

# Home, sweet anarchist home

*In the late 1800s, three families pooled their resources to create Home, an anarchist community on a peninsula in Puget Sound where they embraced radical views and free love. Historian Justin Wadland writes about the radical experiment that went awry.*

**BY GEORGE HOWLAND, JR**  
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In Feb. 1896, three men constructed a small boat and floated from Tacoma out onto Puget Sound. George Allen, Oliver Verity and Frank Odell were looking for a place to form an intentional community. All three men and their families had been part of Glennis, a short-lived socialist community in the Cascade foothills. Its failure did not discourage the families. After all, during the late 19th century, attempts to create utopian communities were commonplace among a small minority of dreamers on Puget Sound, across the United States and throughout Europe.

The three men on Puget Sound rowed, and perhaps sailed, until they came to the piece of land that they had heard would be a fine location for their new community. These 70-plus acres on the eastern slope of the Key Peninsula connected to Carr Inlet through a little body of water called either Joe's Bay or Von Geldern Cove. McNeil and Fox islands floated off to the southeast, and the nearest town was Lakebay.

The three families pooled their resources, bought the land and called their new community "Home." Home lasted until 1919, adopted anarchism as its guiding philosophy, spawned five newspapers, grew to 250 inhabitants, eventually owned over 200 acres and gave rise to a major free-speech fight that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

This year, "Trying Home: the Rise and Fall of an Anarchist Utopia on Puget Sound," the first book-length history of Home, was published by Justin Wadland, a librarian at the University of Washington – Tacoma.

"When I was a graduate student," said Wadland, "I was in this project to catalogue ethnic and special-audience newspapers from around the Pacific Northwest." One of the newspapers he catalogued was The Agitator, the last of the newspapers published at Home. He was puzzled by it. "I didn't know a lot about what it was talking about." He ended up writing a paper about The Agitator and the challenges it presented to the catalogue. That experience was the seed that eventually grew into his book.

## Anarchism: Spirit of mutual cooperation

Back in 19th century Washington, the three families' experience at Glennis informed the way they set up Home. The

founders did not want to repeat the mistakes of the socialist community, where everything was centralized and rules governing the inhabitants' behavior were passed after many hours of unpleasant meetings.

Instead, Home's founders decided on a bare minimum of formal rules and hoped for a spirit of mutual cooperation. They formed a land trust. All of Home's property was owned in common through the Mutual Home Association. New people who wished to join the community paid the association \$1 and then paid for the right to use two acres of the land as they wished. Each individual or family did, however, own whatever improvements – such as houses or stores – they built on their two-acre plot. Also they owned the fruits of that land, whatever they produced through their own sweat by harvesting trees, planting crops or raising animals. Beyond that, there would be no rules governing behavior within the community.

Eventually, the founders recognized that these principles were compatible with that most misunderstood political philosophy: Anarchism. Being the idealists that they were, when Home's founders began reaching out to others to join their community, they announced it was an anarchist colony. That began many problems.

More than a hundred years ago, as now, anarchism was viewed by mainstream society as a political doctrine that advocates violence and chaos. The very idea of an anarchist organization was, and is, wrongly seen as an oxymoron.

Anarchism is the political philosophy that believes human beings would be better off without government or other forms of centralized authority. In the place of large nation states, anarchists want humanity to organize itself into small decentralized communities that cooperate with one another.

Famous American anarchists include figures as different as Emma Goldman, a lifelong organizer and agitator, and Noam Chomsky, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who revolutionized linguistics.

Like many social movements, anarchism has birthed a vast number of differing philosophies – anarcho-communism to anarcho-feminism – and tactics – assassinations of political leaders to nonviolent communalists.



Home, circa 1890s

The members of the Home community were adherents to nonviolence, but they were living in an era where violent anarchists were very active and carried out high profile assassinations, including Leon Czolgosz's murder of President William McKinley in 1901 (there is considerable debate about whether Czolgosz was really an anarchist or someone facing mental illness, but that's another story).

McKinley's assassination heightened the surrounding communities' suspicion of the thriving anarchist colony on Puget Sound. By that time, the colony had grown to 82 residents and was publishing two national periodicals: Discontent: the Mother of Progress and Clothed with the Sun.

## Free love and free speech

Ten days after McKinley's shooting, U.S. Postal Inspector Confucius Wayland served warrants for the arrest of three Home members "for the crime of writing, publishing and mailing certain lewd, obscene and lascivious material," Wadland writes in his new book.

The offending article, "A Healthy Comparison," published in Discontent, was a defense of free love and a critique of monogamy, co-authored by two men, James Larkin and James Adams (the third man indicted was the newspaper's publisher).

Adams seemed like an unlikely propagandist of free love. He sported a long, white beard, was in his 70s and had been "happily married to his wife for almost fifty years," Wadland writes. Yet, Adams outlined his philosophy of free love in a letter to the Tacoma Evening News, quoted by Wadland, "As free lovers we believe that individualism means that we have the inalienable right to love whom we may, to love as long or short a period as we can, to change that lover every day if we please; and with that neither God, devil, angel, man or woman has any right to interfere."

The three defendants paid the steep bail of \$1,000 each and were released on bond until their trial began on March 11, 1902. Postal Inspector Wayland was the prosecution's first witness, and his testimony took all morning. Then the court recessed for lunch. When the court reconvened, U.S. District Court Judge Cornelius Hanford said he had "carefully read the article in question over lunch and did not find it obscene or unmailable," Wadland writes. Case dismissed.

Postal Inspector Wayland was not easily discouraged, however. He persuaded a grand jury to hand down three additional indictments against members of Home. The next trial, in July 1902, featured another

unlikely campaigner for free love: 75-year-old Lois Waisbrooker. Wadland describes Waisbrooker as tall and "with angular features that one contemporary compared to Abraham Lincoln's." Waisbrooker favored long, dark dresses, walked with a cane and had previously been arrested in Kansas for her advocacy of women's rights and free love. She published her illegal article, "The Awful Fate of Fallen Women," in her own magazine, Clothed with the Sun. At the trial, with a different judge presiding, Waisbrooker was convicted and fined \$100 and "became the only person in Home convicted of a crime as a result of the hostility that arose after the McKinley assassination," Wadland writes.

Home's trials were not over, however.

In 1903, the Washington State Legislature "passed one of the most virulent laws against anarchism in the nation," Wadland writes. It took until the long, hot summer of 1911 before it would be used against Home.

In the meantime, the community thrived. Visitors noted its absences: There were no churches, no saloons and no sales of alcohol or tobacco at the local stores. Yet there were no rules forbidding any of those things.

The residents loved to gather at Liberty Hall, a meeting house owned by the community. There they would have dances with music and merrymaking until the wee hours. Most of all, the community liked to bring speakers into the hall, where they would gather for nights of intense discussion. The speakers might be famous political activists such as Emma Goldman or the Wobblies' Big Bill Haywood. They might be residents of Home, like James Morton, who loved to read aloud the verse of the English poets Percy Shelley and William Wordsworth.

Most families survived through a combination of labor. Some stayed at Home farming, raising livestock and children. The latter attended the community's school. Others would leave the community for months at a time to work for wages in the outside world, sending money back to the husbands, wives and children at Home.

## The nudes and the prudes

Jay Fox worked year round at Home, publishing, editing and writing the community's final newspaper, a biweekly called The Agitator. He had moved to Home in 1910. "Forty years old, with a head of prematurely gray hair, Fox had a narrow chin, high cheekbones and a brow that often furrowed and concealed his eyes in shadow," Wadland writes.

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