



CARICATURES OF EARLY FAIRHOPIANS drawn by W. A. Dealy Sr. in a gentle satire of the first days of the Single Tax Colony included one of Marie Howland

carrying a coal scuttle. Mrs. Howland, second from right in the first row, was a controversial figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

She Was Ahead of Her Time

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Living Today Writer

She was a woman before her time . . . perhaps even before our time. The doctrines she espoused and the ways of life in which she believed encompassed the tenets of the women's liberation movement, the commune system and the practice of free love.

During her lifetime, Marie Howland taught school, wrote a book that was banned from the Boston Public Library, became one of the leading figures of an unsuccessful Utopian community and established the Fairhope Public Library.

Born in New Hampshire Jan. 23, 1834, Marie Stevens Case Howland was one of the young people for whom the child labor laws came too late. Marie's father died when she was 12, and soon after she left her home to work in a textile mill in Massachusetts. She spent two years toiling 13 hours a day in the mill before she moved to New York City where she encountered groups of people who were to influence her and her life's work.

It was in New York that Marie made friends with free-thinkers and social reformers. At night she attended the Female Normal School, during the day she taught in the 19th century equivalent of an inner-city school and was appointed its principal when she was 21.

At about the same time, the young educator married a lawyer from Connecticut, Lyman W. Case. Case brought his bride to the Stuyvesant Street Unitary Home, where the young couple lived among other tenants of the cooperative rooming house, which flew a banner proclaiming "Individual Sovereignty".

It was there that Mrs. Case met Edward Howland, a writer who contributed to the country's first Bohemian magazine, *The Saturday Press*. Ray Reynolds, in his book "Cat's Paw Utopia", which contains most of the published biographical information about Marie Howland, describes Case's reaction to the meeting of his wife and Howland. It was a reaction which proved his belief in individual sovereignty. "So solicitous was he that, when she was charmed by a quiet, handsome young visitor one night, Case insisted that Edward Howland was the right man for her."

A divorce was obtained, and the couple married. Their life together, which began at the time of the Civil War, was one which tested their devotion. They farmed in order to support themselves physically, and wrote in order to support themselves spiritually.

Mrs. Howland's book, "Papa's Own Girl", met with little favor in the eyes of established society in 1874. The Boston Public Library found it immoral. Reynolds calls it a "bold treatment of woman's sexual situation." The setting of the novel was as controversial, however, as its feminist philosophies.

The book "depicted the establishment of a Familistere in New England, with idyllic results." Oakdale, the community in the novel, was patterned on the Social Palace, or Familistere, of Andre Godin, a French manufacturer. Constructed for the families of some 300 workers, Godin's Familistere "provided comfortable living quarters and educational and recreational facilities as well."

In the preface to the second edition of the work, Mrs. Howland explained her own feelings on the rejection of the book: "The true secret of the opposition to the novel is that it deals mercilessly with the follies and crimes of society. . . . shows clearly that wealth owes a duty to the disinherited of the earth which cannot be discharged by merely paying wages or giving alms. What this duty is, is taught through the example

of the hero of the story."

In the spring of 1885, when the Howlands had reached a spiritual rock-bottom, Mrs. Howland was approached about the reprinting of "Papa's Own Girl". The second edition was published that year and the Howlands began to consider leaving New England.

Their destination was what they hoped would be the answer to the problem of the nonconformist in a conforming society. Topolobampo, located on the Gulf of California in Sinaloa, Mexico, was to be a Utopian community which provided the needed refuge.

Marie Howland became known as the "soul" of the enterprise, and because of her prominent position among the colonists as editor of the newsletter *Credit Foncier of Sinaloa* and community librarian, her conduct was open to much criticism. She was the center point of two of the many scandals that erupted about Topolobampo. The first scandal concerned her swimming unclothed in mixed company, and the second, which seems to have caused as much of an uproar as the first, was that she rode astride rather than sidesaddle.

Edward Howland died at Topolobampo on Dec. 24, 1890. His widow remained, and for three years she continued in her role as a leader of the colony. But Topolobampo proved to be a misadventure, and in 1893 she left. She blamed the failure of the colony on the lack of conditioning to the concepts of colony life. She told a reporter from the *Philadelphia Express*: "The proper way would be to establish a socialistic school, where the children can be educated and let the second generation come in to manage. . . ."

After several years of traveling around the country, staying with friends, she joined the Single Tax Colony in Fairhope in 1901 and founded the Fairhope Public Library.

In connection with her duties as librarian, she instituted the Library Review Club during her first year in Fairhope. Mrs. Frances Black, who is librarian now, maintains in the library collection the minutes of the club, and they show that Mrs. Howland continued her feminist stand. On March 5, 1902, the minutes record that she reviewed "The Grandeur and Excellence of Women Above That of Men" by Cornelius Agrippa, and that a discussion ensued which made this the only review that day. Ordinarily several reviews were given during the course of a meeting.

The librarian was also associate editor of the *Fairhope Courier*, and wrote the column "Extracts from Mrs. Howland's Letters". Mrs. Ruth E. Rockwell, secretary of the Single Tax Corporation, explains that the column was composed of chatty bits derived from letters Mrs. Howland wrote to her friends. In the letters, she mentions such things as measuring the leaves of her plants, and Mrs. Rockwell notes that Mrs. Howland's interest in gardening gave rise to a caricature of her carrying a coal scuttle drawn by W. A. Dealy Sr. "Mrs. Howland carried a coal scuttle along the street looking for fertilizer for her garden."

Marie Howland spent the last 20 years of her life in Fairhope and died Sept. 18, 1921. Her funeral was held in that part of the library which is now the children's room, and her friends put the following epitaph on her tombstone:

Author
Founder of the Fairhope
Public Library
A Life Spent in the Service
of Humanity
Thy Memory Is Blessed :
Peacefully Rest