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## Society Writings

### Abstract

*This chapter examines the early publications of The Vegan Society as it struggled to define the vegan philosophy, its own organization, and the movement writ large. The society's founders recognized the historical (and linguistic) importance of their efforts and invested considerable resources in the production of The Vegan which served as a herald of vegan ideology and community discourse. Over time, however, The Vegan gradually lost its critical edge, and perhaps as a consequence, its influence in the movement. By the late twentieth century, other social movement actors had begun to compete with the society and its newsletter with regard to its authority over veganism.*

### Introduction

Western veganism and vegetarianism originated in modern Britain in a time when plant-based consumption had become an alien concept to most. Early societies faced a diffused activist base and a generally ignorant public. Editorial teams were key movement leaders responsible for defining a path for social change, conceptualizing concepts and philosophies, and generally manifesting social movement ideas in a tangible way (Wrenn *Piecemeal Protest* 8). Magazines, journals, newsletters, cookbooks, and other print items served as important artifacts that immediately tied the reader to ideas and collectives that were often well beyond their immediate communities. Indeed, readerships became their *own* communities, often stretching across entire nations or across oceans.

There are far too many society publications to summarize here. Instead, this chapter highlights the early works of the Vegetarian Society in Britain, its offshoot, The Vegan Society, and their American reverberations. These organizations funneled most (if not all) of their meager funds into printing, recognizing their multifunctional role in carving out a

movement and achieving desired goals. Their commitment to the literary face of the movement and their influence over movement dynamics mark them as suitable case studies. The discussion herein reflects a convenience sample of early issues of *The Vegan* (The Vegan Society) and *Food, Home & Garden* (Vegetarian Society of America) supplemented by celebratory chronicles such as that of the American Vegan Society (Dinshah and Dinshah *Powerful Vegan Messages*) and insight from movement historians, namely Adam Shprintzen, Colin Spencer, and Joanne Stepaniak. Although vegetarian history is relevant to the chronicle of vegan literary studies, I lend my attention most heavily to the efforts of The Vegan Society for obvious reasons.

The aforementioned scholars take interest in the materials produced by organizations and collectives given their function in defining problems, outlining solutions, and shaping activist identity. Yet, movements are not the only shapers of identity (Gamson 242). Outside players including media influencers, government institutions, industries and advertising, and the public can also advance resonant characterizations. For Nonhuman Animal rights activists (Einwohner 2002: 258) and vegans (Cole and Morgan 134), this has entailed a diminishment of their ethical impetuses and a general stigmatization. Defining the vegan identity and resisting pejorative outsider-imposed depictions was key to sustaining the movement. At the time of the society's founding, nutritional science was just coming into its own with the discovery of vitamins and the consequences of their deficiencies (Carpenter 2003: 3023). Sound nutritional knowledge for even the standard animal-based Western diet was still under development; very little was scientifically known about the complete abstinence of animal products. Anecdotal evidence of the feasibility of a vegan diet did exist, aided by the West's encounters with new colonies where plant-based eating dominated and wartime rationing which made animal products scant for many. Yet, a vegetable diet's association with poverty and crisis was not necessarily a strong selling point. From its beginning, The Vegan Society

(TVS) was committed to principles of rationality and scientific integrity to assuage the public's doubt. *The Vegan* and other publications like it were truly key to the normalization of vegan living and the advancement of vegan knowledge.

### **Cementing the Modern Usage of the Terms**

The Vegan Society released the first issue of its homespun newsletter *The Vegan* in November of 1944 (Figure 1). Many of the first issues were typed, copied, and delivered by co-founder Donald Watson in what amounted to an intensely laborious exercise. It was also a considerable expense, usurping the majority of the fledgling organization's meager coffers (Henderson 5). Nonetheless, its writings were essential to the organization's operations. The society's founders suspected that the first issue that *The Vegan* will be "widely read" given its emphasis on addressing the ongoing debate between vegans and vegetarians which had encouraged the formation of the society. Writes Watson in the first issue: "The work of the Group at first will be confined to the propaganda contained in the bulletin" (1944: 2).

Indeed, the newsletter was itself an act of resistance. The Vegan Society emerged from a debate that had transpired in the pages of The Vegetarian Society's own newsletter, and, while the idea of maintaining a vegan presence had been considered, it was ultimately blocked. Thirty readers of *The Vegetarian Messenger* subsequently donated to Watson in order to fund the publication of *The Vegan* (Stepaniak 3). "This is real pioneer work," contemplated Watson (1944: 2) as the fruit of his group's effort ripened into a bona-fide organization with a journal all its own. The inaugural issue encouraged future submissions and features related to philosophy and debate, gardening, childrearing, nutrition, media coverage, and advertising. Watson explicitly invited letters of disagreement as a measure of preventing the same stonewalling that vegans had experienced with The Vegetarian Society. The society, in other words, not only saw *The Vegan* as the leading voice of veganism, but the presider over the movement's larger discourse. The second issue claims that hundreds of

letters had been received, thus demonstrating “that the formation of this Society is quite due” (Watson 1945, p.2). As the society passed its 20 year anniversary, the importance of *The Vegan* continued to be touted: “The Society serves as a rallying point, and through its journal keeps members informed of the growing implications of veganism, keeps them in touch with trends and practices and through recipes and commodity lists is of great help to all those finding their way” (Sanderson 2). For much of the organization’s early decades, its literary efforts were its primary emphasis for the purposes of conceptualizing and advancing veganism.

The second issue also uncovers the deliberation around the term “vegan” and, consequently, the organization’s name. Alternatives included “allveg,” “allvegit,” “true vegetarian,” “neo-vegetarian,” “Benevore,” “Sanivore,” “Bellevore,” “vitan,” “Dairybans” (“Dare to be a Dairyban, dare to stand alone!”) (Watson 3). Ultimately, these names were rejected given their potential to solicit “derisive jibes,” or their similarity in tonality to sanitary products, or just poor grammar. Watson and his colleagues took care to deliberate this terminology as they recognized the literary legacy it would leave. “This opportunity to further enrich the English language is still open,” Watson offers, “In the meantime we shall remain Vegans, our practice will be Veganism, and our magazine the ‘Vegan News’.” (1945, p. 3). Of course, the society’s founders were not the first to consider terminology. A French researcher coined the word “végétalien” in 1920 to differentiate vegans from other vegetarians in his survey of plant-based practitioners (Henderson 11). It competed with the society’s carefully selected term, but the society also recognized that non-English languages would necessarily adopt variants of “vegan” to suit their cultural and grammatical requirements.

The term “vegetarian” was itself a recent addition to the English language, having been coined a century prior (Spencer 1993, p. xi), it competed with other labels such as

Pythagorean, hygeian, and Grahamite in addition to a variety of food reform initiatives presenting their own alternative dietary schemes. “Vegetarian” became the official term with the launch of the Vegetarian Society in 1847 at a meeting in Ramsgate, a beachside town in southeastern England (Spencer 252). According to the International Vegetarian Union, the locution had already been in use in 1842, but, with the abeyance of the organization not long after its 1847 founding, it was all but forgotten in the written records until reemerging in the 1870s (Davis 55). The term “vegetarian” reflects the political history of the practice as key to their interest in health reform, teetotalism, and spiritual betterment but it is not, as some have conjectured, based on the Latin term “vegetus” (meaning fresh and vital). Rather, it simply refers to a person who eats vegetables.

As with the emergence of veganism, vegetarianism was also a concept born of discord. By the 1870s, various British societies were in competition as to how it should be defined (Grummet 259). In fact, various British societies competed with each other in general, not coming under a shared umbrella until the formation of the International Vegetarian Union in 1908 and eventually merging (their journals included) into the Vegetarian Society of the United Kingdom in 1969. The early journals of the British vegetarian societies were influential in developing many concepts beyond vegetarianism’s religious and nutritional heritage. Henry Salt, famed leader in Nonhuman Animal<sup>1</sup> rights theory and mobilization, claims to have developed many of his early essays from publications featured in *The Vegetarian* (iii).

There is speculation that early vegetarianism was actually intended to be vegan in practice, particularly as it was so frequently associated with religious purity and asceticism. This was sometimes referred to as “strict vegetarianism.” For instance, a member of the Vegetarian Society of America wrote a letter to the society’s journal describing his interpretation: “[ . . . ] [I have] been a strict vegetarian 2 years and 5 months, using the past

year or more not even milk and its products, or eggs, as food.” Like the vegans who formed The Vegan Society, he furthered that the strict vegetarianism he and his brother ascribed to was characterized by its ethical impetus: “[ . . . ] a diet free from flesh is absolutely and entirely beneficial, but we became vegetarians from a sense of justice” (Aker 120).

According to historian John Davis, the first print appearance of “vegetarian” was in a journal produced by the Alcott homesteading experiment in the United States, and their interpretation of vegetarianism was also of the strictest kind (they even refused to employ animal manure, hair, or labor) (32). The Alcotts were themselves aware of previous such dietary practices among indigenous Americans, orphanages, religious faiths, and fad health regimens, using these examples as support for their own endeavors (Alcott 223).

In any case, if vegetarianism had been intended to entail a complete eschewing of animal products, this interpretation had gone by the wayside for most vegetarians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the founding of The Vegan Society indicates. In the third issue of *The Vegan*, veganism is clearly defined as “the practice of living on fruits, nuts, vegetables, grains, and other wholesome non-animal products” (Watson 1945). Joanne Stepaniak records the inclusion of the term “vegan” in the Oxford dictionary in 1962 where it is essentially defined as a stricter vegetarian. After various alterations, the dictionary finally settled on: “A person who does not eat or use animal products,” a definition that persists today (*Oxford Dictionary of English* “Vegan”). Interestingly, vegans are defined independently of vegetarians, but in a depoliticized manner. Vegetarians are defined according to their convictions: “a person who does not eat meat or fish, and sometimes other animal products, especially for moral, religious, or health reasons” (*Oxford Dictionary of English* “Vegetarian”). Yet, across several variations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of veganism has not included a recognition of its ethical component.<sup>2</sup>

### **American Interpretations**

The American Vegetarian Society was founded in 1850 by British immigrant William Metcalfe, who had studied under famous vegetarian advocate and champion of Britain's working poor Reverend William Cowherd (who had died many years prior) (Spencer 258). A journalist for Boston's *Daily Evening Transcript* reported on the society's first meeting and commented on the new concept of vegetarianism:

At first I supposed this must be a gathering of enterprising agriculturalists for the improvement of the breed of pumpkins, cabbages and turnips. But it seems a "vegetarian" is one who confines himself [sic] to vegetable diet, and denounces all meat-eaters in the same terms of frantic denunciation that Garrison & Co employ towards the slaveholders. (Rowe "American Vegetarian Society 1850").

Although this reporter seems to understand the core meaning of vegetarianism, his facetiousness is palpable. Indeed, this dismissiveness plagued the early society, and this, in tandem with the factionalism brought on by varying degrees of support for concurrent social movements (particularly the abolitionism mentioned by the reporter) would send the organization into abeyance.

By the late 1850s, the American Vegetarian Society had been subsumed under the British Vegetarian Society, and members received issues of the *British Vegetarian Messenger*. Facing financial difficulties, the BVS began to require BVS membership for access to the *Messenger*. This ultimately drove many members of the American society to switch to the BVS to retain their access to the journal, demonstrating how valuable 19<sup>th</sup> century vegetarians considered the movement's literary publications to be. Hemorrhaging members, the American Vegetarian Society ultimately dissolved in the midst of the US Civil War (Shprintzen 90-92). Thus, the literary efforts of the vegetarian societies were not only vital in promoting information about vegetarianism, they were vital in maintaining group solidarity. Time again throughout the course of vegetarian and vegan advocacy in the West,



publications proved to be lynchpins. There is an Irish proverb that muses: “Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam” (“A country without a language is a country without a soul”). It appears the same can be said of these early societies whose publications constituted the very core of their essence and survivability.

When another national organization, the Vegetarian Society of America (VSA), established in 1886 in Philadelphia, it reflected new interpretations of vegetarianism based in modern advancements in food science, nutrition, technology, and industry. Established by Henry Clubb (who had worked with the earlier American national group in the 1850s and the British Vegetarian Society), it promoted its message through its publication, *Food, Home and Garden*. Until the publication could be reliably produced, society president John Walter Scott produced his own monthly, *The Vegetarian*, which the society notes had “served a very useful purpose in keeping the sacred flame alive” (“John Walter Scott” 3).

### **Literature as Activism**

Not unlike *The Vegan*, issues of *Food, Home and Garden* were homespun, produced with a humble printer procured through member donations in a Philadelphia residence. President John Walter Scott clearly recognized the value of such a publication, noting in the editorial of the first issue that the society had issued only a limited pressing in order to maximize its collectability as a “relic of great value” (4). Like *The Vegan*, *Food, Home and Garden* also faced financial struggles (Clubb, no title 10), but the society was acutely aware of its propaganda value. Consider, for instance, editor Henry Clubb’s response to a woman who purchased several copies to share with like-minded friends who might be recruited to subscribe: “[ . . . ] F., H. & G. is published not so much to *gather* the harvest as to sow the seed” (“Sowing the Seed” 43). The journal, he insists, is key to vegetarianism’s success: “[ . . . ] the object of the publication is to extend a knowledge of vegetarian principles and practice” (“Shall We Succeed?” 89). He besieges readers to donate (“Help friends help!”) in

order to “send a copy to every newspaper and magazine in the country” (Clubb “Sowing the Seed” 43) and “every [public institution] where the English language is read” (Clubb “For Public Libraries” 89).

The Vegetarian Society of America’s British counterpart had the luxury of aristocratic support to sustain publication commitments, but American vegetarians were left to repeated public appeals. Chides Clubb: “Every one who neglects to send \$1.00 for four copies of F., H. and G. is depriving him or herself of altruistic satisfaction of aiding the best cause on earth, in the most effective and cheapest manner. [ . . . ] the success of the cause depends on *your* doing it” (Clubb “Shall We Succeed?” 90). The organization did its best under these constraints, distributing issues among YMCA clubs and public libraries. For members, the journal provided an array of advantages including correspondence, friendship, even marriage (Clubb 75). Readers were kept abreast of critical news, events upcoming and past, new products, recipes, personal anecdotes, and hard-hitting philosophical and scientific essays—all vital to sustaining far-flung vegetable eaters in an overwhelmingly speciesist society. However, repeated pleas to readers to both donate and spread the journal (a practice also seen in issues of *The Vegan*) demonstrates that, in addition to its ability to build solidarity and maintain networks, movement literature became objects of activism in of themselves. Readers could champion the cause by supporting the journal monetarily or by sharing copies with the uninitiated.

### **New Recipes for Veganism**

Recall that Clubb describes his journal’s production as a “sacred flame” to be preserved by whatever means. This “sacred” element to vegetarian efforts would come to challenge the meaning of veganism to include an element of religiosity. Early issues of *The Vegan* made little mention of spirituality and, in fact, regularly touted the importance of scientific thinking as a means of validating the movement (Wrenn “Atheism in the American

Animal Rights Movement” 6). One means by which early vegans differentiated themselves was through the denunciation of vegetarianism’s legacy of occultism. Although vegetarianism had always had a heavy spiritual leaning, by the time The Vegan Society’s founding, vegetarian journals were reportedly printing astrological advice. Confounded by this fact, one scientist writes to *The Vegan*:

The vegan’s best friend is the chemist. Round the corner of economic recovery, our friend is waiting to flood the market with synthetic plastics to replace leather, fur, skins, bristles, catgut, bone and ivory. Here is the way, and it would be a poor compliment to the Scientist if the vegan were to accept his [sic] goods gladly and at the same time adopt unscientific beliefs, naïve dogmas or a superstitious outlook. Veganism has everything to gain by a wholehearted scientific attitude, and everything to lose by an unscientific approach. Do we want veganism to become another cult or sect of vegetarianism, or do we want it to be the main driving force of the whole progressive movement? (James 7)

The author commends *The Vegan* on maintaining its commitment to science, but it would only be a few years before the publication started to abandon its rational focus to mimic the spiritual emphasis of vegetarianism.

As postwar conservatism settled into the West, The Vegan Society began to reflect these wider value changes in its claimsmaking. Earlier issues of *The Vegan* focused on rebuilding Britain, revolutionizing nutrition, and raising happy, healthy children (Wrenn “The Vegan Society” 7). It also prioritized veganism as a matter of anti-speciesism. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, its rhetoric focused more on improved welfare for farmed animals rather than liberation, and, likewise, improved welfare in the family home. The tone of the magazine became considerably more religious, a trend which persisted until the organization professionalized and likely hoped to appeal to a wider range of funding sources.

In the United States, where religiosity is arguably more resonant with the wider culture, spirituality was intertwined with the American interpretation of veganism and faced less pushback from members. With the encouragement of the British organization, Dr. Catherine Nimmo established the first vegan group in the United States in Oceano, California (Stepaniak 6-7). She and her partner distributed issues of *The Vegan*. Later, the American Vegan Society (AVS) formed in New Jersey in 1960 and began publishing its own magazine, *Ahimsa*, which rebranded to a quarterly publication *American Vegan* in 2001 (AVS History).<sup>3</sup> The AVS founder, Jay Dinshah produced an anthology four years later *Here's Harmlessness* which advanced veganism as a means of non-violence. Dinshah, who was an Indian-Persian American, based his interpretation of veganism in Asian spirituality (AVS *Ahimsa*). Veganism, he explained, was foundational to the "Pillars of Ahimsa":

Abstinence from animal products.

Harmlessness with reverence for life.

Integrity of thought, word, and deed.

Mastery over oneself.

Service to humanity, nature, and creation.

Advancement of understanding and truth.

While spirituality had come to redefine veganism by the middle of the 20th century (a trend which persisted throughout much of the century), this was certainly supplemented by more secular claimsmaking. Dinshah's veganism was, more broadly, an extension of his ethical commitment to social justice for other animals (he was motivated to become an activist after visiting a Philadelphia slaughterhouse) (Dinshah and Dinshah 25).

Like the founders of The Vegan Society, Dinshah invested considerable time and resources into the literary advancement of veganism. He worked tirelessly in writing, publishing, editing, and lecturing on behalf of the American Vegan Society, the British

Vegetarian Youth Movement, and other like organizations. He maintained a rigorous commitment to speaking. He is remembered as regularly taking up menial jobs only to put in his notice before lecturing tours. A year after marrying his partner Freya, they embarked on a countrywide trip to speak at various meetings and collectives relating to vegetarianism, health, gardening, and so on (Dinshah and Dinshah 59).

Freya took a supportive role with regard to Jay's frontline advocacy and his work on the *Ahimsa* magazine, but she did engage in her own motivational efforts through her food writings and cookbooks. The AVS claims her 1965 vegan cookbook is the first American cookbook to employ the term "vegan" in its title (Figure 2). *The Vegan Kitchen* was an outgrowth of the society's collaboration with the North American Vegetarian Society (NAVS) and their work in feeding conference goers (Stepaniak 12). It was not the first vegan cookbook, however. That honor might go to Rupert Wheldon who published *No Animal Food* just 100 miles up the road from the Dinshahs in 1910. Although Wheldon acknowledges the welfare grounds for a totally vegetarian diet, his efforts were firmly grounded in his conviction that plant-based consumption is optimal for human health (11). Even earlier, Russel Thacher published *The Hygeian Home Cook-book* in 1874 which was vegan at least as far as ingredients (no mention of ethical commitment to other animals was made). In 1946, the Leicester Vegetarian Society published *Vegetarian Recipes without Dairy Products*, and that same year, The Vegan Society published Fay Henderson's *Vegan Recipes* (Stepaniak 5). Henderson's book was promoted by the society as a "book of ideas" for "amplifying the non-dairy diet" (The Vegan Society, no title 20). Prior to the 1970s, vegan (and even vegetarian) cookbooks were quite scarce (Spencer 359), such that the humble offerings provided by various societies were essential manuals in *doing* veganism.

### **Staking the Vegan Claim**

By the 1970s, the AVS had begun collaborating heavily with the North American Vegetarian Society. When the NAVS hosted the World Vegetarian Congress, it launched *Vegetarian Voice* for promotional purposes. The newsletter would take on a life of its own. Continuing beyond the conference, it was eventually printing 300,000 copies each run and catering to a mailing list of 20,000 (Stepaniak 10-11). Perhaps its most impactful contribution to the movement was its 1975 publication of a detailed instructional guide on how to start a society. Two years later, the number of societies in North America had increased by tenfold. As the NAVS grew in movement presence, the amount of energy this growth entailed had begun to starve the AVS. The AVS' own publication, *Ahimsa*, had dwindled to just one small issue per year. After the AVS team returned to its own project, *Ahimsa* expanded and became an influential publication into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Stepaniak 17). The AVS certainly had an influence over the NAVS, as *Vegetarian Voice* soon decided to cease any mention of Nonhuman Animal products in its content. The NAVS even required the World Vegetarian Conference (operated by the International Vegetarian Union) to adopt veganism in 1996 (Stepaniak 13). The NAVS and IVU are today primarily only vegetarian in name, applying vegan principles in all facets of their organizing and publications. The Vegetarian Society in Britain, by comparison, continues to publish recipes with animal ingredients in its e-newsletter.

Unlike The Vegan Society, the American Vegan Society remains a family operation and failed to expand in authority as did its British counterpart. Movement historians credit Dr. John Robbins' *Diet for a New America*, not published until the late 1980s, as the true catalyst for veganism in the United States (Davis and Melina 3). Robbins was the heir to the Baskin Robbins ice cream fortune and had come to veganism as a result of his medical training and personal tragedy (his uncle Burt Baskin died of a heart attack at age 54, which Robbins attributed to his high-cholesterol career path). *Diet for a New America* continued in

the tradition of American veganism's spiritual interpretation, what Robbins described as "living in accord with the laws of Creation" (xiii). It became a bestseller and inspired a documentary of the same name for the Public Broadcasting Station (PBS).<sup>4</sup> The wide-reaching cultural impact of his book was an indication that society publications could no longer claim full authority over movement discourse.

Similarly, in Britain, the power and jurisdiction of The Vegan Society in Britain was also being challenged. The counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s increased public interest in plant-based consumption, harmonious coexistence with nature, and resistance to violent state agendas. Television coverage, notably a 1976 episode of the BBC's *Open Door* program spotlighting vegans and the 1982 *Animals' Film* on Channel 4, was especially mobilizing. These developments brought unprecedented attention to The Vegan Society, forcing it to reconsider its small, grassroots organizational style (Wrenn "The Vegan Society" 8-11). By the next decade, the society was also feeling the pressure of the wider anti-speciesist movement which was falling in line with prevailing neoliberal values of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that viewed free economic enterprise as the solution to social ills (this led to an explosion in nonprofits across the globe) (Wrenn *Piecemeal Protest* 212-213) It also felt the pressure of its own members, some of whom had been involved in revitalizing other organizations in the movement. Because of its democratic organizational style, TVS was less able to resist "infiltration" from more powerful peer organizations which hoped to rationalize the movement writ large.

In 1980, TVS became a registered charity, and from thereon, editorials regularly featured pleas for donations to support this rather expensive bureaucratic move (Wrenn "The Vegan Society" 9). In the past, organizational publications called for donations primarily for the purposes of printing and distributing more publications. Now, they called for monies to support the organization itself. This shift indicates that the organization has become

autonomous from the journal; it no longer depended on the journal in order to exist in the movement arena. Furthermore, pleas for donations to support the formalized organization may have become more regular, but the journal was by no means a major source for revenue. After professionalizing, grassroots fundraising becomes insufficient to sustain bureaucratic operations. Most charities accrue the majority of their wealth through grant-issuing foundations, state funding, and large gifts from affluent individuals (Wrenn *Piecemeal Protest* 119-129).

### **New Challengers**

Early issues of *The Vegan* were deeply political and well into the 1990s featured reader and member contributions which challenged the prevailing vegan doctrines. As the society settled into its new professionalized identity, however, this spiritedness was noticeably dampened (Wrenn “The Vegan Society” 11-12). Longitudinal research in the Nonhuman Animal rights movement indicates that, as organizations professionalize and their message compromises, radical contenders emerge (Wrenn *Piecemeal Protest* 81-97). Although TVS has not significantly changed its definition of veganism over the years, the tempering of the society’s activities overall has encouraged discussions about the meaning of veganism beyond the confines of *The Vegan*. TVS member and founder of the Animal Liberation Front (a radical direct action collective which emerged in the 1970s) Ronnie Lee, for instance, now suggests that the definition of veganism should include more than consumptive behaviors and explicitly recognize a moral duty to educate others (Chiorando “Animal Liberation Front Founder Proposes New Definition of Veganism.”). Indeed, this interpretation of veganism as a political identity rather than a simple diet or lifestyle is commonplace in the radical flanks of the Nonhuman Animal rights movement (Thomas et al. 836).



Others, however, have supported a depolitication of veganism, shying away from the term itself as potentially alienating to would-be dabblers or converts (Wrenn *Piecemeal Protest* 110-111). Although veganism has become culturally resonant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “vegetarianism” as a catch-all term is seeing a resurgence in the movement. Like activists a century prior, “vegetarianism” is promoted as a supposedly more welcoming term (as is “veg\*nism,” which is designed to more explicitly refer to both vegetarians and vegans). “Plant-based” is another challenge to The Vegan Society’s carefully crafted terminology, and, like “vegetarian” and “veg\*n,” *can* refer to vegan individuals and products, but still makes room for the use of Nonhuman Animal products given the ambiguousness of what “based” in ultimately entails.<sup>5</sup>

The American Vegan Society is an important hold out in this trend. It has been increasingly bold in its use of the term “vegan.” Following *Here’s Harmlessness*, Dinshah published *Out of the Jungle* to develop his philosophy on vegan ahimsa. In the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, his daughter Anne, adjusts the title to *Powerful Vegan Messages*, citing greater cultural familiarity with the term: “The title change to *Powerful Vegan Messages* recognizes the huge advances in veganism. Vegan is now a household word and is even considered cool or sexy in many circles. In 1967 most people had never heard of vegan [ . . . ]” (Dinshah and Dinshah 11). This is not to suggest that the AVS had previously shied from the term. Quite the opposite, Dinshah’s contemporaries remark on his adamant use of the label “vegan” at conferences and networking events, often to the confusion of long-time vegetarians who were unfamiliar with the concept (Dinshah and Dinshah 56).

In any case, *The Vegan* and *American Vegan* are no longer the authority on vegan discourse in the movement. In addition to the countless magazines and newsletters produced by Nonhuman Animal rights and dietary organizations, a variety of independent lifestyle vegan magazines are now readily available in supermarkets. In fact, the new millennium was

a turning point in the movement's dissemination of information and networking. By this point, internet access had become common place in Britain, America, and elsewhere, reducing production costs and speeding transmission considerably. The Vegan Society responded by shifting to an online presence, operating a blog, podcast and the expected social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram. It, like other anti-speciesist organizations, continue to produce physical copies of its longstanding literary productions, but environmental concerns are pushing back on this tradition. *The Vegan*, for instance, is available in print for members at a slightly higher cost than its "eco" (read: digital) membership. While going digital may have been more consistent with the environmental claimsmaking associated with plant-based eating, it has the obvious disadvantage of undermining its recruitment capability through traditional channels. Issues might be shared online (indeed, The Vegan Society maintains its entire back catalog on [issu.com](http://issu.com)), but it is not clear that sharing them online would have the same impact as a print issue with an attractive cover and physical substance. The society switched to a glossy, conventional magazine style after professionalizing for just this reason, restarting with volume 1, issue 1 in 1985 (Howlet 3). Social media recruitment has now moved to websites and blogs, emails, podcasts, tweets, and posts. Whether or not online advocacy of this kind is superior in efficacy is hotly debated by social movement scholars (Fenton 154-157).

This critique presumes that the journal is still intended for advocacy purposes, which may not be the case as its content has changed more dramatically than its preferred channels. *The Vegan* lacks its once substantive character, reading more like a collection of blogs and social media posts. Spotlights of new vegan products for sale and assorted advertisements now dominate the pages. Astonishingly, the current issue as of this writing (2020, vol. 1) *makes no mention whatsoever of Nonhuman Animals*, nor does it even feature an image of a Nonhuman Animal. The vegan lifestyle has overshadowed vegan ethics, such that *The Vegan*

is now better conceptualized as a product catalog than an activism tool. This might reflect the society's attempt to offset production costs, but it also reflects a movement now sidetracked by consumption politics.

On one hand, veganism has now become a dominant frame for the Nonhuman Animal rights movement (Bertuzzi 8), indicating the ultimate success of early organizations at least in their aim to mobilize activists. On the other, the growing consolidation of power in these organizations (evidenced in part by the gradual elimination of member submissions to publications by way of essays, critical letters to the editor, and so on) likely fueled individualization of activism by folks who recognized digital platforms as a means to have their opinions heard and to share their expertise (Wrenn "Building a Vegan Feminist Network" 5). At the very least, it offers a means of engagement beyond generic official membership characterized primarily by an annual donation. Bertuzzi (10) observes that modern anti-speciesism is now characterized by its lifestyle politics and online mobilization. Although the digital era may have undermined the potency of many social movement newsletters and magazines, their earlier importance in granting legitimacy to a burgeoning idea should be appreciated. Explains The Vegan Society as it gears up for another transformation in journal style, "Over the years our magazine has been an essential point of contact for vegans worldwide, providing tips, information and updates on the vital work of the society" (The Vegan Society "*The Vegan Magazine* has a New Style!" 2020).

### **Keeping the Sacred Flame**

The early publications of various vegetarian and vegan societies in the United States and United Kingdom illustrate the importance of published work in establishing an organization, lending weight to a philosophy, determining definitions, and nourishing group identity. These organizations, the Vegetarian Society of America and The Vegan Society in particular, invested considerable efforts into producing regular journals for these purposes.

These publications offered a key space where a small leadership cohort exerted their authority over a new movement while also providing space for members to participate, if not from direct contributions in article submissions or letters to the editor, then by simply supporting the organizations through subscription.

The literary productions of early vegan and vegetarian organizations served a number of critical purposes for a fledgling movement desperate to establish itself in a generally hostile, speciesist world. First and foremost, these publications were tangible evidence of *existence*. The Vegan Society, for instance, did not simply emerge as an organization independently: it emerged from discord in the *Vegetarian Messenger* and the resultant publication of *The Vegan*. People, of course, met off-the-page in planning the future of veganism, but the society truly became *real* through disagreements and innovations recorded in print. Although many of these publications were compiled by a small team (sometimes even by one person), they created a veneer of legitimacy for establishing groups. This was especially true as the journals and newsletters professionalized with crisp typesetting, photographs, pleasing illustrations, and consistent formatting. A small core of activists could ignite and sustain a movement from their writing pad or typewriter.

Similarly, these publications were vital in establishing movement goals, recruitment, and goal attainment. *The Vegan*, for instance, dedicated considerable space in its early issues to determining the meaning of veganism, the philosophy of veganism, and the aims of the society. These early publications also tended to be quite democratic. Although the editorial team obviously had the power to curate essay submissions, letters to the editor, and general reader feedback, they were remarkably open to disagreement and new ideas. This democratic movement behavior was typical of grassroots activism in the early waves of the movement, but has largely disappeared from today's organizations. The Vegan Society, for instance, deflated its "postbag" section in the 1990s, not long after having professionalized (Wrenn

“The Vegan Society” 14). The internet would emerge as an important substitute for this lost accessibility, such that the newsletters, magazines, and other publications still operated by vegan and vegetarian organizations now find themselves *responding* to popular and contentious issues transpiring online rather than initiating or facilitating the movement’s discourse as they once did.

That said, these publications were also useful in their ability to build group identity. More than giving vegans and vegetarians a platform to voice their ideas and concerns, they provided crucial networking services. Readership learned about important movement leaders and their philosophies, plant-based businesses, conferences, meet-ups, and (through classified ads) like-minded folks in their area. Many formed lasting friendships and marriages through these publications. Even those who never met another subscriber could feel connected. Simply receiving and reading these journals validated their vegan or vegetarian identity. Societies hoped to support these emerging identities as well. Many of the early issues spotlighted biographies, personal stories, anecdotes, and images of healthy, thriving herbivorous hominids. Every issue of *Food, Home and Garden*, for instance, began with a full-length account of a successful vegetarian.

These literary contributions were thus aimed at two audiences: movement members whom they hoped to sustain and would-be members of the public they hoped to recruit. To that end, editors regularly petitioned readers to donate to the production costs, as they tended to usurp the organization’s coffers (sometimes to the point of disrupting publication). The publications became critical objects of activism, as they were, in these early years, the gospel of vegan and vegetarian philosophy. Little other media was available to compete before the commercialization of printing in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and widespread access to the internet at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Ahimsa*, *Food, Home and Garden*, *Vegetarian Messenger*, *Vegetarian Voice*, *The Vegan*, and others were projects that not only established the meaning

of vegetarianism and veganism; they were key activism tools that lent credibility and spreadability to the cause.

## Notes

1. This term is capitalized as a political measure to recognize the personhood of other animals.
2. Stepaniak (3) does find two exceptions to this in variations utilized in 1986 and 1989.
3. Nimmo was the first paying member and frequently wrote for American Vegan (American Vegan Society “Dr. Catherine Nimmo”).
4. Information about the cultural impact of the book can be found on the authors website, <http://www.johnrobbins.info>
5. Emerging consumer research, it is worth noting, does not support the efficacy of this strategy. Average consumers are drawn to products labeled “vegan” more than those labeled as “plant-based” (Anderson 4).

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# "THE VEGAN NEWS"

(QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE NON-LAITH VEGETARIANS.)

Price 2d. (post free 3d.)

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NO. 1.

NOVEMBER 1944.

The recent articles and letters in "The Vegetarian Messenger" on the question of the use of dairy produce have revealed very strong evidence to show that the production of these foods involves such cruel exploitation and slaughter of highly sentient life. The excuse that it is not necessary to kill in order to obtain dairy produce is untenable for those with a knowledge of livestock farming methods and of the competition which even humanitarian farmers must face if they are to remain in business.

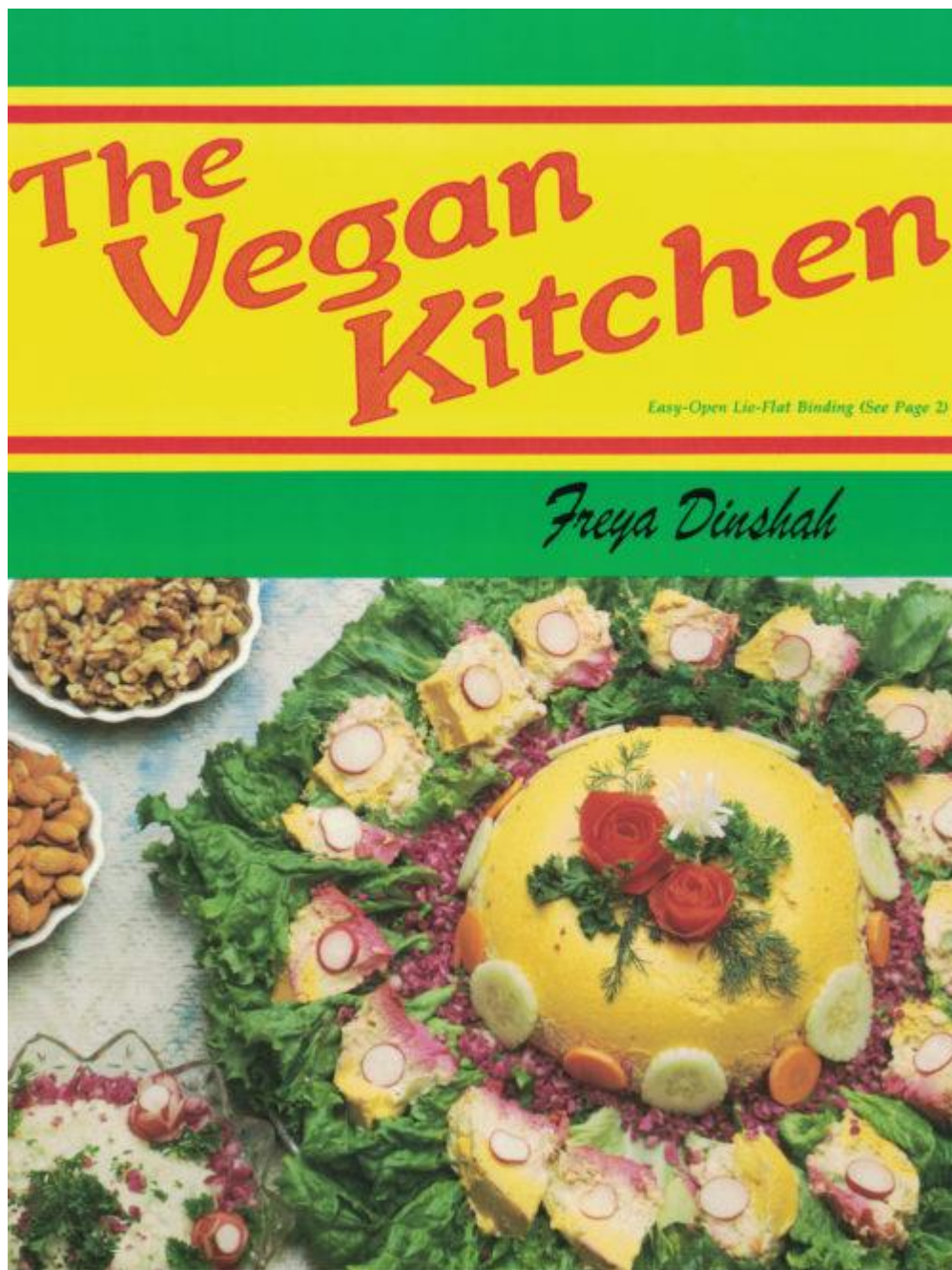
For years many of us accepted, as lacto-vegetarians, that the flesh-food industry and the dairy produce industry were related, and that in some ways they subsidised one another. We accepted, therefore, that the case on ethical grounds for the disuse of these foods was exceptionally strong, and we hoped that sooner or later a crisis in our conscience would set us free.

That freedom has now come to us. Having followed a diet free from all animal food for periods varying from a few weeks in some cases, to many years in others, we believe our ideas and experiences are sufficiently mature to be recorded. The unquestionable cruelty associated with the production of dairy produce has made it clear that lacto-vegetarianism is but a half-way house between flesh-eating and a truly human, civilised diet, and we think, therefore, that during our life on earth we should try to evolve sufficiently to make the 'full journey'.

We can see quite plainly that our present civilisation is built on the exploitation of animals, just as past civilisations were built on the exploitation of slaves, and we believe the spiritual destiny of man is such that in time he will view with abhorrence the idea that man once fed on the products of animals' bodies. Even though the scientific evidence may be lacking, we strongly suspect that the great impediment to man's moral development may be that he is a parasite of lower forms of animal life. Investigation into the non-material (vibrational) properties of foods has yet barely begun, and it is not likely that the usual materialistic methods of research will be able to help much with it. But is it not possible that as a result of eliminating all animal vibrations from our diet we may discover the way not only to really healthy cell construction but also to a degree of intuition and psychic awareness unknown at present?

A common criticism is that the time is not yet ripe for our reform. Can time ever be ripe for any reform unless it is ripened by human determination? Did Wilberforce wait for the 'ripening' of time before he commenced his fight against slavery? Did Edwin Chadwick, Lord Shaftesbury, and Charles Kingsley wait for such a non-existent moment before trying to convince the great dead weight of public opinion that clean water and bathrooms would be an improvement? If they had declared their intention to poison everybody the opposition they met could hardly have been greater. There is an obvious danger in leaving the fulfilment of our ideals to posterity, for posterity may not have our ideals. Evolution can be retrogressive as well as progressive, indeed there seems always to be a strong gravitation the wrong way unless existing standards are guarded and new visions honoured. For this reason we have formed our group, the first of its kind, we believe, in this or any other country.

Figure 1: Inaugural issue of *The Vegan*, November 1944.



**Figure 2:** First “vegan” American cookbook, 1965.