

FREEDOM AND TOTAL LOSS:  
TENSIONS, IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE BACK-TO-THE-LAND  
MOVEMENT IN 1970s VERMONT.

By

Tucker J. Foltz.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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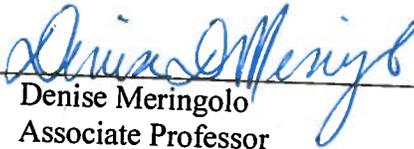


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## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: *FREEDOM AND TOTAL LOSS: TENSIONS,  
IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE BACK-TO-  
THE-LAND MOVEMENT IN 1970s VERMONT.*

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This thesis examines a period of interaction between natives and newcomers during Vermont's "hippie influx." Specifically, it considers the adjacent towns of Brattleboro, Putney and Guilford between 1968 and 1975. These towns saw the state's earliest hippie communes and counterculture institutions. Simultaneously, there was a rise in student populations at local colleges and anti-war demonstrations. Many locals were ambivalent towards the newcomers and at times, reacted violently. This thesis argues against a history of smooth transitions between the 'old Vermont' of conservative farmers and the 'new Vermont' of middle-to-upper class progressives. Although centered in the 1970s, this thesis provides historical context to better understand modern right-wing resurgences in the state, such as the "Take Back Vermont" movement, and the state's current, sharp socio-economic divide. Finally, it explains how state identity was formed and altered over the twentieth century, and to what extent the hippies had an impact on this.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the current-day Vermont of Ben & Jerry's, Bernie Sanders and ultra-progressive Burlington, "America's First All-Renewable-Energy City," it can be hard to remember a time before the hippies.<sup>1</sup> The Vermont Historical Society recently curated an impressive physical and online exhibit, *Freaks, Radicals & Hippies: Counterculture in 1970s Vermont*. They received a two-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the project. They conducted fifty oral histories. The exhibit mostly detailed the many communes that dotted the state in the 1970s. A staff member shared with me that it was the most popular exhibit she could remember. Now-older hippies and their children were making the pilgrimage from all reaches of the state to see the exhibit, and celebrate the roots of their culture (I too came with my mother, as she pointed to things and exclaimed, "I remember this! I remember that!") I saw the solidification of Vermont's hippie legacy on the walls: women's rights, gay rights, alternative energy, local foods, land preservation, health and welfare, etc. Honestly, it was a legacy that I was proud to be a part of. Yet, I couldn't help but notice the experience felt exclusive and self-congratulatory. And the colorful walls lacked a panel: the story of native resistance.

The history of counterculture in Vermont has been flattened out. History texts, newspapers and magazine articles have explained how early hippies set up communes, organized political protests and pressed for environmental reform, but

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Woodard, "America's First All-Renewable-Energy City," *Politico Magazine*,

they are largely silent on any tensions or ambivalence that existed between the newcomers and the locals. This study adds complexity and levels to the remembrance of interaction in this period, an era that has been romanticized and pacified over consecutive decades as the state has continued to accumulate progressive residents.

This thesis explores a period of interaction among native Vermonters, college students and three communes in the Brattleboro area, between the years 1968 to 1975. Brattleboro, a town of about 12,000, was the state's fourth largest in 1970.<sup>2</sup> Situated just across the border from Massachusetts, easily accessible from the highways extending south to the East Coast's largest urban centers, Brattleboro saw the state's earliest and largest concentration of communal experiments.<sup>3</sup> By 1972, there were with approximately sixteen loosely connected communes and many more quasi-communal groups in the area, living in group houses and participating in counterculture activities with the communards.<sup>4</sup>

The Brattleboro area was also host to a high concentration of small, progressive learning institutions, including Goddard College and the Putney School, both dating to the 1930s, and three colleges founded in the mid-twentieth century by experimental educator and Robert Frost mentee, Walter Hendricks: Marlboro College, Windham College and Mark Hopkins College.<sup>5</sup> Windham College in Putney,

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<sup>2</sup> Census Records, Vermont Historical Society, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://vermonthistory.org/explorer/discover-vermont/facts-figures/census-records>.

<sup>3</sup> Barry Laffan, *Communal Organization and Social Transition: A Case study from the Counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1997), 19-22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas W. Ennis, "Walter Hendricks Is Dead at 87; Teacher Began Marlboro College," *New York Times*, October 3, 1979.; Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Robert Frost were both early trustees of Marlboro, Hendricks' first college: "Marlboro

Vt. played a central role in the local counterculture. Windham had a particularly radical faculty and student body during this time. Some in the Windham community were involved with the local commune, Red Clover Collective. Windham students organized large anti-war demonstrations in Brattleboro. The college and town had a contentious relationship. The most violent confrontation between hippies and locals would happen on Windham College land.

The establishment of a few early communes, and counterculture organizations in Brattleboro, combined with the presence of a number of progressive educational institutions, spawned a rural, counterculture bubble. As news spread in hip circles, the buzz attracted successive herds of hippies, eventually sending them spinning out to all reaches of the state, causing a monumental, statewide socio-cultural shift.<sup>6</sup> In this period, locals, college students and communards clashed over politics, ideology, and differing visions of and for Vermont.

This tension between ‘Old Vermont’ and ‘New Vermont’ still exists today, and mostly falls along political and class lines. This study uncovers the seed of these tensions as they manifested in the cradle of the state’s back-to-the land fever. Hippies who came to the state perpetuated certain state myths, challenged long-held traditions and chartered a new path for Vermont that fit their own needs and interests. My study argues that the hippie back-to-the-land movement was the start of a significant philosophical shift that altered the socio-political balance in Brattleboro, just as it did in of many rural communities.

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Through the Years,” Marlboro College,  
<https://www.marlboro.edu/about/history/timeline>.

<sup>6</sup> This had already begun by the time anthropologist Barry Laffan concluded his study in 1975: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 262, 270.

This thesis is situated at the intersection of several bodies of historical scholarship. First, historians Dona Brown, Harrison Blake, and Joe Sherman, each of whom has explored complexities of twentieth century Vermont, provides a solid foundation for my study.<sup>7</sup> Second, I have adopted the interpretive framework Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash put forward in their 700-page history of the state, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont*, which describes Vermont as a quiet, backwoods state suddenly thrust towards change in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Finally, I rely on recent work by social geographers, landscape historians and sociologists that has revealed the ways in which land use practice and a nature-based tourism economy, guide the formation of state identity and resident experience in Vermont.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> University of Vermont historian Dona Brown explores the New Deal era Back-to-the-Land Movement in Vermont and elsewhere and connects it to the 1970s movement of the same name. Brown argues that the difference between the New Deal and hippie farmers was that rural subsistence farming in the 1930s had come from the complications of poverty. The 1970s farmers came about in an era when food was affordable and instead this group was driven by political motives; a “burdensome guilt” that manifested from the revelations of the 1960’s: Dona Brown, *Back To The Land: The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 208, 226.; Blake Harrison explores twentieth century Vermont identity as it relates to work-leisure relationships, a result of the rise of the state’s tourism economy: Blake Harrison, *The View From Vermont: Tourism and the Making of an American Rural Landscape* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2006).; Joe Sherman explores the state’s post-WWII transformation from farm and industrial ‘old Vermont’ to tourism and hippie mecca ‘new Vermont.’ Written for public consumption, Sherman’s text is challenging for the historian in its lack of citations. Nevertheless, his interviews with residents, and comprehensive, bottom-up, approach to history is valuable: Joe Sherman, *Fast Lane on a Dirt Road: Vermont Transformed 1945-1990* (Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, Inc, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, and P. Jeffrey Potash, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont*, 1st ed. (Barre, Vt: Vermont Historical Society, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> A collection of works edited by Harrison and Judd, provides a breadth of history on agriculture, industry, landscape studies and regional identity: Blake Harrison and Richard W. Judd, ed., *A Landscape History of New England*

This thesis is a regional study that makes new connections between Vermont history and studies of the counterculture. Detailed histories of both the counterculture and the back-to-the land movements can be found elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> There are countless historical works that highlight the counterculture generation.<sup>11</sup> There are a few that focus specifically on the back-to-the-land movement.<sup>12</sup> Most scholars have not made

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(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).; See also: Christopher Klyza and Stephen Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont: a Natural and Cultural History* (Hanover, NH: Middlebury College Press, 1999).; Morse and others' recent article explains Vermonter's views on land, farming and identity: Cheryl E. Morse and others "Performing a New England Landscape: Viewing, Engaging, and Belonging" *Journal of Rural Studies* 36 (October, 2014).; Kaufman and Kaliner trace the contrasting identities, politics, and histories of Vermont and New Hampshire from their once likeness to their modern configuration as polar opposites: Jason Kaufman and Matthew Kaliner, "History Repeats Itself, Until It Doesn't: The 'Re-Accomplishment of Place' in 20th Century Vermont and New Hampshire," Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association, Annual Meeting 2007.

<sup>10</sup> A 2002 Master's thesis by University of Vermont student Reid Frazier explores the same Brattleboro communes as this thesis. I discovered Reid's thesis late in my research. Though there are overlaps in topic, Reid's thesis does the work of placing these communes within the greater back-to-the land national movement and the counterculture, especially using Timothy Miller (see next citation). My paper is hyper-local. It reveals a much more detailed account of native experiences, conflicts, and events, as well as adds the story of Windham College. Additionally, the advantage of time has provided me access to new sources. Among them, the Vermont Historical Society's recently recorded 1970s oral histories, my own interviews, and Windham College's and Red Clover's newspapers, now available at Landmark College in Putney Vt., the result of a recent grant. Thus, Reid's paper and my own provide a dynamic pairing: one a detailed story of place, the other a broad comparison of national to local. Reid's thesis can be requested from the UVM library: Reid R. Frazier, "1960s Communes in Southern Vermont," (MA thesis, University of Vermont, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> University of Kansas historian and professor of Religious Studies, Timothy Miller, has written extensively on the counterculture. Especially useful are his definitions of "hippie ethos," see: Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011).; Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).; Timothy Miller, "The Roots of the 1960's Communal Revival," *American Studies* 33, no. 2 (1992).

<sup>12</sup> In addition to Brown, historian Jeffrey Jacob explores and compares American Back-to-the-Land movements. These include the Jeffersonian gentleman farmers, Transcendentalists, New Deal era back-to-the-landers and hippie back-to-the-landers.

a clear distinction between the Haight-Ashbury/Woodstock flower children of the 1960s and the back-to-the-landers of the 1970s; the latter are most often interpreted as an extension of the former. My work takes as its starting point an important critique Dona Brown has made about this historiography:

It is probably more precise to associate the rebirth of the back-to-the-land movement with the *end* of that era or the beginning of the next: the 1970 massacre at Kent State, the Watergate crisis, the 1973 oil embargo. That minor adjustment to the chronology would prompt a substantially different interpretation, rooting the movement not in a moment of apparent triumph for the counter culture but in political disillusionment and yet another economic crisis.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the communards at the center of my study, fled to Vermont in the midst of this panic and upheaval. Back-to-the-landers, a group of mostly white, educated, young people, became disillusioned with the violence in cities, on campuses and in Vietnam in the late 1960s and in response, sought out lives in rural America where it was perceived there would be greater freedom from danger, an oppressive government, and a conservative society. These disillusioned youth didn't simply scatter – they clumped. As one back-to-the-lander remembered,

From San Francisco they went farther north in California and beyond.... Other San Franciscans moved to rural northern New Mexico or southern Colorado. The Ozark Mountains of Arkansas took their share of Midwestern seekers, and the Green Mountains of Vermont got Bostonians and New Yorkers.<sup>14</sup>

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See: Jeffrey Jacob, *New Pioneers: the Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press), 1997.; See also: Merlin B. Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey C. Jacobs, "Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems, Official Religion, and Quality of Life in an Alternative Lifestyle: A Survey from the Back-to-the-Land Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *Back To The Land*, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Salstrom, "The Neo-Natives: Back-to-the-Land in Appalachia's 1970's," *Appalachian Journal* 30, no. 4 (2003): 311-312.

There have been few detailed studies of the economic and political impact of the back-to-the-land movement. Perhaps this is because it is an elusive creature.<sup>15</sup> Historian Jeffrey Jacob argues against even calling it a “movement.”<sup>16</sup> Movements usually include high levels of institutional organization and political lobbyists. Back-to-the-landers enacted their beliefs in a comparably disorganized fashion with no national cohesive entity to speak of. Their ‘practice what you preach’ approach was open to individual interpretation and thus the “movement” evolved unevenly and without clear leadership.

This thesis attempts to track the political impact of the back-to-the-land movement on rural politics in Vermont. This is no easy task. Before the hippies came, politics in Vermont had already shown signs of change. Voters elected the Democrat Philip Hoff as Governor in 1963, disrupting over one hundred years of unchallenged Republican rule.<sup>17</sup> But the counterculture had an undeniable influence on Vermont. For example, in 2000, Vermont became the first state to pass civil union law which gave same-sex couples equal rights in marriage, and in the 2016 presidential primary, Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders won over 80% of the Democratic vote in every county of the state.<sup>18</sup> While this thesis does not study voting patterns, the contrast of

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<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Back To The Land*, 206.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob, *New Pioneers*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Micah Cohen, “‘New’ Vermont Is Liberal, but ‘Old’ Vermont Is Still There,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2012, [https://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/01/new-vermont-is-liberal-but-old-vermont-is-still-there/?\\_r=0](https://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/01/new-vermont-is-liberal-but-old-vermont-is-still-there/?_r=0).

<sup>18</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 582-584; “Vermont Presidential Primary Results”, *Politico Magazine*, December 13, 2016, accessed June 1, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/2016-election/primary/results/map/president/vermont/>.

progressive politics in pre-and-post back-to-the land Vermont reveals a degree of their impact.

My research traces the experience of native Vermonters during the “hippie influx,” so named by Governor Deane Davis, who held office from 1969 to 1973.<sup>19</sup> This was challenging. The historical record is uneven. The most educated and elite members of the back-to-the-land movement produced memoirs, preserved commune records, and even engaged in formal studies of their experiments in communal living. For example, Barry Laffan’s *Communal Organization and Social Transition* provided an insider perspective on commune living that was crucial for my study. Laffan, a doctoral anthropology student from Columbia University spent two years living at Johnson’s Pasture commune conducting participant observation for his dissertation, which was later turned into the book. In contrast, the predominantly rural, poor, and less educated Vermonters did not leave behind the same kind of records from this period. Laffan’s “thick description” analysis however did include a number of disturbing and tense episodes between communards and native Vermonters.

By following the clues Laffan provided, I found evidence that local people reacted to the “hippie influx” in a variety of different ways. At times, they interacted

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<sup>19</sup> Governor Deane Davis received so many letters of complaint from concerned residents he issued a press release in 1971 attempting to quell the public concern. Essentially, he said the hippies had a right to be there, “although their habits and appearance may not be to our taste,” and the state public health authorities would be vigilant to check any festival-sized gatherings. Vermont State Archives have the complaint letters sent to Davis, see: “Influx of Young People (Hippies),” *Governor Deane Davis’s Records*, A181-00027, Vermont State Archives (Montpelier, Vermont).; Amanda Gustin and Jackie Calder, “1970s VT: Fears of a hippie invasion,” *Burlington Free Press*, April 3, 2015, accessed December 28, 2016, <http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/local/2015/04/03/vt-fears-hippie-invasion/70846514/>.

peacefully with commune members and some benefitted economically from the rise in population. However, moments of conflict seem most significant for gauging change. Local people used formal and informal processes to limit the hippies' influence. They created new town ordinances that targeted communal dwellings. They physically assaulted commune members and hippie students. And they were often quite vocal in their disapproval of the hippie lifestyle, publishing letters to the editor condemning a variety of behaviors. Each of these forms of resistance speaks to group preferences, values, and ideologies. Further, stories about conflict run counter to the many nostalgic accounts of the commune era that have been preserved as oral histories and recounted in recent newspaper articles.

I followed Laffan's accounts to the newspapers: the *Brattleboro Reformer*, Windham College's *Lion's Roar* and *Windham Free Press* and Red Clover's underground newspaper of multiple titles. In them I found record of almost every conflict he described. Doing so was challenging because Laffan gave pseudonyms to all persons and place names, adhering to the ethics of anthropology. What the sources revealed was that while there may have been innocent curiosity and tolerance of the communes, there was also significant resistance, especially to the commune members' odd lifestyles choices, hygiene, public political actions, and attempts to radicalize the locals.

By rediscovering and analyzing a history of conflict, my thesis paints a more complex portrait of interactions between local people and the members of the back-to-the-land movement. Chapter two provides historical context to explain how state identity myths about simplicity, purity, and nostalgia were formed, and in turn,

shaped hippie perceptions about citizens and state. Chapter three focuses on the history of Windham College and shows how school growth, anti-war demonstration, college-commune overlaps, and an exceptionally radical college community, led to tense town-gown tensions that fanned the flames of instability in the area. Chapter four explores the histories of three communes: Packer Corners Farm, Johnson's Pasture and Red Clover Collective. I argue that each received varying local receptions; depending to what degree they challenged authorities and adhered to the 'Vermont way.' My work challenges a narrative of smooth transitions, and what has become a romantic portrait of hippie influence on Vermont's politics and economy.

## Chapter 2: Newcomers and Identity

Hatred breeds well as religion—the deep, instriking hate between neighbors, that is born of a hundred little things added up, brooded over time, and hatched by the stove when two or three talk together in the long evenings.

-Rudyard Kipling<sup>20</sup>

Rudyard Kipling was in Marlboro, a small town outside Brattleboro when he wrote these words about the harsh temperament of Vermonters in the early 1890s. He lived there for four years and he wrote *The Jungle Book* during his stay.<sup>21</sup> Kipling thought Vermonters were hardened by the isolation and long winters. He also said they were mad, likely to “hear strange voices” and murder each other.<sup>22</sup>

Outsiders have written extensively about the innate character of Vermont and its residents. Kipling’s century-old portrayal may seem strange to modern readers, considering the state’s current wholesome reputation. “People think of Vermont as a clean state, an honest state, a state with a certain amount of integrity,” said Marsha Phillips, president of the Vermont Specialty Foods Association in the early 2000s.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Letters of Travel, 1892-1913* (Garden City, N.Y.: Double Day, Page & Co., 1920), 108-122, quoted in T.D. Seymour Bassett, ed., *Outsiders inside Vermont: three centuries of visitor’s viewpoints on the Green Mountain State* (Canaan, N.H.: Phoenix Publishing, 1967), 103.

<sup>21</sup> Fox Butterfield, “Marlboro Journal; 1892 Bank Box Opens a Lid on Kipling’s Past,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/19/us/marlboro-journal-1892-bank-box-opens-a-lid-on-kipling-s-past.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Bassett, ed., *Outsiders inside Vermont*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Greenberg, “The Brand Called Vermont: How the Green Mountain State cornered the market on purity,” *Boston Globe*, October 12, 2003,

She was referring to the high market value of “made in Vermont” food products but she might as well have been describing 2016 U.S. presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. Sanders is beloved by his supporters for exhibiting trustworthiness and independence, these traits are archetypes of the Vermont identity. Vermont’s well-branded “authenticity” was in part drawn from images of old-fashioned American traditions and values, as well as unspoiled nature; the sort captured in the paintings of Norman Rockwell and the poetry of Robert Frost.<sup>24</sup> But this is not a “natural” identity. The intertwined characteristics of tradition, nature and purity were qualities first identified and negotiated by the State Tourism Board in the 1890s, then added to and tweaked by two groups of affluent outsiders during the twentieth century. The first were a small group of early twentieth century bohemians that purchased vacation-homes. The second were commune founders at the end of the 1960s, followed by large waves of hippies.

The first English settlers in America landed in Virginia in 1607 and another well-known group arrived in Massachusetts in 1630. Yet, as historian Dona Brown has pointed out by the early decades of the twentieth century, “New England’s imaginative center had been migrating farther and farther north, away from the industrial cities of southern New England with their enormous factories and foreign-

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[http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2003/10/12/the\\_brand\\_called\\_vermont/](http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2003/10/12/the_brand_called_vermont/).

<sup>24</sup> Deborah Soloman, “Norman Rockwell’s New England,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/travel/norman-rockwells-new-england.html>.

born workers.”<sup>25</sup> The idyllic image of the puritan past landed in Vermont. The natural, historic view of clean white steeples against rolling green pastures, residents in small, organized communities, attending town meetings; it better fit the honored memory of New England’s Yankee ancestors.

Throughout the century, capitalist entrepreneurs shaped Vermont’s imagined identity into marketable materials.<sup>26</sup> First it was old-fashioned items like woolen blankets, artisan cheese and handmade furniture. These items could leave the green mountains with their inherent “Vermont-ness” intact, their facets of quality and traditionalism understood on regional and national levels as a kind of reflection of the state itself. Later, Vermont’s special brand of hippie capitalism added on to these understandings with a modern approach: Ben and Jerry’s “capitalism with a conscience” ice cream, hi-tech Burton snowboards, hundreds of small-batch, artisan food and beverage companies.<sup>27</sup> These exports were reflections of the state’s post WWII population. In fact, Harvard sociologists Kaufman and Kaliner found that today, being state-born has nothing to do with “being a quintessentially a ‘Vermont’ type of person” because most of Vermont’s representative’s of culture (Phish, Ben and Jerry’s, Bernie Sanders, Howard Dean, etc.) were not born or raised there.<sup>28</sup> Vermont’s special brand, especially the materialistic side of it, is of course an ironic outcome of the commune hippie trailblazers who envisioned a future for the state untethered from capitalism.

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, *Back To The Land*, 179.; Joseph A. Conforti, “Regional Identity and New England Landscapes,” in Blake Harrison and Richard W. Judd, ed., *A Landscape History of New England* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 31.

<sup>26</sup> Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 35.

<sup>27</sup> For Ben and Jerry’s see: Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 560-561.

<sup>28</sup> Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 16.

### Early Vacationers, Early Back-to-the-Landers

The imaginative, romantic role that Vermont has played in American consciousness, even for the hippies, is directly linked to remembrances of a white, elite, past. “Vermont has been imagined as one of the last remaining spaces of authentic Yankee whiteness,” one historian put poignantly.<sup>29</sup> Notions about cleanliness, safety and tradition, contrast racial and class mixing in cities, and fears about urban crime. They also tie into historic perceptions about who Vermont is and isn’t for. The drive behind baby boomer migration to the state came from within the counterculture. However, earlier in the century, state officials had been working to attract only new residents of a certain type. The lasting impacts of their work influenced hippies’ perceptions about the state.

In the 1890s, Vermont became the first state to form a tourism board.<sup>30</sup> The Vermont Publicity Bureau produced pamphlets advertising homes and land for sale. In them, they refashioned abandoned farmhouses as alluring country vacation homes and touted the natural, pastoral landscape the antithesis of overcrowded, industrial urban centers.<sup>31</sup> However, state tourism and development commissioners weren’t looking to attract just anyone as new residents. They were concerned about a eugenics report out of the University of Vermont that said the state was losing its “good

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<sup>29</sup> Robert M. R Vanderbeck, “Vermont and the Imaginative Geographies of American Whiteness,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 3 (2006): 641.

<sup>30</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 522.

<sup>31</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 522.; Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 39.

Yankee stock” and only the poor whites were breeding.<sup>32</sup> The commissioners wanted to curb what they termed a “backwards movement” by attracting well-bred families.

White-collar urbanites began to purchase vacation homes in the early part of the twentieth century, responding to the desirable, natural aesthetic the state commissioners had promoted.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, many of the second homebuyers were either leftist intellectuals who advocated for the decentralization of government authority, or urban creative-types that produced work portraying Vermont a land of authentic integrity and traditionalism. College professors, doctors, lawyers and radical thinkers as well as writers, artists and musicians bought summer cottages in the Vermont countryside, and produced art and literature that idealized the place and attracted others with similar values to purchase second-homes there too; the type whose “business permit long vacations,” as one famous writer put it.<sup>34</sup> For some, it was a “political statement”.<sup>35</sup> As Brown has pointed out, the decentralist magazine *Free America*, “cherished” Vermont and its governor, George D. Aiken, who valued the “security and self-reliance of the diversified farm.”<sup>36</sup> Many of the journalists for *Free America*, like powerhouse couple Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis, bought summer homes in Vermont.<sup>37</sup> They saw the independence of Vermont farmers in direct opposition to the “centralized government... urban industrial conglomerates... [and] consumer culture” that had caused such catastrophic

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<sup>32</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 40.; Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard DeVoto, “How to live among Vermonters,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 73 (August, 1936) quoted in Bassett, ed., *Outsiders inside Vermont*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *Back to the Land*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

economic collapse in the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> “Even the landscape was an outward expression of the inner grace of self-sufficiency,” Brown explained.<sup>39</sup>

Most new homebuyers, though they admired the local farmer’s self-sustaining independence, did so from afar. They drew clear class distinctions between themselves and the locals. In 1932, author and educational reformer Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote *Vermont Summer Homes*, a book that was published by the Vermont Bureau of Publicity and meant to draw more summer-home buyers. She explained,

Vermont esteems highly certain human qualities even though they do not conduce the making of large incomes... Any of you cultivated families settling in Vermont for a summer home, may thus be sure that the respected and influential Vermonters of your community will value your trained, well informed minds, respect what your educational advantages have done for you, and be glad they and their children are to be in contact with you.”<sup>40</sup>

Canfield meant that Vermonters were exceptional country folk: summer residents need not fear any backwoods bumpkins. Vermonters would follow the example of the town elite, and pay summer folk the class respect that they and their intellect deserved.

She also said that the summer residents had much to learn from their neighbors who lacked an education but were rich in real-world skills because they had “been forced to built up a scheme of life in which cash is not so important as it is for the majority of modern Americans.”<sup>41</sup> A few years later, author and historian Bernard DeVoto echoed Canfield’s sentiment in his column in *Harper’s Magazine*:

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<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Back to the Land*, 178, 188.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Canfield, *Vermont Summer Homes* (Montpelier, VT: Vermont Bureau of Publicity, 1932) quoted in Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

“Vermont has specialized as the summer home of professional people, members of the middle bourgeoisie” he said.<sup>42</sup> Their tax payments were “vital” to the “economic life of Vermont” but that was second to the valuable lessons that the summer folk could learn from locals “in order to recover an American way of life so nearly vanished in other sections that the effort to return to it must be almost archeological.” While conditions of the Great Depression ravaged the American populace, bohemian intellectuals like Canfield, DeVoto, Thompson and Lewis spent their summers gazing in awe at old-fashioned Vermonters, whose traditional farming methods and folkways were a surviving example of the alternative to American consumer culture.<sup>43</sup>

In the same era, a few members of this peer group did abandoned city life altogether in order to live off the land in Vermont. They were part of a smaller, earlier, back-to-the-land movement in the state. One couple, Helen and Scott Nearing bought a farm in Windham County where they became maple syrup farmers, built their own house from stone, grew their own food, and equalized costs and profits on their farm, a political act of anti-capitalism.<sup>44</sup> The Nearings were socialists with a strict “Victorian mind-set.”<sup>45</sup> Scott had been a professor but was dismissed from

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<sup>42</sup> Bernard DeVoto, “How to live among Vermonters,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 73 (August, 1936) quoted in Bassett, ed., *Outsiders inside Vermont*, 112-113.

<sup>43</sup> Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 24.; Brown, *Back To The Land*, 196.

<sup>44</sup> Erik Gray, “Radical Teachings: Scott and Helen Nearing’s Impact on Maine’s Natural Food Revival,” *Maine History*, 48, no. 2 (2014): 278.; Dona Brown said the Nearings exaggerated, they had more income than they mentioned in their books and that they didn’t “subsist entirely on the products of their farm”: Brown, *Back To The Land*, 222.; The Nearings were part of Pikes Falls, a small communal group in Jamaica, VT that spanned the 1940s-1950s, see: Greg Joly, *Almost Utopia: The Residents and Radicals of Pikes Falls, Vermont, 1950* (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Back To The Land*, 218, 221.

multiple universities because of outspoken political views.<sup>46</sup> The Nearings wrote *Living the Good Life* two decades after their experiment in Vermont. It was a politically and philosophically driven “how-to” book for other back-to-the-landers. First released in 1952, it hardly sold any copies. However, upon its re-release in 1970, it became wildly popular with hippie back-to-the-landers. The Nearings themselves became living legends, and the book helped christen Vermont an ideal back-to-the-land location.

In their books, the Nearings described Vermonters in a less idyllic tone than the summer vacationers had. The Nearings identified themselves with an earlier form of Yankee, a breed that was all but extinct in Vermont. Vermonters weren’t like that anymore, they were “messy, haphazard, and self-indulgent,” while the Nearings themselves were hard working, prudent, “plain living and high thinking.”<sup>47</sup> How the Nearings framed themselves, the true bearers of the historic, Yankee character, is important, because their book was so influential with the 1970s back-to-the-landers. Brown said the hippies idealized the Nearings but ignored most other back-to-the-land texts from the period.<sup>48</sup> That’s not surprising. The hippies saw themselves as unique to history and were cynical of anything produced from “straight society.” This would include most writing from their grandparent’s generation. As counterculture historian Timothy Miller explained, “The hippies saw themselves as people of zero, the vanguard who would build a new society on the ruins of the old, corrupt one.”<sup>49</sup> As a result, they were a “do-it-yourself-obsessed generation” creating endless “how-to”

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<sup>46</sup> After this he wrote and lectured: Brown, *Back To The Land*, 197.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 200-201.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *The Hippies*, xi.

texts and entirely new consumer markets.<sup>50</sup> Brown says what was attractive to the hippies about the Nearings was their “moral absolutism.” They admired the Nearing’s strict dedication to their vision, which was all or nothing. When 1970s communards and back-to-the landers came to the Vermont en masse, they exhibited this characteristic. They professed to know the correct way to live in the world and were stubborn to change their views. The political-types spread their message loud and clear across the countryside with alternative newspapers, alternative businesses, and political performance.

### *Tourism and the Bucolic View*

In the 1940s, the state began to publish its own tourism magazine, *Vermont Life*, printing articles about state history, and promoting Vermont with glossy color photographs of landscapes and state traditions. The magazine, which had more subscribers from out-of-state than in-state, touted Vermont as a “a rural, unspoiled paradise” and helped establish its iconic imagery.<sup>51</sup> One mid-century nostalgia pusher, Vrest Orton, capitalized and perpetuated the Vermont image with his wildly successful mail-order catalog and retail shop in Weston, both named the “Vermont County Store.” Vrest was also an editor for *Vermont Life*.<sup>52</sup> He seemed to have had a distinct talent for tapping a longing that city-folk had for their real or imagined Yankee, agrarian roots. Hitting the nail on the head he wrote in a 1953 *Vermont*

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew G. Kirk, *Counter Culture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 5.; For a history of hippie consumerism see also: Thomas Jundt, *Greening the Red, White and Blue: The Bomb, Big Business and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 522.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 522.

*Country Store* column, “When you hear about Vermont you get homesick.”<sup>53</sup> It was probably magazines like *Vermont Life*, and *Vermont Country Store* sitting on the coffee table of their parents suburban home, where children of the baby boomer generation first encountered the state, portrayed as a place unspoiled by modernity, organically closer to a more traditional time and place. It’s no wonder they flocked to a place so pure and sure when things turned sour elsewhere.

Tourism increased gradually over the first part of the twentieth century, then rapidly after WWII. By the 1960s it was the state’s second largest industry.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the state’s agricultural industry had waned. Family farmers, unable to afford the initial costs of new industrial equipment, lagged behind emerging national food corporations elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the state’s textile industry failed to survive the post-WWII dip in production. Many Vermonters looked to the growing tourist trade for jobs. This meant turning the farm into a bed and breakfast and transforming the river-facing factory to a road-facing shopping mall for artisan goods. In the middle-part of the century, many Vermonters experienced a “crossover from the ‘can do’ attitude of the farm to the ‘what can I do for you?’ attitude of the service provider” as their lives became increasingly tied to out-of-state dollars.<sup>56</sup>

Vermont changed drastically in the second part of the twentieth century. From 1860 to 1960, state population had remained amazingly static, increasing from

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<sup>53</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 549.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 523.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 515-519.

<sup>56</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 39.

315,098 to only 389,881.<sup>57</sup> In the 1910s and 1930s Vermont actually experienced loss of population. Then, between 1960 and 1990, the state underwent the largest population influx in its history, an almost fifty percent increase.<sup>58</sup> This increase has been credited to the building of the interstate highways, the success of tourism increasing state exposure, a growing fear of cities, a new enthusiasm about the outdoors encouraged by the environmental movement, and a decrease in Vermont real estate values in the first half of the century.<sup>59</sup> There was another thing: the romanticizing of place, where “certain types of people started moving to Vermont because of certain myths they believed [in].”<sup>60</sup>

Historians maintain it is the land itself that ties all aspects of Vermont identity together. It is the one thing old and new residents care most about.<sup>61</sup> It is also what they argue most about.<sup>62</sup> Concepts about the land and the past in Vermont are completely intertwined. Over much of the twentieth century, there was a belief that Vermont and Vermonters “had somehow escaped the worst aspects of modern civilization” because of the state’s pre-industrial look and strong tradition of small family farming.<sup>63</sup> Though the number of farms decreased dramatically after WWII,

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<sup>57</sup> Vermont Historical Society, "Census by Towns," Vermont History Explorer, <https://vermonthistory.org/explorer/discover-vermont/facts-figures/census-records/census-by-towns> (accessed March 5, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 115.

<sup>59</sup> Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 115.; Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 17.; Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 225.

<sup>60</sup> Kaufman and Kaliner, “History Repeats Itself,” 17

<sup>61</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 621.; A recent study found that residents ranked their attachment to the greater Vermont landscape higher than their attachment to their own property: Morse and others, “Performing a New England Landscape,” 232.

<sup>62</sup> Blake Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 224-225.

<sup>63</sup> Dona Brown, *Back To The Land*, 190.

the landscape retained its homogenous, bucolic look. Viewsheds in the state look remarkably like they did in the 1890s, at the peak of state farming.<sup>64</sup> A fascinating cross-discipline study out of University of Vermont found that private landowners work their property, often at high personal cost, to maintain certain historic aesthetics (such as clearing brush, suppressing forest encroachment, and maintaining barns and stone walls) on land that is not even used for farming.<sup>65</sup> In part, the modern landscape is also due to state law. In 1970, the state passed Act 250, to regulate land use and development.<sup>66</sup> Already the state had put a ban on roadside billboards.<sup>67</sup> Act 250 was praised by environmentalists and condemned by others as a threat to the growth of business and private property rights.<sup>68</sup> The legal solution sought to strike a balance between maintaining the beautiful countryside for residents and visitors, and mediating tourist traffic and development. Overall, private land practice has had more impact on the modern look of the state, but Act 250 has been an effective check and balance system for "opportunistic and ill-considered development plans."<sup>69</sup> More importantly, many environmental enthusiasts were attracted to the state as they interpreted the law a sign of early environmental stewardship.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 564.

<sup>65</sup> Morse and others, "Performing a New England Landscape," 227.

<sup>66</sup> For the details on the application of Act 250 see: Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 115-124.

<sup>67</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 514.

<sup>68</sup> Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 228.

<sup>69</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 615.

<sup>70</sup> Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 225.

### 1960s/1970s Back-to-the-Land Movement

A common affection for the rural landscape was part of what touched off the back-to-the-land movement at the end of the 1960s, but circumstances were more complex. Many young, white, college-educated activists began to believe that mainstream institutions were failing to meet their needs. Confronted by poverty and crime in cities, they left their previous stage of activism and retreated to rural America. Many wanted to re-set and re-assess, exhausted after years of anti-war and other protest. America was reeling at the end of 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of social and political leaders Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert and John F. Kennedy, the Vietnam War, student unrest and new understandings about the degradation of the environment, created an apocalyptic, disorderly climate. Young, white, mobile, urban and suburbanites began to consider independence from the toxicity of “straight society.” This meant seeking literal space from urban centers and drastically restructuring the business-normative trajectory of their lives to pursue subsistence-based, agrarian lifestyles, usually with no pre-existing skills.

One historian estimated that by the end of the 1970s one million people had gone back-to-the-land in North America.<sup>71</sup> Blake Harrison figured, “100,000 hippies and back-to-the land enthusiasts... moved to [Vermont] between 1967 and 1973.”<sup>72</sup> Combining these rough figures it can be supposed that one-tenth of post WWII back-to-the-landers came to settle in the tiny New England state. Back-to-the-landers were part of a greater rural shift. In 1970, for the first time in United States census history,

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<sup>71</sup> Jacob, *New Pioneers*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 225.

non-metropolitan growth surpassed metropolitan growth.<sup>73</sup> Sociologists have found back-to-the-landers to be a strikingly homogenous group: Baby Boomers, middle-to-upper class, largely white and with 4.5 years of higher education on average.<sup>74</sup>

### *Hippies and Vermont*

Perhaps because the 1970s back-to-the-land movement fits neatly into the way the state's identity evolved over the course of the twentieth century there is a misleading nostalgia in popular memory of the "hippie influx." It contains several consistent themes. First, many former hippies argue that newcomers were indebted to their old farming neighbors for having taught them invaluable agricultural and survival skills for subsistence-based rural living.<sup>75</sup> In this narrative, that relationship – one mentor, one apprentice – was an important step in bridging the gap between new and old populations in the state. Back-to-the-land author Tim Matson echoed this sentiment, "I think it's almost a cliché by now about the seventies but seventies people are always very generous in their comments about how much help they got from the natives, and it was true."<sup>76</sup> According to Matson and others, then, the genuine interests that hippies took, warmed the hearts of their aging neighbors, who were lonely after their children had left. "For some reason they were pretty open to us," Matson continued, "I'm not quite sure why, but they were. Maybe because we were interested in hearing their stories. Like Martha once said, 'I love farmers.' We

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<sup>73</sup> Brinkerhoff and Jacobs, "Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems," 64.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Salstrom, "The Neo-Natives," 314.

<sup>76</sup> Tim Matson, Interview with Tucker Foltz, March 13, 2016, 131:40:00 – 1:45:00.

liked their lifestyle, we were very respectful of them, we were in awe of them, kind of.”

In addition, the popular memory of the “hippie influx” includes insistence that they were welcome by local people. The story is bolstered by the persistent belief that Vermonters are inherently and exceptionally tolerant. Usually people point to Vermont having been the first state constitution to have abolished slavery, also the “fierce loyalty” of Vermonters to Lincoln in the Civil War, and finally the strong tradition of small-town democracy.<sup>77</sup> In more ways than one, this discourse is a self-serving one. In actuality, progressive politics and strong central government are very recent in Vermont. The first elected Democratic Governor, Philip Hoff, not only broke the state’s one party-rule, he broke the longest running one-party streak in United States history.<sup>78</sup> Even in the 1936 presidential election, Vermont and Maine were the only two states in the nation that voted for Alf Landon over the overwhelmingly popular FDR.<sup>79</sup> Many current-day residents project their own Democrat-type social tolerance onto Vermonters in the past. In turn, they muddle Vermont’s current progressive ways with the state’s legacy of citizen independence and distaste for centralized government; an identity now more associated with the state’s Libertarian-loving neighbor, New Hampshire.

At a special 2013 Vermont Historical Society “town hall style” annual meeting, the organization invited leaders from the state’s 1970s commune and co-op

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<sup>77</sup> Vanderbeck, “Vermont and the Imaginative Geographies,” 649.

<sup>78</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 505.; Micah Cohen, “New’ Vermont Is Liberal, but ‘Old’ Vermont Is Still There,” Five Thirty Eight, The New York Times, October 1, 2012, <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/01/new-vermont-is-liberal-but-old-vermont-is-still-there/>.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *Back to the Land*, 179-180.

movements. The now-aging hippies participated in a fascinating debate about why they chose Vermont to settle. One speaker mentioned the sans-slavery constitution and town meetings; “I’m more cynical,” said another, “I think it was sort of a self-generating ethos... They went because somebody else went;” someone else disagreed, “In our experience, there was a significant degree of social tolerance locally that allowed communes and their aftermath to continue and integrate into the society. So there was something there that provided fertile soil.” Amazingly, these residents, who adopted the state as their home, locate Vermont identity (and their own legacy within it) with the state’s eighteenth century Yankee founders, just like the Nearings had. The mystique about Vermont’s “natural tolerance” shrouds whole swaths of history for modern Vermonters, as they grasp for dim, self-aligning slivers from long ago.

It is true that throughout history the ‘live and let live’ philosophy of Vermont attracted a host of reformist thinkers, from John Humphrey Noyes’ who founded the Oneida Community in Putney in the 1840s, to the New Deal homesteaders, decentralists, socialists and communal experimenters of the 1930s. However these radicals always met significant resistance, exactly like the communards would in the 1970s, even in the very same towns. In 1847, angry Putney residents chased the Oneida Community out of town after discovering they were not only “sharing all tangible property” but also practicing “complex marriage,” a custom in which all members were considered married to each other and therefore permitted to sleep with

whomever.<sup>80</sup> Over 100 years later, a new generation of Putney residents violently put an end to the hippie Free Farm, another experiment in radical sharing. In the 1970s, the FBI harassed members of the Red Clover Collective. The Nearings too had been sought out by the FBI decades earlier for their socialist leanings.<sup>81</sup> The 1970s communards, isolated and new to Vermont, were unaware of the extent to which they were participating in a legacy of local dissenter experimentation, of which theirs would be the largest, and resistance to it. Hippie literature only “drew attention to a handful of radical individuals” like the Nearings, and in keeping with their generation-obsessed ideology, they ignored every other source of back-to-the lander literature.<sup>82</sup> Everything they learned, they learned from each other or generous neighbors. Brown pointed out that they had missed the opportunity to learn from that breadth of knowledge for it could have proven a “rich potential both as models and as cautionary tales.”

Back-to-the-landers and communards had diverse experiences with local tolerance because locals reacted in different ways. Some were curious and visited their communes, some enacted a “watchful tolerance,” and some provided them space, a commonsense philosophy born out of years of having to live together small communities.<sup>83</sup> Others couldn’t easily swallow their ideology; they saw the communards as self-righteous, privileged, or a problem and they took action. For all,

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<sup>80</sup> “Sign to commemorate Putney landmark,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 14, 2003, pg 11.

<sup>81</sup> Joly, *Almost Utopia*, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *Back to the Land*, 221-222.

<sup>83</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 522; Kate Daloz, *We Are As Gods: Back to the Land in the 1970s on the Quest for a New America*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 111

it was first shock, than adjustment. The communes were usually quite rural and in the early years, communards especially isolated themselves from locals. Historian Kate Daloz caught the ambiance in her book about the Mullein Hill commune in West Glover:

All summer, rumors had circulated in town about what was going on up on those old potato fields, behind the trees. No one could actually hear or see anything, not even a rising tendril of wood smoke, but long-haired hitchhikers suddenly popped up everywhere; it seemed like you couldn't use the pay phone in front of the diner without having to wait for young girls in dirty skirts to wipe their eyes and hang up.<sup>84</sup>

Hippies' understandings of the state and its residents seemed to be deeply saturated in the same romantic notions of purity, simplicity and historic beauty promoted by the State Tourism Board in the 1890s, then strengthened and decorated with notions of safety, self-reliance and Yankee tradition by early twentieth century writers, artists and entrepreneurs. Back-to-the-landers liked Vermonters' lives because they looked simple. They admired the straightforwardness of people providing everything for their families. One back-to-the-lander liked Vermont because it reminded her of a rural goat farming community she had seen on a college trip in Spain. When she arrived in Vermont she bought the first farmhouse she saw with a trust fund.<sup>85</sup> For others, moving to Vermont had a theatrical playfulness to it, like they were going back in time. Packer Corners commune member Richard Wizansky remembered hitchhiking to Vermont to buy their farm: "My friend

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<sup>84</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 72.

<sup>85</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 30-32.

Verandah had a cape on...I had a dungaree jacket on, and a felt hat, and a cane. And I think I was carrying a lantern, as a matter of fact.”<sup>86</sup>

Most everyone was looking to escape in some way. Some quite literally: Vermont communes hid draft evaders and members of the Weather Underground under false names<sup>87</sup> Two of the hiding Weathermen were found and arrested on separate occasions in Brattleboro.<sup>88</sup> Mount Philo commune members in Northern Vermont were part of a network that snuck draft evaders across the border to Canada.<sup>89</sup> Gay and lesbians saw the backwoods as a place to be themselves, aided by the ‘live and let live’ philosophy of privacy.<sup>90</sup> For most, Vermont represented the opposite of the consumer-driven 1950s suburbs in which they had been raised and the dangerous, polluted 1960s cities in which they had attended college or gotten their first job. Tim Matson remembered:

I think one of the reasons I moved here was because you can *drive*. And nobody’s behind you, at night, you know?.... on the back roads.... It was all about freedom, for me. It was getting out of that boarding school, it was getting out of that army, it was getting away from New York.... Get out, and be free, get freedom. Freedom. You know that was what the sixties was all about, wasn’t it? I think it was.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 87.

<sup>87</sup> Susan Green, “Hippie Havens,” *Seven Days*, August 20, 2008, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/hippie-havens/Content?oid=2134607>.; Bridget Downey-Meyer, interview with Jackie Calder, *Digital Vermont: A Project of the Vermont Historical Society*, 00:55:00, <http://www.digitalvermont.org/vt70s/AudioFile1970s-59>.; John Douglas, interview with Jackie Calder and Amanda Gustin, *Digital Vermont: A Project of the Vermont Historical Society*, 00:43:50, <http://www.digitalvermont.org/vt70s/AudioFile1970s-60>.

<sup>88</sup> Virginia Page, “FBI Nabs Fugitive Here,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 13, 1975, pg 1.; Virginia Page, “A ‘Weatherman Fugitive’ Come In From The Cold,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, December 21, 1974, pg 1.

<sup>89</sup> Downey-Meyer, *Digital Vermont*, 00:55:00.

<sup>90</sup> Daloz, *Back to the Land*, 90.

<sup>91</sup> Matson, Foltz, 02:08:00.

The missing factor in almost every hippie testimonials and written history about back-to-the-landers is the economic disparity between Vermonters and hippies at the time. It was enormous. The differences in education, world experience and fiscal agency between the two groups (besides summer vacationers and town elite) cut a sharp cultural divide. The disappearing state farms, industries and population were precisely why real estate was so affordable for the young newcomers. There were approximately 24,000 farms in Vermont at the end of World War II, in 1970 only 6,800 had survived.<sup>92</sup> Some residents in remote towns hadn't gotten plumbing or electricity until well into the 1960s.<sup>93</sup> One anthropologist at the time compared "reading comprehension of children in schools... to urban ghetto areas."<sup>94</sup> Since the end of WWII, the state had been leaking its young people. Veterans, after seeing the world, were uninterested in a future on the struggling family farm. High school graduates saw better economic chances elsewhere. Others left out of boredom: staying meant spending, "decades peering out the glass window of the drugstore or hardware store or bank office if you were a merchant or small businessman."<sup>95</sup>

The subsistence-based, simple life that back-to-the landers ached for, and that they saw in Vermonters, could also be called another thing: rural poverty. The hippies' privilege, their college education, it meant that just like they had escaped into Vermont, they could escape out of it again if the experiment didn't work. And it didn't. Most communes only lasted a few years. The back-to-the-land movement

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<sup>92</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Ron Strickland, *Vermonters: Oral Histories from Down Country to the Northeast Kingdom*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1986), 88.; Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 110.

<sup>94</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 26.

peaked in the 1970s and dissipated as society entered the “affluent 1980s.”<sup>96</sup> Back-to-the-landers were of course not blind to their socio-economic difference from the natives. And no doubt some, especially those working alone like Matson, sought advice from their neighbors. Red Clover members even tried to solve rural poverty with a series of “people’s institutions.” But most commune members kept their distance from locals, tucked away in the forest, just like the early twentieth century summer folk had. Perhaps it allowed them to suspend the romance a little longer. And to give it a try without too many wandering eyes. As Sherman said, “The lives farmers led could, like the smell of manure, stir up ambiguous feelings about the truth of hill-farm life.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jacob, *New Pioneers*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 80.

## Chapter 3: Windham College

### Town and Gown

The story of Windham College has been largely unexplored by historians.<sup>98</sup> The liberal arts school in Putney, Vermont was short-lived (1951-1978), however students and faculty there played a pivotal role in the radical Brattleboro scene. A clear cultural divide emerged between students and local residents during the Vietnam years. As students became politically vocal, so did Putney residents, who blamed the students for being lazy, obtrusive, spoiled, out of touch, and the origin of most town problems. The town-gown clashes during this period reveal how town sensibilities differed from the progressive ideology of the general college community. More so, just as communes were popping up all over the area, and hippie hitchhikers were pouring into Brattleboro, Windham's population was also growing enormously fast, a result of young men avoiding draft and the bump of the baby boomer

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<sup>98</sup> This may be due to the availability of sources; no official administrative records exist for Windham College. The Vermont State Archives hold student transcripts and enrollment forms and Landmark College Archives hold a near complete collection of student newspapers, yearbooks and course catalogs. Landmark College, an unaffiliated school, took over the campus in 1985. A National Endowment for the Humanities preservation grant pursued by Landmark College archivist Mary Jane MacGuire and Windham alum and Putney Town Assistant Clerk Barbara Taylor made these materials available in 2017. Windham alumni maintain an active communication network online through Facebook and the Windham College Alumni Association. Landmark also maintains a relationship with Windham alumni, inviting them to joint reunions and even recently installing the original 'Windham College' marble sign in a garden on campus. For sign and grant details see: Solvegi Shmulsky, "Grant Will Preserve Windham College Memorabilia," *Landmark News*, December 23, 2015, <https://www.landmark.edu/news/grant-will-preserve-windham-college-memorabilia>.

population. Being young, and mostly from urban areas, Windham students aligned themselves with back-to-the-landers off campus and organized with them. Some students joined the local radical commune, Red Clover Collective. Communards, in turn, frequented the campus to take showers and get drugs. They considered Windham, “a goldmine for free drugs.”<sup>99</sup> For locals, the sudden amassing of young leftists in the area was overwhelming. They struggled not only to physically fit them all, but also to accept their lewd habits and public displays of politics.

Windham students cannot necessarily be called back-to-the landers, though some may have been attracted to college in Vermont because of the back-to-the land buzz that the state was receiving in hip circles. Windham’s administration toed the line between support and ambivalence towards local communes. For example, the college hired John Douglas, a founder of the politically radical Red Clover Collective as an art teacher, but they also asked state authorities to shut down the Free Farm, a Red Clover project on college land.<sup>100</sup> Students were also both supportive and ambivalent about the communes. Some participated in Red Clover events, writing for their paper, even starting their own collective, but others participated haphazardly and some were resistant altogether.

Needless to say, the history of Windham College and the Brattleboro communes, especially Red Clover, are intrinsically intertwined. Natives understood the communards and students as two sides of the same coin. Both groups were young, from out-of-state, donned the hippie appearance, and were mostly middle-to-upper class. They were fiercely against the war in Vietnam and engaged in behavior that

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<sup>99</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 197.

<sup>100</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 1:26:30-1:29:00

was questionable to many Vermonters but normal within the counterculture. Essentially, the two groups of outsiders spoke the same language. Most of the communards themselves had been college students only a few years before. It could be argued that communes were a kind of extension of college life, creating space for further personal and social experimentation by placing a delay on ordinary employment.

Windham's stately campus was built on a hill just outside downtown Putney, a short drive from Brattleboro. Famed modernist architect Edward Durell Stone designed it "from scratch" the same year he designed the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C.<sup>101</sup> Enrollment reached its peak during the Vietnam years. It grew from 250 students in 1962 to just shy of 1000 a decade later. Enrollment dipped sharply at the end of the seventies, causing the college to close its doors in 1978.<sup>102</sup> Most students attending Windham were from out of state. A 1971 *Reformer* profile of incoming fall students at the college counted only twelve from Vermont while ninety-six came from New York, fifty-one from New Jersey, and Connecticut and Massachusetts each supplied thirty-seven.<sup>103</sup> Like the new area counterculture population, Windham students also came from the wealthier, urban and suburban states to the south.

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<sup>101</sup> Amy Lilly, "Tiny Landmark College Boasts a Campus Designed by Midcentury Master Edward Durell Stone," *Seven Days*, July 31, 2013, <http://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/tiny-landmark-college-boasts-a-campus-designed-by-midcentury-master-edward-durell-stone/Content?oid=2265604>.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.; Wendy M. Levy, "An educational landmark remembered," *The Commons*, September 23, 2015, <http://www.commonnews.org/site/site05/story.php?articleno=12982&page=1#.WLBicBCwfOQ>.

<sup>103</sup> "Windham College Students Return," *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 9, 1971, pg 9.

Students at the time reported instances of uncomfortable harassment by locals. It was clear what types of students were being targeted: “Hips Hassled” was the title of one *Lion’s Roar* article.<sup>104</sup> In reaction, Student Government formed a “committee on Putney... to work in the area of college-community relations.” The newspaper explained:

It has been reported that a few people within the community of Putney are harassing students of the Windham College Community. This group has reportedly written threatening letters to the governor of Vermont and actually attacked a few Windham College students. Reportedly they have formed what appears to be a lawless vigilante committee dedicated to expressing their dislike for hip people by the most readily available means-- violence.<sup>105</sup>

If a “lawless vigilante group” were indeed organizing and attacking students, the students claimed the local authorities were unhelpful because they were “biased against the WC students and are not protecting the students’ rights.”<sup>106</sup> In response, the school paper staff promised that they would overstep local authorities and contact the state police directly for the students, in every future occurrence. Perhaps their efforts made a difference: a few months later a man was caught and brought to court after he and a “car full of people” began name-calling, roughed up then robbed a student on campus.<sup>107</sup>

The student’s experience of organized local harassment aligns with the accounts of local communards. In his ethnography of the Johnson’s Pasture commune, Barry Laffan even used the same term, “vigilantes,” to describe the “carloads of toughs” that “randomly singled out [hippies] in the area and beat them

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<sup>104</sup>“Harassment,” *Lion’s Roar*, September 18, 1969, pg 6.

<sup>105</sup> “Harassment,” pg 6.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> “Student Roughed up at Putney,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 24, 1970, pg 9.

up.”<sup>108</sup> Communards also did not trust local authorities after being unfairly targeted by both police and town officials.<sup>109</sup> Howard Lieberman, a friend of the Johnson’s Pasture commune, “fled” Vermont after being “beaten by an infamous undercover police officer by the name of Paul Lawrence” and “shot at on more than one occasion by militant members of the lunatic right.”<sup>110</sup>

The decade of growth at Windham had dramatic impacts on the local population as more students, faculty and staff came to town each year. Putney experienced a forty-seven percent population increase between 1960 and 1970, the largest it would see in the twentieth century by a considerable margin; these coincide with Windham’s peak years.<sup>111</sup> Town officials struggled with how to support the growth. When preliminary numbers for the 1970 census appeared, the town Planning Commission called an urgent public hearing at the town hall. The commissioners were concerned that the new population warranted the construction of a sewage system for the village, and they were particularly shocked by the report of town’s housing conditions: a whopping sixteen percent of homes were marked “dilapidated,” more than double state and county numbers.<sup>112</sup> At an unofficial town meeting called by the former pastor of the Federated Church, residents complained to the President of Windham, Eugene Winslow (1964-1974), about the housing shortage caused by

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<sup>108</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186-187.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 188, 190, 212.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>111</sup> Vermont Historical Society, "Census by Towns," Vermont History Explorer, <https://vermonthistory.org/explorer/discover-vermont/facts-figures/census-records/census-by-towns> (accessed February 20, 2017).

<sup>112</sup> “Putney Growth ‘Demands’ Plan,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, July 14, 1970, page 6.

the college.<sup>113</sup> Later in the meeting the president addressed the shaky town-gown relations. His message seemed to poke at the balance of power between institution and town. A reporter summed up his words: “the college has not been fully accepted in the community, but he believed it would be ‘asked to stay’ if it ever considered leaving.”<sup>114</sup>

The dramatic rise and fall of Windham’s population of course had ramifications for the town’s economy as well. By the end of the sixties it was the largest employer in the town, a decade later it was gone.<sup>115</sup> Also, it seems the college may have been paying particularly low wages. When asked at a student-faculty meeting about the college and local economy president Winslow “admitted hesitantly” that the college could keep salaries low because “this is an economically depressed area.”<sup>116</sup> But he also said, “the richer students created problems with their spending.”

Dr. Winslow seemed to have a tenuous relationship with the Putney town selectmen. At the time, Winslow was embroiled in a three-year battle with the board over approval for a first-class liquor license to serve beer and wine in the Rathskeller at the Student Union as well as liquor at private events where students would not be present.<sup>117</sup> Winslow presented three different applications and all three were shot down. In one “heated debate” at a town meeting, he asked the townspeople present for a show of hands: the votes were in favor of the college but with only eighty-three

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<sup>113</sup> “Putney Talks to Putney” *Brattleboro Reformer*, December 15, 1970, page 6.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> “Winslow Raps,” *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Town of Putney, Town of Putney Vermont Board of Selectmen Minutes, 1969-1971.

present, the board said it was inadequate representation of the town. The president attempted to circumvent the town by applying directly to the State Liquor License Board but they refused. Winslow believed, along with 14 other college presidents, that the state's refusal to grant liquor licenses to colleges was an "arbitrary decision" and that it was "illegal."<sup>118</sup> At one point, the selectmen contacted the town's attorney, Robert Gibson, for advice, after Winslow had threatened to sue them for denying him a license. It seems the case never materialized. However, one month later the board approved a separate liquor license for a Mr. James Soper who wished to convert a former home into a restaurant and bar in town.<sup>119</sup> Town meeting minutes show "the college" (probably Winslow) questioned the selectmen over the legality of Soper's "commercial use" of the property. Soper's license application had nothing to do with the college, other than perhaps sour feelings on the part of Winslow. The board informed the questioner that Soper's property was indeed zoned commercial and the procedure completely legal.

The episode between Winslow and the Selectmen is just one example of tense town-gown relations in Putney. As this case shows, it went all the way to the top. In 1968, a committee was formed between members of the Putney Board of Selectmen and Windham student representatives to address, as Hinda Schuman, student representative on the committee put it, the "great deal of animosity between the town of Putney and the Windham college community...[that] has been evident probably

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<sup>118</sup> Town of Putney, Town of Putney Vermont Board of Selectmen's Meeting, August 31, 1971.

<sup>119</sup> Town of Putney, Town of Putney Vermont Board of Selectmen's Meeting, October 18<sup>th</sup> & November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1971.

since the college really began to grow four or five years ago.”<sup>120</sup> Schuman wished to address the “little communication or desire for communication between town and the college.” Students from the college wanted to begin cultivating a relationship with the town by sharing Windham’s facilities or even offering classes to students from the other four schools in Putney. Specifically, they suggested that Windham students volunteer to tutor for the “understaffed” and “lacking” public elementary school, Putney Central.

Present at the first committee meeting were “fifteen men representing a cross-section of the town,” Schuman, and two other Windham students. The two groups shared their grievances, and the Putney delegates seemed to capitalize on the opportunity presented to them. The Putney men complained that students were breaking speeding laws and walking “3 or 4 abreast in the road.” Also, mysterious cemetery visitors had been trashing it with “beer cans and cigarette wrappers,” they thought the culprits were probably students.<sup>121</sup> The men were particularly sore that college administrators (none of whom were present) had asked the Putney Athletic Club to pay a fee to use the college’s fieldhouse, despite the fact that the Windham baseball team has been using the Athletic Club’s field “for years without ever paying a cent for its upkeep.” In the meeting, the students seemed to be able to muster only one grievance to the town representatives: storeowners were being rude to them. The men offered no support in the matter simply saying, “A few of the merchants treat

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<sup>120</sup> Hinda Schuman, “No Community is an Island,” *The Lion’s Roar*, February 15, 1968, ?.; “Committee On Putney,” *The Lion’s Roar*, May 16, 1968, pg 3.

<sup>121</sup> Hinda Schuman, “Town-Gown: Problems Discussed,” *The Lion’s Roar*, April 9, 1968, ?.

everyone that way.” Before the end of the meeting the men seemed to offer an olive branch: “students were welcome to join the Putney Gun Club.”

The grievances presented by the Putney representatives may seem typical of residents in any college-town, sick of the exclusivity of an institutional bubble, and tired of boisterous youngsters that are oblivious to their neighbors. But the meeting does reveal where the two parties stood on the eve of the 1960s. The next years would bring heightened emotions between the two, as students vocalized their distaste for the Vietnam War. But for now, the students felt uncomfortably distinct from the town, and at times unwelcome, whether that be the fault of administrators, students, residents, or a mixture of all three. However, at least a small portion of them recognized this as a negative and took initiative to action. Putney residents on the other hand, sent *fifteen* representatives to the first meeting while the college only sent three. The Putney representatives were all men: town leaders, the head of organizations like the Putney Athletic Club and Gun Club. Their presence shows that townspeople cared strongly about the problems they brought to the students. At the meeting, they monopolized the speaking time. At the heart of their issues were the college students: they were reckless and disrespectful. Schuman too felt that both the responsibility and solution sat with the college, “It is up to students individually, to decided if they themselves would like to remain just in the Windham Community or become involved in a much larger one” she concluded in the school paper.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the Putney Gun Club was the best channel through which the young New Yorkers and

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<sup>122</sup> Schuman, “No Community is an Island,” ?.

Bostonians could have built trust with Putney's town leaders. Instead they decided to volunteer at the poor school.

An issue that did not come up at the town-gown meeting was a more serious one: Windham students had a reputation for drug use. Student Polly Darnell reflected, "there were a lot of drugs there. There was a rumor that the heroin in Vermont mostly came through Windham, and was not consumed there but was passing through there."<sup>123</sup> A number of drug dealers were arrested at Windham by state and federal authorities for nothing as serious as heroin. However, It shocked the town that such dangerous activity was happening in their bucolic backwoods; the busts were covered in detail in the *Brattleboro Reformer*.<sup>124</sup> These arrests did not bode well for town-gown relations.

Exactly how much drug use was happening at Windham was reported in a 1969 "sex, booze and drugs" survey, conducted by a student-faculty committee and published in the school newspaper. The most startling result was actually the amount of action students were getting on campus. Seventy-four percent of surveyed students had had sexual intercourse before. The paper compared their figures with a *Playboy* article that had done a similar study with five colleges nationwide. Their top ranking campus had only reached fifty-nine percent. Windham "makes San Francisco look like a campus of chronic virgins" declared the *Free Press*. The level of promiscuity presented in the survey even caught the attention of *Playboy* who "advised national

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<sup>123</sup> Polly Darnell, interview with Amanda Gustin, *Digital Vermont: A Project of the Vermont Historical Society*, 16:00-16:30, <http://digitalvermont.org/vt70s/AudioFile1970s-58>.

<sup>124</sup> "2 Drug Arrests Made at College," *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 6, 1970, page 1-2.

publication of the sex aspects...which they considered ‘unique’ to a small New England college of 800.”<sup>125</sup> More importantly, the high level of premarital sex on campus can be regarded an indicator of this population’s belief in “free love,” another aspect of the counterculture ethos.<sup>126</sup>

The survey also determined approximately half of the students had tried marijuana, sixty-four percent of those had first tried it at Windham, and eighty-four percent knew where to purchase it on campus. Additionally, users tended to “have a higher family income [and] quite a bit of spending money.” It is unclear if locals knew about the survey. However, the number of arrests and reports of undercover cops on campus immediately following could be an indication that the article had alerted authorities to the school. Four students were arrested in the spring of 1970 on separate occasions: three for possession, and one for selling marijuana and other drugs. Two of the students were taken into custody in a coordinated maneuver between state police and a narcotics agent from Montpelier.<sup>127</sup> According to the school paper, a similar bust one-year earlier had been “led by U.S. Customs.”<sup>128</sup> Two days after the multiple arrests, the *Reformer* ran an outside article explaining the high levels of drug use among blue-collar *and* white-collar workers in San Francisco. It was so widespread there that “it does little good to fire them,” explained the article.

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<sup>125</sup> Tim Pioli, “Joint Com. Reports, Sex Booze & Drugs,” *Windham Free Press*, October 17, 1969, page 1-2.

<sup>126</sup> For free love see: Miller, *The Hippies*, 25.

<sup>127</sup> “2 Drug Arrests Made at College,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 6, 1970, pg 1-2.

<sup>128</sup> Brien Kroeger, “Bust,” *Windham Free Press*, March 6, 1970, pg 7.

Under the article, the *Reformer* editors had placed a text-box: in bold letters it read, “Keep Vermont Clean.”<sup>129</sup>

A few days before the Windham arrests, police officer Marcel Leclaire and a local pediatrician had given a presentation to the Parent-Teacher Club at Brattleboro’s Oak Grove Elementary School warning them “that children in grades as low as 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> are being sold, and in known cases using, drugs.”<sup>130</sup> Writing a letter to the editor after the busts at Windham, Oak Grove’s principle Francis Davies seemed to draw a straight line between the college and the drug problem in Brattleboro. Shaken by the “frightening facts” he heard from the officer, Davies pleaded for a call to action: “It’s time this town does more than leave this problem to be solved by a handful of people.... protect your town and children from a cancer that can, in reality, kill.”<sup>131</sup>

At Windham, students became increasingly paranoid of undercover agents. After a 1968 bust, a student David Cherdak, wrote an article in the *Free Press* that accused the administration of betraying the students: assisting state authorities with arrests but denying their involvement. Otherwise, how were they able to “pinpoint” the drugs so precisely, he wondered?<sup>132</sup> The same student would be the one arrested two years later for drug dealing in the string of 1970 arrests. Following that bust, editors of the *Free Press* published the photos of two known “narcs” working as

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<sup>129</sup> Associated Press, “Drug Use Becoming Way of Life for Some,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 8, 1970, pg 12.

<sup>130</sup> Francis M. Davies, letter to the editor, “Warning on Drugs,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 7, 1970, pg 7.

<sup>131</sup> Davies, “Warning on Drugs,” pg 7.

<sup>132</sup> David Cherdak, “Busted,” *The Lion’s Roar*, October 31, 1968, pg 1.

police informants in Vermont.<sup>133</sup> A friendly outsider wrote a letter to the editor providing further details for the students, including one of the men's real name and his position: "Federal in charge of vt...Hang him before he hangs you!" the outsider advised.<sup>134</sup> The next semester one of the alleged federal agents was spotted on campus asking for LSD.<sup>135</sup>

While state and federal authorities zoned in on Windham as a problem source for drugs in the state, and alarming citizens, conservative residents were also worried about another thing: How would the new bump in area college students affect local elections? Democrats had already reached out to Windham students. George Heller and Randolph Major, two Democrats running for local office, had tried to woo Windham students in the school newspaper by way of a Government professor, Stephen Anderson, who offered to serve as a "contact-point" between the two parties.<sup>136</sup> The Democratic hopefuls asked the students to volunteer for their local campaigns. At that time, voting age was still twenty one, so the politicians probably weren't seeking votes, but in the paper they highlighted hippie-friendly positions such as putting "an end to the Vietnam war, and a wide range of new and effective programs in the areas of environmental pollution, poverty and education." The politician's act of reaching out to the students suggests two interesting factors: for one, Windham County Democrats, who would eventually take the reigns from Republicans and never look back, saw the majority non-native students as their allies.

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<sup>133</sup> "Paul Lawrence, David Merrium," *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>134</sup> Anonymous, letter to the editor, *Windham Free Press*, October 15, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>135</sup> Photo, *Windham Free Press*, March 24, 1971, page 1.

<sup>136</sup> "Local Political Action Possibilities," *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 2.

And secondly, that despite most not being able to vote (though perhaps the seed could be planted), Heller and Major perhaps heard about the radical, leftist political fervor at Windham and were attempting to tap into that.

One year later Vermonters really began to take notice of the potential political agency of the students when, in 1971, the 26<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment was passed which changed the legal voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. Residents grappled with how the new voters might affect their lives. Under new laws, citizens eighteen and up that had proof of residing in the state for only thirty days were eligible to vote in presidential elections; ninety days for federal, county, state senator and state representative; and 160 days for town meetings.<sup>137</sup> “Some 30,000 Vermont teenagers, now between the ages of 16 and 19, will be eligible to vote” in the 1972 election, Vermont newspaper columnist Pete Horton speculated. “State Democrats note that this figure is almost precisely the amount of votes they need to overtake Vermont Republicans.”<sup>138</sup>

In Putney, some residents questioned whether or not Windham students had the right to participate in local elections. A special registration drive had been organized on campus with local elected officials present to help students register for the upcoming election.<sup>139</sup> Town Clerk Inez Harlow wondered, “how a person who had a driver’s license from or a car registered in another state could begin to claim

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<sup>137</sup> “New Rules for Voting in Vermont,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, October 20, 1971, pg 1.

<sup>138</sup> Pete Horton, “Vermont Report: Bureaucratic Politics,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, February 18, 1971, pg 4.

<sup>139</sup> “Students to Register for U.S. Elections,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, October 14, 1971, page 6.; “Student Voter Registration,” *Windham Free Press*, October 25, 1971, page 1.

residence until the transfer had been made” and felt “a person’s dependence on parents in another town” should be considered a factor in eligibility. Windham government Professor Darryl Baskin came to the student’s defense. He wrote an article in the *Free Press* addressing the “concern throughout Vermont towns” about the student vote. In it he challenged notions like Harlow’s that “student’s should vote in their ‘home towns.’”<sup>140</sup> He argued that the new law implied that eighteen-year-olds were adults, responsible enough to fight so responsible enough to vote, and that their rights should not be questioned. He further explained that most had no intention of moving back to their hometowns after college so why should they be forced to vote there? Furthermore, how was discriminating against students “because of dormitory residence” any different from discriminating against non-homeowners? The issue of the vote uncovers evidence about resident’s perceptions of who were insiders and outsiders in Putney. But Darryl Baskin wrote his letter in the school’s newspaper, not the *Brattleboro Reformer*. Putney had an inward-facing cultural bubble and Windham was at the center of it. They balked at those who questioned the student’s right to vote. But of course there would be resistance; it was an entirely new situation and if the known progressive student population actually went to the polls, the entire town order could be turned on its head. Perhaps Baskin and others were privately grinning. Putney had had a small population of wealthier, intellectual progressives for a long time, but the college growth had increased this considerably.<sup>141</sup> A paper mill and a

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<sup>140</sup> Darryl Baskin, “Old Home Town,” *Windham Free Press*, October 18, 1971, page 1.

<sup>141</sup> Putney Historical Society, *Putney: World’s Best Known Small Town*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003.), 98.

basket-making company had been the town's largest employers before Windham's growth in the 1960s.<sup>142</sup> Signs were pointing to big changes for the little town.

### Counterculture and Radical Legacy

Soon after opening, the college gained a reputation for attracting exceptional creative-types, particularly writers and artists.<sup>143</sup> The most notorious on campus was a nineteen-year-old student by the name of William Powell. Just before coming to Vermont, Powell wrote *The Anarchist Cookbook*, a popular do-it-yourself weapons manual that has since been tied to many terrorists and school shootings including Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City bombing), Tomas Spinks (abortion clinic bombings), Zvonko Busic (Croatian nationalist hijacker and Grand Central bomb) and the 2005 London public-transport bombing.<sup>144</sup> Powell, who pulled his research from materials available at the New York Public Library, would come to deeply regret writing the book. In 2013, he wrote in a public apology in the *Guardian*, "The anger that motivated the writing of the Cookbook blinded me to the illogical notion

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>143</sup> Famous authors included Nobel Prize winner and college trustee Pearl S. Buck and novelists Donald Harrington and John Irving who taught in the English and History depts. For Harrington and Windham see: Edwin T. Arnold and Donald Harrington, "Interview: Donald Harrington," *Appalachian Journal* 21, no.4 (1994):432-445.; For Irving and Windham see: Louis Black, "Full Body: John Irving on his job and the upcoming 'Until I Find You'," *Austin Chronicle*, February 25, 2005, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/books/2005-02-25/260208/>.

<sup>144</sup> For *The Anarchist Cookbook* and terrorism see: Mathew Honan, "The Anarchist Cookbook Turns 40," *Wired Magazine*, January 31, 2011.,[https://www.wired.com/2011/01/pl\\_print\\_anarchistcookbook/](https://www.wired.com/2011/01/pl_print_anarchistcookbook/); Tony Dokoupil, "Sorry About all the Bombs," *Newsweek*, February 20, 2011, <http://www.newsweek.com/sorry-about-all-bombs-68549>.

that violence can be used to prevent violence.”<sup>145</sup> But when Powell wrote the book, the anger he felt was the same anger felt by many young people at the time; while Powell was busy writing his book, the Weather Underground were busy bombing federal buildings. Powell, a high school dropout, was terrified of being drafted and he attended anti-war protests where he “watched police attack people with clubs.”<sup>146</sup> Like many, it was a crushing fear that led to his radicalization.

Powell excelled at Windham. He became the editor of the school newspaper and graduated as co-valedictorian.<sup>147</sup> A co-writer for the *Free Press* remembered him as bearded but clean, and that as editor he tried to professionalize the paper, turning away from the style of the previous editor who curated a “trippy, dreaming design” with plenty of political jargon, to a paper that “accommodated classic, reported pieces on the school, faculty and students.”<sup>148</sup> It is important to note that Powell became Windham’s ‘model student.’ The media at the time were responding in horror to his publication. Powell was placed on Hoover’s FBI “Security Index” list and citizens blamed Powell for the increase in domestic bombings and “stuffed his Vermont mailbox with death threats.”<sup>149</sup> Though administrators could never have guessed that his book would be used for such heinous future crimes, it shines a particular light on

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<sup>145</sup> William Powell, “I Wrote the Anarchist Cookbook in 1969. Now I see its premise is flawed,” *The Guardian*, December 19, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/19/anarchist-cookbook-author-william-powell-out-of-print>.

<sup>146</sup> Gabriel Thompson, “Burn After Reading,” *Harpers Magazine*, February 17, 2017, <https://harpers.org/blog/2015/02/burn-after-reading/>.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Louis Black, “When I Write the Book: On luck anarchy, and the narrative vagaries of life,” *Austin Chronicle*, Page Two Column, February 9, 2007, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/columns/2007-02-09/444376/>

<sup>149</sup> Thompson, “Burn After Reading.”; Dokoupil, “Sorry About all the Bombs.”

the college's character, that it was eager to nourish such a student, that was talented no doubt, but undeniably radical and hot.

Left-wing ideology radiated from the top-down. Eugene Winslow, Windham's second president, was a former WWII Navy captain, University of Rhode Island chemistry professor, native Vermonter and undergraduate at Middlebury College.<sup>150</sup> As president, Winslow was outspoken about progressive issues. He set the tone by publicly denouncing the Vietnam War early on; one former professor claimed that he been the very first U.S. college president to do so.<sup>151</sup> During Winslow's tenure, draft counseling was provided in the library, then the service secured its own space on the second floor of the Student Union building. The councilors supplied up-to-date information regarding the lottery, and advised which classification to apply for the best chance at deferment.<sup>152</sup>

In 1968, Winslow published a letter to the editor in the college newspaper, advocating for relaxing the criminalization of marijuana.<sup>153</sup> Winslow's letter appeared next to an article that ranked Vermont one of the "top three areas of the country [along with California and Baltimore] with the greatest degree of drug usage," the article continued, "every high school in the state has known drug dealers in the student body,"<sup>154</sup> Whether a playful jab by the newspaper editors or not, the

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<sup>150</sup> Arthur Westing, "A tribute to Eugene C. Winslow," Obituaries, *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.reformer.com/stories/a-tribute-to-eugene-c-winslow,315256?>.

<sup>151</sup> Levy, "An educational landmark."

<sup>152</sup> "Draft Advice Available in the Library," *Lion's Roar*, April 30, 1969, pg 1.; "Draft Lottery," *Windham Free Press*, October 15, 1970

<sup>153</sup> Eugene C. Winslow, "Legalized Pot," *Lion's Roar*, October 31, 1968, pg 3.

<sup>154</sup> "Vermont Among Top Three Areas of Drug Use," *Lion's Roar*, October 31, 1968, pg 3.

juxtaposition of the police article with Winslow's endorsement would not have looked good for Winslow as a community leader. Yet, while students and the president did not see eye to eye at all times, numerous examples point to a president that was unusually in touch with the student body, more likely to give the green light on risky student experiments, than call in the troops.

Ideological closeness seemed to trickle down to student-faculty relations as well. One student, Polly Darnell, transferred to Windham from Connecticut because of its reputation for political activity and its proximity to Red Clover Collective which she had heard about. She boarded with Darryl Baskin, the same professor that had written to article on voting and one of her Government classes even met in his home.<sup>155</sup> One well-known music professor, David Wells, converted his barn into a performance venue and summer music retreat for his students.<sup>156</sup>

If the Windham faculty and students were particularly close in this period, perhaps it was in part due to the fact that faculty and staff were not called upon to chaperone campus life. Darnell remembered discipline all but absent from the school; “academically it was very traditional, it was just the standard liberal arts curriculum... [but] It seemed like socially there was no supervision, no rules, no nothing.”<sup>157</sup> She compared Windham to Middlebury College, just over the Green Mountains where her sister attended. There, dorm life was strictly regulated: they had to sign out when leaving the buildings and visiting hours with the opposite sex were

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<sup>155</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 13:00-17:30.

<sup>156</sup> The “Yellow Barn” outlived the college and developed into a renowned center for international chamber music, still active in Putney today:  
<http://www.yellowbarn.org/about>

<sup>157</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 13:00-17:30.

limited. At Windham, “there seemed to be no interest in what the students were doing, other than classes.”

Perhaps it was the anti-war fervor, the commonality of a shared enemy that brought the administration, faculty and students body so close. In 1967, a student-faculty group held a forum on civil disobedience. The professors gave talks encouraging civil disobedience if conducted properly, pointing to the success of recent Civil Rights sit-ins in the South. During the forum, a female student from the group burned another student’s draft card, displaying a very real act of nonviolent protest. There was a discussion following the forum in which the stunned and excited audience debated the burning of the draft card.<sup>158</sup> In another episode, the faculty voted unanimously to participate in the national October 15th Moratorium on Business as Usual. They requested all classes be canceled and that they be relieved of their work-related duties for the day. The faculty even drafted a resolution that they asked Winslow to deliver to President Nixon.<sup>159</sup>

The war in Southeast Asia took center stage at the 1970 graduation ceremony. Student and faculty speakers delivered sharp political critiques. The *Reformer* reported that even special speaker Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, director of the Women’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor and an official of Nixon’s administration shared words that were “consistent with those of President Eugene C. Winslow.”<sup>160</sup> In

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<sup>158</sup> “Debate Kindles Action,” *Lion’s Roar*, April 13, 1967, pg 1.

<sup>159</sup> Jeffrey Haight, “Peace & Action; Faculty Moves,” *Windham Free Press*, October 9, 1969.

<sup>160</sup> Jordan D. Cole, “56 Windham Graduates Refuse Vietnam Service,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 25, 1970, pg 1.

his speech, Winslow unapologetically positioned the entire institution on the left side of the aisle:

A majority of the faculty and administrators are in substantial agreement with the majority of our students that the country for which we have such a deep affection is in deep and serious trouble ... Almost the entire college community see a close parallel between the war crimes of the Nazis and our present activity in Southeast Asia ... Students don't have the power. The people in power really aren't listening. If you think that this was a bad year in college communities, wait until next year!

The president's portentous message may seem odd during a period of such national campus unrest. The Kent State shootings occurred just weeks before Windham's graduation. Why would a college president, the authority of his own realm, approvingly predict more social disorder? "[*Just*] wait until next year!" he said. Winslow's words mirror the apocalyptic tone of many voices at the dawn of the 1970s. It was the same words on the tongues of others in Vermont: back-to-the-landers who escaped to the state. People fleeing the chaos and toxicity of concrete cities, a relentless administration that was directing a vanishing act on brothers, fathers, and friends, and police in riot gear; firing at peaceful protesters. It was the same tone Tim Matson took, "Get out, and be free, get freedom," because who could tell what chaos lay ahead.<sup>161</sup>

Also, they were words the college president felt comfortable uttering at that time, on a hill outside of Brattleboro, at probably the largest attended event in which he spoke that year. The *Reformer* described how his speech was received in a front-page article: "Some of the audience dissented from the positions taken by the

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<sup>161</sup> Matson, Foltz, 02:08:00.

speakers, either by refraining from applause by openly spoken critical remarks ... But the partly cloudy skies, and 70 degree temperatures, combined with the obvious interest in the graduates kept the mood generally pleasant.” Windham had joined thousands of aggravated students and faculty across the country in shutting down their campuses as part of the nationwide student strike that May, a response to the Kent State Shootings and Nixon’s Cambodian Excursion. Such heated words of political dissent at a time like this were perhaps wanted. Parents and community members that were intolerant of the atypical ceremony seemed to have been in the minority.

Typical counterculture interests like environmental protection and natural food diets were forefront on campus in these years. In September, 1970 a “food committee,” established by the student government, met with the cafeteria manager and demanded that more vegetables, brown rice and a “special salad plate” to serve “the sizable number of vegetarians at Windham” be available.<sup>162</sup> A list in the school paper offered a “twenty-five point plan” to scare away its cafeteria provider, Prophet Foods. The article suggested to: “Give ID’s to total strangers ... Rip off a lot of food ... Don’t wear clothes to meals ... Get Seconds, Thirds, Fourths ... Throw them away ... Grow your own ... Go to the nurse after every meal.”<sup>163</sup> Under what appears to have been considerable pressure, the cafeteria manager promised, “meaningful changes can be made within their budget.”<sup>164</sup> Advertisements for natural food stores like the Putney Co-op and Butler’s Pantry in Westminster West also appeared in the

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<sup>162</sup> Diane Gaylord, “Food for Change,” *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 6.

<sup>163</sup> Howard Kaplan, “25 Ways,” *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 7.

<sup>164</sup> Gaylord, “Food for Change,” pg 6.

pages of the *Free Press*. Russell Butler even featured an educational guest column, providing information about the benefits whole and organic foods, while simultaneously plugging the products at his store.<sup>165</sup>

Students and faculty were active in environmental work. Arthur Westing, Botany professor and Chairman of the Science Division, traveled to Vietnam in 1970 with a small team funded by the American Association for the Advancement of Science to study the “unprecedented environmental impact ... of our widespread use of Agent Orange and other chemical agents, our intensive bombing campaign, and our intensive tractor clearing operations.”<sup>166</sup> In Winslow’s 2015 obituary, Westing expressed his deep gratitude to the president for having granted him “encouragement and support” over the years for his “time-consuming” environmental endeavors.

Records indicate the Windham community also showed concern for their local environment. The same year as Westing’s trip, an article in the *Free Press* condemned the town’s big employer, the Putney Paper Mill, for polluting the Sacketts Brook and Connecticut River claiming, “The Putney Paper Co. is responsible for the condition the brook is in now, and is continually pouring more and more wastes into the brook.”<sup>167</sup> They noted that paper mills were large contaminators of mercury and that Vermont caught fish could not be sold outside of state due to high levels of the element. The same semester, an Ecology and Politics class took a survey of the mill and met with the owner, Earl Stockwell. Reflecting on the course months later, the *Free Press* took a different stance; they sympathized with the small plant for having

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<sup>165</sup> Russell Butler, “Food for Thought,” *Windham Free Press*, October 11, 1971, pg 4.

<sup>166</sup> “Lecture,” *Windham Free Press*, October 31, 1970, pg 1.; Westing, “A tribute to Eugene C. Winslow.”

<sup>167</sup> “Pollution,” *Windham Free Press*, November 20, 1970, pg 4.

to pay for the new \$250,000 state mandated water treatment facility and concluding that “the Mill is doing its best to clean up the stream.”<sup>168</sup> In this case, whether influenced by the course professor, a meeting with the real-life plant owner, or satisfied with knowledge of the new treatment facility, the shift in campus sentiment, from finger-pointing to unpacking of the complexities of the issue, reveals an interesting episode of maturation in the student’s understanding-of and conscious role-within, the Putney community.

The school newspaper at this time even took on a handmade, folksy, counterculture aesthetic, not unlike the pages of *Whole Earth Catalog*. The new design appeared around 1969. In the succeeding years, headlines were artfully handwritten, newspaper staff began experimenting with unconventional print structure, and artwork and poetry filled the pages.

In light of the fact that the *Lion’s Roar* and *Windham Free Press*, constitute major sources for the assessment of Windham’s character in this paper, it must be questioned how reliable the school paper actually is as a source reflecting the *whole* Windham community, and not just its editors. In an illuminating letter to the editor, Richard Murines, a student, called the paper a leftist, “pseudo-intellectual propaganda sheet” that did not reflect the “voice of the students.”<sup>169</sup> Murines said “It is a one sided, anti-Johnson, anti-Daley, anti-police, rag that concerns itself more with trying to start a revolt on camps than doing its job, mainly, informing the students of the events at Windham.” The fuming letter writer continued by lighting into the whole student body: “We have a school full of A) draft dodging hippies, B) rich draft

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<sup>168</sup> “The Putney Paper Mill,” *Windham Free Press*, March 25, 1971, pg 9.

<sup>169</sup> Richard Murines, “Hope For Lion’s Roar,” *Lion’s Roar*, October 31, 1968, pg 3.

dodging hippies, C) flunk-outs that happen to be draft dodgers, D) the ‘normal students.’ This paper is a reflection of numbers A, B, and C.”

This letter, while demonstrating that the campus had some level of political diversity, also demonstrates that conservative voices at the school saw themselves as outliers, even marginalized. Though his description may have been exaggerated (for example: liberal women are missing all together), by quartering the student body and dubbing three-fourths “hippies”, “flunk-outs” and “draft dodgers,” the letter writer also identifies who the majority and minority groups were on campus.

The school paper also exemplifies the radical environment at Windham by revealing what types of visiting speakers and organized events occurred at the college. The list is an impressive “who’s who” of mid-century political leftists, it includes: Norman Thomas, minister and repeated Socialist Party presidential candidate<sup>170</sup>; Brij Toofan, Indian Independence activist and Socialist Party politician<sup>171</sup>; Robert Bly, poet, activist and cofounder of American Writers against the Vietnam War spoke twice at the college to large crowds<sup>172</sup>; George Wiley, Director of the National Welfare Rights Organization and former Windham employee;<sup>173</sup> Marie C. Taylor, chairman of the Botany department at Howard University.<sup>174</sup> Other

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<sup>170</sup> Thomas came the year before his death to speak against the Vietnam War: “Norman Thomas Speaks: Condemns Viet War,” *Lion’s Roar*, April 13, 1967, pg 1.

<sup>171</sup> “Socialist From India To Be Speaker,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 9, 1970, pg 7.

<sup>172</sup> “Impassioned Poet Returns Custer’s Revenge In Nam”, *Lion’s Roar*, March 23, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>173</sup> Wiley encouraged students to seek experiences outside the campus bubble and channel their money from “daddy” to charities rather than beer funds: “Students Urged to Get Out and Do Something,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 7, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>174</sup> Taylor delivered an apocalyptic lecture on environmental fragility: “Guest Speaker Stirs Controversy,” *Lion’s Roar*, March 16, 1967, pg1.

noted visitors included three female “militants” from Boston who spoke on the Women’s Liberation Movement and afterwards held a female-only workshop and the San Francisco Mime Troupe who performed “Seize the Time,” a play developed with the Black Panther National Office.<sup>175</sup> The performance was followed by a talk from Tom Hayden, of the Chicago Seven. The troupe was traveling the Northeast at the time in an effort to bring attention to the upcoming trial of Seale and Ericka Huggins in New Haven, Connecticut.

One student, Karen Wise, put the college in national headlines when she joined the college’s all-male varsity basketball team. The *New York Times* named her “the first female basketball player in varsity intercollegiate history.”<sup>176</sup> Wise had the support of President Winslow and coach Dave Parker and at first, she even used the same changing room as the men before athletics director Bob Vanelli protested. Vanelli assured the *Times* that the campus was not in chaos: “Women’s Lib[eration] hasn’t taken over at Windham. I guess it’s just that the college is overly liberal. I hope it’s just a fad that will pass rather quickly.... I might not object so much if she was a good basketball player. But she isn’t. She’s like most women. She isn’t strong enough to compete with men.” Vanelli, sounding almost like a caricature of an athletics director, displayed in this episode another conservative viewpoint not often heard during these years at Windham.

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<sup>175</sup> “Fem. Militants to Speak,” *Windham Free Press*, October 2, 1969, pg 1.; The play is about the history of the Black Panther Party and based on founder Bobby Seale’s book of the same name: “Black Panther Play To Be Presented,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, February 12, 1971, pg 9.

<sup>176</sup> Gordon S. White Jr., “Girl at Tiny Windham College Is Creating a Big Court Issue,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1972, pg 32.

Perhaps Winslow's tolerant, vigorous, politically minded character set the progressive tone at Windham. Or perhaps the root of the radical, political behavior at the tiny Vermont college was a natural outgrowth of the ideology of the institution's founder Walter Hendricks, a man utterly fascinated by utopian, socialist, educational experiments. For whatever reason, during the Vietnam Era, the institution itself was undeniably leftist and au courant to youth culture. This was blaringly distinct from the values held by most townspeople.

### Student Demonstration

During the Vietnam Era, Windham students were particularly active participants in civil demonstration. Student organized protests on campus, joined area rallies, and organized transportation to larger demonstrations in the southern New England cities, Montpelier, as well as Washington D.C. and New York City. Students stayed attune to the movements of the larger universities and national student groups. The pages of the *Free Press* during these years were filled with reports of local and national protest. Editors re-reprinted articles from underground press like the Liberation News Service and letters from first-hand witnesses to urban demonstrations, such as one man's account of gruesome police violence at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.<sup>177</sup>

In March 1970, approximately 100 anti-draft protesters from Windham and Brattleboro Union High School (BUHS) marched together from the Brattleboro

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<sup>177</sup> Liberation News Service, "School Days, School Days Dear Old Iron Rule Day," *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 2.; Peter Hayward, "Bill-club Democracy," *Windham Free Press*, November 14, 1968, pg 4.

Library to the “local draft center” with the intention to deliver a petition they had made. When they reached the center, they found it closed so the marchers continued on to the Federal Building where they held a sit-in in the hallway outside the U.S. Marshal’s office. Begrudgingly, they had found it too had been closed early before their arrival.<sup>178</sup> Demonstrations on Windham’s campus, at least once bordered on the absurd: in April of the same year a “Dionysian Liberation Front” called on students to obstruct Windham’s landscape architect’s plans to plant Japanese elm trees in a straight row. The protesters saw the orderly design as “unnatural.”<sup>179</sup> The group wanted to fill the holes dug for the trees, but arriving too late, instead placed a protest sign on each tree. President Winslow called the action “petty” and personally pulled down some of signs.

Just a few weeks later, campus demonstrations assumed a darker tone when Ohio National Guardsmen gunned down student protesters at Kent State, killing four. Demonstrations erupted simultaneously at colleges campuses across the country in response to the killings and Nixon’s new controversial Cambodian Campaign. At Windham, faculty voted “32 to 13 to make classes optional for the two weeks remaining of the semester.”<sup>180</sup> A committee of six students and six faculty organized alternative seminars and peace workshops. In Burlington, protest drew large numbers; no surprise considering the town was three times the size of Brattleboro. Three days

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<sup>178</sup> Grady Holloway, “March by Draft Protesters Foiled, But Speeches Heard,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 20, 1970, pg 1.; “U.S. Gov’t Vanished As Students March On Draft,” *Windham Free Press*, March 23, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>179</sup> “Students Line Up Against Tree Line,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 28, 1970, pg 7.

<sup>180</sup> Jordan D. Cole, “Windham Faculty Makes Class Optional,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 6, 1970, pg 1.

after the shooting, 400 gathered to picket in front of the Federal Building and City Hall and that night 750 students from the University of Vermont, St. Michael's and Trinity colleges held a silent candlelit march through the downtown.<sup>181</sup> At Goddard College just west of Putney, thirty students and faculty halted traffic on Route 2 in front of their campus with a sit-in, handing out leaflets explaining their act.<sup>182</sup> At Middlebury during their weeklong strike, a vacant campus building was set on fire.<sup>183</sup>

In a much-publicized event, Lieutenant Governor Thomas L. Hayes called for what might have been the largest protest in the state, had it not have been canceled prematurely. Hayes, in charge while Governor Davis was attending a meeting in Santa Fe, ordered a day of mourning, the flag at the State House to be lowered to half-mast, and called for a "massive memorial rally on the lawn of the State House" in Montpelier that weekend for the Kent State students and soldiers killed in Vietnam.<sup>184</sup> Hayes and Davis, both Republicans, were famous rivals, not an impossible outcome as Vermont elects its governor and lieutenant governor separately. Hayes, nearly three-decades younger than Davis, vehemently opposed the Vietnam War, Davis supported the Nixon administration. A few months prior, Hayes traveled to Washington to march in the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam while Davis organized an anti-rally in Montpelier in which he called for unity under Nixon

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<sup>181</sup> The Associated Press, "Dissent Spreads Across State, Davis Heads Home," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>182</sup> The Associated Press, "Kent State, Cambodia: Vt. Students Demonstrate," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 5, pg 1.

<sup>183</sup> The Associated Press, "Vermont Protests Rise; Middlebury Hall Burns," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 7, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>184</sup> Associated Press, "Vermont Protests Rise," pg 1.

and “restraint and respect for one another.”<sup>185</sup> Hayes even challenged Davis later that year for the governor’s seat but lost. The *Reformer* claimed that Hayes’ Saturday memorial service was to be the “climax” of Vermont’s week of demonstrations but after the Governor rushed back to Vermont, cancelling a trip to Switzerland, he ordered the flag to be restored to full mast and the memorial to be canceled. Hayes had to make the cancellation announcement.<sup>186</sup>

Speakers at the event were to be Hayes and Brattleboro’s Republican Representative John S. Burgess. After what Burgess described as a “storm of criticism” for his decision to attend, he explained in a public statement that he wished to “restore calm” to college campuses and would “travel to the very threshold of hell to establish communications with the students.”<sup>187</sup> Perhaps it is poignant that Burgess, an elected representative from Brattleboro, acutely cognizant to the distress felt by students and in that area, would rally to Hayes’s call, though it be an act of blatant liberal Republicanism (Burgess later became a Democrat). Burgess ran for and won Lieutenant Governor that year in the seat that Hayes had vacated and he served for two terms there under Davis than Democrat Thomas P. Salmon.

Back in Brattleboro, protest size rivaled the numbers in Burlington despite their huge differences in size. Windham acted as the glue between area students in coordinating demonstrations. Town Manager Corwin Elwell remember the day after Kent State, Windham students came to his office to inform him that they were going to hold an estimated 1,500 person march down Main Street that afternoon. He told

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<sup>185</sup> Associated Press, “Dissent Spreads Across State,” pg1.

<sup>186</sup> “Demonstrations; Week Evaluated,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 11, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>187</sup> Associated Press, “Dissent Spreads Across State,” pg 1.

them the town needed more time to prepare and they would need to be issued a permit.<sup>188</sup> The student representative told him, “It doesn’t make any difference, we don’t need a permit, we’re going to do this regardless of any town requirements.”

That afternoon, 1000 “students, non-students, professors and college administrators” gathered at BUHS and marched down Canal then Main Street, ending with a rally in front of the Armory.<sup>189</sup> Inside the Armory about fifty National Guardsmen were waiting, though the demonstration remained peaceful. The young people carried four open coffins honoring the Kent students and a “large painting of a co-ed crying over the body of one of the slain students” made by Windham’s art department head David Rohn. At the request of a “delegation from the march,” a Vermont flag at Baker’s Bookstore was lowered to half-mast. As a “barefoot young man” did the deed, the crowd erupted into applause. Elwell remembered the march was tense, “you had the American Legion types on one side of the street, the hippies on the other side, and all these college kids in the middle.”<sup>190</sup> Despite the heightened political atmosphere, there were no major altercations. This was thanks to local police that worked to, of all things, lighten the mood: “through humor [they were] able to keep the lid on the whole situation. It was really a great site to see,” remembered the town manager.<sup>191</sup>

The crowd finally gathered at the steps of the Armory. Speakers there included a pastor, a reverend, a Marlboro student, two local veterans who gave

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<sup>188</sup> Corwin “Corky” Elwell, interview with Tucker Foltz, January 11, 2017, 00:17:00.

<sup>189</sup> Norman Runnion, “Thousands March and Sit in Peaceful Protest Here,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 6, 1970, pg 1, 7.

<sup>190</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 00:17:00-00:20:00.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

impromptu speeches condemning the protesters for simplifying the situation in Southeast Asia, and a “girl from Putney” who declared more attention ought be given to the predicament of the Black Panthers and Bobby Seale in jail. She “used obscenities in her speech,” which drew “groans” from the crowd. Windham senior and former student trustee, Matthew Shulman, seemed to be the spokesman for the rally, and he provided the opening and closing remarks. The *Reformer* reported that student were there from Windham, Marlboro, Mark Hopkins College, Antioch-Putney Graduate School and high schools BUHS and The Putney School. Organizers of the march had been Windham College students and faculty.<sup>192</sup> President Winslow and some other school leaders had been publicly supportive of student’s organizing efforts and Antioch-Putney director Norman Wilson remarked that he was “impressed at the responsibility the students have shown.”<sup>193</sup> Two student representatives from Windham also attended a statewide meeting of 13 colleges in Burlington that week and upon returning, organized transportation to rallies in Montpelier and Washington for all interested local college and high school students.<sup>194</sup>

Local journalists had zeroed in on Windham in the days following Kent State. *Reformer* front-page articles framed Windham activities within the context of national student unrest. Students seemed attune to the attention that they were receiving. During one meeting student organizers argued over a course action before asking a reporter to leave and return once they had formulated a cohesive message suited for

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<sup>192</sup> “Area Schools Join: War and Student Deaths Protested,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 5, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Jordan D. Cole, “Students at Windham Act in Several Ways,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 1.

public delivery. Before being removed, the reporter observed students trying to “silence one who said that intercolleage communications had broken down... Windham College ‘had thought,’ he said that it was to be the New England regional center, particularly for the Saturday rally in Washington.”<sup>195</sup>

Certainly Windham students and faculty taking center stage at the Brattleboro march solidified their leadership role in the local anti-war movement. Whether or not most students at the college felt Windham was the center of – or primary organizer for – *all* of New England is unclear; it would be a tall claim considering the school’s rural setting and small size. But the agitated student’s comment does signify that the young, relatively unknown college perceived its role as being one of crucial significance. The ability of the Windham students and faculty to swiftly organize, the fact that others in the area looked to the college for leadership in a time of political unrest, and that local media monitored the school closely during this period, reveals that Windham was a perceived axis for radical, political activity in the area, and that it maintained a strong network with local sympathizers off-campus and further afield.

The first days of May 1970 were filled with heightened emotion as campuses across the country grappled with student deaths in Ohio. As the school year wound down Windham students continued to engage in political activity. At graduation, it was announced that fifty-six men of the 156 graduates had signed a statement to President Nixon that they would “under no circumstances submit to induction into the Armed Forces of the U.S. as long as you or your successors continue to wage this

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<sup>195</sup> Cole, “Students at Windham Act, pg 1.

illegal and immoral war against the inhabitants of Southeast Asia.”<sup>196</sup> The students also took it upon themselves to visit residents and business owners in area towns. The *Reformer* reported forty students petitioned 100 businesses “in the Bellows Falls to Brattleboro area” to close for an hour in memory of the Kent State students, persuading forty-two to do so.<sup>197</sup> Sixty students also canvassed in Brattleboro asking residents to sign a petition to end the war. The *Reformer* paraphrased Government professor Stephen Anderson who helped with the canvassing: “The students were ‘surprised’ and encouraged by many friendly talks, even from those who would not close their businesses.”

Seemingly undiscouraged with the tiny population of the area (or perhaps its manageable size was considered a boon) students and some faculty found pressing need at this time to bring their political views into the community and perhaps energize or influence the residents of southeastern Vermont. These students were encouraged by President Winslow to engage with the outside community, despite the tense political atmosphere. The *Reformer* reported Winslow, “felt it was vital that adults – the ‘over 30s’ – get involved with young people at this time, and that it was equally vital that the young people make an effort to enlist adult support.”<sup>198</sup>

Residents responded to the students’ political activism in a varying ways. Some student-resident interaction, as reported by Professor Anderson, produced “friendly talks.” However the students’ “surprise” to have been met warmly, indicates that they expected to encounter rancor. Student political activity had been a point of

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<sup>196</sup> Jordan D. Cole, “56 Windham Graduates Refuse Vietnam Service,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 25, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, pg 1, 9.

<sup>198</sup> “Area Schools Join,” pg 1, 2.

contention for some residents who spoke publically about it, particularly after multi-school march on May 5th. Mrs. Charles B. Robb, a resident of West Brattleboro, criticized the demonstrators who obstructed her efforts to get medication for her sick toddler from the downtown drug store. “They’re doing their ‘thing’ no matter who they hurt,” she asserted in a letter to the editor.<sup>199</sup> She also took a crack at the popular counterculture notion that anyone over thirty was untrustworthy: “I’m sure this letter is useless because you see I am from the ‘establishment’ and there is a definite generation gap – I am 25.” Another resident, Mrs. Stanley Unwin of Brattleboro, had a similar complaint about the Tuesday protest, “While the students are using their rights to protest in our streets, they are taking away our rights to use these streets for the purpose for which they were built,” she said.<sup>200</sup>

However, beyond an inconsideration for shared space, the large student demonstration brought to the surface a more acute emotion: resentment. A painful, ugly emotion that had perhaps remained mostly hidden up and to this point, but spilled out in the wake obstinate politics. Like with the voting age, residents questioned who belonged and who didn’t. Mrs. Unwin continued:

One last thing that bothers me, Where are all the people who grew up around here? The leaders of the protests and of the demonstrations are not of our town or area. Are we to let outside elements come in and lead our community in directions of which we do not approve? Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own town.

A letter from Stella L. Reed of West Wardsboro echoed Unwin:

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<sup>199</sup> Mrs. Charles B. Robb, letter to the editor, “Anti-Decision,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>200</sup> Mrs. Stanley Unwin, letter to the editor, “The Middle View,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 4.

What happened to the good solid old Vermonters? Why don't they keep 'one foot on the ground'? Why not give our good President Nixon a chance? .... Isn't there a Vermonter left of the old type who would?<sup>201</sup>

In a particularly biting letter, two Putney women asserted that despite only achieving a twelfth-grade education they held "more common sense" than the protesters:

We were always under the impression that when young people went to college, they went to further their education. Not today! They go to demonstrate.... We were always under the impression that there was quite a lot of studying connected with going to College. Maybe some of them aren't here to further their education. So they don't have to study. Maybe they are running away from something, like the draft.... We just wonder if the students had to work their way through college to get their education. Would they demonstrate?.... It was a misfortune that those four students in Ohio met their destiny. If they hadn't been there in the first place it wouldn't have happened. How many soldiers over in Vietnam are dying everyday for their county. Do these so-called demonstrators mourn for them?<sup>202</sup>

The Putney women's letters, signed with their husband's names, certainly contain an undercurrent of socio-economic grudge. From their viewpoint, the privileged students, able to attend an out-of-state private college, and avoid the draft, overvalued the deaths of their Ohio peers to the deaths American soldiers; men that might not have been in the economic position to avoid draft so easily. To these residents, the agitators were out of touch, thus their demonstrations unmerited. As area college students took to the streets with marches, sit-ins and petitions, some residents questioned why they should listen, who deserved to be called a "Vermonters," and where had all the "Old Vermonters" gone? Also, to what degree

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<sup>201</sup> Mrs. Stella L. Reed, letter to the editor, "Give Nixon a Chance," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>202</sup> Mrs. David Short & Mrs. Raymond Snow, letter to the editor, "Proud American," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 8, 1970, pg 4.

should they tolerate the opinionated disrupters that speed through town in the car that daddy bought them and peddle drugs to school children? In one letter to the editor, a Brattleboro resident worried that some in the community may employ violence as a method to silence the demonstrators. As the crowd had lingered after the demonstration the resident overheard some “supposedly ‘educated’ businessmen and citizens... engaged in conversation as to how to ‘clean out’ the whole ‘gang’ (meaning marchers).” The concerned letter writer confessed, “This scares me. True, these people are entitled to their opinions of the issues at stake, but why advocate violence?”<sup>203</sup>

As the summer of 1970 wore on, relations soured. Brattleboro area residents tired of the protests and the endless stream of new hitchhikers that poured into town looking for rides out to the communes. The former Brattleboro town manager Corky Elwell remembered them, “smoking marijuana on the Baptist Church steps” which had become their “second home when they were in the city” to the dismay of the Brattleboro police.<sup>204</sup> “However,” Elwell continued, tapping the familiar anecdote about progressive Vermont exceptionality, “Brattleboro’s always been a pretty liberal community and they were always pretty accepting of these folks.”<sup>205</sup> Records contradict Elwell’s memories. That summer Putney residents would destroy the Free Farm, the co-organized Windham College/Red Clover radical farm project, by driving

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<sup>203</sup> H.J. Johnson, letter to the editor, “A View On Tuesday’s March,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 7, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>204</sup> Laffan explains their downtown activities were much more questionable than just that: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 16-17.

<sup>205</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 00:14:30.

their trucks through it. Then they would set up stocks in front of the town hall and wrested hippies into them, cutting off their long locks with sheep shears.<sup>206</sup>

Windham College, with its out-of-state hippie students, radical faculty and administration, and liberal campus environment, became an ultra-political center of anti-war activity from about 1968-1972. Students organized large demonstrations, wrote petitions and publicized their opinions like a badge of honor. The sudden growth of liberals in town, new voting laws, presence of drugs, and unapologetic politics, challenged native's beliefs about civility, privacy and town tradition. The Windham community had also been mobilizing with area's commune members. The convergence bolstered confidence in both but worried locals. Windham would not see the end of the decade. It closed its doors in 1978, the disappearance of draft dodgers and baby boomers sent the school into a financial nosedive.<sup>207</sup> But its cultural influence lives on, in the progressive politics and funky flair of current-day Brattleboro and its citizens.

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<sup>206</sup> The accounts of the stocks vary slightly, some include a bathtub and or a bathtub on the back of a traveling truck, the Putney Historical Society book either confuses the year as 1969 or there were multiple instances, see: Frazier, "1960s Communes in Southern Vermont," 110.

<sup>207</sup> Shmulsky, "Grant Will Preserve Windham."

## Chapter 4: The Communes

Last Wednesday, to get to your story of the week, it was sunny and warm. It was the first day of spring and the thermostats felt like the Dow Jones averages after a Soviet arms parade.

A car pulled into the Putney Road service station for a shot of petrol. Two or three characters occupied the front seat and one lone single solitary young gal was perched on the back seat.

There was nothing particularly remarkable about the girl, witnesses say, except that she was totally unclad from the waist up.

The station attendant deadpanned the whole bit, which would not have surprised Allen Funt, who knows about reactions what to say to a naked lady. He might have said, in this instance:

“Score two points for the Women’s Liberation Front!”<sup>208</sup>

This was the story from *Reformer* weekly columnist R. L. Dubuque in the spring of 1970. Dubuque was having some fun with a topic that seemed to be on everyone’s mind at that time: exactly what was going on in those backwoods communes? Days after Dubuque’s comments, tragedy would strike when four youngsters would die in a Johnson’s Pasture commune house fire. After the fire, the community would begin to strong-arm their way into asserting some control over the communes. But for now, before the fire, before the protests and before the Free Farm, resident’s attitudes seem to have been located more along the lines of innocent curiosity. One drug trial at the time seemed to draw out this sentiment. A nineteen year-old had been charged for selling “Grade A LSD” to a minor, a seventeen year-old female friend of his. Her mother had called the police. Of all places the drug deal had happened in an ice cream parlor, the girl’s place of work. A *Reformer* journalist described every minute detail of the drug exchange, and her drug experience in the

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<sup>208</sup> R. L. Dubuque, “It Dawns On Us...,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 11, 1970, pg 4.

paper. They described her hallucinations in which she saw “a huge, lighted, glowing butterfly” on her front lawn and “a dog which would shrink to nothing then return to normal size.”<sup>209</sup> The front-page article had an eager inquisitiveness to it. It was called, “Girl Tells About Drug Experience,” not “Boy charged in Drug Trial” or “LSD in our streets.” At least some in Brattleboro seemed interested in what the counterculture was all about, at least from a distance. The Brattleboro Floral Arts Club that year even held a workshop on organic gardening. The speakers at it were two locals, a father and son, who had begun selling organic farm supplies at their greenhouse in Dummerston.<sup>210</sup> These instances show that even in the early years, hippie ideology was not entirely resisted by locals. The hippies’ ideas and activities were assessed on a case-by-case basis. Each was weighed against the values that Vermonters lived by before the hippies came. If the notion was outlandish, let it be; if it was useful, try it out; and if it was dangerous, take action to squash it. Locals talked with each other, wrote letters to the editor, and brought issues to their town representatives. The whole process must have been a rather public one for the usually reclusive mountain dwellers. Perhaps it even brought people together, as they formed a distinctive picture of what a true Vermonter looked like, in contrast to the urban-bred longhairs.

The area’s communes were located outside Brattleboro, in the surrounding hilly townships, but downtown was the gathering place for most hippie travelers entering the state from the cities to the south.<sup>211</sup> Longhairs met at places like

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<sup>209</sup> “Girl Tells About Drug Experience,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 13, 1970, pg 1, 7.

<sup>210</sup> Their names were Harry and Howard Gasset: “Club Told About Organic Gardening,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, July 16, 1970, ?.

<sup>211</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 16-17.

Common Ground Restaurant, where they would learn about the communes and collectives that peppered the state, deciding to either try their luck with the local ones or spread out of Brattleboro, to whichever commune that sounded most intriguing. Laffan estimated there were between one and two thousand people living in communes in Vermont between 1968 and 1975, at the movement's peak.<sup>212</sup> There were around 100 communes in the state at the time, at least sixteen around Brattleboro.<sup>213</sup>

Commune and collective founders came to the state with varying desires and pre-conceived notions. For some, Vermont was a place where they were going to realize radical political change. For others, it was a place to escape the violence and pain of 1960s urban political uprisings. For most it would be where they first experimented with subsistence-based, primitive living and where they would discover, for the first time, a type of honest, human connection with their commune friends like they had never experienced before.<sup>214</sup> This chapter explores the activities of three of them: Packer Corners, Johnson's Pasture and Red Clover Collective.<sup>215</sup> With these histories I explain how locals responded differently to different groups, to reveal that tolerance was a complex and difficult terrain for the communards to navigate as they identified the limits of where there was room to budge and where

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<sup>212</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 20, 259-260.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*; Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 82.

<sup>214</sup> Verandah Porche, interview by Mark Greenberg, interviewed for the *Green Mountain Chronicles* radio series, Vermont Historical Society, 1989, 00:39:20.; Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 34.

<sup>215</sup> Some other area communes were Peter Simon's Tree Frog Farm, the women's commune Mayday, (both within walking distance of Packer Corners) and Montague Farm across the Massachusetts boarder. For Montague see: Tom Fels, *Buying the Farm: Peace and War on a Sixties Commune* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

there was not. By unpacking these negotiations, I dismantle the narrative of uninterrupted, progressive state exceptionalism, buried beneath decades of homogenous, liberal migration, to show how acceptance by natives depended more on the class, propriety, and clamor of its members than anything else.

### *Packer Corners Farm*

For myself I'd much rather follow Uncle Louie back into feudal times and enjoy the life as it exists on our manor. Serfdom has been abolished, of course, and our friends and neighbors are all M'Ladies and M' Lords. Except when there are potatoes to be dug. Then we all become peasants and live in thatched huts. It's also fun to follow the Fen of Wick into the woods like lumberjacks in days of old. First we breakfast on buckwheat cakes with homemade butter and maple syrup and wash it all down with strong black coffee brewed on our woodburning stove. Then it's off to the woods to chop down towering white pine with the heavy steel blade of a double edged axe. The wood has many uses. Verandah is cutting shingles from the short, straight pieces that have no knots. There's also a woodshed and a sugarhouse to be built and Pete is making a chair. Not one board foot of our lumber goes to the King... We're very careful about which trees we cut down. We've seen the way lumberman abused the woodland in logging days of the past, and we're careful not to repeat their mistakes.<sup>216</sup>

—Marty Jezer, 1971

This description of commune life by Marty Jezer, co-founder of Packer Corners in Guilford appeared in the commune newsletter, *Green Mountain Post*. His whimsical fantasy actually provides a distilled illustration of many qualities that Packer Corners communards, as well as the droves of back-to-the-landers who followed them, were searching for in Vermont: a place that somehow *felt* like the past but also accommodated social conditions of the future. A place where traditional American folkways had prevailed, humans and nature existed in equilibrium, people

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<sup>216</sup> Marty Jezer, "Where Barf Barf Is," *Green Mountain Post*, no. 3 (1971): 18. Thomas W. Fels Collection (MS 943). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

still specialized in a trade, a genuine sense of community remained, and social inequities and hierarchies had been stripped away completely.

On the one hand the Packer Corners folks described themselves as childlike, living together in a “clubhouse,” gleefully naïve of the rural lifestyle that they had chosen, on the other hand they considered themselves clever revolutionaries for doing it.<sup>217</sup> They were also highly exclusive. Unlike neighboring communes like Red Clover that actively recruited, or Johnson’s Pasture that was open to all, Packer was a closed group. When it came to the locals they kept a distance. Where Red Clover poked and prodded and the mere size and chaos at Johnson’s Pasture’s disturbed the town peace, Packer was able to maintain stability. Over time, they even became a central component to the public memory of Brattleboro’s hippie past. They also were talented writers and highly educated. Their privilege and popularity would serve them well over time, as Brattleboro and Vermont’s high-cultured, progressive population grew.

In 1968, friends Ray Mungo, Verandah Porche, Marty Jezer, Richard Wizansky and others pooled their money to buy Packer Corners (its literary moniker: Total Loss Farm), a 92-acre farm with a peach tree orchard in the southwestern part of Guilford – ten miles outside Brattleboro. The group had been journalists for the radical underground press organization, Liberation News Service (LNS). LNS, which had “total readership in the millions,” reported on the anti-war movement, oppression at home and abroad, drugs, homosexuality and other counterculture topics, and

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<sup>217</sup> Raymond Mungo, *Total Loss Farm: A Year in the Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), 131, 137, 148.

worked with the Black Panther Party and Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>218</sup> It served as “an alternative Associated Press” for college papers and New Left publications, mailing out bi-weekly “packets” for reprinting. LNS was founded by Mungo and Marshall Bloom and based first in Washington, DC then New York City. As the publication grew, fissures developed between its creators and the majority of staff who desired “a more structured collective control” over the “free-wheeling style of Bloom and Mungo.” The two men split from LNS and with allied friends, abandoned New York to begin “sister communes” less than thirty-miles apart: Bloom in Massachusetts with Montague Farm and Mungo at Packer Corners.<sup>219</sup> Like most communes the number of members fluctuated but in the first years there were about a dozen consistent residents at Packer Corners.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, nearby Johnson’s Pasture had nearly 1000 people pass through in its first year alone; travelers staying for short or extended periods of time on the free land and numbers ballooning in the summers.<sup>221</sup>

Despite its size, Packer Corners, the area’s first commune, was the catalyst for communal activity in the region, leading “directly to the founding of six other communes.”<sup>222</sup> Photographer Peter Simon, brother of singer-songwriter Carly Simon, paid for and established the commune Tree Frog Farm in Guilford in 1970. He said he

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<sup>218</sup> Allen Young, “Liberation News Service: A History,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990).

<sup>219</sup> Marshall Bloom would commit suicide a year later. Special Collections at the University of Massachusetts Amherst holds papers relating to Bloom, Montague Farm, Mungo and LNS.

<sup>220</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 181.

<sup>221</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 72.

<sup>222</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 20.

was just “following the call of Ray Mungo.”<sup>223</sup> The group knew it was on the cutting edge of counterculture movements: “[we] flatter ourselves with the notion that we are always a couple years ahead of the real stampedes (*viz.*, the antiwar movement, dope, rural relocation)” Mungo wrote.<sup>224</sup> Fueled by the popularity of their underground press and the growing fixation of their generational peers on rural America, the group “discovered that every fragment of their experience is marketable” and eventually members Porche, Jezer, Mungo, Peter Gould, and late joiner Alicia Bay Laurel all signed book deals that helped pay for the group’s \$2700 a year mortgage, and food when the writers-turned farmers struggled to produce enough of it.<sup>225</sup> Especially lucrative were Mungo’s *Famous Long Ago* and the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Total Loss Farm*.<sup>226</sup>

The tight-knit group of successful intellectuals in their early twenties could also be outright arrogant at times. They had “a sense of remarkable self-involvement” a book critic for *Atlantic Monthly* once noted.<sup>227</sup> Ray Mungo later admitted, “we were kind of the literary hippies” and “we thought we were better than the other hippies.”<sup>228</sup> The commune was closed to strangers and when many travelers appeared up on their doorstep they would be sent to nearby Johnson’s Pasture which (most of the time) had an open-door policy. The *Atlantic* writer explained, “Self-involvement is essential to the well-being of Total Loss Farm... the authors are aware their

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<sup>223</sup> Patrick Timothy Mullikin, “Drop Out, drop in: Vermont Communes died out, but their spirit is part of the state,” *Rutland Herald*, September 30, 2007, sec E.

<sup>224</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 107.

<sup>225</sup> Richard Todd, “Psychic Farming: County Books,” *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1973, 115.

<sup>226</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 87.

<sup>227</sup> Todd, “Psychic Farming,” 115.

<sup>228</sup> Mullikin, “Drop Out, drop in,” E4.

wholeness depends on their insularity. They are consciously enacting homemade myths which lift the farm out of mundane experience.”<sup>229</sup>

Packer Corners folks did grow their own food. It took a few years to perfect their garden. The first year, “few of us really had any rural skills,” Veranda Porche remembered. But she claimed members learned from ‘how-to’ books and by their fourth year, they were selling their vegetables at the market to pay their taxes. “[We] were placing in the county fair, our vegetables did very well for quite a while, when it was out passion,” said Porche.<sup>230</sup> There is an important distinction in her words. Farming was a *passion*, not a livelihood. Their privilege allowed them to play the farmer, even get quite good at it, but abandon it when they wished, which they did. Here a light is shown on the reasons that some farmers resented back-to-the landers. Mungo too approached farming as romance not a livelihood: “The garden.... It is church, it is synagogue, it is peace on earth and plenty... We are never higher or nobler than when we are weeding the eggplants.”<sup>231</sup>

Packer Corners members affiliated themselves with earlier New Englanders, just like the Nearings had. The communards especially admired nineteenth century transcendentalists Ralph Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In *Total Loss Farm*, Mungo gushed over their beautiful garden, but was silent about their many farmer neighbors, save one, the man that had owned the land before them and “failed in the dairy business after he hung himself in the barn.”<sup>232</sup> Packer folks didn’t emulate their sad Vermont contemporaries, at least not everything about them. Vermonters were

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<sup>229</sup> Todd, “Psychic Farming,” 115.

<sup>230</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:13:00.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 134.

still a part of “straight society.” Perhaps they, like the Nearings, realized Vermonters were nothing too special once they were living among them, unlike the vacationing summer residents of the past. One time they chased away an HVAC salesman that had come up from Brattleboro, ““Go tempt the lost souls of the poor!”” they shouted at him as he “went whooping down the mountain with his tale between his ears.”<sup>233</sup>

The Packer’s crew thought they understood something special about life in the past. In *Total Loss Farm* Mungo recreated Thoreau’s *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* by taking a boat up the rivers with some friends. In the new version he described how polluted the rivers had become, a metaphor for greater society.<sup>234</sup> Back-to-the-landers were taken by characters like Thoreau and the Nearings, because they were political radicals, ahead of their time.<sup>235</sup> Thoreau, a pacifist, had gone to jail for refusing to pay his taxes during the Mexican-American War. Also, as Daloz explained, back-to-the-landers identified with Thoreau because of “his penchant for crankily rejecting whatever smacked of the mainstream... and his insistence on the moral benefits of pairing down to the bare essentials.”<sup>236</sup> *Brattleboro Reformer* editor Norm Runnion coined a whimsical phrase for what was happening up at Packer Corners. He called it “Mungo Waldenism.”<sup>237</sup> Life at Packer was a dream, or at least they wanted their readers to think so. “At the farm, we are lost and thus always on vacation,” Mungo declared. “I was a poet and wanted our lives to be a poem,” Porche

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 15-53.

<sup>235</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 36.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>237</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:16:30.

later remembered.<sup>238</sup> At a gathering in Brattleboro after the very first Earth Day, Mungo spoke to a crowd of about 200, The *Reformer* captured his words:

He said he had come to ‘crummy old Brattleboro’ with all its people and automobile exhausts, to speak in the ceremonies even though he disapproved of demonstrations.... He and his Friends, he said, had chosen to live in a commune ‘because it makes sense economically. We don’t like to work. We like to labor in a field but we don’t like to work for a salary. So I’m all for unemployment provided that people can clothe, feed and house themselves.’

The *Reformer* pointed out that the crowd was “many young people and a sprinkling of adults.” Perhaps the “adults” didn’t think Mungo’s message was meant for them. Or maybe they were at work.

At Packer Corners, Mungo and the others had followed New England’s “imaginative center” out of Massachusetts, north from Thoreau’s Walden Pond and into Vermont. And even if modern-day Vermonters were nothing too special, the communards did appreciate that they mostly left them alone. Mungo, like the literary outsiders before him, placed Vermont on a familiar mystic pedestal. Vermont was inherently safe, and unspoiled, and now it was a good place for freaks. He explained Vermont was not like “the south [that] has nothing to do with anything, nobody you really love lives in the South.”<sup>239</sup> Even San Francisco was “not up to psychic par – almost as if the mood of the East had been strangely transferred to the West on airwaves.”<sup>240</sup> If one was a freak like Mungo and crew, (but also well-read, able catch the literary references on every other page) they could find peace in Vermont:

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<sup>238</sup> Chris Bohjalian, “Urban refugees brought change: New Vermonters search for the good life,” *Burlington Free Press*, August 29, 1999, sec. 4A.

<sup>239</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 82.

<sup>240</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 112.

Not like in New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, places where bad burly men may ask for your license and registration, or worse, search your naked body and demean your dignity for no reason better than bad vibrations... Vermont is a place of strong white magick, a place friendly to adventurers of the mind and body, a holy place<sup>241</sup>

The Packer Corners group did seem to ignite less hostility in the local community than the other communes. Porche recalled that some of their neighbors early on had told them that the locals wouldn't like them "and so we kept very much to ourselves for years. We minded our own business; we were told that that was the 'Vermont way.' And the people that we looked to as neighbors were other so called alternative types."<sup>242</sup> They tried to stay out of major townie-hippie conflicts.<sup>243</sup> Packer's members may have avoided being open to locals out of safety concerns: some of the members, including Mungo were gay.<sup>244</sup> But Laffan noted that Packer "had finally established peace and anonymity among its... neighbors after two years." When trouble did arise between townspeople and other longhairs, Packer's members worried that the townspeople wouldn't make distinctions between them and the other groups and that it might "rekindle old animosities toward them."<sup>245</sup>

Whatever "animosities" Laffan was referencing is unclear. There was one instance when tempers ran so high with a neighbor that he shot the commune's border collie after warning its owners that the dog should not be allowed to roam free during deer season: It had killed somewhere between 11 and 17 deer.<sup>246</sup> Yet most the relations between the Guilford and Packer people in the early years seemed non-

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>242</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:06:30.

<sup>243</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 150, 213.

<sup>244</sup> Mungo, *Total Loss Farm*, 136.

<sup>245</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 122.

<sup>246</sup> Jezer, "Where Barf Barf Is," 24.; Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 76.

existent or harmless. Porche did think their presence brought at least some excitement to the town's journalists:

People were hard up for news and we were news, I mean when we first came here the Brattleboro Reformer used to be full of small items about 'Mrs. Dorothy So-and-so's daughter-in-law is visiting from Vernon.' And after the back-to-the-landers came, oh, they had a lot more grist to crew on.<sup>247</sup>

Packer Corners maintained the longest sustainability among the Brattleboro communes. By the end of the 1970s, members were getting jobs, having children and moving off the land, but plenty also stayed and maintained some level of the commune life.<sup>248</sup> Porche took the reins and transformed Packers Corner into Monteverdi Artists Collaborative, a multifaceted educational and artists residency center with a trust originally secured by Mungo in 1971 when he left for California.<sup>249</sup> It's still in operation today. While members of most other communes had left by the end of the seventies, Packer's members like Porche, Jezer, Gould, Wizansky, Don McLean and Mark Fenwick remained in the area and they eventually blended into the community. "There was a perfect symmetry between us and the native Vermonters," Porche would say thirty years later. She meant that Packer Corners residents, with their interest in traditional farming methods and passion for the 'Vermont way,' physically filled the void left by old Vermonter's children who had left in droves in

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<sup>247</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:18:00.

<sup>248</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:22:30-24:40.; According to Mungo Packer Corners the commune was finished by 1980, see: Mullikin, "Drop Out, drop in," E4.

<sup>249</sup> Green, "Hippie Havens."

search of a more prosperous life.<sup>250</sup> “They are respected citizens of the community, you bet,” Elwell the former town manager said in 2017.<sup>251</sup>

Any rocky relations that existed at first between commune and town were ironed out with time. Packer Corners members eventually came out of their isolation and they took leading roles in the growing Brattleboro hippie culture, a culture that would become a central part of the town’s identity. Marty Jezer went on to help found NOFA, the Natural Organic Farmers Association, the Brattleboro Farmer’s Market, and sat on the Board of Directors at the Common Ground Restaurant. Toward the end of his life he wrote a beloved column in the *Brattleboro Reformer*.<sup>252</sup> Verandah Porche dedicating her life to artistic outreach in the area schools and community, and she, McLean, Wizansky and Gould organized community theater performances on their land and elsewhere, and formed “The Packer Corners Players” which was playfully termed the region’s “most reclusive theater group.”<sup>253</sup> But more than that, Packer Corners members became locally famous: stalwarts of the community. The Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro holds folders of clippings for both Marty and Verandah. In recent years, Porche has had profiles written in the *Times Argus*, *Brattleboro Reformer* and *Burlington Free Press*. In each, the journalists gloss over her recent poetry publications to fixate on the early years of Packer Corners. “Did you know her wedding was featured in the *New York Times*?” the Brooks Library

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<sup>250</sup> Bohjalian, “Urban refugees,” 4A.

<sup>251</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 1:26:00.

<sup>252</sup> “Marty Jeezer,” Obituaries, *Brattleboro Reformer*, June 13, 2005, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/brattleboro/obituary.aspx?pid=14255175>.

<sup>253</sup> Donin Guilford, “Under Milk Wood Play Reading Saturday in Guilford,” *ibrattleboro*, October 22, 2014, <http://www.ibrattleboro.com/sections/arts/under-milk-wood-play-reading-saturday-guilford>.

reference librarian asked me when I shared my paper topic. And there it was – a full page in “Fashion & Style” with color photos. The article gushed over the peasantry of her late-in-life ceremony: “guests trod through muddy fields...while Peter Gould...played sprightly tunes on a concertina.... The meal and cake were potluck.... the brides dress, made by the groom’s mother.”<sup>254</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, communes were national points of voyeurism: their strange looks, odd foods, naked bodies, “modern family” structure, and generational isolation and boldness. In Brattleboro at the time, all those things were true. But today, the former communards are not considered odd, perhaps only to the editors of *New York Times, Fashion & Style*. Now they have blended, their lifestyles are almost typical: Veranda is getting married again and Wizansky manages a consulting firm. He admitted, “I’m totally bourgeoisie now, but I’m a hippie where it counts: in my heart and in my soul.”<sup>255</sup>

What matters is not if they eventually “sold out” to straight society but that their past is a special memory for everyone there to share; revived time and time again in state newspapers. Interestingly, former Town m=Manager Elwell confused which commune had caught on fire in his interview, he thought it was Packer Corners.<sup>256</sup> In public memory, Packer has come to represent an aggregate of all the areas communes that once existed in Brattleboro. It’s revealing that they do. Packer, unlike Johnson’s Pasture and Red Clover, did not have significant conflict with the

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<sup>254</sup> Marialisa Calta, “A Second Union, to a Commune and Each Other,” *New York Times*, May 9, 2014, [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/fashion/weddings/a-second-union-to-a-commune-and-each-other.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/fashion/weddings/a-second-union-to-a-commune-and-each-other.html?_r=0).

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

locals. They were also the ones that stuck around. Brattleboro today, with its burgeoning theater scene and cozy bookstores feels like an extension of Packer more than any of the others. Today, Packer Corners' members are cherished figureheads of 'New Vermont,' the placeholders of sacred memories for the state's aging back-to-the-landers, the vast majority of whom never lived on a commune. They were the modern "pioneers" of the Green Mountains, and the ones that really went all the way.

### Johnson's Pasture

While the Packer Corners group kept mostly out of the way of their Guilford neighbors, Johnson's Pasture was the quite the opposite. The commune's open-door policy and the lack of structure or leadership attracted a revolving carousel of wandering hippies, some of them quite destitute. It also attracted another commune, the Brotherhood of the Spirit. The members of Brotherhood of the Spirit were part of a religious cult looking to expand, and they tried to push the Johnson's Pasture group off the land. The Pasture attracted herds of visitors. Barry Laffan, who lived in his VW camper on the land for two years studying the commune, counted "nearly 1,000 [that] stayed a couple of days at a time or longer" in just one summer.<sup>257</sup> The sudden number of longhairs in Guilford alarmed residents. Being a magnet for drifters to Brattleboro it also increased the number of longhairs coming through downtown.<sup>258</sup> As the full-time group living at Pasture changed over time, soon the open-land policy started to attract a poor and helpless lot, the underbelly of the counterculture. Pastures members subscribed to a host of low-income stereotypes including high rates of

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<sup>257</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 72.

<sup>258</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 73.

pregnancy, drugs, crime and welfare. Their sudden appearance and tumultuous lives became a problem for all in the area. Locals reacted sometimes with benevolence and other times discrimination. They bothered other communards, as locals didn't usually differentiate between the groups, so their reckless ways reflected on everyone.<sup>259</sup>

Johnson's Pasture came together in 1969. The commune was started by friends, non-Vermonters, most of whom had attended college locally and shared a local group house. They were young. The founders average age was twenty-one and by 1970 the average age of members would be even younger, with about an even number of teens and twenty-somethings.<sup>260</sup> New Yorker Michael Carpenter purchased the hilly 100-120 acres from his personal inheritance and a loan from his mother.<sup>261</sup> The commune was very remote. It was "virtually inaccessible by car," and the path from road to camp was over a mile.<sup>262</sup> Carpenter initially took a leadership role but increasingly distanced himself from the commune as it became wrought with very serious issues, refrained from kicking out trouble makers and remained stubborn about keeping the land open.<sup>263</sup>

The original purpose for the founding members had centered on a desire for deep, interpersonal relations, and closeness to nature.<sup>264</sup> It was a revolt from the mundane "9 to 5" existence of straight society. They did grow food, but badly, and work came second to partying, to the chagrin of ambitious members who quickly

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<sup>259</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 56.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30, 39, 86.

<sup>261</sup> The mother, Florence Carpenter, also lent money to his brother to start another commune in California: *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>262</sup> For directions to Johnsons Pasture see: Norman Runnion, "Week After Fire: Pasture Normal Again," *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 24, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>263</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 42, 156-157

<sup>264</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 43.

left.<sup>265</sup> Instead, they mostly lived off food stamps, damaged grocery store goods and whatever was brought to them by visitors. By 1971, Laffan described the Pasture as a “rural ghetto,” plagued by mental illness, inaccessibility to resources, violent outbursts, social isolation and uncleanliness. It was “real, involuntary poverty,” he explained.<sup>266</sup> John Douglas, founder of the Red Clover Collective, recalled visiting in the winter and seeing residents, including babies, wrapped in blankets and sleeping in a shed that was open to the mud and snow.<sup>267</sup> Though original members had wanted to live by an “Aquarian ideology of openness, mutual care, and social collectiveness” that very philosophy ended up attracting “those who needed care more than they could give it, and fostered collections (not collectives) of lost individuals.”<sup>268</sup> The economic status of people at the Pasture plummeted after the first year. As the original college-type drifted away, in their place came poorer hippies, attracted to the free rent probably more than anything else.

Laffan’s report of the fifteen permanent residents that lived there in 1970 revealed a sharp contrast to the typical well-educated, and economically privileged hippies, like those at Packer Corners. Most were from working class backgrounds and a large number of them high school dropouts.<sup>269</sup> Instead of going to college they had worked low-wage jobs. They had periodic health complications including Hepatitis, staff infections and chronic lice.<sup>270</sup> Most had poor relationships with their families; many had tragic upbringings with instances of abuse, neglectful parents and periods

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<sup>265</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 106, 72.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>267</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 1:01:50.

<sup>268</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 81.

<sup>269</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 86-87.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, 76-77, 124.

of institutional state care. One had dealt drugs and another had been a prostitute. Laffan concluded, “It was the hope of finding family, a sense of belonging, and peace that drew them to [Johnson’s Pasture] in the first place.”<sup>271</sup> In this light, what happened at Johnson’s Pasture should be understood within the context of economic inequality in greater society. With little maneuverability, and no family to lean on, these destitute young people could not escape the hardships of their lives, even off-grid in a backwoods intentional community meant to foster better relationships. In Vermont, they met not lesser hardships than they might have elsewhere. Sadly, because of their disheveled appearance and comunard status they were also regarded by natives as privileged, no different from the people at Packers Corner, Red Clover or any other area communes; merely imitating poverty in a search for self-fulfillment.

The Pasture failed as a model for an alternative system unfettered from the Establishment. Members still relied on state institutions, like receiving welfare checks; and were affected by them, like being thrown in jail. However, the Pasture had a great impact on Brattleboro and Vermont in the sheer amount of people that were attracted to the area after having heard about the commune’s open policy through hippie networks (whether or not they stuck around after visiting). Laffan considered the Pasture the single most influential agent of counterculture in Vermont at that time. The Pasture was after all, the largest commune near Brattleboro, the hippie gateway to Vermont, where from 1968 to 1972, communes “were the foci of social, religious,

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<sup>271</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 41.

political and economic change activities in the [Brattleboro] area.”<sup>272</sup> Thus, the Pasture acted as a “conduit” which attracted, funneled, and then distributed thousands of young hippies into the rest of the state; “one of the first steps on the new underground railroad.”

Johnson’s Pasture members exhibited significant criminal behavior, no doubt due in some part to their impoverished state. Member’s excessive drinking and drug use led to uncomfortable incidents in town, such as when a Johnson’s Pasture resident on LSD halted cars in Brattleboro to lecture the drivers about the environment, then proceeded to jump off a twenty-five foot bridge requiring emergency services to save him from the cold water.<sup>273</sup> Members also racked up unpaid bills, both significant and insignificant. The town librarian refused to allow commune members to access the library and its services because of unpaid fines.<sup>274</sup> More troubling, Pasture visitors had tried to avoid paying for treatment at the hospital by using false names and billing the commune before skipping town. Pasture members were also stealing from local businesses, and soon shop staffs were following around anyone with long hair or a particular style of dress.<sup>275</sup> Johnson’s Pasture members even stole from other communes such as taking money from the register at Common Ground Restaurant, or at one point, after a dispute with a founding member had concluded in him leaving the Pasture for Tree Frog Farm, members raided that commune’s kitchen, stealing, gorging on, and destroying all the fresh and canned stock from the rich pantry, while

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<sup>272</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 257-258.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 82-3.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 107, 83.

Tree Frog folk “intimidated and terrified by the mob, huddled together in the living room for mutual protection.”<sup>276</sup>

Disputes with communes led to levels of exclusion from the hip scene, but altercations with locals became physical, revealing the loathing that some felt towards the Pasture. One wintery night, a group of snowmobiles came out to scare the commune, taunting them in “anonymous outfits, masks, and goggles, one yelling that the residents better be out of there by spring or they’d live to regret it.”<sup>277</sup> In another episode, a member was arrested after a bar fight and detained at the town jail where he was “punched a few times” by the police then “dragged down the stairs by his long hair (with scalp wounds to prove it).”<sup>278</sup> Whereas the communards may have met harassment with police in Brattleboro, Guilford Constable Arnold Clark, didn’t describe anything quite so disturbing, he remembered the commune more as an annoyance: “Family members would call at all hours of the night, saying, ‘My daughter is living at the Johnson’s Pasture and I haven’t heard anything from her. Can you go over there and ask if she’s okay?’”<sup>279</sup> Workers at area institutions like the library, hospital, and police began to feel the burden of Johnson’s Pasture. Drugs, stealing, run-ins with law enforcement; these were all distasteful habits. But they were also signs of a group that was sick, hungry and broke. No other town institution held more significance in the lives of the communards than the welfare office.

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<sup>276</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 214, 208-209; Veranda Porche called Tree Frog “the richest farm,”: Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:36:50.

<sup>277</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 82.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>279</sup> Veranda Porche, *Kitchen Talks 3 with Guilford Elders* (published by the author, 2011), 26.

The Brattleboro area food stamp program had only begun in 1968.<sup>280</sup> Resident's opinions about it were mixed. The *Reformer* ran a positive article about the program noting that during the first three years of its existence \$20,000 had been added to the area's economy (in federal dollars).<sup>281</sup> Local food retailers were directly benefiting from low-income residents' ability to use the stamps to purchase local dairy, meat and produce. Not all Vermonters saw it this way. Some were incensed that their tax dollars went towards supporting the hedonist lifestyles of longhaired newcomers that they saw frequenting the welfare office. The *Reformer* reprinted a letter to the editor from a Burlington resident: "[The] usual hippie and his comrades establish their communes in abandoned shacks and old houses and except in a few cases avoid work like the plague... U.S. and Vermont taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for it." Though funds came in federal dollars the letter writer noted that, "some administrative costs fall on the state. It is our feeling that social workers are being taken away from other important work to police these stamps for hippies."<sup>282</sup>

Johnson's Pasture members did rely heavily on welfare. They also lied to get more stamps. There were lots of children at Johnson's Pasture. In the spring of 1970, three women had young children at the same time as three others were pregnant. Packer Corners coined a nickname for them, "The Baby Farm."<sup>283</sup> Most stamps came to the Pastures by way of the mothers, but the food split between all members. They deceived welfare workers in whatever way needed to increase income. At one point,

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<sup>280</sup> "Food Stamps Directly Benefit Area Economy," *Brattleboro Reformer*, June 24, 1971, pg 9.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> "Hippies and Food Stamps," originally published in *Burlington Free Press*, *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 9, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>283</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 107, 33.

when a social worker was visiting the commune, residents rearranged their homes to hide their communal living habits. They made it appear that every mother had a separate residence with a heating source, a stipulation by the office. If other people had been found living with the mother in a “family” situation, they would have been considered responsible for the child’s welfare. One mother’s partner simply hid in the forest until the social worker was gone.<sup>284</sup>

An angry Brattleboro resident wrote a letter to Governor Davis conveying shock and disgust at the newcomers she saw around “begging rides,” on the highway, bathing “nude in the streams” and using “human waste for fertilizer!”

They immediately go to the local Welfare Office where they apply for Food Stamps and many places do sell them Maple Syrup and luxury items which they send out as presents to people in other states. Taxpayers are becoming aware of these things which is most unfair to those who work to support their families and pay their taxes to both State and Federal government.<sup>285</sup>

Joseph Betit, state social welfare commissioner, responded to the criticism. He imposed new restrictions on food stamp eligibility, requiring applicants to prove that they were state residents, that they were seeking employment, and that they lived in homes that met certain standards.<sup>286</sup> Most commune members could not meet these requirements, particularly those at living at Johnson’s Pasture.<sup>287</sup> The Betit cuts were understood as a direct attack on hippies: “We hope the commissioner sticks to his

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<sup>284</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 107-108.; Johnson’s Pasture was not the only Brattleboro commune to capitalize on state welfare, Tree Frog Farm and the Brotherhood of the Spirit were at least two others: Ibid, 191.

<sup>285</sup> Jean F. Hand, May 12, 1971, “Influx of Young People (Hippies),” *Governor Deane Davis’s Records*, box A181-00027, Vermont State Archives (Montpelier, Vermont).

<sup>286</sup> “Hippies and Food Stamps,” pg 4

<sup>287</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 190-191.

guns and that these traveling loafers go back to where they came from, for food stamps,” one resident asserted, “We don’t want to them to starve, but they are no asset to Vermont.”<sup>288</sup> Laffan said the orders directly targeted the Brattleboro communes as proven by the fact they all “simultaneously received letters announcing cut-offs when most regular non-communal recipients were not asked to comply.”<sup>289</sup> A young Liberty Union Party gubernatorial hopeful by the name of Bernard Sanders took the opportunity to rake Betit and the Republicans over the coals before the 1972 election, declaring, “his ‘first act if elected governor would be to fire Welfare Commissioner Joseph Betit.... ‘It seems incredible that Gov. Deane C. Davis would appoint a man who has so little compassion for the problems of poor people’.”<sup>290</sup>

Life at Johnson’s Pasture became especially complicated with the arrival of another communal group, the Brotherhood of the Spirit headquartered, in Warwick and Turners Falls, Massachusetts, just fifteen miles south. A small group came to live at Johnson’s Pasture in the summer of 1969, then returned in droves the next summer, creating violent and emotional upset when they attempted to force the previous residents off the land. The Brotherhood of the Spirit was centered on the teachings of twenty-year-old founder and self-proclaimed mystic, Michael Metelica. It was a New Age spiritual group, loosely Christian-based. Michael Carpenter had become enamored with Metelica and had brought the group to Johnson’s Pasture. Their

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<sup>288</sup> “Hippies and Food Stamps,” pg 4.

<sup>289</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 191.

<sup>290</sup> “Gov. Candidate: Bernard Sanders Says He Would Fire Betit,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 15, 1972, pg 1.; Bernard ‘Bernie’ Sanders ran three times for governor in 1972 (Liberty Union), 1976 (Liberty Union) and 1986 (Independent) receiving 1.1, 6.1 and 14.4 respectively, see: “Office of the Vermont Secretary of State: General Election Results Governor 1789-2012,” *Vermont State Archives and Records Administration*, <https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/308153/stoff1gov.pdf>.

doctrine was apocalyptic: Metelica would lead his followers through the “Picean holocaust” and into “the Aquarian age of human togetherness” where the Brotherhood “will save everything, will rule everything.”<sup>291</sup> One stipulation was that members surrender their assets to the group’s bank account, so that when members needed money, they had to ask permission.<sup>292</sup> The Brotherhood were squeaky-clean; abstaining from alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and promiscuity, but the extreme demands of Metelica and his hand-picked “lieutenants” sometimes caused physical and emotional trauma to members.<sup>293</sup> The two groups couldn’t be more different. Johnson’s Pasture members rejected organizational structure, abhorred leadership, drank heavily, and used dope and psychoactive substances whenever they could get them.<sup>294</sup> The only thing the groups had in common was their want for the land.

Brotherhood members were particularly disrespectful of the town and their neighbors. They angered locals by disposing of trash everywhere, driving recklessly on the roads, and going to the bathroom in public sight.<sup>295</sup> Locals didn’t distinguish between Brotherhood and Pasture members and the negative attention didn’t help the Pasture’s already low image. “At one point [locals] considered cutting a tree down across the road around a sharp curve, hopefully causing one of their vehicles to crash.”<sup>296</sup> The Pasture was at a loss, unable to navigate civil relations with their neighbors and without the authority to dispose of the Brotherhood (Carpenter had left

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<sup>291</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 52.; Jordan Cole, “Brotherhood of the Spirit: New People at Pasture want to be Understood,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 6, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>292</sup> Patricia Curtis, “We Live in a Commune,” *Family Circle*, February, 1973, pg 52.

<sup>293</sup> Abstinence: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 128.; Trauma: *Ibid*, 121, 126.

<sup>294</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 127.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*.

the land and was out of touch).<sup>297</sup> To their relief, the Brotherhood left when it became cold because they didn't have winter-proof housing. They would return in the summer to try and seize the land.

The spring of 1970 brought tragedy to Johnson's Pasture. A devastating house fire killed three men and a woman after a night of excessive drinking. The fire brought greater attention to the backwoods commune; it also brought a burst of philanthropy that would not last. On the night of April sixteenth, twenty people had been sleeping in the in the main house, a two-story, jerry-built wooden structure. It caught fire in minutes after a candle had been knocked over and residents leaped out of windows to escape. Some too drunk, slept through it. As the house burned, seventeen-year-old Mark Vogel, ran a mile and a half to the nearest telephone, a neighbor's house, to alert authorities on and "burst through the door naked with flesh hanging from his back."<sup>298</sup> The Guilford fire truck first drove to the wrong commune, Packer Corners, because the caller had only said, "the hippie commune is on fire."<sup>299</sup> Because of the condition of the Johnson's Pasture road, the fire trucks had to be left behind and firemen used four-wheel vehicles to bring portable pumps and hoses, using a nearby stream to put out the fire, though the building was "totally leveled" by the time they could reached it. In this terrible moment, we get a glimpse at how utterly isolated Johnson's Pasture was, both physically and socially from its community: the citizens and fire department, unsure of which hippies were who; the

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<sup>297</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 58.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>299</sup> "Hippie Commune Destroyed: Four Die in Guilford Blaze," *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 17, 1970, pg 1, 9.

bulky fire truck, sitting helpless on the road a mile from the burning building; and the communards themselves – who really chose to live that far away from the world.

The fire brought forth enormous generosity from the community. While Laffan noted that “some of the townspeople are known to have said they were glad it happened, and that the communards deserved it,” most seemed to have felt pity for them. Locals donated blankets, money, wood, fuel, enough clothing that the commune had to give the excess to a thrift store, and so much food that one member admitted, “We’ve never really eaten this well.”<sup>300</sup> College students even brought mattresses all the way from Marlboro.<sup>301</sup> Verandah Porche remembered the “old Vermonters” being especially generous to her neighbors: “they knew what the people there really wanted and were sure to bring them cigarettes and beer, too.”<sup>302</sup>

Perhaps the community carried a level of guilt about the fire. Three of the four dead were teenagers, as well as the four admitted to the hospital with burn injuries. All had come to Guilford from out of state. If they had families they were far away; the furthest parents were in California.<sup>303</sup> Who had really been keeping an eye on these young people? As news spread across the country, local and state police stations were “deluged with long-distance calls from worried parents” that knew their children were living somewhere off the grid in Vermont but had no way of reaching them, had they been at the fire?<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 95.

<sup>301</sup> Grady Holloway, “Hush Pervades Stricken Colony,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 18, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>302</sup> Bohjalian, “Urban refugees,” 4A.

<sup>303</sup> The Associated Press, “Commune Victims Idents Confirmed,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 28, 1970.; “Hippie Commune Destroyed,” pg 1, 9.

<sup>304</sup> Holloway, “Hush Pervades,” pg 1

Panic and tragedy about the fire brought a new level of public attention to the Pasture. Local newspapers and television staff jumped at the opportunity to peek at the primitive camps and communards, even in their most abject. A week after the fire, Norman Runnion, the soon-to-be managing editor of the *Reformer*, wrote a front-page story on the Pasture. In it he seemed to sympathize with the communes desire for privacy but at the same time he printed precise directions of how to get there through the woods. He gushed over the beautiful landscape and humanized the sometimes-disliked communards. “It was easy to see why a refugee from a city college could believe that he had found nature’s perfection” Runnion mused.<sup>305</sup>

Runnion’s assessment of the communards was wrong. The communards were not “refugee from a city college” but high school dropouts from broken homes. This description more fit their neighbors, Packer Corners. This shows the utter misunderstanding the community had about the Pasture, conflating them with back-to-the land stereotypes. Runnion used rosy tropes to describe the Pasture as a place of quaint rural homesteading, set in a breathtaking New England landscape. It was almost as if he had pulled a page from Packer Corners’ *Green Mountain Post*. “This is poet’s country,” Runnion described, recalling the likes of Frost, “There are clusters of birch and maple, and the dying remnants of the winter’s snow clinging to the wooden hillside. An ancient stone wall runs near the road....the commune’s inhabitants...cook, talk, read...a simmering pot of beans. Books are on the windows,

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<sup>305</sup> Norman Runnion, “Week After Fire: Pasture Normal Again,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, April 24, 1970, pg 1. ; Runnion became editor one year later and held the position for two decades: Kevin O’Connor, “Vermont Journalist Norman Runnion Dies At Age 85,” *VT Digger*, June 22, 2015, <https://vtdigger.org/2015/06/22/vermont-journalist-norman-runnion-dies-at-age-85/>

and there is a wood-burning stove.”<sup>306</sup> Perhaps in an effort to empathize, Runnion borrowed the sentimentality of back-to-the lander literature. However, it doesn’t quite align with Laffan’s description of life at Johnson’s Pasture as that of a “rural ghetto.”<sup>307</sup>

The communities’ misunderstandings of the Pasture must have been caused by the commune’s reclusively and absence from day-to day town happenings. But as the town got to know the commune after the fire, the commune was also concerned about what public image was being formulated, as indicated by one woman asking that newspaper clippings be sent to the Pasture “so that they could see how the story was worded in the press accounts.”<sup>308</sup> Three weeks after the fire, commune members wrote a heartfelt letter in the *Reformer*, thanking the community for their generosity. They also indicated that generosity at the fire had changed them: they wanted to be seen, be a part of the community, and they respected the community:

We’re deeply and positively affected by the long sought for unknown friends we’ve found in you who showed concern by action. A man wants this touch, this knowledge of humanity and love from others and we hope this can only be the beginning of community understanding and acceptance on everyone’s part. We’ve learned a great deal from our loss and someday soon hope to share more with you.

-The Johnsons Pasture <sup>309</sup>

Such was the relationship between town and Pasture when the Brotherhood of the Spirit returned on July fourth with fifty members, falsely claiming that Carpenter (who was unreachable at the time) had sold them the land, they had come to “build

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<sup>306</sup> Runnion, “Week After Fire,” pg 1.;

<sup>307</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, pg. 250

<sup>308</sup> Holloway, “Hush Pervades,” pg 1.

<sup>309</sup> The Johnsons Pasture, “Pasture’s Thanks,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 7, 1970, pg 4.

their citadel... so that eternal unity could be achieved.” They told Johnson’s Pasture members that they could either join the Brotherhood (and adhere all its wild beliefs and restrictions) or they would be banished from the land by the end of August.<sup>310</sup> The Pasture folks did not budge and as the summer progressed the Brotherhood became increasingly aggressive, intimidating and stealing from them. Both sides threatened the other’s lives.<sup>311</sup> Scared, Johnson’s Pasture reached out to other counterculture people in the area, finding solace in Free Vermont, the political radicals, who at one point visited the pastures and “passed out copies of a publication instructing people on the use of firearms for self-defense” and accused Carpenter, who had returned but was cripplingly indecisive on the Brotherhood issue, of being part of the Establishment – a “fascist pig landlord” who enjoyed “the class luxury of governing people’s lives from a distance.”<sup>312</sup>

Guilford residents were turned off by the Brotherhood of the Spirit. After the first summer, they worked to differentiate between the two groups at Johnson’s Pasture. *Reformer* journalist Jordan Cole visited the Pastures and wrote an investigative piece articulating the difference and frictions between the groups. Cole essentially sided with the Pasture’s group, describing the Brotherhood as slightly dangerous, cult-like, religious fanatics.<sup>313</sup> As a result of the article, the Brotherhood

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<sup>310</sup> The Carpenters still owned the land, they had only signed an agreement with Brotherhood that they would no longer be liable for anything that happened on it: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 147.; For Brotherhood vs. Pasture see: Ibid, 117.; Jordan Cole, “Brotherhood of the Spirit: Zoning Relief Sought By Guilford Commune,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 5 1970, pg 1.

<sup>311</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 146-155.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>313</sup> Jordan Cole, “Brotherhood of the Spirit” *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 6, 1970, pg 1, 9.; Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 142-143.

had a poor public image. In addition, they alarmed Guilford residents one day by dynamiting the side of a hill at Pastures to access water and secure the foundation for a building; “the booming sound was heard in all corners of [Guilford].”<sup>314</sup> Residents complained to the town board that their “cows weren’t giving milk” and feared “the water table might be permanently altered.”<sup>315</sup> Zoning administrator Peter Wilde visited the commune to check it out and after discovering that they intended to build “a three-story house for as many as 75 persons,” he and the board sent a letter to the Pasture informing them to cease all building.<sup>316</sup> If they wanted to build such a large structure in Guilford, they would have to apply through the board.<sup>317</sup>

The board called a public meeting demanding that the Brotherhood explain their application to the townspeople. 200 out of 1,073 residents came.<sup>318</sup> Tempers were already running high; the Brotherhood had continued to build despite the letter. They claimed at the meeting that they hadn’t checked their mailbox that was over a mile away. At the meeting, the Brotherhood representatives made a show, proselytizing to the Guilford residents that the Brotherhood “had ‘the answer’ to a ‘world you’ll agree sure needs something’” and that all should join them. Guilford residents may not have felt so pessimistic about the world: “In private conversations, many indicated their strong disapproval of the attempt to ‘change the world’ by such

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<sup>314</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 122.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> In its first year, Brotherhood membership had shot from 17 to over 100 members: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 51, 118.

<sup>317</sup> Cole, “Zoning Relief,” pg 1.; In its first year, Brotherhood membership had shot from 17 to over 100 permanent members: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 51, 118.

<sup>318</sup> Cole, “Zoning Relief,” pg 1.

young and inexperienced persons,” reported the *Reformer*.<sup>319</sup> The board did not approve the Brotherhood’s construction and, unable to oust the Pastures members from the existing buildings, they had no choice but to leave in the fall, this time for good.

Tracing the altercations to Guilford zoning laws in this period provides an interesting picture. As it turns out, the town’s strictest zoning laws paralleled exactly with the height of commune activity. Historically, Guilford has been mostly free of any zoning laws; even today they have none to speak of. Corky Elwell explained in Guilford they’ve retained the traditional Vermont ‘live and let live’ philosophy, “It’s the old property owners view, ‘You’re not going to tell me what I can do and can’t do with my property,’ and they haven’t lost that feeling that they want to hold onto the ability to make their own determination.”<sup>320</sup>

However, between 1969 and 1972, when commune activity was happening at the Pasture, Guilford did adopt interim zoning laws under the administration of the Guilford Zoning Board of Adjustment (the one that issued the letter).<sup>321</sup> The *Reformer* explained the town had adopted the regulations to avoid tourist development; neighboring towns had seen construction of subdivided plots for vacation homes and Guilford residents didn’t want that in their town.<sup>322</sup> However, there may have been ulterior motives. The interim regulations, adopted just after the original Johnson’s Pasture group had built the structures there, included a stipulation that anyone

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<sup>319</sup> Cole, “Zoning Relief,” pg 3.

<sup>320</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 1:07:00.

<sup>321</sup> “Interim Zoning Favored Reluctantly in Guilford,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 28, 1969, pg 5.; Virginia Page, “Interium [sic] Expires: Guilford Votes ‘No’ on Zoning,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 1, 1972, pg 1.

<sup>322</sup> “Interim Zoning,” pg 1.

wishing to construct a home intended for more than two families (family defined as “marriage and blood relations” only) must get approval from the board.<sup>323</sup> The communards (and Laffan) interpreted this as discriminatory practice. There may have been a little more to it than that. In 1972, after Carpenter finally sold the land into more stable hands (more about that in a minute) Guilford residents voted to terminate interim zoning laws. Town Attorney Thomas French was disappointed by the decision. He thought the town’s “old-time people,” may have supported permanent zoning laws if the board had “struck while the iron was hot a few years ago when everyone was so upset over the Brotherhood of the Spirit commune.”<sup>324</sup> In other words, French thought they should have pushed for a vote on permanent zoning two summers before, when they had a greater chance of getting the working-class support. Residents who considered Guilford a bedroom community wanted protections to prevent “unrestricted and uncontrolled residential development” in their backyards. Farmers in Guilford, whose land was their livelihood, wanted full rein of their property. The period of commune disruptions had generated a common enemy that bridged the socio-economic split in town. If they had acted faster it would have tipped in the favor of the town elite.

This does not prove for certain that Guilford residents had communards in mind when they voted for than against the adoption of interim zoning during the peak of commune activity, but does seem highly probable. It was the interim zoning laws after all that rid the town, and the Pasture, of the Brotherhood. What it does establish is that town leaders, such as French, saw the communards as potential pawns in their

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<sup>323</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 83.

<sup>324</sup> Page, “Interium Expires,” pg 8.

schemes and that both commune's members, only squatters on the land, were highly controlled by laws which they had no agency in creating.

In 1971, Johnson's Pasture was sold to seven "30-somethings," a group of college professors and artists with money to spare. One of the purchasers was Laffan himself, a peculiar move considering anthropological ethics and methodology. The Pasture was ultimately turned into a summer friends retreat or what one termed a "radical professor's retirement farm," but the few Pasture's people that still living on the land were permitted to stay, on the condition that they signed a regulatory contract.<sup>325</sup> Relinquishing ownership of the land ended Carpenters' open-land experiment. The new owners kicked out one longtime Pasture resident after he displayed a pattern of violent behavior. In a move that indicated a different kind of town-Pasture relationship under new owners, they asked a town official if the police would support them in forcibly removing the trouble maker if need be, and the town official promised the police would oblige.<sup>326</sup> It seems the town had come to view the Pasture differently, once the religious cult had cleared out and the place was controlled by organized, mature, professional, hippies-types. "The worry about the communes has died down now-- they are almost respectable," French remarked that year.<sup>327</sup>

The story of Johnson's Pastures shows a commune group that was unlike the others in Brattleboro and runs counter to typical 1970s commune narratives. While its foundation was similar, started by a young, wealthy donor on counterculture

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<sup>325</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 240, 251, 254.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>327</sup> Page, "Interium Expires," pg 8.

philosophy, its “Aquarian ideology of openness” sent the commune on a downward spiral, marked more with the burdensome calamities of its low-income residents than anything else. The Pasture’s open-door policy did have profound impact on the state, probably attracting more back-to-the landers into Vermont in that early period than any other commune. The memory of Johnson’s Pasture in Brattleboro today is not significant. If wasn’t for Laffan’s book it would probably would not receive the amount of attention it has. Former members are not interviewed by newspapers like the members of Packers Corner, or to a lesser degree, Red Clover. The Vermont Historical Society did not interview a Pastures member for their oral history project. Howard Lieberman, Laffan’s friend, wrote the epilogue for his book after Laffan passed in the late 1990s. Lieberman conducted follow up interviews with as many former members as he could find. He found that people’s class distinctions had stayed true to whatever they had been before they came to the Pasture. Those in the upper strata became lawyers, college professors, a filmmaker, a business owner. Others were “homeless or town drunks,” a dishwasher in Putney, one died from AIDS and another held four part-time jobs in Brattleboro.<sup>328</sup> It may be easier for Vermonters to forget Johnson’s Pasture. Its story can’t easily co-exist with other back-to-the land memories of freedom, youth, good friends and good food.

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<sup>328</sup> Laffan *Communal Organization*, 280.; Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 91-92.

## Red Clover Collective

The Red Clover Collective was a group of radical activists living and organizing together in an old farmhouse in Putney, Vermont. Founded in 1969, they were most active in the first few years of the 1970s and had dissolved by 1975. The impetus for Red Clover was Newsreel, a group of New York-based, left-wing, political filmmakers, the core of which were John Douglas, Robert Kramer, Norman Fruchter and later Roz Payne. John Douglas purchased the land in Putney for \$18,000. It was 150 acres, a house, five outbuildings and a “the largest standing barn” in town.<sup>329</sup> Douglas was a Harvard dropout from a prominent Illinois family: his father’s father had been a founder of the Quaker Oats Company and mother’s grandfather a merchant and US Senator.<sup>330</sup> He bought the land in the late sixties with an inheritance from his grandmother. Like many, Douglas chose to come to southeastern Vermont somewhat arbitrarily: it was in the country, he had money, and a friend was headed that way.

Before Douglas decided to start the collective, he and Newsreel were all over the world making their political films (they would sometimes edit in Putney) and they were gaining recognition. In 1968, they were even invited to join a U.S. delegation to Vietnam to save three pilots in exchange for a video recorded statement by Ho Chi Minh, a request from the Vietnamese government.<sup>331</sup> They traveled there alongside Grace Paley. Upon arrival, Ho Chi Minh was unwell and the filming was canceled but the Vietnamese allowed them entry to travel and film for nearly two weeks. The

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<sup>329</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:12:00.

<sup>330</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:02:30

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid*, 00:24:40

footage became the much-publicized *People's War*, and was a blue ribbon winner at the 1969 USA Film Festival in Huston.

By the spring of 1970, Douglas and the others had decided to settle in Putney full-time. Douglas got a job as an art teacher at Windham College, linking him with the radical community of faculty and students there, and leading to strong connections between the two.<sup>332</sup> The Newsreel members had hip name recognition and were soon known in the area, they held showings of their documentaries on a circuit of Vermont liberal arts colleges.<sup>333</sup> They decided to channel their energy and resources into real political organization in the state. They held open meetings at the house with other activists, students and community organizers and ruminated over a statewide, grassroots revolution. Out of one meeting came the idea for Red Clover Collective and its broad revolutionary mission, which they called “Free Vermont.” The meeting attracted about 100 attendees. At it, they concluded that “Political and economic structure in the area would have to be bypassed in order to bring about real change.” Thus began Red Clover.<sup>334</sup>

Getting back-to-the-land and a interpersonal growth were not central to Red Clover’s philosophy, unlike Packer Corners and Johnson’s Pasture. As member Roz Payne remembered,

We weren’t out there to farm and have gardens. We were into radicalizing people in the area about poor people, racism, women’s rights. We came out of heavy 1968 political movements, like Columbia

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<sup>332</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 1:26:30- 1:29:00.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 00:27:50 ; Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 24.

<sup>334</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 24.

University. A lot of us had that thing about left-wing politics, and still do.”<sup>335</sup>

Polly Darnell, Windham student activist, newspaper worker and frequent Red Clover visitor articulated the philosophy of Free Vermont:

It was about people being able to organize themselves together to do things instead of waiting for the state to do it for them, which they wouldn't. It was about people who did not have a lot of resources being able to work together to get what they needed from each other, or find ways to get it. And about not participating in activities like the War.<sup>336</sup>

In the Marxists sense, the radicals sought to define the forces of class and governmental oppression in the state (and beyond), inspire the people to come together to topple these forces, “then take that power and return it to all the people.”<sup>337</sup>

Although Red Clover members came out of the student rebellion on mostly white campuses, by the late sixties, this group was taking direct inspiration from the Black Panther Party. Especially influential were the Black Panthers' social welfare programs, meant to supplement for lacking public services in urban black ghettos, and their penchant for guns, a defense and intimidation tactic.<sup>338</sup> In fact, Red Clover members had high contacts in all the radical parties. For example, former SDS president Carl Oglesby lived at Red Clover for a period and gave open lectures there. Another time, the FBI raided Red Clover searching for Kathy Boudin, a Weather Underground member. John Douglas had close contact with Black Panther member

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<sup>335</sup> Dan Chordorkoff and others, “Colleges Communes & Coops in the 1970s: Their contribution to Vermont's Organic Food Movement,” *Vermont History*, no. 2 (2014): 124.

<sup>336</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:23:50.

<sup>337</sup> *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, 1970, pg 19.

<sup>338</sup> “Right On! Brothers and Sisters,” *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, 1970, pg 10-11.

Zayd Malik Shakur (James F. Coston) who died in a shootout on the New Jersey Turnpike between state troopers and Panther members, including the now famous Assata Shakur, after they had been pulled over in a car with Vermont license plates.<sup>339</sup>

Though Red Clover insisted on arming for the revolution, the guns could have also been part of a countryman aesthetic. As Daloz explains, “there were a lot of city and suburban-bred men in rural communes across the country for whom the freedom to own and wear a gun contributed to the appeal of living in the woods – its romantic swagger one part Davy Crockett, one part Jesse James, and one part Che Guevara.”<sup>340</sup> At Red Clover, members held target practice in the backyard. Word spread about it in hip circles, so much so that sometimes, total strangers would show up looking for the “shooting range.”<sup>341</sup>

Though their peers viewed them as “seasoned political organizers,” and they seemed to have the best intentions, Red Clover often fell short of their lofty goals. They also made significant errors, which led to fissures with the very same working-class populations they wished to serve.<sup>342</sup> At the heart of their work were the “people’s institutions,” which meant to replace government and other Establishment institutions of oppression. These spaces became buzzing zones of area counterculture activity, but they repelled locals and were sometimes viewed as competition. Red Clover also scared people with their guns, their close ties to the Black Panthers, and

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<sup>339</sup> Carl Oglesby: Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:19:20; Kathy Boudin: Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:43:50.; Zayd Malik Shakur: Ibid, 00:44:45.; Joseph F. Sullivan, “Panther, Trooper Slain in Shoot-Out,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>340</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 22.

<sup>341</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 0:30:30, 0:45:40.

<sup>342</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 21.

their recruitment of high school students. Mounting tensions would eventually culminate in a violent blowout at one of their people's institutions, the Free Farm, and signal the end for commune.

### **Inception**

The Free Garage was their first project. "Located in a dilapidated building in the poor section of town," the primary organizers were Thomas Lowell, Lou Sempliner and Jane Kramer.<sup>343</sup> The purpose of the garage was to provide free car service and repair to anyone they could attract. The workers were admitted amateurs but knew some things, and were passionate learners if anyone "would be willing to teach us some of the things we don't know." They were also lacking equipment "so if anyone has donations of tools or something that you think we could use" to bring them on by.<sup>344</sup>

The philosophy of the garage (pronounced "garge") was more convoluted. It was outlined over six pages in their newspaper. It was part-female liberation – to "break through years of conditioning that taught us that cars and garages are only for men," half of the workers were female; part-daycare center – as more and more curious neighborhood children began showing up, the organizers converted a room into a makeshift kid's space and read to them and kept an eye on them because "we need free child care centers so that women can do other things, instead of being forced to be babysitters and housecleaners all their lives"; and part-mini town green,

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<sup>343</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 26; Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:34:00

<sup>344</sup> "so we opened a garage," *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective, pg 22.

where all would congregate – “we were lucky because our garage came with a patch of grass to do everything on; sleep, play, paint pictures, picnic, be together...”

Yet the Free Garage was also something else for them. Cloaked behind whimsical, beckoning language, recondite to the nature of a service station that somehow paid rent yet never charged for labor, the Red Clover paper failed to reveal that opening their “garage” was a calculated move to attract low-income young people or “greasers,” that “could be drawn in and politicized.”<sup>345</sup> By exhibiting gender-equal work in a familiar environment, it was hoped the communards could expand the horizons the town’s disadvantaged youth, and then hook them for the revolution.

With the garage, workers wanted to help people cut down car repair costs by teaching them skills, turn a male-dominated trade on its head, and meet working class people to bring them into Red Clover. What they didn’t consider was that local garage owners or mechanics may have been losing business from their “free garage.” In the immediate capitalist society in which Red Clover existed, to offer free community services where a paid system already existed could mean the persistency, not solution to poverty. All summer long tourists and hippies were pouring into Brattleboro – in cars. This was undoubtedly an opportunistic market. Yet now the longhairs, “drifters and easy rider types” as well as some town “liberals and low income people” were all bringing their cars to the Free Garage instead.<sup>346</sup> One other thing, the locals hated their sign, “an angry, red clenched fist holding a wrench.”<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 25.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, 26.

The symbolism was not lost on them. One has to wonder about how locals perceived of the middle-to-upper class suburban kids ‘playing mechanic’ in a blue-collar neighborhood, or their heroic claims in the paper about helping to bear the great load of childcare for the poor, neighborhood women.

The mouthpiece of Red Clover’s revolution was their newspaper. Articles were written anonymously. The group spoke as a collective.<sup>348</sup> They claimed to have no editor and that the paper was created completely by consensus.<sup>349</sup> There were anywhere from twenty to forty “workers” listed in the papers, by first name only, but articles were not credited to anyone. The curious degree of anonymity was probably due to a combination of the paper’s radical nature and the creators’ paranoia about federal surveillance. They published three issues under different names: *The Paper*, *Free Vermont* and *Hard Work* and distributed them in Brattleboro and all over the state in the winter and spring of 1970.<sup>350</sup> “The paper was a way of articulating a different idea of what Vermont should be like and then disseminating it. They thought in terms not only of the local community but of the state as a whole,” remembered Darnell who worked on it.<sup>351</sup>

In their first issue, *The Paper*, writers were critical of the state’s new land-use regulations, Act 250. In the 1960s, large tourist developments, many of them in ski towns, had gone completely unregulated, catapulted real estate values, and caused

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<sup>348</sup> Accordingly, information from their newspaper can only be attributed to “Red Clover” the group, as opposed to individuals.

<sup>349</sup> *The Paper*, Red Clover Collective, 1970, pg 2.

<sup>350</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:22:00.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

significant environmental damage.<sup>352</sup> In an effort to curb this, Governor Dean Davis introduced Act 250, providing the state never before seen land-use control, even on private property in some cases. It was a seismic shift: “in 1968 only 75 of the state’s 237 towns had zoning regulations” at all.<sup>353</sup> It included the creation of a state Environmental Board and local district commissions that were granted veto power over any development proposals larger than ten acres, or anything higher than 2,500 feet, that didn’t meet the certain standards for “air and water pollution, water supply, soil erosion, highway congestion,” and so on.<sup>354</sup> Though introduced by a Republican governor, Act 250 was considered highly progressive for its time.

Red Clover members didn’t trust the bill; they called it “irrelevant to our real needs” because “small business men, relators, local middleclass homeowners, and politicians at the state and local level” were controlling the conversation, and they were only opposed to out-of-state developers because it threatened their established local powers.<sup>355</sup> State control, they believed, only worked to strengthen the status quo of local hierarchical power structures and serve upper and middle class interests, in this case NIMBY aesthetics, meanwhile working class people were being forced to “buy trailers on heavy credit.”<sup>356</sup>

However, Red Clover’s zoning critique glossed over a major part of the bill, the introduction of widespread environmental state protections. This made them appear hypocritical, many of their articles wailed against society’s devastation to

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<sup>352</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 607.; Klyza and Trombulak, *The Story of Vermont*, 121-124.

<sup>353</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 607.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, 609.

<sup>355</sup> “Danger Zones,” *The Paper*, Red Clover Collective, pg 3.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid*.

nature. Also, the bill was a direct effort to halt skyrocketing real estate, new development had affected Windham County more than any other with its high number of ski resorts and “second-home boom” towns.<sup>357</sup>

Red Clover’s critique ran counter to how most young liberals understood Act 250. Actually, the state’s strict environmental protections were a part of what attracted so many hippies to settle there.<sup>358</sup> Vermont’s bill was nationally publicized in progressive media as bold action on the cutting edge of environmental policy and it came out during a flurry of other related events: the National Environmental Policy Act and the first Earth Day. But Red Clover members found it incomprehensible for the government to pass any legislation without the existence of some hidden clause that benefited the rich. Whether Vermonters came to the same conclusions about government conspiracy as Red Clover, or, more likely, it had to do with distaste for centralized government, a poll taken after the passage of the act found that only fifty-one percent of residents supported it.<sup>359</sup>

Red Clover’s also criticized local schools in their paper. They believed the education system perpetuated class division by separating students into various high-achieving or vocational tracks that aligned with their class backgrounds, keeping some down while rewarding others, and ultimately dividing them forever.<sup>360</sup> On at least two occasions Red Clover members were spotted at high schools handing out their newspaper and pulled into the principal’s offices for questioning. One man was informed it was illegal to pass out literature on school grounds without a permit from

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<sup>357</sup> Sherman and others, *Freedom and Unity*, 607.; Sherman, *Fast Land*, 103.

<sup>358</sup> Harrison, *The View From Vermont*, 225.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>360</sup> *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, pg 3.

the police, and the other, who had been taking photographs, had his film confiscated by the principal under threat of calling the police.<sup>361</sup> In their second paper, *Hard Work*, Red Clover members responded to these events by suggesting that school administrators, whom they called out by name, had something to hide:

1. Why are they uptight?
2. Why are they afraid of exposure?
3. Why did [assistant principal Frank] Kennison consider my photos to be a “dangerous threat” and to what?
4. Why was their getting the film so important that they would threaten police action?
5. Does something go on at the High School that we should all know about??<sup>362</sup>

Underneath their words was a cartoon of a young person lighting the high school on fire. Understandably, the public slandering and threatening images bothered school administrators. BUHS administrators drafted a “Proposed Policy on Pupil Expression,” that Red Clover understood to be in response to their paper.<sup>363</sup> The policy outlined clear rules about distribution of literature and petitions on school grounds. Non-students were prohibited from doing so, and if students wished to, materials and distribution points would have to be pre-screened by the principal’s office. Red Clover leaked the document in their paper. They termed the proposition an attack on student’s freedom of expression; a “tool by which the administration can keep the student body from questioning policies that destroy the individual’s mind and ability to search for himself.” They called administrators “true oppressors trying to run the lives of us – the students. UP AGAINST THE WALL!!!” Their advice to students was to break down the barriers between “freaks” and “greasers” to form a

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<sup>361</sup> *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, pg 4-5.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, pg 4.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, pg 12-13.

united rebellious front. They ended their article with a cryptic invite; “A few of us have gotten together already. We aren’t going to remain silent any longer. Watch for us!!!” Whether BUHS actually implemented their proposed literature monitoring policy is unclear. What is clear is that Red Clover shook things up at the area high schools, alarmed administrators, and angered residents. One irate resident had something to say about it in the *Reformer* after reading a paper that had been distributed at Bellows Falls High School, “sick minds write sickening articles in a sickening language... just pray for the recovery or death of the sick minds that publish ‘Hard Work.’”<sup>364</sup>

Members were also stopped from handing out newspapers in downtown areas. Police threatened arrest, despite the distributors insisting that their actions were entirely legal.<sup>365</sup> The *Windham Free Press*, attuned to the activities of Red Clover, reported “In Bellows Falls ten people were run out of town for passing out Hard Work and Free Vermont on two occasions.”<sup>366</sup> The suppression of Red Clover newspapers even galvanized a large, cross-commune “town meeting” of longhairs.<sup>367</sup>

Despite actions to censor Red Clover’s literature, their message did still reach and resonate with Vermont teenagers. In *Free Vermont*, Red Clover published testimonials from high schoolers in Brattleboro, Rutland, Bennington, Castleton, Burlington, Springfield and elsewhere, describing their accounts of perceived oppression in schools. They included instances of drug raids, forced conformity,

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<sup>364</sup> Mrs. ?, letter to the editor, “What’s Wrong with Pigs? At Least They’re Clean,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 12, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>365</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 148.

<sup>366</sup> Polly, Bob, Ellen and Josh, “Repression Finds Those Who Wish To Live Unoppressed in Amerika,” *Windham Free Press*, September 17, 1970, pg. 3.

<sup>367</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 148.

forced haircuts, bad educators, worthless lessons, depression and even boredom.<sup>368</sup> Side-by-side the high schooler's words were printed accounts from another group: low-income Vermonters, especially women on welfare. These messages described the brutality of poverty and humiliation of being on welfare, "You take these food coupons and go into a store with them and I'm telling you people look at you like you were a cockroach," said a woman from Bellows Falls.<sup>369</sup> The overall message Red Clover wished to convey with these testimonials was clear and articulated in the paper's opening title, "WE'RE NOT ALONE." They explained that the systems that Americans were forced to prescribe to: educational, welfare, capitalist, and so on, only served the upper class and had drained the vulnerable to the point of disaster. But there was power in numbers and the unlikely assemblage of poor Vermonters, teenagers and freaks could just be the arsenal for revolution.

Red Clover worked hard to appeal to working-class and poor locals. But a cultural gap lay between them and they knew that as hippies, they might not be taken seriously or worse, hated for their privilege. They attempted to identify a new enemy:

A lot of new people are coming into Vermont. Kids, longhairs, married couples, professionals...so people say: 'they're outsiders, they don't know how we live, they have bad ideas about everything, about drugs, the Vietnam war, sex...'

We think an outsider is a guy who doesn't care about the people, who is in it for himself... who pretends that he's better than you are, superior, more "cultured," a "higher class of a person...some guy who has lived here all his life and runs a factory that doesn't pay people what they need to live like human beings."<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective. It is unclear how Red Clover collected the student's words. They may have visited high schools and interviewed students or received them in the mail. Red Clover channeled all written communication through a post office in Putney, see: *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>369</sup> *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective, pg 41.

<sup>370</sup> *The Paper*, Red Clover Collective, 1970, pg 3.

The radicals tried to reveal a wolf in sheep's clothing: the real enemy had been right in front of Vermonters the whole time, it wasn't the strange newcomer with "hair down to his knees" but bosses, principals, elected town officials, and those who wielded power and fell under the general umbrella of "ruling class townspeople."<sup>371</sup>

Despite Red Clover's efforts to connect with locals, many residents were openly hostile. They published vitriolic letters to the editor in the *Reformer*. For example, a woman from Westminster West wrote a scathing letter after reading *Hard Work*. Playing on their use of the word "pig" for policeman, she said, "I'd rather be called a 'pig' than a Hippy or Yippy for then I would know I was clean in body and especially clean in mind and mouth."<sup>372</sup> Also, she found their political ideas naive and underdeveloped, and their lifestyle hypocritical to no end: hippies wore "factory made garments and shoes," took photos at the high school with "factory made cameras," drove "factory made cars" to distribute their paper, "spread[ing] gas fumes" all over town, yet preached about workers conditions and a clean environment. On the one hand, the author highlighted grievances about hippies that were commonplace, such as appearance and disrespect for authority. However, the author also questioned Red Clover members' concept of class. While they claimed solidarity with workers, she described the writers as "pitiful, rich, immature, so called, adults who were sent to private schools, lacked a home life with love, and were sent to college with their own

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<sup>371</sup> "A Revolution is not a spectacle!" *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, pg 17.

<sup>372</sup> ?, "What's Wrong with Pigs?," pg 4.

large bank account.”<sup>373</sup> In essence, her words defined Red Clover as the elite, the very evil they swore to overthrow.

She argued that their dissatisfaction with the world stemmed from their childhoods, which were rich in wealth but devoid of love. Also, Red Clover members couldn’t understand public schools because they hadn’t gone to public school. They couldn’t understand farm and factory laborers because they had “never worked for a living.”<sup>374</sup> Their understanding of the worker was utterly confused because their polished existence had been too far removed. Because they had “never become real friends with the laboring ‘hard work’ing factory worker, they could not appreciate how happy the worker is – could only belittle him.” The spoiled hippies had “never had the fun and full life of making friends with the world’s average contented kid.” Red Clover had gotten it all wrong about the worker, and worse, they had come across as patronizing. Most of all, working class residents were not going to let affluent outsiders explain to them how unhappy they were.

Yet community response to Red Clover’s radical papers were not entirely negative. A man from Bellows Falls, John Snell, published a response to the Westminster West woman, defending of the young revolutionaries. Snell professed in the *Reformer* that the older generation would do well to pay attention to their younger neighbors. He himself was one of the “over 30,” and he admitted that older people were prone to accept the powers that be, even when they threatened personal freedoms, because “to resist them is too difficult and the alternatives are not too clear or rewarding enough to warrant the trouble required.” Though he “personally, would

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<sup>373</sup> ?, “What’s Wrong with Pigs?,” pg 4.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

like to see an orderly change in our system for the better,” implying the democratic process rather than a violent overthrow, he concluded that “revolution, whatever form it may take, will be an expression of a new direction in the destiny of men” and “it behooves us all to become aware of what the new sounds of the 70s are about.”<sup>375</sup>

Earnest DeRosia, a Brattleboro resident, disagreed. He didn’t think the young radicals had a right to complained that much. They had been raised in a society that was cushier, and far more tolerant than the one the “over 30’s” had had to endure. He agreed that there were generational differences that should be overcome in order to “work together for a more promising future” but that “violence, dissent demonstrations, and blaming each other, plus the added attraction of dope addiction, are not part of the preferred solution.”<sup>376</sup> Unlike Snell, DeRosia did not see promise in the message of the revolutionaries. These troubled youngsters would not help society answer its tough questions. He asked, “can you image leaving decisions on birth control, air pollution and such items as cleanliness to a group that haven’t realized what combs, razors and even soap were invented for[?]”

Beneath these arguments, residents were wrestling with how literally they were to interpret the messages in Red Clover’s papers. Among their articles about the War in Vietnam and women’s liberation, Red Clover was also making threats. Declarations like “we will declare war against landlords and liberate homes and apartment buildings... and arm ourselves against the pigs.... 450,000 freaks came to [Woodstock]... We looked at our numbers and realized our POWER!.... What would

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<sup>375</sup> John Snell, letter to the editor, “‘Underground’ Publications Get Backing From Bellows Falls Man,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 20, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>376</sup> Earnest L. DeRosia, letter to the editor, “‘Underground’ Paper View Draws Reply From This Reader,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 24, 1970.

you do if 450,000 freaks marched into your town?... WE'RE ON OUR WAY MOTHERFUCKERS!"<sup>377</sup> John Douglas recalled in an interview years later that once he had gone to a community meeting and the locals there had described him as "violence-prone." He shrugged it off, "they were all good Democrats, or whatever it was."<sup>378</sup> But by the turnout of events it seems that locals did take the radicals at their word, and locals were probably scared of Douglas and the others.

Red Clover had been talking a lot about guns in their paper. They too were paranoid about an attack, from ring-wing Vermonters: "Guns in this county mean the violence and hate that's all around us" they wrote in *Free Vermont*, "gun racks in the rear windows of pick-up trucks, not only in racist Mississippi, right here in Vermont."<sup>379</sup> The communards re-printed the introduction from *Fire Arms & Self Defense: A Handbook for Radicals, Revolutionaries and Easy Riders*, a piece that educated "flower children" on proper choice and handling of firearms.<sup>380</sup> The pressure cooker that was building would in fact end in shots fired. Thankfully there would be no fatalities.

### **The Free Farm**

While residents grappled with how they were to understand, approach and manage the disruptive newcomers in the winter and spring of 1970, Red Clover was busy organizing. The episodes of resistance that they encountered with high school administrators, police and disapproving residents that year had not staggered their

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<sup>377</sup> "Peace Festival," *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, pg 2.

<sup>378</sup> John Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 1:10:00.

<sup>379</sup> "Guns," *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective, pg 13.

<sup>380</sup> "In Defense of Self Defense," *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, pg 13.

momentum. The spring and summer of 1970 would be an exciting and productive time for them. The Kent State Shooting, national student strike, and expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, while unfortunate, led to increased radicalization among young people in the area. Hippies, college and high school students participated in more political demonstration, locally, and traveled to cities together.<sup>381</sup> As the mass of dissatisfied youth came together to organize, they began to realize just how many of them there really were.<sup>382</sup> Before, counterculture groups had existed in isolated pockets on rural campuses, communes, and group houses. The post-Kent State march in Brattleboro drew 1000 people alone.<sup>383</sup> Barry Laffan called it a sudden “euphoria” for young people living there. There was excitement “over the perceived inevitability of [counterculture] growth and impending wholesale societal transformation” in Vermont.<sup>384</sup> As Red Clover grew, they looked to expand their people’s institutions. The communards had been looking for land on which to establish a “Free Farm” to grow food for the local poor. The land was to be entirely controlled by the people. When it became known that Windham College owned an unused plot in Putney, they jumped at the opportunity. Windham students, who were part of Red Clover would make the request.

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<sup>381</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 23-25, 184-185; “Strike?,” *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective, pg 6.

<sup>382</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 183.

<sup>383</sup> The 1000 person headcount was provided to the paper by law enforcement officials: Norman Runnion, “Thousands March and Sit in Peaceful Protest Here,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 6, 1970, Page 1, 7.

<sup>384</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 234.

The ten acres field was noncontiguous to the campus, north of town on the east side of Route 5.<sup>385</sup> Windham was on strike at the time, in solidarity with the National Student Strike. In the tense political atmosphere, students asked President Winslow for use of the land, which he agreed to. Laffan said Winslow buckled to student's wishes "amid threats of student rebellion," however it may not have been such an outlandish idea for the known progressive president to have supported.<sup>386</sup> The idea presented to Winslow was a sort of agricultural learning project: they would gain farming skills, eat "healthy fresh food" and somehow build stronger bonds with the community.<sup>387</sup> But as the summer wore on, the free farmers relationship with both the college and locals would become increasingly strained.

Very early in the summer, fewer and fewer students showed up to farm, "wearyed from the physical and tedious work."<sup>388</sup> Non-students stepped in, they were Red Clover and others area radicals. Windham administration would claim it was the non-students that ruined the Free Farm, causing them to shut it down, but to the few student farmers that were involved throughout the summer, like the Free Farm Collective, a group that rented a trailer in Putney to participate over the summer, these newcomers were not unfamiliar at all.<sup>389</sup> They were the older, experienced radicals whose commune was the very axis of radical activity in the area. Red Clover was where political Windham students visited for meetings, lectures, and Newsreel

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<sup>385</sup> John Carnahan, interview with Tucker Foltz, January 11, 2017, 01:14:00.

<sup>386</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 185.

<sup>387</sup> How the community would be involved in the original farm plan is not clear: Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 185.

<sup>389</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:26:50 – 00:30:00.

movie showings.<sup>390</sup> Together, the free farmers plowed two acres of the field for a garden and sweat under the hot summer sun. For many it was their first time growing food, an empowering experience. The Free Farmers encouraged anyone to join them. Locals kept their distance.<sup>391</sup>

For the free farmers, the take over and cultivation of the land were calculated acts of rebellion. They amplified that message, “The land doesn’t not really belong to Windham College at all, but is free and belongs to ‘the people’” the *Reformer* reported them as saying in early July.<sup>392</sup> The free farmers explained their philosophy in a handbill they distributed,

One of the things that the Revolution means in Vermont is the redistribution of land... Over the past 20 years small farmers have been forced off the land by real estate developers and corporate farms who are not concerned with people’s needs... If a community doesn’t have control over how its land will be used then it can’t be sure it won’t be abused... Winhdam College owns a lot of land, most of it is lying unused, and has no interest in the people of Putney.<sup>393</sup>

The distribution of free food was to also meant to be a revolutionary act. Cheap, healthy food was a human right. Red Clover suggested that the food could be made “available to the people around here who need it, or truck it down to brothers and sisters in the city, like the Black Panthers or the Young Lords Puerto Rican Organization, for their free food programs for poor people.”<sup>394</sup> The Free Farm produce never got to the Black Panthers or other city folk, to the dismay of some, but

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<sup>390</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:18:00

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Grady Holloway, “Free Farmers’ Enjoy College Land,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, July 11, 1970 pg 5.

<sup>393</sup> “Free Farm’ Gatherings Bring Formal Complaint,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 4, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>394</sup> “Strike?,” *Free Vermont*, Red Clover Collective, pg 6.

they did feed the revolutionaries, every Sunday at the farm's open gatherings.<sup>395</sup> They also distributed produce in town "several times."<sup>396</sup> However, a journalist for the *Reformer* accompanied them on a distribution mission and reported that their food was not getting to the poor. After sitting with the free farmers for an hour the journalist only encountered only one taker, and it was a "well-dressed, young businessman."<sup>397</sup> The one needy group that the food did get to was the members of Johnson's Pasture. They would come every Sunday "only to take free food and beer," but had no interest in contributing to revolutionary talk or action, which annoyed the free farmers to no end.<sup>398</sup> Apparently, the free food was not just meant for hungry stomachs, to eat suggested commitment to future revolutionary action.

The college administration quickly changed its stance on the Free Farm once it became apparent how many outsiders were involved and how badly they were making the college look in the *Reformer*. As early as July, the president had filed a complaint with State's attorney M. Jerome Diamond and the farm had been visited by police, who informed them the Sunday gatherings were not permitted without written permission from the college. The Free Farmers did nothing, and the gatherings were growing in size. The *Reformer* reported that one Sunday, 200 "youth" had been trucked out to the farm party from Brattleboro and that they used a neighbors phone

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<sup>395</sup> For Black Panthers see: Phil Hardt, "Sun. Sept. 6," *Windham Free Press*, September 17, 1970, pg 4.

<sup>396</sup> "'Free Farm' Defies College," *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 1, 1970, pg 5.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 138.

to call for more; “100 motorcycle riders from Concord, N.H.,” though they never showed up.<sup>399</sup>

The Free Farmers understood that they were a menace to some at the college and in the community. As stated in their handbill, the “Sunday gatherings and the idea that the community can make things cheaply are a threat not only to the college but to all those who maintain and support the old ideas of private property.”<sup>400</sup> While being true to their revolutionary principles, the free farmers were essentially isolating themselves almost completely. The college was the enemy because it was another business that preyed off the little guy. Private property owners were the enemy if they claimed full rights to the use of their land. The town’s laborers, renters, these people were imaginary allies. Like the Nearings, the farmers were exhibiting moral absolutism: one had to be all in or all out. The *Reformer* made note that their handbill concluded with a “silhouette of persons carrying loads and rifles over their shoulder,” another ominous threat.<sup>401</sup> Any whisper of violent confrontation at the Free Farm carried tremendous weight at that time. Since the start, people had made comparisons between the Free Farm and the People’s Park in Berkeley, California.<sup>402</sup>

The People’s Park occurred in 1969, when Berkeley activists claimed three acres of a city block that was owned by the college but sitting vacant. Without permission they ripped up the asphalt, replaced it with grass and gardens and transformed it into a much-needed green space that, for a period, was enjoyed by a

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<sup>399</sup> Holloway, “Free Farmers’ Enjoy College Land,” pg 5.

<sup>400</sup> “Free Farm’ Gatherings” pg 1.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Holloway, “Free Farmers’ Enjoy College Land,” pg 5.

cross-section “hip” and “straight” residents.<sup>403</sup> When newly elected Governor Ronald Reagan heard about the law-breakers, he took the opportunity to quell student demonstrations that had been rocking the city for years. He called in city and county of police, who fenced off and bulldozed the park. A violent confrontation ensued between authorities and protesters where police fired on the crowd, killing one man, injuring over 100 and sending 400 protesters to jail. Confrontations between police and young people continued for weeks afterward at the school. At one point tear gas was dropped from helicopters while protesters were trapped inside of an open plaza.<sup>404</sup> The People’s Park played a memorable and timely role in the late sixties environmental movement, and it was a bold stand “against the idea of private land ownership.”<sup>405</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the Free Farm were unmistakably similar to the People’s Park; it’s hard to imagine they did not take a page from the famous California dissenters.<sup>406</sup> In both instances, young revolutionaries and students made a land-grab of college property, demanding space untethered from capitalist interest, to be controlled by the people. Both revolutionary spaces were small, only a few acres, but they caused massive alarm, provoking state leaders to dispatch enormous authoritative force. One has to wonder why the activists chose college land, and not some other type of private property? Was a college perhaps a safer space in which to

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<sup>403</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Tears of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1987), 355, quoted in Kate Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 62.

<sup>404</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 61-66.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid

<sup>406</sup> Laffan said the Free Farm had “all the ear-marks of the People’s Park battle in Berkeley” but failed to expand on this, his singular focus was Johnson’s Pasture: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186.

challenge authority? A familiar space with comparatively tolerant leaders and an inherent character of neutrality – not owned any one person but vaguely tied to many?

Of course, the events were also different. At Berkeley, college officials ignored the activist's requests – but they took the land anyway.<sup>407</sup> At Windham, they obtained permission from the head of college but the president changed his mind when the operation changed. The largest dissimilarity between the two was how they ended. In Berkeley, it was a militant police force with riot gear, shotguns and gas masks.<sup>408</sup> In Putney, the police too came with riot gear, but they left. It was to be residents with guns and trucks that shut the thing down.

Also, People's Park was a project rooted in urban dissatisfaction: a "green oasis" of "purity and freedom" in a polluted, oppressive concrete jungle.<sup>409</sup> The Free Farm was distinctively rural. The Vermont activists wanted more than just to *be* in a park amongst nature, they intended to work the land, to live off it. The Free Farm can be understood as the next logical step after the People's Park in the same direction. By growing their own food, on seized land, they were now defying two Establishment systems at once, adding onto the original model.

The Sunday gatherings continued throughout the summer in defiance of the college ban. Over the summer it became a valuable gathering place for the local hip community.<sup>410</sup> For instance, Johnson's Pasture members came there seeking help with their Brotherhood of the Spirit problem and their efforts were rewarded, the free farmers knew the *Reformer* reporter who wrote the article sullyng the Brotherhood's

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<sup>407</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 61.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, 62, 63.

<sup>410</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 138.

local reputation.<sup>411</sup> But to the college, it was a blight. Earlier attempts had not worked but President Winslow became determined to squash it. He wanted free farmers off the land by commencement of the new academic year and issued a signed notice that was posted on the farm's community bulletin board, "there will be no more picnics, gatherings, conferences or other group affairs permitted on the property without the specific sponsorship of the Windham College Student Government... Vermont Criminal Trespass law... will be strictly enforced."<sup>412</sup> The free farmers didn't budge. They added their own note underneath, "we worked hard on the farm. We are a community. We will not be forced off the land because THE LAND BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE."<sup>413</sup>

The long anticipated confrontation finally came on Sunday, September 6th. It was unfortunate timing. That day Windham was hosting a freshman orientation barbeque for new students and their parents. Winslow had issued another complaint with the state's attorney, so when the free farmers arrived for their weekly gathering at the farm, they found "No Trespassing" signs and "the area cordoned off by about 5 Sherriff's Deputies and 10 state troopers."<sup>414</sup> Seventy-five free farmers gathered on the edge of Route 5, "singing, chanting [and] talking with police" before "taking police entirely by surprise" by marching south down the road to campus to crash the freshman barbeque. A student witness described the memorable image of the free farmers, swarming the campus playing flutes, bells and drums and waving three

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<sup>411</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 139.

<sup>412</sup> "'Free Farm' Defies College," pg 5.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> George Carvill, "'Free Farmers' Involved: Showdown Averted at Windham College," *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 8, 1970, pg 1.

homemade flags: “the Yippie flag with the marijuana leaf; the Free Vermont flag a half black and half earth shape on a green background; [and] a yellow self determination flag.”<sup>415</sup>

What ensued on the campus was a heated “dialogue” between free farmers, college administrators, and faculty members. Clouding the whole event was the fact that that President Winslow was absent, he had filed the states attorney complaint then left for his vacation home in New Hampshire. Administrators left in charge were “painfully aware that 400 new freshman, their mothers and fathers were standing around watching.”<sup>416</sup> Meanwhile, more police had been called, they now numbered around fifty. There was also “ambulances, paddy wagons and a special tactical unit trained in riot control.”<sup>417</sup> The police were “waiting just out of site of the lower campus... [they] wore no protective helmets and no guns, but carried riot clubs for self protection.”<sup>418</sup> The plan was that “in the event that the police were asked to clear the campus, each officer would arrest one trespasser,” reported the *Reformer*.<sup>419</sup>

Violent confrontation was avoided in a delicate balancing act between the substitute college officials and the state and county police who “stalled for an hour” under the direction of Sheriff William Graham, despite off-site orders from the deputy state’s attorney to move on the campus. During that time, Windham administrators decided to give in: the free farmers could return to the land “in

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<sup>415</sup> Hardt, “Sun. Sept. 6,” 4.

<sup>416</sup> Carvill, “Free Farmers’ Involved,” 7.

<sup>417</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186.

<sup>418</sup> Carvill, “Free Farmers’ Involved,” 7.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

exchange for leaving the campus peacefully.”<sup>420</sup> The police made no arrests. As it was the college that had filed the trespassing ban, and now they had changed their minds (conceding to the farmers in fear of a clash in front of student’s parents), the free farmers were no longer breaking any laws. The radicals had won the day, at some point they burned the No Trespassing signs.<sup>421</sup>

The next morning, while the free farmers were away, townspeople destroyed the farm. It was Labor Day, cars were driven through the field, the vegetables cut in half with “sharp instruments” and the “corn was knocked down.”<sup>422</sup> At first the *Reformer* called it “vandalism,” but new reports surfaced the next day from unnamed sources, that led them to correct their story. With sarcastic undertones they reported that it was actually the free farmers who had been “liberated” by the townspeople that day:

Residents took the Free Farmers literally when they argued that the food grown on the plot was for ‘the people’... Putney people picked the crops, and distributed them among townspeople and migrant apple pickers. In the process, the farm got pretty well wrecked, but only after the food was virtually gone....

The Free Farmers previously had put up a sign saying ‘King Harvest Will Come.’ Late Monday, the back of the sign read, ‘We Came.’<sup>423</sup>

The Free Farmers were hurt. They also were frightened. “It was kind of scary, when that happened, because people did feel under possible attack,” recalled student

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<sup>420</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186

<sup>421</sup> Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 01:04:00.

<sup>422</sup> Carvill, “‘Free Farmers’ Involved,” 1.; Polly & Bob, “Free Farmers Speak On Once and Future Plans,” *Windham Free Press*, September 17, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>423</sup> “Free Farm in Putney ‘Liberated’ by People,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 9, 1970, pg 9.

and free farmer Polly Darnell.<sup>424</sup> In response, Red Clover “mounted armed patrol cars” to protect hippies that were being “randomly singled out in the area and beat up by carloads of toughs.”<sup>425</sup> The next Sunday, despite all the reports about hippie harassment, the free farmers still decided to hold a gathering.<sup>426</sup> Far less longhairs attended, around thirty, no doubt people were shaken by the events of the previous week.<sup>427</sup> During the gathering about same number of Putney residents arrived in cars and trucks to shut it down. The two groups argued, and a “bloody fight broke out” which ended up in some being sent to the hospital.<sup>428</sup> The free farmers were told to leave the land in an hour and a half or be met with more townspeople who were on their way. As the farmers retreated, “they could see men in battle fatigues moving down the bushy hillside on the other side of the field towards them.”<sup>429</sup> That night the free farmers went to Red Clover where they set up “defenses.” The town “vigilante

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<sup>424</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:48:00.

<sup>425</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>427</sup> Polly & Bob, “Free Farmers Speak,” 1.

<sup>428</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 187.

<sup>429</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 187. There is a significant discrepancy in Laffan’s telling of the story and an article published by student free farmers in the *Windham Free Press*. The Windham article reported that “no one was badly hurt” and that the free farmers overstayed their curfew and left without knowledge that the others were actually coming. The discrepancy is perhaps the fault of different accounts from that day. Johnson’s Pasture members were at the confrontation, so if Laffan was not there himself he would have received first-hand accounts, of course they could have been exaggerated. On the other hand, the students may have subdued their telling of the conflict in the school paper, wishing for the Free Farm’s continuance. The “Polly” who wrote the article is almost certainly Polly Darnell from the VHS oral history. In that interview she remembered a very real “threat of violence” that weekend: Polly & Bob, “Free Farmers Speak,” 1.; Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:46:20:00.

group” shot at the buildings from the road. The free farmers even held that they recognized one of the attackers; it was off duty policeman.<sup>430</sup>

Without record from the nameless “vigilantes” who tore up the farm and threatened the radicals, it is difficult to know the level of organization they had, or to say for sure why they did what they did. The *Reformer* didn’t report on the nighttime shootout like they didn’t report on hippies being targeted and beaten. It seems neither party wanted, or trusted, the police, because nobody called them.<sup>431</sup> Also, the hippies did not seem well acquainted with their aggressors; they didn’t seem to know who they were, despite the small size of the town. Laffan said the hippies simply called them “rednecks.”<sup>432</sup> In one way, “rednecks” may seem a mild insult for the hippies to use, considering the violent behavior of the local men. But this particular name is loaded with class-prejudice, and it is a sign of sharp homogeneity on the part of the name-callers. It is also highly hypocritical to their “of the people” disposition. Additionally, records indicate all area communes isolated themselves, or stuck to counterculture circles in their early years.<sup>433</sup> But Red Clover had the most prominent public face among them. Its newspaper and “people’s institutions” all but required local participation to work. But there was an inherent snag which may have inhibited their ability to get to know most natives: true inclusivity with Red Clover would have

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<sup>430</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 187. Barry Laffan’s account of the armed shootout that night is the only detailed description of the event that research could uncover. Douglas briefly mentions the “shootout” following the free farm incident: Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:38:00.

<sup>431</sup> Without more proof, town-police collusion seems unlikely.

<sup>432</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 186.

<sup>433</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 79, 243.; Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:06:50.

meant dedication to the revolution they called Free Vermont, and most locals weren't willing to do that.<sup>434</sup>

What is clear is that disgruntled locals were not satisfied with the passivity displayed by the college and police during the confrontation – enough so to take drastic action. President Winslow simply said, “The people of Vermont think they see in the Free Farm a distinct communist threat.”<sup>435</sup> The additional “reports” leading the *Reformer* to change its story show that some residents were also not pleased with being labeled “vandals,” and most curious of all was that the paper concurred. This likely indicates that the consensus among natives was that though it may have been an unfortunate event; everyone was better off without the Free Farm. The usually peppery letter to the editor page of the *Reformer* was silent on the issue. Most interesting was that in the end, the produce appeared to have gotten to the individuals that the free farmers intended, just not in the way they had wanted.

After the incident student free farmers wrote a piece in the *Windham Free Press* that chalked up the incident to their failure in communicating to locals the mission of their work:

In talking about a ‘community garden’ it was not made clear who was part of that community, whether it was just longhairs or everybody. When we talk about Free Vermont, we do not mean long-hairs taking over the state, but rather building one community of long-hairs, of refugees from the unlivable cities, and of life-long Vermonters, working together to provide for each other’s needs. We don’t think anybody should have to work in a factory owned by someone else in order to live on the earth we were born on.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 267.

<sup>435</sup> “Winslow Raps,” *Windham Free Press*, September 25, 1970, pg 1.

<sup>436</sup> Polly & Bob, “Free Farmers Speak,” 1

The glaring gap in their arms-open message was of course that the Free Farm was not an inviting or available space to everyone. To farm there meant to have expendable free time and energy, a privilege rarely afforded the working class. To visit there one would be expected to engage in conversation about the environment, organic foods and capitalist corruption. These were topics in which the free farmers were well versed; they would have encountered them in college classrooms or counterculture literature. It may have been intimidating for residents without the same background, who hadn't attended college or read *Diet for a Small Planet*.

In talking to the town men the day the fights broke out (perhaps the first time the two groups had actually talked) the free farmers learned something they seem to have not considered before. Locals worried about the dangerous precedent that would be set if they allowed the land-grab to have continued. If the free farmers were allowed to steal college land, and the college did nothing, and the police did nothing, who would stop them from stealing everyone's land? The free farmers explained (in the college newspaper) that their battle was with the college and not the townspeople,

This does not mean that we want to take over everybody's land. We think there's a difference between personal property and corporate property. Windham College affects the whole town of Putney, but the town has no control over [Windham's ] actions in the town. We do not believe in taking land or anything else from individuals who do not use those resources to control other people.<sup>437</sup>

This was a new message after the fact. Had they forgotten what they had said in their handbill? “[Our] Sunday gatherings... are a threat... to all those who maintain and support the old ideas of private property.”<sup>438</sup> The free farmers confrontations with

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<sup>437</sup> Polly & Bob, “Free Farmers Speak,” 1

<sup>438</sup> “Free Farm’ Gatherings” pg 1.

the police, college, then townspeople, and the night barrage at Red Clover put an end to the experiment, they stopped visiting the land. Like the People's Park, the Free Farm had been brief, but an electrifying act of rebellion, tolerated for a time but considered too dangerous to stay by institutional and state authorities. However, the free farmers had not met face to face with bullets from police but bullets from the very working class populations who were at the center of their entire work but whom they did not seem to know at all.

### **Expanse and Diffusion**

After the Free Farm incident, Free Vermont continued with community-oriented projects, but they never again ignited the same sort of backlash. Laffan said that after the incident, Free Vermont “reconsidered their organizing strategies, becoming less involved in specific local issues while shifting to less confrontative efforts on a region-wide basis.”<sup>439</sup> It could also be said that they turned further inwards. Their focus shifted away from forcing ideas of revolution on the town's young and poor populations. Instead, they channeled their energy towards growing their institutions, which were alternatives to the oppressive institutions of straight society but which essentially only met the needs of one group: themselves.

From the beginning, Red Clover had thought on the state-level, hence the name of their revolution, Free Vermont, and their efforts to distribute their message

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<sup>439</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 187. Because Red Clover's newspapers are undated, (except one that includes the year 1970) it is unclear when the paper ceased. Because the paper never mentioned the Free Farm incident it is likely that it ended beforehand. The timing indicates that it is possible ending the paper could have been an effort to ease relations with the public considering the outcry that their articles and high school distribution had generated.

statewide through their newspaper. Increasingly they reached outside of Brattleboro to draw together isolated hippies that were living in separated pockets all over the state. They organized missionary trips to communes all over Vermont “to try and make contact and see who was interested in being together and see if there were common issues we could work on.”<sup>440</sup> Out of these meetings came an explosion alternative institutions like the People’s Free Clinic in Burlington (Now the Community Health Centers of Burlington), Red Paint Kids Collective, a private homeschool and intentional community for commune children, and the first cross-commune, bulk food order, occurring in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, which touched off an explosion of co-op openings across the state.<sup>441</sup> With inspiration drawn from meeting and talking to likeminded souls, Vermont’s most ambitious longhairs came together to spearhead an array of exciting projects that provided the building blocks for others to easily access alternative lifestyle such as affordable natural foods, radical education and low cost health care, all the while challenging the Establishment economy.

Locally, Free Vermont would help start two more projects in Brattleboro that that continued the mission of the Free Farm and Free Garage: one of those was the cooperatively owned Common Ground Restaurant that opened in 1971, and the other

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<sup>440</sup> For descriptions of the communes visited see: Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:32:00; Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:59:00.

<sup>441</sup> Darnell, *Digital Vermont*, 00:39:00-00:45:45.; For Red Paint see also: Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 00:47:30.; For Co-ops see also: Jim Higgins, interviewed by Jackie Calder, *Digital Vermont*, May 26, 2010.; For People’s Free Clinic see: Kevin J. Kelly, “Burlington’s New, Improved Public Health Clinic Still Has an Image Problem,” *Seven Days*, June 20, 2012, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/burlingtons-new-improved-public-health-clinic-still-has-an-image-problem/Content?oid=2184292>.

the Green Mountain Health Center, opened 1973.<sup>442</sup> The restaurant was located downtown Brattleboro, above a Sherman Williams paint shop.<sup>443</sup> Different communes ran the place and cooked the food and one day per week on rotation. Red Clover, Free Farm Collective and Johnson's Pasture were some of those involved. Problems soon ensued between the communes when not all the groups did equal work and some abused the space.<sup>444</sup> The place eventually oriented towards a more normative staff organization, though many were shareholders in the cooperative.<sup>445</sup> The menu had "organic or natural foods...fresh and wholesome things to eat at moderate prices."<sup>446</sup> Jean Davis, who moved to East Dummerston in the 1970s remembered her regular order at Common Ground was "stir-fried veggies with tofu and tamari." The setup was unique for a Vermont restaurant at that time, "A lot of it was self service for all your coffee and tea and silverware," at the end of the meal you'd buss your own dishes, "It wasn't like your typical restaurant."<sup>447</sup>

Common Ground became the central gathering place for the hip community, replacing the vacancies left by the Free Farm and Free Garage. However, now their gathering place was in the center of town. The restaurant became famous outside of Brattleboro too. District Judge John Carnahan worked downtown, he remembered it

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<sup>442</sup> "Common Ground is New Distinctive Restaurant," *Brattleboro Reformer*, August 14, 1971, pg 9.; "Common Ground Renovates Kitchen, Expands Menu," *Brattleboro Reformer*, January 5, 1974, pg 7.; "Green Mountain Health Center: 'Improving Distribution of Medical Care'," *Brattleboro Reformer*, December 1, 1973, pg 7.

<sup>443</sup> Common Ground was at 25 Elliot Street, Brattleboro. For a description of downtown Brattleboro businesses and locations at that time see: John Carnahan & Corwin 'Corky' Elwell, interview with Tucker Foltz, January 11, 2017, 00:46:25 - 00:51:20.

<sup>444</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 214-15.

<sup>445</sup> "Common Ground Renovates," pg 7.

<sup>446</sup> "Common Ground is new," pg 9.

<sup>447</sup> Jean Davis, interview with Tucker Foltz, January 9, 2017, 00:14:00.

was “a place that most people from out of town were looking for... They would stop and ask for directions to the Common Ground, I remember it came up all the time.”<sup>448</sup>

The restaurant did draw a diverse crowd for lunch, professionals who had offices downtown for instance, but “it was the counterculture folks that were their regular customers.”<sup>449</sup> Any longhaired hitchhiker that rolled into town now had an immediate place that they could go, a place that had a familiar feeling.

In this way, the restaurant played an important role in the spread information to the counterculture community. There was a well-used bulletin board and the area’s most prominent political organizers could be found there working the line any day of the week.<sup>450</sup> Laffan also professed that the restaurant acted as a sanctuary for Brattleboro’s most dirty, unwanted hippies, like some members of Johnson’s Pasture that had burned their bridges with too many establishments in town and thus had limited maneuverability downtown.<sup>451</sup> Now, they had a public space where they were accepted.

The Green Mountain Health Center offered low-cost, low-urgency health care services to residents in an approachable, “informal atmosphere,” in opposition to the cold, detached patient experience of modern hospital buildings.<sup>452</sup> Even the health center had a DIY ethos: the nurses, “hammered together” the examining table themselves. The health clinic claimed that it was ““more consistent with the original austerity of Vermont’ than is the shiny chrome of contemporary hospitals and doctors

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<sup>448</sup> Carnahan, Foltz, 00:51:40.

<sup>449</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 00:53:00.

<sup>450</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 184, 205.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>452</sup> “Green Mountain Health Center,” 7.

hospitals and doctors offices.” A few “hippie leaning” Vermont doctors who were turned off by the high cost of healthcare and the demise of honest doctor-patient relationships, agreed to volunteer their time to get the center going by training a group of area hippies as paramedics on a “spectrum of disorders [that] was relatively limited” and visiting the clinic when they could.<sup>453</sup> The place also tried to break the stigma about venereal disease, “young people won’t go for help....this center is going to fill an important need in this area for a VD clinic” said Dr. Saxton, one of the lead doctors.<sup>454</sup> Jean Davis worked there as a bookkeeper for a period, she remembered the clinic also served the gay and lesbian community “that weren’t comfortable going to a regular doctor and being able to share about that.”<sup>455</sup>

The Green Mountain Health Clinic intended to serve the entire community; “We absolutely don’t want straight people to think of this only as a hippie clinic – that would be a stupid barrier... We want everyone to feel free to come – middle income, low income, high income – everyone!” said clinic founder Michael Scott in the clinic’s *Reformer* introduction (the newspaper also made a point of mentioning that he was a member of Mayday Farm, a Guilford commune). But the Green Mountain Health Center, like the Garage, like the Free Farm, and like Common Ground, just didn’t attract locals. “Basically it was a hippie clinic when it came right down to it,” said Dr. Howard Freed a doctor drove all the way from Bennington once

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<sup>453</sup> “Green Mountain Health Center,” 7.; Howard Freed, interviewed by Jackie Calder, *Digital Vermont*, 00:24:0, <http://www.digitalvermont.org/vt70s/AudioFile1970s-61..>

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Davis, Foltz, 00:17:00.

a week for five years to volunteer.<sup>456</sup> The clientele were “healthy kids who got venereal disease, or they got a bad sore throat, or they slipped and hurt their angle.”<sup>457</sup>

Whether aspects of the clinic were a turnoff to natives, they actually felt unwelcome, or they were simply satisfied with their “straight” doctors, the Green Mountain Health Center was an institution developed for and by new Vermonters. The clinic closed in 1978 due to cuts in their federal health grant, but before they did the Brattleboro Town Select Board approved a \$1000 grant to them as part of a community development plan, showing that at least some town leaders approved of their activities.<sup>458</sup>

Though it only lasted five years, the clinic was an important puzzle piece of the revolution. “We think free medical clinics can be set up one way or another,” Red Clover announced in their paper in 1970.<sup>459</sup> Three years later, though service was cheap and not free, the clinic was a reality. They also declared before establishing any of their people’s institutions: “we need a way to supply good cheap food... Perhaps through food co-ops or cheap restaurants.... we may all be prepared to seize the land we need to live on... We need and can create: day-care centers, liberation schools, free garages, people’s newspapers, bookstores to carry all the materials we’re interested in.” Like Red Clover had foretold the future, by the mid 1970s, Brattleboro and the surrounding towns would have one or more of all these things.

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<sup>456</sup> Freed, *Digital Vermont*, 00:41:40.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, 00:25:00.

<sup>458</sup> Gretchen Becker, “Money Problems Force Green Mountain Health Center to Close,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, July 21, 1978, pg 9.; Virginia Page, “Selectmen O.K. Budget For CABA and Others,” *Brattleboro Reformer*, November 19, 1975, pg 1.

<sup>459</sup> “A Revolution is not a spectacle!” *Hard Work*, Red Clover Collective, 1970, pg 18-19.

Laffan concluded that Free Vermont disintegrated because of strained resources, energy, and because they dreamed too big:

All but one of [Free Vermont's] specific projects failed, not, however, because the ideas behind them were outlandishly new or unworkable... The primary reasons these particular, more global efforts did not succeed were lack of long term financial savvy, the strident ideological packaging that went along with them, a naïve reliance on volunteerism, unanticipated verbal, legal and physical attacks, and eventual burnout by members.<sup>460</sup>

Free Vermont as an organized group had ended by 1975, though many who had had attended Free Vermont meetings and worked on their projects stayed in the area.<sup>461</sup> Interestingly, most founding members of Red Clover left for other parts of Vermont and further afield.<sup>462</sup> Their dispersal, however, didn't hinder the growth of hippie institutions. Brattleboro probably saw a greater concentration of alternative establishments in the first half of the 1970s than any other Vermont town because of the early influence of Red Clover and the size of its hip scene. Red Clover and Free Vermont did not have their hand in every hippie project that opened up of course, but the reputation they and other communes had given the place by 1970, helped attract other leftist activists and designate it a heady mecca in the Northeast. As a result, longhairs arrived in a steady stream throughout the decade. Not all these people wished to live on a commune like the early settlers, but they had time on their hands

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<sup>460</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 265-266.

<sup>461</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 267.

<sup>462</sup> John Douglas continued filmmaking but moved to Burlington: Douglas, *Digital Vermont.*; Robert Kramer moved to France and continued filmmaking: Alan Riding, "Robert Kramer, 60, a Director of Films With a Political Edge," *New York Times*, November 13, 1999.; Roz Payne moved to Richmond and continued political filmmaking: "Colleges Communes & Coops," 121-122.; Polly Darnell became the Librarian and Archivist at the Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury: Darnell, *Digital Vermont.*

and were itching to contribute. As such, Brattleboro experienced a frenzy of hippie-run program and business openings in the first few years of the seventies. These included Brattleboro's first recycling center run by BUHS and Antioch-Putney Graduate School students; the Brattleboro Farmers Market, The Whole, a volunteer-run youth community center for "creative learning" that offered activities like mural painting, hikes and small folk concerts; Solar Alternatives a solar energy installation and DIY equipment store; The Good Life natural food store, and the Brattleboro Food Co-op.<sup>463</sup> One natural foods distributor, Bob Swanson, located his operation in the basement of The Good Life on Main Street. He trucked in natural foods from a supplier in New York City for store upstairs and soon many other stores in Vermont, then other states. The demand was great and the company experienced exponential growth. The base of support Swanson saw in Brattleboro acted like miracle grow: now called Stowe Mills, the company is the second largest natural food distributor in the country.<sup>464</sup>

The bottom line is that it didn't matter if natives participated in counterculture projects or shopped at counterculture businesses. The endless expansion of

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<sup>463</sup> "Recycling Center Opens Tomorrow," *Brattleboro Reformer*, September 24, 1971, pg 9.; "Farmer's Market to Open on Elliot Street Site July 6," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 30, 1974, pg 11.; "Meeting Set for the Whole," "The Whole Opens," "The Whole Will Expand It's Hours", "The Whole Plans New Activity" *Brattleboro Reformer*, April-June, 1974.; "Solar Energy Used to Heat Water," *Brattleboro Reformer*, May 7, 1976, pg 5.; photo, "Good Life Begins," *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 27, 1971, pg 5.; "our history," Brattleboro Food Co-op, accessed 5/20/17, [http://www.brattleborofoodcoop.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10&Itemid=12](http://www.brattleborofoodcoop.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10&Itemid=12).

<sup>464</sup> William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, *History of Erewhon: Natural Foods Pioneer in the United States (1966-2011)* (Lafayette, California: Soyinfo Center, 2011), 227-228.; "Llama, Toucan & Crow: Worker Control of Business Tried at Natural Food Store," *Brattleboro Reformer*, October 25, 1975, pg 1.

progressive young folk into Vermont would guarantee their sustainability.

Vermonters were acutely alert to the rapid pace of change that was happening in their communities, but they were essentially powerless to stop it.<sup>465</sup> Town Manager Corwin Elwell described natives as experiencing a discomfoting loss of control at that time; they “felt that this whole system was being uprooted, their life was being challenged, and it was kind of a fear of the unknown ahead, combined with people that were pretty adamant about the war one way or the other.”<sup>466</sup> On the one hand, growth was finally occurring after decades of lost and stagnant populations, but that growth came with uncomfortable byproducts. Urban hippies brought with them their health food co-ops, free spirits, dope, and shaggy locks. But some of them aggressively pushed ideas for a new Vermont without taking time to understand or show respect for Vermonters that already had a way of living.

The radicals behind Free Vermont also learned an important lesson about working-class Vermonters: they didn't like being told that they were poor. Once more, Vermonters saw the communards unkempt appearance, lack of modern appliances and crowded living conditions as a cheap disguise. Commune poverty was voluntary; they could leave it at any time. To “play” the poor life, play at being a mechanic, play at farming, and on free land at that – it was demeaning. Even if the hippies didn't mean it that way. In the greatest irony of all, the children of the privileged were suddenly shouting at them about the hardships of poverty and then chastising them for being old fashioned when they didn't join the revolution. Joe

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<sup>465</sup> Laffan defined the period of most dramatic change as 1968-1975: Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 268.

<sup>466</sup> Elwell, Foltz, 00:17:00.

Sherman said poor Vermonters held an unusual amount pride, that it inhibited them from seeking help when they needed it.<sup>467</sup> It was perhaps a combination of ego, the heightened political atmosphere of the war and the swiftness with which the radicals arrived and descended on their schools and streets that caused the violent words and actions of area locals. The free farmers thought it was their own lack of communication that caused the incident but it is clear that locals were reading their papers. Also, residents understood their guns and disregard for authority to be exactly what it was: a threat to the order of things.

The refocusing of Red Clover after the Free Farm towards enriching the counterculture while withdrawing from direct operation on Brattleboro's poor, caused the two populations to even drift further apart. Accompanying this was the never ending stream of upper and middle-class urban and suburban hippies that had heard about what was happening there and wanted a piece of Vermont too. The question was if there would be room in their new Vermont for the old Vermonters. As Sherman put it, it was "in the early seventies that Vermont began to have conspicuous "have" and "have not" towns," where the quality of schools and public services directly reflected the wealth of its residents.<sup>468</sup> In the Brattleboro region, it was post-industrial Bellows Falls that experienced the economic plunge while in surrounding towns, property values shot up. Laffan said Red Clover "failed most dismally with blue collar populations."<sup>469</sup> But one is left wondering, even if their approach hadn't

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<sup>467</sup> Sherman, *Fast Lane*, 199.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>469</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 267.

been off-putting, might their ingrained pedigree have been too great a barrier to overcome in the long run anyhow?

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

A recent article described how 1970s back-to-the landers had changed the relationship that Vermonters had with their food by introducing organic, and building a burgeoning, and highly sustainable local food economy. The article contrasted the successful back-to-the-land farmers with Vermont's mid-century farmers, mostly dairy, who had not found the same success. The journalist interviewed a hippie farmer:

“[Back-to-the landers] have shown themselves to be savvy businessmen and women. Compared with the dairy farmers of the previous generation, ‘these people who came in were more marketing people... [They] had more of a focus on selling (and knew) how to motivate people to come and buy.’”<sup>470</sup>

While the statement contains some truth, in the sense that back-to-the land business-oriented farmers did find success *because* of the hippie market that existed there, the journalist and hippie farmer entirely discount class disparity as a factor in old and new farmers' success. They blame the downfall of the old farmer on their bad business skills, while the back-to-the landers simply had “more of a focus on selling.” While the lack of empathy or historical insight may be unsettling, the thrust of the article was this: The aging-hippie farmers were in a state of crisis as they reached retirement age because there was no one to take their place. A healthy, local food market existed, but there were not enough skilled or interested farmers to fill in, and

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<sup>470</sup> Nora Doyle-Burr, “Retiring Farmers Reflect on Their Successes While Struggling to Find a Successor,” *Valley News*, February 5, 2017, <http://www.vnews.com/Back-to-the-Landers-Leave-Lasting-Legacy-in-the-Upper-Valley-s-Food-System-7253566>.

their children had all left for the cities. In a fascinating repetition of history, back-to-the land farmers found themselves in a predicament quite similar to the one mid-century farmers had, around the time the hippies had come to buy their old farmhouses for dirt-cheap. Neither journalist nor the interviewed farmer made this connection.

Needless to say, when the hippies and natives first became neighbors, the benefits of historical reflection were not available. The 1968 to 1975 explosion of communes in Brattleboro, heightened political fervor, and local backlash, can all be understood, on some level, as manifestations of an exceptionally low point in the stability of greater American society at that time. In a “right time right place” sense, Brattleboro became a crowded epicenter where all the chaos, tension and social constraints of that era, bottled and simmering in the young urban activists, students, and social rejects, was gathered – then released when it reached the open, unrestrained countryside. It ricocheted off the green mountains and set a motion that has not stopped.

Current-day Brattleboro pulsates with the influence of the communards and radical students. The cultural spirit lives on in the town’s institutions like the large and teaming Brattleboro Food Co-op, the experimental New England Youth Theater (where former Packer Corners member Peter Gould is a director), the social-justice puppetry of Sandglass Theater, the Yellow Barn and Marlboro Music festivals, rainbow pride flags hanging from white steeple churches, numerous art galleries, and the year-round Brattleboro Area Farmer’s Market. Even the Brattleboro Area

Chamber of Commerce website mentions, “while the communes are gone, the hippies have had a lasting influence on the town’s character and values.”<sup>471</sup>

This lasting effect may have something to do with the size of the town. Brattleboro stopped growing by 1980, the hippie influx was the last, large migration that the town would experience.<sup>472</sup> Guilford and Putney have doubled in size but both remain below 3,000 residents.<sup>473</sup> Income levels in the towns are higher than national averages, but not greatly so.<sup>474</sup> They are greater in other parts of the state, like Burlington’s Chittenden County. Interestingly, the income levels of current-day Brattleboro area residents reflect general findings about back-to-the-land populations; a group that mostly enjoyed comfortable lives, but tended toward livelihoods that were not centered on capital gain, instead pursuing part-time work or self-employment.<sup>475</sup>

When Laffan’s friend and colleague Howard Lieberman conducted follow up interviews with the Johnson’s Pasture group in the 1990s, he found their lives, from a socioeconomic standpoint, had been largely unaffected by the experience. Those who came to the commune poor stayed poor and visa versa. Though the experience of living in an intentional community may have been impactful, from a broad

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<sup>471</sup> “The One And Only,” Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://www.brattleborochamber.org/the-one-and-only/>.

<sup>472</sup> Vermont Historical Society, "Census by Towns," Vermont History Explorer, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://vermonthistory.org/explorer/discover-vermont/facts-figures/census-records/census-by-towns>.

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> “Guilford, Vermont” City-Data, 2017 Advameg, Inc., <http://www.city-data.com/city/Guilford-Vermont.html>.; “Putney, Vermont” City-Data, 2017 Advameg, Inc., <http://www.city-data.com/city/Putney-Vermont.html>.

<sup>475</sup> Brinkerhoff and Jacobs, “Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems,” 68.

perspective, their lives “look amazingly similar to the lives of most others of their generation.”<sup>476</sup> Packer Corners member Verandah Porche said the greatest skill she gained from communal living was an improvement to her interpersonal skills:

I understand the way groups work. When I go into schools I’m a stranger among strangers and I can see how the school as an organism functions very fast, because I’ve lived with Richard and Joan and Shoshanna and Marty and Mimi and Todd. I mean sooner or later the people boil down to the types that I’ve sat around the kitchen table with.<sup>477</sup>

Lasting influences of the communes can be detected in various aspects of modern Vermont. For example, the writers at Packers Corner passed the torch of Vermont’s mystical lure by creating new kinds of romantic rural prose that built off the work of Thoreau, Frost and others. The work of radicals at Red Clover Collective can be detected in the success of third-party politicians in Vermont, such as the long serving Bernie Sanders, and the newly elected, Progressive Party Lieutenant Governor (and organic farmer) David Zuckerman. It could also be concluded that hippies repopulating the state was a saving grace for its residents. In the long run, the economy grew tremendously, health improved, and public education is continuously ranked one of the top in the country.<sup>478</sup> On the other hand, reports indicate that despite population growth, poverty in Vermont has remained at a constant since the 1960s and in recent years, residents have been suffering from a crippling opioid

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<sup>476</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 279-281.

<sup>477</sup> Porche, *Green Mountain Chronicles*, 00:39:20.

<sup>478</sup> Laffan, *Communal Organization*, 269.; “State Education Ranking Shows Vermont #1, South Carolina Last,” American Legislative Exchange Council, September 1, 2010, <https://www.alec.org/press-release/state-education-ranking-shows-vermont-1-south-carolina-last/>.

epidemic. 100 residents died from opioid overdose in 2016 alone.<sup>479</sup> The truth is that two Vermont's still exist side-by-side, but one is rarely heard from.

One unique political uprising of 'old Vermont' came in 2000, when the state passed its civil union law. An anti-civil union movement rallied behind the slogan "Take Back Vermont," which appeared on thousands of car bumpers, barns and lawns across the state. Governor Howard Dean received the nickname, "Howard the Coward" for signing the bill "behind closed doors" and his approval rating dipped by over twenty percent.<sup>480</sup> An anti-civil union gubernatorial candidate, Ruth Dwyer, won the Republican primary but lost to Dean in the end. Dwyer had said her political idol was Robert E. Lee.<sup>481</sup> The elections that followed saw five Republicans Representatives that had voted for the bill lose their seats. Residents that were opposed to the law, feared the state would become "a new gay mecca," where same-sex couples would swarm the state to settle and marry.<sup>482</sup> They termed their fears around memories of the hippie influx, when so many felt they had lost control of their state.

Yet, "Take Back Vermont" was about more than anti-gay rights. It challenged all the proliferating progressive reform of the previous three decades: greater state

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<sup>479</sup> George Plumb "Poverty & Population," *VT Digger*, May 21, 2014, <https://vtdigger.org/2014/05/21/george-plumb-poverty-population/>.; Gina Tron, "How Did Idyllic Vermont Become America's Heroin Capital?" *Politico Magazine*, February 7, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/vermont-heroin-capital-of-america-103280>.; Mark Davis, "Death by Drugs: Opiates Claimed a Record Number of Vermonters in 2016," *Seven Days*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/death-by-drugs-opiates-claimed-a-record-number-of-vermonters-in-2016/Content?oid=3983873>.

<sup>480</sup> Stanley N. Kurtz, "Civil Revolt: Vermont Stands Up," *National Review*, 52 (October 9, 2000), 25.

<sup>481</sup> Debra Rosenberg, "State of the 'Union'," *Newsweek*, October 23, 2000, 56.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

regulation of land and schools, high property and other taxes, resources funneled to the tourist economy rather than local needs, and so on.<sup>483</sup> Actually, political reform in the second-half of the twentieth century had run counter to the Vermont ‘live and let live’ philosophy, the tradition that was so cherished by the early twentieth century decentralists and 1970s communards who loved privacy, and wanted the freedom to experiment. A breed of ‘new Vermont’ state politicians had been reaching into everyone’s community and pocketbooks, while at the same time deflating long-held traditions and values by deeming them old-fashioned or backwards.

The ‘gay migration’ feared by so many did not happen. But it revealed that many residents longed for a time before the political, cultural, and economic hippie takeover. It showed that the great “‘progressive’ social engineering” experiment in Vermont did not improve everyone’s lives. Liberal Vermonters were shaken by the backlash. It rattled their understanding of the state as a place of exceptional social tolerance. Residents stepped back to reassess their communities: had they missed something important while they were tucked away in the hills, busy raising a family all these years?

As I wrote this thesis I couldn’t help but recognize its pertinence to current politics. The 2016 presidential election saw the most unlikely candidate, Vermont Socialist Senator Bernie Sanders, come close to winning the national Democratic primary election. Communal fever in Vermont had been part of the recipe for Sanders. Bernie came to Vermont when he heard about the alternative, social experiments happening there. Before he entered state politics, he traveled the

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<sup>483</sup> Debra Rosenberg, “State of the ‘Union’,” *Newsweek*, October 23, 2000, 56.

commune circuit, making friends, building connections and figuring out his life path.<sup>484</sup> Sanders represented a certain dream that had been cradled in Vermont since the 1970s and now again, resonated with many, especially young, white, college-educated people. Republican real-estate mogul Donald Trump captured the emotional heart of another American group, one that also distrusted the government and were searching for an outsider. His motto, “Make America Great Again,” rings the same tune as “Take Back Vermont.”

The colossal bipartisan split of the presidential election reveals two very distinct populations in America today. Ideological preferences are etched deeply by geographic region. It draws the question, what were the great gains of such “self-sorting” among young, white urbanites to rural locations in the 1960s and 1970s?<sup>485</sup> Also, in what some gained by leaving the cities, did others lose who could not move? And for those who lived in the way of the hippies’ chosen rural paths, have they found peace with a new sense of home?

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<sup>484</sup> Daloz, *We Are As Gods*, 146.; Douglas, *Digital Vermont*, 01:10:00.

<sup>485</sup> Cohen, “New! Vermont Is Liberal.”

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