

## TIME ON HIS HANDS

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A recent study of Cincinnati Metropatterns by Myron Orfield and Tom Luce notes the social separation of our region, its growing segregation by income and race. The same observation, with due allowance to differences in time and stage of development, could have been made about the infant Cincinnati of almost two hundred years ago. On the one hand, travelers in the 1820s and 30s were almost invariably impressed by the bustling community, circled by its hinterland of attractive hills, that was rising out of the flat plain that jutted out into the majestic Ohio River. Evenly laid out streets, brick houses, the constant arrival and departures of steamboats at the riverside, all this testified to the fact that Cincinnati was becoming the commercial entrepot of the rapidly growing Midwest. On the other hand, it took little searching to find the negro shanties of the West End or the so-called brickyard district or the ill-favored tenements of the poorer folk, where flood and cholera invariably took the highest toll in lives and suffering. Alexis de Tocqueville as usual zeroed in on the salient features of a city, sprouting, in the words of one observer, "without any plan or system." Tocqueville visited Cincinnati in 1831 and commented on "great buildings, thatched cottages, streets incumbered with debris, houses under construction, no names on the streets, no numbers on the houses, no outward luxury, but the image of industry and labor obvious at every step."

As our historian, John Diehl, has pointed out, in every way Cincinnati was a typical river town, sharing many of the virtues and the vices of a Pittsburgh or a Memphis or a Louisville. Intemperance, violence, and brutality, as Daniel Aaron has put it, showed the seamy side of western society not often featured in frontier history. Even the prevalent gambling, which seems to have been a weakness of all classes in the community, resisted all attempts to curb it in the interest of civic stability.

But it would be a mistake to overemphasize the tales of swindling and burglary, lewdness and murder that filled the pages of the Cincinnati press in these early days. The material growth of the city gave rise to a solid governing middle class who differed little from their fellows in the more settled east. Merchants, manufacturers, meat packers were faced with some of the same conditions of doing business as confronted their more settled fellows in Boston or Philadelphia or Baltimore. Issues of credit and banking in particular exercised these frontier business men all the way through the financial panics of 1819 and 1837, and indeed beyond.

At the same time as these westerners were tangling with the "Eastern monster" of the United States Bank, the mercantile and businessmen and their professional advisers looked to the east for most of the manners and customs that they sought to emulate. Philadelphia's leadership in particular seems to have been the exemplar for the definitions of success and the patterns of behavior adopted by the men-and the women-who set the intellectual and the cultural standards of the community. Associations of every sort rose

and fell as the years passed--the Cincinnati Literary Society, the Legislative Club, the Franklin Society came and went along with Societies for Mutual Instruction in Natural Science, or the Washington Literary and Forensic Circle, or the Ohio Mechanics Institute. The latter was uncharacteristic, having lasted until this very day, now as the College of Applied Science of the University of Cincinnati. Indeed, this year has witnessed the celebration of the 175th year of that institution's existence.

Two of the groups that met in the evening--Daniel Drake's Buckeye Club and the somewhat aristocratic Semi-Colon Club may be regarded as the precursors, but not the model, for our own Literary Club, though perhaps we should not claim relation to the latter, whose members included men and horrors women! and whose papers have been described as reflecting a "smug, opinionated, snobbish Whiggism, a contempt for the people. . .and an abhorrence of anything smacking of Jacksonism." Again as John Diehl has implied, the young men who founded our club a few years after the period I am discussing, were reacting against the exclusiveness and the narrow focus of groups like the Semi Colon Club--a lesson that our club president recently suggested we think about.

This, then, was the Cincinnati to which Mrs. Frances Trollope, already disillusioned by her observation of Frances Wright's experiment in communal living at Nashoba, Tennessee, came in 1828. The reaction of most club members to the mention of Mrs. Trollope at the last annual meeting is evidence enough of the almost Pavlovian response her critique elicits even to this day. Embittered no less by the failure of her ill-chosen and badly located emporium than by the parallel failure of Cincinnati society to welcome her with open arms, she published her *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, which hardly displayed the delicate understanding of social relationships so evident in the work of her more famous son. Instead, she painted a somewhat heavy-handed, but well-known and corrosive picture of a vulgar and uncultivated Cincinnati society. In response, some of Cincinnati's leaders pointed to Mrs. Trollope's own vulgarity of person and dress, her ignorant financial speculations, even her suspected liaison with the young Frenchman who was a member of her entourage. As usual, there was something to be said on both sides. Cincinnati, like most of the America that Mrs. Trollope caricatured, was far from the rude and untutored frontier outpost of her imagination. But neither was she the "choleric and truculent harridan" (the words are Daniel Aaron's) of her detractors. However it may have been distorted, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* remains a memorable caricature, more than can be said for the thirty-five subsequent novels of social observation that Mrs. Trollope published after she had reached her fifty third birthday.

Mrs. Trollope was only one of a series of critics, not specifically of Cincinnati itself, but of the young, commercial and even industrial society that was emerging in both Europe and the United States. A number of these critics were attracted by the communitarian ideas of Robert Owen, the remarkable industrialist who achieved widespread renown by his experiments first in factory reform and then in comprehensive social planning on the banks of the Clyde in Scotland. When he turned his attention to America, Owen's initiative was one of a rising tide of utopian schemes which, starting in the 1820s, reached their peak in the 1840s and then gradually subsided. Owen's experimental community at New Lanark was more or less the model for a similar venture

at New Harmony in southern Indiana which likewise flourished briefly and then disintegrated under the conflicting tensions of competing ideologies.

At one time or another, almost all of the New Harmony leaders made Cincinnati their jumping-off place. Here Owen for several days locked horns on religious questions with the Reverend Alexander Campbell, a somewhat genial Presbyterian divine who evidently took as much pleasure in his anti-Catholic sallies against the members of the growing German community as in his debates with such irreligious opponents as the radical Owen. Here too the notorious Fanny Wright, a feminist with a sharp mind and an even sharper tongue, preached her pointed criticism of existing society. Her lectures commending freethinking in religion, her attacks on moneyed aristocrats described as plundering the weak with impunity, above all her shocking advocacy of muslin bloomers as proper articles of women's dress -- remember the horror when our contemporary ladies began to wear slacks -- all these were at best distasteful to Cincinnati's recognized leaders. So too was her cautious questioning of the slavery issue, although it must be said that the critics reserved their most vitriolic abuse for the out-and-out abolitionists who threatened to undermine the Southern good will that meant so much to Cincinnati's prosperity.

It would be a mistake to overemphasize the importance of what Arthur Bestor has called these "backwoods utopias." They have meant more to historians seeking to understand the various strands that have gone into the making of American assumptions, prejudices, institutions than to the leaders of early Cincinnati whose confidence in the certainty of their conventional wisdom made them impervious to the challenges of a tiny and somewhat quixotic minority.

However that may be, the effervescence of unorthodox ideas attracted the interest of one Cincinnati who was finally to draw quite different conclusions from those of Robert Owen from his experiences with the new utopias. Josiah Warren was a descendent of the General Warren who was killed at the battle of Bunker Hill. A skilled musician, he came to Cincinnati after his marriage at the age of twenty to find employment as an orchestra leader and music teacher. In 1823, he invented a mechanical lamp that was so successful he patented his invention and opened a lamp factory.

Robert Owen's glowing picture of the new world to be achieved by his plan for cooperative effort so impressed the Cincinnati manufacturer that he decided to join the Englishman at New Harmony. There he entered fully into the life of the community, but soon became disillusioned with the principles upon which Owen had built New Harmony, feeling that the cause of its evident failure had been the suppression of individuality. He began to believe that effective social reform could only be achieved by the widening of individual rights and interests to as great a degree as possible.

For the time being, however, Warren's theory of individualism was permitted to lie dormant while he tried out another, though related, experiment. On May 18, 1827, he opened at the corner of Cincinnati's Fifth and Elm Streets an Equity Store, designed to illustrate what he called the Cost Principle. The central point was an attack on the capitalist principle of exchange which determined the price of any commodity by its value to the consumer. As an article became worth more to the buyer, he declared, its price went up, so that commerce was in reality a system of taking advantage of the needs

and requirements of the purchaser. For this system of "civilized cannibalism" Warren proposed to substitute a method of determining price by the cost of labor used up in buying and selling the product. The result, he contended, could be the abandonment of profit-making, each person being content to receive payment for all the sacrifices entailed in the production of the commodity and no more.

For the present, Warren applied his principle merely to the field of retail selling, though he was later to extend the Cost Principle in published writings and in community experiments. Meanwhile, trade at his "Time" store became so favorable that he was forced to double its size. In two years it did some hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of business and forced the merchant on the next comer to adopt the Cost Principle in self defense.

Warren marked the goods he sold according to their cost, then added seven per cent for rent, fuel, and incidental expenses. Perhaps the most novel feature of the store was the big clock which computed the amount of time a salesman gave to a customer. The cost of this time was added to the price of the purchase, forming the salary which the clerk received. As business expanded, the charge for the use of the salesman's time was decreased. Separately computing the cost of the goods and of the salesman's time, Warren thought, would expedite business, since customers would make purchases quickly for the sake of economy. In this way, also, Warren hoped to prove that the Cost Principle would lead to mutual aid and voluntary, rather than compulsory, cooperation on the part of society.

In the "Time" store Warren introduced another economic innovation. For the goods he purchased he paid either in other goods or gave the seller his labor notes for the amount of work required to pay for the purchase. These labor notes were promissory notes to give the bearer a specific amount of labor time when he required it. If the bearer did not need the promised labor immediately, he could use the labor notes as a circulatory medium in exchange for other goods or services required of him. The average labor time necessary to pay for certain goods was listed in the store, the price of articles being set forth in hours rather than dollars. Warren claimed that the labor notes were of more use than money, because they represented a definite amount of labor or property, while ordinary money, due to fluctuations in its purchasing power, was not a stable medium of exchange. The labor note was not only a circulatory medium, but also a means of credit, since by it a person could write out a promise to deliver his labor at a future date in return for whatever he needed. The check upon overexpansion of credit would be the danger that notes would not be accepted when it was felt that the person issuing them could not fulfill his obligations. Warren asserted that his labor notes were not being permitted to replace money mainly because they were feared by the people interested in jobbing, banking profits, financial manipulations and commercial corruption. All those abuses would be wiped out by provision for the simple exchange of labor based on cost.

During the entire course of Warren's Time Store trial, the leading Cincinnati newspaper, the *Gazette*, made no mention of his establishment. It remained for a radical journal, the *Free Enquirer* of Fanny Wright and Robert Dale Owen to point out the work of Warren as illustrative of adequate principles of liberty and social justice. In sum, the development had been a significant, if minor, note in the radical thought of the period, despite the lack of enthusiasm with which it was received.

Having, as he thought, made his point, Warren closed his Time Store. That at least is the contention of his biographer, who suggested that Warren was content to have successfully demonstrated the validity of his system. Moncure David Conway, who first met Warren some years later, argued that rival storekeepers drove him out by circulating rumors about his selling damaged stock. There is no evidence for such action, except that subsequently, when Warren opened a Time Store in Evansville, Indiana he did actually have to deal with slanders by his competitors.

After spending some time in New York conferring with Robert Dale Owen, Warren then returned to Cincinnati to prepare for launching a new village experiment on his own. He began to train himself in wagon-building, wood- and metal-working, printing and type-founding in order to be prepared to carry his share of the work of the projected community. The first by-product of this activity was the invention in 1830 of a new type of press, which copied handwriting and drawing, as well as printed matter. The versatile Warren did not patent the invention, but built a press, which was the first of the roller type and was self-inking, for the *South-Western Sentinel* of Evansville, Indiana. The press was so efficient that it aroused the ire of the hand printers who saw it as a competitor for their jobs and proceeded to wreck it at every opportunity.

Meanwhile, Warren busied himself as a band leader in Cincinnati. When a cholera epidemic broke out in 1832, he played the marches at many of the public funerals conducted by the Freemasons and other fraternal orders. More significantly, he compiled information about cholera and sanitary methods of prevention and treatment, distributing pamphlets containing the findings throughout the city. He was later tendered a vote of thanks by the city government for his service.

In January, 1833, Warren brought forth *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, a four-page weekly, which he printed himself. It was the first anarchist journal in the United States, for it presented Warren's theory of "Individuality" which he later expounded in fuller terms. After a few months, however, the paper was discontinued, and its author once more turned his attention to the idea of a model community. The site chosen in Tuscarawas County, Ohio was so marshy and damp that it had to be abandoned in less than two years without any attempt to set up a full-fledged community. Warren returned to Cincinnati and remained passive for a number of years, spending his time in mechanical pursuits and inventing a cylinder press. Then he was ready for another experiment. Despite opposition, he opened another Equity Store, and again, as before, it was successful until he closed it two years later. Still another communal initiative was tried a few years later, but more and more Warren's energies were devoted to the writing of *Equitable Commerce*, which, when it was published in 1846, was the first full-scale exegesis of the anarchist philosophy in the United States.

This is not the place to outline the organized body of ideas that Warren marshaled to make his case. His anarchism was based on a rejection of the state as an instrument for promoting the social welfare of the people. He argued that government had spread destruction and oppression under the pretext of protecting life and property, forcing the individual to do things unwillingly, with the result that his security was lessened rather than ensured by the government. Consequently, in order to achieve that security, individuals struggled ruthlessly for state power so that they could control government in their own behalf rather than be subordinate to it. The outcome was dishonesty, civil

strife, and often war. Majority rule, he charged, was merely the imposition of the will of some people upon others who had as much right as the majority to act as they pleased. The remedy for these evils of government, said Warren, was to do away with the state completely and to let each individual be the judge of his own conduct. He pointed out that all people were different in all particulars, calling this assertion the doctrine of "Individuality." Because of this individuality, to require people to conform equally to the same laws and habits was unjust and could not be successful. Consequently, people must not be required to fit into the pattern of institutions, but rather institutions should become subordinate to the individualism of men. Thus, social order and justice would result only when there was a disconnection of all interests, permitting the individual to be sovereign within the scope of his own actions. By accepting responsibility for his own deeds, an individual would be extremely careful that his conduct should not involve him in any difficulties, so that everyone would live in harmony with his fellow men in order to protect himself.

Warren felt that his doctrine of anarchism was in tune with the times. He declared that the inauguration of constitutional government had been a step toward anarchism since it disconnected the subjects of legislative action from the rights reserved to the people. The separation of church and state, he said, had been another great blow for freedom, and consequently for harmony. It remained now, he concluded, to continue this development, bringing freedom into all the social relations of man by giving him complete liberty in all his actions. Anticipating the objection that the sovereignty of the individual—a phrase used by John Stuart Mill in his *Autobiography* with attribution to Warren—would lead to social disorder, Warren declared that individuality would foster the trying out of every experiment (at the cost of the experimenters) so that by exchange of ideas it would be easier to arrive at harmonious conclusions and to work together in a manner acceptable to all. He did not object to cooperation, so long as it was voluntary.

The subsequent career of Warren has little to do with Cincinnati. But it is perhaps useful to remember that Cincinnati was once a community where "utopian" dreams, however eccentric they may have been, flourished. To be sure, the challenges to conventional society were the work of a tiny minority. Equally certain, since so many of the challenges looked back to a supposed simpler and more ideal state of society, they greatly underestimated the dynamics of the exploding new political and economic and social models that were emerging in the Cincinnati of the western world. Yet these visionary schemes, of which Warren's was one example among many, were themselves a testimony to the ferment and the vigor and above all the hopefulness that came to place their stamp on the early days of the infant new republic.

As for Warren, he moved east and once again tried to set up a model community at what he called "Modern Times" on Long Island. Like his other community ventures it belied his expectations, but a community continued to exist and today is the "modern" suburban community of Brentwood thirty miles from New York. He also continued to write, using *True Civilization* to illustrate case after case to buttress his arguments for individuality. The real cause of the Civil War, he claimed, was the idea of government itself, which made people place the state above the individuals within it. If the South wanted to secede, he argued, it should be permitted to do so gladly, for the idea of unity in itself meant nothing, while freedom of individual choice was all important.

The work of Josiah Warren was not an isolated curiosity. His anarchist doctrine bore a resemblance to the various movements for "free trade", "free land", "free capital", and "voluntary cooperation" which swept over the United States in the middle period of the nineteenth century. In each case the movement was a protest on the part of the ordinary American against being shut off from the gains of an expanding industrialism, while it also reflected the growing insistence upon the rights of the common man. Those rights, it was believed, could best be assured by the provision of equality of opportunity for all men. In the final analysis, Warren's anarchism was an attempt to guarantee that equality to the rank and file of society. Contemporaneously with him, Fourier, Brisbane, Greeley, and others projected a theory of cooperative anarchism in the form of individual communistic entities, but Warren was the founder of individualistic anarchism in America.

More important than Warren's ideas themselves is their significance for the period in which he lived. That period was one in which the perception of growing economic maladjustments led to countless attempts at amelioration. Warren's work, therefore, was significant as illustrative of the radical programs that grew out of the social ferment of the times. Unlike the doctrines of a Robert Owen or a Charles Fourier, however, it seems to have developed as an intensification of the spirit of individualism and the struggle for democracy which characterized the new America, of which Cincinnati was a dynamic and quite characteristic part.

*Disclosure:* I first came across Josiah Warren when I was an undergraduate 65 years ago. At the time, there was a hagiographic and inadequate biography published by William Bailie in 1906 and a few references, such as that of Moncure Conway's description of Modern Times in a *Fortnightly Review* article in 1865. Since then some substantial work had been done, for example in Daniel Aaron's *Cincinnati. Queen City of the West 1819-1838*, a marvelous doctoral dissertation that was published fifty years later in 1993 by Zane Miller and Henry Shapiro in their Urban Life and Urban Landscape series. I have used it shamelessly, along with the usual monographs on some of the utopian movements, in catching up with what I thought I knew 'back then-which wasn't much. A small article on Warren was published in the old *Dictionary of National Biography*, but when it appeared that he might be passed over in the contemporary *American National Biography*, my colleague, Roger Daniels, got in touch with Jonathan Weiner, one of the editors of the *ANB*, who reports that the an article on Warren has indeed been commissioned and that he will be included.

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