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## The farm a hippie commune as a countercultural diaspora

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# THE FARM: A HIPPIE COMMUNE AS A COUNTERCULTURAL DIASPORA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in History  
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at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Connie Lester

## **ABSTRACT**

Counterculture history is often divided, with a focus on either the turbulent 1960s or the “back to the land” exodus of the 1970s. A study of Stephen Gaskin and his followers’ founding of The Farm, a rural commune near Summertown, Tennessee, provides a unique insight into the commonalities and connections of these two periods. It will be the aim of this thesis to weave the separate narratives of this demographic into one complete idea. The idea that the hippies constituted a counterculture suggests that once that culture went into exile, onto numerous communes, they existed as a diaspora. The Farm’s existence as a spiritual commune, with their roots in Haight-Ashbury’s short-lived utopian dream, and their continuation and evolution of that dream in Tennessee, make this particular group a model for the diaspora.

The Farm, with its larger profile, publishing, and outreach programs, became the preeminent post-Haight-Ashbury commune. The commune was able to preserve the counterculture in exile, while it became a leader in dictating the direction of its progress. The Farm’s efforts in midwifery, sustainable living, promotion of vegetarian diets, and outreach in America’s inner cities and the Third World all point to a proactive counterculture and the commune’s leadership role for the remnants of the counterculture. While the profile of the counterculture has diminished, a shift in American attitudes toward natural childbirth, ecology, and a more earth-friendly diet containing a greater variety of organic and vegetarian options reveal a significant success for their agenda.

## **DEDICATIONS**

To my Mother, for sharing the gift of perception and teaching me to question everything.

To my Father, for showing me the value of hard work and commitment to my goals.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Established in Summertown, Tennessee, in 1971, The Farm was a commune formed by members of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury hippie community. Beginning, in 1967, with a class at San Francisco State's Experimental College, known only as the Monday Night Class, the teacher and founder of The Farm, Stephen Gaskin became something of a countercultural guru. The class, which at times drew more than 1,500 students, was a freeform walk through diverse topics with a focus on the evolving hippie spirituality. Gaskin soon assumed the role of goodwill ambassador for this spiritual quest, as a visiting group of ministers and theologians asked him to give a lecture tour across America. Not wanting to miss the camaraderie and spiritual teachings of the Monday Night Class, a group of his students decided to form a caravan and join Gaskin on his tour. A convoy of sixty school buses, and more than 250 followers took to the road. The color and spectacle of Haight-Ashbury was now on tour. The unifying experiences of the Monday Night Class solidified during the Caravan. Gaskin and his followers were now a community. Upon their return to San Francisco they decided to extend the trip, eventually arriving in rural Lewis County, Tennessee, and the land that would become the commune known as The Farm.

The historical account of communes and intentional communities usually begins with their foundation and a brief mention of the roots and inspiration. The Farm's mission and structure are deeply rooted in its counterculture experiences in the Haight-Ashbury. The collective experiences of the founding members of The Farm in San Francisco, including the exposure to alternative lifestyles, urban communes, and bonds formed from the Monday Night

Class were significant in The Farm's development as the preeminent counterculture commune. Instead of retiring to The Farm once they left San Francisco, Gaskin and his followers raised their influence nationally, creating a successful model for the continuation of the counterculture in exile. It is the intention of this research to show The Farm as a significant and iconic part of a larger countercultural diaspora, representing the continuation and evolution of the ideals of hippie spirituality and alternative lifestyles that were born in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco in the 1960s. Additionally this research will add to the history of The Farm and examine its legacy in greater detail.

### Literature Review

The Farm has been the focus of two dissertations, one later evolving into a published book, and one master's thesis. Pat LeDoux's dissertation "The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm" deals directly with the community, While, Tim Hodgdon's *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius* and Elizabeth Prügl's "Technicolor Amish: History and World View of The Farm, A Communal Society in Tennessee" use the commune as the archetype for understanding larger countercultural ideas.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Arthur Theodore Kachel did significant research on Gaskin and his students during the Monday Night Class and Caravan, in a dissertation "An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ledoux, *The History of A Hippie Commune*. Timothy Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Timothy Hodgdon, Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-83 (Advanced Reading Copy)*, (New York: Columbia University Press., 2007). Elizabeth Prügl, "Technicolor Amish: History and World View of The Farm, a Communal Society in Tennessee," (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Theodore Kachel, "An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970," (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1975).

Writing a complete history of The Farm, LeDoux's 1992 Middle Tennessee State dissertation relies heavily on interviews conducted by the researcher with a cross section of members and former members of the commune. This dissertation works as a historical narrative to describe The Farm through its various levels of development. The rich use of oral histories allows the history to develop from the perspective of the participants, giving the narrative an insightful, but biased perspective. LeDoux's work is successful in placing The Farm in the larger context of rural Lewis County, allowing the contrast between Haight-Ashbury hippies and rural Tennesseans to be understood. LeDoux argues the failure of the commune resulted from a failure of utopian visionaries to realize their goals due to a complete lack of skills, practical knowledge, and discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Hodgdon and Prügl's works are not pure histories of The Farm, but provide historical perspective from within the contexts of their fields of study. Hodgdon, a historian, centers his research on the ideas of masculinity and gender roles in both Haight-Ashbury and The Farm. The Diggers of Haight-Ashbury and the residents of The Farm represent two (of many) distinct currents in counterculture masculinity, according to Hodgdon.<sup>4</sup> In his argument the Diggers represented an outlaw anarchist manhood, while men of The Farm constituted a more mystically chivalrous archetype.<sup>5</sup> Prügl's research deals specifically with the hippie spirituality of The Farm and its role in shaping the view of the world around them. Beginning with a general history of the commune that complements LeDoux's history, Prügl's work will aid this diaspora research in showing The Farm members, views on their place in the larger world including their

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<sup>3</sup> LeDoux, *The History of A Hippie Commune*, 204-5.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

interaction with the local community, government leaders, and international communities through outreach programs. Prügl argues that it was their psychedelic spirituality that drove their particular worldview. Hodgdon and Prügl rely on the spirituality of The Farm's members for their research, showing the importance of these beliefs as it shaped their relationships within the commune, the outside community, and the world.

Charles Perry's *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* and Nadya Zimmerman's *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* provide a solid foundational understanding to the Haight-Ashbury counterculture. Perry's work is especially important to this research, particularly his view concerning the demise of the Haight-Ashbury as the center of the hippie nation. He describes the Haight as working "like a cyclone- tugging them in from all over, whirling them up in the air and scattering them in every direction."<sup>6</sup> This collapse and dispersal are critical to the countercultural diaspora theory.

Zimmerman's work focuses on idealistic personas, or characteristic archetypes that existed in San Francisco's counterculture. The development of these personas is helpful in understanding the backgrounds and intentions of the people who created the Haight-Ashbury scene. Chapters four and five, dealing with the natural and new age personas are of particular interest to this research, as it would be these two personas that would most likely join The Farm or other communes. Zimmerman's final chapter, describing lessons from the counterculture

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005), 280.

builds on the ideas presented by Perry, in the decline of not only the Haight-Ashbury, but the counterculture in general.<sup>7</sup>

It would be impossible to study the 1960s hippie commune phenomenon without the works of Timothy Miller. Two books, *The Hippies and American Values* and *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* provide unique insight into the counterculture which is necessary to understand the values and intentions of Gaskin and his followers. In the Chapter “The Ethics of Community,” the book *Hippies and American Values*, traces the values of community within the counterculture as they would eventually evolve into the idea of communes. Miller’s second book on the subject continues, expands, and focuses that theme into the overall commune movement that emerged from the counterculture and other social movements of the sixties. While providing a number of passages directly discussing The Farm, Miller’s work also aided in understanding The Farm’s place in the larger commune movement. The discussion of the various models of communes and an understanding of their successes and failures will allow for comparison, while Miller’s overall history and analysis of the commune lifestyle will provide a valuable frame of reference.

### The Idea of Diaspora

The Greek meaning of the word diaspora is to scatter or disperse, evolving to mean a nation or group of people separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nations but preserving their own culture. Until the 1950’s, the term had only a religious meaning, generally used to describe the Jewish community outside of Israel, or Christians living

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<sup>7</sup> Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008).

among pagan tribes.<sup>8</sup> In more recent times the word has become an evolving and working definition, referring to any group living outside of its homeland, with few restrictions on the term. Three core ideas that define a diaspora can apply to the counterculture and The Farm, first a religious connotation, second a minority political belief, finally a distance and scattering of the community.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in this dispersion, the group maintains a level of unity.<sup>10</sup> It is within this framework that this research examines The Farm. While not completely typical of a diaspora, lacking ethnic and international migration for example, seeing this community within the larger theory can help to understand the counterculture's movement out of the Haight-Ashbury and onto wide-spread communes.

While the idea of a diaspora is an important way to contextualize the counterculture and commune movement, it is also necessary to consider the full definition of the word. This research respects the sensitivity to the ethnic and political forces that drive most international diasporas. Hippies, despite their political pressures and persecution for their lifestyle and beliefs, were for the most part white, well-educated, middle class young adults. The counterculture was a chosen lifestyle, a statement of social protest, involving passionate beliefs, but one they could have chosen to leave. Nevertheless most of these people had turned their backs or outright rejected the mainstream, investing their young lives and commitment to the idea of a new society. The definition of a diaspora has evolved to mean very simply, a distinct group living away from their homeland. The Haight, despite its short-lived heyday, was the spiritual and cultural homeland of the counterculture. The hippies fit many of the political, social, and

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<sup>8</sup> Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 4-25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29.

religious factors that define a diaspora. It is useful to consider this movement away from the Haight and into thousands of communes, including The Farm, in these terms.

Kim Knott, professor of religious studies and director of the British program *Diasporas, Migration, and Identities*, suggests that diasporas are spatial, in that they have a sense of movement from a common center outward. Within this outward traveling context, the definition evolved into a multidimensional idea of space and movement not restricted to physical movement to physical places, but to incorporate ideas of “imagined, material, culturally, virtually, and socially networked places.”<sup>11</sup> Within Knott’s definition, which takes the idea into a more abstract notion, we can see a diaspora being not only of people, but of culture and ideas.

The core definition, rooted in the spiritual diasporas of Judaism and Christian New Testament, presents the idea of scattered pilgrims waiting for the return to the City of God.<sup>12</sup> The Haight was a psychedelic pilgrimage point for seekers from across the country. While only a few years in the making, the ideals and goals of the community were key to those who took an active role in its creation, and in turn drew tens of thousands of people to the area. While not all were spiritual seekers, the common bond among the young people who came to the Haight was the act of seeking. The Monday Night Class, a key part of the evolving counterculture spirituality, attracted many of these seekers and added to Gaskin’s prominence in the community.

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<sup>11</sup> Kim Knott, “Space and Movement,” from Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin eds. *Diasporas : Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, (London: Zed Books, 2010), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Dufoix, *Diasporas*, 5.

The foundation of The Farm also worked to attract people who had not been a part of Monday Night Class, the Caravan, or had even lived in San Francisco but who were drawn to the lifestyle by the literature and music that spread the culture nationally. When asked what had brought them to the commune; many people cited three major factors. First Gaskin's speaking tours, second the book *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*, and the midwife practices. These played to the scattered diaspora that had been influenced by the music and writings of the counterculture or lived in other hippie communities across the country. As they had at the height of the Haight-Ashbury, many hippies coalesced around Gaskin on The Farm.

### Thesis

Counterculture history is often divided, with a focus on either the turbulent 1960s or the "back to the land" exodus of the 1970s. A study of Stephen Gaskin and his followers' founding of The Farm provides a unique insight into the commonalities and connections of these two periods. It will be the aim of this thesis to weave the separate narratives of this demographic into one complete idea. The idea that the hippies constituted a counterculture suggests that once that culture went into exile, onto numerous communes, they existed as a diaspora. The Farm's existence as a spiritual commune, with their roots in Haight-Ashbury's short-lived utopian dream, and their continuation and evolution of that dream in Tennessee, make this particular group a model for the diaspora.

The Farm, with its larger profile, publishing, and outreach programs, became the preeminent post-Haight-Ashbury commune. Its successes and well intentioned mistakes in planning that led to overpopulation and collapse mirrored the downfall of Haight-Ashbury.

However, The Farm eventually recovered and adapted as the Haight had not. Not only was The Farm able to preserve the counterculture in exile, it became a leader in dictating the direction of its progress. The Farm's efforts in midwifery, sustainable living, promotion of vegetarian diets, and outreach in America's inner cities and the Third World all point to a proactive counterculture and the commune's leadership role in the remnants of the counterculture. While the profile of the counterculture has diminished, a shift in American attitudes toward natural childbirth, ecology, and a more earth-friendly diet containing a greater variety of organic and vegetarian options reveal a significant success for their agenda.

To understand the impact of this diaspora, it is necessary to understand both the developing mindset of the counterculture and how those ideas were implemented once they began communal life. This thesis will begin with a chapter detailing the planting of utopian ideals and community in the Haight-Ashbury counterculture. The second chapter will explore the Caravan experience and the demise of the counterculture, examining the factors that pushed the group towards communal life. A third chapter will discuss the foundation of The Farm and how the commune existed as part of a larger countercultural diaspora. This chapter will also attempt to assess the legacy and impact of The Farm both in the counterculture and American society as a whole. A concluding chapter will summarize the research, including the collected reflections of historians on the counterculture and The Farm as well as a review of the idea of diaspora as it pertains to this population

## CHAPTER 1:

### THE HAIGHT-ASHBURY AND THE MONDAY NIGHT CLASS

Growing out of the 1950s Beat Movement, the hippies became a significant population of cultural dissenters in the mid to late 1960s. This dissent differed from the general left wing radicalism advocated by other student movements of the time, as it sought not to change America within the established order, but instead to create what Theodore Roszak coined a “counterculture.”<sup>1</sup> Roszak defined this counterculture as a completely unique society that would stand in contrast to the technocratic, consumerist, and militaristic society that hippies believed America had become. They advocated dropping out of this corrupted society, doing your own thing, while expanding your consciousness—generally with the use of mind altering psychedelic drugs, spirituality, and artistic expression.<sup>2</sup> The counterculture was a rejection of not only establishment culture, but politically a rejection of ideas from both the Left and Right, what the hippies would term the “mainstream.”<sup>3</sup> These opposing sides seemed content to argue within the confines of a system the hippies judged to be completely dysfunctional, having lost touch with both the natural order and humanity. The military-industrial complex, which waged an ongoing Cold War globally and a hot war in Vietnam, alongside a societal embrace of conformity,

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). While this word has grown in definition, this research uses the word in context of the specific group in the late 1960s and early 1970s of social protesters. For this research the term is used interchangeably with the term “hippie.”

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>3</sup> The term “mainstream” is a fluid term with shifting definitions. Put simply, the mainstream could be defined as any part of the dominant culture that wasn’t the counterculture. Music, drug use, clothing and hairstyles, spiritual beliefs and sexual mores could all be signifiers of those not in the mainstream.

consumerism, and materialism ran contrary to the counterculture's vision for humanity.<sup>4</sup> They sought a third way outside the confines of the traditional social order. The community that emerged in the Haight-Ashbury district would act as a model for better living with an emphasis on spirituality, dignity for humanity, and wide-open free expression. As stated in the counterculture newspaper *The San Francisco Oracle*:

Our protests have been ineffective because we're psychologically and materially dependent on the system we're protesting. American democracy needs our protest to acclaim its health. To protest as we have been is to nourish the system that is waging war degrading people. Effective protest is not in proclaiming the faults of the system, but in surviving independent of the system. That's why drop-outs bring meaningful change, as they are creating a new community which the system cannot explain or assimilate."<sup>5</sup>

This chapter details aspects of the Haight counterculture community that would have influenced Gaskin and his followers during their time in the area as the Monday Night Class. The influence of the various features of the counterculture lifestyle and community is hard to ascertain; some are obvious connections, while other links are only circumstantial. This chapter seeks to only suggest the link through geographical and cultural proximity and shared values. The Monday Night Class was part of the larger Haight hippie scene. The discussions in the class focused on topics that held an interest for the counterculture, but it is not assumed that all individuals were part of the scene or influenced by all aspects of it.<sup>6</sup> An understanding of the hippies of the Haight's belief systems and community institutions will help to understand the

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xxv.

<sup>5</sup> *The Oracle: The Psychedelic Newspaper of the Haight-Ashbury*, CD-ROM (Regent Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Monday Night Class*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 2005), 7-13.

later actions of Gaskin and his students as their Monday Night Class studies would evolve into life on The Farm.

### Haight-Ashbury Foundations

The Haight was not the only hippie community in America, but it was by far the most popular and most potent in inspiring the early hippie movement's agenda. The counterculture envisioned the district as a psychedelic "City on a Hill" that served as their alternative vision for community. Bordered by Golden Gate Park to the west, and an extension of the park called The Panhandle to the north, the area had a prominent past, evidenced by the majestic Victorian homes that dominated the architecture of the district. The evolving nature of the population included a mixture of East European, Asian, and African-Americans, with an influx of white professionals who began arriving in 1958. By 1963 the Haight was home to a small bohemian cosmopolitan community. African-Americans of the community tended to be musicians, civil rights activists, and intellectuals. Whites, meanwhile, identified with the beat culture and were writers, college students, musicians, and actors. The Beats had sought a liberation from the constraints of American conformity and materialism with a mixture of artistic expression, drug use, and spiritual exploration, much as the later counterculture would. The Beats were especially drawn to Zen Buddhism for the perceived authenticity of the spiritual tradition, as well as the exotic contrast it posed to American religious institutions.<sup>7</sup> The Beats and hippies of the counterculture both shared a bohemian lineage, seeking a break from the modern world through self-discovery, a sense of adventure, experimentation, and an admiration for the exotic and

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Kenji Masatsugu, "Reorienting the Pure Land: Japanese Americans, the Beats, and the Making of American Buddhism, 1941-1966." (PhD dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2004), 132.

authentic. They both sought standing as the social outsider, attempting to criticize the political and philosophical mainstream, while remaining disengaged from it. However the Beats saw hippies negatively, as more interested in a good time and getting stoned than doing something meaningful. The term “hippies” actually comes from slang admonishing them as cut rate hipsters.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually the Beats faded from the scene with many notables re-emerging into the hippie movement including Allen Ginsberg, Allen Watts, and Neal Cassidy. As the community shifted and became the epicenter of the hippie movement it built upon this bohemian lineage. Three aspects were both defining to the community and inspiring to the future communitarians as they sought to use many of the utopian ideals of the Haight on a smaller scale at The Farm, including drug use, rock music, and the developing infrastructure including businesses and organization.

Foundational to the emerging sense of community was the use of illegal drugs, especially psychedelics. While drug use was not unique to the counterculture, its importance as a central tenet of hippiedom made drug use a key aspect of community. Religious scholar Timothy Miller argues that drugs were a crucial factor in distinguishing between the counterculture and the mainstream.<sup>9</sup> Drug use created a psychedelic common ground between those who were “hip,” and divided them from those who were not “turned on” in the mainstream. Generally associated with the music and art of the counterculture, psychedelics were a tenet in the kind of spirituality studied by Gaskin and his Monday Night Class students, who saw them as a shortcut to unlocking spiritual enlightenment. The importance of drug use to hippie spirituality can be

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005), 5, 240-241.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 25.

further emphasized by examples of psychedelic interpretations of books like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the *Tao Te Ching* sold in the Haight. Gaskin's original goal for the Monday Night Class was to be a discussion group for acid trippers, to act as a way to share, understand, and enhance the experience.<sup>10</sup> Many users of psychedelics argued that these substances gave the user an ability to achieve a unique connection with their soul.<sup>11</sup> While this connection is not quantifiable, the perception of the user is important here. This strong belief in drugs as a religious sacrament is a key aspect of Gaskin and his students' spiritual beliefs.

Often closely associated with the psychedelic drug use was the Haight's acid rock music scene. Two specific elements helped to shape the Haight community and in turn Gaskin and his students; first, the close-knit family atmosphere that surrounded some bands, and second, the rock festival experience. Seminal Haight-Ashbury band the Grateful Dead did as much as anybody in cultivating the image of community both within the band's inner circle and among the Haight community. Phil Lesh, bassist for the band, was quoted as saying "It is the dream and hope of The Grateful Dead that small moral communities continue to grow. These families represent the true nature of all future people who are presently subjected by the paid-off and unaware community."<sup>12</sup> The Dead were often headliners of large shows in Golden Gate Park, coined "Be-Ins." These open air concerts were precursors to the weekend long festivals with names iconic in music history like Monterey Pop, Woodstock, the notorious Altamont. These were all gatherings of the hippie tribe and provided an opportunity to experience not only the

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities 1965-83*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 136.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 44. (Originally quoted from Lawrence Lipton, "The High Priest of LSD," *Los Angeles Free Press*, October 4, 1968.)

<sup>12</sup> Hank Harrison. *The Dead: A Social History of the Haight-Ashbury Experience*. (San Francisco: Archives Press, 1990), 195.

music, but the community of fellow hippies, engaging in sacraments of drugs and sex.<sup>13</sup> The close knit almost tribal framework of some of the band's followings and the music festival experience both provided a simplistic version of communal life that would inspire many to take a look at more permanent group living situations.

As the counterculture sought to build its ideal community, infrastructure became a necessity. Numerous hippie storefronts began to appear as well as the more the clandestine business of drug dealing.<sup>14</sup> The arrival of hippie owned businesses showed enterprise, as the counterculture sought its separate society. Additionally the communities DIY, or do-it-yourself, spirit saw two organizations rise to meet the population crush of the Summer of Love and fear that city leaders were not prepared for the deluge of young people expected in the area. First, The Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, was set up and specialized in treating drug reactions and overdoses, sexually transmitted diseases, and foot ailments while also providing first aid.<sup>15</sup> Second, The Council for a Summer of Love was formed by local businesses and counterculture leaders to be a point of reference for the city, a clearinghouse for information, and to organize events for the summer.<sup>16</sup> The council and the clinic made a difficult situation better in an attempt to help the hippie image and preserve the community. This entrepreneurial spirit, community responsibility and ingenuity would all be evident on The Farm as shown in their cottage industries, midwife practices, and DIY community independence.

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 75.

<sup>15</sup> Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 193-94 and, David E. Smith, M.D. and John Luce, *Love Needs Care: A History of San Francisco Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic and it's Pioneer Role in Treating Drug-Abuse Problems*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 132. It should be noted that The Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic had planned to open before the Summer of Love and its opening was meant to help the entire district and not just the Summer of Love visitors.

<sup>16</sup> Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 165.

### Religion, Spirituality, and Mythology

Jefferson Airplane singer Grace Slick described the scene during an evening of music at the Fillmore Auditorium, “Electronics and Indians, disco balls, and medieval flutes. Day-Glo space colors and Botticelli sprites. The howl of an amplifier and the tinkling of ankle bracelets. This is not Kansas, Dorothy... This is the American dream.”<sup>17</sup> This was the potpourri spirituality of the counterculture that Gaskin and his students used as the base of their psychedelic spirituality, a blending of everything to make something unique. The argument here was a rejection of Kansas, representative of middle-America and its mainstream values to create something in itself uniquely American.

The counterculture continued the spiritual curiosity of the Beat Generation before them. The Beats had been drawn to Buddhism as part of their larger search for authenticity that they argued had been lacking in 1950’s Cold War America; hippie spirituality built on this ideal.<sup>18</sup> They took the search for the authentic beyond the exotic eastern religions and embraced other spiritual traditions. As observed by sociologist Bennett M. Berger, the ideas of the hippies were a recycled bohemian doctrine of self-expression, living in the moment, neo-paganism, liberty and equality, psychedelic drugs, and a romantic love of the exotic.<sup>19</sup> It was from this doctrine that the counterculture mixed ideas from multiple spiritual traditions with the bohemian doctrine they valued. It is important to note however that these religions and spiritual traditions were seen in

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<sup>17</sup> Grace Slick with Andrea Cagan, *Somebody to Love: A Rock-and-Roll Memoir*, (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 97.

<sup>18</sup> Masatsugu, “Reorienting the Pure Land,” 132.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett M. Berger, “Hippie Morality: More Old Than New” *Trans-Action* (December 1967): 19-20.

the most simplistic terms, as hippies were able to pick and choose appealing aspects of the mystical, while leaving dogma and discipline behind. They kept some traditional Judeo-Christian values spiced with variable aspects of whatever flavors from other religions were appealing.

Native Americans held a mythic place in the hippie spiritual mind, akin to the historical colonial idea of the “noble savage.” These views of Native Americans were influenced not by spiritual texts or study, but by white middle-class stereotypes. The counterculture saw in Native Americans a simplicity, a respect for nature, and a sense of tribalism or communalism that resonated with their own arguments against the industrialized world they were protesting.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the counterculture held idealized versions of Bay Area subcultures like the militant civil rights group the Black Panthers and motorcycle gang the Hell’s Angels, due to their example of perceived self-reliance and independence from the mainstream.<sup>21</sup> Their cursory admiration led to an idealized version of both. Like their admiration of Native Americans, this view was a shallow one, with no real understanding of any of the their larger beliefs or situations. At the height of the Haight experience, there was no push from the counterculture towards any of the civil rights goals of either the Black Panthers or Native Americans, while the Hell’s Angels became awkward allies with the hippies, despite their penchant for violence. Interestingly, The Farm would amend this with its relief organization Plenty which was active on Native American reservations and in predominantly African-American inner-city communities.

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<sup>20</sup> Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 136-137.

<sup>21</sup> Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 34.

The counterculture's idealization of Asian spiritual traditions went against the traditional Cold War consensus that saw military action in two Asian countries (Korea and Vietnam) and tensions with another in communist China, as well as the subjugation of World War II enemy Japan. In this way the counterculture was able to relinquish responsibility for the imperial attitudes of the mainstream American mindset, while not actually giving up any of the benefits of the American imperial legacy.<sup>22</sup> This problem of rebellion from a position of privilege would continue into the back to the land movement. Put simply, this hedonistic oppositional culture existed because of American imperialism and its vast resources, not in defiance of it. Like the appreciation of Native Americans and African Americans, the counterculture's idealization of Asian cultures came off as condescending. Indian musician Ravi Shankar, famous for his collaboration with The Beatles and performance at Woodstock said of the hippies, after he distanced himself from them, "They use our music as part of the drug experiences and [their] understanding of India's ways [is] shallow. Wearing beads and bells and flowers and carrying joss sticks [comes] across as mimicry and mockery of the real thing."<sup>23</sup> Embracing the exotic allowed the counterculture to escape the realities of the time, namely the injustices of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, while rejecting the entire political structure and escaping the reality of American imperialism.<sup>24</sup>

It was in this framework of avoidant imperialism, from this buffet of mythological and spiritual traditions that Gaskin and his students held their discussions during the Monday Night Class. The counterculture attempted to ritualize and spiritualize multiple aspects of daily life,

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<sup>22</sup> Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 86. Quoting from Ravi Shankar, *My Music, My Life*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 93.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 89.

such as drug taking, music, dancing, sex, and communal living.<sup>25</sup> The Monday Night Class was an attempt to sort out the finer points of this free-for-all spirituality. Gaskin was a charismatic leader, who was able to discuss Buddhism, relate it to Christian doctrine, and not alienate his listeners. From the beginning the structure of the class was that of a *mondo* or a rapid back and forth conversation between a Zen master and his students.<sup>26</sup> The counterculture of the Haight was largely apolitical, and Gaskin and his students would come to a better understanding of their belief system and their political role as they moved to The Farm. The commune itself would be organized as a spiritual monastery, working toward a fulfillment of the countercultural goal of finding spiritual meaning in everyday actions.

### Monday Night Class

Gaskin's Monday Night Class fits the model of many other Haight institutions as it began to fulfill a need of the community. Young people who had come to San Francisco from around the country did so to become part of a larger life mission. Some, like Robert Gleser, saw Gaskin as a teacher who could continue the personal spiritual quest that had brought him from the Bronx to San Francisco in the first place.<sup>27</sup> Young people chose the counterculture and the Haight from a variety of youth movements and developed a sense of purpose towards the particular goals of the counterculture. The Monday Night Class would play a significant role as a popular and consistent part of the Haight scene. The class met in the district until October, 1970, when they left on the Caravan.

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<sup>25</sup> Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Hodgson, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 137.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Gleser Interview by author, August 8, 2011.

The class started in December 1967, with twelve people meeting in an informal discussion group with other acid trippers as part of San Francisco State's Experimental College.<sup>28</sup> Over time, the numbers rose and the locations evolved to accommodate them. From San Francisco State's Gallery Lounge to the Glide Memorial Church, the Straight Theater on Haight Street, and eventually the Family Dog Ballroom.<sup>29</sup> The class discussions were held in a "stoned, truthful, hippy atmosphere" and ranged the spectrum of mythology, religion, mysticism, current events, and psychedelic topics.<sup>30</sup> As Gaskin noted in the book *Monday Night Class*, the ability to draw crowds of over one thousand people was indicative of a larger pool of spiritually enlightened students.<sup>31</sup> Hippies attended numerous weekly classes offered by a variety of teachers around the community. Over time individual students gravitated to gurus who met their particular needs and created groups with more serious spiritual goals.<sup>32</sup> Researcher Arthur Theodore Kachel attended many of these groups as part of his study of drug-using religious communities. He noted that the Monday Night Class and Stephen Gaskin as the only area group with a strong religious focus connected to the psychedelic drug experience.<sup>33</sup> Many of Gaskin's students became his close friends, getting high and attending concerts together, and creating a bond that would deepen the relationship with the teacher and student to plant the seeds of tribe.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hodgson, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Monday Night Class*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 2005), 9. There is some discrepancy in which Family Dog facility the group met in, with Gaskin's source saying "The Family Dog Ballroom on The Great Highway and Hodgdon saying it is "A Family Dog run dancehall on the Pacific Coast Highway." What's not in question is that it was a larger facility that could hold the over 1,000 now attending the class.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ledoux, "The History of a Hippie Commune," 16.

<sup>33</sup> Kachel, "An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970," 13.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Prügl, "Technicolor Amish: History and World View of The Farm, a Communal Society in Tennessee," (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983), 16

The Monday Night Class solidified Gaskin's reputation as a leader and teacher. His experiences as a college professor of literature and semantics, his imposing stature, and his military service equipped him with the verbal skills and charisma to lead the large open-ended group discussions. His own experiences with acid and mysticism, and his relaxed grooming habits gave him credentials with the younger hippies.<sup>35</sup> These skills also enabled him to fend off challenges and diminish power struggles, which are inevitable in a room of hundreds, if not thousands, of stoned cultural radicals.<sup>36</sup> Commanding such an audience took skill.

Drugs, sex, music, communal living and the creation of a "counterculture" had all been part of a larger search for meaning. The Monday Night Class was in its way, a culmination of that search for many people and the beginnings of a spiritual community in which to fulfill that search. The larger happenings and gatherings of the Haight had set a tone for the counterculture, the music broadcast ideas nationwide, but the Monday Night Class hashed it out week after week to build more than just ideals and good intentions. Without further research it is impossible to know exactly how involved future members of The Farm would have been with the various activities of the Haight. In reading Gaskin's multiple books as well as through interviews the students of Gaskin's class suggest they were deeply connected and committed to the counterculture and the community building in the Haight. The link can be suggested that the attitudes and ideals would have prevailed with the group as they worked to build a commune in a reflection of the greater ideals planned for the Haight. Actions taken on the Caravan and The

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<sup>35</sup> Hodgson, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Farm will reflect their countercultural heritage that they would claim long after they and multitudes of others left the Haight for rural communes around the country.

### Conclusion

The Haight would not survive the deluge of young people during the Summer of Love and would see the hippie community's dream in the district coming to an end, as many of the luminary figures of the scene moved on and the shops closed up. The hippie ideals of love, trust, and community diminished in the Haight. Gaskin's Monday Night Class stayed in the area for a few more years, bringing together those faithful to the hippie dream.<sup>37</sup> The eventual foundation of a The Farm emulated the foundation of a separate community sought by the hippies of the Haight. The time spent in the district by Gaskin and his students allowed them to observe and participate in the social experiment, and to learn from their experiences. Roszak observed that "For all its quirkiness, the counter culture dared envision a better future."<sup>38</sup> It was that vision attempted in the Haight that inspired Gaskin's group to venture similar ideas in Tennessee.

The particular aspects of the Haight highlighted here inspired core features of the commune experience. Certain ideas like drug use and spirituality would be carried directly to The Farm, while rock music, business ideas, and health care would find new forms on the rural commune. Rock music became the gospel of the hippie spiritualists, with The Farm Band becoming an integral part of The Farm's outreach programs.<sup>39</sup> They toured extensively

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<sup>37</sup> Albert K. Bates "Technological Innovation in a Rural Intentional Community, 1971-1987 (lecture, National Historic Communal Societies Association Annual Meeting, Bishop Hill, IL, October 17, 1987). Transcript: <http://www.thefarm.org/lifestyle/albertbates/akbp1.html> (Accessed October 10, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, xxxiii.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1974), no page numbers, section titled "This Band Always Plays for Free."

supporting Gaskin's speaking appearances after the commune's foundation. The independent business models of the Haight educated the communards as they sought to create revenue on The Farm. The Book Publishing Company, Old Beatnik Sorghum Molasses, The Farmhands work crews, and the short lived commercial farming operations are a few examples of Farm enterprise. One of the most successful institutions was the practice of midwifery. Much like the Haight Free Clinic, the midwives were founded out of an acute need for the service, while still operating within the ideals of the community. The Free Clinic's open door policy was mirrored by The Farm's invitation to pregnant women to come to the commune for free midwife services, both of which had a policy of never turning away those in need. Childbirth would become a part of the larger religious vision of The Farm, vaulting the midwives to an important role within the community. Gaskin and his students were positioned well to learn from these experiences as well as preserve and evolve the counterculture. As the 1960s came to an end, the counterculture would be increasingly threatened both internally and politically. These challenges would push the Monday Night Class to adapt and survive.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE END AND THE EXODUS: THE HAIGHT-ASHBURY IN DECLINE, THE CARAVAN, AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE FARM

On September 16, 1967, Golden Gate Park officials declared the Summer of Love officially over. Summer had ended and officials assumed that most of the short term residents of the Haight-Ashbury would be returning to high schools and colleges. Realistically there were more hippies in the Haight than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Many among this next wave of hippies were younger, less intellectually curious, and less spiritually minded than the original Haight residents.<sup>2</sup> Head Nurse Margaret Sankot and Dr. David E. Smith of the Haight Free Clinic noted “The original subculture was shattered by thousands of upset, unhappy young people looking for immediate answers to life’s problems,” as they engaged in recreational drug use with harder substances.<sup>3</sup> Replacing the founders of the counterculture were a new group of runaways, attracted by colorful news reports and the popularization of acid rock nationally, but unprepared for the lifestyle, or understanding of the hippie philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Added to the mix were drug dealers, thugs, and pimps who exploited the situation. Where peace and love went out, hard drugs and crime came in.<sup>5</sup> Property values plummeted; storefronts went empty, the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic temporarily closed its doors, and The Council for a Summer of

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Wenner Books, 2005), 229.

<sup>2</sup> Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 140.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Sankot and David E. Smith, “Drug Problems in the Haight-Ashbury,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 68, No. 8 (August 1968): 1687.

<sup>4</sup> David E. Smith, “Runaways and their Health Problems in Haight-Ashbury During the Summer of 1967,” *American Journal Of Public Health And The Nation's Health* 59 (November 1969): 46-50.

<sup>5</sup> Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 140.

Love disbanded.<sup>6</sup> The psychedelic community vision of just a few years earlier seemed all but lost.

The Diggers brought a symbolic end to the Haight's utopian dream with a Death of Hip funeral on October 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>7</sup> The dramatic street theatre, complete with casket and funeral procession, was a reiteration to the common sentiment in the district that the movement had lost its spirit during the Summer of Love.<sup>8</sup> Eighty people followed the funeral march down Haight Street to the sounds of "Taps," passing the iconic (and closed) Psychedelic Shop's window displaying signs reading; "Be Free" "Don't Mourn for Me, Organize" and "Nebraska Needs You More."<sup>9</sup> The Digger parade was an outward expression of what the old guard of the counterculture knew, the media attention and popularization of the hippie ideal meant the Haight and the counterculture was becoming diluted and commercialized. The Diggers were founded as a catalyst for countercultural ideas; the funeral procession was an expression that the ability to affect the vision of the counterculture was no longer theirs. The Summer of Love had caused real and permanent damage to the peace and love dream in the Haight. Political and social pressures, both inside and outside the Haight would further the decline of the counterculture. Stephen Gaskin and his Monday Night Class students would see their path begin to evolve away from the Haight and into a traveling community they dubbed "The Caravan."

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<sup>6</sup> David E. Smith, M.D. and John Luce, *Love Needs Care: A History of San Francisco Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic and it's Pioneer Role in Treating Drug-Abuse Problems*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 213-214.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>8</sup> Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 233.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 235.

### Counterpoints

While the Diggers were burying the counterculture, the nation as a whole was about to erupt with a heightened level of violence, as a series of riots and assassinations challenged the country. Many of Haight's hippies reacted to the changing climate by withdrawing; retreating to countryside communes, traveling as vagabonds, or carving a space among the remnants in San Francisco. The New Left however escalated the level of confrontation.<sup>10</sup> Students for a Democratic Society leader, Tom Hayden explained the Left's shift to militancy while speaking to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in October, 1968, "Having tried available channels and discovered them meaningless, having recognized that the establishment does not listen to public opinion- it does not care to listen to the New Left- the New Left was moving towards confrontation."<sup>11</sup> These inflammatory words were meant to give meaning to the Chicago Democratic National Convention riots of August, 1968 and the increased number of riots around the nation stemming from civil rights, Vietnam War protests, and SDS/Free Speech Movement protests on college campuses.

To mainstream America, the nuanced difference between the counterculture dropouts, the anti-war activists, civil rights marchers, and New Left agitators was negligible. Essentially they were all youthful movements and adamantly opposed the Vietnam War. Together they represented a challenge to the post-war societal and cultural norms. They were all symbolic of an unraveling of a Cold War American consensus that demanded conformity and allegiance to the status quo. The fact that the New Left argued within the capitalistic system and the counterculture attempted to operate outside that system was semantics to the average

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Love Needs Care*, 213-214.

<sup>11</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 286.

American.<sup>12</sup> The distinctions were more obscured by the New Left's adaption of some of the more visible aspects of the hippie lifestyle, long hair, clothing, and drug use.<sup>13</sup> Many Americans might have agreed with a letter to the editor of *Time*, "I fail to see much real altruism or idealism in my children or their friends. I see, rather, a perverted, sentimental self-centeredness."<sup>14</sup> Mainstream America felt their lifestyle and values were increasingly under attack throughout the sixties, and 1968 was their breaking point.

The events in Chicago in August were just the high mark on what was a tumultuous year in American history overall. January saw the North Vietnamese challenge notions of American supremacy in the Vietnam conflict with the Tet Offensive. The April assassination of African-American leader Martin Luther King Jr. and the resulting nationwide riots undermined any perceived progress in the civil rights movement. The June assassination of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy continued to unsettle the country and rob the liberal and anti-war factions of the Democratic Party of its strongest candidate. Television news projected the image of a nation at war with itself and in Vietnam, and seemingly losing both. Viewing these events in succession rocked the confidence of the nation and saw 1968 as the flashpoint in a decade of cultural battles.

The unrest led conservatives to reassert themselves in the debate. On college campuses conservative youth formed new organizations, started newspapers, and ran for student government. Their gripe was as much about politics as it was about the unrest that disrupted

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<sup>12</sup> Theodore Roznik, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xxiv-xxvi.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216.

<sup>14</sup> *Time*, Letters, January 20, 1967. Quoted in Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, (New York: Scribner, 2008), 179.

campuses.<sup>15</sup> By 1969 there were over 450 chapters of the major right-wing organization *The Young Americans for Freedom* on campuses nationwide.<sup>16</sup> Conservative intellectual and publisher Norman Podhoretz used his magazine *Commentary* to wage public war on the New Left and counterculture. Podhoretz attacked the youth movements relentlessly, commenting on the counterculture's rejection of athletics, the emerging ecology movement, while comparing the New Left to German Communists who had weakened Germany before Hitler's rise.<sup>17</sup>

Conservative journalist Irving Kristol commented in a 1968 essay on the demands of the young:

To see something on television is to feel entitled to it; to be promised something by a politician is to feel immediately deprived of it. What is called "the revolution of rising expectations" has reached grotesque dimensions that men take it as an insult when they are asked to be reasonable in the desires and demands. The reasonable is what they expect to obtain automatically. The unreasonable is what they look to government to provide by special, ingenious effort.<sup>18</sup>

He continued, suggesting that the young live in "an anti-world, one whose existence challenges the legitimacy of the adult world," where popular culture is changing and religion is diminishing.<sup>19</sup> William F. Buckley, like many conservatives, felt the change, "There is in the air a sense of great excitement, among conservatives who have reason to believe that their time is coming."<sup>20</sup> Richard Nixon's 1968 election was the realization of that excitement and a victory against the New Left and the counterculture, to pundits like Podhoretz, Kristol, and Buckley, as well as the majority of Americans who did not approve of the social and political unrest.

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard Weinraub, "Unrest Spurs Growth of Conservative Student Groups," *The New York Times*, October, 12, 1969. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 5, 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> Irving Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea in America*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), 26. (Originally published in *Fortune*, July, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27-29.

<sup>20</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr. "On the Right," January 13, 1968.

In the midst of this period of turmoil, as the counterculture retreated or merged with the left, the remnants of the hippie population remaining in the Haight negotiated their survival. An attempt was made by the community leaders, including Gaskin, to pull things together with a civic organization called “The Commons.” It was to be a new beginning, allowing for a refocusing of the community toward communal events, service institutions, communications, and a shared communal leadership.<sup>21</sup> Gaskin’s association with the largely unsuccessful endeavor was short-lived, but the action spoke to a desire to adapt and continue counterculture goals, in the context of ever mounting pressures and challenges both inside and outside the Haight. Gaskin also organized two “Holy Man Jams” bringing together a variety of spiritual and religious leaders, including counterculture luminaries like Alan Watts and Tim Leary, for multiday events. The Monday Night Class also continued, after a short hiatus. The events and environment around them, both locally and nationally, drew the group closer and more dedicated to their spiritual search. A growing core of the most devoted students now made up the backbone of the class. The continuation of the class as well as his involvement with The Commons and Holy Man Jams fortified Gaskin and his students in their spirituality, while simultaneously turning attention outward towards society and attempting to preserve a diminishing flame of the counterculture.

### Manson and Gaskin

Fresh out of prison, Charles Manson arrived in the Haight in the wake of the Summer of Love and began to recruit members for his “family.” He quickly emerged as a psychedelic guru

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur Theodore Kachel, “An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970” (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), 83-84.

to a group of mostly women as he traveled up and down the West Coast. While Manson himself rejected the term “hippie” and held no counterculture credibility, this fact would have been lost on most of the audience amidst the sensational news reporting.<sup>22</sup> Historian Dominick Cavallo points out that “in retrospect, perhaps the most telling sign of the decline of the Haight-Ashbury and the counterculture was the late 1967 arrival of Charles Manson.”<sup>23</sup> The group eventually settled on an old movie lot ranch outside of Los Angeles where they lived communally until their arrest for the Tate-LaBianca murders in December, 1969.

The Manson murders focused unwanted attention on the counterculture and psychedelic spiritual leaders. Manson and Gaskin, while opposite in their ideals, did share some eerie similarities. While Manson headed a core group of followers in which he engaged in a family-like structure, Gaskin, was the leader of a larger group of students and tutor to a core group of followers who engaged in “four way marriages.” A popular arrangement among Gaskin’s closest followers, the relationship was a committed bond between two couples who shared all aspects of their lives together.<sup>24</sup> Both groups sought out rural communal living situations. Both leaders preached the spiritual powers of LSD, and believed it gave them heightened senses of universal understanding and visionary abilities. Manson’s apocalyptic visions ran opposite to those of most hippie spiritual teachings, and Gaskin and Manson’s vision for the world could not be more opposite. Ten days after Manson’s arrest, Gaskin would be consulted for an article in the *New York Times* titled, “Many Religious Communes of Young People Are Under the Sway

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<sup>22</sup> Steven Roberts, *The New York Times*, “The Hippie Mystique,” December 15, 1969.

<sup>23</sup> Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*, 141.

<sup>24</sup> Kachel, “An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970,” 81.

of Compelling Leaders.”<sup>25</sup> While the article was sympathetic to the differences in the spiritual leaders, it also noted the similarities, arguing that the leaders of such groups had a controlling mandate with their followers. The article clearly stated that while the end results are distinctly different, they share a common ground.<sup>26</sup> Gaskin was conscious of being compared to Manson, as he suggested in an interview with *Mademoiselle*, conducted in December of 1970 (a year after the Manson arrests). When discussing the psychedelic sacrament of LSD, “I’m off acid right now because I figure it’s worn out... There are too many Charlie Manson’s in it... nuts to all that jazz.”<sup>27</sup> Later in the same article, when asked about negative spiritual paths people sometimes take, he continued to create a contrast between himself and Manson, claiming his negative spiritual path was an example of a lack of moral instruction in the country.<sup>28</sup> A distinct desire to differentiate himself from Manson, and other apocalyptic religious gurus, drove Gaskin to communicate the group’s ideas and goals openly with the public.

Some of Gaskin’s early LSD experiences and psychedelic teachers had taught him the duality of the tripping experience. The powerful visions that Gaskin interpreted with deep spirituality were available to all, regardless of intention. He used these experiences to formalize his own ideas for a psychedelic church with more equality and one in which students would not seek to “cop each other’s minds”<sup>29</sup> Margaret, Gaskin’s first wife and part of his four-way marriage, discussed the contrast of some psychedelic leaders, “I see people sometimes who are

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<sup>25</sup> “Many Religious Communes of Young People are Under the Sway of Compelling Leaders.” *New York Times*, Dec 14, 1969. 82.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Mary Cantwell and Amy Gross, “I Want Us to Get Real Good Understanding and Real Good Love and Peace and Brotherhood and Just Hang Around, Man,” *Mademoiselle*, March 1971, 146.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Hodgson, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 131-132.

trying to be on a power trip, which being a leader implies... and it makes me sad, because the hippy way is not the way of power. It's the way of love and helping people."<sup>30</sup>

Robert Gleser, a student of Gaskin's from the Monday Night Class and among the group that founded The Farm, reflected that after a search for spirituality that took him through Europe and across America, to him Gaskin's leadership was sincere and genuine.<sup>31</sup> Aware of his position and having a legitimate concern for his followers saw Gaskin take responsibility twice for drug possession charges (once in Oregon and later in Tennessee), and caused him to be one of the last to move from a tent to home on the commune.<sup>32</sup> Individual followers had their own intentions for being a part of the group, with some being more zealous than others. Those at the core, including the founders of The Farm, believed Gaskin to be the "real deal."<sup>33</sup> The large crowds and positive reception the group usually got from audiences, media, and authorities all speak to Gaskin's engaging personality and leadership style, as well as a leader who sought to differentiate himself from the darker elements of the counterculture emerging in the late 1960s.

The Manson Family murders closed the turbulent sixties on a dark note. Sixties historian, Nadia Zimmerman comments, "Manson exemplified what could happen when the countercultural sensibility became an empty signifier, disconnected from the fragile communal ecosystem within the Haight-Ashbury district."<sup>34</sup> Zimmerman could be explaining the entire post-Summer of Love era of the Haight, as that disconnection from the core values of the movement grew increasingly common. Gaskin worked as a counterpoint to the Manson element

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<sup>30</sup> Maggie Gaskin interview from: Leonard Wolf ed. *Voices from the Love Generation*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968) 89.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Gleser, interview with author, August 8, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Hodgson, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Gleser, interview with author, August 8, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Nadia Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 168.

that crept into the counterculture. As the students of the Monday Night Class prepared to leave the Haight on the Caravan, this belief in the original and positive ideals of the Haight would be continually reiterated.

### The Caravan

Gaskin summarized the Caravan this way, “but there came a thing from San Francisco that said there was a spirit happening and people pulled up stakes all over the country and went to San Francisco to see.” He continued, “But some of what the spirit was that they were chasing was so unconscious that they wandered off somewhere. But we kept the faith, and we found out that you don’t have to find a fire, you can make a fire- and it warms us. And so we’re the folks from all over the United States who went to San Francisco to look for spirit and we made spirit; and now we’re back out here and we’ve got it. And it’s with us- and we transport it in this caravan.”<sup>35</sup> Gaskin’s words summarize the process of the larger Haight migration. As people from across the country came in search of an intangible ideal, some of those searchers believed they had begun to achieve this goal, and others “wandered off.” Gaskin and his followers believed they were keepers of a sacred flame, an original spirit of the counterculture and his own words signal his intent to align himself with the pre-Summer of Love roots of the counterculture. This allegiance to this ideal explains why they stayed longer than some did in the Haight. More importantly it sets up the idea of a counterculture diaspora, as Gaskin and his students saw themselves leaving the spiritual homeland of the counterculture and beginning the process of an exodus. The first step of this exodus was the Caravan, preaching their word to both the

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<sup>35</sup> Cantwell and Gross, “I Want Us to Get Real Good Understanding and Real Good Love and Peace and Brotherhood and Just Hang Around, Man,” 146-147.

converted and curious across the country. This journey further bonded the community founded in the Monday Night Class.

Early in 1970 Gaskin's public profile began to rise. He had arranged two successful Holy Man Jams, and his students published a collection of his Monday Night Class lessons. His media presence and appearances at community meetings brought attention from people not connected with the Monday Night Class.<sup>36</sup> At one of those outside lectures Gaskin received invitations to speak at a variety of venues nationwide.<sup>37</sup> In July, Gaskin and a group of followers travelled to Boulder, Colorado, for The Boulder Whole Earth Fair, where Gaskin was a key participant in the week long gathering of "holy men." He was the only representative of psychedelic spirituality at the gathering.<sup>38</sup> These events helped to solidify Gaskin as a countercultural spiritual leader of prominence and further encouraged him to take his teachings out of San Francisco to a larger audience.

The nationwide speaking tour began in October, 1970 with Gaskin hitting the road with around two hundred followers in sixty converted buses that acted as both transportation and homes as they traveled around the country. The tour encountered an early roadblock as police were waiting for the caravan at the Oregon state line, eager to search the hippies for marijuana. Gaskin was the only one arrested and faced a sympathetic judge. After explaining the group, their beliefs, and their mission they were released on the stipulation that the judge would keep up with their progress and hold them to their spiritual mission.<sup>39</sup> It would be the first of many times their leader would use his honesty and charisma to positively affect a difficult situation.

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<sup>36</sup> Kachel, "An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970," 88.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>38</sup> Kachel, "An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970,"

<sup>39</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 11.

Generally the Caravan found goodwill as they traveled around America, and the group enjoyed their interactions with Middle America. This came with effort, as Gaskin had laid out ground rules for the group's behavior. The buses were kept tidy and the exteriors clean and well painted. They realized that one individual's actions spoke for the larger group, so their interactions with the community were polite, and Gaskin was the spokesman and leader. In Minneapolis, Gaskin related a story about meeting a local police officer who "felt like taking off his coat and badge and getting on a school bus and joining the caravan."<sup>40</sup> These experiences would be the beginning of trends that would extend to life on the commune, including the idea of positive public relations allowing for the community to exist with minimal harassment and a cultivating an honest relationship with authority figures. Two ideas not common in the counterculture previously became essential for long term survival of the group both on the road and on the commune.

Gaskin understood you could not protest the system and be dependent on it at the same time. California Governor Ronald Reagan had decried hippies on the 1966 campaign trail on this point, as he pinned the rise in welfare costs to the emerging counterculture, arguing that working people were "asked to carry the additional burden of a segment of society capable of caring for itself," but instead chose to "freeload at the expense of more conscientious citizens."<sup>41</sup> Reagan would revisit the argument in the 1970 reelection campaign, leading to the California Welfare Reform Act of 1971. In the light of such attacks, financial independence added to their argument of cultural separation. As the caravan worked its way through cities, the hardworking hippies

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<sup>40</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *The Caravan*, (New York: Random House, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *The Rise of Ronald Reagan*, (New York: Random House, 1968), 140.

looking for odd jobs proved a contrast to the lazy hippie stereotypes.<sup>42</sup> The group also did not use government welfare or food stamps; this became a standing rule for The Farm as well.<sup>43</sup> The group's stance on relationships as commitments, with Gaskin insisting that people who were sleeping together were considered engaged and those producing children were married broke the "free love" hippie stereotype.<sup>44</sup> Both of these values were transferred to The Farm as well, showing the group as becoming more accountable for their actions.

The press began to follow the movements of the Caravan, as the large line of buses filled with exotic hippies could not go unnoticed as they drove through America. Numerous radio stations, newspapers, magazines, and television news stations ran stories and conducted interviews with the group. With the negative images of hippies the media usually portrayed during this period, these positive views made the trip into a "hippie goodwill tour" of sorts, allowing Gaskin to highlight the positive aspects of the countercultural ideal. While he preached the usual ideas of spirituality through psychedelics, nonviolence, and love for your fellow man, his ideas had evolved through the Monday Night Class experience to form a solid doctrine. He was adamant that hippies continue the goals of the original counterculture and to change the world by changing themselves and serving as an example.<sup>45</sup>

Overall the Caravan had covered 7000 miles in four months and visited Mount Angel, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Iowa City, Iowa; Evanston, Illinois; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Dayton, Ohio; Plainfield, Vermont; Providence, Rhode Island; Stony Brook, New York;

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<sup>42</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> LeDoux, "The History of A Hippie Commune: The Farm," 35-36.

Princeton, New Jersey; Haverford and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Washington D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia; Nashville, Tennessee; Columbia and Kansas City, Missouri; and Tulsa Oklahoma.<sup>46</sup>

The group arrived back in San Francisco on February 1, 1971, a more cohesive and mature group than the one that had left four months earlier. The road served to bond them communally to the point that going back to their lives in San Francisco and once-a-week classes was unappealing. The events between 1968 and 1971 had also changed the counterculture and the Haight in negative permanent ways. Gaskin rejected the idea of teaching again in the Haight, seeing the students there as not being genuine in spirit, and the youth ghetto with all its problems as a “burned over district.” There had been discussions during the Caravan about finding some land and living in a way that reflected their ideals. If Gaskin and his followers were to be the keepers of a counterculture flame and live by the values of the original hippies, they knew they could no longer do it in the Haight. Ten days after arriving back in San Francisco, Gaskin informed the group after a Sunday morning service of his intentions:

Whatever you put your attention on you get more of. Whatever you put your attention on you amplify and make that thing stronger and more so in the world. And I’ve been teaching that in San Francisco for about five years. This trip we took out across the country, like all good trips, expanded our consciousness. I’ve been saying that about attention for so long that I believe it myself now. Therefore I can’t put my attention into a city scene anymore. Because the worst thing happening on the planet is the cities. Like the cities are the major causes of warfare, poverty, totalitarian police state whatnot...

After the services the caravan’s going to take off to Tennessee and get a farm. Because what you put your attention into you get more of, and I need more trees, more grass, more wheat, more soybeans, more healthy babies, more good-looking sane people, people that can work. That’s what I really what I want to see a lot more of and that’s what I’m going to put my attention into.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Kachel, “An American Religious Community Using Hallucinogens in 1970,” 130.

<sup>47</sup> Gaskin, *The Caravan*.

### Finding Sanctuary

The counterculture's move from urban to rural was not out of character with the hippie mindset. An idealism of nature and romanticized pastoralism had been at the root of the counterculture's argument against the establishment that waged a technological war in Vietnam and prized conformity. Historian and social critic, Theodore Roszak, while defining the counterculture, identified them as a utopian community where there is a "small is beautiful" technology base to relieve the drudgery. There the free flowering of personality, the ideal of organic community, the adventure of ethnic diversity, the exploration of the further reaches of human nature, life lived gently on the earth, economics of permanence, a new biocentric contract between species and more than human world from which we draw our sustenance become the priorities of the day."<sup>48</sup> The ideals and beliefs of the counterculture naturally lead them out of the cities and into rural communes. Gaskin and his students' move towards acquiring land in the early 1970's mirrored a larger "back to the land" movement nationally. This undertaking saw millions of young people move on to rural communes or backwoods homesteads in an attempt to reconnect with the land.

Additionally, the teenagers who left home to live in the crashpads of the Haight were now growing up. Having spent years in the Monday Night Class discussing "right livelihood" and practicing it in their personal lives, the natural next step was to expand the practice. They were also ready to start families. Robert and Virginia Gleser, pointed to this idea of being eager to expand their spiritual studies and being ready to settle down, have children, and build something of their own as key reasons they and their fellow travelers on the Caravan decided, without

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<sup>48</sup> Roznik, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, xxxiii

hesitation, to head with Gaskin to Tennessee.<sup>49</sup> They felt a move to build their commune was a progressive step towards their goal of spiritual fulfillment, as well as an escape from a society they had initially protested. Much as the initial move to the Haight-Ashbury had been a step in that direction, this move was not a radical gamble, but a continuation of a larger journey to these or many of the other counterculture communarians.

The Caravan took off on the last leg of its journey, leaving in February, 1971. First going to Oregon to clear up the previous legal matters concerning Gaskin's marijuana arrest, the Caravan headed east. The journey was challenging as they were snowed in in Nebraska, and escorted straight across the state of Kansas by state police, who were leery of letting the nomadic hippies lingering too long in their state. The group remained at around 250 people, roughly the same number that had left with the original caravan. This solid number suggests not only a strongly bonded community, but also retention of students interested in pursuing the next stage of the countercultural group's development and spiritual growth. They arrived in Nashville in late March, 1971, staying at a new campground on Percy Priest Lake built for tourists of the Opryland theme park, as guests of the US Army Corps of Engineers, until they found a permanent home.<sup>50</sup>

Word spread across the region that the group was looking for a suitable location that would fit their needs. They looked at land in Kentucky, Arkansas, and locally in Cheatham County. Each time they returned disappointed, with the land being more expensive than advertised, or smaller than the seller had claimed. The piece of land in Kentucky had been involved a family dispute, with the hippies being drawn in as pawns in a struggle over the land.

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<sup>49</sup> Robert and Virginia Gleser, interview with author. August 8, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, (Summertown, TN: Self-Published, 1994), 13.

Many were reluctant to sell to these strangers from San Francisco, as the local media treated them with curiosity at best, and generally skepticism.<sup>51</sup>

On March 29, 1971, *The Nashville Tennessean* published two front-page articles describing two very different religious leaders leading a flock into the area. The two in-depth articles described Gaskin and his students, as well as Reverend Robert Theobald, who left Southern California two and a half years earlier, and came to Murfreesboro to escape the “Sodom and Gomorrah” of California.<sup>52</sup> Theobald cited the sinful nature of the region, including the hippies, as a reason for the coming judgment that would slide California into the sea.<sup>53</sup> They had left, not to escape this judgment, but because God had led them to a more holy place for the fundamentalist sect to practice beliefs in divine healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation of prophesy, miracles, and emersion baptism. While both articles subtly played on the quirkiness of these religious strangers, the articles were respectful of the groups and spoke of the deep faith that had led each across the country to Tennessee and an eagerness to do their spiritual work in the area. Gaskin and his group, who were used to the media spotlight, were constantly in the press from the moment they arrived and many accounts labeled them as “cultists.” The size and notoriety of the counterculture in mainstream media made their search for land and their acceptance from locals challenging. The lessons from the Caravan, including the ability to keep a positive and united public face helped them to remain patient. A chance meeting with a the

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<sup>51</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 13-14.

<sup>52</sup> Jim Bennett, “No Smokes, No Meat, No Last Names, but Life is Good for Caravan Group,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, March 29, 1971. Wendell Rawls Jr., “They Brought With Them Nothing but Faith... And Built a Church,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, March 29, 1971.

<sup>53</sup> David Brinkley and David Burrington, “Geologists and others predict California earthquake,” *NBC Evening News*, NBC, aired April 3, 1969.

daughter of Rose Martin, a local landowner, would help settle the group and change their luck.<sup>54</sup>

A group from the Caravan met the younger Martin while in Nashville shopping for guitars.

Having read about the group in the local newspapers, she was familiar with their situation and

offered a piece of long vacant family property in nearby Lewis County for the low price of a

dollar a year until they found a more suitable permanent home.<sup>55</sup> As Rose Martin explained,

“They’ve traveled a long way and deserve a rest.”<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

While the counterculture declined in the Haight, many sought refuge on rural communes in an attempt to continue the social experiment begun in the district. Others had sought to carve out space and reconnect with likeminded seekers in the quickly deteriorating urban counterculture centers.<sup>57</sup> Gaskin and his students followed both of these trends as they stayed in San Francisco longer than most of the hippies before settling down into a rural commune. By first attempting to coalesce the remaining counterculture after the Summer of Love and reiterate the positives of the movement, then that core of faithful traveling on the Caravan helped to solidify the community. This time in San Francisco and on the road helped them to preserve and exemplify their counterculture values and lifestyles. By establishing The Farm as a commune they attempted to bring into daily practice what had been theory in the class and a short term experiment on the Caravan. While Gaskin and his students were not the first hippies to found a commune, two advantages helped them to be more successful than most. First, they had met and

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen Gaskin, “Landing in Homer’s Backyard,” in *Voices from the Farm*, ed. Rubert Fike (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 14. Gaskin, “Landing in Homer’s Backyard,” 6.

<sup>56</sup> “Hippie Clan on Drake Lake,” *Lewis County Herald*, May 13, 1971.

<sup>57</sup> Hodgon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 139.

discussed their shared values weekly as the Monday Night Class and traveled as a group in the Caravan. Additionally they have seen many earlier communes, either through short term visits or living on them, and being able to learn from their experiences. Their later establishment gave them the benefit of perspective. The trials of surviving the fall of the Haight and the travels of the Caravan meant that the initial founders of the commune were the most committed to their vision. The conservative pushback, the escalation of violence in the streets, rising militancy of some hippies, the dark turn signaled by the Manson Family murders gave the residents of The Farm a counterpoint to their vision of community as they strove for a counterculture idea that had been lost since before the Summer of Love.

## CHAPTER 3

### A COUNTERCULTURE COMMUNE AND ITS LEGACY

The Martin Farm was a classroom for the new communitarians, as they quickly went to work planting crops, building infrastructure, and learning about their new neighbors. Their first interaction was with the caretaker of the Martin Farm, Homer Sanders. Upon seeing the multi bus convoy pulling up to the gate, Sanders met the group, intent on running them off with his shotgun. After talking to Gaskin, he liked him and the group, deciding he would help them out. The road into the Martin Farm was accessed by a road owned by a Mr. Smith, who had no interest in letting these hippies move in next door or use his road to do so. He also had a long running feud with Sanders.<sup>1</sup> The pacifist hippies were a bit shocked by the whole affair, that nearly became in the local vernacular “a shooting scrape,” and eventually found another way on to the land by cutting some trees to make a new path.<sup>2</sup> These first months on the Martin Farm were formidable as the group experienced the hard work and long hours their new living situation required, but they were buoyed by their commitment to build a model community.<sup>3</sup> They survived difficult primitive conditions, troublesome neighbors, and an above average rainfall over the summer. They learned a difficult lesson in health as an outbreak of hepatitis from eating wild growing watercress quarantined the group for a time.<sup>4</sup> They made other

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<sup>1</sup> In both Rubert Fike, ed. *Voices from the Farm*, (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998) and Michael Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, (Summertown, TN: Self-Published, 1994), this neighbor is referred to only as Mr. Smith with no first name ever provided.

<sup>2</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Pat LeDoux, “The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm” (doctoral dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University, 1992), 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

mistakes, over-spending on food supplies or attempting to straighten corn stalks after a bad thunderstorm, not realizing they would straighten on their own, breaking the stalks in the process and losing the crop.<sup>5</sup> Lessons of rural agricultural life came in quick succession with real consequences to the success of the commune.

Like the counterculture communitarians before them, communes like The Farm helped the legacy of the hippies remain vital beyond the sixties. The Haight counterculture of popular memory only lasted two short years.<sup>6</sup> While these years were formative on the American psyche, they only began to establish the ideals that would work as a counterpoint to the mainstream. The vision of a utopian new age of man had only begun in the Haight, and was stunted by the commercialization of the hippies as well as political and social events that would corrupt the ideal. Gaskin and his students represented a preservation of the dropout lifestyle and social protest of the original Haight. More importantly, The Farm used the ideas of the Haight counterculture to grow, evolve, and establish itself as a consistent protest on the American social and political landscape. This chapter will show how, as a diaspora, the counterculture worked to continue to define themselves and act upon their vision for a better society. As a diaspora, it is important to understand the area where The Farm was established, understand how the commune operated, and the lasting legacy of The Farm.

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<sup>5</sup> Rubert Fike, "Martin Farm Summer," in *Voices from the Farm*, ed. Rubert Fike (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998), 10-13.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History*, (New York: Wenner Books, 2005), xvii. Perry traces the Haight counterculture from the Human Be-In in 1966 to the end of the Summer of Love. While these provide solid popularly used parameters, one cannot assume aspects did not exist before, or that the culture did not survive in the area. Gaskin and his followers, for example, lived in the area until 1970.

### Lewis County and The South

Culturally and politically there could not have been a more contrasting region for Gaskin and his students to build a hippie commune. The post-war period in the South is defined by two major currents, first of modernization and an expansion of both population and infrastructure, and secondly the ongoing Civil Rights movement that would produce some of its fiercest battles in the South. By 1970, 65% of the Southern population was urban, while the economy had integrated into the larger national economy, with more southerners working for national and multinational corporations.<sup>7</sup> Still in 1970, the South had a higher proportion of residents living in the same state where their parents had been born than any other region in the nation.<sup>8</sup> Despite the influx of business and ideas into the region, the core values and ideas of the South survived.

Southern writer and social philosopher James McBride Dabbs, writing in 1972, pointed to a sense of place, as a defining feature of southern culture. For southerners, the abstract was less important than the concrete, and a search for answers inevitably led back to tradition. Southern liberalism, distinctly different than its Northern counterpart, could be critical of things, but was unwilling to make drastic alterations to the existing structures. A Southerner's thinking tended to be circular rather than direct, and there was less emphasis on the hopes and dreams of an abstract future. The traditional notions of strong community mixed with a paradox of rugged individualism defined interactions of Southerners with one another. In this deep-rooted tradition

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<sup>7</sup> Charles P. Roland, "The Improbable Era: The South Since World War II," in *The American South Comes of Age*, ed. Jack Bass and Thomas E. Terrill, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1986), 343.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

of family and community existed the idea that the South belonged to the Southerner and the Southerner to the South, and both were fortunate to have one another.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis County had a typical rural Southern profile in 1970. A population of 6,761 people lived in the 285 square mile county, giving it a population density of 23.7 people per square mile. A little more than half of the population lived in the county seat, Hohenwald.<sup>10</sup> The population was mostly white and native, with 90% of the population born in Tennessee and only 1.9% of the population African-American. Only twenty-eight foreigners (seven Russians, seven Canadians, and fourteen other nationalities) lived in the county, while no Americans from the West or Northwest moved into the county between 1965 and 1970. Lewis County residents had an average of 8.8 years of schooling, with only 118 residents completing four years of college. Additionally many young people who left the area for higher education did not return. Economically 21.6% of the population lived below the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> These educational and economic numbers contrast dramatically to the mostly middle class and college educated residents of The Farm. An FBI agent would tell Farm residents that Lewis County was one of the “least controlled” areas in the state, known for its bad soil and moonshiners.<sup>12</sup> In the group’s attempt to leave the city and go rural, they had found the perfect place.

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<sup>9</sup> James McBride Dabbs, “Haunted by God: The Cultural and Religious Experience of the South,” in *The American South Comes of Age*, ed. Jack Bass and Thomas E. Terrill, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1986), 361-363.

<sup>10</sup> United States Bureau of the Census. *Characteristics of Population: Tennessee, 1970*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973. 17.

<sup>11</sup> United States Bureau of the Census. *Characteristics of Population: Tennessee, 1970*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 15.

### The Farm

It was right before their move to the Black Swan Ranch and the official founding of The Farm, while still on the Martin Farm, that a pivotal event took place. In late August, 1971 police raided the farm, finding three of the members of the “Pot Crew” tending to the group’s marijuana plants. While Gaskin himself was not in the fields, he confessed he knew of the plants growing there and took responsibility for them.<sup>13</sup> Lewis County Sheriff T.C. Carroll and fifteen agents of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation found over 1,000 marijuana plants, valued at the time at 25,000 to 30,000 dollars.<sup>14</sup> A sixth patch was turned over voluntarily by Gaskin to TBI agent Tom Whitlach.<sup>15</sup> Local newspapers told an already leery community about the arrest of “members of a long-hair religious cult.” Gaskin, Dana Culbertson, Wilbur Jordan, and Brandon Lerda would spend time in prison after a long legal battle. The incident had a number of ramifications. Gaskin’s honesty and good nature during the arrest gave him and his followers a positive reputation with law enforcement in the area. Also Gaskin’s time in prison forced The Farm to stand on its own, independent of Gaskin’s leadership, leading to his eventually removal as leader.

The Farm legal team argued the use of marijuana as a sacred spiritual right, and pursued the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The local trial showed a cross section of sentiment for the group in the area. In his statement to the jury, local defense attorney Jerry Colley sympathetically argued they “are undergoing hardships because they feel what they are doing is right” as they felt they had the right to worship as they choose. District Attorney

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<sup>13</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> “Four Men Jailed, Charged; Officers Seize Marijuana,” *Lewis County Herald*, September 2, 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

General Alonzo Bates referred to Gaskin and his followers as a bunch of marijuana users that have come here on what they think is a retreat or haven where they can use their drugs without being bothered. “They came from California to find a place where they could practice the use of marijuana.”<sup>16</sup> This idea played on the fears of a local jury not completely certain of the group’s intentions. In the end the jury took two hours to deliberate, suggesting that both points of view were given consideration, before they were found guilty.

Around the same time as the drug bust, the group found their eventual home. Carlos Smith offered the group the Black Swan Ranch’s 1,000 acres at seventy dollars an acre . Located in close proximity to the Martin Farm, the land was perfect for the group’s needs. Soon 300 people moved onto the land and founded The Farm. The commune operated as a kind of Buddhist or Hindu ashram, with students learning and living with their teacher. The general goals of the community were to live a spiritual, non-violent, minimalistic, and vegetarian lifestyle. They wanted to form a community of right-livelihood that could be attainable by anybody in the world, acting as an example of the better world they envisioned. Living together in a harmonious community was a key to representing their values. These goals suggest both a foundation in the counterculture and an evolution to a lifestyle fitting their aspirations and experiences.

Like on the Martin Farm, they quickly set to work building new infrastructure, plowing new fields, and sending Farm crews into the local community to work and earn money. They quickly destroyed any stereotype of lazy hippies, and their hard work earned a fair amount of respect in the community. The largest sources of income were the work crews and the Book

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<sup>16</sup> “Gaskin, Three Followers Convicted Here Thursday,” *Lewis County Herald*, November 18, 1971.

Publishing Company, which had started years earlier with the publication of the Monday Night Class lectures and now printed how-to guides for CB radios and natural birth control, as well as lifestyle books and vegetarian cookbooks. A third key but unreliable source of income was inheritances and trust funds of members.<sup>17</sup> While there was extensive agriculture on the commune, it was never a money maker despite an attempt to go into a full scale operation at one point. Farming was never able to feed the entire population.<sup>18</sup>

An unwritten code of conduct or set of expectations dictated behavior on The Farm. Some of the rules originated on the Caravan, such as not living off government welfare, engaging in sex outside of commitment, or having children out of wedlock. Other ground rules of the community stemmed directly from Gaskin and his teachings, including living the principles of non-violence, right livelihood, and prohibitions on alcohol, smoking (tobacco), jewelry, shaving and cutting hair, and the eating of meat and other animal products. All of these rules were part of the larger spiritual teachings of the community, enforced by mutual agreement and with Gaskin in the end acting as arbitrator if necessary.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, a cornerstone of the community's belief system was the vow of poverty taken by each person who entered and placed their money and any worldly goods into the community. The vow of poverty begins:

We are organized on a communal basis according to the *Book of Acts* of the New Testament, Acts: 2:44,45:  
*And all the believed were together and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all as every man had need.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> LeDoux "The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm," 66. Kevin Kelly, "Why We Left The Farm: An Interview with Eight Long-Time Members of The Farm Who Left the Renowned Granddaddy of New Age Communes," *Whole Earth Review*, (Winter 1985,) 62.

<sup>18</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Pat LeDoux, "The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm," 99.

<sup>20</sup> Traugot, *The Farm: A Short History*, 28.

These ground rules and the vow point to an unexpected conformity and conservatism in a community of hippies. As the group journeyed on the Caravan it could be assumed that the importance the spiritual path, public acceptance (or at least not open hostility), and a desire to live together were more important than “do your own thing” idea of the early Haight movement. These conservative shifts were pragmatic, as they were part of a spiritual search, not the spectacle of a Human Be-In. The Farm founders represented the “true seekers” of the Haight, not the runaways who came looking for drugs and mayhem. Many had lived in urban and rural communes in California, the core had experienced the Caravan, and they had a close knit like-minded group that formed in the Monday Night Class. These multiple factors helped them find initial success.

### Demographics and Population

The foundation of a counterculture commune with the size and ambition of The Farm attracted people from around the country. The remnants of the counterculture and the idealists left over from its collapse were drawn to the idea of living in a like-minded community. Three things in particular brought new members to the commune. First, Gaskin went on extensive speaking tours with “The Farm Band.” Gaskin evangelized the lifestyle and ideals of the commune as the band played spiritual rock and roll, giving the attendees a taste of the fun aspects of commune life.<sup>21</sup> The same message was distributed in the book *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*. Pictures of smiling beautiful babies and new construction of elaborate multifamily homes filled in the spaces between psychedelic headlines reminiscent of sixties rock

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<sup>21</sup> Kevin Kelly, “Why we Left the Farm: An Interview with Eight Long-Time Members of the Farm Who Left the Renowned Granddaddy of New Age Communes.” *Whole Earth Review*, (Winter 1985,) 63.

posters and long passages describing the finer points of commune life and the group's beliefs. To the counterculture diaspora it was a call home, and they answered in the hundreds.<sup>22</sup> However, both the book and Gaskin's lectures exaggerated the early successes of the commune.<sup>23</sup> Advertising provided another effective tool for recruitment. Ads in major city newspapers spoke to pregnant women considering abortions and encouraged them to come to The Farm, where they could deliver their babies free of charge. The offer promised women they could leave their babies on The Farm and return for them whenever they were ready for the demands of parenting, or they could take their newborns home with them. Prenatal, birth, and postnatal care were provided at no cost. This service, while great for public relations and cementing the reputation of The Farm and Ina May Gaskin as central to the midwife movement, also added multiple new mouths to feed while only adding minimally to the labor pool. Additionally, the community also had an open gate policy, allowing anybody to stay for a few days and decide if he/she wanted to join.

By 1974 there were 750 people living on The Farm. A visitor, travel writer Peter Jenkins, was given unique access to The Farm's records, which he used in his book *A Walk Across America* to describe the community. The commune demographics as he relates them consisted of 320 married couples, 180 single individuals, and 251 children. The majority of the adults were young, with 228 between the ages of 19 and 27. Most were born in major cities, with only sixty from small towns. Education levels showed that most had at least two years of college, with 121 having a junior college degree, eighty-two having a bachelor's degree, and

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Kelly, "Why we Left the Farm: An Interview with Eight Long-Time Members of the Farm Who Left the Renowned Granddaddy of New Age Communes." *Whole Earth Review*, (Winter 1985,) 63. These exaggerations should be seen as enthusiasm and naivety more than a calculated act.

fourteen masters or PhDs. There were twenty-three high school drop outs, and only three or four members with any farming experience. Most of the educated had degrees in English, sociology, or art. Spiritual backgrounds were mixed: 138 had grown up Protestant, 100 Catholic, and forty-six Jewish. Most of the residents grew up with no spiritual affiliation.<sup>24</sup>

The commune reached its peak of 1,400 people by 1980. Two years later, the population was down slightly to 1,200. Population pressures, the lack of infrastructure, and leadership concerns saw the population decline to 800 in 1983 and 400 by 1984. This period, referred to as “The Changeover,” will be discussed later in this chapter. After the Changeover, The Farm would continue as a cooperative community, with a stable population of 225 residents in 1994 and 200 in 2010. An effort was made to curb the population pressures through the operation of satellite farms in other states, starting in 1973.<sup>25</sup> As of 2011, over 2,000 children have been born on The Farm, with over half of them spending some significant part of their childhood at the commune.<sup>26</sup>

### Community Relations

Following the marijuana arrests, The Farm attempted to set a new tone for the commune. Taking out full page ads in local papers at the end of the year, the Farm Report showed the positive strides the commune had made, explained the ideals of the group, and thanked the local community for its hospitality. The report included detailed lists of their harvests and financial balances. A strong attempt was made to “fit in” with a folksy down to earth honesty. Pictures of

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Jenkins, *A Walk Across America*, (New York: Marrow, 1979). 193

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 159.

<sup>26</sup> The Farm Community, “The Farm Community FAQs,” <http://www.thefarmcommunity.com/FAQ.html> (Accessed: March 5, 2012)

square dances, building construction, and modestly dressed loving families showed the hippies as more or less like the locals. A group manifesto of sorts led the report, a quote from a Monday Night Class lecture after the group had arrived on The Farm:

...we did a whole bunch of this stuff on purpose, set out to do a thing and do it right and all that. And it's still happening and what we're doing is we're making the assumption that people everywhere like the same things, that we all really are all one, and that nobody's such a stranger that he's going to have radically different ideas of what he likes. So we're saying that most people are going to like the same kind of things we like and what do you like? Peace and quiet, something to do that means something, a chance to grow, a chance to do something.<sup>27</sup>

The meaning could be interpreted as a proverbial throwing open the shutters and allowing the community to be viewed not as the hippie long-hair cult from California, but a group of down-to-earth people trying to settle in, more eager to fit in than stand out. The Farm Report would become an annual report published in local newspapers.

Another event cast a shadow on the commune, and brought police and TBI agents back to The Farm. The suffocation death of twenty-three year old Judith Kowler, who died while being restrained during a mental illness episode, shocked everyone. Three members were arrested and tried for the murder. They were found not guilty.<sup>28</sup> Despite this event, and the marijuana incident, The Farm remained, with a general level of acceptance.

Gaskin's leadership is cited by numerous people as key to these first years. Additionally the group's Caravan experience provided linguistic skills for explaining their lifestyle and beliefs without offending or engaging in debates.<sup>29</sup> From the outset Gaskin had said the community

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<sup>27</sup> "The Farm Report" Advertisement, *The Lewis County Herald*, December 9, 1971.

<sup>28</sup> "Autopsy Reveals Girl Suffocated at The Farm," *The Lewis County Herald*, April 6, 1972.

<sup>29</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 15.

would be like a transplanted organ, and the surrounding area would either accept or reject it.<sup>30</sup>

The Farm members worked hard and were honest, two values important to the residents of rural Tennessee.<sup>31</sup> Gaskin cultivated relationships with T.C. Carroll, the man who had earlier arrested him for growing marijuana, and other local leaders. They had befriended the local FBI agent, based in nearby Columbia, Tennessee, Sonny Jones as well. Gaskin, upon reading the community's FBI file accessed through the Freedom of Information Act, noted that the report on the group was written so sweet and honest; he could send it to his Mom.<sup>32</sup> Initially the group agreed to not participate in local elections, knowing they could sway any vote. Later, after they found it important to vote, they were valuable allies for anybody running for office and received local and state politicians eager to get The Farm vote.<sup>33</sup> The Farm crews, who worked around the community, as far away as Nashville, building, planting, harvesting, and doing general manual labor also continued to serve both as money makers but also ambassadors for the community. They worked for fair wages and honored contracts, even when projects went over budget.

An exchange of ideas in letters to the editor of the *Columbia Daily Herald* shows two polarizing views of the commune within the larger community. Marsy S. Potts of Columbia, Tennessee, asked four questions of the editor about The Farm. First she questioned The Farm as a religious and educational organization. She wondered about the validity of a religion that had no name or purpose that could be explained. The educational materials that she read were

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<sup>30</sup> Rupert Fike et al., "Introduction," in *Voices from the Farm: Adventures in Community Living*, ed. Rubert Fike (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998), viii.

<sup>31</sup> Fike, *Voices from The Farm*, vii.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Gaskin, "Sonny Jones Was Our FBI Man," in *Voices from the Farm: Adventures in Community Living*, ed. Rubert Fike (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998), 84.

<sup>33</sup> Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 158.

“shocking and not fit for her teenage daughter.” Second she inquired about their tax exempt status from the IRS, since she did not see them as religious or educational. Third she wondered how to “reconcile” their disapproval of society and tax exemption, while taking advantage of public services like the Public Health Department (although to this point she provided no clear examples of when they did this, and according to all other literature, they only used hospitals in extreme emergencies and went into debt to do so). Lastly, she questioned their business dealings such as “The Farm Hands” that work in the community, while also paying no income taxes. Potts argued, “Most of us secure our income in the same working manner and pay our taxes.” She suggested that the community was “working both sides of the street.”<sup>34</sup>

In a following letter to the editor, Joy Costa of Hampshire, Tennessee, came to their defense. While she did not personally agree with communal living, she stated they had a right to be different and admired them for not being motivated by financial gain. On the idea of religion she suggested that it did not require structure to be religious and asserted that in the end God would be their judge, not her or Potts.<sup>35</sup> The two letters signify both a reluctance to host such a group in the community, and certain level of respect from some citizens. Over time, The Farm hippies, through their community work, honesty in dealing with local politicians, and work ethic, were seen a decidedly different but generally harmless part of the community.<sup>36</sup>

### The Changeover

To this point in The Farm’s story, the narrative has been driven by Gaskin and his leadership. As a spiritual leader, Gaskin was deeply involved with his students’ lives, deciding

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<sup>34</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Columbia Daily Herald*, January 22, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> Letters to the Editor, *The Columbia Daily Herald*, January 29, 1976.

<sup>36</sup> Ledoux “The History of a Hippie Commune,” 116.

the rules by which the community would live, where the community would settle, and the ways by which the community would survive. Beginning in 1975 many of the new members of the commune were no longer under the direct tutelage of Gaskin, seeing him only for the weekly Sunday Morning Services, at least when he wasn't in prison or away on tour.<sup>37</sup> In 1975 governance of the group shifted to a Tribal Council that evolved into a Board of Directors in 1976, led by heads of each of the key work crews on The Farm. Overpopulation, Gaskin's neglect of leadership duties, and quality of life issues in regard to raising children contributed to the demise of the commune in 1983. The Farm shifted to cooperative ownership, what they called The Changeover, with the land being held in common while each household paid dues to the community.

The Farm's popularity brought a different population with different intentions. While there were some eager to shed the urban life and shared the communities lifestyle and work ethic, many who came to the commune lacked the necessary values. The early commune worked because it brought together a close knit group with a declared mission, or attracted those who understood and bought into the idea of communal living. As Gaskin preached:

You're not a paying passenger on the airline. You're a hippie stowaway and, you ain't got bread for your passage. You need to work. This is a spaceship with all crew and no passengers. It only works right if all concerned are trying as hard as they can. Man and God are not separate- if man lays back, then part of God is laying back, and you cannot expect the best of all possible universes.<sup>38</sup>

Gaskin's tours and books describing a utopian hippie paradise attracted many who were eager to engage in the communal, philosophical, and more enjoyable aspects of Farm life without

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<sup>37</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *This Season's People: A Book of Spiritual Teachings*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1976), 109.

necessarily engaging in the hard work necessary to support such an endeavor.<sup>39</sup> Another aspect of Gaskin's outreach appealed to people with mental health problems. Believing the good lifestyle and close community would heal psychic wounds, he preached that The Farm could make people sane. When they arrived, Gaskin would sit with them, talk to them, get stoned with them, appoint somebody to keep an eye on them, and perhaps not see them again for years. Matthew McClure reflects, "We'd always have at least one psychotic living in our house... who would have been in an institution if he hadn't been on The Farm."<sup>40</sup> These two populations placed additional burdens on the working members of The Farm and the limited resources of the community. The long running open-gate policy and Gaskin's refusal to institute any kind of vetting process gave the commune no control over the population changes.<sup>41</sup> Only rarely were people expelled from the commune.<sup>42</sup> The population growth and the challenges for the struggling commune are described by former commune members Daniel Luna and McClure, as "only about 100 or so people working at a time making cash, supporting The Farm in terms of cash, but still more single mothers giving birth for free, still more psychotics... So the same people who were once supporting 600 people, five years later are supporting 1,500."<sup>43</sup> John Seward added that "There were a bunch of things on The Farm that made it so it couldn't learn from itself. If we'd been able to learn from our mistake and evolve it'd still be happening."<sup>44</sup> While the community wasn't learning from itself, it also hadn't learned from the counterculture's experience in the Haight. Overpopulation, a lack of infrastructure, and the influx of a second

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<sup>39</sup> LeDoux, "The History of a Hippie Commune," 89.

<sup>40</sup> Kevin Kelly, "Why We Left The Farm," 60.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>42</sup> Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius* 164.

<sup>43</sup> Kevin Kelly, "Why We Left The Farm," 63.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 65.

population wave less concerned with the initial goals of the original group had all damaged the Haight community to the point of forcing most of the hippies out of the area. By 1985, only forty of the original founders were still on The Farm, once again forced out by the some of the same factors that facilitated their move from San Francisco.<sup>45</sup>

Some argued that Gaskin was unable to let go and allow his students to grow up. On a particularly rainy Sunday in 1981, the weekly service was being carried on the community's local television station, with the usual question and answer session being handled via "Beatnik Bell" the phone system installed by the group. Gaskin asserted that The Farm had become more selfish and stingy as of late. A respected crew head, Michael Cook, challenged Gaskin. He argued that they were living "in a skeleton of the dream" and were so busy taking on more projects, more "schitzy trippers," cramming more people into their homes, doing all this social work. As a result they hardly had any money and were living in unhealthy squalor. Cook and Gaskin argued at length. Cook and his family left The Farm soon after.<sup>46</sup> Gaskin's leadership had been openly challenged by a respected member of the community, who had pointed out the "psychic cracks" in the community.

It was these concerns of overcrowding, the lack of food and health care, the presence of people with mental health issues, and the hard work for nothing that led many to consider their children. Originally, for both the founders who sought a good place to raise children and the single mothers who came to give birth naturally with The Farm's midwives, the idea of communal child rearing was a big plus. Life on the commune was punctuated by the "kid

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<sup>45</sup> Kevin Kelly, "Why We Left The Farm," 56.

<sup>46</sup> Gary Rhine, "Psychic Cracks," in *Voices from the Farm: Adventures in Community Living*, ed. Rubert Fike (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1998), 145-146.

herds,” large masses of boisterous children kept inline by a few adults; it was a prime example of a village raising many children. Eventually however, when conditions failed to improve, the vow of poverty that the adults had signed began taking a real toll on their ability to provide adequately for their children. Flour, sugar, salt and margarine were all rationed, necessities like shoes were bought as the money was available, and there were many requests for the same dollars.<sup>47</sup> Eventually a number of residents took action by either moving off The Farm or supporting a coup against their spiritual leader.

Since Gaskin was often away from The Farm doing relief work and fulfilling speaking engagements, he didn’t experience the day to day deprivation of life on The Farm.<sup>48</sup> While he was away on a relief trip to the Caribbean, the Changeover occurred. When Gaskin returned, he adamantly opposed the changes and “in doing so allowed members to glimpse a different Gaskin, a man full of bitterness and anger.”<sup>49</sup> The Changeover happened despite his disapproval. At the time the population was 700. The commune became an intentional cooperative community in which residents paid regular dues to support The Farm. With the means to support oneself in rural Lewis County hard to come by, the population dropped to 250 in three years. Many would say the whole thing felt a lot like a divorce.<sup>50</sup> Households that held three or four families were split apart, sometimes without warning, as families made provisional plans and left The Farm.

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<sup>47</sup> Kelly, “Why We Left The Farm,” 61.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>49</sup> LeDoux, “The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm,” 161.

<sup>50</sup> Doug Stevenson, “We Never Really Considered Leaving” in Kevin Kelly, “Why We Left The Farm,” 142.

### Legacy

If this research focused solely on the idea of The Farm as a commune, the Changeover would signal a failure for such a utopian endeavor. In a wider frame, a study of Gaskin and his students as a countercultural diaspora identifies this “Changeover” as an evolutionary step in the community’s progress. Practically, the Changeover brought the population down to a manageable number and made residents more accountable. Religious historian Timothy Miller has suggested that “The hippies never worked very hard at trying to change institutions; their appeal was always to the heart.” An inevitable change in society would come when people dropped out and created a new society.<sup>51</sup> The Farm is the most successful realization of that vision. From its position in a counterculture diaspora, The Farm has both preserved a pre-Summer of Love hippie ideal that stuck closer to the roots than the popularized idea, while also continuing the goals of the counterculture and adapting them to a changing world. Communitarianism was a means, not an end.

In debating the overall legacy of the sixties counterculture, many historians and observers take the general approach that the hippies had “won the battles and lost the war.” America experienced a decidedly conservative shift on the political landscape, and more importantly, no large long term changes caused by the social protest of the dropout counterculture. There was no psychedelic revolution, no larger expansion of human consciousness and brotherhood. However, to argue that nothing changed is short sighted. On the surface, the counterculture affected the American mainstream in the views of casual clothing, popular music, sexuality, and

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<sup>51</sup> Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 127.

the increased acceptance of recreational drug use.<sup>52</sup> The Farm was a sanctuary for the counterculturally minded, with both a large number of residents and visitors coming to live “amongst their own kind.” The hippies’ reverence for nature and the natural order was a powerful motivating factor for many of the actions taken on The Farm. It was in three ideas, based in these beliefs, that the commune was most able to affect larger change and further some of the goals of the counterculture. First, they served as a vanguard for the environmental movement that began in the late 1960s. Second, The Farm were strong advocates for a vegetarian diet, which they saw as environmentally and socially responsible, as well as beneficial for one’s physical and spiritual health. Third, and most successfully, the work of Farm midwives led by Ina May Gaskin produced a modern midwife revival. It was within these three areas that The Farm was able to make the most impact.

The environment had been one of the main factors in Gaskin’s declaration that the group would be leaving San Francisco and heading to Tennessee, because cities were “the worst things happening on the planet,” and the group’s desire to find a place more connected with nature and, in turn, their beliefs about living in accordance within a natural order.<sup>53</sup> As Gaskin said during a Sunday morning religious service on January 9, 1977, “We came out here because we wanted to be out in the boondocks and find some room to get Holy.”<sup>54</sup> The sermon focused on Tennessee state laws concerning water use, coal and oil, and reassured the commune that the facilities on The Farm were adequate for everybody to be warm enough and well fed.<sup>55</sup> Gaskin and the

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<sup>52</sup> Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Gaskin, *The Caravan*.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Volume One: Sunday Morning Services on The Farm*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1977), 95.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

community members felt a closeness to nature that would inspire their environmental policy from the foundation of the commune to present.

Beyond the rhetoric, The Farm advocated “appropriate technology,” or technology that accomplishes the most with the least amount of resources with a minimal impact on the environment.<sup>56</sup> The Farm also led in the emerging alternative energy movement. They constructed solar homes on and off The Farm, a photovoltaic power system for the Tennessee Valley Authority at the Muscle Shoals Visitor Center, and an early electric car that they drove in the daily parade at the Knoxville World’s Fair in 1982.<sup>57</sup> They constructed a solar school house on The Farm out of reclaimed and recycled materials, a 200 cubic foot walk-in solar food dehydrator, and home solar water heating. There were numerous experiments with wind, hydro, and manpower electricity generation.<sup>58</sup> They were active allies with the environmental group Greenpeace, setting up an improved radio system aboard the ship Rainbow Warrior and their European offices, as well as sailing aboard many of the environmental activist ships on peace missions.<sup>59</sup>

American Vice-President, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore, spent a considerable amount of time at The Farm. Having covered the commune as part of his beat for the Nashville *Tennessean*, Gore became friends with Gaskin and the community, even writing the introduction to Farm resident Albert Bates’ book *Climate in Crisis*. The friendship soured a bit by the time Gaskin was running for a nomination on the Green Party presidential ticket against Gore in 2000. Gore, both as a politician and as a citizen after his failed election bid has been a strong

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<sup>56</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Albert Bates, “Technological Innovation in a Rural Intentional Community, 1971-1987” (Lecture, National Historic Communal Societies Association Annual Meeting, Bishop Hills, IL, October 17, 1987).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Lisa Harris and Vickie Montagne interview with author, June 23, 2011.

campaigner for the environment. His most notable advocacy being his lecture turned Academy Award winning movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. While there is not a direct link to The Farm's environmental beliefs and Al Gore's work beyond the friendship with the community and his introduction to the book, the connection could be implied.<sup>60</sup> Gore's time on the commune and exposure to the group's environmental value system had at least some level of impact on his later beliefs.

The Farm has remained active in environmental action since the Changeover. In 1997 The Farm created the Ecovillage Training Center to teach sustainable building practices to visiting students from around the world. The Swan Conservation Trust, was set up in 1992 to protect the forests and streams, in the Big Swan and Big Bigby watersheds, and the Western Highland Rim of Tennessee. The organization has purchased sizable tracts of land in the area, including 100 acres near The Farm for preservation. Through both their teachings and their actions The Farm has advocated for environmental causes that match their spiritual beliefs.

Fitting into their reverence for nature and environmentalism, The Farm practiced a strict vegetarian, or vegan diet, as a community until the Changeover. Gaskin and his students adopted the diet as part of a larger spiritual practice of Hinduism and Buddhism, starting with the Monday Night Class.<sup>61</sup> A vegan diet also had realistic implications to feeding the growing community. According to Albert Bates, "We soon learned that using normal Tennessee farming methods we could get 40 bushels of soybeans per acre of land. That's more than a ton of beans per acre. The same acre in cattle or dairy cows would yield around 300 lbs. of beef or 1000

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<sup>60</sup> R.U. Sirius, "Gore's Hay Day," Salon.com, February 15, 2000. <http://www.salon.com/2000/02/15/farm/> (accessed Oct 25, 2011)

<sup>61</sup> Traugot, *A Short History of The Farm*, 33.

gallons of milk per year. Pound for protein pound, you could feed ten times more people, much more inexpensively.”<sup>62</sup> Workers on the farm experimented with soy, creating tofu, soymilk, tempeh, and okara. They were also among the first in America to create a soy based ice cream product.<sup>63</sup> These products, difficult to find in the 1970s and 1980s were common fare by 2000 and a 2.5 billion dollar industry.<sup>64</sup> By 2007 36% of American households consumed at least one soy based food product per month; with a statistical break down of 19% of polled households consuming Tofu, 19% a veggie burger, and 13% consuming soymilk.<sup>65</sup> While the overall percentage of Americans practicing a purely vegetarian diet has remained a stable one to three percent, these numbers point to a social acceptance that increased in the late twentieth century continuing into the early twenty-first century.

Part of this acceptance comes from recognition by medical and nutritional authorities who legitimized the diet and dispelled the fear of nutritional deficiencies.<sup>66</sup> The Farm did its part in helping overcome this fear of nutritional deficiencies by allowing the group’s children to take part in the landmark study *Growth of Vegetarian Children: The Farm Study* in 1989, which showed that “The growth of The Farm children... showed no evidence of marked abnormality.”<sup>67</sup> This research helped to substantiate the commune’s long held belief in the health benefits of a vegetarian diet.

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<sup>62</sup> Albert Bates, “Technological Innovation in a Rural Intentional Community, 1971-1987” (Lecture, National Historic Communal Societies Association Annual Meeting, Bishop Hills, IL, October 17, 1987).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Arbindra Rimal, Wanki Moon, and Siva K. Balasubramanian, “Changes in Soy Based Food Consumption, 2001 and 2007” (paper, Annual Meeting of Southern Agricultural Economics Association, Dallas, TX, February 2-5, 2008). <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/6888/2/sp08ri01.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Arbindra Rimal, Wanki Moon, and Siva K. Balasubramanian, “Soyfood Consumption Pattern: Effect of Product Attributes and Household Characteristics” (paper, Annual Meeting of Southern Agricultural Economics Association, Mobile, AL, February 4-7, 2007). <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/34999/1/sp07ri01.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, s.v. “Vegetarianism.”

<sup>67</sup> JM O’Connell et al., “Growth of Vegetarian Children: The Farm Study.” *Pediatrics* 84, (September, 1989): 480.

An early cottage industry on The Farm, The Book Publishing Company was important for educating and advocating the vegetarian and vegan lifestyle practiced in the community. Begun in 1974 and still publishing today and the company's books are mainstays on most natural foods stores bookshelves nationwide. Books like *The New Farm Cookbook* and *Tofu Cookery* helped introduce recipes and meal ideas to a growing community of people interested in a vegetarian diet. The company continues to publish books on plant-based cooking and nutrition, juicing, organic gardening, alternative and natural therapies, and natural ways to maintain wellness.<sup>68</sup> Although historic sales numbers were unavailable, representatives stated that book sales remain stable and consistent.<sup>69</sup>

It was another Book Publishing Company book and its author that would have perhaps the largest legacy. Ina May Gaskin's book *Spiritual Midwifery*, published in 1977, that helped to revitalize the use of midwives in births in America. Stemming from necessity, Gaskin began attending births during the Caravan. The first took place in a bus in the parking lot of Northwestern University, in which she volunteered, having "never seen a photo or a drawing of a birth, but I knew birth could happen and I knew how I had wanted to be treated, so I volunteered."<sup>70</sup> It was after a difficult birth a week later in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that led Gaskin to begin to study midwifery. Gaskin is often called the grandmother of the modern midwife movement, with 1,300 births attended, five books written, countless articles, impassioned appeals for the changing of state laws to legalize home and midwife births, and even a birthing

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<sup>68</sup>The Book Publishing Company, "About Us," [http://www.bookpubco.com/about\\_us/about](http://www.bookpubco.com/about_us/about) (accessed December 20, 2011).

<sup>69</sup>Mary Bowen, Interview with author, November 15, 2011.

<sup>70</sup>*The Diane Rehm Show* NPR, July 25, 2011.

maneuver bearing her name.<sup>71</sup> Midwifery was an important aspect of the group's spiritual world view that respected life.

Statistics show that in 1975 Americas had 11,265 midwife attended births. That number spiked dramatically in 1979 to 54,859 after the publication of *Spiritual Midwifery*. The trend continued to move upward, with 169,135 midwife attended births in 1989. By 2003 midwife attended births are more than doubled at 350,793. An informal polling of women who have had midwife births or are midwives themselves all cite Gaskin as a major influence and *Spiritual Midwifery* as their manifesto. Much as Dr. David E. Smith and the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic had responded to a need for public health care during the Summer of Love, Gaskin and The Farm midwives responded and revolutionized ideas in childbirth.

### Conclusion

It is irresponsible to suggest that The Farm is solely responsible for an uptick in vegetarian diets, environmentalism, or the use of midwives. What this research suggests is that places like The Farm acted as a sort of vanguard in advocating these ideas that were unpopular at the time of their suggestion. Social anthropologist John W. Bennett in his study of communes believed, "that the most important function of the communitarian ideal and the communal society is to provide a demonstration of the possibility of the capacity of humans."<sup>72</sup> Gaskin and his students founded The Farm with that idea in mind, attempting to form a community that would act as an example for the world around them. Living on a rural commune in the middle of Tennessee, the group had a global reach. Satellite farms, speaking tours, publishing, the

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<sup>71</sup> *The Diane Rehm Show* NPR, July 25, 2011, and Joseph P. Bruner et al., "All-Fours Maneuver for Reducing Shoulder Dystocia During Labor," *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, 43 (May 1989): 439.

<sup>72</sup> John W. Bennett, "Communes and Communitarianism" *Theory and Society* 2, (Spring, 1975): 43.

outreach organization Plenty, and embrace of technology (CB radio, HAM radio, and eventually computers and internet) all connected the commune to the world around them. The group's mission of showing right livelihood and responsible living found a global audience.

There is a personal legacy also. The neighbors who had once feared them, now affectionately call them "the longhairs."<sup>73</sup> During a research visit to The Farm local Amish and visiting Guatemalans were working together in the Eco-Village Training Center, alongside a visitor from London, England, who had traveled to see where she had been born. She was among the more than 2,000 children who had been born on The Farm over the years. Ragweed Day, celebrating a failed raid by local police in which a patch of ragweed was mistaken for marijuana, still brings former residents back to The Farm to reconnect. The Kids to the Country nonprofit brings urban kids to the former commune every summer, and community events such as The Farm Experience Weekend and a variety of natural living retreats offer visitors a taste of life on The Farm. When asked if there was a lasting legacy, Virginia Gleser echoed many of the former commune members "It was truly an amazing experiment to base the whole thing on living in love and peace. A big order for us mere humans. The lasting legacy is that the love has continued and whenever we meet with former or present Farm folks there is a strong bond of connection and communication that will never die."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kate Wenner, "How They Keep Them Down on The Farm," *New York Times*, (May 8, 1977).

<sup>74</sup> Virginia Gleser, Interview with author. September 18, 2011.

## CONCLUSION

*It is a plane of experience that many thousands of people were catapulted into through the psychedelic revolution. There are still people all over the country saying “Wow! What was that?”<sup>1</sup>*

There is a tendency, eagerness even, to qualify the counterculture and The Farm as a success or a failure. Most scholarship argues the counterculture, along with the New Left, failed at making any lasting political changes, and even inspired a conservative shift in American politics. The Changeover on The Farm signaled the “failure” of the communal idea. Pat LeDoux in her research, *The History of a Hippie Commune*, suggests that the community “had to pay the price for the impracticality of their vision.”<sup>2</sup> Such suggestions lack an understanding of the overall values and goals of Gaskin and his students. How do you qualify the success of a group of people whose initial goal was to drop out of the mainstream, not to change the system, but to create their own? In his assessment of commune failure vs. success, anthropologist John W. Bennett reasons “The (commune) movement has repeatedly “failed” as its communities have disintegrated, yet repeatedly “succeeded, “as its message has become a prod to the conscience and a hopeful vision of an alternative.” Bennett continues to suggest that “the most important function of the communitarian ideal and communal society is to provide a demonstration of the possibility of the capacity of humans or at least some humans, to live more cooperatively and more humbly... while there seems little chance that human society can be reconstructed along

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *This Season's People: A Book of Spiritual Teachings*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1976), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Pat LeDoux, “The History of a Hippie Commune: The Farm” (doctoral dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University, 1992), 205.

these lines, perhaps it can be influenced in the general direction.”<sup>3</sup> The Farm was that possibility, along with other counterculture communes, hippies worked to be that demonstration. Gaskin and his followers are the embodiments of Bennett’s words as they continually worked not only to live their ideal, but to serve as an example. As previously discussed in this research, Gaskin’s proselytizing of The Farm worked to add new members. There is another plan of action argued by Gaskin in the final section of *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*: “We’re really serious about trying to get a whole bunch of farms all over the country that would be really good places that would have healthy kids and hardworking people.”<sup>4</sup> These plans in turn helped to create a larger network for the diaspora.

### The Farm Diaspora

The Haight is no longer the epicenter that defines the counterculture, despite some anniversary gatherings for the Summer of Love and the Human Be-In. The term counterculture has shifted definitions to mean any segment of the population stepping out from the mainstream, with little emphasis on social protest or the foundation of a separate society. Forty years later, the ideal of hippies has had a surprising longevity, although arguably nostalgic and commercialized. Timothy Miller points out that many small college towns throughout America have become places where the “children of the hip” have worked their parent’s countercultural ideals into these communities.<sup>5</sup> Several thousand communes still exist in America, while not as many as existed in the early seventies, more than ever existed before the sixties in American

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<sup>3</sup> John W. Bennett, “Communes and Communitarianism,” *Theory and Society* Vol 2, no 1, (Spring 1975) pg. 64-65.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This is The Farm Book*, (Summertown, TN: The Book Publishing Company, 1974), no page numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 142-143.

history.<sup>6</sup> The challenge of distance and separation from likeminded people is now more easily overcome with digital devices and the internet, much as The Farm's early CB and HAM radios kept them in touch with the outside world. The diaspora framework has been useful in studying the movement of a particular group away from the Haight and into rural Tennessee.

Whether that diaspora survives another generation is uncertain. As many of the founders pass away and leave the legacy in new hands, the diaspora idea shifts to that of a counterculture settlement. Many if not most of the diaspora's children, the legacy of "free love" and modern midwives, would not classify themselves as hippies. Though like the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, they "Seek not to walk in the footsteps of the men of old, but to seek what they sought." Saul Gleser, son of Virginia and Robert Gleser, recognized the distinct differences between himself and his parents, while at the same time noting significant differences in his life he attributed to growing up on a commune. He specifically mentioned tendencies towards independent thinking, a lack of materialism, an open-minded spirituality, and the importance of genuine relationships. Arriving on The Farm at the age of four, Kerri Gavin's family adopted four children left at The Farm after their heroin addicted mother dropped them off there. One born addicted to heroin and the rest deeply psychologically disturbed, Gavin cited this experience gave her a sympathy that has translated well into her career as a psychiatric technician.<sup>7</sup> Generally throughout time the importance of definitions like hippie and counterculture have become less important on The Farm than the larger continuation of a mindset and a set of values. Moving forward, that is perhaps the legacy of the diaspora.

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* 67-69.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Hamburg, "Old Farm Hands: Their Parents Left San Francisco 30 Years Ago to Build Utopia in Rural Tennessee. Now Some of the Products of That Grand Experiment- Their Children- Have Come Back," SF GATE.com August 6, 2000.

### Future Research

The challenges of modern mass society, the possibility of a looming environmental crisis, and the emerging need to provide for more with less all make the sixties counterculture, communes, and The Farm lend themselves to future study. At its peak The Farm was a workshop for innovation showing people how to live within more modest means. Today the community is a center for the incubation of ideas involving more responsible living. From its beginnings, The Farm has begged to be studied, duplicated, and researched.

It is the aim of this research to compliment the work of previous researchers working on the counterculture and The Farm. This project was limited in its scope to the culture of The Farm residents and their connections to the early counterculture. A more complete study of the interaction of The Farm with the local community and the impact on Lewis County and vice versa would build on this research. This would require more in-depth interviews with locals, former residents and visitors to the commune, as well as local detractors of The Farm to better understand its larger role in the community. Additionally a better understanding of how other sections of the counterculture diaspora were able to influence the mainstream or negotiate their lives outside of it would add to our understanding of the legacy of the sixties.

Important to judging the success of The Farm will be seen in how viable the community can remain under the guidance of future generations. The 2,000 plus children born on The Farm have maintained a network, first with a newsletter *Whirling Rainbow News* until 1996, and more recently with social networking internet sites. The continued connection of this generation and

the longevity of their ties to the former commune will be insightful in understanding the remaining diaspora.

The sixties are an emerging era of historical study as the baby boom generation is entering into retirement age. Theodore Roszak, who first addressed the youth counterculture in his book *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* in 1969, revisits the baby boom as he covers a very different topic. In his book *American the Wise: The Longevity Revolution and the True Wealth of Nations* he discusses how:

The people who are supposedly darkening the future were the same people I had once written about in their youth. I had called them a “counter culture,” young people who, in surprising numbers, had bravely questioned authority of all revived ideas. They had not vanished in a puff of smoke in 1975- though there were certainly those on the political scene who had been pretending they had. But here they were, two or three decades further along, causing a different kind of cultural trouble by the very act of staying alive a good long time.”<sup>8</sup>

Roszak is onto something, and the further implications of mass longevity will be a further point of research going forward. How the events of the sixties affected both future generations of young people as well as the Baby Boom is politically and socially significant. It is worth noting the 2009 Tea Party Movement phenomenon was largely supported by members of the Baby Boom generation.

### Haight-Ashbury Dreams

In the late 1960s youth from all over the nation converged on the Haight-Ashbury district in search of an intangible spiritual awakening. The original goals of the Haight community

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<sup>8</sup> Theodore Roszak, *American the Wise: The Longevity Revolution and the True Wealth of Nations*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1998), 12.

while unprecedented, were never realized, there was no widespread psychedelic revolution of human consciousness. However in communities like The Farm, the counterculture was able to carve out space for themselves and their lifestyle. They were able to regroup and continue to both live by and disseminate their beliefs, becoming a small but significant oppositional cultural diaspora. More importantly, they were able to find a sanctuary for the spirit they initially went to the Haight to find. For the group of students drawn to Gaskin's Monday Night Class, who would follow him on the Caravan, and eventually to settle down on The Farm there is no separate narrative of the radical 1960s and the communal 1970s, they are simply two parts of the same adventure.

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