FOOTNOTE ON THE HARMONISTS

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Charles M. Stotz has already reviewed Dr. Karl J. R. Arndt's second volume on the history of Old Economy, *George Rapp's Successors and Material Heirs*, in this issue of the magazine, and so this item is but an informal commentary on my friends, the reviewer and the author.

Since boyhood I have been interested in the Harmonists — or, as they had come to be known in my family — "the Economites." One of my great-grandfathers, on my mother's side, had been a member of George Rapp's group from infancy until the great "secession" in 1832; and for half a century afterward he and his offspring were in touch with the Society and with those of their relatives who had remained in it. I can't remember when my mother did not quote "Grandfather Wagner" and "Father Henrici" and others who had played a part in the society.

Jacob Wagner had seceded, not because he had changed his mind concerning the principles of the society, but because he could not and would not accept the new doctrine of celibacy. Fortunately for me and for all my kindred he pulled out, married one of the pretty girls in "Count Leon's" group, took his severance gift, went to Phillipsburg (now Monaca), invested in land, worked hard, prospered, and founded a family. (I must say that I heartily approve of his decisions.)

Through my mother I met John Duss when I was a youngster, and through Charles Stotz I met Karl Arndt when he was researching the archives at Economy. All four of these persons were remarkable — for quite different reasons — and all four whetted my interest in this most successful of all communal experiments in America.

From my mother I received an understanding of the religious and philosophical motivation that made this Christian commune work for nearly a century. From Charles Stotz, who carried out the restoration of Old Economy so admirably, I learned to appreciate the architectural and mechanical genius of Frederick Reichart, Rapp's adopted son, who built three planned communities in the wilderness and equipped them with all the facilities for domestic living as well as for an efficient, self-contained agricultural and manufacturing economy.

From Karl Arndt I learned something about the drive which enabled him, a linguistic scholar and teacher, to dig through tons of

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documentary material and to hammer out a series of definitive historical works on the Society while achieving his major professional goal: the headship of the department of German in a great university.

Dr. Arndt's first book, *George Rapp's Harmony Society*, published in 1965, told of the building of a great vision into a living reality; his new book tells the sad story of its "dissolution and desecration."

The part played by John Duss in the windup of the society is told here by a hardnosed professional scholar. The Duss side of the story is contained in his book, *The Harmonists: A Personal History*, published in 1943. Duss was a forceful, colorful character with a genius for promotional publicity as well as for litigation. He could churn up a tempest at the slightest hint that he was not the "savior of the Society" and "the greatest Roman of them all."

Dr. Arndt's assessment runs quite to the contrary — and he documents it.

There are some points of agreement in these books on the great experiment, but if their two authors ever square off in confrontation in the world to come, I hope to be watching from a ringside seat. My money, incidentally, will be on the professional — and I feel quite certain that Father Rapp and Father Henrici and Great-Grandfather Wagner will be betting with me.