

“Yours for Colorado”: Applicants to the 1870 Union Colony at Greeley

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Abstract

The recent revelation of 324 letters written in December 1869 by applicants to the Union Colony at Greeley offers vital demographic information about the pioneers who settled territorial Colorado in the early 1870s. These letters provide insight into how pioneers in the Reconstruction era understood their own participation in westward expansion. This thesis explains the Union Colony as a physical intersection of nineteenth-century ideologies including utopianism, communitarianism, temperance, westward expansionism, and Manifest Destiny. It presents the widely-circulated *New York Tribune* as a vehicle of utopian socialism in the mid-nineteenth century, through which Union Colony founder Nathan Meeker both developed and disseminated his communitarian ideals. Finally, this thesis articulates why the term “frontier utopianism” offers an illuminating description of the unique marriage of communitarian ideology and expansionist conceptions of agrarian settlement which gave rise to the Union Colony.

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I drew on much practice with Dr. Munkhoff to “unpack” the language of Nathan Meeker’s “Call for a Western Colony” and to analyze the rhetoric of his piece of literary propaganda. I took cues from Dr. Andrews in thinking about the ecology, geography, and native presence in the area that was to become Greeley, attempting to evoke in my own very brief and amateurish way the physicality of the land and its impact on the human history of the area. Finally, ever since last spring, every time I approach a piece of history, I try to do so with sensitivity towards and empathy for the people of the past I encounter. This stems from a very moving lecture on Bernard Bailyn’s treatment of Thomas Hutchinson which Dr. Anderson delivered to our senior seminar. This insight, in addition to his creed that you can’t make anything up and you can’t leave anything out, form the basis of how I approach history now. Such polarizing figures as Horace Greeley and especially Nathan Meeker put that newfound sensitivity to the test as perhaps only Andrew Jackson otherwise has in the past year.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all three for making me a better writer in spite of myself over the past four years.

A Note on Methodology

Ironically, in a project dedicated to excavating and appreciating information previously thought lost about the individuals who blazed the trail to Greeley, it becomes necessary to quantify these letters in order to identify trends, thus in some ways diminishing that hard-won claim to individual fame each applicant accomplished by writing a letter which survived for nearly 150 years. This paper seeks to balance the revelation that the mean age of applicants was 34.7 years with the discovery that hardware manufacturer J.H. Yerkes hunted bears and alligators in Louisiana and Mississippi. Although the use of an Excel spreadsheet in some ways quantified an inherently qualitative primary source, many of the letter-writers proved so colorful, so lively, so endlessly quotable that their personalities shone through the enumeration of offspring and the monetization of estates.

A special thank you to applicant John F. Wheaton, whose sendoff provided me with a title.

A Note on Organization

This project attempts first to answer the question: what nineteenth-century ideologies bore on the settlement of the Union Colony? This thesis presents the Union Colony as a uniquely poignant manifestation of the nineteenth century concepts of utopianism, communitarianism, temperance, westward expansionism, and Manifest Destiny.

The following section investigates the lives and the ideologies of the men who founded the Union Colony. It analyzes Nathan Meeker's decades-long ideological journey to developing his own brand of Fourierist-derived, mildly utopian communitarianism, which he then attempted to realize through the Union Colony. It also explores briefly the power of Meeker's boss, Horace Greeley, over the development of such ideas even before the men met – possible through the immense mid-century power of his utopian socialist-inflected *New York Tribune*. The combined ideological thrust of these two polarizing men, utilizing the unmatched circulation of the *Tribune* as their journalistic vehicle for influencing followers, proved powerful enough to found an entire colony of *Tribune* leadership and by *Tribune* readership.

Each subsequent section attempts to utilize the newly-recovered Union Colony Letters Collection to elucidate that portion of the *Tribune*'s readership who felt so compelled just by reading about the prospect of what this paper describes as a “frontier utopia” that they pledged their fidelity, their fortunes, and their families to the project.

This thesis interprets this frontier utopia as a marriage of Meeker's utopian communitarian ideals and his applicants' expansionist aspirations. It asks first, what was Meeker's vision for his frontier utopia at Greeley? His 4 December 1869 “Call for a Western Colony,” published in the *Tribune*, explains the premise of his communitarian project, and this section includes an analysis of that propagandistic piece of advertising journalism as well as an investigation into what Meeker looked for in prospective colonists.

The heart of this essay, however, examines the authors of these rediscovered letters. The project explores the demographics of these correspondents to find out who they were and where they came from – geographically as well as ideologically. The following section analyzes who was left out of such calculations for westward expansion, and the final section attempts to answer that age-old question: Why did anyone go to Greeley in the first place?

This project concludes by attempting to answer a few final questions: How utopian was the Union Colony really? How did its communitarian origins inform the early history of Greeley? And finally, what does the revelation of these primary sources contribute to the study of nineteenth-century utopian and communitarian settlement, territorial Colorado town-founding, and the realization of westward expansion by individuals and by communities? Quite a lot, this project argues.

Introduction: A Primary Source Revelation

In January of 2014, the Greeley History Museum acquired through dozens of private donations initially made to the Greeley Museums Heritage Foundation a collection of 324 previously unknown letters originally written in December 1869 and January 1870 by applicants to Nathan Meeker's agricultural utopian community, the Union Colony at Greeley. Written just months before the colony's April 1870 founding, these letters microcosmically illustrate the who and why of nineteenth-century communitarianism, territorial Colorado town-founding, and Reconstruction-era westward expansion. These amazing letters – written primarily by white, middle-class farmers and artisans from the North and Midwest – read like optimistic mini-biographies, detailing how each writer hoped to contribute ideologically, economically, and mechanically to Meeker's agrarian paradise.

Invigorated by Meeker's proposal, these correspondents pledged their talents and their fortunes to the project, promising to anxiously await his call to pack up and travel upwards of 2,000 miles in some cases to meet him in an arid and sparsely populated region of northeastern Colorado. For such a radical commitment, applicant demographics actually indicate that the majority of Union Colony hopefuls were not themselves radically unconventional. None of these aspirants detailed a flight from unendurable social controversy or local law enforcement – though they likely would not have disclosed such dramatics to Meeker – and instead appear to have been middle-class, American-born family men who felt their ideological and expansionist heartstrings tugged when they read Meeker's 4 December 1869 appeal in the *New York Tribune*. They collectively indicated an urge to seek their fortunes in the West, to take advantage of the cheap and plentiful land there, and the scenic and healthful climes, and to capitalize on the unique social and cultural moment in the immediate post-Civil War period which allowed

practically any man with a few hundred dollars and a basic knowledge of agriculture to start anew in the West.

This unprecedented window into the lives of Greeley's first pioneers exists only because of the whim one young boy felt on an afternoon in 1935. An aspiring thirteen-year-old philatelist named Jack Shuman discovered a bundle of old letters in the trash at a home his father was repairing. The home belonged to Nathan Meeker's elderly daughter, the last surviving child of Greeley's controversial founder. Rozene Meeker, her health failing and her finances reeling, had relocated from the original 1870 family home on 9th Avenue some two decades previously after it was seized for back taxes and converted into the Meeker Museum. However, she retained possession of many heirlooms of Greeley's earliest days, among them this stack of application letters, saved from the trash by chance for their interesting antique stamps. These 324 letters – roughly a 10% sample of the 3,000 applications Meeker received between December of 1869 and the town's April 1870 founding – survived in an attic for the intervening seven decades, only coming to light in late 2013 when Mr. Shuman's widow passed away and their two daughters discovered the letters. Following a trip to the "Antiques Roadshow" and a \$16,000 appraisal, the letters ended up at the Greeley History Museum, ready for conservation, categorization, and transcription.

This collection comprises many of the earliest applications from December of 1869, and features the applications of several of the colony's most prominent early members, including colony vice president and locating committee member R.A. Cameron and Greeley's first historian, David Boyd. It boasts hundreds of pages of elegant nineteenth-century penmanship; a litany of colorful spellings and colloquial phrases; a half-dozen colors of ink, including green

and purple; fifty-five successful colonists; a letter from the collection's sole female applicant; and a mountain of new insight into the pioneers who founded the unusual semi-communitarian temperance and agricultural haven called the Union Colony, which ultimately evolved into a surprisingly typical – if a little smellier and more conservative than average – northeastern Colorado farm town called Greeley, now anticipating its 146th birthday.

This project seeks to trace the trajectory of the Union Colony from its nineteenth-century ideological origins, through the lives of its most influential promoters, and to contrast its unconventional founding as a semi-communitarian settlement with its subsequent devolution into a relatively unremarkable early Colorado farm town – all in the context of what fresh insight this correspondence can provide. Based on the content of these letters, Greeley's rapid divergence from its utopian origins makes more sense; these statements are not the impassioned manifestos of loyal communitarians and utopian socialists. Rather, these 324 documents reveal that the applicants were eager to acquire farm land and to live in a cooperative society – with an emphasis on the acquisition of plenty of land.

Nathan Cook Meeker embraced utopianism from early in his career as a writer and newspaperman, his personal communitarian ideology developed in his travels across antebellum America, from his home in Ohio to New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York, and beyond. He and his wife Arvilla belonged to a Fourierist phalanx in the 1840s, where Meeker served as book-keeper and recorder. Upon joining the *New York Tribune* as a war correspondent and later serving as its agricultural editor, Meeker entered an environment in which boss Horace Greeley and his disciples had been grappling with communitarianism and utopian socialism for decades, through the writing and thinking of such influential contemporary philosophers and *Tribune*

contributors as Karl Marx, Margaret Fuller, Charles Dana, and Henry James, Sr. The communitarian socialist-inflected *Tribune* helped fine-tune Meeker's views on communal living, and he wrote a popular series on the Oneida community for the paper. In October of 1869, Greeley sent him west to study the Mormons in Utah, and while heavy snows forced him to turn back before reaching Salt Lake City, he toured the Colorado Territory with an eye for future communitarian settlement.

The realization of these plans did not have to wait long, as Greeley endorsed Meeker's plan for settling Colorado and published Meeker's "A Call for a Western Colony" on 4 December 1869. The subsequent flood of responses convinced Meeker that he could find a suitable group of temperate, hard-working, like-minded individuals to follow him west, and from these correspondents, he selected several hundred to meet him in northeastern Colorado near the confluence of the South Platte and Cache la Poudre Rivers the next spring. A clear ideological leader in Meeker, a standard \$155 membership fee to fund community projects including attempts at communal land ownership, and expected collective adherence to prescribed social values distinguish the early Union Colony as at least nominally communitarian.

The story of the Union Colony at Greeley belongs to Meeker and to Horace Greeley and to the utopian socialists and communitarians whose ideas inspired the settlement. But more than that, the story of the Union Colony belongs to the middle-class farmers, carpenters, merchants, physicians, teachers, and machinists, and their families, who wrote to Meeker in earnest, requesting the opportunity to brave the unknown and follow him to a spot in northeastern Colorado Territory which probably looked a lot more like a patch of dusty grass than it did a fertile utopia. Before now, their story has been difficult to tell without records in their own words to explain what inspired their cross-country relocation to the Colorado prairie. The revelation of

these applications corrects that deficiency to the immense benefit of our understanding of an odd, semi-utopian colony and its descendant farm town of Greeley, which has anchored Weld County for close to a century and a half now.

Historiography

The very recent revelation of these documents precludes a direct historiographic link to any previous work – a uniquely daunting yet empowering circumstance. However, plenty of scholarship exists with which to contextualize these letters.

Serendipitously, the collection contains the application of David Boyd, Greeley's first historian. Published in 1890, Boyd's *A History: Greeley and the Union Colony of Colorado* is the definitive work on the formation of the colony and its first twenty years. Boyd's remarkable skill at distancing himself from a subject matter in which he was personally entangled distinguishes his work from a primary source or an unreliable piece of contemporaneously-manufactured history. Though imperfect, Boyd's *History* is the seminal work of history on early Greeley. The book's appendices include the first constitution and by-laws, the certificate of the colony's formation, a record of all initial land purchases, and the list of all original colonists from which it was gleaned who among these 324 applicants was successful.

Most subsequent accounts of the Union Colony are derivative of Boyd's work. Thirty years after the publication of Boyd's *History*, CU history professor James F. Willard compiled and curated a set of financial records, membership lists, newspaper articles, correspondence, and other documents related to the colony's founding. Willard's *The Union Colony at Greeley, Colorado, 1869-1871* drew from Boyd as well as his own personal interviews with surviving colonists. Willard's work kicked off a brief regional renaissance of work on the Union Colony and its contemporaries and imitators, including a 1926 tome called *Experiments in Colorado Colonization, 1869-1872* which Willard co-authored with fellow CU Professor Colin B. Goodykoontz.

Among those colonists whom Willard interviewed for *The Union Colony* was J. Max Clark, whose memoir entitled *Colonial Days* provides an overview of the colony and his participation in it as one of early Greeley's most prominent and influential citizens. This immensely engaging work, published in 1902, balances proximity to the actual events with a concerted effort at candor and impartiality, and provides commentary which, like Boyd's, inspired much reliance on Clark in later works, including the 1938 history of Weld County written by Mary L. Geffs entitled *Under Ten Flags*.

In his 1957 *Massacre: The Tragedy at White River*, Marshall Sprague contextualizes the titular murder of Indian Agency employees including Nathan Meeker himself by tracing the events which brought Meeker, a journalist and utopianist, to White River as an Indian Agent. His biography of Meeker distills and supplements Boyd, and it is unique among the numerous books about the White River tragedy in providing so much detailed background on Meeker.

Architectural historian Dolores Hayden visited Greeley in the mid-1970s to research her book *Seven American Utopias*, which, as the name suggests, presents an architectural history of communitarian socialism by focusing on the communal buildings of a sample of seven communities including the Union, Amana, and Mormon Colonies. She was evidently not impressed with what she found on the Union Colony, as she described Greeley as an unimaginative farm town that happened to be built over the top of a failed communitarian experiment. Her dismissive work challenges much of the received narrative about how successful Greeley was.

Beginning in 1983, Carol Schwayder began publishing a series entitled *Weld County Old & New*, a massive multi-volume history of Greeley and surrounding areas. It again drew on

Boyd, as well as numerous archival sources, to present in small, easily-digestible encyclopedia-style entries information on Weld County since prehistoric times.

Outside of this regional history, plenty of work exists on Horace Greeley, including numerous detailed biographies which began appearing even during Greeley's lifetime. Erik S. Lunde's *Horace Greeley* (1981) represents a succinct interpretation of his life and legacy. A more recent installment in this history of Greeley provides a unique interpretation of the *Tribune's* social and political ideology under Greeley – Adam Tuchinsky's 2009 book *Horace Greeley's New York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor*.

Utopian communities have long attracted attention from historians for their exciting and controversial subject matter. Individual footnotes reference further reading for each colony mentioned. Carl L. Guarneri's 1991 analysis of Fourierism in America, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, provides an especially detailed look at this short-lived 1840s phenomenon which influenced the establishment of the Union Colony.

The work with which this essay is in conversation most is Dolores Hayden's *Seven American Utopias*. In her chapter on Greeley, pointedly entitled "The Disintegration of Association," Hayden discredits the communitarian integrity of Nathan Meeker and especially his Union Colony disciples, describing Greeley as "a rather disappointing communitarian experiment."¹ Hayden criticizes the rapidity with which Greeley's farmers dug up the communitarian roots Meeker tried to plant in the dry soil of northeastern Colorado: "Within four years of its founding the colonists had abandoned most of their communal institutions and

¹ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 261.

created a town indistinguishable from dozens of others in the region.”² However, where Hayden faults such ideological inconstancy, this project argues that the mild commitment to communalism which made Greeley so short-lived as a utopian community, as it dissipated, allowed Greeley to make a smooth transition into an organized, conservative, successful Colorado farm town. Hayden traces the diluted communalist ideals of Greeley back to Meeker himself, and his interest in “the weakest features” of the utopian communities from which he drew inspiration:

The founder of Greeley had visited the Shakers, Mormons, Fourierists, and Oneidans before planning the Union Colony, and he drew from these experiments Fourierist vagueness about economic ‘Association’ and Mormon idealization of the single-family home, two of the weakest features of these four communal systems.³

She also implicates the Union Colonists for even further dilution of Meeker’s already-watery communalist philosophy, portraying them as more committed to their own financial interests in private property ownership than any ideological program:

Greeley demonstrates how easily communitarian idealism could disintegrate through too much emphasis on private property... Members of the Union Colony wanted community, but they were unwilling to adopt any religious, social, or economic practice which threatened the family or individual initiative.⁴

Hayden depicts a Union Colony far-removed from its founder’s utopian idealism, even at its inception. While this essay largely agrees with Hayden’s diagnosis of the dissipation of communitarianism in Greeley, my research hopes to demonstrate that Greeley’s gradual easing of its communitarian principles actually facilitated an orderly, largely successful transformation into an economically and socially viable agricultural town.

² Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

³ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

⁴ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

Part I: The Background

Chapter 1: Nineteenth-Century Ideological Context

Utopianism, Communitarianism, Temperance, and Manifest Destiny

Utopias denote an ideal of people living together as harmoniously as possible. In the sense that utopianism seeks to create a perfect society, the concept has existed as long as societies have. Thomas More coined the term in 1516 for the title of his book critiquing English ruling-class society. More's eponymous play on two Greek words indicated that utopia was unattainable – "no place."⁵ Movements from seventeenth-century Puritanism in America to the eighteenth-century advent of the Quaker-offshoot Shakers in England contain elements of utopianism, but "it came to fruition in the 19th and 20th centuries, most often in the form of communities based on communal living."⁶ American idealism proved an especially potent partner to utopianism, as "it was in the United States that utopianism bloomed brightest in the 19th century."⁷ Of course, Americans interpreted an ideal society to entail myriad social constructs, including postmillennialism, pietism, transcendentalism, Mormonism, Fourierism, abolitionism, socialism, communism, and religious fanaticism, and even non-isms like free love, complex marriage, and temperance. In fact, the only commonality between many of these divergent ideologies was yet another ism: their nationalism. If utopia was to be had, America was the place to have it, with many utopianists "convinced that a perfected society could be created in time in the United States, the worldwide symbol of progress for the world."⁸ Most

⁵ James M. Morris and Andrea L. Cross, *The A to Z of Utopianism* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), xxii.
Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Morris, *A to Z*, xxii.
Sargent, *Utopianism*.

⁷ Morris, *A to Z*, xxx.

⁸ Morris, *A to Z*, xxxi.

utopias sought to achieve this ideal across the North and Midwest through structured communal living – often called communitarianism.

One ideological subset of utopianism particularly relevant to the Union Colony via Nathan Meeker's *New York Tribune* pedagogy was utopian socialism, a social reform movement developed in response to the cultural turmoil and social strife of the industrializing world. Recognizing that capitalism generated inequality, utopian socialism sought to reform labor and living conditions in order to maximize the benefits of society to all its members. Charles Fourier developed the ideology which bears his name based on this utopian socialist instinct that collective labor and communal living could solve society's ills. Disenchanted with the exploitative nature of capitalism and the inequality of late eighteenth-century French society, Fourier developed a "complete theory of psychology and history which, he claimed, solved the riddle of human existence."⁹ Fourier believed that his communitarian system would "propel humanity to a new golden age, a millennial paradise."¹⁰ Fourierism exemplified both the labor reformism of utopian socialism and the nationalism of utopianism in general; though the movement traces its ancestry back to eighteenth-century France, it experienced its greatest practical success in the United States in the 1840s.

Fourierism took root on this side of the Atlantic due to a "sense of disorientation induced by rapid social change combined with a romantic belief in infinite human possibility."¹¹ Upon its importation to the United States, Fourierism shed some of its more bizarre tenets;

⁹ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 15.

Holloway, *Heavens on Earth*, 135.

¹⁰ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 16.

¹¹ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 15.

“Associationists,” as American Fourierists called themselves, jettisoned Fourier’s most personal, emotional, and eccentric ideas:

He predicted that diseases would no longer ravage the population, humans would live for 144 years, Siberians would enjoy an Italian climate, new species of docile animals such as ‘anti-lions’ would help Harmonians cultivate the globe, and – most interesting of all – human beings would develop long and ‘infinitely useful’ tails.¹²

To its credit, Fourierism contained some less peculiar notions also, including its proto-feminist underpinnings, using the “social position of women” as one of the main indicators of humanity’s progress; for example, the then-current state of “Civilization” indulged in the “enslavement of women in monogamy,” and thus would soon pass in favor of the superior, consecutive states of “Guarantism, Sociantism, and eventually the glorious stage of Harmony,” to last through a “60,000 year period of creativity and happiness.”¹³

Most significantly, Fourierism attempted to create a system of collective labor which would harness people’s “passions” in order to maximize their joy and productivity in laboring for the good of the community.¹⁴ This was most effectively achieved by freeing families from the redundancy of their individual homes, establishing instead a large communal living facility called a phalanx, which would house 1,600 members and provide “abundant resources, guaranteed income, and... attractive work arrangements,” in order to “promote the welfare of all.”¹⁵ Phalanxes would eventually replicate, filling the countryside until they had built “over two million communities whose vast regional associations would supersede current nations.”¹⁶ While the movement produced a maximum of approximately thirty phalanxes across the U.S. during

¹² Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 19.

¹³ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 18.

¹⁴ Holloway, *Heavens on Earth*, 135.

¹⁵ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 19.

¹⁶ Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 19.

the 1840s – as opposed to the rather optimistic figure of over two million – the basic principles of Fourierism continued to influence utopian socialism through the efforts of notable Associationists including Albert Brisbane, Horace Greeley, and Nathan Meeker.

Notable Nineteenth-Century American Utopias

The communities which these ideologies inspired flourished in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. Among these counter-cultural movements, some utopias stand out more than others for their scope, their antagonism of the mainstream culture, and their sheer outlandishness. A disproportionate share of this ideological fervor centered on the “burned-over districts” of western and central New York, where the fires of the religious revivals of the early part of the century had left behind fertile soil in which utopian ideas took root more frequently than in any other area of the country. For example, followers of the small, New York-based, early 1830s Kingdom of Matthias held that carpenter and wife-beater Robert Matthews was God’s chosen prophet – and thus the right man to dictate the personal and professional circumstances of his followers. Adultery and manslaughter ensued, implicating future abolitionist Sojourner Truth in the chaos.¹⁷ The “unique sexual practices” of the Oneida Community similarly attracted attention and enmity to the John Humphrey Noyes-led contingent of Perfectionists and complex marriage practitioners living communally in central New York beginning in the late 1840s.¹⁸ Even the Union Colony applicant demographics reflect this tradition to a degree, as, according to Dolores Hayden, “Many applicants came from the

¹⁷ For more information on this short-lived cult, see Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Morris, *A to Z*, xxxi.

Maren Lockwood Carden, *Oneida: Utopian Community to Modern Corporation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), xv.

‘burned-over district’ of upper New York State, and others resided in the area of the Washentaw and Trumbull Phalanxes; Oneida, New York; Zoar, Ohio; Bishop Hill, Illinois; and Nauvoo, Illinois.”¹⁹

Communities outside New York also captured attention from their contemporaries for their unorthodox, unpopular, and unprecedented views on communal living, religious beliefs, and labor practices. Among the earliest of these was Indiana’s short-lived New Harmony, founded in 1825 by social reformer Robert Owen to test his social and financial theories of communal living on the repurposed site of a German Lutheran settlement.²⁰ Back east in Massachusetts, transcendentalists at Brook Farm sought in the 1840s to maximize and regulate communal profits by controlling participants’ labor, eventually building a Fourierist phalanx which financially ruined the community when it burned down.²¹ By contrast, longer-lasting settlements at Amana, Iowa, founded in 1856, managed to survive into the 1930s, with villagers adhering to strict Pietist-related rules on food, marriage, labor, worship, and civic responsibility.²² Just as religious intolerance brought Amana adherents west from first Germany and then New York, religious intolerance also drove the Mormons west, first out of New York’s “burned-over districts” in the 1820s during the Second Great Awakening, and then out of Ohio and Missouri in the 1830s and Illinois in the 1840s, and eventually into to Utah, where they

¹⁹ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 286.

This project corroborates Hayden’s assertions, particularly about the New York and Ohio regions, to a degree, although the local readership of the *Tribune* in New York state, as well as Meeker’s Ohio connections, certainly skew the data. New York contributed the most correspondents of any state in the collection with 84, or 26% of all responses. Ohio was a distant third, with 23 responses, or 7%.

²⁰ For more information on New Harmony, see William E. Wilson, *The Angel and the Serpent: The Story of New Harmony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

²¹ For further reading on Brook Farm, see Sterling F. Delano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²² On the Amana villages, see Diane L. Barthel, *Amana: From Pietist Sect to American Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

established religious communities committed to plural marriage, proselytization, and temperance.²³

Temperance

The Union Colony shared several similarities with its nearby utopian cousins in Utah. Both colonies celebrated cooperative efforts that did not infringe on private property ownership and both were adamantly temperate – an ideology which both communities maintained longer than most of their fellow utopian settlements even existed – a century in Greeley and to the present in Mormon communities.

Temperance represents another iconic, decidedly nineteenth-century ideological movement – although a Prohibition-inducing twentieth-century resurgence proved pretty successful as well. Organized opposition to liquor in this country traces its roots back to colonial America, but it was not until the 1820s that more cohesive temperance societies emerged. Factions within the movement called alternately for moderation, use only for medicinal or religious purposes, and total abstinence. Arguments against alcohol associated drunkenness with degenerate behavior like domestic abuse and neglect. Some fought it exclusively on social or moral grounds, while others sought legislative prohibition. Temperance plays and other literary propaganda decried “demon drink” as an insidious domestic scourge. A young would-be social reformer penned this emotional appeal in 1842 about a man who, with the help of an “angel of mercy,” resisted the urge to drink in the aftermath of his infant son’s death: “Once more I am

²³ On the origins of Mormonism, see Robert Remini, *Joseph Smith* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002). Also Richard Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

happy, thou demon of slaughter... No more shalt thou rule all my fortunes in life.”²⁴ That aspiring reformer was Nathan Meeker, and he carried that same zeal for temperance with him to his days at the *Tribune* and beyond.

In fact, the most cohesive and consistent support for any one ideological concept among these letters is for temperance. Ninety-two applicants voiced support for temperance – just over 28% of all 324 letter writers. In his “Call for a Western Colony,” Nathan Meeker wrote, “The persons with whom I would be willing to associate must be temperance men.”²⁵ He resoundingly got his wish. Initially, temperance flourished by unwritten mutual agreement by all colonists. In 1871, a temperance clause in all land deeds officially prohibited intoxicants, and anyone found in violation of the law faced repossession of their land by the colony. From a practical standpoint, lazy drunks posed a threat to the community's economic well-being, and inebriated workers could endanger others when handling tools and machinery. In the first several years at Greeley, temperance thrived.

However, within a decade of the colony's founding, temperance began to face controversy, as spirits began to trickle in from neighboring Evans, and druggists found it difficult to treat certain ailments without access to medicinal whiskey. Numerous arrests, two suspicious arsons, and a public scandal involving P.T. Barnum – who owned a whole city block in downtown Greeley in the 1880s – ensued even before the colony turned twenty, and Greeley experienced increasing difficulty enforcing the statute as time wore on.²⁶ Garden City sprang up

²⁴ Marshall Sprague, *Massacre: The Tragedy at White River* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1957), 4-5.

²⁵ Nathan Meeker, “A Call for a Western Colony,” *New York Tribune*, December 4, 1869, Meeker Manuscript Collection, City of Greeley Museum's Permanent Collection.

²⁶ Carol Schwayder, *Weld County Old & New: People & Places* (Greeley: Unicorn Ventures, 1992), 433. Schwayder writes that Greeley citizens tried to press charges against P.T. Barnum for a violation of the temperance clause perpetrated by one of his tenants – which “gave Barnum quite a laugh. He had been in England at the time – giving a temperance lecture himself.” Ironically, it seems that Barnum had in fact originally acquired the properties

nearby to provide alcohol to anyone who fell off the wagon - and prospered for it.

Unsubstantiated urban legend says that the ground underneath downtown Greeley is riddled with smuggling tunnels – a myth prevalent in other western cities as well. Ultimately, after a century of temperance in Greeley, legal controversy ended temperance for good in 1969.²⁷

Manifest Destiny and “Frontier Utopianism”

One final nineteenth-century concept which influenced the settlement of the Union Colony was Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny was a term developed in the mid-1840s to explain a long-preexisting concept: American expansionism. It presumed to provide ideological justification for this westward encroachment, as well as a rallying cry for the premise that it was not only America’s right but her duty to expand from coast to coast, civilizing the continent and propagating an idealized, agrarian American society. It also implied national, cohesive support for what was in reality a divisive and highly politicized concept. Utilized to accomplish such political motives as expansion into Oregon and Texas – and even to instigate the ensuing war with Mexico – it was polarizing from its outset. Democrats were the staunchest proponents of Manifest Destiny, while many Whigs feared an accompanying expansion of slavery into new territory.²⁸

to shelter his daughter and her new boyfriend William Buchtel – “an alcoholic physician with tuberculosis” – from the scandal their union had caused in Indiana when she left her husband for Buchtel. This is quoted in Jan Murphy, *Mysteries and Legends of Colorado* (Guilford: Twodot, 2007), 31.

²⁷ Carol Schwayder, *People & Places*, 433.

²⁸ On Manifest Destiny, see Robert J. Miller, *Native America: Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport: Praeger, 2006).

Also Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

While Manifest Destiny was past its political prime by 1869, the concept retained its rhetorical power for those seeking to justify expansionism. Advocates of Manifest Destiny attempted to disguise simple greed by employing rhetoric of American expansionist “ideals,” utilizing words like liberty and empire to veil underpinnings of exploitation and racism. Proponents propagandized westward movement in order to promote their own version of the ideal expansion of society in the same way contemporary utopian reformers did. The nationalism and patriotic idealism inherent in Manifest Destiny link it to many of the same assumptions concerning “frontier utopias” – American society was the ideal, and thus an agrarian extension of it across the continent was not only desirable but inevitable. Utopians sincerely believed that they could and would implement their social beliefs in the same way that adherents to Manifest Destiny believed that an American civilization program should and would be carried across the West. Where Manifest Destiny achieved its east-west goal – if not its north-south goal – so far no utopia has ever achieved this same level of success. This failure has historically obscured the lofty expansionist tenets of utopian societies merely because these goals have as yet never been accomplished on a large scale.

If American society was uniquely suited to cover the continent, as Manifest Destiny argued, then surely a distilled and idealized version of American society in the form of a frontier utopia presented the perfection of that nationalistic and expansionist goal. And who better than a group of middle-class, white, American-born farmers and their families to carry out such a goal? This rhetoric of Manifest Destiny suffused the Union Colony applicants’ letters, but until now, these miniature expansionist manifestos were lost – and thus so was the connection between expansionist rhetoric and communitarian ideology on the level of the individual who participated intentionally in both.

This project attempts to highlight the ideological and rhetorical similarities between Manifest Destiny and the hybrid ideology which developed at Greeley, a combination of Meeker's brand of utopian communitarianism and his followers' abiding desire for western farmlands on which to establish a model agrarian village. In service of that goal, this essay proposes the term "frontier utopianism" to describe the unique marriage of communitarianism and expansionism that the intersection of Meeker's and his colonists' ideologies produced.

One caveat of this comparison is that Manifest Destiny was largely a Democratic ideal, and these men were *Tribune*-style Republicans, their political beliefs descended at least in part from the Whigs who opposed Manifest Destiny in the 1840s. However, this essay argues that it was the rhetoric and nationalism of Manifest Destiny which endured in the Union Colony's frontier utopianism, and not its 1840s political ramifications.

Though the Union Colony descended ideologically from these nineteenth-century utopias and social reform movements, what differentiates it from many of these more radical experiments is the rapid palliation of – rather than desperate intensification of or dramatic digression from – its already rather dilute utopian commitment. While almost every other utopia throughout history eventually dissolved, Meeker's experiment made a successful transition away from its more structured communitarian roots, enduring no strange detours into financial ruin, personal scandal, or religious fervor along the way. Unfortunately, many nineteenth-century utopias survive only as footnotes, punch-lines, and even tourist attractions. That the Union Colony's legacy prevails in Greeley's wide, tree-lined streets; profusion of parks; still-extant original irrigation ditches; and lingering social conservatism is actually fairly unique among

former utopian communities. While the longevity of these features belongs to the earnest and hard-working founders and early pioneers of Greeley, the initial implementation of these foundational communitarian ideals can be traced to the vision of one eccentric Ohioan – Nathan Cook Meeker.

Chapter 2: Nathan Meeker and Horace Greeley

Nathan Meeker

Nathan Cook Meeker – named for kindly neighbor Mr. Cook who delivered fresh eggs in honor of the new baby – was born to New England transplants Enoch and Lurana Meeker on 12 July 1817 on their homestead in Euclid, Ohio.²⁹ According to the biographer Marshall Sprague, “Though dirt-poor, the Enoch Meekers had distinction” – they were of respectable New England stock.³⁰ Lurana’s ancestor John Eliot “translated the Bible into Algonquin and persuaded a whole tribe of Massachusetts Indians to stay on a Reservation” – a tragically ironic heritage in light of Meeker’s fatal contact with the White River Utes as an Indian Agent in the late 1870s.³¹ His father’s side also boasted brushes with greatness. Upon his contribution of no fewer than eighteen sons to George Washington’s Revolutionary Army, Meeker’s paternal grandfather shook hands with the General himself.³²

But it turned out to be young Nathan who would ultimately elevate the family name, earning fame as a prominent journalist, social theorist, and town-founder. He demonstrated an early proclivity for writing and lecturing on his favorite subjects, chief among them “social injustice” and “intelligent farming methods.”³³ When his parents and younger brothers tired of his sermonizing, he left the family farm at seventeen. According to David Boyd, who knew him well, Meeker often related with good humor a near-death experience he endured almost immediately upon setting out on his own. Aboard a steamer for New Orleans, Meeker fell headfirst twenty feet down a hatch, saved only by his tall hat stuffed with his own amateur

²⁹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 3.

³⁰ Sprague, *Massacre*, 3.

³¹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 3.

³² Sprague, *Massacre*, 3.

³³ Sprague, *Massacre*, 4.

poetry: “This he said was the best turn that his poetry served him.”³⁴ He worked in his young adulthood as a journalist, poet, teacher, and traveling salesman, publishing pro-labor and anti-drink tracts, but with little financial success. According to Sprague, by age twenty-six, Meeker already enjoyed a well-developed political and social ideology:

Next to debt, he hated slavery the most, and then conformity, capital punishment, Daniel Webster, luxury, and New England conservatism. In his quest for perfection, he studied all the lush revolts of a revolt-loving period – the celibate Shakers, the amorous Oneida Community, the fanatic Mormons, the Brook Farm transcendentalists. He favored agrarianism and hard work, temperance and eugenics, Jacksonian reform and eating carrots for better vision at night.³⁵

It was in this mindset that Meeker encountered the writings of the father of American Fourierism, Albert Brisbane, in the *New York Tribune*. He soon declared an ardent support for Brisbane’s ideas. But before he could act on this conviction, he met Arvilla Delight Smith – and decided “it was love at first sight.”³⁶

Arvilla disagreed, based on Meeker’s history of atheism and his age – she hesitated to marry a man two years her junior. She retracted her protests, however, when Meeker joined the Campbellite Disciples of Christ and falsified his year of birth as 1814 – a date which Boyd preserves in his *History*, whether out of ignorance or loyalty to the woman to whom he dedicated his book.³⁷ In fact, Arvilla so insisted upon the deception that his tombstone in Greeley lists his birthdate as 1814 as well.³⁸

³⁴ David Boyd, *A History: Greeley and the Union Colony of Colorado* (Greeley: Greeley Tribune Press, 1890), 13. Sprague, *Massacre*, 4.

³⁵ Sprague, *Massacre*, 5.

³⁶ Sprague, *Massacre*, 7.

³⁷ Boyd, *History*, 12.

³⁸ Sprague, *Massacre*, 331.

Though their union produced five children and lasted until Meeker's 1879 death, his minimization of her aversion to joining the nearby Trumbull Phalanx in Braceville introduces a troubling trend in their life together: Meeker dictating and Arvilla acquiescing. Wrote Meeker of his new bride, "She is entirely passive. When I asked her how she would like to go, she said she was glad they had soft water! Gods and little fishes! Here is this Community of men struggling to convince the world of the most important truths, and they are commended for having *soft water!*"³⁹ Unfortunately, this sexism presaged Meeker's future bias in selecting colonists for the Union Colony, dismissing the concerns of men whose wives disdained the project and rejecting decisively the sole female applicant.

Arvilla's doubts aside, the newlyweds immediately embarked together upon what would prove to be one of the defining ventures of Meeker's life – first-hand experience with communal living in an Associationist phalanx. The Meekers joined nearly one hundred other families at the phalanx, where "the Braceville board assigned Meeker to 'talent' with a vengeance,"⁴⁰ and the newlyweds rolled up their sleeves to start laboring for the common good. Their enthusiasm dissipated, however, in the face of widespread infidelity at Trumbull to the Fourierist tenet of hard work for the benefit of all. Boyd contrasts the lofty economic ideals of Fourierism with the reality of its implementation at the Trumbull Phalanx: Although in an ideal phalanx, "the poorest person in the Association is not only to be secure of comfort, but his minimum of enjoyments will be greater than the present social arrangements can give millionaires and princes," at Braceville, "many shirked their work... Many families were very large and with only the father to work, they were constantly running behind. Mr. Meeker knew just how this was, as he kept

³⁹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 8.

⁴⁰ Sprague, *Massacre*, 8.

the books.”⁴¹ Meeker’s “talent” group received three shares of profits to labor’s five and capital’s four, meaning that although he served as “Phalanx librarian, auditor, secretary, teacher, historian and poet laureate,” and Arvilla “taught kindergarten,” the family, like the rest of the phalanx, struggled financially – though they departed the failed community three years later much better off than almost anyone else: in the black with “an uncollectable credit of \$56.04.”⁴² Meeker forever resented the laziness of his fellow Associationists, recalling later, “I learned how much co-operation people would bear.”⁴³ Sprague affirms Meeker’s assessment, attributing the phalanx’s failure to “its damp location, mosquitoes, ague, laziness of members and bitterness caused by cliques exploiting the altruism of others.”⁴⁴

Upon Trumbull’s dissolution in the fall of 1847, the young family of four – including infants Ralph and George, who had been born at the phalanx – moved back to Euclid, where Meeker and his brothers ran a succession of stores unsuccessfully for three years. During this time, Meeker quit the Campbellites, eschewing organized religion for the rest of his life. However, where his enthusiasm for religion dissipated, his interest in social developments flourished. John C. Frémont’s travels fascinated him, directing his attention to the Rocky Mountains and to the merits of Manifest Destiny.⁴⁵ He delved further into communitarianism, learning about the Mormons and writing a manuscript for a novel called *The Adventures of Captain Armstrong* about a shipwrecked sailor who civilizes island natives – in what Sprague describes as a disturbing presentiment of Meeker’s own doomed plan to assimilate the Utes in the 1870s.⁴⁶ These communitarian explorations, completed in yet another time of financial

⁴¹ Boyd, *History*, 14.

⁴² Sprague, *Massacre*, 8-9.

⁴³ Boyd, *History*, 15.

⁴⁴ Sprague, *Massacre*, 8-9.

⁴⁵ Sprague, *Massacre*, 9.

⁴⁶ Sprague, *Massacre*, 10.

deprivation for Meeker, performed one profitable – if not monetarily remunerative – function for Meeker: they brought him to the attention of Horace Greeley, beginning “an association which became the prime influence of Meeker’s life.”⁴⁷

Horace Greeley

Even more polarizing and eccentric than Meeker himself, Horace Greeley has alternately been described as “a philological incendiary with a vision of universal freedom,” a man whose “follies were worn upon his sleeve for daws to peck at,” and “a truly representative man of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁸ Born on 3 February 1811 into poverty in New Hampshire, nicknamed “Hod,” and bullied into a strange proficiency at reading upside down, young Greeley nevertheless excelled academically and became a printer’s apprentice at age fifteen, thus joining the newspaper profession which would dominate his life and his legacy.⁴⁹ In comparing the two newspapermen, Meeker’s biographer highlights their similarities – “Both were teetotalers and poor businessmen. Both could be tactless and opinionated” – while providing an especially colorful depiction of Greeley:

At the very least he deserved to be called a character. He had the pink, mild face of a contented infant. His voice was a squeak and his whiskers were limp as corn silk. His handwriting was unreadable. He wore outlandish clothes. Though his income was large, he was usually short of cash, being a soft touch for endless charities. He was a Free-soiler and a student of spiritualism. He abhorred artists,

⁴⁷ Sprague, *Massacre*, 10.
Boyd, *History*, 15.

⁴⁸ Robert Williams, *Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom* (New York: NY University Press, 2006), 1.
Francis Zabriskie, *Horace Greeley, The Editor* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), 380.
Erik Lunde, *Horace Greeley* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 16.

⁴⁹ Glyndon Van Deusen, *Horace Greeley: Nineteenth-Century Crusader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1953), 5.
Lunde, *Horace Greeley*, 22.

opera, Paris, the theater and Turkish baths... He opposed Catholics and Germans because, he said, they drank too much beer.⁵⁰

In his ostentatious white suit and white hat, Greeley cut an unmistakable figure as he navigated New York society promoting social reform, Whig politics, and his newspaper.

Greater than the sum of his (eccentric) parts, Greeley became one of the most influential men in America through the enormous success and wide circulation of his *New York Tribune*, which he had founded in 1841. His interest in utopian socialism sparked that same interest for many thousands of others, including Meeker himself, who joined the Trumbull Phalanx based on Albert Brisbane's writings in the *Tribune*. "The conscience of America," Greeley's "opinion was law to millions."⁵¹ His most famous advice – "Go West, young man, go West" – "borrowed" from Indiana newspaper editor John Soule, who coined the phrase in 1851 in an article in his *Terre Haute Express* – inspired many thousands more.⁵²

A collection of idiosyncrasies, lifelong Whig Greeley ultimately "played an influential role in the rapid rise of the Republican Party in the mid-1850s," helping "transition former Whigs into Republicans."⁵³ However, his support for the mainstream Republican Party waned, and thus he is best known for challenging President Grant in the election of 1872, running as a Liberal Republican with the official support of the Democratic Party. On 29 November 1872, before the Electoral College could officially reelect his opponent, a disheartened Horace Greeley

⁵⁰ Sprague, *Massacre*, 10.

⁵¹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 10.

⁵² Rosemarie Ostler, *Let's Talk Turkey: The Stories behind America's Favorite Expressions* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2008), 124.

⁵³ Mitchell Snay, *Horace Greeley and the Politics of Reformism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 113.

died at the age of 61 – making him the only presidential candidate to ever die during the electoral process.⁵⁴

In three of those six action-packed decades between his unassuming birth and dramatic death, Greeley wielded the *New York Tribune* as not only a mouthpiece for his own Whig and Republican political beliefs, but as a vehicle for the dissemination of some of the most cutting-edge social and political ideas of the nineteenth century, among these the utopian socialist tracts which initially caught Meeker's eye. Historian Adam Tuchinsky argues that the *Tribune* “became the representative voice first of the ‘reform Whigs’ and then the Radical Republicans,” its political philosophy further complicated by the paper's continuing commitment to “liberal socialism.”⁵⁵ It was this juggernaut of sometimes seemingly contradictory political and social theories and unparalleled circulation that propelled Meeker from amateur utopianist to famous journalist during the Civil War.

In want of a war correspondent for the Midwest, Greeley remembered that the *Captain Armstrong* author whose communitarian ideas had intrigued him lived in the area. Greeley hired Meeker to leave his fruit farm in southern Illinois – where he had moved the family after yet another financial setback – to follow the nearby movements of the Union Army under Generals Grant and Pope at Cairo, Illinois.⁵⁶ He excelled as a war correspondent, and when the Confederate surrender put him out of a job in the spring of 1865, Greeley hired him as the *Tribune*'s agricultural editor.⁵⁷ Meeker's relocation facilitated more and closer contact between the two, though Sprague emphasizes that their relationship “was more that of the respectful

⁵⁴Williams, *Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom*, 306.

⁵⁵ Adam Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley's New York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), x.

⁵⁶ Sprague, *Massacre*, 11.

⁵⁷ Boyd, *History*, 16.

employee and august employer” than an intimate friendship.⁵⁸ According to Boyd, his 1868 articles on the Oneida community “made Meeker famous.”⁵⁹ He even published his second book, called *Life in the West, or Stories of the Mississippi Valley*, to greater acclaim than his first, but it was not until October of 1869 that Meeker actually went west himself – an experience which would shape not only his own destiny, setting in motion events which would lead to his death exactly one decade later, but also the destinies of many hundreds of pioneers and their descendants.

Hoping to capitalize on the success of Meeker’s recent articles on Oneida, Greeley selected Meeker to study the Mormons in Utah and sent him west in the fall of 1869.⁶⁰ Meeker traveled west by rail, aboard the Kansas Pacific Railroad from Kansas City toward Denver. During the journey, KPRR executive William Jackson Palmer held court in his palace Pullman, to which he invited Meeker, who listened to Palmer’s prophecies of the forthcoming boom decade for Colorado with increasing fascination.⁶¹ When Meeker disembarked at Sheridan, he caught a wagon west with Palmer and business tycoon Cyrus Field. Sprague describes these weeks travelling down to the future site of Colorado Springs and up to Denver as nothing short of life-changing for Meeker, who began to mold himself into the great pioneer he had always suspected he might one day become: “He arrived home chewing tobacco and dropping his ‘gs’ like a Western pioneer.”⁶² Snow precluded his planned examination of Mormon communities at Salt Lake City, which suited Meeker fine as it kept him in his newly-beloved Colorado. His trip north with *Rocky Mountain News* founder William Byers cemented his conviction, and, his head

⁵⁸ Sprague, *Massacre*, 12.

⁵⁹ Boyd, *History*, 16.

⁶⁰ Boyd, *History*, 16.

⁶¹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 12-13.

⁶² Sprague, *Massacre*, 19.

abuzz with ideas, he boarded the Denver Pacific for Cheyenne near the confluence of the South Platte and Poudre Rivers at Evans – a locale seared onto Meeker’s imagination as he headed east in November formulating a plan for a colony in Colorado.

Before he approached his ideological partner in Horace Greeley, Meeker explained his idea to plant an agricultural utopia in Colorado to his life partner. Arvilla understandably chafed at the thought of uprooting the finally-stabilized family of five young adults, all settled into the jobs, schools, and steady home lives which Meeker’s restlessness had previously precluded. Oldest son Ralph was starting his third year reporting at the *Tribune*, and youngest daughters Mary and Josephine enjoyed their friends and school in Brooklyn. Middle children George and Rozene, on the other hand, suffered from tuberculosis and anxiety, respectively, and might not bear a trip of that magnitude.⁶³ Disregarding Arvilla’s trepidation, Meeker barreled characteristically ahead, and she managed to extract only one concession: that Meeker give up his new tobacco habit.⁶⁴

The small matter of his family’s willingness out of the way, Meeker tested the waters for Greeley’s approval. He recalled Greeley’s reaction in a speech on the colony’s first anniversary on 5 April 1871: “I wish you would take hold of it, for I think it will be a great success, and if I could, I would go myself.”⁶⁵ Meeker composed an article which he hoped would inspire interested parties to submit applications, and Greeley wrote an endorsement of Meeker’s plan to accompany the article. Meeker’s “Call for a Western Colony” appeared in the 4 December *Tribune*, and he sat back ready to receive responses. He did not have long to wait for the unexpected barrage of letters, which started the day after the article’s initial publication, and,

⁶³ Sprague, *Massacre*, 20.

⁶⁴ Sprague, *Massacre*, 20.

⁶⁵ Boyd, *History*, 29-30.

encouraged by the article's continual republication both in the *Tribune* and in local papers and agricultural newsletters, did not cease until their recipient had already headed West to select a location for the colony.

Chapter 3: Call and Response

Meeker's "Call for a Western Colony" represented a strange and glorious amalgamation of idealist utopian manifesto, nineteenth-century advertising journalism, communitarian recruitment brochure, Manifest Destiny triumphalist tract, and hyperbolic Colorado Territory marketing campaign. Meeker embellished and exaggerated, combining all of the best features of the Colorado regions he visited into one idealized and invented mystery spot, which he declined to name in order to prevent "schemers and speculators" from usurping his location.⁶⁶ Meeker projected his utopian ideal onto the Colorado landscape, highlighting the true natural beauty of the Rockies while smoothing away flaws like Colorado's inherent aridity. Heady and quixotic, Meeker's "Call" invested what was essentially a business proposition with a hint of the sublime: "The Rocky Mountain scenery is the grandest and the most enchanting in America. I have never seen a place which presents so many advantages and opportunities."

And yet beneath this elegant rhetorical gloss, Meeker bared his ideological soul to readers. The culmination of fifty-two years of his personal grappling with political and social ideas, "The Call" extolled the virtues of temperance, cooperative living, hard work, social progress, private property, and patriotism. He advocated for "the formation of an intelligent, educated, and thrifty society," certain that "it should be the object to exhibit all that is best in modern civilizations." He planned to achieve such social harmony by balancing the freedom of private property with the efficiency of cooperative community services, including a communal laundry and bakery. He reassured less communally-inclined readers, however: "In all this, the separate household, and the ownership of property should be without change; I only propose that,

⁶⁶ Meeker, "Call for a Western Colony."

if there are any advantages in cooperation, they could be secured by a colony.” He assuaged fears of the unrestrained and savage West, assuring readers that “society can be had at once.” Through collective effort, the immediate construction of “a church, town-hall, a school-house... and library” would ensure that “all the advantages of an old country” would be transplanted to a more healthful and scenic environment, with the additional benefit of colonists enjoying such social landmarks alongside like-minded and carefully-curated neighbors.

This exclusivity would foster “good society” run by “proper persons.” Meeker carefully wove his expectations of applicants’ character into this persuasive narrative, declaring, “In particular should moral and religious sentiments prevail, for without these qualities man is nothing.” Prospective colonists “must be temperance men” as well as family men, as “happiness, wealth, and the glory of a state, spring from the family.” This statement, coupled with his celebration of private property, explains the more mild utopianist Meeker had become by 1869. “The Call” promoted relatively socially conservative values, and explicitly eschewed more radical utopianist beliefs like the prohibition of private property and the practice of complex marriage or free love, betraying his lingering anxieties from his experiences at the Trumbull Phalanx. Meeker assured readers of the “decidedly healthful” locale, but admitted he expected a strong work ethic; applicants must be “ambitious to establish good society.” But his most explicit lingering prejudice evident in “The Call” references not only the financial ruin of the phalanx, but also his lifelong struggle to excel monetarily on a personal level. His financial plan demanded quotas of wealthy individuals for the colony: “Among as many as 50, ten should have as much as \$10,000 each, or twenty, \$5,000 each, while others may have \$200 to \$1,000 and upward. For many to go so far without means can only result in disaster. After a time, poorer people can be received and have a chance.” His ideological convictions led logically to the

practical business points of his plan, notably community funding and land ownership. He expected “settlement almost wholly in a village,” with the surrounding farm land divided between private agricultural holdings of “40 to 80, and even 160 acres” and community-owned plots, which could be held and sold strategically, with the proceeds earmarked for “making improvements for the common good.”

This article represented the zenith of Meeker’s journalistic achievements, and is in fact a very fine example of nineteenth-century advertisement writing. It even managed to discuss some of the great social concerns of the day with tact. For example, when Meeker argued – actually quite prophetically – that stock-raising would eventually prevail in the region, he raised the stakes of this development by invoking patriotism, capitalism, and progress. According to Meeker, future colonists would perform their civic duty and help tame the West while profiting personally in a win-win scenario which would “hasten the day” for the expansion of railroads and commerce into Colorado and beyond. Meeker rhetorically linked Manifest Destiny with patriotic duty, closing his tract with his conviction that, “In the success of this colony, a model will be presented for settling the remainder of the vast territory of our country.” This well-crafted conclusion showcased westward expansionism, wrapping it up in American progress, and tying it with a bow of subtle utopian communitarianism, the proponents of which had long linked progress with the modelling of exemplary social constructions.

The downside of this ideologically meticulous and idealistically effusive tract was Meeker’s misleading exaggerations about the raw material advantages of the location. With areas near Colorado Springs and Pueblo in mind in addition to the Greeley locale which was ultimately selected, Meeker felt justified in generalizing and amalgamating. In reality, no single location ticked all the boxes of Meeker’s imagined setting:

A location which I have seen is well watered with streams and springs, there are beautiful pine groves, the soil is rich, the climate is healthful, grass will keep stock year round, coal and stone are plentiful, and a well-travelled road runs through the property... A railroad is almost certain to pass through the land I refer to.⁶⁷

Part persuasion, part manipulation, this hyperbole caused problems when colonists, their expectations raised unfairly, actually laid eyes upon the chosen site six miles west of the confluence of the South Platte and Cache la Poudre Rivers.

The Edenic scene which Meeker described in order to entice colonists back in New York bore little relationship to reality, a fact which did not escape the dozens of colonists who took one look at what must have felt to them like a patch of desert in the middle of nowhere and immediately hopped the train back to Cheyenne, too disgusted to even wait for refunds.⁶⁸ The elusive truth of what those first arrivals actually encountered lies somewhere in between these extremes, as each viewer projected his or her own expectations and anxieties onto the landscape. Ecologically, the area was dry, with very few native trees and plants, save scrubby prairie grass. Coyotes and wolves roamed the grasslands where bison had reigned a century previously, but not so abundant were the “deer, antelope, wild turkeys, prairie chickens, and speckled trout” promised in “The Call.” Prairie *dogs*, perhaps, but not so much prairie *chickens*. The mountains Meeker had described lined the horizon far to the west, obscured by a haze of unsettled dust, and the nearby “mineral springs” were not so nearby, after all. In 1820, Dr. Edwin James, who surveyed Colorado as part of the Stephen H. Long expedition, famously provided his estimation of the geography of the area to which Union Colonists would flock exactly a half-century later:

⁶⁷ Meeker, “Call for a Western Colony.”

⁶⁸ Sprague, *Massacre*, 22.

Carol Schwayder, *Weld County Old & New: People & Places* (Greeley: Unicorn Ventures, 1992), 436.

We have little apprehension of giving too unfavorable account of this portion of the country, we do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and, of course, uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence. Though the soil is in some places fertile, the want of timber, of navigable streams, and water for the necessities of life, render it an unfit residence for any but a nomad population. The traveler who shall at any time have traversed its desolate sands, will, we think, join us in the wish that the region may remain forever the unmolested haunt of the native hunter, the bison and the jackal.⁶⁹

In reality, this supposedly vacant oasis was sparsely populated in the spring of 1870 with a small railroad encampment of “roughnecks” at Evans to the south and a few “squatters” from whom Meeker had purchased land to the west and north. For many centuries previously, nomadic Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes hunted and gathered on the land, but by the time the Union Colonists arrived, natives passed through infrequently. A few white fur-traders, explorers, and soldiers had trickled through the area in the preceding decades, building Forts Lupton, Vasquez, Jackson, and St. Vrain in the mid-1830s, but by the time the Union Colonists arrived in the spring of 1870, “the surrounding county was dominated by ranchers, railroads, and town, road, and ditch companies.”⁷⁰ The land on which the Union Colony located Greeley belonged to the Denver Pacific and a few small-scale farmers, all of whom sold out to Meeker for between \$3 and \$12 an acre.⁷¹ Meeker additionally paid \$930 in “preliminary fees for occupancy of government lands,” for a total expenditure of \$59, 970.88 for a total acreage of 11,916 and 29/100ths.⁷²

Further disappointing the new arrivals, this figure fell far below his January promise of 70,000 acres and far above his guarantee of plentiful land purchased at ninety cents per acre, not

⁶⁹ John Dugan, *Greeley and Weld County: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk: Donning Co. Publishers, 1984), 17.

⁷⁰ Richard Hogan, *Class and Community in Frontier Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 81. Dugan, *Greeley and Weld County*, 17.

⁷¹ Boyd, *History*, 431.

⁷² Boyd, *History*, 431.

to mention his outlandish promise in “The Call” that the land “can be settled upon without other cost than \$18 for 100 acres.”⁷³ Sprague imagines the “successive waves of disenchantment” which must have rolled over those first arrivals.⁷⁴ Original colonist J. Max Clark both corroborated and contradicted this assessment with his *Colonial Days* account of his ambivalent arrival in June of 1870, at which point only a few makeshift structures had been erected along a couple of plotted streets. The photograph which opens this thesis depicts this paltry development.

Clark immediately despaired of his relocation upon his arrival on the “sandy” soil of the Union Colony: “I said to myself: ‘Who are all these people, gathered together under the leadership of one visionary old man, in the vain hope of building up a paradise in the sands of the desert? Evidently all of them cranks and fools, and myself pre-eminently the fooliest fool in the lot.’”⁷⁵ Amidst a sea of unfamiliar faces, choking on the dust stirred up by “unwarrantably insane” men “running hither and thither” up and down the “magnificent imaginary streets,” Clark and his travelling companion Mr. Baker contemplated heading back east:

Baker and myself smiled loftily at these poor infatuated mortals running crazy over imaginary homes to be built up in the sand; and, returning to camp that night, tired out with our tramp, disgusted with the enterprise into which we had been foolishly duped, and displeased and mortified at the part we had played in it, we sat there in the deepening shadows of approaching night, too ashamed of ourselves to strike a light and see how mean we looked.⁷⁶

Lost in “gloomy reflections” over time and money wasted on the project, and agreed they had “seen enough to satisfy” them of the colony’s worthlessness, they fell asleep contemplating “where we would go, and what we would do,” ashamed of their apparent failure at seizing the

⁷³ Sprague, *Massacre*, 22.

⁷⁴ Sprague, *Massacre*, 22.

⁷⁵ J. Max Clark, *Colonial Days* (Denver: Smith-Brooks Company, 1902), 29.

⁷⁶ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 29-30.

prize of Manifest Destiny.⁷⁷ However, a shift occurred while they spent that first night in a tent at Island Grove Park, and upon their return to the “imaginary streets” of the townsite, “it seemed to me that for some reason or another they did not look quite so ridiculous as they did the day before.”⁷⁸ The potency of the Colorado climate softened Clark’s resolve to depart: “There had been a little shower during the night, the air was fresher, and it occurred to me that the soil did not look quite so sandy as it did the day before.”⁷⁹ Caught up in the excitement of possibility at last, “we were not conscious of being quite the extraordinary fools we thought ourselves the day before; and then the first thing we knew, we were running frantically about looking for lots for ourselves, quite disgusted, too, to think we had wasted so much time.”⁸⁰

That frenetic morning in 1870, Clark picked up the contagion of stick-to-it-iveness from his neighbors, in turn infecting new arrivals with his pioneer enthusiasm as they arrived throughout the summer and fall. This remarkable, collective rolling-up of the sleeves is difficult to imagine given the hardships they must have known were in store for them. In order to try to understand the mindsets of those rugged and determined pioneers who arrived on the future site of Greeley, it is important to appreciate the self-portraits of some of those same hopefuls and their compatriots, who ended the journey wielding shovels on the wind-swept prairie that spring, but who started the journey wielding pens in comfortable homes to the east the previous winter.

⁷⁷ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 30.

⁷⁸ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 30.

⁷⁹ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 30-31.

⁸⁰ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 31.

Part II: The Letters

Chapter 4: Meeker's Vision

In “The Call,” Meeker provided simple instructions to anyone moved by his message: “People wishing to unite in such a colony, will please address me at THE TRIBUNE Office, stating their occupation and the value of the property which they could take with them.” Considering such an unequivocal statement, Meeker’s motivations for approving or disregarding a letter seem obvious. Would the correspondent contribute sufficient capital and labor to the project? Obsessed with correcting the failures of the Trumbull Phalanx, Meeker determined to find men of means, strong constitutions, and practical skills with whom to unite. But Meeker, himself a poet and a romantic, could occasionally be swayed by elegant prose. More importantly, Meeker, himself a social theorist and a utopianist, could also occasionally be swayed by staunch ideological convictions. He also sought leadership potential, pioneering experience, and unique skills which might diversify this group of like-minded expansionists enough to survive those first years of trial and error, and hard work and hunger.

Meeker helpfully provided a method for determining his opinion of a colonist. Because a correspondent might have stayed at home of his own volition – having changed his mind, or found a better job, or headed west with another group – and not due to a rejection, the process of determining who Meeker accepted is somewhat speculative. He could not respond individually to 3,000 applicants, and any acceptance letters he might have sent did not survive. However, Meeker meticulously endorsed all but fifteen – or only 4.6% – of the 324 letters with the dollar amount they could bring, their occupation, and occasionally an additional piece of information like city of residence or a subjective judgement like “good man,” thus confirming not only that

he privileged means and occupation above all other considerations, and not only that he read and judged each letter individually, but that he treated the letters with a degree of subjectivity which could provide some insight into his hopes for the makeup of his agrarian utopia. Meeker invested his savings and his reputation in this project, giving up a job he loved writing for a man he idolized. These high personal stakes at least somewhat justified his neurotic level of engagement with each individual application. Plus, these men and their families would ostensibly serve as his companions for the foreseeable future – what an intriguing opportunity but also a daunting task to hand-pick the several hundred future neighbors, friends, and coworkers with whom you expect to interact for the rest of your life.

Anxious to surround himself with the best people, and hoping to populate his utopia with colonists who would give the project the greatest chance for success, Meeker sought men of means, skill, and strength. He also privileged the same ideological concerns he outlined in “The Call,” including temperance, cooperativity, and family values. Of these 324 applicants, fifty-five, or 17%, became founding colonists. What follows is an examination of the trends these letters reveal, beginning with the concerns Meeker himself privileged: wealth, occupation, and labor potential.

Finances

An analysis of these 324 letters shows that the monetary realities of prospective colonists forced Meeker to deviate substantially from his stated financial plan in “The Call”: “Among as many as 50, ten should have \$10,000 each, or twenty, \$5,000 each, while others may have \$200 to \$1,000 and upward.” Meeker, hoping to guarantee at least \$100,000 in capital for every fifty

colonists, far overestimated the pecuniary potential of applicants. Meeker's best-case scenario in "The Call" demanded that ten out of every fifty colonists command \$10,000 or better – or 20% of the total population. In reality, out of the 306 applicants who disclosed financial data, only twenty divulged means of \$10,000 or more – or 6.5%. Wanting to maintain that \$100,000 threshold, Meeker offered to settle for twenty colonists out of fifty with means of \$5,000 or more, or 40%. In reality, including those super-wealthy twenty applicants with \$10,000 or more, only forty-three applicants offered \$5,000 or more – or 14%. Unfortunately for Meeker, only one category – the poorest segment – actually exceeded his projections. The limit for these poorest men was set, depending on if Meeker achieved the ten colonists at \$10,000 or twenty colonists at \$5,000 figure, at between 60% and 80% of his village. In reality, with only 14% of applicants – instead of 40% – able to travel west with \$5,000 or more, 86% of applicants fell into that poorest tier of ownership – worse than even Meeker's least optimistic projection.

This poorest, remaining 86% in reality comprised two categories: those \$200 to \$1,000 applicants enumerated in "The Call," and the middle portion of applicants with \$1,000 to \$5,000 whom "The Call" overlooked. The largest portion of the total applicants, at 146 out of 306 – or nearly 48% – qualified in Meeker's poorest tier, with means of \$200 to \$1,000. However, the remaining and most influential group of applicants – and the one from which Meeker ultimately drew the greatest proportion of successful colonists – was one which "The Call" failed to specifically acknowledge: those with between \$1,000 and \$5,000. 117 applicants – or 38% of the total – fell into this middle range.

Of the fifty-five successful colonists, fifty-two provided financial information. Of these fifty-two, a disproportionately high number were \$1,000 to \$5,000 financiers – twenty-seven out of fifty-two, or 52%. The remaining 48% comprised eighteen poorer and seven wealthier

applicants. At 13% of successful applicants, those with \$5,000 or more carried over in almost identical proportion from the 14% of all applicants, successful and unsuccessful, who fit that category. The proportion which diminished, of course, was that poorest segment, who comprised 48% of all applicants but only 35% of all successful colonists, a conclusion which aligns logically with Meeker's strategy for selecting from otherwise appropriate colonists those as wealthy as possible. The following charts illustrate this contrast:

Distribution of All Applicants' Wealth

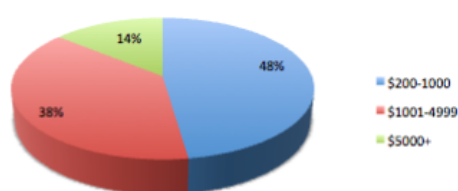


Figure 1: Means of 306 applicants who disclosed financial information.

Distribution of Successful Colonists' Wealth

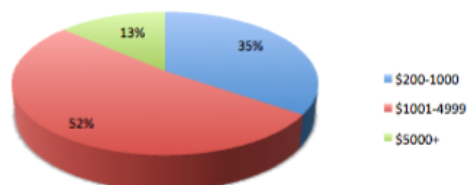


Figure 2: Means of 52 successful colonists who disclosed financial information.

A further break-down of applicants' finances helps to elucidate the economic status of people disposed to westward movement and communal living in the Reconstruction era. Historian Dolores Hayden, working in the 1970s off of limited financial data from the application records of successful applicants which were available before the discovery of the actual application letters themselves, concluded that applicants to the Union Colony were much wealthier than their counterparts in more radical utopian communities: "A majority of applicants declared that their savings ranged from \$1000 to \$5000, which, if true, would make them considerably more prosperous than the members of most other communitarian groups."⁸¹ The greatly-enhanced information on Union Colonist finances now available corroborates and expands upon Hayden's assessment that most successful applicants indeed commanded \$1,000 to

⁸¹ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 286.

\$5,000. Figure 2 above confirms that a 52% majority of colonists fell into this category, which, combined with an additional 13% for super-wealthy colonists, paints a picture of relative Union Colonist prosperity.

In light of Hayden's indication that Union Colonists possessed wealth, on average, far above that of their communitarian contemporaries, Meeker's calculations from "The Call" seem even more unrealistic. Meeker, projecting lingering anxiety about the Trumbull Phalanx's failure onto this new venture, apparently expected quite wealthy applicants – an expectation proven even more idealistic in light of financial records which elucidate working-class financial realities in Reconstruction America. The *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture* lists the national average monthly pay without board for a farm laborer in 1869 as \$19.49.⁸² *The Daily Colorado Tribune* of 13 April 1870 offered a glimpse at the somewhat more profitable economic climate which awaited the Colorado hopefuls, with labor more in-demand on the territorial frontier than in the South, for example, where the 1869 regional average was only \$12.40.⁸³ Average wages in the Colorado Territory that spring were reported thusly:

Farm Labor: \$25 to \$40 per month/including board.

Mechanics (Artisans): \$5 per day/without board.

Women Cooks/Housekeepers: \$7 to \$10 per week/including board and room.

Teamsters/Herdsmen: \$15 to \$25 per month/including board.⁸⁴

⁸² *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897) 586.

⁸³ *Yearbook*, 586.

Carol Schwayder, *Weld County Old & New: Chronology of Weld County, Colorado, 1836-1983* (Greeley: Unicorn Ventures, 1983) A34.

⁸⁴ Schwayder, *Chronology*, A34.

These wages multiplied out to yearly salaries provide a working-class comparison against which to understand the relative financial standings of applicants:

Farm labor, Colorado average: \$300 to \$480 including board

Labor by mechanics, Colorado average: \$1,825 without board

Domestic work for women, Colorado average: \$364 to \$520 with room and board

Labor by teamsters/herdsmen, Colorado average: \$180 to \$300 including board

Farm labor, national average: \$233.88

Farm labor, Southern average: \$148.80

These working-class figures show that, in economic terms at least, most Union Colony applicants were middle-class or slightly better, with significantly more means in most cases than the farm laborers in these categories. Two applicants even helpfully provided their salaries for a further point of reference. New York school principal H. Warren made \$1,000 per year, offering to bring a year and a half's worth at \$1,500.⁸⁵ By contrast, Lewis Williams of Vermont netted \$1,250 per year as a machinist and factory supervisor.⁸⁶

In light of such figures, Meeker's presumption to select applicants with means of \$5,000 or more at a rate of 40% looks quite unrealistic. Luckily for him, applicant statistics seem to confirm, even beyond Hayden's communitarian-specific assertion, that Union Colony applicants for the most part enjoyed stable, middle-class wealth – despite not earning at a rate in line with Meeker's overly optimistic predictions. As Figures 3 and 4 illustrate, Meeker selected a disproportionately wealthy group of colonists from among the applicants.

⁸⁵ H. Warren to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869, Union Colony Letters Collection, City of Greeley Museum's Permanent Collection.

⁸⁶ Lewis Williams to Nathan Meeker, 16 December 1869.

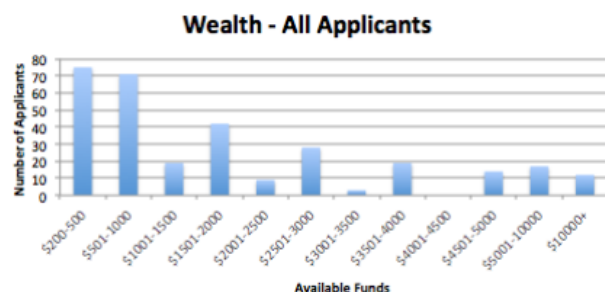


Figure 3: Reported means of 306 Union Colony applicants.

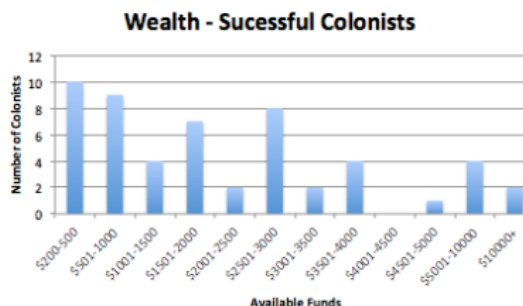


Figure 4: Reported means of 52 successful Union Colonists.

Some exceptions to this rule of relative applicant affluence include the eighteen correspondents who earnestly offered the minimum amount of \$200, of whom only one became a successful colonist – and perhaps only then by accident or oversight, since New York farmer J.D. Worth was also a German immigrant, a group Meeker disdained:

It is important to note that the progress of towns settled by Germans has been exceedingly slow, and that a large admixture of Germans is far from favorable to rapid development... It seems to me by their beer-drinking and convivial habits they are made unfitted for engaging in enterprising industries, and incapable of understanding what American progress means.⁸⁷

Apparently party to the vitriolic nativism of his era, Meeker disregarded other applicants from Denmark, England, Scotland, and Wales, the only other exception to this anti-immigrant rule being the long-naturalized, eminently wealthy, and highly-qualified Scots-Irish Union Army veteran Captain David Boyd, who ironically recorded for posterity Meeker's above nativist tirade in *A History: Greeley and The Union Colony*.

J.D. Worth's incongruent acceptance aside, his fellow \$200 applicants reveal a trend of young, single, working-class applicants in particular not making the cut. Recalling the financial disaster that was the Trumbull Phalanx, Meeker wrote in "The Call," as previously noted, that,

⁸⁷ Boyd, *History*, 17-18.

“For so many to go so far without means can only result in disaster. After a time, poorer people can be received and have a chance.” Of the seventeen poorest men who reported their occupation, seven were farmers, three were carpenters, and six were tradesmen or mechanics. Of the nine who provided their age, six were under thirty, including the youngest applicant in the collection, twenty-year-old farmer Henry M. Sheldon. These young farmers and artisans fit the mold of the typical unmarried pioneer, but not Meeker’s conception of the right sort of founding colonists for his utopia. While he enlisted a few wealthier single men, Meeker mostly sought family men who would have a greater stake in the community, working hard in exchange for the benefits of communal living like good schools and churches, and better opportunities for their children. A poor family man was more likely than a poor single man to become a successful colonist, as the nineteen colonists with means no higher than \$1,000 demonstrate in Figure 4.

Interestingly, Meeker similarly disregarded applicants on the other end of the spectrum; of the twenty super-affluent correspondents with means over \$10,000, he accepted only three – and even then, three of the poorest, at \$10,000, \$11,000, and \$13,000, respectively. On paper, Meeker should have consistently favored very wealthy applicants in order to minimize financial risk and maximize the colony’s success. However, Meeker evidently tempered his need for capital with a suspicion of the wealthiest applicants – understandable, for a communalist working for a utopian socialist-leaning newspaper. J. Max Clark also provides some possible insight into the personal nature of these selections, with his analysis of Meeker’s financial status in 1869, when Meeker was at the height of his journalistic success and fame:

Mr. Meeker had from years of patient toil in his profession saved, as near as I have been able to ascertain, about \$15,000... His means were very soon swallowed in the inevitable expenses incidental to moving and settling in a new

country and establishing the Greeley *Tribune*, which for several years after did not pay expenses.⁸⁸

Of the eight applicants with means greater than or equal to his own holdings of \$15,000, he accepted none, potentially wary of any one colonist using large means to assert undue influence over his project, especially men like Thomas H. White (\$25,000), H.P. Harp (\$28,000), and Arthur Murphy (\$30,000). Wealthiest successful colonist M. Wiley ironically, unwittingly voices this tension when he laments that “My means are Small \$13000” – almost as much as Meeker commanded at the absolute zenith of his personal wealth.⁸⁹

Occupation

The other major factor in Meeker’s selection equation was occupation, the only other piece of information “The Call” explicitly required applicants to report. Although at its heart the Union Colony was an agrarian utopia, Meeker considered dozens of other specialties important for the taming and refining of the West via communitarian settlement: “Whatever professions and occupations enter into the formation of an intelligent, educated, and thrifty community should be embraced by this colony.” In fact, “The Call” elucidated what kind of labor Meeker expected the colony to require immediately: “Farmers will be needed, nurserymen, florists, and almost all kinds of mechanics, as well as capitalists to use the coal and water-power in running machinery... The first settlers must of course be pioneers; for houses, mills, and mechanic shops are to be built.” Carpenters and joiners would have been disproportionately busy in the colony’s

⁸⁸ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 125.

⁸⁹ M. Wiley to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

early days, and would have required an architect to direct their efforts. Right away, a surveyor or two needed to mark out plots, streets, and parks, with everyone pitching in to plant trees and dig irrigation ditches as directed by the surveyor. While the colony's needs shifted over time, concerns like cooking, laundry, cleaning, child care, and the maintenance of households required constant labor from colonists' wives from day one. Obsessed with carrying "refined society" to the West, Meeker hoped within the first six months of colonization to open a church, library, school, and town hall, and he himself undertook immediately to establish a newspaper under his own supervision – the still-extant *Greeley Tribune*, named in honor of his beloved *New York Tribune* which made the Union Colony possible. He faced the daunting task of balancing the heavily front-loaded requirements of surveying land, digging ditches, and building houses with the continued economic success of individual colonists and the colony as a whole once most colonists owned a delineated plot of land, an irrigated field, and a finished home.

Meeker thus sought a careful distribution of colonist occupations. This concern for strategically-distributed labor again harkened back to his Fourierist roots; Associationists divided phalanxes into labor, capital, and talent, and then split profits according to the perceived usefulness of each group. Although the Union Colony eschewed this system of structured profit-sharing, Meeker rightly calculated that the colony could only support a few physicians, blacksmiths, and grocers, while mechanics and especially carpenters and farmers could excel in larger numbers. "The Call" recognized the importance of collective labor, one utopian ideal Meeker did strictly adhere to: "In planting, in fruit-growing, and improving homes generally, the skill and experience of a few will be common to all."

Willing to thus labor for the common good, thousands of people offered their time and talent to the project. Of the 307 out of 324 surviving letters which list the writer's occupation,

125 – or 41% – described farming as the primary occupation, with an additional 68 different writers – or 22% – providing farming as a secondary occupation – for a staggering 193 total applicants involved in farming – a 63% majority. Add to this two professional nurserymen, as well as countless sons, neighbors, and in-laws the letter writers hoped to bring along, and the data truly testifies to an agrarian-dominated effort of westward expansion.

The majority of successful colonists were also farmers. Of the fifty-four successful applicants who listed their occupation, twenty-four were primarily farmers – or 44%. The next closest figure is a meager four carpenters – just over 7%. The following table lists the occupations of successful colonists:

Occupation	Number of Colonists
Farmer	24
Physician	5
Carpenter	4
Teacher	3
Book-Keeper	2
Machinist	2
Blacksmith	1
Cabinet maker	1
Cashier	1
Clerk	1
Cotton mill foreman	1
Gunmaker	1
Iron worker	1
Mechanic	1
Merchant	1
Mill engineer	1
Newspaper editor	1
Principal	1
Shoemaker	1
Wood-worker	1
Unknown	1

Table 1: Occupations of 55 successful colonists.

Overall, though difficult to quantify since dozens of different occupations fall under the umbrella of “tradesman,” this category was without a doubt the next largest among applicants after farming. Carpenters, mechanics, machinists, blacksmiths, masons, millwrights, shoemakers, engineers, wagon makers, painters, harness makers, iron workers, and gun makers applied with working- and middle-class means. A few physicians, teachers, merchants, grocers, and book-keepers rounded out the applications.

Health

The Trumbull Phalanx failure was the specter which haunted Meeker's calculations for all his communitarian colonization efforts, from his Trumbull-related concern for selecting an occupationally diverse cross-section of hard workers to his preoccupation with finding healthy applicants. His conflicted feelings on sickness surfaced in his ambivalence regarding the health of potential applicants. Though he advertised Colorado's healthful climate in "The Call," his memories of the ague-inducing climate in which the Trumbull Phalanx was situated prevented him from extending amnesty to sick applicants. He ultimately reneged on his 4 December promotions, meant apparently to entice only the already-healthy: "It is a decidedly healthful region; the air is remarkable [sic] pure. Summer is pleasant, the Winter is mild, with little snow, and agues are unknown." Most egregious of all, he acknowledged the benefits of Colorado for consumptives – of whom his son was one – though he ultimately rejected every applicant who referenced tuberculosis: "Already, consumptives are going thither for their health." Of the five colonists who disclosed a TB-related health concern, he selected none, even those who only divulged a predisposition for the disease through extended family. In fact, Meeker also denied the other eight applicants who named any specific ailment – from "Colds and Catarrh" to "Fever and Ague."⁹⁰ Though unaware of germ theory, Meeker discriminated against unhealthy applicants – somewhat hypocritically, since each and every member of the Meeker family struggled with health issues throughout their lives. While oldest son Ralph could complain mostly just of baldness, oldest daughter Rozene fell into a well at age five while her father was supposed to be watching her; she nearly died and was never the same mentally or physically.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Eugene Eaton to Nathan Meeker, December 1869.

Thomas H. White to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

⁹¹ Sprague, *Massacre*, 47-48, 58.

Youngest daughter Josephine fell off a horse and went into a coma when she was eighteen.⁹² In later years, Mary died giving birth to a child young, and Arvilla died of “senility” after years spent agonizing over her family’s tragedy.⁹³ In spite of all this, Meeker maintained an ambivalent attitude toward sickness. Unable to shake the memory of the Trumbull Phalanx’s failure, Meeker eschewed the establishment of Greeley as a restorative refuge, preferring instead applicants he knew could labor effectively to establish and improve the colony.

Ironically, future colonist J. Max Clark, who eventually became one of Meeker’s best friends, cited tuberculosis as one of his main reasons for immigrating first to east Tennessee and then to Colorado: “For one inducement to go there, however, I remember that a number of my relatives having died with consumption up in the rigorous climate of Wisconsin, where I was born, I had thought to find a warmer climate.”⁹⁴ Even more ironically, of all the unhealthy prospective colonists, none struggled so gravely as Meeker’s son George, who had the dubious distinction of being the first colonist to die on-site when he succumbed to tuberculosis-related pneumonia on 26 April 1870; tragically, he died alone, as his father had already headed east to move the family from New York.⁹⁵ Boyd explicitly links George’s health to the Trumbull Phalanx, paraphrasing an article Meeker read at the Greeley Lyceum in the colony’s early days:

Mr. Meeker gave an account of the workings of this Phalanx and the causes which led, in some three years to its dissolution. The reasons were first, ague. His second born child George, commenced shaking when it was a day old, and had it steadily for three years. He grew up weakly, took pneumonia and finally consumption of which he died in Evans a few days after the location for Union Colony was made at what is now Greeley.⁹⁶

⁹² Sprague, *Massacre*, 48.

⁹³ Sprague, *Massacre*, 319.

⁹⁴ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 9.

⁹⁵ Boyd, *History*, 14.

⁹⁶ Boyd, *History*, 14.

George, born in the ague-inducing climate of the Trumbull Phalanx in August of 1847 on the eve of its dissolution, tragically fulfilled his mother's prophesy of the peril of relocation, dying before she had even arrived in Colorado to say goodbye.⁹⁷ According to Sprague, Arvilla never let Meeker forget this apparent failure to safeguard their son: "Now and again she hinted that poor son George might have lived longer if his father had spent more time at Trumbull Phalanx trying to cure George's ague and less time trying to make an American success of Fourier socialism."⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sprague, *Massacre*, 8.

⁹⁸ Sprague, *Massacre*, 47.

Chapter 5: Who They Were

Meeker favored healthy, American-born, middle-class farmers and tradesmen, who obliged by applying in droves. But Meeker's calculations reduced the applicants to mere puzzle pieces for him to pick up or discard – an unfair and incomplete way to tell the story of individuals who survived the passage of time against all odds in the form of 324 earnest application letters. The vast majority of letters revealed much more about who their authors were than the reductionist “Call” required of them. An analysis of this wealth of information follows.

Age

The data reveals a pool of applicants largely in their mid-twenties to mid-forties, with the greatest number of applicants in the 25-29 range. The same trend held for successful colonists, the greatest number of whom was also aged 25-29. The mean age of successful colonists was 35.6 years – slightly older than the applicant pool as a whole, with a mean of 34.7 years. The median age was 34 in both cases.

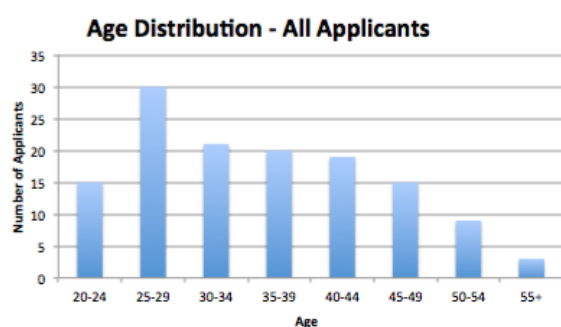


Figure 5: Distribution of 137 applicants who provided age data.

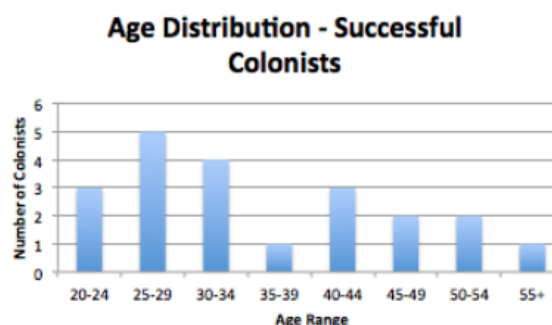


Figure 6: Distribution of 21 successful colonists who provided age data.

The oldest applicant was fifty-eight – and he was also successful as a colonist. The youngest applicant was twenty and the youngest successful colonists were twenty-one. The data, in conversation with the familial data below, testifies to two distinct types of applicants – young,

single or newlywed men in their mid- to late-twenties hoping to make a start as independent farmers and tradesmen, and married fathers in their mid-thirties to mid-forties hoping to provide more comfortably for their relatively young families.

Marriage and Family

Most letter writers were married. In all, 209 applicants provided marital data, of whom 174 – an overwhelming 83% majority – were married. A similarly decisive 90% majority of successful colonists were married.

Marital Status - All Applicants

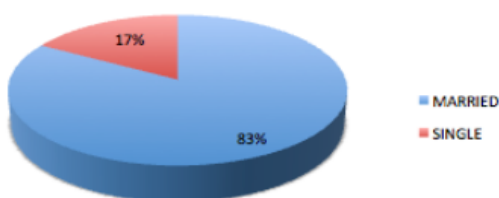


Figure 7: Marital status for the 209 applicants who provided marital data.

Marital Status - Successful Colonists

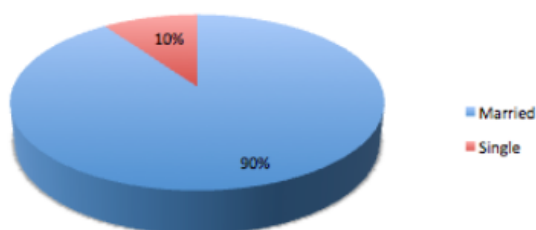


Figure 8: Marital status for the 41 successful colonists who provided marital data.

A majority of those married applicants also had children – 76% had one or more. The largest two families who applied had eight children each. An even greater proportion of successful colonists had children – 80%. Applicants and successful colonists were more likely to have small families; 47% of applicants and 51% of successful colonists had one, two, or three children.

Number of Children - All Applicants

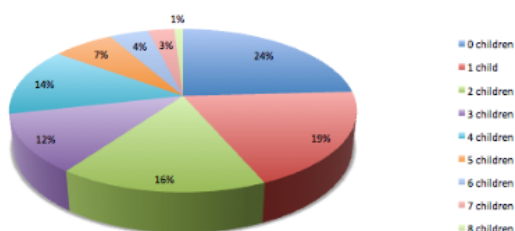


Figure 9: Family sizes of 207 applicants who provided family data.

Number of Children - Successful Colonists

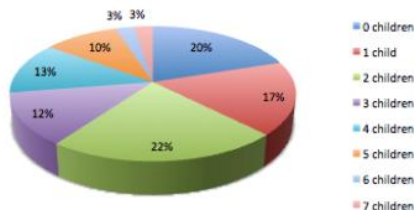


Figure 10: Family sizes of 40 successful colonists who provided family data.

Region

The greatest divergence between applicant trends and successful colonist trends is state of residence. A disproportionately large number of successful colonists were from New York, even as compared to the whole applicant pool, where New York held a decisive majority anyway, with nearly 26% of all applications from New York residents.

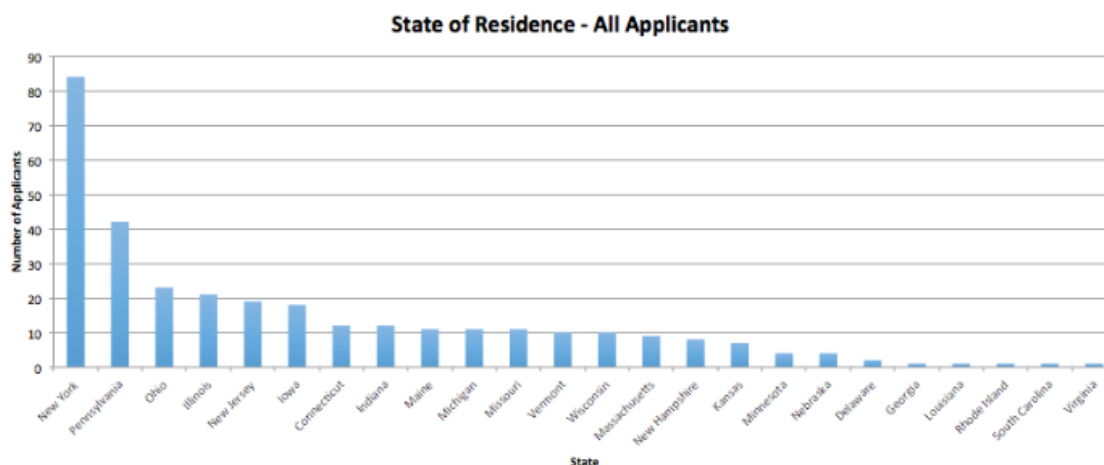


Figure 11: Residence of 323 applicants who provided city, state information.

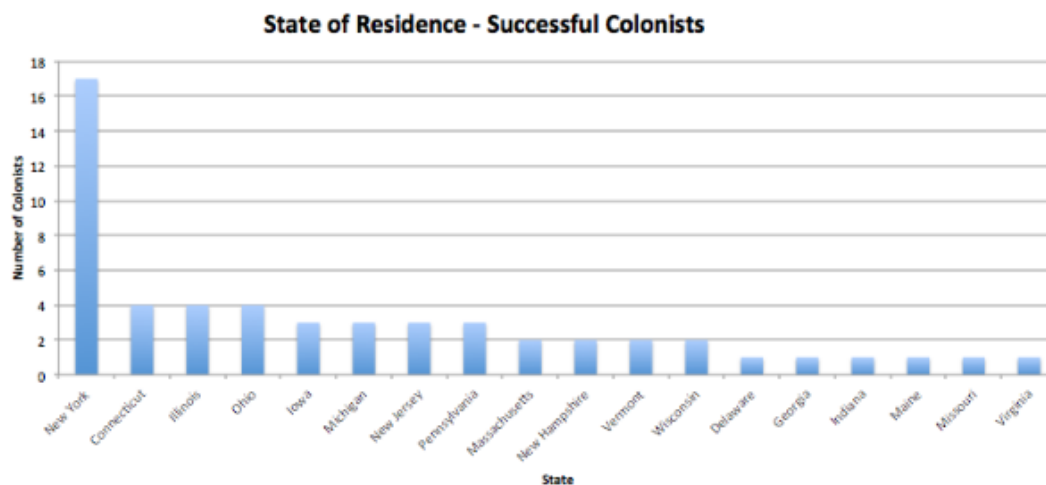


Figure 12: Residence of all 55 successful colonists.

Tribune readers from New York skewed the regional data in more ways than one. Not only was New York the concentrated center of *Tribune* readership, as well as the site of the most

utopian activity, as discussed above, it was also Meeker's headquarters. He called a membership meeting for 23 December 1869 in New York, inviting prospective colonists to attend, vote on colony leadership, and pay their \$155 membership fee. Living locally, New York applicants were more likely to attend and thus more likely to have been successful colonists, as Meeker extended informal acceptances to meeting attendees when they paid up.

Religion

As perhaps befitted the communitarian experiment of a man who flirted with agnosticism, eschewed organized religion, and settled for a vague social commitment to Christian morality, Meeker's Union Colony drew from an applicant pool apparently only mildly enthusiastic about religion. A few very devout applicants, including one self-described ultra-pious Methodist deacon, slipped in, but the vast majority merely said nothing on the subject, apparently content that they met the requirement of "moral and religious sentiments" without discussing the subject further. This likely suited Meeker fine, as he himself felt it relevant only so long as people tended to believe in something for the socializing and moralizing benefits of church membership and religious fellowship.

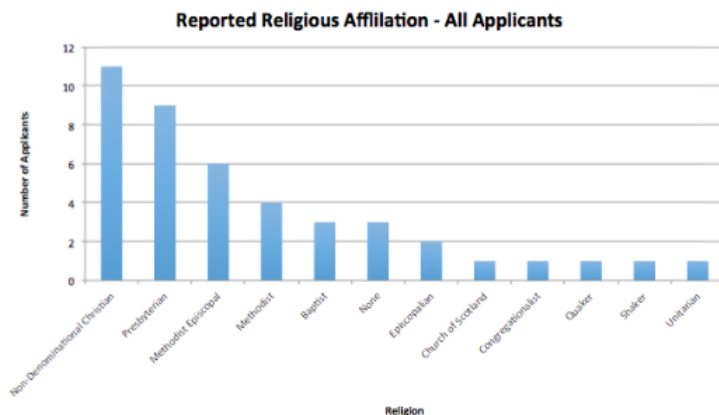


Figure 13: Religious affiliations of 43 applicants who provided data.

The data testifies to tepid religiosity, with only forty-three applicants reporting their religious affiliation – about 13%. In fact, the most enthusiastic discussion of the subject came from that same Methodist deacon, who voiced the ugly but prevalent opinion of the era: “One request further no Roman Catholics sure to be tolerated.”⁹⁹ Judging by the complete dearth of Catholic applicants in this collection, Deacon Dayton may have gotten his wish.

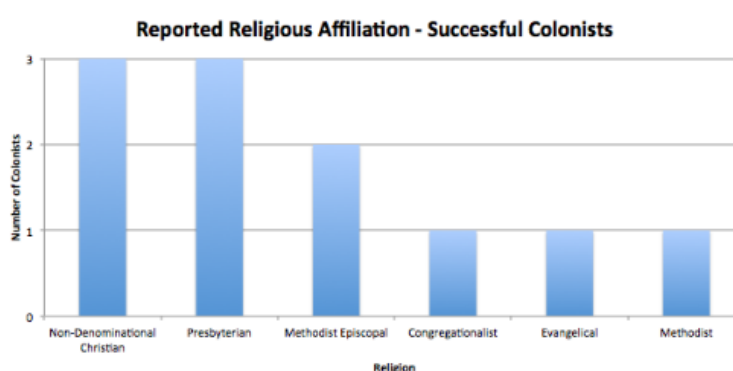


Figure 14: Religious affiliations of 11 successful colonists who provided data.

On the other hand, in spite of Meeker’s personal ambivalence regarding religion, the admittedly limited information on the beliefs of successful colonists seems utterly incompatible with the knowledge that Greeley’s motto at one point was “City of Churches.” Even though Meeker’s community was not explicitly religious, “The Call” had mentioned that “moral and religious sentiments should prevail.” In this unique case, the data seems irreconcilable with the reality of what happened upon the colony’s settlement. This suggests that colonists were much more religious than their applications stated, or perhaps they turned to worship for comfort and

⁹⁹ William Dayton to Nathan Meeker, 16 December 1869.

fellowship when faced with the challenging new realities of living hundreds or thousands of miles from home and dozens of miles from “civilization.”

Politics

These applicants would make great dinner party guests – they avoid discussing religion and politics. With only nine explicit mentions of political affiliation – all Republican – it is difficult with so few responses to even gesture towards a trend in the collection. However, the fact that so many subscribed to the *New York Tribune* implies that quite a few were likely Republicans, as the *Tribune* was one of the first influential publications to explicitly promote the Republican Party, under the direction of Horace Greeley, who was a vehement early Republican during the time these men were subscribers. James Ford Rhodes famously quipped that, “If you want to penetrate into the thoughts, feelings, and ground of decision of the 1,866,000 men who voted for Lincoln in 1860, you should study with care the New York weekly *Tribune*.”¹⁰⁰ He almost certainly referenced some of these applicants in that statistic.

Greeley’s nominal Republican political affiliation hung on through many ideological shifts in the party, although today’s GOP would be ideologically unrecognizable to Republicans in 1870. At the same time, the Union Colony’s social conservatism also stuck, though it evolved separately from, albeit in conversation with, the town’s political culture. Thus, modern Greeley traces down different historic avenues its social conservatism and Republicanism – which are paradoxically now synonymous, despite their divergent paths from 1870 to 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune*, 2.

Civil War Involvement

Only thirty applicants – about 9% – cited Civil War service, all for the Union army. One man mentioned his eldest son's death in combat, and two mentioned being wounded in combat. In fact, the letters actually shed more light on carpetbagging, as discussed later, than they do on the conflict itself. Two of the most prominent Greeley citizens whose letters appear here – R.A. Cameron and David Boyd – served as a general and a captain, respectively, in the Union Army.

Notable Applicants

General R.A. Cameron's articulate and self-assured letter predicted his leadership role in the Union Colony, as he informed Meeker, "I would add that, having traveled much in the West & South, I would like, if desired on your part, to be one of the party or Committee of location."¹⁰¹ This deft combination of assertiveness and deference no doubt intrigued Meeker, who sought executive control of the Union Colony but also recognized the importance of finding intelligent and knowledgeable lieutenants. Cameron did indeed join the locating committee, and, at the gathering of prospective colonists at New York's Cooper Institute on 23 December, applicants elected Cameron colony vice president to Meeker's president and Greeley's treasurer.¹⁰²

In spite of their eventual friction, as their ideas on the management of the colony began to diverge after a few years, it is easy to identify what Meeker saw in Cameron from this initial correspondence. He billed himself as an "old pioneer," who cut his teeth farming in northwestern Indiana from the age of fourteen: "I saw the Country grow from a Wilderness to Civilization and

¹⁰¹ R.A. Cameron to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

¹⁰² Boyd, *History*, 37-38.

wealth.” From there, he obtained a degree in medicine, owned and edited a small newspaper, and was elected as a Republican to the Indiana state legislature, where he served for one year before volunteering for the Union Army. Cameron rose up through the ranks quickly, improving on his initial commission as a captain in 1861 to become a major general by 1865. For character references, he named former governor and current U.S. senator Oliver Morton of Indiana and sitting Vice President Schuyler Colfax – “who are personal friends.”¹⁰³ Despite the dubiousness of such an endorsement in light of the *Crédit Mobilier* scandal a few years later, such a name-drop no doubt resonated with Meeker. Most impressively, Cameron was only forty-one at the time.

This sterling résumé, in addition to Cameron’s \$2,500 plus “library and medical instruments,” easily set Cameron apart from the J. Bowers (age twenty-two, no trade – sounds familiar!) and the Walter S. Brags (Maine farmer, consumptive) – stereotypes Meeker feared from his time in the Trumbull Phalanx. Cameron even flattered Meeker a little, opening his letter with a compliment: “I have followed you through the South and West with great interest. I like your plan of a Colony and trust your Selection is a good one.”¹⁰⁴

David Boyd’s letter similarly revealed exceptional rhetorical skill as well as a diverse résumé. Like Cameron, Boyd served as a captain in the Union Army. He even opened his letter with similar praise for Meeker: “Having read your communications in the *Weekly Tribune* in reference to founding a Colony in the Territory of Colorado, and having also read your letters from both the South and West, I deem your Selection of a home for such a Colony to be based

¹⁰³ Cameron to Meeker, 11 December 1869.

¹⁰⁴ R.A. Cameron to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

upon a broad and judicious observation.”¹⁰⁵ However, his journey to the Union Colony started much farther east than Cameron’s – in Ulster, Ireland, instead of Long Island, New York. Boyd described his emigration to the U.S. at age eighteen, his experience farming in the Midwest, and his graduation from the University of Michigan. He enlisted as a private in the Eighteenth Michigan Volunteer Infantry, and similarly rose through the ranks, ending his four-year service as Captain of Company A of the 40th U.S. Colored Infantry on 25 April 1866.¹⁰⁶ He met his wife during this time, while he was stationed in Stevenson, Alabama, where she “was teaching colored children.”¹⁰⁷ Boyd’s property, worth \$4,500, placed him in a wealthier tier of applicants, and he was thus welcomed into the colony – a wise decision by Meeker, who unwittingly recruited the town’s first and most influential historian when he approved Boyd’s application.

¹⁰⁵ David Boyd to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹⁰⁶ Boyd to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹⁰⁷ Boyd to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

Chapter 6: Who They Were Not

Only by squinting can a semblance of diversity be identified in these letters written mostly by white, middle-class Northern and Midwestern farmers and tradesmen. Unfortunately, issues of gender and race appear only indirectly and infrequently in the collection – much to Meeker’s satisfaction, no doubt, as he sought a homogenous group of colonists. However, the dearth of material on these subjects in itself provides insight into the culture of mid-nineteenth-century, Manifest Destiny-inflected westward expansionism, a male-driven socio-political concept which glorified rhetorically the masculine conquest by virile white Americans over nature as well as supposedly weaker, feminized Native Americans.

Disability

Other than the two crippled Union Army veterans, referenced above, the only applicant with a permanent disability – as opposed to a health concern, as discussed in a previous section – was deaf newspaper printer Henry M. Lane. His letter revealed similar “climatology”-based sentiments about the health benefits of relocation, and he also had experience in other colonies. He promised to attend the 23 December meeting with his wife “to supply my want of ears.”¹⁰⁸ Meeker acknowledged Lane’s disability in his endorsement: “2000 Deaf.”¹⁰⁹ Lane was ultimately unsuccessful as a Union Colonist, but is discussed further in later sections, as he commented eloquently in his letter on the reasons for participating in westward expansion.

¹⁰⁸ Henry M. Lane to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹⁰⁹ Lane to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

Gender: “A divided opinion in the family”

Women exercised limited but poignant agency in and mostly in-between the lines of these male-driven letters. New York gun-maker Arthur Taylor’s wife, for example, laid down the law concerning what type of society she could endure on the frontier: “I could not get my wife to go unless the society would be such as you speak of, Temperate & Progressive.”¹¹⁰ Connecticut dentist A.N. Hart revealed candidly to Meeker that his wife dismissed the idea of their relocation in no uncertain terms, despite Meeker’s bland endorsement: “\$3,000 Dentist Wife uncertain.”¹¹¹ According to Hart, “I might as well stop since commencing this letter I have been to supper & my wife on finding that I was writing says I might as well stop where I am. It looks a great way to her But [sic] when we are better informed perhaps she will change her mind.” The Harts, including their six-month-old son, proved unsuccessful applicants. Perhaps Mrs. Hart succeeded at pulling off a coup Arvilla Meeker never could, preventing her husband from dragging the young family halfway across the country.

Original colonist J. Max Clark recounted a similarly “divided opinion in the family” in *Colonial Days*.¹¹² Unfortunately, his application letter did not survive – likely because he only stumbled upon Meeker’s proposal in the spring of 1870, right before the accepted colonists started for Colorado, while all but four of the 324 surviving letters date to December of 1869. He later recounted his dramatic reaction to first reading about the Union Colony in the *Tribune*, overcome with excitement at the prospect of leaving his much-despised adopted East Tennessee home: “I arose from my chair with a sudden jump and surprised my wife nearly out of her wits

¹¹⁰ Arthur Taylor to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

¹¹¹ A.N. Hart to Nathan Meeker, 7 December 1869.

¹¹² Clark, *Colonial Days*, 14.

with the emphatic declaration that I had ‘struck it.’”¹¹³ Clark then provided this sexist interpretation of his wife’s reaction:

She wished to know if I had gone crazy; and when I proceeded to read her the proposition, pronounced it perfectly wild and visionary. Women are constitutionally opposed to change, and especially the change involved in moving from one place of residence to another... She now bitterly opposed the contemplated move to Colorado. However, having once made up my mind as to what I conceived to be best for both of us, I was not deterred by so small a matter as a divided opinion in the family.¹¹⁴

No wonder Clark and Meeker – “with whom I was from the first on unusual terms of intimacy, if, as a matter of fact, anyone can be said to have ever been intimate with him,” wrote Clark – bonded so well; they treated their wives’ convictions with similar dismissive condescension.¹¹⁵ Clark provides insight into the type of conversation which no doubt occurred across the North and Midwest in December of 1869, as husbands elected for Colorado and wives picked up the pieces of what such a unilateral decision might mean for their families and for their futures. The letters unfortunately indicate the existence of more Mrs. Clark types than Mrs. Hart types, as husbands applied either without the knowledge or without the approval of their wives.

However, not every letter hinted at marital discord; a few conjured optimistic portraits of marital partnerships. Henry Thompson’s letter revealed he and his wife’s harmonious ideological expectations of a future colony: “We both desire to settle in a community to some extent refined and cultivated.”¹¹⁶ Maine farmer Walter S. Brag lauded his “capable” and game wife as a

¹¹³ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 13.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 13-14.

¹¹⁵ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 129.

¹¹⁶ Henry Thompson to Nathan Meeker, 16 December 1869.

potential asset to the colony as a tailor, teacher, and musician.¹¹⁷ Farmer and chair-maker Artemus Briggs also credited his wife with an excellent education and teaching experience, sentiments which machinist Levi W. Fifield echoed almost exactly: “My wife is a very capable woman and has been a teacher before and since marriage.”¹¹⁸ Henry Lane wrote, “And should I be able to persuade my wife to join me, she would have as much mone [sic]” – indicating separate finances of \$2,000 each.¹¹⁹ Wesley Williams described his marriage’s “excellent foundation” of shared “scholarship” and “good common sense – the main thing, after all, in a man or woman!”¹²⁰ Sadly, the Williams family stayed in Ohio, despite the eloquence of Wesley’s self-described “prolix” letter, which fellow Ohioan Meeker found “Interesting” – a shame, for Wesley’s evolved attitude on marriage might have rubbed off on Meeker, who was a loving tyrant of a husband.

Gender: “Poor chance”

The sole surviving letter from a female applicant was written by thirty-year-old Mrs. Ellen P. McKean, the widowed single mother of one young son from Pennsylvania. Like most other correspondents, Mrs. McKean opened her letter with numerous questions about the where and when of Meeker’s proposed project. Her final question set her apart, however: “Seventh can single women join the colony, and what probability would there be of such getting employment?”¹²¹ Though Meeker apparently never responded to Mrs. McKean, his endorsement on her envelope answered this question unequivocally: “\$300 widow Poor chance.” Despite the

¹¹⁷ Brag to Meeker, 31 December 1869.

¹¹⁸ Artemus Briggs to Nathan Meeker, 28 December 1869.
Fifield to Meeker, 11 December 1869.

¹¹⁹ Lane to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹²⁰ Wesley Williams to Nathan Meeker, 14 December 1869.

¹²¹ Ellen P. McKean to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

eloquence and matter-of-fact tone of the letter – rhetorical strategies which Meeker favored elsewhere, based on his written reactions to letters of similar length, content, and tone – Meeker obviously disregarded Mrs. McKean as a potential liability to his colony, as McKean and her young son offered little labor capital.

This letter, when juxtaposed with other evidence of Meeker's disparaging attitude towards women, testifies to the sexism Meeker displayed in his personal life and in his efforts at Greeley. As previously discussed, Meeker considered his wife's desires secondary to his own, happy to uproot the family as it served him, regardless of Arvilla's misgivings. Though Meeker's personal writings testify to an ardent love for her, he did not respect her as an equal partner in the household. According to Dolores Hayden, Meeker felt all households should function in such a way. Hayden describes the Union Colony as the exception to the rule that communes in the second half of the nineteenth century tended to elevate the status of women in society, as the Union Colony's preoccupation with the single-family home meant women had to stay home to run the household singularly instead of collectively. Meeker spoke of more active economic roles for women, but when faced with the implementation of this policy, he demurred, favoring instead the confinement of women to domestic spaces, where they could "make their dress neat and their home elegant."¹²² But the worst rhetorical expression of this belief came in Meeker's private correspondence, when he advised, "A woman is weak unless she can have a comfortable house; and a man is not only weak but untidy unless he has a housekeeper."¹²³

¹²² Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 274.

¹²³ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 274.

African-Americans

Unfortunately but not unexpectedly, these letters almost entirely obscure the existence of African-Americans in Reconstruction-era society. Among the 324 white, European-descended correspondents, only two even mention black Americans, and only tangentially as related to their own résumés. Writing from Orange, Virginia, John N. Pratt of Massachusetts related his experience teaching “colored children” at “a colored school” there run by the “New England Branch Freeman’s Union Commission,” believing he, as an educator, would thus “fill a use full [sic] niche in this colonial temple.”¹²⁴ David Boyd’s wife also taught black children in the South, where they met while Boyd was serving as a captain in the 40th U.S. Colored Infantry, as previously noted.¹²⁵

The South

The process of creating this Western temperance colony proved even further removed from the broader Reconstruction-era American social climate in that it was created by and for a decidedly Northern demographic. Only four letters were posted from Southern states, including one each from Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia, and South Carolina. However, none of these letters indicated that their authors hailed originally from the South – or even remotely enjoyed their temporary travels there. Two out of these four letters reveal obvious Northern authorship: Pratt, writing from Virginia as a Freedman’s Union employee, and Maine merchant George W. Woodman, writing from South Carolina.¹²⁶ Considering their organizational affiliations (Pratt) and wealth (Woodman – who pledged \$10,000 to the new colony), their motives for moving

¹²⁴ John N. Pratt to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹²⁵ Boyd to Meeker, 21 December 1869.

¹²⁶ Pratt to Meeker, 13 December 1869.

George W. Woodman to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

south perhaps hint at carpetbagging, or at least condescending Northern post-war interventionism, though if these men were in fact sincere promoters of Radical Reconstruction, their forays in the South would then embody more benevolent motives. Newspaper editor Amos S. Collins, writing from Carrollton, Louisiana, also indicated a marked lack of communion with his neighbors, and indeed, a marked sense of Northern alienation, when he exclaimed, “We like this state, except the people!”¹²⁷ Even book-keeper William J. Camp, an eventual Union Colonist, expressed no affinity for his sojourn in Georgia, sending Meeker a telegram at a cost of four dollars to express his regret at being too far south and consequently missing the organizing meeting held in New York on 23 December 1869.¹²⁸

But worse than these displaced Northern malcontents was L.C. Walker, who felt compelled to provide his unprompted, vitriolic testimony on the South; although interested in “the great piedmont of Colorado,” Walker considered it second place to Virginia’s piedmont – the perfect place to settle if not for Virginians:

I think that true Northern men should never submit to them in any shape or form... Although our Northern people (consumptives) go South for their health yet the South & the Southwest is [sic] the most unhealthy sections of country & you were perfectly right in your view about the Black belt being so suitable for the negro [sic] The Southern Cracker, is I think the lowest in the scale of all white people in our country.¹²⁹

This prejudice against Southerners carried over, unfortunately, into J. Max Clark’s testimony as well. Whereas most colonists reached Greeley by train – from the east to Cheyenne and then south on the Denver Pacific to Evans – Clark reached the Union Colony by wagon – in his case,

¹²⁷ Amos S. Collins to Nathan Meeker, 27 December 1869.

¹²⁸ William J. Camp to Nathan Meeker, ticker tape, December 1869.

¹²⁹ L.C. Walker to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

a wagon painted with a uniquely antagonistic farewell to his Tennessee neighbors: “Baker and Clark Late ‘Carpet-Baggers’ – ‘Good-Bye, Sunny Southern Clime.’”¹³⁰

Native Americans

Regarding the White River Massacre which ended Meeker’s life, Boyd commented that “nearly everyone killed was from Greeley.”¹³¹ Those men would have had little to fear from Indian attack had they stayed at home, as no direct and violent confrontations with native peoples appeared in the town’s early history – though many applicants feared as much. In fact, thirty-seven inquired about natives in the region, every one of them in terms of fear and animosity: “How about Indians are they troublesome or much so?”¹³² “Will there not be danger of being troubled with the Indians?”¹³³ “Howabout [sic] the Indians, are they friendly or hostile?”¹³⁴ Noted J.R. Carothers, “Our wives dread the Indians.”¹³⁵ For some, fear incited nasty prejudice: “Would their [sic] be any danger from the Indians, I don’t like very well to expose my wife and children to the scalping knife of the savages.”¹³⁶ New York physician William Mann even resorted to crude colloquialism: “Is it a good country for hair to grow? For my wife fears nothing but Indians.”¹³⁷ Mann’s comment, an ugly manifestation of the prejudice inherent in Manifest Destiny, not only trivialized violence by and against Native Americans, but also projected what one might imagine were his own fears onto a voiceless female for whom he claimed to speak; it was perhaps the most telling expression of the exploitative, machismo dimension of Meeker’s

¹³⁰ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 16.

¹³¹ Boyd, *History*, viii.

¹³² A.B. Crockett to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹³³ William Herell to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹³⁴ William Harding to Nathan Meeker, 16 December 1869.

¹³⁵ J.R. Carothers to Nathan Meeker, 3 January 1870.

¹³⁶ William Eaton to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

¹³⁷ William B. Mann to Nathan Meeker, 8 December 1869.

enterprise in all of the correspondence – and of the anxieties that man prospective colonists felt about Indians.

Though “The Call” expressly avoided any mention of Native Americans, Easterners would have been aware of several highly-publicized incidents in the region in the 1860s which would explain those thirty-seven inquiries. One of the most sensationalized tragedies in the history of territorial Colorado was the murder of the Hungate family on 11 June 1864. “Often given as a cause for the savagery of the massacre on Sand Creek,” the unsolved murders invited speculation – of dubious credibility at best – about an attack by Cheyenne or Arapaho, thus generating fear and anger: “The bodies were exhumed and brought to Denver on June 13, where they were publicly displayed, inciting the citizens and heightening the paranoia about impending Indian attacks.”¹³⁸ Just months later on 29 November, the white, American, government-employed perpetrators of the Sand Creek Massacre murdered many dozens of innocent Native Americans, garnering national acclaim for what was contemporaneously considered a Civil War engagement. Applicants might also have known of more recent regional engagements including the September 1868 Battle of Beecher Island and the July 1869 Battle of Summit Springs.

Those thirty-seven inquisitors, though they comprise only 11% of all applicants, embody the popular fear and anxiety regarding native peoples in this era, although perhaps the silence of the other 89% actually reveals more – that most prospective pioneers apparently never stopped to think about how or why the land they wanted was open and available, they just trusted their government to facilitate their expansionist desires – which it did. Pennsylvania butcher John C. Lloyd mentioned his conviction, for example, that not only should the government provide land

¹³⁸ Jeff Campbell, “Hungate Family Murdered,” news release, June 2, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/sand/learn/news/hungate-family-murdered.htm>.

to pioneers, it should also provide arms to ward off native encroachment on said lands.¹³⁹ In one of the uglier revelations of this collection, these Eastern applicants testified to a combination of disdain and apathy among Reconstruction Americans toward native peoples, a potent blend which informed and was in turn informed by the government's genocidal crusade to steal Western land from its Native American inheritors throughout the nineteenth century.

While this project in some ways celebrates the philosophical and practical achievements of nineteenth-century pioneers, the inescapable truth is that all of its main characters are white men. In the sense that westward expansion afforded middle-class white male Northerners and Midwesterners the privilege of escaping the vicious tangles of urbanization, industrialization, and Reconstruction policy which ensnared immigrants, the poor and working classes, and Southerners white and black, male and female alike, the demographics of this collection appropriately, unfortunately reflect this exclusionary historical trend. From that angle, their flight to the West appears less brave and more opportunistic. In fact, even if they individually never perpetrated crimes of sexism or racism, these white males were the beneficiaries of policies which disenfranchised women and deprived African-Americans, and more damningly, their success depended upon the dispossession and extermination of Native Americans.

¹³⁹ John C. Lloyd to Nathan Meeker, 16 December 1869.

Chapter 7: Why They Went

This collection proves somewhat unique in that it is entirely one-sided. Often in family histories or in archives, only one half of a correspondence survives so that the content of the missing missives can only be guessed at based on their mates. But there is no missing other half of this correspondence to speculate about, as Meeker explicitly informed readers of the *Tribune* that he would not personally respond to inquiries, unless perhaps to communicate an acceptance to a New York resident. In only two cases does the survival of a second letter by the same applicant hint that Meeker responded promptly, meaning that even most successful colonists waited, watched the *Tribune* for updates, and tried to make it to the 23 December meeting in New York, at which Meeker further explained the mission of the colony, and after which committed parties paid a \$155 membership fee and elected a locating committee.

“Tribune disciples”

This then presents a strange challenge to each applicant, to craft a politely self-promotional message loaded with personal information, which would most likely lead to a long wait or a dead-end. And yet a surprising number of correspondents managed to write with a combination of warmth, friendliness, and respect. Some explicitly attributed this cordiality to their familiarity with Meeker’s work; for example, successful colonist T.C. Randolph told Meeker, “We have confidence in you Mr Meeker. This confidence is the result of our long acquaintance with you through the Tribune.”¹⁴⁰ Ohio merchant C.L. Skinner similarly testified that, “I have been a constant reader of the Tribune for over twenty years and if I do not (know

¹⁴⁰ T.C. Randolph to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

you like a book) I do like a newspaper or as well as a person can another by reading of them in a paper.”¹⁴¹ Long Island nurseryman Isaac T. Whitbeck further flattered Meeker that his reputation preceded him:

There may be persons, however, who will venture to embark in your colony, not so readily from their knowledge of that country as from a reliance on your description of the locality, and especially from their perfect confidence in your practical knowledge of agricultural affairs. I am very glad that you have inaugurated [sic] a colonization scheme, for you are just the man to manage such an undertaking to the satisfaction of all interested persons.¹⁴²

At once a testament to Meeker’s talent for journalism, to the intimacy fostered between a good writer and his audience and magnified by sustained readership, and to the influence of newspapers in Reconstruction America, comments like this also testify to the power of the *New York Tribune* in particular over its readers – so much so that a simple article by Nathan Meeker paired with an editorial by Horace Greeley led eventually to the creation of an entire town nearly 2,000 miles from *Tribune* headquarters, yet sponsored by the *Tribune*’s founder, founded by the *Tribune*’s agricultural editor, and populated entirely by *Tribune* subscribers.

Unbelievable as it may sound, J. Max Clark might not have exaggerated too badly when he wrote that, “When Mr. Greeley issued his famous call for the organization of the Colony, it must have been read by at least half a million people.”¹⁴³ According to historian Adam Tuchinsky, “By 1856, nearly 280,000 readers subscribed to one of the daily, weekly, or semiweekly editions of the *Tribune*. Countless more read it, either sharing others’ subscriptions

¹⁴¹ C.L. Skinner to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁴² Isaac Whitbeck to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁴³ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 130.

or reading its articles and opinions after they were reprinted in other newspapers.”¹⁴⁴ As the newspaper with the largest national circulation in Reconstruction America, Greeley’s *Tribune* dominated the political, social, and cultural conceptions of hundreds of thousands of readers, a phenomenon which one contemporary noted when marveling at the *Tribune*’s ability to manipulate public opinion: “The Tribune alone does actually form, direct, and control it.”¹⁴⁵ When James Ford Rhodes described it as a “political bible,” he truly meant that Greeley’s readers looked to his paper for guidance, to find “some meaning in the blooming, buzzing confusion of the world around them.”¹⁴⁶ In fact, Pennsylvania dentist and Union Colony applicant Joseph Hertig confirmed as much in his letter: “I was educated to a belief in the principles of Democracy as expounded by the leaders of the Democratic party, but less than two years reading the Tribune converted me to Republicanism.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, Greeley’s *Tribune* was apparently a social bible as much as it was a political one. Wrote Wisconsin farmer Newton Whitman: “In regard to being a temprate [sic] man I would say that I do not believe that you can find half a dozen men in Wis [sic] who are constant readers of the Tribune but what are temprate [sic] men.”¹⁴⁸

The collection as a whole corroborates this dramatic appraisal of the *Tribune* as the most influential social and political authority in its readers’ lives. Multiple correspondents listed subscriptions of sixteen, eighteen, or twenty years as the most effective measure of the strength of their character and the rightness of their ideas. Admitted New York farmer William Carrey, “I am a Protestant, a republican [sic], a Subscriber to the Tribune” – which he considered the three

¹⁴⁴ Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune*, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune*, 2-3.

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Hertig to Nathan Meeker, 21 December 1869.

¹⁴⁸ Newton Whitman to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

most effective indicators of his integrity.¹⁴⁹ In communicating their approval of Meeker's plan, several writers invoked the power of the *Tribune* to explain their confidence in it. For example, Vermont farmer Eugene E. Eaton opened his letter by informing Meeker, "Having great confidence in the N.Y. Tribune, and taking a great interest in the discussions of the 'American Institute of Farmers' the reports of which have given me your name I am induced to believe that your plan for forming a 'Western Colony' is a good one."¹⁵⁰ Hertig again most effectively summarized the power of the *Tribune* over these applicants when he testified that, "Doubtless nearly or quite all your colonists will be Tribune disciples, and the fact, so far as my knowledge extends, that they are, as a class, upright, thinking, energetic, progressive working men is in my case one of the strongest inducements to join the colony."¹⁵¹

J. Max Clark's memoir further relies on this devout readership of the *Tribune* to explain not only how he came to be aware of Meeker's proposition through its columns but to illustrate his character, as do the above applicants. Clark linked his Republicanism decidedly to his readership of the Tribune: "I was then an ardent Republican and a subscriber, of course, to the New York *Tribune*, just as my father had been."¹⁵² Clark further considered his inherited readership of the *Tribune* his link to polite society during his much-despised sojourn to the immediate post-Civil War South. So devout a subscriber was Clark, in fact, that he considered the dearth of fellow *Tribune* readers in his temporary East Tennessee home so egregious that he commented on it alongside his complaints that his neighbors told him they "would fill" a "Carpet-bagger" like himself "so full of bullet holes" that his "hide" wouldn't "hold 'shucks.'"¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ William Carrey to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

¹⁵⁰ Eugene E. Eaton to Nathan Meeker, December 1869.

¹⁵¹ Joseph S. Hertig to Nathan Meeker, 21 December 1869.

¹⁵² Clark, *Colonial Days*, 10.

¹⁵³ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 15.

He lamented that, “There were two other subscribers for that paper in that country – ‘Bloody Fentress’ county it was called – and one of these was a gentleman from a foreign country at that.”¹⁵⁴ Clark’s only other fellow subscriber incited his deep curiosity:

I often thought that I would sometime make a special trip over there in order to make his acquaintance and ascertain just what sort of a crank Southerner he must be, who, being born and raised in that illiterate country, could still take kindly to the old New York *Tribune* of that day and generation.¹⁵⁵

Here Clark highlighted not only the decidedly Northern character and ideology of the *Tribune*, he also offered another reason for the absence of Southern interest in the colony: the *Tribune* was evidently not for Southerners, and they were assuredly not for it.

Westward Expansion

Perhaps the richest contribution of these recovered documents to the broader study of early Colorado history as well as nineteenth-century westward expansion, however, is their disclosure on an individual scale of the explicit reasons why middle-class white Northern and Midwestern farmers and tradesmen moved west in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Though unique for their interest in Nathan Meeker’s communal labor and temperance colony, these letter writers in many ways can actually claim to represent the broader demographic of conventional pioneers. The majority of correspondents informed Meeker in their opening lines that they had already planned to head west, but awaited an opportunity for safe travel in a group, or a more favorable real estate market for their current property, or an indication of a particularly fertile region of the West. In many cases, Meeker’s proposition aligned with their timeline and

¹⁵⁴ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 11.

their geographic preferences more than their social and political ideologies, though most also endorsed Meeker's social conservatism, and understood the expectation of communal effort.

Dozens of similar sentiments opened these letters: "I have always had a strong desire to go West."¹⁵⁶ "I have been thinking for some months past of selling out and starting for Colorado or Kansas."¹⁵⁷ "I have a passion of the west & have hd [sic] for some time."¹⁵⁸ Some even took time to wax poetic about their long-standing disposition to the untamed West: "The idea of getting into that clear and bracing air and enjoying health and happiness among those everlasting hills, has for some time possessed my soul."¹⁵⁹ "[I] desire to locate toward the set of Sun."¹⁶⁰ Like so many millions of their nineteenth-century contemporaries, they heard the call of Manifest Destiny, luring them across endless miles of prairie grass. This inducement, combined with their thirst for adventure and their building frustrations with Eastern overcrowding and political strife, conjured dreams of acres of fertile soil awaiting the intrepid ministrations of some semi-competent farmer to set it into fantastic fecundity. The West represented for them, as for millions of others, a source of unrestrained possibility, and echoes of Frederick Jackson Turner's democracy-producing frontier appear in these letters. Most applicants felt as New Hampshire farmer Moses Little did when he said, "I have the western fever quite serious."¹⁶¹

Several applicants disclosed a related urge for independence, one of the great historic motivators for young, single men in particular to strike out on their own on the frontier, seeking economic independence, and hopefully economic prosperity. Twenty-five-year-old farmer John S. Camp, for example, was ready to finally leave the family farm: "Have always lived on a large

¹⁵⁶ Thomas H. White to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Randall to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

¹⁵⁸ Samuel Mennen to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

¹⁵⁹ William W. McGregor to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁶⁰ C.M. Clark to Nathan Meeker, 21 December 1869.

¹⁶¹ Moses K. Little to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

farm of my Father's, have taken the lead for some time, but wish to branch out for myself.”¹⁶²

A.V. Dickinson reported similar growing pains in the family business: “I am now dependent on my relations for the position I hold (salesman) but I would rather paddle my own canoe.”¹⁶³

This canoe metaphor appeared again in the manifesto of an Iowa farmer:

The preamble to the American declaration of independence [sic] is my creed, political and theological[,] and expect to paddle my own canoe whether cooperation with others or not. That is I intend to be of as much advantage to others as I desire from them.¹⁶⁴

This ambivalence regarding cooperation no doubt caused consternation for communitarian Meeker, but similar sentiments appeared elsewhere in the correspondence, highlighting the tension between the collective good and personal profit which these independent farmers, tradesmen, and small business owners no doubt contemplated extensively before deciding whether or not to apply to an enterprise founded on communal labor. Some found the practice distasteful yet decided to apply anyway. Illinois farmer Valentine Roof embodied this suspicion of communal labor better than anyone else. Referencing the plans for a communal laundry and bakery in “The Call,” he wrote, “Don't care about getting my clothes mixed with everybody's [sic] in a laundry as I have caught graybacks that way in the army and as for baking, my wife can do that tolerably well herself.”¹⁶⁵ He then doubled down on both his ambivalence about the project and his disaffecting attitude, declaring, “I might join your colony provided our leder [sic] don't run the first bear he sees.” Roof then concluded his rant with one more demand: “Please don't show this to anybody or they will larf [sic] at me.” Indeed.

¹⁶² John S. Camp to Nathan Meeker, 21 December 1869.

¹⁶³ A.V. Dickinson to Nathan Meeker, 8 December 1869.

¹⁶⁴ Cromwell Wilson to Nathan Meeker, 22 December 1869.

¹⁶⁵ Valentine Roof to Nathan Meeker, 22 December 1869.

Polite farmer T. Henry Tibbles, on the other hand, heartily agreed with Meeker's communitarian-inflected rhetoric in "The Call," one of a minority of applicants who seem to have fully grasped the scope of Meeker's proposal: "This enterprise of cooperation with an individual interest in personal property and land seems so proper and reasonable that I am greatly impressed with the idea."¹⁶⁶ A. Holmes similarly appreciated Meeker's commitment to private property over communal living: "I understand that this is not on the community system, but that each on [sic] controll[s] [sic] his own property."¹⁶⁷ Long Island nurseryman Isaac Whitbeck also endorsed the project, summarizing effectively the cooperative atmosphere Meeker hoped to achieve:

I think your suggestions relative to organizing and establishing a colony are most excellent. And I would be happy to know that cooperation in the affairs of such a colony should be adopted to the most economical and beneficial extent possible; and that the social, intellectual, and religious welfare [sic] of the colony be secured and promoted by systematic arrangements which I think would be readily adopted by all.¹⁶⁸

Whitbeck's especially insightful understanding of Meeker's brand of cooperative social practices affirms that at least some applicants were able to read between the lines of Meeker's propaganda in "The Call" to recognize his ideological bent. Moses Kingsley similarly approved of Meeker's plan because he saw that "the enterprise shall be devoted to the general good, instead of the large fish answering the smaller."¹⁶⁹ Mechanic T.H. Holcomb recycled this marine rhetoric when he complimented Meeker that he "don't [sic] propose to let the big fish devour the smaller ones."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ T. Henry Tibbles to Nathan Meeker, 24 December 1869.

¹⁶⁷ A. Holmes to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁶⁸ Isaac T. Whitbeck to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁶⁹ Moses Kingsley to Nathan Meeker, 10 December 1869.

¹⁷⁰ T.H. Holcomb to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1865.

Many more understood the shared benefits of Meeker's plan, if not the ideology behind it. George F. Conner played into Meeker's marketing strategy in "The Call," which guaranteed a school, church, and town hall within months, parroting Meeker's rhetoric back to him verbatim: "By the mode of settling proposed we would have the benefit of schools and good society which would be the great inducement of joining such an organization."¹⁷¹ Conner unwittingly proved Meeker's advertisement journalism a success by employing all the buzzwords of the original as though the rhetoric was his own. Moses Kingsley's reference to the "general good" quoted "The Call" directly, while Martin E. Leonard's "model Community" and Albert P. La Fance's "correct habits" both sounded like Meekerian jargon.¹⁷² Missouri carpenter A.R. Lemon did Horace Greeley the same honor, writing that he "took Mr Greeley's advice and went west."¹⁷³

But perhaps the best-received buzzword was "temperance." Ninety-two applicants used the word temperance – although not all ninety-two seemed capable of spelling it correctly – for a respectable 28%. Farmer H. Stoughton also quoted "The Call" almost verbatim when he testified, "I agree with you, that Temperenc [sic] moral and religious sentiments should prevail or man is nothing."¹⁷⁴ Although he had "four children under ten years of age," I.S. Robinson took the prospect of their potential adolescent delinquency very seriously, affirming, "Of course, am pleased with the idea of placeing [sic] my Boys as far as I can from saloons and their advocates."¹⁷⁵ He and H.F. Mills would doubtless have gotten along famously, as Mills stood firmly in the legislated prohibition camp of temperance advocates: "As for the temperance

¹⁷¹ George F. Conner to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

¹⁷² Kingsley to Meeker, 10 December 1869

Martin E. Leonard to Nathan Meeker, December 1869.

Albert P. La Fance to Nathan Meeker, 6 December 1869.

¹⁷³ A.R. Lemon to Nathan Meeker, 22 December 1869.

¹⁷⁴ H. Stoughton to Nathan Meeker, 22 December 1869.

¹⁷⁵ I.S. Robinson to Nathan Meeker, 24 December 1869.

question I wish that a law could be established at the outset to abolish all drinking saloons, not only for the time being, but forever.”¹⁷⁶

While most applicants who addressed temperance stated their disdain for “intoxicating liquors” in exaggerated terms, among this cohort, some extended this hyperbolic contempt to other habits which they associated with drinking. Often this adamancy actually painted the author in an unflattering light, as these temperance adherents took their advocacy to somewhat comical levels. Forty-two-year-old New Yorker LeRoy Whitford, for example, poked fun at regional dialects while struggling himself with grammar in his profession of abstinence, telling Meeker he had “never drinked [sic] whiskey or ‘chawed turbarker,’ & would raise my left-hand for the exclusion of the vile weed from the coming colony, as soon as I would my right for the suppression of the evils of intoxicating liquors.”¹⁷⁷ Wealthy farmer Truman P. Allen provided the most melodramatic judgment of chemical indulgence, testifying, “I think that I would come as near filling the requirement as regards temperance as almost any one [sic] you may find, for I never drank a glass of any kind of liquor nor beer nor even soda water, nor a cup of tea nor coffee nor never [sic] took a chew of tobacco nor Smoked a pipe or cigar.”¹⁷⁸ Even conservative Meeker found Allen’s over-stated self-restraint off-putting, writing on Allen’s application, “Stuffy man.” Tragically unsuccessful as a colonist, Allen no doubt would have enjoyed imbibing in the clean, delicious water which Greeley eventually became known for as one of the towns most successful in securing water rights in early Colorado.

¹⁷⁶ H.F. Mills to Nathan Meeker, 12 December 1869.

¹⁷⁷ LeRoy Whitford to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹⁷⁸ Truman P. Allen to Nathan Meeker, 14 December 1869.

This clean water, fresh air, and dry climate enticed many an applicant. Connecticut farmer W.S. Eaton succinctly declared, “My great object in going is the climate.”¹⁷⁹ Harness-maker J.S. White informed Meeker, “My purpose in joining such a movement is 1st to give my family the advantages of climate and society.”¹⁸⁰ Others preoccupied with climate simply hated their present one enough to accept Colorado’s. Farmer O.S. Clark related, “We wish to change our location on account of the climate and poor soil” in Champlain, New York.¹⁸¹ A. Wetherbee simply “would prefer a milder climate than this part of Ill.”¹⁸² Disappointed in his relocation from New York to Michigan on account of “muskatoes,” A. Holmes hoped to try again in Colorado.¹⁸³ The same temperance-advocating farmer from above, LeRoy Whitford, summarized a complex combination of climate-related factors when he told Meeker:

To me the climate would be the great inducement. On these hills of Chautauqua we must feed our stock eight months, which is a longer winter than the almanac gives us. Nor is this all the worst of it. Protect ourselves as best we may, at great expense of time and money, our climate is so trying that we suffer almost constantly from hoarseness, coughs, and colds.¹⁸⁴

That their livelihoods as farmers depended on an obliging climate justifies such rampant preoccupation with weather and temperature. Had Meeker told the truth about the aridity of Colorado, and could they have predicted the immense difficulty with which irrigation was ultimately implemented, no doubt some of these malcontents would have found some benefit in the cold of Illinois winters or the unproductiveness of New York soil to compel them to stay. Ultimately, Weld County’s natural fertility rewarded those Union Colonists who were able to

¹⁷⁹ W.S. Eaton to Nathan Meeker, 14 December 1869.

¹⁸⁰ J.S. White to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁸¹ O.S. Clark to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

¹⁸² A. Wetherbee to Nathan Meeker, 17 December 1869.

¹⁸³ A. Holmes to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁸⁴ Whitford to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

deliver enough water to their crops, but the first decade of inexperienced irrigation proved draining – both in terms of manpower and of colonists’ funds.

Utterly convinced of the correlation between climate and health, that same amateur climatologist and New York malcontent LeRoy Whitford conceived of settlement in Greeley as a cure for his all family’s ailments, medical as well as agricultural: “I fear that my wife is tending to consumption, & the children, in spite of all our care, will cough most of the time in the winter. All that we need in order to decide in favor of joining your colony is assurance of good health in the new location.”¹⁸⁵ For some like Whitford, climate was no mere matter of agricultural inconvenience, but a matter of life and death. Pre-germ theory conceptions of health and disease contributed to several applicants’ certainty that the dry, clean air and fresh spring water of Colorado would cure what ailed them, from frequent colds to dyspepsia to rheumatism – and even tuberculosis. A belief which would come to be known as “climatology” in the 1880s told sick applicants to seek the open spaces and smog-less atmosphere of Colorado in order to escape the “miasma” of their Eastern cities and the damp chill of their Midwestern farms.¹⁸⁶ Unaware of the dangerous communicability of diseases like tuberculosis, Nathan Meeker nevertheless expressed a prejudice against unwellness, as evidenced by his failure to admit a single sick applicant. However, this bias likely stemmed more from Meeker’s preoccupation with finding healthy, strong laborers for the colony than for any conception of what kind of havoc a contagious consumptive could potentially have wrought on the public health of the new town.

Considered alternately the scourge of the impoverished and the most picturesque way to die, the “White Plague” ravaged millions upon millions as it “surged in the poverty and crowded

¹⁸⁵ Whitford to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

¹⁸⁶ Carol R. Byerly, “*Good Tuberculosis Men*”: *The Army Medical Department’s Struggle with Tuberculosis* (Houston: Office of the Surgeon General, 2014), 5.

living conditions of the increasingly industrialized and urbanized societies to become the leading killer in Western Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century.”¹⁸⁷ In keeping with their gospel of climate as cure, Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century identified Colorado as a healthful region and flocked here in search of respite from a broad range of health complaints. However, one illness loomed over all others: “Tuberculosis is the disease that brought the most people to the West.”¹⁸⁸ Denver and Colorado Springs opened several tuberculosis sanatoria, advertising across the East the desirability of the dry mountain air: “Many communities, with little appreciation of the contagious nature of tuberculosis, welcomed people with tuberculosis, especially if they brought adequate funds. In Denver more than 20 percent of the population was invalid in 1890.”¹⁸⁹

Perhaps some of the rejected, tubercular applicants eventually reached Denver or Colorado Springs. Hopefully Maine physician G.B. Crane, though he proved unsuccessful as a colonist, did not “conform to the disagreeable rule”: “The tendency of my family being to die of consumption I have decided to seek a change of climate rather than to conform to the disagreeable rule. Have only waited till the present time to have something to go with.”¹⁹⁰ Hopefully the Fifield children, “extra scholars” though they were, escaped that most Romantic of diseases: “My wife is a very capable woman and has been a teacher before and since marriage but is consumptive. My children are extra scholars; which means in these New England towns consumption at 22 years.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Byerly, “*Good Tuberculosis Men*,” xix.

¹⁸⁸ Byerly, “*Good Tuberculosis Men*,” 4.

¹⁸⁹ Byerly, “*Good Tuberculosis Men*,” 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ G.B. Crane to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

¹⁹¹ Levi W. Fifield to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

This idea of relocation as insurance for the letter-writer's children extended far beyond correspondents with health concerns. Meeker selected apparently healthy colonists who seemed most likely to contribute to the overall success of the colony, which he helped assure by selecting primarily applicants with families. He hoped that such applicants would benefit the most from community services like parks and schools, and would thus invest the most time and resources. Rollin W. Drake summarized this impulse when he stated, "My chief reasons for wishing to join you are the advantages to my children of educated, moral, and religious Society, such as I am confident you have in your colony if the plan you propose is adopted."¹⁹² Father of four Dalton Madden testified that, "My object in uniting in a colony would be more for the benefit of my children than than [sic] my self [sic]."¹⁹³ Successful colonist John Grant favored a more proper environment for his girls: "[I] wish in general terms to settle my wife & 2 nearly grown girls, in a new moral & religious community where intelligence and sobriety is the rule."¹⁹⁴ Both Alexander Gifford and W.B. Lascill, on the other hand, sought more farm land to distribute among sons, and Roland Newcomb wished to educate his children in the merits of hard work "& bring them up to habits of industry" by quitting his medical practice and putting his children to work in the orchard he hoped to plant in Greeley.¹⁹⁵

Several letter-writers acknowledged this challenge of raising their children on limited means, hoping to find more productive farm land and better wages in Colorado. Previously mentioned Ohioan Wesley Williams, for example, sought relocation in order "to see whether I could do better there for my little family than I can ever expect to do here, where it has become

¹⁹² Rollin W. Drake to Nathan Meeker, 25 December 1869.

¹⁹³ Dalton Madden to Nathan Meeker, 11 December 1869.

¹⁹⁴ John Grant to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

¹⁹⁵ Alexander Gifford to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

W.B. Lascill to Nathan Meeker, 6 December 1869.

Roland B.C. Newcomb to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

difficult for a man to rise without a pretty good capital to begin with.”¹⁹⁶ New York farmer James H. Clark, with \$2,000 at his disposal, told Meeker, “I have a family of a wife and seven children and think I can do better for my family with the means I have out there,” though he included the skeptical caveat, “if things are as you represent them.”¹⁹⁷ New Jersey farmer J.R. Carothers lamented, “Our schools are not very good, and chances for making money rather discouraging unless we had three or four times as much land.”¹⁹⁸

Some even cited financial catastrophes and a consequent need to start anew. An unspecified “reverse of fortune” afflicted merchant Henry Hagadorn, who penned his 4 December appeal to Meeker the minute he finished reading “The Call” on the day of its initial publication, demonstrating the immediacy and sincerity of his wish to get back on his feet with his haste: “Still being ambitious to accomplish something, I know of nothing that would please me better than your project.”¹⁹⁹ Mechanic J.D. Worth admitted that he “lost all [his] savings in an unfortunate business venture” two years previously, and thus commanded the minimum amount of \$200, as discussed in Chapter 4.²⁰⁰ Bad business investments also plagued Newton Whitman of Wisconsin: “So far as capital is concerned I have not got much of that comodty [sic], having been so foolish as to mortgage my farm to the Rail Road company to build the Lacrosse road I lost it or nearly all of it.”²⁰¹ “Tribune disciple” Joseph Hertig lost everything in a fire in 1864, as did Professor A. Jackman in 1866.²⁰² Though his setbacks had all been on a smaller scale, Meeker must have been able to empathize, as he restlessly pursued success across

¹⁹⁶ Wesley Williams to Nathan Meeker, 14 December 1869.

¹⁹⁷ James H. Clark to Nathan Meeker, 8 December 1869.

¹⁹⁸ J.R. Carothers to Nathan Meeker, 3 January 1870.

¹⁹⁹ Henry Hagadorn to Nathan Meeker, 4 December 1869.

²⁰⁰ Worth to Meeker, 18 December 1869.

²⁰¹ Newton Whitman to Nathan Meeker, 18 December 1869.

²⁰² Hertig to Meeker, 21 December 1869.

A. Jackman to Nathan Meeker, 29 December 1869.

a dozen states and a dozen professions before settling in Greeley. Employing the language of rebirth and regrowth, these men looked west for a brighter future.

Even those who had not experienced financial setbacks utilized this same language of growth in pleading their cases. They employed that great expansionist triumphalist rhetoric of “going to a new country, to help build it and grow up with it.”²⁰³ Wrote Wisconsin merchant J.C. White, my “object is to get into a new country, where [sic] I will have beter [sic] oportunites [sic] growing up with the country than here.”²⁰⁴ Moses Kingsley’s letter embodies multiple thematic threads common to the collection as a whole, as he explained to Meeker how, in the interest of providing his sons with a better life, he hoped to kick them out the door to “grow up with the country” as their father did on the Michigan frontier: “I tell these sons to push out into the new country as I did 39 years ago, get cheap land & grow up with the country, and not stay around the homestead, which is none too large for us old folks and the younger members yet to be sent out.”²⁰⁵ This vocabulary suggests a dual purpose in their mission; these men admittedly sought personal gain, but they implied that their efforts would have the symbiotic effect of helping to develop the land along the way. This rhetoric moves closer to that of Manifest Destiny and its propaganda of expansion in the name of nationalism.

Some applicants had already seized this opportunity with varying levels of success, having travelled the West as pioneers before. For example, Manitowoc, Wisconsin’s W.Y. Watrous wrote (say that three times fast!) that he “was one of the pioneers in Wis 20 years ago,” making good on his incursion into the west and ready to try again \$4,000 richer.²⁰⁶ He was

²⁰³ D. Brown to Nathan Meeker, 8 December 1869.

²⁰⁴ J.C. White to Nathan Meeker, 14 December 1869.

²⁰⁵ Kingsley to Meeker, 10 December 1869.

²⁰⁶ W.Y. Watrous to Nathan Meeker, 20 December 1869.

successful, as was M. Cooley, who wrote from Wyoming, Delaware that he wanted to contribute \$6,000 and plenty of know-how: “Have lived in the west... Went the overland rout [sic] to California in forty nine, and am used to pioneer life - can survey, and locate lands.”²⁰⁷ These testimonials, combined with the large pocketbooks Watrous and Cooley had at their disposal, perhaps indicated to Meeker that there could be money in pioneering. Meeker also favored Cooley’s knack for surveying, endorsing his letter, “Surveyor Been to California Pioneer.” A handful of applicants boasted a familiarity with Colorado which might also contribute to the expedition. Joseph Grant had worked in Colorado as a government-contracted teamster and had fallen in love with the country along the way.²⁰⁸ Evan Rea travelled across southern Colorado, visited Pikes Peak in 1859, and “was much pleased with the scenery.”²⁰⁹ He, too, was selected as a colonist.

Another handful of applicants disclosed an even more relevant qualification: experience building actual colonies. Deaf printer Henry M. Lane related his experience with a previous venture, telling Meeker “Have already ‘emigrated’ to the west once (from Buffalo) in 1856, went to Southern Minnesota with a Colony originating in N.Y. I was there a year & so have some experience.”²¹⁰ E.L. Northrup, on the other hand, described his participation in an unsuccessful colony in Kansas which failed before it could even get off the ground; the majority of pledged participants, Northrup related to Meeker, had failed to sell their current properties, bankrupting investors who had already purchased property on the proposed colony site.²¹¹ Meeker selected Northrup, perhaps if only so they could commiserate together over fickle co-colonists.

²⁰⁷ M. Cooley to Nathan Meeker, 10 December 1869.

²⁰⁸ Joseph Grant to Nathan Meeker, 19 December 1869.

²⁰⁹ Evan Rea to Nathan Meeker, 22 December 1869.

²¹⁰ Lane to Meeker, 20 December 1869.

²¹¹ E.L. Northrup to Nathan Meeker, 1 December 1870.

A. Jackman was similarly involved in a failed town-founding enterprise, this time in Oregon: “Was one of the Party to start the ‘Pacific City’ at the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon, which city was killed by Congress reserving the Point for a Navy Station.”²¹² However, even another disastrous venture in Kansas the previous year failed to dampen Jackman’s expansionist zeal, as he testified, “The wild life, of a new place, is just the Spice of my being.”

On a plane all his own – one out of 324 – was mason George A. Miller, the only applicant to boast a legitimate communitarian pedigree: “I was brought up with the Shakers at Tyringham mass [sic].”²¹³ Struggling to make ends meet in New Jersey, Miller hoped to utilize his knowledge of cooperative living to his financial advantage. Miller’s letter no doubt gave Meeker pause, as selfish sentiments like his prevailed disastrously at the Trumbull Phalanx, where capricious members hoped to reap the benefits of others’ hard work. In these letters, Meeker sought like-minded optimists and idealists like himself, but often found more base rationale, as he did here.

Nevertheless, Meeker also found enough to encourage him in these letters. Some applicants understood and agreed with his ideology, and many at least agreed with the prospective benefits Meeker’s colony plan seemed to offer. His applicants employed enthusiastic rhetoric backed up by obvious energy and ambition. They struck the right balance of pioneer zeal and an acknowledgement of the hard work and sacrifice in store. They largely said what he wanted to hear. However, they also voiced numerous individual impressions of what they understood cooperative community building and westward expansion to mean. Philip D.

²¹² Jackman to Meeker, 29 December 1869.

²¹³ George A. Miller to Nathan Meeker, 13 December 1869.

Hammond, who had travelled through Colorado, encapsulated the perfect, representative combination of Meeker's impulses as well as his fellow colonists' when he wrote:

I like your plan and believe it will, or may, be entirely successful. Also that there should be many similar enterprises. It is the right way to settle our country... I can do well here, but I have an irrepressible 'hankering' for a conquest amid the adventures of our great & grand west. Sooner or later, it is my purpose to adopt a rural life & own a paradise in a good climate.²¹⁴

The marked enthusiasm for pioneering and farming combined with the vague and underdeveloped ideological rhetoric of these surviving letters helps explain why the communitarianism of the Union Colony faded while Greeley's agricultural prospects flourished. Whatever Meeker thought he saw in these applicants, their letters on the whole make it clear that the majority of these white, middle-class Northern and Midwestern farmers and tradesmen wanted to go west to farm, and Meeker's plan provided an opportunity to do just that, communitarian rhetoric mostly aside.

The importance of the letters is that they explain how participants in this communitarian experiment understood its ideology as dictated by Meeker. Just as Meeker cherry-picked his favorite elements of utopian socialism – notably Fourierist cooperative labor practices – and tempered them with more mainstream practices, including that of single-family living, these applicants in turn identified their favorite elements of Meeker's philosophy, including temperance and the sanctity of private property, and worked to create a colony which would emphasize those values. These increasing degrees of separation explain why the Union Colony, even from its outset, functioned only as a mildly communitarian settlement.

²¹⁴ Philip D. Hammond to Nathan Meeker, 15 December 1869.

Epilogue: Nathan Meeker's Fate

Any reference to Nathan Meeker inevitably invites reflection on his tragic death and the controversial events which preceded it. His finances depleted by the strains of colony-founding, making him desperate to pay off his unexpectedly called-in debt to the estate of Horace Greeley, Meeker finally accepted an appointment to the White River Ute Indian Agency after several years of unsuccessful pursuit of federal employ. Meeker hoped to save enough within a few years to pay off his debts and return to his beloved but unprofitable colony. According to J. Max Clark, he took the job only because “it had seemed to him there was really nothing else he could do to save his home and the little property he had left.”²¹⁵ Historian Marshall Sprague hypothesized that Meeker, accepting the financial necessity of the position, decided to treat it as his final chance for a “civilizing miracle.”²¹⁶ But where Meeker’s ideological convictions had served him and his Union Colony disciples relatively well at Greeley, they proved disastrous when Meeker attempted to apply them to a very different group of people in the Utes.

Meeker had historically possessed negative, racist opinions of Native Americans. Their presence was the only dark cloud over his rapturous visit to Colorado in the fall of 1869, with Meeker reporting back in the *New York Tribune* to his readers, “The extension of a fine nervous organization is impossible in the Indian, because he is without brain to originate and support it.”²¹⁷ Such prejudices made Meeker a detestable Indian Agent. In attempting to dismantle their cultural reliance on horses and to impose cooperative agricultural practices, Meeker demonstrated that although by 1879 he had become more familiar with the Utes, he did not know them at all. As the tension built in the summer of 1879, he began to mention frequently their

²¹⁵ Clark, *Colonial Days*, 128.

²¹⁶ Sprague, *Massacre*, 56.

²¹⁷ Sprague, *Massacre*, 18.

relocation, as well as “manacles and handcuffs and nooses.”²¹⁸ His utter failure to understand the Utes and their culture, and his bungled attempts to impose his own vision of an agrarian ideal upon them, led directly to his death and those of his employees in the White River Massacre of 29 September 1879, as well as the abduction of his wife Arvilla and his daughter Josephine, who spent three weeks in captivity following the attack. This tragic demise inevitably casts a shadow across the life which came before it – rightly and incontrovertibly, as Meeker antagonized the Utes for many months preceding the attack. But where other accounts of Meeker have heretofore attempted to employ his biography and his decade in Colorado as a mere prelude to tragedy, this project hopes to contextualize a justified critique of Meeker’s relationship to native peoples with an acknowledgement that his finances and his previous success at manipulating the Colorado landscape as well as the beliefs of his white followers helped lead a reluctant Meeker astray into a position for which he was ill-suited – to disastrous result.

Epilogue: The First Two Decades in Greeley

The years 1869 to 1871 witnessed a boom of migration to Colorado by organized groups of “colonists,” of which the Union Colony was the second large group to arrive, preceded by mere weeks in February of 1870 by the German Colonization Company – a “communistic association” which selected a location in Custer County at which to settle its German artisans and laborers.²¹⁹ Meeker, Cameron, and the locating committee selected Greeley over areas near Pueblo and Colorado Springs in April of 1870, and colonists began arriving at the end of the

²¹⁸ Sprague, *Massacre*, 198.

²¹⁹ James F. Willard, *The Union Colony at Greeley, Colorado: 1869-1871* (Boulder: W.F. Robinson Printing Co., 1918), xiv.

month. During that first summer, colonists lived in tents and shacks purchased from railroad workers moving on from Evans, as the opening photograph illustrates. Some also stayed in the ironically-named makeshift “Hotel de Comfort,” which eventually became stables.

Meeker’s precedent of “semi-co-operative” colony-based group migration proved popular, with several Union Colony imitators following within the year: “The Union Colony was the model for three colonies founded during the latter part of 1870. These were the Chicago-Colorado Colony with its community centre [sic] at Longmont, the St. Louis-Western Colony at Evans, and the South Western Colony at Green City.”²²⁰ The Evans-based colony maintained an especially complicated relationship with its Union Colony prototype, as the neighboring colonists battled for population, reputation, and most importantly, the county seat – which shuttled back and forth between Greeley and Evans half a dozen times in over the next decade in a battle for regional dominance. The climactic skirmish of this conflict involved a midnight burglary of the Evans county vault; ultimately, the culprits made off with important records in addition to the vault door itself.²²¹

In fact, Evans and Greeley maintained a complicated relationship even before the official settlement of either town. Upon their arrival at the confluence of the South Platte and Poudre Rivers, the Union Colony locating committee found a make-shift encampment at the temporary terminus of the Denver Pacific at Evans, one of five platted stops for trains to replenish water between Cheyenne and Denver.²²² This improvised settlement preceded Greeley by several months; while Meeker fielded inquiries about his previous week’s “Call” in New York, the

²²⁰ Willard, *The Union Colony*, xvi.

²²¹ Schwayder, *People & Places*, 128.

²²² Schwayder, *People & Places*, 128.

Denver Pacific Railroad reached Evans on 13 December 1869.²²³ The next April, the locating committee, finding the residents of Evans too intemperate and unwilling to become less so, decided to purchase land from farmers who they referred to as “squatters” just a few miles north of the encampment.²²⁴ When the railroad moved on, so did many temporary residents of Evans. Some historians and pro-Greeley advocates thus claim Greeley predates Evans, as the spot was re-populated by an organized group of farmers in 1871.²²⁵ This failure to even agree on the timeline exemplifies the Greeley-Evans rivalry which so embroiled the developing region in the 1870s and 1880s (and which manifests today in such relevant disputes as which town claims the Walmart on 23rd Avenue).

However, this delineation felt immediate and important to the staunchly idealistic Union Colonists, who envisioned and then worked to uphold a high standard of temperance and morality, which some felt the intemperance of Evans threatened from the very beginning. Ralph Meeker recorded in the minutes of the planning meeting on 23 December 1869 at the Cooper Institute in New York that his father advised the gathered applicants, “Those who are idle, immoral, intemperate or inefficient, need not apply, for they will not be received; nor would they feel at home.”²²⁶ This elitism engendered antagonism between Greeley and nearby towns, in spite of some neighboring communities’ recognition of Greeley as a model for settlement. This rivalry still bears somewhat on Greeley’s somewhat competitive relationship with towns founded by influential Union Colonists like R.A. Cameron (Ft. Collins) and Benjamin Eaton (Eaton).

²²³ Schwayder, *People & Places*, 128.

²²⁴ Boyd, *History*, 431.

²²⁵ Willard, *The Union Colony*, xvi.

Mary L. Geffs, *Under Ten Flags: A History of Weld County, Colorado*, (Greeley: McVey Printery, 1938).

²²⁶ Boyd, *History*, 37.

Although Greeley immediately inspired imitators and congratulators, practical success eluded colonists for the first several years. Trial-and-error irrigation methods enabled only limited control over the growth of crops, grasshopper infestations devastated many of the fields which did receive sufficient water, and costly endeavors like the town fence depleted colony funds. According to Boyd, the first several years were marked by “strife, struggle, and experiment.”²²⁷ However, he also tempered this assessment by praising the subsequent decade in Greeley as a period of “fruition, attainment, definite realization, and confident hope,” and one in which Greeley was officially incorporated in 1886.²²⁸

In “The Call,” Meeker described the power of communitarian settlement to tame the West effectively and efficiently: “Schools, refined society, and all the advantages of an old country, will be secured in a few years; while, on the contrary, where settlements are made by the old way, people are obligated to wait 20, 40, and more years.” Meeker likely oversold Greeley and undersold its neighbors, but he was right that the intentional manufacture of community and society offered Greeley certain advantages that spontaneous settlements lacked. The “unimaginative grid” which Dolores Hayden so disdained actually facilitated orderly growth.²²⁹ A membership buy-in fee and the sale of community-owned lands generated funds for public services, including the construction of a church, school, library, and town hall. Public statutes, including a temperance clause in all property deeds, ensured orderly conduct and minimized conflict. Even the unsuccessful early efforts at town improvements, like the ineffective first irrigation ditch and the costly yet futile town fence, demonstrated a community-wide commitment to the town’s collective economic success.

²²⁷ Boyd, *History*, 174.

²²⁸ Boyd, *History*, 174.

²²⁹ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 270.

Even a century and a half later, geographical vestiges of Greeley's utopian origins are still visible: the original irrigation ditches run through downtown, the 1884 well which cured early settlers' bad water woes remains as the central fountain in Lincoln Park, and the research for this project was performed on the same site where the original colonists pitched tents that first summer – in the basement of one of the first headquarters of Nathan Meeker's *Greeley Tribune*, which has delivered the news continuously since November of 1870. Trees line all the older streets, and parks abound. More importantly, social remnants remain, as well: For one hundred years, Greeley remained a dry city, true to its roots as a temperance utopia. Founded by *New York Tribune*-style Republicans, the town remains a Republican urban stronghold in Colorado's overwhelmingly conservative fourth congressional district – albeit an urban stronghold for a kind of political conservatism ideologically very different from that original early Republicanism.

Conclusion: The Relevance of Frontier Utopianism

In *Seven American Utopias*, Dolores Hayden disputed Greeley's utopian credibility. She offered a scathing critique of colonists' half-hearted initial attempts at implementing communitarian practices, the main factor in what she considered Greeley's almost immediate failure as a utopian community. Grappling with a flagging collective commitment to utopian ideals, the Union Colonists faced an early crisis of identity, uncertain of how communitarian their town should be. According to Hayden, their practical failures in merely attempting to set up the physical means of establishing a farming community solved this problem for them: "This struggle was resolved by the Union Colony's incompetence in collective irrigation, incompleteness of collective fencing, support of private industry, inattention to cooperative industry, and obsession with private houses."²³⁰ Their immediate struggle to survive as a farm town precluded any efforts to agree on fixed communitarian practices, to the point that once the colony was able to assure its mere survival, too much time and distance prevented the colonists from codifying set utopian values: "After a frantic year of town building, they discovered, with some dismay, that communal life had been sacrificed for economic growth."²³¹ Hayden thus found the Union Colony an immediate and utter failure – "a rather disappointing communitarian experiment."²³²

However, this project disagrees – not with Hayden's assertions, but with her conclusion. Just as a space shuttle soon sheds its booster rockets after launch, Greeley shed its commitment to explicitly communitarian practices in order to progress as a functional frontier farm town. Greeley enjoyed the lingering benefits of communitarianism without the growing pains. The utopian mold afforded Greeley a structurally-sound shape, with its social cohesion and

²³⁰ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 278.

²³¹ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

²³² Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

meticulous municipal foundations, but the departure from this template ultimately proved more beneficial than harmful. Greeley, if it failed at communitarianism, succeeded well enough at agriculture, and eventually irrigation, that it has managed to survive for nearly a century and a half – extraordinary longevity in the context of utopian society.

Whereas Hayden identified ideological failure, this paper hopes to highlight the colony's knack for adaptation. This collection of letters reveals their writers' concern with collective success, and their willingness to labor to achieve this goal. The applicants faced the unknown in applying to Meeker's utopia, indicating willingness to adjust to unexpected conditions. The strict adherence to a particular set of ideals which characterized other utopias prevented them from adjusting to fit changing circumstances, and thus most collapsed relatively quickly. Greeley's longevity, then, distinguishes it from less successful utopian experiments – a longevity it owes in part to its founding colonists' ability to adjust their vision and Meeker's vision to the practical realities of living and farming in an inhospitable and arid climate.

Hayden argued that in its utopian ambivalence, "Greeley's history helps to clarify the relationship of communitarian settlements to other American frontier towns, since the colony came closer and closer to the norm as each communal institution was discarded."²³³ But where Hayden found fault, this project finds accomplishment. Her work largely declined to investigate this connection which seems so fruitful, favoring instead an analysis of the haphazard architectural manifestation of Union Colony communitarianism. With gratitude for Hayden's observation, this essay seeks to expound upon the implications of such an assertion.

²³³ Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, 261.

What better place than the frontier to test utopian settlement? Whereas isolation retarded economic growth in many frontier situations, freedom from scrutiny helped utopias to flourish, as the histories of regional antagonism and forced exodus of both the Mormon and Amana colonies – two of the longest-lasting utopias in American history – illustrate. While isolation was counterproductive to the eventual goals of utopias, which planned for their ideas to take root nationally, in cases where the larger culture proved hostile, utopianists like the Mormons and Inspirationists were forced to retreat and regroup in relative isolation. The situation of these two colonies along the frontier has long been a subject of historical scrutiny. This has not been true of Greeley, a deficiency which this project hopes to correct. Unlike the Mormons of the Great Basin and the Inspirationists at Amana, the Union Colonists at Greeley demonstrated a less fanatical adherence to single-religion social cohesion (Mormons) and utopian values (Inspirationists). And yet, their utopian-inflected settlement managed to flourish in a fairly hostile frontier setting. On the issue of isolation versus freedom, Greeley cleverly compromised with its distance from neighbors to the north, east, and west, and its proximity to the newly-opened Denver Pacific depot at Evans to the south.

The Union Colony signified a link between utopianism and expansion – between the philosophy of perfecting society and the practice of establishing it. The unique ability of early Greeley to straddle the line between planned utopian colony and spontaneous frontier village gave rise to a relatively more stable city than either archetype alone could provide – one which weathered social crises better than the average organic settlement but which lasted longer than the typical structured commune.

Imitations of the Union Colony prototype petered out in the 1890s and the novelty of Greeley's duality wore off. Since then, this distinctive dichotomy of Greeley as frontier utopia

has netted little attention. Perhaps such an acknowledgement needed the Union Colony letters. They allow for a new historical interpretation of Greeley as the marriage of two visions of frontier settlement – a marriage between Nathan Meeker’s mild utopian socialism and his colonists’ agrarian expansionism. Where written evidence of Meeker’s communitarian rhetoric had survived, the written testimonies by the individuals who actually carried out the colony’s settlement apparently had not – an historical vacancy which has now, happily, been filled. The revelation of these letters elucidates how Greeley came to be both more and less than what Meeker alone had envisioned.

The applicants to the 1870 Union Colony at Greeley were white, American-born, middle-class farmers and tradesmen with above-average real-estate or liquid assets. They were in their mid-twenties to mid-forties, and were married with small, growing families. They lived in the North and Midwest and had supported or fought for the Union during the Civil War. If they were political, they were more likely to vote Republican, and if they were religious, they were more likely to attend a Protestant church. They were temperate, and thought of themselves as moral and upstanding citizens.

They had considered westward migration for some time, and were prepared to depart within a year of writing. Most had been unwilling to strike out alone, had been actively looking for the right offer to join a group, and hoped to move with neighbors or extended family. They sought to improve their lives and those of their children with access to more and better farm land; better schools, churches, and public services; and a more healthful climate. Some were predisposed to move west because they had either migrated to the Midwest to farm, or were the

children of parents who had; or had themselves travelled west of the Rockies in the 1850s as pioneers, miners, teamsters, or laborers. Other applicants were predisposed to a cooperative village arrangement for several reasons, either because they lived in a region in states like New York and Ohio near a utopian community, or were long-time readers of the utopian socialist-inflected *New York Tribune*, which published communitarian propaganda on the North American Phalanx, the Oneida community, the Mormons, and many other utopian projects during applicants' specified dates of readership. Most held socially conservative values and were drawn to Meeker's marketing campaign in the *Tribune* based on his advertised commitment to family, cooperation, private property, and temperance. They provided the manpower for an expansionist, agrarian utopia unmatched in its ideological hybridity and its staying power. They were at once utterly conventional and utterly unmatched – the pioneers of a frontier utopia.

Unexpected discoveries like that of this unparalleled collection of primary sources on the Union Colony generate a unique type of excitement. Finds like these send a thrill down the spine of any history enthusiast, and anyone who loves a good story. Like the near-mint Ty Cobb baseball cards in the attic and the priceless Tiffany lamp in the crawlspace, these modern revelations of historical artifacts invigorate the study of history and of culture, as historians and amateur history buffs alike hold out continual hope for one more scrap of information which can better explain the past and its inhabitants. These letters will be available forever now, so that another student of history can come along and offer an even better interpretation and contextualization of them, in the process offering new insight into early Colorado, into nineteenth-century utopianism, into frontier town-founding, and into these last surviving bits of paper which illuminate the lives of average Americans previously lost to history.

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