

THE DIVERSITY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE LARKIN FAMILY

Having been rather fascinated over the years by some of the interesting religious involvements with which Larkin family members became involved, I decided to take a closer look. I was not disappointed!

EARLY LARKIN FAMILY RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: Daniel Larkin, biographer of his grandfather, John D. Larkin, Sr. (JDL hereinafter), informs us of the not-so-pleasant church experience of JDL's youth. His family attended a Baptist church located at Seneca and Washington Streets. They were very involved in the church and strictly adhered to its teachings. Every Sunday as well as other days of the week were spent at the church. "On Sunday the sermon, anywhere from one to two hours in length, was the centerpiece of the service, dealing chiefly with the doctrines of the church, salvation, hellfire and the Day of Judgment." Mary Hubbard Heath, JDL's future sister-in-law, also recalled her terror at such services. "I listened with horror, waiting for certain inevitable passages describing the Judgment Day...The scenes of Gabriel coming in the clouds of heaven, the blast of his trumpet, the separation of the sheep from the goats, and the awful sentence to the left hand of the throne of God." "Doleful sounds, she learned, would emanate from the graves as the bodies emerged to either rise to Heaven or descend to the fires of Hell. How that early experience affected JDL, we do not know, but it must have created a tension in his gut, (See "John D. Larkin: A Business Pioneer, by Daniel Larkin, pp. 11-12.)

JOHN AND FRANCES (FRANK) LARKIN: Upon moving to Buffalo in 1875, and setting up their household at 213 Eagle St., close to where JDL would build his company on Seneca St., the young couple joined not one, but two churches, the Cedar Street Baptist Church, close to their home, and Prospect Avenue Baptist Church. Dan Larkin tells us that they were active in both churches, attending Sunday services as well as involving themselves in many of the activities of the churches. They seemed quite happy with the churches – presumably no "Hell and Brimstone" performances. Interestingly, The Cedar St. Church had a largely black population. Dan does not tell us what the reason was for joining that church, but I would not be surprised to learn that he – and his wife, "Frank," wanted to be near to and supportive of a congregation that undoubtedly included many of

JDL's employees. I looked for records of the churches, but no such records were retained.

JDL and Frank, in 1901, moved to 237 North Street. Though they had been quite content at the Prospect Ave. church, they decided to attend the now closer, Delaware Avenue Baptist Church. But about that same time, influenced by family and friends, JDL and Frank began to attend services at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral. Their daughter, Frances, had previously become a member there and her two sons were baptized there. In 1902, JDL's and Frank's daughter, Ruth, followed suit. All that time the Larkins still had not formally joined that church, but that was soon a dramatically change. In December, 1902 the newspapers published the "hot news" about Frank's brother's (Elbert Hubbard) affair with his paramour and the birth of their baby – a very horrible scandal given that Bert was still very much married and had children living in East Aurora. Since the Larkins were still members of the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church, we learn from Dan Larkin that a delegation from the Baptist Church asked Frank to formally (i.e., publicly) disassociate herself from her brother or leave the Baptist congregation.. Undoubtedly, both humiliated and outraged, she withdrew from the Baptist congregation. (At the same time, we shall see, Elbert was a pastor of a church in East Aurora and suffered no consequences.) As a result of the emotional upset caused by her brother's affair, divorce and scandal and her being asked to leave the church, Frank, according to Dan, turned to Eastern Mysticism, Theosophy and Spiritualism while still retaining her involvement with the Episcopal Church. (See Dan Larkin's book)

WILLIAM AND MARY HEATH: Mary Heath was Francis Larkin's (Frank) sister. She had been living in Chicago with her attorney husband, William. At a point where JDL desired more presence of family in the ownership of the Larkin Co., he asked, and William accepted, a position at the Larkin Co. Patrick Mahoney, a local architect and expert on everything Frank Lloyd Wright, wrote a book about them and the house they had hired FLW to design on Soldiers Circle. The book, entitled "FLW's Scholarly Clients, William and Mary Heath", was published in 2015. Arriving in 1899, they were soon settled in their new home and joined Lafayette Presbyterian Church. Not content to just be a member, Mary established "The Heath Bible Class" which Mahoney describes as soon being known nationally for its teaching technics. William, who headed the Larkin Co. legal department, arranged in 1920 for the financing of construction of the Community House of the church. The Heaths also frequently hosted lectures, dances and meetings in their basement playroom, some of which generated articles published in the Buffalo Courier (Feb. 18, 2007) and Buffalo Evening (May 22, 1924) News papers. A memorial plaque was placed at the church after the Heaths' deaths, him in 1932 and

her in 1942. It can still be observed on the wall of the nave of the church and reads, “There till this day as a lasting reminder of the major contribution the Heaths made to the church and to the community in general.” (See “ Frank Lloyd Wright’s Scholarly Clients, William Heath and Mary Heath”, 2015. William’s death was published in a “New York Times “obituary on 9/29/32. It read, “WRH is dead; lawyer, churchman, this prominent attorney was for several years Moderator of the Buffalo Presbytery.” And look for Patrick Mahoney strolling around our building, since he is the LCOC’s architect for most of the interior area as well as the amazing “Ghost Pier”, a glass reincarnation of the original pier that stood at the Seneca and Larkin St. corner of the parking lot once occupied by FLW’s Larkin Administration Building. Or say hello to Patrick at the bar at Eckl’s, once it reopens.

ELBERT HUBBARD: Frances (Frank’s) brother was a religion unto himself. After being taken in to the Larkin Co. by John Larkin was Bert was only 19, he rose to be an owner and officer of the company. He was very imaginative, coming up with several marketing ideas that were largely responsible for the financial success of the company. Bert was Best Man at JDL’s and Frank’s wedding. In 1893 Bert was all about treachery. He claimed he was going to enroll at Harvard Univ. to study and write. Though an economic depression swept the country, he insisted that JDL nevertheless pay him a huge sum of money representing what he claimed to be based on an evaluation of the company’s worth, set forth in a contract which they entered into literally a short time before the great crash of 1893. When JDL asked for a schedule of payment that would spread the load out over a longer time, Bert refused and sued his sister’s brother! JDL managed to raise the money and struggled on to keep his company alive. He also investigated Bert’s work for the company and found evidence of his wrong doing in his accounts (He does not specify specifically what the issues were). But worst – and especially devastating Frank, was the discovery that Bert was having an affair with a woman named Alice who he had hidden in Massachusetts, and she had had a baby by him. At about the same time, he had impregnated his wife, Bertha. It’s a long, convoluted story, and one of shameless treachery. At one point Bertha took him to court for failure to pay his child support for the baby and his sons! During the time that he had Alice hidden away in Massachusetts where she knew nobody and had been told by Bert not to tell anybody there about their relationship, she had to face her first pregnancy alone while Bert went back and forth between two states. He would not even permit her to see a doctor or arrange for a midwife and she was forbidden to contact her family back in Western New York Just before Alice’ baby was due, he came home to Bertha but spent most of his time in the attic. It turned out that he was studying Bertha’s father’s

medical books to learn how to deliver Alice' baby. Alice had no medical assistance of any kind when Bert went to Mass. and delivered her ten pound baby. (See "As Bees in Honey Drown: The Love, Lives and Letters of Roycroft's Alice and Elbert Hubbard," by Charles Hamilton, 1973.

But back in East Aurora, where he had lived with Bertha, he began to reinvent himself, never appearing to rue any of the misery he had created. He had lied to his mother about his plans and completely bamboozled a friend, Felix Shay about what had happened and what he would be doing. Shay wrote a book, "Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora," in 1926. Shay says that when Bert left the Larkin Co., he had all the money he needed or wanted. "He resigned his occupation to peace and amity and good will for \$75,000 and 'retired' from business." His plan was to "loaf... and incidentally, to pursue a higher education." Shay notes that he did not go to Harvard, but did go to England where he met William Morris and was highly impressed with the Kelmscot printing press he saw there. "Between 1892-1895 Bert found his life's work (Shay was apparently unaware of Alice hidden away in Massachusetts!) which was apparently printing. Such an "enterprise would permit him to live a rounded existence and to develop every aspect of his versatile mind and heart symmetrically...Between times, what doubts must have assailed him! What divine restlessness must have disturbed his plans. Retired, he was too energetic to rusticate, too virile to do nothing." (p.33) Shay goes on and on with this deification of Bert. "He was looked upon as a visionary and dreamer" but, Shay notes, Bert "was not a dreamer or a theorist, but a sound and practical thinker – and a Prophet." (Excuse me while I gag.)

And there is the clue. Bert did not seek religion; he was the subject of religion! Bert started a farm where boys and girls from the area would work and who would love it so much, they would never want to leave the farm to work in a city. He added the making of arts and crafts which could be sold in a Roycroft shop, again diverting their attention from cities. Crafts expanded to include working with leather, pottery, hammered copper, wrought iron objects, weaving, making furniture and famously, printing and binding fine books. Lecturers and outside guests came. Workers lived in their own homes – it was not a commune. But they were paid for their work from their sales, and if they did not put in enough work, they were ousted, to make their own way to support themselves in East Aurora or other places. Buildings went up, Shay notes, "Elbert Hubbard is the only man who ever had to build an inn to house admirers." (p.80) Bert, says Shay, wanted to be known – to stand out among distinguished men... to write for vast audiences; to speak before the multitudes; to be admired and applauded by them; to be recognized as a power in the intellectual sphere." Shay then notes, Bert acted as "judge, jury and chief executioner – under his plan there was no security of tenure, When a member was good, he was happy, and when not good, he was escorted out into the Cold

World and that was that!. As far as religion goes, Bert thought of himself as pastor of his flock. Shay concludes, “Elbert had the power to make us think, weep, applaud – and always laugh. And while Bert was the spiritual leader at the Roycroft, even after he brought Alice to live there, it was his sister, Frances, who was asked to leave her church because of the scandal! Famed Roycrofters, Kitty Turgeon and Robert Rust, in their book, “Images of America: the Roycroft Campus”, say that the Roycroft was as much a state of mind as a place.” It is this writer’s opinion that the religious deity here was Elbert Hubbard himself. – all powerful, all controlling and the focus of everyone’s endeavors.



CHARLES AND HIS SON , CHARLES, JR.

LARKIN: John and Frances Larkin’s oldest son, Charles, born on March 4, 1875, was converted by Swami Paramahansas Yogananda to his Brahmanistic cult in America which he had founded in the U.S. in 1924. Its objective was to develop self realization via meditation. His method was to take, through meditation, inspiration from Jesus. He claimed to have experienced a vision, i.e. a radiant form of Jesus. “I implored Christ to guide me in divining the true meaning of the Word” P.561...” (“Autobiography of a Yoga” by Yogananda) “Yogananda translated the “Bible” of , many Eastern religions, the “Bhagavad-Gita” and wrote a detailed commentary that presents the various paths of a Yoga. “The aims and ideals of his fellowship are to disseminate among the nations a

knowledge of definite scientific technics for attaining direct personal experience of God.” P. 573. Charles was so intrigued, that he went to India to learn more and returned to the U.S. with several priests in tow, to the great chagrin of his wife who promptly divorced him. Charles, Sr. apparently supported his son’s involvement in the religion as evidenced by his giving his son a book entitled, : ”At the Feet of the Master,” which was an eastern religious type philosophy book. It had been inscribed to “Charles Larkin, Jr. from his father, dated 3/4/15.”

JOHN LARKIN, JR. – Born on 10/28/77. He was given a book written by Yogananda and inscribed by him, “To John D. Larkin with Boundless Blessings. May he guide you in every way as you have always been a friend of Carise and me. 12/26/32”He also possessed a typescript entitled “Life and Teachings of the Masters of the Far East “ by

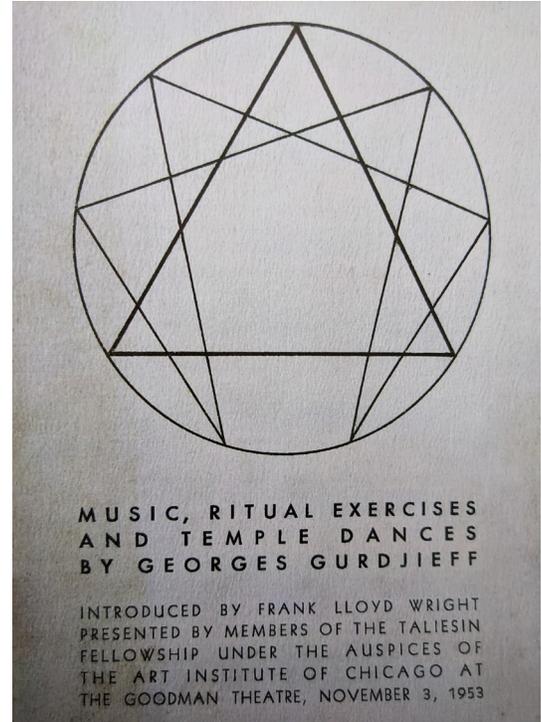
Baird and Spelling. JDL, Jr. had an avid interest in eastern mysticism and theosophy.. He passed that interest down to his son, Crate, who had majored in philosophy and religion at Williams college.

WILLEM NYLAND AND ILONKA KARASZ. Born in Holland in 1890, moving to the US in 1920, he was a chemist but also a gifted pianist. He was employed at the Larkin Co. Nyland became very involved with the teachings of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, a Russian mystic who was very advanced in an Eastern-influenced, holistic

system of beliefs centering on the idea of “work” as a means of developing a human to its fullest potential. Nyland had met Gurdjieff in New York City in 1924 and remained a devoted student with close contact with him until Gurdjieff’s death in 1949. Nyland then pursued creating a Gurdjieff Institute in New York where devotees could continue to pursue their studies and interactions. In 1960 he left the group and assisted in creating another which developed many branches around the US. His wife, Ilonka Karasz (1896-1981) was a talented artist. They had moved to Buffalo around 1934 where Ilonka worked as a designer at Buffalo Pottery, a subsidiary of the Larkin Co. while Nyland became employed in Sales and Marketing. Ilonka developed an art group for the devotees and by the 1960’s, had incorporated it. It became affiliated with the Gurdjieff Foundation.. Gurdjieff had lived from 1877-1949. His biographer, P.L. Travers described Gurdjieff’s mission: “He had come not to bring peace, but a special kind of inner warfare. His mission in life was to destroy men’s complacency and make them aware of their limitations. Only by such means, by what he called ‘conscious labors and intentional sufferings, was it possible to bring about their inner development.” Devotees lifestyles consisted of hard labor by day and at night it was required that to take part in the sacred dances, or ‘movements’ or one could assist with the preparation of a large feast. The feast was consumed under the influence of good food, vodka and the watchful eye of the ‘Master’. Opportunities were provided for those with the courage to come face to face with themselves. JDL, Jr. became involved with Gurdjieff as well and that interest spread to Crate. In February, 1937. Ilonka left Buffalo Pottery, apparently because of some kind of conflict.

So who was this Gurdjieff? James Moore, in his book, “Gurdjieff: the Anatomy of a Myth (1991, describes Gurdjieff: He is God of all the world and also of my outer world. I am God also, although only of my inner world.:p.34. He had been very traumatized by the war in Armenia and Tibet. Moore explains that “Gurdjieff perceived man as deeply asleep, blindly and aimlessly suffering, torn by war and passion fouling everything around him...He longed to comprehend – and even to challenge – the dreadful process of war, and the hysteria underlying it.” Gurdjieff concluded that he must

discover at all costs, some manner and means for destroying in people the predilection for suggestibility which causes them to fall easily under the influence of ‘mass hypnosis.’ His method involved teaching an ‘universal language’ of postures, gestures, movements. These were called “Sacred Dances.” Gurdjieff did believe in God who was centered in the vast, but ultimately apprehensible material universe. Apparently the evening sessions that were comprised largely of eating a feast and dancing also had sexual overtones. Gurdjieff was rumored to participate in sex with his devotees, including one of his most famous students, Oglivanna Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright’s wife. When Oglivanna and FLW met, Oglivanna already had a child. It was suspected she was Gurdjieff’s daughter!!! Nevertheless, Wright welcomed him to visit Taleisin and seemed impressed with his philosophy. Nyland seemed above the seamlessness of Gurdjieff’s ‘s nightly revelry. He had an “unrelenting passion for work {JDL must have loved that!} He was very faithful to Gurdjieff’s teachings. In addition, he wrote and played beautiful music on his piano. It was considered to be a nonverbal transmission of ideas and an aural current of his presence. Playing not only to audiences but recording on 33 rpm discs, they had the benefit of record jackets beautifully designed by his wife. (“A Remembrance of W.A. Nyland In the Eye and Ear of the Beholder,” by Terry Winter Owens.



ELISA LARKIN NASCIMENTO: Elisa is the daughter of Daniel Larkin, JDL’s grandson who wrote the Bible of Larkin, “John D. Larkin: A Business Pioneer.” Elise married Abdias Nascimento after meeting him at the Univ. of Buffalo, where they were both studying. They eventually returned to live in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where Abdias held elected federal positions of Congressman and then Senator They pursued the Afro-Brazilian religious tradition of Orisha worship which had its roots in ancient Egypt

DARWIN R. MARTIN: Not really a Larkin but treated like family, Darwin had come to work at the Larkin Co. as a young teenager. He was put right to work assisting JDL with the bookkeeping and given the weight of the ledgers, he soon had developed a card system to file data about customers and their orders. He was often invited to the homes of JDL and Frances as well as Bert and Bertha Hubbard. Recently I acquired a book entitled “Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community” by George Wallingford Noyes published in 1923. I was surprised to find a name plate inside the front cover with Darwin Martin’s name inscribed. Even more to my surprise was a letter addressed to DDM obviously tied into the spine of the book when it was bound. It was from Oneida Community, Ltd. Mr. Noyes had requested the

publisher to send a book to Darwin because of, apparently, his interest in the Community. The Oneida religious group had tried to create a community for themselves, including a variety of industries which would make them as independent as possible. Various household goods were made at plants set up in a number of communities, one such plant being a metal company. My guess is that Darwin was not so interested in the community itself, but rather in its making of metal eating utensils which the Larkin Co. may have been looking for information contemplating purchasing them to use as premiums. A review of the outlined history of the Larkin and Buffalo China Company prepared by Lester Rickard is informative. There are many references to Oneida. For example 1846 – “John Humphrey Noyes founded Putney Community and practices communal living; 1877 – Oneida Co, embarks on sale of flatware; 1880 – flatware co. moves to Niagara Falls. 1884 – Oneida Co, produces silver plated spoons for Larkin Co.; 1916 – first Oneida Community service plate pattern offered as a catalog item; 1935 – Oneida Comm. changes name to Oneida Ltd. I have not found anything that suggests a religious tie between Darwin and Oneida, and, indeed, no unusual religious life at all involving Darwin.

And that’s all I could dig up, so I conclude with a warm “Hare Krishna!”

And many thanks for the wonderful sharing of information by Larkin expert, Jerry Puma, and Larkin relative, Alexandra Stocker