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Early Education

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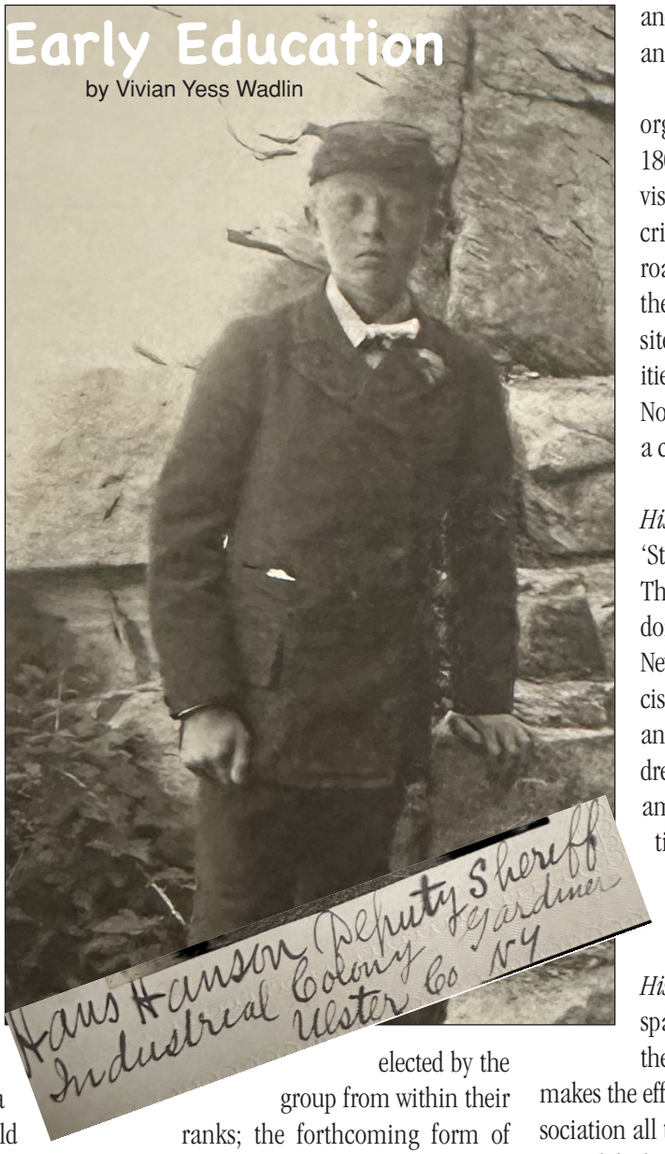

There was a new sheriff in town. A *very new* sheriff.

When the image (above) arrived in the mail from an ebay® seller, I was taken aback by how young Deputy Sheriff Hans Hanson looked. Indeed. Because he was.

THE GARDINER INDUSTRIAL COLONY

In researching Gardiner's Industrial Colony noted in the photo's caption, a *New York Times* article, "Boy Government on Farm," transported me to New York City of the late 1890s.

The article, dated November 28, 1898, was a window into a disturbing world. I wanted to know more about how the boys ended up in Gardiner, what they learned there, and especially, what became of young Hans Hanson.

The *Times* article explained the mission of the Industrial Colony Association (ICA). "It was giving poor and friendless boys a chance to develop in the right way to make something of themselves."

Twenty-eight boys ages 12-15 were taken from the mean streets of New York City by the Industrial Colony and offered the opportunity to travel to a world apart. There, these youngsters would create their own self-government complete with a sheriff, self-legislated laws, a court system, and work details. They could meter out their own justice (within the confines of the colony's rules and the laws of New York State). The *Times* continued:

> On the association's specially equipped farm city boys of the rougher class who are willing to try a total change of environment and submit to a certain degree of wholesome discipline are accepted as boy citizens.

The resulting "boy government's" civic and political jobs would be filled by those elected by the group from within their ranks; the forthcoming form of government much like a New York State county. This government had its own fiat currency, and even had an "Overseer of the Poor." The boys earned the currency learning the building trades, doing farm work, and other assigned tasks. Each had a bank account used to pay for his food, lodging and treats. The accounts earned interest on unspent funds at banks run by the "citizens."

Any boy too lazy to work was fined or imprisoned. Deputy Sheriff Hanson would have been in charge of the latter.

"The disgrace of pauperism and its attendant discomforts speedily puts an end to idling and the boys to become industrious and thrifty," wrote the Times.

The colony was not a one-off organization. At the end of the 1800s, the population of unsupervised, undernourished, sometime criminal, and always idle boys roaming the streets of citys across the nation was a burden to each sites' civility, civic budgets, charities, orphanages, and police forces. Not to mention the horror of being a child of those circumstances.

An online article in *New York History Review* (2012), titled 'Street Arabs, Gutter Snipes, Waifs': The Problem of Wayward, Abandoned and Destitute Children in New York City, 1840-1920" is a concise explanation of the problems of and caused by these neglected children, and the charitable efforts to ameliorate the situation. The article discusses earlier organizations such as Charles Loring Brace's New York City's Childrens' Aid Society (CAS). In his *History Review* article, Brace's unsparingly negative description of the immigrants and their progeny makes the efforts of the Industrial Colony Association all the more understandable. Brace posited the best way to help these street urchins was to remove them from the culture and insert them into an environment of reason and responsibility.

This was also the era that saw treatment of the insane becoming more humane, frequently based on the theories of Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, leading to the building such institutions as the Hudson River Psychiatric Hospital in Poughkeepsie and others elsewhere in the United States. Kirkbride believed you needed to remove the mentally ill from the chaos of their surrounding and provide the quiet and structure of an institution in rural

surroundings. Echos flowed into the Industrial Colony Association's mission: Getting people out of crowded, uninspiring spaces which offered little or no recourse and no personal agency, was therapeutic for all.

Summing it up in a February 8, 1896, *New York Times* article, Brace outlined the situation: "These problems are more complex and difficult in New York than in any other city because of the density of our population." He added. "In the tenement districts the average number of people in one house of the usual twenty-five-foot front is 43." He noted that it was a density twice that of Chicago, London, Paris or Hong Kong, among others.

These were some of the pressures that brought forth the Progressive Era of thought in public policy in the United States, leading to the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, a former college president, in 1912. Progressivism, according to Wikipedia, "...is a left-leaning political philosophy to advance the human condition through social reform." It harbors a two-pronged ideal based on the perfectability of man through social programs and the rightness of a class of well-educated men, i.e. experts, leading the institutions, businesses and government. Much of this thinking had long been brewing in Europe. These ideas immigrated along with masses of humanity, but more often, because universities across the big pond were considered more substantial than those homegrown for American scholars. Many an American student returned from European universities well-marinated in the Progressive culture.

But according to the *New York Times* artical, philanthropy goes just so far:

> In this progressive age, said Mr. Moss, (NYC police commissioner) nothing in a large city was more progressive than juvenile depravity. There could not be too many Industrial Colony Associations. They were all doing splendid work, and yet all that they could do did not prevent a frightful increase of juvenile depravity in this city. Each boy taken out of the slums and taken into an industrial colony was like one snatched from an evil life.

Above: An early 1900 postcard image shows some of the co-ed George Junior Republic buildings in Grove City, PA.

So what of Deputy Sheriff Hanson? According to the *Times* story, when a boy left the colony, his savings in "colony money" was redeemed in hard US currency. I like to believe citizen Hans Hanson, upon his two-month graduation, stayed in Gardiner, NY, became an honest, hardworking community member, and that I had gone to school with his great-grandchildren.

With that in mind, I consulted the 1910 New York City census and found a Hans Hanson, age 24, single, born in 1886, working in a "Brokers Office." He lived at 125th Street as a border. Born in Norway, he immigrated to the US in 1893. He both read and wrote English. Those statistics mean he could have been our Hans.

Another possible fate for Hans was that he went off on one of the orphan trains to live with a farm family out west. Since we don't know if he was orphaned, abandoned, or simply an at risk youth on the streets of New York City, his journey is not ours to know... yet.

The poorhouses in New York State were often compelled by law to send children to asylums and orphanages away from the home area. A very informative new exhibit on the UlsterCountyNY.gov site about the history of the Ulster County Poorhouse, provides an illuminating section titled "Journey of The Forgotten Children."

The story begins with an explanation of the New York State rules governing the"redemption" and education of the poorhouses' children. "Sadly, this practice proved to be more in theory than in fact."

Children between the ages of three and sixteen at Ulster's poorhouse were "relocated" to live with private families or sent to the Susquehanna Children's Home, Binghamton, NY, where they were unlikely to see their families again.

More than a dozen Ulster County children were sent. The story tells of a four-year-old George Davis, who in 1894, was sent to Binghamton. There he was indentured out for the next seventeen years.

Some Ulster children at the Susquehanna Home were brought back to Ulster County in 1891 and housed in another Industrial Home in Kingston, NY. "Many of the children placed in the Industrial Home eventually became riders on the Orphan Trains and shipped to the Mid west."

The sad story of America's children making headlines in the 1890s, tells of the many individuals and societies exploring new ways to mitigate the effects of homelessness, juvenile delinquency, starvation, abandonment, and abuse.

THE GEORGE JUNIOR REPUBLIC

One of the earlier organization's whose structure and ethos permeates this movement, was the George Junior Republics. The book, *Citizens Made and Remade*, (1912) by William R. George and Lyman Beecher Stowe (nephew of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe), recounts the development of William George's understanding of human motivation and the fruition of that understanding in changing the lives of extremely underprivileged boys and girls.

Beecher wrote of George's early thinking,

> With all his heart he believed that every normal boy, no matter how sordid the condition into which he was

born, had in him latent possibilities which if properly fostered could and would place him in the hightest, and most honorable social ranks.

Young William George and his parents lived in a Manhattan apartment into which George brought several of the street boys whom he had befriended while trying to help them and their peers where they resided–the overcrowded tenements. His belief that the boys should contribute to the household for their own self-respect gave him the idea of something in which almost every youngster could participate– sales.

George's family had only recently moved to the city from a farming community in upstate New York. He knew that his former neighbors had difficulty selling their excess produce. He set his boys about the poorer neighborhoods selling this produce, mostly eggs.

After running afoul of the local Organized Charity group to which he belonged because his group did not have a board of trustees, he looked for a new way to help the boys. The Organized Charity did not accuse him of anything other than not properly running his incipient organization. William George was in his early 20s at the time.

George then physically moved *into* the street gangs of New York City and slowly moved the gang's members' objectives from doing evil to gain status within the gang, to actually helping the police and courts by pointing out crimes and sometimes pointing fingers. George understood that within boy-gangs status was the motivation, the currency of respect you garnered by following the implicit "values" of the gang, and it was not the deed itself that counted, just the fact that an action was approved by the fellow gang-members.

This understanding eventually led him to form the George Junior Republic. His first go at this, a Junior Republic in Freeville, NY, was initially a summer camp, closely following the Kirkbride idea of getting away from the chaos. After two years of this format, George began to see the "campers" were more interested in ob-


WILLIAM R. GEORGE AND MISS LEVIN

Mr. George Is the Founder of the George Junior Republics.

taining the food, clothing, and other handouts to take back to the city, than in learning any new behaviors to deal with the world, ideas that might set them on the path out of poverty.

Stowe describes George's new thinking, which contradicted the Progressive mantra of man's perfectability, as follows.

> As one can not change human nature, to make these boys and girls generous, industrious, responsible, grateful, and law-abiding, was impossible. But one can change the manifestations of human nature. Ordinary human nature follows the line of least resistance. *Therefore, the line of least resistence should be made, so far as possible, the line of right conduct.*
>
> Emphasis added.

And the model George chose to reinforce the "line of least resistence," and to inculcate the children toward civilized behavior, was that embodied in the theory and structure of a republic. A community where the citizens made the rules by which they lived and did the work required to provide for themselves.

In an undated reprint of a booklet which was originally "Printed by the Citizens in the Franklin Print Shop, George Junior Republic," titled *Nothing Without Labo*r, added the following: "Being the Motto of the George Junior Republic Located at Freeville, NY." It is written by William George.

After describing the Junior Republic as being "exactly like any village in the United States," he relates that the voting citizens were girls and boys between 16- and 21-years old. The village abides by the laws of New York State and "... such additional laws as the young citizens may enact in their own meetings are the laws of the Junior Republic."

It further reiterates the booklet's title–Nothing Without Labor. It states, "This means that every young person residing in the little colony is compelled to meet and battle with the unerring laws of political economy." Or, as small "L" libertarians might phrase it: TANSTAAFL (There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch).

The children's first lesson in Freeville was an understanding of the fact that you don't have a right to any thing that someone else is coerced into providing. Rights were something to protect you from actions of bullies, fraudsters. thieves, government, and other coercers of human actions. After that you are on your own.

This meant you could join with others in peaceful production and trade–a system leading to plenty and wealth, not just of individuals, but of nations. Adam Smith would have been proud. It followed so perfectly on Smith's statement in his seminal book *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* about the butcher and baker plying their talents not to the benefit of the society, though it did do that, but first to the benefit of themselves. This was a useful corollary of George's understanding of engendering civilized behavior, *"Therefore, the line of least resistence should be made, so far as possible, the line of right conduct."*

And how did the first group of boys exposed to this change of state at GJR react?

Beginning the third year of Junior Republic, a new group of boys and girls arrived. Stowe noted in his description of them that they were not the same campers, but campers

with the same, "...distressingly familiar characteristics; namely, greed, irresponsibility, lawlessness and ingratitude."

They were offered shovels, told if they wanted to earn coin of the republic to buy their food, they had to work. At first, the boys were enthusiastic because it was one more way to attain coveted status. That lasted only a few days. One by one, they all quit.

Stowe describes a pivotal moment when the unconvinced boys saw the power of their individual choices. Previously given clothing unattainable in their former lives, George tempted them with articles of fine clothing and then put the suits away, no longer to be given to the boys as a right.

It is a long chapter in the book, but in the end, that temptation of heretofore unattainable clothing broke the back of the incipient strike when one boy, a leader, agreed to work five days road-building to acquire a coveted suit.

Once in his possession, instead of abusing it because he would be given another tomorrow as had been the case in previous years, he borrowed a flatiron and pressed his new outfit.

Much of the largess boys could work toward owning was donated by individuals, churches, local farms, city governments, and transportation companies. The nation's large cities were a constant source of uncivilized youngsters–a drain on the resources of the communities. The many civic-minded people seeking to mitigate street urchins' dismal prospects and make their cities more livable, saw the George Junior Republic (GJR) format as a savior.

Other nearby GJRs included the Pennsylvania George Junior Republic opened 1909 in Grove City (pictured above). Another, Junior Republic began in nearby Litchfield, CT. In Arcade, NY, another. A George Junior Republic in Chino, California evolved and is run today as Boys Republic. One famous resident there was the late actor Steve McQueen.

Other "Republics" opened in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Ohio – short-lived but patterned directly after the Freeville experiment. The GJR movement flourished for several years with chapters springing up in additional states and in Europe, each with equally encouraging outcomes.

Another connection we in the Hudson Valley have with the GJRs is the following from the William George Agency, the current iteration of the GJR of Freeville from their website wgaforchildren.org.

In 1951, after visiting the a GJR, Eleanor Roosevelt is quoted,

> Sometime ago I visited the George Junior Republic at Freeville, New York. I was impressed by the program which was being carried out, which lays particular emphasis on preparation for citizenship. Many young people find the particular project which suits them best in a set-up such as the George Junior Republic, and I think anyone visiting this school will be enormously impressed by the success they have with young people."

Unfortunately, William George was accused of unprofessional attention to three girls. This, and perhaps the new ideals of the Progressive Movement, contributed to the collapse of GJRs' forward momentum.

Though the Republics for the most part disappeared or transformed into places for at-risk youth, the theoretical foundations of the Republics was continued or resurrected in other organizations including the Gardiner Industrial Association.

Left: Postcard image of the Freeville, NY George Junior Republic buildings. Circa 1900. It was the initial Junior Republic.

Before leaving the GJR, this observation from *Citizens Made and Remade (1912)* stopped me in my tracks:

> Curiously enough, our public schools, which are supported by our taxpayers and which should obviously be fountain heads of democratic training, have been organized after the autocratic manner of our industrial world instead of after the democratic manner of our political institutions.

RAYMOND RIORDON SCHOOL

Hints of the GJR's philosophy of the republic in education are reflected in another long-gone educational institution in Ulster County–the Raymond Riordon School (RRS, 1914-1940) in Highland, NY. After the death of Riordon, the private boys' preparatory school briefly moved to Milton, NY, in 1940 and soon thereafter closed.

Although RRS was dealing with mostly boys from affluent families, the students were expected to be self-sufficient including cutting ice; caring for the school's farm animals, gardens and orchards; waiting on tables; building roads and major campus structures (sports fields, dorms, a gymnasium); running the school's power plant; and planting tens of thousands of trees in several states over the span of the school's existence.

Additionally, these students spent a significant number of weeks in Washington, DC, studying our form of government. The boys, ranging in age from eight to 20, had rigorous academic schedules, played sports and did many civic projects, locally and in other states. The idea of raising knowledgable, contributing citizens was central to a Riordon education, just as it had been in the George Junior Republics and the Gardiner Industrial Colony movement.

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