

El Paso Herald-Post

Editorials
Women's News

Part of Religious Colony's Settlement

First Purebred Herds Brought Here in 1880s

One of the first purebred Guernsey herds in the Southwest was brought here from the East before the turn of the century. It was part of a religious colony's farming enterprise in the Mesilla Valley where steam tractors pulled plows to cultivate land for growing vegetables. A 16-mile long irrigation system watered vineyards and orchards of apples, peaches, apricots, pears and plums.

The Land of Shalam was established in 1884, six miles north of Las Cruces. It was the dream of Dr. John B. Newbrough, who prophesied that the desert would "blossom like the rose."

A TALL (6 feet 4 inches), handsome man of magnetic personality, he had trained as both a medical doctor and a dentist. A native of Ohio, he followed the gold rush to California in 1849. He found gold and moved on to discover more in Australia. He returned to this country a rich man.

inspired, were lost in a flood in El Paso some years after the colony closed.

Among the first colonists was a young divorcee, Frances Van de Water Sweet, with her infant daughter, Justine. She became Dr. Newbrough's wife in 1887 after he obtained a divorce from his estranged wife in New York.

MRS. NEWBROUGH shared her husband's concern for neglected children. She set up a home in New Orleans where 10 foundlings of different racial backgrounds were cared for.

When children's facilities were completed at Shalam in 1887, she brought them west and Dr. Newbrough added three more children to the group. The two-story children's building provided room for more in 1890 and the Fraternum thereafter housed teachers and nurses.

Each child had a nurse and a teacher, also a porcelain bathtub. In their school they were trained in Faithist principles of the colony, music,

stores of the area charged them high prices. They used a coupon system to keep outsiders from benefiting. A village of 20 completely-furnished adobe homes, Levitica, was built for families with an acre of land to cultivate for each.

PARALLELING the history of other 19th century communal religious groups, the Land of Shalam fell on difficult times. The workers grew tired of their labors in the fields and the nurseries. Cattle began to disappear. Families at Levitica grew quarrelsome. Inattentive workers allowed a thousand chickens to freeze on a cold night. Dairy sales did not bring in needed income because of refrigeration and transportation problems.

Rio Grande floods also took their toll, eating away crops and irrigation ditches and reducing the land holdings to 900 acres. Levitica was wiped out in a flood.

\$60,000. It is now private farms.

Howland died at 83 in 1917 and his wife in 1922. Some of the children they had cared for at the colony continued to look on them as parents for years.

THE INSPIRATION tower, which had a star-studded blue ceiling, collapsed in 1900. Years later a few crum-

bled adobes marked the spot where it stood, and on two rocky hills east of the colony were cairns marking the place where strange burial rites were said to have taken place. More recently, farm workers were housed in the two-story brick structure which had been erected for children, and the only other remaining colony building was used for storage. The

Fraternum burned down about 1950. The temple bell was given to Our Lady of Purification Church in Dona Ana.

Although this early farming enterprise did not last, the book which inspired it is still in publication and small groups dedicated to its beliefs still are active in several parts of the world.

Dr. Newbrough set up a dental practice in New York City where he undertook projects including help of alcoholics. He discovered a psychic gift in the 1870s, a period when spiritualism was a popular subject. Under the influence of a spirit, he said, he took direction on a type-writer and produced what was published as "OAHSPÉ" in 1881. The name, he explained, meant "Earth, Sky and Spirit" in a dead language, Paneric, which had been spoken on the continent of Pan. It was between Japan and North America before being submerged by floods 24,000 years ago, he said.

THE STRANGE BOOK, which is still advertised in publications dealing with the occult, calls the one Creator Jehovih (sic), recommends a vegetarian diet, and seeks world peace through setting up colonies where everyone works and shares alike, thus ending poverty.

One section describes the advantages of caring for homeless children, a matter of great concern to Dr. Newbrough. He set about finding a spot where he could carry out the way of life advocated in the book.

In the summer of 1884, en route to California, he passed through Las Cruces and decided the Mesilla Valley was the location he sought. On his return trip he bought 1,200 acres on a bend of the Rio Grande, a mile west of Dona Ana, for \$4,500 cash. That fall he brought 20 followers to establish the Land of Shalam.

THEY LIVED in tents until homes could be built. The fratenum, a 40-room structure with a central courtyard, was the largest building. The group registered with the secretary of the New Mexico Territory as the First Church of Tae. Around 1890 three more buildings were completed, a two-story brick children's home, a circular temple of Tae, and a studio in which Dr. Newbrough worked, meditated and painted. His paintings, also said to be spirit-

THEY ATE vegetables (those grown above the ground) and children under 6 were given milk. They wore simple, pajama-like clothing, mostly white, and sandals. The cult frowned on unnecessary clothes and no haircuts or shaves were allowed.

In order to fulfill the ideal of caring for the children, the colonists had to operate a sizable farm. In 1885 Andrew Howland arrived from the East to join the group, bringing with him considerable personal wealth and valuable know-how. He ran the cooking procedures, ordered food by the carload, and offered money for more buildings.

ADVERTISEMENTS for the colony brought a motley group of followers, ranging from the incompetent to the lazy to the fanatic, along with some sincere hard workers.

A flu epidemic hit the colony in 1891 and Dr. Newbrough, 62, exhausted from caring for the sick, developed pneumonia and died April 22. First buried at the colony, his body later was moved to the Masonic Cemetery in Las Cruces. A group of Faithists in 1952 placed a granite marker which read "Unto Thee Jehovih Creator be praise and thanks for brother John B. Newbrough . . . through whose hands OAHSPÉ the new Bible was transcribed for the world."

HOWLAND succeeded his friend in managing the colony. He set up the irrigation system, bought three steam tractors, set up an apiary for honey production, and established the Guernsey herd. Milk was processed in a pasteurizing plant and butter and cheese were produced. A chicken house with a concrete floor held more than a thousand hens.

A community store, selling to colony workers for at-cost prices, was set up when retail

COLONISTS LEFT, the school closed and Howland faced the reality that the colony must end. He had married Mrs. Newbrough in 1893. By 1901 only they and 25 children remained. They placed 21 of them in private homes and orphanages. Howland sold food products in nearby towns to support his wife, stepdaughter and four foster children. They finally moved from Shalam in 1907, settling in California and later in El Paso.

The land was sold in 1908 to an agricultural syndicate for