

= Spirit Fruit Society =

The Spirit Fruit Society was a communitarian group in the United States that was organized after a period of repeated business depressions during the 1890s . The society had its beginnings in Lisbon , Ohio and , over the years of its existence moved to Ingleside , Illinois and , finally , to California . Plagued by rumor , suspicion , and attacks in the press during its early years , the group remained active until 1930 . Although it never numbered more than a handful of adherents , the Spirit Fruit Society existed longer and more successfully than any other American utopian group .

The name is derived from the group 's belief that mankind 's spiritual state is that of a bud or blossom on a plant and that man 's soul has not yet developed into a fruit from a blossom . The goal of the society was to bring the soul to fruition . As the society 's founder , Jacob Beilhart , said in documents for incorporation of the society , " ... as yet , man is an underdeveloped ' plant ' which has not manifested the final fruit , which he is to produce . " The essential philosophy of the group was based upon a belief in self @-@ renunciation , hard work , tolerance , and peace .

= = Jacob L. Beilhart , founder = =

The Spirit Fruit Society was started by Jacob Beilhart ( 4 March 1867 ? 24 November 1908 ) , who was born in Columbiana County , Ohio , to a Lutheran father and a Mennonite mother . Beilhart was raised in the Lutheran church and his early home environment was strictly religious .

When he was 18 , Beilhart moved to Kansas , where he met and married Olive Louema Blow , whose family belonged to the Seventh @-@ day Adventist church , which Beilhart then joined . Jacob and Louema traveled to California to attend the Adventist College at Healdsburg . Jacob received a preacher 's license and the couple returned to Kansas where he began preaching . After two years , however , faced with the prospect of being sent to work in other areas of the country , Beilhart left preaching , maintaining that he wanted to do something " besides talk " . Beilhart felt a strong need to help the sick so he enrolled in a nursing program at the Battle Creek Sanitarium , which was run by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg .

Beilhart became friends with C. W. Post , who had been a patient at the sanitarium . Post 's health improved dramatically while under the care of a Christian Science " faith healer " , Mrs. Elizabeth K. Gregory . In 1892 , Post started La Vita Inn , a sanitorium of his own , and hired Beilhart as an associate . The two men took instruction in Christian Science while Beilhart worked at the inn and helped develop Post 's cereal drink , Postum . Post and Beilhart rejected much of the Christian Science doctrine , but embraced the religion 's view that illness was an illusion and could be overcome by mental suggestion and self @-@ sacrifice .

During his time in Kansas , Beilhart obsessively investigated a variety of beliefs , including Christian Science , Divine Science , Spiritualism , and Theosophy . He found , however , that none of these religions held his interest . In time , he came to the realization that he would not adhere to any one denomination , but develop a faith of his own by combining aspects of several different religions .

= = Philosophy = =

Beilhart rejected materialism and disavowed personal property . He held that jealousy , doubt , and the fear of losing the love of another caused much of the disease people experienced . He felt that rejecting personal possessions was a means of attaining the Fruit of the Universal Spirit .

Members of the Spirit Fruit Society lived according to the following basic principles : seek happiness through selflessness ; follow one 's conscience ; take responsibility for one 's actions ? and develop an awareness of the consequences of one 's actions on others ; and accept whatever happens . Beilhart believed very strongly in the individual 's right to guide his own actions , and not be dictated to by others . While there was no mention of any kind of organization or hierarchy in any documents , as the leader , Beilhart likely made important decisions concerning the group . There is no record of any kind of internal conflict between members .

Newspapers of the time reported that the society promoted free love , but the society promoted free

love only in the sense that consenting adults had a right to change partners and even to have more than one partner at a time . Rather than promiscuousness , though , the society promoted tolerance , including tolerance of homosexuality . The Spirit Fruit Society , unlike most other communitarian groups of that time , did not seek to convert or recruit others to the group . Members were permitted to come and go as they pleased . The goal of the commune was not to convert or to expand membership in the society ? it was simply to live as the adherents wished to live .

Very little exists in the way of firsthand accounts of life within the society . In an effort to dispel some of the misconceptions and rumors about the society , Beilhart wrote extensively for newspapers to explain the workings of the group .

The members worked together and shared all property . If a member of the society needed money for some purpose , they were free to take it from a community supply . Women of the society worked in the house sewing , setting type for newsletters , and general housework , while the men worked the farm . One of the founding principles of the society was that of the " free gift " . It dictated that , if anyone wanted something that they had to give ? printed materials in particular ? they had only to ask and it would be given to them without charge . After reading or seeing the society in practice , those people were free to contribute if they wished , but it was stressed that this was a " free gift " and not payment . In order to rise from their lower , selfish nature into an unselfish , spiritual nature , the society taught , everyone should obey the law of their being and subdue passions and impulses that control them by nature . The society believed in business and societal laws , but they felt that man would rise above those laws when they gained full control of their lower nature . They maintained , however , that they should still be obedient to those laws .

= = History = =

= = = Lisbon , Ohio , the beginning = = =

In 1896 , Beilhart returned to Ohio and settled in Lisbon , close to where he was reared . Paramount among the reasons for his return was the confession of Louema Beilhart that her two children were not his , but C. W. Post 's . She soon left Lisbon for her home in La Cygne , Kansas . In 1899 , Beilhart decided to create an intentional community to practice his newly developed beliefs and to demonstrate this practice to others . In the aftermath of the Civil War , a number of communitarian groups were started around the United States . The rise in activism was further promoted by the effects of the depression at end of the 19th century . By this time , however , McKinley prosperity had developed and , in any case , Beilhart never displayed a particular interest in politics or economics . At this time he started two newspapers , Spirit Fruit and Spirit Voice , which were widely distributed and supported by donations . The Spirit Fruit Society was officially incorporated as a religious organization in 1901 . The stated goal in the incorporation documents was to " teach mankind how to apply the truths taught by Jesus Christ . " Beilhart made no attempt to solicit members for his commune and sometimes rejected applicants when he felt they were not fit candidates . As a result , the commune only attracted about a dozen residents , mostly from outside the area .

The group did not beg or in any way disturb their neighbors . Beilhart preached in Chicago and elsewhere , but was not known to proselytize strongly . While the group typically kept to themselves , their mysterious nature led to misconceptions and suspicion in the press . Specifically , the birth of Beilhart 's niece , Evelyn , was cause for concern as her mother , Mary Beilhart ( Jacob 's sister ) , was not married to the child 's father , Ralph E. Galbreath ( cousin of Ohio State Librarian Charles Burleigh Galbreath and State Senator Asher A. Galbreath ) . Dubbed the " Love Child " , this birth prompted newspapers to characterize the group as a free @-@ love society of promiscuity . The arrival of " Blessed " Katherine Herbeson , a teenager from Chicago , also gave concern . It was reported in the press that " Blessed " was either held against her will or brainwashed by the society . Her father and brother came and ' rescued ' her and she was forced to leave the society against her wishes . Additional negative publicity occurred when Beilhart objected to his wife 's petition for

alimony .

In 1904 , numerous newspaper articles and editorials were written , mostly in Chicago , about the society . Those articles were often sensationalist and tended to put the society in a bad light . The views of the society , particularly those against marriage and promoting free love , were not accepted well in the small Ohio village of Lisbon . In fact , a local newspaper reprinted a warning that had been distributed in the community : " Wanted ? Fifty good women , over twenty and under fifty years of age ; also fifty good honest @-@ hearted men with families , to meet upon the Square when called upon , and go to the Spirit Fruit farm and tell them to take their departure at once or take the consequences , as tar is cheap and feathers plentiful . "

In June 1904 , Beilhart invited the public to an ' open house ' where he attempted to explain the motives and beliefs of the society . Over 400 people attended the gathering ; Among them , it has been claimed , were Clarence Darrow and Elbert Hubbard but this has not been documented , although Beilhart is known to have visited Hubbard in East Aurora and Darrow was a frequent visitor to the society during the Chicago and Ingleside years . In the end , the society 's rejection of marriage on the grounds that it made a ' slave of the woman ' , and the misinterpretations of their views on free @-@ love were too much for the people of Lisbon to accept . In late 1904 , the group left Lisbon for Chicago , in the hope that their progressive ideas might be better tolerated there .

= = = Ingleside , Illinois , and the death of Beilhart = = =

In 1905 , Beilhart purchased 90 acres ( 36 ha ) near Ingleside , Illinois , along Wooster Lake , a tract known as the Dalziel Farm . About a dozen established members of the Spirit Fruit Society moved with Beilhart to Illinois , along with a few new members . Over the next two years the society built a spacious house and later a large barn entirely by hand . They were better received by their Illinois neighbors than they had been in Lisbon . On the property by the lake , the society 's members hand @-@ built a concrete @-@ block home that they called the " Spirit Fruit Temple " . The 2 ½ -story residence had 32 rooms , a full basement , and modern ( for the time ) conveniences . The dining room accommodated up to 100 people . The society continued to live peacefully in Ingleside for several years . They provided for themselves from what came to be known as the " Spirit Fruit Farm " , opened the farm and temple to visitors , and produced their newsletter . Beilhart continued to speak to groups in Chicago promoting the ideals of the society .

In November 1908 , Beilhart became ill from acute appendicitis . Despite attention from a surgeon who performed an appendectomy , Beilhart developed peritonitis and died three days later . In keeping with the society 's beliefs in simplicity , Beilhart was buried in a plain coffin in an unmarked grave overlooking Wooster Lake . None of the buildings remain , having been covered by a housing development , although Beilhart 's grave remains in a brush @-@ obscured corner of the tract .

The loss of a charismatic and dominant leader often precipitates the decline of such groups , but the Spirit Fruit Society persevered . This made the society unique among other groups of this time . Though the commune continued after his death , their two publications , Spirit Voice and Spirit Fruit , ceased to be produced . Virginia Moore was chosen president of the society upon Beilhart 's death , and the community stayed together and carried on its activities as before . In 1911 , the society put an advertisement in the local papers seeking to sell their lakefront property and ' temple ' . Virginia Moore stated that the Illinois climate was not suitable for their activities and the decision had been made to move to California , . In the winter of 1914 ? 1915 , the society moved west .

= = = California and the end = = =

In 1915 , the society purchased 80 acres ( 32 ha ) of land in Soquel , California , which they named " Hilltop Ranch " . At this point , only 12 of the society 's members remained . They included Mary Beilhart 's two ' illegitimate ' children born in Ohio , now 11 and 15 years old . Just as in Ohio and Illinois , the group made no efforts at recruiting new members , although three new members did join during this time .

The primary focus of the society at this time was simple subsistence . To continue as a group , they

had to focus all of their energies on producing food . This was problematic because many of the members were becoming old and several suffered illnesses . Since the beginning , Beilhart and the other members had not actively sought out new members , believing that a small group was more viable . This proved to be their undoing as there were no younger members to sustain the farm . The original members , who had stayed with the group since its inception , began to leave and by 1928 , only six were left . Financial strains forced them to relinquish the ranch and move to a house in the village of Soquel .

The group finally disbanded in 1930 when Virginia Moore died of cancer . After her death , the remaining members of the Spirit Fruit Society dispersed to various homes of friends and family . Despite the small membership , the society had been in existence for almost 30 years ? 20 years beyond the death of its founder .

= = Success of the society = =

Throughout its existence , the society never claimed more than a couple dozen members . They never actively recruited new members nor proselytized in the communities . Like many such organizations , they were often persecuted by the press and were the subject of dubious reports . Despite this , and , more significantly , despite the loss of their spiritual leader , Beilhart , the society continued to exist longer than most other communes at that time .

Though rooted in Christianity yet exhibiting traits of communalism , the members of the society were not bound by either set of beliefs or values . Murphy suggests that this is one of the reasons for the society 's longevity - that , rather than be confined by one belief system , the members could easily adapt to , and solve , everyday issues arising within the community as well as threats from outside .