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| http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/images/ornament-top.gif  **Transcendental Ideas: Social Reform**  http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/images/ornament-bottom.gif  **History of Brook Farm**  **Jessica Gordon, VCU**   |  | | --- | | Brook Farm  *The Hive at Brook Farm* |   George Ripley founded and created Brook Farm, but before the formation of the community, Ripley lived in the city of Boston. He remained in the ministry until 1840, and his home attracted Harvard Divinity Students. Many of these students, such as Theodore Parker and John Sullivan, were trying to find a middle ground between Norton's traditionalism and Emerson's decision to leave the church. Ripley objected that Norton would "separate the pastor of a church from the sympathies of his people, confine him to a sphere of thought remote from their usual interests, and give an abstract and scholastic character to his services in the pulpit." While still in Northhampton, Ripley sent a [letter of resignation](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/letter.html#ripley) to his congregation. Thus, Ripley set out to find his own church to which he could be honest and faithful. Emerson praised Ripley's decision because he knew that Ripley's church would be more than a Sunday gathering place. Indeed, Emerson predicted that Ripley's church would be an experiment in Christian living. Just as Ripley's home had attracted men who doubted the Unitarian church, it also became a point of contact between transcendentalists and more radical social critics. These people helped channel Ripley's discontent into the idea of a community that would eventually be called Brook Farm ([Rose,](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/resources/tr-bib.html#rose) 103-105).  Brook Farm began in April of 1841 with [George Ripley](http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/brook_farm.html#Brook_Farm_Community) as the founder, his wife, Sophia Ripley, and about fifteen other members. The farm was bought from Charles and Maria Ellis, according to the deed on October 11, 1841. Although it says nothing about it in the deed, another strip of property was also purchased, called the "Keith Lot," which consisted of twenty-two acres. On the same day, the trustees--Ripley, Hawthorne, Dana, and Allen--mortgaged the property to Daniel Wilder and Josiah Quincy to secure the payment of $6000 in three years and twenty-one days. They also made a second mortgage to George Russil, Henry Sturgis, and Francis Shaw at $1500 each, and to Lucy Cabot at $500.00. The tuition of one pupil per stock share was entitled to each subscriber. No stockholder had any claim on the profits of the farm besides the 5% interest.  **Philosophy of Brook Farm**  Ripley stated his general goals for Brook Farm in a [letter](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/letter.html#ripley2) to Emerson in 1840 and in the *Original Constitution* of Brook Farm. Ripley's goals were a systematic statement of what all the transcendentalists had been looking for: individual freedom and humane relationships. Specifically, however, the transcendentalists sought harmony, the merging of values, ideas, and spiritual matters with physical events, the union of mind and body, spirit and flesh. At Brook Farm, and in other communities, physical labor is perceived as a condition of mental well-being and health. They believed that manual labor was uplifting, and thus, every member, even the writers and poets, spent at least a few hours a day in physical effort. Another expression of the connection of flesh and spirit is manifested through the abundance of physical tasks performed at Brook Farm. The members of Brook Farm believed that they could create a utopian microcosm of society that would eventually serve as a model for and inaugurate the social macrocosm.  **Economy and Finances**  Brook Farm began as an experiment in Christian living and became a center of reform activity to promote the beliefs of Fourierism. At the beginning, there was a serious purpose behind the Brook Farm amusements; the members were attempting to work out an economy that allowed everyone an equal chance for social, intellectual, and spiritual growth. The members of Brook Farm had an insatiable desire for pleasure: music, dancing, cardplaying, charades, tableaux vivants, dramatic readings, plays, costume parties, picnics, sledding and skating. By offering a solution to economic problems, Fourierism brought the Brook Farmers in reach of their goals.  The Brook Farmers introduced several changes in social organization between 1841 and 1844 that involved three aspects of their economy: the plan for reuniting social classes, the voluntary system of labor, and the choice of agriculture as the principal industry. The object of these measures was to promote and able the free development of the individual. Ripley stated his [general goals](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/letter.html#goals) for Brook Farm in a letter to Emerson.  Ripley's primary objective was to end the division of educated and laboring classes. Ripley believed that both classes shared a common difficulty in that their work no longer met the standards of a calling. The Brook Farmers intended to share the labor on the farm in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency and therefore end wage slavery. "Everyone must labor for the community in a reasonable degree, or not taste its system in operation," Elizabeth Peabody wrote in the *Dial* in 1842 . "By the wide distribution of these labors," she continued, "no one has any great weight in any one thing." ([Rose](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/resources/tr-bib.html#rose), 134) In another article, Peabody refers to seeing the men delay teaching Greek to nurture fruit trees and women spend the morning doing the laundry. Because they divided the labor, the members had a great deal of time to devote to one of their main goals, self-improvement.  While Brook Farm guaranteed equality in education and labor, membership in the association depended on ownership of property. Brook Farm was organized as a joint stock company. The price of a share was $500.00. Upon purchase, a member could then have the right to vote on community policies. (The second edition of the Articles of Association, drawn up in 1842, allowed a person to become a member by the vote of the associates.) The members of Brook Farm believed that private property was necessary for individual integrity. Ripley wrote a letter to a reform society in New York explaining this principle.  The voluntary system of labor was another reform undertaken in the interest of individual freedom. As Elizabeth Peabody said, "everyone prescribes his own hours of labor, controlled only by his conscience." She noted also that the free atmosphere enhanced sociability. A person who did not perform an acceptable amount of work would find himself isolated and neglected and would not be able to continue living there. In 1841, the members voted to have more specific general standards for work: 300 days was considered the equivalent of one year's labor, and ten hours in the summer and eight in the winter were considered one day. Several problems arose in which a new member did not perform an equal amount of work, and due to these cases, the members agreed to officially record hours of labor. Understandably, this type of rigidity at Brook Farm was disturbing to members who set up the community to encourage and facilitate moral growth.  The Brook Farm Institute for Agriculture and Education was the name the Brook Farmers chose for their community in 1841. It referred to the way they chose to unite labor and culture and to the way that they chose to earn their living. The transcendentalists perceived farming to be the occupation most favorable to personal growth because of its distance from the market, proximity to nature, and promise of a subsistence to protect moral independence. The Brook Farmers, unlike the member of Fruitlands, did however sell their milk, vegetables, and hay and kept their stock dividends low in order to keep enough capital to expand production. In one sense, the Brook Farmers operated something like a boarding school where the students paid in cash unless they worked on the farm. Furthermore, when the Brook Farmers admitted Lewis Ryckman, he initiated a new thriving business of shoemaking in the community. Thus, they were making money on culture, and this act demonstrates the Brook Farmers interest in practical economics as a means to social justice in the year before their allegiance to Fourierism ([Rose](http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/resources/tr-bib.html#rose), 130-140).  **Lifestyles**  In the mornings everyone in the community would wake at approximately 6:00 am, eat breakfast, and then work for ten hours in the summer or eight hours in the winter. Even so, enjoyment was the first pursuit of Brook Farm. After the work was done and after dinner had been served, there was plenty of time for personal enjoyment and leisure. The members of Brook Farm had an insatiable desire for pleasure: music, dancing, cardplaying, charades, tableaux vivants, dramatic readings, plays, costume parties, picnics, sledding and skating. Even in stormy weather, impromptu discussions were started in the Hive. Literary societies and reading clubs were very popular at Brook Farm, as were the readings and performances of Shakespeare's plays. Musical visitors were common, and some members also sang. Anti-slavery gatherings in Boston and Dedham were attended by many members. But perhaps the most important and symbolizing custom at the Farm was "The symbol of Universal Unity." This ritual was performed by the entire company rising and joining hands in a circle and then "vowing truth to the cause of God and Humanity." |

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