

anarchy in kansas

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A Look at Kansas Anarchist History

When writing about her visit here to lecture at the University of Kansas in 1911, Emma Goldman made the following comments: "The State of Kansas, like Massachusetts, lives on past glory. Had it not given John Brown to the cause of the slaves? Had not the rebel voice of Moses Harman sounded there? Had it not been the stronghold of free thought? Whatever its historic claim to progress, Kansas now gave no sign of it. The Church and Prohibition had evidently performed the last rites at the interment of liberalism." Anarchists and anarchist periodicals had been an important part of this radical past, with Harman and his paper *Lucifer* perhaps being the best known among them.

Lucifer, the Light-Bearer

In 1879, Moses Harman moved to Valley Falls from Missouri. An abolitionist and freethinker, he began a freethought journal called the *Valley Falls Liberal* in August, 1880, and served as the secretary of the local Liberal League in Valley Falls during the early 1880s. At this time the freethought movement included a number of anarchists. The 1891 annual meeting of the Kansas Liberal League in Ottawa, which was denounced by the *Topeka State Journal* as a "Free Love" gathering, was attended by Voltairine de Cleyre, and its 1894 annual meeting in Topeka demanded that Grover Cleveland "take off your crown, vacate your throne, lay down your sceptre and take yourself away from the sight of human eyes forever." Harman and his paper, from the beginning, were also concerned about many other issues besides freethought. In a prospectus published in 1880, the *Liberal*, in addition to endorsing the platform of the National Liberal League, pledged to "champion the rights of the poor, laboring man as against monopolists of every class."

Harman changed the paper's name to the *Kansas Liberal* in 1881, and moved it to Lawrence for six months in 1882, during which time it served as the organ of the Kansas Liberal Union. Because of clashes with his associates there over prohibition (which he opposed) he resumed control of the paper and moved it back to Valley Falls. The paper now began carrying more advertising offering anarchist, sex radical, and freethought books and periodicals for sale. In 1882, Edwin Cox Walker, an Iowa freethinker, began writing for the *Kansas Liberal*, and became

assistant editor in 1883. While associated with GH Walser and Liberal University in Liberal, MO, Walker developed a plan for an anarchistic economic arrangement to free them from the "ranks of capital's dependents," which, however, never came to fruition. He also contributed to *Liberty*, an anarchist journal published in Boston. Walker had an even more libertarian reputation than Harman, having been described by the editor of the *Atchison Globe*, as "a fellow so intensely liberal that he opposes the law against indecent exposure."

In August, 1883, as Harman became more interested in sex, labor, and property issues, the *Liberal* evolved into *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*, a title described by Benjamin Tucker as "Quite the best name we know of, after Liberty!" As time went on, *Lucifer* became increasingly anarchistic in outlook, describing itself in 1885 as a 'weekly Anarchist-Freethought Journal.' In 1887, the editor of the anarchist *Kansas City Sun*, writing in *Liberty*, said that "*Liberty* attacks the State, the *Truth Seeker* attacks the Church, the *Word* attacks Madam Grundy, but *Lucifer* is not content, in its own way, without attacking all three." During this time Harman's children also joined the staff of the paper, George as copublisher and Lillian as compositor.

In 1886, as an expression of their view that government had

no business regulating the sex lives of individuals, Walker and Lillian Harman publicly entered into a "common-sense arrangement", an "autonomistic" non state-sanctioned marriage governed by a "wholly private contract" between the parties. The "newlyweds" were arrested the day after their wedding at the *Lucifer* office and held that night under guard at Cataract House in Valley Falls. They were transferred to county jail at Oskaloosa the next day, but Lillian was later allowed to return under guard to Valley Falls, since the jail had no facilities for a woman. Harman and Walker were later brought to Shawnee County jail in Topeka in October to await trial, and their case was heard in district court in Oskaloosa. Found guilty of living together as husband and wife without license and legal marriage, they were imprisoned in adjacent cells in the Oskaloosa jail. Moses



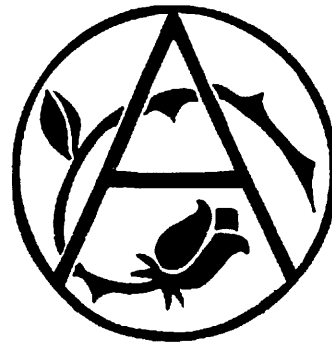
"Wait! Wait! Listen to me!... We don't HAVE to be just sheep!"

Hull, publisher of the *Des Moines New Thought*, wrote that they had been jailed "for being anarchists, agnostics, atheists and everything bad that begins with an A."

While their partners in *Lucifer* were still in jail, Moses and George Harman also ran afoul of the law. In keeping with their policy of not editing letters submitted for publication, the Harmans had published sexually explicit material in their paper. Early in 1887, they were arrested on obscenity charges and indicted by a federal grand jury in Topeka on 270 counts of obscenity. In 1890, after continuing to publish letters about sex during the trial, Moses Harman was found guilty on 4 counts and sentenced to five years in the Kansas penitentiary and fined \$300. He served 4 months and then was released on a technicality. While free, he was tried for having printed another sex letter and was sentenced to a year, but served only eight months before being released on a procedural point. He was then resented to one year at hard labor for his original conviction, returned to prison to serve out his time, and left prison in April 1896. Having moved *Lucifer* to Topeka in 1890 in order to more easily fight his legal battles from there, he moved to Chicago in 1896 after his release from prison. Government harassment of Harman and his paper due to his free editorial policy continued there, and he was sentenced to a year of hard labor for obscenity in 1906, at the age of 75. He broke rocks in Joliet eight and a half hours a day in the Illinois winter, which ruined his health and resulted in his transfer to the federal prison in Leavenworth. There he was hospitalized for bronchitis and spent much of the remainder of his sentence in the hospital. In 1908 he moved to Los Angeles, where he died in 1910.

While Harman had been tied up fighting censorship in the courts, many changes had taken place in the *Lucifer* office. In 1888, Walker and Lillian Harman had resigned from *Lucifer* over differences with Moses about his free language policy, and started their own anarchist newspaper called *Fair Play*, also published in

Valley Falls. This paper was suspended in 1891, and its subscriptions were transferred to *Liberty*, for which Walker wrote and acted as canvasser and traveling salesperson.



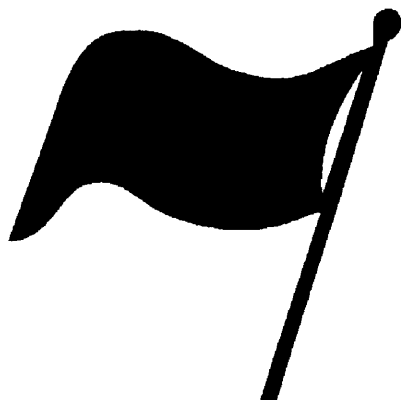
With the departure of Lillian and Walker, Moses was forced to seek out new blood to assist him with putting out *Lucifer*. Clarence Lee Swartz, who had formerly edited *Voice of the People* an anarchist journal in Kingman, edited *Lucifer* during part of Moses' first imprisonment in 1890. After his stint at *Lucifer*, he, too, ran into problems with the

government in Kansas for daring to believe in freedom of the press. In 1891, he distributed the irreverent reform-minded Kansas City, MO, *Sunday Sun* in Topeka, and was arrested under a Kansas law against sensational literature. His bond was set at \$4000, and later lowered to \$2000, but he spent 36 days in jail before raising this amount. Fortunately for him, the prosecutor did not show up in court and charges against him were dropped. Years later, Swartz produced *What is Mutualism*, an edited collection of Benjamin Tucker's writings, and wrote an article on "Anarchism Communism" in the *New Encyclopedia of Social Reform*.

Anarchist Lois Nichols Waisbrooker edited *Lucifer* for several months in 1891-1892. One of the issues she edited was barred from the mails for reprinting a section of a book mailed by the USDA. While printing the word penis was the cause for Moses Harman's imprisonment, this official government publication used the word freely, and Waisbrooker wished to point out this double standard. The issue also contained three ads judged obscene by the post office. She put out subsequent issues of *Lucifer* with a front page streamer which stated that the paper was now "Published under Government Censorship." Waisbrooker also published and edited her own journal *Foundation Principles* from several places, including Topeka during the eighties and nineties, and was arrested in Topeka in 1894 for publishing obscenity. The court case lasted months and her poor health led her to stop publishing *Foundation Principles*. She finally received an arrest of judgement in 1896. Waisbrooker later lived in the anarchist community, Home, in Washington state.

Other Area Anarchists

The circle of people involved with *Lucifer* were not the only anarchists in the area at this time. Eight people in Salina responded with donations to an appeal to readers of *Liberty* in 1882 to fund the Society of the Red Cross of the Will of the People (the so-called nihilists) in Russia. In 1884 and 1885, the anarchist *Miners' Journal* was published in Scammonville, and edited by John McLaughlin, who started the *Radical Democrat* in 1885 in the same town. Albert Parsons toured Kansas in 1885 as a labor organizer, speaking in Ottawa to around 3000 people on July 4. He also spoke in Topeka, and addressed miners in Scammonville, Weir City and Pittsburg. And in 1886, John Shrum, the secretary of the Scammonville Group, IWPA, the international anarchist organization, lived in Columbus.



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Nobody deserves to live off your taxes.
Nobody can legislate your freedom.**

**NOBODY IS THE
PERFECT CANDIDATE!**

If you think that Nobody
represents your interests,


**VOTE FOR
NOBODY**

If you think Nobody
should run your life,

**VOTE FOR
NOBODY**

If you think,

**VOTE FOR
NOBODY**



In the 1880s, Charles T Fowler edited the *Kansas City Sun*, an anarchist and labor paper in Kansas City, MO. He had been an associate of Josiah Warren, Benjamin Tucker, and Sidney Morse in Boston before moving to the Midwest. He wrote a number of anarchist pamphlets, including *Cooperation: Its Laws and Principles*, *Corporations*, and *Cooperative Homes*, which showed how people could organize their lives without government intervention. He also contributed to both *Liberty* and *Lucifer*, in which journal he defended the Haymarket anarchists. Fowler died in Westport, MO in 1889.

Anarchists were notorious enough in kansas in this era that when a railway express package addressed to Winfield exploded in Coffeyville in 1888, injuring two people, the *Courier* in Winfield claimed this showed that "Evidences of Anarchism in Kansas are Increasing." In 1889, Gaspar C Clemens, an attorney in Topeka advocated anarchy in the *Kansas Democrat*. He had earlier defended Walker and Harman when they were arrested for their outlaw marriage and wrote a pamphlet protesting the treatment of the anarchists in Chicago. He had also spoken on their behalf and against police violence in Topeka, calling for the abolition of the police court and jail. In 1893, *The Advocate*, a populist journal printed his essay, "Anarchism as Anarchists Understand It," and allowed him to respond to his critics in the same journal two weeks later. And, demonstrating the influence of anarchist ideas in the region, the editor of the *Jeffersonian*, a populist paper in Lawrence and Topeka, wrote in 1891 that "A good government is a contradiction in terms, equivalent to good evil."

While the anarchist movement in kansas petered out around the turn of the century, a number of anarchists were imprisoned in Leavenworth during the first world war. Mexican anarchists Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magon, publishers of *Regeneración*, were arrested in 1918 in california. Ricardo was transferred to Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1919, and was found dead in his cell in November, 1922, possibly having been murdered. Enrique was also at Leavenworth for a time. Their associate Librado Rivera, who was also arrested in california was transferred to Leavenworth in 1920, then released and deported to mexico in

1923. Another antiwar anarchist imprisoned at this time was Louis G Raymond, who spent five or six years in Leavenworth and was deported to Spain after his release. During their imprisonment these prisoners were aided by a committee called the Ladies' Tea Club organized by anarchist Bessie Zoglin in Kansas City, MO, who, with her husband Isaac, also arranged lectures in KC by Emma Goldman, Saul Yanofsky, Rudolph Rocker, and other anarchists. Members of the club visited prisoners and gave them food and clothing. According to Zoglin, Elbert Preshner and another anarchist working as orderlies in Leavenworth prison hospital said that Ricardo was being slowly poisoned and they poured out the poison and were replaced. Poison was reportedly found at autopsy.

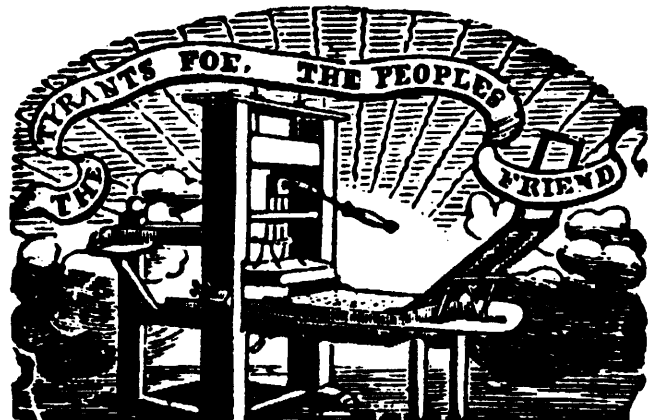
Anarchist Publishing in Kansas in the Twentieth Century

Although there has been little anarchist activity in kansas since this time, anarchist literature has continued to appear intermittently. In 1919, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius began a publishing project in Girard, called the Little Blue Book Company. Until his death in 1951, in addition to various atheist, freethought, and other oppositional literature, Haldeman-Julius published works by anarchist writers, including Percy Bysshe Shelly, Victor Yarros, Henry David Thoreau, Peter Kropotkin, Oscar Wilde, and Leo Tolstoy.

In Lawrence, the Affinity Group of Evolutionary Anarchists, a number of years ago, published a journal called *Meander Quarterly*, as well as anarchist pamphlets, including *Consent or Coercion?* The group has since renamed itself the Voluntary Cooperation Movement and the local Lawrence group is called the Ricardo Flores Magon Club. One of its members has also published a new edition of Augustin Souchy's book, *With the Peasants of Aragon*.

The Bad Press, which is a continuation of the Boston Anarchist Drinking Brigade's publishing project, relocated to Kansas City in 1999 and has published several broadsides here, in addition to this newsletter. Anarchists believe it is important that the libertarian idea (and anarchist history) be kept alive, even in times and places where there is little anti-state activity. After all, it is only when people are exposed to anarchist ideas that we can ever hope for libertarian change in individuals and society.

(For more information on the people discussed in this article, check out the *Sex Radicals* by Hal Sears, Fred Whitehead's article "The Kansas Response" in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, and *Liberty*, which is available on microfiche.)



Why I Am an Anarchist

People become anarchists for various reasons. Our experiences living in authoritarian society, the experiences of our friends and loved ones, the things we read, the things we see and hear, our temperament, and our views about human nature (or the lack thereof) all contribute to our ideas about the state, individuals and society. Those of us who become anarchists all agree on one point: that people are fully capable of figuring out how to live their lives without government and other coercive institutions. But, because we have all arrived at our libertarian viewpoint in different ways, we often have different priorities in our activities promoting social change, and are more or less outraged by different displays of power on the part of the state. The following are some of the things about government that most disgust me and for which I see no solution short of abolition of government.

Armed government thugs are empowered to harass and abuse peaceable, non-invasive people. Police claim that they are there to "serve and protect us," and in many places people are prevented by the state from owning firearms, rendering them unable to protect themselves. However, the police have demonstrated their unwillingness or inability to protect anyone but themselves and the officials who employ them. Instead, the police spend their time victimizing people engaged in peaceful activities like driving without a government permit (license and registration); buying, using, or selling drugs not approved of by the state; trading sex for money; or even keeping a messy backyard. But beyond enforcing unjust laws, these bullies also harass, arrest, and attack people with no provocation, because they appear "suspicious," or "look guilty," are driving on a road where the police have decided to set up a checkpoint, are carrying "too much" cash, or are simply driving while black, sometimes resulting in the death of someone who has done nothing illegal, simply because they did not obey police or made a move which police considered threatening. When people resist police attacks and harassment, they can be shot and killed with impunity, and sometimes have even been incinerated in their dwellings. Those who survive their encounters with the police and end up in prison are routinely brutalized and demeaned by their keepers, who then fail to protect them from being raped, beaten and sometimes killed by their fellow inmates.

Government uses its laws and police to protect the unjustly acquired wealth of its corporate allies and supporters. It protects titles to land which allow some to own property they neither use nor occupy, the possessors of which are then able to extract rent from those who need land on which to live and/or work. The state also protects the property rights of owners of factories and other businesses, where the workers produce the wealth and those who employ them steal a portion of the product of their labor. Government and its associated banks monopolize the money supply, thus denying credit to those who don't already possess some wealth, facilitating extortionate interest, and preventing most people from

becoming independent of capitalist employers. And the government which enables this systematic dispossession of working people through interest, rent, and profit supports itself with tax money it steals directly from working people.

With police action and imprisonment as an ever-present threat for those who dare to disobey, the state tries in myriad ways to control the daily lives of its subjects. It attempts to force all young people into its indoctrination factories, where they are crowded together in same age herds, sometimes forced to all dress alike, expected to respect the authority of self-appointed experts, intimidated or brutalized by violent peers, and frequently not even taught to read or write. People who attempt to rescue their children from this system are treated with suspicion and forced to surrender the privacy of their homes to the inspection of bureaucrats who believe they know better how to take care of their children.

The state prevents people from freely purchasing medicines, forcing them to get a note from a government-approved health provider before they can treat their own illnesses, and criminalizes people who dare to give health advice or care without first obtaining a license from the government. The state even presumes to dictate who may cut your hair or trim your nails; what you can and cannot see and hear on television; what kind of home you are allowed to live in; if, when, and where you may travel outside of the country; and how late you can have a drink at a bar. Nothing is too important or too petty for the government to concern itself with.

Besides interfering constantly in the lives of those who live in the territory it controls, the government also maintains an international force for terrorizing people in other countries. When the governments of other nations do something of which the united states government disapproves, and threats of force are not adequate to change the situation, the military is dispatched to murder civilians, poison the land, destroy essential utilities and otherwise immiserate the subjects of the government in question. If such attacks are not adequate to obtain abject surrender, trade sanctions, enforced by the military, are then implemented, in order to further torment the populace. And this is often in retaliation for actions on the part of a foreign government which would be ignored if carried out by a nation which is friendly to the united states government or its corporate supporters.

That is what government does. That is its essential nature. But although this is standard procedure for all the states of the world, such a system of organized force and theft is not the only way for human society to be organized. Getting rid of the state

would allow working people to stand up to corporate predators and refuse to surrender any part of their product to the owners. Renters and tenants could lay claim to the land and property they use and occupy, and stop paying rent. People could produce and circulate whatever means of exchange they wish, greatly increasing available credit and allowing people to earn their living independently if they so choose. And people would no longer be taxed to support those who dominate and rob them.

Without a state, people would be able to figure out ways to interact, trade, and learn cooperatively and peacefully. Persuasion would generally replace force as a means of settling disputes and the only limit on one's freedom would be the equal freedom of others. This is anarchy. And that is why I am an anarchist.

