

## BELLAMY'S CHICOPEE A Laboratory for Utopia?

JOHN ROBERT MULLIN

**Edward Bellamy is arguably** America's most famed utopian. His seminal text *Looking Backward* (1888)<sup>1</sup> was one of the top two best-selling novels of the nineteenth century (after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*),<sup>2</sup> was translated into dozens of languages,<sup>3</sup> and has never been out of print.<sup>4</sup> *Looking Backward* and its sequel, *Equality*,<sup>5</sup> have had a dramatic and long-lasting influence on many political theorists and planners. Among these were John Dewey,<sup>6</sup> Peter Kropotkin,<sup>7</sup> Thorstein Veblen,<sup>8</sup> and John Maynard Keynes.<sup>9</sup> From a planning perspective, one can note his influence on the city beautiful<sup>10</sup> and garden city movements<sup>11</sup> and the American New Deal<sup>12</sup> and even Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City concept.<sup>13</sup> Today, Bellamy's writings continue to be a subject of scholarly discourse.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, his books continue to sell. For example, Amazon.com lists five editions of *Looking Backward* on its current list.<sup>15</sup>

While there are hundreds of books and articles written on Bellamy and his utopian perspectives,<sup>16</sup> few have realistically or comprehensively focused on the influence of his home community of Chicopee, Massachusetts, in the development of his thoughts, ideas, and concepts.<sup>17</sup> What is most remarkable about this shortcoming is that historian after historian and political theorist after theorist acknowledge that Chicopee, as a place, was critical to Bellamy's perspectives of a utopian future.

Typically, these theorists and writers note that Chicopee was Bellamy's hometown and provide some basic facts about the town. What is most striking is how they portray his home community. Daniel Bell, for example, while analyzing Bellamy's utopian perspectives, calls it an "indigenous, home-spun, made in Chicopee version."<sup>18</sup> R. Jackson Wilson summarizes *Looking Backward* by commenting that "Boston in the year 2000 resembled nothing so much as Bellamy's home town of Chicopee Falls before the Irish and the mills had invaded it in the 1860's and 1870's."<sup>19</sup> William Dean Howells, writing shortly after Bellamy's death, summarized his thoughts as follows: "I am glad he died at home in Chicopee—in the village environment by which he interpreted the heart of the American nation."<sup>20</sup> Charles Madison notes that Bellamy's utopia is "set in the small town he knew so well."<sup>21</sup> From Daniel

Aaron who described Bellamy as a village utopian,<sup>22</sup> to Walter Taylor who considered Bellamy as “a villager in his outlook and sympathies,”<sup>23</sup> to Joseph Schiffman who noted that Chicopee was Bellamy’s village,<sup>24</sup> to Edward Spann who described Chicopee as peaceful,<sup>25</sup> to Rose Martin who described Chicopee as a “little cotton town,”<sup>26</sup> writer after writer has attempted to create a connection between Bellamy’s community and his utopian writings.

Throughout these discussions, Chicopee is typically described as pastoral, peaceful, small, rural, and a village environment. The message one receives is that Bellamy’s Chicopee was a quaint community with overtones of a Puritan or Colonial Era village ensemble. Nothing could be further from the truth. By the time of Bellamy’s birth, it was a thriving manufacturing town of national significance and a place where the challenges and conflicts of America at midcentury could be seen and felt everyday. If we accept that Chicopee was critical in the evolution of Bellamy’s utopian writings, as Bellamy himself has stated, it is important that we are able to comprehensively understand the character of his community, what he observed, and how he reacted to the changes that were occurring. The purpose of this article is to contribute to this understanding.

The premise of this article is that the aforementioned authors, among many others, were, at best, only partially correct concerning their interpretation of Chicopee’s role in the development of Bellamy’s utopian ideals and concepts. They were correct in that Chicopee, far more than any other place, was Bellamy’s laboratory. With the exception of short periods of time when he traveled to Germany, the Sandwich Islands, Colorado, and a brief working stint in New York City, Bellamy rarely left home. As John Thomas has noted, Bellamy had a deeply rooted sense of place that made the quiet routine, comforting, and reassuring.<sup>27</sup> In fact, he was born, came of age, raised his family, and died in houses that were only plots apart. His writings, throughout his life, regularly represented many of the conditions and activities that were occurring around him.

These writers, however, misrepresented Chicopee’s character. It was not the small, peaceful, pastoral, long-settled, and economically balanced village that they portrayed. It was a constantly changing and growing industrial center that was rapidly evolving from a mill town to a city throughout his lifetime. It was a place of powerful industries, of firms chaotically buying and selling in the world’s marketplace, and of newcomers with different values. And it was a place that was attracting people from the nearby New England villages as it was almost daily moving to city status. In fact, by 1885, as Bellamy was writing *Looking Backward*, Chicopee had become the sixth most populated town in Massachusetts.<sup>28</sup> For a man who loved order, symmetry, and harmony, these trends were disconcerting. For a writer who loved to commune with nature and who espoused village life, this was an anathema.<sup>29</sup> And for a futurist who, like most nineteenth-century utopians, was endeavoring to create a society marked

by equality, Chicopee must have represented that which he hoped would be eliminated in his New Jerusalem.

The main body of the article is divided into five parts. The first is a concise synopsis of Edward Bellamy's life and a summary of his two utopian novels. The second is a description of Chicopee from its first known settlement through the death of Bellamy in 1898. The third part represents a reconstruction of how Bellamy participated as a "citizen" of Chicopee throughout his lifetime. Part four represents an interpretation of the critical communitarian elements found in Chicopee that worked their way into his utopian ideas and concepts. And finally, in part five, the article concludes with a concise analytical prospective of why so many of the interpreters of Bellamy's work mischaracterize his home community.

### BELLAMY AND HIS BOOKS

Bellamy was born in 1850 into a religious family of long-standing Yankee stock in Chicopee, Massachusetts. In his early life, he was an avid reader and very much caught up in the spirit of the Civil War. On finishing his local schooling in 1867, he applied to West Point but was rejected due to health reasons. He then followed his brother to Union College where he enrolled in, what would be called today, a series of independent study courses. After one year at Union, he traveled to Germany where he witnessed the mammoth inequities of the industrializing city and the beginnings of applied socialism over a two-year period. On returning to the States, he prepared for the Bar and was admitted in 1870. His career as a lawyer was short-lived: After one case, where he argued for the eviction of a widowed tenant, he never practiced again! He then became a reporter for the *New York Evening Post* where, once again, he observed the problems of urban life. He returned to Chicopee in 1872 to write for the *Springfield Union* and, five years later, to cofound the *Daily News*. He served at various tasks for both papers including editorial writer, book review editor, and reporter. After resigning from the *Daily News* in 1884, he began to seriously write articles and books and gained a popular audience. In 1888, with the publication of *Looking Backward*, he became famous. Not only was the book a tremendously successful bestseller, it led to Bellamy being treated as a prophet. It also led to his being a spokesperson for the nationalist movement in the 1890s, which ultimately stimulated the creation of a political party that captured more than a million votes in the 1892 election. Throughout the 1890s, Bellamy's health declined, and shortly after he finished *Equality* (1897), he died of tuberculosis at home in Chicopee in 1898.<sup>30</sup>

We assume that the readers of this journal have read, or at least are familiar with, *Looking Backward* and *Equality*. In case they are not, the two books describe a utopian society set in Boston in the year 2000. It is a place of prosperity, peace, and equality—provided one follows strict rules. It is a place

where large cities are magnificent and a time when small towns are no longer culturally isolated. There is no direct democracy, and the spirit of an industrial army rules. There are some differences between *Looking Backward* and *Equality* that may have contributed to the debate over the influence of Chicopee on Bellamy's writing. In *Looking Backward*, he wrote of the awe-inspiring character of the New Boston. It was a great city with broad streets, magnificent buildings, glistening fountains, and colossal public buildings and was marked by architectural grandeur.<sup>31</sup> In *Equality*, published less than a decade later, his concept of the city had changed. The cities are smaller and more defined by regions. Small towns are now connected via technology and have all of the services and activities formally found in the great city.<sup>32</sup> The shift of perspective in the two books leads one to believe that Bellamy was ambivalent over the place of the city in Utopia. It is no wonder: He saw both the greatness of the emerging city and its evils in his own home community.<sup>33</sup> Bellamy was not alone in developing a utopia that was reacting to social and technological change. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, utopian works by Mark Twain, Ignatius Donnelly, and William Dean Howells were all popularly received. In each of them, the quest to balance egalitarian ideals with technological advances was paramount. Of all of them, however, Bellamy's work was the most influential.<sup>34</sup>

### CHICOPEE DESCRIBED

The land area that became Chicopee is located at the confluence of the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers, immediately north of Springfield, Massachusetts, one of America's earliest industrial centers. The area was first settled by Europeans in the mid 1630s when William Pynchon of Roxbury, Massachusetts, established a Puritan presence in the Connecticut River Valley between Enfield, Connecticut, and the joining of the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers.<sup>35</sup> Springfield, located at the approximate center of this land mass and at the juncture of several Native American trails near the Connecticut River, became the commercial, religious, and residential hub of the area.<sup>36</sup> Chicopee, due to its prime soils and proximity to Springfield's marketplace, evolved as an agricultural community. It served this function through the end of the Revolutionary War.<sup>37</sup> At that time, however, the valley began to rapidly grow, and Chicopee began to attract new settlers. This, in time, led to the creation of locally owned iron works, sawmills, and gristmills among other small businesses. By the end of the War of 1812, the Chicopee area, while still an unincorporated landmass within Springfield, had evolved into several small, compact villages surrounded by abundant fields.<sup>38</sup>

This balance between land, market, and community changed abruptly in 1822 when the Boston Associates, builders of the famed mill communities at Waltham, Lowell, and Holyoke, purchased water and property rights along the

banks of the Chicopee River in the unincorporated village of Chicopee Falls. The company selected a site near the natural fall and along a bend in the river and began to develop a simple L-shaped mill village layout with the mill structures, a canal, and road running parallel to the river while the boarding houses were perpendicular.<sup>39</sup> The plan was scrapped as soon as it was developed: The owners realized that the site was suitable for far more extensive development. Within a very short time, four Lowell System mills were constructed.

The site at Chicopee Falls was quickly joined by extensive construction in Cabotville, another village in the Chicopee area, one and one-half miles distant. Here, the Boston Associates used symmetrical planning elements—three main streets, joined at a common point, radiating outward toward the mill structures along the river's edge. Juxtaposed to the street were the boarding houses and tenements for the mill operatives. John Reys noted that the Chicopee Falls and Cabotville projects had unique site-planning attributes and labeled them as being reflective of a "Milltown Baroque" pattern.<sup>40</sup> The frenetic pace of development in Cabotville was described by George White in his biography of Samuel Slater (1835) as follows: "This pleasant village is growing up with astonishing rapidity and bids fair to become . . . a second Lowell. A few weeks produce changes here that almost destroy the identity of the place and give to the visitor new objects of admiration."<sup>41</sup>

The development of Chicopee followed the pattern of Lowell in the sense that it was the implantation of a "total institution" on two small villages. Erving Goffman defines a total institution as places "of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable amount of time together, lead an enclosed formally administered round of life."<sup>42</sup> With such a pattern of development, it is not surprising that community leaders sought to self-govern the area and petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for a town charter. After several attempts, it was granted in 1848.<sup>43</sup> By 1850, the year of Bellamy's birth, Chicopee, with a population of 8,291 residents, was well on its way toward becoming a community that housed manufacturers of national significance. At that time, its mills operated more than 51,000 cotton spindles. It housed one mill complex that was more than one-third of a mile long, its goods were sold in the world's marketplace, and its foundries were capable of manufacturing products ranging from heavy guns to the doors of the Nation's Capital.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, commercial and institutional growth grew apace with the mills. A commercial district complete with a hotel and two banks had been developed. It also had a railroad connection to Springfield.<sup>45</sup> Among its six churches was the first Catholic Church in Greater Springfield. It was built to serve the needs of Irish laborers who had been moving to the community since 1830.<sup>46</sup>

The metamorphosis of Chicopee from a dispersed area of agricultural villages to a booming manufacturing center in the twenty-five years prior to Bellamy's birth was hardly evolutionary. One could not see a steady shift out of agriculture to artisanship or to local entrepreneurs taking advantage of natural

resources. It was as if, with the coming of the mills, its 170-year dependence on agricultural production, its village character, and its traditional self-rule were simply crushed. As Szetala commented, "It looked as though a distant city had been lifted bodily and transplanted to Chicopee Falls."<sup>47</sup> Now controlled by bankers, insurance companies, and investors located ninety miles distant, it was not one of Winthrop's idealized cities on the hill but a town built for profit. As such, its fate rested with the economic cycles of boom and bust that were so common to manufacturing in this period. Moreover, the seemingly constant efforts to find faster machinery, obtain workers who would require less pay, and remain competitive in the marketplace placed enormous economical and social pressure on the community. Chicopee clearly no longer guided its own destiny. As Bellamy's parents awaited his birth, with a family heritage of more than two hundred years residence in New England and staunch members of the middle class, Chicopee's transformation indeed must have been shocking.<sup>48</sup> As Shlakman summarized, "Chicopee did not grow into an industrial community: it suddenly found that it was one."<sup>49</sup>

In Bellamy's childhood era (1850-1860), the town continued to change in terms of ethnic composition and economic development. Irish settlers, first attracted to the area by work opportunities on nearby canals and the railroad, readily accepted work in the mills in increasing numbers. They were joined by Irish women and their younger brothers, who were more than willing to replace long-term "Yankee" workers at lower wages. By 1858, approximately twenty-five percent of the population and sixty percent of the mill workforce were of Irish heritage.<sup>50</sup> This workforce was dramatically different than the one it replaced. The former workers had roots in the area, were of the same faith as the owners, more often than not had some schooling, and, in hard economic times, had a family network as a social and economic safety net. The replacement worker was a rootless, illiterate immigrant of Catholic faith who had no commitment to community and who was without an economic backup—as the mill succeeded or failed, so did this worker.

The need of the mill owners to remain competitive led to almost constant efforts to lower wages while maintaining long hours. This in time brought labor strife to Chicopee. For example, Chicopee workers turned out "en masse" in October 1836 to protest a decision of management to raise boarding-house rents.<sup>51</sup> In 1844, Chicopee workers were successful in persuading management to postpone the lighting of the mill until after breakfast. (The practice of "lighting" consisted of requiring workers to report to work in the dark before 5:00 a.m. and breakfast and fire up lanterns and candles. It was extremely unpopular.)<sup>52</sup> In April 1858, following the financial panic of 1857, more than three hundred Irish workers went on strike. None of the remaining English stock laborers followed. While this strike failed, it was the first of many to follow and provided a powerful message that the Chicopee workforce would not be passive. The conditions of millwork deeply touched Bellamy. In fact, there is a section in one of his preliminary drafts of *Equality* where he writes,

You will find it easy to understand that in my day native Americans would, for the most part, rather starve than work in our mills. First, the Irish were called to take their place till they too revolted, then the French were called in from Canada to take their places till they too refused to work on such terms any longer, then came the Poles and Hungarians."<sup>53</sup>

The Irish also caused social consternation. By the mid-1850s, there was reported Irish "rowdyism" in the streets, popular perceptions that there was a rum shop in every fourth Irish home, and even concern over the fact that the Irish practiced their faith "loudly and considered the Sabbath as a day of amusement." In this period, the Irish section of Chicopee, called by various names (i.e., Ireland, the Patch, the Huddle), was considered a tenement district characterized by poor ventilation, cholera outbreaks, and intemperance.<sup>54</sup> These newcomers were a far cry from the descendants of the Puritans and the serious-minded Baptists and Calvinists!

The coming of the Civil War in 1860 ushered in a period of technical innovation and new product development. The non-textile companies in Chicopee, such as the Ames Manufacturing Company, the Massachusetts Arms Corporation, and the Gaylord Manufacturing Company, all makers of needed military equipment, prospered tremendously. Chicopee gun manufacturers were quite open minded in their sales. At various times, as the nation moved toward war, they served the military needs of John Brown's Bloody Kansas initiative, the Confederacy, and the Union.<sup>55</sup> By war's end, Chicopee's manufacturers employed more than 2,400 workers.<sup>56</sup> The textile companies, on the other hand, suffered greatly. For example, the Dwight Company, which employed 1,600 workers before the war, reported a workforce of 400 in 1864. In the post-war period, conditions were reversed. The textile mills recovered quite nicely, while the other manufacturing companies struggled to redefine themselves.

Through the 1860s and 1870s, more immigrants continued to move to Chicopee and consistently challenge the Yankee establishment. Indeed, the 1870 federal census showed that more than one-third of Chicopee residents were of foreign birth.<sup>57</sup> The lack of security concerning wages, poor working conditions, and the attitude of the political elite constantly agitated these new workers. There were now reports of the middle classes leaving the town, increasing labor strife, and even Irish challenges to the Yankee political leadership.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, new immigrant groups, including Poles and French Canadians, began to be attracted to Chicopee in great numbers. By 1880, Chicopee had a population of more than eleven thousand and, given its landmass of 25.7 square miles, could easily handle additional growth.<sup>59</sup> Almost all of these workers were common laborers—the skilled workers and management were of Yankee heritage. Few of these laborers were prepared for the economic insecurity of the period. In fact, a sequence of strikes, booms, panics, recoveries, and depressions and recoveries again marked the period. It was the time of the Strike of 1868, the Strike of 1874, the Panic of 1876, and, ultimately, the Boom of the 1880s.<sup>60</sup>

And so, as Bellamy sat down to write *Looking Backward* in his fifteen-room, wood-framed, Greek Revival house on one acre, at the crest of a hill overlooking the mills, worker housing, and Chicopee River below, what did he see in his hometown?<sup>61</sup> Clearly, it is not his father's and mother's community—it is not an agricultural community where self-employed folk provide farming products to citizens of a swiftly urbanizing neighboring city. Nor is it a piously homogenous community where Puritan, Baptist, and Calvinistic values of hard work and “moral purity” are guideposts for life. It is not a community where well-meaning burghers, sitting with their neighbors at town meetings, are in control of the body politic. Moreover, the town meeting is no longer a place of like people deciding the future of their like neighbors. There are now people who speak differently, pray differently, and play differently who are clamoring for their democratic rights. It was not a calm place where workers, managers, and owners had similar goals. There was significant self-interest—an attitude of profit, survival, and obtaining one's share of the economic pie was the order of the day. It was a place of divisions where class, ethnicity, skill level, political affiliation, religion, and even gender determined how one fit in the community. If one ignored the Civil War years, where was the common good, the betterment of human kind, and the balanced village where one helps one neighbor (and is, in return, helped)? Bellamy would have had to look deeply to find it.

But there were positive attributes as well. Bellamy would have seen technological advances that, in one way or another, contributed to an improved quality of life. As a young man, he saw the railroad speed up travel, the telegraph make distant communications easier, and the promise of turbine power became a reality. And he would have seen the rise of the great trusts that, at least, had the promise of providing more goods inexpensively. All of this could be noted from his front porch—the industrial workers answering the bell, the pride of production, the technological advances, the classism, the hunger, the hovels, and the anger. It was an exciting, chaotic, and turbulent community.

Thus, we can note that Chicopee, by the time that Bellamy was writing *Looking Backward*, was well on its way to becoming a city. Far from isolated, its river, roads, rail, and streetcar connections ensured that the town's people and goods could be easily and efficiently moved to the city of Springfield and other communities throughout the region and distant markets. And far from pastoral, it was the home of several of the nation's largest mill complexes that collectively employed more than 3,500 workers. This is not the postcard New England village that is fixed in our collective minds. It is not Puritan, not Colonial, and hardly an agricultural center emerging naturally from a collection of yeomen farmer settlements. It was a place for profit where people made things. Perhaps this could be most vividly noted by examining the official “town seal,” as selected by community leaders in 1848. It depicts the profile of Chicopee's brick-constructed factories along with three important products of Chicopee manufacturers (armaments, tools, and textiles). It also shows a railroad engine

steaming next to the mills and smoke pouring from the mill chimneys. There is nothing in the seal that suggests that Chicopee had a historic past. It is as if Chicopee's beginning was in 1848 rather than 1658. While all of this occurred two years before Bellamy's birth, forty-two years later, when Bellamy was forty years old, Chicopee formally became a city. Again, its leadership chose a new seal. This time it chose a motto mounted on a shield—"Varied Industries." Certainly far from noble, hardly awe inspiring, and certainly not intended to contribute to warm feelings, the motto bluntly tells us what Chicopee is: a city built for production. (Interestingly, in the early 1980s, Chicopee adopted a slogan to represent itself as a progressive community. It chose "Chicopee Works"—had anything changed?).

### BELLAMY AND HIS CHICOPEE

Bellamy was a strange man. His daughter, in a letter to his biographer Arthur Morgan, wrote that no one really knew him.<sup>62</sup> His brother Charles wrote, "Intent on protecting the sacredness of his inner life, he was ever want to hide under affectations of coldness or cynicism the workings of an exceptional poetic and emotional heart and soul."<sup>63</sup> He kept in almost daily touch with the needs of his family and to the best of his abilities endeavored to ensure its happiness. He was said to be happy, ate raw eggs, and drank a beer the same time each day. His involvement with local citizens was, at best, minimal. He would walk throughout town on Sundays, use the local brew master to translate German letters, be kind to paupers, and never fail to be polite to people passing by. However, he rarely participated in local social or political events. And yet, he was quite pleased when his townspeople commented about his writings.<sup>64</sup> His son, in a letter to Arthur Morgan, commenting on a meeting that his father, supposedly, had with a worker from nearby Cabotville, stated that he did not think the meeting could have taken place in that village because it was outside of his father's range of daily activities.<sup>65</sup> Cabotville was less than two miles from his home! The picture one observes of his life in Chicopee is a man who desired privacy and who worked to ensure that his community life centered around his family. There were quiet walks to the library and the town square, slow rambles on horseback, and sauntering strolls through nearby woods.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, his time in Boston, to which he commuted regularly, was quite different. Here, among men of cosmopolitan intellect and style, he would come alive. His debates and discussions, whether formal in his office at 13 Winter Street or at the bar, were renowned. He kept late hours, smoked a pipe, never exercised, slept by day, walked Boston Common at night, hobnobbed with newspaper editors, went to boxing matches with the great John Boyle O'Reilly, and was known to be able to hold a great amount of liquor.<sup>67</sup>

Bellamy lived among the families that constituted Chicopee's very small middle class in an area of single-family homes.<sup>68</sup> The neighborhood was

clearly separated from the mill community by its physical and social characteristics. His home, built of wood, contained a large verandah, while the lot included a small lawn with numerous shade and fruit trees. This neighborhood was also separated by topography and nature. It was on the high ground overlooking the mills on one of the highest elevations in Chicopee Falls. This location would automatically place the Bellamy family as living among the local elite: In New England mill towns, typically, the higher one's house was above the mill, the higher was one's social rank. Between the neighborhood and the mills was a slope covered by natural vegetation—one could see the mills below through the trees and shrubs.

This disconnection, as well, could be noted in terms of the economic condition of the Bellamy family. Neither his parents nor his family depended on the mills in any direct sense for their economic well-being. His father was both a property owner of some repute and a Baptist minister. He owned a block of apartments, stores, and offices in downtown Chicopee Falls from which he gained income.<sup>69</sup> As a Baptist minister, he relied on the contributions of his congregation for his salary. Yet, very few of workers or mill managers would have been Baptist. And Bellamy himself, first as reporter and then as author, had virtually no need, beyond a reporter's beat, to depend on the success of the mills for his well-being. This sense of removal, of seeing but not participating, was an important part of Bellamy's personality. His first biographer, Mason Green, provided an example of this attribute when he wrote, "After visiting Brooklyn and witnessing a strike, Bellamy was forced to come back to Chicopee early: 'I can get a better view of the Brooklyn strike under my apple tree in Chicopee Falls than from a Fulton Street curb.'"<sup>70</sup> From birth to death, Bellamy lived in an enclave among people who were quite separated from the new Chicopee.

It was an excellent location from which to be a dispassionate reporter and observer of the community. And for someone of Bellamy's curiosity, it offered itself as a social laboratory. Above all, he was enamored with the size, power, and output of the mills. Bender goes so far as to state that these mills were the models for his utopia.<sup>71</sup> In *Looking Backward*, his Dr. Leete, in conversation with Julian West, with admiration notes, "You used to have some pretty large textile manufacturing establishments even in your day. . . . No doubt you have visited those great mills . . . covering acres of grounds, employing thousands of hands, and combining under one roof, under one control, the hundred district processes between, say, the cotton bale and the bale of glossy calicos."<sup>72</sup>

Most likely, Bellamy's point of reference would have been the expanding complex of mills that were a short distance from his home. As Arthur Morgan noted, "In *Equality*, he is relying on his own personal observations of factory workers in his hometown of Chicopee Falls."<sup>73</sup> These included the enormous structures of the Chicopee Manufacturing Company. To place the size of its complex in perspective, if its structures were placed upright, in the form of a

skyscraper, their collective height would have been taller than the Empire State Building.

In terms of organization, Bellamy would have been enamored with the military-like discipline of the workers. As bells rang and whistles blew, these hundreds of workers would hurry from their homes, in virtual lock step, to their anointed places to begin their labor. Indeed, the paternalistic structure of the mill was so strong that it not only governed one's work schedule but, as examples, where one lived and when one would be home at night. It is here that one can see the precursor of his concept of an industrial army. Bellamy saw this concept as a means to combine order, patriotism, valor, and devotion to duty to his community. Consisting of men and women between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five, the industrial army would, through careful planning, eliminate the nation's wasteful economy and create abundance for all.<sup>74</sup>

He would have been equally fascinated with the radial pattern of the new streets. These streets were much straighter and wider than the street pattern that had emerged from Chicopee's earlier times. They represent rationality, standardization, efficiency, and planning—all positive traits in Bellamy's envisioned future.

And institutional structures? Did they create positive iconic feelings in the citizens? While there were none of the scale that one could find in Bellamy's ringing image of the magnificent city in *Looking Backward*, the Chicopee schools, churches, and town hall were certainly impressive. Bellamy's daughter remembered that the community was quite proud of its school system.<sup>75</sup> It must have had some good qualities: Its high school principal was elected governor of Massachusetts in 1883!<sup>76</sup> The one structure that dominated the community was Chicopee's town hall. Built in 1870, this huge Victorian gothic structure, complete with a cantilevered tower and rose window, was supposedly modeled after Florence's Palazzo Vecchio.<sup>77</sup> The linking of a building design for Florence, one of the oldest centers of Western culture, with Chicopee, Massachusetts, one of the New World's most modern centers of production, sends an image of a community endeavoring to be sophisticated and urbane.

Concerning nature and parks, there was never a sense of total separation of nature from the mills or the mill residential areas. In less than one mile from these areas, one could be in the countryside. This can be most vividly noted in the pictures of the mill villages taken ten years before Bellamy published *Looking Backward*. In this instance, Chicopee is almost a prototype of the industrial villages described in *Equality*: They were always well connected to other villages in the hinterland. Throughout Bellamy's life, there were many farms operating within the town/city limits. Indeed, the Massachusetts census of 1865 noted that there were 120 farm operations on 8,658 acres within the community's corporate boundaries.<sup>78</sup>

There was also a negative side to everyday life that Bellamy could not help observing in Chicopee as he was writing *Looking Backward*. This could be

noted at several levels. The first was the fundamental problem of existence. There were people who were hungry, nearly starving, without resources, and who existed in hovels in the ground in Chicopee. These were well-intentioned people, on the whole, who simply wanted a better existence. When they did not find it or they failed, they were forced involuntarily to live in these shacks. Moving up a notch on the economic ladder, there were those who were employed but, due to skill level and family circumstance, had little to keep at the end of the day. While these people were not starving, the margin between having a roof over one's head and food on the table, on one side, and the cold and hunger, on the other, was very narrow. Beyond this, there was little hope for Chicopee's newcomers: An overwhelming number of these workers were not going to rise to the foreman level, become a professional, or become a landowner. They were, for all intents, indentured workers. Yes, they had the right to quit, move or create a new future, but the reality was quite simple—no work, no pay. It is this constant fear of everyday life in Chicopee that touched Bellamy deeply and that caused him to call for changes in the industrial climate in his articles and books. More specifically, one could read of his reactions to these issues in the *Springfield Daily News*—children going hungry, unemployment, cholera and dysentery, alcoholism, and the absence of a safety net. Moreover, its thousands of workers dispersed of their waste in privies over ditches that eventually created an offensive stench as it moved to the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers. Conditions were so bad that the Massachusetts State Board of Health, in 1876, found typhoid and meningitis caused by the city's factory privies.<sup>79</sup> How could such a great country as his United States of America allow these conditions to exist? Indeed, it struck Bellamy hard that the evil conditions of the European city that he had observed in 1868 had rapidly made their way to his own industrial community. He also found the chaos of the city, in general, abominable. At its worst, it was a place beset by strikes. He found labor protest particularly disturbing for it created class warfare. Bellamy had lived through strikes in Chicopee and had seen the lockouts, arrests, pain, and suffering that occurred.

Finally, Bellamy had little good to say about local politicians. On one hand, it is doubtful that he was pointing his finger at his immediate neighbors. And yet, on the other hand, he was witness to the rising tide of Irish political ambitions and their impact on the local body politic. This was not a community of gentle discourse. The Irish made it clear that it was simply a matter of time before they would be the most powerful political block in the city.

Placing all of the above in perspective, he was clearly influenced by the miserable working and hiring conditions of the workers. He was equally disturbed by the chaos of the day-to-day life, the failure of politicians to respond to local problems, the coming of class warfare, and the failure to have a balanced urban-rural continuum. On a positive side, there was the power of production, the wonder of great mills, and the commitment of laborers walking off to work to produce the nation's goods that impressed him. In a final analysis, it would

appear that it was the chaos, turmoil, and constant change as this community became citified that influenced him most.

### AN INTERPRETATION OF BELLAMY'S PERSPECTIVES

Several years after writing *Looking Backward*, Bellamy described his community as follows:

Up to the age of eighteen, I had lived almost continually in a thriving village of New England where there were no very rich and very few poor and everyone who was willing to work was sure of a fair living.<sup>80</sup>

There appears to be a significant degree of embellishment in Bellamy's statement. It hardly fit the definition of a Puritan, Colonial, or even post-Bellum New England village with a group of homes clustered around a common, a post road connecting to other villages, and a Protestant church and a few commercial structures to serve local residents nearby. And the absence of rich and poor? Again, Mr. Bellamy must have forgotten what he had observed in his days as a reporter. There were clearly well-off residents and those who lived in poverty. And finally, in a legal sense, his village of Chicopee Falls, throughout his first eighteen years, was not a freestanding village. It was part of a town of approximately eight thousand people.

His Chicopee Falls had characteristics far more common with a newly formed urban neighborhood than a freestanding village with a long heritage. It was a place where there were minimal shared values, a lack of collective responsibility, extensive religious and ethnic bigotry, and little commitment to place. His town was a community where people came to gain employment. Those workers were neither noble peasants nor yeomen working for the common good. They worked to survive and would leave in a minute if improved opportunities were presented elsewhere.

Why, then, did Bellamy refer to his community as a New England village, and why did so many of the interpreters of his work stress his ties to this almost mythical form of community? While it is impossible to conclude the rationale behind Bellamy's position, there are certain factors that appear plausible. To begin with, Bellamy was a homebody. The residences where he was born, grew up, first married, and spent almost his entire life were literally a few hundred yards apart. His school and church were also nearby. The Church Street neighborhood where he lived was a nativist Yankee enclave of middle-class citizens with English surnames, like Blake, Taylor, and Buckland, and whose values matched those of the Bellamy family. Beyond the fact that he employed an Irish maid, Bellamy had little contact with Irish or any other immigrants. Located on a hill overlooking the mills, his neighborhood was both protected and separate from the changes occurring below. Only in his

personal life was he, in effect, living in an area that had many of the attributes of a preindustrialization-era village.

Nor did Chicopee Falls have characteristics of the Slateresque mill villages common to the Blackstone Valley of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. These small hamlets typically had an owner (or partner) on the premises, tended to employ families rather than individuals, and consisted of family houses and tenements in a village environs. They were minimally capitalized and regularly relied on local power sources.<sup>81</sup> There was also a far greater degree of informality between workers and management, and local government and mill owners. There were, in the words of Jonathan Prude, “complex patterns of give and take.”<sup>82</sup> If anything, Chicopee Falls had ceased to function as a village as soon as the Chicopee Manufacturing Company mill began operating in 1825. Although this date was twenty-two years earlier than Bellamy’s birth, it could hardly be part of his personal, cognitive experience.

Bellamy was an active outdoorsman who took advantage of the rural character that surrounded Chicopee. In fact, within minutes of walking time, he could easily leave the urban character of the town and be within farmlands and woods. These were special places to him. And yet, while he traveled through this quiet countryside, he could not help but note the decline of rural life. As Schlesinger noted, by 1890 in New England, 932 of 1,502 townships had fewer people than the previous decade. He further noted that by the end of the 1880s, there were approximately 1,500 abandoned farms in Massachusetts.<sup>83</sup> Bellamy also could not help but observe that the integration of the villages into the landscape, the commitment to the land, the connectedness of family and nature, and overall population were in decline in the small rural communities that could be found throughout the lower Connecticut River Valley. For example, the population of Chicopee’s neighboring farm community of Granby fell from 1,104 in 1850 to 765 in 1890.<sup>84</sup> The contrast with the “instant” booming mill town that dominates the community like a Hockney painting could not have been more overwhelming. Perhaps of greater importance, he was living and writing in an increasingly urban environment that was a critical influence on the decline of this countryside.

Beyond these reasons, Bellamy was writing in an age when there was a revival of interest in Jeffersonian agrarianism and the almost mythic, small, New England communities of the Federalist period. Stimulated by the discontent in the nation following the Civil War, the fear of rising industry, concerns over immigration, the seemingly constant changes in technology, and the financial panics of the era, this revival resulted in the creation and promotion of the myth of the New England village. It was, as Yi Fu Tuan has noted, a time when the city was viewed as corrupt and rural life as virtuous. This theme, Tuan further noted, was so repeated that it took on the characteristics of folklore.<sup>85</sup> Joseph Wood was more specific: “In the collective American mind, the historic New England village represents a new Eden, a second Zion.” He also noted that writers and social reformers, among others, were “inventing a

geographical past that never existed.”<sup>86</sup> One could argue that Bellamy was among those that were promoting this ideal. As Aaron remarked, “Bellamy was part Jeffersonian.” Furthermore, he noted that Bellamy’s “Yankee readers . . . savored his Chicopee concoction of science and mysticism.”<sup>87</sup>

And why did so many learned writers describe his Chicopee as a village? It would appear that there are two reasons. First, an examination of *Equality* and Bellamy’s other writings would show that he was much enamored with the small village. This point coupled with Bellamy’s own statement defining his life in a village may have led them to believe that Chicopee was a small, rural, passive community. Several also may have picked up on the comments of Bellamy’s contemporaries, such as William Dean Howells, who pointed out that his “village environment” was critical to his interpretation of the future and accepted their interpretations as fact. Whatever the reason for their perspectives, Chicopee Falls was hardly a New England-style village in any sense of the word in Bellamy’s lifetime.

Shlakman, in her wonderful study of Chicopee, wrote several pages of commentary in which she compared industrial communities that slowly evolved to those, like Chicopee, that simply were created out of virtually nothing. The former tend to have a mixture of several economic classes, a commitment to place, an extensive number of property owners, a sense of society and the placing of industry and tenements on the “other side of the tracks.” About the latter, she wrote,

But if we are dealing with a factory town, especially one in which a major part of the industry is controlled by absentee owners, the situation is different. Such a town has smokestacks and factories, which are far from decorative. It has numerous shabby streets and tenements, which are quick to catch an eye. Its stores and theaters and houses are poor, its streets not too well paved. It offers few “attractions” to the middle class observer. Chicopee is such a community.<sup>88</sup>

It is this portrait that fits the reality of Chicopee. It is not Bellamy’s mythic village. Nor is it the image that emerges from the aforementioned writers.

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