

SEARCHING FOR PARADISE IN THE RAIN
OREGON'S COMMUNES AND INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES
OF THE 1960S AND 1970S

by

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Approved:

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In the late 1960s, the United States' expanding counterculture gave rise to thousands of communes, or intentional communities, which sprouted up across the nation. Many of these communities chose Oregon to be their new home because of the state's progressive politics and social climate, fertile farmland, and proximity to California, at the time a hotbed of political activism. Magic Farm and Alpha Farm, two Oregon communities described in detail in the thesis, exemplify some of the many approaches to the institutional, economic, and social challenges posed by communal living. Ultimately, the tale of these two settlements explains in part the reasons that some intentional communities continue to prosper even today, while others collapsed in the middle 1970s. Regardless of their final fate, Magic Farm and Alpha Farm, as well as their many companion communities, are part of Oregon's very rich recent history filled with those who have searched for paradise in the rain.

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This thesis is more than just a study of valiant group efforts, for it was itself a very communal achievement. The following pages are, after all, not only the product of my work but also of the advice, guidance, and efforts of many others.

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I

Back to the Land

The United States' Communal Movement in the 1960s and 1970s

"The Commune Comes to America," announced *Life* magazine's July 1969 cover. Inside, bold full-color photos heralded its arrival. They showed one man meditating in his teepee as night fell; scraggly-haired, unkempt, but happy children frolicking in the woods; and two men wearing the bright colors and loose clothes of the counterculture enjoying a lunch of rice, vegetables, and fruit. The names of the commune's members--Twig, Ama, Evening Star--were unfamiliar and un-American, as was their language: "The energy we perceive within ourselves is beyond electric; it is atomic; it is bliss."¹

The commune upon which the story was based wanted to avoid publicity as much as possible, so *Life* referred to it simply as "the Family," and with a vagueness that kept readers guessing, said it was located "somewhere in the woods." But this particular group of new-age pioneers actually called themselves The Family of Mystic Arts, and made their home amongst the tall firs and broad leafed oaks of western Oregon.

The Family of Mystic Arts was not alone. Just a short drive up the interstate at the southern end of Oregon's Willamette Valley, several dozen rural communes had been founded and were flourishing. The state's southern counties had become a refuge for

¹John Stickney, "The Commune Comes to America," *Life*, 18 July 1969, p. 16.

communes abandoning the overcrowded Golden State. In fact, Oregon's entire western half, from Portland to California, from the Pacific to the Cascades, was peppered with communes. By beginning with the roots of the communal movement and then focusing on individual organizations, this thesis will explain the arrival of intentional communities in Oregon, their unique dispositions, and their interaction with the region.

Before Oregon's influx of communes can be understood, one must draw back and take in the national movement from which it came. Across the United States as in the Pacific Northwest, thousands of young people from affluent backgrounds were dropping out of mainstream society and creating new lifestyles based on the principles of cooperation, not competition. Alternately called communes, intentional communities, utopian communities, cooperatives, or families, the settlements were as diverse and widespread as the terms used to describe them. In 1970, the *New York Times* estimated that two thousand communes had burst into existence within the previous two years, while others following the movement claimed there were as many as ten thousand. Everyone, however, agreed that the country had never seen the likes of the communal movement before, for "by 1970 there were at least twice as many rural communes in America as there had been throughout all previous history."²

The communal movement was undoubtedly the result of the infamous social turmoil of the 1960s. More specifically, communes

² Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1978) p. 3.

stood at the confluence of several of the decade's social developments: activism on college campuses, the drug culture, and a rediscovery of non-Western philosophies. College activism had its beginnings in the Civil Rights demonstrations of the early '60s. For the first time, television showed college students and other concerned citizens the brutal realities of racial inequality. Images of Southern police beating peaceful black protesters propelled thousands into collective political action. Students continued to combat injustice through the middle 1960s, but it was the Vietnam War that widened the scope of activism from a small but radical group to include a significant percent of America's university students. War protesters felt America's involvement in South-East Asia was an immoral intrusion into the affairs of a sovereign country, the unjustified cause of tens of thousands of American deaths, and a severe overreaction to the fading menace of communism. Vietnam came to symbolize many of the forces that campus activists were fighting against: the inhumanity of war and the need for peace, the monolithic and close-minded federal government, and eventually the distrust of those in authority and all things American.³

As demonstrations and disappointment mounted, marijuana, LSD, and a host of other psychedelic drugs blended with the world of political dissent. To psychedelic drug users, the "straight" world, with all its rules and discipline, began to seem anachronous and phony. "In effect," wrote one sociologist, "the drug experience stirs within the user a euphoric vision of a new humanity that is the very

³ Ibid., p. 5.

antithesis of the Protestant Ethic psychology.”⁴ Moreover, a spirit of camaraderie formed within the drug culture. Those who had used drugs felt mutually connected on a level that straight culture could never understand. In addition to the development of campus activism and the drug culture, many Americans became aware of ideas beyond the realm of traditional Western thought.

Environmentalism and Eastern religions contributed to a new awareness, in which the acquisition of wealth was secondary to the earth’s well-being and inner peace. Not all who participated in anti-war protests were also Eastern religion devotees, but the connection between all the movements was strong enough that a permanent core became dissatisfied with their country. Through a combination of social activism, psychedelic drugs, and alternative thought, the counterculture was created and distanced from mainstream America.

Together these movements resulted in the alienation of thousands of young, white, middle-class citizens from the American culture they had been brought up in. Members of the counterculture distrusted not only the federal government, but the consumerism and capitalism upon which American society was based.

Consumerism was seen as greedy and wasteful, while capitalism necessarily led to competition and exploitation. Although the college products of the 1960s had been prepared for professional careers, none wanted be absorbed into the “system” and repeat the twisted errors of the past. In addition, the country’s generation of college students had built a strong sense of community. They had fought for peace in Vietnam together; enjoyed each others' company, rallied,

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

and experimented with drugs as the movement progressed. And as the 1960s drew to an end, many involved in the decade's social movements felt the need to make a fresh start--to live without the corrupting influences of American society.

One answer was to drop out, join friends, and begin a commune. Members of the counterculture decided that living together among those who shared vital political, social, and environmental ideals was far more fulfilling and a far more potent agent for real change than years of protests had been. Communes, believed those who initiated them, were the first step in applying these values to real life. As one member of the movement reflected that given, "both our despair over the social injustices endemic to our political and economic systems, and our optimism about our own ability to come together and create better environments in which to live, it now seems inevitable that so many of us would try to form communes in the late sixties and early seventies."⁵

Although settlements founded by members of the counterculture comprised the bulk of the 1960s and '70s communal movement, many different groups of people--even middle-class Americans and devout Christians--were inspired to abandon society and create independent communities. Despite their differences, all shared a common rejection of conventional society, and a belief that only by creating an entirely new tradition could they find fulfillment. In addition, once they had banded together, all the communities practiced some degree of communal sharing, from pooling and then

⁵ David [sic.], "The Commune Movement in the Middle Seventies," *Communities*, September/October 1975, p. 22.

redistributing every penny, to simply asking for small contributions to pay for daily meals together. Finally, each group's members shared mutual goals; they united in order to create a "lifestyle that reflects their shared core values."⁶

When in the late 1960s these communities vaulted from a sociological aberration to a national phenomenon, members of the news media as well as those within the movement realized the event was something new, but didn't know how to define it. All searched for appropriate words with which to describe the America's evolving new set of social experiments. "Commune," of course, was one early term and almost always used to describe communities established by the counterculture, who for the most part accepted it. Some groups sought to replace the general public's negative stereotypes for the counterculture with positive connections to brotherhood and communalism, and in the early '70s coined the phrase "intentional community." "Communal settlement" was a somewhat academic and inoffensive term accepted by all. Before these expressions even existed, "utopian communities" of the 19th and early 20th century had struggled to create the perfect society on earth.

The term intentional community is used most often in this thesis, though the other phrases are included too. All were considered carefully, but complete precision is impossible, as definitions overlap and even those living in communal settlements are sometimes unsure of what to call themselves. One long-time communal organizer acknowledged that there are significant

⁶Geoph Kozeny, "Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals." *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (Langley, Washington: Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1995) p. 18.

"challenges of drawing a distinct boundary around a concept so inclusive as intentional community."⁷

From farmhouses and teepees across the country, counterculture communalists reflected upon their move back to the land and most often saw it as radical, spontaneous, and unprecedented, at least in American history. They caught glimpses of themselves in the Pilgrims' flight from political oppression and subsequent success; they casually acknowledged the achievements of suffragists and progressives; but most of their inspiration came from still-unraveling social developments of the time or ancient Eastern philosophy. The country's 1960s communal movement did not actively draw upon American social movements that had come before it.

However, some historians feel that even this national explosion of communal settlements was an extension of fundamentally American attitudes; that the communes of the counterculture owed far more to their country's past than they assumed. Author Frances FitzGerald linked the communal drive of the late twentieth century with the excitement surrounding utopian communities in the early nineteenth century. The members of communal settlements, both recent and long-gone, shared the urge to reinvent themselves and their society and the astonishing conviction that they could do so. Both nineteenth century utopian communities such as Oneida, in the state of New York, and 1960s communes rebelled against the conservative, fixed status quo. Members of the former rejected the

⁷Dan Questenberry, "Who We Are: An Exploration of What 'Intentional Community' Means," *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living* (Langley, Washington: Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1995) p. 33.

rigidity of strict Victorian society, while members of the counterculture reacted to the inflexible bureaucrats of Washington and “square” society. Both groups knew they could drop out, and start over. This conviction, FitzGerald finds, is uniquely American:

From a European perspective this was an absurd enterprise. Man could change the political system by reform or revolutions; he could change the social system by reform or revolution; he could change the social system by changing means of production. But he--or she--could not erase history or pull himself up by his own bootstraps. Yet Americans characteristically continued to try.⁸

The communal movement of the late 1960s and 70s can be seen as a sudden, sweeping social innovation, or a development rooted in a time forgotten by those who took part in it. No matter the interpretation, it is undeniable that the communes of the late twentieth century were a radical departure from the society that surrounded them.

⁸ Frances FitzGerald, *Cities on a Hill* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1981) p. 23.

II

Oregon Bound!

Communes Migrate to the Pacific Northwest

The initial area of our choice was... a beautiful area characterized by its moderate weather and good growing season; good multi-crop agricultural land; West Coast location but away from earthquake prone zones; excellent educational facilities; progressive government and relatively comfortable political climate ("flexible within a structure"); and a social climate that seemed to be as tolerant of new ideas as any area of the United States. After much discussion we agreed that Oregon, especially the Eugene area, was the most propitious in the country.¹

This was the conclusion that the founding members of Alpha Farm, a fledgling intentional community, came to in 1971. By the following year, the group's six members had left their former home of Philadelphia and settled in to a 280 acre farm in Deadwood, Oregon.

As the Alpha Farm's statement suggests, Oregon was selected as a new home for a number of reasons. In addition to the state's open-minded and environmentally-oriented populace and government, and fertile agricultural areas, Oregon offered new communities sparsely populated and inexpensive land. Also significant to Oregon's development as a communal center was its proximity to that beehive of activism, California.

The University of California at Berkeley, along with many other areas of the golden state, were abuzz in the 1960s, and the demonstrators and ideas they generated had a great impact on the communal movement in Oregon. In San Francisco, only miles from the Berkeley campus, hippies were forming a tightly knit community

¹Alpha Farm Community, "Alpha: A Prospectus," p. 4.

incorporating altruistic sharing and a rejection of straight society. When members of the counterculture first decided to break free and go "back to the land", many roamed north to California's Sonoma County. But by 1967, the area's mainstream residents joined with police to bulldoze two large open-land communes, Wheeler's Ranch and Morningstar.

By 1968, Californians who sought communal lifestyles knew they would have to search beyond the borders of their increasingly disapproving state. So the movement split: some headed to New Mexico, while others chose Oregon. The intentional communities of Magic Farm, Talsalsen, Shiloh Youth Revival Centers, and even the Family of Mystic Arts were all founded by Californians, and many other Oregon communes housed refugees from the Golden State.

In 1974, a *New Yorker* correspondent wrote that Oregonians, "have laws so progressive that, by comparison, many other states look doddering."² Indeed, as communalists and mainstream Americans alike could see, Oregon's government, especially in the 1960s and '70s, had taken bold and imaginative approaches to issues such as the environment, honest politics, and the Vietnam War. Tom McCall, Oregon's governor from 1967-75, declared that, "thou shalt not pollute," was the state's eleventh commandment, and backed it up with more than one hundred bills that protected air and water quality. Oregon's bottle bill halved litter in the state, and its new "greenway" of park lands lined the Willamette River from Eugene to Portland. The governor praised and preserved Oregon's unique

²Carlos Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) p. 407.

"livability": its commitment to the environment, high standard of living, and evenly distributed population. In an effort to make government more personal, he opened his office to citizens for a half hour each day.

Joining McCall in the fight to create a more livable state were Senators Wayne Morse and Mark Hatfield, both adamantly opposed to America's entanglement in Vietnam. One historian wrote: "Wayne Morse didn't come early to the peace movement--there was a time when he *was* the peace movement."³ Political action such as this thrilled communalists who were looking for a way out of America's military-industrial complex. In fact, even though mainstream politicians had developed Oregon's new system, members of the counterculture saw their own ideals mirrored in it.⁴

But despite Oregon's progressive politics, the state did not always welcome communalists with open arms. Although Governor McCall was sympathetic to anti-war activists and environmentalists, he did not feel the same connection to commune members, and threatened to raise state taxes in order to pay for the welfare increase they had caused. The proposal, while entirely reasonable, increased the hostility that native Oregonians showed towards their new hippie neighbors. Another sentiment that endangered the reception of intentional communities was Oregonians' attachment to their space and environment. Oregon's residents feared that immigrants, especially Californians, could crowd the state and ruin their way of life. "Don't Californicate Oregon" became a popular

³Ibid., p. 469.

⁴Ibid., from "Profile: Tom McCall of Oregon" and "The Politics of Anxiety and Affluence."

bumper sticker that protested the population invasion from the south, and communalists often could not avoid identification as unwanted newcomers.

No matter how chilly a reception they received from locals, communes continued to materialize in Oregon. Still another reason was that the state had retained the same qualities most early American pioneers had looked for: inexpensive land and unsettled territory. Communities arriving in Lane County in the early 1970s could expect land to be priced "as low as \$250 an acre," including any pre-existing buildings on the site--and that rate was offered in one of the states' more settled areas.⁵ The CRO farm, several miles from Eugene, paid approximately the same rate for sixty-five acres of farmland and the farmhouse, barn, and chickenhouse. Oregon's land was inexpensive due to its modest population and the low demand for real estate. Most of the state's citizens were concentrated in the cities, from Portland to Eugene, of the Willamette Valley, leaving the rest of the state open to newcomers. While Californian and Eastern communalists found it was quite difficult to retreat beyond sight of their nearest neighbor, Oregon offered enormous areas of sparsely populated back country.

Oregon's excellent farmland also drew intentional community builders. The Willamette Valley's rich topsoil has a well-deserved reputation as an excellent farming region. But it was Oregon's plentiful hilly areas which were especially well-suited to intentional communities, who did not need top quality land to grow crops for

⁵Doug Bates, "Lane County's rural areas nurture communal lifestyle," *The Register Guard*, 29 August 1971, p. 1B.

sale. Most communities simply hoped to grow enough vegetables to keep their plates full, and Oregon's considerable winter rainfall and sunny summer provided for that. Again, communities which settled in other areas of the country, from California, to New Mexico, to Minnesota, were at a disadvantage; while they were forced to invest major amounts of energy just to make sure their small plots produced for their basic needs, Oregon's communes relaxed with the knowledge that a seed planted would bear fruit.

Other intentional communities had their own individual reasons for coming to Oregon; Alpha Farm, that had called Eugene "the most propitious in the country," included proximity to a university as a major factor. At the same time, other factors discussed above may have had no bearing on certain communes' decision to settle in Oregon. Some intentional communities originated from within the state, others were so disorganized that they could hardly pause to evaluate Oregon's political climate, and still others occupied houses in urban areas where agricultural potential was irrelevant.

Yet Oregon certainly attracted intentional communities. As early as 1968, *Communities* magazine, published by and for members of intentional communities, turned up eight communal settlements in the Emerald State, and only four in the more populous Washington.⁶ Moreover, those who compiled the magazine's national listings openly stated that there were at least as many unknown communities haunting the country's backwoods, as groups that had

⁶Communities Publications Cooperative, *Communities*, December 1968, page 31.

announced their presence. The majority of intentional communities settled in Oregon because they approved of its progressive politics and realized the potential of the state's inexpensive yet fertile land, and because many commune founders began their journeys in neighboring California.

III

From Breitenbush to Yellow Submarine

An Overview of Oregon's Intentional Communities

One writer's 1972 summertime voyage through Oregon and Northern California's intentional communities turned up a collection so diverse that the traveler could only express himself in a string of superlatives and opposites. The communities, he wrote, varied from

village type, to single and coupled community, to extended family; from complete community of property to private ownership; from open land, to open membership, to closed-up tight; from atheist, to theologically eclectic, to agnostically spiritual, to dogmatically religious--altogether implying that there are many ways to seek an end.¹

Some intentional communities are astoundingly different--so much so that they might balk at being described by the same term. The groups that have called Oregon home since the late 1960s ranged from a small farm of hippies in the Southern Coast Range, to a large, modern communal development composed entirely of zealous religious followers, to an "eco-village" of middle class environmentalists seeking a supportive family-oriented neighborhood.

But the groups are not categorized together without reason. All shared some amount of dissatisfaction with America's conventional culture--so much so that they had decided to withdraw and create their own alternative. In addition, all the communities practiced

¹Bill of Neverland [sic.], "Commune Tripping" *Communitarian* (March/April 1972) p.23

some degree of communalism or sharing, from pooling all income to just paying rent together. And most importantly all came together in order to create a "lifestyle that reflects their shared core values."²

Oregon's communal movement has been subdivided and analyzed in various ways. Some judge that the movement is split between communes that escaped from society into anarchy and those that constructed new alternatives. Many within the movement feel pigeonholing groups is artificial: "Intentional communities are like people--you can categorize them based on certain distinguishing characteristics, but no two are ever identical."³ Others feel loose descriptions are useful, and divide intentional communities into categories and subcategories based on their size, amount of economic sharing, sexual norms, or social and ideological origins.

The last criterion seems to be the most accurate and most often used, because of the distinct social and ideological traditions--from Marxism to the psychedelic subculture--from which the generations of the late twentieth century drew their inspiration. So, Oregon's recent communities are best divided into five groups: rural counterculture, urban counterculture, Christian radical, middle-class, and Eastern mystic. Remember, however, that many middle-class Oregonians followed Eastern mystic teachers, and rural hippie communes often contained devoted Christians; communes, like people, are not always easily defined.

²Geoph Kozeny, "Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals," *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living*. (Langley, WA: Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1995) p18.

³Ibid.,

The rural communal phenomenon was old news to Lane County's residents by the early 1970s--they had long since grown used to the communalists' rainbow-splashed Volkswagen buses and patched-up overalls. As Oregon residents might have guessed, rural communes were by far the most numerous type; several dozen groups ringed Eugene, and dozens more were located near Portland, the Pacific Coast, and in the hills of Southern Oregon.⁴ In 1971, a "hip" real estate agent ventured that, "the number of Emerald Empire communes is at an all time high, and the demand for communal land continues to run strong."⁵ Precise estimates are difficult, because so many of the groups sought isolation and anonymity. Furthermore, few at the time were concerned with counting the constantly changing and often transitory communities.

These rural intentional communities were the ones most often referred to as communes, and as the word suggests, they shared as much as they could of the little they had. Most of the groups felt that any member with money, tools, or resources should freely contribute them to the group. Almost all the communities grew vegetables in their organic gardens, but they invariably had to buy at least half of their food from outside vendors. In reality, Oregon's rural communal establishments were far from internal economic self-sufficiency. A large part of the resources they needed came from the their middle-class families or the government. However, because the day-to-day workings of Magic Farm are described in the following chapter, I will refrain from a complete portrait of rural

⁴For a complete list of Oregon's Intentional communities, see Appendix 2.

⁵Doug Bates, "Lane County's rural areas continue to nurture communal lifestyle," *The Register-Guard* (Eugene, Oregon) August 29, 1971.

communes here. Magic Farm, despite its particular peculiarities, was a typically laid-back rural commune of the 1970s, and one indicative of the entire movement.

In contrast, the Crow Research Organization, or CRO, was a fairly structured settlement. The living standard was relatively high, and regular work, within the group or without, was expected. Located in Veneta, the commune practiced "group marriage," in which every member supposedly had equal emotional and sexual access to every other. CRO's members were young and radical politically, but unlike their counterculture companions, they were highly academic, and had kept their middle-class jobs in the area. Also unusual for the largely vegetarian rural communes of the time was that in addition to farming, they raised several cows for meat.

Oregon's other, more typical, rural communes included Breitenbush, Talsalsen, Great Pumpkin, and countless others. Breitenbush is one of the state's longest lasting communities, and has operated a hot springs retreat in Detroit since 1977. Talsalsen, on the other hand, was a group-marriage founded in 1968 by a band of communal idealists from Berkeley, California after they had known each other for only three weeks. Unfortunately, the group collapsed in almost as short a time as it had taken to begin. A rock band from Portland founded the Great Pumpkin commune in Tillamook because it needed a barn to play in, without worrying about waking up the whole block. Like similar communal efforts, Great Pumpkin gardened organically, and also refused to use electricity, except when playing its guitars. Several all-women communities, including Rootworks and Womanshare, began in the mid seventies, and focused

on, "feminism, lesbianism, love of nature, recovery, and women's spirituality."⁶ Obviously, the differences between Oregon's various communities were not simply cosmetic, yet the groups shared a common belief that they could find a way of life better than the corrupt American alternative.

At least one Oregon community happily bridged the gap between rural and urban settings. The Rainbow Family, by 1971 a well-established commune, owned a house in Eugene and a farm several hours away near Drain.⁷ The community found a unique way to supplement its conventional sources of income. In addition to their successful garden and outside employment, the Eugene house sponsored teenage runaways and delinquents. The arrangement was approved by the county, although many thought that a commune was the last place a misguided child should be. However, the commune's unofficial leader, Harold Williams, felt that the Rainbow Family gave something to the kids that traditional foster care didn't: "Kids living here learn the responsibilities they have for themselves and others. They are given adult status."⁸

The urban cousins of Oregon's rural communes also believed they could create a more harmonious, less capitalistic lifestyle. To many critics within the movement, however, the urban commune was only the first step towards full rural communalism. After all,

⁶Fellowship for Intentional Community, *Directory of Intentional Communities* (Evansville, Indiana: Fellowship for Intentional Community, 1993), p 212.

⁷The Rainbow Family commune referred to here should not be confused with the counterculture's annual Rainbow Family Gathering, though the two may be related.

⁸Bill Keller, "Children Mature in Rainbow Family." *The Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), November 28, 1971.

complete escape from America's oppressive system was nearly impossible while one was assaulted by it daily. Many rural hippies questioned the ability of urban communalists to attack the system while they shopped at corporate-owned supermarkets or held jobs.

Urban communities, such as Eugene's Yellow Submarine, were forced by their more compact environment to employ different methods to sustain and improve themselves. In many ways, urban communes faced a greater task. More vagrants and drifters were likely to pass through communities in Eugene, Portland, or other cities, and constant visitors could create constant disturbances. Another disadvantage urban communes dealt with was that their meager back yard plots could not possibly produce the nourishing vegetables that sprouted in rural farms. Finally, urban communalists, no strangers to drug experimentation, were subject to tougher law enforcement from city police than their rural comrades. On the other hand, members of urban communes were frequently more able to find work. Yellow Submarine's members found jobs at a local food cooperative, Eugene's alternative to the grocery store, and in this way were able to survive in the city without submitting to the system.⁹

During the late 1960s, while the counterculture rebelled urgently against the country's decaying system, one segment of the urban communal world embraced a fundamentally American institution: Christianity. The resulting religion was called the Jesus movement. To hippies and mainstream folk alike, the conversion of

⁹Kay Teeters, *Communal Utopias of the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Honors College Thesis) p41.

many young communalists seemed an odd development. After all, church represented everything the counterculture didn't: Western tradition, structure, formality, and hierarchy. However, the Jesus movement offered a new spiritual purpose that transcended the emotional turmoil of the counterculture. The movement's leaders gave hope and an energetic work ethic to young drifters disoriented and depressed by drugs. But many members of the Jesus movement retained their laid-back, anti-establishment stance and counterculture appearance. Christianity and the counterculture combined and flourished in Oregon, and across the country.¹⁰

The Jesus movement's largest and longest-lasting intentional community in Oregon was Shiloh Youth Revival Center. The community began in Southern California, then moved to Dexter, Oregon in 1969. There, they hoped to lead a Christian life of good works that had become increasingly difficult in their former urban home. Shiloh's structure was modeled around early Christianity's nearly complete communal sharing and simple living standard. Due to their spiritual inspiration and remarkable industriousness, the community grew rapidly and soon owned a spacious farm which served as a retreat and spiritual focal point; hundreds of acres of orchards and farmland; offices, a worship center, and meeting hall in Eugene; and even communal houses in other towns in Oregon. Shiloh and the Jesus movement in general soon came under severe attack for their fundamentalist dogma and practice of recruiting confused adolescents from communes--which combined were labeled

¹⁰James T. Richardson, et al., *Organized Miracles*, (New Bruswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979) p. 5-20.

"brainwashing" by the media and public. Despite the community's early success, the group collapsed in the middle '70s after a leadership dispute.¹¹

Shiloh may have been Oregon's most extreme Christian intentional community, but many others accepted the faith to different degrees. Living Springs was a small fundamentalist community similar to Shiloh where a dedicated, religious farmer guided a band of former hippies. The nearby Family of Mystic Arts in Sunny Valley had taken on elements of Christianity but, while its members debated the Bible with visitors at the commune, they still looked for all the world like rural counterculture communalists:

Their dress (what there was of it), their manner, their hair all reflected this new life style, yet they seemed as fanatically committed to Jesus as any of their more conservative, straight-type brethren.... It was a mind-blowing scene. Four uptight, tight-lipped, straightlaced, well-groomed, conventionally dressed, knit-browed Oregon Okies talking with two dusty clothed, freaky hatted, longhaired, land-loving, out-of-sight Christian hippies.¹²

Beyond the fringes of the counterculture, far from the shock waves caused by the Jesus movement, many Americans lived in middle-class stability and security. But even their lives were not untouched by the social and political turmoil that shook the 1960s. Across the country, middle-class citizens who dared not join Vietnam protesters in youth rallies and marches agreed with many of the principles of the student movement. They were troubled by the

¹¹Marion Goldman, personal interview. Note: the surviving papers of Shiloh--a large collection--are in the Oregon Collection department of the Knight Library, but pending processing, are not generally open for research.

¹²Richard Fairfield, *Communes U.S.A.: A Personal Tour* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books Inc., 1972) p.105.

immoral war, racial inequality, and the government's apparent indifference. But dissatisfaction, writes Ron E. Roberts in *The New Communes*,

is not enough to motivate an individual to throw away the security of the bourgeois life-style, however. Middle-aged Americans watch communal ventures with a jaundiced eye. They know a commune may be nothing more than a pleasant interlude in the life of a post-high-school nineteen-year-old.¹³

Because they seriously doubted the long-term reliability of the commune movement, white collar dissenters looked for other possibilities. Some found that participating in cooperative businesses, such as groceries, allowed them to withdraw from the capitalist economic system. Through discussion and encounter groups they could discuss new social and personal options. Some few typical citizens felt the need to remove themselves from mainstream America, join an intentional community, and lead a life more in tune with their values.

The Cerro Gordo community, billed as an "eco-village" near Cottage Grove, attracted the attention of many middle-class individuals and families as its planning began in 1971. The goal of the community, then as now, was, "to have a small pedestrian village, a lodge and conference area, houses gathered into clusters, and small businesses, all set in less than 200 acres, preserving over 1000 acres of forest, meadows and streams."¹⁴ Cerro Gordo has actively fought the term "commune" and its connotations. This establishment, its

¹³Ron E. Roberts, *The New Communes* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971) p. 100.

¹⁴Cerro Gordo World Wide Web page. Though the page was posted recently, the community's goals have remained constant since its inception.

planners said, would be a well-structured, economically self-supporting village for families, not to be confused with a subsistence-level counterculture refuge. Farming, small internal businesses, and outside work would all play a part in the vibrant community. The group's members would share some costs, but not all income. Cerro Gordo's founders were still planning the village in 1974, well after the energetic apex of the communal movement, and planners could see from the past what approaches would work for a new breed of middle-class communalists.

Unfortunately, early visions of Cerro Gordo have never been realized. At the settlement's peak, some 100 members lived on the land or in nearby Cottage Grove; today, about 25 people live on the site. Current and former members give several reasons for the community's failure. Perhaps the most troubling are accusations of financial mismanagement against the community's leaders. Others blame the county bureaucracy, which halted construction for most of the seventies. It also seems that the community was too concerned with designing and imagining their new lifestyle, and not committed enough to jump in and live it. The *Cerro Gordo Town Forum* chronicles years of discussion, not action. Cerro Gordo's failure is discouraging because, unlike Oregon's hippie communes, this eco-village provided a unique blueprint that might have convinced mainstream America that ecologically sound, community style living is possible. In this respect, its place in Oregon's communal past is unique.¹⁵

¹⁵Cerro Gordo's fortunes continue to decline: as I completed this thesis, the state attorney filed suit against the community. See *The Register-Guard*, 6/27/97

While Cerro Gordo attempted to transform their communal dream into a reality in the middle 1970s, another intentional community inspired by the religious teachings of a Indian mystic burst into existence. This remarkably impressive planned urban community, located near Antelope, was called Rajneeshpuram, and powered by the teachings of the captivating and withdrawn Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the community became home for several hundred believers. This eastern mystic community was certainly one-of-a-kind: Rajneesh's largely middle-class following of young urban professionals was required to make large contributions to the community, which were then invested in upscale condominiums, an airport, and the leader's personal collection of Rolls-Royces.¹⁶ In the 1980s, Oregon authorities learned that Rajneesh was not a United States citizen and forced him to return to India. Rajneeshpuram ended shortly after.¹⁷

Eastern mysticism, however, was frequently incorporated into rural communes without totally dominating their ideology. For example, the sacred Hindu syllable "om" could be heard in communal meditation ceremonies throughout Oregon. The *I Ching* often occupied a hallowed spot on communal bookshelves next to near-holy organic gardening guides. Mysticism had a profound effect on many communes, because it rejected unbending rules in favor of personal discoveries. Communalists who had chosen the graceful contours of Oregon's hills over linear cities appreciated this acceptance of mystery and unpredictability.

¹⁶Rajneeshpuram community. "Bhagwan, the way of the heart."

¹⁷Marion Goldman, personal interview.

From eastern mysticism to fundamental Christianity, Oregon's communal pioneers of the late twentieth century were experimenting--and no two communes combined the new array of cultural possibilities to produce the same result. While the majority of intentional communities born in the late 1960s and '70s sprouted from countercultural roots, other traditions were also involved in the movement. Even former suburbanites came to Oregon, and a crucifix began to look natural dangling from a teepee.

The following two chapters detail two of Oregon's intentional communities: Magic Farm and Alpha Farm. The descriptions go beyond surface definitions and into the day-to-day workings of each community. Magic Farm was a relatively typical rural counterculture commune, while Alpha continues as an enduring community which grew from a middle-class background. Their similarities and differences should illuminate some of the more unfamiliar aspects of communal life: backgrounds, institutional and economic structures, and social setting.

IV

Magic Farm

A Country Commune

In 1970, Elaine Sundancer completed a novel that documented her personal journey through a year on an Oregon commune. She called it *Celery Wine*, and on the title page of one copy, wrote: "I don't want this book to be assigned as required reading to anyone, Elaine."¹

In many ways, this simple statement represents her philosophy, and that of her commune, Magic Farm. Most of Magic Farm's members were well-educated drop-outs from UC Berkeley, but at some point they all decided that life was better when very little was assigned or required. An average of one dozen adults occupied the 17-acre hillside plot, tucked among the creased valleys of Southern Oregon near Takilmah, from 1968 until 1975. The group chose to live without schedules or committees; they filled this organizational vacuum by farming their one-acre garden, meditating, and exploring their new surroundings with unhurried wonder.

Magic Farm was in many ways a stereotypical American commune of the 1960s. Most of the residents might be called hippies, although some at the farm embraced the label while others rejected it. They had taken refuge from the cities, because there was something unhealthy and out of kilter in American culture. They were tired of corrupt politics and the Vietnam War. While some

¹Elaine Sundancer, *Celery Wine*. This quotation was a handwritten note by the author on one novel's title page.

reveled in the psychedelic world of marijuana and LSD, others preferred the natural high of living and gardening in harmony with nature. One member wrote this advice to a newcomer: "Take off your clothes, it feels better....Sweat. Stay loose."²

Those who made their home at Magic Farm from the late 1960s into the '70s were part of the country's first generation of communal rebirth since the early twentieth century. Magic Farm's founders became interested in living styles outside the mainstream as members of a Berkeley, California, discussion group called the Wednesday Night Group. The group consisted primarily of University of California at Berkeley sociology students, and as 1968 wore on, they became less interested in talking about communes and more serious about living in one. While some desperately needed an escape from the pressures and hassles of American society, others were very hesitant to abandon the culture they were so comfortable with in favor of the unknowns of communal living.

For most of the Magic Farm family, immigration to Southern Oregon was personal more than political. The Wednesday Night Group's members just took to each other and found something calming, inspiring and beautiful in nature. Though some were heavily involved in Berkeley's turbulent 1960s political movement, their opinions did not seem to be the prime motive for dropping out of mainstream society and moving to Magic Farm.

But the fact that there were so few rules, or even routines that could be relied upon from month to month, reveals much about

²Sundancer, *Celery Wine* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Community Publications Cooperative, 1973) p. 142.

Magic Farm's nature. A distaste for rules and control, and the faith that given time things would work themselves out, combined to create an unpredictable and unbounded community. Members came and went, and as they did, work projects were taken on or discarded, new ideas introduced, and the farm's character evolved. Magic Farm had very few requirements or expectations: no membership donation, no standard work hours, and infrequent meetings. For many, the freedom from restrictions and duties was invigorating. But for others, the uncertainty that resulted from the absence of structure was annoying.

As the fervor of late 1960s counter-culture gave way to the apathy of the 70s, so Magic Farm's good fortune slowly dwindled. According to one observer the farm had no definite end, but instead, "a long twilight period."³ The community was still living happily in 1973, but the group's notoriety proved to be its downfall. The area around Magic Farm, including the towns of Takilmah and Cave Junction, had long been known as a safe haven for hippies and members of the Jesus movement. By the middle '70s the area had passed its saturation point: many other communes had joined Magic Farm in the area, which only attracted more newcomers. Commune researcher Hugh Gardner wrote that

by 1973 the more or less permanent "freak" population had grown to about five hundred, and a valley-wide sense of identity was growing that was perhaps more significant than its communes ever had been....Indeed, the valley became nothing so much as a wild frontier settlement struggling all over again.⁴

³Benjamin Zablocki, personal correspondence.

⁴Hugh Gardner, *The Children of Prosperity: Thirteen Modern American Communes* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1978) p. 180.

There were simply not enough beds, food, resources, or motivation to support the dense population. One of Magic Farm's communal neighbors, Talsalsan, was overrun and became open land on which migratory hippies could camp. As we shall see upon closer examination, the area's swelling counterculture presence, and Magic Farm's resulting overpopulation tore the community apart--economically and socially. The truth is, there is no record of the moment that Magic Farm's long twilight period dimmed to night, but the influx of newcomers surely contributed to the commune's demise.

Above all, the summation of Magic Farm's legacy, from infancy to overpopulation, provides no categorical definition. For every communalist who dreamed of building a fabulous communal house for the group, there was another who just wanted to camp out in the forest. For every member who hungered for steak, another was a strict vegetarian. And countering those who wanted an intimate, close family, were others who felt the farm's gate was open to all.

Institutional

Magic Farm's first rule: there are no rules--customs and routines maybe, but no rules. After all, rules were something Magic Farm's members were universally fleeing from: government, parents, police, and society all regulating and judging their actions.

From this first premise, the institutional character of the community followed. Situations were explored intuitively, and dealt with one at a time through group meetings or personal interaction.

No leader's opinion controlled the family's course, though a core group of long-time residents did tend to make the big decisions. However, this group did not always agree, and it never issued ultimatums. Hence, issues such as new members, budget allocation, and crop placement were never finally resolved.

Decisions at Magic Farm were reached by a consensus from all members in group meetings, which could be called by any member by writing a simple announcement on the main house's chalk board. The sessions were carried on in the typically loose style of Magic Farm. Questions and ideas were brought up by some, then discussed informally. Often, decisions about the garden or food supplies were made and implemented. However, others meetings ended with apparent finality but then produced no action.

At one May, 1969, meeting, the community decided that it could no longer handle any more animals, because the responsibilities required to care for them would be too great. By August that year, several new members had joined the farm, bringing four dogs and a cat. The community had also acquired two goats and a flock of twenty chickens.⁵ Like most decisions made at Magic Farm, "no more animals," became a suggestion, not a commandment.

While Magic Farm's animal population grew uncontrollably, the commune's open-door policy only added to its wildly dynamic human population. In general, the commune's custom was to allow anyone who showed up on its doorstep to stay as long as they liked. During the Pacific Northwest's rainy season, extra residents were not

⁵Sundancer, p. 92.

common or problematic, and the commune stabilized at ten residents or fewer. But Oregon's golden summers drew crowds of travelers north from California and other states, which could double or triple Magic Farm's winter population. Unfortunately, the newcomers meant three times as many mouths to feed but not three times as much work done. Luckily, the garden was churning out more vegetables than even the swollen commune could consume.

From the beginning, open admissions was one practice that divided the group. Those who supported it felt the profound interconnectedness of the youth counterculture. Their brothers and sisters who happened upon the commune had undergone similar spiritual and intellectual journeys as Magic Farm's members, and now deserved to be welcomed. Furthermore, many residents did not feel they owned Magic Farm, but instead that they were fortunate guests living on the land. Other members, however, longed for a consistent core of friends on the farm. Newcomers disrupted Magic Farm's daily routine and group unity. When the farm's population swelled to 30, many of the original members felt as if they were running a resort, not living quietly in the backwaters of Oregon. Elaine Sundancer originally leaned towards total acceptance, but after little more than a year on the farm, she was beginning to have her doubts.

Economic

As one might expect from a community that did not require regular work of its members and had no consistent income, Magic Farm often scrambled for money at the beginning of each month. By

Sundancer's calculation, the farm needed a monthly income of at least \$400--a startlingly small figure considering it supported up to 20 people. Half that amount went to food bought outside the farm, a quarter to the mortgage payments, and the final quarter towards gas, car repairs, and miscellaneous equipment.⁶ Judging from estimates made by others living in commune's during the early 1970s, Sundancer's seems low, and may not take into account private money that was spent on individual needs.

Magic Farm's placed its hope for making its payments and having enough left over for other expenses in "the flow"--the tide of people, money, and possessions that washed up the road, and then at times receded. Indeed, at times the flow could be very rewarding, as new members invested their savings and resources into the farm. Tools, cars, and furniture also arrived unexpected, but well-received by the community.

For Magic Farm, no work schedule did not translate into no work. In fact, many of the members worked exceptionally hard because they loved their work. Almost none fit the stereotype of the jobless, unmotivated hippie. Gordon and Jonathan were the garden gurus, constantly checking their backyard guidebooks and advising others on how much to water and where to plant. Other members had their own interests. Some enjoyed fiddling with the farm's collection of cars or canning and storing fruits for a rainy winter day. Everyone living at Magic Farm valued their community and was more than willing to preserve their special life on the farm.

⁶Ibid., p. 115.

"If it didn't get done, it wasn't necessary," states Sundancer, in the most succinct and accurate expression of Magic Farm's work ethic possible. It may sound naive to many middle class Americans, who know that 40 hours a week and foresight are the only way the bills get paid.

But Magic Farm's resourceful members had ways beyond their garden of supplementing the flow when its source seemed to dry up. Some earned money locally, splitting fence posts or performing other manual labor. The commune frequently traded its labor or crops to neighboring farms in exchange for animals or tools. One month, when Magic Farm's communal coffers were particularly empty, the group paid its \$100 mortgage with five cords of split wood. Many members enjoyed month-long winter respites in West Coast cities, where they earned money which would later be contributed to the community.

The unfortunate truth, however, is that Magic Farm could not have lasted so long without the Uncle Sam's generosity. The federal government supported community members through welfare, unemployment compensation, government surplus foods, and food stamps. But the government provided for its alienated citizens in much subtler ways, too. As Sundancer writes, using Norton as a pseudonym for the town of Grants Pass:

Maybe we're cheating. It's easy for us. No matter what we say or do, the hospital in Norton goes right on existing. I've often walked past a hospital and thought, 'They'll never get me sucked into their operations.... But when Alan was in a coma after his car accident I found myself praying that the hospital would save him.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 125.

The communards had convinced themselves that they had escaped “the system,” that their fledgling commune could be an island of ecological and social righteousness independent of the bourgeois consumerism that surrounded them. But as Sundancer realized, they were not. To her, hospitals were just one symbol of Magic Farm’s economic dependence upon the outside--the government also subsidized their clean river water, roads, and local library, all heavily used by the community.

Social

Those who called Magic Farm home were searching for some kind of companionship or family, and most found it. Close friendships grew rapidly through constant contact, and an interconnected family unit followed. As in any intentional community, the tight-knit group could not remain so without disagreements and occasional personal clashes, but those were the exception, not the rule.

Sexual promiscuity plays a very big role in the accepted image of 1960s hippie communes, but there was little difference between relationships at Magic Farm and those in the outside world. No “free love” or group marriage ethos existed at the commune--the group’s harmony and its connection to the land were too important to endanger with sexual experimentation. The community’s core membership was mostly single, complemented by several couples. Short-term relationships between Magic Farm’s members were rare because they endangered the group’s social stability. However,

relationships between Magic Farm members and outsiders were common. Couples usually moved off the land when they became serious because there was simply not enough privacy on the constantly crowded farm.

Children on the farm were raised by all the adults. The traditional and exclusive parent-child relationship of the nuclear family had given way to an extended family of affectionate adults who all contributed to each child's education and development. "Nowadays," writes Sundancer, "each child still has a special relationship with his own parent (bedtime stories and special cuddling and such), but a casual visitor to the farm usually can't tell which child belongs to which adult."⁸ Adults taught children the special skills that each knew and enjoyed: car repair, gardening, cooking, or reading. At one point, the community attempted to establish a more structured school for the children but found that the traditional assignments and rules conflicted with everything the commune valued.

Heavy drug use is another prevalent communal stereotype that Magic Farm's members did not fit. It is difficult to gauge how many of the commune's members smoked marijuana or experimented with psychedelics because each resident had his or her own routines. However, the prevailing sentiment seems to be that drugs had their place for certain occasions, but were inappropriate for daily use. Drugs, many at Magic Farm realized, not only prevented one from doing work, but dulled appreciation of the farm's magnificent natural surroundings. Many communes of the counterculture came to same

⁸Ibid., p. 36.

conclusion, and frowned on psychedelics in favor of hard work. During one conversation about drugs, a visitor asked Niles, a Magic Farm resident, what the community did for fun. Niles looked up from his gardening and responded: "Man, like everything I'm doing is fun. You know I used to go to a bar and have a few drinks.... And I wasn't really enjoying it at all. Now I'm not doing that anymore."⁹

Meditation was Magic Farm's central social ritual, and the only daily routine beyond working and eating, that members sustained over many months. Before dinner each night, the community gathered in the meadow's tall grass to follow their spiritual custom: silent, inward-focused meditation first, followed by chanting the sacred syllable "om," and completed by joining hands in a circle. The ceremony was a daily spiritual rejuvenation for many Magic Farm members. "I remember the shock I felt," writes Sundancer, "one time just after the chanting had ended, when the person next to me reached out and took my hand, and the joy I felt as I reached for the hand of the person on my other side, and felt energy flow through the united circle."¹⁰

Once meditation had satisfied Magic Farm's need for psychic calm, their appetites kicked in. And a steaming organic dinner was usually ready for the entire community following the daily spiritual routine. Communal dinner was the group's second daily meeting time, and it was over the table that problems, plans, and daydreams could be discussed.

⁹Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

Magic Farm's routines held the group together for most of the year, but the summertime flood of visitors and drifters could not help but unravel that relatively fragile social fabric. As was emphasized above, newcomers disturbed many permanent residents, not least because they could no longer follow their usual social patterns: a quiet breakfast with several friends, solitary weeding in the garden, and intimate group meditation at dusk. The intrusion of dozens of visitors each summer disrupted Magic Farm's established relationships and social continuity.

Seen from one angle, Oregon's Magic Farm was a failure: despite a hopeful and energetic beginning, the commune lost its momentum and faded by the middle 1970s. Many who visited the farm, however, thought it was a huge success--a "together" commune. For unlike many similar rural communes of the counterculture, Magic Farm had weathered storms of visitors, managed to eke out a living through harnessing "the flow," and resolved economic and personal disputes in order to realize their communal and ecological ideals.

Alpha Farm**An Intentional Community and Extended Family**

Gong! The deep peal of Alpha Farm's dinner bell resonates through the wooded valley, breaking sunset's peaceful spell for a moment. Gong! By the bell's fifth ring, the farm's hungry residents have begun to meander in to the inviting farmhouse from their day's work in the vegetable garden or barn. The steamy aroma of potato- carrot soup welcomes them inside. Once gathered around the dining room table, 16 heads drop to observe a calming moment of silence; then seats are taken and forks grabbed: dinner has begun.

The residents of Alpha Farm have made their home in Oregon's Deadwood Creek valley since 1972, making them one the country's longest lasting intentional communities. Fifteen members currently call the 280 acre farm home. They work and eat together, pool their incomes, and generally act as a large extended family. Their success is not accidental. Rather, it is the reward of a combination of hard work, good planning, and a warm extended-family environment that has made living together an exciting and fulfilling experience.

In the early 1970s, this communal family was only a dream in the minds of six social activists living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Among them were Caroline and Jim Estes, the only original members who still live at Alpha. The Estes and their friends had been highly

involved in Vietnam War protests as well as social work in the city, but their efforts to improve lives in Philadelphia began to feel like an uphill battle. After many late-night discussions, the group concluded that the injustices caused by society could not be healed from within. Only by living their lives by the principles of sharing and love could they begin to push the world in a positive direction. Start small, they decided, and let our communal dreams spread. With that in mind, six East Coast idealists dropped out, packed their bags, and arrived in Oregon to found Alpha Farm.¹

Twenty-five years later, Alpha Farm has been the site of both marriages and births, seen handfuls of members come and go, endured the dislike of neighbors, and enjoyed the fruits of good harvests. But through it all, Alpha has remained remarkably unchanged. The number of members at the farm has grown, but its current population is within the founders' expectations. The institutional system by which Alpha Farm is guided remains the same. Alpha's sources of income have grown, but the strong work ethic has never faded. Finally, according to those who have lived at the farm the longest, the community's social and spiritual character, despite the shuffling of individual members, continues to be accepting and active.

Institutional

Alpha Farm's institutional framework is subtle and friendly, yet strong and effective. The community strives to be an accepting

¹Michael Thoele, "Alpha Farm," *Communities*, September/October 1978, p15.

extended family. But Alpha's founders realized early on that without formal planning, the family could fragment. Many communes born in the early 1970s, says Caroline Estes, were so disgusted with America's monolithic "system" that they rejected all types of structure, and pursued complete freedom instead. Alpha's founders felt that it was not structure itself that was rotten, but the way those in power were using it. So the group relies on regular meetings, the consensus system, a well planned work week, and equal influence for all members.

Three different meetings are scheduled at Alpha: organizational, spiritual, and personal. Each does its own part to ensure that Alpha's members feel the family is being steered in the right direction. At each Sunday's organizational meeting, members map out the coming week's work schedule, make the shopping list, review bills, and generally tune up the nuts-and-bolts issues that must be taken care of in all of our lives. While all members are required to attend the organizational meeting, the spiritual meeting which precedes it each Sunday is optional. Those who participate in the spiritual meeting try to make it as accessible as possible, and avoid the traditions of established religions. It does seem to have some roots in Quaker services, where participants are free to express their spiritual state or feelings at any time.

Alpha's most unique gathering may be "third meeting"--a session each month during which members can voice and resolve any personal conflicts they have with other members. The third meeting has been a wonderful binding force for the community, without which, says Caroline Estes, Alpha may not have survived. The

encounter enables members to talk about their personal 42
disagreements, while other members contribute and mediate.
Ideally, problems that might have been bottled up and grown can be
expressed and solved.²

Because Alpha Farm's founders felt that each member should be an integral and equal part of their community, they chose the consensus process to be their way of making decisions. Consensus means that decisions are reached by general accord; i.e., every participant must concur with the group's final course of action, though he or she may not originally have supported that course. If even one person withholds their approval from the community's decision, no final choice can be made. For example, if the group decided to buy a new car at the weekly organizational meeting, every one of the community's members would have to agree upon the vehicle's make and model before a check could be made out to the dealer. According to Caroline Estes, even the color of the community's first car was wrangled over at length. Consensus often involves hours-long discussions during which everyone is encouraged to add their two cents. The discussion only ends when all are satisfied with the outcome. If the consensus process is a success, through compromise and persuasion, all involved believe that their opinions were taken into account for the final, and best, solution. Supporters of consensus say that the process includes everyone, and gives each participant a sense of ownership in final decisions. Such inclusion, they say, is absent in democracy because

²Caroline Estes, Alpha Farm founding member, personal interview, 6 May 1997.

the minority is inevitably defeated by the majority, leaving the 43 losers alienated and unwilling to participate in future decisions.³

But not every decision can be made by consensus. The brand of coffee one Alpha member buys during the weekly shopping expedition is not necessarily mulled over in a group meeting. Nor must a committee agree on where the new tomatoes should be planted. In fact, many daily choices are made by individuals--a consensus on every one would require days of bureaucratic deliberation. But the decisions which really count, or about which people have strong feelings, are decided by consensus.

While Alpha has worked diligently to make its decision making process open and accessible to all at the farm, one wonders if, as in most groups, the more experienced and outspoken members tend to dominate the consensus process. Caroline Estes says this does not happen, but at the same time it is clear that she is a motherly figure, if not the leader, of the family. One younger member called her "inspirational." But her peaceful presence suggests that her leadership role is more negotiator than director.⁴

Still, there is the potential for a controlling core at Alpha. Members who have lived at Alpha Farm for more than a year can opt to make long-term decisions without the other residents, because they are most likely to be affected by those choices. But this happens rarely, and for the most part, consensus is reached.

Economic

³Ibid.

⁴Alpha Farm members, from interviews, 6-7 May, 1997.

While other intentional communities have counted on a 44 subsistence standard of living, welfare, and a steady influx of outside funds to keep them going, Alpha Farm planned their financial survival from the beginning. Never a group to put off till tomorrow what they could do today, Alpha's members have kept one step ahead of the cooking, cleaning, building, and harvesting from the beginning. Alpha's economic outlook remains bright due to a half-dozen sources of income, and because of their physically tough 40-hour, farm-style work week. The economic relationship between the farm and its members has also been well conceived and defined. In ensuring a solid financial foundation, Alpha's members practiced their usual practical family spirit.

The seven main ways in which Alpha Farm brings in money and resources are: through on-site production; the Alpha-Bit cafe in Mapleton; new members' investments; a local mail delivery route which they operate; odd jobs and construction in the community; Jim Estes' newspaper job and pension; and community-building workshops that Caroline Estes' teaches. Obviously, Alpha farm has a fairly stable economic base.⁵

The fertile soil of the Deadwood Creek valley allows Alpha's members to grow an acre's worth of broccoli, corn and other vegetables. In addition, the community drinks the milk from their three goats, and the water of the stream which flows through their land. The nourishment which the land provides is helpful, but it could not possibly sustain all of Alpha's fifteen members without outside income.

⁵Ibid.

Alpha-Bit cafe is a small piece of the farm, transplanted and⁴⁵ seemingly out of place in its new-age nook between Mapleton's modern general store and supermarket. The cafe is much more than just a place to get a bite to eat--beyond Alpha-Bit's counter are shelves of books and arts and crafts. Alpha-Bit is a source of income for the community, as well as a social focal point. Locals who stop for coffee meet and come to understand Alpha's members, while the cafe prevents Alpha from becoming too isolated on their remote farm.

Each new member who officially joins the community after a year of residency also makes a significant economic contribution. Because new members have decided to make Alpha their permanent home, they contribute their money and property to the farm's communal fund. \$5,000 is goes directly to the community's spendable account, while any remaining assets are kept in a reserve from which only the interest can be used by the farm. However, the entire contribution is refundable should the member decide to leave Alpha. The community only asks that it be allowed time to return the money, as it is always invested in the farm itself or one of its businesses.

Alpha's other sources of income are somewhat more mundane: while few Americans grow more than weeds in their backyards, most would not feel too out of place delivering mail or receiving a pension check. Alpha-Farm took over two of western Lane County's mail routes in the mid-1970s and has continued to operate and profit from it ever since. Alpha's members rumble down hundreds of miles of the coast range's bumpy back roads each week to deliver mail. Members of the community also make money by doing repair and

construction jobs in the area. Jim Estes is the only Alpha member⁴⁶ who worked for several years at a job outside the farm. As an editor for the *Salem Statesman-Journal*, his salary and pension have helped his companions significantly. Jim's wife Caroline also makes money outside the farm through consensus and intentional community workshops which she hosts around the country.

Anyone who has ever worked on a farm knows its not easy. Add all of Alpha's other jobs and obligations, and you've got a heavy load. Members usually work from eight until five, with a break for lunch at noon. Its no idyllic life in the country, but as one member said, "I'd rather work 40 hours out here than in a building.

To counter the strain of work, jobs rotate among members, so that

In order to make the daily grind somewhat interesting, jobs rotate daily at Alpha. Nobody is forced to shovel dirt five days a week. Instead, a member may work at Alpha-Bit cafe on Monday, garden Tuesday, and drive the mail route Wednesday. Members cook communal meals about once a week in two-person crews. Even so, if there's a big project that must get done, such as building a new house, everyone may pitch in for weeks or months. In addition to avoiding monotony, job rotation keeps people from identifying themselves with a single job. No Alpha member is "the cook" or "the leader," and those on the farm like it that way. When every member understands and contributes to the work of every other member, work becomes a team effort, not the labor of some under the direction of others.

At times, though, communal ideals must give way to practical realities. Caroline Estes can no longer chop wood as well as some of

the younger members, which means she will rarely be seen splitting a cord of Douglas Fir on a hot summer day. Another long-time member was trained as an accountant, so she's far more qualified to figure Alpha's taxes than others. Often, due to differing abilities or preferences, some members find themselves performing similar jobs, rather than rotating randomly. That doesn't mean the system is too idealistic, but instead that Alpha's residents use common sense when putting together their schedule.

While individual jobs keep Alpha's members busy most days, the farm must also plan and complete big group projects which will benefit the whole community. In the course of Alpha's 25 years, the group has built two large structures, the "new house" and the office, and repaired and improved many others. These buildings represent major undertakings for Alpha, especially since many members didn't know a wrench from a ratchet, and the farm must continue to focus on its other sources of income. The new house, now more than ten years old, is a two-story, five bedroom wood home which fits quietly into Alpha's wooded hills. It took the community 13 years to complete. Several other cabins on the land, one of which was converted from a chicken coop, were also the result of sustained group efforts. Each of the structures is evidence of Alpha's ability to balance large projects with small ones.

Each worker at Alpha Farm is essential to a stable economic unit, and the group, in turn, repays them all. Members do not receive wages for their work, but the community supplies everyone with reasonable food, clothing, shelter and any other necessities. In addition, residents are given a monthly allowance--\$35 for those

who have lived at the farm for more than a year, and \$25 for others-
-which allows them to do a little personal spending. But more
importantly, Alpha is committed to investing in its members. The
community has paid for members' classes at the University of Oregon
in Eugene, and even helped to put one member through the
University's school of Architecture. And the community encourages
the ideas and interests of its members, from buying frisbees to
setting up a ceramics workshop.⁶

Social

Economic and institutional guidelines help to define Alpha Farm, but its warm, hospitable spirit is the community's core. "Socially, we envision a modified style of family life that overcomes the isolation and rigid classifications of single persons, couples, and separate families.... Community members of all ages will participate together in the living and growing of each other." In Alpha's vision, the divisions in American society are bridged, creating unity and family. And the vision has become reality: three generations live, work, and play together on the farm.⁷

Alpha's members, like those of other intentional communities, experience and enjoy life together. Everything from their daily lives to unique They work, eat, play, and hang out all in each others' company

Its hard to draw the line at Alpha Farm between members' social and professional lives. For most Americans, the separation

⁶Ibid.

⁷Alpha Farm Community, "Alpha: A Prospectus," Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1971.

between business and pleasure is clear. Workers leave the office⁴⁹ drive home and then make plans with family or friends to relax and unwind. But at Alpha, the two worlds are inextricably intertwined: members work with friends, and socialize with their fellow workers. Communal meals are some of the most precious social times.

Breakfast and lunch are prepared by the rotating kitchen crew for everyone, but members break for these meals at different times and often eat in small groups. Dinner is especially valuable, for it's the only time during the day when the entire community is sure to be gathered together in the same room. Before the evening meal is served, the members of Alpha join hands for a moment of silence, and often a song.

While the community is nearly always together, some residents appreciate time by themselves, and Alpha ensures they can get it. The community promises each member his or her own room--a private space to retreat to or store personal belongings in.

Personal space can be very valuable, especially at Alpha Farm, where human contact is virtually unavoidable. And while constant companionship is pleasant, many members of intentional communities say that living with 20 friends can be one of the hardest transitions to make. Americans, after all, are notoriously independent: we drive alone, and often live thousands of miles away from our extended families. Learning the social skills necessary to share possessions, resolve minor personal problems, and divide one bathroom between six people can discourage less dedicated visitors. Living communally is not easy, Alpha's members say; it's not for everyone. When serious personal problems arise within the

community, they are dealt with at Third Meeting. If they still can't be resolved, the farm's members may make a consensus decision that one or more people must leave. Fortunately, disagreements rarely progress that far

Few rules are placed on interpersonal relationships at Alpha Farm. Lovers, friends, families, and singles of all sexual orientations are welcome. As their prospectus states, the group seeks to join together groups who are traditionally separated. The community only asks that its members are respectful of others' wishes and privacy. If the group's harmony remains, Alpha is content to allow any lifestyle or relationships.

Children at Alpha are raised not by one or two biological parents, but by 15 adoptive ones. There's always a mom or pop around to teach the young ones a new skill or keep them out of trouble. Sally, mother of three of the farm's children, has enjoyed Alpha Farm's extended family child rearing. The help she receives from other members removes the burden of constant surveillance from her shoulders, and she feels her kids have gotten more perspectives and experiences from a farm full of parents than a traditional nuclear family could have provided.⁸

Though Alpha's members feel that communal child rearing is a great benefit for both parents and kids, most children are schooled in Mapleton, 15 miles south of the farm. Alpha does not want its smallest residents to grow up insulated and sheltered from the outside world. Apparently, parents at the farm acknowledge that there may be some lessons which cannot be taught by a small

⁸Alpha Farm members.

intentional community. Kids also enjoy the opportunity to make⁵¹ friends their own age in public schools. Ironically, Alpha has run a small school on the farm for children of the Deadwood Creek valley. However, no child from Alpha has ever been educated there.

VI In Retrospect Oregon's Intentional Communities in Historical Perspective

Though Alpha Farm endures as a tribute to the possibilities of communal living, many communities that like Alpha began full of hope have long since faded away. Alpha Farm's longevity has proved to be the exception, not the rule. Oregon saw the establishment of dozens of intentional communities during the late 1960s and early '70s, but the social forces which spurred and sustained the communal movement soon gave way to the inclinations of a new era.

The decline of student activism, an economic recession, and the failure of many communities to achieve self-sufficiency stole the excitement that had once saturated the movement. Though the Vietnam War continued into the 1970s, the student movement had splintered into opposing factions, and was no longer the proud social force it had once been. After the 1970 Kent State killings, radicals who sought to use violence to retaliate alienated their more composed comrades. The '70s also challenged the young communal movement with an economic recession. Many communes found survival difficult already, and as money from relatives slowed and spot jobs became more difficult to find, insufficient on-site production failed to meet their needs. Intentional communities in Oregon and across the country fell into a slump, which discouraged

others from joining the movement. "The flow," as Magic Farm called it, began to dry up.¹

Some communities, like Alpha Farm, Breitenbush, and Mountain Grove, pulled together to ride out the hard times, and still exist today. As we evaluate the success of the late twentieth century's communal movement, it is valuable to put the groups in historical context, and remember that while they were unique, they do not stand alone in American history.

The United States' first communal movement of note was the Millenarian sects of the east coast who, in the 1820s, believed that God would soon end civilization on Earth, select his "chosen," and bring them to his heavenly kingdom. The Shakers and Harmonists were two such groups. Both practiced celibacy as there seemed to be no sense in having children when judgement day was so near. The Harmonists began several communal towns which excelled in agriculture and craftsmanship. The Shakers settled in both rural as well as urban areas, when they often owned blocks of homes. Both were highly successful--economically and socially--and despite obvious obstacles to propagation, they lasted until the late 19th century.²

America's next rush of new Utopias came in the 1840s, when Owenism and Fourierism offered people new alternatives. These new social theories reached people as industrialization rapidly changed the 19th century world. Factories, unemployment, and

¹ David [sic.], "The Commune Movement in the Middle 1970s," *Communities*, September/October 1975, p. 23.

² Edward K. Spann, *Brotherly Tomorrows: Movements for a Cooperative Society in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) pp. 1-17.

urbanization all made people question the direction society was headed. Because of this, Massachusetts' Brook Farm, and other Fourierist communities attracted attention and volunteers. More than 30 utopian communities began in New England alone during the 1840s. Charles Fourier, a French philosopher, believed that each person should follow his own multitude of inner passions, and experiment, rather than be bound to one vocation. This constant interest in new labor, he believed, would propel communities forward, making them dynamic and productive. However, Fourierism's convoluted social planning proved to be much more difficult to apply to real life than it appeared to be in theory; all of the middle nineteenth century's Fourierist experiments eventually collapsed.³

Most relevant to the study of Oregon's twentieth century communities are Aurora and New Odessa, two well-documented and moderately successful nineteenth century utopian communities that settled in the state. Aurora, founded in the Willamette Valley in 1855, very much fit the mold of successful communities of its time: a charismatic religious leader united his followers communal village. Like George Rapp and his Harmonists, Aurora's members were devoted to Wilhelm Keil and his plans for self sufficiency through agriculture and industry. Keil encouraged close study of the bible, and was said to possess remarkable healing powers. The community prospered, sold its high quality handicrafts in Portland, and eventually operated a well-known hotel on the route to San

³ Ibid., pp. 67-121.

Francisco. Upon Keil's death in 1877, tensions already present within the group were aggravated, and Aurora broke apart.⁴

New Odessa was founded a quarter century after Aurora, but was more short-lived--it survived for only three years, from 1882 to '85. A group of Russian Jewish immigrants, dedicated to putting communism into practice, started the community after moving from New York city. Their dreams of a more harmonious political environment were tempered by the struggle to carve out a living in Oregon's frontier environment, while preventing personal conflict in a small, isolated environment. After three years, frustrated by internal differences, New Odessa's members abandoned their utopian attempt.⁵

The combined legacy of these utopian communities and the twentieth century's intentional communities is an intriguing and unfinished chapter in Oregon's history. Though the earlier settlements did not directly influence the communities of the counterculture era, a similar spirit drew both groups to the Northwest.

When political activism combined with a new youth consciousness in the 1960s, those who could find no other solution chose to drop out of American society. Intentional communities of the time arrived in Oregon because they believed they could adapt the state's progressive politics, and fertile and plentiful land to their new communal lifestyle. They founded communities that ranged from loosely-organized rural communes to large fundamentalist

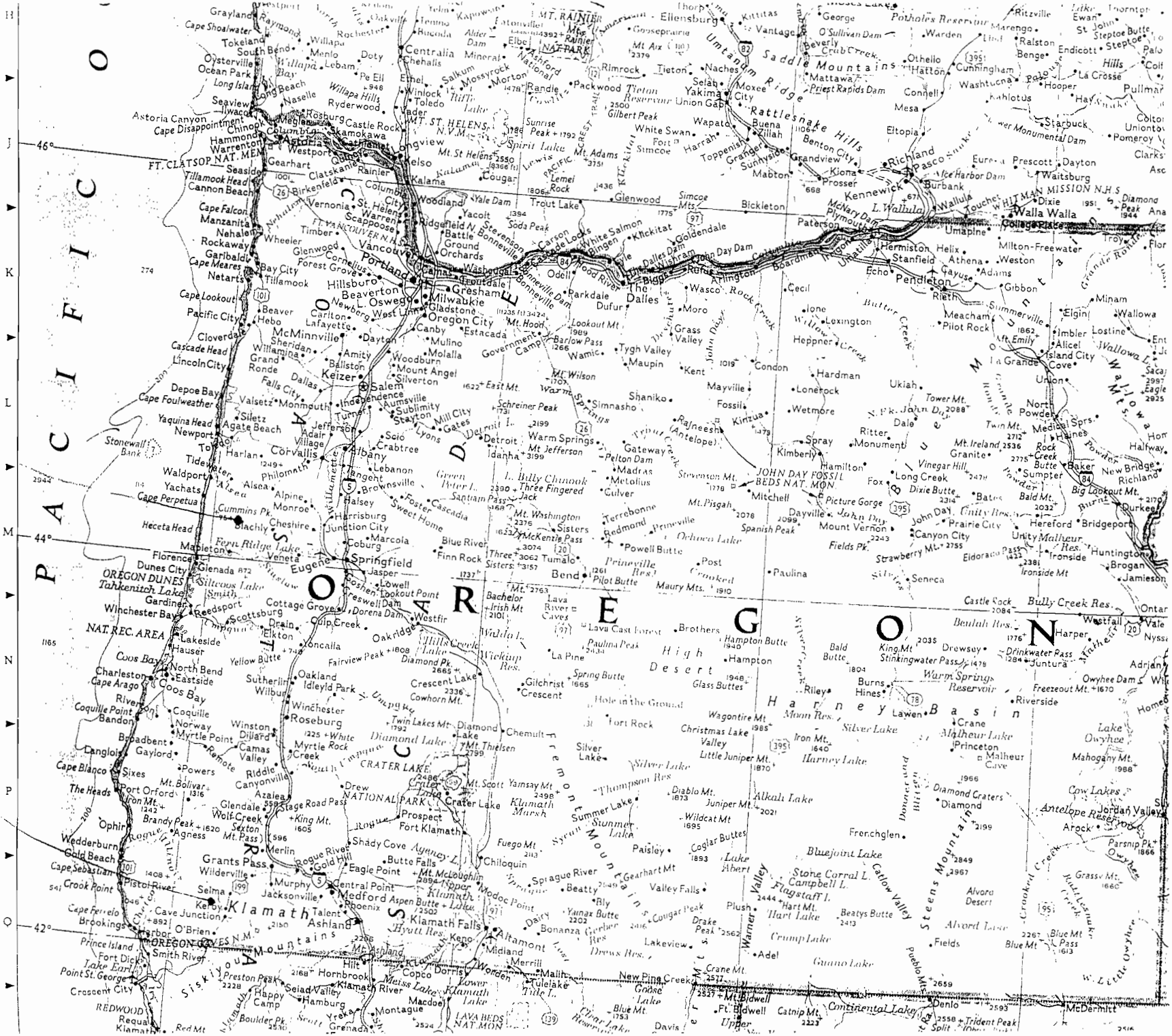
⁴ Kay Teeters, *Communal Utopias of the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon, 1972) pp. 4-20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-30.

Christian groups. And despite the failure of many intentional communities, the tide of communalists that swept across Oregon's borders nearly thirty years ago has left unmistakable marks on this state's contemporary political and social climate.

ALPHA FARM

MAGIC FARM



Appendix II

An Inventory of Oregon's Utopian Communities, Intentional Communities and Communes

For a complete explanation, see the notes following the inventory.

<u>Community Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Lifespan</u>	<u>Main Source</u>
19th Century Intentional Communities			
Aurora	Aurora	1855-77	<i>Communal Utopias</i>
New Odessa	Glendale	82-85	<i>Communal Utopias</i>
Nehalem Valley Cooperative		86	
Union Mill Company		90	
20th Century Intentional Communities			
Great Pumpkin	Tillamook	1967-	<i>Oregonian</i> , 8/22/67
Magic Farm	Takilmah	68-70s	see bibliography
(Saddle Ridge Farm, High Farm, Sixteen Acres)			
Shiloh Youth Revival Centers	Dexter	68-70s	<i>Organized Miracles</i>
The Eater Family	Coquille	68	FIC 68
Mu Farm	Yoncalla	68	FIC 68
Portland Group	Portland	68	FIC 68
Rainbow Family of Living Light	Sunny Valley	68	<i>Life</i> , 7/18/69
Crow Research (CRO)	Veneta	68-	<i>Communes, USA</i>
Vonu Life	Cave Junction	68	FIC 68
Living Springs		68	<i>Getting Back Together</i>
Family of the Mystic Arts	Sunny Valley	68	<i>Getting Back Together</i>
Crook's Creek		69-	<i>Children of Prosperity</i>
Yellow Submarine-->Rivendell.	Eugene	68-	<i>Communal Utopias</i>
Talsalsan Farm	Takilmah	70	<i>Children of Prosperity</i>
Mountain Grove	Glendale	70	FIC 93
Lichen	Wolf Creek	71	FIC 93
Hog Farm	Marcola	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Christian Farm	Brownsville	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Church of the Creative	Creswell	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Lynx Hollow Farm	Cottage Grove	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> ,
8/29/71			
Footbridge	Swishhome	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Indian Creek	Swishhome	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Hungry Hill Farm	Eugene	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Live Wood Farm	Eugene	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Organic Mud Farm	Eugene	71	<i>Register-Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Rainbow Family	Dunes City->Eugene.	71-75	<i>Register Guard</i> , 8/29/71
Cerro Gordo Community.	Cottage Grove	71-97	FIC 93
Alpha Farm	Deadwood	72-97	see bibliography
Main Street Gathering	Portland	74	FIC 74

Pahana Town	Lake Dorena	74	FIC 74
WomanShare	Grants Pass	74	FIC 93
Appletree Co-op	Cottage Grove	74-93	FIC 93
Earth's Rising Co-op Farm	Monroe	70s	FIC 93
Rootworks	Wolf Creek	70s	FIC 93
Rajneeshpuram	Antelope	70s	
RFD	Wolf Creek	76	FIC 74
Owl Farm	Days Creek	76	FIC 93
Still Meadow	Clackamas	76	FIC 93
Brietenbush Hot Springs	Detroit	77-97	FIC 93
Older Women's Network	Wolf Creek	78	FIC 78
End of the Road House	Cottage Grove	81	FIC 93
Cornucopia		83	FIC 83
Crabapple		83	FIC 83
Crack of Dawn		83	FIC 83
Folly Farm		83	FIC 83
Seven Springs Community		83	FIC 83
Wolf Creek Sanctuary		85	FIC 93
Lost Valley Center	Dexter	89	FIC 93
Seven C's	Medford	89	FIC 93
Galilee		90	FIC 93
EarthSky			WWW Communities
page.			
Bag Ladies of the World	Eugene	92	Community's
pamphlet.			
East Blair Co-housing	Eugene	90s	Community's
pamphlet.			

Notes about the Inventory:

This list of communities is by nature somewhat inaccurate and definitely incomplete. The communities' lifespans in particular are particularly subjective measures, as different communities judge their starting date differently. Some fixed their starting date at the time when the community's land was purchased, others when all the members had moved into the site. As was noted in this paper, communities more often decline than end abruptly, so some of the ending dates listed above may be inexact also. More than a few communities have changed locations and names.

Please remember that this list is far from complete. Especially during the communal heyday of the late 1960s and early 70s, bands of communards coalesced and dissolved all in several months' time, before

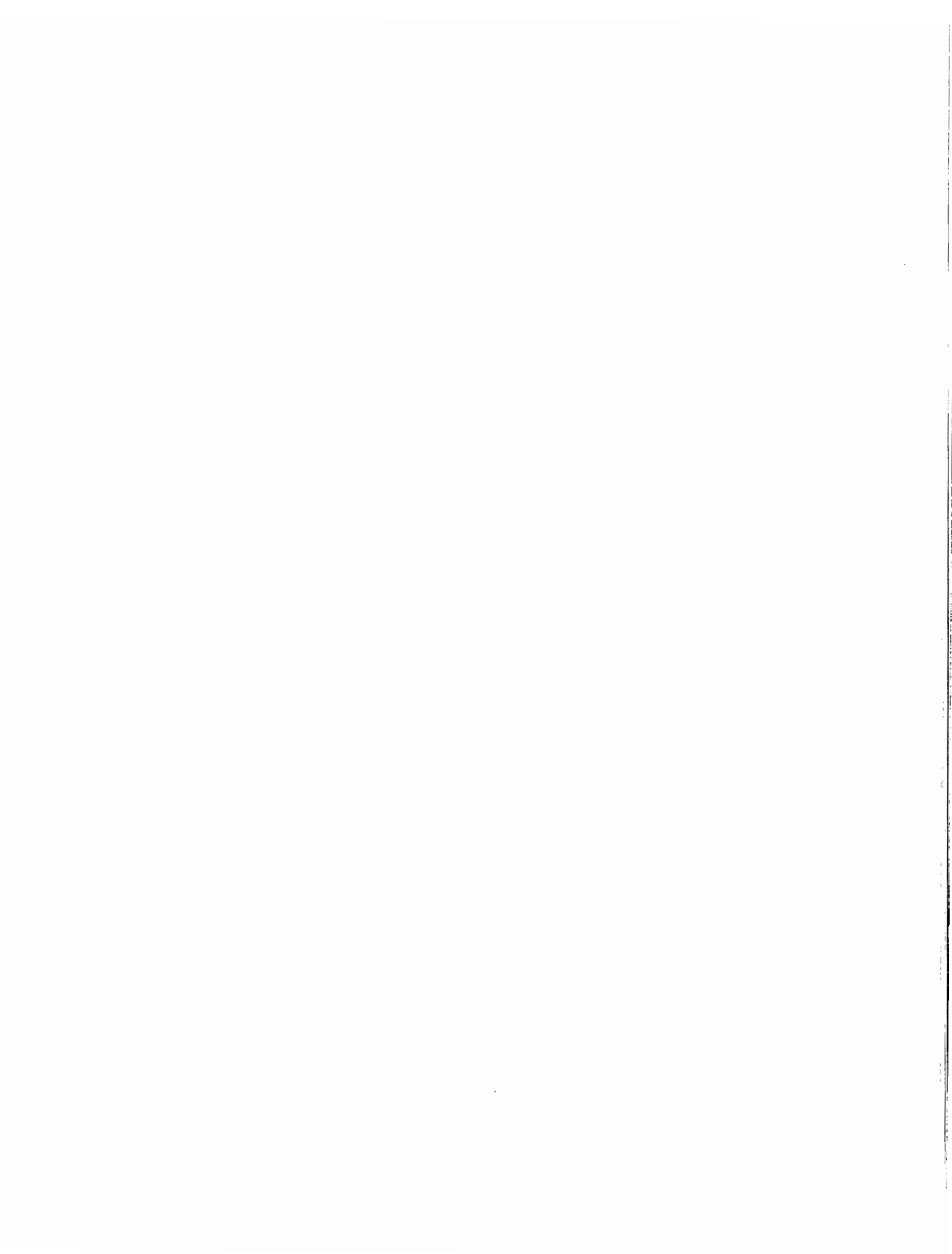
they could announce their presence or even be noticed by others interested in the movement. Even the Federation of Intentional Communities, in whose lists many of these groups were found, acknowledges that there are many communities out there still unknown to them.

Although most of the communities listed were rural, their locations have been listed by town and city. However, most groups actually lived several miles from the listed towns, not in them.

Years followed by a dash (71-) indicate founding date. Years listed alone (73) indicate that the founding date is unknown, but that the community was first referred to in the listed year.

"FIC" is used as an abbreviation for the Fellowship for Intentional Community. The Fellowship publishes *Communities Directory: A Guide to Cooperative Living*, a compilation which grew out of *Communities* magazine's yearly national guide to intentional communities. Hence these publications share the "FIC" notation accompanied by the year the Fellowship listed the community.

Communal Utopias refers to the University of Oregon Thesis, "Communal Utopias of the Pacific Northwest", by Kay Teeters.



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