single mind, and only one, must govern absolutely the whole enterprise, corresponding to the Divine Mind. Divine monarchy is just. He must rule without votes..." At the same time, paradoxically, participation was voluntary; absolute individual freedom was to be preserved. In fact, each person employed in the new commercial structure would name his or her own compensation, and be allowed to withdraw at will.³⁸ This hierarchical and authoritarian quality was reflected in the commercial institution's architecture, with its Panopticon-like organization. In a review of *Equitable Commerce* published in *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison pointed to a "suspicious autocracy" in its idea of a grand, Leading Mind, comparing the system to the czardom in Russia.³⁹ John Orvis responded to Garrison's criticisms in a subsequent issue, arguing that less value should be placed on democracy, which he equated with voting. After all, Orvis reasoned, a vote was merely the "outer expression of what dwells within," and he evoked the centralized structure of Nature ("Nature, invariably, works from the centre to the circumference"), insisting somewhat obscurely that at the center of this divine commercial operation was "the Love element."⁴⁰

³⁸ *Equitable Commerce*, 17.

³⁹ "Equitable Commerce," *The Liberator*, September 14, 1855, 146.

⁴⁰ John Orvis, "Equitable Commerce." *The Liberator*, September 28, 1855, 154.

An Aesthetic of Circularity

The relentless centralization of the spirits' equitable commerce structure reflected an aesthetic of circularity that suffused Spiritualist practice and theology at large. Bret Carroll has observed that the circle or sphere was the "central architectural feature" of the Spiritualist universe, "and a metaphor crucial to their visions of the spirit world and the physical world alike."⁴¹ According to Carroll, the preference for circles drew on Neoplatonic traditions, transmitted through Emmanuel Swedenborg to Andrew Jackson Davis and down to Spear.⁴² Davis, following Swedenborg, imagined a heavenly universe organized as a series of hierarchically gradated concentric spheres. (Fig. 6.7) At the center was God and at the outermost edge was the "lowest" order of heavenly beings. On passing to the spiritual world, souls initially took up positions at the level corresponding to their state of development at death; as they became more elevated and refined, they moved progressively up the hierarchy, closer to God.⁴³

Spear adopted this idea of a universe organized according to circularity.

Throughout his writings are references to Nature's "Concentric Law"—the idea that the

⁴¹ Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 62.

⁴² Swedenborg had developed a theory of forms that posited a hierarchy of shapes, with the angular at the lowest end of the ladder, the circular above that, followed by the spiral, the vortical, the celestial, and the spiritual.

⁴³ Carroll observes that in conjuring this model of progressive spiritual development in the afterlife, Spiritualists "envisioned a cosmos much like their understanding of how Jacksonian society functioned; hard work and free action resulted in spiritual ascent, status and authority were achieved rather than ascribed, and success (salvation) was within the grasp of all. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 75.

circle was the fundamental organizing form of Nature.⁴⁴ After all, flowers, fruits and seeds were centrally organized. The family was also conceived as a circle, with the woman “in its centre, around which all interests shall cluster.”⁴⁵ This circular structure of the family was taken as the fundamental model for all institutions, both in heaven and on earth. In Spear’s own diagrams—supposedly transmitted from the spirits but undoubtedly influenced by Davis, circularity and centripetal relationships were ubiquitous. *The Educator* included several diagrams transmitted by the spirits, illuminating the structure of the heavens and earth, including one radial drawing showing the General Assembly of spirits in the center, surrounded by the seven associations. (Fig. 6.8) Similarly, a diagram of “The Church and Her Offspring” showed the Church at the center, surrounded by concentric circles representing the principles of faith, love, fidelity, and so forth, and surrounded by seven other circles representing commerce, government, home, education, philanthropy, nursing, and progress. (Fig. 6.9)

The appeal of the circle was not just that it was an armature for centralized authority, but also that it produced certain aesthetic effects that were vaguely associated with smoothness, harmony, and lack of discord. Sprinkled throughout Spear’s revelations are echoes of eighteenth-century aesthetic prescriptions about the pleasing effects of certain forms on the eye: “Circularities control and overcome angularities.”⁴⁶ Such

⁴⁴ See Spear, *The Educator*, 58, 59-65, 70, 109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60, 64.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

statements blurred the line between aesthetic judgment and political effect, since “angularity” was also used in Spiritualist parlance to denote social discord over subjects like slavery and capitalism.

Harmonial Homes

The aesthetics of circularity were also visible in the other work of architecture proposed by the Kiantone spirits: a design for Homes of Harmony transmitted through Simon Crosby Hewitt beginning around 1853.⁴⁷ Several prototypes of these homes were apparently built in Kiantone. Oliver Chase, who grew up near the village, recalled in 1904 that “Ten or twelve cottages, square, round and octagon, were built, these were divided into rooms, painted the colors of the rainbow.”⁴⁸ The structures were said to be domed and ranged in diameter from ten to thirty feet. (Figs. 6.10 and 6.11) Hewitt published several diagrams of his design in Robert Owen’s magazine *The Millennial Gazette* in 1856.⁴⁹ The drawings in *The Gazette* show three plans ranging in size, all featuring obsessive radial arrangements of oval rooms. The smallest version consisted of a three-story structure with three rooms on the ground floor devoted to a parlor, kitchen, and dining areas. The largest was a grand building of unspecified height, intended for an association or cooperative organization.

The ground floor alone featured seven large rooms—including two drawing rooms, a

⁴⁷ “Convention of Spiritualists,” 5.

⁴⁸ Chase, “The Kiantone Movement,” 829. One room was apparently devoted to the shattered remains of the “Electric Motor.” Some may have been built on glass rollers to allow them to be rotated and to maximize sunlight.

⁴⁹ Owen, the famed socialist, had been converted to spiritualism just a few years earlier.

music and amusement space, a breakfast area, kitchen, dining, and family parlor, as well as a series of smaller chambers intended as reception areas, ladies' dressing rooms, musical cabinet, and conservatory. In his letter accompanying these plans, Hewitt explained how these Harmonial Homes related to the cause of social reform: Little or no progress could be made, he explained until man was "comfortably circumstanced." Humans required a "comfortable, cheerful, harmonious place of abode—a HOME which shall be, at once, the sacred *locale* of his affections, the embodiment of his tastes, and, if not the symbol of his actual attainments, at least that of his aspirations and his more ennobling desires."⁵⁰

Hewitt's explanation indicated that these houses were imagined as ideal types— aspirational symbols of a more perfected state of society. This was different from Orson Fowler's view of octagon houses as functional tools to directly improve man and thereby bring about a new world. Hewitt explained that "as the man becomes rounded, all-sided, beautiful, in the maturity of his spiritual growth, his dwelling will exhibit a corresponding development."⁵¹ In other words, more spiritualized humans would require and produce a more spiritualized architecture, rather than the other way around.

In contrast to the past, which had been an "age of struggle," Hewitt explained that the new order of society being ushered into existence would bring "new forms of life and action": "There will be less of isolation—of mere *individualism*; there will be more of association, of co-operation,—exhibiting the harmonious GROUP-LIFE." He made clear

⁵⁰ Hewitt, "Architecture of the Future," 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

that the designs for houses were targeted not only at the “individual or isolated family,” but were also intended to spark new ideas for “unitary edifices; also for the organization of CIRCULAR CITIES.”⁵² But here again, the implication was that the Harmonial Homes would contain and symbolize harmonious cooperation rather than directly, functionally facilitating it.

The Body as a House

The circular forms of the Harmonial Homes, Hewitt explained, were inspired not only by nature’s preference for circularity, but also by the roundness of the human body itself: “It hardly needs to be said that, as the human body becomes more perfect, it presents a more charming rotundity of form. It is the *house* in which man dwells; and, as man becomes rounded, his dwelling will exhibit a corresponding development.”⁵³ Indeed, the analogy of house to body was one of the driving concepts of the house design.

Hewitt, who stressed that he had no previous education and “knew nothing of architecture, or even of geometry, from books,” insisted that the design of the houses had

⁵² Hewitt, “Architecture of the Future,” 11. Owen published a lukewarm response in the July 1, 1856, issue of the *Millennial Gazette*, in which he expressed appreciation for the spirits’ revelation, but argued that Spear’s design was too small to facilitate real social reform. “The architecture for the New Existence of Man upon the Earth in the spiritual social state will require to be a united or combined arrangement for a federative family society of three thousand in number, and so combined into one arrangement as to be the most convenient for *all* the purposes of such united society.” Owen referred Hewitt to the plans that he had produced more than thirty years with the help of a “talented scientific architect” for just such a unitary dwelling, while acknowledging that the intervening years had brought many scientific improvements that would no doubt lead to improved designs for large communal structures. Owen was almost certainly referring to the model he’d generated with architect Stedman Whitwell in 1825 and published in 1830—a large, rectangular courtyard plan for 2000 inhabitants, to be deployed at New Harmony, Indiana.

⁵³ Hewitt, “Architecture of the Future,” 4.

been entirely guided by the spirits. It was they who directed him to examine a human skeleton as a model for the building. Unable to procure a complete skeleton, he had been forced to join one together from parts, a process which gave him a “lively idea of the human frame.” At night he would place a chart he had made under his pillow, and in the morning he would be aroused by revelations. “Lying awake on his bed, he had electrical flashes of circles, which taught him that his rooms must be either circular or oval.”⁵⁴

The idea of using the human form as a model for architecture is, of course, as old as Vitruvius. Yet whereas the Renaissance revival of the idea of the building as a kind of body is best understood in the context of the era’s philosophical humanism, Hewitt (and his spirits) were drawing on a different ideological background: mid-nineteenth-century health reform literature that conceived the human body itself as a kind of house. In *The Educator*, A. E. Newton referred to “design of ‘the house we live in,’—the human body,” a nod to William Andrus Alcott’s *The House I Live In*, published in 1837. (Fig. 6.12) Alcott’s book, intended as an anatomy text for children, drew an extended metaphor between the human body and the residential structure. The skeleton was the “framework” of the house, the hips were the sills, the cranium was the cupola, the skin the shingles, the eyes the windows, and so forth.

Orson Fowler had also used the body as an analogy for the house, emphasizing especially the idea of the kitchen as a stomach.⁵⁵ But as I discussed in Chapter 3, Fowler

⁵⁴ “Convention of Spiritualists,” 5.

⁵⁵ O. S. Fowler, *A Home for All, or, the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building New, Cheap, Convenient, Superior and Adapted to Rich and Poor*, rev. ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1853).

was more concerned with the functional ways that the house could affect human bodies—providing healthier air through ventilation, or spaces for exercise, or a more compact organization to save labor. Hewitt, in contrast, saw the relation between house and body in more symbolic terms. Of the harmonial house’s tripartite arrangement, he explained that the lower apartments corresponded to the abdominals “for the lower labors” and therefore housed a kitchen. The central floor housed the vital and respiratory organs—the dining room was the stomach, the worship room the heart, the mother’s private room the liver. Above these, the cupola corresponded to the brain, and was where reading, writing, and thinking would occur. Windows were like eyes; the door was the mouth. A vertical circular hollow shaft, corresponding to the spinal cord, nerves, and blood vessels, extended from the base to the dome and provided communication among the stories, via “sliding apparatus, spiral staircases, bell-wires, speaking-tubes, water-pipes.”⁵⁶ At his 1857 Convention speech, Hewitt gave the impression that this central shaft also contained an “ascending room” or “lift” by which people and objects might ascend and descend instead of using stairs.⁵⁷

Although Hewitt did not provide many details about how his fantastic architecture would be constructed, he did offer this tantalizing hint: “When or before the proper time arrives for the construction of dwellings on this plan, the ingredients of a *new building material*, specially adapted to this mode of architecture, are to be disclosed.” Elsewhere, he

⁵⁶ Spear, *The Educator*, 350.

⁵⁷ “Convention of Spiritualists,” 5.

revealed that the new material would be a kind of “cement or mineral paste,” capable of being moulded into any form, becoming speedily hard as granite, and available at a small expense.”⁵⁸ Whether or not Hewitt knew of Orson Fowler’s recent advocacy of the “gravel wall,” this presentation of concrete as a kind of magically pliable and inexpensive substance reinforces the idea that at least some nineteenth-century Americans saw it in quasi-utopian terms, as the very materiality for a new world.

Interior Sensations

The form of Hewitt’s spiritual architecture was determined by Nature’s law of circularity and by analogy to an idealized human body. But an equally important aspect of the Harmonial Homes was their atmosphere. Here, Hewitt gestured toward an understanding of architecture as not just a form that was modeled on the body, but capable of affecting that very body as well, through the production of sentient effects. Just as the Equitable Commerce institution had its whispering galleries, its tranquil and organized main chamber, and its odors and appropriately garbed agents, so too Hewitt’s reformed domestic realm would be a highly aestheticized environment. Above all, he adopted the emerging mid-nineteenth-century ideology of the home as a kind of refuge from the chaos and discord of the public sphere, and spiritualized it. In addition to the other rationales

⁵⁸ At the 1857 Spiritualist Convention in New, Hewitt again lauded the new material, a “liquid flint or quart rock,” analogous to the bones of the human body, which had “glutinous and mineral elements.” This material would make the building fireproof and allow it to “endure from generation to generation.” He drew a parallel to the human body, whose essentials did not change—only people’s dress—mere ornament—changed. Ibid.

given for the house's circular forms, Hewitt cited the perceptual qualities of particular geometries. The angles of ordinary buildings, it was asserted, would "not only disturb the body, unfavorably affecting the elements, but will also pain the eye. *Angular* persons do not notice this; but the more spiritual, the more perfectly or roundly unfolded, are affected somewhat as if pierced by sharp pins."⁵⁹

To provide a comfortable atmosphere for refined souls, each house should have a "holy of holies," a quiet space, sheltered from disturbance, "where spiritual beings may congregate at will, write out their thoughts, if they choose, or impress them on the mind." The holy of holies should contain an altar, sacred tablets, a font of pure water, divine statuary, and other spiritual objects "adapted to bring out and intensify the diviner, nobler faculties of the human soul." This sanctified space was imagined as "secluded from the noise and bustle of life," and from the external world, where "all things are astir."⁶⁰

The designation of this holy of holies hints not only at a sensationalist aesthetic of architecture, primarily oriented toward a sense of withdrawal, but it also reflected Spiritualism's emphasis on individual worship in opposition to organized congregations. As Spear put it, whereas the churches in his day served throngs, "the true worshipper would be alone, where no eye but the Divine can rest upon him, and where the Divine

⁵⁹ *The Educator*, 347. "It is as impossible for such a one to be comfortable when thus surrounded, as for a delicate lady to walk barefooted on a newly-reaped rye-field with pleasure." It was for aesthetic, perceptual reasons also that Hewitt modified the circle into an oval. He believed there was a "lack of elegance in a perfectly *round* structure; it produces a monotonous effect, which wearies the mind. But the *oval* is more agreeable. The eye is pleased with its graceful sweep; and not unfrequently greater beauty and economy can be secured by its adoption." Besides, the author added, the public might find the oval form more acceptable than the "baldly round. Hewitt, "Architecture of the Future," 11.

⁶⁰ Spear, *The Educator*, 346-47.

Presence alone can be felt.” He acknowledged that “the public church has its uses”—for example, teaching large assemblies. “But there is a condition when the worshipper would no longer mingle with the crowd; when the soul says, ‘Leave me; I would be alone; I would be my own priest, and worship God in my own way, without an intermediate.’”⁶¹

The concern for providing spaces of privacy—a retreat within the retreat of the home—also reflected the Kiantone Spiritualists’ particular beliefs about women. Spear’s circle, like other Spiritualists, was generally supportive of the woman’s rights movement, yet their advocacy of greater economic and sexual autonomy for women was often accompanied by peculiar views about women’s special status. Women were seen variously as more elevated, finer souls, as receptive vessels, and as mothers and protectors of the womb. Thus, in designing the new Harmonial Home, a special place must be reserved for women:

[T]he *mother* must have all her wants gratified, to the highest possible extent. In certain conditions she desires to be alone. She needs to retire from the world, or at least needs an apartment which she can call her own, into which no uninvited person, under any circumstances, would be expected to enter. She should not be interrupted or startled by any occurrence in the building; because the slightest incident sometimes disarranges all the earlier processes, and miscarriage results.⁶²

Here we get a glimpse of Spear and company’s collective preoccupation with sexual generation and what they termed “wombology.” Like many Spiritualists, Spear believed that traditional marriage bonds confined individuals in un-spiritual marriages and treated women essentially as the chattel of the husband. They argued that unions should be based

⁶¹ Ibid., 346.

⁶² Ibid., 347.

on voluntary attraction and affinity. This led naturally to accusations of “free love”—and indeed, both Spear and Hewitt dissolved their first marriages and acquired more suitable partners some point. However, the Spiritualist ideology of union also had eugenicist implications. The Spirits claimed that unions based on love would yield biologically superior beings, and placed a great emphasis on the “electrical charges” passing through the woman during intercourse and pregnancy.⁶³ Like Orson Fowler, the Kiantonists believed that the sense impressions a mother received during pregnancy would be transmitted to her fetus: thus, a woman who immersed herself in astronomical texts would bring into existence “an astronomer...who shall be able to modelize a self-generating and self-moving Planetarium.”⁶⁴ This led to the notion of scientific generation, or breeding. An article in *The Spiritual Age* predicted that “It will be quite as possible to introduce into the world astronomers, mathematicians poets, artists, metaphysicians, moralists, organizers and better types of humanity generally, as they may be desired, as it now is to improve the stock of animals on the farm.”⁶⁵ The implication was that the new harmonic world would be bred.

⁶³ John Humphrey Noyes also developed the idea of scientific procreation into a system he called “stirpiculture” at his colony in Oneida, New York.

⁶⁴ “Human Chemistry—What Is It?” September 24, 1858, in the Sheldon Papers, University of Pittsburgh. Quoted in Buescher, *Remarkable Life*, 184.

⁶⁵ *The Spiritual Age*, December 25, 1858.

Models

Despite these few hints that external environment could shape the inner soul, the Kiantone Spiritualists' approach to architecture was more symbolic than functional. The Equitable Commerce exchange and the Harmonial Home were to be symbols of a new elevated state of being, and their geometric forms were imagined as representing rather than directly producing more harmonious relations. The key term describing these symbolic, representative relationships was "model." The words "model" and "modelize" recur throughout Spear's writings, and provide the key to understanding the relationship between Spiritualist geometric architecture and social reform. Just as Josiah Warren spent a lifetime establishing demonstration "experiments" of his reform principles, what set Spear apart from other Spiritualists of the day was his relentless modelizing.

The word "model" had multiple distinct connotations for Spear and his associates. First, there was the notion of a model as an analogy—for example, the way that the human body served as a literal model for Hewitt's Harmonial Home. Over the years, Spear's circle was instructed by the spirits to use such analogical models for a number of enterprises. The community, for example, was directed to build an electrical ship based on the model of a duck, and a sewing machine on the model of a human arm.⁶⁶ This kind of analogical thinking reflected a Spiritualist impulse to see a grand harmony in all things by

⁶⁶ Spear and his circle worked on the electric ship for almost five years, with the help of a shipbuilder from Maine named David Densmore. The ship was supposed to be made of iron, lined with salt, and driven by electricity generated from "personal magnetisms" of sensitive mediums. It would move through the water "with lightning speed, and supersede all other sea-going craft." On the ship and sewing machine, see Buescher, *Remarkable Life*, 142-44, 235-45.

identifying correspondences between unlike entities, and between concrete manifestations and universal, abstract principles. Hence, the human body was imagined to be round in the same way that a seed or the sun was. This belief in correspondences and hidden resemblances was an inheritance of Swedenborgianism, and is a common feature of esoteric religions.⁶⁷

More pragmatically, one reason that the Kiantone Spiritualists cited models like the body and the duck was their belief that concrete, visible models were necessary as part of the process of construction. The spirits instructed Spear that if “the human mind is ever brought to high achievements, it must be by having before it an ideal, or copy, as perfect as can be formed.”⁶⁸ This was because the mind requires “something tangible; something which can be pictured to the vision, as a guide, or a copy to be imitated.... In all important enterprises it is desirable to have thus before the mind a model or embodiment of the thought.”⁶⁹

The emphasis on the tangibility of the analogical model can be related to a central problem of Spiritualism—indeed, of religions in general, which is whether and how to figure something that is not visible. Spiritualism, a religion that aspired to scientific

⁶⁷ Scholars like Antoine Faivre have asserted that a belief in correspondences is a central feature of all esoteric religions: “Symbolic and real correspondences...are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen....These correspondences, considered more or less veiled at first sight, are, therefore, intended to be read and deciphered.” Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁶⁸ Spear, *The Educator*, 92. Spear gave the example of having a carpet manufactured in a particular texture and pattern: one should present an ideal or pattern to be copied. “Having your model, diagram, or copy, their minds are focalized, their energies are bent in that particular direction.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 418.

rationality, was inordinately preoccupied with problems of manifestation and proof. Scientists-turned-Spiritualists like Robert Hare developed elaborate devices to authenticate spiritual manifestations. (Figs. 6.13–6.15) Andrew Jackson Davis published diagrams and pictures to concretely illustrate the relationship between visible and invisible worlds. (Figs. 6.16–6.21) Ralph Waldo Emerson had criticized just such a desire for concreteness in Emmanuel Swedenborg as an “excessive determination to form.” According to the Transcendentalist, Swedenborg “saw not abstractly, but in pictures, heard it in dialogues, constructed it in events”—an accusation that could well be applied to Spear.⁷⁰ Emerson saw such desire for concrete manifestation as a vulgarization of the spiritual.

Spear, who could also be accused of an “excessive determination to form,” thought of models as small, concrete manifestations of large, abstract ideas. In response to criticisms that the New Motor did not work properly, Spear’s amanuensis A. E. Newton insisted a little disingenuously that it was never intended as a working mechanism but, “on the contrary, simply a *model* for the embodiment of the IDEA.”⁷¹ The model, in this sense, was something like a first manifestation of a larger, heretofore unseen vision—the instrument through which utopia (an idea that does not yet exist) might become actualized.

This is how the model could also become the key term for a Spiritualist vision of social reform—as a kind of first manifestation or demonstration. Spear’s spirits claimed

⁷⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Co., 1850).

⁷¹ Spear, *The Educator*, 242.

that a “*model* of a better social state must be constructed,—*a miniature world*, which, on inspection, will meet the approval of sincere and earnest inquirers.”⁷² “[T]he first great work is *to construct a model*,—to show man that that which the mind is capable of conceiving *can be brought forth*.”⁷³ The idea of the model also underlay the importance of the colony as a vehicle for social transformation. Spear and his followers believed that a “band of ... courageous persons have it in their power, by forming a separate community, to inaugurate a model society, free from every evil work, in which may be born and reared a better generation.”⁷⁴ Spear suggested that seven colonies should be created (the number seven being perfect). The participants of the colonies would comprise “truly harmonious, intelligent, and advanced minds,” and would be taught how to select suitable partners, with the assistance of an astrologer. Spear imagined that these scientifically bred colonies would gradually “take the place of villages, towns, and states.” The first colony would not only serve as an example, a model to be replicated, but also, as the reference to spiritually scientific mating indicates, would propagate through selective procreation.⁷⁵

The New Motive Power

The model that Spear was best known for during his own period was the “New Motive Power.” Its annunciation by the spirits suggested a singularly momentous discovery:

⁷² Ibid., 50-51.

⁷³ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁴ “Movements of Spiritualists,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 1858.

⁷⁵ Spear, Spear, *The Educator*, 117.

“Unto your Earth a child is born. Its name shall be called the ELECTRICAL MOTOR. It is the offspring of *mind*,—of the union of mind with matter impregnated by invisible elements. It is to *move* the moral, scientific, philosophical, and religious worlds.”⁷⁶ The Electrical Motor was a perpetual motion machine deriving energy not from the typical sources, but from the “electric life-currents of the universe.” The band at Kiantone believed this “bold and stupendous” device had the potential to change everything, though its exact significance remained shrouded in mystery. It was something like a scientific model—Newton wrote that it would “modelize, or illustrate to the eye, the grand principle of universal and perpetual Motion, as it exists in Nature.”⁷⁷ But it was also described as a way of tapping into the energy forces coursing through the universe and ultimately deriving from the divinity, which they referred to as the “Grand Electrical Focus.” Newton described it as a “thing of life”—evoking a kind of living machine, or cyborg. Lastly, the motor was also a “practical” utopian device. Like John A. Etzler’s massive wind-, water- and solar-powered machines a few years earlier, the New Motive Power promised unlimited productive power in an age just coming to grips with the marvels (and perils) of mechanization. (Figs. 6.22–6.24) The Kiantone band believed the electric motor had the potential to revolutionize transportation, production, and communication: Not only could it power ships “with greater power and more economy than steam” but “nations would communicate with each other without the aid of wires or

⁷⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 241.

submarine cables, and the planets, by its means, would hold mental communication.”⁷⁸

The New Motive Power embodied in one object, or model, the unlimited power and connectivity coursing through the universe.

Instructions were transmitted from the spirits to John Spear, who was said to be merely the passive conduit of information, being “quite destitute of either inventive genius, scientific knowledge in either of the departments involved, or even ordinary mechanical abilities.”⁷⁹ In fact he himself was skeptical of the whole enterprise, but over the course of ten months, he and his followers dutifully followed the spirits’ direction in building a model of the motor at High Rock Tower in Lynn, Massachusetts. High Rock Tower was a consecrated site for Spiritualism, since it had been the site of Spear’s first communications from the spirits as well as a famous revelation for Andrew Jackson Davis. (Fig. 6.25)

Newton gave a detailed description of the constructed apparatus in *The Educator*. Built on a circular wood table, three feet in diameter, was a device consisting of “various metallic bars, plates, wires, magnets, insulating substances, peculiar chemical compounds, etc., arranged, by careful direction, in accordance with the relations of positive and negative, or masculine and feminine.”⁸⁰ Each element of the machine corresponded to a

⁷⁸ “Convention of Spiritualists,” 5.

⁷⁹ Spear, *The Educator*, 239.

⁸⁰ The full description reads: “[U]pon the centre of an ordinary circular wood table, some three feet in diameter, were erected two metallic uprights, six or eight inches apart; between these, and reaching from one to the other, near their tops, was suspended on pivots a small steel shaft, which was crossed at its centre by another shaft, about six inches in length, on the extremities of which were suspended two steel balls enclosing magnets.... Between these suspended balls, between the uprights, and in the centre of the table,

body part—“not in outward *form*, but in *function*,” Newton stressed. A series of suspended zinc and copper plates comprised the “brain” of the machine; these were attached to metallic conductors, or “attractors” pointing upward that corresponded to human hair, which the spirits claimed were the body’s aerial collectors of atmospheric energy, including the energy that carries memories.

In spring 1854, the machine underwent a series of trials.⁸¹ In the culminating tests, Spear encased himself in the apparatus and entered a trance condition for over an hour. According to Newton, “a clear-seer, who was present during the operation, described ‘a stream of light’, a sort of umbilicum, emanating (from the encased person) to and enveloping the mechanism.”⁸² The spirits next indicated that someone of even “finer”

was arranged a very curiously constructed fixture,—a sort of oval platform, formed of a peculiar combination of magnets and metals. Directly above this were suspended a number of zinc and copper plates, alternately arranged, and said to correspond with the *brain* as an electric reservoir. These were supplied with lofty metallic conductors, or attractors, reaching upward to an elevated stratum of atmosphere. In combination with these principal parts were adjusted various metallic bars, plates, wires, magnets, insulating substances, peculiar chemical compounds, etc., arranged, by careful direction, in accordance with the relations of positive and negative, or masculine and feminine, as set forth in the foregoing treatises. At certain points around the circumference of the structure, and connected with the centre, small steel balls enclosing magnets were suspended. A metallic connection with the earth, both positive and negative, corresponding with the two lower limbs, right and left, of the body, was also provided. Certain portions of the structure were subjected to very peculiar processes, such as immersion for a time in novel chemical preparations... The details of all these processes have been preserved, and may be inspected by the curious. All parts were adjusted with mechanical nicety, and finished with tastefulness.” Spear, *The Educator*, 240.

⁸¹ For the first test of the machine, Spear charged it using a static generator, apparently producing only a small vibration. The Spirits then told them that it was necessary to charge the machine with persons “of both sexes, in such a way as that they might impart to it their personal magnetisms.” This led to several attempts in which circles of individuals sat around the table, with their hands on the table, in the same manner as for spirit manifestations. These attempts failed to produce satisfactory results, so Spear’s followers reasoned that a “finer quality of vital magnetism” was required—in other words, the presence of someone not of the “coarse and ordinary” type of the previous participants, but someone “well known for a long life of philanthropic labor, and self-denying devotion to the good of others.” This almost certainly was Spear himself. Spear, *The Educator*, 242.

⁸² Spear, *The Educator*, 245.

stuff was required to act as the human medium. Since the bodies and minds of females, as a class, were considered to be in purer conditions than those of males, this meant that the subject was to be a woman. The chosen subject was most likely Sarah Newton, the wife of A. E. Newton. What happened then is unclear. In *The Educator*, Mr. Newton wrote vaguely: “The process of impartation in this case presented some novel and unlooked-for characteristics, the details of which, though of interest to the careful student of mental physiology, are unimportant to the present purpose.” Other observers intimated that the woman went through childbirth-like symptoms.⁸³ In any case, Newton reported, “*something* had been imparted.... A slight pulsatory action became perceptible in the extremities.”⁸⁴ In *The New Era*, Hewitt announced momentarily, “THE THING MOVES.”⁸⁵

The machine’s operations had unmistakable sexual overtones: “The wires connecting the [male and female elements] represent sexual interminglings.... This mechanism is no longer destitute of activity. Slight and joyous motion exists, which will increase as the matrixal processes to their completion.”⁸⁶ The annunciation of the New

⁸³ See Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: Published by the author, 1870), 225; Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Spiritual Telegraph*, June 10 1854.

⁸⁴ Spear, *The Educator*, 247.

⁸⁵ *The New Era*, June 28, 1854.

⁸⁶ Spear, *The Educator*, p. 208-9. John Buescher has analyzed Spear’s edits to a manuscript description of the episode at High Rock Tower and has concluded that it consisted of a sexual rite, probably involving *coitus reservatus*, and possibly involving Paschal Beverly Randolph, an African American trance medium, writer on sexual magic, associate of Spear’s, and later a founder of the Rosicrucian order in the United States. See Buescher, *Remarkable Life*, 128-33. On Randolph see John P. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A*

Motive Power caused much controversy in Spiritualist circles. Many doubted its purpose and also the means used to usher its birth. Newton claimed hyperbolically that it was “subjected to a merciless storm of public ridicule and contemptuous criticism, compared with which the flagellations and stake-burnings of ancient martyrs might have been coveted.”⁸⁷ It was moved to Randolph, New York, and destroyed by locals in August 1854, though apparently revived in some form by 1857, when Hewitt presented it at the Spiritualist Convention in New York.

Deus ex Architectura

By any ordinary accounting, Spear’s machine was a failure. Ridiculed and mocked, it is easy to write off today as the delusion of either a fanatic or a charlatan. From a political perspective, the Kiantone Spiritualists’ looking to a machine for salvation can be seen as an evasion of the conflicts confronting antebellum Americans, and a turn away from the more direct and agitational political praxes that Spear and Hewitt engaged in as younger men. In the sexualized techno-fetishistic rite that surrounded the Electrical Motor, one senses a desire for a *deus ex machina*—an intervention from on high to magically harmonize a discordant world. So too, the circular Institution of Equitable Commerce and the Homes of Harmony—architectural machines—could be seen as utopian in the worst sense: facile fantasies of a post-revolutionary world, with little realistic sense of how to arrive there,

Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁸⁷ Spear, *The Educator*, 252.

beyond the hoped-for divine intercession. In the Spiritualists' obsession with sexuality and "wombology," in their concern with facilitating ideal conditions for reproduction, we can read an interest in "breeding" a more refined and harmonic society rather than struggling for it through prosaic political channels.

Whereas Orson Fowler had believed that architecture could transform its inhabitants—could make them stronger and healthier, the Kiantone Spiritualists' architectural schemes were not primarily motivated by a functionalist environmental ideology. They saw their more refined architecture as a natural outgrowth of more elevated humans. In his writings, Spear suggested that the new spiritual architecture would be an outgrowth, an "unfolding" of man's inner state:

All which exists in the external primarily dwelt in the *inner*; that man is ever writing *himself* out; and that a higher order of society will *of necessity* bring out a diviner architecture. Geologically speaking, *man is reaching finer conditions*; these call for finer surroundings, and the edifices in which he now dwells will become as unsuitable to him in the future as have become the caves and wigwams of the past.⁸⁸

Spear reminded readers that the novel architecture was a *new system*, designed to coordinate with a *new* social condition, and to be introduced "only so soon as people and means shall be ready for the undertaking." "The 'new wine' is not intended for 'old bottles.'"⁸⁹ This was his strongest statement that radical architecture would follow the regeneration of human beings, not the other way around.

⁸⁸ Spear, *The Educator*, 345.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Yet to read the Spiritualist architectural and other machines simply as political evasions is reductive—an act of functionalist “philistinism” in its own way, to evoke Friedrich Engels’s famous remark about those who would dismiss early-nineteenth-century utopian socialism without recognizing the germs of insight therein.⁹⁰ There is something undeniably marvelous about the Spiritualist creations, with their whispering galleries and angels of commerce, their novel amalgamations of humans and machines, and their intimations of a world without scarcity or conflict. One is reminded of Frederic Jameson’s observation, inspired by the writings of Ernst Bloch, that some utopias function as partial allegories rather than as total systems. Such allegorical utopias “seep into the daily life of things and people and afford an incremental, and often unconscious bonus of pleasure unrelated to their functional value or official satisfactions.”⁹¹

We can glean further hints for an alternate reading of these Spiritualist designs—one that sees them as aesthetic objects with political effects, rather than simply as failed political instruments—in Roland Barthes’s interpretation of Charles Fourier’s utopian fantasies, which the Spiritualists’ visions sometimes evoked. Recognizing the fantastically imaginative qualities of Fourier’s texts, Barthes observed: “It is a vast madness which does

⁹⁰ Marx and Engels were themselves quite critical of the utopian socialists—especially Owen, Fourier, and Cabet. However, as I discuss in the Introduction, Engels defended the insights and “germs of thought” in these figures’ work: “We can leave it to the literary small fry to solemnly quibble over these phantasies, which today only make us smile, and to crow over the superiority of their own bald reasoning, as compared with such ‘insanity’. For ourselves, we delight in the stupendously grand thoughts and germs of thought that everywhere break out through their phantastic covering, and to which these Philistines are blind.” Friedrich Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (1892),” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972).

⁹¹ Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 5.

not end, but which permutates.” Barthes credited Fourier with creating a “topos of the impossible” and engaging in a play of language—a “systematics” that he contrasted with the scientific “system” of Marx and Engels:⁹²

The *system* is a body of doctrine within which the elements (principles, facts, consequences) develop logically, i.e., from the point of view of the discourse, rhetorically. The system being a closed (or monosemic) one, it is always theological, dogmatic; it is nourished by illusions: an illusion of transparency (the language employed to express it is purportedly purely instrumental, it is not a writing) and an illusion of reality (the goal of the system is to be *applied*, i.e. that it leave the language in order to found a reality that is incorrectly defined as the exteriority of language); it is a strictly paranoid insanity whose path of transmission is insistence, repetition, catechism, orthodoxy. Fourier’s work does not constitute a *system*; only when we have tried to “realize” this work (in phalansteries) has it become, retrospectively, a “system” doomed to instant fiasco; system, in the terminology of Marx and Engels, is the “systematic form,” i.e., pure ideology, ideological reflection; *systematics* is the play of the system; it is language that is open, infinite, free from any referential illusion (pretension); its mode of appearance, its constituency, is not “development” but pulverization, dissemination...⁹³

What is suggestive in this passage for our purposes is Barthes’s indication of a path outside of a purely functionalist, transparent theory of language (and, we could add, of architecture). He offers a way of evaluating utopian projects that is not limited to their realizability or to the ethics of their content.⁹⁴ Barthes reads Fourier as a textual inventor, one who took the fragments of culture, science, and literature, and redeployed them to

⁹² Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 110, 18.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁴ For Barthes, “the social intervention of a text (not necessarily achieved at the time the text appears) is measured not by the popularity of its audience or by the fidelity of the socioeconomic reflection it contains or projects to a few eager sociologists, but rather by the violence that enables it to *exceed* the laws that a society, an ideology, a philosophy establish for themselves in order to agree among themselves in a fine surge of historical intelligibility.” *Ibid.*, 10.

produce a “counter-rhetoric,” “by introducing into their code a “grain” (of sand, of madness).”⁹⁵ According to Barthes, the charm of Fourier’s writing lay in its transgressive process of cutting up and reassembly of signifiers: his “expression derives its felicity (and ours) from a kind of upheaval: it is excentric, displaced, it lives on its own, outside its context.”⁹⁶

To identify the resonance of the Kiantone Spiritualists’ architectural schemes similarly requires going beyond a functionalist definition of form as merely that which transparently expresses, or even produces, particular social effects.⁹⁷ What is original in the Spiritualists’ designs, I would argue, is that they saw architecture as a ritualistic choreography of movement and information—not in the sense that Fowler did, where the goal was simply efficiency. Instead, the Spiritualists’ scenography aimed to make the practice of commerce into something more than just a bare economic exchange, to invest it with properties beyond the merely economic. Their pamphlet on Equitable Commerce distinguished between “mere trade” and a more exalted “commerce”—consisting of “interchanges of persons, transitions from clime to clime, from hemisphere to

⁹⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

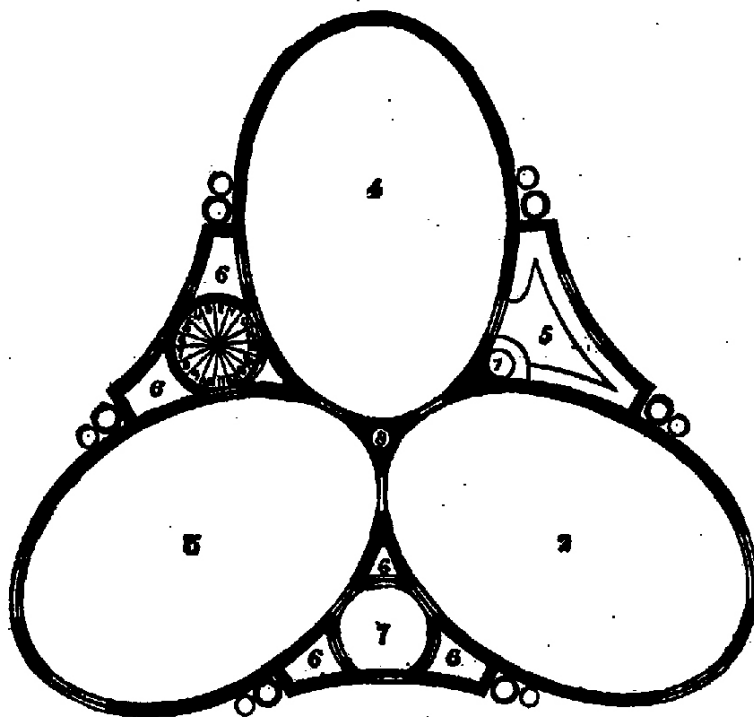
⁹⁷ For a different perspective that similarly tries to rediscover and rekindle the Kiantone group’s utopianism, see John Lardas Modern’s excellent book *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 350. Modern reads the New Motive Power as a figure of counter-disenchantment—as an instance of a momentary ascendance of feeling and affect over reason in the mid-nineteenth century. Spear and Sarah Newton, Modern writes, “Spear & Newton “actively sought to become the objects of a technological totality, to feel as though they had become perfected, that is, mechanical versions of themselves..[T]he new motive power was an invitation to be haunted through and through by technology—to be systematically treated by ‘ethereal laws’ and ‘heretofore mechanical forces’ that were part and parcel to divinity.” (297) The overall project of Modern’s book is to frame modernity as haunted, in contrast to the standard narrative of modernity as defined by the rise of rationality and secularism and the decline of myth and enchantment.

hemisphere”: “Commerce brings two or more persons of different communities, different climates, together. They look each other in the face, study each other’s peculiarities; observe each other’s manners, customs, laws, habits...; and thus derive certain advantages from what may be called acquaintance one with another.”⁹⁸ By creating a temple-like environment with elevated platforms, special odors, ritual dress, and infrastructural networks facilitating the frictionless transmission of goods and information, the Kiantone Spiritualists were imagining an architecture of seamless movement and communication, where economic exchanges could be reimagined as primal social encounters.⁹⁹ This was an inverse cognitive space to the contemporary capitalist marketplace, with its predations, deceptions, and frictions, but also its relentless instrumentalizing rationality. In their reworking of home, market, and machine as ritual and even erotic sites, the Spiritualists were manifesting a longing for a world that exceeded existing rational representations and understandings. The drawings of circular markets and ovoid homes were less interesting as models to be realized than as placeholders for worlds yet to be imagined.

⁹⁸ John Orvis, “Equitable Commerce,” *The Liberator*, September 28, 1855, 5-6.

⁹⁹ Barthes makes a similar observation about Fourier’s phalanstery: “[A]rchitecture and urbanism reciprocally withdraw in favor of an over-all science of human space, the primary characteristic of which is no longer protection, but movement.” Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 12.

PLATE 1.



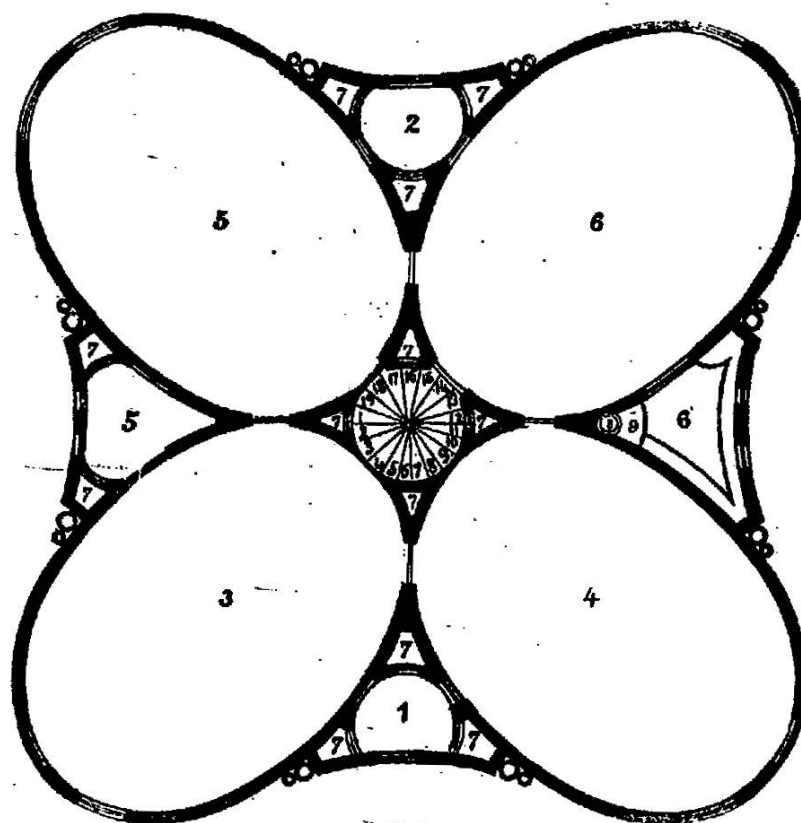
HOME OF HARMONY. GROUND PLAN OF 1ST STORY.

Three Stories High—9 Rooms.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Front Hall—diam. 6 feet. | 5. Pantry. |
| 2. Parlour—25 × 18. | 6. Closets. |
| 3. Sitting Room. | 7. Chimney. |
| 4. Kitchen and Dining Room. | 8. Flue for Ventilation and Heating. |

Fig. 6.1 Simon Crosby Hewitt, Nine-room Home of Harmony (*New Millennial Gazette*, July 1, 1856)

PLATE 2.

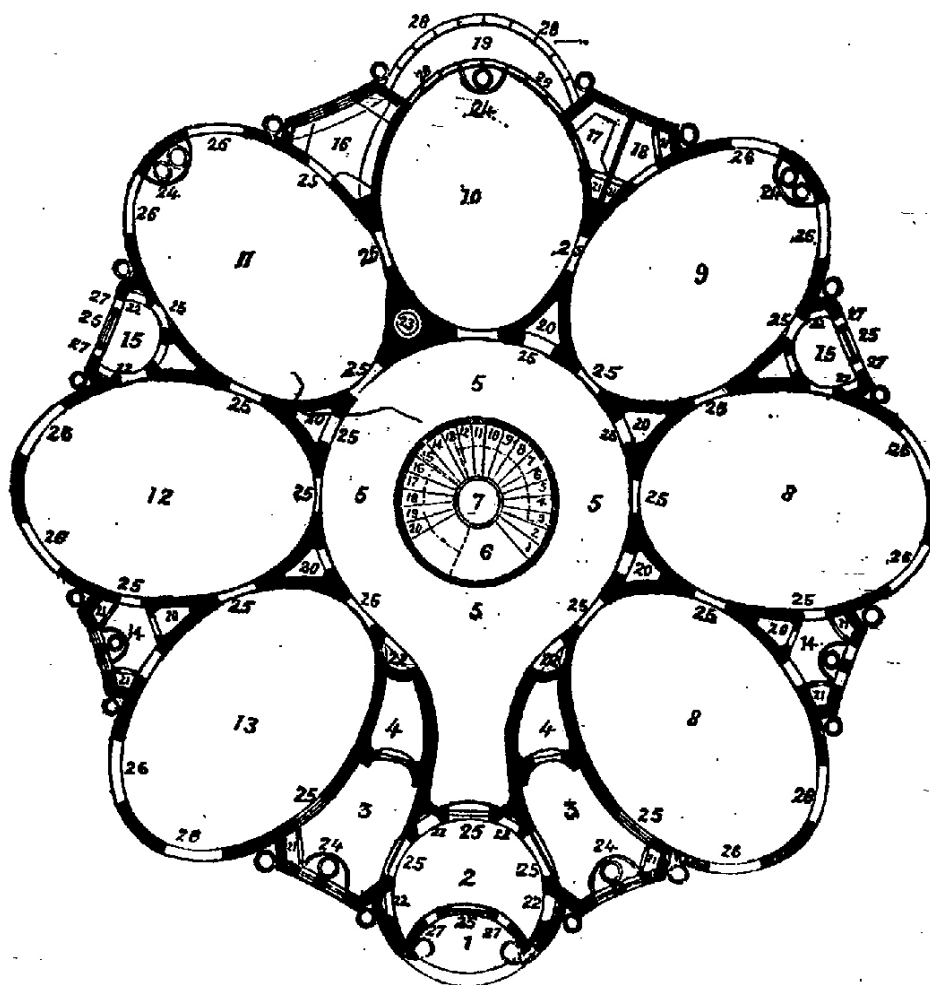


HOME OF HARMONY.—GROUND PLAN OF 1ST STORY.

Three Stories High—14 Rooms.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Front Hall—6½ feet diam. | 6. Kitchen 25 × 18. |
| 2. Back Hall " " | 7. Closets. |
| 3. Drawing Room 25 × 18. | 8. Chimney. |
| 4. Parlour " " " | 1—19. Spiral Stairs from Kitchen, and |
| 5. Sitting and Dining Room, and Ladies' Dressing Room, —25 × 18. | Dining, and Sitting Room—6 feet diam. |
| | 9. Gas Cooking Arrangement. |

Fig. 6.2 Simon Crosby Hewitt, Fourteen-room Home of Harmony (*New Millennial Gazette*, July 1, 1856)



HOME OF HARMONY.—GROUND PLAN OF FIRST STORY.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Niche Entrance. | 15. Side Entrances. |
| 2. Entrance Hall. | 16. Pantry. |
| 3. Reception Rooms. | 17. China Closet. |
| 4. Wardrobes. | 18. Musical Cabinet. |
| 5. Inner Hall. | 19. Conservatory. |
| 6. Spiral Stairs. | 20. Closets. |
| 7. Opening for Light. | 21. Cupboards. |
| 8. Drawing Rooms. | 22. Niches. |
| 9. Music and Amusement Rooms. | 23. Chimney. |
| 10. Breakfast Room. | 24. Toilets and Patent Wash Bowls. |
| 11. Kitchen. | 25. Doors. |
| 12. Dining Room. | 26. Windows. |
| 13. Family Parlour. | 27. Side Lights. |
| 14. Ladies Dressing Rooms. | 28. Iron and Glass. |

Fig. 6.3 Simon Crosby Hewitt, Large Home of Harmony (*New Millennial Gazette*, July 1, 1856)

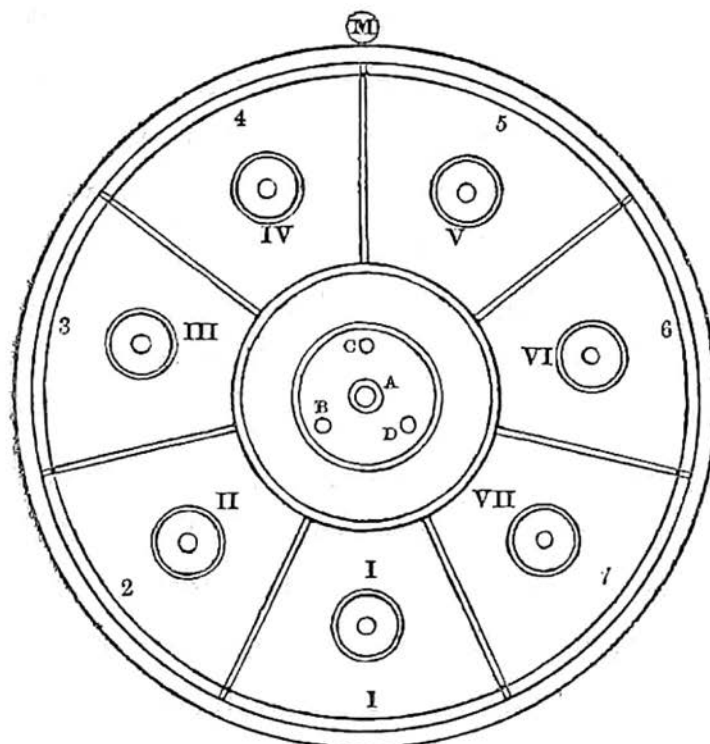
Message from the Association of Beneficents.

The undersigned, by the Instrument which is now being herein communicated, say to the inhabitants of the earth on which this Scribe dwells, that an association called "THE ASSOCIATION OF BENEFICENTS" has been selected, qualified, and commissioned, to teach of the Benefices; and they now say and declare that they have in contemplation a system of revelations which will much surprise the dwellers of the lower earth. They, moreover, now make declaration that, through the various instrumentalities which now are, and which, as they are most needed, will be under their control, teaching, and direction, this Association will greatly, wisely, and seasonably, instruct and bless the diseased, the suffering, and the wretched, of the aforesaid earth. And they declare that this Scribe, known by the name of JOHN MURRAY SPEAR, is now chosen and set apart to execute their schemes, and to complete their beneficent intentions.

Benjamin Rush	Joseph Hallett
Benjamin Franklin	John Murray
John Howard	John Pounds
Roger Sherman	Th. Jefferson
Oliver Dennett	John Spear
Thos Clarkson	J. T. Hopper

Communicated and dated April 1, 1853 (being the commencement of the united Labors of the Association of the Beneficents), and delivered into the hand of John Murray Spear.

Fig. 6.4 Message from the Association of Beneficents, an organization in the spirit world (*The Educator*, 1857)



PLAN OF A COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE.

A. Position of Leading Mind. B. Purchaser. C. Receiver. D. Transmitter. I to VII. Heads of Departments. M. Outside Messenger. 1. Department of Nutriments. 2. Garments. 3. Fuels, Lumber, etc. 4. Implements. 5. Furnishings. 6. Books, Papers, etc. 7. Remedials.

Fig. 6.5 Plan of a commercial structure imparted by the spirits (*The Educator*, 1857)

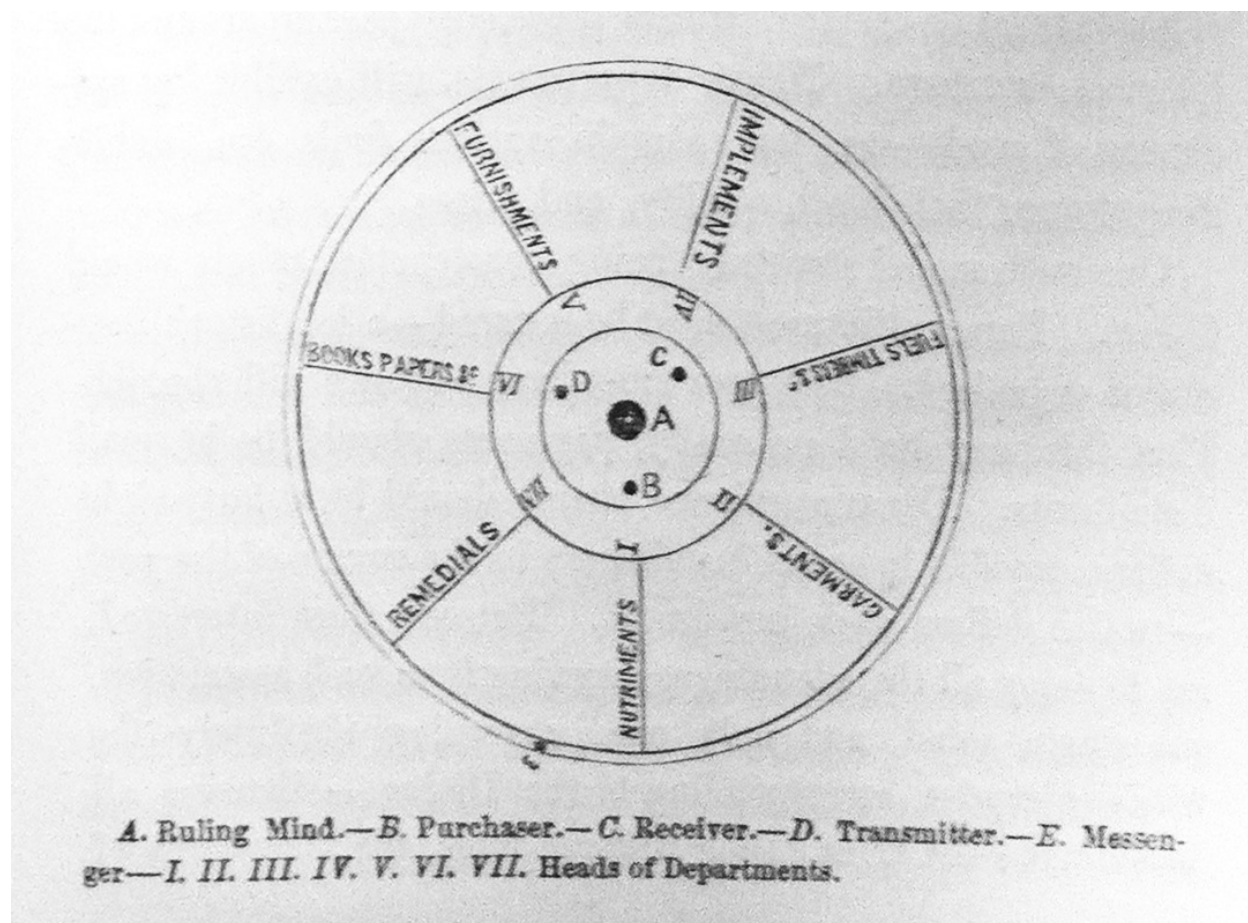


Fig. 6.6 Another version of the plan of a commercial structure imparted by the spirits (*Equitable Commerce*, 1855)

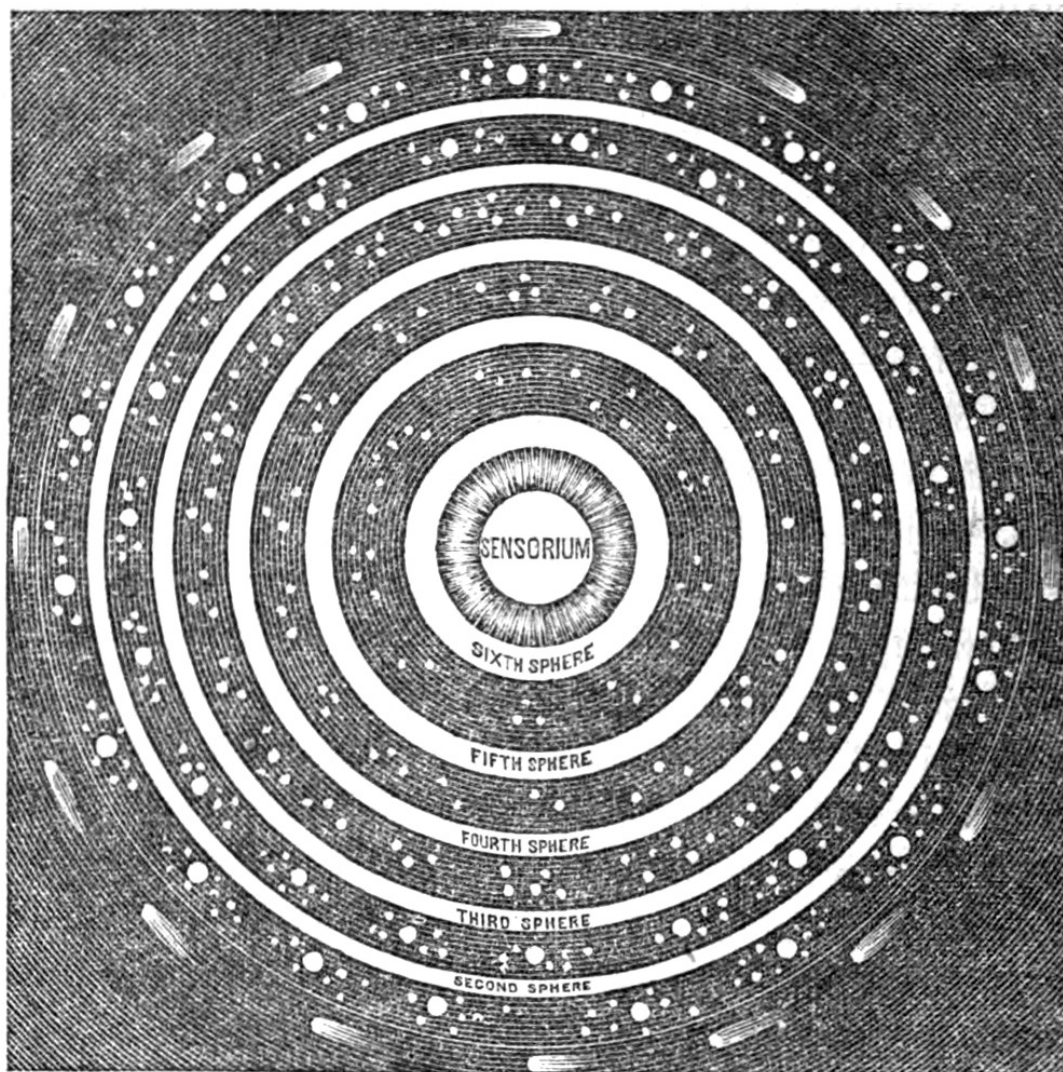
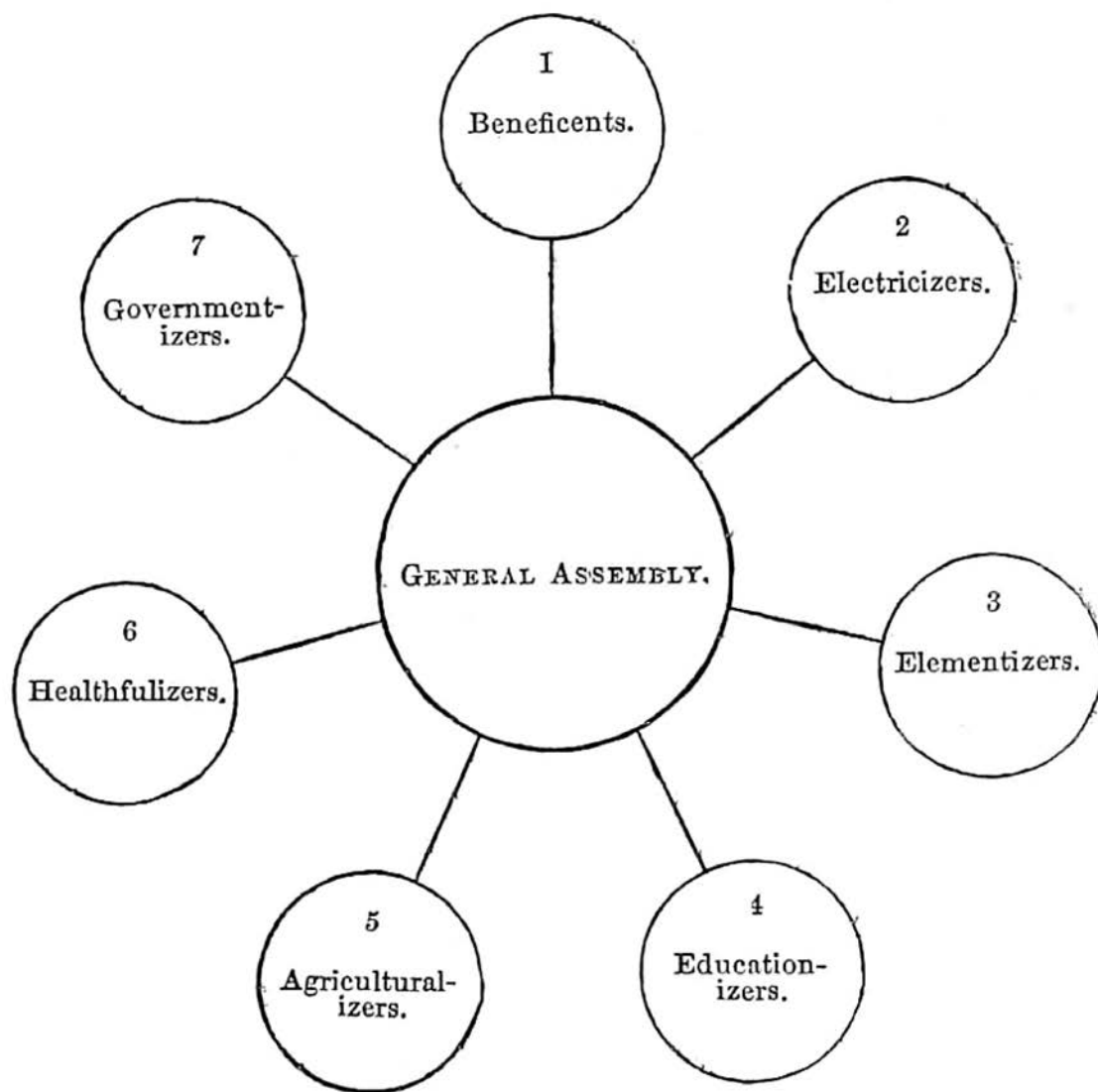
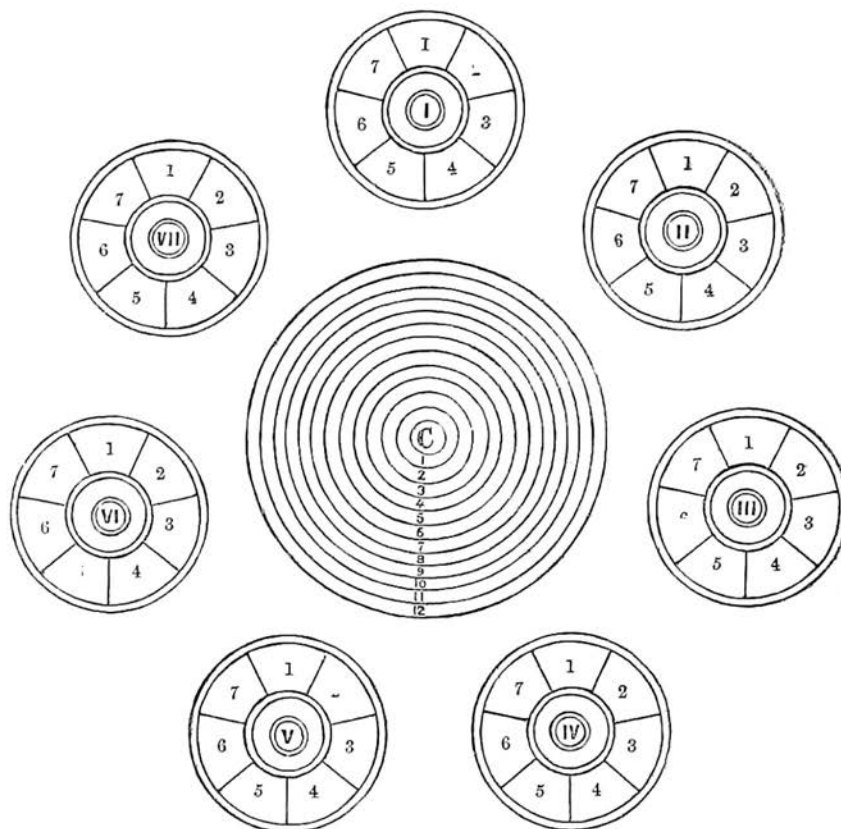


DIAGRAM OF THE SPIRITUAL SPHERES.

Figs. 6.7 Andrew Jackson Davis, Diagram of the Spiritual Spheres (*The Magic Staff: An Autobiography*, 1857)



Figs. 6.8 John Murray Spear, Diagram of the organization of the spirit world (*The Educator*, 1857)



THE CHURCH AND HER OFFSPRING.

EXPLANATION.—The Centre, C, with its 12 concentric circles, represents the CHURCH, consisting of twelve co-ordinate and co-operative principles, viz. : 1, Faith ; 2, Love ; 3, Fidelity ; 4, Beneficence ; 5, Heroism ; 6, Education ; 7, Morals ; 8, Knowledge ; 9, Frugality ; 10, Conscience ; 11, Success ; 12, Triumph.

The seven exterior circles represent the INSTITUTIONS legitimately proceeding from the Church, viz. : I. Commerce ; II. Government ; III. Home ; IV. Education ; V. Philanthropy ; VI. Nursing ; VII. Progress.

The divisions of the exterior circles indicate the DEPARTMENTS in each institution, viz. :

I. COMMERCE : embracing, 1, Nutriment ; 2, Garments ; 3, Fuels, Lumber, etc. ; 4, Implements ; 5, Furnishings ; 6, Books, Papers, etc. ; 7, Remedials.

II. GOVERNMENT : embracing, 1, The Divine ; 2, Morals ; 3, Internals ; 4, Spirituals ; 5, Socials ; 6, Emotionals ; 7, Celestials.

III. HOME includes, 1, Right to Soil ; 2, Shelter ; 3, Marriage ; 4, Offspring ; 5, Seclusion ; 6, Harmony ; 7, Aspiration.

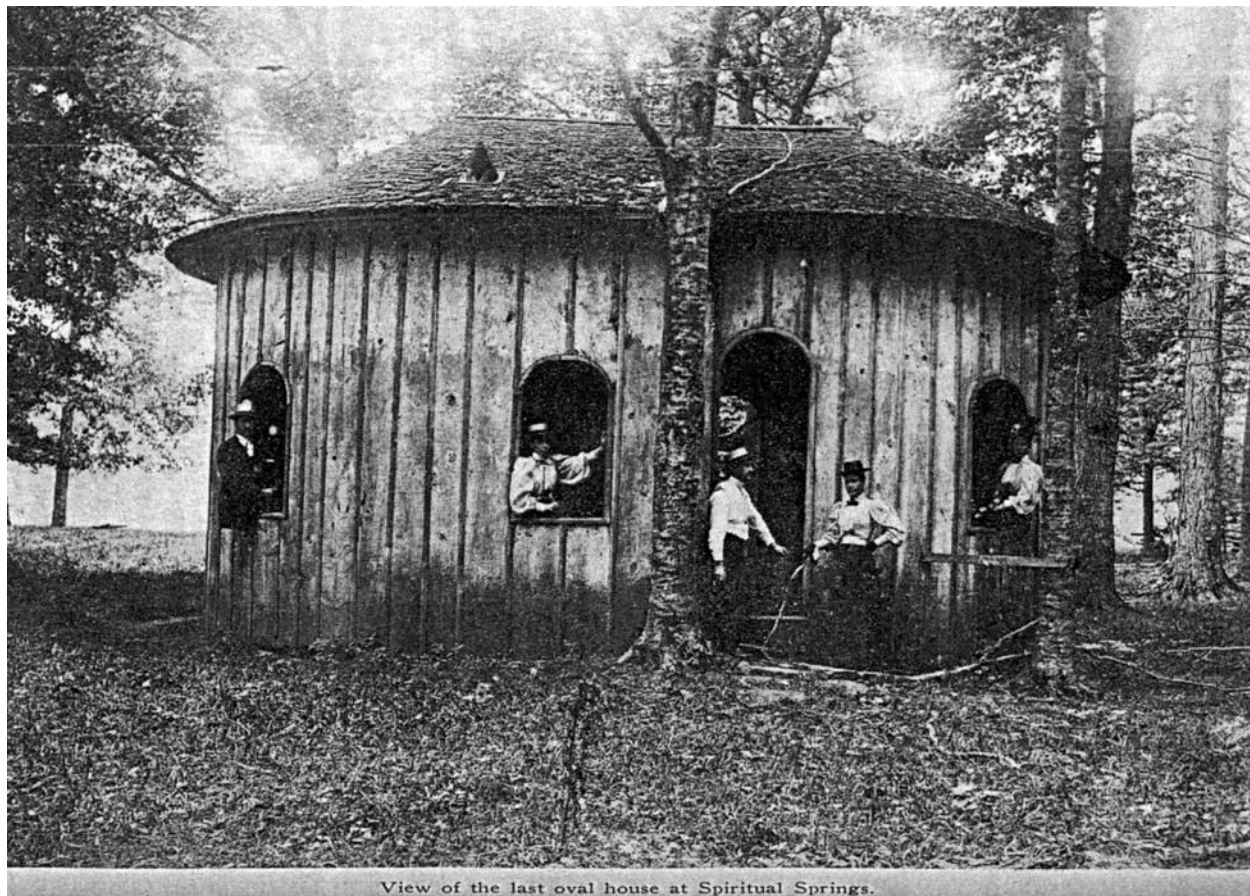
IV. EDUCATION relates to, 1, The Body ; 2, Rights ; 3, The Intellect ; 4, The Religious Faculties ; 5, Complexes ; 6, Angelic Unfolding ; 7, Super-human, do.

V. PHILANTHROPY regards, 1, Children ; 2, Outcasts ; 3, Widows ; 4, Criminals ; 5, The Persecuted ; 6, The Struggling ; 7, The Weak, or Idiotic.

VI. NURSING embraces, 1, The Maimed ; 2, The Malformed ; 3, Lunatics ; 4, The Blind ; 5, The Lame ; 6, The Diseased ; 7, The Aged.

VII. PROGRESS will be, 1, Mental ; 2, Agricultural ; 3, Societary ; 4, Constructive ; 5, Alimentary ; 6, Amusementary ; 7, Ascensional

Fig. 6.9 John Murray Spear, Diagram of the Church and Her Offspring (*The Educator*, 1857)



View of the last oval house at Spiritual Springs.

Fig. 6.10 The last oval house at Kiantone (Ernest Miller, "Utopian Communities in Warren County, Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 49, no. 4, 1966)

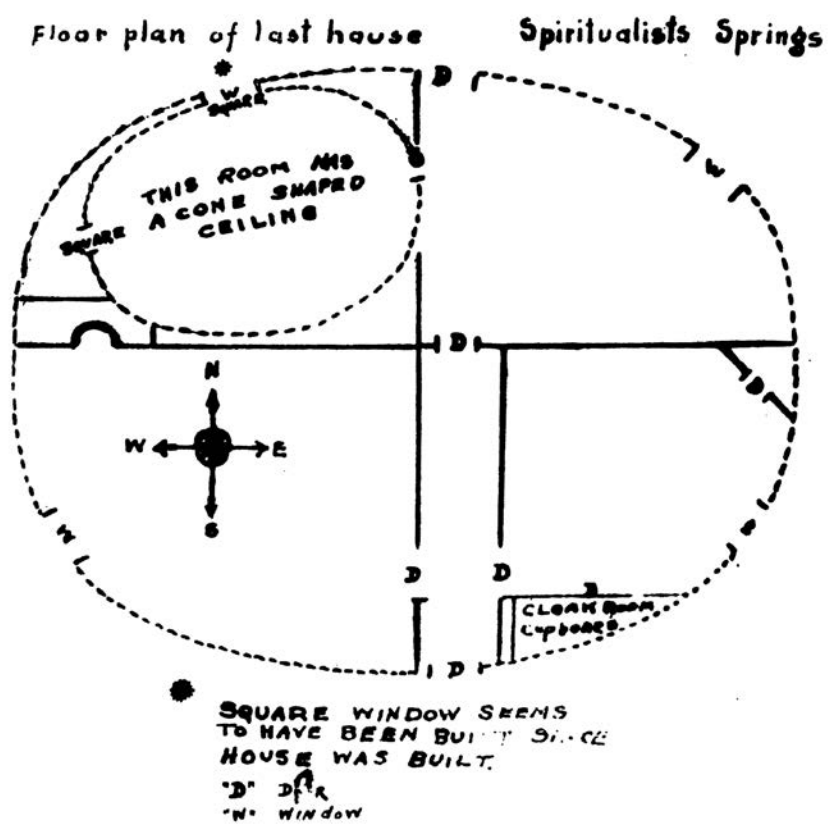
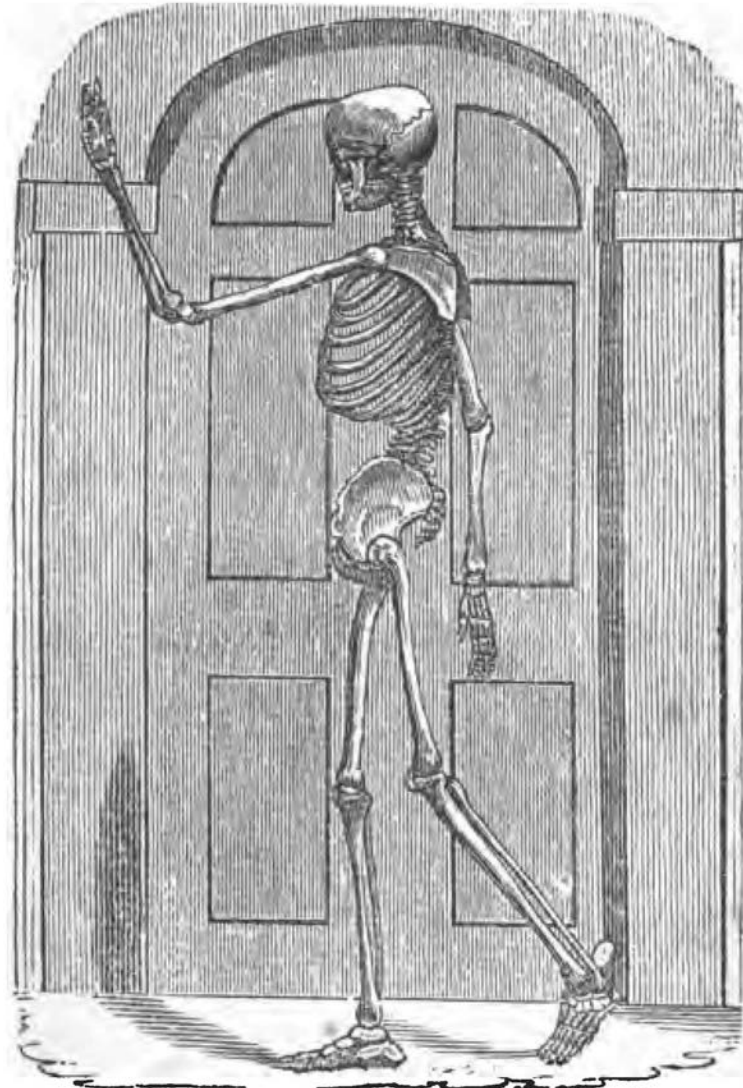


Fig. 6.11 Plan of the last house at Kiantone, drawn by Viola Cushman, 1907 (Russell Duino, "Utopian Theme with Variations," *Pennsylvania History*, 1962)



"I am fearfully and wonderfully made!"

Fig. 6.12 Plate from William Andrus Alcott, *The House I Live In* (1837)

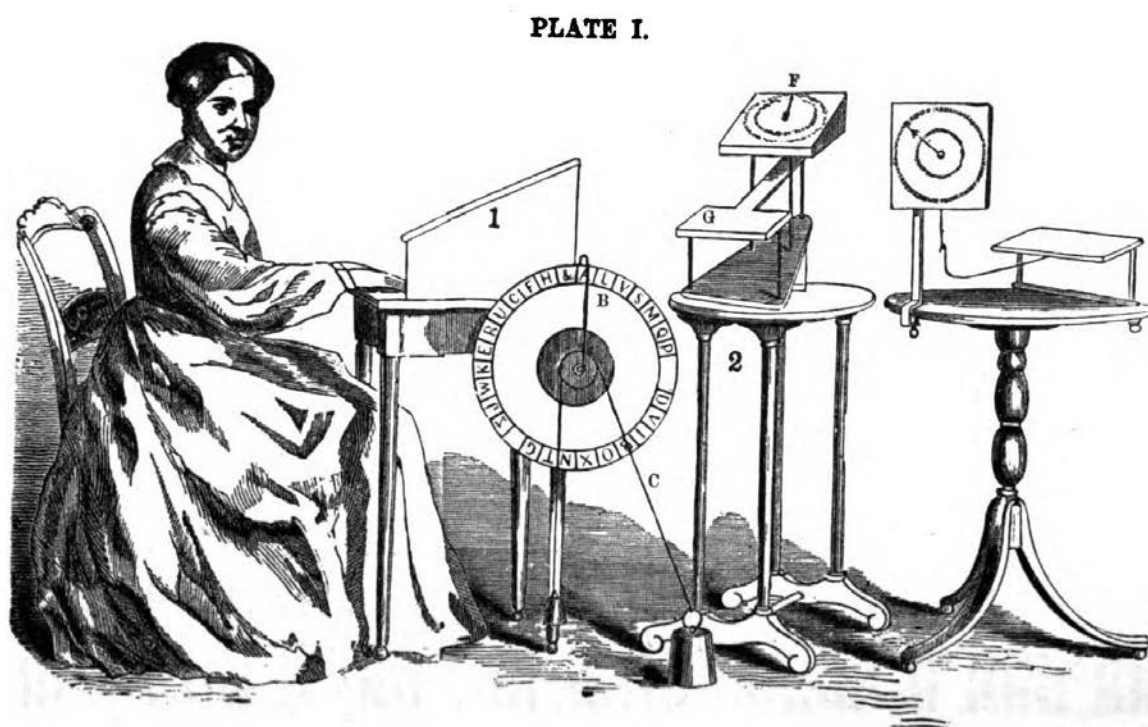


Fig. 6.13 Robert Hare's spirotoscope, invented as a way to verify spirit manifestations. Hare added weights and cables to Isaac Pease's Spiritual Telegraph Dial to ensure the medium could not see or manipulate the letters being pointed to. (Hare, *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations*, 1855)

PLATE III.

Fig. 6.14 "Instrument by which spirits were enabled to move a table under the influence of mediumship, yet in no wise under the control of the medium employed" (Robert Hare, *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations*, 1855)

PLATE IV.

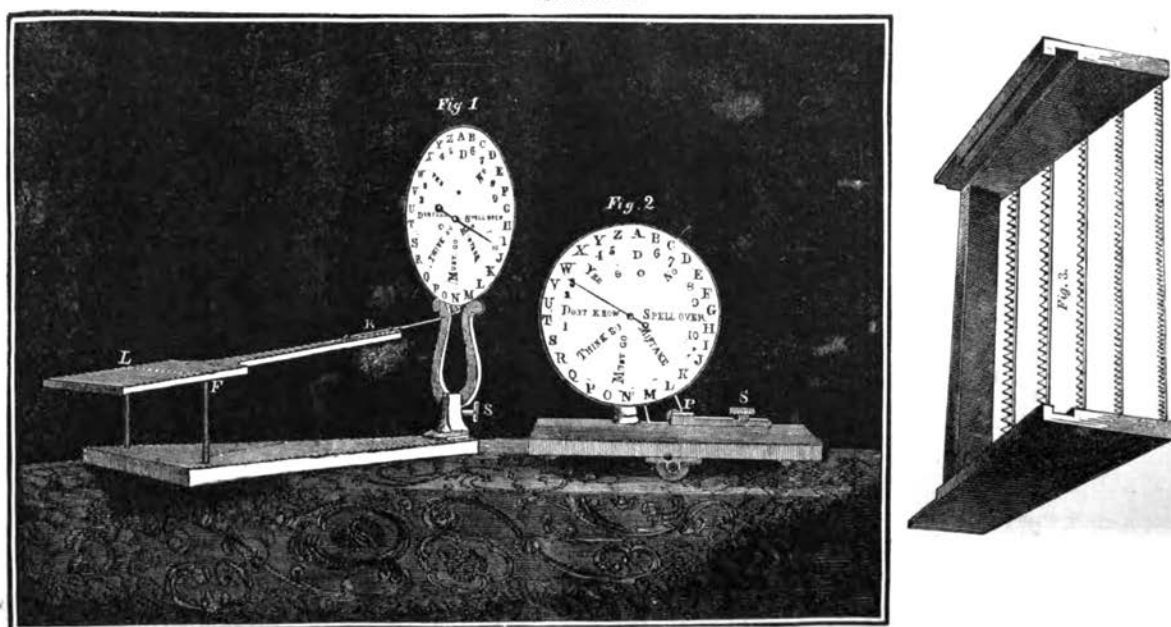


Fig. 6.15 Spiritoscopes (Robert Hare, *Experimental Investigations of the Spirit Manifestations*, 1855)



Fig. 6.16 Illustration from Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Present Age and Inner Life* (1853). “The above engraving is designed expressly to illustrate the process of *table-moving*, as accomplished on principles already explained. Elevated above the cloud-region, is seen the spirit-circle in telegraphic correspondence with the mundane party in the lower story of the dwelling. The influence from the upper circle is seen passing through the roof and floors to the surface of the table, where it imperceptibly radiates and emits invisible rays in every direction... This is a true copy from nature.”

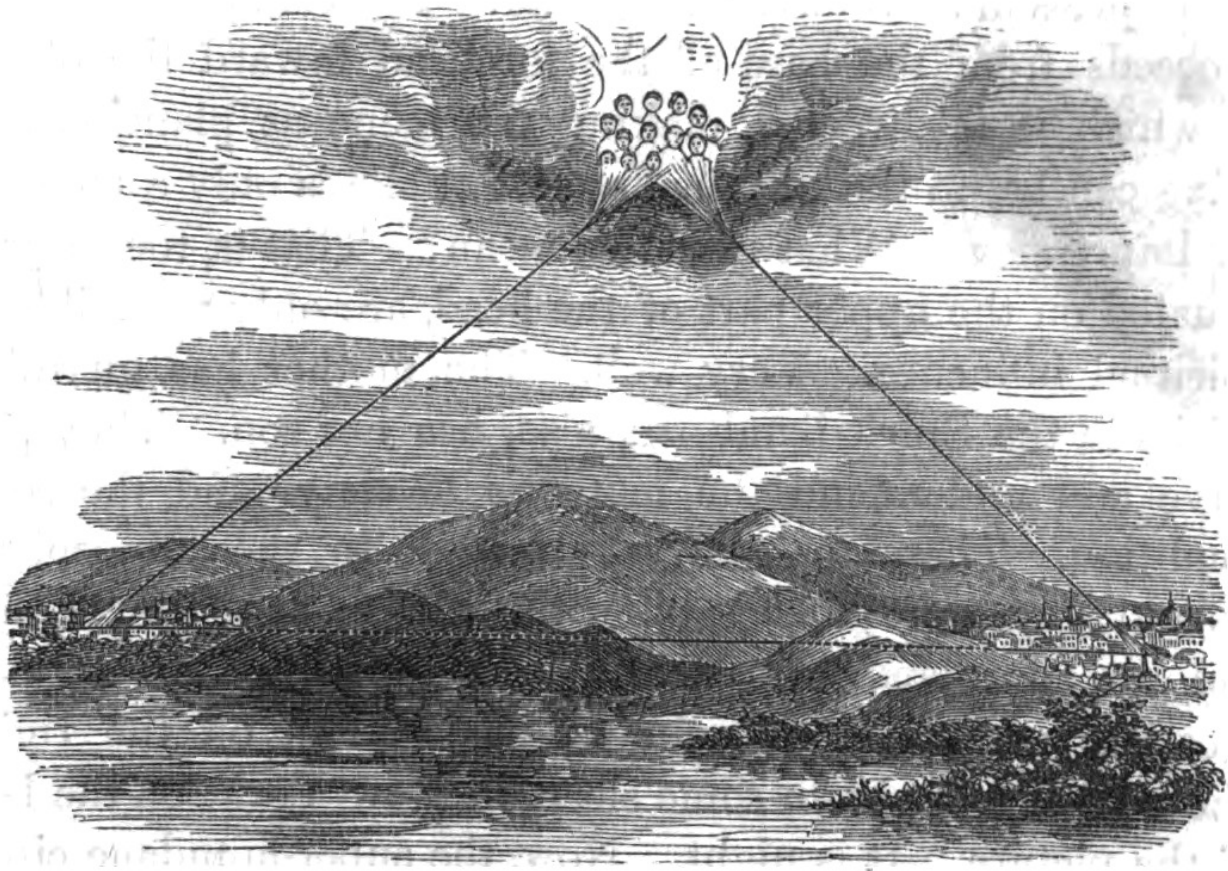


Fig. 6.17 Illustration from Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Present Age and Inner Life* (1853). “The above engraving gives, as well as an external symbol can be made to do, a perfect representation of spiritual intercourse through clairvoyance, and also by impression. The cities may be considered thousands of miles apart--say one, the city of London, across the Atlantic, the other, New York City.”

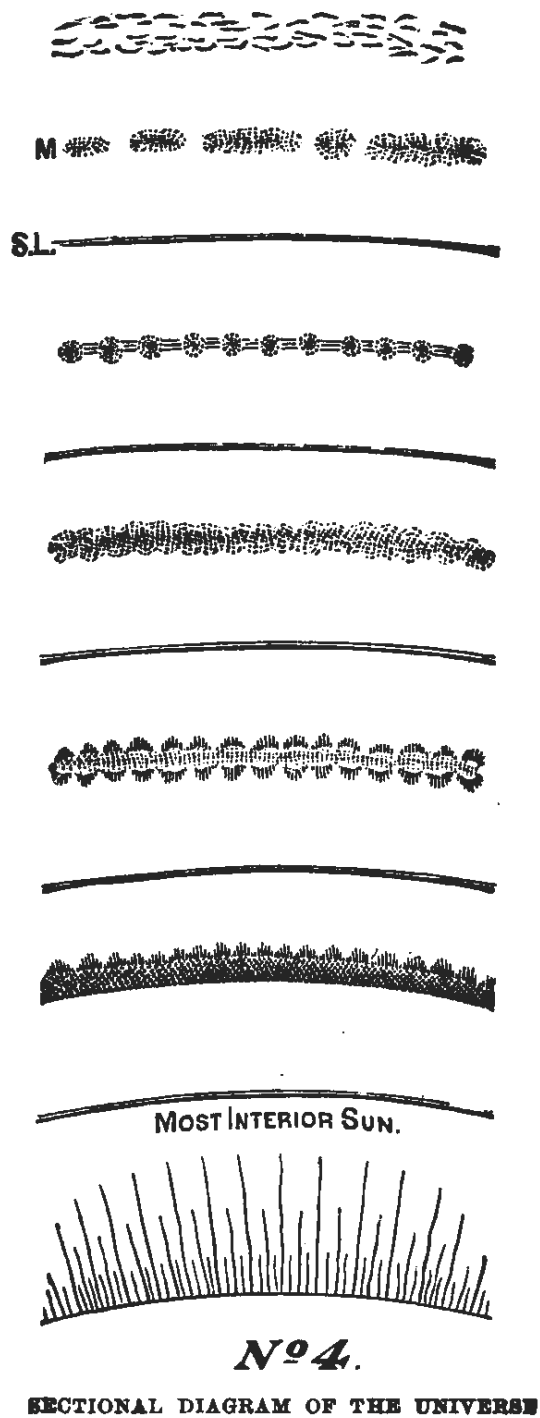


Fig. 6.18 Sectional Diagram of the Universe (Andrew Jackson Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home*, 1877)

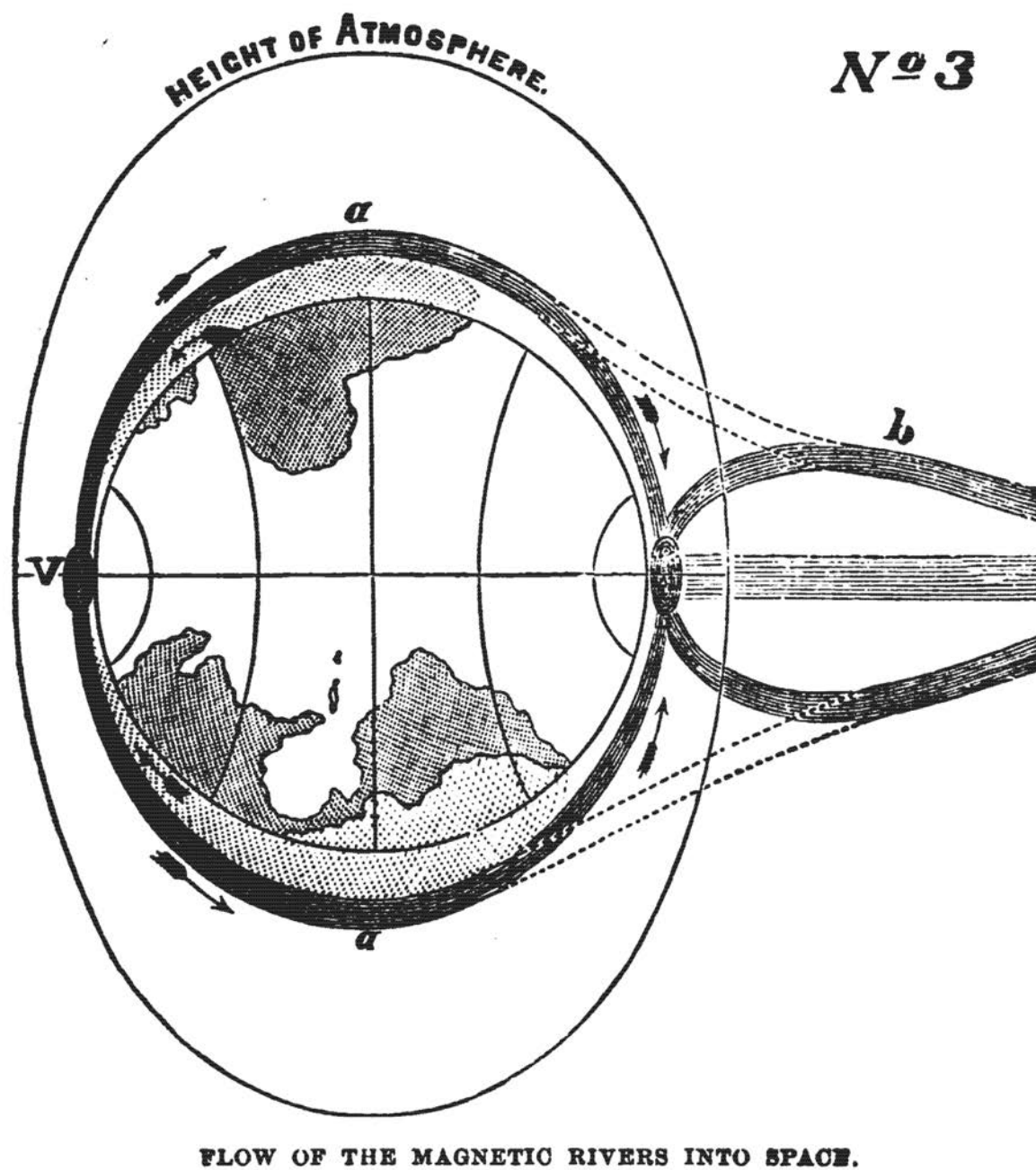


Fig. 6.19 Diagram of magnetic rivers (Andrew Jackson Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home*, 1877)

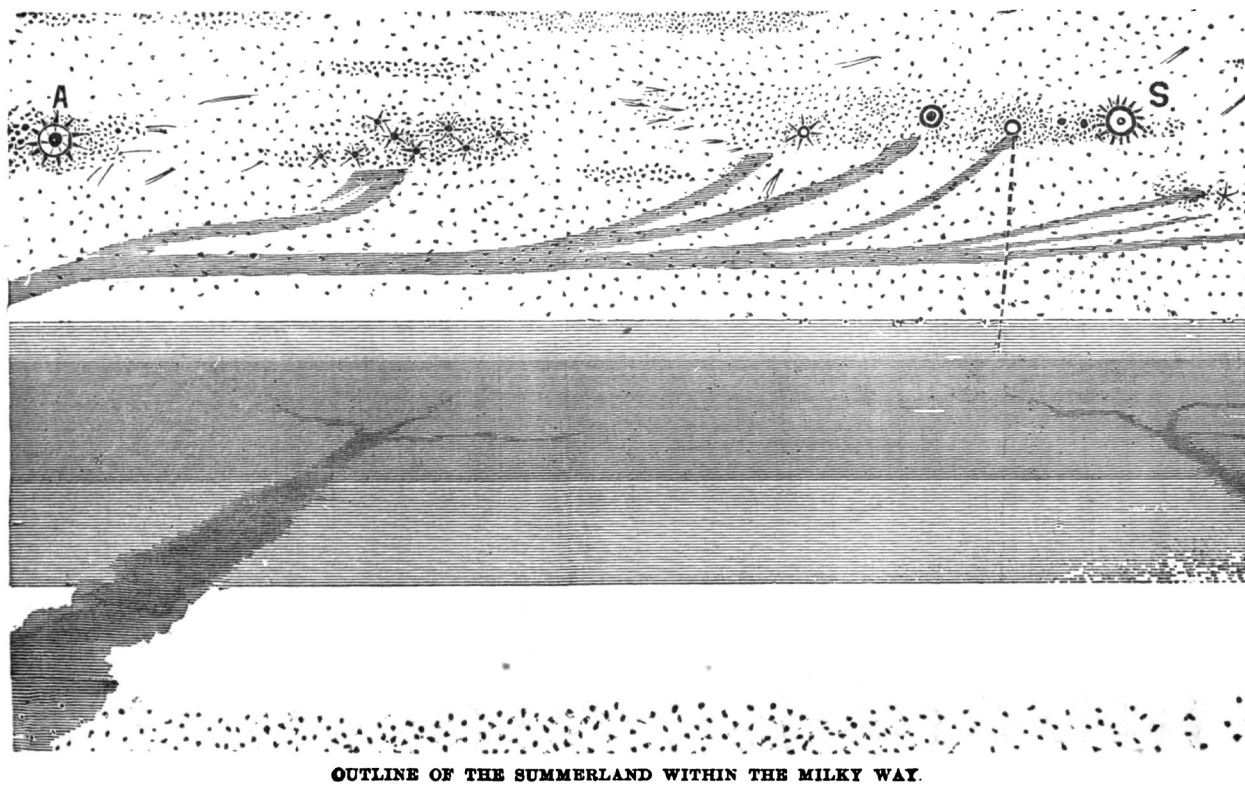
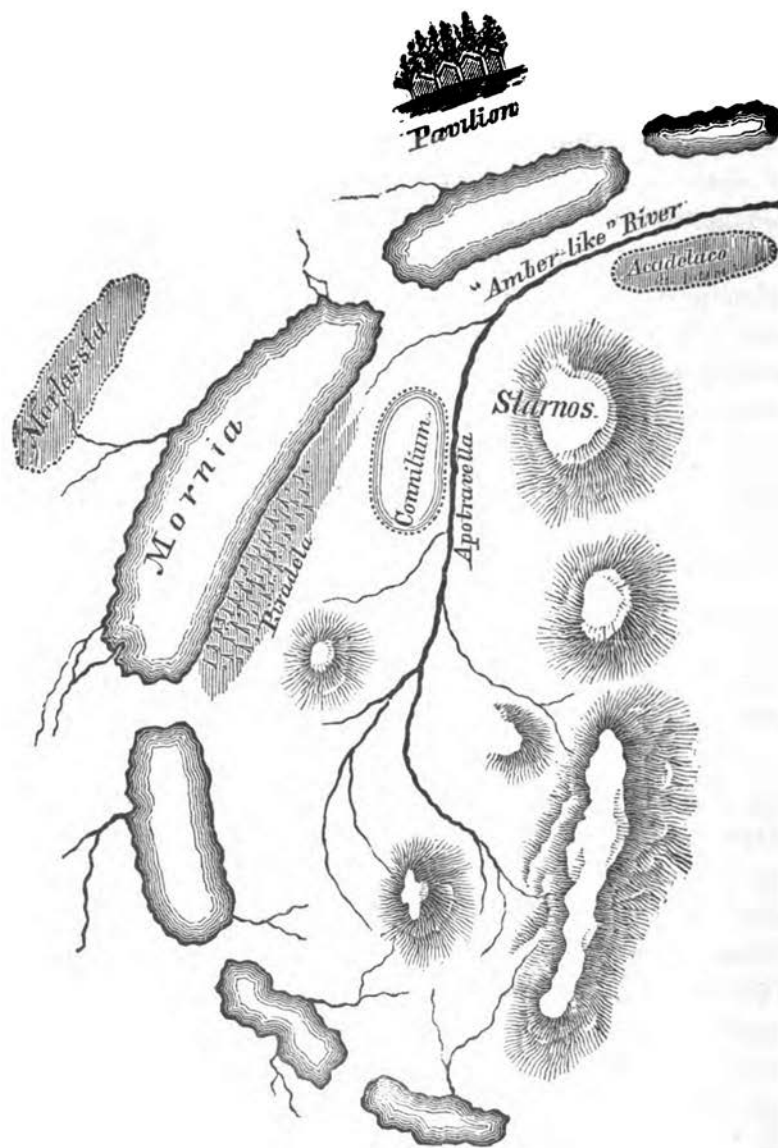


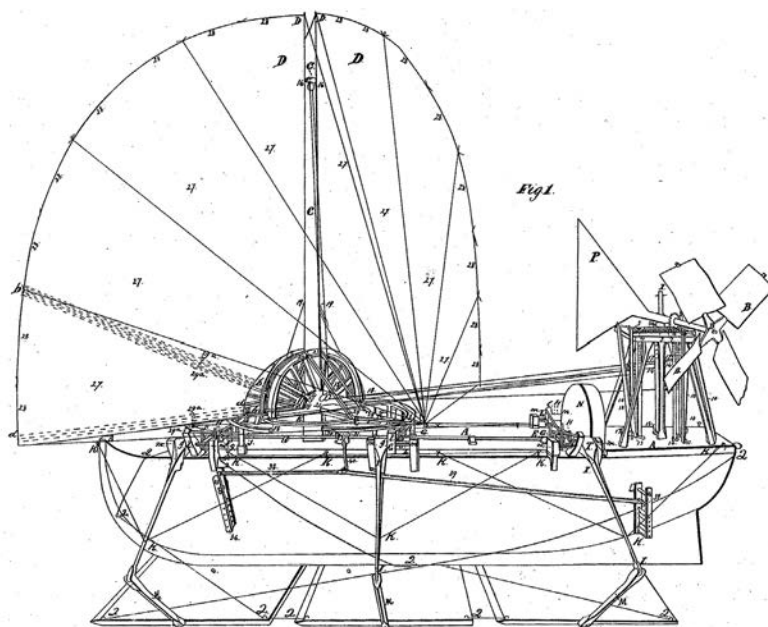
Fig. 6.20 Illustration of the Summerland (Andrew Jackson Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home*, 1877)



(No. 7.)

THE SEVEN LAKES OF CYLOSIMAR.

Fig. 6.21 Map of lakes in the Summerland (Andrew Jackson Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home*, 1877)



No. 533.

Sails & Rigging.

Patented Apr. 1, 1842.

J. A. Etzler, Inventor.

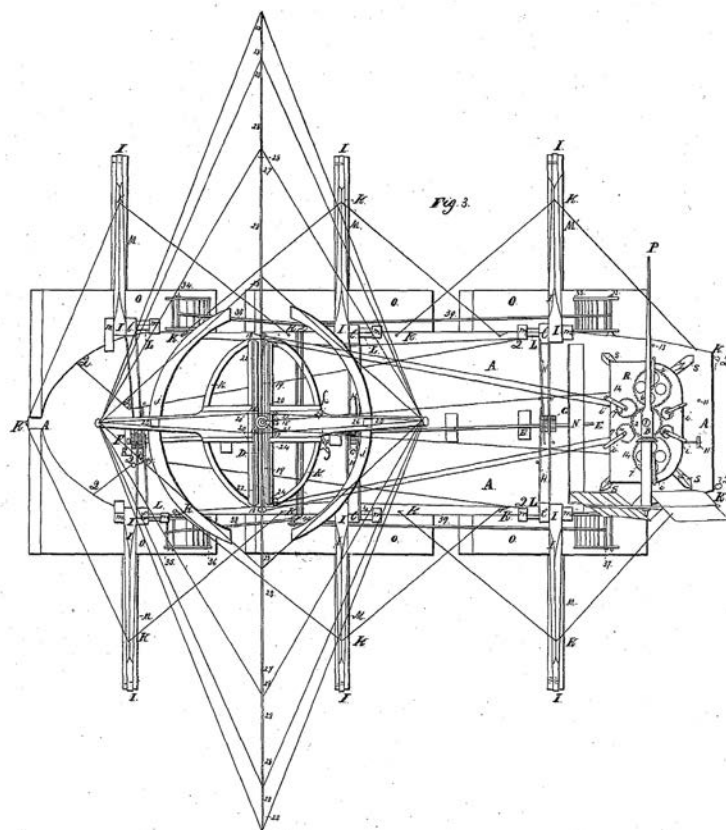


Fig. 6.22 John A. Etzler, Patent drawings for navigating and propelling vessels by the action of the wind and waves, 1842

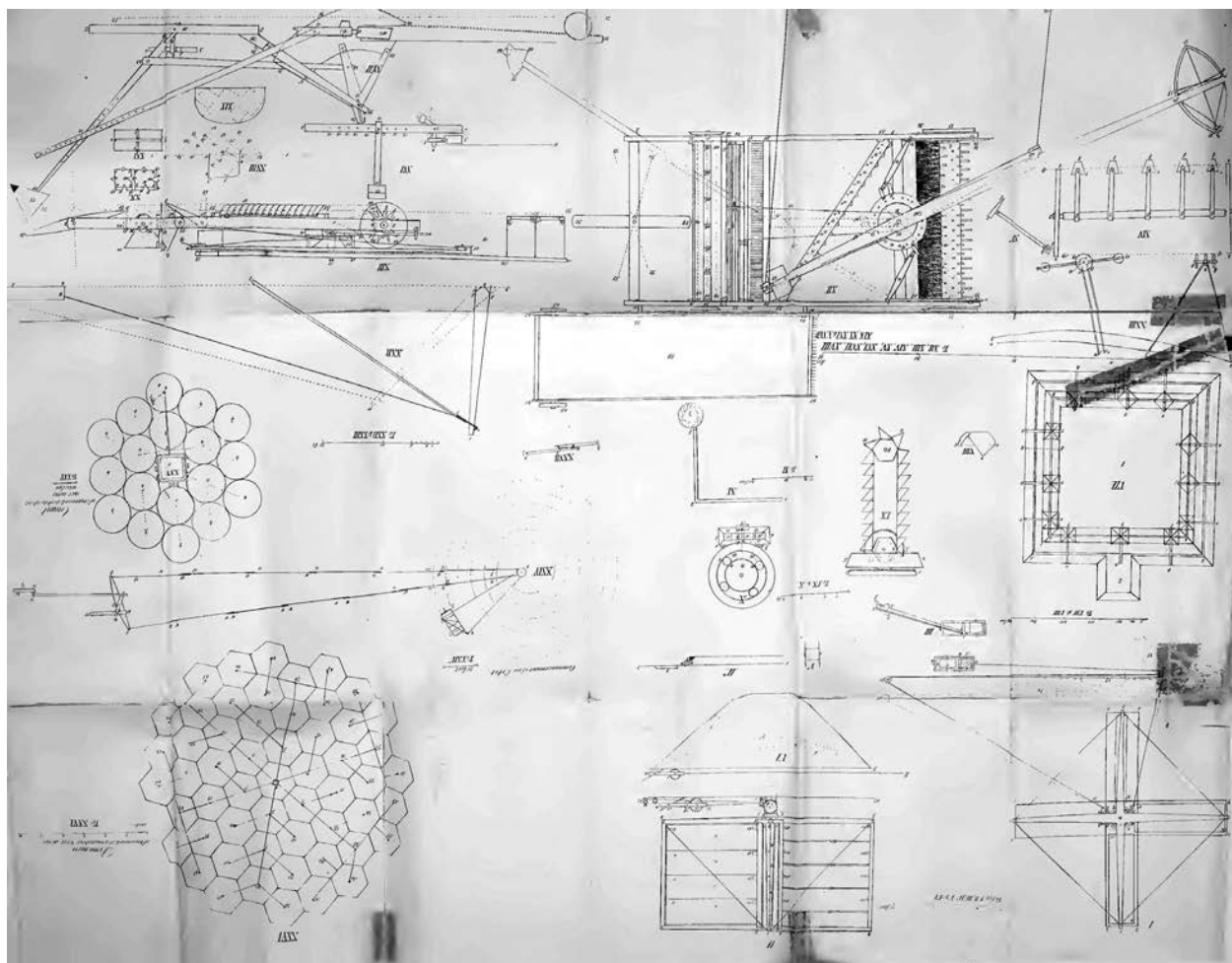


Fig. 6.23 John A. Etzler, Mechanical system to perform the labors of man and beast by inanimate powers, that cost nothing, for producing and preparing the substances of life” (*The New World*, 1840)

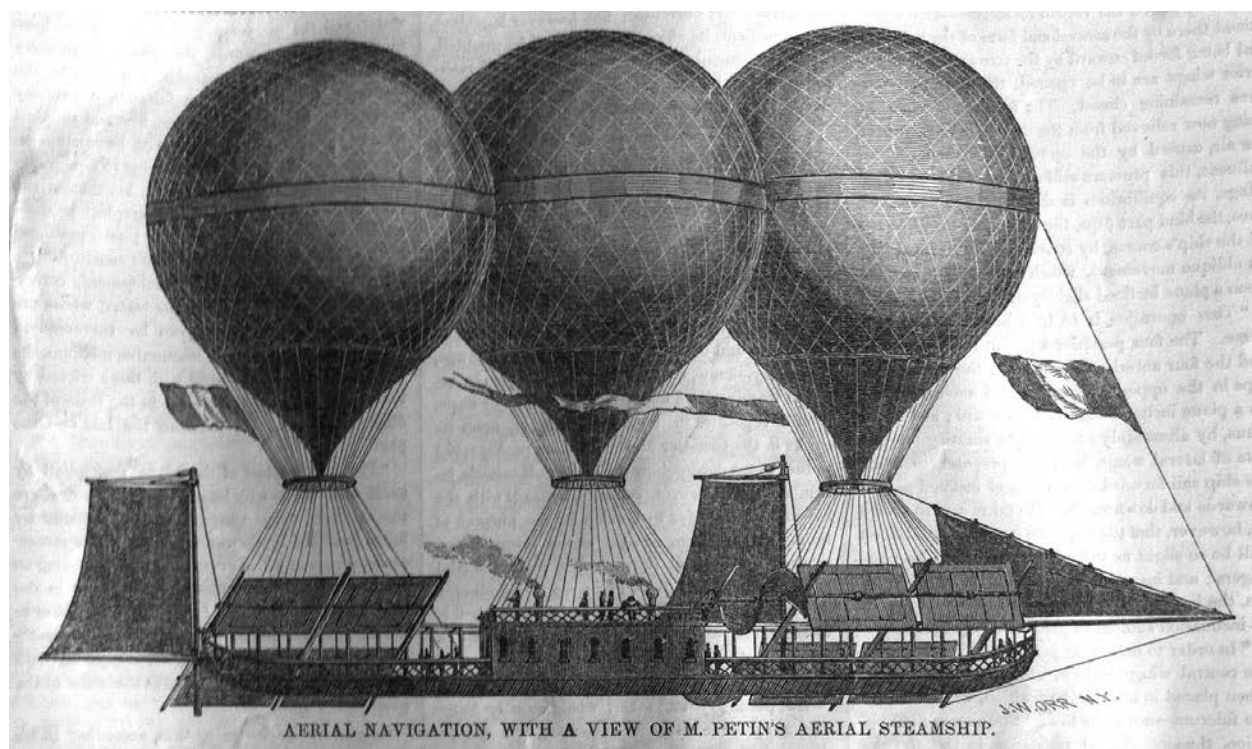


Fig. 6.24 Illustration of an aerial steamship from *The American Phrenological Journal* (July, 1852)

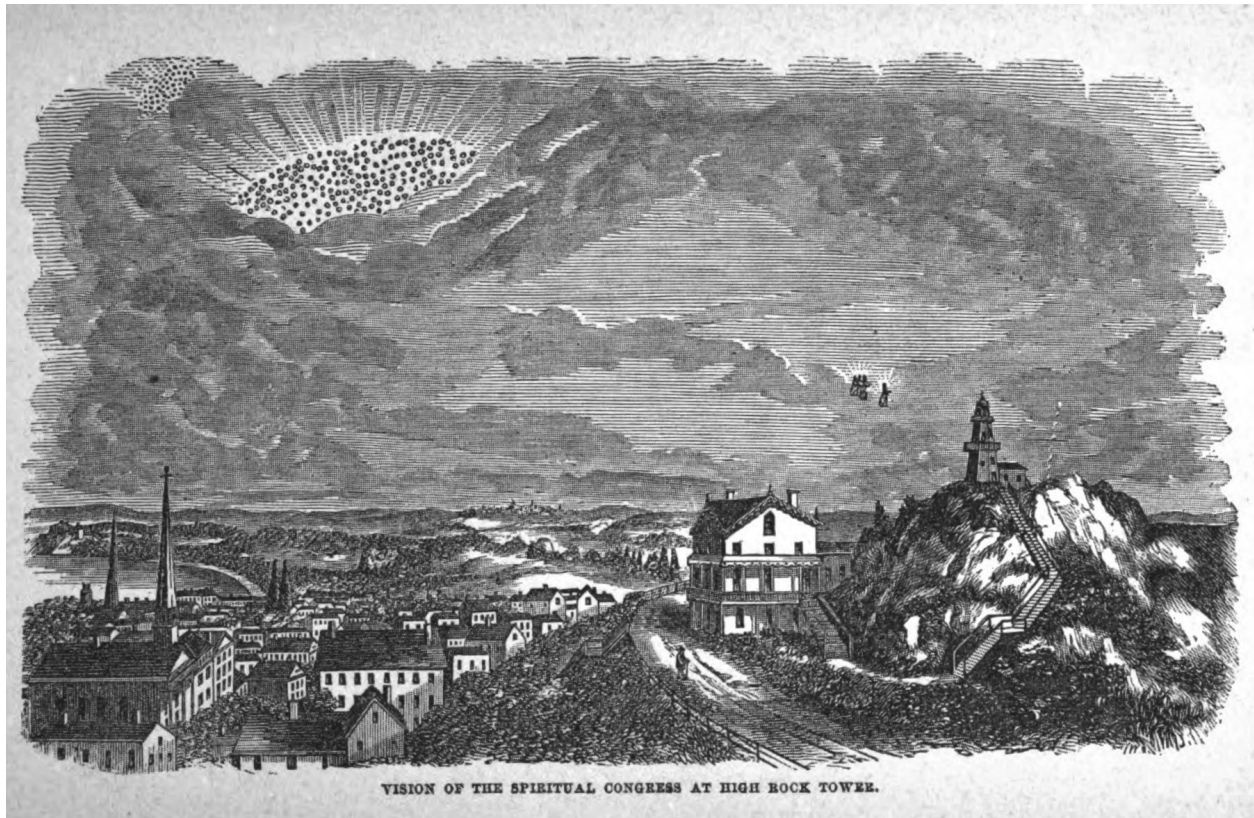


Fig. 6.25 High Rock Tower, Lynn, Massachusetts, scene of a Spiritual Congress witnessed by Andrew Jackson Davis, as well as the birth of Spear's New Motive Power (Davis, *The Present Age and Inner Life*, 1853)



Fig. 6.26 High Rock Tower, Lynn, Massachusetts

Postscript: Looking Backward at Utopia

What can we learn from these minor nineteenth-century utopians? Most people today would probably concur that these geometric projects were naïve and doomed to failure. The abolitionist Kansas Vegetarian Octagon Colony lasted a scant few months, doing little to advance the causes of vegetarianism or anti-slavery. Friedrich Engels's famous condemnation of the Utopian socialists' schemes—"the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure phantasies"—has become the last word in many quarters.¹ More specifically, nineteenth-century beliefs about the power of built forms to transform society are often dismissed as antiquated precursors to the now-maligned functionalist thinking of the 1950s and 60s.

Yet to stop at the conclusion that the nineteenth-century utopian reformers were "wrong" or "failed" is to subscribe to a superficial view of history as merely the act of debunking or confirmation. It also sinks into the fallacy of accepting the reformers' own functionalist assumptions and criteria for judgment. Even Engels, despite his scathing critique of the utopian socialists, recognized something redeemable in the speculations of people like Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon: "We can leave it to the literary small fry to solemnly quibble over these phantasies, which today only make us smile, and to crow over the superiority of their own bald reasoning, as compared with such 'insanity'. For ourselves," Engels wrote, "we delight in the stupendously grand thoughts and germs of

¹ Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (1892)," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 687.

thought that everywhere break out through their phantastic covering.”² For Marx and Engels, the utopian socialists had failed to develop a properly proletarian, materialist, or historicist form of socialism, yet the value of their thinking lay in their incipient analysis and critique of modern industrial society—of economic basis of politics (as in Saint-Simon), the role of women (in the case of Fourier), or of the environmental determinants on character (Owen). These “germs of thought” were of the utmost usefulness for the scientific socialists. What Marx and Engels did not argue, but what this dissertation suggests, is that while the geometric utopians thought that their diagrammatic plans were *functional*—that is, providing solutions to social problems, in fact, their value was *aesthetic*—in their potential to represent and to ask questions about the social totality.

As Arthur Bestor pointed out many decades ago, the first half of the nineteenth century was a period when institutions were still in embryo, and US society still seemed malleable.³ The school reformer Henry Barnard could write of “a futurity, now fluid,—ready, as clay in the hands of the potter, to be moulded into every form of beauty and excellence.” The question, for Barnard was, “Into whose form and likeness shall we fashion this flowing futurity?”⁴ The cataclysm of the Revolutionary War a generation earlier seemed to suggest that society was capable of being invented anew according to men’s best and most rational designs. In our age when liberal-capitalist systems of economy and

² Ibid., 688.

³ Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., “Patent-Office Models of the Good Society: Some Relationships between Social Reform and Westward Expansion,” *The American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1953): 514.

⁴ Barnard, quoted in Bestor, 518.

government seem like such unmalleable, even incomprehensible, behemoths, is there something we might glean from these mid-nineteenth-century reformers—if nothing more than the spark of audacity to imagine something different?

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