

Novel Views of the Aurora Colony

The Literary Interpretations of Cobie de Lespinasse and Jane Kirkpatrick

THE PUBLICATION IN 2008 of *A Mending at the Edge* completed a trilogy of novels written by Jane Kirkpatrick and based on the experiences of Emma Wagner Giesy, the only female member of the scout party sent by William Keil to locate a new colony site in the Pacific Northwest. These historical novels in the Change and Cherish Historical Series — the others are *A Clearing in the Wild* (2006) and *A Tendering In the Storm* (2007) — explore the history of the Aurora Colony, from its roots in Bethel, Missouri, through the aborted attempt to establish the colony on the Willapa River in what is now Pacific County in Washington to the settlement of the Aurora Colony along the Pudding River in the Willamette Valley. These works are well researched, as Kirkpatrick utilized the available resources and also uncovered many heretofore unknown documents and photographs within the collections of descendants and others. Clearly, many aspects of the story presented in the novels are speculative — and some portions are completely fabricated — but there is a solid historical basis for much that Kirkpatrick writes. That historical basis warrants attention in examining the overall picture of the Aurora Colony, for those historical novels — although in fiction form — introduce new information to the Aurora story. Moreover, the interpretive nature of these novels offers some provocative glimpses into the possible personal struggles that underlay the historical, documented activities of the colony, thereby giving attention to a topic largely untouched in most other writings.

Kirkpatrick's "Emma trilogy" is not the first attempt to present the history of the Aurora Colony through the lens of historical fiction. A novel



*A view of Aurora from the 1880s shows the colony dwellings and the orchards started by the colonists. Aurora is the setting for Cobie de Lespinasse's *Second Eden* (where the colony is called Mills) and the second two novels in Jane Kirkpatrick's trilogy, *the Change* and *Cherish* Historical Series.*

written by Cobie de Lespinasse, published in 1951, is the earliest known attempt to bring the story of William Keil and his followers into the public view through a fictionalized approach.¹ *Second Eden: A Romance*, as stated on the title page, is a “novel based upon the early settlement of the Oregon country.” Although subtitled “A Romance,” this novel also is based on historical documents and presents some provocative perceptions of aspects of the Aurora Colony, which de Lespinasse does not name as such within the work. Like Kirkpatrick’s novels, de Lespinasse’s book warrants further exploration from historians because of its reflection on some unexplored, or even unspoken, elements of the Aurora story — specifically the sexual exploits of its charismatic leader, William Keil.

The historical novel has often been bypassed by historians as a legitimate means of expression of events of the past, but some argue that the fictional treatment of historical events has its place in providing glimpses of the past not included in standard historical texts. This debate is not a new one, dating

from even before the rise of the novel as a form of literary expression. The works of Homer, Sophocles, and other classical writers might be viewed as straddling the line between history and fiction, and some might even include the Bible among such works. In the modern era, however, the historical novel has been at the center of this debate. As Mark C. Carnes notes in an examination of historians and novelists, “the tension between good storytelling and ‘truthful’ storytelling, between art and history, is similarly bound up with the evolution of the novel.”² Examining some of these tensions within the treatment of the Aurora Colony in the writings of Cobie de Lespinasse and Jane Kirkpatrick allows for exploration both of issues related to the value of the historical novel and of the relationship of the history presented in these novels with the known factual history of the Aurora Colony.

The Aurora Colony was established in 1856 by William Keil, who purchased a donation land claim on the Pudding River and named the colony after his daughter, Aurora. Keil was a Prussian-born tailor who came to the United States in the mid 1830s and was infected by the religious revival and the outburst of communal spirit that characterized that decade and the early 1840s.³ He was associated with several Protestant groups in New York City and Pittsburgh but then denounced those organized groups to establish his own community of followers devoted to fundamental Christian beliefs, particularly the Golden Rule — to treat others as you wish to be treated.⁴ Believing that a communal society was the way to organize his followers, Keil acquired land in Shelby County, Missouri, in 1844 and established the Bethel Colony there. Keil had assistance from individuals who had participated in earlier communal experiments, most significantly the Economy community of George Rapp in Pennsylvania. Over the next decade, the Bethel Colony prospered in many respects, allowing the mostly German immigrant population that reached eight hundred at its peak to practice their simple Christian beliefs while living communally and achieving some level of financial profitability through production and sale of such commodities as wagon wheels and whiskey.⁵

Despite these successes, Keil sought a new location for his colony and, in 1853, sent a scout party to the Pacific Northwest to find a “Second Eden,” as he called it. The group — including Emma Wagner Giesy — identified land on the Willapa Bay in Washington Territory, and in 1855, Keil led a wagon train, which included the hearse carrying his oldest son, to this new site. Keil was immediately dissatisfied with the Willapa location, however, and chose to winter in Portland while looking for another site, which he found in the Willamette Valley in early 1856. Most of the individuals who came with Keil to the Pacific Northwest moved with him to Aurora, although some remained at Willapa. Those who settled in Aurora encountered several

challenges, including disease that claimed four of Keil's children in 1862, but some initial developments at the colony took place. It was not until 1863 that another large group arrived from Bethel, with carpenters and craftsmen then hastening the growth of the community. The following years saw additional arrivals from Bethel and the completion of numerous buildings. Eugene Snyder has called the period from 1863 to 1870 the "Golden Age" of the colony, culminating with the arrival of the California & Oregon Railroad line into Aurora in 1870.⁶

Keil was a charismatic leader, but his leadership and personality led to a range of views about him; some affectionately called him "Father Keil," while others labeled him "King Keil" in a more critical manner. He held firm control of the Aurora Colony, and in absentia of Bethel, but he did transfer some control of the colony to a group of trustees in 1866 and took steps to initiate transfer of land to individual households in the early 1870s. Colonists expected additional transfers, but Keil died suddenly on December 30, 1877. Without another individual to assume leadership of the colony, the trustees began to dissolve both Aurora and Bethel — an act completed officially in January 1883.

Throughout its existence, the Aurora Colony imparted significant influence on the social, cultural, and agricultural landscape of the Willamette Valley and, to some degree, beyond. Some of these contributions are examined by Kirkpatrick in a non-fiction work, *Aurora: An American Experience in Quilt, Community, and Craft* (2008), and others were part of a special Winter 1991–92 issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*.⁷ The Aurora Colony story also has been told through numerous articles, pamphlets, theses, and other writings. Still, there has yet to be written an extensive and thorough scholarly monograph on its history and on the important contributions of the Aurora Colony to the broader social, economic, and cultural history of the region.

Robert Hendricks's *Bethel and Aurora: An Experiment in Communism as Practical Christianity with Some Account of Past and Present Ventures in Collective Living*, published in 1933, often is cited as the authoritative source on the history of the colony.⁸ As valuable as Hendricks's work is, in many respects, it is far from an authoritative text on Aurora. Philip H. Parrish, in reviewing the book for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in late 1933, characterized it as pseudo-historical in its nature, because of Hendricks's speculative approach to many details of colony life and sometimes even fanciful assumptions. Parrish also noted:

In commenting on *Bethel and Aurora* in the *Oregonian*, I expressed the belief that since this was the first extensive examination into an extremely important human experiment, Mr. Hendricks would have done better to confine himself to carefully documented mate-

rial, rather than to interlard the whole with what Charles C. Carey, in the appreciation, refers to as “revealing imaginary conversation.” By letter, Mr. Hendricks replied that the conversations were founded upon what he considered to be sufficient basis — that is, upon his own long study of the deeds and conversations of the leaders of the Aurora group.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that imagined words and actions, no matter how well grounded in psychology, cannot be accepted as history.⁹

Parrish is correct in stating that Hendricks’s work could have been more faithful to the historical record, as it was known at the time, but there was then — and continues to be — little of personal reflections and voice of the colonists. Hendricks’s “imaginary conversation,” as then Oregon Historical Society President Charles Carey observed, “spiced” the narrative and was an effort to present Keil and others in a more personal manner. Although not oral history as it has become known, much of Hendricks’s research was based on the voices of descendants, and he seemingly tries to bring those voices to his readers through imagined conversations. As Parrish concludes in his review, “it is merely necessary to discount somewhat for Mr. Hendrick’s [sic] personal enthusiasm and rather romantic viewpoint.”¹⁰

That “romantic viewpoint” characterizes many of the writings on the Aurora Colony because, in part, tracking the history of the Aurora Colony is in itself at times a utopian quest.¹¹ Several reasons might be suggested for the absence of documented detail about the Aurora Colony. One of these is presented in Charles Nordhoff’s 1875 compilation on such societies in the United States, another work often viewed as an authoritative source on the Aurora Colony. Based on personal visits to the communities in Missouri and Oregon, Nordhoff presents significant detail about these two colonies founded by Keil. In his observations of Aurora, Nordhoff states, “the community has no library,” and he adds, “its members, as far as I could see, lack even the most common and moderate literary culture, aspiring to nothing further than the ability to read, write, and cipher; that from the president down it is absolutely without intellectual life.”¹² Capturing their history for posterity was not what these communities were about, and such action would have been inconsistent with the beliefs of Keil and his followers, suggesting some sinful nature of self praise. Correspondence from Keil and his followers would also be a significant source of information on the colony, but other than some letters Keil wrote on his trip west to some of his followers in Bethel, very few such primary sources have been located.¹³

There are other types of documents related to the Aurora Colony, from business ledgers to musical scores, but the writing of the history of Aurora is much like the delicate quilt work that also exists as a document produced by the colonists.¹⁴ Historians have stitched blocks of information together

to create the documented Aurora quilt, but as with fabric quilts, there is a great deal of interpretation possible with the viewing of them as well as the method in which they were stitched.

Some of the pieces of information are reflective writings of descendants and others associated with the colony, capturing important elements of life within the community. Eugene Snyder's *Aurora, Their Last Utopia: Oregon's Christian Commune, 1856–1883* (1993) is particularly valuable in the reflections he presents on his family involvement with the community. Generally, however, Snyder offers a popularized history of the Aurora story that lacks the necessary broad examination. Many other historical accounts fall back on the sketches and reports of Aurora that appeared in compilations on communal societies, such as Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (1875).¹⁵ Those earlier reports bear careful analysis (with a touch of skepticism) of their historical accuracy, however, as they are limited in scope or perspective and perhaps not all that far removed from “imagined words and actions.”

This general absence of a complete history of the settlement has led to many different types of works and oral traditions to fill the void. The history written about the colony therefore includes a blend of “fact, hearsay, and fiction,” as Coralie Cassell Stanton suggests in one of the several theses written on the Aurora Colony.¹⁶ The nature of history writing itself also changed in the second half of the twentieth century, from what Daniel Aaron called the “old school” of narrative history to one with a more “scientific” or structural approach. The result, according to Aaron, “left a void that biographers and writers of fiction history quickly filled.”¹⁷ Cobie de Lespinasse and Jane Kirkpatrick's novels filled some of that void with historical fiction based on historical facts.

Some might see the “revealing imaginary conversation” in Robert Hendricks's *Bethel and Aurora* as fiction, but he presented that work as history. De Lespinasse and Kirkpatrick presented their works as fiction, but the result, contrary to Hendricks's work, may actually offer some revealing historical perspectives. In seeking to uncover the broad history of the Aurora Colony, literary interpretations based on historical research are of note. As Jackson Putnam argues, a novelist who adheres to research responsibilities and knows the historical record can utilize his or her creative imagination and, in doing so, “is well qualified not only to describe the western experience accurately but to impart meaning to it.”¹⁸ De Lespinasse and Kirkpatrick adhere to these guidelines and are thus qualified to impart meaning to the experience of the Aurora Colony. The specific meanings that these two women authors impart center on both personal aspects of life in a communal setting and the tensions that exist in the delicate balancing act of

individual and community interests and needs. These tensions are related to the authoritative, charismatic leader, William Keil. For de Lespinasse, it is the power, including even sexual dominance, of Keil. For Kirkpatrick, it is the struggle for individual identity — even survival — within the framework of a communal society dominated by Keil. The meanings imparted by these literary interpretations bring to light issues that have not been examined in any formal scholarship to date.

In examining the works of these two authors, some background and information about how she came to select the Aurora Colony as her subject is useful. For chronological and other reasons, it is appropriate to commence with Cobie de Lespinasse. Born in Orange City, Iowa, in 1883 to a prominent Dutch American family, Jacoba (Cobie) Muyskens's youth was spent in Iowa until her family moved to Oregon, where they settled in Hubbard, a small town a few miles south of Aurora.¹⁹ Her interests in the Aurora Colony probably date to soon after her arrival in Oregon, but her first major literary work clearly is rooted in her own youth in Iowa.

The Bells of Helmus, published in 1934, is a novel that depicts a dark dichotomy between the two Protestant churches in a small town and those who are associated with each.²⁰ It represents de Lespinasse's efforts to show some less than ideal aspects of her Dutch American heritage. As Suzanne M. Sinke notes in *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880–1920*, “*The Bells of Helmus* . . . challenged religious orthodoxy, particularly as it had an impact on gender roles.” This theme of religion and its impact on gender roles is also evident in de Lespinasse's novel about the Aurora Colony. It is also significant, as Sinke observes, that *The Bells of Helmus* prompted “scathing comments from commentators within the community who read it.”²¹ This would not be the only instance of this reaction to one of de Lespinasse's novels.

De Lespinasse's second book was a children's story titled *Four Brothers*,



Courtesy of the Aurora Colony Historical Society

Cobie de Lespinasse (1883–1963) raised a family in Hubbard, Oregon, and later turned to writing. Second Eden (1951) is her fictionalized account of the Aurora Colony.

published in 1947 (the same year *Bells of Helmus* was translated and published in Dutch).²² This story also is set in a small town (probably in Iowa), and some of the same episodes that appear in *The Bells of Helmus* also show up in the *Four Brothers*. Interestingly, the book was illustrated by Anna Stauffer, a descendant of the Aurora Colony.²³

The idea of writing about the Aurora Colony seems to have been on de Lespinasse's mind for some time. In 1939, she received on loan from Clark Moor Will and his wife Mary a package of typewritten sheets dealing with the colony records. The "Receipt and Agreement" signed by the Wills and de Lespinasse on May 28, 1939, noted the records were "indexed and arranged in 18 sections." It was specified "that said material should be used only in the manner asked for, i.e., as a thought guide in the writing of a novel."²⁴

In an examination of de Lespinasse's historical novel in terms of the research she undertook and the authenticity of the information she used, it is important to note the efforts of Clark Moor Will. The son of John William Will, a member of the Aurora Colony, Clark Moor Wier Will (1893–1982) was orphaned before he was one year old and raised by an aunt and uncle, George and Otilia Wolfer of Hubbard. Will worked as a printer and plumber-electrician, and for many years for the Salem Water Department. His passion was the history of the Aurora Colony, and he became the leading advocate for documenting the stories and lives of the Aurora colonists, many of whom he interviewed over the years. He compiled extensive notes on the colony, and he published several articles and presented talks on Aurora at many venues. Will's illustrations of Aurora accompany many other publications on the colony, and he was involved in the establishment of the Aurora Colony Historical Society in the early 1960s. Will sought to write the history of the colony — an unfulfilled aspiration. Still, he amassed the greatest concentration of materials on the colony, much of it directly from colonists and their descendants. It was this material that served as the basis of de Lespinasse's research.²⁵

De Lespinasse was in frequent contact with Will about such details as the English wording of German hymns composed by Keil, including the Advent hymn sung at the graveside of his oldest son, Willie.²⁶ That Will would share these records with de Lespinasse is noteworthy, as he was highly protective of the material he compiled on the colony. In a letter to de Lespinasse in April 1951, he reminds her, "you Cobie and Cornelia Marvin are the only person [sic] who have ever had the opportunity to carefully read and study or compare my notes with what has come before."²⁷ Cornelia Marvin (Pierce) was the Oregon State Librarian from 1905, when the Oregon Library Commission was established, to 1929. She, like Will, had been interested in preparing a book on Aurora, and she suggested Will's

father by adoption, George Wolfer, was also considering writing such a book.²⁸ Although Will apparently loaned his materials to Marvin, her book never appeared. Still, Will described Marvin's interest in his work in the same April 1951 letter: "Cornelia Marvin's words still ring in my ear — 'I am anxious to see your historic notes published, they are the missing link of Oregon's history.'"²⁹

It appears that de Lespinasse had most of the writing done early in 1940, as she wrote to Will on March 1 that year — "I have the story all written but will wait with the third typing . . ."³⁰ Although most of the writing was completed, the novel would not be published for another eleven years. There are likely several reasons for this delay, including the arrival of World War II, but finding a publisher was probably a critical one. She acknowledged this in a letter to Will in March 1951, noting, "I've had it to so many publishing houses."³¹ In 1943, de Lespinasse contributed a small piece for the *Junior Historical Review* titled "Aurora Colony," which had illustrations by Will.³² Her children's book also appeared in these years, but she was eager to see the Aurora book published. She made an agreement with Will that they would share equally any proceeds from the book, but the difficulty in finding a publisher raised concerns about this arrangement. In her March 29, 1951, letter to Will, de Lespinasse stated: "I have almost decided to invest some money in bringing out 2nd Eden. That is, if you approve." She realized that "no publisher will advance some of the expense" and also identified an important aspect of the book: "It will never reach popular sales values, as it is too much history and not enough sex and entertainment."³³

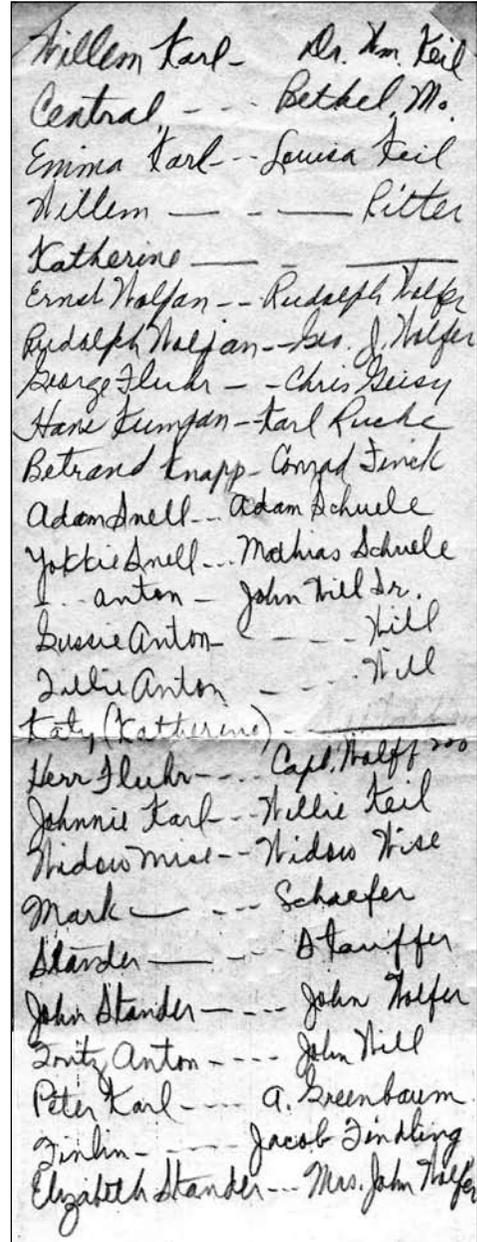
When she did find a publisher for the book, it was not an Oregon publishing house as it had been for her two earlier books but the Christopher Publishing House of Boston. De Lespinasse reported this in a postcard to Will, dated April 6, 1951: "I've signed contract and work is under way."³⁴ The book appeared later that year with a dust jacket illustrated by Will. He notes in several letters that a number of his illustrations were submitted for the book, including one of William Keil and his daughter Aurora, but only the jacket illustration was accepted.³⁵ Will also penned a foreword for the book, but it was also dropped in final production. In the proposed forward text he sent to her in a letter of April 29, 1951, Will wrote:

Your understanding and interpretation of the human elements lined up in my notes are like bell-tones in the printed pages of "Second Eden." Thus we have in "Second Eden" a fictional-narration basically true and interesting. As we follow the magnetic "Karl" through from Pennsylvania to Oregon we sense [sic] at once the response and reaction to his words and deeds during his everyday contacts with his people. For here is revealed the inmost nature of an uncultured German gentleman of magnetic personality who grasped an opportunity of great possibilities only to loose [sic] it. The pastoral [sic]

background was rich and full of promise — a wonderful seed-bed of culture and good living and neighborliness.³⁶

Despite these omissions, de Lespinasse acknowledged Will's significant contributions to the book on the dedication page — "This romance of early Oregon days is dedicated to Clark Moor Will whose research and records are the basis for the story."³⁷

The book was published without actual place-names and both the title page and jacket note, "This story is fiction based upon the early settlement of the Oregon country." Nevertheless, any reader familiar at all with the story of Keil and either Bethel or Aurora would see clearly that this story is that of the colonies. The names have been changed, but it is easy to identify that the charismatic leader — William Karl in the text — is William Keil. The omission of any specific reference to the Aurora Colony and real names appears to be in response to concerns raised by Will. In his lengthy missive to de Lespinasse on April 4, 1951, he states: "Correct dates & name places seem to me are out of place in a fictional narrative story like *Second Eden* and as they come from source records and are to be published I sincerely hope you will so change the place names and dates that only a very few people could ever guess its real source." He goes on to state: "I hope this is not too much of a monkey wrench in your proposed action — I am sorry if you think so — but really I can't help but feel you will completely agree after thinking the matter over carefully — on top of it all I truly



An early reader of *Second Eden* prepared a sheet with the names of the fictional characters in the novel alongside the actual individuals from the Aurora Colony; it was found affixed to the inside of the novel's dust jacket.

believe it will be a better book if it remains strictly fictional narrative.”³⁸ De Lespinasse apparently heeded Will’s request, although it is interesting that, in the foreword he drafted, he described the book as “a fictional-narration basically true and interesting.” Perhaps this was Will’s own way to suggest the conflict between “fact” and “truth.”

It is evident early in the novel that this is going to be a different kind of representation of William Keil (aka Karl) than those in any earlier writing, even publications that were more critical of Keil. In describing Karl’s character, de Lespinasse writes, “it was easy to see that here was a man to whom other men listened and whom they were proud to obey, a man who might play the very devil with women” (12).³⁹ Soon thereafter, in describing the marriage of Karl and Emma (Louisa in real life), it is noted that “he admitted to himself that marriage was not so thrilling as he had hoped and thought it would be. . . . He soon tired of the featherbed and all endearments so easily to be had and so — so lacking in fire by his little companion” (15). The sexual attraction of Karl and his apparent frustrations in his own marriage quickly set the tone for an underlying theme in the novel.

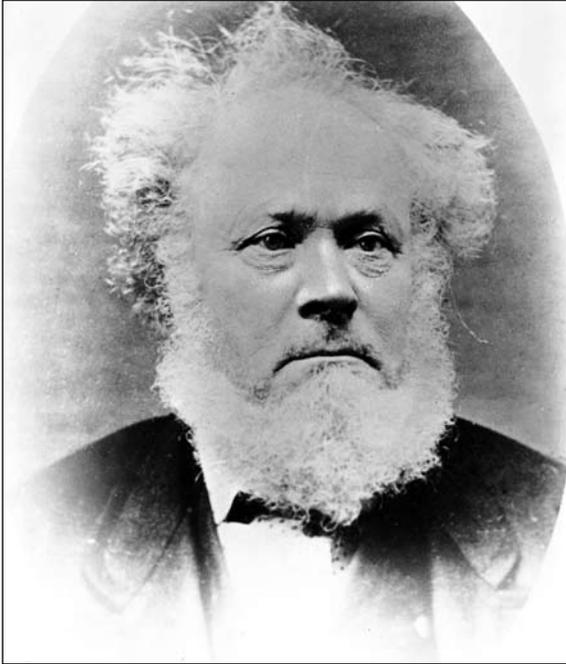
After Karl establishes Central (Bethel), he moves into the Master House with Emma and their five children as well as a young woman named Katherine. The Master House would be the meeting place for Karl and those men who constituted his immediate council. In one of the early discussions among this group, the school teacher mentions that the idea of a community of goods existed long before Christ, to which Karl responds, “You said two men in Greece talked of a community of goods long before Christ?” (44). The teacher answers that Pythagoras and Plato did indeed suggest this and that Plato “wanted not only all things in common but even wives.” At this, “Karl chuckled dryly. ‘Hm! That would not sit so well with some — of the wives. Wives in common? No, that is not good. Still, it sounds exciting. The devil, it sounds *most* exciting’” (44).

The imagined conversation touches on an issue that was not uncommon among earlier or contemporary communal groups of Bethel and Aurora. The influence of such groups on Keil and his followers has not been extensively examined, except that of the Harmonists — the followers of George Rapp — as some of Keil’s followers had been involved in the later stages of those communities.⁴⁰ Keil’s arrival in the United States in the 1830s and his founding of Bethel in 1844 coincided with an unprecedented outburst of communal activity, from the Joseph Smith era of the Mormons to the initial efforts of John Humphrey Noyes and the Perfectionists that would become the Oneida community. These and other groups, including the Shakers who were established in the eighteenth century, represent a wide range of

beliefs and practices related to marriage and gender roles, including celibacy, polygamy, and complex marriage.⁴¹

Keil may have been influenced directly or indirectly by other communal movements of the period, while he was developing his own views on how his communal society would be structured. As with many aspects related to the formation of his personal vision, or that of his followers, there is not a substantial source of documentation to support a definite link to any similar groups. There are some contemporary accounts, however, that hint of possible reasons for some of Keil's (and Karl's) views of marriage. David Nelson Duke explores one of these in "The Evolution of Religion in Wilhelm Keil's Community," suggesting that Keil was influenced by the spirit of millennialism evident in the early 1840s, as several of the leaders of religious communal groups in this period (and many before) were influenced.⁴² Duke proposes that Keil's interest in the Book of Revelation was not because of his fascination with the mysticism embedded within the reading but was due to his evolving sense of the millennial message within it. In coming to this realization, Keil was joining other religious communal leaders, many of whom saw celibacy as an outgrowth of this belief or, in the case of the Oneida Community of John Humphrey Noyes, believed in and practiced complex marriage because of their belief in millennialism. In this version of addressing "heaven on Earth," Noyes preached that in the state of perfection — which he and his followers were in since the Second Coming, which had taken place centuries earlier — monogamous marriage did not exist and essentially everyone was "married" to everyone else.⁴³ Similar to practices at other communal groups of the period, moreover, Keil seemed to exercise control over marriages, at least at some points during the history of Bethel and Aurora.⁴⁴ Thus, the ideals of Plato that de Lespinasse suggests intrigued Karl may reflect ideas regarding beliefs and practices related to marriage and gender roles that influenced other communal societies at the time.

Whatever the germ of the idea of some different views of marriage and sexuality, de Lespinasse's Karl soon addresses his needs in a way that has not been tracked in any history books. Feeling particularly pleased with his power and influence (as one character tells him, "you attract men and women as honey does the flies"), Karl knew "that there was only one thing needed to make the evening perfect; he felt a great physical and spiritual need to hold a dearly beloved woman to him" (56). By now, however, he was no longer even sharing the same room with his wife, and the thought of seeking her out was not an option, although "he knew she would welcome him with kind words if he should go to her, that she would accept his lovemaking serenely." So instead, on this occasion, "he decided to take a cold sponge"



The charismatic leader of the Bethel and Aurora colonies was Prussian-born William (Wilhelm) Keil (1812–1877). Keil (or Karl as named in Second Eden) is a central figure in novels about the Aurora Colony by Cobie de Lespinasse and Jane Kirkpatrick.

(57). This was not long to be the case.

Later, J. Anton, a member of the colony who equates with John Will, Sr., is severely ill. Karl, as the doctor-pharmacist in residence (reflecting Keil's actual practices in these areas), is called to treat him, which he does but also scolds Anton and his family about the evil spirits in their home that are the cause of the illness. Anton's wife and small children fear Karl but the oldest girl, Gussie, does not. At sixteen, Gussie is described as "slender, yet rounded, frail and spiritual, yet strong and little." As Karl watches her, he "instinctively . . . knew that she was the type which could be taught to be all fire in a man's arms" (67). Gussie's younger sister Tillie also "had unusual beauty," and Karl knew "that she adored him and that he

might perhaps have his way with her." Soon thereafter, Karl finds a moment to hold Gussie, "kissing her lightly," an exchange witnessed by Tillie, thereby setting up a jealousy and revenge subplot for the rest of the novel.

As Anton's health worsens (and he later commits suicide), Karl decides that in order to cast out the evil spirits, some drastic measure is necessary. As he is thinking what this step will be, he recalls hearing "that one of the other communistic colonies had done away with marriage as too many marriages meant a financial burden to the colony" (69). This thought, as well as his feeling when glancing at Gussie that "it would be too utterly disquieting to think of that lovely girl in another man's arms," led him to make the Anton girls promise they would put out of their minds all thoughts of love and marriage. The text goes on to note: "That was the beginning of young women and girls making promises of putting aside love and marriage. It became a fad among the young, emotional girls who worshipped the master. Suitors cursed in silence but dared not say anything to Karl or even to each other" (71).

In relating these events, de Lespinasse touches on some documented aspects of the history of the colony, including a scattered move toward celibacy, but she casts these events under a dark cloud of intent by Master Karl. Were Karl's actions based on some economic argument for limiting marriage, or did he have ulterior motives? Soon after, de Lespinasse suggests that there was more than a financial burden. Karl "had to admit to himself that . . . he found it so extremely, exhilarating and easy to look at the younger women. All the young girls worshipped him and waited upon him and he knew he could have his way with them if he desired this" (77-78). This bothers him so much that it strains further his spousal relationship with Emma, and he ends up having sex with Katherine, the young woman who is the housekeeper at the Master House. This started a relationship that would last, in some fashion, from Central (Bethel) to Mills, de Lespinasse's name for the settlement of Aurora, where she later notes that "Katherine . . . had become more than plump as the years went on . . . [and] fortunately for all concerned, was childless" (183), suggesting that at least there were no out-of-wedlock children to make matters worse.

Karl's exploits were not limited to Katherine. On the trip west, which de Lespinasse describes in much detail, Karl also is intimate with one of the girls near Fort Kearney. Her identity is not readily revealed, but readers later learn it is Gussie. In Oregon, Gussie becomes his favorite, as she "was always praising him, doing all she could for his comfort . . . [and] whose red lips were sweet and soft, whose form was slender yet rounded and who was always happy to be in his arms and whose kisses were fully as ardent as his own" (183). This long-standing relationship with Gussie brings out the ire of her sister Tillie, who, feeling betrayed, seeks some type of revenge on Karl. At one point she confronts her sister and exclaims: "You think he loves only you? He loves all the young girls, he kisses them behind every rose hedge. He embraces them at every chance and he loves them with his eyes even when he does not touch them" (225). Throughout all of this, Karl's wife Emma accepts the role and duty that both Katherine and Gussie play in Master Karl's master plan, but other characters are not so accepting. One of Karl's closest advisors notes to others: "Long have I had the feeling that all is not well here but today when the young girls had to be forcibly [sic] restrained from throwing themselves upon the master's breast, I felt I could keep silent no longer" (253-54). At the same time, it is observed that "all the way from Central to Mills one, two thousand miles, some of our young women dreaded coming here, and the nearer they came, the greater was their fear" (255).

There is no need to go into further detail of this aspect of the story of William Karl that de Lespinasse presents. Many other parts of the novel are

full of details of the move west, the activities undertaken in the colony, the building of the tavern, and the establishment of the band that are solidly based on what is known about the Aurora Colony. What stands out in the novel are these ideas and actions of Karl. Are these sexual feelings and exploits of Karl merely a literary device to make the book a “romance”? There is no question that the “sex and entertainment,” to use de Lespinasse’s own words, was included to make the book more than history, but some indications from primary sources suggest de Lespinasse may have been hitting close to some unspoken truths about Keil’s control and influence.

This possibility is reflected in some of the documentation from families of descendants. Patrick Harris, who continued the documentation work initiated by Clark Moor Will, interviewed descendants and occasionally came across some sentiments about Keil that suggest de Lespinasse’s interpretation was not too far off the mark.⁴⁵ In a March 1989 interview with a colony descendant and her husband, Harris recorded that “the husband said, ‘Keil had a regular whorehouse operating,’ referring to his bedding so many colony women.”⁴⁶ No other details are presented here or elsewhere, at least as far as existing records show. Without such documentation, such perceptions may be viewed as family lore about the leader of the Aurora Colony. Still, there are other thinly veiled comments in the existing records of colony descendants that hint at some displeasure with the manner in which Keil used his authority, particularly with younger women in the community. Henry T. Finck — who grew up in Bethel and later moved to Aurora, where his father Henry C. started the Aurora band — offers this assessment of Keil: “Dr. Keil, though personally rather unprepossessing, short and heavy, had a pleasant manner and an undoubted gift of leadership, and he managed to blind his followers to his own selfishness.”⁴⁷ This selfishness, as well as other “dark” sides of Keil and the colony, are suggested by a descendant’s comment to Will that “it was not all heavenly.”⁴⁸ Such comments suggest that there is more to the Aurora story than existing documentation reveals.

Soon after the publication of *Second Eden*, Will responded to criticism some descendants made of the book. In a letter to Hattie Will Ehlen on October 3, 1952, Will wrote:

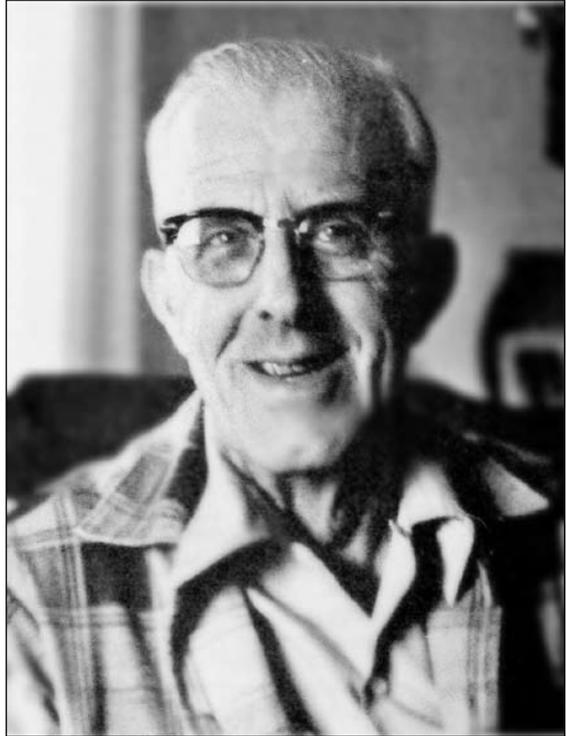
Cobie took great liberties with her play on colony characters — there is nothing in my colony notes to warrant [sic] any direct smear on any colony member with one possible exception and that person mentioned by first name only. I happen to know who the person was and told Mary it was no one from the Will family — she promptly said — “don’t you know many people think Cobie’s stuff might be true and as she got her data from your notes feel you know more than you care to say.” The so called sex stuff in the book is a build up to help make a selling book — fiction — and a possible movie build up.

Will adds in his own defense, “My notes cover all phazes [sic] of colony life which I feel is proper and *justifiable* in face of what has been written.”⁴⁹ The following June, Will received a letter from Mary Goodall, who wrote, “I have just finished reading Cobie de Lespinasse’s book and it certainly gives a different picture of Dr. Keil then I had gathered from reading Bethel and Aurora.”⁵⁰ In response, Will wrote, “don’t forget there is another party wanted to use my notes who said ‘If I would write a book on the Colony I wouldn’t let Keil off as easy as Cobie did’”⁵¹

Some of the more intriguing comments on *Second Eden* came from Alfred Powers, author of many books on Oregon history, in a letter to Cobie in June 1952. He wrote:

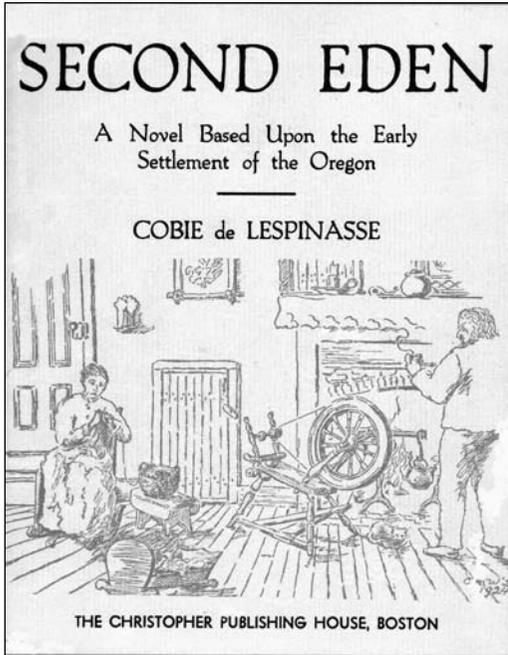
I read your book with a great deal of pleasure. You managed a biographical novel while sticking to the main historical facts. You seemed a little fearful about getting fully into the love story in the way Vardis Fisher did in the *Children of God*. And I sensed that you were sometimes too aware of the factual history. Nevertheless, you wrote a book which has a very real emotional impact, fine character portrayal, and a vivid presentation of community living.⁵²

Power’s mention of *Children of God: An American Epic* (1939) by Vardis Fisher is an interesting choice. Fisher’s novel, based on the first hundred years of the Mormon community and religion, was highly controversial, denounced by some Mormons while praised by others.⁵³ His works also marked a new direction in the historical novel. As Ronald W. Taber notes in his examination of Fisher: “American historical novelists began to feel the need to tell



Courtesy of the Aurora Colony Historical Society

Clark Moor Wier Will (1893–1982) is a descendant of the Aurora Colony whose passion for its history led to gathering much information from colony members and descendants. His records served as the basis for Cobie de Lespinasse’s Second Eden.



The dust jacket of Second Eden includes an illustration by Clark Moor Will depicting a scene from the Aurora Colony. Several other illustrations by Will were considered for the book, but none were included.

the truth about history, convinced that the novel could elucidate and extend man's knowledge better than the works of professional historians. No one was more in the forefront of this new movement to demand truth and historical accuracy in the American historical novel than Vardis Fisher.⁵⁴ Both *Second Eden* and *Children of God* — in the stories they tell and in the reaction of descendants and others to such stories — highlight the challenges of the historical novel in conveying a sense of the history of a group while also imparting meaning to that history in a way that a historical text may not.

These challenges relate to the “imaginary conversations” and events included within the historical novel that are not part of the historical record. Some will question how such extrapolation or interpretation can be considered history or impart meaning to it. Yet,

these literary conventions bring life, and perhaps meaning, to these historical figures in a way not dissimilar to some of the lore and oral traditions of major players in history, from Biblical characters to such individuals as Sacagawea and York of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The historical record for such figures is often vague, or even non-existent, but the interpretation of these individuals through literary and other means has imparted meaning to their perceived roles in historical events.

Jane Kirkpatrick's historical novels center on some of these same challenges of blending the historical record with perceived personalities of individuals, in particular women in the western experience. In the three novels in the Change and Cherish Historical Series, Kirkpatrick turned to the Aurora Colony, and Emma Giesy specifically, to relate the story of one woman's experience while also highlighting such issues as individualism versus the expectations of living in a communal setting. Similar to de Lespinasse (and to Emma Giesy), Kirkpatrick was born and raised in the Midwest (Wisconsin)

and later moved to Oregon. Her background is in clinical social work, and she was a mental health and educational consultant, working for seventeen years with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. She then sought her own pioneering experience and, with her husband Jerry Kirkpatrick, settled on land on the John Day River at a remote place known as Starvation Point. She chronicled this experience in the nonfiction book *Homestead* (first published in 1991, with an expanded edition in 2000). Prior to turning to Emma Wagner Giesy, Kirkpatrick wrote twelve historical novels.⁵⁵

As Kirkpatrick notes in an interview at the end of the first book in the trilogy, *A Clearing in the Wild*, she came to explore the life of Emma Giesy after reading of her in Mary Bywater Cross's quilting book, *Treasures in the Trunk: Quilts of the Oregon Trail* (1993). In researching Emma, Kirkpatrick notes, "I tried, through reading descendant accounts and historical material about the Bethelites and where they came from, and through letters left behind, to create an accurate account of the colony, the faith that defined it, and the place of women within it."⁵⁶ As her story of Emma continues west, Kirkpatrick undertook research at the Pacific County Historical Society and the Aurora Colony Historical Society, where she likely used some of the same materials as de Lespinasse. She augmented this with documents and photographs from Aurora Colony descendants as well as with census records and other materials. She conducted similar research for the other two books in the series, enhanced by material uncovered as part of her initial foray into the history of the colony and of Emma Giesy. From this work, she crafted the story of Emma's experiences first in Bethel, then at Willapa, and finally at Aurora.

Unlike de Lespinasse's novel, Kirkpatrick includes actual names for individuals and places. Also unlike *Second Eden*, there is no "sex and entertainment" as a means to bolster sales (and potential movie rights, if Will's assertion is accurate) in any of the works in the trilogy. Rather, Kirkpatrick focuses on the personal drive and passion of the heroine of the three works as she seeks independence, survival, and ultimately acceptance within the communal settings of Bethel, Willapa, and Aurora. The first-person presentation, primarily in the voice of Emma Wagner Giesy but also at times in that of Keil's wife Louisa, is a predominant fictionalized aspect of the story. The broader story is, by and large, consistent with the historical record, although some specific details are fabricated. It is the general historical basis that Kirkpatrick adheres to that makes these three works of particular importance in the telling, and documenting, of the Aurora story. In many cases, Kirkpatrick had access to records and other materials outside regular repositories, with many of those documents still in the possession of colony descendants.

For historians of Aurora and communal groups more generally, Kirkpatrick's works are significant in their examination of the struggle of the individual, in this case Emma Giesy, with the dominant, charismatic male leader of the community, William Keil, and by extension, with the community as a whole. What is the balance between the blind faith following of a spiritual and communal leader and one's own beliefs and aspirations? Therein lies a key challenge of utopia societies such as Aurora, and a primary reason why communal settlements struggle to exist for any length of time. These challenges are at the heart of the aptly named *Change and Cherish* Historical Series by Kirkpatrick.⁵⁷

A Clearing in the Wild commences in Bethel, Missouri, in late 1851, after the colony has been in existence for seven years and is well established. Emma Wagner is a young woman infatuated with an older man, Christian Giesy, one of Keil's lieutenants at the Bethel Colony. Giesy and others had ties to the followers of George Rapp, and Kirkpatrick incorporates these communal precursors well in framing the history of Bethel.⁵⁸ The romance of Emma and Christian is central to the story. Through it, readers can see the control of Keil and the allegiance to him by Christian and others. That control is illustrated when Christian is sent away on colony business, thus delaying his marriage to Emma, and in the key aspect of the plot — when Keil allows Emma to accompany Christian and the other scouts on the westward journey to locate a new site for the colony. Keil's control is countered by Emma's drive for independence and change in the order of things, evident early in the novel when Emma reflects: "Change has its richness in a colony where everything seems the same. At seventeen, I am of marriageable age, so change sticking its head inside my door will be patted like a welcomed dog on its happy head" (7). Similarly, her views on Keil's control are also presented early in the novel, and they set the tone for all three works in the series:

Keil, our leader, pronounced his own name in the English as *keel*, the word that means the backbone of a vessel. He saw himself as a keel, that portion of a boat's structure which runs from bow to stern and to which all else must attach to form the ship. It is what keeps the ship afloat. But in German the word does not mean "keel," but "wedge" instead, something that splits, heavy like an anchor piercing the sea to hold the ship or keep it from moving forward (17).⁵⁹

Emma perseveres in her efforts to win Christian Giesy and in being "allowed" to accompany the scout party. She does so without informing Keil or her new husband that she is pregnant, setting up further tensions later in the story.

The novel chronicles the journey west, including the hardships on the way and when they reach their destination, where Emma, sick and weakened, experiences a difficult childbirth followed by the inability to nurse her child.

In the midst of this bleak situation, however, there are elements of hope in the assistance of strangers, including Native Americans. But there also is the personal struggle Emma confronts, feeling both desire for isolation and independence and need for community and support.

The continuing tension between the ideal and reality sets the tone for the remainder of the novel, as Emma and Christian seek to establish their own home while meeting the needs of the fledgling communal group on the Willapa River. These tensions are heightened when Keil and his party arrive from Bethel in 1855, bringing hopes of the new life at Willapa. That hope is already tempered by the fact that the arrival of Keil brings with it death, as the party follows the wagon that serves as the hearse for Keil's oldest son Willie. Tensions are further heightened when Keil decides that the site selected by the scouts is inadequate and the colony will not resettle there. For Emma, Keil's rejection of the Willapa site also is an affront to her husband who, as he did in Bethel and before, follows the choices

of Keil. This disturbs her deeply. The novel ends with Keil moving off to Portland with most of the party that accompanied him while Emma and Christian remain at Willapa to find their own Eden.

Hope is prominent at the beginning of *A Tendering in the Storm*, the second novel in this trilogy. It is 1856 and Emma and Christian Giesy are settling into their new life at Willapa while Keil and most of his followers who came from Bethel are in Oregon, preparing to settle at Aurora. The shadow cast by Keil still is felt by Emma in Willapa, but there is promise in the possibility of living outside the communal environment. Kirkpatrick contrasts the thoughts and lives of Emma Giesy in this novel with those of Louisa Keil, William's (or Wilhelm, as spelled by Kirkpatrick) wife, as occasional chapters present Louisa's voice interspersed with Emma's. Louisa

*This image is unavailable
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to view.*

The first novel in the Change and Cherish Historical Series by Jane Kirkpatrick, A Clearing in the Wild chronicles the story of Emma Wagner Giesy and her husband Christian from Bethel, Missouri, to the Willapa River in Washington Territory.

also lives in the shadow of Keil but, of course, on a much closer level. For her, hope is a requirement of her station as much as it is a personal desire. With the loss of a child in Willie's death, that hope is diminished, but she knows she must be strong; Father Keil expects it.

Death also transforms Emma's views of the possibilities of a good place, as Christian drowns while trying to save another. She is widowed with young children and no immediate family to comfort her, as she does not consider her in-laws in that light. Her staunch independence amid this tragedy further highlights the struggle between individual and community, as others believe she should give up custody of her sons so they can be cared for in a way that would be consistent with the communal spirit, even though they are outside of Keil's immediate influence. It also highlights gender issues, as colonists view Emma as being incapable of raising young males in a suitable fashion. Emma, however, sees their offer as a threat instead of salvation.

The novel focuses on these two women and their efforts to survive in

the communities they chose (or were chosen for them). Emma's plight is deepened when a marriage of convenience — supposedly to help in restoring a family — to Jack Giesy, an abusive husband by whom she has another child, creates additional problems. Survival becomes more than a matter of individual identity for Emma and her children; instead, it is a matter of existence. Through this, she begins to see some hope in community and ultimately seeks refuge, if not salvation, in the community she so desperately sought to avoid — fleeing Jack to find sanctuary at Aurora. This emotional and psychological journey of Emma (and for Louisa also) is presented in the context of historical accuracy of life at Willapa and the evolving community at Aurora. Kirkpatrick holds close to the historical record while weaving an important story of the personal challenges, particularly for women, in a nineteenth-century communal frontier.

Courtesy of the Aurora Colony Historical Society



*Emma Wagner Giesy (pictured here in about 1888) was the only woman among the scouting party sent by William Keil in 1853 to the Pacific Northwest to locate a "Second Eden" for his colony. She is the central figure in the three novels in the *Change and Cherish Historical Series* by Jane Kirkpatrick.*

In *A Mending at the Edge*, Kirkpatrick continues the struggle of Emma Giesy to rediscover hope, for as Emma expresses in the first line of the novel, “of all the things I left in Willapa, hope was what I missed the most” (1). She and her children are in Aurora and learning to live and to survive in the communal environment. This is a significant challenge for Emma, as she struggles with the concept of communistic ideals as practiced at the colony. Much of the novel centers on her quest for her own house, which is a real desire but also a metaphor for her seeking an identity of her own spiritual home as much as a physical one. Even the arrival of her family from Bethel does not provide the immediate satisfaction she desires, or requires, as she must learn again to be part of a large family, in terms of giving, sharing, and receiving.

Kirkpatrick again does an excellent job of placing the story in historical context with descriptions of buildings, social activities from fairs to quilting, and the lives and activities of Aurora. The smallpox epidemic that strikes the community and claims the lives of four of the Keil children early in the novel presents a challenge for the community but also for Brother Keil — Emma refuses to call him Father — as he confronts his own beliefs and his own mortality. Ultimately, Emma finds a balance between her individuality and the communal environment, perhaps symbolized by also getting her own house, which is the “mending at the edge.”

While Kirkpatrick does not present the stark controversy inherent in the sexual overtones of de Lespinasse’s novel, her three novels also center on the power of a charismatic leader and the impact and influence of that power on the community and, in this case, on one individual. In presenting the narrative in this manner, Kirkpatrick’s treatment of Emma Giesy not only offers a view on women’s roles in communal groups of the nineteenth century but also captures many elements that would be important in the rise of women’s communities in the late twentieth century. The separatism that Emma seeks from the dominant male of William Keil foreshadows a broader movement in the 1970s when, as Ní Aódagain notes, “women began to break away from male-dominated communal arrangements and demand women-only spaces.”⁶⁰ Although Kirkpatrick’s Emma cannot be viewed as a precursor to the rise of women’s land, her efforts to achieve some level of freedom, independence, and power are reflective of those qualities that Dana Shugar explores in *Separatism and Women’s Community* (1995). That separatist identity is rooted in the same utopian spirit that was inherent in many of the nineteenth-century communal societies but often overlooked by historians when considering the role women played in them. And the sanctuary that Emma seeks and ultimately finds in community is also consistent with the evolution of the empowerment women achieved on their own land

in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶¹ Suggesting that the historical Emma Giesy was part of this evolution is making too great a leap, but examining these historical novels in their treatment of gender issues as well as leadership traits might impart some meaning not only to the history of the Aurora Colony but to the broader communal history of Oregon and beyond.⁶²

There are many stories of that history yet to be told. As Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood notes: “Individual memory, history, and the novel are all selective: no one remembers everything, each historian picks out the facts he or she chooses to find significant, and every novel, whether historical or not, must limit its own scope. No one can tell all the stories there are.” Mark Carnes offers this in another way by noting: “Historians and novelists remember in different ways; either is incomplete.”⁶³ The historical novel is just one part of the broader story, but it is one that should not be overlooked.

Noted Western writer A.B. Guthrie, Jr., offered these views on the fictionalizing of history:

The historical novelist must know his history — which means that his research will take as much or more time than his writing. He must know it in ways that the academic historian may not. Not only must he be familiar with the broad outlines, social, economic, political and military: he must also know how men talked, what they wore, with what techniques they fashioned their lives, how they regarded and how they met, or didn't meet, their problems, some of which may beset us today.⁶⁴

He is quick to point out, however, that “even that isn't enough,” as the novelist must read between the lines, and he offers examples not usually included in primary documents such as how “women on the Oregon Trail manage to relieve themselves in proper privacy” or how women dealt with their periods or their morning sickness when pregnant. In addressing “What Can You Learn From A Historical Novel,” Daniel Aaron writes: “Good writers write the kind of history good historians can't or don't write. Historical fiction isn't history in the conventional sense and shouldn't be judged as such. The best historical novels are loyal to history, but it is history absorbed and set to music, so to speak, changed into forms akin to opera or theatrical productions.”⁶⁵

The “music” of Cobie de Lespinasse's *Second Eden* and Jane Kirkpatrick's novels on the Aurora Colony offer literary interpretations of this important utopian experiment in Oregon's history. All four novels were well researched with the sources available to the authors when they were crafting their stories. Although both novelists introduce several imaginative elements, those elements are based on a solid understanding of the history of the Aurora Colony. But both authors also introduce interpretations of that historical record that

are worth exploring, be it the sexual exploits of a charismatic leader or the individual struggles of a woman in a communal environment. As John Willis, Jr., suggests in "Taking Historical Novels Seriously," historical novels have value in that they "open discussion of a neglected aspect of the transmission of historical understanding to large audiences."⁶⁶ For that alone, these novel views of the Aurora Colony bear consideration in the story of that communal society and the role it played in the early history of Oregon.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2006 Communal Studies Association annual conference in Marshall, California.

1. The spacing in Cobie de Lespinasse's last name as used here follows that found in her published works. The name also appears as deLespinasse in some references, and family members have used this form in recent times.

2. Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 15.

3. See, for example, Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America, 1680–1880* (New York: Library Publishers, 1951); Robert S. Fogarty, *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732–2000* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003); and Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities, 1824–2000* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

4. On the religious background of Aurora, see David Nelson Duke, "A Profile of Religion in the Bethel-Aurora Colonies," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92:4 (Winter 1991–92): 346–59; and David Nelson Duke,

"The Evolution of Religion in William Keil's Community: A New Reading of Old Testimony," *Communal Societies* 13 (1993): 84–98. In addition to the Golden Rule, Keil's followers also practiced the Diamond Rule, which is caring for one's neighbors more than for oneself.

5. On the Bethel Colony, see William Godfrey Bek, "A German Communistic Society in Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 3 (October 1908): 52–74, *Missouri Historical Review* 3 (January 1909) 99–125; William G. Bek "The Community at Bethel, Missouri, and its Offspring at Aurora, Oregon," *The German American Annals*, n.s. 7 (1909): 257–76, 306–28, and n.s. 8 (1910): 15–44, 305–30; H. Roger Grant, "The Society of Bethel: A Visitor's Account," *Missouri Historical Review* 68 (1974): 223–31; and Harold Dailey, "The Old Communistic Colony at Bethel," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 52 (1928): 162–67.

6. Eugene Edmund Snyder, *Aurora, Their Last Utopia: Oregon's Christian Commune, 1856–1883* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1993), 73.

7. Jane Kirkpatrick, *Aurora: An American Experience in Quilt, Community, and Craft* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group, 2008). Guest edited by Charles Le Warne, the Winter 1991–92 issue of the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (92:4) included contributions on religion, music, architecture, and marriage within the Aurora community.

8. Robert J. Hendricks (1863–1943) was a native of Oregon and spent most of his life in Salem, where he was editor of *The Statesman* for forty-four years. He was married to Emilie Giesy of Aurora, a descendant of an important family of the colony.

9. Philip H. Parrish, “Bethel and Aurora [review],” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 34:4 (December 1933): 374. A review of Hendricks’s book also appeared in *The Portland Spectator* 54 (October 7, 1933): 5.

10. Parrish, “Bethel and Aurora,” 374. Despite these concerns, Parrish also notes, “the Christians of Bethel and Aurora long have deserved their historian and . . . Mr. Hendricks, who is thoroughly steeped in the atmosphere of French Prairie region, had done a fascinating job of it.”

11. I explore this challenge related to Aurora and other communal groups in Oregon in “Documenting Utopia in Oregon: The Challenges of Tracking the Quest for Perfection,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 105:3 (Fall 2004): 308–19.

12. Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States; From Personal Visit and Observation: Including Detailed Accounts of the Economists, Zoarites, Shakers, The Amana, Oneida, Bethel, Aurora, Icarian, and Other Existing Societies, Their Religious Creeds, Social Practices, Numbers, Industries, and Present Condition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 321.

13. William G. Bek used these letters in his research on Keil and they were deposited in the Missouri Historical Society. Translations of several of the letters appeared in “From Bethel, Missouri to Aurora, Oregon: Letters of William Keil, 1855–1870,” *Missouri Historical Review* 48 (1953): 23–41, and 49 (1954): 141–53. See also “The Letters of Dr. William Keil,” *Sou’wester* 28 (Winter 1993): 3–20.

14. Efforts have been undertaken at the Aurora Colony Historical Society to preserve the business ledgers and other aspects of documentation of the colony. Regarding the music of the Aurora Colony, a project is ongoing to locate, preserve, digitize, and make available for bands original scores of

music played by the colony bands.

15. See, for instance, William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities: Brief Sketches of Economy, Zoar, Bethel, Aurora, Amana, Icaria, The Shakers, Oneida, Wallingford, and the Brotherhood of the New Life* (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the American Socialist, 1878); and Alexander Kent, “Cooperative Communities in the United States,” *Bulletin of the Department of Labor* 35 (July 1901): 563–646. Unlike Nordhoff, neither Hinds nor Kent visited Aurora.

16. Coralie Cassell Stanton, “The Aurora Colony, Oregon” (M.A. Thesis, Oregon State University, 1963), 1.

17. Daniel Aaron, “What Can You Learn From A Historical Novel?” *American Heritage* 43:6 (October 1992): 55–56. Other essays in this issue include “Nat Turner Revisited,” by William Styron (64–73), “A Short and Scary Walk with Andrew Jackson,” by John Updike (74–82), and “My Favorite Historical Novel” (84–107), with responses from a wide range of historians, novelists, and journalists to a question of what their favorite American historical novel was and why.

18. Jackson K. Putnam, “Historical Fact and Literary Truth: The Problem of Authenticity in Western American Literature,” *Western American Literature* 15:1 (1980): 23.

19. She married the town dentist, Adolph F. De Lespinasse (1879–1960), whose family also came from Orange City, and they had three children: Bert (1902–1982), Franklin (1912–2006), and Marie (1913–2005). She pursued an extension course on writing through Columbia University and became a popular lecturer, giving a series of thirteen radio lectures sponsored by the University of Oregon. Her writing led to her becoming a correspondent for the *Salem Capital Journal* and the *Oregonian*, and she was later selected as a reader-reporter for the *Woman’s Home Companion*. On Adolph De Lespinasse’s ancestry, see Nella Kennedy, “Dr. A.F.H. De Lespinasse, the Man from Helmus,” in *A Century of Midwestern Dutch-American Manners and Mores — and More* (Orange City, Iowa: Northwest College, 1995), 1–9. In addition to the space in the surname, the capitalization

of “de” varies in references.

20. Cobie de Lespinasse, *The Bells of Helmus* (Portland, Ore.: Metropolitan Press, 1934).

21. Susanne M. Sinke, *Dutch Immigrant Women in the United States, 1880–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 191. On page 38, Sinke notes that *The Bells of Helmus* also presented a “very negative interpretation of a husband’s power.” She also included Cobie de Lespinasse in her examination of “Gender in Language and Life: A Dutch American Example” in Rita James Simon, ed., *Immigrant Women* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 144–45.

22. Cobie de Lespinasse, *Four Brothers* (Portland, Ore.: Binford & Mort, 1947). Paul deLespinasse, a grandson of Cobie and Adolph, offers this information on this book: “The children’s novel, *Four Brothers*, was originally written chapter by chapter and sent to my folks where we were living in Washington, D.C. during World War II to read aloud to me and to my younger brother Hank. (We are the Paul and Hank to whom the book is dedicated.) I can still remember that they were typewritten on yellow paper, which may have been more available during the WWII shortages. There were enough chapters to fill about 4 books the length of the *Four Brothers*, and I think she hoped to publish some sequels but never did. We still had all the chapters in the early 1950s, but somehow they got lost in the shuffle when or after we moved away from Redmond in 1952. Nobody could figure out what happened to them. . . . The sister in the book was based on Cobie herself, and Dick, John, Leo and Al were the actual names of her four younger brothers.” Paul deLespinasse e-mail to Jim Kopp, August 9, 2008.

23. *Four Brothers* also was translated into Dutch. Cobie de Lespinasse, *De Vier Broers* (Baarn: De Boekerij, 1949).

24. “Receipt and Agreement,” May 28, 1939, de Lespinasse file, Aurora Colony Historical Society Archives [hereafter ACHS].

25. Some of Will’s papers are housed at the Aurora Colony Historical Society, but the

bulk of his papers reside at the University of Oregon in the Clark Moor Will Papers. A finding guide to this collection is available at <http://nwda-db.wsulibs.wsu.edu/print/ark:/80444/xv05822> (accessed April 14, 2009).

26. Clark Moor Will to Cobie de Lespinasse, February 13, 1940, de Lespinasse file, ACHS.

27. Clark Moor Will to Cobie de Lespinasse, April 4, 1951, *Ibid.*

28. Cornelia Marvin to George Wolfer, April 17, 1925, Clark Moor Will Papers, University of Oregon Special Collections [hereafter UO Special Collections]. Marvin married former Oregon governor (and later five term Congressman) Walter M. Pierce in December 1928.

29. Clark Moor Will to Cobie de Lespinasse, April 4, 1941, de Lespinasse file, ACHS.

30. Cobie de Lespinasse to Clark Moor Will, March 1, 1940, *Ibid.*

31. Cobie de Lespinasse to Clark Moor Will, March 29, 1951, Clark M. & Mary Will Correspondence file, ACHS.

32. Cobie de Lespinasse, illustrations by Clark Moor Will, “Aurora Colony,” *Junior Historical Review* 4 (November 1943): 93–95.

33. Cobie de Lespinasse to Clark Moor Will, March 29, 1951, Clark M. and Mary Will Correspondence file, ACHS.

34. Cobie de Lespinasse to Clark Moor Will, April 6, 1951, Clark M. and Mary Will Correspondence, ACHS.

35. Clark Moor Will to Cobie de Lespinasse, April 4, 1951, de Lespinasse file, ACHS.

36. Clark Moor Will, “Foreword,” April 29, 1951, de Lespinasse files, ACHS.

37. Cobie de Lespinasse, *Second Eden: A Romance* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1951), 5. There were several exchanges between de Lespinasse and Will regarding the dedication. At times he seemed reluctant to receive this credit, perhaps concerned about the fictional nature of the book, but yet also pleased. On March 29, 1951, she asks, “Then I would also like to have permission that the book be dedicated to you for your

preliminary research which made the book possible." Cobie de Lespinasse to Clark Moor Will, March 29, 1951, Clark M. and Mary Will Correspondence file, ACHS.

38. Clark Moor Will to Cobie de Lespinasse, April 4, 1951, de Lespinasse file, ACHS.

39. For the novels examined, pagination for quotes is presented within the text.

40. Rapp and his followers established communities at Harmony, Pennsylvania (1804–1814), New Harmony, Indiana (1814–1824), and Economy, Pennsylvania (1824–1847). The New Harmony site was later sold to Robert Owen, who started his own communal effort there. On Rapp and the Harmonists, see Karl J.R. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society, 1785–1847* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965).

41. For examination of gender and marriage roles in nineteenth century American communal societies, see Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias — the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Wendy E. Chmielewski, Louis J. Kern, and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell, eds., *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993); and Carol A. Kolmerten, *Women In Utopia: the Ideology of Gender in American Owenite Communities* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

42. Duke, "The Evolution of Religion in Wilhelm Keil's Community," 84–98.

43. On the practice of complex marriage, see Richard DeMaria, *Communal Love at Oneida: A Perfectionist Vision of Authority, Property, and Sexual Order* (New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1978); appropriate sections in Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell, "Family Love, True Womanliness, Motherhood, and the Socialization of Girls in the Oneida Community, 1848–1880" in Chmielewski, Kern,

and Klee-Hartzell, eds., *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, 182–200.

44. For a broader discussion of views on marriage within the Aurora Colony, see Kimberly Swanson, "'The Young People Became Restless': Marriage Patterns before and after Dissolution of the Aurora Colony" *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92:4 (Winter 1991–92): 417–31. Swanson uses the papers of Clark Moor Will in her study, and of interest here related to authenticity in the historical record, she offers this statement in a note: "Though credible, these stories must be placed in the proper context. Both Clark and Charles Will [Clark's brother] recorded numerous incidents showing conflict between Keil and the Will family. This conflict evidently caused the family to travel to Oregon with some trepidation" (429m10).

45. Patrick Harris was Director of the Aurora Colony Historical Society from 1983 to 1996, and returned as Curator in 2005.

46. Burkholder file, ACHS.

47. Henry Theophilus Finck, *My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1926), 38.

48. Clark Moor Will, "The Aurora Story," *Marion County History* 1 (1958): 12.

49. Clark Moor Will to Hattie Will Ehlen, October 3, 1952, Clark M. & Mary Will Correspondence, ACHS.

50. Mary Goodall to Clark Moor Will, June 10, 1953, Ibid.

51. Clark Moor Will to Mary Goodall, June 14, 1953, Ibid. Will may have been referring to Cornelia Marvin here, but the reference is not clear.

52. Alfred Powers to Cobie de Lespinasse, June 17, 1952, de Lespinasse files, ACHS.

53. On the reception to *Children of God*, see Stephen L. Tanner, "Vardis Fisher and the Mormons" in Joseph M. Flora, ed., *Rediscovering Vardis Fisher: Centennial Essays* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 2000), 97–113.

54. Ronald W. Taber, "Vardis Fisher: New Directions for the Historical Novel," *Western American Literature* 1 (1966): 285.

55. A listing of Kirkpatrick's books and

related information are available on her website, www.jkbooks.com.

56. "An Interview with Author Jane Kirkpatrick," in *A Clearing in the Wild: A Novel* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 356–57.

57. The correspondence and writings of women in other nineteenth century communal groups illustrates similar challenges. See, for instance, Christopher Clark and Kerry W. Buckley, *Letters from An American Utopia: The Stetson Family and the Northampton Association, 1843–1847* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Sally L. Kitch, *This Strange Society of Women: Reading the Letters and Lives of the Woman's Commonwealth* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); and Rosemary D. Gooden, "'In the Bonds of True Love and Friendship': Some Meanings of 'Gospel Affection' and 'Gospel Union' in Shaker Sisters' Letters and Poems," in Chmielewski, Kern, and Klee-Hartzell, eds., *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, 104–13. For a later experience, see Paul M. Gaston, *Women of Fairhope* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984).

58. Besides mentioning the Harmonist communities, including the separatist Phillipsburg colony established by Count de Leon, she also brings Amana into the discussion later in the text. Kirkpatrick, *A Clearing in the Wild*, 7, 85.

59. The pronunciation of Keil's name has been a matter of long-standing debate.

60. Ní Aódagain, "Empowerment through Community: From Separatism to Sanctuary" (Paper presented at the 26th Annual Gender Studies Symposium, Lewis & Clark College, March 8, 2007), 1.

61. Ní Aódagain also addresses this sense of sanctuary in her paper. It is important to note that Oregon had, and continues to have, one of the largest concentrations of women communal societies in the United States.

62. For a survey of Oregon's communal history, see James J. Kopp, *Eden Within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009).

63. Margaret Atwood, "In Search of

Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction," *American Historical Review* 103:5 (December 1998): 1516; Carnes, *Novel History*, 24. This issue of *American Historical Review* includes an "AHR Forum" on "Histories and Historical Fictions." Writing in response to Atwood's essay are Lynn Hunt, "'No Longer An Even Flowing River': Time, History and the Novel" (1517–21), Jonathan Spence, "Margaret Atwood and the Edges of History" (1522–25), and John Demos, "In Search of Reasons for Historians to Read Novels" (1526–29).

64. A.B. Guthrie, Jr., "Why Write About the West?" *Western American Literature* 7:3 (1972): 165.

65. Aaron, "What Can You Learn From A Historical Novel," 62.

66. John E. Willis, Jr., "Taking Historical Novels Seriously," *The Public Historian* 6:1 (Winter 1984): 39. The Willis essay, which included Alex Haley's *Roots* as one of his examples, prompted an examination in a subsequent issue of *The Public Historian* of whether oral history was more like the historical novel. See Charles T. Morrissey, "Oral History and the Boundaries of Fiction," *The Public Historian* 7:2 (Spring 1985): 41–46. The historical film also has come into the discussion. See, for example, Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (New York: H. Holt, 1995); Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001); and David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Roy Morris, Jr., eds., *Memory and Myth: The Civil War in Fiction and Film from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Cold Mountain* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2007). The role of television as a source of history is examined in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001). On history as represented in various media, including fiction, photography, film, and comic books, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London & New York: Verso, 2005).