The Utopian Colony of *La Réunion* as Social Mirror of Frontier Texas and Icon of Modern Dallas

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The direct bond between Europe and the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century produced immigrant communities of all sorts within an American setting. Though accommodating rapidly to the social and political ideals of their new country, European settlements could not easily forget their violent and often revolutionary pasts. Nowhere in nineteenth-century America was this rivalry between imported ideas and indigenous conditions more pronounced than in the religious, communist, and socialist colonies that sprouted from New Jersey to Texas in the years immediately before the Civil War. The most significant of these religious settlements were New Lebanon (Pennsylvania), Oneida (New York), Salt Lake City (Utah), and Zoar (Ohio). The principal secular communities of a communal nature were Brook Farm (Massachusetts), Nauvoo and New Harmony (Indiana) as well as the North American Phalanx (New Jersey). To understand how one group of French, Belgian, Swiss, and Alsatian immigrants, who were often branded as radical by American standards of the time, found a home in the nativist confines of Texas, this paper will focus on the utopian colony of *La Réunion* that scratched out a meager existence in Dallas from 1855 to 1858, but helped to shape the burgeoning frontier town for decades thereafter. Given the checkered fate of contemporaneous socialist ventures across the United States, the failure of the “Old French Colony”—as *La Réunion* is still called in Dallas circles—was hardly a surprise. Its steady cultural and intellectual influence on one of America’s most politically conservative cities, however, is indeed surprising.
The relationship between America and the European socialism that emerged after the French Revolution was one in which participants often misunderstood each others’ conceptual foundations and specific motivations. Though attempting to establish themselves in a country that either tacitly allowed or openly encouraged chattel slavery, Europe’s radical immigrants, many of them the followers of Charles Fourier (1772-1837) and Robert Owens (1813-1858), looked on America’s “peculiar institution” as simply another form of class domination.

For its part, much of ante-bellum America viewed the socialists as part of a much broader immigration problem. Fearful of losing the foundational ideals of their country with the spread of the exotic concepts that accompanied the flood of European newcomers in the 1840s and 1850s, many United States citizens agreed with the nativist stance of the Know-Nothing Party that saw uncontrolled immigration as a clear danger to the base rock of American democracy.

Despite the starkly different intellectual positions between the socialist immigrants and their new homeland, the lure of free land and the need for its rapid settlement overrode such concerns and inexorably pushed forward the occupation of immense frontier zones in the Republic (and later state) of Texas. Taking advantage of the region’s liberal land policies, Europeans of all political stripes established themselves within the large land grants associated with the Texas empresario system.

As France lurched into yet another revolution in 1848, a small stream of socialist immigrants came into the broad swath of grassland between the Red River and the tiny
frontier settlement of Dallas. The first of these were the adherents of the revolutionary activist, Etienne Cabet (1788-1956). A native of Dijon, Cabet earned a law degree but did not practice. Instead, he turned to politics, winning a seat in the French *Chambre de Députés* after the 1830 Revolution. Because of his obstreperous opposition to the government of Louis Philippe (1830-1848), he was exiled to England, but returned to his homeland in time to become an integral participant in the Revolution of 1848. Even before the revolutionary government had turned against the lower classes during the infamous “June Days,” Cabet was planning an escape to the New World, sending his adherents to establish a settlement they hopefully called *Icarie* (after the political agitator’s literary utopia) on lands above Dallas in the summer of 1848. This small group soon fell victim to the region’s unpredictable weather and crucial changes in Texas’s land policies. Despite this failure of Texas to live up to its reputation as a “terrestrial paradise,” the temptation of establishing new lives would bring even more radicals to the lands watered by the Elm Fork of the Trinity River.

The most successful socialist venture of the period that sought to use north Texas as a base was intimately connected with one man: Victor Prosper Considerant (1803-1893). As Fourier’s most forceful and intelligent disciple, Considerant had attempted to establish a small colony laid out on socialist and communal principles (called a *phalanx* by Fourier) outside of Paris in 1852, only to have all such ventures outlawed by France’s last emperor, Napoleon III (1852-1870). Exiled for his bitter criticism of the new regime, the radical leader spent time in Belgium, but soon turned to the United States for the fulfillment of his professional and personal aims. After a six-month sojourn that took him from New York
across several western states into north Texas, he chose a site for his new phalanx on the limestone bluffs across the Trinity from Dallas.\textsuperscript{15} With his return to Europe, Considerant began the process of funding the new project with the formation of the \textit{European and American Colonization Society of Texas} which would serve as an administrative body for the colony and for the expenditure of monies raised for its operation.\textsuperscript{16} To publicize the venture, the socialist leader became a skilled promoter in an American sense with the publication of the pamphlet, “To Texas” \textit{Au Texas}. This melding of political tract and travel book, which was soon translated into English and German, invited Europeans oppressed by the Continent’s stifling class system to find a new life in Texas, “one of the most favored regions of the globe,” where they could happily sow the “seeds of liberty, knowledge, and love.”\textsuperscript{17}

The popularity of \textit{Au Texas} soon attracted a number of northern Europeans to Considerant’s venture. This group was marked by the great differences of its individual members. Some were socialist “true-believers”; others, weary of revolution and recession in their homelands, wanted to make a new start in America; still others were “bored to death” and hoped to be renewed by “the revitalizing power of nature.”\textsuperscript{18} They were trained in a number of urban professions ranging from business to geology; unfortunately, very few possessed practical skill in agriculture.\textsuperscript{19}

Though many of the colonists initially “believed everything that Considerant said,”\textsuperscript{20} their faith in the great political leader started to wane as they experienced the harsh realities of frontier life. Finding nonexistent the easy river access promised in \textit{Au Texas}, small parties
were forced to walk the two-hundred miles between the upper Gulf Coast and La Réunion. Europeans trudging across the prairies behind the wagons that hauled their goods apparently brought out “crowds of natives” to take in the alien sight.\textsuperscript{21} After as much as two months of walking, the French, Swiss, German, and Alsatian immigrants reached La Réunion to find nothing there but the name.\textsuperscript{22} The finished structures and “alimentary supplies” promised by Considerant in print were nowhere to be found.\textsuperscript{23} It then dawned on these representatives of European urban culture that pre-packaged dreams did not exist on the Texas frontier.

Despite the hardships and disappointments endured in reaching the promised land of Texas, the colonists, numbering some four-hundred by the end of 1856, set to work with a will to build a two-story central structure, a commissary, and a separate kitchen.\textsuperscript{24} They took fewer pains with their own living quarters, a number of rough-hewn log cabins which remained largely open to the weather.\textsuperscript{25} Even after months of hard work and the vicissitudes of the region’s climate, the colony seemed to prosper. Working and eating together, the colonists (who spoke several European languages, but not English) even relied on each other for entertainment, holding weekly concerts, voice recitals, and dances.\textsuperscript{26} Under this facade of perfect socialist harmony, La Réunion, like all other American phalanxes, was about to fall under the influence of two fatal problems, class strife and financial insolvency.\textsuperscript{27}

The colonists blamed the rapid collapse of La Réunion in 1856-1857 on the character and administration of Considerant himself, but it also sprang from the structural weakness of Fourier’s ideas. Though the phalanx was supposed to be based on the “law of love,” it
was not democratic, relying rather on the stern rule of the president and its directors. When the colonists’ initial trust began to disappear, Considerant, as president, became increasingly autocratic. Embittered at his loss of authority that was largely his own fault, he became “a sullen man ...[who was] unable to communicate and became profoundly depressed.” To get through these terrible bouts of despondency and self-doubt, Considerant consoled himself with both whiskey and morphine. As Considerant relinquished his hold on the colony and eventually spent ever longer periods away from it, bitter disputes over the governance of La Réunion erupted among the colony’s artisans and professional men.

A deepening pall of despair, worsened by the colony’s penury and fiscal dependence on the community of Dallas, fell over La Réunion and effectively set the stage for the figure who would dominate its last days. The real catalyst for these events was the obstreperous French army doctor, Augustin Savardan, who came to La Réunion in 1855 and almost immediately began to question the authority of Considerant, who considered the newcomer as “conceited, touchy...[with] a certain narrowness of spirit.” Claiming that the president was in the process of either “eat[ing] up the capital or exploit[ing] the workmen,” the doctor accused Considerant and his supporters of malfeasance, maladministration, and favoritism. Saying that it was time for “each man to become his own justice,” Savardan quickly emerged as the leader of a disloyal opposition. The colony was now divided into two parties, “each of which were increasingly embittered and accused each other of all the evil things they had suffered.” The result of this revolution against the colony president was a triumph for
neither side, but rather a nervous gridlock. In this “silence of death,” *La Réunion*, unable to weather “the impetus of individualism,” passed away and its members either returned to Europe or settled in the environs of the growing city of Dallas.\(^{35}\)

Despite *La Réunion*’s rapid demise, its short existence had a marked effect on Texas and, more especially, on the community of Dallas. Considerant’s striking personality brought rapid responses, both negative and positive, from his adopted homeland. Because of the widely favorable accounts of the Fourerist venture run in the *New York Tribune* thanks to its left-leaning owner and editor, Horace Greeley,\(^{36}\) Considerant’s initial actions were lionized in the Dallas and Galveston papers with the hope that the socialist colony might help to usher in a “higher degree of civilization” for frontier America.\(^{37}\) Thanks to the rosy picture of his colony tirelessly projected by Considerant, the Texas Know-Nothing Party and its principal news outlet, the *Texas State Gazette*, now became aware of *La Réunion* and unleashed a number of negative articles against the French socialists. Portraying the newcomers as revolutionaries, political quacks, abolitionists, or, worse yet, Catholics, the rightest editor of the Austin newspaper decried the colony as a dangerous element that wished to sap the vitality of Texas’s democratic society.\(^{38}\)

In February, 1855, this Know-Nothing outlet characterized Considerant and the anticipated residents of his colony as “an armed band of seditious, lawless, foreign abolitionists...who were seeking to sap the foundations of society” whose plans could not be “carried out without creating bitter and unrelenting prejudices and animosities among our native citizens.”\(^{39}\) On June 2, 1855, the same paper branded Considerant’s followers as “a
mischievous element of the population” whose “wild theories would not long last the test of experience.”\footnote{40} A month later, the same news sheet exclaimed that it would rather see Texas “a howling desert than witness the spreading wave of Socialism spread itself over [the state’s] Christian Churches and ...Slave Institution.”\footnote{41}

The stark change in attitude toward his political activities discernable throughout 1855 forced Considerant to take the propagandistic offensive when he returned from Europe to Dallas. Answering the Know-Nothings' charges point-by-point in a pamphlet entitled \textit{European Colonization in Texas},\footnote{42} he then attempted to establish his enterprise on firm economic and political footing by petitioning the Texas legislature for compensation through a land grant for all the money his organization had spent in settling so many colonists at the Dallas site.\footnote{43} When the Democratic majority in the state house and in the governor’s office rejected this request, Considerant attempted to salvage something from his foray into the primitive arena of Texas politics by having the \textit{European-American Colonization Society} incorporated in its new home state.\footnote{44} By 1857, the attacks by Texas newspapers against the Dallas socialists reached a fever pitch.\footnote{45} Considerant, however, had lost the will to oppose them and was instead forced to admit that all of his hard work had been for nothing. It was not in his character to accept blame for the \textit{La Réunion} failure. Instead, he rehearsed recent history in a pamphlet entitled \textit{Du Texas} “From Texas” in a way that blamed the xenophobic Texans and the selfish and lazy colonists for the Dallas debacle, but never saw his own autocratic and indecisive brand of leadership as reason for the collapse of his plans.\footnote{46} This failure did not ultimately discourage the old campaigner who attempted to establish yet
another phalanx—this time in Uvalde in the West Texas—before returning to France where he remained a socialist icon of sorts until his death within sight of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{47}

While some segments of the Dallas community, viewed the socialist venture taking place on the far bank of the Trinity as a dangerous experiment in atheism, free love, and abolitionism,\textsuperscript{48} the vast majority looked on the establishment of the French Colony as an economic boom that effectively doubled the population base of their settlement. The simple fact that most of the newcomers had little experience in agriculture also cemented their dependence on the original Dallasites who routinely outproduced them and sold commodities at a much lower rate.\textsuperscript{49} As a result, \textit{La Réunion} was never really solvent and, because of its trade imbalance with the merchants across the Trinity, soon ran up a large deficit. Despite this galling dependence on American capitalism to survive, the “workers of the future” (\textit{des ouviers de l’avenir}), as they called themselves in their anthem “The Immigrants” (\textit{Les Emigrants}), started a butcher shop, saw mill, and community store within months of their arrival.\textsuperscript{50} Some of the colonists had even practiced viticulture with the wild muscadine grapes that grew on the limestone uplands on which the colony was situated.\textsuperscript{51} The rapid building method of filling wooden boxes with crushed stones in wooden boxes, stacking these containers like cinder blocks, and then stuccoing the resulting rough-hewn wall formed by this method was much admired by Dallasites and was used for the construction of houses throughout the city during the late-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{52}

Even with Dallas’s growing appreciation of the varied skills the foreign craftsmen and professionals brought with them into the region, \textit{La Réunion}’s corporate organization would
eventually mire the colony in legal difficulties that endured for almost a decade after its dissolution in 1858. Arranged as a company funded from the sale of stock, the *European and American Society of Colonization* was managed by a board of directors headed by Considerant himself. With an ocean between the board and its executive director, the colony soon ran through the money allocated for its first year of operation. Due to droughts, freak cold spells, and disastrous crop failures during this period, *Le Réunion* could not even pay off the interest from the debts they had incurred. With no ready cash to defray such essential expenses, Considerant and Cantagrel found themselves named in lawsuits aired in a Dallas courtroom during the second half of 1855 by unpaid contractors and carters who had sold the colony goods or had moved its members and their property from Houston to Dallas. Ironically, some of these litigants were, themselves, members of the colony. The plaintiffs in these actions submitted itemized bills that topped out at over $1400. The response to these claims from the colony representatives was that such bills had to be submitted to the society’s board of directors in Belgium. The plaintiffs angrily and quite rightly responded that no such organization existed at the time under Texas law, and so they demanded payment in cash and on the spot. Despite their “expenses incurred in traveling, sickness, and sacrifices of property and time,” the plaintiffs were ultimately disappointed with their day in court, eventually accepting the colony’s promise to settle its debts on the installment plan. It is highly unlikely, however, that this payment schedule was honored even after the sale of the colony site was completed in the last years of the Civil War since the investors in the enterprise were never fully compensated for their losses and several of the colonists were
involved in litigation concerning the division of La Réunion’s lands down to 1890.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite these judicial complications, the members of La Réunion who remained in Dallas after 1858 were well-liked, many of them excelling in business and the professions. Friendship and inter-marriage even further linked the two communities which routinely held large celebrations on such national days as the Fourth of July and Bastille Day.\textsuperscript{57} Even after the colony dissolved, the favorable impression it had made on Dallas did not disappear. As one editor in 1858 put it, La Réunion, though fallen into disrepair and largely deserted, “had been a benefit to the country,...[furnishing] excellent workers in useful employments.”\textsuperscript{58}

Dallas’s friendly tone also often extended to the colonists who had returned to Europe. Though Considerant could hardly claim such popularity in the site of his greatest failure,\textsuperscript{59} François Cantagrel was so popular in Dallas that when he returned to France and won election to its national assembly, the French Chambre de Députés in 1876, his former hometown celebrated this stunning political success by naming a street for him.\textsuperscript{60}

With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 that was seen as a disastrous blow to Texas’ “beneficent and patriarchal system of African slavery,” the state rapidly moved toward secession, forcing, in the process, unpleasant choices on all of its foreign-born citizens.\textsuperscript{61} Though Considerant had rejected the claim leveled by the Texas Know-Nothing Party that he was an abolitionist and classified slavery as only one of the “great evils” the modern world had produced,\textsuperscript{62} most of La Réunion’s residents maintained amicable relations with the region’s African-American population, both slave and free, who profited from being the principal suppliers to the colony of fish and fresh game.\textsuperscript{63} The decision to support
the Confederacy against the homeland they had sworn to uphold would prove an exceedingly difficult choice for *les emigrants* who remained in Dallas after 1858. A number of the younger colonists volunteered to fight with Texas units. Emil Remond, one of *La Réunion*’s cadre of scientists, willingly left behind his research to join the Nineteenth Texas Cavalry before transferring to an artillery detachment. He served with distinction in a large number of campaigns, always seeking out “the place where the fighting was going on and joining the fray.” Other colonists involved in the war were Ashiel Frichot, Henry Boll, William and Joseph Knapfly, and John Louckx. Other sons of Dallas’s socialist venture like Maxime Guillot put their mechanical skills to use for the Confederacy by aiding in the repair and dispersal of weapons from facilities across Texas. Despite this support of the Confederate war effort by some of *La Réunion*’s former members, the colony suffered in the first months of the war from the enlistment-, weapons-, and supply-gathering patrols mounted by southern forces stationed at Dallas. The older French colonists, still barely functional in English, underwent intermittent “threat and assault” from passing Confederate troops, but suffered little bloodshed. The most dangerous confrontation of this type occurred in the first year of the war when a Confederate recruiting party attempted to enlist a group of Frenchmen led by Alexander La Notte. La Notte outwitted the Confederates by gathering all the colonists he could in the *La Réunion*’s deserted storehouse and then having each of them train two or three guns on the invader out of the stone structure’s windows. Through this ruse, the Confederates, thinking that they were facing a much larger force, were forced to withdraw. Before 1862, however, southern commanders operating in north
Texas had become desperate for weapons and had confiscated all the useable guns at La Réunion. Even before a general military exemption was granted in late 1861 to all foreign aliens in the Confederacy, however, the community of Dallas had rallied to keep its French neighbors out of the line of fire by convincing southern officers and administrators that the colonists posed no danger to the Confederacy, but were, instead, “peace loving and tired of war.”

With the Confederate defeat in 1865, La Réunion, little more than a ghost town except for the scattered farms of its former residents, became a cherished and often-commemorated part of Dallas’s past. The stone archway, the director’s house, and the community store that had been erected so speedily in 1855 under the skillful supervision of J.F. Barbier and Ferdinand Michel, still stood, as they would for almost a century until consumed by the neighboring Lone Star Cement Company. Despite their socialist past, the majority of the former colonists became prosperous citizens of Dallas in a number of fields. Within only a few years of La Réunion’s break-up, the European immigrants who had entered Dallas life from the colony possessed property assessed by county tax agents at nearly $37,000. A number of their fellows, however, who had remained on the land rather than entering the enriching stream of Dallas commerce had some trouble in retaining middle-class status. A good example of these agriculturalists, who, “though not in want,... [were] far removed from comfortable circumstances,” was Frances Boulay, who died in 1875, leaving his wife all but destitute. Penury was not to be her lot, though, since, while cleaning her scantily furnished house, she found under the floor boards a sizeable fortune of
almost $2000. Distrusting banks, like many of the poorer members of La Réunion, Boulay had sequestered this nest egg, but had neglected to tell his wife that it even existed.\textsuperscript{72}

Despite the colonists’ different financial standings, this apparently disparate group was held together by the Belgian, French, and Swiss nationalities they had grown to adulthood in and the formative experience at La Réunion. They advanced in the larger Dallas society by joining clubs like the Knights of Columbus, Freemasons, and Odd Fellows. From these invaluable connections, they formed a solid political base that would allow one of their fellows to advance in a Dallas political environment that was about to undergo a governmental sea change. Ben Long (formerly Lang), a native of Switzerland, had grown wealthy as a ferry operator over the Trinity and a land speculator who had brought even more Swiss immigrants into the region.\textsuperscript{73} With the passage of the First Congressional Reconstruction Act on March 2, 1867,\textsuperscript{74} the dominant political party in Texas during the war, the Democrats, were barred from holding office by statute since the vast majority had been slave holders. To form civil governments in the territory under their authority, the military governors, Philip Sheridan and then W.S. Hancock, filled the slates of municipal offices with anti-slavery appointees.\textsuperscript{75} This propelled to the center of Dallas politics the sons of La Réunion, none of whom had ever held slaves. In 1867, A.J. Gouffre served as city treasurer, and in the next year, Long was appointed mayor and a number of his colleagues from the Old French Colony were selected for principal offices and for service on the board of aldermen.\textsuperscript{76} After serving for two years, Long returned to Switzerland for a short visit and then finished his term. He was elected mayor twice thereafter—1872 and 1874—because
of his “personal popularity among foreigners as well as native citizens.” He ended his career in 1875 after almost a decade in attempting to establish law and order in Dallas, which one of La Réunion’s younger residents, George Cretien, described as a place filled with “saloons, gamblers, and dance halls, wild men and wilder women.” Getting into an argument with an Austin dead beat in a drinking establishment owned by one of his Swiss countrymen, Long was shot, dying instantly. His murderer was tracked down and killed the next day. Despite this stunning end to his career, Long represented how far the former residents of La Réunion had come in their adopted hometown.

La Réunion’s influence within its host community was surely due to the talented and educated people who had exchanged utopia for life in the burgeoning settlement on the other side of the Trinity. Despite its small population, the colony had included a number of remarkable professional and amateur scientists. Jacob Boll, a Swiss citizen, was an accomplished naturalist before he joined his family at La Réunion in 1858. Establishing a warm relationship with Louis Agassiz, one of America’s foremost scientists at the time, Boll collected insects, mammals, and invertebrate fossils across Texas for Harvard University. He was also an accomplished mineralogist and geologist who even engaged in infant science of paleontology with the excavation of dinosaur remains. Boll’s career ran in tandem with his colleague, Julien Reverchon. Coming to La Réunion after its failure in 1858, the young Frenchman settled with his father at a farm near Dallas and continued the botanical collecting he had begun in his homeland. Through this intense and incessant observation, Reverchon became the unquestioned expert on the flora of the Southwest and attained such
a advanced reputation in his new home that its city fathers named a park after him. Although Boll and Reverchon eventually gained professional acceptance and employment in several fields of study, they sprang from a group of non-professional scientists that originally called the Dallas colony their home. A number of them, like Pere Frichot and François Santerre, put their interest in geology and agronomy to practical ends in brick making and agriculture. From this group of amateur scientists, the most successful was Emil Remond. Arriving at the French Colony in 1856, he soon began to study the region’s soil that was so unproductive for agriculture. He soon put these observations to practical use by identifying zones of clay around the colony that were perfect for the production of bricks and concrete.

Besides these shining stars of science and technology, *La Réunion* sent a body of well-educated and skilled men into the Dallas community of the mid-nineteenth century. They brought professions unheard of in the frontier town, and, in so doing, helped to engender its sense of difference from Fort Worth and other settlements in the neighborhood. The group that came into Dallas in 1858 included an agronomist, architect, brewer, brickmaker, builder, copper, ice maker, jeweler, linguist, lithograph, mason, milliner, and restauranteur. This illustrious company helped to transform Dallas by their own drive to attain personal success. In this activity, they were responsible for a number of innovations in their new home’s agricultural and commercial life including the first cultivation in Dallas County of almonds, bananas, cotton, grapes, and a number of other fruits and flowers, the first examples beer and wine making, the first jewelry store, and the first skyscraper. Their cultural attainments
were at least as impressive, endowing Dallas with its first dance school and piano, its first benevolent society for the promotion of the arts, the beginning of its public park system and its largest collection of books until the opening of the Dallas Public Library in 1899.86

Robert Penn Warren has called the Civil War America’s “felt history,”87 In some senses, this phrase would describe Dallas’s relationship with the utopian colony that dissolved in 1858. Though most of the colonists left Dallas to set up homes in other parts of the United States or to return to Europe, the group that remained began the active commemoration of La Réunion’s existence and its clear influence on the Dallas community. They celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of La Réunion’s founding in 1906 and the hundredth anniversary in 1956.88 More permanent remembrances were established with the placing of historical markers on the colony site in 1924 and on the French cemetery in 1974.89 As Texas celebrated its own centennial in 1936, the descendants of Dallas’s socialist community were honored in the retelling of La Réunion’s story in public lectures to the city’s business community.90 Between 1936 and 1967, the story was carefully studied by two members of the Santerre family and became the subject of a novel by Benjamin Capps.91 The commemoration of La Réunion continued in 2005 with the celebration of the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of its founding.92 While such celebratory efforts led architect, Jon Carsey, to propose the creation of meticulous scale-models of the colony’s surviving structures in 1934, few seemed to think of saving the colony edifices themselves.93 During the same period, however, at least one Dallas citizen, however, sounded the alarm in regard to the condition of the colony’s surviving structures, observing sadly that they were
“crumbling from year to year into further dilapidation under the battering assault of wind and weather.”

Because of their service to the rapidly changing community that Dallas was and remains, the city’s newspapers, the Morning News and Times Herald, seemed to take as a civic responsibility the commemoration of the Old French Colony. Their principal duty in this regard seemed to be the chronicling the life of La Réunion by announcing the birthdays, marriages, and deaths of its members. The most significant of these obituaries was that of Cesarine Santerre Remond whose death in 1923 marked the passing of the colony’s last adult member and the demise in 1951 of Ms. Eugenie Roessler, the last of the children born in La Réunion to pass away. Because the memories of those who had experienced the communal life of Considerant enterprise seemed to vary wildly in their later years in regard to “facts, activities, plans, locations, leaders, and characters of leaders,” staff writers, such as W.A. Adair, Frank M. Cockrell, Paul Crume, and Louella Styles Vincent, took it on themselves to tell and retell the general story of the colony and collect the reminiscences of its principal members. The Dallas Morning News also fulfilled this duty by regularly including episodes of colonial life in its historical cartoon series, Texas Lore.

Besides possessing a historical significance that was rehearsed every few years in newsprint, La Réunion was meaningful for Dallas as both a commercial symbol and municipal reality. By the early 1970s, the colony’s name was associated with a huge office complex known as One Reunion Place, a site that included Reunion Arena, the home of Dallas’s professional basketball and hockey teams, and the iconic Reunion Tower. Mirroring
the fate of its namesake, the arena, at least, fell victim to the intense pressure of the city’s commercial life that made every square inch of real estate inordinately valuable. After three decades of service that included hosting the NCAA Men’s Basketball Final Four and a number of other professional championships, the arena was closed on July 1, 2008 and demolished a little over a year later.\(^{101}\)

The same type of life cycle applied to the property on which *La Réunion* had existed, if only briefly. Even before the colony’s structures had been consumed by Lone Star Cement’s limestone-consuming kilns, external forces had begun to target the colony lands for new construction. In 1943, the war effort dictated that a thousand temporary houses be built across *La Réunion*’s grounds to accommodate workers for the regions’ defense plants.\(^{102}\) With V-J day two years later, the hastily built structures were left deserted, leaving a blight on the neighborhood until they were torn down and the land sold in 1954.\(^{103}\) By 1962, Dallas’s post-war “building boom” had even reached the colony lands that now looked like some kind of industrial wasteland. Sensing profit even among the ruins, Herman Loupot, descendant of colonist Jean Loupot, began the construction of 175 brick homes where the war structures had stood.\(^{104}\) This development was aided by 1975 with the completion of a neighborhood elementary school and a huge bulk mail center.\(^{105}\)

Even in the decade before all this new building took place, the colony site had been so overwhelmed by new structures that only one acre of the land purchased for Considerant by Cantagrel in 1855 was left in its pristine state.\(^{106}\) The passing years, filled with illegal immigration and high crime rates, have not been kind to the neighborhood of *La Réunion*
that has increasingly been covered with derelict housing and mounds of garbage. Growing away from the early site that in some ways had defined it, Dallas, now a burgeoning metropolis, seemed to have little use for the French Colony site. After formally promising in 1973 and 1987 to maintain its burying ground (the Fish Trap Cemetery named after the colonists’ method of fishing in the Trinity with willow traps), a string of city administrations from the 1990s to the present time have allowed the site, the final resting place of Julien Riverchon and many other colonists, to become thoroughly overgrown and clogged with refuse.¹⁰⁷ As recently as the summer of 2010, Dallas has been called to task in some quarters for its failure to maintain adequately La Réunion’s physical remains. Stepping in to take up this job, volunteers from the trans-Trinity community and former town of Oak Cliff have made the upkeep of the cemetery a project for the support of their own community identity.¹⁰⁸

All Fourierist phalanxes of ante bellum America vanished “at the touch of experience”¹⁰⁹; La Réunion, however, adapted itself to a much larger myth, that of the great city that grew up around it. Like the Reunion Tower that overlooks the limestone bluffs on which the colony stood as well as John Neeley Bryan’s cabin that constituted the core of early Dallas, the life and after-life of the Old French Colony has cast its light in a random fashion over its adopted hometown for almost two centuries.

END NOTES
1. I would like to thank Dr Dean Fafoutis, editor of the International Social Science Review, and the two anonymous readers who helped bring this article into its final form. I also appreciate the encouragement concerning this project given me by brother, Jerry Kagay, my cousin, John Ridings Lee, and my other siblings, all of whom, in some sense, owe their existence to La Réunion.


9. The empresario system, which had begun under Mexican rule, relied on the activities of land agents such as Henri Castro, Charles Mercer, and W.J. Peters. These empresarios were given tracts of Texas territory of up to 20,000 acres for settlement and then worked to establish settlers on the land. For every ten sections they settled, the agent claimed one section for his own use. Walter Struve, *Germans and Texans: Commerce, Migration, and Culture in the Days of the Lone Star Republic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 42, 46-50; E.C. Barker, “Notes on the Colonization of Texas,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10, no. 2 (Sept., 1923): 141-52; Mary Virginia Henderson, “Minor Empresario Contracts for the Colonization of Texas 1825-1834,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* [hereafter abbreviated as *SHQ*] 31, no. 4 (Apr.,1928): 245-324; Archie P.


12. By the time, the Icarians had reached Texas in 1848, the large empresario contract was quickly becoming a thing of the past. Though some further contracts had been issued to W.S. Peters during the 1840s, the Republic’s Congress had attempted to outlaw all land settlement by empresarios in 1844. The dispute this caused was only settled in 1848 after a long legal battle that favored the congressional position. This change in settlement rules had thus come into effect shortly before Cabet’s “soldiers” came to Texas. Reuben McKitrick, The Public Land System of Texas, 1823-1910 (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin, 1918), 46-47; Christopher H. Johnson, Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians, 1839-1851 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 282-83; idem, “Communism and the Working Class Before Marx: The Icarian Experience,” American Historical Review 76, no. 3 (June,1971): 281-82; Harry Wade, “Les Communistes in East Texas,” East Texas Historical Journal 24, no. 1 (April,1986): 16-17, 19-25.


19. Velma Irene Sandell, “The Effect of the Assimilation of the La Reunion Colonists on the Development of Dallas and Dallas County,” (M.A. Thesis, University of North Texas, 1986), 29-43; ; Santerre, *White Cliffs*, 36-37; Lutz, “Almost,” 32-35; Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 172. François Cantagrel, the agent who had purchased the colony land, was said to have exclaimed when he saw the new arrivals from Europe: “*Mon Dieu*, I am sent here to direct an agricultural colony and have no agriculture to direct.” Quoted in “Old French Colony,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 25, 1891, pt. 3, p. 1. All citations to the *Dallas Morning News* between 1885 and 1977 are drawn from the Historical Archive in the *Dallas Morning News* website [http://www.dallasnews.com](http://www.dallasnews.com). This electronic newspaper file exactly reproduces the newspapers and indicates the page reference for each article.


22. Lutz, “Almost,”326; “Au Texas! Aperçus Biographiques,” 188. The trip of Jean and François Loupot to the colony was typical. Leaving Anvers in November, 1855, they arrived at New Orleans on December 12 and Galveston shortly afterwards. Jean reached the colony on February 24, 1856; his uncle, who was taken sick in Palestine, Texas, did not reach Réunion until the end of the year. For the origin of the colony’s name, see Santerre, *White Cliffs*, 81.

23. Considerant, *Great West*, 44.

24. The schedule that the colonists soon fell into was: breakfast (4:00-4:20am); work (4:30-10:30am); lunch and rest (11:00am-2:30pm); work and afternoon break (2:30-7:00pm), dinner (7:30pm). Godin, “Documents,” 452.


26. “Old French Colony,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 25, 1891, pt. 3, p. 1; Santerre, *White Cliffs*, 45, 53-55, 300; Godin, “Documents,” 457-58. Considerant was the only member of Réunion who spoke the late winter English well. The changes in weather the colonist encountered were drastic going from drought in late winter of 1856 to several cold snaps, complete with snow, in the spring of 1857. For description of the north Texas weather in late 1850s, see Considerant, *Great West*, 12-18.


biographiques,” 104-8. Considerant was the only president of the colony; François Cantagrel was the first director. After he lost his job in July, 1856, the second director was Allyre Bureau who became director in 1857 and oversaw the dissolution of the colony in 1858.


37. In February, 1855, the *Dallas Herald* hailed the establishment of *La Réunion* as an event that would add to the North Texas community both economically and culturally. The *Galveston News* predicted that *La Réunion* and like colonies, if successful, would usher in for mankind “a higher degree of civilization,” but feared that, “discord...[could] cause it to riot in infamy.” The two newspaper accounts are quoted in Hammond and Hammond, *La Réunion*, 74-75.


43. Petition, 9-11; Reuben McKitrick, *The Public Land System of Texas, 1823-1910* (Madison, Wisc.: Bulletin of University of Wisconsin, 1918 47-49. This system consisted of the waiving of competition for land between settlers if one of them put up a down payment for the land (usually pennies per acre) and then settled it.


48. For Fourierist doctrine of free love, see Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 353-63.


51. Rogers, *Lusty Texans*, 80; “Old French Colony,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 25, 1891, pt. 3, p. 1. One of the first such vintners in Dallas county was a Frenchmen involved with the Icarie venture named Gounant who sold his home brew for a dollar a bottle. The most important of the socialist winemakers was Jean Loupot.


55. District Court Minutes, Dallas County, Case No. 308: Ross v. Considerant, October 26, 1855 State of Texas, 9th District Court; Case No. 309: Comé v. Considerant, State of Texas, 9th District Court, November 1, 1855; Case No. 310: Priot v. Considerant, State of Texas, 9th District Court, Nov. 5, 1855; Case No. 311: Bowie v. Considerant, State of Texas, 9th District Court, Nov. 10, 1855; Case No. 312: Despard v. Considerant State of Texas, 9th District Court, Nov. 10, 1855; *Twelve Years Afterwards*, 7-11; Hammond and Hammond, *La Réunion*, 112-13.

56. “Citation: The State of Texas,” *Dallas Daily Times Herald*, October 7, 1890, p. 6; “La Reunion Articles, Dallas County, Texas” Jim Wheat’s Dallas County Texas Archives.


60. “Dallas in the French Parliament,” *Dallas Herald*, May 6, 1876, n.p.; HDGC, Box C, File C-56; “Street Name,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 22, 1886, p. 8; “Old French Colony,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 30, 1891, pt. 3, p. 1. Cantegrel was so well thought of that an official photograph taken in conjunction with his election was on display in the Dallas courthouse for years after his term of service had ended. The honor of street naming was tarnished by the misspelling of Cantagrel’s name, a faux pas repeated by the city of Dallas when naming a street for colonist Jean Loupot. Dallas streets were also named for J.F. Barbier and Emil Redmond.


63. “Old French Colony,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 25, 1891, pt. 3, p. 1. For the steady increase of the slave population in Texas in the decades before the Civil War, see Texas House of Representatives, *A Report and Treatise on Slavery and the Slavery Agitation* (Austin: State of Texas, 1857), 12; Richardson, *Texas*, 162. The slave population in Texas was 5000 in 1836, 58,000 in 1850; 125,240 in 1857; 150,000 in 1860.


76. Sandell, “Effect,” 81-82. The 1868 slate included John Barbier (marshall), Alexis Barbier (assistant marshall), A.J. Gouffre (treasurer); Henry Boll, Jean Loupot (aldermen).


79. Rogers, Lusty Texans, 140-41.

80. S.W. Geiser, Naturalists of the Frontier (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1937; Dallas, Univ. Press, Southern Methodist University 1948); Clinton P. Hartman, “Boll, Jacob (1828-1880),” Handbook of Texas Online, [accessed June 22, 2010].


85. Dallas Herald, June 2, 1866, p. 2; “La Reunion Articles, Dallas County, Texas,” Jim Wheat’s Dallas County
A good example of La Réunion's horticultural influence was a "giant lily" brought from France as a bulb and then transplanted by the colonists several times. After a century, the plant still prospered, producing several generations of descendants. “Giant Lily Traced To French Colony,” Dallas Morning News, August 2, 1953, p. 9.


95. Most of the evidence for this process comes from the Dallas Morning News's historical archive. Unfortunately, with the closing of the Dallas Times Herald in 1991, such documentation is nor readily available to the researcher.


