

Early area 'commune' failed

By ROSE H. McILVEEN

Special to the H-T

Much has been written about Robert Owen's social experiment at New Harmony. Almost overlooked is the fact that Monroe County had a brief little New Harmony of its own.

Called the Blue Spring Community, it was the brain-child of a Joseph Berry who came to the county from Vermont. Such institutions as schools and churches as we know them today, didn't exist in the 1820s. There were, of course, God-fearing settlers who went to church, and reading, writing and arithmetic were being taught in crude log houses. However, emigrants accustomed to established institutions in the old world, were in a hurry to have them here.

INFLUENCED BY Robert Owen's writings, men like Berry dreamed of utopian communities where everyone pooled efforts for the common good. An extension of his theory was that the cooperation would

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contributions to the Looking Back column, which appears each Saturday, are accepted by The Herald-Telephone. They can be in the form of manuscripts (not more than 800 words) or pictures. Articles and pictures can be sent to: Looking Back, The Herald-Telephone P.O. Box 909, Bloomington, Ind. 47401. Pictures will be returned.

spawn spiritual growth and provide an atmosphere where education would flourish.

Berry was an early purchaser of land in Van Buren Township. It is recorded that he bought property singly or jointly in sections 21, 28, 32, 34. Men who were joint owners with Berry were John Collins, Adam Bowen, John Briscoe, and Arthur Patterson.

In 1826 Berry and those who felt as he did, entered into an agreement to pool their resources — namely land, labor and other effects in a share-and-share-alike ar-

rangement. They began bravely enough by constructing common buildings into which they brought their respective possessions. There were also a conventional public square, a couple of stores, and, of course, a school. At first the community thrived. The children were getting the kind of education their elders prescribed.

MEANWHILE, in the neighborhood and in Bloomington the community members attracted a lot of ridicule like their counterparts at New Harmony and Shaker Town in Kentucky. Apart from brief mentions of the community in Pop Hall's *Historic Treasures* and the 1914 history of Monroe County, there is little information about it. It was Hall who managed to unearth the fact that founder Berry's sister was born in England. It is likely then that he was, too, and had read Owen's social writings before coming to America. Owen, meanwhile, had made a sizable investment in the New Harmony community in 1826 also.

(Continued on page 2, Col. 6)