

THE CLARKSON PHALANX

While trying to do research on the Clarkson Phalanx, I came across an article that had been done by Mary Smith, the Hamlin Historian. This subject has always been of interest to me and I hope you will find it so, too.

According to Mrs. Smith, in the mid-1800's thirty socialist communes sprang up in the United States. Of these, six of them were in the 150-mile radius around Rochester. The largest, with 420 communists, was in Hamlin, then part of Clarkson.

The commune, known as the Clarkson Phalanx, started in the spring of 1844 and attracted people from the areas most prominent families. The leaders were mostly of the upper class; the followers were middle class and young people. The ventures in idealism collapsed after two years, and its members then scattered in shame over their failure and the outside community scorned them.

This all took place around the intersection of North Hamlin Road and Route 19 (the East Fork of Lake Road). That was the center of the commune - near the mills and a blacksmith shop. As Mrs. Smith relates, Sandy Creek, a short distance south of its mouth, supported two lumber mills and a grist mill for the commune. She stated that with a little snooping she found an old concrete abutment along the creeks edge which was evidence of the old mill race.

The Hamlin commune and the other 29 experiments in group living interpreting the socialistic teachings of Frenchman Charles Fourier were founded in a large part as a reaction to the depression of the late 1830's. The Clarkson Phalanx, unlike some other communes, did not practice free love. Their families lived together as families.

The commune had an intricate job-rating system. Skills were rated and paid on a scale according to the necessity of their role. The seamstresses were women and were paid less than the carpenters, who were men. The apprentices got paid less than foremen. There was a foreman for every six workers. "The work schedules were rigid and enforced," said Mrs. Smith. It is an agriculturally based commune, but they also made furniture, They had a chair shop, a print shop, a Blacksmith Shop and lumber and grist mills.

In the fall of 1844, during its infancy, the commune met head on with a terrific drought. It was, some say, the kiss of death. Dreams were shattered. The word "communist" later became associated with philosophies alien to Clarkson communists, and later, Mrs. Smith, eager and fascinated, undertook to reconstruct a bit of her own history of Hamlin. "If there is information in this town about the Phalanx, it's in the hands of someone whose ancestors participated and it's hidden," she said.

A historical marker now marks the site of the main house of the Phalanx on the west side of East Lake Road south of North Hamlin Road.