NOTES AND DOCUMENTS


The Articles of Association of George Rapp’s Harmony Society as preserved in the “Book of Life” of the society in the Pennsylvania State Archives at Harrisburg are a backdated fraud. This is an important point in the history of this richest and longest-lived of some one hundred fifty American communist utopias. Because the archives holds a falsified text and signatures, many individuals have not received the credit due them as cofounders of the society with George Rapp. Many genealogists have been misled in their research by these records. Jacob Wagner, a longtime member of the society, stated that he trusted the Rapps fully until he overheard Frederick Rapp’s plan to make up these articles and arrange for signatures to them in their backdated form. Hermann Marckworth, in his article “Die Rapp’schen Colonien” (in Beilage zum Sonntagmorgen, Cincinnati, July 16, 1882), reported his interview with Jacob Wagner about the articles and then stated: “Das war der Contrakt von 1805; der Contrakt und die Unterschriften sind gefalscht.” (“That was the contract of 1805; the contract and signatures are falsified.”) Wagner did not present any written evidence, and no one searched for the real originals in the archives because they were probably destroyed, but evidence has been discovered supporting Jacob Wagner’s statement.

The spiritual domination of Father Rapp over all members of the society and the economic and legal power of Frederick Rapp outside the society were so great that the validity of the articles of February 15, 1805, was never successfully challenged in the long, litigious history of the society, although the society three times appeared before the United States Supreme Court. To make clear and firm this assertion of fraud, an English translation of the original German text of the Articles of Association, as recorded in the “Book of Life,” must be examined. This appears to be a backdated fraud accomplished under the spiritual duress or with the connivance of those who signed their names under the German text of the articles.

Professor of German at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, Dr. Arndt has written numerous articles and books about the Harmony Society.—Editor
"Be it announced and made known hereby to all for whom it is necessary to know, that today between us the undersigned on the one hand, and George Rapp and his Society, on the other hand, the agreement standing hereafter has been made and decided, namely,

"Firstly. We, the subscribers, on our part and on the part of our heirs and descendants, deliver up, renounce, and transfer all our estate and property consisting of cash, land, cattle, or whatever else it may be, to George Rapp and his Society in Harmonie, Butler County, Pennsylvania, as a free gift or donation, for the benefit and use of the congregation there, and bind ourselves on our part, as well as on the part of our heirs and descendants, to make free renunciation thereof, and to leave the same at the disposal of the superintendents of the congregation, as if we never had nor possessed the same.

"Secondly. We do pledge ourselves jointly and severally to submit to the laws and regulations of the congregation, and to show due and ready obedience toward those who are appointed and chosen by the congregation as superintendents in such a manner that not only we ourselves endeavor, by the work of our hands, to promote the good and interest of the congregation, but also to hold our children and families to do the same.

"Thirdly. If, contrary to our expectation, the case should happen that we jointly or severally could not endure in the congregation and would within a few years or more abstain from our promises and withdraw from the community, for whatever cause it may be, we will never demand any reward, either for ourselves or our children or those belonging to us, for work or services rendered, but whatever we jointly and severally have done or shall do, we will have done as a voluntary service for our brethren.

"On the other hand, George Rapp and his Society adopt the subscribers jointly and severally as members of the congregation whereby each of them obtains the privilege to attend all religious meetings, not only they themselves, but also their children and families, shall and will receive the necessary instruction in church and school which is needful and requisite for temporal and eternal felicity.

"Secondly. George Rapp and his Society promise to supply the subscribers jointly and severally with all the necessaries of life, as lodging, meat, drink, and clothing, etc., and not only during their healthful days, but also when one or several of them should become sick or otherwise unfit for labor, they shall have and enjoy the same care and maintenance as before; if, after a short or long period, the father or mother of a family should die, or be otherwise separated from the
community and leave a family behind, none of those left behind shall be left widows or orphans, but receive and enjoy the same rights and care as long as they live or remain in the congregation, as well in sick as healthful days, the same as before, or as their circumstances or needs may require.

"Thirdly. And if, as stated above, the case should happen that one or several of the subscribers after a short or long period should abstain from their promise and could or would not submit to the laws and regulations of the church or congregation, and for this or another cause would leave the Harmonie, George Rapp and his Society promise to refund him or them, the property brought into the Harmonie without interest, and that in one, two or three annual installments, as the sum may be, large or small; and if one or more of them was poor and brought nothing into the congregation, they shall, provided they depart openly and orderly, receive a donation in cash, according to their conduct while here, or as their circumstances and needs may require, which George Rapp and his Society shall determine at his or their departure.

"In confirmation whereof, both parties have signed their names.
So done, Harmonie, February 15, 1805."

The first signatures that follow the above date under the German text are: George Rapp, Christina Rappin, Rosina Rappin, Fredk. Rapp. At a respectful distance from this block of signatures belonging to the Rapp family there follow 179 signatures of men and women; additional signatures are under the date February 15, 1816. In other words, including the Rapps, there are 183 signatures to the Articles of Association of the Harmony Society as of February 15, 1805. Two questionable points should be noted immediately: First, George Rapp's physical son Johannes did not sign these articles with the family; and second, Frederick Reichert Rapp used the Anglo-American signature that he developed later in his extensive business dealings with the Anglo-American world as Father Rapp's adopted son and manager of worldly affairs. The signature is definitely not the one he used in 1805 as a novice to the Anglo-American world. Johannes Rapp came to America with his father as a surveyor, was married in the society, and fathered a daughter, Gertrude, whom both Father Rapp and Frederick Rapp loved dearly. It is unthinkable that this physical son should not have signed the articles in the block reserved for the family if he had been alive — but the signature is not there. Johannes Rapp
died on July 27, 1812, and has the distinction of being the only member of the society to be interred in any of its three cemeteries with an individual tombstone bearing a warm and loving inscription. Because he was probably already buried when these articles were signed, the real date of the signatures to these articles must have been after 1812, and simply backdated to meet certain legal requirements.

There are two Harmony Society documents that have been discovered in places where they were preserved from the pious frauds of George and Frederick Rapp: the National Archives and the published records of the Pennsylvania state legislature.

In January 1806 George Rapp was in Washington to witness the presentation of the Harmony Society memorial to Congress asking for special consideration in purchase of government lands. The text and signatures of this petition or memorial appear in my *Harmony on the Connoquenessing* on pages 137-41. This is identified as an official memorial of the Harmony Society at Harmonie, Pennsylvania, and it is signed by 201 male heads of families. Among the signatories are the following members of the Harmony Society whose names are not on Father Rapp’s backdated articles of February 15, 1805: Jacob Heckelblaible; Friedrich Wilhelm; Johannes Rapp (not his son); and David Gloss, the man who brought the first shipload of Rapp’s followers to Baltimore on July 4, 1804, and who later, in leaving Rapp’s cloister, reminded him that the heavenly Jerusalem had four gates while Rapp’s had only one.

Let us remember: The Harmony Society memorial presented to Thomas Jefferson and to the United States Congress in January 1806, and therefore already signed in 1805 before Father Rapp’s departure for Washington, was signed by 201 heads of families, while Father Rapp’s backdated document of February 15, 1805, was signed by 179 men and women. Clearly, the Harmony Society memorial preserved in the National Archives is the only accurate list of Harmony Society members in 1805. A comparison of Father Rapp’s signature to his backdated articles and those preserved beyond his reach proves the complete unreliability of his pious fraud. An examination of Father Rapp’s text of February 15, 1805, proves the backdated record is not the text of his earlier articles but is one manipulated by Rapp’s spiritual hold on the group to conform to the letter of the law and to protect his society from lawsuits.

On December 15, 1807, a memorial of the Harmony Society was presented to the Pennsylvania legislature requesting incorporation of the society. The original text of this memorial could be found neither
in the Harmony Society archives nor in the Pennsylvania State Archives, and it must be presumed lost. But the most important parts of the Articles of Association have been preserved in the printed record of the *Journal of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania* (1807-1808). They make no provision for the return of property placed in the common fund as stated in Rapp's backdated articles printed above. The request for incorporation of the Harmony Society was denied by a unanimous vote, but because the reasoning of the committee of the legislature to which the petition was assigned for study and recommendation so clearly quotes Rapp's actual articles before they were altered and backdated, the pertinent part of the official report of the committee of the legislature on January 16, 1808, must be given, as follows:

"Mr. Mechling from the committee to whom was referred on the 15th ultimo, the memorial of the Harmony Society in the county of Butler, made report, which was read as follows, viz.

"That from an examination of the memorial, they find the memorialists lately emigrated from Germany, with a view to enjoy under the mild, and pacific government of the United States and this state, that peace, happiness, and religious repose, which they in vain sought in the land of their nativity. That the memorialists have associated themselves under the name of 'The Harmony Society' and have submitted to your committee the articles of their association; amongst others we find the following, 'No individual or individuals of the society shall hold or possess in their individual capacity, either real or personal property, but each and every one renouncing and disclaiming all property whatever, vest it in the common stock for the use of the society: And in case any member of the society should quit the society, he shall have no claim on the society for money or property, but shall leave all to the discretion of a majority of the society, who alone shall determine whether any thing, and how much, he shall have.'

"And to carry into complete effect these articles of association, they request the intervention of the Legislature — And here your committee are constrained to observe, that however well they feel disposed to encourage emigration, or foster those, who seek an asylum in our country from the iron grasp of tyranny, which, unfortunately for human happiness, has too long pervaded the European world; yet they cannot withhold their disapprobation to measures, which if established in this state, might lead to consequences equally dangerous and oppressive;
for your committee conceive to give a society power to pass bye-laws, prohibiting any individual of the society from acquiring or holding property in their individual capacity, would not only be a virtual infraction of our state constitution, which declares, 'That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and indefeasible rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, and acquiring, possessing and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness'; but it would be extremely impolitic, inasmuch as it would tend to damp and discourage that spirit of individual exertion and enterprise, that self-dependence, that conscious dignity and consequence, which each individual should attach to himself in a free republic; but that article of association which declares, that the individual who has attached himself to, but who from a change of opinion, wishes to withdraw from the society, shall not (but at the discretion of the society) have restored to him the property or money vested in the stock of funds, appears to your committee still more exceptionable: for in this case we should set up an active authority, with power to determine a disputed right, above the controul of judicial functionaries, or even subsequent acts of the Legislature; which likewise appears in hostility to the constitution, which declares, 'No man shall be deprived of his life, liberty or property, unless by the judgement of his peers, or the law of the land.' Neither will it be sufficient to say, that the association is the voluntary act of the individuals concerned, who may submit their rights to a majority of the members associated; for it will be found by the provision of the constitution already recited, that the legitimate powers of government cannot affect certain inherent and indefeasible rights there enumerated, 'which shall remain forever inviolate.' Neither should the Legislature sanction attempts calculated to undermine and destroy those fundamental principles of free government, which has so conspicuously distinguished us from all the nations of the earth, which has induced and invited thousands from abroad to abandon their native soil, to participate in the advantages flowing from rational liberty.

"From these considerations, independent of the reasons which suggest themselves against the policy of incorporating individuals for ordinary purposes, your committee are strongly induced to recommend for the adoption of the House, the following resolution:

"Resolved, That it would be highly improper and dangerous to grant the prayer of the petitioners.

This resolution was passed by a unanimous vote."
Although the Biblical fanaticism of Father Rapp never changed in this matter of returning property, as will be shown in a later document, it was obvious even to him and to Frederick Rapp that these articles after such a determined rejection by the Pennsylvania legislature could not be presented in court when Eugene Miller sued the society in Pittsburgh in 1821. There were also other pressing legal reasons that forced the Rapps to revise their articles and to add one promising return of property to those who withdrew openly. A number of cofounders with George Rapp had sued him for return of the funds they had at first, in good faith, placed into the common funds of the Harmony Society. These, however, were completely under the control of the Rapps. The reader will find the record of these lawsuits by Johannes Rapp (not a relative), Johann Georg Munz, Jacob Heckenlaible, and others in the author's documentary history, *Harmony on the Connoquenessing*. These people had signed the Harmony Society memorial as members in 1805, and if the Articles of Association of the Harmony Society of February 15, 1805, are held to be honest and genuine, then the signatures of these members who sued Rapp and of others who signed the memorial in 1805 should have been shown, as well as the missing signature Johannes Rapp.

There is something suspicious about the great joy with which the Rapps received the news that, particularly in Pittsburgh, their Articles of Association had been tested in court in the case of Eugene Miller versus Rapp, and that they had been approved legally. Furthermore, there is something suspicious when Frederick Rapp, who by no means was known for his generosity in making deals, wrote thus about the lawyer's fees: "I suggested to him in a letter of the 13th ulto. not to scruple the amount of fees our Councils may demand, but to pay them gratefully, I am now very glad you allowed Mr. Ross what he thought himself entitled to" (Arndt, *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society* [Indianapolis, 1978], 2: 698).

Eugene Miller was excluded from the society without compensation. Justice did not prevail in this case because the Anglo-American court was handling a German-American case dealing with affairs in a society where German was the only language spoken, and where records were kept in German. The German-Americans did not know their rights under the law. The depositions of witnesses in the case were taken in Indiana in English and were given under the duress of George Rapp’s spiritual and Frederick Rapp’s legal and economic control. If German-American former members of the society in Pittsburgh or members of the society had been heard in court in German, free
from the duress of George Rapp, Rapp would have lost the case. Frederick Rapp, however, through his economic power and complete control of the common treasury, and in connection with Father Rapp, determined the vote of the society. The Rapps, having political power, created a situation in which no former members could hope to obtain justice once they had joined the Harmony Society and then left it.

The falsified Articles of Association had now obtained the blessings of a court in Pittsburgh, the city in which many German-Americans lived who knew Rapp from personal experience and hated him. The exceptions were the politically active and influential Charles L. Volz and Charles von Bonnhorst — both in Rapp's employment. The article with the promise of the return of property put into the common treasury of the society was circumvented in devious ways. George Rapp put up with the article as long as it was necessary as a means to an end, but he never accepted it. As in 1818 he burned the book containing a record of funds put into the common treasury, so in 1836 he felt himself powerful enough to delete even this token of obedience to the American Constitution. Here is the record of his act as translated from the "Book of Life."

"October 31, 1836. Messr. C. L. Volz and Wm F. Baum reached Economy at 12 o'clock some minutes after one o'clock P.M. The Bell was rung and all the members of the Harmony Society appeared in the church except a few who were prevented by indisposition. After all were seated Mr. George Rapp observed that they were now going to sign a Document, with which the members were all acquainted as it had been spoken of before, that those who felt free and willing to sign, were welcome to do so, and those who were unwilling should let it alone, as no one would be flattered about the matter. After these remarks Jacob Henrici read the document slowly and loud in the hearing of all the object and purpose of the Document is, to annul and make void the 6th article of their contract or articles of association by which a seceding member was entitled to money or the value of property which was contributed by him, said 6th article is recited in the said Document. After the reading was over Mr. Rapp enquired whether the members had understood the purpose (purport) which was answered in the affirmative. He then mentioned that if any one member had any objection to the said Document to rise and speak, giving ample time to do so, but no one rose, and it was taken for granted that no member had any objection, upon which Mr. Rapp
took the pen and signed his name. R. L. Baker observed that an act of this kind in which all took equal part, could not be considered hard or unfair, which remark met general approbation. The signing was then continued for about two hours, when Joseph Gotz, Jacob Bauer, Michael Fritz, George Kurtz and Jacob Bitzer came forward and stated that they were absent when the Document was read, the signing was then stopped and the same was read to them by Jacob Henrici after which they signed it, and the signing was continued either by Mr. Volz or R. L. Baker, whether they understood what they were doing, and whether they signed with a free will, and among the whole number there was not one who answered in the negative, but all appeared cheerful and showed a readiness to sign their name to the said Document contained in the same book, where the articles of association are contained in. The signing was finished in the Evening except the Eight last signatures they were put to it on the morning of the first November.

"That the foregoing is a true & faithful Statement of the proceedings above related, We the subscribers cheerfully and unhesitatingly acknowledge by our voluntary Signatures this first day of November 1836.

Chas L. Volz
Wm F. Baum"

George Rapp saw to it that the witnesses to the signatures and to the English translation were bilingual German-Americans from Pittsburgh on whom he could always depend. His fanatic zeal about the common treasury of the Church of the Apostles never changed, although it might take a pious fraud to make this a reality in an unredeemed world. Though he often boasted that he never was a paid preacher, he was undisputed master of all that he surveyed.

On February 7, 1833, the above-named Charles Volz, the German poet Lenau, and W. Riedlen visited the Harmony Society at George Rapp’s invitation. The result was a book which Riedlen dedicated to Volz and Lenau and published under the title Guther Rath an Einwanderer in die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika (Aarau, 1834). The book contains an article by Y. P. Dewis which is very critical of Rapp’s Harmony Society and the way of life in Economy. Riedlen publishes this with his criticisms of the Englishman Dewis’s article and then adds his own glowing account. The Riedlen account is of special interest because of the economist Friedrich List’s review. List as a fellow
Swabian knew Rapp's society well. His comment: "To the Englishman Dewis this Rapp method of stable-feeding, this reverential prayer colony which keeps mind and body in chains, is repugnant to the highest degree. Our Riedlen looks more at the external side of the whole rather than on the condition of the individual, and then finds everything so very beautiful and admirable, especially since in his thoughts he might be dreaming himself into the place of Father Rapp and hence might not find it bad as a single member to stand at the head of so many zeroes. However, he might as well let this hope pass away; such good believing, such loyal souls like these Swabian Separatists, one does not find everywhere, and not everyone possesses Father Rapp's magnetic power."

Since Christ never came to claim Rapp's fanatically sealed-off common treasury of his Divine Economy, and since, however reluctantly, and to him incredibly, the angel of death did come to call, readers might wonder what eventually happened to Rapp's jealously guarded common fund "for orphans, widows, and the Second Coming." While the Rapps lived, many thousands were paid out to the best lawyers of America to defeat claims of former members or their descendants for a fair share of the wealth they had helped to create, but in the end, again with the help of the "church fund" under the control of unworthy trustees, the "church fund" was changed from a common treasure of the Church of the Apostles to individual wealth held by those who had done nothing to create it. There is a table of such distributions in the author's *George Rapp's Successors and Material Heirs, 1847-1916* (Cranbury, N.J., 1972).